

Blessedness and Religion: the Errant Believer's Portion in the TTP

MICHAEL ANFANG

Benedict Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* gives an account on the role of religion within the state, ultimately positing that the state is the best way to provide for peace among inhabitants, making it the best way to be obedient to God's command of 'love thy neighbor.'¹ ² The state is what allows for man to live freely and securely, so that he is able "to use [his] reason freely," or so that he is able to know and obey God because He is God, and not from fear.³ At times, however, this end of the state seems difficult to maintain. After all, in other places, Spinoza argues that the state's goal is merely "to live securely and conveniently,"⁴ and he regularly asserts the difference between outward religion, or piety, and inward religion, or knowing God or Truth.⁵ At this point, there would seem to be an implicit break between the goal of the state for those who could live freely and those who could not, i.e. those who rely on reason and those who rely on faith.⁶

However, due to a particularly interesting passage at the end of chapter XV and hints to this elsewhere, it does not seem like Spinoza is prepared to have the state abandon the ordinary person's search for the good. In this section, Spinoza asserts the "utility, even necessity, of Sacred Scripture," since "we can't perceive by natural light that simple obedience is a path to salvation [or blessedness per the ADN footnote]." Since the vast majority of people need revelation, which is errant in its speculative assertions, to "acquire a habit of virtue...if we didn't have the testimony of Scripture, we would doubt nearly everyone's salvation."⁷ I will argue that Spinoza's notes here and elsewhere about the necessity of Scripture or errant beliefs about God for the common people is not merely a cynical pragmatic point to make it possible for the philosophers to reason freely. Rather, I hypothesize that Spinoza entertains the possibility that people can receive some amount of blessedness from understanding

¹All citations of Spinoza will refer to Gebhardt page and line numbers in Volume III of Gebhardt's collected works of Spinoza as formatted in Benedictus de Spinoza, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. II, ed., trans., Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016). *Tractatus Theologico-politicus* will be abbreviated TTP and *Tractatus Politicus* will be abbreviated TP.

²E.g., Spinoza, TTP, 229.9-17.

³Ibid., 241.3-8, 62.18-21, cf. id., TP, 296.11-5.

⁴Id., TTP, 48.13-5, cf. id., TP, 275.35-6, 295.15-7.

⁵E.g. id., TTP, 59.23-6, 70.9-10, 71.10-1, 71.26-7, 202.20-2, 228.19-30.

⁶E.g. ibid., 59.29-31, 65.28-9, 77.32-78.5, 168.27-32.

⁷Ibid., 188.21-29.

God to the best of their abilities. By looking at the definition of the highest good, its psychologizing aspects, and Spinoza's language regarding personal capabilities, I will establish a case for reading the TTP as concerned with a public with a range of abilities, rather than a state in which reasonable people begrudgingly withstand the faithful, and that this concern extends even to the vulgar's ability to attain some form of blessedness, albeit not the highest one. Finally, I will show that this reading has fairly direct grounding within Spinoza's text itself.

1. Defining the Highest Good

Spinoza's definition of the highest or supreme good seems at the outset rather simple: knowledge of God.⁸ This definition is sometimes expanded to "knowledge and love of God," or even just "love of God," yet the essential idea is clear, actively and correctly appreciating God brings the highest reward.⁹ Notably, the supreme good for Spinoza is the entirety of the goal of the divine law, as opposed to human law, which aims "to protect life and the republic."¹⁰ Yet this seems somewhat vague still. Spinoza gives us some hint as to what it might look like if someone follows the divine law, that is follows the path aiming at true knowledge of God. The reward for "following the universal divine law" is blessedness or the ability to act "freely and with a constant heart," while the punishment for failing to follow it is "an inconstant and vacillating heart" and "act[ing] like a slave."¹¹ What is notable is that this seems separate from the normal idea of obedience to the divine command of love thy neighbor. That command would seem to protect life, putting it under the idea of human law rather than divine law, even if it does have a divine basis. Further, the command for obedience, or love thy neighbor is seen as scriptural, that is from a basis upon which we cannot base speculative judgments about God's true existence.¹² So it seems at this point that the highest good is primarily about knowing God through reason, with its ultimate goal as "understanding things through their first causes [God]."¹³ What is also clear is that this "intellectual, or, exact, knowledge of God is not a gift common to all the faithful," since "not everyone is equally able to be wise."¹⁴ It is likely that this is the underlying reasoning behind the statement at the end of chapter XV in which Spinoza says that scripture is necessary to provide an alternative path to salvation, one that would allow those not equipped with enough reason to acquire the habit of virtue.¹⁵ In other places, Spinoza comments that the "supreme good consists in the perfection of the intellect," which is solely linked to knowledge of God.¹⁶

What is less clear within Spinoza is the relationship between the three competing terms "highest good," "blessedness," and "salvation." The first two seem to be somehow

⁸Ibid., 59.25-6.

⁹Ibid., 60.13-62.21, cf. 66.7-9.

¹⁰Ibid., 59.23-6.

¹¹Ibid., 62.18-21, 66.7-9.

¹²Ibid., 61.34-5, 77.32-78.1, 174.19-176.31.

¹³Ibid., 46.27-30.

¹⁴Ibid., 168.27-32, 170.1-6.

¹⁵Ibid., 188.21-9. At the very least it would allow those who are not able to reason to merely think obedience is enough for salvation. This cynical reading will be addressed later.

¹⁶Ibid., 59.32-60.3.

linked, in that Spinoza says that "our supreme good, then, and our blessedness come back to this: the knowledge and love of God."¹⁷ Salvation's link to these two is less secure, but we can look toward the passage in chapter XV again for help. Spinoza's last line there—"if we didn't have this testimony of Scripture [that obedience without knowledge of God is enough for salvation], we would doubt nearly everyone's salvation"¹⁸—implies that those whose salvation we would not doubt, or the remainder of 'nearly everyone', are the reasoning people. Similarly, Spinoza says that "true salvation and blessedness" so far as it is related to scripture consists in understanding it very clearly, something that the common people cannot do¹⁹ Yet, on the other hand, Spinoza elsewhere writes that "everything necessary for salvation can easily be grasped" by the common people, even though they might not know the reasoning behind them.²⁰ Similarly, Spinoza at some levels denies the very possibility of faith being sufficient for knowledge of God, i.e., the highest good.²¹ This would make clear that the highest good is unattainable to those who rely upon faith, yet it does not necessarily mention ideas of blessedness or salvation here. At this point we will keep these distinctions in mind—particularly between the highest good on one side and salvation on the other—in dealing with the possibility of salvation or blessedness without the highest good. Blessedness in some respects here could be, along with the hypothesis, accorded even to those who do not attain the highest good. We will return to this point later in considering the issue overall, but will rely on the provisional set up of the highest good being the only thing that is definitively and totally dependent on intellectual knowledge of God.

2. A Psychological View of Blessedness

Blessedness in Spinoza seems to at the very least be connected to a psychological state of a person. This can be drawn out from the distinction in relation to following the divine law where the reward is a "whole and constant heart" and the punishment is an "inconstant and vacillating heart."²² On this view, having some knowledge of God is correlated with a constant heart or peace of mind, while lacking that knowledge, that is not appreciating the world properly, results in having internal struggle. So far, it would seem that a positive psychological state, or peace of mind, should be tied to appreciation of the highest good. Yet, in other places, Spinoza links the possibility of peace of mind coming through faith, or without the highest good.

The clearest example comes only a few lines later than the prior one, in which "faith alone" equals "full consent of the heart," at least from within the context of scripture.²³ Full consent of the heart here implies obeying God wholeheartedly, or following the laws without any hesitation, rather than following God for fear of punishment. In other words, faith alone would mean following God's command, i.e., practicing loving-kindness or loving the neighbor, due to love or reverence for God rather than corporal punishment. Similarly,

¹⁷Ibid., 60.18-9.

¹⁸Ibid., 188.27-9.

¹⁹Ibid., 111.29-34. See similar language of "true blessedness" in 45.2.

²⁰Ibid., 115.8-13.

²¹Ibid., 61.28-35.

²²Ibid., 62.19-21.

²³Ibid., 65.25-6.

this is why Jesus "taught things as eternal truths and did not prescribe them as laws. In this way he freed them from the bondage of law."²⁴ Spinoza also argues that the true message of Psalms, or the good moral sentiments it advances, are "only a question of blessedness" and thus perhaps peace of mind.²⁵

There is ground to argue here that this is already within the notion of Scripture's somewhat artificial necessity for the common person to believe that he is worthy of salvation.²⁶ While this is possible on some level, it seems that a properly psychologized view of blessedness or salvation can even remedy this claim. This claim would most seriously come up in Spinoza's distinction of "true salvation and blessedness" from salvation and blessedness simpliciter. The former can only come from "true peace of mind," which is found "only in those things we understand very clearly."²⁷ This comes up in the passage where Spinoza is discussing how to interpret scripture and comparing it to the clarity we have when we read Euclid. He concludes that what we can understand clearly from scripture are these moral sentiments, and that we likely can acquire these same principles by reason. Perhaps we might distinguish "true peace of mind" with regard to scripture as requiring clarity in understanding those moral elements through reason, whereas simple "peace of mind" may only require a subjective drive of devotion to God. This idea of requiring clarity for "true peace of mind" is supported in the idea that scripture is necessary in the first place since most people cannot on their own attain clarity through rational thought.²⁸

On the other hand, the possibility and perhaps necessity of everyone believing in God wholeheartedly is paramount in Spinoza. In chapter XIV Spinoza lists seven "doctrines of the universal faith" as being general principles about God's perfection combined with acknowledgment of him as having supreme right and requiring loving-kindness.²⁹ These doctrines serve to ensure obedience, whereas other more speculative matters, such as God's true nature or being are not necessary for each person. In fact, each person only need to create certain ancillary principles that are necessary to "accommodate these doctrines of faith to his power of understanding...as it seems to him easier for him to accept them without any hesitation, with complete agreement of the heart, so that he may obey God wholeheartedly."³⁰ Elsewhere Spinoza echoes this call for each individual to determine his speculative opinions on his own, specifically outside the control of the state.³¹ This second context is especially important because it separates out the personal understanding of God from the outward showing of piety or religion, since it is outside the control of the state.³² In other words, they are separate from obedience in a meaningful way.

One might say that this is only the case because they are prior to obedience, i.e., they ensure that one will be obedient, and so they are not truly separated from obedience. This

²⁴Ibid., 65.10-1.

²⁵Ibid., 71.29-72.1.

²⁶E.g. *ibid.*, 185.16-32.

²⁷Ibid., 111.29-34.

²⁸Ibid., 65.28-9, 78.4-5.

²⁹Ibid., 177.14-178.10. There is the somewhat strange seventh principle, that "God pardons the sins of those who repent." Spinoza comments that this is what allows people to believe in the possibility of salvation, since otherwise they could not think of being saved since everyone sins. This seems parallel to the note in chapter XV about obedience being enough for salvation, and should be kept in mind.

³⁰Ibid., 178.30-5.

³¹Ibid., 239.13-18.

³²Cf. *ibid.*, 229.4-8.

might be the case, except for that Spinoza wants to specifically separate speculative philosophy that allows the philosopher to live comfortably from the outward showing of obedience, arguing that the details of philosophy are not important so long as they lead to obedience.³³ Similarly, "piety itself and the internal worship of God, or the means by which the mind is disposed, internally, to worship God wholeheartedly," is without the control of the state, and is considered as unattached to the "external practice of religion."³⁴ If there were truly no benefit to free philosophizing other than simply ensuring obedience, it would be hard to justify so much effort on Spinoza's part in proving this point. And this should come without surprise: after all, the true benefit is intellectual knowledge of God, i.e. the highest good. But it seems strange to ignore the possibility of a second benefit of obedience-forming beliefs even if those beliefs are entirely or somewhat erroneous.

It seems then that for everyone the ancillary benefit of forming such a belief that one is able to be obedient wholeheartedly could be the psychological benefit of the belief itself. There is proof to this idea. At one point, Spinoza notes that "really, the Holy Spirit is nothing but a satisfaction which arises in the mind from good actions."³⁵ His conception of the Holy Spirit is markedly different from reason, and therefore from the highest good, but it may not be pure salvation, or something acquired by obedience alone.³⁶ Spinoza's language here of "good actions" rather than obedience, piety, or loving thy neighbor, should make us question what Spinoza has in mind here.³⁷ It recalls Spinoza's discussion of doing "good acts freely and with a constant heart" versus acting from an evil compulsion.³⁸ Presumably the latter case would be enough for piety, since he is still doing good acts ostensibly, and he would be considered like a slave.³⁹ In this situation a man is not free, that is, he is unable to attain the highest good, but he is still acting piously. Thus, the phrase "good actions" should make us think that man is acting in a way similar to the manner in which a subject acts.⁴⁰ Applied to religion though, it perhaps indicates that Spinoza's language of good action in 188—which like the conception of the subject in 195 involves a psychological state in which one is doing the action because it is right or good for himself instead of out of fear—should be seen as implying constancy of the heart mentioned elsewhere. Thus, the "satisfaction that arises in the mind" or the Holy Spirit would be the reward for obedience with proper devotion. Notably, this proper devotion does not seem to require true conceptions of God, but merely accommodations of the true doctrine "so that he may obey God wholeheartedly."⁴¹ This reading, while tenuous, supports an idea of a certain ancillary benefit to obeying the law on one's own accord rather than by fear of death and punishment. At this point, it is somewhat unclear whether this benefit can be classified merely as salvation or also as some form of blessedness. Supporting the reading of salvation, this would explain the necessity of claiming obedience's sufficiency for salvation (at the end of chapter XV), in that it would allow people to obey comfortably, i.e., not from fear, and would be its own reward psychologically. However, one could read blessedness as "the way to salvation" indicating that the positive psychological state that would enable one to be truly obedient

³³Ibid., 10.31-11.8, 188.12-19, 229.13-7.

³⁴Ibid., 229.3-6.

³⁵Ibid., 188.2-3.

³⁶Ibid., 188.4-5, cf. 188.21-9.

³⁷Cf. virtue in 69.31-2.

³⁸Ibid., 66.7-9.

³⁹Ibid., 196.10-1.

⁴⁰Ibid., 195.13-4.

⁴¹Ibid., 178.30-5.

is blessedness.⁴² The upshot of either of these readings would still be that there is a real benefit, albeit a psychological one, to this process that is entirely outside the highest good.

3. The Role of Personal Capacities

Throughout the TTP, Spinoza emphasizes the requirement to conceive of God intellectually as far as it is possible for that individual, or alternatively, that knowledge of God needs to be accommodated to the individual. Spinoza does not require each person to be able to understand God properly, but rather just to know God in a vaguer sense.⁴³ The average man does not need to have any conception of God or know his attributes⁴⁴ other than that provided within the seven doctrines of faith.⁴⁵ In this sense, personal capabilities play a role within the area of the possible good, that is within the possibility of knowing and loving God. To look at this, we will take a very close look at Spinoza's language when talking about ranges of abilities.

First, it is clear from Spinoza that some people simply are unable to achieve true understandings of God. Time and again, Spinoza asserts that "the man of the flesh cannot understand these things," they being knowledge of God.⁴⁶ Likewise anyone who relies on faith to attain knowledge of God will not form any true knowledge of God,⁴⁷ and exact knowledge of God is said to be uncommon.⁴⁸ In fact, the proper conception of God is quite far from the common conception of God, since "it is only because of the common people's power of understanding and a defect in their knowledge that God is described as a lawgiver or prince."⁴⁹ Rather, God should truly be known as first cause or a perfect being.⁵⁰ Yet, we can find some acceptance on Spinoza's part of those with lesser rational abilities.

The first example of this is when Spinoza writes that "since the intellect is the better part of us, we should certainly strive above all to perfect it as much as we can."⁵¹ This last clause is key, and in the Latin reads "ut eum quantum fieri potest, perficiamus," with the infinitive "fieri" implying a sense of activity or of formation of the intellect. Additionally, the term "eum quantum" implies a range of extents. In this context, it is possible for the intellect to be perfected in degrees, and also it could be possible that some intellects are perfectible more than others. Similarly, Spinoza asserts that common people need erroneous conceptions of God either because they have "too meager a knowledge of God—*nimis ieiunam Dei habet cognitionem*"⁵²— or due to a shortage in their "power of understanding and a defect in their knowledge—*ex captu vulgi, et ex solo defectu cogitationis/cognitionis*."⁵³

⁴²Ibid., 97.3-4.

⁴³Ibid., 168.27-32.

⁴⁴See *ibid.*, 170.1-6.

⁴⁵Ibid., 177.14-178.10.

⁴⁶Ibid., 61.6-7.

⁴⁷Ibid., 61.28-35.

⁴⁸Ibid., 167.27-8.

⁴⁹Ibid., 65.28-9.

⁵⁰Ibid., 46.27-30.

⁵¹Ibid., 59.29-31.

⁵²Ibid., 66.6-11.

⁵³Ibid., 65.28-9. As Curley notes on this line in his volume, he emends the Gebhardt text to read *cognitionis* instead of *cogitationis* to accord with 63.25-9.

The language here is particularly interesting. In the first section one could translate "ieiunam" as insignificant or trifling as well, which gives an idea of a natural incapability to have a fuller conception of God. Similarly, the phrase "ex captu vulgi" in the second example works to indicate their natural potential or ability, although it does not necessarily specify here abilities of understanding or cognition.⁵⁴ The last clause also aids here, in the reading of either "defectu cogitationis" or "defectu cognitionis," in that in the former case it would accord more to a defect in their reasoning understanding of God, while in the second case could be read either as a "defect in knowledge" or a "defect in their acquiring of knowledge." These seem somewhat less supportive of our argument, but nonetheless there is room to claim that an imperfect knowledge of God counts as a defect.⁵⁵

These help explain Spinoza's acceptance of men who "err [in their understanding of God] from simplicity of the heart."⁵⁶ This error is not only acceptable for Spinoza, but it is even expected as "men's minds differ as much as their palates."⁵⁷ Yet this error seems to be only acceptable to such an extent. For example, Spinoza asserts that "cognitionem illam,⁵⁸ quam Deus per Prophetas ab omnibus universaliter petiit,"⁵⁹ with this knowledge being cognition of God. God and the prophets make it clear that each person is supposed to have some knowledge of God, that is, knowledge of God's "Divine Justice and Loving-kindness." Since Spinoza asserts these principles elsewhere, it would seem far fetched to call these absolutely false, as opposed to some other understandings of God, such as God as a "lawgiver or prince."⁶⁰ Importantly Spinoza asserts that though scripture cannot teach men true knowledge of God, it can "teach and enlighten men enough to imprint obedience and devotion on their hearts."⁶¹ In other words, scripture does not just lead men to obedience, it also causes them to be devoted to God. It does not seem to be a great leap to move from devotion to God to love of God, at least so far as that is possible for the average person.

Further, Spinoza even asserts that some of the theoretical opinions that the common people have are "true," since the person who arrives at knowledge of God without scripture has a "distinct [rational] conception" of God that scripture cannot provide.⁶² Notably, it is not that this person is the only one who is blessed, period. Rather, he is "completely blessed (beatum omnino esse)," or "more blessed than the common people (vulgo beatiorem)" be-

⁵⁴Cf. Leo Strauss, "How to Study Spinoza's Theological Political Treatise," in *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* vol. 17 (1947-8): e.g., 106, 107n63, 111.

⁵⁵Although "cognitionis" agrees better with the parallel passage in 63, due to other places in which "cognitionis" is associated with a more universal knowledge of God whereas "cogitationis" is solely used for intellectual knowledge, I find reading "cogitationis" preferable here with Gebhardt.

⁵⁶Spinoza, TTP, 176.25.

⁵⁷Ibid., 239.23-5.

⁵⁸Contra earlier in the sentence where it is "intellectualem, sive accuratam Dei cognitionem" or "intellectual, or exact knowledge of God." Curley here inserts a comma after "exact," which I find potentially confusing. Nonetheless, "intellectualem cognitionem" and "accuratam cognitionem" clearly serve as a foil to "cognitionem" below, see *ibid.*, 168.27.

⁵⁹Ibid., 168.28-32. Curley translates: "knowledge of God, through the Prophets, has demanded of everyone" but would be more literally translated as "this knowledge [of God], which God through the Prophets universally requested/demanded from all."

⁶⁰Ibid., 65.28-9.

⁶¹Ibid., 78.1-2, teach and enlighten here are "docere" and "illuminare," in which docere might not necessarily imply teach but rather guide or lead men to obedience. Illuminare is unambiguous here and clearly gives an idea similar to our enlighten.

⁶²Ibid., 78.10-2.

cause of this rational conception.⁶³ Spinoza advances this point even further, saying that the one who has neither the scriptural conception of God nor the rational conception of God is worse off still. This person is "devoid of human feeling, and almost a beast. He does not have any of God's gift."⁶⁴ This is true even if he is not impious, that is if he acts with obedience. The devotional aspect that can be supplied by the scriptural sense of God and knowledge of him within it (cf. "cognitionem illam" above) provides some sort of benefit (here "ullum Dei donum") to the believer that is simply not given to the pious non-believer. Given the context, and especially the "ullum" which implies the same sort of quantitative scale above, it would seem that this "Dei donum" is "beatum esse" or to be blessed. An alternative is to consider this salvation, since this is normally considered within the context of God's grace or gift.⁶⁵ However, given the contexts in which "donum" arises verses "gratiam," it would seem to support a more intellectual idea of blessedness than that of salvation.⁶⁶ This is especially shown where they arise together paralleling "love" and "worship" of God, respectively.⁶⁷ This seems tied especially well to other instantiations of linking this belief to devotion with outward acts usually according with worship.

4. Conclusions and Objections

So far in this paper I have advanced a reading of Spinoza's TTP in which there is an idea of the average person attaining some sort of non-material benefit out of her faith-based (i.e. somewhat erroneous) belief in God that is necessary for her obedience to God.⁶⁸ This has been accomplished first by separating out the notion of the highest good, or true knowledge and love of God, from those of blessedness and salvation. Then, I laid out the psychological tendencies in describing blessedness as related to a constant or unwavering heart or soul (animus), contrasted with the possibility of carrying out obedience under coercion. Finally, I established that a close reading of Spinoza's text, especially in the Latin, allows for the possibility that knowledge of God, or rather having true opinions of God, can come in various levels. This attitude toward God seemed to correspond with experiencing love or devotion to God, which I argued resulted in a form of blessedness, albeit a lesser form than that of attaining the highest good. According to this view, blessedness would be a gift that would be possible for man to receive depending on how well his conception of God provides him peace of mind in doing his divine duty.

One objection would be that this argument is reading too much concern for the common person into Spinoza. This would accord with a Straussian reading of the TTP, and would be supported in fact by some of Spinoza's sharp comments toward the common

⁶³Another way of reading "beatum omnino esse" would be that the rational person is "blessed in every way" or "blessed in everything," implying a difference in the ways or areas in which he is blessed rather than a difference in overall degree.

⁶⁴Ibid., 78.12-4.

⁶⁵See *ibid.*, 165.27-9. 188.23.

⁶⁶See, for "donum" *ibid.*, 15.23, 112.31, 113.7, and 182.13 meaning natural cognitive ability especially one that is not particularized to a group, cf. at 168.28, 170.1, 170.32, and 172.26 as (intellectual) or other knowledge of God. See for gratiam, as Spirit at 26.34, as God's presence, 53.23, as complementing knowledge and love of God, 55.34- 5, as the phrase "God's grace," like a gift, e.g., 152.1, 168.36, 177.33, 178.8, as an attribute of God, e.g., 65.18, as linked to salvation, 157.24, 165.27, and 188.24.

⁶⁷They appear together, with "freedom," in paralleling "true life, and the worship and love of God' at 41.6-8.

people, particularly in his letter to Albert Burgh.⁶⁸ Additionally, it agrees with Curley's comments on the "vulgus," in which he says that Spinoza does not have much concern for them.⁶⁹ The argument here would run along the lines that Spinoza merely includes these strange comments about common people being able to receive blessedness or salvation as a means of satisfying the common person if he happens to read Spinoza's book. This would help Spinoza avoid censorship and it would help him keep his duty to the state.⁷⁰ Additionally, it could be understood by Spinoza's own hermeneutic principle where if the text (there by scripture, but maybe here too by the TTP) contradicts reason, the text must be interpreted figuratively.⁷¹ So in all these places where blessedness or salvation is assured to the faithful, we can wink them away as figures of speech, or things Spinoza does not really mean, but rather that they are intended to hoodwink the masses.⁷²

There are several difficulties with this reading. The first is the historical account that Spinoza explicitly printed this book in Latin, not Dutch, which would limit his readership to the learned. In other words, it is somewhat unlikely that an average common person would read this book, and thus it seems strained to claim that Spinoza spends fourteen out of twenty chapters talking about the Bible when the reasonable person would do away with it anyway. Secondly, Spinoza acknowledges this likelihood by addressing his reader as "Philosophical" and in discouraging the common person from reading the book, especially when they have a strong attachment to scripture.⁷³ Even if he was trying to convince other philosophers who are stuck in their so-called pious ways, the amount of time and effort Spinoza puts into the biblical criticism sections still seems excessive.⁷⁴ Finally, and most importantly, far too much of the TTP mentions the necessity of scripture, or of a faith-based understanding of God. It seems rather strained to suggest that one read a work of philosophy, especially one as systematic as the TTP, in a periphrastic way, by which one would have to cherry pick the arguments in order to make sense of the work. Of course it would be impossible to disprove the objection: we simply do not have definitive statements from Spinoza that the goal of his work was or was not to hoodwink common people and secretly enlighten the proud few. Yet, I believe that my reading requires fewer emendations of the text without hurting the political philosophy of Spinoza nor disturbing the sense to which his rational believer in God does have significantly more blessedness than the scriptural believer, since he has attained the highest good. Thus, I find that in expanding Spinoza's idea of blessedness to include those for whom their most accurate and most calming conception of God is the erroneous religious one aids in understanding the text as is, or in the way Spinoza suggests we understand texts.⁷⁵ The additional benefit of my reading would be that it would allow us to see Spinoza as maintaining a sort of intellectual elitism while not consigning the common person to the role of automaton. In other words, this reading

⁶⁸See id., "Letter 76 to the Most Noble Young Man Albert Burgh," IV.319a.1-320a.2, 322a.13-324a.5.

⁶⁹Edwin Curley, "Glossary," in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. II, ed., Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016): 620-1 s.v. "Common People."

⁷⁰Cf. Strauss, "How to Read," 106.

⁷¹Cf. *ibid.*, 110 in thinking about how this could parallel Maimonides's Guide.

⁷²See *ibid.*, 112ff.

⁷³Spinoza, TTP, 12.3, 12.13-19.

⁷⁴Strauss raises this point, and thinks that the primary audience is Christians who are capable of philosophy, thus explaining the necessity of comments on all of Scripture. Yet Strauss's argument relies on the idea that the philosopher is using relatively little of the text, and so my objection can still be maintained. See Strauss, "How to Read," 113, 119.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 98.17-99.7.

would see people filling their roles within the intellectual hierarchy.⁷⁶

A second objection would be quite the opposite. This objection would say that I have not laid out anything particularly new as one could already see this line in Spinoza's thinking before my intervention. In other words, my effort was unnecessary and my reading is the most obvious one. This objection can be refuted by the previous one itself: the very fact that a major school of thought about Spinoza's TTP works against this argument and likewise against his concern for the common believer, shows that my intervention is useful and that I have established a provocative reading of the text.

To conclude, I have shown that it is viable to read Spinoza's concept of blessedness as being partially accorded to those for whom erroneous beliefs of God are satisfactory, and push them to devotion as well as obedience. This would create two rewards with definitive categories: the highest good would be accorded to those who truly know and love God, while salvation would go to those who obey God, without these being mutually exclusive. Blessedness would exist in a category somewhat attached to both, in that for the truly rational people, blessedness and attaining the highest good would coincide. For the common person, blessedness would come about when he felt no conflict about obeying the divine order, and this peace of mind would prove to be a real yet non-material benefit.⁷⁷

Works Cited

1. Benedictus de Spinoza, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. II, ed., trans., Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).
2. Leo Strauss, "How to Study Spinoza's *Theological Political Treatise*," in *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* vol. 17 (1947-8): 69-131.
3. Edwin Curley, "Glossary," in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. II, ed., Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016): 620-1 s.v. "Common People."

⁷⁶Perhaps this is similar to discussions about who Maimonides thought the thirteen principles of faith espoused in his first comment on Perek Chelek were for.

⁷⁷Of course, Strauss suggests the most important upshot of this: maybe Spinoza is right. This solution would be much more palatable than one that heavily condescends to the vulgus. See Strauss, "How to Read," 81-2.