



Intra-Jewish Censorship: The Case of Spinoza

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BARUCH SPINOZA
TRACTATUS
THEOLOGICO-POLITICUS

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CHAPTER 3

Of the vocation of the Hebrews, and whether the gift of prophecy was peculiar to them.

EVERYONE'S TRUE HAPPINESS and blessedness consists solely in the enjoyment of good, not in priding himself that he alone is enjoying that good to the exclusion of others. He who counts himself more blessed because he alone enjoys wellbeing not shared by others, or because he is more blessed and fortunate than others, knows not what is true happiness and blessedness, and the joy he derives therefrom, if it be not mere childishness, has its only source in spite and malice. For example, a man's true happiness and blessedness consists solely in wisdom and knowledge of truth, and not in that he is wiser than others, or that others are without true knowledge. This adds nothing at all to his wisdom, that is, his true happiness. So he who rejoices for this reason rejoices at another's misfortune, and is therefore spiteful and malicious, knowing neither true wisdom nor the peace of the true life.

So when Scripture, in exhorting the Hebrews to obey the Law, says that God has chosen them for himself above all other nations (Deut. ch.10 v.15), "that he is nigh unto them as he is not unto others (Deut. ch.4 v.4,7)," that for them alone he has ordained just laws (same ch. v.8), that he has made himself known only to them before all others (same ch. v.32) and so forth, it is speaking merely according to the understanding of those who, as was shown in the previous chapter and as Moses also testifies (Deut. ch.9 v.6,7), knew not true blessedness. For surely they would have been no less blessed if God had called all men equally to salvation, nor would God have been less close to them for being equally close to others, nor would their laws have been less just or they themselves less wise if those laws had been ordained for all men. Miracles would have displayed God's power no less if they had been wrought for other nations as well, and the Hebrews would have been no less in duty bound to worship God if God had bestowed those gifts equally upon all men. When God tells Solomon (1 Kings ch.3 v.12) that no one shall be as wise as he in time to come, this seems to be just a figure of speech, intending to signify exceptional wisdom. Be that as it may, it is quite

incredible that God should have promised Solomon, for his greater happiness, that he would never bestow such wisdom on anyone thereafter. This would in no way have increased Solomon's understanding, nor would the wise king have been any the less grateful for such a gift even if God had said that he would bestow the same wisdom on all men.

However, although we assert that Moses was speaking to the understanding of the Hebrews in the passages of the Pentateuch just quoted, we do not mean to deny that God ordained those laws in the Pentateuch for them alone, nor that he spoke only to them, nor that the Hebrews witnessed marvels such have never befallen any other nation. Our point is merely this, that Moses wished to admonish the Hebrews in a particular way, using such reasoning as would bind them more firmly to the worship of God, having regard to the immaturity of their understanding. Further, we wished to show that the Hebrews surpassed other nations not in knowledge nor in piety, but in quite a different respect; or (to adopt the language of Scripture directed to their understanding) that the Hebrews were chosen by God above all others not for the true life nor for any higher understanding—though often admonished thereto—but for a quite different purpose. What that purpose was, I shall now proceed to demonstrate.

But before I begin, I wish to explain briefly what I shall hereafter mean by God's direction, by God's help, external and internal, by God's calling, and, finally, by fortune. By God's direction I mean the fixed and immutable order of Nature, or chain of natural events; for I have said above, and have already shown elsewhere, that the universal laws of Nature according to which all things happen and are determined are nothing but God's eternal decrees, which always involve eternal truth and necessity. So it is the same thing whether we say that all things happen according to Nature's laws or that they are regulated by God's decree and direction. Again, since the power of Nature in its entirety is nothing other than the power of God through which alone all things happen and are determined, it follows that whatever man—who is also a part of Nature—acquires for himself to help to preserve his own being, or whatever Nature provides for him without any effort on his part, all this is provided for him solely by the divine power, acting either through human nature or externally to human nature. Therefore whatever human nature can effect solely by its own power to preserve its own being can rightly

be called God's internal help, and whatever falls to man's advantage from the power of external causes can rightly be called God's external help. And from this, too, can readily be deduced what must be meant by God's choosing, for since no one acts except by the predetermined order of Nature—that is, from God's eternal direction and decree—it follows that no one chooses a way of life for himself or accomplishes anything except by the special vocation of God, who has chosen one man before others for a particular work or a particular way of life. Finally, by fortune I mean simply God's direction in so far as he directs human affairs through causes that are external and unforeseen.

With these preliminary remarks, let us return to our purpose, which is to see why it was that the Hebrew nation was said to have been chosen by God before all others. To demonstrate this, I proceed as follows.

All worthy objects of desire can be classified under one of these three general headings:

1. To know things through their primary causes.
2. To subjugate the passions; i.e. to acquire the habit of virtue.
3. To live in security and good health.

The means that directly serve for the attainment of the first and second objectives lie within the bounds of human nature itself, so that their acquisition must depend on human power alone; i.e. solely on the laws of human nature. For this reason it is obvious that these gifts are not peculiar to any nation but have always been common to all mankind—unless we entertain the delusion that Nature at some time created different species of men. But the means that serve for the attainment of security and physical wellbeing lie principally in external circumstances, and are called the gifts of fortune because they mainly depend on the operation of external causes of which we are in ignorance. So in this matter the fool and the wise man have about an equal chance of happiness or unhappiness. Nevertheless, much can be effected by human contrivance and vigilance to achieve security and to avoid injuries from other men and from beasts. To this end, reason and experience have taught us no surer means than to organise a society under fixed laws, to occupy a fixed territory and to concentrate the strength of all its members into one body, as it were, a social body. However, a quite considerable degree of ability and vigilance is needed to organise and preserve a society, and therefore that society will be more secure, more stable

and less exposed to fortune, which is founded and governed mainly by men of wisdom and vigilance, while a society composed of men who lack these qualities is largely dependent on fortune and is less stable. If the latter nevertheless endures for some considerable time, this is to be attributed to some other guidance, not its own. Indeed, if it overcomes great perils and enjoys prosperity, it cannot fail to marvel at and worship God's guidance (that is to say, in so far as God acts through hidden external causes, and not through the nature and mind of man); for what it has experienced is far beyond its expectation and belief, and can truly be regarded even as a miracle.

Through this alone, then, do nations differ from one another, namely, in respect of the kind of society and laws under which they live and are governed. Thus the Hebrew nation was chosen by God before all others not by reason of its understanding nor of its spiritual qualities, but by reason of its social organisation and the good fortune whereby it achieved supremacy and retained it for so many years. This is quite evident from Scripture itself. A merely casual perusal clearly reveals that the Hebrews surpassed other nations in this alone, that they were successful in achieving security for themselves and overcame great dangers, and this chiefly by God's external help alone. In other respects they were no different from other nations, and God was equally gracious to all. For in respect of their understanding (as we have shown in the preceding chapter) it is clear that the Hebrews' ideas of God and Nature were quite commonplace, and so it was not in respect of their understanding that they were chosen by God before others. Nor yet in respect of virtue and the true life, for in this matter again they were on the same footing as other nations, very few of them being chosen. Therefore their election and vocation consisted only in the material success and prosperity of their state; nor do we see that God promised anything other than this to the Patriarchs* and their successors. Indeed, in return for their obedience the Law promises them nothing other than the continuing prosperity of their state and material advantages, whereas disobedience and the breaking of the Covenant would bring about the downfall of their state and the severest hardships. This is not surprising, for the purpose of an organised society and state (as is clear from what has just been said, and as I shall show

* See Note 4.

at greater length hereafter) is to achieve security and ease. Now a state can subsist only if the laws are binding on all individuals. If all the members of one society choose to disregard the laws, by that very fact they will dissolve that society and destroy the state. Therefore, in return for their consistent observance of the laws, the only promise that could be made to the society of the Hebrews was their security* with its attendant advantages; whereas for disobedience no surer punishment could be foretold than the downfall of their state, accompanied not only by the usual unhappy consequences but by additional troubles, peculiar to them, entailed by the special constitution of their state. This latter point I need not labour at present, but this I will add, that the laws contained in the Old Testament were revealed and ordained for the Jews alone; for as God chose them only for the establishing of a special kind of society and state, they must also have had laws of a special kind. As to whether God ordained special laws for other nations as well and revealed himself through prophecy to their lawgivers—that is, under those attributes by which they were accustomed to imagine God—I cannot be sure. But this at least is evident from Scripture, that other nations also had their own state and their special laws by God's external guidance. To prove this I shall cite two Scriptural passages only.

In Genesis ch.14 v.18,19,20 it is related that Melchizedek was king of Jerusalem and priest of the Most High God, and in his capacity of priest (Num. ch.6 v.23) he blessed Abraham, and Abraham, the beloved of God, gave a tenth part of all his spoils to this priest of God. All this shows well enough that before God founded the nation of Israel he had established kings and priests in Jerusalem and had appointed rites and laws for them. Whether he did so through prophecy is, as I have said, unclear. But of this, at least, I am sure, that while Abraham lived there he lived religiously according to those laws. For Abraham had not received from God any special rites, and yet it states in Gen. ch.26 v.5 that he observed the worship, precepts, statutes and laws of God. This must undoubtedly refer to the worship, precepts, statutes and laws of king Melchizedek. Malachi, in ch.1 v.10,11 rebukes the Jews with these words: "Who is there among you that would shut the doors (of the temple) lest fire be kindled on mine altars for nought? I have no pleasure in

* See Note 5.

you . . . etc. From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name is great among the nations, and everywhere incense is offered unto me, and a pure offering. For my name is great among nations, saith the Lord of hosts." Surely by these words, which can be interpreted as referring only to his present time unless we do violence to the text, he abundantly testifies that the Jews at that time were no more beloved of God than were other nations. Indeed, he indicates that by his miracles God made himself known to other nations more so than to the Jews of that time,—who had then partly regained their independence without miraculous intervention—and that the Gentiles possessed rites and ceremonies by which they were acceptable to God.

But I leave these considerations, for it is sufficient for my purpose to have demonstrated that the choosing of the Jews referred only to the following facts: their temporal material prosperity and freedom—i.e. their political independence; to the manner and means whereby they achieved it, and consequently to their laws as well, in so far as these were necessary for the preservation of their special kind of state, and, finally, to the way in which these laws were revealed. But in other matters, wherein consists the true happiness of man, they were on the same footing as other nations. So when Scripture says (Deut. ch.4 v.7) that no other nation has its God so nigh unto them as the Jews have their God, this must be understood in respect of the independence of their state, and as referring only to the time when so many miracles befell them, and so forth. For in respect of understanding and virtue, that is, in respect of blessedness, God is equally gracious to all, as we have already stated and proved by reason. This is also well established from Scripture, for the Psalmist says (Psalm 145 v.18), "The Lord is nigh to all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth." Likewise in the same Psalm, v.9, "The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." In Psalm 33 v.15 it is clearly stated that God has given the same understanding to all, in these words, "He fashioneth our hearts alike." The Hebrews considered the heart to be the seat of the soul and the understanding, as I think everybody knows. Again, from Job ch.29 v.28 it is clear that God ordained this law for the whole human race: to reverence God and to abstain from evildoing, i.e. to act righteously; and so Job, although a Gentile, was to God the most acceptable of all men, for he surpassed all men in piety and religion. Finally, it is quite evident from Jonah ch.4 v.2 that not only

to the Jews but to all mankind God is gracious, merciful, long-suffering and abundant in kindness, and loth to punish. For Jonah says, "Therefore I resolved to flee before to Tarshish, for I knew (namely, from the words of Moses, Exodus ch.34 v.6) that Thou art a gracious God, merciful . . . etc." and therefore likely to pardon the Ninevites.

We therefore conclude (since God is equally gracious to all and the Hebrews were chosen only with respect to their social organisation and their government) that the individual Jew, considered alone apart from his social organisation and his government, possesses no gift of God above other men, and there is no difference between him and a Gentile. Since, then, it is true that God is equally gracious, merciful etc. to all men, and since the function of the prophet was to teach not the special laws of his country but true virtue, and to admonish men thereto, there is no doubt that all nations possessed prophets and that the gift of prophecy was not peculiar to the Jews. In actual fact, this is borne out by history, both secular and sacred; and although the sacred history of the Old Testament does not specify that other nations had as many prophets as the Hebrews, or indeed that any Gentile prophet was expressly sent by God to the nations, this has no significance; for the Hebrews were concerned to record their own history, not that of other nations. It is therefore sufficient that in the Old Testament we find that Gentiles and the uncircumcised, such as Noah, Enoch, Abimelech, Balaam etc., did in fact prophesy, and furthermore that Hebrew prophets were sent by God not only to their own nation but to many others. Ezekiel prophesied for all the nations that were then known. Indeed, as far as we know, Obadiah prophesied only to the Idumaeans, and Jonah was chiefly a prophet to the Ninevites. Isaiah bewails and foretells the calamities, and prophesies the restoration, not only of the Jews but of other nations. In chapter 16 v.9 he says, "Therefore will I bewail Jazer with weeping," and in chapter 19 he foretells first the calamities of the Egyptians and then their restoration (see same chapter v.19,20,21,25), saying that God will send a saviour to free them, that God will make himself known to them, and that the Egyptians will worship God with sacrifices and gifts; and finally he calls that nation the blessed Egyptians, the people of God. All this is certainly worthy of special note. Lastly, Jeremiah is called the prophet not only of the Hebrew nation but of all nations absolutely (Jer. ch.1 v.5). He, too, bemoans the coming calamities of nations and foretells

their restoration, for in chapter 48 v.31 he says of the Moabites, "Therefore will I howl for Moab, I will cry out for all Moab," and in verse 36, "Therefore mine heart will sound for Moab like timbrels:" and he prophesies their eventual restoration, as also the restoration of the Egyptians, the Ammonites and the Elamites.

Therefore there is no doubt that other nations, like the Jews, also had their prophets, who prophesied to them and to the Jews. Although Scripture makes mention of only one man, Balaam, to whom was revealed the future of the Jews and of other nations, we should not suppose that Balaam's prophesying was confined to that one occasion; the narrative makes it quite clear that he had long been renowned for his prophecy and other divine gifts. Balak, ordering him to be summoned, said (Num. ch.22 v.6), "For I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed." So we see that he possessed the same power that God bestowed on Abraham (Gen. ch.12 v.3). Then Balaam, as was his custom in prophesying, told the messengers to await him until God's will should be revealed to him. When he was prophesying, that is, when he was interpreting the true mind of God, he was wont to say of himself, "The word of him who hears the words of God, who knows the knowledge (or mind, or foreknowledge) of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open." Finally, after blessing the Hebrews by God's command, he began, as was his custom, to prophesy to other nations and to foretell their future.

All this abundantly shows that he had always been a prophet, or that he had frequently prophesied, and (another point to be here noted) that he possessed that which especially afforded prophets certainty of the truth of their prophecy, namely, a mind bent only on that which is good and right. For he neither blessed nor cursed whomsoever he pleased, as Balak thought, but only those whom God willed to be blessed or cursed. That is why he answered Balak, "If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord to do good or ill as I will. What the Lord saith, that shall I speak." As for the Lord being angry with him while he was on the way, the same thing befell Moses when he was setting out for Egypt at God's command (Exodus ch.24 v.4); as to his receiving money for prophesying, Samuel did the same (1 Sam. ch.9 v.7,8); and if he sinned in any way (see 2 Ep. Peter ch.2 v.15,16 and Jude v.11), "there is not a just man on earth who

always doeth good and sinneth not" (Eccl. ch.7 v.20). Indeed, his prayers must have always had much influence with God and his power of cursing must have been very considerable, since it is often found in Scripture, as testimony of God's great mercy towards the Israelites, that God would not hearken to Balaam and changed his cursing to blessing (Deut. ch.23 v.6, Josh. ch.24 v.10, Nehem. ch.13 v.2). He must therefore have been most acceptable to God, for the prayers and cursings of the wicked move God not at all. So since he was a true prophet, and yet Joshua (ch.13 v.22) referred to him as a soothsayer or augur, it is clear that this title, too, was an honourable one, and that those whom the Gentiles called augurs and soothsayers were true prophets, while those whom Scripture often accuses and condemns were false soothsayers, deceiving the Gentiles as false prophets deceived the Jews. And this is also quite clearly established from other passages of Scripture. Therefore we conclude that the gift of prophecy was not peculiar to the Jews, but was common to all nations.

The Pharisees, however, vigorously contend that this divine gift was peculiar to their nation, whereas other nations (such is the ingenuity of superstition!) foretold the future with the aid of some diabolical power. The chief evidence they adduce to give authoritative support to this belief is Exodus ch.33 v.16, where Moses says to God, "For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? Is it not when thou goest with us? So shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are on the face of the earth." From this, I repeat, they would infer that Moses besought God that he should be present to the Jews and reveal himself to them by prophecy, and, further, that he should grant this grace to no other nation. Surely, it is absurd that Moses should grudge God's presence to the Gentiles, or that he should have ventured to make such a petition to God. The fact is that when Moses realised the character and the obstinate spirit of his nation, he saw clearly that they could not accomplish their undertaking without mighty miracles and the special external help of God, and must assuredly perish without such help; and so he besought this special external help of God so that it should be evident that God willed them to be saved. For he speaks as follows (ch.34 v.9), "If now I have found favour in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us, for it is a stiff-necked people . . ." and so on. Thus the reason why he sought God's special external help was the

obstinacy of the people, and the fact that Moses sought nothing beyond this special external help is made even clearer by God's answer. For God answered at once (same chapter v.10), "Behold, I make a covenant; before all thy people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation . . ." Therefore Moses is here concerned with the choosing of the Hebrews only in the way I have explained, and sought nothing else from God.

However, in Paul's Epistle to the Romans I find another text which carries more weight with me, namely, chapter 3 v.1,2, where Paul's teaching appears to differ from that which we have here presented. He says, "What advantage, then, hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God." But if we have regard to the main doctrine that Paul is concerned to teach, we shall find nothing at variance with the view we are here presenting; on the contrary, his doctrine is the same as ours. For in verse 29 of the same chapter he says that God is the God of both Jews and Gentiles, and in chapter 2 v.25,26, "If thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision; on the other hand, if uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, his uncircumcision shall be counted for circumcision." Again, in chapter 3 v.9 and chapter 4 v.15 he says that all alike, Jews and Gentiles, were under sin, but that there can be no sin without the commandment and the Law. This makes it quite clear (as we have also shown above from Job ch.28 v.28) that to all men without exception was revealed the law under which all men lived—namely, the law which has regard only to true virtue, not that law which is established to suit the requirements of a particular state and is adapted to the character of one nation.

Finally, Paul concludes that, since God is the God of all nations—that is, he is equally gracious to all—and since all mankind were equally under the law and under sin, it was for all nations that God sent his Christ to free all men alike from the bondage of the law, so that no longer would they act righteously from the law's command but from the unwavering resolution of the heart. Thus Paul's teaching coincides exactly with ours. So when he says, "To the Jews alone were entrusted the oracles of God," we should either take it as meaning that only to the Jews were the laws entrusted in writing while to other nations they were communicated by revelation and conception alone, or we must say (since Paul's aim is to refute objections that could be raised only by the Jews) that Paul is answering

in accordance with the understanding and beliefs of the Jews of that time. For in order to preach that which he had partly seen and partly heard, he was a Greek with the Greeks and a Jew with the Jews.

It now only remains for us to answer the arguments of those who would convince themselves that the election of the Jews was not a temporal matter, concerned only with their commonwealth, but was eternal; for, they say, we see that the Jews still survive in spite of having lost their commonwealth and being scattered all over the world for so many years, separated from all nations; and that this has befallen no other nation. And again, they say, there are many passages of Holy Scripture that appear to tell us that God has chosen the Jews for himself unto eternity; and so, although they have lost their commonwealth, they nevertheless remain God's chosen ones. The passages which they think most convincing in teaching this eternal election are chiefly the following:

1. Jeremiah chapter 31 v.36, where the prophet testifies that the seed of Israel shall remain God's people unto eternity, comparing them with the fixed order of the heavens and of Nature.

2. Ezekiel chapter 20 v.32 and following, where the prophet apparently means that, although the Jews may deliberately turn away from the worship of God, God will nevertheless gather them together again from all the lands where they are scattered and lead them to the wilderness of peoples, as he led their fathers to the wilderness of Egypt; and from there eventually, after separating them from the rebellious and the transgressors, he will bring them to his Holy Mountain, where the whole house of Israel shall worship him.

Other passages are also cited, especially by the Pharisees, but I think I shall satisfy everybody if I reply to these two. This will occasion me no difficulty when I show from Scripture itself that God did not choose the Hebrews unto eternity, but only on the same terms as he had earlier chosen the Canaanites. These also had priests (as I have shown above) who devoutly worshipped God, and yet God rejected them because of their dissolute living, their folly, and their corrupt worship. For Moses (Levit. ch.18 v.27,28) warns the Israelites not to defile themselves with abominations like the Canaanites, lest the land spew them out as it had spewed out those peoples that used to dwell there. And in Deuteronomy ch.8 v.19,20 he threatens them with utter destruction in the plainest possible terms, speaking as follows, "I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish; as the

nations which the Lord destroyed before your face, so shall ye perish." And many other passages to this effect are to be found in the Law, expressly indicating that God did not choose the Hebrew nation absolutely, nor unto eternity. So if the prophets foretold for them a new, eternal covenant involving the knowledge, love and grace of God, it can be easily proved that this promise was made for the godly alone. For in that same chapter of Ezekiel which we have just quoted it is explicitly stated that God will cut off from them the rebellious and the transgressors; and in Zephaniah chapter 3 v.11,12 that God will take from their midst the proud, leaving behind the poor. And since this election has regard to true virtue, it is not to be imagined that it was promised only to the godly among the Jews to the exclusion of all others. We must evidently believe that the true Gentile prophets, whom we have shown to be found among all nations, made the same promise to the faithful of their own nations and comforted them thereby. Therefore this eternal covenant involving the knowledge and love of God is universal, as is clearly shown from Zephaniah chapter 3 v.9,10, so that in this respect no difference can be granted between Jews and Gentiles, nor therefore any special election of the Jews beyond that which we have already indicated.

As to the fact that the prophets, in speaking of this election which refers only to true virtue, intermingled many sayings regarding sacrifices and other ceremonies and the rebuilding of the Temple and the city, such figurative expressions, after the manner and nature of prophecy, were intended to convey a spiritual message, so that they might also indicate to the Jews, whose prophets they were, the impending restoration of their commonwealth and temple, to be expected at the time of Cyrus. Therefore at the present time there is nothing whatsoever that the Jews can arrogate to themselves above other nations.

As to their continued existence for so many years when scattered and stateless, this is in no way surprising, since they have separated themselves from other nations to such a degree as to incur the hatred of all, and this not only through external rites alien to the rites of other nations but also through the mark of circumcision, which they most religiously observe. That they are preserved largely through the hatred of other nations is demonstrated by historical fact. When the King of Spain¹ formerly compelled the Jews to embrace the

¹ Ferdinand. A reference to his decree of 1492.

religion of his kingdom or else to go into exile, a considerable number of Jews accepted Catholicism. Now since all the privileges of native Spaniards were granted to those who embraced their religion, and they were then considered worthy of full civic rights, they were so speedily assimilated to the Spaniards that after a short while no trace of them was left, nor any remembrance. But just the opposite fate befell those whom the King of Portugal² compelled to embrace his country's religion. Although converted to this religion, they lived on their own, because the king declared them unworthy of civic rights.

The mark of circumcision, too, I consider to be such an important factor in this matter that I am convinced that this by itself will preserve their nation for ever. Indeed, were it not that the fundamental principles of their religion discourage manliness, I would not hesitate to believe that they will one day, given the opportunity—such is the mutability of human affairs—establish once more their independent state, and that God will again choose them. The Chinese afford us an outstanding example of such a possibility. They, too, religiously observe the custom of the pigtail which sets them apart from all other people, and they have preserved themselves as a separate people for so many thousands of years that they far surpass all other nations in antiquity. They have not always maintained their independence, but they did regain it after losing it, and will no doubt recover it again when the spirit of the Tartars becomes enfeebled by reason of luxurious living and sloth.

In conclusion, should anyone be disposed to argue that the Jews, for this reason or any other, have been chosen by God unto eternity, I shall not oppose him, provided that he holds that this election, be it temporal or eternal, in so far as it is peculiar to the Jews, is concerned only with the nature of their commonwealth and their material welfare (since this is the only distinguishing mark between one nation and another); whereas in respect of understanding and true virtue there is no distinction between one nation and another, and in regard to these matters God has not chosen one nation before another.

² Manuel. A decree of 1496.

CHAPTER 4

Of the Divine Law.

THE WORD LAW, taken in its absolute sense, means that according to which each individual thing—either all in general or those of the same kind—act in one and the same fixed and determinate manner, this manner depending either on Nature's necessity or on human will. A law which depends on Nature's necessity is one which necessarily follows from the very nature of the thing, that is, its definition; a law which depends on human will, and which could more properly be termed a statute (*ius*), is one which men ordain for themselves and for others with view to making life more secure and more convenient, or for other reasons.

For example, the fact that all bodies colliding with smaller bodies lose as much of their own motion as they impart to other bodies is a universal law governing all bodies, and follows from Nature's necessity. Similarly, the fact that a man, in remembering one thing, forthwith calls to mind another like it, or which he has seen along with it, is a law that necessarily follows from the nature of man. But the fact that men give up, or are compelled to give up, their natural right and bind themselves to live under fixed rules, depends on human will. And although I grant that, in an absolute sense, all things are determined by the universal laws of Nature to exist and to act in a definite and determinate way, I still say that these latter laws depend on human will. My reasons are as follows:

1. Man, in so far as he is part of Nature, constitutes a part of the power of Nature. Thus whatever follows from the necessity of man's nature—that is, from Nature as we conceive her to be determinately expressed in man's nature—follows from human power, even though it does so necessarily. Therefore the enacting of these man-made laws may quite legitimately be said to depend on human will, for it depends especially on the power of the human mind in the following respect, that the human mind, in so far as it is concerned with the perception of truth and falsity, can be quite clearly conceived without these man-made laws, whereas it cannot be conceived without Nature's necessary law, as defined above.

2. We ought to define and explain things through their proximate