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Spinoza's Use of the Psalms in the Context of His Political Project

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Abstract

Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* pertains to matters of biblical interpretation as much as it does to political philosophy. In addition to laying the groundwork for a method of biblical interpretation in his seventh chapter, Spinoza engages in biblical exegesis throughout his work. Among the many portions of the Bible that he uses and discusses are the Psalms. An examination of Spinoza's highly selective use of Psalms shows this use to be apologetical. Spinoza used the Psalms as part of his defense of his political philosophy, wherein he privatized religion, handing over public religious matters (such as ritual) into the hands of the secular state.

Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* is known primarily as a work of political philosophy, yet much of Spinoza's text addresses matters of biblical exegesis. In fact, his entire seventh chapter is devoted to laying out a method for how to interpret the Bible scientifically.[1] In this article, I examine Spinoza's use of the Book of Psalms in his *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, showing how the specific psalms that he selects function within his apologetic framework in defense of his political philosophy. In some instances, the psalms serve to naturalize what Jews and Christians traditionally considered the supernatural. In other places, Spinoza uses the psalms to support one or more aspects of his concept of God in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*.[2] Particularly illuminating is Spinoza's use of Psalm 40 in the fifth chapter of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, which pertains to the role religious ceremonies play in the Bible. Spinoza redeploys Psalm 40 to deemphasize the importance of external ritual. In doing this, Spinoza resembles certain strains of Protestant exegesis from the previous hundred years or more and the traditions of interpretation that they bequeathed. As we shall see, this use of Psalm 40 serves an important function within Spinoza's overall political philosophy, wherein he asserts the authority of the state on all matters pertaining to the public realm, including religious ceremonies and rituals. Although Spinoza cites portions of the Pentateuch more frequently than the Psalms, of the seventy-four different sources that Spinoza explicitly cites throughout his *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (see Tables 1 through 3), only six are cited more frequently than the Psalms, making the Psalms one of the most important sources on which Spinoza relies and the most important from among the wisdom literature of the Old Testament (see Table 1).[3]

[1] Unless otherwise mentioned, all citations to Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* are taken from Spinoza (2007). However, when the Latin text is being consulted, those citations and quotation are from the most recent critical edition (Spinoza 2012).

[2] This is as distinct from the way in which Spinoza describes God in his *Ethica*. Spinoza began his *Ethica* before writing *Tractatus theologico-politicus* but interrupted his work to publish the latter. After publishing *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, Spinoza completed his *Ethica* but did not publish it. Although Spinoza's discussions of God in *Tractatus theologico-politicus* are relatively easy to square with more traditional Jewish and Christian conceptions, his descriptions of God in *Ethica*, wherein God is collapsed into nature, are not.

[3] Spinoza makes an explicit reference to Baruch, which seems to be a reference to the Book of Baruch, but it is possible that he is simply referencing Baruch as Jeremiah's scribe and not referring to the actual text of Baruch, in which case Spinoza cites from only seventy-three different sources. With the exception of the Bible, whose authorship is highly contested, I am using sources to refer to authors (thus in some cases, Spinoza is relying on multiple works by the same author). With regard to biblical books, I count each book as a different source.

Table 1: Spinoza's Old Testament Citations

Old Testament Sources, in Order of Most Frequent Appearance in Main Text	No. Times Cited in Main Text	No. Times Cited in Marginal Annotations, Probably to be Added in a Later Edition
Deuteronomy	83	1
Exodus	50	1
Jeremiah	39	1
Genesis	38	6
Isaiah	30	1
1 Samuel	25	2
Psalms	25	0
Ezekiel	23	0
Joshua	22	1
Judges	20	1
Numbers	18	6
Nehemiah	15	9
1 Kings	14	2
2 Kings	14	5
Ezra	14	5
Daniel	14	1
1 Chronicles	13	8
2 Chronicles	13	1
Proverbs	12	0
Job	11	0
2 Samuel	8	4
Leviticus	7	0
Esther	7	0
Ecclesiastes	7	0
Jonah	6	0
Ruth	4	2
Amos	4	0
Zechariah	4	0
Hosea	3	0
Obadiah	3	0
Malachi	3	0
Micah	2	0
Zephaniah	2	0
Song of Songs	1	0
Lamentations	1	0
Nahum	1	0
Joel	1	0
Haggai	1	0
1 Maccabees[a]	1	0
Baruch (?)	1	0

[a] Although 1 Maccabees was not part of the Jewish biblical canon of Spinoza's contemporary Dutch Jews or a part of the Protestant canons of many of his Protestant interlocutors, he appears to use it as part of the Old Testament, as do Catholic and Orthodox Christians as well as Ethiopian Jews. The same appears to be the case with Baruch if he is in fact citing the Book of Baruch. In the case of 1 Maccabees, he cites it alongside Nehemiah, as if it is another Old Testament book (Spinoza 2007).

Table 2: Spinoza's New Testament Citations

New Testament Sources, in Order of Most Frequent Appearance in Main Text	No. Times Cited in Main Text	No. Times Cited in Marginal Annotations, Probably to be Added in a Later Edition
Romans	30	2
Matthew	14	1
1 Corinthians	12	0
1 John	5	0
James	4	0
Galatians	3	0
John	2	0
Hebrews	2	0
Acts	1	0
2 Corinthians	1	0
Philemon	1	0
1 Timothy	1	0
2 Timothy	1	0
2 Peter	1	0
Jude	1	0
Mark	0	1

BROADER HISTORICAL AND INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT FOR SPINOZA'S USE OF PSALMS

Spinoza stands at a pivotal place in the history of the march toward modern biblical criticism—the sort of biblical criticism that would come to full flower in the German universities of the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Goshen-Gottstein 1983; Morrow 2010c). This progressive development of modern biblical criticism, extending back into the medieval period, was part of and was affected by the major cultural currents and shifts that were taking place throughout Europe (Hahn and Wiker 2013; Morrow 2014, 2015). Medieval debates about the relationship between throne and altar, which resulted in many ongoing quarrels during the feudal period, were aided by the court exegesis performed by Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockham, which was motivated and shaped by the very debates their work served (Hahn and Wiker 2013; Minnis 2003). The Renaissance and Humanist emphasis *ad fontes*, which we find in Machiavelli as well as Erasmus, focused on the honing of philological and textual skills to the finest point possible (Goshen-Gottstein 1975, 1987; Kugel 1990; Legaspi 2010). The Protestant Reformation's singular emphasis on the text of Scripture, particularly in contrast to the authority of popes and councils, combined these trends of philological and textual focus, taking them in a direction that was greatly influenced by the politics of its time (Frampton 2006; Hahn and Wiker 2013).

Table 3: Spinoza's Citations of Other Literature

Other Sources, in Order of Most Frequent Appearance in Main Text	No. Times Cited in Main Text	No. Times Cited in Marginal Annotations, Probably to be Added in a Later Edition
Ibn Ezra	15	2
Maimonides	14	1
Talmud	8	0
Curtius	8	0
Josephus	7	1
Al-Fakhar	7	0
Rashi	3	1
Tacitus	3	1
Philo	2	0
Targum Jonathan	2	0
Seneca	2	0
Euclid	1	1
Aristotle	1	0
Ariosto	1	0
Ovid	1	0
Joseph ben Shem Tov	1	0
4 Ezra	1	0
Qur'an	1	0
Bomberg's Edition of Bible	1	0
Lodewijk Meyer	0	3
Spinoza (not by name but by text)	0	1
Virgil	0	1
Gersonides	0	1
David Kimchi	0	1
Abraham ben David	0	1
Tremellius' translation of the New Testament	0	1
Hobbes	0	1

The work of Martin Luther in particular coincided with German princes' desires for autonomy from the Papal States (Hahn and Wiker 2013). This wish for political autonomy was not a uniquely German desire but was widespread throughout Europe in regions that remained Catholic after the Reformation as well as in regions where the Protestant Reformation was successful. Indeed, every region that remained Catholic after the Reformation had already managed to secure concordat agreements with the pope before the Reformation. These agreements limited papal authority within their realms, especially by the state appointment of bishops and the curbing of monies that flowed out of their realms to the Papal States. In contrast, the Protestant Reformation succeeded only in regions that had failed to secure such concordats in advance. Thus the practicalities of

both the enduring presence of Catholicism in places such as France and the success of Protestantism in places such as the Germanic regions functioned as ideological justifications for increasing state sovereignty and as means of limiting the pope's reach within their realms (Cavanaugh 1995, 2009; Skinner 1978). R. W. Scribner and C. Scott Dixon's (2003: 34) comments on the Reformation's immediate aftermath are illuminating here:

> After a brief period of mass enthusiasm, . . . [support for the Reformation] retreated to being a minority phenomenon. At a crude estimate, during the first generation of the Reformation, up to mid-century, and perhaps even during the second, probably no more than 10 per cent of the German population ever showed an active and lasting enthusiasm for reformed ideas. Where massive numbers were "won" after 1526, to what became the new church, it occurred involuntarily, through a prince deciding that his territory should adopt the new faith. When we speak of the extensive hold "Protestantism" had on Germany by the second half of the sixteenth century . . . this was because there were large numbers of "involuntary Protestants" created by the princes' confessional choices.[4]

Spinoza stands firmly within this historical context. Although his background was Sephardic Jewish, his tendencies are more toward a Protestant-informed exegesis than a traditional Jewish one. Such tendencies were more a matter of circumstance and situation than of enthusiasm. Spinoza's methodological program in his *Tractatus theologico-politicus* is also pivotal in taking this exegesis further, secularizing it in Spinoza's ostensible intent to create a scientific biblical exegesis patterned on the then-emerging natural sciences (Morrow 2013).[5] However, Spinoza's political desire to avoid Church-court politics was at the forefront of his mind and was explicit in his work, as he made clear when he wrote, in the preface of his *Tractatus theologico-politicus* 2007: 8–9):

> As I reflected on all this . . . that doctrinal conflicts are fought out in Church and Court with intense passion and generate the most bitter antipathies and struggles, which quickly bring men to sedition, as well as a whole host of other things that it would take too long to explain here—I resolved in all seriousness to make a fresh examination of Scripture with a free and unprejudiced mind . . . . With this proviso in mind, I devised a method for interpreting the sacred volumes.

We should bear in mind that by this point, Spinoza had been kicked out of the Sephardic Jewish community of Amsterdam for reasons that are not entirely

[4] Compare this with the history of the Reformation in Duffy (1992, 2001).

[5] Spinoza's important, but often unrecognized, use of Francis Bacon's method is a case in point (Manrique Charry 2010; Morrow 2013; Preus 2001; Zac 1965).

known (Kaplan 1984; Popkin 2004; Vlessing 1997).[6] He befriended a number of intellectuals who remained on the margins of the reigning Calvinist orthodoxy within the Dutch Republic and often quite outside the bounds of that orthodoxy (Popkin 1982, 1984, 1985, 1986). Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* was an attempt to eviscerate the traditional authority of religious traditions and then repackage those traditions so that on all external matters, they would be seen as subservient to the state, and all of this would be based on the Scriptural texts that the Jewish and Christian traditions held so dearly. Spinoza's historical exegesis was an ostensible attempt to level the playing field, giving everyone equal access to the Bible's meaning. In reality, it privileged the emerging secular states—and the future secular exegetical specialists envisioned by such a method—over any and every religious tradition that was unwilling to secularize (Levenson 1993). This was by design.

EXAMINATION OF SPINOZA'S USE OF PSALMS

In examining Spinoza's use of Psalms, I follow the order in which he brings them up in his book. His exegetical approach to Psalms in general, within his *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, is not systematic; rather, Spinoza uses and interprets the Psalms in passing, to bolster his arguments. Although Spinoza's citations of the Psalms account for only 3 percent of his total overall citations, and 4 percent of his citations from the Old Testament, the Psalms (along with 1 Samuel) remain the seventh most frequently cited source out of seventy-four sources (see Tables 1 through 3) and the sixth most frequently cited Old Testament book (see Table 1).[7] The first time that Spinoza brings up Psalms explicitly in *Tractatus theologico-politicus* is in the first chapter, "On Prophecy." He cites Psalm 135 as evidence that the Hebrew word *ruach*, often translated as "spirit," can be used to mean a

[6] One of the possible reasons for Spinoza's excommunication that is too little considered, despite the impressive archival evidence that lends it credence, pertains to the combination of Spinoza's defaming his father, who had been a prominent member of the synagogue community, blaming his late father for the financial debt Spinoza owed, and then securing a legal gentile guardian from the secular Amsterdam authorities, thereby bypassing the Jewish authorities who would normally deal with the financial situation. Spinoza's act cancelled his debt and would have been seen as a major public embarrassment to the Sephardic Jewish community of Amsterdam at that time (Frampton 2006; Kaplan 1984; Morrow 2010b; Vlessing 1993, 1996, 1997).

[7] If we include Spinoza's citations of sources in his later marginal annotations that were intended to be incorporated into later editions of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, the citations of Psalms remains 3 percent of the overall citations and 4 percent of the Old Testament citations (see Tables 1 through 3). The only difference is that 1 Samuel displaces Psalms as the seventh most cited source in total and sixth most cited source from the Old Testament. Whereas both 1 Samuel and the Psalms are cited twenty-five times in the actual text of Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, Spinoza did not add any citations from the Psalms in his marginal annotations, but he did add a further two citations from 1 Samuel (see Table 1).

variety of natural phenomena, in this case "breath." Spinoza writes, "The word *ruagh* in its literal sense means 'wind' . . . but it is very often used to refer to many other things, all of them, however, derived from 'wind'. It is used: (1) to signify 'breath', as in Psalm 135.17, 'also there is no spirit in their mouth'" (20).[8] Although it is obvious that *ruach* can mean "wind" or "breath," Spinoza includes only natural meanings in his discussion here.[9]

This proves significant because Spinoza offers a very thorough and erudite discussion of "spirit" using both Hebrew *ruach* and its Latin equivalent, *spiritus*, in ways that are vastly different from how they have been traditionally interpreted and translated.[10] Spinoza isolates seven major categories for how "spirit" should be understood in the Bible: "breath," "life," "courage"/"strength," "ability," "mind," "soul," and "quarters of the world" (20–26). As can be seen in Table 5, Spinoza defines "spirit" in more than thirty different ways, all of which fall into one or more of the above seven categories. Most often, Spinoza understands "spirit" as having to do with the "mind" (see Table 4). Spinoza employs the word "spirit," referring either to God or to his linguistic discussion about "spirit" in order to understand the idea of "spirit of God," 148 times in *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (see Table 5). He explicitly defines the word only 63 of those times, 42.5 percent of the times that he uses the phrase (see Tables 4 and 5).[11] In some cases,

[8] In Latin, *Spiritus* can likewise be "spirit" or "breath."

[9] The possible exception here is when he includes the notion of "soul." Whether or not this is natural or supernatural depends on whether one views the soul as a natural or a supernatural entity. See the important study on Spinoza's philological analysis of *ruach* in his *Tractatus theologico-politicus* as a challenge to Maimonides' hermeneutic in his *Guide to the Perplexed* (Diamond 2011). Shortly after this discussion, Spinoza alludes to a passage in Psalms (presumably Psalm 80:10) that references the "cedars of God" (21). The context here is explaining "cedars of God," apparently God's possessions, as in this case referring rather to their "extraordinary height" (21).

[10] See Tables 4 and 5 for Spinoza's use of "spirit" in his *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. One of the most important examinations of Spinoza's linguistic discussion of "spirit" to date is Diamond (2011). Not all of Spinoza's new uses of "spirit" are unique to his work, since Hobbes had already engaged in a similar comparison in his *Leviathan*, with which Spinoza was likely familiar. But unlike Hobbes, who did not know Hebrew, Spinoza was able to place these new uses of "spirit" on more solid philological ground. For a brief look at Hobbes's interpretation of "spirit" in the Bible, see Morrow (2011). On Spinoza's knowledge of Hobbes, see Malcolm (2002), Osier (1987), Pacchi (1989), Parkin (2007), Sacksteder (1980), and Schumann (1987).

[11] As can be seen from Table 5, part of the reason for this is that 25.6 percent (thirty-eight) of his uses of "spirit" are simply Spinoza's use of *ruach* in Hebrew font as part of a quotation from the Old Testament. A further 24.3 percent (thirty-six) of his uses of "spirit" represent Spinoza's use of the Latin *spiritus* as a translation of these Old Testament quotations. In another 10.1 percent (fifteen) of the cases, Spinoza is providing a Hebrew phrase (not tied explicitly to a specific verse from the Old Testament) in Hebrew font. In yet another 10.1 percent (fifteen) of these instances, Spinoza is providing a Latin translation of these Hebrew phrases. Finally, in 3 percent (five) of his uses of "spirit," Spinoza is merely transliterating the Hebrew word, which he had just printed in Hebrew font, into Latin letters. Adding up the percentages here yields more than 100 percent, the reason being that in some of the instances cited, Spinoza does actually explain what he means by

Spinoza writes, "'spirit of God' and 'spirit of Jehovah', signify nothing more . . . than an extremely violent, very dry and fatal wind" (22).

Proceeding further in the first chapter, Spinoza comes to Psalm 51, wherein he marshals this famous penitential psalm to support his interpretation that the *ruach* of God can be understood, in passages, to refer to "the human mind itself" (23). He observes, "So also Psalm 51.12–13, 'create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew in me a proper' (or, modest) 'spirit' (i.e., desire)" (23).[12] Rather than "spirit," however, Spinoza sees *ruach* as referencing the human mind.

Spinoza then underscores what he detects to be anthropomorphisms in Scripture regarding depictions of God. He explains, "Now, since Scripture, deferring to the limitations of the common people, is accustomed to depict God like a man, and to ascribe to God a mind and a heart and the passions of the heart, as well as body and breath, 'the spirit of God' is often used in the Bible for mind, i.e., heart, passion, force and the breath of the mouth of God" (23). Thus Psalm 143:10 refers to the mind of God, and Psalm 33:6 "improperly" attributes breath to God (23). Writing further and quoting (but not naming) Psalm 33:6, Spinoza claims, "[T]he Psalmist, speaking poetically, even says, 'by the command of God the heavens were made, and all their host by the spirit' or breath 'of his mouth' (i.e. by his decree, as if it were expressed as a breath)" (24). Spinoza likewise interprets God's spirit in Psalm 139:7 as figurative (24). Neither human beings nor God, it seems, has a supernaturally understood "spirit," according to Spinoza.

This naturalization of spirit is crucial for Spinoza's broader Machiavellian project of unmasking the assumed hidden political agenda of religions and of hypocritical religious leaders. As we read about Machiavelli in one recent work:

> The gap between the appearance of holiness and the underlying reality of corruption in the Curia became, for Machiavelli, the paradigmatic form of princely deception . . . . Machiavelli inferred that the same gap exists in the Biblical text itself. His discovery of the "key" to the underlying motives of biblical figures created a new mode of exegesis, and Machiavelli therefore can rightly be considered as one of the earliest, and certainly the most influential, sources of the hermeneutics of suspicion (Hahn and Wiker 2013: 144).

"spirit." The point is that many of these examples do not require explanation, as when Spinoza gives the word "spirit" in Hebrew font and then transliterates it or when he quotes from a biblical passage in Hebrew and then translates it into Latin. In many of these instances, he is using the term "spirit" but simply transliterating or translating a passage or phrase for an audience that might not be literate in Hebrew.

[12] He finishes the quotation, "Do not cast me away from your sight, nor take the mind of your holiness from me,'" then comments, "Because sins were believed to arise from the flesh alone, and the mind was believed to urge nothing but good, he invokes the help of God against the desires of the flesh, but for the mind which the holy God gave him, he only prays God to preserve it."

Table 4: Spinoza's Definitions of "Spirit" (*Ruach* in Hebrew, *Spiritus* in Latin)

Meaning of "Spirit"[a]	Number of Occurrences
Spirit[b]	1
Wind	2
Breath	3
Life	2
Breathing/respiration	1
Courage	1
Strength (*viribus*), force (*vim*, *vi*), power (*vis*, *potentiam*)	4
Ability	1
Capacity	1
Sentiment	1
Mind	10
Will	2
Decision/decree	3
Appetite/desire	5
Movement of the mind	1
Passion	3
Talents	1
Pride	1
Humility	1
Hatred	1
Melancholy	2
Kindness	2
Virtue	3
Soul	2
Four quarters of the world	1
Sides of anything that faces the four quarters of the world	1
Heart	2
Mercy	2
Grace	1
Healthy and happy mind	2

[a] The English translations here are taken from Spinoza (2007). In certain places, I will link them or modify them and place the Latin original in parentheses for purposes of clarification.
[b] This is the supernatural translation, which Spinoza notes is the normal way in which the word is translated in the Bible but which he does not use in his work.

In this view, much of what is merely natural in the Bible has been interpreted supernaturally, as a tool of priestcraft. Such pretentions must be unmasked, and when the veil is removed, tyrannical religious powers will be rendered impotent, religious strife will end, and peace will reign on the earth—or so the view goes. Replacing "spirit" with "mind" is one way of delegitimizing the authorities that are concerned with the supernatural spirit; without "spirit," state leaders can guide

all actions toward the end of earthly peace, concerned with the human mind rather than human spirit.

In Spinoza's third chapter, "On the vocation of the Hebrews, and whether the prophetic gift was peculiar to them," he uses the Psalms to defend the notion that all people are equal under God:

> For the Psalmist says (Psalm 145.8), 'God is near to all those who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth'. Likewise at 145.9, 'God is kind to all men, and his mercy is to all things that he had made'. At Psalm 33.15 it is plainly stated that God gave the same intellect to all men, in these words, 'who forms their heart in the same manner'. For the heart was believed by the Hebrews to be the seat of the soul and of the intellect, as I suppose is well enough known to everyone (49).

As with the naturalization of spirit, this chapter naturalizes prophecy and discredits the notion of a people chosen by God. In so doing, Spinoza uses these texts to discredit religious authority, which rests so much on allegedly prophetic and divinely inspired revelation given to a particular people. Here, Spinoza uses the Psalms to universalize God's designs for humanity. He attempts to undercut Jewish claims to the unique calling of the Hebrew people in the Hebrew Bible. At the same time, this implicitly undercuts any Christian claims to unique status as new Israel.

It is in the fifth chapter, however, that we find one of the most significant tactics undertaken by Spinoza in his use of the Psalms. He entitled this fifth chapter "On the reason why ceremonies were instituted, and on belief in the historical narratives, i.e. for what reason and for whom such belief is necessary." We get a very clear sense of Spinoza's program here by looking at how he employs Psalm 40:

> Equally lucid is the testimony of verses 7–9 of Psalm 40, where the Psalmist says to God: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not wish, you have opened your ears to me, you have not sought a holocaust and an offering for sin; I have sought to carry out your will, O God; for your law is in my entrails'. Thus he applies the term 'law of God' only to what is inscribed in the entrails or heart, and excludes ceremonies from it; for ceremonies are good only by convention and not by nature, and therefore are not inscribed in the heart. Other passages in Scripture testify to the same thing, but it is enough to refer to these two [the other being Isaiah 1] (69).

Spinoza maintains that, according to Scripture, the law of God is primarily internal and that external ceremonies and rituals are the purview of the state. Following Isaiah 58 and using the Psalms as support, Spinoza explains further:

> Thus we see that the prophet promises as the reward for liberating [the oppressed] and practicing charity, a healthy mind in a healthy body and the glory of God after death, but the reward for ceremonies is merely the security of the state, prosperity, and worldly success. In Psalms 15 and 24 no mention is made of ceremonies, but only of moral teaching, evidently because in these psalms only happiness is proposed and offered, albeit in figurative language. For it is certain that in these psalms the 'mountain of God' and 'God's tents' and living in them signifies happiness and peace of mind, not the mountain of Jerusalem or the tabernacle of Moses; for no one lived in these places, and they were served by men from the tribe of Levi alone (70–71).

Judaism and the Church therefore may offer a "moral teaching," but their ceremonies and rituals are clearly inessential to the practice of the faith.

This use of the Psalms represents Spinoza's clearest attempt to redeploy the Psalms to privatize religion. It is part of Spinoza's rant against external ceremony. Very strong elements of this were present in certain segments of the Protestant Reformation (Asad 1993; Gregory 2012) as well as in Spinoza's contemporaries, such as Thomas Hobbes (Morrow 2010a, 2011). Spinoza radicalizes it beyond any of the Reformers such that no external rites, ceremonies, sacraments, or the like have any value before God but rather remain squarely within the purview of the state. The state, for which God apparently has no concern, thus maintains absolute control over such external matters as religious ceremonies.

In his sixth chapter, "On miracles," Spinoza makes a passing parenthetical reference to Psalm 73 that does not have much import; more significantly for that chapter and for his continued efforts throughout the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* to naturalize the supernatural, Spinoza invokes Psalms 104, 105, and 147 to emphasize that so-called miracles are really natural phenomena and not miraculous at all (Garrido Zaragoza 1988; Hammill 201; James 2012; Nadler 2011; Popkin 1979; Rosenthal 2010). Spinoza claims that "when the Bible says that this or that was done by God or by the will of God, it simply means that it was done according to the laws and order of nature, and not, as most people think, that nature ceased to operate for a time or that its order was briefly interrupted" (89). Thus he writes:

> In Psalm 105.24 it is stated that God turned the hearts of the Egyptians to hate the Israelites; this too was a natural change. . . . At Psalm 147.18 the natural action and heat of the wind by which frost and snow are melted is termed the word of God, and in verse 15 wind and cold are called the utterance and word of God. In Psalm 104.4 wind and fire are styled the envoys and ministers of God, and there are many other things in the Bible to this effect, showing very clearly that the decree of God, his command, his utterance, his word are nothing other than the very action and order of nature (89–90).

Table 5: Spinoza's Use of the Word "Spirit" (*Ruach* in Hebrew, *Spiritus* in Latin)[a]

Use of "Spirit" (*Ruach* or *Spiritus*)	Number of Occurrences
Total use of *ruach* or *spiritus*[b]	148
Use of *ruach* in Hebrew font	57
Use of *ruach* transliterated using Latin letters	5
Use of *spiritus* as a Latin translation of the Hebrew *ruach*	50
"Spirit of God" as a complete phrase	17
"Holy Spirit" as a complete phrase	15
"spirit" as a stand-alone word and undefined	4
Uses of "spirit" (either *ruach* or *spiritus*) where Spinoza explicitly defines what it means	63
Use of "spirit of God" in reference to the prophets	4
"Spirit of God" unmodified and undefined	7
"Spirit" as a word to be defined	4
"Spirit [*spiritus*] of God" as a translation of the Greek New Testament word *pneuma*, from a quotation	2
Ruach in Hebrew font, as a Hebrew word whose meaning is at question	3
Ruach transliterated as a Hebrew word whose meaning is at question	3
"Spirit" as a translation of *ruach*, implying supernatural spirit, against which Spinoza will argue	1
Ruach in Hebrew font as part of an Old Testament quotation	38
"Spirit" (*spiritus*) as a Latin translation of an Old Testament quotation	36
Ruach in Hebrew font as part of a Hebrew phrase not explicitly attached to a specific biblical verse	15
"Spirit" (*spiritus*) as a Latin translation of a Hebrew phrase not explicitly attached to a specific biblical verse	15
"Spirits" plural	1

[a] All of the data used in this article for Spinoza's use of "spirit" are based on his Latin text. The available modern translations have a tendency to use the term "spirit" (or the equivalents in the various modern languages, such as French) in places where Spinoza does not use it, as translations of other Latin words because the various translators think that it is the most appropriate translation; however, these are not relevant to Spinoza's discussion of "spirit" (*ruach*, *spiritus*). In addition, the modern translations have a tendency to omit using Hebrew font and solely include transliterations where applicable or just a translation into the modern language into which they are translating Spinoza. Spinoza, by contrast, occasionally transliterates the Hebrew after first including the word in Hebrew font and also often includes the Old Testament quotation in Hebrew font followed by a Latin translation.

[b] This usage accounts only for the occurrences in which Spinoza uses the term "spirit" in reference to the "Spirit of God" or the "Holy Spirit" or as part of his linguistic study on the term.

In support of the idea that nature is fixed and ordered by natural laws, Spinoza invokes Psalm 148:6 (95). Thus Spinoza transfers what was traditionally understood to be the intentional work of God to the scripted work of nature.[13]

Finally, in Spinoza's seventeenth chapter, we find a very brief reference to Psalm 139:21–22 to explain why the Israelites might have thought it was pious to consider others to be enemies of God (222). This chapter bears the lengthy title "Where it is shown that no one can transfer all things to the sovereign power, and that it is not necessary to do so; on the character of the Hebrew state in the time of Moses, and in the period after his death before the appointment of the kings; on its excellence, and on the reasons why this divine state could perish, and why it could scarcely exist without sedition." Spinoza hence indicates that the Hebrew state, despite temporary success, was destined for failure. Thus he continues his attempt to delegitimize the notion of the Israelites as God's chosen people and to emphasize that the so-called Laws of God were only state laws for the particular Hebrew state while it existed.

CONCLUSION

In the end, we find that Spinoza's use of the Psalms is selective, as is his use of other portions of the Bible; he chooses the ones that support his political designs. To secure the freedom to philosophize, Spinoza has to neutralize the religious authorities that are unwilling to privatize their traditions, particularly Catholics, Calvinists, and Jews in the seventeenth century Dutch Republic. Spinoza's overall biblical exegesis in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, including his use of the Psalms discussed here, provides support for his intended political transformation of society via the privatization of religion. Spinoza reinterprets the supernatural spirit as the natural human mind; he discredits the idea of a people chosen by God; he eliminates religious ritual and transfers ceremonial authority to the state; he renarrates the work of God as the work of nature; and he views the Hebrew state as destined for failure. Biblical Psalms in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* thus serve as one among many theological-political weapons Spinoza employs against his adversaries.

[13] In the tenth chapter, "Where the remaining books of the Old Testament are examined in the same manner as the earlier ones," we find Spinoza's very brief historical treatment of the Psalms' background. He writes, "The Psalms too were collected and divided into five books in the period of the Second Temple. According to Philo Judaeus, Psalm 88 was published when King Jehoiakim was still in prison in Babylon, and Psalm 89 after the same king had regained his liberty, something I do not think Philo would have said, were it not either the received opinion of his time or had he not received it from others worthy of credence" (144–145).

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