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Abstract

**Spinoza's Bible: The importance of the Bible to Spinoza's Contract Based Society**

This lecture will challenge two of the main readings of Spinoza's critical approach to the Bible. In the first part of the lecture I will focus on Spinoza's critical reading of the Bible. Most of Spinoza’s *Theological Political Treatise* (TTP) is dedicated to a critical reading of the Bible according to a new historical method of reading, which Spinoza introduces in the TTP. In twofold manner Spinoza introduces his method of interpretation.

1. **The refutation of the truths expressed in the Bible** — Spinoza criticizes various schools who claim that the Bible expresses *truth*. According to Spinoza, the Bible is neither the source of philosophical *truths*, nor the source of scientific ones. Moreover, the source of prophetic knowledge is the imaginative cognition; imaginative cognition according to Spinoza's epistemology cannot yield valid and certain knowledge. Thus, Spinoza’s criticism is directed at two distinct and opposing views, namely, it is directed at those who believe that biblical stories and phrases teach literally the truth about the world; at the same time Spinoza fiercely criticizes Maimonides who claimed that a metaphorical reading of the Bible can reveal that the bible expresses metaphysical valid views in figurative ways. Those who look for the truth in the Bible are wrong twice: they are wrong philosophically (misunderstanding the source of truth), and they are wrong theologically (misunderstanding the kind of knowledge revelation is).

2. **The rejection of claims to interpretative authority** — In his critical polemics, Spinoza aims at two main interpretative approaches — the Rabbinic interpretation of the Bible (based on tradition) and the Catholic one (based on the Holy Spirit relations to the church). According to Spinoza, none of them can establish a valid claim to interpretative authority.

The second part of my lecture will focus on explaining the political philosophical problem that Spinoza struggled with, and on the kind of solution the Bible-reading offers. The second part of my lecture will focus on explaining the political philosophical problem that Spinoza struggled with, and on the kind of solution the Bible-reading offers.
thesis on social-contract, he still struggled with the question of human action on ‘good faith’. The original social contract cannot account according to Spinoza for this human behavior (‘good faith behavior’) which is essential to the stability of society according to Spinoza. Spinoza dismisses the Hobbesian arguments on the absolute status of the original contract. Instead, I will suggest, Spinoza finds a support in a certain obedience which is the product of the reading of the Bible. Whereas Hobbes’ comments suggest on occasion that biblical interpretation is a right handed to the sovereign to manipulate citizens, Spinoza shifts the focus of the philosophical question. To wit, Spinoza inquires the kind of power that the Bible has in society. In this lecture, I will show that Spinoza’s discussions of biblical interpretation aim to clarify this kind of knowledge that the reading of the Bible yields within Society; a knowledge which results in good faith. Spinoza’s explication of the power that the reading of the Bible has within human society paved the way to the understanding of human interaction which supports the original contract in a new way; the human activity of reading the Bible is disclosed to result in a human interaction which is based in good faith. Accordingly, I will claim that the Bible has a decisive role in Spinoza’s (TTP) political philosophy.

In the third part of the lecture, I will focus on the role of the reader. I will suggest that major political theses of the TTP, such as freedom of thought and freedom of speech are tightly connected to the central role of the reader in Spinoza’s philosophy. I will conclude this section with the explication of Spinoza’s political philosophy (the TTP) as a protestant philosophy.

In the conclusion, I will discuss shortly the Spinoza’s mature views (the Ethics and the TP), namely the dismissal of the TTP’s political philosophy based on his new radical ontology which at its centre stands the criticism of the cartesian subject — one the results of Spinoza’s criticism of Cartesianism, I will claim, is the rejection of Spinoza’s early theses on the social contract.