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General Preface

I'VE BEEN AT WORK on this translation for a long time now. It's been forty-five years since I began on Volume I, and nearly thirty years since I started on this second, final, volume. It's time, at long last, to put an end to this project, at least for a while, and to make the results of my work available to whoever is interested.

The basic goals of my edition remain what they were in 1969. I believed then, and still believe, that a truly satisfactory edition of Spinoza's works ought:

first, to provide translations which are as accurate as possible, which show good judgment, when something more than accuracy is required, which are as clear and readable as fidelity to the text will allow, and which leave interpretation to the commentators, so far as this is possible;

second, to base those translations on the best available critical editions of the original texts;

third, to make the edition as comprehensive as possible, so that readers of Spinoza will have conveniently available all the primary data for the interpretation of his philosophy;

fourth, to offer translations which are all by the same hand, in hopes of achieving the kind of consistency in the treatment of important terms which makes it easier to appreciate their importance and meaning, to compare passages in different works treating the same topic, and to form judgments about the possible evolution of Spinoza's thought;

fifth, to arrange the texts in chronological order, so far as this can reasonably be determined, to make it easier to grasp the development of Spinoza's thought in those areas where it changed over the course of his philosophical career; and

finally, to supply the texts with editorial aids to assist in understanding of Spinoza's work: prefaces, annotation, indices, and, in a limited way, commentary.

The response to Volume I has generally been quite gratifying. A number of reviewers seemed to think I had achieved my goals. Some—most notably, Jonathan Bennett¹—combined high praise with really helpful criticism. Many authors writing about Spinoza in English seem

1. In the *Philosophical Review* 96 (1987): 306–11.

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to have wanted to use my translations where they could, citing other translations only when the work was one I hadn't done yet. Some expressed a certain impatience for the completion of Volume II. No author could reasonably wish for more.

Still, I have felt that in Volume II I could, and should, do better. Bennett's main criticism was that in my quest for fidelity I hadn't given enough weight to readability. I didn't agree with all his examples, but I did realize that he had a point, one I have come to appreciate more and more as I have reviewed my successive drafts with a view to improving their style. In this volume I have tried very hard to make sure that my translations are as readable as I can make them without sacrificing my other goals.

In this effort Bennett has been extraordinarily helpful. After he retired from teaching, believing students often had unnecessary difficulty understanding the classic texts in early modern philosophy, he embarked on the project of making them "easier to read while leaving intact the main arguments, doctrines, and lines of thought."² When he decided that the *Theological-Political Treatise* (TTP) should be included in this collection, he asked if he could use my draft translation to guide him. I was happy to agree. I had some reservations about encouraging students to read abridged versions of these texts, in what was sometimes more a paraphrase than a translation. But I felt he was providing a great service to the profession. No one will agree with everything Bennett does. However, he was addressing a real problem in a genuinely constructive way. And generally I have tried to cooperate with other scholars by sharing my draft translations with those who asked to use them in their teaching or research. Given the length of time it was taking me to produce a version I was content to publish in the more usual way, this seemed the least I could do.

In this case circulating my draft led to extremely valuable feedback. Seeing what Bennett did with my draft of the TTP to make it more readable—and the problems which his thoughts about the text sometimes alerted me to—gave me many ideas about how I could improve my translations. Some of his devices for achieving readability may be irrelevant or not open to a translator. But others are both relevant and useful to any translator.³ More recently Bennett decided to tackle

2. For the current state of this ambitious project, go to <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com>.

3. For the general principles of Bennett's work, see <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/how.html>. Someone translating Spinoza from Latin or Dutch need not worry about updating the language in the way an editor of Hobbes might. And a translator will not consider it proper to omit passages which don't "earn their keep." But striving

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Spinoza's correspondence, and asked if he could use my draft translations of that part of the corpus. I agreed again, this time asking him to give me specific comments on any problems he encountered in my drafts. I could not have asked for a better collaborator.

There are several other ways in which I hope this volume will improve on its predecessor. In producing Volume I, I worked without the aid of a computer. For Volume II, I've had a series of ever-improving computers to use. They have helped me write and revise my translations, print out drafts without having to worry that the typing process will introduce new errors, circulate drafts to other scholars, do word searches in the texts—not only in the English of the translation but also in the Latin of the text translated—record data about words which require an entry in the Glossary-Index, consult online reference works through my university library, email other scholars, order books for my personal library, and, lately, download books which once would have required a trip to a distant library. I have been amazed, and very grateful, to see how much has become available on the Internet. The computer has changed my life, much for the better, on the whole. It has its downside: it has provided me with more distractions than I needed, and tempted me to pursue inquiries which were probably not always necessary. But on the whole it has been a great blessing.

One issue raised by some readers of Vol. I was whether my translations were too interpretive. One thought they were. Another praised them for keeping the effects of my overall interpretation to a minimum.⁴ They were interpretive, of course; they still are. In my view *every translation is inevitably often an interpretation of its text*. It must be. You can try to deal with this fact by adding footnotes explaining that others might render the text differently, or using a device like the Glossary-Index to discuss your choices. But it does none of us any good to pretend that a translator can avoid interpretation.

When it seemed necessary, I did add footnotes calling attention to some of the translations I thought might be particularly contentious.⁵ But if you did this as often as the situation might call for it, you would have intolerably many footnotes. In the languages of the texts translated here—in every language I know anything about—many terms are ambiguous. So the translator must constantly make choices: which

for “less convoluted syntax and shorter sentences, numbering of points, indenting of passages that are helped by such a display”—these all seem both legitimate and helpful. To this list I would add the breaking up of long paragraphs into more manageable and coherent units of thought.

4. Cf. Rice 1990 with Doniela 1987.

5. For example, in E I D4, I D6, I D8Exp., II P13S, III P6, etc.

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of the various possible translations of this term seems likely to best express Spinoza's meaning? I take this to be a question of trying to decide what English term Spinoza would have chosen if he had been writing in our language and had been fluent in twentieth- or twenty-first-century English. This question is wildly hypothetical, of course. Still, there *may* be a right answer to it. That is, there may be a fact of the matter about what choice Spinoza would have made under those conditions.⁶ Moreover, *sometimes*, when the stars are properly aligned, we can be reasonably confident that we *know* what the answer is.⁷

Here's an easy case. The Latin noun *liberi* can mean either children in general or only sons. When Spinoza is presenting his recommended constitution for a non-tyrannical monarchy, he writes that "If the king has had a number of *liberi*, the eldest should succeed by right" (TP vi, 37). In spite of the ambiguity of *liberi*, no competent, careful reader of the text will be in any doubt about Spinoza's meaning. It's as certain as can be that Spinoza meant to refer only to male children. Two sentences further on he writes: *filiis in haereditatem imperii venire, nulla ratione concedendum*, as I would put it, "under no circumstances should daughters be permitted to inherit the rule." Even if we did not have that sentence, there are, as Spinoza's admirers may regret, a number of other passages which would guide us to the right answer, passages where Spinoza expresses his doubts about the ability of women to rule well.

Most cases aren't that easy. Here's one that's more difficult. The Latin term *saeculum* can refer to periods of time of very different lengths: a generation, a century, an age, or simply a long period of indefinite duration. The different possible ways of translating *saeculum* yield significantly different meanings for the passages in which it occurs. In Chapter 8 of the TTP Spinoza says that the author of the Pentateuch lived many *saecula* after Moses. Does he mean that the author lived many generations after Moses, or many centuries? (To simplify I focus on what seem to be the two most salient possibilities.) We know from things Spinoza says later in the TTP that he thought that author lived many centuries later. But did he intend to *say* that as early as §§17 and 20 of Chapter 8? I don't think so. So in those two passages in Chapter 8 I've translated *saeculum* as "generation."

6. Or there may not. A Spinoza fluent in English might still have found no suitable equivalent in English for a particular term in Latin or Dutch. It might be that there is no English term which has quite the right connotations, or which matches the ambiguity of a given Latin or Dutch term. It might be that Spinoza wished to take advantage of that ambiguity. It may also be that he used a particular term without giving any thought to its ambiguity.

7. I've discussed the general issues, using Hobbes as my example, in Curley 1994.

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A more difficult case, but not an impossible one. I can give reasons for the choice I made.⁸ It's not purely arbitrary. Still, it illustrates the point that a translator must frequently use his (or her)⁹ best judgment, fallible though that judgment must be. Different translators will make different judgments. So I repeat, with a modest qualification: *every translation of an extended piece of serious philosophical writing must often be an interpretation of the text*. No one should be under any illusions about that necessity, or the difficulty of the task.

A few years ago Lydia Davis, widely admired, not only for her short stories, but also for her translations of French literature, stated the challenge of translation well:

A single work involves often hundreds of thousands of minute decisions. Many are inevitably compromises. The ideal translation would result in an English that perfectly replicated the original and at the same time read with as much natural vigor as though it had been born in English. But in reality the finished translation is likely to be more uneven—now eloquent, now pedestrian, now a perfect replication, now a little false to the original in meaning or rhythm or syntax or level of diction. A careful weighing of the many choices involved can nevertheless result in a wonderful translation. But great patience and of course great skill in writing are essential, not to speak of a good ear and a deep understanding of the original text.¹⁰

It may be reckless to invite judgment by such a standard. And I must confess that I have not tried to meet it in every respect. There's no way you can write an English which speaks as simply and directly to the reader as I would like to do, while at the same time respecting Spinoza's (and his century's) tolerance for long, complex sentences, and long, complex paragraphs. My highest priority is to be as true to the original in meaning as I can. I do not give nearly as much weight to rhythm or syntax or level of diction. I am translating philosophy, not literature.

8. See the Glossary entry AGE, CENTURY, GENERATION.

9. I dislike this awkward way of avoiding the sexism of English pronouns, and try to use it sparingly, preferring, when I am speaking for myself, to alternate more or less randomly between masculine and feminine pronouns. In translating Spinoza, however, I think it would be a mistake to give the impression that he possessed our sensitivities in these matters.

10. "Up Front: Lydia Davis," *New York Times*, June 9, 2011, Book Review section, p. 4. While I was writing this preface, Claire Messud gave us some elegant examples of these "minute decisions" in her review of Sandra Smith's new translation of Camus' *L'Étranger* in the *New York Review of Books*, June 5, 2014.

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Nevertheless, it has seemed to me that I could, to some significant extent, reduce the difficulties inherent in translation by giving the reader a systematic sense of the most important problems I faced in the works translated, of what the options seemed to be, and why I made the choices I did. The main purpose of the Glossary-Index is to try to be clear, without being tedious, about those choices and why I made them. I also share information about the decisions Spinoza's contemporary Dutch translators made, which I find often helpful in the interpretation of the text.¹¹

The Glossary is another area where I think this volume improves on its predecessor. In preparing Volume I, I added the Glossary at a fairly late stage of my work, as I came to appreciate how difficult it would be for readers without much (or any) Latin or Dutch to use an index constructed on the basis of terms in the original languages. Adding the Glossary late in the process meant that I didn't fully exploit its possibilities. The notes I wrote explaining my choices and acknowledging the different choices other translators had made were often very short, and not, I now think, as reflective or well argued as they might have been. In preparing Volume II, I've had the advantage of knowing from the start that I intended to create a substantial section explaining my treatment of problematic terms, of being able to use the computer to quickly survey the various contexts in which the terms occurred, and of fine-tuning the draft entries as I went along, and as I reflected on the meaning of the terms in their various occurrences. This has its downside, too: it has made it much easier to agonize endlessly about getting it, if not right, then as good as I could make it. But I think it has made the Glossary much more useful.

In constructing the Glossary-Index this time, I've had two immense advantages I did not have when I was constructing the similar tool for Vol. I. First, as indicated, I've had all the Latin texts available on disk. I'm grateful to Mark Rooks for the initial scanning of those texts and to Frédéric Béliet, Debra Nails, and William Levitan for proofreading the scans. Having these texts available has made searching for occurrences much easier and much more reliable. It can still be time-consuming

11. Sometimes this seems to me quite important. Consider the term *hieroglyphicum*, which occurs infrequently, but is crucial in Strauss's reading of Spinoza. In this case I think Glazemaker's renderings are very illuminating. See the Glossary entry SYMBOL (OBSCURE). Glazemaker was no doubt fallible. All of us are. And in producing the *Nagelate schriften* he seems to have been working under intense time pressure. But he was an experienced and intelligent translator of seventeenth-century philosophical Latin, whose views deserve our consideration and respect. For a balanced appreciation of his strengths and weaknesses, see Akkerman 1984.

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and tedious. But it's not impossibly so. Since one of my goals has been to achieve as much consistency as possible in the treatment of key terms, and to make my decisions in the light of a comprehensive view of Spinoza's usage, this was a great help.

Second, Minna Koivuniemi patiently and scrupulously checked a late draft of the index for occurrences I might have failed to record, false positives, and misinformation I might have given about the terms I used to translate a given term. Her assistance has saved me a lot of time, greatly improved the accuracy of the index, and made me indebted to her far beyond what I could ever hope to repay. This portion of the work must now contain far fewer mistakes than it would have without her help. (It is still the product of human effort, so it can't possibly be error-free.) Also, because Minna knows Spinoza and the literature on him very well, she was able to give me valuable feedback on some of the Glossary entries.

Some years ago I published a pair of essays which contained in their titles the phrase "notes on a neglected masterpiece" (Curley 1990b, 1994). This was a reference to the principal work in this volume, Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*, which I believed had been seriously neglected by English-language commentators, but which I also believed deserved the label "masterpiece" as much as the better-known *Ethics* did. There are few works in the history of philosophy which can claim to have laid the foundations for a whole new discipline, as the TTP did for the science of biblical interpretation.¹² Add to that the fact that the TTP is also the first work by a major philosopher in the Western tradition to defend democracy as the most natural form of government, which best preserves the freedom and equality of the state of nature. Add further the facts that the TTP's powerful critique of revealed religion made a major contribution to the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century,¹³ and that it offers a forceful defense of freedom of thought and expression, which surely surpasses anything published up to that time (and probably surpasses much that has been published since then).

12. On the importance of Spinoza in the history of biblical interpretation, see Anchor Genesis, xx–xxii; Kugel 2007, ch. 1; and Curley 2014. Curley 1994 defends my (Spinozistic) view that biblical interpretation—and textual interpretation generally—can be a scientific discipline.

13. See the three massive volumes of Jonathan Israel's history of the Enlightenment (Israel 2001, 2006, and 2011), whose main conclusions are summarized in Israel 2010. No doubt Israel's grand narrative is open to just criticism. I've criticized some of his claims myself in Curley 2007. But to support the claim made in the text it is necessary only to cite Vernière 1954.

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In the last twenty years, I'm happy to say, anglophone scholars have begun to pay the TTP more attention. These years have seen several works which undertook to give it its due,¹⁴ and numerous others which, without being specifically about the TTP (or even specifically about Spinoza), provided important background to his religious and political thought.¹⁵ Perhaps we may hope that before too long the other major work in this volume, the *Political Treatise* (TP), will have its day.¹⁶ Though unfinished, it does a great deal to give concreteness to the programmatic position on politics sketched in the TTP.¹⁷

One fortunate, though hardly intended, consequence of the protracted period leading up to the production of this volume is that in the period between Volumes I and II we have seen the appearance of new critical editions of the TTP and TP, in the series published by Presses Universitaires de France (PUF), under the general editorship of Pierre-François Moreau, with highly qualified editors responsible for the individual volumes.¹⁸ In spite of the problems of the Gebhardt edition, which is gradually being superseded by the PUF edition, I still treat it as my default edition of the text, in the sense that, unless I see reason to think otherwise, I generally assume that Gebhardt's text is correct, and do not discuss earlier editions when I think he has clearly improved on them. His is still the most nearly complete edition of the texts. I also make my references to his volume and page numbers, to make it easier for students to navigate the secondary literature. As for

14. To mention only recent works in English which deal specifically with the TTP, and only the most notable of these: James 2012, Nadler 2011, Melamed and Rosenthal 2010, and Verbeek 2003. To these we might add two English translations of important French works on Spinoza's political thought generally: Balibar 1985a/1998 and Balibar 1985b/1989.

15. Any list will be incomplete, but even an incomplete list would have to include Haitsma Mulier 1980, Menasseh 1842/1972, 1652/1987, Ibn Ezra 1988, Van den Enden 1665/1992, Van Gelderen 1992, Van Bunge and Klever 1996, Bodian 1997, Smith 1997, Nadler 1999, 2001, Preus 2001, Grotius 1647/2001, Jelles/Spruit 1684/2004, Meyer 2005, Kugel 2007, Koerbagh/Wielema 2011, Weststeijn 2012, Van Velthuysen 2013.

16. In some places this is already happening. Cf. the recent judgment of three French scholars: "Relégué pendant longtemps à l'arrière-plan, au profit de l'*Éthique* et du *Traité théologico-politique*, le *Traité politique* est aujourd'hui au coeur des études spinozistes" (Jaquet 2008, 11). Not many anglophone scholars would be apt to say this now, but we may hope that in a few years we will catch up with our European colleagues.

17. *Perhaps* it also signals a significant shift in Spinoza's position on central issues in political theory, such as the idea of a social contract. I am more skeptical about the latter point than are some other scholars, but the research I anticipate should shed light on these questions.

18. For details, see Works Cited, Editions of Spinoza's works, ALM and PR. To these editions we must add Pina Totaro's invaluable edition of the TTP, with the Latin text (generally, but not invariably, following Akkerman), an Italian translation on facing pages, and tremendously helpful annotation. (See "Totaro" in Works Cited.)

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the problems of his edition, I have tried to give a fair account of them in the notes and to discuss the more important textual issues raised by subsequent editors.

As for the other major component of this volume, we do not yet have a volume of the correspondence in the PUF series. But we do have the Akkerman, Hubbeling, and Westerbrink translation of that correspondence (AHW), which contains many valuable improvements on Gebhardt's text.

At the beginning of this preface I signaled my intention to set this project aside "at least for a while." Believing, for the reasons indicated, that Volume II improves on Volume I in a number of respects, I would like to come back to my earlier work in a few years, and make the kinds of improvement, in a revised edition of Volume I, that I believe I've made in Volume II. I cannot know whether I will be granted the continued longevity and good health necessary to achieve that goal. But if things go well, I would also hope to make this edition more complete by adding some portions of Spinoza's *Hebrew Grammar*. It's hard for me to believe that many people will want to read a complete translation of that work, much of which is devoted to laying out the conjugations of Hebrew verbs. But there are some passages in it which seem to me of genuine philosophical interest. I would have included them in this edition if I had believed that the benefits, in terms of understanding Spinoza's thoughts about language, outweighed the costs of delaying further the publication of works I think are vastly more important. I do not include the two short scientific treatises on the rainbow and the calculation of chances which Gebhardt ascribed to Spinoza. I believe there is now a consensus that they are not by Spinoza.

In addition to the people thanked above for their assistance on this volume, there are many others whose help I am grateful for. First, of course, my editors at Princeton University Press: Rob Tempio, Debbie Tegarden, and Jenn Backer. It was Rob's patient prodding over the years, and Debbie's gentle nudging, which finally persuaded me to turn loose of this manuscript. And Jenn's insightful questions about what I had written saved me from many failures of clarity and downright mistakes. Among the many others to whom I am grateful are: Jacob Adler, Fokke Akkerman, James Amelang, Wiep van Bunge, Herman de Dijn, Scott Dennis, Alan Donagan, Dan Garber, Don Garrett, Xavier Gil, Liz Goodnick, Ian Hacking, John Huddlestun, Jonathan Israel, Susan James, Gary Knoppers, James Kugel, Mogens Laerke, Jacqueline Lagrée, Michael LeBuffe, Maurie Mandelbaum, Jon Miller, Pierre-François Moreau, Steve Nadler, Debra Nails, Geoffrey Parker, David Potter, Charles Ramond, Michael Rosenthal, Don Rutherford,

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E. P. Sanders, Tad Schmaltz, Rebecca Scott, Piet Steenbakkers, Pina Totaro, Jeroen van de Ven, Theo Verbeek, and Manfred Walther. Finally, I owe an immense debt to my wife, Ruth, who has made a wonderful home for me for over fifty-five years now, traveled cheerfully with me to the many places where my work or curiosity took me, and given me her sustaining love, through good times and bad. She has also helped greatly by reading the page proofs of the entire volume.

When I began this project in 1969, I was fortunate enough to have a research position at the Australian National University—ultimately a tenured research position. It was with some trepidation that I returned to a teaching job in the United States in 1977, with the project not quite half completed. But on the whole things have worked out well for me. I have been fortunate again to have the support of numerous universities and granting agencies: the University of Illinois at Chicago, the University of Michigan, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Humanities Center, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. I am very grateful for the support of these institutions. Without it the completion of this project would still be years away.

I dedicated the first volume to my mentor in Australia, John Passmore. I dedicate this volume to Bernard Peach, who gave me my first introduction to Spinoza, in a characteristically wonderful seminar at Duke many years ago, and who was a model of what a thesis supervisor should be.

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