

BENTO (OR BARUCH) DE SPINOZA WAS BORN AND RAISED IN AMSTERDAM. HIS FAMILY BELONGED TO THAT CITY'S PORTUGUESE-JEWISH COMMUNITY.



THESE SEPHARDIC JEWS WERE DESCENDANTS OF GENERATIONS OF JEWS IN SPAIN AND PORTUGAL WHO, IN THE LATE 15TH CENTURY, HAD BEEN FORCED TO CONVERT TO CHRISTIANITY.



THE "CONVERSOS" SUFFERED UNDER THE SPANISH INQUISITION.



MANY EVENTUALLY MIGRATED TO THE DUTCH REPUBLIC AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 17TH CENTURY.



AFTER HIS FATHER'S DEATH, AND WHILE STILL A YOUNG MAN, SPINOZA TOOK OVER THE FAMILY IMPORTING BUSINESS.



HE CONTINUED HIS STUDIES, HOWEVER, AND APPARENTLY REMAINED AN UPSTANDING MEMBER OF THE CONGREGATION.



BUT SUDDENLY, IN JULY OF 1656, THE TWENTY-THREE YEAR OLD SPINOZA WAS PERMANENTLY BANISHED FROM AMSTERDAM'S PORTUGUESE-JEWISH COMMUNITY,



THE *HEREM* DOCUMENT SPEAKS OF HIS "ABOMINABLE HERESIES AND MONSTROUS DEEDS".



SPINOZA HAD LOST HIS COMMITMENT TO THE JEWISH FAITH BY THIS POINT, AND SEEMS TO HAVE TAKEN IT ALL IN GOOD STRIDE.



IN THE 1660S, SPINOZA SUPPORTED HIMSELF BY LENS-GRINDING...



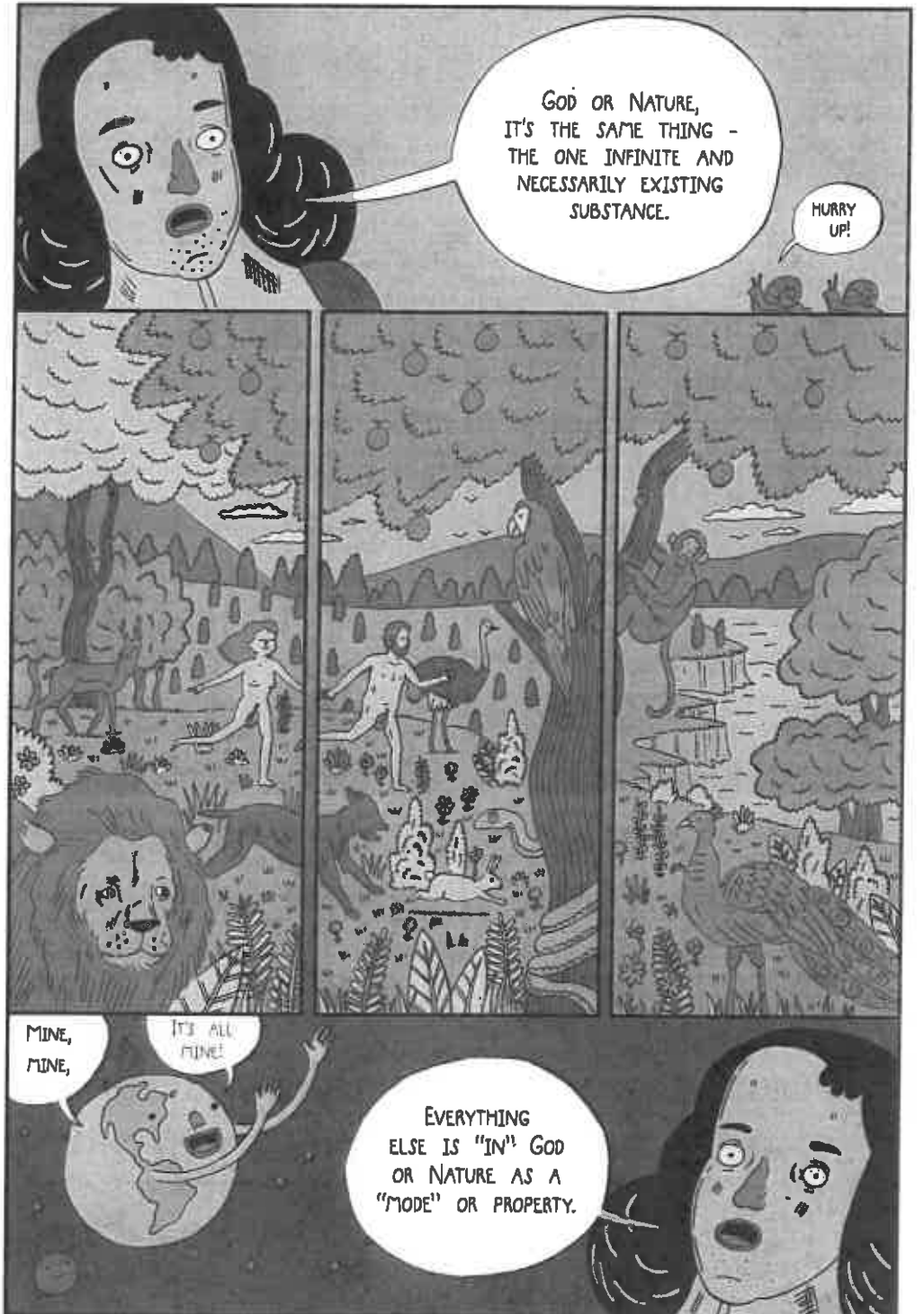
AND WORKED ON HIS PHILOSOPHICAL MASTERPIECE, THE *ETHICS*.



HIS IDEAS ON GOD, MORALITY, AND RELIGION WERE EXTREMELY RADICAL - AND, IN THE EYES OF CONTEMPORARIES, HIGHLY DISTURBING.



ACCORDING TO SPINOZA, THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A TRANSCENDENT, PROVIDENTIAL GOD - THE SUPERNATURAL AGENT OF THE ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS.





GOD OR NATURE IS ETERNAL. THERE WAS NO BEGINNING FOR NATURE AND THERE WILL BE NO END.



THERE IS NO CREATOR DISTINCT FROM NATURE'S OWN INFINITE AND ETERNAL POWER.



IT'S GOOD TO BE ETERNAL!

NO SUPERNATURAL BEINGS ALLOWED!



IT IS ABOUT TO RAIN...

GOD OR NATURE MAKES NO CHOICES. WHATEVER HAPPENS IN NATURE IS DETERMINED TO HAPPEN BY NATURE'S POWER AND LAWS.

IN NATURE, NOTHING IS CONTINGENT.

ALL THINGS HAVE BEEN CAUSED BY NECESSITY OF THE DIVINE NATURE TO EXIST AND PRODUCE EFFECTS IN A CERTAIN WAY.



THINGS COULD NOT HAVE BEEN OTHERWISE. THIS IS THE ONLY POSSIBLE WORLD.



WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

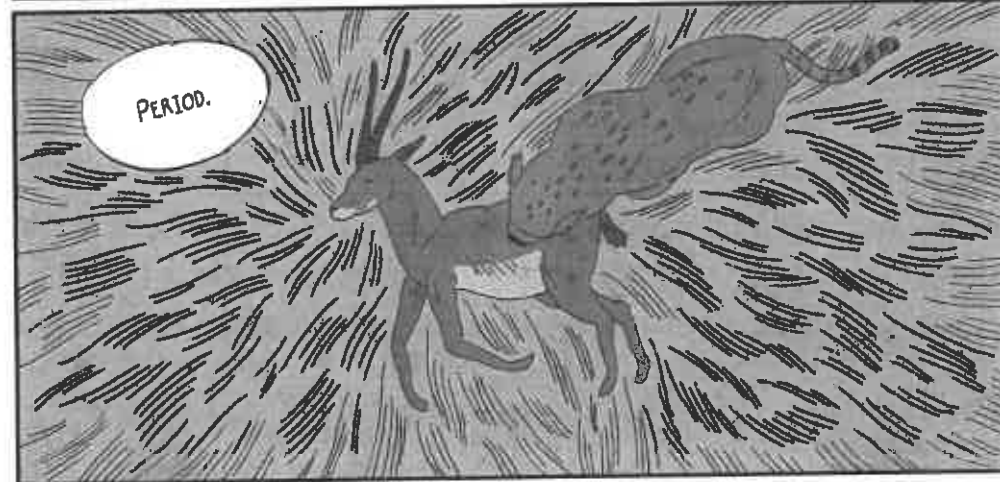
IT DON'T MEAN NOTHIN'!



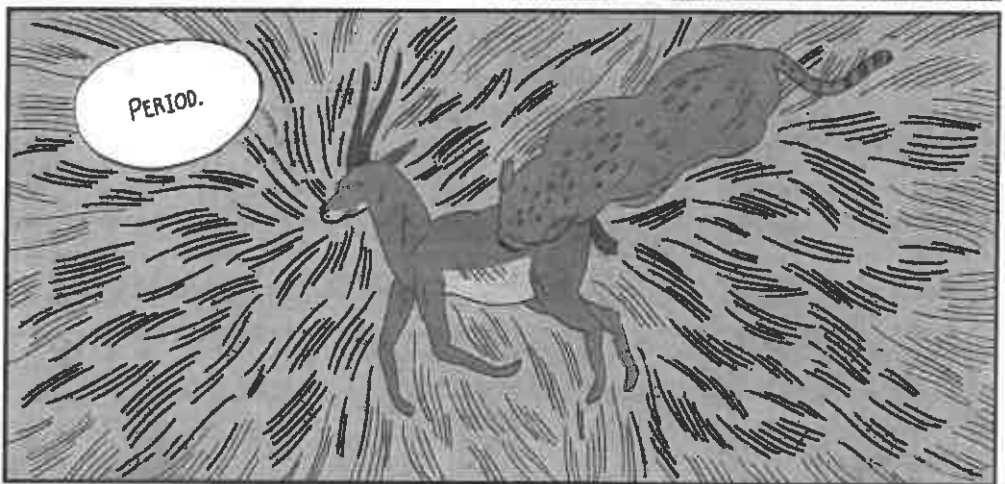
THERE IS NO GOOD OR BAD IN NATURE.



WHATEVER IS, JUST IS.



PERIOD.

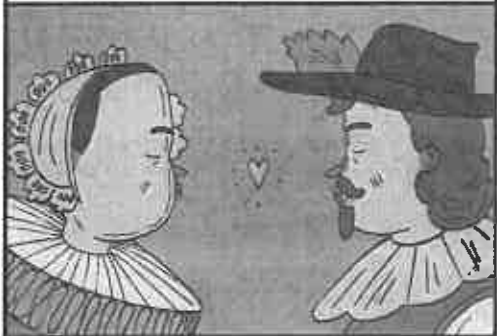




SPINOZA INSISTS THAT HUMAN BEINGS ARE AS MUCH A PART OF NATURE - AND SUBJECT TO ITS LAWS - AS ANYTHING ELSE.



THE THOUGHTS, DESIRES, EMOTIONS, AND CHOICES OF HUMAN BEINGS ARE ALL DETERMINED BY CAUSES.



SPINOZA WAS STRONGLY INFLUENCED BY DESCARTES. BUT HE DISAGREED WITH THE DUALIST PICTURE OF MIND AND BODY.



THE HUMAN BODY, LIKE ANY BODY, IS A MODE OF NATURE UNDER THE ATTRIBUTE OF EXTENSION - IT IS A PART OF NATURE'S MATERIAL REALM.



THE HUMAN MIND IS A MODE OF NATURE UNDER THE ATTRIBUTE OF THOUGHT - IT BELONGS TO NATURE'S MENTAL REALM.



MINDS DO NOT CAUSE THINGS TO HAPPEN IN BODIES.

NOR DO BODIES CAUSE THINGS TO HAPPEN IN MINDS.

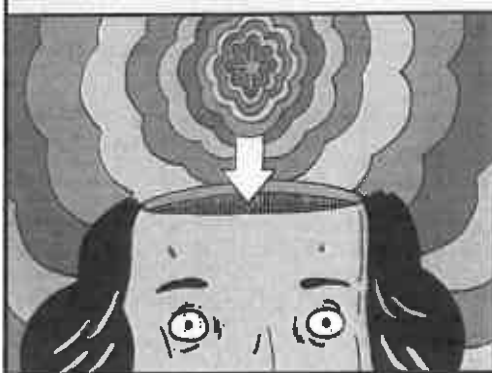
ONLY BODIES CAUSE MOTION IN OTHER BODIES.



IDEAS OR THOUGHTS ARE AFFECTED ONLY BY OTHER IDEAS OR THOUGHTS.



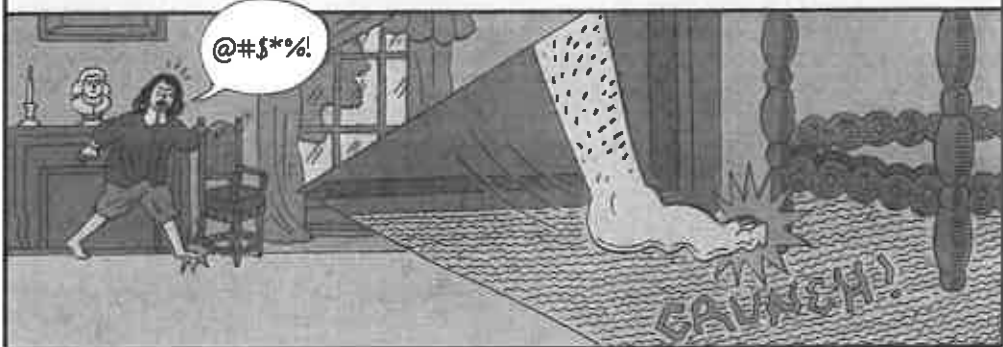
A HUMAN MIND IS NOTHING BUT A PARTICULAR ITEM IN NATURE'S MENTAL REALM THAT DIRECTLY CORRESPONDS TO A PARTICULAR BODY IN THE MATERIAL REALM.



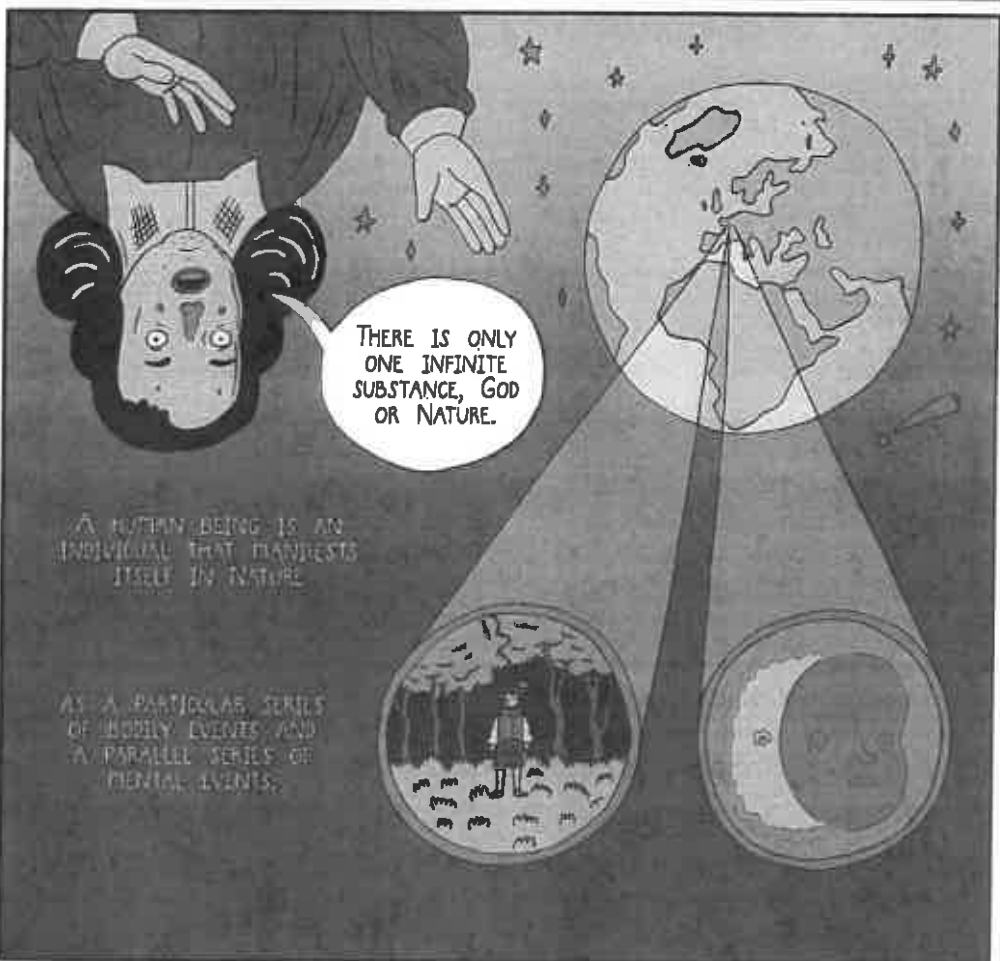
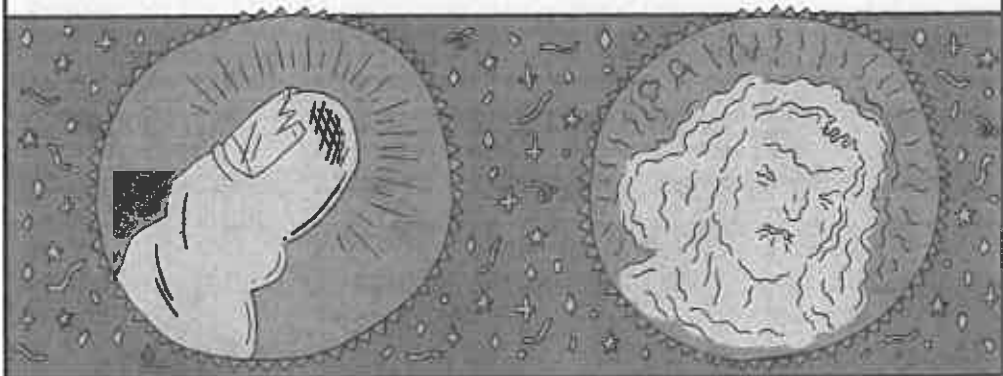
THEY ARE, IN FACT, ONE AND THE SAME THING IN NATURE EXPRESSING ITSELF AS A BODY IN THE MATERIAL REALM AND AS A MIND IN THE MENTAL REALM.



A PAIN FELT IN THE MIND IS NOT CAUSED BY SOMETHING HAPPENING IN THE BODY. RATHER, IT IS SIMPLY THE EXPRESSION UNDER THE ATTRIBUTE OF THOUGHT



OF THE SAME THING THAT IS EXPRESSING ITSELF UNDER THE ATTRIBUTE OF EXTENSION AS THE BODY'S PHYSICAL DISTRESS.



SPINOZA'S METAPHYSICAL EXPLANATION OF WHAT WE ARE AND HOW WE ARE A PART OF NATURE LAYS THE FOUNDATIONS FOR HIS ACCOUNT OF HOW WE LIVE - AND SHOULD LIVE - OUR LIVES.



ARE WE GUIDED BY OUR PASSIONS, BY THE WAYS IN WHICH WE ARE MADE TO FEEL BY THINGS IN THE WORLD AS THEY AFFECT US?



OR DO WE LEAD OURSELVES THROUGH REASON, BY WHAT WE KNOW TO BE TRUE AND IN OUR BEST INTEREST?



DO WE PASSIVELY SUFFER THE SLINGS AND ARROWS OF OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE?



OR ARE WE ACTIVE AND IN CONTROL OF OUR LIVES?



WE'RE TAKING CONTROL OF OUR LIVES.



A LIFE GOVERNED BY THE PASSIONS IS A LIFE OF BONDAGE. A PERSON IS A SLAVE TO HIS DESIRES FOR THINGS NOT UNDER HIS CONTROL.



HIS HAPPINESS IS SUBJECT TO GOOD LUCK AND BAD LUCK.



TO THINK THAT GOD IS A PERSONAL AGENT WHO WILL DISPENSE ETERNAL REWARD AND PUNISHMENT MEANS THAT YOUR LIFE WILL BE DIRECTED NOT BY KNOWLEDGE BUT BY THE EMOTIONS OF HOPE AND FEAR.





ON THE OTHER HAND, A LIFE UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF REASON -



ESPECIALLY AN UNDERSTANDING OF HOW ALL THINGS, INCLUDING OURSELVES, ARE A PART OF NATURE AND NECESSITATED BY ITS LAWS -

WILL BE A LIFE OF FREEDOM, VIRTUE, AND PEACE OF MIND.



WE WILL BEAR CALMLY THOSE THINGS THAT HAPPEN TO US CONTRARY TO OUR WELL-BEING,

Ow!



WHEN WE REALIZE THAT WE COULD NOT HAVE AVOIDED THEM AND THAT WE, NO LESS THAN OTHER THINGS, MUST FOLLOW NATURE'S ORDER.



THE TRULY FREE PERSON WILL KNOW THAT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS FREE WILL OR AN IMMORTAL SOUL, AND SO SHE WILL NOT BE TROUBLED BY IRRATIONAL BELIEFS ABOUT AN AFTERLIFE.

A FREE PERSON THINKS LEAST OF ALL OF DEATH.



THE REWARDS OF THE LIFE OF REASON AND VIRTUE ARE IN *THIS* WORLD.

HAPPINESS! WELL-BEING! KNOWLEDGE!



IN THE LATE 1660S, WITH THE LIBERAL AND TOLERANT IDEALS OF HOLLAND UNDER ASSAULT BY POLITICAL CONSERVATIVES AND THEIR RELIGIOUS ALLIES,



SPINOZA PUT ASIDE THE *ETHICS* TO COMPOSE HIS *THEOLOGICAL-POLITICAL TREATISE*.



IN THE *TREATISE*, SPINOZA ARGUES THAT POLITICAL STABILITY AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING REQUIRE:





HE MAKES HIS CASE BY SHOWING THAT THE BIBLE, WHICH RELIGIOUS LEADERS USE TO INFLUENCE THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF CITIZENS, WAS NOT LITERALLY WRITTEN BY GOD.



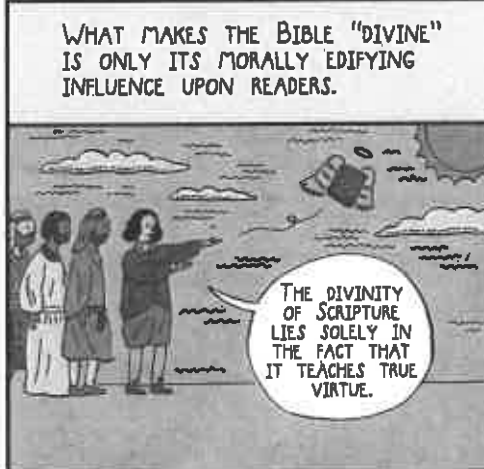
THE ORIGINAL TEXTS WERE COPIED MANY TIMES AND HANDED DOWN THROUGH THE CENTURIES...



ITS AUTHORS WERE ORDINARY HUMAN BEINGS ADDRESSING VERY PARTICULAR HISTORICAL CIRCUMSTANCES.



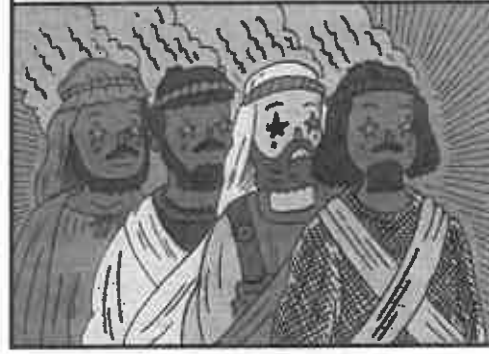
AND FINALLY EDITED INTO A SINGLE COLLECTION LONG AFTER THEY HAD BEEN WRITTEN.



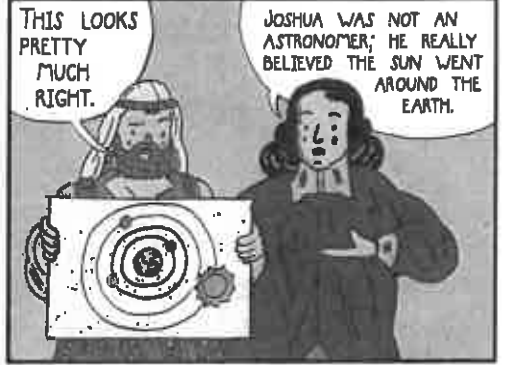
THE PROPHETS WHO WROTE THESE BOOKS WERE NOT PHILOSOPHERS OR SCIENTISTS OR EVEN THEOLOGIANS.



THE PROPHETS WERE, HOWEVER, MEN OF EXTRAORDINARY VIRTUE AND VIVID IMAGINATION.



AND SO WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT GOD, NATURE, AND HUMAN BEINGS IS NOT NECESSARILY TRUE.



TRUE RELIGION CONSISTS ONLY IN JUSTICE AND CHARITY TOWARD OTHERS.



EVERYTHING ELSE - ALL THE CEREMONIES AND RITES OF ORGANIZED RELIGIONS - HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH PIETY.



SPINOZA ALSO ARGUES THAT MIRACLES ARE IMPOSSIBLE.



SPINOZA IS, ABOVE ALL, CONCERNED TO SHOW THAT LIBERTY OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION IS ESSENTIAL TO THE WELL-BEING OF A POLITY.



ANY EFFORTS TO REPRESS INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM IN THE NAME OF RELIGION WILL ONLY BACKFIRE AND BE HARMFUL TO SOCIETY.



IT IS UP TO THE CIVIL AUTHORITIES, NOT RELIGIOUS LEADERS, TO GOVERN THE LIVES OF CITIZENS.



THUS SPINOZA, LIKE HOBBS, SAYS THAT EVEN RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS ARE TO BE OVERSEEN BY SECULAR AUTHORITIES.



UNLIKE HOBBS, HOWEVER, SPINOZA INSISTS THAT DEMOCRACY IS THE BEST POLITICAL SYSTEM FOR INSURING PEACE AND PROGRESS.



I APPROACH MOST CLOSELY THAT FREEDOM THAT NATURE GRANTS TO EVERY PERSON.

SPINOZA'S *THEOLOGICAL-POLITICAL TREATISE* WAS PUBLISHED ANONYMOUSLY IN 1670, WITH A FALSE PUBLISHER AND CITY ON THE TITLE PAGE AS A PRECAUTION.



THESE ARE DANGEROUS TIMES, ESPECIALLY FOR SOMEONE WHO SPEAKS HIS MIND!

THE BOOK CAUSED A TREMENDOUS UPROAR AND A VICIOUS BACKLASH.



THIS IS AN EVIL, ATHEISTIC TREATISE THAT WILL CORRUPT THE SOULS OF READERS!

THE *TREATISE* WAS ATTACKED BY RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES AND BANNED BY CIVIC BODIES IN HOLLAND AND ELSEWHERE.



ONE CRITIC LABELED IT "A BOOK FORGED IN HELL BY THE DEVIL HIMSELF".



EVEN THOMAS HOBBS WAS TAKEN ABACK BY SPINOZA'S AUDACITY.



I DURST NOT WRITE SO BOLDLY!

IN THE SPRING OF 1676, A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR CAME TO SEE SPINOZA IN THE HAGUE.



HE WAS GERMAN, AND SAID HE WAS A FELLOW PHILOSOPHER.

- OR WAS HE A SPY?

HE VERY MUCH WANTED TO MEET THE AUTHOR OF THE SCANDALOUS *THEOLOGICAL-POLITICAL TREATISE*.