

INTRODUCTION

- Benedictus de Spinoza anonymously published his *Theological-Political Treatise (TPT)* in 1670.
- In this work, Spinoza examined Scripture in a critical manner while also putting forth interpretations that supported his naturalist theory of God and his political philosophy.
- While Spinoza denies many common Judeo-Christian notions such as the inspiration of Scripture, the election of the Israelites, and the belief in miracles, he analyzes Jesus and His morals very favorably.

BACKGROUND

- Some have said that Spinoza advocated for a minimal form of Protestant Christianity,¹ but this seems to be projecting ideas onto Spinoza.²
- Spinoza demonstrates in some of his personal letters that did not believe core Christian doctrines even though he accepted certain historical details of Christianity.³
- Spinoza uses Christ as an ideal philosopher, who only taught universal truths.
- Christ is often contrasted by Moses, a shrewd political leader who created a long-lasting state though still prey to the superstitions of the multitude.⁴
- Christ's teachings were rational but, like Moses, he sometimes accommodated them to the multitude's understanding.⁵

METHODS

- Close reading of Spinoza's *TPT*, especially passages analyzing Moses and Jesus
- Primary Sources
- Secondary Literature

CONCLUSIONS

- Some conclude that Spinoza uses Christ to symbolize a government different from that of Moses, one that promoted more tolerance and freedom such as a liberal democracy.⁶
- However, while Christ inaugurated universal religion, He remained subject to the national law of Moses according to Spinoza.

"[Christ's] teaching took the form of eternal truths, not of prescribed laws. In this way he freed them from bondage to the law, while nevertheless giving further strength and stability to the law, inscribing it deep in their hearts."⁷

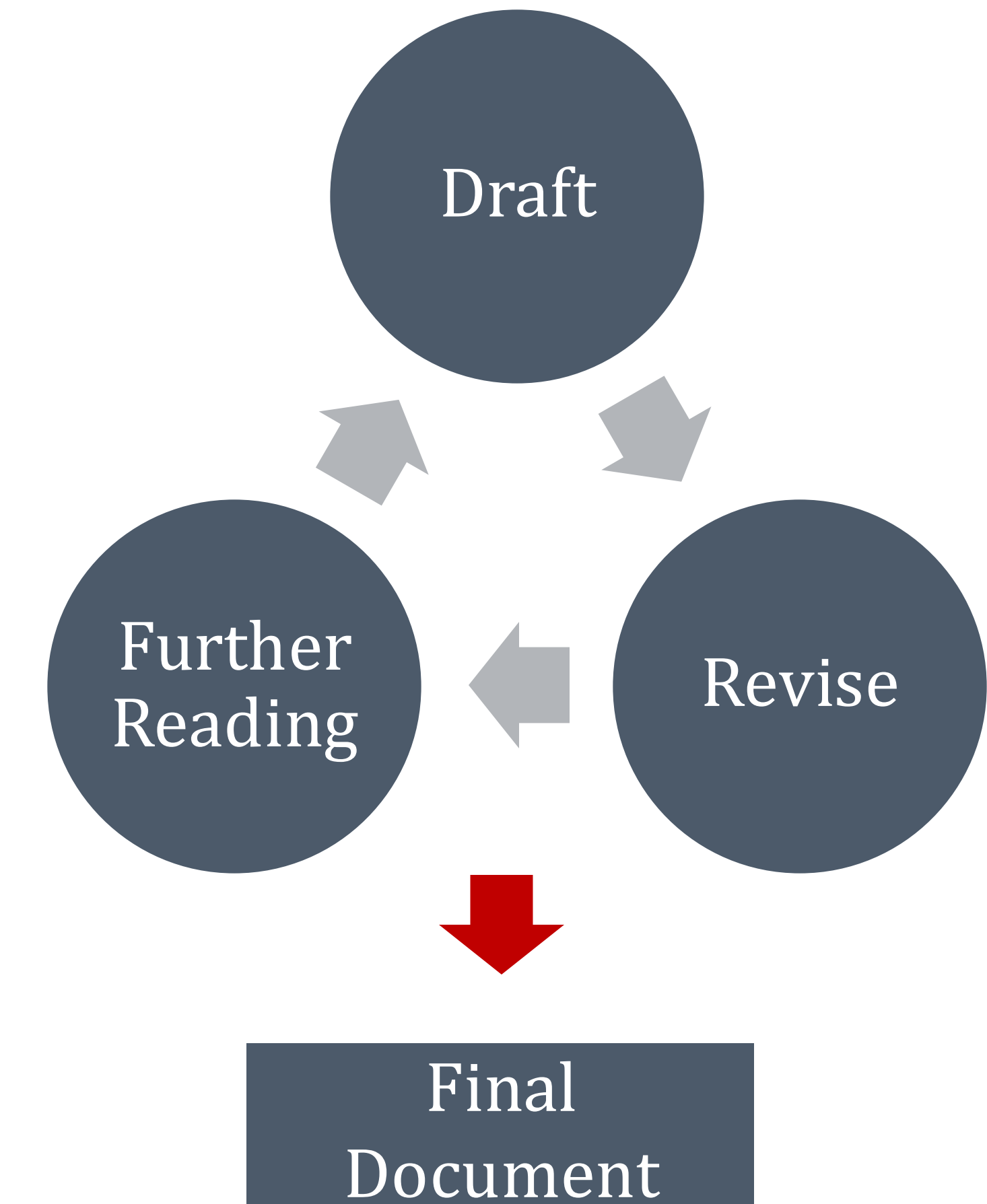
- Jesus' universal teachings instead point toward Spinoza's political goal of establishing a national religion.
- Spinoza envisions that a government will have a national law for establishing civil society and a national religion based on rational, universal morals that provides people freedom to pursue good.
- Just as Jesus could be followed by reason or obedience, Spinoza's national religion could be followed through reason alone or obedience to a minimal credo accommodated to the opinions of the multitude.⁸

REFERENCES

- ¹ Graeme Hunter, *Radical Protestantism in Spinoza's Thought* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 75-84.
- ² Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "Charitable Interpretations and the Political Domestication of Spinoza, or, Benedict in the Land of the Secular Imagination," in *Philosophy and Its History: Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy*, eds. Mogens Laerke, Justin E. H. Smith, and Eric Schliesser (Oxford Academic, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199857142.003.0013>.
- ³ Benedictus de Spinoza, *The Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1995), 348.
- ⁴ Steven Frankel, "The Invention of Liberal Theology: Spinoza's Theological-Political Analysis of Moses and Jesus," *The Review of Politics* 63, no. 2 (2001): 301, doi:10.1017/S0034670500031193.
- ⁵ Benedictus de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. by Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2001), 54-55.
- ⁶ Frankel, "The Invention of Liberal Theology," 311.
- ⁷ Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 55.
- ⁸ Daniel Garber, "Religion and the Civil State in the *TP*," in *Spinoza's Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Hasana Sharp (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 134-136.

NEXT STEPS

- Increase my understanding of Spinoza's philosophy through a closer read of his *Ethics* and personal letters
- Read more works by Spinoza's contemporaries such as Hobbes, Grotius, Koerbagh, the De la Court brothers, etc.
- Possibly learn to read French to access more important secondary literature



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to University Scholars for giving me the funding and means to delve into this research project over the summer. I am also grateful to my research mentor Dr. Fishman for piquing my interest in Spinoza and guiding me along this process.