

Spinoza on Revealed Religion and the Uses of Fear

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Abstract: This paper argues that fear constitutes an important part of Spinoza's redefined version of revealed religion as presented in the *Theological-Political Treatise*. My claim is not only that obedience as conceived by Spinoza always entails fear, but that the biblical image of God as king or lawgiver *requires* fear to fulfill its function; and thus, by extension, that fear remains one of the very tissues that binds together the body politic. Although, throughout his corpus of work, Spinoza often associates fear with cognitive weakness and a destabilizing temperament, he also acknowledges its potential use for sustaining civic concord. My argument is both positive and negative: the state can foster support for itself by the proper utilization of religious fear, but if it neglects to do so, it undermines its stability and risks falling victim to the destructive effects of superstition.

Keywords: Spinoza, divine law, exemplars, dogmata, fear

This paper argues that Spinoza's redefined version of revealed religion, as presented in the *Theological-Political Treatise*,¹ relies heavily on fear (*metus*). These feelings of fear are fundamental to Spinoza's portrayal of theological

¹ All translations of the *Theological-Political Treatise* (hereafter abbreviated TTP) and the *Political Treatise* (TP) are from *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. II, edited and translated by Edwin Curley, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016. References are to chapter and paragraph of the translation, then to volume and page number of *Spinoza Opera*, edited by Carl Gebhardt, 4 vols, Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925. References to Spinoza's letters (Ep.) are from Spinoza, *Complete Works*, translated by Samuel Shirley, edited by Michael L. Morgan, Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002. All quotes from the *Ethics* (E) are from *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. I, edited and translated by Edwin Curley, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985. Passages in the *Ethics* will be referred to by means of the following abbreviations: p = proposition,

obedience—they form an essential part of the multitude’s conception of a just God—and it follows from this that fear operates as an indispensable tool for Spinoza in the governance of well-ordered states. Though no state “has sustained a violent rule for long,”² every commonwealth is bound to utilize a certain degree of fear in order to compel its citizens to behave in accordance with the laws.³ Hence, it is through the implementation of a civic religion that governments enforce mechanisms that rely on fear to support obedience and stability.

I have chosen to frame this discussion as a response to Susan James’ *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics: The Theologico-Political Treatise*.⁴ Whereas, according to James, Spinoza’s project intends to *eliminate* fear as a constitutive factor in faith, my reading reveals Spinoza to be a thinker whose overarching concern was how to productively channel the religious fears of men. I argue that Spinoza’s ingenuity lies in his distinction between the constructive and destructive utility of fear. That is, while superstition exploits man’s natural fear for the vainglory of one man or a clergy gone astray, the ‘true faith’ of the TTP utilizes that same affect to promote loving-kindness and strengthen unity among a non-philosophical multitude. In other words, by appropriately utilizing these religious sentiments, the state can encourage support for itself among men, while neglecting to do so risks undermining or destroying its stability.

This paper comprises four main sections. In the first of these, I present in rough outline James’ position regarding fear and the role it plays in Spinoza’s redefinition of religion. In order to discuss the limitations of her reading, I must show that (i) Spinoza’s general account of obedience not only includes, but requires fear as a motivating factor, and (ii) that theology’s reliance on fear crucially informs Spinoza’s overall philosophical project. Thus, in order to establish (i), I will consider the difference between the so-called natural and revealed divine law, which forms section two of the paper. I argue here that Spinoza’s description of the cognitive and affective disposition of those to whom the revealed divine law is directed—i.e. passionate men and women incapable of rational self-legislation—indicates that for the majority of people religious obedience necessarily entails a bondage to the affects of hope and fear. This is followed by a discussion of Spinoza’s dogmas of faith (section

s = scholium, app = appendix, def = definition. Accordingly, EIVp37s2 refers to *Ethics*, Part 4, Proposition 37, Scholium 2.

² TTP 5.22, GIII: 74.

³ See, for instance, TTP 4.6, GIII: 59; TP 4.4; EIVp54s.

⁴ Susan James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics: The Theologico-Political Treatise*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. James’ approach is an elegant and detailed reconstruction of the historical and philosophical background that Spinoza worked in. This method has allowed her to reveal the various positions that Spinoza was attacking through situating the work within the specific and relevant debates with which he was engaging.

3.1), in which I establish that it is precisely because of its reliance on religious hopes and fears that the revealed divine law is able to realize its main function, i.e. to stimulate in the multitude just and charitable behaviour. I will then show that the mechanism behind theology's instrumental usage of these otherwise unstable passions corresponds with Spinoza's account of the affects in the *Ethics* (section 3.2). In order to then establish (ii), I discuss another kind of *dogma* present in Spinoza's work- the so-called maxims of life found in the *Ethics* (section 3.3). Whereas the dogmas of faith are grounded in passions of hope and fear, the dogmas of reason are meant to subdue and suppress the debilitating beliefs that can be associated with these affects. Thus, one way to approach philosophy's epistemological superiority over theology is by considering the contrast between their respective reliance on hope and fear. Finally, I situate my reading within the broader framework of the TTP, arguing that it is precisely because of the fine line Spinoza draws between faith and the speculations through which it decays into superstition that the usurpation of religious power by the state is required. As this paper will show, only in the hands of the state can revealed religion become a tool of control of the polity.

1. Susan James on Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

One crucial aspect of James' reading of Spinoza centers on the idea that the latter's confrontation with revealed religion is far more hospitable to philosophy than commonly assumed: the biblically-based analysis of religion is not a rejection, but a rearticulation of a set of philosophical conclusions he himself defends in the *Ethics*.⁵ James urges us to consider the constructive uses of the imagination, the degree of freedom of thinking religion grants, and the latter's potential to uphold philosophically acceptable standards of moral certainty. Spinoza's version of religion "create[s] conditions in which we can try to develop the kind of understanding to which philosophy aspires."⁶ From this perspective, one cannot read Spinoza as someone who is implacably opposed to religion. According to James, Spinoza's redefinition of religion also encompasses the psychological mechanism underlying theological obedience. She maintains that Spinoza argues "against attempts to ground *obedience* on fear" [emphasis mine],⁷ formulating this as follows:

Instead of playing on their fear of God, it (true religion) attempts to foster a confidence-inspiring conception of a deity who is just and charitable. Such

⁵ James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*, p. 189.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

a religion is organized, then, around love and devotion for God rather than fear, and is designed to counteract the poisoned ways of life that arise from superstitious anxiety.⁸

In this way, Spinoza's version of revealed religion meets an important psychological condition that makes it easier for philosophers to embrace, or at least tolerate, the otherwise inadequate conception of God as lawgiver. Spinoza's explicit association of superstition with fear,⁹ as well as his remark in the *Ethics* that harmony born out of fear is necessarily unstable,¹⁰ seems to render this line of thought very plausible.

However, in what follows I will show that James' characterization of the moral psychology underlying revealed religion is flawed in several important respects. While Spinoza's depiction of revealed religion does not exclude the optimistic approach advocated by James (in an ideal scenario the faithful will mainly be guided by feelings of love and devotion) it is made clear that in reality this is not plausible. In order for revealed religion to realize the function Spinoza attributes to it—an instrument without which “we would doubt nearly everyone's salvation”¹¹—we must embrace a far less restrictive and idealistic conception of the multitude's true religion.

2. Spinoza on the natural and revealed divine law

Let me begin with the notion of obedience as Spinoza treats it in the TTP. In chapter 4, Spinoza explains that the Bible does not condemn an intellectual approach to religion.¹² What the *Ethics* identifies as the supreme spiritual good of all men—i.e. the love of God grounded in philosophical understanding¹³—is also expressed in the teachings of certain biblical figures. According to Spinoza's interpretation, Solomon, Jesus, and Paul are all read as identifying the love of God with a virtuous disposition present in the man who rightly knows God.

⁸ Ibid., p. 202. A similar reading is found in Jaquet: “The principal mechanism of this belief is not fear (as in the case with superstition), but, rather, confidence in the idea that the love of one's neighbor, that is to say, the practice of justice and charity, assures salvation.” See her “A Response: Logic of the Superstitious, Logic of the Pious,” in Jack Stetter and Charles Ramond (eds.), *Spinoza in Twenty-First-Century American and French Philosophy*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019, p. 312.

⁹ The reason why “superstition arises, lasts, and increases, is fear” (TTP preface §5, GIII: 6).

¹⁰ See EIVappXVI.

¹¹ TTP 15.44, GIII: 188.

¹² TTP 4.46–50, GIII: 68. See also Chapter 19, where Spinoza writes that true religion is “inscribed by divine agency in men's hearts, i.e., in the human mind, and that this is the true original text of God, which he himself has stamped with his seal, i.e., with the idea of him, as an image of his divinity” (TTP 12.2, GIII: 158).

¹³ E.g. EVp27 & EVp32.

Spinoza, for instance, refers to Solomon, who calls the human understanding, “the fountain of true life.”¹⁴ He explains that *Proverbs* 2:3 clearly shows that, according to Solomon, “wisdom and knowledge flow from the mouth of God.”¹⁵ This is a message consistent with his own opinion, Spinoza tells us, for “this is what we ourselves have shown above, viz. that our intellect and our knowledge depend only on the idea or knowledge of God, arise only from it, and are perfected only by it.”¹⁶ The Bible, Spinoza asserts, “commends, without reservation, both the natural light and the natural divine law.”¹⁷ A man who lives in accordance with the natural divine law is someone who devotes himself, “to loving God, not from fear of punishment, nor from love for another thing, such as pleasure or reputation, etc., but only because he knows God, or because he knows that the knowledge and love of God is the highest good.”¹⁸ He embraces God’s laws as eternal truths, and spontaneously devotes himself to justice and charity because he understands that this is what reason demands.

However, the natural divine law, characterized by the precept, ‘to know God and to love him from true freedom,’¹⁹ surpasses the intellectual ability of most people. Spinoza repeatedly notes that, “the man of the flesh cannot understand these things.”²⁰ While some people have true knowledge of God and so out of necessity love him, most lack the ability to live in this manner. The majority of people are guided by immoderate desires and are unable to self-legislate. While Scripture may appeal to a philosophical audience, it was written primarily “for the common people, the uneducated multitude.”²¹ Due to the latter’s inability to grasp the natural divine law, God revealed through prophecy the requirements for salvation. “For nothing prevents God from communicating to men in other ways the same things we know by the light of nature.”²² The divine law in the hands of the prophets became anthropomorphized and represented by the parable of God as king and lawgiver.²³ God’s decrees are no longer conceived of as eternal truths, but presented to the people as if they were the commands of a prince. The love of God ceases to be a virtue and becomes an imperative, an order: to love God is to *obey* his commandments. The prophets thus preached what Spinoza calls the revealed

¹⁴ TTP 4.41, GIII: 66.

¹⁵ TTP 4.44, GIII: 67.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ TTP 4.50, GIII: 68.

¹⁸ TTP 4.14, GIII: 60.

¹⁹ TTP 4.21, GIII: 62.

²⁰ TTP 4.16, GIII: 61.

²¹ TTP 13.27, GIII: 172.

²² TTP 1.6, GIII: 16.

²³ E.g. TTP 4.29, GIII: 64.

divine law, and did so in a manner “so that men would embrace the Word of God without any conflict and with their whole heart.”²⁴

It should now be clear why I felt it important to start this section with a brief outline of the distinction between the natural and the revealed divine law, that is, because it makes clear for us the precise scope of Spinoza’s notion of obedience. Obedience does not apply to philosophers who come to love God through knowledge; that is to say, those who have the remarkable capacity to devote themselves to God and their neighbor not through fear of punishment, or hope for some reward.²⁵ Rather, obedience only makes sense in relation to the multitude, i.e. people who follow God’s laws because they believe they are thus commanded. This brings us to the central question at hand; that is, whether Spinoza believed this can be achieved *without* relying on the fears of the multitude. However, Spinoza’s definition of the natural divine law—i.e. loving God not out of hope or fear—and his emphasis on the fact that this is unattainable for the multitude indicates that in reality most people will indeed only obey God because they are motivated to do so by certain hopes and fears. In what follows I argue that this is in fact a grounding premise of Spinoza’s account of revealed religion, i.e. the true religion of the multitude embodied by the tenets of universal faith.

3. *Spinoza’s dogmata*

Before unpacking the TTP’s definition of faith, let me begin with a brief remark on the issue of hope and fear as Spinoza treats it throughout his writings. Spinoza tells us that human beings “vacillate wretchedly between hope and fear.”²⁶ To strive to live according to the guidance of reason is to strive to depend less on hope and fear.²⁷ However, our lack of power over and against nature—for it is impossible that a man “should be able to undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his own nature alone”²⁸—makes us subject to our passions; even the sage is occasionally thrown around

²⁴ TTP preface §26, GIII: 10.

²⁵ “As for natural divine law, whose chief precept, as we have said, is to love God, I have called it a law in the same sense the philosophers call laws the common rules of nature, according to which all things happen. For the love of God is not obedience, but a virtue which is necessarily in the man who rightly knows God. Obedience is concerned with the will of the one commanding, not with the necessity and truth of the matter [...] So under the guidance of reason we can love God, but not obey him. For we cannot embrace the divine laws as divine so long as we are ignorant of their cause; and we cannot, by reason, conceive God as establishing those laws like a prince.” (TTP Adn. XXXIV, GIII: 264).

²⁶ TTP preface §1, GIII: 15.

²⁷ EIVp47s.

²⁸ EIVp4.

by uncertain feelings of hope and fear. Consider Spinoza's following remark in a letter to Oldenburg:

[...] moral precepts, whether or not they receive from God himself the form of command or law, are nonetheless divine and salutary, and whether the good that follows from virtue and the divine love is bestowed on us by God as judge, or whether it emanates from the necessity of the divine nature, it will not on that account be more or less desirable, just as on the other hand the evils that follow from wicked deeds and passions are not less to be feared because they necessarily follow from them. And finally, whether we do what we do necessarily or contingently, we are still led by hope and fear.²⁹

Spinoza confronts the concern, voiced by many theologians, that a deterministic world in which "all things follow with inevitable necessity from God's nature"³⁰ completely undermines conventional morality and religion. If everything follows a fixed and inevitable course, the concern goes, there is no longer room for responsibility, punishment and reward. Whilst for Spinoza causal determinism does to a large extent preclude moral responsibility,³¹ he maintains that the complete determinateness of things does not prevent us from differentiating between actions that generate good and actions that generate bad consequences. Moral precepts, for this reason, remain extremely valuable, whether or not one conceives of these precepts as decreed by a divine lawgiver or as dictates of reason. This corresponds to an important remark Spinoza makes in the TTP: "we are completely ignorant of the order and connection of things itself, i.e., of how things are really ordered and connected. So for practical purposes it is better, indeed necessary, to consider things as possible."³² Thus, moral precepts are seen as effective means to remediate the damaging effects of our limited knowledge of Nature. This applies as much to the man of faith as to the philosopher; in order to strengthen their ability to live in a cooperative way, both will need to address their imaginations and fall back on certain *dogmata*. However, Spinoza makes a distinction between dogmas that are grounded on hopes and fears, and ones that intend to subdue these very passions, a distinction to which I will now turn.

²⁹ Ep. 75.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Justin Steinberg, in his "Review of Matthew Kisner's Spinoza on Human Freedom: Reason, Autonomy, and the Good Life," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 26.08.2011, asserts that for Spinoza moral responsibility is conditional on human freedom, i.e. on man's causal independence or power of acting. Since sinful actions above all indicate a person's lack of power, Spinoza appears to exculpate evildoers (see Ep. 78, TP 2.5, GIII: 277, and EVp10s). For an opposing view; see Matthew J. Kisner, *Spinoza on Human Freedom: Reason, Autonomy and the Good Life*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, chapter 3.2.

³² TTP 4.4, GIII: 58.

3.1. The dogmas of universal faith

In chapter 14, Spinoza sets out what he calls the tenets of universal faith (*fidei universalis dogmata*).³³ This set of tenets, or *dogmata*, is comprised of a small number of doctrines that are derived from the precept that forms the foundation of the whole religion, i.e. “to love God above all else, and to love your neighbor as yourself.”³⁴ These *dogmata* are: (1) that there exists a God, (2) that he is one, (3) that he is present everywhere and all things are open to him, (4) that he has supreme right and dominion over all things, (5) that the worship of God and obedience to him consists only in justice and loving-kindness, (6) that all and only those who obey God by living in this way are saved, and (7) that God pardons the sins of those who repent.³⁵ Spinoza tells us that once a person has these opinions—and believes them to be true—obedience to God is necessarily posited.³⁶ To this, Spinoza adds that, “[...] faith is not saving by itself, but only in relation to obedience, or as James says (James 2:17), faith by itself, without works, is dead.”³⁷ As faith is itself constituted by a sincere belief in these tenets—and faith implies obedience to the command to love God and one’s neighbor—works of justice and loving-kindness are the logical consequence of having these opinions. Anyone who genuinely believes these things will in principle defend justice, aid the poor, kill no one, covet nothing which belongs to another, and so on.³⁸ These dogmas thus ground the moral precepts that confirm one’s obedience to God.

³³ Following Garber (Daniel Garber, “Should Spinoza have published his philosophy?,” in Charlie Huenemann (ed.), *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 166–187) I depart here from Curley’s translation, which renders this as “tenets of the universal faith.” This suggests a single universal religion through the use of the definite article ‘the,’ which would conflict with the emphasis Spinoza places on flexibility in our understanding of the tenets of faith (see e.g. TTP 14.32–33, GIII: 178–179).

³⁴ TTP 12.34, GIII: 165.

³⁵ See TTP 12.36, GIII:165 and TTP 14.25–28, GIII: 177–178.

³⁶ For Spinoza, the emphasis is on the motivational efficacy, rather than veracity, of these tenets: “faith does not require tenets which are true as much as it does tenets which are pious, i.e., tenets which move the heart to obedience, even if there are many among them which have not even a shadow of the truth, so long as the person who accepts them does not know them to be false” (TTP 14.20, GIII: 176). For more on this, see Theo Verbeek, *Spinoza’s Theologico-Political Treatise: ‘Exploring the Will of God’*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003, pp. 28–34; Yitzhak Melamed, “The metaphysics of the *Theological-Political Treatise*,” in Yitzhak Melamed and Michael Rosenthal (eds.), *Spinoza’s Theological-Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 135–137; Garber, “Should Spinoza have published his philosophy?,” pp. 172–173.

³⁷ TTP 14.14, GIII: 175.

³⁸ In a recent unpublished manuscript titled “Spinoza’s Faith,” Martin Lin has argued that while faith is a necessary condition for obedience, it is not always sufficient for generating compliance. Daniel Garber concurs: “while a given set of beliefs may make it plausible that I will be obedient, no set of beliefs can *guarantee* obedience: too many things (other desires, beliefs, etc.)

There are a number of compelling reasons in favor of James' argument that these tenets are intended to invoke a 'confidence-inspiring' conception of God. First, Spinoza considers devotion towards God as the highest achievement for the faithful (tenet 2), and we find in the *Ethics* that devotion is defined as "love joined to wonder."³⁹ Spinoza also distinguishes devotion from consternation, i.e. wonder aroused by an object of fear.⁴⁰ From this we can conclude that someone who is devoted to God is therefore someone who is in awe of a deity that he loves, not fears. The second compelling reason is that the tenets make no mention of heaven or hell. James refers to Van Velthuysen, who complained that Spinoza "makes no mention of life and death, or of any reward or punishment through which men are influenced by the judge of the universe."⁴¹ A deity who does not invoke the prospect of hell in the case of disobedience can indeed be seen as more 'confidence-inspiring' than one who does. Further to this, fear of hell, Spinoza tells us, "is the single cause of superstition."⁴² Third, Spinoza's lawgiving God pardons the sins of those who repent. Previous transgressions do not rule out salvation in such cases of repentance—undoubtedly a confidence-inspiring thought.

However, convincing as this may be, it is clear that obedience also heavily relies on fear. After all, the *Ethics* clearly teaches us that "there is neither hope without fear, nor fear without hope,"⁴³ and what is 'confidence-inspiring' meant to imply if not hope? Spinoza describes how the two are intertwined in the following formulation:

For he who is suspended in hope and doubts a thing's outcome is supposed to imagine something which excludes the existence of the future thing. And so to that extent he is saddened (by P19), and consequently, while he is suspended in hope, he fears that the thing [he imagines] will happen.⁴⁴

Although men of faith can be confident that God judges people in a consistent manner, i.e. that God always rewards those who obey, and always punishes those who do not, they will still have doubts concerning their own ability to live consistently in a pious manner. This existential insecurity will

can get in the way and undermine action." See Daniel Garber, "Anthropomorphism, Teleology, and Superstition: The Politics of Obedience in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*," in Stetter and Ramond (eds.), *Spinoza in Twenty-First-Century American and French Philosophy*, p. 309.

³⁹ EIIIp52s.

⁴⁰ Ibid. For an analysis of Spinoza's account of wonder, see Michael Rosenthal, "Miracles, wonder and the state," in Melamed and Rosenthal (eds.), *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise*, pp. 231–249. Rosenthal shows how Spinoza imports the structure of the miracle into his political thinking in order to solve collective action problems in his social contract theory.

⁴¹ James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*, p. 208.

⁴² Ep. 76.

⁴³ EIII def affects XIII.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

spontaneously give rise to both hope and fear. Thus, by virtue of emphasizing hope, such a reading cannot avoid giving a place to fear that necessarily goes along with it. The tenets clearly confirm this psychological truth; after all, Spinoza emphasizes that obedience also requires people to believe that God systematically punishes those who live under the control of the pleasures (tenet 6). If men did not firmly believe this, the image of God as lawgiver would no longer be effective. Furthermore, to be faithful, one must believe that God is everywhere and sees everything (tenet 3); no one can escape God's all-seeing eye. Thus, we must conclude that fear of punishment and hope for reward both are fundamental motivating factors for obedience. In ideal cases obedience might entail devotion, but this seems to overlook what is really at stake here: divine justice centers on the belief that no one can escape God's judgment.⁴⁵

3.2. Spinoza on exemplars and knowledges of good and evil

My claim is not only that obedience as conceived by Spinoza always entails hope and fear; but that the biblical image of God as king or lawgiver *requires* these hopes and fears to fulfill its function. In order to come to this conclusion, we must (first) address certain features of Spinoza's description of ethical language as presented in the *Ethics*.

For Spinoza 'good' and 'evil' are nothing but subjective value judgements. They, "indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are they anything other than modes of thinking, or notions we form because we compare things to one another."⁴⁶ Spinoza's main point here is that the value judgements people have are above all indications of their own affective dispositions. He writes:

we desire nothing because we judge it to be good, but on the contrary, we call it good because we desire it. Consequently, what we are averse to we call evil. So each one, from his own affect, judges, *or* evaluates, what is good and what is bad, what is better and what is worse, and finally, what is best and what *is* worst. [...] And so, each one, from his own affect, judges a thing good or bad, useful or useless.⁴⁷

According to Spinoza, human existence is characterized by a fundamental desire to preserve one's own being.⁴⁸ People, however, have widely divergent opinions concerning those things that they believe to be beneficial or detrimental to

⁴⁵ On James' reading, the prospect of divine punishment in case of transgression does not inflict much fear in the one obeying; only when God is "conceived, for example, as vengeful or arbitrary, our desire to obey him will be compromised by fear and resentment" (James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*, p. 194).

⁴⁶ EIV, preface.

⁴⁷ EIIIp39s.

⁴⁸ EIIIp6.

that striving. Spinoza, for instance, explains that “the ambitious man” will regard esteem by others as the most valuable object to be pursued, whereas “the greedy man” primarily considers abundance in money as conducive to his well-being. Since joy and sadness are this desire itself “insofar as it is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, by external causes,”⁴⁹ the former (i.e. the ambitious man), by consequence, experiences joy in the accumulation of worldly honour, the latter (i.e. the greedy man) sadness in losing money. Human beings thus apply the notions of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ to those things that affect them with either desire or aversion. And since one and the same thing can be ‘good’ for one while ‘bad/evil’ for another,⁵⁰ value judgements are necessarily characterized by a high level of relativity.⁵¹ Spinoza, however, is reluctant to reject these terms outright:

But though this is so, still we must retain these words. For because we desire to form an idea of man, as a model of human nature which we may look to, it will be useful to us to retain these same words with the meaning I have indicated. In what follows, therefore, I shall understand by good what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature we set before ourselves. By evil, what we certainly know prevents us from becoming like that model.⁵²

According to Spinoza, good and evil are evaluative notions that indicate an object’s relation to a certain standard or model. The greedy man, for instance, values above all the accumulation of money since he perceives this object as the quintessential means for achieving well-being. Consequently, he sets before himself the ideal of the rich man as a model according to which he judges the value of external objects. Such passion-based ideals, however, differ from person to person.

Spinoza, in the passage above, argues for the acceptance of a model of human nature that can serve as a more objective standard of good and bad,⁵³ according to which we are able to value things as being *certain* means by which we may approach embodying that model in our lives.⁵⁴ There is, in other

⁴⁹ EIIIp57d.

⁵⁰ See EIIIp51s and EIV, preface.

⁵¹ E.g. Don Garrett, “Spinoza’s ethical theory,” in Don Garrett (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 273, and Steven Nadler, *Spinoza’s Ethics: An Introduction*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 216.

⁵² EIV, preface.

⁵³ See Michael Rosenthal, “Why Spinoza Chose the Hebrews: The Exemplary Function of Prophecy in the Theological Treatise,” in Heidi M. Ravven and Lenn E. Goodman (eds.), *Jewish Themes in Spinoza’s Philosophy*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2002, p. 229.

⁵⁴ See also TTP 16.11-13; GIII 191, where Spinoza distinguishes between the advantage (*utile*) that all human beings pursue and “the true advantage of men” (*verum hominum utile*)

words, a specific model of human life that represents a perfection of human nature. In part four of the *Ethics*,⁵⁵ Spinoza identifies this model of human nature with the ideal of the so-called “free man.” This free man represents someone “who is led by reason alone [and] [...] has only adequate ideas,”⁵⁶ and thus whose judgements about good and evil are grounded in rational perception alone, i.e. his value judgements are based solely on an adequate understanding of what is truly beneficial for man.

However, the ideal of the perfectly free and rational person itself is imaginary and inadequate.⁵⁷ Our lack of power over and against Nature necessarily makes us subject to our passions.⁵⁸ The woman of reason that takes the ‘free man’ as exemplar, however, understands that happiness depends on the accumulation of adequate ideas. She is aware that the more adequate knowledge she has of herself, her surrounding world, and the way passions influence her, the more her activity and freedom are increased. Her ideas and actions no longer will be determined solely by the way external objects randomly act upon her, instead she will strive as much as possible to have her own nature—i.e. reason—become the cause of her thoughts and actions. Spinoza tells us that the more we act according to our own nature, the more virtuous and free we become—and subsequently, the more we preserve our own being. In this way, Spinoza’s proposed model of human nature thus equates reason, virtue and self-preservation. Since virtue—i.e. acting freely according to our own nature—and reason necessarily aim at self-preservation, we can be sure that whatever we do from virtue and reason will also be ‘good’ for us.⁵⁹

The difference between a model of human nature grounded in reason, and those based upon a passionate, subjective way of judging things is captured in Spinoza’s distinction between “*true* knowledge of good and evil” (EIVp14 and onwards) and simply “knowledge of good and evil” —without the ‘true’—which I will call *purported* knowledge of good and evil (see e.g. EIVp8). According to Spinoza, the free man judges as good only those things that will necessarily contribute to increasing the well-being of himself and others. See, for instance, EIVp35d: “because what we judge to be good or evil when we follow the dictate of reason must be good or evil (by IIP41), it follows that

sought by those who “live according to the laws and certain dictates of our reason.” See Donald Rutherford, “Spinoza and the Dictates of Reason,” *Inquiry* 51 (2008), p. 498.

⁵⁵ EIVp67–73.

⁵⁶ EIVp68d.

⁵⁷ See e.g. Daniel Garber, “Dr. Fishelson’s Dilemma: Spinoza on Freedom and Sociability,” in Y. Yovel and G. Segal (eds.), *Ethica IV: Spinoza on Reason and the “Free man,”* New York: Little Room Press, 2004, pp. 196–197, 202; Michael Rosenthal, “Spinoza and the philosophy of history,” in Huenemann (ed.), *Interpreting Spinoza*, p. 125.

⁵⁸ EIVp4.

⁵⁹ E.g. Garrett, “Spinoza’s ethical theory,” pp. 292–293.

insofar as men live according to the guidance of reason, they must do only those things which are good for human nature, and hence, for each man.” Consequently, since their evaluative judgements are grounded in adequate ideas alone, such people are guided by ‘true knowledge of good and evil.’⁶⁰ However, this is not the case when we consider the exemplars men usually set before themselves. For the greedy or ambitious man, ‘good’ and ‘evil’ follow merely from a subjective appreciation of the way certain objects affect him, and what is good for the greedy man differs from what is good for the ambitious man. As such, there is no correspondence between what they perceive to be good and evil and what is objectively so. There is, in other words, a difference between their *purported* “knowledge of good and evil” and “true knowledge of good and evil.”⁶¹

This is not to say that exemplars grounded in passions can never contribute to one’s self-preservation. The greedy man will, for instance, be motivated to quit smoking if the pleasure he derives from it is unable to compete with the loss of money that goes along with it. That this would be the case follows from a fundamental principle of Spinoza’s psychological theory, i.e. that “an affect cannot be restrained or taken away except by an affect opposite to, and stronger than, the affect to be restrained.”⁶² What is important to understand about purported “knowledge of good and evil” is that it entails, in the person who holds it, the knowledge that certain objects affect him or her with joy or sadness respectively.⁶³ In cases where affects such as love of honour or hate of disgrace are deeply ingrained in an individual’s mind, they will subsequently have the ability to overpower other affects that are less motivationally effective.

⁶⁰ See De Dijn: “This knowledge of good and bad is called true knowledge, not simply because it just happens to correspond to what is really useful to us or not [...] It is called true because it is based on reason (as is clear e.g. from the demonstration of EIVp15). Therefore, it is inappropriate to call it inadequate or to equate it with knowledge of the first kind” (“Ethics IV: The Ladder, Not the Top. The provisional morals of the Philosopher,” <http://www.hermandedijn.be/viewpic.php?LAN=N&TABLE=PUB&ID=1445> [accessed January 7, 2016], p. 8). I would add, however, that this does not mean that imagination has no role to play in the application of reason’s dictates to daily life. As Justin Steinberg has aptly put it, the exemplar of the free man ultimately functions “as a kind of Trojan Horse through which reason infiltrates and colonizes the imagination” (“Following a *Recta Ratio Vivendi*: The Practical utility of Spinoza’s Dictates of Reason,” in Matthew J. Kisner and Andrew Youpa (eds.), *Essays on Spinoza’s Ethical Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 196). Indeed, a proper application of the relatively indeterminate and uninformative ‘general’ precepts of reason relies crucially on the resources and practices of memory and imagination.

⁶¹ See also Rutherford, “Spinoza and the Dictates of Reason,” pp. 498–490: “Spinoza aims to preserve a distinction between how we are naturally determined to act in pursuing or advantage and how we might act in pursuing our ‘true advantage,’ in accordance with the dictates of reason.”

⁶² EIVp7.

⁶³ EIVp8.

Thus, “knowledge of good and evil” that is not “*true* knowledge of good and evil” in some individual cases may indeed contribute to self-preservation—however, not reliably so.

If we now redirect our attention to the dogmas of faith discussed in section 1, it is clear that they qualify exactly as such a body of knowledge. As we have seen, Spinoza emphasizes that theological obedience requires people to believe that God systematically punishes those who live under the control of the pleasures (tenet 6). Furthermore, to be faithful, one must believe that God is everywhere and sees everything (tenet 3); no one can escape God’s all-seeing eye. Thus, fear of punishment and hope for reward are both fundamental motivating factors for theological obedience. In other words, the dogmas of faith always incite one to hope (for divine reward) or fear (for divine punishment).⁶⁴

In proposition 47 of Part IV, Spinoza argues that hope and fear can be constructive affects, but only in certain circumstances. On his account, “affects [of hope and fear] cannot be good of themselves, but only insofar as they can restrain an excess of joy.”⁶⁵ Understanding why this is so requires referring back the claim, made earlier in the EIV, that excessive pleasures are evil because they prevent the body from being affected in a great many other ways,⁶⁶ which in turn prevents one from making better use of his or her rational potential.⁶⁷ Thus, in cases where an affect maximizes our capability to be rational by way of restraining factors that would mitigate this, that affect must be considered constructive.

This seems to be Spinoza’s position. People are often so fixated on their bodily pleasures that they no longer are useful to themselves. In such a scenario, hope and fear can still be valuable because they have the ability to make us reconsider our true priorities. For instance, fear of sickness or death can stimulate smokers to reconsider their destructive habit. Now, at a certain moment Spinoza calls excessive greed, ambition and lust “species of madness.”⁶⁸ Therefore, we can safely assume that such passions qualify as evils that can be restrained by ‘good’ hopes and fears.

⁶⁴ Daniel Garber reaches a similar conclusion: “the fear of what will happen to us after death, fear of punishment and the coordinate hope of heaven, is a primary motivation for the common man to behave in accordance with morality.” See his “A Free Man Thinks of Nothing Less Than of Death: Spinoza on the Eternity of the Mind,” in Christia Mercer and Eileen O’Neill (eds.), *Early Modern Philosophy: Mind, Matter, and Metaphysics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 112.

⁶⁵ EIVp47.

⁶⁶ EIVp43.

⁶⁷ EIVp38 & EIVp26–27.

⁶⁸ EIVp44s: “But when a greedy man thinks of nothing else but profit, or money, and an ambitious man of esteem, they are not thought to be mad, because they are usually troublesome and are considered worthy of hate. But greed, ambition, and lust really are species of madness, even though they are not numbered among the diseases.”

We are now in a position to turn back to one of the most crucial tenets of the dogmata, that is, tenet 6, wherein the relationship between what we have explored thus far in regard to fear and hope and theological obedience becomes clear. As we have seen, Spinoza formulates the tenet as follows: “VI. Everyone who obeys God by living in this way [viz. in Justice and Loving-kindness, or in love towards one’s neighbor] is saved; the rest, who live under the control of pleasures, are lost.” He also adds: “If men did not firmly believe this, there would be no reason why they should prefer to obey God rather than pleasures.”⁶⁹ Thus, we can see that according to Spinoza, a person of faith will always genuinely believe that those who live under the control of the pleasures will be lost. The reason why he obeys God, and not his own indulgences, is because he believes that a life devoted to bodily pleasures would jeopardize his chances of salvation; he will, for instance, fear the consequences of sexual promiscuity (or hope for reward in case of moderation) and therefore suppress excessive lust. My point is that the psychological mechanism behind theological obedience mirrors exactly the principle described in the *Ethics*: faith’s reliance on the hopes and fears of the multitude is instrumentally good because of its ability to prevent the person in question from succumbing to a bigger evil. The same psychological mechanism is described at the end of the *Ethics*, where we find Spinoza expressing his frustration about the absurd beliefs commonly associated with religion.⁷⁰ He scrutinizes the multitude’s belief in heaven and hell, yet simultaneously realizes how ideas like this are especially capable of restraining the common man’s desire for bodily pleasures. He writes that “if men did not have this hope and fear [...] they would return to their natural disposition, and would prefer to govern all their actions according to lust.”⁷¹ This suggests that for Spinoza theological obedience is mainly characterized by how it takes advantage of the ductility of the multitude. By working on their fears and hopes, the biblical image of God as king or lawgiver stimulates people to act in accordance with their supposedly true interests.⁷² The tenets of faith, in other words, qualify as a body of inadequate propositional knowledge that teaches religious adherents *purported* ‘knowledge of good and evil’; knowledge particularly effective in bringing about behavioural changes. While there are many passion-based exemplars, for Spinoza the image of God the lawgiver stands above and beyond these. Indeed we can surmise, given the account of psychological motivation we have explored in this section, that it

⁶⁹ TTP 14.27; GIII 177–178.

⁷⁰ EVp41

⁷¹ EVp41s.

⁷² To be clear: while superstition exploits man’s natural hopes and fears for the vainglory of one man, one class, or a clergy gone astray (e.g. TTP, preface §10, GIII: 7), Spinoza’s version of universal faith utilizes these same affects to promote loving-kindness and strengthen unity among a non-philosophical multitude.

is precisely because of its reliance on men's most profound existential hopes and fears that this image of God is so emotionally compelling. After all, in the *Ethics* Spinoza clearly suggests that only the very few—i.e. the philosophically gifted—are capable of overcoming fear of death.⁷³ Scripture, however, speaks to those who are unable to understand God intellectually; men and women who are led primarily by unstable hopes and fears.⁷⁴ The Bible addresses exactly these individuals whose imaginations are particularly sensitive to the image of a personal God allotting rewards and punishments. Ultimately, both the natural disposition of those to whom Scripture speaks, and the motivational efficacy the anthropomorphic image of God has in bringing about obedience contribute to the uniqueness of the Bible as pedagogical instrument.⁷⁵

Thus, on this reading, *both* fear of punishment and hope for reward remain essential to Spinoza's definition of universal faith, and the one-sided notion of a confidence-inspiring deity organized around love and devotion for God, rather than fear, remains for this reason debatable. In what follows, I will emphasize this further by focusing on another kind of *dogma* present in Spinoza's work.

3.3. The dogmas of philosophy

After having described in Part IV of his *Ethics* the various obstacles to a life lived according to the guidance of reason, in Part V Spinoza turns attention to the so-called “remedies of the affects” (*affectuum remedia*). Propositions 1–20 set out a number of techniques intended to assist the rational person in affirming the power of reason over their passions.⁷⁶ Whilst the majority of these techniques require a certain degree of intellectual development, one remedy emphasizes the importance of a providential morality:

The best thing, then, that we can do, so long as we do not have perfect knowledge of our affects, is to conceive a correct principle of living [*rectam vivendi rationem*], or sure maxims of life [*dogmata vitae*], to commit them to memory,

⁷³ See EIVp67.

⁷⁴ For those who have the most powerful imaginations are less able to grasp things by pure intellect” (TTP 2.1; GIII 29).

⁷⁵ Spinoza further stipulates that “faith in historical narratives, whatever in the end those narratives may be [...] does not have any utility except in relation to teaching. It is only in this respect that some narratives can be better than others” (TTP 5.45; GIII 79).

⁷⁶ Spinoza provides a summary of these techniques in the scholium to proposition 20. A number of commentators have suggested to add to this list the remedy discussed in EVp6—see for example Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984, p. 337; Don Garrett, “Spinoza's Ethical Theory,” p. 281. For an excellent discussion of these techniques, see Herman De Dijn, “Ethics as Medicine for the Mind (5P1–20),” in Michael Hampe, Ursula Renz, and Robert Schnepf (eds.), *Spinoza's Ethics: A Collective Commentary*, Leiden: Brill, 2011, pp. 265–279.

and to apply them constantly to the particular cases frequently encountered in life. In this way our imagination will be extensively affected by them, and we shall always have them ready.⁷⁷

Spinoza, for instance, identifies the following dogmas that serve such purposes: “hate is to be conquered by love *or* nobility” and “fear can be conquered by tenacity and strength of character.”⁷⁸ The basic idea behind these *dogmata* is training our imagination in such a way so as not to be affected by feelings of hope, fear, anger and despair.⁷⁹ They do so by invoking virtues that, according to the *Ethics*, all are grounded in reason itself (tenacity, for instance, includes moderation, sobriety, and presence of mind). Then, through invoking the fictional image of someone who fully embodies these virtues, such as tenacity and nobility,⁸⁰ we can increase our understanding of how one should adequately respond to emotionally upsetting situations. Hence, it is through the practice of constantly reflecting on such principles and applying them to daily life that we strengthen our awareness of our own power and capacity to control how we respond to such events. The many obstacles we encounter will no longer be a cause of despair; on the contrary, we will be able to reorder our affects and transform them into thoughts and feelings of joy.

Similar to the dogmas of faith, the dogmas of philosophy address our imagination in order to strengthen our ability to live in a just and cooperative fashion. The TTP, however, emphasizes that only the latter allows us to live according to reason: “we cannot obey [...] according to the guidance of reason.”⁸¹ One way to make this epistemological inferiority of the tenets of faith intelligible is by focusing on the role of passions like hope and fear. Whereas the dogmas of faith always incite one to hope (for divine reward) or fear (for divine punishment), the dogmas of reason are intended to do the exact opposite, i.e. to subdue these feelings. Arguably, Spinoza’s contrasting usage of the term *dogmata* in the TTP and the *Ethics* is meant to highlight the difference between an instructive and a truly constructive use of the imagination. Whereas the effectiveness of the dogmas of faith lies mainly in its potential to suppress antisocial passions, the dogmas of philosophy are capable of realizing an affective reorientation towards genuinely social passions such as love and trust. Though James’ thesis that philosophers need not

⁷⁷ EVp10s.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ For a succinct, more elaborate treatment of the remedy discussed in EVp10s, see Rosenthal, “Spinoza and the philosophy of history,” pp. 111–127.

⁸⁰ Spinoza defines tenacity as “the desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to preserve his being,” and nobility as “the desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to aid other men and join them to him in friendship” (EIIIp59s).

⁸¹ TTP Adn. XXXIV, GIII: 264.

straightforwardly reject Spinoza's version of revealed religion is not unfounded, this insight should caution them to remain critical.

4. Concluding remarks

My disagreement with James' claim is that, in the case of theological obedience, fear is unavoidable. While I fully agree that the notion of God as giving people promises and threats is part of the anthropomorphism Spinoza rejects, I hope to have shown that it is doubtful that Spinoza advocates a form of religious obedience that intends to eliminate fear as a motivating factor of faith. His dismissal of philosophical analyses that "border on fantasy or could be put into effect [only] in that golden age of the poets"⁸² forces us to embrace and understand reality as it is. Spinoza emphasizes that "men usually err most regarding religion, and are apt to compete greatly in inventing many things according to the differences in their mentality."⁸³ Even a purified version of revealed religion that limits the propositional knowledge associated with obedience will not prevent men from interpreting religious duty in a widely disparate manner. Consequently, Spinoza argues that the common people need to be instructed by "Pastors *or* ministers of the Church" —appointed by the state—in those biblical "narratives which are most able to move their hearts to obedience and devotion."⁸⁴ However, even in the ideal situation where men's minds are moved to devotion towards God, the danger of religious decline still lurks. Especially significant here is Spinoza's claim that devotion often brings people to a more fervent belief in miracles,⁸⁵ the epitome of superstitious ignorance.⁸⁶ This fine line between faithful obedience and superstitious naiveté is a continuous thread that runs through the TTP.⁸⁷

⁸² TP 1.1, GIII: 273.

⁸³ TTP 16.62, GIII: 199.

⁸⁴ TTP 5.44, GIII: 79. Van Velthuysen, keen observer of Spinoza's activities in the TTP, singles out this very point in his letter to Ostens: "The author therefore argues that it is the right of the magistrate to decide which and what kind of doctrines [*dogmata*] should be publicly taught in the commonwealth, and that it is the duty of subjects, so far as concerns public pronouncement, to refrain from teaching and professing doctrines which the magistrate has by law forbidden to be publicly professed." (Ep. 42, p. 876; addition mine).

⁸⁵ TTP 6.3, GIII: 81.

⁸⁶ Ep. 73.

⁸⁷ For an opposing view, see especially Jaquet, "A Response: Logic of the Superstitious, Logic of the Pious." She argues that Spinoza maintains a sharp distinction between the true faith of the TTP and superstition. Whereas the former is supported by confidence in the idea that the love of one's neighbor assures salvation, the latter is grounded in superstitious credulity driven mainly by fear. For this reason, she argues, the principal mechanism of the true faith of the TTP "is not fear (as in the case of superstition)" (p. 312). The arguments presented above should already be sufficient to disqualify this latter assertion. I would like to add, however, that her reading of Spinoza's definition of superstition is also not able to support her claim. While it

The *Treatise*, as I mentioned before, emphasizes that “we cannot obey [...] according to the guidance of reason.”⁸⁸ The truly faithful person who embodies the tenets of faith and acts in a just way, in other words, still cannot be said to live according to the guidance of reason. This is a thought with far-reaching implications, particularly if we consider that for Spinoza “there is no singular thing in Nature which is more useful to man than a man who lives according to the guidance of reason.”⁸⁹ Now, when Spinoza describes the actions of the prophets and their use of the multitude’s passions, he notes that this kind of skillful molding will ultimately benefit the people: it is necessary so that “in the end they may live from the guidance of reason, i.e., may be free and enjoy the life of the blessed.”⁹⁰ Spinoza thus suggests that “acting from obedience” can only become “acting according to the guidance of reason” when something is added; by itself, theology will always be insufficient. To complete the story, Spinoza’s final chapters of the TTP redirect attention to the state: only via the right of state will religion be able to realize its full potential.⁹¹

An important argument in support of James’ claim (that is, that Spinoza argues against attempts to ground obedience on fear) centers on the idea that harmony born out of fear, or secured through oppression, is necessarily unstable.⁹² James, and other commentators with her, have good reasons to highlight Spinoza’s assertion that a hope-driven citizenry is intrinsically superior to one driven by fear.⁹³ However, Spinoza holds no illusions that “for the Common-

is true, as we have seen, that Spinoza often identifies superstition with fear, he also emphasizes its counterpart hope as integral to it (see, for instance, TTP pref., §1 and §4, GIII: 307–308). Furthermore, Spinoza himself clearly states that “the chief distinction [...] between religion and superstition is that the latter is founded on ignorance, the former on wisdom” (Ep. 73, p. 942). His subsequent discussion of the ‘wisdom of doctrine’ associated with the true faith of the TTP shows that religion turns into ignorance when miraculous opinions supersede the essential tenets of faith. However, no mention is made of fear as being the principal, let alone sole, impetus behind superstitious naiveté. For a more extensive discussion of Spinoza’s use of the notion of ‘wisdom of doctrine,’ see my “Spinoza on History, Christ, and Lights Untamable,” PhD diss., Ghent University, 2016, pp. 159–170.

⁸⁸ Adn. XXXIV, GIII: 264.

⁸⁹ EIVp35c1.

⁹⁰ EIVp54s.

⁹¹ TTP 19.6, GIII: 229.

⁹² James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics*, p. 260.

⁹³ I am thinking in particular of Justin Steinberg’s recent *Spinoza’s Political Psychology: The Taming of Fortune and Fear*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. To be clear: I fully endorse James and Steinberg’s shared view that the privileging of hope over fear is absolutely essential to Spinoza’s normative political thought. Spinoza, as we have seen, repeatedly associates fear with superstition, timidity, oppression and slavishness. My emphasis here is on Spinoza’s definition of revealed religion as presented in the TTP. My claim is that fear constitutes an essential component of Spinoza’s portrayal of universal faith, and thus, by extension, remains one of the very tissues that binds together the body politic.

wealth to be its own master, it is bound to maintain the causes of fear and respect.”⁹⁴ This insight renders Spinoza’s sustained efforts to accommodate religion to the safety of the state fully intelligible. To argue that, for Spinoza, only the state has the potential to truly liberate people and make men of faith act in accordance with the dictates of reason is a project for another paper.⁹⁵ However, my reading of revealed religion as grounded in part on fear is sufficient for us to be able to make full sense of Spinoza’s theologico-political project. For instance, it makes clear how significant it is that Spinoza measures the success of states in terms of their ability to remove fear and alleviate distress. In terms of how they actually go about doing so, he turns to civil order, defining this as the penultimate instrument that can successfully remove general fear in the populace. Such an emancipatory dimension is never attributed to the true religion of the multitude, *except* insofar as it is a tool of the state. On this reading, Spinozists must be far more tepid in their approach to revealed religion.

To conclude; I do not deny that Spinoza’s revised version of revealed religion, centered around a pious belief in the seven tenets of faith, does not add some elements of rationality to religious obedience and piety. Indeed, compared to the Mosaic law, the universal religion put forward in the TTP is clearly less exclusivist. There are, moreover, the additional elements explored in section 3.1 that suggest an effort on Spinoza’s behalf to present his readers with a conception of faith more agreeable to a philosophical mind. Given these points, it is understandable why Susan James has been motivated to argue that Spinoza’s tenets are intended to invoke a ‘confidence inspiring’ conception of God. However, what I hope to have shown in this paper is that there are compelling reasons to think otherwise. At the heart of these is a matter of consistency with fundamental aspects of Spinoza’s thought; for instance, as we have seen, the *Ethics* teaches us that “there is neither hope without fear, nor fear without hope” (EIII def. affects XIII). Thus, even if we were to accept a reading of the tenets that places more emphasis on the hope they invoke, by virtue of this point alone one must also account for, if not at least recognize, that fear will *of necessity* be just as present. I have argued that for Spinoza theological obedience is characterized mainly by its advantageous use of the ductility of the multitude. By working on their hopes and fears, the biblical image of God as lawgiver stimulates people to act in accordance with

⁹⁴ TP 4.4, GIII: 293.

⁹⁵ Justin Steinberg (“Spinoza on Civil Liberation,” *Journal for the History of Philosophy* 47 (2009), pp. 35–58) confronted the issue of the state’s capacity to promote civil liberty through a reordering of the affects. In his discussion of the various institutional features a state has at its disposal to promote social agreement and *securitas*, Steinberg also covers the importance of a purified civic religion.

their supposed interests. On this reading, fear of punishment and hope for reward remain essential to Spinoza's definition of faith; the biblical image of God requires these affects to fulfill its function. And while Spinoza's ingenuity lies in his distinction between a constructive and destructive use of hope and fear, it is precisely this reliance on passive affects that renders religious faith unstable and, ultimately, philosophically suspect. Seen from the perspective of reason, there is, after all, nothing 'confidence-inspiring' in the tenets of faith.

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