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Governing between Reason and Affects

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Governing between reason and affect: Spinoza and the politics of prophets

Abstract

Through a close analysis of Spinoza's views on prophecy and the Hebrew Republic, this article contributes insights into how certain modes of governing succeed in aligning and entangling affects with reason. I argue, first, that the prophet must be seen as a political figure immersed in the imaginative-affective domain. Through the imagination, signs, and a moral compass, the prophet utilizes affects such as humility, repentance, and devotion to exhort people to live in accordance with the guidance of reason. In this way, prophetic authority underlies a mode of governing that utilizes imaginative and affective means to reach rationally expedient ends. However, since affects are inherently inconsistent and fluctuating, something needs to be invoked to make commendable affects durable, intense, and lasting. I therefore turn to Spinoza's analysis of Moses' government of the Hebrews to argue that by commending collective, repetitive, and bodily performances of ceremonies, rituals, and liturgy, he was able to habituate individuals to certain moods, values, and virtues that conform with the prescripts of reason on an affective basis. It is my hope that the article will enhance our ability to see that, although affects are governable, not all affects can be entangled with reason and that the difference between true and false prophets is small.

Keywords: Spinoza, affect, reason, prophets, governing, ceremony, ritual

Introduction

In *Spinoza and Politics,* Étienne Balibar notes that in the famous 37th proposition of part IV of the *Ethics* Spinoza surprisingly gives two diametrically opposed albeit equally necessary demonstrations for the institution of society and foundation of the state (1998, 76–88). The first demonstration explains the engendering of society insofar as so-called 'free men' strive solely from the dictates of reason to join others in friendship and act on the basis of *joyful actions* such as tenacity, nobility*,* courtesy, and honesty (EIIIp59s | GII/188; TTP, Ch. 5 | GIII/73).[1] For a person guided by reason, there is nothing more

useful than other reasonable individuals for they agree in nature, and she will be freer in a state where she maintains a principle of common advantage by living from a common decision than if she lived in solitude and had to strive to preserve her being alone (EIVp73 | GII/264; TP, Ch. 3, §6 | GIII/286).

The second demonstration, on the other hand, takes its outset in those who are torn by the subset of affects that we commonly call *passions*. These individuals neither agree with others nor with themselves because passions inevitably draw them in different directions, towards different ephemeral goods – wealth, honour, sensual pleasure or glory – which can only be possessed to the exclusion of others. This makes them inconstant, unreliable, and fundamentally prone to conflict (EIVpp33-4 | GII/231; TP, Ch. 1, §12 | GIII/281). Since this is the case, Spinoza demonstrates how passions such as fear, hope, hate, and revenge, however contradictory it may sound, can consolidate social bonds through a process of affective imitation: 'For certainly men are guided by nature to unite in one aim, either because of a common hope or a common fear, or because they long to avenge some common loss' (TP, Ch. 3, §9; Ch. 6, §1| GIII/288; 297).[2]

This bifurcation between reason and affect – between the reasonable few and the passion-ridden multitude – cuts through all of Spinoza's works and seems to constitute an almost absolute dichotomy (TTP, Ch. 4; 16 | GIII/59; 190; TP, Ch. 2, §5 | GIII/277; EIVp37 | GII/235-9; cf. Strauss 1997, 232). However, in this article I will show that a careful analysis of Spinoza's account of the political function of prophets – in particular Moses' state-building efforts – allows us to loosen some of the opposition between reason and affect. My claim is that 'prophetic authority' underlies a mode of government that utilizes imaginative and affective means to reach rationally expedient ends. This in turn means that by commending affects such as humility, repentance,

reverence, admiration or devotion, 'those who are subject to these affects can be guided far more easily than others, *so that in the end they may live from the guidance of reason*' (EIVp54s | GII/250; my emphasis).

From this point of view, the rationally expedient ends require that people are guided (morally) through affective modes in ways that make them prefer public right over private advantage. To demonstrate this, I show that Spinoza's analysis of the Hebrew Republic allows us to see how fickle and inconstant affects can become durable, intense, and lasting in practice through habitual, social practices such as ceremony, ritual, and liturgy. Through such practices, an outward habit of virtue that conforms with reason can be fostered (Jaquet 2018, 78).

Prophetic politics, I claim, must thus lead us to see the relation between reason and affect not as a static dichotomy but instead as fundamentally entangled. I conclude that according to Spinoza, prophetic politics exemplifies how reason and affect can constitute an identity of difference; an identity with regards to ends or effects while differing with regards to the means or causes used to reach these ends.

Directing affects according to the guidance of reason

It is no coincidence that in the part of the *Ethics* that concerns 'Human Bondage, or the Powers of the Affects', Spinoza strategically places a scholium, which grants an affective vantage point to a major topic in the *Theological-Political Treatise*: the theologico-political role and power of prophets. The Scholium reads:

> Because men rarely live from the dictate of reason, these two affects, Humility and Repentance, and in addition, Hope and Fear, bring more advantage than disadvantage. So since men must sin, they ought rather to sin in that direction. If weak-minded men were all equally proud, ashamed of nothing, and afraid of nothing, how would they be united or restrained by any bonds?

> The mob is terrifying, if unafraid. So it is no wonder that the Prophets, who considered the common advantage, not that of the few, commended Humility, Repentance, and Reverence so greatly. Really, those who are subject to these affects can be guided far more easily than others, 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 (EIVp54s | GII/250).[3]

The scholium is based on a number of assumptions that underscore the entanglement of affect and reason. First, we must recall that Spinoza believes that an affect cannot be restrained, moderated, or taken away except by an affect more powerful than – and opposite to – the first (EIVpp7; 14 | GII/214; 219). In other words, affects can only be transformed from within their own economy. For reasons which shall be stated later, the prophet exemplifies a political figure who restrains affects by countering these with more powerful affects. Consequently, the politics of prophets is preconditioned by the prevailing imaginative-affective foundation on which it rests and draws its resources. This means that the prophet does not stand above the imaginative-affective life but rather at its very core (TTP, Ch. 1; 2 | GIII/28; 31; cf. Rosenthal 1997, 219; Smith 1997, 89–103).

Secondly, Spinoza believes that it is a prescript of reason always to follow the greater of two goods or the lesser of two evils (EIVp65 | GII/259; TTP, Ch. 16 | GIII/191-2). It follows that although pity, shame, compassion, repentance, humility, and similar affects are indeed sad passions, they still possess an instrumental value insofar as they succeed in restraining excessive joyful passions such as gluttony, drunkenness, lust or greed, or tame conflictual sad passions such as ambition, pride, overestimation or love of esteem. Prophetic politics is thus not a question of extinguishing the passions but of redirecting and reorganizing them in ways that cultivate piety and devotion, justice and loving-kindness. The prophet, who considers the common advantage,

utilizes this imaginative-affective register to bring about a measure of order, stability, and direction (Strauss 1997, 237).

Thirdly, if the prophet is able to bring people to live a secure and honourable life – outwardly at least – then it is possible that people will be spurred to behaviour that accords with the prescripts of reason; not on the grounds of threats and force that engender sad passions, but rather from joyful passions such as hope and trust. As Deleuze has aptly shown (1990, 274; 1978), by organizing affectional encounters in such a way that joyful passions are maximized, individuals are led to increase their power of acting and power of understanding, 'so that in the end they may live from the guidance of reason' (EIVp54s | GII/250). This means that actions that are determined by sad passions can equally be determined by joyful passions; and joyful passions, in turn, might be transformed into joyful actions, at least in principle (EIVp59 | GII/254).[4]

In order to grasp how this politics of prophets constitutes such a mode of imaginative-affective government that directs affects in concord with the prescripts of reason, I will turn to Spinoza's treatment of prophets in the *TTP* to develop what kind of figure the prophet is.

A phenomenology of prophecy

In the first two chapters of the *TTP*, Spinoza lays down a 'history of prophecy' (*historiam prophetiae*) for the sake of uncovering the nature and limits of prophecy as well as the character of prophets. A critical history of prophecy and revelation is important since it exemplifies how a knowledge that is immersed in the imaginative-affective domain and thus wholly inadequate can have real and even reasonable effects for a political community (Gatens 2013, 25–26). The socially beneficial effects which prophetic authority can bring about, I argue, rely on the way in which it uses imaginative and affective means to arrive at reasonably commendable ends and

therefore constitute a specific site of entanglement between reason and affect. To show this, we need to examine what type of knowledge prophecy is, what its limits are, and what its certainty consists in.

'Prophecy or revelation,' so Spinoza opens the first chapter of the *TTP*, 'is the certain knowledge of some matter which God has revealed to men' and the prophet is the interpreter or spokesman of God's revelation to those who do not have certain knowledge of revelation but must embrace it by simple faith in the authority of the prophet (TTP, Ch. 1, Adn. 2 | GIII/15-6). The prophet perceives God's revelations through words (*verba*) or visions (*figurae*/*visionis*) that are either real or imaginary (TTP, Ch. 1 | GIII/17, 28). It was by a true 'created voice' that God revealed himself to Moses, with whom God spoke 'face to face', but through imagined visions and words to the rest of the prophets (Ibid.; cf. Num. 12:6-8; Deut. 34:10). For the vast majority of prophets, the word of God was revealed in dreams, which Spinoza with no lack of irony observes is the time when the *imagination* is most vivid and naturally most prone to imagine things that do not exist (TTP, Ch. 1 | GIII/17). This means, *pace* Maimonides, that the prophets in no way possessed a perfect mind in order to prophesy, but rather an extraordinarily vivid power of imagining (*potentiâ imaginandi*) that is inversely proportional with the power of the intellect (*intellectûs potentiâ*) (TTP, Ch. 2; 11 | GIII/29; 153).[5]

By defining revelation as an exercise of the imagination, which includes sensations, memory, hypotheses, fictions, dreams, hallucinations, and universal ideas, Spinoza implicitly demarcates the limits of revealed knowledge. Revelation is inferior to natural knowledge insofar as natural knowledge involves its own measure of certainty (EIIp41-2 | GII/123). Thus, 'Unlike a clear and distinct idea, a simple imagination does not, by its nature, involve certainty', remarks Spinoza. 'It follows that,

by itself, Prophecy cannot involve certainty. As we've shown, it depended only on the imagination. So the Prophets were not certain about God's revelation itself, but by some sign (*signum*)' (TTP, Ch. 2 | GIII/30; James 2012, 50).

Consequently, the difference between the certainty of prophetic knowledge and natural knowledge – viz. the difference between the imagination and reason – is that reason entails a *mathematical certainty* that is logically demonstrable on its own terms whereas prophecy only involves a *moral certainty* (*certitudo moralis*) that is judged by its effects (TTP, Ch. 2; 7 | GIII/32; 111; EIapp | GII/79). Unlike mathematical certainty, the moral certainty of prophecy is based on three conditions:

> '[I] That the prophets imagined the things revealed to them very vividly, in the way we are usually affected by objects when we are awake. [II] That there was a sign (*signum*); [III] And finally—this is the chief thing—that they had a heart inclined only to the right and the good (*aequum, et bonum*)' (TTP, Ch. 2 | GIII/31).

To appreciate the epistemological implications of Spinoza's reduction of prophetic certainty to these conditions, we are advised to relate prophecy to the theory of knowledge in *Ethics* part II, where Spinoza distinguishes between three kinds of knowledge. Evidently, prophecy squares with the first kind of knowledge, which Spinoza calls 'opinion or imagination' (Gatens 2013, 4; Rosenthal 1997, 216–22). Like prophecy, this kind of knowledge proceeds either from random experience (*experientiâ vagâ*) of singular things in a way that is mutilated, confused, and without order or it proceeds from signs (*signis*) 'e.g. from the fact that, having heard or read certain words, we recollect things, and form certain ideas of them, which are like them, and through which we imagine the things', with the effect that things are perceived as contingent allowing for wonder and miraculous explanations (EIIp40s2 | GII/120; TTP, Ch. 1 | GIII/84).

Knowledge issuing from opinion or imagination is therefore in principle liable to error and falsity. Leo Strauss has argued that the critique Spinoza levels against prophecy rely in part on the adoption of a Cartesian conception of knowledge. Specifically, his epistemological critique relies on the radical doubt posited by Descartes, which not only questions what is manifestly false, but also what is not fully certain and indubitable (Strauss 1997, 183ff.; cf. James 2012, 62–63). In the case of prophecy, this is clear from the fact that the certainty of the prophets' vivid imagination was only clear to the prophets themselves, and from explicit statements in Scripture (e.g. Exod. 7:11-12) we know that seers, sorcerers, and false prophets also confirmed their teachings with apparent signs and miracles. This means that the certainty arising from a vivid imagination or signs is susceptible to epistemological error and therefore quite doubtful (TTP, Ch. 15 | GIII/186).

We are thus led to the conclusion that the cardinal thing that renders anyone certain of a true prophet (and able to distinguish him or her from a false one) is whether that person teaches the divine law and gives signs of his or her mission. '[T]he Prophet's certainty was only moral,' holds Spinoza, 'because no one can justify himself before God, or boast that he is the instrument of God's piety' without possessing a singular virtue beyond the ordinary (TTP, Ch. 1; 2 | GIII/27; 31). The moral certainty of prophecy – the piety or impiety of a prophet – is consequently the *conditio sine qua non* for judging the truth of a prophecy.

Here it must be recalled that Spinoza believes that the core moral teaching of 'justice and loving-kindness' can be arrived at by different ways (TTP, Ch. 4 | GIII/61-2; Ep. 43 | GIV/222-4b). It is properly arrived at *ethically,* i.e. from the natural light where the 'divine law' is *understood* as eternal truths. According to this view, blessedness is not the reward of virtue but virtue itself and the highest reward for

observing the divine law is the law itself. This, however, is the privilege of the few (TTP, Ch. 4 | GIII/62; EVp42 | GII/307). ‘Justice and loving-kindness’ can also be arrived at *morally*, since revelation ‘can teach that it’s enough for salvation or blessedness to embrace the divine decrees as laws or commands, and that it’s not necessary to conceive them as eternal truths’ (TTP, Ch. 15, Adn. 31 | GIII/188; Deleuze 1988, 22–30). So, since prophets neither understood God adequately nor his laws as eternal truths but rather imagined Him anthropologically as ‘a ruler, a lawgiver, a king’ and the divine law as ‘precepts and institutions’, they were able to give morality the force of law: ‘*Thus says God*’ and ‘*Thou shalt!*’ is accordingly the prophets manner of speaking (TTP, Ch. 11 | GIII/151). As we shall see shortly, the prophets induced the common people to live piously and obediently by promising them imagined rewards and punishments after death; that is to say, they utilized affective, imaginative, and fictive modes to bring about real, political effects (TTP, Ch. 19 | GIII/231-2; cp. EVp41s | GII/307 and Ep. 75 | GIV/312a; Gatens 2013, 5f.).

The prophetic character

Although all true prophets impressed devotion in the hearts of the people and exhorted them to pious behaviour, the style, symbols, and narratives they used varied enormously from prophet to prophet. In order to fully appreciate this variety in modes of prophesising, I will now turn to analyse the imaginary-affective dispositions of prophets. According to Spinoza, revelation varied in each prophet, ‘according to the disposition of his bodily temperament (*dispositione temperamenti corporis*), according to the disposition of his imagination (*imaginationis*), and according to the opinions (*opinionum*) he had previously embraced’ (TTP, Ch. 2 | GIII/32).

Prophecy varied according to the bodily temperament or rather affective disposition of a prophet: were the prophet cheerful (*hilaris*), compassionate (*misericors*)

or calm (*blandus*), then victories, peace, and other things that move people to joy (*laetitia*) would be revealed to him; were the prophet sad (*tristitia*), angry (*irato*), or mournful (*moestus*), defeats, wars, punishments, and other perils would be revealed to him (Ibid.). Spinoza exemplifies this with the prophet Elisha who was angry with King Jehoram and therefore asked for music to charm him so he could prophesy joyful things to Jehoram, since 'those who are angry with someone are ready to imagine evils, but not goods, concerning them' (Ibid. | GIII/33).[6] This, Spinoza believes, also explains why the killing of the first-born was revealed to Moses while he was angry (*ira*); the future wretchedness and stubbornness of the Jews was revealed to Ezekiel when he was angry and impatient (*irâ et impatienti*); and the calamities of the Jews was revealed to Jeremiah while he was mournful and weary of life (*moestissimus, et magno vitae taedio*). 'The prophets, therefore,' infers Spinoza, 'were more ready for one kind of revelation than another, according to the variations in their bodily temperament' (Ibid. | GIII/32-3).

The second reason why modes of prophesising varied were due to the disposition of the prophet's imagination. The prophets came from different social strata – Isaiah was a courtier, Jeremiah of priestly stock, and Amos a sheepherder – which affected the clarity of their visions as well as the representations and symbols of their revelations. The more refined prophets – among whom Spinoza counts Isaiah, Nahum, and Jeremiah – perceived God in a sophisticated manner, whereas the unrefined prophets – Ezekiel, Amos, Obadiah, and Hosea – perceived Him in an obscure manner. Thus, prophecy 'varied similarly in the revelations represented through images. If [the prophet] was a rustic (*rusticus*), bulls, cows, and the like, were represented to him; if he was a soldier (*miles*), generals and armies; if he was a courtier, the royal throne and things of that kind' (Ibid.).

For the attentive reader, the distinction between the *rusticus* and the *miles* advises us to look to the *Ethics* for an epistemological explanation. Here Spinoza explains how associations – the connection of our ideas – are often aligned not with the order of the intellect but rather with the order of the affections of our body. During our lives, we retain impressions, traces, or images of things that we have encountered or are familiar with. 'For example,' writes Spinoza, in all likelihood with the prophets in mind:

> a soldier (*miles*), having seen traces of a horse in the sand, will immediately pass from the thought of a horse to the thought of a horseman, and from that to the thought of war, etc. But a farmer (*rusticus*) will pass from the thought of a horse to the thought of a plow, and then to that of a field etc. And so each one, according as he has been accustomed to join and connect the images of things in this or that way, will pass from one thought to another (EIIp18s | GII/107).

This exemplifies how each prophet was accustomed to imagining God in the images of things he had previously experienced. The rustic will imagine Him as 'the Great Shepherd of Israel', whereas the soldier will imagine Him as 'the Lord of *Sabaoth*'.

The final reason for the variation in the prophets' revelations follows from the fact that prophets embraced speculative opinions and prejudices that were often wrong and at times even contrary to one another. When Joshua for example thought that the sun stood still in Gibeon or when Isaiah imagined that the sun moved backwards, we should not infer that Joshua or Isaiah had natural knowledge about these matters. They were by no means astronomers (TTP, Ch. 2; 6 | GIII/36; 92).[7] As we have seen, the truth or falsity of these speculative opinions was not decisive for the validity of their revelations, for the real purpose of prophecy is practical. Spinoza therefore concludes the theological part of the *TTP* with the following stipulation:

> Reason's domain is truth and wisdom; Theology's is piety and obedience. For as we've shown, the power of reason does not go so far as to enable it to determine

> that men can be blessed by obedience alone, without understanding things. But Theology teaches nothing but this, and does not command anything but obedience.' (TTP, Ch. 15 | GIII/184).

It follows that the prophets are not to be praised for the excellence of their understanding for they held quite ordinary opinions (or rather prejudices) about God and Nature. Rather, the task of the prophet was to instil obedience to God, which only consists in acts of justice and loving-kindness (*justitia et charitas*). Spinoza therefore concludes that faith in prophetic revelation does not require true doctrines (*vera dogmata*) but only pious doctrines (*pia dogmata*) 'even if many of them do not have a shadow of the truth', for in the end, 'it's obedience which makes the subject, not the reason for the obedience' (TTP, Ch. 13; 17 | GIII/168, 176; 202). Dimitris Vardoulakis explains that because prophetic revelation is based on the imagination it opens up a field larger than reason and thus sets itself beyond the epistemic distinction between truth and error. Accordingly, it is not the universal truths of reason that count in questions of prophetic politics but rather the new modes and orders of 'effectual truths' discovered by Machiavelli, which are concerned instead with the 'calculation of utility' (2020, 83).

We can thus conclude that prophetic authority (*authoritate prophetica*) draws its legitimation from God, whose words the prophet is the interpreter of. Unlike the apostles, who were reasoning (*ratiocinantur*) and argued from common notions in order to convince all men and hence submitted their reasoning to the discretionary judgement of anyone, prophetic revelation contained 'only bare authoritative judgments and decrees (*mera dogmata et decreta*)' (TTP, Ch. 11 | GIII/152).[8] In this respect, the apostolic teaching was 'completely removed from Prophetic authority' since its brotherly *advise* was 'mixed with a politeness which Prophetic authority is completely opposed to' (Ibid. | GIII/153; Vardoulakis 2020, 76–97). The aim of prophetic *admonishing* was exactly not 'to convince people's reason, *but to affect and fill their*

fantasy and imagination' in order to move them to devotion (TTP, Ch. 6 | GIII/91; my emphasis). Thus, unlike Rousseau's Lawgiver in *The Social Contract*, 'who could understand the passions of men without feeling any of them, who had no affinity with our nature but knew it to the full', Spinoza's prophet is not at all a 'superior intelligence' (Rousseau 2004, 43f.). As already noted, the prophet is not above the imaginative-affective life but rather operates at its very core.

Ruling over the souls of subjects

Situating prophetic authority in the realm of the imagination and the affects allows Spinoza to raise certain questions about how to understand authority on an affective basis. The most effective authority (*imperium*), he states, is the one that extends to absolutely everything that can bring men to act in compliance with its commands. It follows that efficient authority must be seen as a question of mobilizing, directing, and harnessing the affective sensibilities of people so they resolve to act in compliance with the commands of the authorities from their own decision (TTP, Ch. 17 | GIII/202). Spinoza explains:

> For whatever reason a man resolves to carry out the commands of the supreme 'power, whether because he fears punishments, or because he hopes for something from it, or because he loves his Country, or because he has been impelled by any other affect whatever, he still forms his resolution according to his own judgement, notwithstanding that he acts in accordance with the command of the supreme 'power […] So whatever a subject does which answers to the commands of the supreme 'power – whether he's been bound by love, or compelled by fear, or (as indeed is more frequent) by hope and fear together, whether he acts from reverence (a passion composed of fear and wonder) or is led by any reason whatever – he acts by the right of the state, not his own right (ibid.).

In this quotation, we see Spinoza reflecting on how people are brought to obedience on the basis of as diverse affects as hope, fear, reverence, patriotic love, or 'by any other affect whatever'. A power that can tie the governed to the governing or bring subjects to obedience by affective bonds is a power that works from within the archive of the imagination and the affects. In the unfinished *Political Treatise,* published posthumously in 1677, Spinoza resumes these intriguing considerations about what it means to have another person in one's power on the basis of affective dispositions. Here he writes:

> One person has another in his power [1] if he has him tied up, or [2] if he has taken away his arms and means of defending himself or escaping, or [3] if he has instilled fear in him, or [4] if he has so bound him to himself by a benefit that the other person would rather conduct himself according to his benefactor's wishes than according to his own, and wants to live according to his benefactor's opinion, not according to his own. Someone who has another person in his power in the first or second of these ways possess only his Body, not his Mind. If he has him in his power in the third or fourth way, then he has made both his Mind and his Body subject to his control – but only while the fear or hope lasts. When either of these is taken away, the other person remains his own master (TP, Ch. 2, §10 | GIII/ 275).

It seems to me that what Spinoza is attempting to expose in these considerations is a specific register of governing that attempts to rule not only the bodies but also the hearts and minds of its subjects (*animos regnat*), i.e. their entire affective disposition. I will explain shortly how such a mode of governing deliberately utilizes, coordinates, and manages a process of 'affective imitation' through ceremonies and rituals in order to bring forth and stabilize certain collective affects (*communes affectus*) in a group of individuals (TP, Ch. 3, §9; 7, §10 | GIII/288; 311). But before I proceed to analyse the use of ceremony and ritual in Moses' affective government of the Hebrews, a few words on Spinoza's ambivalent views of the Hebrew Republic are in place.

The history of the Hebrew Republic

It is generally recognized that Spinoza's regime analysis of the Hebrew Republic in chapters 17 and 18 in the *Theological-Political Treatise* is important.[9] It has, however, also been observed that Spinoza's analysis contains 'inherent tensions', especially when compared to chapters 3 and 5 (Melamed forthcoming), and that the theocratic state Spinoza reconstructs 'is a profound contradiction' (Balibar 1998, 46f.). The contradiction, argues Balibar, lies in the fact that while theocracy strongly resembles democracy (e.g. TTP, Ch. 17; 18 | GIII/206; 230), it simultaneously reverses these very democratic features by putting collective sovereignty in the hands of a fictitious God, who necessarily needs (to use Hobbes' apt phrase) a 'Lieutenant' to fill his vacant throne, which gives the prophet close to absolute power.

It follows from this that Spinoza does not laud the Hebrew Republic *tout court.* On the one hand, he holds that the Hebrew Republic 'could have lasted forever' and that it had 'many excellent features, which are at least well worth noting, and perhaps imitating'. But, on the other hand, no one can imitate it completely now nor is it advisable unless one is willing to live 'alone, without foreign trade, shutting [oneself] up within [ones] own boundaries, and segregating [oneself] from the rest of the world' (TTP, Ch. 18 | GIII/221). Because I am interested in the affective features of Moses' government here, we have to be clearer about what Spinoza praises and what he decries about the Hebrew Republic.[10] In order to see this, we must look to the heading of chapter 17 where he promises to treat:

> The Hebrew Republic during the life of Moses, and after his death, before they elected Kings; on its excellence; on the causes why the divine Republic [*Respublica divina*] could perish, and could hardly survive without rebellions. (TTP, Ch. 17 | GIII/201; translation amended).

Note that Spinoza refers the ‘excellence’ of the *divina Respublica* to the time before the Hebrew Republic turned into a Monarchy (Ibid. | GIII/219-21; cf.1 Samuel 8:4-5). In fact, one of the lessons Spinoza infers from Hebrew history in chapter 18 is exactly ‘how fatal it is to choose a Monarch when the people are not accustomed to live under kings, and have laws already establish’ (TTP, Ch. 18 | GIII/226). But, alas, human affairs are changeable, and the change of regime form in the Hebrew Republic issued in a state of decline where the laws of the kings counted for the divine law. Wars and rebellions erupted constantly, and hundreds of prophets arose to warn the people and hundreds of false prophets arose to deceive them, explains Spinoza (Ibid. | GIII/225).

However, the complete fall of the (second) Hebrew Republic began when the priesthood usurped sovereign power and turned the monarchy into a priestly monarchy under the rule of the Levite-dynasty, the Hasmoneans. The prophetic authority (*authoritate prophetica*), which Moses originally instituted and later prophets upheld with an eye to ‘the common advantage, not that of the few’ turned into its opposite in the hands of priestly authority (*pontificali authoritate*); that is, a means for an elite to dominate the common people. The priests began ‘determining everything by priestly authority and daily issuing new decrees, concerning ceremonies, the faith, and everything else, decrees they wanted to be no less sacred and to have no less authority than the laws of Moses’ (TTP, Ch. 18 | GIII/222). Priestly authority did not exhort people to piety. Rather, the priests sought glory for themselves in both religion and politics. And the result? The theopolitics Moses established by prophetic authority deteriorated into ‘deadly superstition and the true meaning and interpretation of the laws was corrupted’, which led to sects springing up and the social order of the Hebrew Republic began dissolving under internal pressure (Ibid. | GIII/222; Vardoulakis 2020, 285–89).

Matters stood quite differently in the incipient stages of the political history of the Hebrews. Spinoza begins chapter 17 by staging the Hebrews in a state of nature after the exodus from the House of Bondage. He interprets the covenant at Sinai as a compact by which the Hebrews formed a theocracy where everyone was equal 'as in a Democracy' (TTP, Ch. 17; 19 | GIII/205-6; 230). But the direct rule of God was short-lived, for the Hebrews immediately chose Moses as mediator, promulgator, interpreter, and judge of the divine law. However, before his death, Moses made sure that no one person or group would possess all functions of supreme power. Rather, he granted the right of interpreting the divine law to the Levites with his brother Aaron as high priest and the right to command and administer the state according to the laws to Joshua. After the conquest of Canaan, the tribes (excepting the Levites) divided the land and became a federacy (TTP, Ch. 17 | GIII/210). The successors of Aaron retained the right to interpret the law and the chieftains of each tribe held the other sovereign functions. In this way, they kept each other in check. This republic had certain features by which it could 'moderate people's hearts, and restrain both the rules and the ruled, so that the ruled did not become rebels and the rulers did not become Tyrants' and thus minimized the possibility of usurpation and sectarianism (TTP, Ch. 18 | GIII/212-2).

In this state, leadership was generally based on meritocracy and the people knew the law, for they were obliged to read and reread it continuously. This meant that the laws remained uncorrupted and were observed meticulously. Spinoza notes that prophets only arose occasionally to warn the people and that often more than forty years passed in peace without either war or civil war (Ibid. | GIII/224-5). The people were thus free from arbitrary dominion, held equal rights, and were devoted to their country in a manner where they preferred public right over personal advantage (TTP, Ch. 17 | GIII/203). 'Nowhere,' concludes Spinoza,

> did the citizens possess their property with a greater right than did the subjects of this state, who, with their leader, had an equal share of the lands and fields. Each one was the everlasting lord of his own share. If poverty compelled anyone to sell his estate or field, it had to be restored to him once again when the jubilee year came […] Nowhere could poverty be more bearable than where the people had to cultivate with the utmost piety, loving-kindness towards their neighbor (i.e. toward their fellow citizens), so that God, their King, would favor them […] no one was subject to his equal; everyone was subject only to God, and loving-kindness and love towards one's fellow citizen were valued as the height of piety. (Ibid. | GIII/216).

It is clear from Spinoza's regime analysis of the Hebrew Republic that social cohesion is a fragile thing that both has to rest on good institutions and stands in need of continuous affective cultivation. But while it is indeed one thing to have the power and wit to engender collective affects that bind a group of individuals together, it is another to produce the means to sustain and maintain these affective bonds. This means that in order to make collective affects durable, intense, and lasting – which by their very nature are fickle and unpredictable – something needs to be invoked.

It is undoubtable that Spinoza believed that ceremonies and rituals are important in this regard, for he devotes the entire 5th chapter of the *TTP* as well as substantial portions of chapters 3, 17, and 18 to them. Spinoza's case in point in these parts, I claim, is a social theoretical analysis of how Moses gave the Hebrews laws, institutions, ceremonies, liturgy, rituals, and other habitual, social practices with a view to consolidating social cohesion on an affective basis (TTP, Ch. 17 | GIII/216). What I would like to focus on now is showing the role ceremony and ritual play in affectively sustaining social cohesion and devotion.

'Obedientiae Disciplina' – *sustaining affective bonds*

While the ceremonies instituted by Moses were legitimized prophetically, Spinoza casts them as historical constructs with a purely political function: they relate 'only to the temporal happiness of the body and the peace of the state', not individual bliss (TTP, Ch. 5 | GIII/69). Spinoza's functionalist view of religion and nominalist perspective on sacredness implies that faith, ceremonies, or other things 'sacred' have no value in themselves, but only insofar as they bring about piety, devotion, and obedience; that is, exhort people to right conduct (TTP, Ch. 12; 14 | GIII/161; 175).

Now, the exemplarity of the Mosaic law rested, according to Spinoza, exactly on its ability to moderate the minds (*animos moderari poterat*) both of those who reigned from becoming tyrannical and in bridling subjects from becoming rebellious (TTP, Ch. 17 | GIII/212). As a student of Hebrew political culture, Spinoza explains that Moses was able to exhort the Hebrews to obedience by assimilating the civil law with religion, which resulted in the complete ritualization of life (Balibar 1998, 46). This led the Hebrews to imagine that their kingdom was 'the Kingdom of God', that their enemies were 'enemies of God', that their army was led by 'The Lord of Hosts', that their land was a 'Holy Land', and that they were a 'chosen people'. By way of these theologico-political imaginations, Moses succeeded – affectively as it were – in instilling a special love in the heart and souls of his subjects. The affective love the Hebrews had for their fatherland (*amor patriam*) was a complex love sustained by piety (*pietas*).

Here we should pause to note that Spinoza does not use the term 'piety' or other moralizing terms according to the traditional Judeo-Christian lexicon (EIIIDefAff20exp. | GII/195). In Spinoza's subversive recasting, piety is fundamentally measured by the collective utility it brings about; and the supreme piety, consequently, is the one a person has toward his country (DeBrabander 2007). 'From this it follows,' he says,

> that you can't do anything pious to your neighbour which doesn't become impious if some harm to the republic as a whole follows from it. Conversely, you can't do anything impious to anyone which shouldn't be ascribed to piety if it's done to preserve the republic (TTP, Ch. 19. | GIII/232).

It is clear from this that piety is defined as a virtue that can be attributed to justice, fairness, and honesty. But from our perspective, piety is more than that. *Pietas*, as Spinoza explains in the *Ethics,* is an affect or rather a 'desire to do good generated in us by our living according to the guidance of reason' (EIVp37s | GII/235). True piety, consequently, is an affect that aligns with the dictates of reason.

This conception of pious love, which became a second nature to the Hebrews through ceremonial habituation, dialectically implied an equally pious and devotional hatred towards other nations, which was only reinforced by being returned (TTP, Ch. 17 | GIII/215). An affect of hate, Spinoza comments in the *Ethics*, inevitably gives rise to vengeance and thus fuels 'a desire by which, from reciprocal Hate, we are roused to do evil to one who, from a like affect, has injured us' (EIIIDefAff37 | GII/201). According to the theory of hatred in the *Ethics* – particularly in the much-understudied 46th proposition of Part III that concerns racism, class-hatred, and stereotyping – Spinoza explains how, from a sad encounter with a person with a certain background, we tend to take that person to represent the entire 'class or nation' he or she belongs to. In the accompanying demonstration, Spinoza supports this with reference to proposition 16, which concerns the imagination of likeness (*similitudo*), dispassionately implying that national hatred can be crucial for social formation since excluding others through mechanisms of hatred can highlight and increase the imagination of sameness of one's own group. Spinoza traces this 'hatred of the Nations [which] has done much to preserve them' all the way down to the Spanish and Portuguese inquisitions of his own day (TTP, Ch. 3 | GIII/56-7). So, while it is clear that devotional hatred played a large

part in preserving the distinctiveness of the Hebrews, it is equally clear that it exposed them to grave dangers from external enemies. Nonetheless, Spinoza seems to suggest that the collateral damages of national hatred are compensated for by its socializing functions – the fact that common hatred or a common desire for vengeance can unite men in one aim – insofar as common hate alleviate a far greater danger; namely, that 'We've never reached the point where a state is not in more danger from its own citizens than from its enemies' (TTP, Ch, 17 | GIII/203-4; TP, Ch. 3, §9 | GIII/288; Jaquet 2018). Consequently, Moses institutionalized this pious love and devotional hatred through the daily worship and the laws he commended so that the Hebrews were exercised in obedience (*obedientiae disciplina*) to the commonwealth insofar as they had to do everything after the regimen of the Law of Moses.

Producing a nation – ceremony and ritual

To truly understand the underlying logic of this affective *obedientiae disciplina,* it is important to note that Spinoza, anthropologically speaking, holds that when an individual is born it is for the most part completely dependent on external causes. As such, infants are born ignorant of all things and unfit to speak, walk, or reason (EVp6s | GII/284). This means that through different forms of education, cultivation, and disciplining, different political results will naturally issue, since 'men aren't born civil; they become civil' (TP, Ch. 5, §2 | GIII/295). Spinoza, it has been noted, entertains a similar ethnographic view of nations (Davidson 2019, 826). 'Surely', he writes,

> nature creates individuals, not nations, individuals who are distinguished into nations only by differences of language, laws and accepted customs. Only the latter two factors, laws and customs, can lead a nation to have its particular mentality (*ingenium*), its particular character, and its particular prejudices (TTP, Ch. 17 | GIII/217).

Hence, nations are not distinguished from one another with regards to their intellectual capacities or ethical dispositions, because only individuals have such (this is the critique levelled at the notion of a 'chosen people' in chapter 3). Rather, the only thing which does distinguish one nation from another is the circumstantial social order and laws under which they live (TTP, Ch. 3 | GIII/47; 57). It is this social order that continuously produces and reproduces the character, habits, and customs of a nation.

It is with this view in mind that we must approach the ceremonial laws given to the Hebrews, however rigid they may seem. According to Spinoza, it was by the vigilance and prudence of Moses that the ceremonial law was adapted to the national character of the Hebrews, that is to say, to individuals accustomed to slavery and therefore completely subjected to sad passions (TTP, Ch. 3; 5 | GIII/53; 75). Moses, therefore, left nothing to the Hebrews' own devices: they were not allowed to sow, plough, or harvest at will, but only at prescribed times, in certain years, and with one kind of beast of burden. They were neither allowed to dress nor cut their hair or shave their beards to their liking but only in accordance with the directions given in the law. Even their leisure was assigned to specific days of rest and their honest enjoyment and feasting (*laetitiae actus honesti, et convivia*) were commanded to be celebrated with banquets at prescribed times to manage their lusts. Furthermore, the Hebrews were obliged to put up devotional signs on their doorposts, hands, and between their eyes to remind them daily of their perpetual obedience to God (TTP, Ch. 5; 17 | GIII/75; 216).

Now, according to the author of the *Ethics*: 'As an image is related to more things, the more frequent it is, or the more often it flourishes, and the more it engages the mind.' (EVp11 | GII/289). Hence, it can be inferred that the decisive thrust of ceremonies rests exactly on its ability to modify behaviour by frequently organizing specific 'affections of the body' that engage the mind so as to remind people of their

obedience and in turn socialize them. These bodily affections included managing *physical activities* (sowing, ploughing, harvesting); organizing *modifications of the body* (rules for eating, dressing, shaving, circumcision); commending *visual and tactile signs* (the commandment to put up devotional cases '*mezuzot*' on their doorposts and phylacteries '*tefillin'* on their hands and heads); as well as coordinating relations of *motion and rest* (days of rest, festivals, banquets, pilgrimage) (Davidson 2019).

Especially the fixation and communication of motion and rest – a principle that governs all of Spinoza's physics – is able to consolidate a union of bodies to the extent that they must be considered 'one body or Individual, which is distinguished from the others by this union of bodies' (EIIp13s | GII/99-100; cf. Jaquet 2018, 82).[11] Thus, through these ceremonial and ritual practices, the entire life of the Hebrews was to be understood as a perpetual cultivation of obedience (*continuus obedientiae cultus*) (TTP, Ch. 17 | GIII/216). 'I do not think anything more effective can be devised for steering people's hearts in a certain direction.' concludes Spinoza, for: 'Nothing wins hearts more than the joy which arises from devotion, i.e. from love and wonder together' (Ibid.).

Not surprisingly, the evocation of devotion as a joy arising from love joined with wonder is in complete agreement with the definitions of devotion found in the *Ethics* (EIIIp52s; DefAff10 | GII/180-1; 193). Here we learn that 'wonder' (*admiratio*) is the imagination of a singular thing, which we fail to relate to other things and thus cannot explain through its proximate causes. Wonder thus captivates us and fixates our minds. Spinoza notes, moreover, that we often wonder at and hence venerate someone who excels in prudence, diligence, or – with respect to Moses – 'divine power' (TTP, Ch. 1, Adn. 3; 5 | GIII/ 27; 75). Because Moses's regimen harnessed wonder to foster obedience it is easy to see it as a kind of 'Opium des Volkes' that makes people fight

for their servitude as if it were their salvation. And indeed, as Vardoulakis notes, Spinoza has exercised a great appeal on theories of ideology (Althusser) and power (Foucault) in the twentieth century. Vardoulakis also rightly argues that Spinoza does not reject authority but instead operates with an important distinction between *authoritarianism* that calculates utility to further its own purposes to the detriment of the people and *authority* that takes the well-being of the collective into account in its calculation of utility. A distinction that is missing in both Althusser and Foucault (2020, 42, 66, 272–76).

The distinction between authoritarianism and authority is exactly what seems to be at work in Spinoza's distinction between *priestly* and *prophetic authority*. While both rely on wonder and embellish themselves with ceremony and pomp so the common people will follow their commands with constancy and reverence, the affective differences between these modes of authority are noteworthy (TTP, pre | GIII/7). Priestly authority is based on superstition, which is maintained and increased by 'hope, hate, anger, and deception, because it arises, not from reason, but only from the most powerful affects.' Priestly authority, therefore, fixates people by combining wonder with sad affects to cause consternation, dread, and contempt. Prophetic authority, conversely, attempts to combine wonder with joyful affects such as love, gladness or gratitude in order to spur veneration and devotion that agree with reason (TTP, pre | GIII/6; EIIIp52s | GII/180-1). Accordingly, Moses took great care that the Hebrews did their duty 'not so much from fear as from devotion' and indeed embellished true religion with ceremony in order to 'move the mind of the multitude to devotion toward God' i.e. to practicing justice and loving-kindness (TTP, pre; Ch. 5 | GIII/10; 75).

This means that the strategic use of ceremonies and rituals can be seen as an attempt to solve a problem inherent in inconsistent and fluctuating affects from within

the affects themselves. Ceremony and ritual are by nature collective performances that apply to the entire community, which grants these practices a socializing function. The affective purchase of ceremony rests on their ability to unify otherwise disperse affective dispositions by ‘affective imitation’ (Davidson 2019; Moreau 2011).

Moreover, ceremonies have a repetitive nature (they are preformed daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly), which makes them capable of habituating individuals to and reminding them of desired moods, values, or virtues. As Spinoza shows in Part III and IV of the *Ethics,* passions are often transformed through practical principles or ‘rules for living’, i.e. through the deployment of habit and repetition as well as an active imagination (Gatens 2013, 6). In this sense, ceremonies and rituals transforms desired behaviour into habitual practices and thus produce constancy and stability.

Thirdly, and unlike the ethical techniques Spinoza enumerates at the beginning of part V of the *Ethics,* which work cognitively to align ideas of affections to the order of the intellect, ceremonies and rituals relate to the materiality of bodies. A person who is not yet reasonable may not be able to change and cultivate his mind and produce adequate ideas. Nonetheless, insofar as Spinoza's theory of the unity of attributes – his so-called ‘parallelism’ – is taken seriously, it follows that bodily modifications are an external way of making people act in accordance with the dictates of reason.

Conclusively, ceremony and ritual capture an attempt to modify affects by bodily modifications – or in other words, ceremonies produce what Foucault has memorably called ‘docile bodies’ – in order to compel people to live as if they were reasonable (Foucault 1991). Spinoza believes that the useful value of things that are of assistance to the common society, such as ceremony, derives from the fact that they ‘bring it about that men live harmoniously, at the same time bring it about that they live according to the guidance of reason’ (EIVp49d | GII/241).

Conclusion: lessons from the history of the Hebrews

In the Talmud, the rabbis relate that after the death of the last three prophets – Haggai, Zachariah, and Malachi – 'the Holy Spirit (*ruach haKodesh*) ceased to manifest itself in Israel' and the sages were left only with the 'the daughter of the divine voice (*bat kol*)' (Tosefta Sotah 13:2-4). But even if prophetic authority has ceased, what remains to be answered is whether Spinoza's analysis of prophetic politics and the Hebrew Republic has any relevance for issues beyond religious communities today. Arguments have been made in favour of this.

Louis Althusser, whose deep engagement with Spinoza is increasingly becoming clear, enlists Spinoza as the first profound diagnostic and critic of ideology (Montag and Stolze 1998). Due to his analysis of the imagination and superstition, Spinoza is hailed by Althusser in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* as an indispensable ally for a Marxist understanding of society (2014, 265). According to Althusser, society is not simply to be understood as divided between an economic base and superstructure. The superstructure itself contains at least two levels, the politico-legal and the ideological. It is exactly ideology, an 'imaginary distortion' that interpellates and thus constitutes individuals as subjects, which Spinoza can help us understand. One can surmise that in Spinoza's theory of imagination and analysis of Moses, Althusser finds the theoretical resources to understand the smokescreen of imaginary relations, which ideology uses to conceal 'real relations which govern the existence of individuals […] the real relations in which they live.' (2014, 256). And indeed, the final counsel of the essay is that: 'To find the material with which to construct a theory of the [ideological] guarantee, we must turn to Spinoza' (2014, 268–69).

In a similar vein, Balibar, Althusser's student and collaborator, has noted that 'theocracy' – a term he believes Spinoza was the first to make systematic use of and

form into a theoretical concept – was intended to have ‘general significance’ (1998, 45–46). Spinoza’s analysis of theocracy, in this reading, has had a lasting legacy for modern political societies. Balibar explains:

> [Theocracy] represents a type (it is tempting to say an ‘ideal type’) of social organisation, of behaviour on the part of the ‘multitude’, and of the representation of power, whose equivalents, or at least approximations of them, can be found in many other kinds of State and in the political tendencies they represent. Perhaps they are to be found in *any* real State (Ibid.).

While Althusser and Balibar’s propositions are both insightful and instructive with respect to superstition and ideology, their reading of Spinoza, as I noted with Vardoulakis, fails to take into account the decisive distinction between authoritarianism and authority, superstition and true religion (cf. Vardoulakis 2020, 42, 66, 272–76). The government of affect can be both because it is ambivalent. It has the capacity to provoke sadness and antagonism *and* the capacity to establish a common rule for living where there is none. This ambivalence, I submit, is preconditioned by the vacillating nature of the affects it invokes. As Spinoza reminds us, not all affects are alike; some agree more with reason and collective utility than others (EIVp18s | GII/222).

It is reasonable to ask what Spinoza intends to put up with this fact and whether he knows any remedy against the authoritarian government of affect? Spinoza’s advice is not to bewail, laugh at, or disdain the government of affects, but rather to *understand* it ‘with the same freedom of spirit we’re accustomed to use in investigating Mathematical subjects’ (TP, Ch. 1, §4 | GIII/274; EIIIpre | GII/137; Ep. 30 | GIV/166/5). Such an understanding implies at least two things: First, only by understanding and approaching the government of affect with the said nuances do we become apt to diagnosing and assessing when true religion begins to deteriorate into superstition, liberty into tyranny, and freedom into bondage. Simultaneously, it puts us

in a better position to discern whether and when the government of public affairs is done by *right* (even when right makes a pact with violence) and when it is done *the best wa*y, i.e. 'guided by the prescription of reason', as Spinoza will go on to develop in the *Tractatus Politicus* (Ch. 5, §1 | GIII/295).[12]

The overall aim of this article has been to suggest that Spinoza's analysis of prophetic authority and the Hebrew Republic in the *TTP* represents the paradigmatic example of a mode of government that is inextricably directed at and comes from the imaginative-affective domain. Hence, if we agree with Spinoza that human nature is always the same and that men are often 'guided more by affect than by reason', then it follows that *government is always to a certain extent the government of affects* (EIVpre | GII/138; TTP, Ch. 16; 17 | GIII/192; 203). To substantiate this insight, it has been the ambition of the preceding analyses to spell out the logic of this affective mode of governance from one of its primary sources because I believe it has obvious contemporary pertinence in times with increasing political demagogy, populism, and misuse of political rituals, which affect theoretical analyses is especially well-suited to uncover. In particular, one of the main contributions of this article to political and social theory is the idea that inconstant and fluctuating affective sensibilities first become durable and intense – and thus governable – through ceremonial and ritual practices. This implies that the government of affect is best fleshed out by focussing on the diverse ways in which it materializes itself through collective, repetitive, and corporeal practises because these have the capacity to habituate individuals to desired moods, dispositions, or values. This suggests that in order to study such governmental techniques from an affective register, we are encouraged to turn to the political rituals and ceremonies of everyday life.

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[1] All references to Spinoza refer to Edwin Curley's *The Collected Works of Spinoza* in two volumes (1985; 2016). The *Theological-Political Treatise* is abbreviated TTP, and adnotations, Adn.; the *Political Treatise* (*Tractatus Politicus*) is abbreviated TP; *Letters* (*Epistolae*) are abbreviated *Ep*; and references to the *Ethics* take the conventional form, e.g. EIVp54s, which indicates Part IV, proposition 54, scholium. Other abbreviations include: ax for axiom; def for definition; d for demonstration; c for corollary; pre for preface; app for appendix; DefAff for definition of affects. Refences are followed by the Gebhardt pagination, e.g. GII/214, which refers to Volume II, page 214 in the Gebhardt edition.

[2] That sad passions can serve as positive foundations for the state has persuasively been argued before; see especially Matheron (2020, 124–36) for his analysis of 'indignation' and Jaquet (2018) for her analysis of 'longing for vengeance' as such passionate foundations of the state.

[3] On the face of it, the notion Spinoza conveys here, namely that 'those who are subject to these affects can be guided far more easily than others, so that in the end they may live from the guidance of reason', seems to contradict Spinoza's mature view in the *Political Treatise* where he writes: 'So those people who persuade themselves that a multitude, which may be divided over public affairs, can be induced to live only according to the prescription of reason, those people are dreaming of the golden age of the Poets. They're captive to a myth' (TP, Ch. 1, §5 | GIII/275); or as he writes in the *TTP*: 'But only very few (compared to the whole human race) acquire a habit of virtue from the guidance of reason alone' (TTP, Ch. 15 | GIII/288). The claim expressed in the *Ethics* is not, however, that the multitude should be induced to live '*only* according to the prescription of reason [*ex solo rationis praescripto vivant*]' or 'acquire a habit of virtue from the guidance of reason *alone* [*virtutis habitum ex solo rationis ductu acquirunt*]', but rather the more modest view that through the socialising function of affects they *may* become capable of living *more* reasonably.

[4] It is important to clarify what 'prescripts of reason' means in this context. As is well known, Spinoza presents his strictly epistemological views on reason in EIIp40s2, which consist in attaining *adequate ideas* about singular things in a rational and orderly manner through the second and eventually third kind of knowledge. However, the understanding of reason I expound in the following could be called reason in the practical sense. In *Ethics* part IV,

Spinoza is interested in examining 'what reason prescribes to us, which affect agree with the rules of human reason, and which, on the other hand, are contrary to those rules.' Reason, he says here, makes no demands contrary to nature, since it consists in following the laws of our own nature. Hence, reason demands that people strive to persevere in their being; that they desire what is useful to them; and that they seek their true advantage or utility (EIVp18s | GII/222; cp. TTP, Ch. 15 | GIII/191). Now, individuals normally seeking their own advantage under the sway of the passions, which sets them at odds with one another and jeopardises sociality. According to the Spinozan programme, the immense task and toil (*hoc opus, hic labor est*) is to incite people to seek their own advantage in ways that is mutually beneficial to all, i.e. to turn individual self-preservation into collective self-preservation, 'so that everyone, whatever his mentality, prefers the public right to private advantage' (TTP, Ch. 17 | GIII/203). In a recent book, Dimitris Vardoulakis astutely shows how this understanding of practical reason or *phronesis* in terms of calculating one's utility comes from Spinoza's Epicurean affinities (2020, 29–37). For the purpose of this article, it is worth noting that Spinoza turns to Moses and thus singles out the prophet as a figure who is able to direct the affects in accordance with the dictates of reason, for he goes on to 'note and weigh those things divine revelation once taught Moses for this purpose' (TTP, Ch. 17 | GIII/205; cf. Rosenthal 1997, 219; DeBrabander 2007, 22).

[5] While Maimonides (1963, 2:360–78), like Spinoza, argues that prophecy is conditioned on a perfect imagination and a perfect moral *habitus*, he also claims that prophets need to be in possession of a perfect rational faculty to receive the divine overflow through the active intellect. It follows that the prophets, in Maimonides view, can 'indubitably grasp speculative matters.' For Spinoza's relation to Maimonides' prophetology, cf. Strauss (1997, 183–92), Ravven (2001), and Nadler (2015).

[6] Spinoza notes, however, that many court-prophets were more conflictual in their dealings with kings. Micaiah, for instance, 'never prophesied anything good to Ahab.' (TTP, Ch. 2 | GIII/33) The wicked King Ahab, it must be recalled, had five encounters with prophets (twice with Elijah, twice with two unnamed prophets, and once with Micaiah cf. 1. Kings 17-18; 20-22). They all condemned Ahab, predicted droughts, and confronted him with his unjust actions. Similarly, the court-prophet Nathan spoke truth to power when, in 2. Sam. 12., he rebukes King David for killing Uriah the Hittite 'with the sword of the Ammonite' in order to take his wife Bathsheba. Keith Green (2019) has argued that Spinoza generally locates prophetic authority in the 'immanence' of a tradition of law. Accordingly, Moses is the inaugurator of this tradition of law and successive prophets exhort trespassers back to the Mosaic law. However, Green also shows that in cases of outright tyranny, Spinoza's conception of prophets can accommodate an 'outsider prophet' who wages fiercer social critique at injustice and amorality with the aim of

rebellion. For a modern view of prophecy as a mode of social critique in political theory, cf. Walzer (1993).

[7] Spinoza, shying away from his principle of explaining prophecy and miracles from scripture alone, conjectures that because there was much ice in the air (cf. Josh. 10:11) a greater refraction of the light made it seem like the sun stood still. Likewise, in the case of Isaiah, 'the sign could really happen and be predicted to the King by Isaiah, even though the prophet did not know it's true cause' (TTP, Ch. 2 | GIII/36).

[8] Prophetic authority would thus be authority in the strong sense of the term according to Alexandre Kojève, who defines authority as 'the *possibility* that an agent has of *acting* on others (or on another) without these others *reacting* against him, despite being *capable* to do so', since 'any *discussion* is already a *compromise*' (2014, 8–9). See also Vardoulakis (2020, 77–108), who has devoted an important chapter to the concept of authority in the *TTP* with regard to Moses. Vardoulakis argues that Spinoza neither understands prophetic authority as primarily political nor theological. Rather, because immersed in the imagination, prophetic authority originates from error: First, because the common people disdained the natural knowledge common to all and instead desired rare things, they misapprehended the exceptional *potentia* of the prophets. Secondly, the prophets themselves misunderstood God by anthropomorphising Him and assuming that His authority reinforced theirs because they were His mouthpiece. It follows that authority according to Spinoza is not *sui generis* but rather artificially self-constructed in the interplay between the people and the prophets.

[9] Antonio Negri, alone among commentators, is an exception to this rule. He claims that the analysis of the Hebrew Republic 'remains an unsuccessful attempt, a tangential trajectory', that the 'arguments are not very Spinozian' and that 'Spinoza's investigation wanders aimlessly' (1991, 116). Steven B. Smith opines that Spinoza viewed the Hebrew Republic under Moses as 'a paradigm for the kind of state he wants to recommend' and that he enlists scripture 'in the service of a democratic republic' because the Mosaic law's focus on actions grants freedom of conscience and belief (1997, 146–47). According to Firmin DeBrabander, Spinoza drew important political conclusions from the history of the Hebrews, above all the lesson that religion is key to fashioning citizens: 'Though religion is a necessary ingredient of flourishing public life,' he notes, 'serious measures must be taken to mitigate its damaging tendencies, while drawing from its sociable elements. Spinoza provides an outline for this, selectively adopting elements of the Biblical Hebrew state, or learning from its errors in some cases…' (2007, 20). Along the same lines, Michael Rosenthal argues that Spinoza used the Hebrews as an 'exemplar', in the technical sense, to 'tell us something about the constitution of society and the nature of political language itself', namely that prophetic language makes 'appeal to an imaginative narrative example that claims universal authority in order to justify a particular set of institutions' (1997, 210). Sharing this constructive view of the Hebrew exemplar,

Vardoulakis argues that Spinoza uses the Hebrew Republic to show a state of authority that caters for the utility of the people, thus exemplifying a more or less successful solution to the 'dialectic between authority and utility'. From this perspective, Vardoulakis claims that Spinoza casts 'theocracy and the Hebrew state as paradigmatic of how the path of the emotions can achieve the good and virtue' (2020, 263–95). In what follows, I attempt to complement the latter three readings with more affective insight.

[10] The radicality of Spinoza's views on the Hebrew Republic derive partly from the conclusions he draws from his political realism and philosophy of immanence (cf. TTP, Ch. 3 | GIII/46) and partly from his 'hermeneutics of suspicion', which compels him to use extra-biblical sources in analysing Hebrew history, in particular the first century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (Abolafia 2019, 38). Josephus' role in early modern political theory is becoming increasingly clear. Eric Nelson (2010) has shown that a number of Christian Hebraists, such as Hugo Grotius and Petrus Cunaeus, saw Josephus as a fitting source for the development of a new political theory that cast sacred history and a divinely inspired polity in the idiom of ancient constitutional and political theory. Nelson argues that this 'political Hebraism' generally defended republican exclusivism, redistribution of wealth and land, and principles of religious toleration. Jacob Abolafia (2014; 2019) has persuasively added that in parallel to the political Hebraist evocation of Josephus, prominent Amsterdam-Jewish thinkers such as Joseph Semah Arias, Orobio de Castro, and Spinoza's former teachers Menasseh ben Israel and Isaac Aboab da Fonseca for a number of cultural reasons strongly identified with Josephus. They used Josephus both for apologetic purposes and 'to legitimate the idea of communal (ritual) life as equal in importance to sovereign politics', i.e. that Jewish political life could be fully realised in the diaspora; an ideal Spinoza clearly opposes in chapter 3 (2019, 36–37). It is beyond doubt that Spinoza had the 'Josephism' of these groups in mind while crafting chapters 17 and 18. Although Josephus is only cited once in these chapters, Spinoza makes abundant use of Josephus' account and terminology in reconstructing the political features of the Hebrew Republic. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that when explaining the fall of the Hebrew Republic, Spinoza does not use the exposition from Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum* but instead cites Tacitus' affective account in his *Historiae* that considers the 'mentality of the people' and 'their superstition' (TTP, Ch. 17 | GIII/215; Abolafia 2019, 38).

[11] A more thorough analysis along these lines, which is outside the scope of this article, must be complimented by Balibar's suggestion that 'in the case of collective (social or political) individuality, what determines the identity of the composite is first of all the degree and mode of composition of minds, whereas in the case of singular individuality, it is first of all the mode of composition of the body.' (2020, 161). Balibar's article *Potentia multitudinis, qua una veluti mente ducitur* from the same collection is a promising point of departure for such an investigation.

[12] Although the analysis of the Hebrew Republic in the *TTP* is the paradigmatic example of a governance of affect, I surmise that Spinoza was deeply concerned with the government of affects in laying down the best foundations for monarchies, aristocracies, and democracies in the *TP.* At the end of the discourse on aristocracy, for instance, he writes: 'I conclude, then, that those common vices of peace which we're speaking about here should never be prohibited directly, but only indirectly, by laying down foundations of the state which will result, not in most people being eager to live wisely–that's impossible–but in their being guided by affects more advantageous to the Republic' (TP Ch. 10, §6 | GIII/355-6). Of all Spinoza's main works, the *TP* has received least scholarly attention and an affective reading of it is especially needed (Melamed and Sharp 2018, 1–4).