

TOWARDS A SPINOZIST CONCEPTION OF HOPE

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Table of Contents

Introduction	2-4
Chapter 1: Spinoza's Understanding of Hope	5-20
1.1. Spinoza on the <i>Affects</i> , the <i>Conatus</i> and Passions	5-8
1.2. Hope as a Passion	8-11
1.3. Spinoza on Miracles	11-14
1.4. Spinoza and 'Regulative' Hope	15-20
Chapter 2: Spinoza's Dualistic Conception of Hope in Relation to René Descartes and Thomas Hobbes	21-25
2.1. Descartes and Hope as a Passion	21-23
2.2. Hobbes and Hope as a Passion	23-25
Chapter 3: Pessimism and Optimism in Relation to Spinoza's Dualistic Conception of Hope	26-30
3.1. Evaluating Pessimism: Nietzsche and Spinoza	26-28
3.2. Evaluating Optimism: Bloch and Spinoza	28-30
Conclusion	31
Bibliography	32-34
Consulted Literature	35-36

Introduction

a. Introduction to Research Topic

The philosophy of hope is a broad and extensive philosophical body that ranges from Hesiod to more modern thinkers like Terry Eagleton. Philosophical attitudes towards hope have changed and developed through-out the history of philosophical thought. A drastic shift in how philosophers came to evaluate hope arose during the early Enlightenment in which there was a discernible move from the Christian and broadly providential understanding of hope towards a more critical evaluation of hope's nature and value. However, one of the early Enlightenment's preeminent figures, Baruch de Spinoza, is seldom linked to this development. Spinoza's brief mention of hope in *Ethics* has led to the lack of historical attention regarding the Spinozist understanding of hope. Furthermore, due to Spinoza's understanding of hope as a passion, he has been primarily represented as providing a pessimistic account of hope. The present thesis argues that Spinoza's conception of hope is more nuanced and extensive, and thus deserves greater attention due to the fact that it relates to his discussions on freedom, reason, the *conatus*, as well as his discussions on miracles as presented in the *Theological-Political Treatise (TTP)*. Therefore, the thesis develops on the findings of Simon Wortham who, in *Hope: The Politics of Optimism*, presents a dualistic interpretation of Spinoza's understanding of hope. The thesis argues that Spinoza provides a nuanced dualistic account of hope that defies easy categorisation in relation to pessimism and optimism.

The thesis aims to assess to what extent Spinoza's attitude towards hope differs from René Descartes' and Thomas Hobbes' understanding of hope. The paper therefore compares Spinoza's understanding of hope in relation to the attitudes of Descartes and Hobbes in order to assess its novelty and character. To assess Spinoza's status as a pessimist, Spinoza will be removed from the strict historical context of the early Enlightenment and be compared to Friedrich Nietzsche and Ernst Bloch. This is premised on the assertion that Nietzsche proposed an overtly pessimistic account of hope, and that Ernst Bloch in the *Principle of Hope* provided an optimistic account. The afore mentioned comparative studies aims to better evaluate Spinoza's attitude and argue that Spinoza presents a mid-point between pessimism and optimism by virtue of his pragmatic attitude towards hope.

The juxtaposition with Descartes, Hobbes, Nietzsche and Bloch aims better illustrate the complexity and nuance of Spinoza's attitude towards hope. Descartes and Hobbes are chosen in order to assess whether Spinoza's views differed from other contemporary authors, and whether they presented pessimistic or optimistic undercurrents within the context of the early Enlightenment. The selection of Nietzsche and Bloch as archetypal pessimists and optimists respectively, aims to better explicate Spinoza's position *vis a vis* pessimism and optimism. The thesis argues that the comparative analysis illustrates Spinoza's pragmatic attitude towards hope.

b. Research Question

How does Spinoza's discussion of hope in *Ethics*, *TPP* and the *Political Treatise (TP)* differ from the attitudes of Descartes and Hobbes and to what extent can Spinoza be considered a pessimist in relation to his understanding of hope?

c. Outline of Argumentative Structure

Firstly, Spinoza's understanding of hope as a passion and its relation to concepts such as the *affects*, reason, the *conatus* and freedom will be explicated. In doing so, it will be argued that Spinoza presents a dualistic conception of hope, wherein hope is, on the one hand critiqued insofar as it runs counter to reason and on the other hand, that it can be seen as valuable in as much as it is derived from joy. A detailed understanding of Spinoza's position allows for a discussion of the attitude of Descartes and Hobbes in which similarities and differences are outlined. Thirdly, a comparative analysis will situate Spinoza's thought between Nietzsche's pessimistic account and an optimistic account in the form of Bloch. Lastly, the paper will conclude by assessing the originality and character of Spinoza's conception of hope.

d. Relevance of the Thesis to Main Study

The thesis topic relates to history in as much as it concerns the history of philosophical thought and the history of ideas. It claims that Spinoza has been *historically* misrepresented in terms of his thought on hope (i.e., he has not been adequately inserted into the philosophy of hope and tends to be viewed as a pessimist). Therefore, the thesis responds to a historical understanding of Spinoza. Due to the scope of the essay an extensive discussion of Spinoza's representation in terms of hope is not possible. Furthermore, a full account of the early

Enlightenments' socio-political background lies beyond the scope of the thesis. Instead, the paper aims to assess the nature of Spinoza's attitude compared to his immediate predecessors (Descartes and Hobbes) and future philosophers of hope (Nietzsche and Bloch).

e. Note on Terminology

The terms, pessimism and optimism in the present thesis refer to negative and positive conceptions of hope respectively. Pessimism and optimism within the context of the early Enlightenment have tended to refer to understandings of evil, as evidenced in Leibniz, Bayle and others. However, in the present study pessimism and optimism solely relate to the discussion of hope and not evil more generally.

Chapter 1

Spinoza's Understanding of Hope

The present chapter aims to explicate Spinoza's understanding of hope as presented in Part III and IV of the *Ethics* as well as the *TTP*. However, in order to do so, an understanding of various key concepts must be provided. Therefore, the chapter firstly aims to provide preliminary definitions of the *affects*, passions as well as the notion of the *conatus*, bondage and reason. Following the definition of concepts, a detailed analysis of Part III and IV of *Ethics* will illustrate what hope as a passion means for Spinoza. The analysis will result in the claim that Spinoza has a dualistic approach to hope. Spinoza has a negative conception of hope due the presence of inadequate ideas implicit within it. However, because hope derives from the affect joy, it is clear that Spinoza also holds a more positive or 'regulative' conception of hope.

1.1. Spinoza on the *Affects*, the *Conatus*, and the Passions

If one is to arrive at Spinoza's understanding of the passions, it is imperative that his notions of the *affects* are clearly explicated. In part III of *Ethics*, Spinoza describes the *affects* as states that influence the body's ability to act, either through an increase in action or a decrease.¹ The *affects* as first described in the *Ethics* seem to distinguish themselves from states of mind in as much as they are directly related to the body's ability to act. However, Spinoza's rejection of Cartesian mind-body dualism, means that something that influences the body necessarily influences the mind (as for Spinoza, mind and body are one and the same).² This leads Spinoza to state that the *affects* of the body are the same as those of the mind.

Spinoza conceives of the *affects* as states that influence the activity or inactivity of the mind and body.³ When an affect is seen to increase the body's activity, it is called an action; when

¹ Spinoza, *Ethics* III, D3

² E III P2 S.

³ Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), xxv.

it is seen to diminish the body's ability to act it is referred to as a passion. The *affects* can therefore be reduced to either actions or passions. Spinoza relates the understanding of the *affects* to the epistemic distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas.⁴ An idea is considered adequate when the causes are clearly understood and are seen to emerge from the individual's nature. Therefore, adequate ideas are self-generating and allow for the causal nature to be understood. Inadequate ideas on the other hand, represent something incomplete because it relates to a variety of external forces that confuse the subject leaving him/her unable to understand the causal connection.⁵ Spinoza goes on to state that all passions derive from inadequate ideas. Therefore, passions leave the subject passive because he/she is unable to act properly, due to a lack of sufficient understanding of causes and thus, as stated by Spinoza leads to a deficit of knowledge and a lack of power.⁶

Spinoza's understanding of the *affects* can be said to directly relate to an individual's ability to act. The notion of the *conatus* which describes the striving and self-preservation of a given organism, therefore relates to the above-described *affects*.⁷ Stuart Hampshire in *Spinoza and Spinozism*, claims that for Spinoza, this striving for self-preservation is the very essence of an individual.⁸ For Hampshire, Spinoza sees the *conatus* as linked to the desire for "greater power and freedom".⁹ In part IV of *Ethics*, Spinoza states that virtue is defined by striving to preserve one's being and states that happiness can be found in such a striving.¹⁰ Spinoza justifies such a claim by stating that virtue is acting in accordance with the laws of nature and thus insinuates that striving and actively preserving one's being is the virtuous essence of humankind.

Through Spinoza's understanding of the *conatus*, it is clear that his attitude towards the *affects* is dependent on the extent to which they allow for action and the aiding of the *conatus*. Spinoza treats the passions with disdain given that they restrain action and therefore contradict the need for action implicit in the *conatus*.

⁴ E III P1

⁵ Steven Nadler, "Baruch Spinoza," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2020 edition)

⁶ E IV P47D

⁷ Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, xxvii.

⁸ Ibid. xxx.

⁹ Ibid. xxvii.

¹⁰ E IV P18 S.

For Spinoza, there are two primary passions from which all other are subsequently derived: joy and sadness. Spinoza views joy as that passion that allows the mind to reach greater perfection; conversely sadness is that which leads the mind to lesser perfection.¹¹ In this definition of joy and sadness, it is not clear why joy should be considered a passion due to the fact that if it allows for the mind to attain greater perfection, it would therefore be involved in the search for adequate ideas and thus aid the *conatus*. A further complication arises in *Ethics IV* wherein Spinoza states that “joy is not a passion” since we experience joy through the presence of adequate ideas.¹² However, closer reading illustrates that joy is not a passion provided it does not become excessive, and that both joy and desire can allow for action. Although joy can aid the striving implicit in the *conatus*, it can also lead to a variety of other more troublesome passions such as hope and pride. Therefore, joy in itself is an action, but its derivatives are passions. Spinoza’s treatment of sadness, on the other hand, is more definite. For Spinoza, sadness and all the passions that derive from it impede action.

Spinoza’s description of the primary passions and their derivatives illustrates his attitude towards the passions as confused ideas that, in the words of Lilli Alanen are viewed as “obstacles to true knowledge”.¹³ As described above, the passions, as based on inadequate ideas, do not prompt comprehension and reasonable outlooks, but instead lead to confusion. For Spinoza, inadequate ideas do not allow for action in as much as the subject is unaware of the true causes as long as he/she is guided by the passions. For Spinoza an understanding of the true causes is the prerequisite for action. Therefore, the passions go against the very essence of human nature namely the *conatus*.

It is clear that the passions are by nature passive and therefore impede the active, self-preservatory power of the *conatus*. Spinoza further critiques the passions by way of illustrating their relation to freedom. According to Spinoza, people believe themselves to be free because they are conscious of their desires and passions. In other words, people see themselves a free because they know what they want.¹⁴ However, freedom for Spinoza can only arise once an individual is aware of the causes of his/her actions and lives in accordance

¹¹ E III P11 S

¹² *Ethics IV* p.63 dem

¹³ Lilli Alanen, “The Metaphysics of Affects or the Unbearable Reality of Confusion,” in *The Oxford Handbook on Spinoza*, ed. Michael Della Rocca (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 315.

¹⁴ E III P2 S2

with reason (i.e., true knowledge and adequate ideas). Therefore, although an individual may be aware of their desires because they are driven by passions, they do not understand the reason or cause for their desires, and therefore cannot be considered truly free. Spinoza contrasts the passions with the search for freedom, thus indicating that he/she who is driven by passions is incapable of attaining true freedom. Rather, freedom can only be attained by living under the “guidance of reason”, which relates to the consciousness of the causes behind one’s actions.¹⁵ Spinoza contrasts freedom with the notion of bondage, which describes a state in which an individual is guided not by reason but by the passions.¹⁶ Whereas the reason leads to freedom, the passions lead to bondage, a form of captivity that leaves one vulnerable to inadequate ideas.

It can be said that Spinoza critiques the passions as *affects* that run counter to the very essence of humankind as well as the search for freedom. Although Spinoza seems to loath the passions in as much as they deny freedom, he does not believe that they passions can be totally nullified. Unlike Descartes (see below), who believes that the soul has the ability to conquer the passions, Spinoza believes that humans are always liable to be acted on by external forces that manifest themselves as passions.¹⁷ For Spinoza, the key to attaining freedom is through the moderation of the passions. An individual must attempt to minimise the delirious influence of the passions, by striving to be aware of the true causes of their actions, and thereby live according to the dictate of reason.

1.2. Hope as a Passion

The above section has provided definitions as well as an outline of Spinoza’s’ attitude *vis a vis* the passions. The present section aims to address Spinoza’s attitude towards hope, which in Part III and IV of *Ethics*, Spinoza explicitly states is a passion derived from joy. The section will analyse the definition and discussion on hope as presented in Part III and IV of *Ethics* and in doing so, will illustrate Spinoza’s attitude towards the passions as well as the relationship between hope and other passions such as fear. The section will argue that there

¹⁵ E IV P37 S

¹⁶ E IV, Preface.

¹⁷ E V, Preface.

are two diverging accounts of hope hinted at in *Ethics*. The first will be referred to as ‘epistemic hope’, in as much as it phrases hopes’ delirious effects with regards to the attainment of reason and knowledge. The second will be referred to as ‘regulative hope’, which relates to hope’s connection to joy and its role in political discourse. The two divergent accounts of hope will be treated in section 1.3. and 1.4. respectively.

Any discussion of hope in Spinoza’s work must yield to the definition of hope provided in *Ethics III*, in which Spinoza describes hope as “an inconstant joy which has arisen from the image of a future or past thing whose outcome we doubt”.¹⁸ For Spinoza, hope is inseparable from fear, which is the “inconstant sadness, which has arisen from a doubtful thing”.¹⁹ Both hope and fear are thus passions that are derived from joy and sadness respectively. This qualification is further justified by the fact that according to Spinoza an image of a future thing necessarily impinges on the present. Therefore, although the object of hope or fear is positioned in the future, the feelings produced by these two passions impact our present state of mind. Thus, hope and fear influence our present state of mind, and like all affects can either increase or decrease our ability to act.

Spinoza’s discussion of hope and fear, allows for one to better assess how the two passions function. One can assume that what is said of fear extends to that of hope because, according to Spinoza “there is no hope without fear and no fear without hope”.²⁰ In *Ethics IV*, Spinoza clearly indicates that hope and fear are primarily negative in character as they “cannot be good in themselves”.²¹ This attitude towards both passions is due to fear being a derivative of sadness, which for Spinoza is wholly negative. Spinoza makes the questionable link between hope and sadness on the basis of hope’s coupling with fear. As will be argued later, the aforementioned link neglects hope as being a derivative of joy.

In *Ethics IV*, hope and fear are obstacles to living according to reason. Both passions illustrate a degree of weakness and a lack of adequate ideas, and thus impede the attainment of reason or true knowledge. In line with their definitions, hope and fear are both related to the imagining of a doubtful thing. Imagination is contrary to reason in as much as it relates to

¹⁸ E III, P18 S2

¹⁹ E III, P18 S2

²⁰ E III P50 S

²¹ E IV P47

a variety of external factors and uncertainties as opposed to true knowledge. In as much as we are affected by hope and fear, we do not seek out the true causes but are distracted by a doubtful eventuality. Imagination is not a benevolent force removed from our ability to act, but rather something that directly influences the *conatus*. According to Spinoza, in as much as an individual is “affected by the image of a thing” he/she will incorporate this imagined thing into the present, thus influencing the activity or striving of said individual.²² Hope and fear are passions that affect our present and that influence our ability to act, and like all passions are liable to render the individual passive rather than active.

Spinoza strongly asserts that to be guided by fear does not allow one to act in accordance with reason. Rather, to live in accordance with reason requires one to jettison all fear and imagination and rather embrace adequate ideas.²³ To embrace fear and hope is rather to be superstitious, a point that is clear in Spinoza’s writing on miracles as discussed in 1.3. Because hope and fear impede the virtuous life of living in accordance with reason, Spinoza goes on to illustrate to what extent they limit the possibility of human freedom.

Spinoza makes the link between reason and freedom explicit in *Ethics* IV when he states that “a free man is one who lives according to reason alone”.²⁴ For Spinoza, freedom is defined as the embodiment of reason, adequate ideas and thus the moderation of the passions. Since passions are defined as external sources acting upon the agent, they necessarily decrease said agents’ freedom. The agent is unable to be called truly free if he/she is not aware of the reason for his/her actions. Hope and fear more specifically leave the individual liable to manipulation by others (as illustrated in *TTP*) and lead to said individual passively waiting for that which causes either inconstant joy (as in hope) or inconstant sadness (as in fear). Hope and fear are not mere epistemological obstacles towards an ideal form of knowledge, but rather obstacles to the essence of humanity in the form of the *conatus*, as well as human freedom.

The subsequent sections will elaborate and further explicate Spinoza attack on hope in as much as it diminishes awareness. However, the present section also aims to indicate that the afore mentioned critique of hope might not be as clear as it initially seems. Rather, Spinoza’s

²² E III P18 D

²³ E IV P63

²⁴ E IV P67 D

attack on hope occurs by virtue of its partial coupling with fear. The most vehement denunciations of the passions take place in *Ethics* IV in which the passions are seen as that which “torments” and places humans in bondage.²⁵ Fear is mentioned frequently, whereas the strongest statements against the passions do not contain the word hope. The fact that Spinoza refers to hope and fear as one and the same leads one to discount such a discrepancy. However, as stated by Susan James and Justin Steinberg, the strict hope-fear dyad must be reconsidered.²⁶ Furthermore, Wortham has indicated that hope receives a radically different treatment in the *TTP*. All reassessment of Spinoza’s attitude towards hope needs to relate to its definition, namely that it is an “inconstant joy”. Hope’s nature as a derivative of joy points to it being less harmful than fear, which is a derivative of sadness.

1.3. Spinoza on Miracles

The *TTP* can be said to provide two very different views on hope. The present section argues that Spinoza’s discussion of miracles takes the form of a vigorous critique of hope. However, as will be discussed in section 1.4, the *TTP* also sees Spinoza elevate and praise hope in as much as it can allow for personal motivation and social stability. A cursory look at *On Miracles* might lead one to question the afore mentioned connection with hope. However, the present section is premised on the assertion (as will be expanded upon) that miracles are the psychological manifestation of hope. In other words, miracles are strictly related to the act of hoping, given that miracles are seen as justification for hope. In other words, if an individual witnesses a miracle before their eyes, this miracle confirms and bolsters their hope. Spinoza’s discussion of miracles mirrors his discussions of the passions presented in *Ethics*, and provides an insightful case study for the perils of inadequate ideas. Therefore, the inclusion of Spinoza’s thought on miracles is based on the assertion that it illustrates his over-all attitude towards the passions in general, and hope more specifically.

Spinoza’s analysis of miracles during the time of its publication represented a bold and audacious break with the more theologically inclined and reserved definitions of miracles,

²⁵ E IV P15

²⁶ Justin Steinberg, “Spinoza on Security and the Value of Hope,” in *Spinoza: Thoughts on Hope in our Political Present. Contemporary Political Theory* 20, (2021): 207.

provided by thinkers such as Bayle and Leibniz.²⁷ According to Steven Nadler, Spinoza's view constituted an "abominable hypothesis", on the basis that it out-ruled the possibility of miracles.²⁸ For Spinoza miracles are not divine works of God, but rather natural events whose true causes we cannot ascertain.²⁹ According to Spinoza, we call divine that which we do not know.³⁰ For Spinoza, the adherence to miracles is underpinned by the belief held by the 'common people' that God and nature are separate, and that an act of God is different from an act of nature.³¹ Spinoza's monism clearly refutes such a claim and thus, conceives of God and nature as one and the same. Therefore, a miracle is not a divine event, but in as much as it contradicts the law of nature, can be said to contradict the law of God.³² Because miracles contradict nature they should not be viewed as divine according to Spinoza, but rather merely as events whose true cause cannot be ascertained. Spinoza makes the blatant claim that miracles are an "absurdity" in as much as they contradict not affirm, divine will.³³

It follows that, to act under the guidance of miracles would be to act in accordance with inadequate ideas. Believers for Spinoza are defined by their ignorance in relation to miracles, for "they accept as divine, that which they do not know".³⁴ Much like Spinoza's discussion of the passions, his attitude towards miracles is premised on the fact that miracles divert us from true causes, and rather lead to the acceptance of inadequate ideas. Spinoza makes this link apparent when in a letter to Oldenburg he states that "miracles and ignorance are the same".³⁵ Furthermore, Spinoza explicitly states in the *TTP* that "miracles only seem to be owing to men's ignorance".³⁶

Spinoza's discussion on miracles unlike his discussions of the passions in *Ethics* expands on the inherent dangers of acting in accordance with inadequate ideas. For such ideas lead us to embrace superstition. The common people for Spinoza are "addicted to superstition" and thus

²⁷ Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011), 81.

²⁸ Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, 76.

²⁹ Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 81.

³⁰ Spinoza, *TTP*, 81.

³¹ *Ibid.* 81

³² *Ibid.* 87.

³³ *Ibid.* 87.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 81.

³⁵ Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, 89.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

“averse to true religion”.³⁷ If an individual is afflicted with superstition, they by implication do not live in accordance with reason but rather inadequate ideas. The danger for Spinoza, lies in the fact that those afflicted by superstition are vulnerable to the machinations of other parties, eager to capitalise of the ignorance of the common people. Spinoza’s strongest critique relates to the instrumental use of miracles by theologians, who use miracles to “bolster their authority”.³⁸ According to Nadler, Spinoza sees miracles as events that can allow for theologians to capitalise on the superstitions of the masses. Therefore, miracles can become instruments of power. Inadequate ideas in the form of miracles are not benevolent, but rather can lead to manipulation.³⁹ By tapping into the superstitions of the masses, theologians are able to gain greater power by endowing their actions or ideas with divine authority.⁴⁰ Miracles for Spinoza are used not as signs of divine intervention, but rather tools to secure power and influence. According to Nadler, Spinoza’s discussion on miracles mirrors the over-all project of the *TTP* given that it advocates for true religion and the lack of theological prejudice. It can be added however, that Spinoza’s discussion of miracles closely relates to the project of Part III, IV and V of *Ethics* since it aims to nullify the proliferation of inadequate ideas in the form of superstition and prejudice.

Miracles are related to the passions because they, like the passions, rely on inadequate ideas, and if they are allowed to proliferate without moderation can lead to ignorance, passivity and vulnerability. Of all the passions, hope seems to bear the strictest resemblance to miracles. As stated, Spinoza’s discussion on miracles can be viewed as a discussion of hope more generally. This is premised on the assertion that hope is the fundamental component of miracles. If one ceases to hope, miracles will lose their grip because an individual will rather act in accordance with reason and nature and will not be susceptible to so called ‘divine’ events. The lack of hope makes the individual more reasonable and less liable to theological manipulation. As stated by Spinoza, much like miracles lead to superstition, hope can be said to sustain superstition.⁴¹ Furthermore, the perceived existence of miracles justifies our hope. Miracles suspend our hope that something miraculous or beneficial might occur in the future. Therefore, to understand miracles merely as events “whose natural cause cannot be

³⁷ Spinoza, *TTP*, 4.

³⁸ Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, 84.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 83.

⁴⁰ Spinoza, *TTP*, 97.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 5.

explained” would lead us to moderate our hopeful tendencies and thus act in accordance with reason.⁴²

Miracles can be said to be the psychological manifestations of hope, in as much as they inspire us to hope for a future joy, and that hope allows for miracles to hold sway. Miracles can also be said to relate to hope more so than to fear, thus challenging Spinoza coupling of the two passions. Miracles are more positive than negative, they relate more to a doubtful and “inconstant joy” than an “inconstant sorrow”. Miracles inspire hope and to a certain degree dispel fear.

Both miracles and hope engender superstition and ignorance of true causes. Spinoza’s discussion of the passions as presented in the *Ethics* and his writing on miracles, present a rigorous critique of hope. The valuation that Spinoza provides in these texts is a negative account of hope on the basis of its epistemologically flawed character. Therefore this form of hope shall be referred to as ‘epistemic’ hope.

In these texts one sees an emerging pessimism in relation to hope. For Spinoza those that “fluctuate wretchedly between hope and fear” are vulnerable and are unable to act due to the fact that action for Spinoza requires adequate ideas.⁴³ This understanding of hope presented in *Ethics* and illustrated in *On Miracles*, is pessimistic in character as it questions the value of optimism and the need to hope for something better. Instead, the afore mentioned passages seem to suggest that people should cease to hope and rather live in accordance with reason. However, as Section 1.4. will indicate, this more pessimistic appraisal of hope comes to be contradicted in sections of the *TTP* and *TP*.

⁴² Ibid. 84.

⁴³ Ibid. 3.

1.4. Spinoza's Conception of 'Regulative' Hope

The above sections have illustrated that hope, in so far as it is conceived as a passion receives a negative appraisal by Spinoza. In *Ethics* and Spinoza's writing on miracles, hope is viewed much like the other passions, and therefore is connected to the proliferation of inadequate ideas. However, recent scholarly works by Moira Gatens, Justin Steinberg and Simon Wortham have pointed out that Spinoza comes to provide a different appraisal of hope in the *TTP* and the *TP*. The present section argues that Spinoza presents a different account of hope in the *TTP* and *TP*, in which the pessimistic account of hope presented in *Ethics* gives way to a more optimistic account.

The section will illustrate that hope as a derivative of joy comes to be viewed as a passion that allows for motivation and social cohesion, whereas fear is seen as something overtly negative. In line with the argument presented by Susan James, this section argues that Spinoza diverges from the hope-fear dyad and comes to privilege hope over fear, although he does not nullify the dyad as such. The section will claim that, although hope is seen as more beneficial than fear, hope is still conceived as a passion that can lead to superstition and inadequate ideas. Lastly, the section will argue that Spinoza provides an account of 'regulative hope', a form of hope whose value lies in its ability to regulate and aid individuals and society.⁴⁴ The section aims to illustrate that the novel concept of 'regulative hope' exemplifies Spinoza's dualistic conception of hope, a dualistic understanding that ranges from more pessimistic interpretations of hope to more optimistic interpretations.

In the *TTP* Spinoza indicates that hope and fear both play a significant role in the make-up and functioning of the state. This is because the real world is not the ideal society where people could cease to "fluctuate wretchedly between hope and fear".⁴⁵ Rather in the real-world, fear and hope are present in the minds of the common people. To Spinoza, both hope and fear impel the common people to keep promises and maintain stability. According to Spinoza, no individual will keep a promise unless they "hope for a greater good or fear a

⁴⁴ As will be discussed later, the concept of regulative hope is borrowed from Gatens's similar understanding of 'reasonable hope'.

⁴⁵ Spinoza, *TTP*, 3.

greater evil.”⁴⁶ Due to the *conatus*, we are innately driven by a desire to preserve our own being, this form of self-interest means that we will keep a promise or undertake a given act provided we hope that it benefits us or if we fear that to not do so will be to our detriment. Hope and fear therefore emerge as practical tools to ensure a form of obedience. However, Spinoza by evoking Seneca, claims that although fear is an effective tool in terms of allowing for social cohesion, it cannot be the basis for a long-lasting state.⁴⁷ Fear according to Spinoza, does not lend itself to stability. Rather, a state whose hold on the people is predicated on fear alone, cannot exist for long.⁴⁸ Spinoza in Chapter 20 of the *TTP* states that one of the central principles of the state is to not control citizens by use of fear.⁴⁹

Spinoza’s rejection of fear as a constitutive part of political life marks the beginning of his differentiation between hope and fear. Such a differentiation emerges in the hope-fear dyad’s genealogy. Although both are passions, the fact that hope is a derivative of joy means that it is imbued with more value than fear, the latter being a derivative of sadness. For Spinoza nothing good can come from sadness, whereas joy, can lead to action and aid the *conatus*. An action is defined by its ability to increase the body’s ability to act.⁵⁰ Therefore, joy being an action has the ability to increase our ability to act. Spinoza, as discussed in section 1.2. comes to view the derivatives of joy as passions and not actions. However, the fact that hope is a derivative of an action means that it is more liable to lead to action than fear which is derived solely from sadness.

Prior to investigating the specific views on hope as espoused in the *TTP* and *TP*, it is imperative that the hope-fear dyad is better understood. More specifically, one must ask the question whether hope can be decoupled from fear. A reading of *Ethics* could lead to such a question being answered in the negative, on the basis that, whenever one hopes one is necessarily affected by a degree of fear and vice versa. According to *Ethics*, hope and fear are inseparable. However, the seeming disparity between Spinoza’s valuation of hope and fear in his political and theological works, has led to a variety of assertions regarding this seemingly inseparable dyad.

⁴⁶ Spinoza, *TTP*, 199.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 199.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 251.

⁵⁰ *Ethics* III, D1

Susan James has argued that hope and fear are indeed inseparable.⁵¹ According to James, one must rather see the dyad in terms of degrees and not separation. For it is impossible, according to James, that in the act of hoping for something, we are not afflicted by the fear or anxiety that such a thing might not occur. According to James, when Spinoza refers to fear in the negative sense and hope in the positive sense, he has not jettisoned the dyad, but rather refers to a psychological state where hopefulness is more pronounced than fear. Although, hope and fear are always intertwined, individuals and societies can be affected more by hope than by fear.⁵²

Spinoza aims, in the *TTP* and *TP*, to envisage a society in which people are compelled more by hope than by fear. Spinoza privileges hope in as much as he states that citizens should be driven by hope of rewards rather than fear of punishment.⁵³ Furthermore, Spinoza states in the *TTP* that the laws of the state should ensure that “people are restrained less by fear than hope of something good”.⁵⁴ For Spinoza such laws that accommodate the hopes of citizens, will lead them to do their duty willingly. Thus, by implication, laws premised on the perpetuation of fear would diminish the citizen’s ability to carry out his/her duty willingly, because to act under fear alone is merely to act to avoid punishment or harm.⁵⁵

Spinoza’s assertions presented above supports the claim that hope can allow for increased activity of the citizens of the state. Hope compels people to act, whereas fear incapacitates them. Mirroring Hobbes, Spinoza agrees that fear can be useful in order to free people from the state of nature, however contrary to Hobbes, fear cannot become the *modus operandi* of the state.⁵⁶ Rather hope and faith in political institutions ensure the long-term existence of a state. In short, hope leads to an active and duty driven citizenship. This duty driven citizen will be willing to keep his/her promises and will remain obedient to the ruling institutions. As stated by Wortham, hope in this sense can be seen as the “glue” that keeps society together.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Susan James, “The Interdependence of Hope and Fear,” *Spinoza: Thoughts on Hope in our Political Present*. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 20, (202): 217.

⁵² James, “The Interdependence of Hope and Fear,” 221.

⁵³ Moira Gatens, “The Ambivalence of Hope,” in *Spinoza: Thoughts on Hope in our Political Present*. *Contemporary Political Theory* 20, no.1 (2021):204.

⁵⁴ Spinoza, *TTP*, 73.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 74.

⁵⁶ Discussed in 2.2.

⁵⁷ Simon Wortham, *Hope: The Politics of Optimism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 32.

Steinberg echoes such a claim by asserting that hope is a “species of willing motives”, and thus linked to the increase in activity and willingness on the part of citizens.⁵⁸

According to Steinberg, Spinoza in the *TP* goes further by stating that a hopeful citizenry is freer than a fearful one.⁵⁹ For Steinberg, Spinoza’s notion of *securitas* relates to the feeling of safety and confidence and lack of fear, not only in a physical sense but also a psychological sense. For Steinberg *securitas* leads to an empowered and liberated citizenry, and allows for freedom within society, which Spinoza sees as integral.⁶⁰ The notions of hope and freedom are partially incommensurable on the basis that the former is a passion, and the latter requires sound reason devoid of passions. However, Spinoza suggests in the *TP* that although, hope is a passion and thus anathema to reason, a hopeful citizenry is *freer* than a fearful one. According to Spinoza a free citizenry is “guided more by hope than by fear”.⁶¹ This is premised on the fact that hope being a derivative of joy allows for an increase of activity and “making use of life”.⁶² Fear, however, being a derivative of sadness is solely related to avoiding punishment or death.⁶³

The above indicates a more optimistic treatment of hope. However, much as the hope-fear dyad remains in Spinoza’s discussion of hope in the *TTP* and *TP*, so does hopes’ nature as a passion. The citizenry that is hopeful is not to be seen as an ideal. Rather, they, are liable to become superstitious and be misled. Although hope can lead to an increase in action and willingness, Spinoza (as stated in *Ethics*) would rather people be motivated and driven by true reason than hope for a reward. Therefore, any optimistic reading of the *TTP* and *TP* must be offset with the understanding that hope, as a passion, is contrary to Spinoza’s ideal world in which people live in accordance with reason.

Spinoza’s political works are concerned less with ideals than with the reality of the world. On the basis that humans will always be afflicted by passions. Spinoza seems to realise that the ideal psychological make-up as presented in *Ethics* is untenable in the real world. Rather, we

⁵⁸ Justin Steinberg, *Spinoza’s Political Psychology: The Taming of Fortune and Fear* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 82.

⁵⁹ See Spinoza in *TP* V/VI: “A Free community is led more by hope than by fear”.

⁶⁰ Steinberg, *Spinoza’s Political Psychology*, 81.

⁶¹ Spinoza, Benedict De. “Political Treatise in Spinoza Complete Works, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing), V/VI.

⁶² Spinoza, *TP*, V/VI.

⁶³ *Ibid.* V/VI.

will always be afflicted by both hope and fear to some degree, and thus be liable to manipulation and superstition. However, because hope is less harmful than fear, Spinoza advocates for a degree of hope in any political society, in as much as it can allow for stability and cohesion. Hope in this sense is therefore ‘regulative’. Hope is not constitutive, because as presented in *Ethics*, it does not have any good in itself.⁶⁴ Rather, its ‘regulative’ nature is premised on the fact that its existence can allow for beneficial effects such as cohesion. This conception of hope as a ‘regulative’ concept fits in with Spinoza’s over-all theory of the moderation of the passions. For hope, in this regulative sense, is viewed as partly beneficial, but not as something to be embraced whole heartedly. Individuals and societies must, in line with Gatens, adopt a ‘reasonable hope’: a form of hope that precludes the more illusionary qualities of the passions, and rather focuses on the concrete socio-political sphere and allows for stability and cohesion.⁶⁵ ‘Reasonable’ hope phrases the need to moderate the superstitious and ignorant aspects of hope, but admits that hope is ‘regulative’ and allows for stability. Gatens’ conception of ‘reasonable’ hope allows for one to conceive of hope as a functional and beneficial force, provided it is moderated and made devoid of its illusionary qualities. The present thesis, however, uses the concept novel of ‘regulative’ hope due to the fact that the use of the word ‘reason’ in Gatens’ formulation contradicts the definition of the passions which are innately distinct from reason. Therefore, ‘regulative’ hope can be said to be a more applicable concept since it does not presuppose that hope can be reasonable, but rather that it can be beneficial for a given society. Spinoza’s understanding of ‘regulative’ hope indicates a pragmatic attitude towards hope. Although hope is fundamentally negative in character, Spinoza can be said to be a pragmatist in as much as he allows for it to proliferate in society on the basis that it can lead to stability.

The above section along with 1.3. has clearly explicated that Spinoza presents two distinct accounts of hope. In line with Wortham, for Spinoza, “hope is both false and true”.⁶⁶ In other words, Spinoza conceives of hope both in a negative sense and a positive sense. This dualistic approach illustrated above, points towards Spinoza attitude towards hope being more complex than the simple rejection of hope on the basis of its existence as a passion. Rather it can be said that, within Spinoza’s dualism, there is an ‘epistemic hope’, which receives a negative appraisal because it is contrary to true reason, and a pragmatic ‘regulative’ hope

⁶⁴ *Ethics* IV P47

⁶⁵ Gatens, “The Ambivalence of Hope,” 204.

⁶⁶ Wortham, *Hope*, 33.

which can allow for stability and cohesion. The following sub-chapters will aim to further illustrate this nuanced dualistic conception of hope by way of comparing it to the thought of Descartes and Hobbes.

Chapter 2

Spinoza's Dualistic Conception of Hope in Relation to René Descartes and Thomas Hobbes

The present section aims to ascertain to what extent Spinoza conceptions of hope are novel within the context of early Enlightenment thought, and to what extent it can be considered either optimistic or pessimistic within said context. Section 2.1. will contrast Spinoza's thought with that of Descartes. Section 2.2. will compare the thought of Spinoza to that of Hobbes and investigate Hobbes's attitude towards hope.

2.1. Descartes and Hope as a Passion

The passions underpin any Cartesian understanding of hope. As stated by Claudia Blöser early Enlightenment conceptions of hope are generally concerned with an over-all understanding of the passions.⁶⁷ This claim is true of Descartes as it is of Spinoza. However, Descartes and Spinoza's understanding of the passions simultaneously converge and diverge on certain points.

Descartes defines the passions as perceptions or sensations residing in the soul that are caused by "some movement of the spirits".⁶⁸ The "movement of spirits" is innately vague and uncertain, leading Descartes to claim, like Spinoza, that the passions are by definition "confused and obscure".⁶⁹ On the basis of the obscure nature of the passions, Descartes, like Spinoza subscribes a distinctly illusionary quality to the passions. As stated by Descartes, passions are "unaware of any approximate cause" and are liable to misrepresent various states of affairs.⁷⁰ Therefore, Descartes and Spinoza both view the passions as irrational. However, Descartes' view of the passions diverges from that of Spinoza on the basis of their function and utility. The passions for Descartes are a prerequisite for action, whereas in Spinoza passions are linked to passivity.

⁶⁷ Claudia Blöser, "Enlightenment Views of hope," in *Historical and Multi-disciplinary Perspectives on Hope*, ed Steven C. van den Heuvel (Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 2020): 62.

⁶⁸ Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, trans. Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), §26.

⁶⁹ Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, §28

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* §25

Passions, for Descartes, lead to a degree of agitation within the soul. This agitation leads the soul by way of the “little gland” to influence an action of the body.⁷¹ Descartes claims that the main function of the passions is to prepare the body for certain actions. Therefore, the principal function or consequence of the passions is not passivity, but rather action, due to the fact that passions prepare and motivate the body to perform certain tasks.⁷² Sean Greenberg has offered a perspective of the passions that diverges from the traditional representational understanding of the passions, in which they are seen as representations and passive sensations of the world. Rather, for Greenberg, the passions are inherent in the process of volition. Passions in Descartes’ philosophy according to Greenberg, are not passive, but are rather motivational states that form the core condition for action.

Descartes’ attitude towards hope illustrates his over-all understanding of the passions as obscure but also motivational. Much like Spinoza, Descartes makes use of the hope-fear dyad by insisting on the co-existence of such passions. Whereas hope is linked to the likelihood that a given issue “will come to pass”, fear is the lack of such likelihood. Furthermore, as in Spinoza, fear is overly negative whereas hope, as a sub-species of joy, is more benevolent. Hope receives a positive value allocation for Descartes. Although hope in its extreme form can lead to complacency, hope also functions to dispose us to certain actions. Descartes uses the example of boldness, which he conceives as a type of courage that allows one to take on daunting tasks. For Descartes, boldness cannot exist without hope.⁷³ The individual who does not hope for a given thing, would be unwilling to undertake a dangerous task. Hope for Descartes allows for one to energetically pursue a given outcome and act with perseverance and vigour.⁷⁴

Descartes, in the *Passions of the Soul* does not present the passions, and therefore hope in a wholly negative light; rather for Descartes the ‘passions are all good by their nature’ although we should be careful to not let them become excessive. This is contrasted with Spinoza’s view of the passions as presented in *Ethics*, wherein the passions are seen as harmful given they depend on inadequate ideas, and therefore inhibit the *conatus*. Although Spinoza allots

⁷¹ Ibid. §36.

⁷² Sean Greenberg, “Descartes on the Passions: Function, Representation, and Motivation,” *Noûs* 41, no.4 (2007): 723.

⁷³ Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, §173.

⁷⁴ Ibid. §173.

utility to hope in its ‘regulative’ sense, hope by definition remains distinctly negative. In Descartes, one sees that, due to the understanding of passions as linked to action, hope is seen in a more positive light. The overt similarity, however, is that Descartes, like Spinoza, does not see acting under the guidance of passions as ideal, but rather regards an individual as virtuous if he/she is able to control if not totally nullify the affects of the passions. However, it is clear that Descartes presents a more optimistic account of hope than Spinoza does in *Ethics*.

2.2. Hobbes and Hope as a Passion

The above section has illustrated that Descartes provides a more optimistic account of the passions on the basis of their motivational character. However, Descartes in the *Passions of the Soul* does not indicate the practical function or role of the passions, and more specifically hope within society. Hobbes on the other hand, provides a more detailed account of the role of hope in society, thus allowing for one to better understand the optimistic and pessimistic undercurrents of early Enlightenment philosophy. The section argues that, like Spinoza, Hobbes has a contradictory understanding of hope in as much as hope receives two contrasting valuations. However, as will be illustrated, Hobbes’ understanding of hope is the inverse of Spinoza’s understanding.

For Hobbes the passions are directly related to action and therefore the *conatus*. According to Hobbes, passions are types of motion residing in the individuals that predispose them to different types of actions. Hobbes distinguishes between animalistic and unconscious *vital motion* and conscious *voluntary motion*.⁷⁵ Passions are related to the latter as they cause the individual to imagine a certain outcome and act regarding said outcome. Hobbes considers passions to be types of appetites or aversions that influence action.⁷⁶ According to Maria Lukac de Steir, the passions for Hobbes are the principles of internal motion that simultaneously re-enforce and hinder actions.⁷⁷ Hobbes, like Descartes and Spinoza view the

⁷⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Penguin Press, 2017), 41.

⁷⁶ Christopher Bobier, “Rethinking Thomas Hobbes on the Passions,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 101, no.4 (2020): 584.

⁷⁷ Maria L. Lukac de Stier, “Hobbes on the Passions and the Imagination: *Tradition and Modernity*,” *Hobbes Studies* 24 (2011): 80.

passions as irrational on the basis that they can run counter to reason.⁷⁸ However, Hobbes points to the passions as being an important component of action. Mirroring Descartes, Hobbes conceives the passions as contrary to reason, but none-the-less integral to the internal motion of an individual.

Hobbes, like Descartes understands the passions as motivational because they influence actions. This understanding consequently influences Hobbes' understanding of hope. Hope for Hobbes is an "appetite with the opinion of attaining something".⁷⁹ Hope is directly concerned with the acquisition of a given thing, and is therefore, liable to motivate the individual to act. Whereas Spinoza's definition phrases uncertainty and doubt regarding the "inconstant joy" which arises from hope. Hobbes' definition sees hope cast as a passion that inclines the individual to act on the desire of attaining something.⁸⁰ Like Descartes, Hobbes equates hope to other passions such as courage, which he defines as a hope of avoiding something painful by way of resistance.⁸¹ Courage lends itself to an understanding of hope as something that far from making one passive, propels an individual into action. On the basis of the link between hope and action, Blöser has stated hope's "important role Hobbes's philosophy of action".⁸²

Hobbes' understanding of hope as a passion can be said to bear more similarity to that of Descartes than Spinoza. Both Descartes and Hobbes have motivational and therefore optimistic accounts of hope as a passion. However, Hobbes' understanding of hope is more nuanced than that of Descartes. In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes' phrases the value of hope in a society. In doing so, certain similarities between Hobbes and Spinoza appear. However equally striking differences emerge, in which Hobbes, unlike Spinoza, takes a pessimistic turn on the basis of his privileging of fear over hope.

Like Spinoza, Hobbes views hope as an important social component that allows for trust and stability. Hope for Hobbes is a crucial part of deliberation which he conceives as a core aspect of a healthy society. Without hope, there could be no deliberation, and therefore no

⁷⁸ Lukac de Steir, "Hobbes on the Passions," 88.

⁷⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 45.

⁸⁰ Blöser, "Early Enlightenment," 65.

⁸¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 45.

⁸² Blöser, "Early Enlightenment," 65.

stable society.⁸³ Furthermore, Hobbes considers hope as one of the principal passions that incline us to peace. Hobbes therefore, conceives hope as positive force in society thus mirroring Spinoza's 'regulative' understanding of hope.⁸⁴ However, as stated by Michael Le Buffe, the clearest contrast between Spinoza and Hobbes relates to the use of fear in society.⁸⁵

As stated in 1.4. Spinoza aims to decrease the presence of fear in society. Hobbes does the opposite, claiming that fear on the part of citizens is required in order to maintain order.⁸⁶ Without fear there can be no stable society. Whereas Spinoza conceives hope in a 'regulative' sense, Hobbes reverses the hope-fear dyad and advocates for a 'regulative fear', thus painting a more pessimistic picture of hope's relevance to society. Although, hope inclines us to peace, fear is seen as the ultimate conditioner in so far as fear of death and punishment ensures that we remain outside of the *state of nature*.⁸⁷ Hope allows for trust and stability, but fear is the most reliable way in which to ensure co-operation and order. Spinoza's conception of 'regulative' hope conceives of fear as something that inhibits willingness on the part of an individual and sees hope as allowing for willingness and duty-bound conduct. In contrast, Hobbes views fear as the passion that ensures stability and security.⁸⁸

Sections 2.1. and 2.2. have illustrated that Spinoza's definition of the passions present a pessimistic undercurrent within the context of the early Enlightenment, as it equates passions with passivity and rejects the passions link to action. Therefore, Spinoza is unique in this regard. However, section 2.2. has shown that Hobbes presents a far more pessimistic understanding with regards to hope's role in society. Therefore, Spinoza's novelty within the early Enlightenment relies on his unique dualism regarding hope.

⁸³ Ibid. 66.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 67.

⁸⁵ Michael Le Buffe, "Spinoza and Hobbes" in *A Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2021), 86.

⁸⁶ Le Buffe, "Spinoza and Hobbes," 86.

⁸⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 103.

⁸⁸ Steinberg, *Taming of Fortune and Fear*, 100.

Chapter 3

Pessimism and Optimism in Relation to Spinoza's Dualistic Conception of Hope

The previous sections have explicated Spinoza's dualistic attitude towards hope as well as how Spinoza's understanding of hope compares to Descartes and Hobbes. It has been illustrated that Spinoza's conception is unique and that it carries distinct pessimistic and optimistic undercurrents. The current section aims to better understand Spinoza's relationship to pessimism and optimism respectively.

3.1. Evaluating Pessimism: Nietzsche and Spinoza

In order to evaluate Spinoza's pessimistic attitude towards hope, his thought will be compared to that of Nietzsche, who in *Human all too Human* provides an overtly pessimistic valuation of hope. The current section does not aim to reduce Nietzsche's thought to blatant pessimism. Rather, it claims, that, although Nietzsche presented nuanced and often contradictory views of the passions, his understanding of hope in the form of his retelling of Hesiod's tale of Pandora is distinctly pessimistic on the basis that it considers hope to be the "greatest of evils."⁸⁹

Any Nietzschean account of hope must yield to Nietzsche's criticism of hope in which he evokes the myth of Pandora in order to illustrate the insidious and "evil" nature of hope. For Nietzsche, hope is evil because it "lengthens the ordeal of man".⁹⁰ According to James Magrini, Nietzsche's sees hope as prolonging suffering because it imbues people with the unjustified belief that they can transcend their worldly existence, which in part is composed of suffering.⁹¹ Hope clouds our judgment and alienates us from the true nature of the human condition. According to Magrini, hope can be acquainted to a false consciousness. Furthermore, Nietzsche considers hope to be an ineffective remedy for any malady, for it

⁸⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human all too Human* (Gutenberg Project, 2011), 71.

⁹⁰ Nietzsche., *Human all too Human*, 71.

⁹¹ James Magrini, "Pessimism. Hope and Tragic Art of the Greeks," *Philosophy Scholarship* 21 (2020): 4.

merely distracts people from the reality of their existence. Hope for Nietzsche is a dangerous form of escapism that clouds our judgement and alienates us from the reality of our existence.

Nietzsche's critique, like Spinoza's, is based on hope's illusionary and non-rational qualities. Spinoza's critique of hope is premised on his belief that hope distracts us from reality, and rather than letting us live under the guidance of reason, causes us to live under the guidance of illusion. Both Nietzsche and Spinoza critique hope on epistemic grounds. It can be said that Spinoza's understanding of hope presented in *Ethics* runs parallel to Nietzsche's pessimistic critique mentioned above.

Both Nietzsche and Spinoza propose similar techniques in order to minimise the effects of passions such as hope. As phrased in 1.2, Spinoza states that individuals must be aware of the true causes and aim to moderate the passions in order to live under the guidance of reason. Nietzsche proposes a project of *self-cultivation* in which, like Spinoza, he advocates for the moderation of the passions that allows for self-awareness.⁹² Significant debate exists regarding the relation between Nietzsche and Spinoza's attitudes towards the passions. However, it can be said that they both advocate for a type of *therapeutic naturalism*, which according to Ansell Pearson, promotes self-awareness, thus emancipating individuals from superstition.⁹³ *Therapeutic naturalism* allows for conscious worldly existence or "existential flourishing".⁹⁴ For Spinoza and Nietzsche in order for such a project to occur, delirious passions such as hope must be moderated. As stated by Ansell Pearson, Nietzsche's understanding of *therapeutic naturalism* is in itself not pessimistic. Contra the stoics, Nietzsche does not aim to nullify the passions altogether, but rather to moderate them in such a way that they contribute to conscious existence.⁹⁵ Nietzsche's "affirmative philosophy of the passions" aims to decrease the effects of delirious passions through moderation and allows for the proliferation of joyful affects.⁹⁶ Nietzsche's 'affirmative philosophy' resembles Spinoza's evocation of 'regulative hope' in as much as it sees the privileging of joyful passions over those rooted in sadness. However, both Nietzsche and Spinoza see hope as fundamentally problematic.

⁹² Keith Ansell Pearson, "Nietzsche on the Passions and Self-Cultivation," *Continental Philosophical Review* (2021): 2

⁹³ Ansell Pearson, "Nietzsche on the Passions," 13.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 13.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 15.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 15.

Although Nietzsche's over-all philosophy of the passions can be said to be partly optimistic in as much as it advocates for *self-cultivation*, his treatment of hope is fundamentally pessimistic. This is because, in order for the project of *therapeutic naturalism* to be realised hope must be moderated. The comparison between Nietzsche and Spinoza, illustrates that Spinoza, like Nietzsche, has a fundamentally pessimistic appraisal of hope. However, as section 3.2. will illustrate Spinoza's dualistic approach challenges a singularly pessimistic reading of hope in Spinoza's thought.

3.2. Evaluating Optimism: Bloch and Spinoza

If pessimism in relation to hope can be considered to be the negation of the importance of hope with regards to human existence, then there can be said to be no stronger optimistic counter claim than that of Ernst Bloch. Bloch, considered by Katharina Bauer to be "one of the greatest philosophical defendants of hope", articulated a philosophy in which hope occupied a central role.⁹⁷ Furthermore, the normative quality of Bloch's work resides in his staunch believe that hope should be cultivated in society. Therefore, Bloch as an archetypal optimist can be said to act as a useful case study in order to assess whether there is any latent optimism in Spinoza's dualistic understanding of hope.

For Bloch, hope is not a negligible drive within humans, but rather a central component of human consciousness. Bloch like the afore mentioned thinkers, views humans as beings affected by a variety of passions (or in Bloch's term *Affecte*). However, for Bloch hope is the most pronounced passion, one that constitutes the nature of the individual. According to Paul O'Callghan, Bloch views humans as "beings who hope".⁹⁸ In other words, humans are ontologically defined as hopeful creatures. For Bloch, hope is a latent force within humans and society that needs to be developed and kindled. Hope provides in the words of James Dodd, the "raw resources for life itself" and thus impels people towards action.⁹⁹ For Bloch, hope is the core condition for action. Much like Spinoza, Bloch considers humans to defined

⁹⁷ Katharina Bauer "Will the Corona Crisis make us Better? Activating (Fragile) Hope for Justice," *Law, Culture, and Humanities* (2020): 12.

⁹⁸ Paul O'Callghan, "Hope and Freedom in Gabriel Marcel and Ernst Bloch," *The Irish Theological Quarterly* (1989): 215.

⁹⁹ James Dodd, "The Philosophical Significance of Hope," *The Review of Metaphysics* 58, no.1 (2004): 118.

by the *conatus* or self-preservation. True to Bloch's belief in the centrality to hope, he states that in order for the *conatus* to flourish, hope must exist.¹⁰⁰ Hope boasts a distinctly motivational character that allows for human's flourish.¹⁰¹ In the words of O'Callaghan, hope for Bloch is the "substrate of infrastructure" on which human life is based on.¹⁰²

Bloch is not oblivious to the presence of anguish and fear. However, unlike Spinoza who presents a strict hope-fear dyad, Bloch merely considers fear and anguish as circumstantial and transient, whereas hope being that which ontologically defines humankind, is seen as being deeply 'embedded'.¹⁰³ Bloch's palpable optimism means that hope has the ability (if cultivated) to triumph over fear. Bloch's optimism is further illustrated through his Hegelian teleology, in which he asserts that cultivated hope allows for the attainment of freedom.¹⁰⁴ Unlike Spinoza, who sees hope as contributing to human bondage, Bloch sees hope as ultimately leading to freedom and action, and thus contradicts Spinoza's understanding of hope (in *Ethics*) as contributing to passivity.

Any optimistic reading of Spinoza could attempt to draw similarities between Spinoza's *conatus* and that of Bloch. Although Spinoza considers the *conatus* to the essence of humankind.¹⁰⁵ For Spinoza the drive towards self-preservation is not dependent on hope. Rather, in being tormented by hope and fear, the *conatus*, far from being strengthened, is in actuality hindered due to the innate passivity implicit in the hope-fear dyad. For Spinoza, living in accordance with reason is the best way to ensure the functioning of the *conatus*. This assertion runs counter to the optimistic philosophy of Bloch, who considers hope to be the very foundation of the *conatus*.

Spinoza's definition of hope as a passion, places him in contrast to the optimistic definition of hope. However, one must assess whether Spinoza attitude towards hope presented in the *TTP*, and *TP* lends itself to an optimistic reading. As illustrated in 1.4. Spinoza comes to privilege hope over fear, and advocates for the proliferation of hope within society. In this articulation, hope (being a derivative of joy) is seen to allow for greater flourishing than fear. It is clear in

¹⁰⁰ O'Callaghan, "Hope and Freedom," 216.

¹⁰¹ O'Callaghan, "Hope and Freedom," 228.

¹⁰² Ibid. 217.

¹⁰³ Jack Zipes, *Ernst Bloch: Pugnacious Philosopher of Hope* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 67.

¹⁰⁴ O'Callaghan, "Hope and Freedom," 232.

¹⁰⁵ Hampshire, *Spinoza and Spinozism*, xxx.

the *TTP* and *TP* that hope within society can lead to an increase of trust, willingness and co-operation.¹⁰⁶ But to what extent can Spinoza's advocacy of the 'regulative' aspect of hope lead him to be considered an optimist?

Spinoza's continued insistence in the *TTP* that hope still leaves individuals vulnerable to superstition, illustrates that hope for Spinoza is fundamentally negative in character. Spinoza believes that humans will always be affected by the passions to some degree because they are unable to fully nullify them.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, because people are necessarily affected by passions, society should aim to cultivate the joyful passions over the 'sad' passions. Spinoza's advocacy for hope does not represent an optimistic understanding of hope, but rather comes to indicate a pragmatic outlook in which Spinoza sees the joyful passions as more beneficial than the passions derived from sadness. Because Spinoza is aware that passions will always exert power of individual and society, he makes the pragmatic decision to seek the proliferation of hope rather than fear.

The comparison with Bloch has indicated that Spinoza cannot be said to present an optimistic reading of hope, but rather a pragmatic reading. The optimism of Bloch is incommensurable with Spinoza's dualistic understanding of hope. Spinoza on the one hand, presents a pessimistic reading of hope in *Ethics*, and on the other hand presents a 'regulative' conception that far from phrasing hope's implicit value, merely asserts that society should be ruled by hope rather than fear. Although hope for Spinoza has positive consequences, he cannot be considered truly optimistic on the basis that hope by definition is negative in character. Sections 3.1. and 3.2. have therefore indicated that Spinoza is neither a blatant pessimist nor an optimist, but rather that he holds a pragmatic attitude towards hope, thus occupying the middle-ground between pessimism and optimism.

¹⁰⁶ Steinberg, *Spinoza's Political Psychology*, 82.

¹⁰⁷ E V, Preface.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that Spinoza presents a unique dualistic conception of hope, containing both a pessimistic reading of hope in as much as it is a passion; and on the other hand, containing a positive reading of hope in relation to its role in society. Spinoza can be said to have a negative ‘epistemic’ conception of hope, as well as a positive ‘regulative’ conception. The thesis has argued that this dualism is unique when compared to the views of Descartes and Hobbes. Spinoza is unique in his pessimistic definition of hope, but also unique in his advocacy for a society ruled by hope as opposed to the Hobbesian society ruled by fear. The comparative study within the context of the early Enlightenment allowed for a better understanding of Spinoza’s attitude to hope and therefore made a subsequent comparative study possible in which Spinoza was compared to Nietzsche and Bloch. The comparison with Nietzsche indicated that Spinoza’s attitude towards hope is partly defined by a pessimistic understanding of hope in which hope’s value is called into question. However, 1.4. illustrated that Spinoza’s ‘regulative’ conception of hope is incommensurable with a blatant label of pessimism. The comparison with Bloch allowed for any optimistic undercurrents within Spinoza to be explicated. Section 3.2 indicated that Spinoza cannot be considered to an optimist, but rather a pragmatist. Spinoza can be seen to be a pragmatist because, although he harbours an innate distrust of hope, he nonetheless sees that in reality (wherein people are affected by passions), hope is more beneficial than fear. The thesis has therefore illustrated that Spinoza has a unique understanding of hope within the context of the early Enlightenment, and that he harbours a distinctly pragmatic attitude towards hope. The thesis has presented the novel concept of ‘regulative’ hope as well as presented an innovative analysis of miracles that allows for one to better understand Spinoza’s understanding of hope. In phrasing Spinoza’s pragmatism, the thesis has also made an original contribution to the field of study relating to Spinoza and hope. Further studies could further investigate Spinoza’s ‘regulative’ understanding of hope as well as Spinoza’s pragmatism. It is hoped that the thesis will allow for further discussion of Spinoza’s unique dualistic understanding of hope, thus resulting in more attention being paid to Spinoza’s place within the philosophy of hope.

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