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Why Spinoza Today? Or, "A Strategy of Anti-Fear"

Hasana Sharp

This essay contends that Spinoza provides a valuable analysis of the "affective" damage to a social body caused by fear, anxiety, and "superstition." Far from being primarily an external threat, this essay argues that terrorism and the promulgation of fear by the current administration in the United States pose a threat to internal social cohesion. The capacity to respond in constructive and ameliorative ways to current global conflicts is radically undermined by amplifying corrosive relationships of anxiety, suspicion and hatred among citizens. Spinoza presents a portrait of natural and political existence as deeply relational and "affective" such that human freedom and power depend upon the concern for the affective and passionate dispositions of human bodies and minds. In order for democracy, the power of the many, to exist effectively, the social body must be ruled by "joyful passions" rather than "sad passions," which are destructive and debilitating by nature.

Key Words: Spinoza, Balibar, 9/11, Terrorism, Affect

Whereas Spinoza was cursed during his own lifetime, and many detractors remain today, in the past thirty-five years several philosophers have written veritable odes to him.[1] Those encomia appear in various forms. "Spinoza is the Christ of philosophers, and the greatest philosophers are hardly more than apostles who distance themselves from or draw near to this mystery" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 59–60). "Spinoza's philosophy introduces a theoretical revolution without precedent into the history of philosophy, and is without doubt the greatest philosophical revolution of all time" (Althusser 1968, 128).[2] The basic argument that most have made for reading this extremely difficult seventeenth-century thinker, however, can be encapsulated by

1. I take the subtitle of this article from a remark made by André Tosel in a discussion of Spinoza: "If civil war, sedition, is the modern form of fear, a materialist politics must be a strategy of anti-fear" (1994, 149).

2. Many quotations of French thinkers are my own translations from the original texts, because I did not have the English texts available to me at the time I originally composed this essay. Hereafter, I mention also the English editions when available. Interestingly, Ben Brewster's English translation of these lines is significantly tempered: "Spinoza's philosophy introduced an unprecedented theoretical revolution in the history of philosophy, *probably* the greatest philosophical revolution of all time" (1970, 102; my emphasis). The French text clearly states "*sans doute la plus grande révolution philosophique de tous les temps.*" Although it certainly is

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Negri's (1991) felicitous dubbing of Spinoza as ''the savage anomaly.'' With different emphases, most contend that Spinoza offers an extremely valuable alternative to the dominant mode of thinking within the Western philosophical tradition. Althusser (1976, 1998) finds in Spinoza a way beyond the problems posed by Marx's Hegelianism; Negri and Althusser identify him as one of the most important thinkers in an alternative tradition, or ''subterranean current,'' of materialist philosophy (Althusser 1994); Deleuze and Guattari (1994) classify him as the great thinker of ''immanence''; and feminist philosophers find tremendous resources for reconsidering embodied knowledge and human existence embedded within nature (Lloyd 1994; Gatens 1996). Noting her debt to Deleuze, Genevieve Lloyd makes the argument eloquently.

> Descartes, revolutionary though his thought was in his own context, is part of our received intellectual framework—a progenitor of our thought patterns—in a way that Spinoza is not. To read Descartes is to read ourselves—to see made explicit some of the basic structures of modern self-consciousness, even if some of them may appear more exotic than they do in the forms in which we now see them. If to read Descartes is to read what we ourselves are, to read Spinoza is to get glimpses of what we might have been—of possibilities of self-consciousness that run against the grain. (1994, 169)

Similarly, Macherey notes that ''Spinoza obsesses and haunts us in the manner of a theoretical unconscious'' (1992, 7). The common claim, then, is that Spinoza represents a site of freedom within the history of philosophy: a freedom from being passively determined by that history.

In other words, according to these historical arguments, Descartes, Kant, and Hegel are the conscious of our thought that needs to be examined in order to know ourselves, to learn what we have become, and to gain some critical power through reflecting upon what Marx famously refers to as the nightmarish weight of the dead. Spinoza, on the other hand, is that which was repressed in order for such weight to assert itself. In order to know not only our conscious life but that which operates offstage—what conditions our conscious life like some kind of shadow that reveals the light—we may turn to Spinoza. In order to ascertain, then, not only the manifest content of our self-consciousness but what is being concealed by such content, we can study Spinoza. Spinoza is often named as the thinker whose ''heresy'' was so great that he has been relegated to the dark underbelly of our history, while remaining available to those aiming to animate such heresy in our own time. What has come to be known as the Enlightenment, at least one recent book suggests, was built upon the suppression of a far more materialist and emancipatory discourse of ''radical Enlightenment,'' of which Spinoza is the paradigmatic figure (Israel 2001).

Spinoza, then, represents the thinker who protested our present at its very birth. Modernity and the Enlightenment did not emerge uncontested. Modern Enlightenment

not uncharacteristic for Althusser to make absolute and hyperbolic statements, the translator chose to attenuate significantly the appraisal of the revolutionary character of Spinoza's thought.

principles triumphed not only over antidemocratic discourses of absolute monarchy and the divine right of kings, but also over a more radically democratic, republican, and materialist tradition (Negri 1994, 1999). The retrieval of Spinoza, according to his advocates, is the discovery of an alternative that "might have been." If we could go back and choose our own adventure, we might have been better served to embrace this more naturalized and materialist path toward democracy. Perhaps, though, the seventeenth century was not ready to embrace such a way of life, and the rumble of support for Spinoza today portends his posthumous birth. He was not completely negated by having lost the struggle for ideological hegemony, many contend, since his alternative conceptions labor on as the "unconscious," or the "subterranean current," of our current way of thinking and correspondent way of life.

In order to find a lever within the powerful tradition of philosophy, these thinkers contend that, rather than exiting the tradition, we might be better served to turn it against itself. Indeed, this was the technique of Spinoza himself, who often deepened the very arguments of those he opposed such that "the weapon they aim at us, they really turn against themselves" (1994, EIP15S).[3] Marx, of course, likewise deploys a strategy of immanent critique, whereby he grasps the texture of his opponent's arguments better than they themselves, and thus unravels their claims without having to appeal to any external standard.

Such a discourse in philosophy, however, is nothing new. Althusser contends that it is necessary for "every philosophy to pass through detours of other philosophies in order to define itself and grasp itself within its difference: within its *division*" (1998, 182; cf. Althusser 1976). It is noteworthy, however, that many have allied themselves with Spinoza in order to demarcate themselves from other thinkers. Spinoza has come to represent a viable rebel camp into which the history of philosophy has been divided. This is an interesting position for a seventeenth-century thinker, who has never achieved the status of common sense, to have acquired.

The support for Spinoza in recent years, then, often makes an argument for reading Spinoza "today" most relevant to students (understood broadly) of philosophy. In an effort to examine the tradition of thinking about the human condition as well as our social and political life, Spinoza serves especially well to illuminate alternatives. He offers a refreshing perspective on traditional impasses concerning freedom and determinism, the mind and the body, and society and nature. This, of course, has immense political implications for these thinkers. Spinoza, for them, is not interesting merely for offering new solutions to metaphysical puzzles, but rather for his capacity to open up new fields of action, and, as Althusser (1976, 1998) and others have implied, for a theory of truth according to an immanent criterion of "practice." The sometimes obscure claims about Spinoza's unequivocal affirmation of "immanence" and "univocity" precisely introduce the imperative to act constructively and creatively in this world. Spinoza's "immanence" amounts to the claim that because one never has recourse to an ideal world, either in heaven or in

3. Hereafter I cite Spinoza's *Ethics* (1994) with the standard notation, which indicates first the Part (I, II, III, IV, or V), followed by the Proposition number (e.g., P32), and then reference to whether it is a demonstration (D), definition (def.), scholium (S), or appendix (App.).

the mind, one must actively engage in the transformation of current material conditions.[4]

Spinoza, they note in various ways, is a "savage anomaly," radically discontinuous with his own time, and, because he provoked such horror in our fathers, a voice of protest in our own. Spinozism, then, at its best, is a counterpower within thought, an intervention into our own consciousness that frees us to think differently. He allows us not only to identify faults with the dominant tradition but to consider living alternatives that may have always been present, but that remained obscure for various reasons.

I do not contest in any way these passionate appeals for a turn to Spinoza. Indeed, they are precisely what have led me to commit my studies to this thinker. These appeals, however, have already been made persuasively and even beautifully. Such authors assert Spinoza's contemporary relevance for their time, and I endeavor to participate in that tradition by identifying his importance today, right now, especially for people living in the United States. I aim to highlight the way in which Spinoza's analysis of the affective structures of sociopolitical life are not only useful but imperative in the world as it is today, characterized by a proliferation of discourses surrounding threat, terror, violence, and emergency. Thus, I am making not an argument for his particular rupture within the tradition of Western thought, but for his ability to examine a concrete political problem with which we are faced today. This age-old problem that is especially visible in our current conjuncture is what Balibar (1997) has called "the fear of the masses" (in English, see Balibar 1989). Spinoza is valuable, especially in our current political climate, in that he provides the tools for an analysis of the "affective" condition of the social body: the various passions and feelings that condition the thoughts and actions of a multitude. This analysis, I contend, reveals the way in which "fear," as it pervades the social body, is highly noxious to democracy. Fear—along with other "sad passions" like hate, anxiety, and envy—undermines democratic institutions, bringing as much harm to the state as to its constituents. From a Spinozist perspective, therefore, many aspects of our current "war on terrorism" (from the Department of Homeland Security's color-coded terror alert to the now defunct TIPS program) present a great threat to internal cohesion and thus to the durability of the U.S. power structure. Spinoza, then, provides an account of the particular dangers that "a politics of fear" pose to the functioning of democracy internal to the political body. Simply put, an overwhelmingly fearful, hateful, and anxious populace cannot enact democracy. Spinoza, then, provides an analysis of the social body, which amounts to an imperative to construct institutions promotional of joyful passions among the masses in order for democracy to be realized. Following Spinoza, the current "war on terrorism," insofar as it promotes fear and hate among U.S. citizens, might be a greater threat to internal cohesion and our own democratic institutions than any terrorist organization.

4. Montag's elegant discussion of this aspect of Spinoza's thought appeared long ago in *Rethinking Marxism* (1989). See also his more recent book-length study (1999).

Being Inside

"Being inside is the common condition of Empire," write Hardt and Negri (2001). Thus, they contend that the current political situation they call "Empire" consists in the absence of any exteriority to a global network of power relations. This aspect is both a historical development and an ontological condition that has always existed. By virtue of being finite, natural beings—according to the ontological perspective that Hardt and Negri cull from Spinoza, we cannot willfully transcend or evade the impact of the myriad relationships in which we are always already engaged. "Empire" is a concrete historical formation that may, *Empire* seems to imply, better reveal our natural existence as one that is deeply integrated within a network of inescapable relations (Hardt and Negri 2000). Thus, they outline a kind of political condition that affirms, exploits, and manages this ontological fact accounted for by Spinoza.[5]

Spinoza, in the *Ethics,* aims to establish and analyze the existence of finite beings, or modes, as those things which have their "being" in another and are conceived through another (IDef.5). Human beings, and most everything we perceive, are modes, thus have their "being inside" the unbounded totality of nature, or substance. Such a reality is easily recognizable in that human modes, for example, are constantly exchanging parts of their bodies with the atmosphere in order to breathe. Likewise, we depend upon natural laws of gravity and the solidity of the earth in order to engage in motion, and we think with language that has been learned from, and is practiced by many other human beings, alive and long dead. As feminists and other materialists have long emphasized, human beings are creatures of need, dependent upon many other beings, and most profoundly upon other human beings, both for survival, and in order to realize higher human capacities like reason, speech, and political life. We have our being originally and irreducibly in nature and in some kind of community. This is a natural fact of our existence, and the notion of an original state of individual separateness preceding political life, from this perspective, is nothing more than a juridical fiction. The fact of "being inside"—of being inescapably embedded within a system of relationships, institutions, and practices that far exceed an individual's conscious control—is examined by Spinoza at its most basic level as well as in terms of its political implications.

"Being inside," or being finite modes, has as its consequence that we are fundamentally incomplete and dependent beings, and, therefore, we are beings submerged within, and constituted by a field of "affects." To explain this, let me note a basic principle of Spinoza's in terms of "modal life"—that is, the life of finite, determinate beings, among which humans are included.

> Every singular thing, or anything which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist

5. Among the essays in the "Dossier on Empire," those of Murphy (2001) and Read (2001) both describe the stakes of the ontological perspective in *Empire*.

> and produce an effect by another which is finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity. (Spinoza 1994, IP28)

With this proposition, Spinoza holds that all finite beings exist within a causal community such that their actions and lives depend upon the actions and lives of other beings, and so on, to infinity. This is one of the central claims whereby he establishes what Balibar (1997) identifies as ''transindividuality.'' The action, then, of any finite mode has its origin and its completion in other beings. This is what it means to be completely ''inside'' a system of cause and effect. One is always, at the same time, both a cause and an effect. This means that one always both acts and lives by virtue of being ''affected'' by other beings, and that one necessarily ''affects'' others with her actions and her life. To exist, then, is both to be dependent on the power, strength, and vitality of other beings, and to be a powerful being oneself: ''Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow'' (Spinoza 1994, IP36).

Built, then, into our very being is a pervasive situation of affectivity. To be finite is to be necessarily open to other beings, to be affected by others, and to live through their actions and powers. At the same time, it is to affect and impact others through one's actions which, for Spinoza, include the actions of bodies as well as ideas. Moreover, human beings are highly complex finite modes, and thus our bodies are always, at the same time, undergoing and producing many affects at once. We are always, in certain respects, producing and experiencing myriad ''feelings'' and ''emotions,'' which condition and constitute our power to think and act. Moreover, we are always to some extent responsible for and engaged in the affective constitution of those around us and, ultimately, all of nature.

Spinoza defines an ''affect'' as ''affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections'' (1994, IIIDef.3). An affect, then, applies equally and at the same time to the mind and the body, and serves as an index of the variations in the body's power, its increased or diminished capacity. Moreover, an affect is something that occurs between, among, and within bodies. They exist by virtue of encounters between different bodies, and the complex experience of agreement, disagreement, amplification, and diminution that is entailed by such an encounter. This affectivity makes up our very being; that is, it belongs to the fact that we are originally and ineluctably relational beings. Furthermore, while we cannot escape this relational aspect that belongs to our nature, we can navigate this affective field and respond to our own affective constitution in various ways.

In this transindividual situation, one is determined to ''exist and produce an effect'' in qualitatively different ways. The environment in which one necessarily has her being contains affections by which one's powers are aided or harmed. The simultaneous increase in one's corporeal and intellectual capacities is experienced fundamentally as a ''joyful passion,'' and the decrease in such powers is experienced as a ''sad passion.'' Among the joyful, amplificatory passions are friendship, love, and ''self-esteem.'' The ''sad passions'' include envy, fear, and hate. Any individual, by virtue of the various relationships constituting its being (an individual can be a person, community, nation, etc.), has a singular ''complexion'' made up of many affects at once; yet, the mind and body may be overwhelmed, or ''ruled,'' by a

particular one at any given time. Thus, one may describe herself at some moment as happy, and one may describe a culture, as Michael Moore seems to have done in *Bowling for Columbine*, as one of fear.[6] If one adopts Spinoza's analysis, these affects, then, might provide something like a criterion of selection among relationships, providing some indication of the kinds of relations toward which to strive and those to avoid.

Because all of nature is included within the "one substance," according to Spinoza, ultimately all finite beings are connected to one another through the infinite causal community of which we are all necessarily a part. The development of an increasingly efficient and complex global network of communication, and wider-reaching economic systems, have opened contemporary finite beings to being more immediately and easily affected by others. The recent bombing of trains in Madrid, for example, provoked immediate and intense alert on railways around the world. For weeks afterward, police presence was maximized and in France, where I was riding the subway, people were almost completely silent and visibly anxious, no doubt encouraged by the loudspeaker announcements every five minutes asking us to identify any suspicious baggage and preparing us to be searched. In a different era, when reporting was not immediately available in the form of live feed and when terrorists had individual nations as their targets, a bombing in one city might not have immediately provoked a sense of vulnerability and anxiety all over Western Europe and in the United States.

The infinite causal network, then, has more avenues and new threads by which to put more beings into relationship with one another, establishing the material conditions for being, at the same time, more determined and more effective. The increased ability to communicate and affect one another should not be seen merely as a means by which terror is more rapidly entrenched and reproduced. Such avenues are likewise seized for the communication of revolutionary and joyful affects. The intensification of global relationality is characteristic of Marx's analysis of capitalism as well as of Hardt and Negri's portrait of Empire. Today, more than ever, the way in which we are affected by infinitely many beings and the way in which this conditions our thinking and action are visible.

It is interesting to note that much of the anxious discourse surrounding terrorism refers to a "network of terror." It is an object of fear, often precisely in terms of its status as a complex system of interconnections and efficient communication. It is represented as a cancerous force that communicates its message as it infects the bodies of others with the power and will to do harm. It is described as a "cellular" organization, without any identifiable, centralized structure, which could be anywhere and everywhere at once—housed comfortably by "rogue nations" or penetrating otherwise lawful ones.

6. Moore's latest film, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, suggests that such fear is a purposeful manipulation on the part of our leaders: "You can make people do anything, if they are afraid." The deliberate inculcation of fear, albeit a reasonable conclusion to draw about the Bush administration's practices, is not the focus of this essay. While government plays a role in the production and excitation of fear, it cannot be understood to be government's product exclusively. Government is one of many factors contributing to a climate, or affective constitution, of fear.

Thus, the terror network is like an inverted, ugly image of the "information highway" that maximizes capitalist efficiency, and allows those on business trips to remain in uninterrupted "instant message" communication with their families. Likewise, the network image appears amidst emancipatory discourses of mass international resistance and solidarity. There is a veritable struggle going on in terms of defining, seizing, and wielding the networks characteristic of our lives within Empire.[7] Spinoza is relevant not only in identifying this ontological condition—the way in which we are always necessarily within a complex yet unitary structure by which we affect and are affected—but in offering a qualitative analysis of these affects. Moreover, I would like to contend, he shows how these affects condition political and social reality. That is, Spinoza reveals that the particular way in which these networks, constitutive of the social body in its increasing complexity and intensity, support or impede democracy.

The Fear of the Masses

Balibar claims that Spinoza's originality as a philosopher lies in the fact that "the mass as such is the principal object of investigation, reflection, and historical analysis" (1997, 59; cf. 1989, 106). By virtue of his pervasively relational ontology, Spinoza cannot consider human beings in their isolation. They are relational, affective creatures, "necessarily subject to the passions" (Spinoza 2000, 1.4).[8] That people are necessarily subject to passions means for Spinoza that they both "imitate" and undergo the passions of those with whom they identify, and that they strive to make others desire, love, and hate as they do (1994, IIIP27), "approving what he approves and rejecting what he rejects" (2000, 1.5). This is, in part, the nature of corporeal reality, which we observe most readily in children: "For we find from experience that children, because their bodies are continually, as it were, in a state of equilibrium, laugh or cry simply because they see others laugh or cry. Moreover, whatever they see others do, they immediately desire to imitate it" (1994, IIIP32S).

Adult bodies are more entrenched in habits and shaped by their singular history of experience, preventing them from undergoing the near fluidity of infantile experience. Children, however, serve only as more vivid examples of a general human phenomenon, according to Spinoza. Moreover, in relation to the particular communities we inhabit, our affective life can almost be said to resemble that of infants. We fear and love the same things as those we love. Spinoza cites a poem by Ovid in order

7. My discussion of terror networks and contemporary existence is indebted to a panel of papers presented for The Society for Social and Political Philosophy on "Biopower and Politics," held at the annual meeting of the Society for Phenomenological and Existential Philosophy, in fall 2002. Papers by S. Shaviro, A. S. Rai, and R. Mourad are available on the society's website: www.sspp.us.

8. Hereafter all citations of *The Political Treatise* will indicate the chapter number followed by the paragraph number.

to illustrate this point: ''As lovers, let us hope together and fear together; he has a heart of steel, who loves what another man leaves alone'' (IIP31C).

Human beings, then, both imitate and strive to be imitated in turn. They cannot escape some measure of empathy. They share in the pathos of others, feel pity at the sufferings of others, and develop animosities toward those things they imagine, rightly or wrongly, that others dislike. Likewise, they love more those things they imagine others to love, and their joy is amplified when it is shared. The contagious and fundamentally ''transindividual'' nature of feelings clearly produces various social problems. The way in which individuals quickly take on the hostilities of those with whom they identify, for example, leads to the hatred of other nations and classes (IIIP46S). Likewise, the tendency to adopt the same love objects as those one esteems can lead to envy and antagonism.

While both individual human bodies and social bodies are traversed by many affects at once, bodies—collective and individual—can be said to be more or less powerful, more or less stable, and more or less characterized by violence, depending upon their affective constitution and which affects dominate corporeal and mental experience. If we recall the earlier definition of ''sad passions,'' we note that they are destructive in nature. They decrease the body's power of acting as well as the mind's power of thinking. Spinoza discusses social bodies especially in terms of their ''passionate regimes,'' in order to assess their virtue and power (Balibar 1997, 59; 1989, 107). In the preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise,* Spinoza meditates upon the particularly poisonous nature of fear.

Spinoza begins by discussing the natural fact that much in nature lies far beyond human control, and thus humans are not able to anticipate the good or bad fortune that befalls them. In times of good fortune, they are arrogant and boastful, neglecting to seek the counsel of reason, imagining that their good fortune is the simple realization of their will and desire rather than the product of an infinitely complex nexus of forces. In times of bad fortune, on the other hand, they are wretchedly fearful and ''there is no counsel so foolish, absurd or vain which they will not follow'' (2001, 1).[9] They not only look to fools, madmen, and seers for advice, but imagine that they find divine decrees within the entrails of beasts and the cracks of tortoise shells. Nature suddenly appears to be seething with signification. Everything and anything can seem to have a message, of either hope or doom, for the fearful. ''To such madness are men driven by their fears'' (2).

Fear thus engenders a superstitious form of subjectivity. This superstition, I want to argue, is characterized by the infusion of meaning, mystery, and danger into quotidian objects. Suddenly, objects are imbued with power they never seemed to have before. People develop fantastic forms of interpretation whereby every surface seems to point to unfathomable depths and disproportionate power. Objects seem to express some kind of intention or will to speak to, and benefit or harm, their anxious perceiver. Such interpretation breeds a kind of overwhelming narcissism as well as paranoia. Nature seems always to contain a special message for its viewer, and seems

9. See the excellent analysis of the response to ''fortune'' in Moreau (1994).

to have oriented all its ends toward the superstitious subject, in one way or another (1994, EIApp.).

Such paranoia is not unfamiliar to those of us who have recently lived through several anthrax scares and attacks where the most quotidian of acts, retrieving the mail, becomes potentially lethal. Moreover, the threat of biological and chemical weapons, often completely invisible, renders absolutely any object whatsoever a harbinger of death. The menace of terrorism infuses anything and everything with potential suffering and violence. Such an experience is only a logical extension, however, of the many ''special report'' television shows in the United States that inform us of the germs and microorganisms swarming in our sinks and mattresses. Likewise, hidden camera exposés warn us of the grave threat posed by babysitters, restaurant vermin, or derelict factory workers, simultaneously reminding us, of course, that we may at any time be surveyed and exposed to the public eye. This is not to say that people did not really die from anthrax poisoning, or that people do not suffer everyday from abusive childcare. It is merely to point out that various ''ideological apparatuses'' have been engaged in the production of a superstitious form of subjectivity for a long time, the effects of which should be considered further. From Spinoza's perspective, I want to suggest, the active production of such fear of the masses poses many serious problems, both epistemological and political.

Perhaps most important, the problem with the narcissistic and paranoid imagination—where nature contains cryptic messages and threats for whoever is willing to decipher them—is that it can amount to an utter disempowerment of the perceiver. If ''the ruling affect'' of a body is fear, and nothing can be excluded from the regime of threatening signification, one is left nearly without recourse. The object appears to be a completely independent entity, acting by virtue of its exclusive power and even its mysterious will. Images by nature, however, are affections, which arise from a relationship between the perceiver's body and the external body. As Spinoza repeats throughout the *Ethics,* ''an imagination is an idea which indicates the present constitution of the human body more than the nature of an external body—not distinctly, of course, but confusedly'' (IVP1S). That is, what one sees as emanating from the power of the dirty sink alone, belongs more properly to the particular affective constitution of one's own body. Even if the germs are able to make one sick, it is by virtue of a particular and variable capacity of the body to be affected by the germs, a capacity which might be modified in order to more successfully resist the germs.

When my sister, who suffers from fairly serious paranoia, sees in a fuse box an espionage device of aliens, she is, in reality, apprehending primarily herself. Her own fear (perhaps of not being at all similar to those with whom she interacts) is displaced onto the fuse box. It is remarkable that her condition causes her to simultaneously literalize and displace her own alienation (understood as an elaborate complex of psychophysical and sociopolitical conditions). In regard to the fuse box, she is then terribly afraid of its power over her and is without any clear path by which to moderate such fear. If this experience were seen not as an effect of the reality contained by the fuse box, but as a complex set of associations that her body has with the fuse box and an indication of her own anxious bodily constitution, she might be

more able to identify ways to address her fear, which is not to say that such an effort would be easy or transparent.

When a social body's rather than an individual's ruling affect is fear, Spinoza affirms repeatedly, the greatest danger is posed to the state itself. The people are much more liable to engage in revolution because "seers" or prophets can appear, amplify people's fear, and drive them toward revolution. It is relatively easy and effective to rule the crowd, according to Spinoza, with their fear. Fear scorns reason, and cannot be mollified by the simple appearance of good arguments: "no affects of sadness can be related to the mind insofar as it acts, but only affects of joy and desire" (IIIP59D). It is a dangerous situation. People by nature, according to Spinoza, seek desperately to be liberated from fear—the least tolerable of affects, especially when dominant—but are not able to find a rational path by which to construct a less fearful way of life. The objects of their fear appear irreducibly external, alien, and unknowable. They are not seen as the effect of a complex relationship nor are they seen as disclosive of the affective constitution of the social body.

Suicide bombers, for example, are characterized as monstrous, inhuman, and irrational. They are absolutely other, and the causes which have brought them into being are not available to scrutiny. One cannot examine or modify the system of relationships that might produce such hate and enmity, as well as the willingness to eradicate one's (worldly) existence. There is no power available by which to alter the relationships or the sad passions that would bring people to commit themselves to their own deaths and those of many other people. When it is presumed in advance that the hatred springs from an unknowable and absolutely alien source, the only option is extermination. There is no relationship to be addressed because, from the point of view of radical fear, there is no relationship at all.

Within the grips of the sad passions, moreover, the social body's power to think and act is weakened, and the actions that spring from them often produce more sadness rather than less. At their height, Spinoza warns, such passions deeply estrange human beings from each other.

> Insofar as men are assailed by anger, envy, or any emotion deriving from hatred, they are drawn apart and contrary to one another and are therefore the more to be feared, as they have more power and are more cunning and astute than other animals. And since men are by nature subject to these emotions ... men are therefore by nature enemies. For he is my greatest enemy whom I must fear and against whom I must guard myself. (2000, 2.14)

This is not to say that men are by nature enemies but, *insofar* as they are assailed by hate and fear, they are enemies. At its limit, such fear provokes a situation of pervasive civil war. People, then, are most fearful to one another when they are themselves most filled with fear. Thus, the "fear of the masses," as Balibar points out, always refers both to the fear that those in power have of the masses and the fear that the masses themselves exhibit and suffer.

Spinoza remarks that "the position has never been achieved where the state was not in greater fear from its citizens than from an external enemy, and where its rulers were not in greater fear from the former than the latter" (2001, 187). Because the state is always dependent upon its own constituents for its strength and power ("the

king's sword or right is in reality the will of the people'' [2000, 7.25]), it has often relied upon threats, violence, and coercion to maintain its citizens in fearful obedience. Thus, the state deploys the strategy of displacing its own fear of the masses onto the masses themselves. Historically, those who came to power motivated the subjects to rebel, precisely by animating their fear and hatred. Once established, the state can then encourage collective fear of external enemies as well as state power in order to overcome the situation of civil war that brought about revolution in the first place. This can, according to Spinoza, achieve temporary order and obedience.

It is arguable that the current administration, whose own power came into being despite having lost the popular vote and after a very questionable electoral process, might be engaged in exploitation of the terror provoked by the attacks on 11 September 2001. By virtue of the tenuous support for its coming into power, its practices indicate that it is relying on means other than the love and admiration of its constituents in order to maintain its position. Regardless, however, of the Bush-Cheney regime's motivations (which may be beyond reproach for the purposes of this analysis), the objective effect of its policies since the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon has been to animate rather than assuage the anxieties of its own people. People are encouraged to travel and spend in order to support America and triumph over terrorists, but, at the same time, are provoked to notice and report the suspicious activity of any neighbor or friend since the institution of the U.S.A. Patriot Act. People are constantly warned that terrorists are within our borders, planning to attack at any moment, and thus vigilance must be maintained by each and every one of us at all times. Not only can we expect to have our buying, banking, and library activities surveyed, but we should be wary of anyone else's activities. Turning each and every citizen into, concomitantly, a police agent and suspect directly contradicts, according to Spinoza, the effort to ''Unit[e] and Strengthen America'' (''U.S.A.'' in ''U.S.A. Patriot Act''). Indeed, the emergency measures granting police power to search people's homes without their permission or even notification, and to arrest thousands to be held indefinitely and questioned brutally without legal recourse, induces fear and even hatred toward both one's government and one's neighbors. I am not suggesting that such measures will necessarily provoke a return to a Hobbesian state of nature, the famous ''war of all against all,'' but they fail to approach anything like the purported goal. The objective effects amount to dividing and weakening the people of America.

The unprecedented increase in emergency powers since 9/11 is justified, according to an astute analysis by William E. Scheuerman, on the basis that the executive power must be freed from the constraints of the deliberative process in order to respond as quickly as possible to a ''physical threat'' upon the vulnerable body of the polis (2002, 496). The political body is imagined according to a model of an organic, human body whose penetration must be forestalled and whose injury must be treated. The treatment of the injury to a political body is not as self-evident, however, as the medical treatment of a wound or broken leg. Moreover, the path to healing requires more than an immediate counterattack upon some other physicopolitical entity. The injury and pain caused by the very real and terrible attack on 11 September 2001 consist surely in the devastating loss of life and harm of bodies, but also in a much

broader affective damage that, I am claiming, is likely exacerbated by the provisions of the Patriot Act, other emergency measures, and uncritical reporting and fear-mongering by the mass media. The executive, as Scheuerman persuasively argues, might not be best served by rapid-fire retaliatory response to the harm that was caused and the repression of its own constituents. Why not engage in a deliberate and careful process of public reasoning about what might be a genuinely healing and strengthening response to the loss of three thousand lives? Instead, public reasoning, as many intellectuals have pointed out, has been blamed as a major source of division and a failure to appreciate the reality of the damage (e.g., Butler 2002). More joyful affects might be produced in order to genuinely unite and strengthen the people of the country: for example, by calling upon them to enact their actual powers and strengths—their ability to think and act—rather than cultivating the anxious subjectivity that can find menace anywhere and everywhere. The damage has been to the mind as much as the body, and the healing of each requires the construction of an affective regime whereby our powers are amplified rather than diminished, whereby we can see the world not only as a site of menace but as a site of joy, pleasure, life, and strength.

The cultivation of fear and anxiety, however, is a much easier way to instill order. Fear is an economic affect, in the short run. Fear and threats are a highly effective way to constitute political order, as history has repeatedly shown. Such order, however, remains highly unstable, and, if it does endure, it creates what Spinoza considers an aggregate of slaves rather than a commonwealth (2000, 5.4). Fear, hatred, melancholy, and other sad passions are naturally unstable: they weaken bodies and minds; they dissolve bonds of affection; they undermine "self-esteem," that highest of all joys that flows from the experience of one's own power to think and act (1994, IVP52).[10] Moreover, it is a natural law, according to Spinoza, that human beings desire to be liberated from fear (2001, 185). Thus, Spinoza quotes Seneca: "*violenta imperia nemo continuit diu*—tyrannical governments never last long" (178).

What is important to note, then, is that fear poses the greatest threat not to one's external enemies, but to the power structure itself. The government that subjugates its citizens and produces their loyalty through fear creates not a democracy but an aggregate of highly resentful slaves (2000, 5.4). Ultimately, if a government relies overwhelmingly on the sad passions, it creates wretched conditions and an unbearable affective disposition for its constituents—yet another way in which power gives birth to its own gravediggers. This may not appear to be bad news for those who reject the current structure of Empire. Spinoza reminds us, however, "how

10. It may be objected that plenty of "sad passions," including hatred and enmity, have positive political functions—indeed, are the heart and soul of politics (the most ready example being Carl Schmitt). While Spinoza asserts categorically that "Hate is never good" (1994, EIVP45), he does describe its political efficacy in terms of uniting one nation against another, and thereby constituting national identity and internal cohesion. Thus, although one could undertake an analysis of the positive political force of hate from within a Spinozist framework, as Pedro Lomba (2004) has done, it is clear that hate is harmful and has no positive function *interior* to the polis. Thus, in terms of internal political relations—the topic of this analysis—hate, indeed, is never good.

foolish are attempts so often made to get rid of a tyrant while yet the causes that have made the prince a tyrant cannot be removed'' (5.7).[11] Thus, as long as the ruling affects remain overwhelmingly sad, fearful, and productive of superstitious subjectivity, democracy cannot be said to exist effectively. The conditions that preserve and even require tyranny include an overwhelmingly fearful mass or multitude. In other words, for as long as fear remains the ruling affect, at least one of the major causes for tyranny remains.

Moreover, as the power structure becomes increasingly global, what counts as interior and exterior is continually called into question by capitalist trade relations, international governmental and legal institutions, and wars, as well as by the terrorists themselves. Al-Qaida and related Islamic extremist groups target not only the United States but all its supporters and anyone else who might be seen as infidels. France, for example, has made its opposition to the war in Iraq very clear, yet it receives terrorist threats by virtue of having outlawed the wearing of the Muslim veil in public schools. Targets are distinguished sometimes by nation, sometimes by religion or ideology, and sometimes by participation in the oil industry. As I suggested above, the affective communication certainly transcends national borders, and the internal support of a government and the cohesion of a people are certainly affected by their relations with other countries (as is manifest in Spain's election results and the massive decrease in popularity of Prime Minister Tony Blair). The effective functioning of democracy and the transformation of our affective condition is clearly a massive and daunting global effort, but one that is only impeded by the amplification of sad passions.

In order to realize truly democratic institutions, then, the sad passions must be transmuted into joyful ones. The fear of the masses must become the love, joy, and self-esteem of the multitude. In a true democracy, Spinoza claims, there is hardly anything to fear (2001, 178). The governing power no longer has to fear its constituents, the activity of the masses that is its foundation, and the social body is no longer determined most of all by fear. Such a transmutation is not easy since fear does not respond to reason. On the contrary, reason, which is irreducibly tied to democracy for Spinoza, must emerge through the constitution of joyful relations among the masses.

The Public Use of the Passions

While democracy has come to refer to fair principles and procedures, an equal application of law, and an equal burden of rights and responsibilities, for Spinoza it

11. This also serves to explain why one cannot just cut off the head of a tyrannical social body represented by Saddam Hussein, and expect the body not only to be grateful but to reconstitute itself spontaneously into a completely new form. Tyranny requires a tremendous amount of support in order to endure. If the masses in Iraq only needed to eliminate their ruler in order to create a new way of life, it would have been very easy to do so themselves. The body was, however, functioning to some extent, and is going to resist becoming something different, taking on a radically new state form, until the causes that committed it to tyranny in the first place are transformed. This is the lesson of Machiavelli's *Prince*, according to Spinoza.

meant ''a united body of men which corporately possesses sovereign right over everything in its power'' (2001, 177). As long as a people are ruled by sad passions, they are not a united body, and can be said not to be at war but cannot be said to be enjoying peace, ''which comes from strength of mind'' (2000, 5.4). When the sad passions rule, neither the mind nor the body can be said to be strong or united. Spinoza holds that democracy is ''the most natural form of state, approaching most closely to that freedom which nature grants to every man. For in a democratic state nobody transfers his natural right to another so completely that thereafter he is not to be consulted; he transfers it to the majority of the entire community of which he is a part'' (2001, 179). It is most natural because it is the condition and the effect of the use of humanity's great power: reason.

''Reason,'' for Spinoza, is not great by virtue of being a faculty universally endowed in each of us, which elevates us out of the brute causality of nature. Reason is, rather, the experience by which we grasp ourselves as relational beings and affirm this system of relationships as we act more effectively, powerfully, and joyfully within it. Reason is the apprehension of our existence as pervasively affective, and determined by our ''being inside'' a complex constellation of other beings. By affirming our ''being inside'' and knowing ourselves as, in fact, a site of myriad causal and affective relations, it grasps that our power to think and act is realized by virtue of a coordination of the powers of others rather than over and against them. Reason affirms that we never act or think alone, and that our strength is contingent upon the amplification and development of the strength of those around us.

Spinoza remarks famously in the *Ethics* ''that we can never bring it about that we require nothing outside ourselves to preserve our being, nor that we live without having dealings with things outside us.'' By virtue, then, of our relative weakness as well as the impossibility of living in isolation, it serves both our minds and our bodies to join with other beings, increasing our power.

> For if, for example, two individuals of entirely the same nature are joined to one another, they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one. To man, then, there is nothing more useful than man. Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body; and that all should strive together, as far as they can to preserve their being; and that all, together, should seek the common advantage of all.
>
> From this it follows that men who are governed by reason—that is, men who, from the guidance of reason, seek their own advantage—want nothing for themselves which they do not desire for other men. Hence, they are just, honest, and honorable. (1994, IVP18S)

Democracy, then, is a physical and affective condition. It is the joint action and passion of bodies by which individuals become more able to persevere in their being, more able to defend themselves against contrary forces, and, importantly, more able to recognize and incorporate those common powers.

Democracy is understood, at the same time, as an intellectual force. The body that is more powerful has as its idea a more powerful mind. In Spinoza's words:

> [T]he commonwealth that is based on reason and directed by reason is most powerful and most in control of its own right. For the right of a commonwealth is determined by the power of a people that is guided as though by a single mind. But this union of minds could in no way be achieved unless the chief aim of the commonwealth is identical with that which sound reason teaches us is the good of all men. (2000, 3.7)

The laws, aims, and constitution of the commonwealth must be in accord with reason in order to be a union of minds that directs itself according to reason. What is reasonable is that which is good for all men, which is precisely this unity, and the collective pursuit of a shared good. Moreover, such a state is not desirable because there are eternal rational principles that should be respected for their moral value. Rather, the mental and corporeal unity of a commonwealth constitutes its strength and power. It is most able to direct itself, and most able to think and act effectively, because it has constituted the ability to think and act in terms of constructive and affirmative relationships among each other and other beings rather than by promoting and amplifying corrosive encounters and affections.

This discussion of Spinoza's picture of democracy has been all too brief, and remains full of new questions to answer. What I have tried to show is that, for Spinoza, democracy requires that the people, the *demos,* are *in actuality* powerful. As Machiavelli advised, the people ought to be armed. The way to disarm the people is to galvanize corrosive relationships of fear, making them both afraid and terrifying. In order to arm them with the power to think and act, and to create an enduring and thriving social body, they need to be addressed as affective beings. This for Spinoza is rational, and it is what constitutes human freedom.

Freedom is not an escape from being affected and determined by others. Freedom emerges in and through collective association, which can only be enacted if that collectivity is not characterized primarily by fear, hatred, and anxiety. Thus, Spinoza's famous words from the *Theological-Political Treatise:*

> It follows quite clearly from my earlier explanation of the basis of the state that its ultimate purpose is not to exercise dominion nor to restrain men by fear and deprive them of independence, but on the contrary to free every man from fear so that he may live in security as far as is possible, that is, so he may best preserve his natural right to exist and act, without harm to himself and to others. It is not, I repeat, the purpose of the state to transform rational beings into beasts or puppets, but rather to enable them to develop their mental and physical faculties in safety, to use their reason without restraint and to refrain from the strife and the vicious mutual abuse that are prompted by hatred, anger or deceit. Thus the purpose of the state is, in reality, freedom. (223)

The state, then, has a responsibility, first of all, to address the passions of the people. The state so often takes its responsibility to be to secure its own power and the obedience of its people. Fear has been an economical and efficient way to subjugate the populace and maintain something that appears to be peace or security. Such peace for Spinoza, however, is profoundly unstable and suitable only to a "desert" rather than to a commonwealth. Genuine peace, on the other hand, "consists not in the absence of war but in the union or harmony of minds" (2000, 5.4). Peace,

therefore, requires a kind of ''transindividualization'' of reason. Such collective reasoning is only possible when fear ceases to be the ruling affect of the social body.

It may appear that Spinoza makes a merely negative assertion. One might read this paragraph to suggest that the role of the state is to remove the obstacle of fear hampering our natural propensity to reason. ''An affect,'' however, ''cannot be taken away or restrained except by an affect opposite to, and stronger than, the affect to be restrained'' (1994, IVP7). The state, then, cannot simply remove an object of fear and thereby free the social body from fear. Rather, the affective relationship has to be transmuted into a joyful rather than a sad passion. For Spinoza, joyful passions are by definition stronger than sad ones, even if the sad ones provoke such dramatic responses. In order to enable people to develop their reason and exercise their freedom, their hatred, anger, and fear must become love, joy, and understanding: ''Operation Enduring Freedom'' must become coextensive with ''Operation Enduring Joy'' rather than ''Operation Enduring Fear.'' In order for objects that once prompted fear to come to mean something totally different, however, a whole network of passionate relationships must be transformed.

Political philosophy and practice, from Spinoza's point of view, ought to concern the ability of (trans-) individuals to think and act freely. They must advocate individual freedom through an engagement with the material conditions of that freedom. They cannot, therefore, take individual freedom for granted as a quality or attribute of human existence. They must begin from an understanding of human beings necessarily subject to passions, such that those passions become the site of political engagement and constitution. There must be a public use of the passions, an engagement with the affective body for the public good. They must, then, seek not merely to preserve or manipulate the passions in order to achieve an empty peace. Spinozist political philosophy and practice engage the passions in order to move the political body toward its own self-understanding and self-direction. This requires a citizen to understand herself not as an individual originally endowed with freedom but as necessarily part of a composite body, which constitutes the material conditions of her thought and action. The people are simply not powerful—there is not democracy—when they are ruled by fear. To alter a well-known phrase by Foucault, Spinoza forces us to conclude that ''democracy is exercised rather than possessed.'' The power, freedom, and rationality of the multitude depend upon our ability to understand and operate as beings necessarily inside an affective field. Our freedom depends upon our ability to experience, affirm, and build a joyful social body. Why Spinoza today? Because democracy depends upon our ability to transform networks of terror into networks of joy.

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