



## CHAPTER 8

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# Hope, Hate and Indignation: Spinoza and Political Emotion in the Trump Era

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### INTRODUCTION

Americans are angry. After an economic collapse, slow recovery, and the resulting increase in inequality between economic classes, those in the dwindling middle classes are angry. The anger of many of these people has been channeled by sources like Fox News and right-wing radio, internet sites and social media into hatred of and resentment toward immigrants, refugees, Muslims, and African-Americans. Throughout the Obama presidency Donald Trump amplified some of the most fact-challenged of these propaganda organizations. As a “birther”, Trump championed the idea that Barack Obama was a Muslim born in Kenya after all evidence pointed to the contrary. This theory, however, served as an organizing tool for those who believed their country had been “taken over” by those who did not look like them and who they believed threatened their way of life. The resentment and anger, for which it was a lightning rod, was a potent political force in the 2016 election. This resentment and anger brought Donald Trump into the White House.<sup>1</sup>

Although the circumstances of the U.S. Election in 2016 are far from the 17th Century world of philosopher Spinoza, his views on the role of

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emotions in human behavior and their results for political philosophy are, I propose, relevant insofar as hope, fear, and anger are still being employed as tactics to create political agreement, and insofar as there remain humans with the capacity to feel anger, fear, and even hope.

While less well known than Hobbes or Machiavelli, Spinoza offered a new set of arguments for why political leaders should take into consideration the emotions of the populace, and indeed, to build policy and institutions to shape these emotions for the good of the state. Spinoza's views are often at odds with these better-known theorists. A key difference is Spinoza's insistence that fear and hatred are emotions that diminish both the power of individual humans and the states of which they are part.<sup>2</sup> Following from this, Spinoza proposes that the state gains its power from that of its citizens, and thus, should try to organize its policies and institutions to empower its citizens either through emotions like 'joy' or through more active participation in and knowledge of the activities of the state. Before we take Spinoza to be too naive a philosopher to take politics seriously, he also worried about the role of hope in individual lives and in politics. Hope, he argued, was a variety of fear, and as such made individuals in its grip less powerful than they might otherwise be.

In this chapter, I will set out the ideas of Spinoza on the political emotions while using the extended example of Donald Trump's campaign and early presidency. While all presidential elections arouse strong emotions, the Trump campaign and early presidency have seemed to arouse two kinds of emotions that Spinoza thought to be quite dangerous for the state, and enervating for both those who experienced them and the state of which they were a part: hatred and indignation. Before delving into these, I'll begin with an emotion that one might think would be good, namely, hope to see it as Spinoza might have: an emotion which, once disappointed, can turn into hate.

### TRUMP'S EMOTIONAL POLITICS

On the surface, one could hardly imagine two more different presidential campaigns than that of Barack Obama in 2008 and Donald Trump in 2016. Obama's campaign was built on the idea of grassroots community organizing, and explicitly campaigned on the idea of hope—that the future could be better than the past and the present.<sup>3</sup> Hope was a keyword in his 2004 keynote address to the Democratic National Convention.<sup>4</sup> Obama's book, *The Audacity of Hope*, set out a program of creating a better future and realizing the hope of inclusion through increasing public participation in democracy and in civic engagement.<sup>5</sup>

Barack Obama appealed to the hope for better times in 2008—a moment of widespread fear after a major international economic collapse. Obama offered the nation a hopeful vision of the future. He was also a candidate seemingly without a history. He had not been a politician for long before his inspiring speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. In 2016, after eight years of an obstructionist congress, a less progressive president than many were hoping for and the expansion of right-wing propaganda into mainstream media, Americans were angry.<sup>6</sup> Hope had turned to anger.

Trump's appeal to that anger was highly emotive, and ultimately successful. Trump's campaign was characterized by many as focused on fear-mongering and hate.<sup>7</sup> Trump insisted that the United States was under siege, and that threats to Americans were coming from both the outside and within from Muslim terrorists to Mexican immigrants.<sup>8</sup> His solutions were in the broadest sense 'protective' and 'exclusionary'.<sup>9</sup> To prevent these threats, Trump argued, we must ban Muslims from entering the country, restrict immigration in general, and build a border wall between the United States and Mexico.<sup>10</sup> Trump's campaign, while promising to "Make America Great Again" was more critical of the contemporary state of the United States, arguing that America needed to be "taken back".<sup>11</sup> In a campaign rally in Wisconsin, Trump argued, "This is your last chance ... to take back power from all the people who've taken it from you over so many years."<sup>12</sup> The rhetoric of taking back our country could be an innocuous campaign promise. The parties that the country has to be taken back from are not identified so that those who hear it can read into it whatever they like. However, some argue that the phrases "take America back" or referring to the country as "under siege" are so-called 'dog whistles'. Dog whistles are seemingly innocuous phrases that are associated with white nationalist organizations and support for racist policies that are socially unacceptable to back openly.<sup>13</sup> Hate groups have taken Trump's policies and statements as veiled endorsements of their activities.<sup>14</sup> Some argue that Trump's rhetoric has emboldened racists, and indeed hate crimes in the United States are rising.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, Trump has cut funding to the groups that monitor hate groups and attempt to ameliorate their influence.<sup>16</sup> After the events of August 12, 2017 in Charlottesville, Virginia, the connection between Trump and white-supremacist movement took a more direct turn, when he was slow in condemning hate groups initially, and then after a few days, appeared to offer support to the white nationalist cause.<sup>17</sup> As I write this in August 2017, these events are still developing. For the purposes of this study, I am interested in the fact

that hate, fear and indignation played a role in making Mr. Trump's campaign for President of the United States in 2016 successful.

Political psychologist Drew Westen has argued that Democrats are less successful at gauging and responding to affective politics—issues that arouse strong emotional states in citizens. In Westen's view, Democrats are not as savvy as Republicans at understanding the emotions of the electorate. Democratic candidates often take rational and measured stances on issues that are emotionally charged. While this rational or unemotional approach is lauded by other Democrats, Westen argues that this approach is ineffective among many. Westen proposes that this approach makes Democratic candidates appear untrustworthy and as individuals who do not understand the importance of an issue.<sup>18</sup> When a candidate seems to have the wrong emotional response, or no emotional response to important issues, those who are not already supporters tend to find such a candidate unappealing.<sup>19</sup> Many scholars of politics have argued that a large swath of the American public feels resentment toward minorities, angry and disconnected from American public and political life,<sup>20</sup> and disempowered in a globalizing economy. Given this, Trump's appeal to and cultivation of the anger of the multitude who voted for him is not just unsurprising, but indeed, brilliant strategically.

Trump was able to recognize, and then to gain the trust of those who, like him, felt angry and resentful about perceived changes in the United States. While some of these are economic, many have to do with cultural phenomena that have seemingly little to do with general wellbeing. Many Trump voters, while genuinely afraid of Islam and immigration, noted their anger at "political correctness" as a reason for their vote.<sup>21</sup> Trump tapped into this anger. He acknowledged and amplified this anger. With every racial slur, with every rude comment toward women, Trump gained the trust of those who wanted someone to "tell it like it is". Despite his much-documented untruth, Trump was seen by his supporters as honest for this reason: he was willing to say out loud their own hatred in a way they no longer felt comfortable doing.<sup>22</sup> Recognition is an incredibly powerful force.<sup>23</sup> Trump's acknowledgement of this anger, resentment, and petty emotions of a large group of people won him the election in 2016. Winning elections, however, is different than governing, and this may be where the efficacy of appealing to and cultivating hate diminishes. In the next section, I will examine Spinoza's view of the relative efficacy of hope and hate as emotions to use for governing. This will take us first through Spinoza's theory of the emotions, and his view of how the emotions of individuals affect the political communities of which they are parts.

## SPINOZA AND EMOTIONS

In Book Three of the *Ethics*, Spinoza begins setting out his theory of emotions. First, he proposes that there are three basic emotions: pain, pleasure and desire.<sup>24</sup> Now, desire turns out to be a bit more than an emotion, but for our purposes, the first two are the most important. Pain and pleasure are the basic emotions from which all other emotions derive. All of what we might call the ‘positive’ emotions are pleasure modified by the idea of an object, a temporal dimension, a modal dimension and a proximity dimension. This sounds complicated, but is as simple as the following: our joy for seeing our family (object) might be increased given its nearness to us in time, the degree of likeliness of this visit, and whether or not there are likely circumstances that could block this visit, etc. Love, for Spinoza, is the feeling of pleasure with the idea of an object, often a person, as the cause. This may sound bloodless to many, but it’s really just an attempt to come up with a theory of how emotions can be based on relatively few basic emotions.<sup>25</sup> Spinoza defines hope as “inconstant pleasure arising from the idea of a thing future or past, of whose outcome we are in some doubt.”<sup>26</sup> When we become more certain about the outcome of some event, our hope becomes joy should it go our way,<sup>27</sup> and disappointment should we have been wrong.<sup>28</sup> All of the positive emotions are based on pleasure relating to our idea of some object, be it an individual or event. Our ideas about that individual or event modify our degree of pleasure, and some of these modifications are significant enough to merit their own names as specific emotions. Among the positive emotions Spinoza identifies are honor, pride, esteem, joy, approbation, inclination and love.

What we might call negative emotions are all those emotions based on pain, but with the same sort of modifications as the positive emotions. Hate, for example, is defined as “pain accompanied by the idea of an external cause.”<sup>29</sup> Fear is defined as “inconstant pain arising from the idea of a thing future or past of whose outcome we are in some doubt.”<sup>30</sup> Careful readers will notice the parallel between hope and fear—each is an emotion involving inconstancy and uncertain outcomes. Hope, for Spinoza, is thus, is always intermixed with fear and thus, is a negative emotion.<sup>31</sup> Our ideas about the object that we believe cause us pain can increase that pain or diminish that pain. Should we consider something that we hate to be unfree, for example, Spinoza argues that our hatred will ebb.<sup>32</sup> Our emotions build on one another and our ideas about their objects. Should we fear something, we will hate it.<sup>33</sup> Should we hate something, we will try to

destroy it.<sup>34</sup> Spinoza defines anger as the desire to destroy that which we hate.<sup>35</sup> The negative emotions that Spinoza defines include: fear, anger, hatred, aversion, disappointment and indignation.

Thus far, I have been using the terms ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ emotion without explaining the significance of this distinction. For Spinoza, all emotions based on pleasure, insofar as they are not intermixed with emotions based on pain, express an increase in our power of acting and thinking.<sup>36</sup> They are, in a straightforward sense, good for us. All emotions based on pain, diminish our power acting and thinking, and are always bad for us.<sup>37</sup> It’s possible, for Spinoza, for us to increase our power further, through understanding the causes of our pain and pleasure. This understanding is the best way to increase our power of acting and thinking; however, emotions based on joy help us to achieve this increased power as well.<sup>38</sup>

For Spinoza, the human individual seeks to free itself from pain.<sup>39</sup> This means that, for example, when we’re confronted with something that diminishes our power, something that causes us pain, we try to imagine that thing destroyed or even act to destroy it in order to regain our sense of wellbeing or power.<sup>40</sup> In this sense, for Spinoza, pain and other emotions that are species of pain doubly enervate individual power—they diminish an individual’s power in the first place, and then require that that individual focus on their negative emotions to destroy the object which they believe causes the pain. This is why, for Spinoza, an affect like hatred can never be good.<sup>41</sup> While pain may have its place in an affective economy, hatred can never be good. Further, Spinoza insists, the emotions of hope and fear in themselves can never be good.<sup>42</sup>

For Spinoza, emotions like hatred, anger, fear and even hope diminish humans’ power of thinking and acting, leading us to make worse decisions, have less reasonable ideas than if we had emotions based on pleasure such as joy or love. Further, Spinoza insists, when our power is diminished, and when we experience the emotions of fear and anger, we tend to be at odds with one another.<sup>43</sup>

The objects of our love or hate, and our ideas about them can be incredibly complex. We can, Spinoza insists, hate love or fear just about anything,<sup>44</sup> depending on our ideas of that thing. Our ideas are often wrong, so we often hate things we should love, etc., and more to the point we often misidentify the causes of our emotions.<sup>45</sup> Our ideas about the world are shaped by those around us, and indeed, according to Spinoza we tend to emulate the emotions of those we identify with and whom we love.<sup>46</sup> Again, for Spinoza, just because we take something to be like us we

may take on their emotions and ideas as our own, but whom we take to be like us and why is an incredibly complex process. Although, for Spinoza, all other humans are like us and are beneficial for us,<sup>47</sup> he recognizes that we rarely recognize this, and come to love and hate other human beings based on a variety of contingent features<sup>48</sup> about them which may not relate to us in the ways that we think and which inspire our love or hate. Throughout Book 3 of the *Ethics*, Spinoza sets out how it is that our affects and ideas shape one another, and are shaped by what we believe others to think and to feel.<sup>49</sup> Negotiating our own affects through this process of socialization is one that can lead to error, but which also creates social groups whose likes and dislikes, emotions and ideas are shared. Even if the ideas and emotions of others are confused, being in a group, for Spinoza, is always better than being alone.<sup>50</sup> Being in a group and sharing the emotions of a group does not always mean we agree on everything. Indeed, as Spinoza argues, we can be wrong about what others think and feel about anything, and we can be wrong about what they think of us. His example of this is somewhat appropriate: “It can easily happen that a vain man may be proud and imagine that he is popular with everybody, when in fact he is obnoxious.”<sup>51</sup>

In the next section, I will set out how Spinoza’s thought about the emotions—particularly of hope, fear and indignation—work when he considers humans living together in political communities.

*It is not that important who sits in the White House if the structures of democracy are strong. If the structures of democracy are strong—you can have a madman or madwoman for four years or even eight, and then he or she is gone, and the nation’s freedoms live.*<sup>52</sup>

## EMOTIONS AND INSTITUTIONS: SPINOZA’S POLITICAL THOUGHT

Spinoza based his political philosophy on his theory of emotions<sup>53</sup> developed in the *Ethics*. We have seen above that, for Spinoza, emotions like hate and fear diminish the power of individual humans, and in the political works, he argues that although fear may be useful at times, it should be avoided given that an individual or populace overcome by fear is weak. However, while Spinoza’s sage-like figure in the *Ethics* sought individual perfection and reason, Spinoza did not seek perfection in the political realm. Spinoza is clear at the very beginning of his *Political Treatise*, that those who would seek to

perfect human nature in either governance or citizenship were dreaming of a ‘golden age’ that never existed.<sup>54</sup> We cannot rely on a leader or citizen’s virtue for the freedom or stability of a state, we need institutions that shape the emotions, ideas and actions of humans so that they can live together. In the political realm, hope and fear are the major engines of affective organization of the multitude. While both are dangerous for individuals, given that reason cannot be expected in large numbers, Spinoza agrees with Hobbes and Machiavelli that they have political utility. Spinoza insists that the best leader ought to govern with kindness, with limited appeals to hope and fear, and other passive affects like hatred. In the following section I will set out his views of how these emotions.

Hope, according to Spinoza, is a dangerous emotion for individuals. However, given the choice between hope and fear as tools of governance, Spinoza leaves open room for the use of hope. Hope, in political life, is a better tool for a government to use to coordinate its populace, because it is a species of pleasure. For individuals, it is contraindicated because of the measure of fear intermixed with this pleasure; however, pleasure beats pain in Spinoza’s calculations of the power of human emotions. Pleasure increases human power, while pain or fear diminishes it.<sup>55</sup> Thus, even a pleasure intermixed with fear is better than fear alone. Like a fearful individual, a fearful population is dangerous and weak.<sup>56</sup> Their weakness, however, does not give the state more power, but rather, gives the state an inordinate number of potential individuals to worry about while diminishing its overall power.

The weakest form of state for Spinoza is one where there are very few who govern and a large population that is governed but has no say in either advising or in making decisions in the commonwealth. This is how Spinoza understands monarchy. Monarchy, traditionally, is the rule of the one, but Spinoza argues that each monarchy is really a hidden aristocracy, since the monarch is only a single human individual, and needs help to govern. Monarchies on Spinoza’s view, have characteristic problems, namely, they exclude the multitude of citizen-subjects from rule, and thus must create ways in which to either include these individuals in government (which is what Spinoza suggests), but more often tend to try to find ways to diminish the power of this multitude, so that the monarch need worry less about the development of powerful individuals, factions, or even general revolt.<sup>57</sup> Diminishing the power of one’s people, however, diminishes the power of the state. If the state weakens the multitude, this same multitude will be too weak to act collectively or to carry out state

policies. Should the state need to, for example, counter foreign invasion, raise capital for infrastructure, or prepare for and recover from natural disasters, the multitude of individuals whose power has been diminished to make them innocuous, also makes them too weak and disorganized to act together as successfully as they might otherwise have done. Weakening one's own population may allow one (or a few) to rule without worry, but they cannot govern effectively or hope for any large-scale collective action or collaboration. This is one way in which to work out how fear weakens the state according to Spinoza's view. Fear diminishes the potential power of a state, which is held in the persons which make it up and their manner of organization. By making citizen subjects fearful and suspicious of one another—a natural outgrowth of fear—the collective power of the state is weakened.<sup>58</sup>

Disappointed hope leads to fear, hatred and indignation.<sup>59</sup> This indignation can lead to what we might call 'nihilism', but what Spinoza characterized as having "nothing to hope or fear from the state".<sup>60</sup> Those who believe that they have nothing to hope or fear from the state may not be correct—they may gain all sorts of advantages from the state or they may indeed have much to lose if the state were to act against them—however, our beliefs are not determined by what is the case. The feeling of indignation, for Spinoza, combined with the belief that one has nothing to hope or fear from the state, creates a citizenry that poses the most serious danger.<sup>61</sup> A ruler who evokes the indignation of the majority puts the very existence of the state in jeopardy. While fear and hate diminish the power of the individuals in a state and the state itself, indignation threatens the very status of a state.

While Spinoza is ambivalent about the usefulness of hope, he is unequivocal about the destructive power of hate and anger. Hate, for Spinoza, is always bad. Thus, if a political figure seeks to appeal to anger, this is always a bad or destructive action. That's not to say it wouldn't be successful—in the short term. Indeed, hatred of something can be shared. The object of shared hatred can briefly unify a group, and their shared power can be used to destroy the object of their hatred. However, hatred is not a force that unifies for long. Spinoza recognizes that anger against a common enemy can, briefly, be a source of political unity.<sup>62</sup> However, he argues it is not a good basis for collective association.<sup>63</sup> As hate is a species of pain, it weakens individuals, and thus, weakens the groups of which they are part.

According to Sharp, Spinoza insists that, “Peace, or political unity, depends upon organizing our social relations to counter one of the most prevalent emotions among human beings: *odium*”<sup>64</sup> Odium, or hatred, as an individual emotion enervates an individual’s power to think and act, and as a collective emotion, or as a way of organizing a group, makes the group weaker than they would otherwise be. Recently, philosopher Myisha Cherry has argued that anger can be good. Cherry argues that a species of anger, which she calls “moral anger” is an important motivator to political action and as a proper response to, for example, injustice.<sup>65</sup> Another source of arguments in favor of anger as ‘good’ or at least ‘proper’ can be found or derived from the literature in ethics on the fittingness of emotions.<sup>66</sup> Feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye has argued that anger, particularly women’s anger, has been repressed, and that to free repressed anger is genuinely liberatory.<sup>67</sup> For Spinoza, no passive emotion like hatred can ever be liberatory. However, understanding one’s emotions and their causes can be. Indeed, for Spinoza, knowing ourselves as part of the natural world, with emotions that are caused often by external forces that are also natural, is the only real way in which people become free and how we overcome hatred—but that is another matter.<sup>68</sup> Reason, like perfection, is not a requirement of political participation for Spinoza.

If we cannot expect reason in either our leaders or our citizenry, how can we expect to have a stable state? Spinoza does not think that we can make people live wisely, but we can “guide” them to feelings that conduce to the greater good of the commonwealth by laying a good foundation for the state.<sup>69</sup> States derive their power from the individuals that make them up and the way they are coordinated or how they agree. Widespread indignation is a sign, for Spinoza, that governments have failed to do so. For some scholars, Spinoza’s notion of indignation is akin to a concept of resistance. It is the point at which human power can take down the state. Indignation may be a cousin of Cherry’s notion of moral anger. Filippo Del Lucchese proposes that the notion of indignation indicates that Spinoza believed that people sought an incorruptible state.<sup>70</sup> Thus, when something appears to shake the foundations of a state, the people become indignant. Indignation is the limit of the power of the state.<sup>71</sup> For Spinoza, human power always makes up the power of the state.<sup>72</sup> For Spinoza, the state has no juridical limit to its power. More extreme even than Hobbes’ view: for Spinoza the state is in the state of nature. Nothing limits its right other than its power.<sup>73</sup> The only limit to the power of the state is the

indignation of the people. The power of the state is limited by what the people will allow. Their indignation is resistance to the state. Spinoza derives from this a prescription to any state leader or functionary: if one wishes a state to persist, one must avoid creating the kinds of laws that will cause the people indignation, and avoid the kind of behavior that will rile up the multitude against the state.<sup>74</sup> These are two separate suggestions, based on the idea that the indignation of the people is a (and perhaps the only) limit on the state's use of power. When the hatred of the populace is focused on the state or the rulers of the government, this is certainly one way in which the state can topple, but this is hardly a good result for Spinoza. Spinoza sought ways to create strong political institutions;<sup>75</sup> he did not hope for their destruction. The essential insight of these thinkers, and the work of Alexandre Matheron on which they are based, is the idea that, for Spinoza, the limit of the power of the state is the power of the multitude.<sup>76</sup> The limit of this power is what the multitude of individuals will agree to, and their collective indignation marks the limit of that to which they will agree. Like the quotation above from Wolf et al, for Spinoza, strong democratic institutions can withstand a bad leader or vicious citizens. If a state cannot rein in a bad leader, then its institutions have failed.<sup>77</sup>

The state, and its leaders, can act only insofar as the people allow. That is, when the people become indignant—angry at the leaders of the state—the power of the state and its leaders are diminished. Spinoza sets out some prudential advice for leaders of a state, based on his undemanding of human emotions and how the most destructive of these emotions are aroused. For Spinoza, indignation is caused by the widespread perception that the leaders are acting in any one of the following ways:

- Acting viciously: that is, the leader is or has been found to indulge in vices, illegal acts, corruption, or other acts that are widely condemned.<sup>78</sup>
- Violating the norms of the state. Even when the leader is not engaging in illegal or vicious acts, they may violate the political, social or even basic comportment norms of the state. The most serious of these is when a leader violates the basic principles or fundamental laws of a state.<sup>79</sup>
- Removing basic freedoms. When a ruler attempts to rescind a freedom or a right that is basic to the citizens.<sup>80</sup>

Any leader who does the above, or who is thought to have done the above is in danger of arousing the indignation of the multitude of citizens, thereby losing power and undermining the power of the state.

### TRUMP: FROM HATE TO INDIGNATION

Indignation, the anger of the multitude toward the rulers and institutions of government, is a perilous situation for any state.<sup>81</sup> As I write this, the approval ratings for Trump are 38 per cent.<sup>82</sup> The disapproval rate is 54.7 per cent.<sup>83</sup> Hate groups are emboldened, the leader of North Korea believes that the President of the United States has declared war,<sup>84</sup> and Trump has called for the firing of dozens of players in the National Football League.<sup>85</sup> Between the hatred and anger candidate Trump used and cultivated to get elected and the anger and indignation mounting against Trump as President, these are dangerous times for the United States. Do we have Spinozist reasons to worry about Trump? In a word: yes.

Trump's campaign and his early presidency have made extensive use of fear and hatred. For Spinoza, to the extent a leader uses fear and hatred, he weakens the civil state. This can be elaborated in a number of ways: with hate crimes on the rise, we have more violence and to an extent social peace and trust are eroded. Angrier citizens are weaker citizens. Weaker citizens lead to a weaker state, on Spinoza's view. Perhaps more worrying is that Trump's actions have fulfilled the criteria listed above for the kinds of things that tend to arouse the indignation of the people. Trump's flouting of norms of presidential comportment through texting national policy decisions, false assertions, calling for the firing of private citizens, name calling, nepotism, failing to release his taxes, and failing to strongly disconnect his personal financial dealings from policy have all put Trump in Spinoza's danger zone for arousing indignation.

Now, some may say, we certainly have had presidents who have done similarly outrageous things; however, the proposal here is just that these are norms that have been flouted. For Spinoza, social norms shape our attitudes.<sup>86</sup> To be part of a society is to, generally speaking, accept and expect that the norms of one's community are followed. Thus, when any norm is flouted any and all members of the community generally notice this, and excluding previous commitments, will generally condemn the flouting of a community norm. Some with the previous commitment to support the norm-flouter, might be happy about the flouting of a norm. We see this with Trump supporters who argue that his use of Twitter for calling out private citizens shows that he will not take an insult lying down, etc.

Another set of worries for Spinoza is the leader who tries to undermine or significantly change the political institutions of the civil state. In this, I think Trump may be in a worrying position with respect at least to the right to vote and the right to the privacy. This is a norm against which states have fought back, when the Trump administration requested sensitive voter information.<sup>87</sup> For others, the Trump administration's continuing attack on immigrants and attempts to exclude immigrants and visitors to the United States based on their religion has undermined crucial features of the U.S. Constitution—what Spinoza would understand as the fundamental laws of the state. Indeed, as of the writing of this, each version of the Trump administration's rules restricting immigration and entry into the U.S. based on religion have been rejected as unconstitutional.<sup>88</sup> This shows that there is widespread recognition that many of the policies and strategies of the Trump administration conflict with basic ideals, norms and values. These conflicts have led to people disregarding (or overturning) these policies. This, for Spinoza, is the foundation of indignation, and the signs that the power of the state and its rulers is diminishing.

### FROM INDIGNATION TO RATIONAL HOPE

Where do we go from hate and indignation? Does Spinoza provide a solution to states that are mired in indignation, anger and hate? The short answer is yes. Indeed, Spinoza's turn to politics was inspired by the dark days leading up to the murder of the architects of the United Province's Golden Age.

In the mid-1660s, Spinoza set aside working on his book the *Ethics*, to try and write a book about politics. He wrote to his friends and colleagues that he felt he needed to intervene into the debates of his own time, which he felt were becoming dangerously violent.<sup>89</sup> What emerged from this was the *Theological-Political Treatise*. In this work, Spinoza seeks to argue that freedom to philosophize should be allowed both for the stability of the state and for the safety of religion. In this, he was arguing against the grain of his own time. The United Provinces was in the middle of a constitutional crisis, and many in the United Provinces worried that the unfettered investigation into the natural world might challenge religious, political and social norms.<sup>90</sup> Spinoza worried that Calvinist ministers were engaging in politics from the pulpit, fomenting anti-scientific and anti-Republican sentiments. His fears were warranted. In 1672 the Republican leaders of Amsterdam were killed and mutilated in the streets of The Hague, just

blocks from Spinoza's home.<sup>91</sup> With this ultimate act of barbarism, as Spinoza saw it, he finished the *Ethics* and turned to write the *Political Treatise*, in which he offers a chastened view of politics, but one which the central aim of all political institutions is to understand and coordinate the emotions of the multitude of passionate individuals who could either form a destructive mob or a flourishing state.<sup>92</sup>

For Spinoza, the only solution to a state organized or disorganized through fear and indignation is a turn toward democracy. For Spinoza, this meant massive democratic councils, where individuals could build collective agreement without having to trust that anyone else was looking out for their interests. Fear undermines social trust.<sup>93</sup> For Spinoza, rebuilding social trust requires institutions that do not require much trust in the political system or in representatives of the whole. For Spinoza, even advisory councils—non-decision-making bodies—could be effective in creating the kind of political consensus that would be strong enough to build trust in the state.<sup>94</sup> Spinoza argued that these councils should be large—massive really—large enough that they could involve the participation of as many citizens as possible.<sup>95</sup> He believed that this active participation of regular, not necessarily virtuous citizens was the best way of recreating a stable political culture and a strong state.<sup>96</sup>

It's important here to note that while Spinoza argued in favor of large deliberative councils, he did not believe that those participating were necessarily rational or virtuous. He believed that any agreement made by such a large group of imperfect individuals would be better than anything any particular one of them could devise. Such an agreement would be better, Spinoza thought, both on its individual merits and because the deliberative process created stakeholders of those deliberating. Given the tendency for deliberation to be interpreted as rational communication, I prefer using the term “communication” to emphasize that Spinoza did not rely on the rationality of any particular member of the group to yield an agreement that could be considered rational.

For Spinoza, recovering from a state of fear required massive political participation. This participation was meant to create hope in each individual that his or her desires might be realized through participation. Hope, as we've seen, is an unstable emotion. However, in this circumstance, Spinoza proposed that hope merely brings participants to the democratic table. The process of democracy—communication, advising and creating new agreements for the future of the state—creates new affective alignments for those participating. This process rebuilds citizens as it rebuilds the state or political community—ideally on firmer ground than hope alone.

If one can see echoes of the Obama campaign's attempt to build community through community service and volunteering, that's no mistake. The idea of active democratic participation runs from Spinoza to Marx to the 2008 Obama campaign.<sup>97</sup> This is not to say that Obama is a Marxist, but rather that they share the idea that building community capacity inoculates populations against the corrosive effects of hate and fear. The failure of the Obama program of active democratic participation does not undermine the fact that such an approach is, according to Spinoza's theory, the only way to effectively rebuild social trust, and thereby the power of a state.

This passage from the *Political Treatise* is particularly apt:

And what we have written will, perhaps, be received with derision by those who limit to the populace only the vices which are inherent in all mortals ... as for the populace being devoid of truth and judgment, that is nothing wonderful, since the chief business of the dominion is transacted behind its back, and it can but make conjectures from the little, which cannot be hidden. For it is an uncommon virtue to suspend one's judgment. So it is supreme folly to wish to transact everything behind the backs of the citizens, and to expect that they will not judge ill of the same, and will not give everything an unfavorable interpretation. For if the populace could moderate itself, and suspend its judgment about things with which it is imperfectly acquainted, or judge rightly of things by the little it knows already, it would surely be more fit to govern, than to be governed. But, as we said, all have the same nature. All grow haughty with rule, and cause fear if they do not feel it, and everywhere truth is generally transgressed by enemies or guilty people; especially where one or a few have mastery, and have respect in trials not to justice or truth, but to amount of wealth.

The *Political Treatise*, as anyone who has read it will attest, is a fairly disappointing book. It was written after Spinoza had lost his youthful hope in the possibilities of his political present, and after he had witnessed turbulent political events that had been unthinkable. The writer of the *Political Treatise* is a chastened political philosopher, who can no longer write about people and about democracy as he once did in the *Theological-Political Treatise*—a book that looks positively upbeat in its hopefulness about the naturalness and inevitability of democracy. However chastened, the writer of the *Political Treatise* is still a democrat. He still thinks that the only way to seek peace is to include as many people as possible. He argues in the passage above that those who would deride the populace should not—since human nature is everywhere the same, echoing his dictum from the TTP

that good citizens are not born, they are made.<sup>98</sup> Thus, the ignorance, foolishness, and violence of the multitude is to be expected. They are ignorant of the workings of the state, because these workings are hidden from them—they take no active part in it, so they have no knowledge of how things work. What little they do know may be false, inflammatory or both. So, it is no wonder that they act badly. Blaming people for acting badly, when their actions could have been avoided is not just bad form, it's shirking responsibility to engage and include the populace.

I take from this passage and Spinoza's writings in general two clear messages: (1) If we seek truth, enlightenment, freedom or salvation, we must not deride those elements of human nature that seem to bar us from attaining them—our emotions, our tendency to mistake consequence for cause or to believe other falsities, and our desires. Neither can we deride the emotions of others—the hate, anger and fear that motivate their political choices needs to be understood. Instead of judging and bemoaning our collective fate, we must try to understand our emotions, desires, and ways of thinking and knowing as if they were 'rocks and stones'—that is, fully intelligible and morally neutral objects of inquiry. This is true not just for our own emotions, desires and minds, but also for those of the 'multitude' or aggregation of other humans among whom we live. Rather than fearing or hating them, or deriding their judgment and passions, we must understand them. We must understand their emotions, their beliefs and their desires. These may be odious to us, they may seem ridiculous or just false, but if we do not understand them, we can never change their minds or improve their circumstances. (2) The second lesson I take from Spinoza is as follows: for our own sake, that is, for our own enlightenment, empowerment and freedom, we must do just that—improve the minds and circumstances of the multitude among which we live.<sup>99</sup> Most importantly, the lesson from Spinoza seems to be that to empower the multitude requires that we create institutions that include them, that allow them to communicate their beliefs, emotions, desires and interests to as many others as possible.

Following Spinoza, our aims must be to improve and not perfect—since this is impossible. Our aims must be to understand, and intervene carefully to build institutions that foster empowerment in regular, imperfect, passionate humans. These institutions will be communicative and participatory, and they must include as many as possible. The lesson of Spinoza's life and work, for us, in the time of Trump is to retain our belief in democracy by working to make it stronger, more inclusive, and more

participatory. In order to avoid tyrants and fools for leaders, we need strong, educated, and healthy citizens. This, from a Spinozist point of view, is the work to be done in a time of anger, indignation and hate.

## NOTES

1. Nearly every U.S. citizen has a view on how Donald Trump won the election of 2016. I am not proposing here a complete forensic investigation of the circumstances of the election. My account is consistent with a host of other causes: foreign intervention into the election and the role of the GOP changes to its primary and caucus rules, gerrymandering, the usual party-change in the white house after 8 years of a Democrat in charge, etc. I seek only to address the role of emotion in the recent election, and to understand how it might be understood in terms of Spinoza's theory of the role of emotions in politics.
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