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## Collective Nobility: Spinoza and the Politics of Emotion

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COLLECTIVE NOBILITY: SPINOZA  
AND THE POLITICS OF EMOTION

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Philosophy  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The intent of this thesis is to examine Spinoza's philosophy of emotion as it relates to groups of individuals, or collectives. These groups, especially political collectives such as nation-states, are evaluated through Spinozist understandings of virtue, nobility, and blessedness. From this analysis, a novel concept of "collective nobility" is used to create philosophical guidance for the emotional dimensions of politics and state action. Drug policy is used as a case study to understand how emotion influences policymaking and vice versa, both negatively (as in the United States) and positively (as in Portugal).

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Spinoza and the Centrality of Emotional Ethics .....	8
Substance, Will, and Virtue: Spinoza’s Ethical Metaphysics .....	9
Bondage, Freedom, Affect: Spinoza’s Philosophy of Emotion .....	20
<b>Chapter 2</b> .....	<b>28</b>
The Political Dimensions of Spinozist Affect Theory .....	28
Collective Affect and Collective Nobility .....	29
Political Collectives and Governance Through Nobility .....	42
<b>Chapter 3</b> .....	<b>48</b>
Global Drug Policy: An Affective Analysis .....	48
The War on Drugs – American Responses to Drug Use .....	50
Decriminalization and Humanization: Drug Policy in Portugal .....	57
Sketching the Future: Comparative Analysis .....	62
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>65</b>
Affective Policy and Active Collectives .....	65
Collective Nobility and the Future: Areas for Potential Application .....	68
Liberation and Freedom in Spinoza’s Nobility .....	71
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>74</b>

## Introduction

In what has been dubbed the “affective turn,”<sup>1</sup> recent work focusing on the philosophy of emotion and affect has flourished. This stands in contrast to much of the history of Western philosophy, where emotion had previously been sidelined as being separate from and outside of “reason,” with “being emotional” considered to be greatly at odds with “being reasonable.” In particular, the growing presence of affect theory has enabled analyses of politics and public life from an affective lens. This means examining how emotions, not just rationality, shape and contribute to political decisions – not just how voters vote, but also how policies are crafted and implemented by lawmakers. However, even as this work has begun to flourish, the great dualistic antagonism between emotion and reason remains an obstacle to the conversation between affect theory and the traditionally consequentialist realm of policy analysis, which focuses on policies being good or bad for their empirical effects. Without considering the fact that policies are not merely expressions of an emotionless reason but are instead created and implemented by emotional beings, it is difficult to understand both *why* some policies can be passed over others and also how the consequences of those policies are evaluated. Thus, in order to have a meaningful discussion of policymaking, it’s important to ask ourselves the following general question: How can theory of emotion inform policy analysis?

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<sup>1</sup> Steven D. Brown and Ian Tucker, “Eff the Ineffable,” In *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 233.

In order to respond to this question, I turn to the work of Benedict de Spinoza as a way to offer a potential answer. Spinoza is particularly relevant thanks to his thoroughly developed and thought-out theory of emotion and, critically, that he offers not just critique but also solutions for how we can reorient our emotional life in a fashion that would produce better decisions, better policy, and, ultimately, freer people. Thus, the central question of the thesis can be refined: Can Spinoza's affect theory be understood at the collective level, and, if so, how can we use it to analyze policy? By this I mean that we will explore whether or not Spinoza's arguments about how individuals experience emotions can be expanded to include analysis of how groups of people experience emotions, from groups as small as a crowd to as large as the entire body politic. If, as I will argue, we can indeed do so, we can then use these "collective" emotions to understand how populations choose to govern themselves through government policy and how the emotions felt by these groups contribute to shaping that policy. In exploring this question, I argue that Spinoza sees the potential for a politics that takes is both affective *and*, simultaneously, based in reason. I further seek to understand whether this synthesis can be extended to the collective level in the same vein as other work in affect theory in the past. Finally, I undertake an exploration of how Spinozist affect theory can be used to analyze and inform policy discussions by reviewing key case studies in contemporary policymaking on issues such as the drug war and criminal justice.

In Chapter 1, I begin with a textual analysis of Spinoza's *Ethics* to explain Spinoza's affect theory, including his synthesis of reason and affect in the "active"

emotions of fortitude, nobility, and courage. Central to this theory is the distinction between “passive” and “active” emotions. For Spinoza, our mind can possess inadequate and adequate ideas. In the former case, our minds are passive and liable to be acted upon; in the latter case, our minds are active.<sup>2</sup> In terms of affect, passive affects are those which result from external causes – external causes that become fixed in our mind through our inadequate ideas. For example, Spinoza notes that hatred is pain accompanied by an external cause; the pain felt by the subject is associated with something, resulting in the subject hating that thing.<sup>3</sup> This understanding of ‘passive’ affects is critical for Spinoza’s overall vision of human freedom, as he notes, “Man’s lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects I call bondage.”<sup>4</sup> When a person’s action is easily controlled by external causes, they cannot possibly be free – instead, they will be enslaved to whatever thing causes their affective state. For Spinoza, active emotions are those that become freed from external causes – while we cannot hope to be unemotional, through reason we can hope to be less affected by this sort of emotional bondage.

I argue for the significance and centrality of this affect theory to Spinoza’s overall conception of the word “ethics.” I also forward a key distinction between Spinoza’s affect theory and many other theorists: notably, that Spinoza’s theory is descriptive *and*

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<sup>2</sup> E3p1. Note that throughout this paper I shall refer to Elwes’ translation of Spinoza’s *Ethics* (1883) and follow the standard style for citing Spinoza’s *Ethics*, where ‘E’ stands for the part of *Ethics*, ‘p’ for proposition, ‘s’ for scholium, ‘c’ for corollary, ‘d’ for definition, ‘l’ for lemma, ‘app’ for appendix, and ‘DNB’ for ‘Digression on the Nature of Bodies’.

<sup>3</sup> E3p7.

<sup>4</sup> E4 preface.

prescriptive. I argue that for Spinoza, the control of the passions and the development of active emotions are a critical component of realizing human freedom – any other attempt at theorizing what we *should* do is of no particular value in a world where we are still primarily enslaved to our passions. Furthermore, I note that Spinoza’s affective project is an attempt at articulating a critical moral dimension to emotion, not just a practical discussion on how one might be less passive. In particular, I will consider his association of activity and understanding with virtue and goodness, and his association of passivity and a lack of understanding with badness.

In Chapter 2, I begin the exploration of Spinoza’s affect theory at a collective level by bringing it into conversation with modern research on how affective states can overtake a crowd, such as in a mob. By examining various sources of Spinoza scholarship, I conclude that Spinoza’s conception of affects can be applied to groups as well as individuals. This is because Spinoza’s affects are formed within bodies and modes – but while these bodies are traditionally represented as human, the union of humans forms a new body much like the union of organs forms a human. Thus, I argue that the generation of affect in social bodies and collectivities is often responsible for guiding the behavior of groups of humans. The strength of these collective passions enables human bondage through collective passivity – large groups can be quickly overtaken by inadequate understandings of a situation, resulting in undesirable passive affects at a massive scale. As groups develop affect in response to external causes, those causes begin to exercise control over them. This is critical for the larger discussion of how Spinoza’s affect theory allows us to understand politics – if voters, for

example, can be made to hate one group or another, they will be more likely to support policies that target that group. Rather than merely pointing out that manipulating voters is bad and should not be done, it would behoove us to question how we could inoculate the body politic from such manipulation. I argue here that Spinoza's affective project provides a perfect starting point for doing so, as much of his work in the *Ethics* already discusses how humanity, through reason, might free itself from being so passive and easily controlled by external causes.

In Chapter 3, I take the American criminal justice system, and particularly the war on drugs, as a case study from which to understand the political nature of collective affect. I argue that the worst excesses of the drug war can be understood through Spinozist affect theory. Returning to the earlier definition of hatred as pain accompanied by an external cause, the *pain* of the drug epidemic was strongly identified with the *external cause* of drug users and dealers, resulting in hateful and angry states of affect directed toward those people. Spinoza notes that those who envision the destruction of the object of their hatred will inevitably derive pleasure from that destruction,<sup>5</sup> and, in similar ways, the images of incarcerated drug addicts provided a pleasurable salve to the wounds caused by the drug war. As a result, the state machinery lashed out toward these individuals in order to fulfill the desire for vengeance created by the passions. I also argue that this identification of pain with persons often occurs concomitantly with

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<sup>5</sup> E3p20.

efforts which seek to identify certain communities as “threatening” while other communities are identified as “victims.”

Following the discussion of American policy, I again turn to a case study to help explicate the central argument of the thesis by analyzing the positive consequences of active emotions rather than the negative consequences of passive emotions. This section undertakes a deeper exploration of nobility’s effects at a social level, notably by arguing that it can play a key role in the development of a more empathetic civil society that is less constrained by the passions. I contrast Portuguese drug policy, which treats drug use as a health epidemic rather than an issue of criminality, with American drug policy both in its affective orientation toward drug use but also in its long-term effects on populations. I also attempt to forward an understanding of Portuguese drug policy as a policy decision rooted in nobility rather than the passions, an example of the synthesis of affect and reason applied to policymaking.

In the conclusion, I take the lessons learned from these case studies and attempt to generalize them by explaining how Spinozist affect theory creates a uniquely beneficial lens both for the analysis of policy and the analysis of the politics necessary to create those policies. With the creation of this lens, I argue for collective nobility as an alternative model for approaching politics. This model prizes the development of active emotions not just among a select few individuals, but within the entire body politic. It is this collective nobility that I believe functions as the primary original contribution of this thesis, one that seeks to understand the political as an aggregate of individual affects and, following that, seeks to change the political by changing those affects on a

collective scale. In the conclusion I also posit that Spinozist affect theory is not merely a descriptive tool for understanding politics, but a *liberatory* tool that enables human freedom by helping produce nobility at a collective level.

Finally, I conclude by roughly sketching out the contours of where work still needs to be done in the utilization of Spinozist affect theory both as philosophy and as politics. I focus here mainly on remaining arenas for policy analysis and how the state can center the emotional life of its citizens in its policymaking decisions. In this way, I hope to prove that the model provided by the thesis can help guide analysis and provoke questions for many facets of social organization.

# Chapter 1

## Spinoza and the Centrality of Emotional Ethics

Many philosophy curricula gloss over parts three and four of Spinoza's *Ethics*, preferring to instead focus on Spinoza's theology, metaphysics, and work on freedom. Nevertheless, Spinoza himself arrives to the fifth part of his work – a treatise on freedom – only after a lengthy consideration of human bondage in Part Four; after all, without a clear idea of an opposite condition of 'bondage', it becomes difficult to clearly conceptualize when one is free and when one is not free. Part Four itself relies heavily on the explanations and analyses of the emotions made in Part Three in order to lead to its overall conclusion that human bondage is an *affective* bondage. I will attempt to contribute to the resolution of this oversight by recontextualizing Spinoza's project of freedom through reason in light of his affect theory.

It may also be instructive to reflect on Spinoza's choice of name for his work. In selecting the name *Ethics*, Spinoza was making a conscious decision with regard to how he wished to communicate the primary subject of the work. Rather than using a name referential to God, divinity, nature, or freedom, Spinoza chose to emphasize the ethics implied by his philosophical system. In that case, it is worth considering how, precisely, Spinoza envisioned the *Ethics* informing the way we live our lives.<sup>6</sup> By

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Strawser, *Kierkegaard and the Philosophy of Love* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 3.

outlining what these ethics actually are and connecting them to contemporary case studies, this thesis aims to provide an argument for the value of seeing Spinoza's ethics as the centerpiece of the whole work.

To complete this analysis, I will begin in the following section by outlining a basic explanation of Spinoza's metaphysics in order to ground the following discussion. Then, I will turn more properly to Spinoza's affect theory by explaining how he sees the affects and how they relate to the ethical considerations laid about by Spinoza throughout his work. Altogether, it is my aim that this chapter will provide a conceptual foundation for the arguments I will make for the existence and importance of collective nobility in Chapter 2.

### **Substance, Will, and Virtue: Spinoza's Ethical Metaphysics**

Though Spinoza's metaphysics are not the primary area of discussion for this thesis, it is still important to begin with a brief explanation of how Spinoza's system of philosophy sees reality. It will have a large bearing both on how Spinoza's affect theory is traditionally applied (to individuals) and how it will be applied in this particular thesis (to the collective).

The first critical component of Spinozist metaphysics is that he sees all things as being part of one singular substance: God.<sup>7</sup> For Spinoza, this God is not the traditional

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<sup>7</sup> E1p15.

conception of an omnipotent, personified Abrahamic God, but rather God-as-Nature. So significant was this break from tradition that it is perhaps Spinoza's best-known argument – it is so central to understanding Spinozist metaphysics that Hasana Sharp sees fit to explain it on the first page of her book *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*, writing, “Spinoza unequivocally rejects anthropomorphic portraits of God as a master artisan, legislator, commander, or king.”<sup>8</sup> In place of these anthropomorphic conceptions of God, Spinoza conceives of the totality of nature as being equivalent to the divine, rather than the divine being separate from or transcendent to nature. This essential divine substance of the universe has infinite attributes,<sup>9</sup> attributes which when modified constitute individual modes – each of the individual things in the universe. Indeed, all individual things in existence are ultimately mere modifications of God's substance.<sup>10</sup>

This general model of the universe has a few very important implications: the first is the rejection of the concept of transcendent substance that lies implicit in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic philosophical traditions. Spinoza's model of metaphysics forecloses the potential for souls/minds which exist *outside* the realm of everyday experience – bringing the mind into the realm of nature and subject to the same influences as the rest of it. Though Spinoza later argues for the immortality of the mind,<sup>11</sup> which may seem reminiscent of notions of eternal and transcendent souls, the

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<sup>8</sup> Hasana Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>9</sup> E1p11.

<sup>10</sup> E1p25c.

<sup>11</sup> E5p23.

most significant argument for the purposes of this thesis is not the mind's existence as a vulnerable and precarious entity, but rather its being bound by the same laws that undergird all other entities in Spinoza's metaphysics. Spinoza writes that will "requires a cause by which it should be conditioned to exist and act," and further that it relates to God in the same manner as all natural phenomena.<sup>12</sup> As such, we might see human will and intellect, not as free and independent forces acting in a realm apart from and aside from nature, but rather as being part of the same chain of causality as the rest of nature. This will be critical as part of our later discussion of the affects.

The second major implication from this metaphysical model, which follows from the first, is the negation of free will. The human mind is but one mode of God, and subject to the same interplay of modes as all other modes are. Like a ball rolling down a hill does not choose to roll but is caused to do so by gravity, so the mind does not think or will on its own but only does so as a result of an incredibly vast array of causal chains.<sup>13</sup> Sharp writes, "Spinoza's naturalism denies human exceptionalism in any form. Like any other thing in nature, humans are corporeal and ideal, ineluctably immersed in a system of cause and effect,"<sup>14</sup> and, as a result, we can understand human behavior the way we understand natural behavior. To understand fully the later pieces of this thesis, it is key to understand the mindset that human thought and will arise as natural phenomena in *exactly the same way* that, for example, the motion of the wind arises as

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<sup>12</sup> E1p32c2.

<sup>13</sup> E2p48.

<sup>14</sup> Sharp, *Politics of Renaturalization*, 1.

a natural phenomenon. There is nothing unique about the emergence of human thought in Spinozist metaphysics.

It is here that one might anticipate the first of what are sure to be several objections to the overall argument of this thesis. One might argue that Spinoza is working within an outdated model of physics which sees reality as strictly deterministic – and further, one may point to more contemporary models of physics which incorporate evidence of seemingly non-deterministic events. To provide a simple explanation, traditional deterministic theories of physics (such as the one that Spinoza seems to assume in the *Ethics*) see the universe as extremely mechanistic, acting in accordance with the principle of cause-and-effect. As such, in theory, one with universal and perfect information should be able to predict the future with absolute certainty simply by tracing the effects originating from causes. Quantum physics seems to challenge this, with some events seemingly possessing genuinely probabilistic properties (i.e., doing the exact same thing a hundred times will produce a distribution of varying results, rather than the exact same result as one would expect in classical physics) rather than being linearly deterministic. As such, most contemporary physicists no longer believe the future to be concretely pre-determined by the effects of past events.

However, rather than be sidetracked by an attempt to prove the complete legitimacy of Spinoza's deterministic theology and metaphysics in the face of this evidence, I would argue that its *absolute* truth, on a universal level, is not relevant for our purposes. Instead, as we are chiefly concerned with human behavior, we may offer two responses to this objection. The first is that what we might call a "Newtonian" model

of physics, which views the universe as predictable on the basis of causality, is still considered to be generally reliable for everyday phenomena, with quantum probability only coming to play at the very smallest scale of reality (and in a few select macroscopic phenomena). The second, and perhaps more important response, is that these events are still deterministic in one major sense: there is no aspect of *choice* involved, and the outcome still emerges as the result of a cause. For instance, if flipping a coin were non-deterministic (i.e., there was no way to determine which side a coin would land on if flipped), it would still be absurd to claim the coin was *choosing* to be heads or tails. Further, we might argue that the only reason the coin landed on either side was because it was flipped in the first place. Similarly, human behavior could be at some level probabilistic, but that does not imply the existence of a free will that makes choices transcendent to the chain of causality inherent to nature. Rather, it simply means that if we were to replay the same set of circumstances repeatedly, it may be possible for the human subject in question to act differently – not as a result of choice, but as a result of chance. Though the existence of probabilistic phenomena *does* violate Spinozist metaphysics, which holds that all things happen necessarily, it does *not* cause any significant change to the lessons about human behavior that are developed out of this metaphysics later in the text for the aforementioned reasons.

With this objection out of the way, we might turn to yet another key component of Spinozist metaphysics: the idea that things principally aim to persist in their own being.

<sup>15</sup> For Spinoza, each mode is a determinate expression of the attributes of God, and, further, an expression of God's power. Each thing uses its power to strive for its own continuance, and as such, we might say that a thing's endeavor for its own existence constitutes the *essence* of what it is.<sup>16</sup> We might say, following this, that a rock's essence is its aim to continue in its rock-ness, and that each rock is a rock because of its persistence in said rock-ness (stillness, hardness, etc.). When a rock is fashioned into a stone structure by humans, it is not doing this as part of *its* endeavor, though it is clearly capable of being part of a structure. Instead, it has been caused to fill this role by some other mode (in this case, humans). Nonetheless, within the constraints of it being part of this structure, it persists in its rock-ness – and, as a result, it becomes a reliable building material. This may seem like a rather obvious observation, that things are what they are and continue to be so, but it quickly reveals itself to have profound implications when we begin to consider it in the context of more complex phenomena.

In Part Four of the *Ethics*, Spinoza takes this concept and uses it to analyze the mind in particular. Here, Spinoza sees the essence of the mind as *understanding*, i.e., when a mind is acting in accordance with its mind-ness, it is because it understands. If a mind were to understand nothing at all, it would not be active and instead be dominated entirely by external causes, as the mind is only moved to action on the basis of its understanding.<sup>17</sup> As such, this sort of mind could be said to not be a mind at all. It is from these considerations that a picture of how Spinoza envisions ethics emerges. For

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<sup>15</sup> E3p6.

<sup>16</sup> E3p7.

<sup>17</sup> E4p24 and E4p26.

Spinoza, virtue can only consist in doing what is true to one's nature, i.e., to exist according to one's own being. That is because virtue cannot exist *prior* to the endeavor for self-preservation, as to do so would imply that the essence of things comes before their existence, and it is only through the existence of things that virtue emerges in the first place.<sup>18</sup>

Putting these two concepts together, we begin to see a picture of what Spinoza wishes for us to do. If striving after our mind's existence implies the need to understand and striving after existence is the only basis of virtue, then it seems that the thing which is chiefly virtuous for human minds is to understand things. Spinoza lays this out clearly when he writes that "the mind's highest good is the knowledge of God, and the mind's highest virtue is to know God"<sup>19</sup> (remembering that God here implies the totality of nature rather than a specific transcendent being). That is because to understand God is to have the highest level of understanding possible, as nothing is outside of God. We also begin to see what is considered non-virtuous: to be controlled by external causes. If virtue consists of being in accordance with one's essence, and the only things which can make something contrary to its essence are external causes, then it follows that being manipulated by external causes is the reason for a lack of virtue. On this basis, Spinoza lays out a rather simple metric for differentiating good from bad: that which is

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<sup>18</sup> E4p22.

<sup>19</sup> E4p28.

conducive to understanding is good, and that which contravenes understanding is bad.

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The ideal human behavior, then, is to achieve an adequate understanding of God (or, in other words, everything), to act via that understanding according to our nature, and to be entirely unaffected by external causes. This, seeming to be essentially impossible, might come across as a rather curious system of ethics. It is, in fact, entirely impossible, by Spinoza's own admission: he writes that "The force whereby a man persists in existing is limited, and is infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes,"<sup>21</sup> which seems as a relatively straightforward argument that humans are ultimately limited in their ability to pursue their own nature. In this sense, we could make the argument that humans can never be fully good or fully virtuous, always being checked and removed from greater understanding due to the infinite power of the rest of the universe. In the fourth proposition of Part Four, Spinoza makes this even clearer by arguing that it is impossible for humans to never be affected or changed by anything except that which can be understood through their essence. Here, he comments in the corollary that humans must always be prey to their passions.<sup>22</sup>

This leaves the reader in a bit of a conundrum: on the one hand, Spinoza directs us to act virtuously and explains how to do so; on the other hand, he (in the very same

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<sup>20</sup> E4p27.

<sup>21</sup> E4p3.

<sup>22</sup> E4p4c.

part!) declares that to do so successfully is impossible before we set out on the task.

How, then, are we to proceed?

The answer is to consider Spinozist ethics not as a system of obligations and duties, where each person should be ethical in all cases and in all circumstances, but as a perfectionist ethic that directs where we ought to aim ourselves as we continuously try to improve. Michael LeBuffe forwards this reading of Spinoza, noting:

The central idea of perfectionism is that we ought to be guided in how we lead our lives by the project of improving ourselves. Because improvement may be understood in many ways, this view might encompass many very different ethical views. Traditionally, however, perfectionist moral theories have understood the relevant improvement to be an improvement of the respects in which we are fundamentally human. Spinoza adopts precisely this notion in his discussion of a model of human nature in the Preface to Part 4 of the *Ethics*. [...] In addition, Spinoza refers repeatedly to Aristotelian views of human function and complete goods in developing the account of Part 4. These points suggest strongly that Spinoza belongs to the perfectionist tradition.<sup>23</sup>

This follows from the idea that humans can be more or less virtuous – to use an intentionally hyperbolic example, one who adequately understands forty percent of God might be said to be more virtuous than one who adequately understands only twenty percent of God. Thus, the expectation is not that we be wholly virtuous, but rather that

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<sup>23</sup> Michael LeBuffe, *From Bondage to Freedom: Spinoza on Human Excellence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 170-71.

we *strive after virtue*. The value of this way of understanding the world will be shown by example in Chapter 3, where we will consider a case study of policy as it relates to Spinozist ethics.

Before we move on to the discussion of the affects, which is the primary focus of this thesis, it is wise to consider one more potential objection to the arguments laid out so far. This objection would point out the somewhat obvious tension between the two consequences of Spinozist metaphysics that we have thus far identified: the lack of free will and a system of virtue seemingly based on choices made by humans. If we lack free will, then how are we expected to be virtuous by choosing to understand God? In response, I would offer three arguments. The first is that something can be good without humans having the ability to choose to do good – e.g., if it were true that charity were the absolute essence of goodness for the entire universe, it would not be any less good simply because some people lack the capacity to provide charity or may be irreversibly led away from doing so due to some other factor (mental illness, neurochemistry, upbringing, etc.).

The second response I would argue is that the knowledge and understanding of the nature of virtue actively intervenes in the chain of cause-and-effect; that is, knowing something to be good will steer humans to behave in a certain way on that basis – having knowledge of the good will cause them to take actions they would not have taken otherwise. Therefore, it is still useful for the discussion of what is good to be considered in public, where it might affect the causal chain. The third and final response I would give is that while all effects have causes, not all effects have *external* causes.

As discussed earlier, humans often act according to the internal cause of their own understanding (e.g., I understand that I need food to live, and so I eat food on that basis). It is the task of this system of ethics to produce human behavior that is more frequently internally caused in this manner. These internal causes account for “choice” in the sense that we understand it. Though, ultimately, this choice still is not made with a free will, the direct causes of an action can take place within the mind. For example, take the case of a person who chooses to purchase one food item over another because it is healthier; this is a choice, even though it would have been metaphysically impossible for them to make a different choice. That is because the direct cause of the action is within the person’s mind, but further back in the causal chain we find determinate causes that ultimately created this choice: that person’s education on which foods are healthy, whatever upbringing they had that made them prioritize their health, etc. Furthermore, the deliberations and understanding that took place within the person’s mind to lead them to that choice were simultaneously internal mental phenomena *and* necessarily determined by the various causes that go into mental processes – neurochemistry, brain cells firing in a certain pattern, etc. As a result, we can declare a choice good or bad and attribute it to a person – but we cannot say that they ultimately made that choice with freedom of will. It is only by fully appreciating this fact, that choices exist and have moral character but are not causally independent, that the system of ethics in Spinoza’s work begins to make sense.

With this groundwork established, we can begin to move on to the particular way in which humans are most often affected by external causes and led astray from their essence: the passions.

### **Bondage, Freedom, Affect: Spinoza's Philosophy of Emotion**

Before we can consider how the affects lead to bondage, we must understand how Spinoza explains the affects in the first place. Spinoza defines the emotions, or affects, as, “the modifications of the body, whereby the active power of the said body is increased or diminished, aided or constrained, and also the ideas of such modifications.”<sup>24</sup> This definition is rather broad and seems to include all sorts of actions and reactions that we might have – if any action, or any reaction to any given external event, constrains or aids our active power (i.e., our ability to act with ourselves as the cause), it is an emotion. Our lives are full of emotion, as we are always reacting to stimuli in our environment. This is one reason why Spinoza's consideration of our emotions is so central to the *Ethics*; these emotions are a pragmatic target for his project, as they are the determinants of our moment-to-moment behavior, and thus our ability to act ethically.

Having considered Spinoza's basic understanding of the affects, we can now turn to the question of passivity – the condition that will ultimately produce the bondage that Spinoza warns so heavily against in Part Four of his *Ethics*. Passivity is human behavior

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<sup>24</sup> E3d3.

which is dictated and dominated by the presence of *external causes*; in other words, the actions we take and the very desire we have to take them is a method by which the world exerts a form of control over us. These causes are as varied as the events they cause, and include other people, animals, weather, chemicals, etc. In all of these cases, the key consideration is that our behavior is largely contingent upon things which occur externally to us. It is this contingency that produces the bondage Spinoza discusses in the *Ethics*, as – much like slaves in the more literal sense – we are not directing our own behavior but rather having it dictated *to us* by outside forces.

If passivity is so dangerous to human freedom, we must consider how Spinoza proposes we liberate ourselves from it. Spinoza does not believe we can be any more or less emotional than we already are, and so this methodology should not be confused for a simple argument to ‘not be so emotional’. The shift that he proposes we undergo is not a change in *quantity* of affect but rather a change in *kind* of affect. He proposes a shift to active emotions, rather than passive ones – in particular, the emotions of nobility and courage.<sup>25</sup> Active emotions are those that are caused internally, rather than externally, and as a result are free of the influence of outside forces. These emotions are in accordance with our essence, and thus lead us to higher virtue. This general principle underlies the entire goal that Spinozist affect theory leads us toward – to be liberated from our own passivity and instead led down the path of virtue. It will be the goal of later parts of this thesis to fully illustrate the significance of this shift, but it may

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<sup>25</sup> E3p59.

be worth considering the frequency by which people later regret their own actions, decrying them as having been made “in the heat of the moment” or “in a poor state of mind” – in either of these cases, passivity is the underlying cause, and *activity* is the cure.

Nevertheless, irrespective of the significance of the shift, discussing it is rather pointless without a method by which to produce active affective states rather than passive ones. Fortunately, Spinoza informs us that reason and an increasing understanding of the nature of God can help us, as passive states are caused by inadequate knowledge, and as our knowledge becomes increasingly adequate, so too do our emotions become increasingly active.<sup>26</sup> Susan James explains, “The task of replacing our inadequate ideas with adequate ones is [...] a process of affective change, in which our passions give way to stronger, non-passionate emotions of joy and desire.”<sup>27</sup> What, then, does this non-passionate, or *active*, emotional state look like? Spinoza identifies active emotions as part of what he calls “fortitude”, which he divides into two emotions: nobility and courage. In the case of nobility, one begins to act with a desire for the good of others, not as a result of external influences, such as beauty, intelligence, or family ties, but in accordance with the dictate of reason. Courage, meanwhile, is about each person’s seeking to preserve their own being, again in accordance with the dictate of reason.<sup>28</sup> Though courage is incredibly important, being the key thing that drives us toward virtue, it is nobility that should chiefly color our

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<sup>26</sup> E4p23.

<sup>27</sup> Susan James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Clarendon Press: 1997), 201.

<sup>28</sup> E3p59.

interactions with other humans and thus our political nature. Therefore, this thesis will be primarily concerned with nobility and examining how it might exist in practice.

At first, it can seem as though the idea of nobility isn't particularly novel at all – indeed, the idea of an ethical commandment to express good will towards others could be considered a centerpiece of many religious writings. What makes Spinoza's nobility stand out is its emotional character: as Michael Strawser writes, "it is an active noble love that involves rationally desiring the good for another and joining with the other to aid in the transition from a lesser state of perfection to a greater one."<sup>29</sup> Though this interpretation may be surprising to those who focus primarily on Spinoza as a metaphysical thinker whose emotional writings might be easily confused for mere Stoicism, Strawser indicates a few pieces of evidence for seeing nobility as an "active noble love." First, Spinoza's indication of a love which "advises us" to do things which will lead to our blessedness seems to be directly contrary to the idea that love can only be a passive emotion, and therefore not one which could wisely advise us.<sup>30</sup> Secondly, Spinoza's idea that love allows for the destruction of hatred requires *activity*, for if one is already feeling hatred, to rise above that in order to show love would have to be a distinctly non-passive behavior.<sup>31</sup> Finally, in Proposition 46 of Part Four, Spinoza explicitly uses the Latin word *sive*, which implies equivalence, to compare nobility to love.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Strawser, "The True Spinoza of Market Street," *Textual Practice* 33, no. 5 (June 2019), 758.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 756-757.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 758.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 759.

With this evidence in mind, we may consider what nobility truly is: a form of *love* that is entirely separate from and unaffected by external causes. In doing so, we begin to see the vast gulf between Spinoza's affect theory and the predisposition not only of his contemporaries but also of modern people. For instance, it is easy to love the innocent, but it is substantially rarer for that love to be extended to the thief, and rarer still for it to be shown to a murderer. Nevertheless, for nobility to truly be an active affect it must be extended to these people all the same – being affected and controlled by what we know of someone's past actions would be precisely the passivity of which Spinoza warns us. It ought to be noted that a cold, impartial treatment of all human beings – something we might think of as “fairness” – is not what we are discussing. Spinoza is not merely making the claim that it is good to treat people equally regardless of if we think they are good or bad people. He is saying that we ought to actively *desire* the good for others; in other words, this is a truly *emotional* love, one which affects not just what we do but how we feel.

To understand how Spinoza defends the somewhat radical proposition that we ought to love people regardless of their crimes, we must return to Spinoza's conception of human will as previously discussed. Notably absent from his evaluation is the transcendental free will of the acting subject. That is because, as we have seen, Spinoza has a deterministic view of human behavior, seeing it as the product of an infinite array of factors rather than the will of the person themselves. In this conception, we understand the decision to commit crime, not as a mere decision, but rather the product of things such as upbringing, education, neurochemistry, etc.

In this sense, our disdain for those who take actions we dislike is only a product of our imperfect knowledge about reality. Because we see only the last link in the causal chain, the person taking the action, we overly identify the pain caused by that action with the person who committed it. By Spinoza's own definition, hate arises from the identification of pain with an external cause – that hate then produces joy when we perceive the object of our hatred as being harmed.<sup>33</sup> This set of dynamics thus sets us up to derive happiness from the suffering of those people who take actions we dislike, and thusly makes an all-encompassing love nearly impossible. However, if we were to take in the full complexity of the causation of the event which we find painful, it would be very difficult to singularly assign 'responsibility' to the last link in the chain and not the varied other links before it. In this way, human behavior is a consequence of nature's unfolding rather than solely a consequence of human consciousness – thus, to assign full responsibility to individual consciousness, which is but one causal factor among many, would be unreasonable. As discussed in Section 1, Spinoza sees human will as a phenomenon indistinguishable from other natural phenomena in a metaphysical sense. As a result, hating a criminal for their crimes is not unlike hating nature for a natural disaster; neither are the result of intentional and deliberate action, but merely the next piece of the tapestry of determined events. Because of this analysis, hate is without any justification according to the dictate of reason, and, in Spinozist ethics, unvirtuous.

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<sup>33</sup> E3p20.

The example of criminality has been used up until now for its ability to present an extreme case where nobility still applies – it will be revisited in Chapter 3, where we will consider the implications of nobility for criminal justice. However, it is important to remember that Spinoza is not merely discussing an ideological commitment to nobility in these extreme cases, but also the working of active emotions into daily life. For example, a driver who experiences road rage is, in fact, being greatly harmed by their own passivity. The development of adequate knowledge and the corresponding active emotions would play a substantial role in liberating this driver from something which directly harms their state of being.

At this point in our discussion of affect, it is important to keep in mind that Spinoza's ethics are perfectionist in that we can't reasonably expect a person to be *fully* free of the passions, but rather to simply aspire to that as an ideal and to continue improving themselves on that basis. What, then, does a life lived according to this aspiration look like? It may not mean a total absence of bondage, or a total absence of passivity. Indeed, hatred, anger, and other passions are unlikely to disappear from our lives entirely. However, an awareness of the structure of our emotions and to what we ought to aspire can allow for keeping those passions in check and restraining them from their worst effects.<sup>34</sup> A life lived with fewer instances of the passions and more instances of nobility and courage is one that is substantially less likely to result in being greatly

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<sup>34</sup> E5p3.

misled by one's emotions into taking actions that are disadvantageous for ourselves and others, and the more likely we are to live the virtuous life detailed earlier.

So far, we have accounted for Spinozist affect theory as it plays out at the individual level. However, we are still left with the task of investigating how, if at all, this theory can explain and improve life at the *collective* level. If this way of perceiving the world can improve our private lives greatly, perhaps it can also improve public life – specifically, perhaps it can improve our political lives.

## Chapter 2

### The Political Dimensions of Spinozist Affect Theory

Until this point, our discussion has centered around the explication of Spinoza's affect theory as it is largely depicted in parts three and four of the *Ethics*: as an analysis of individuals and their affective states. In this chapter, we will begin to examine a more novel reading of Spinoza that uses his metaphysics and affect theory to analyze *collectives*, rather than mere individuals. A collective, in this instance, is not merely the same as a "group" or "category." Any collection of multiple individuals can become a group, but a collective requires those individuals to, at some level, function as a singular entity. Perhaps the most immediately obvious example of a collective is our very own bodies: we are collections of cells, tissues, and organs, all of which are independently existing things but which combine to exist as a larger, singular entity. Another relatively simple form of a collective is a mob – a mob is made up of individual beings, however, by definition, it is a group of beings acting toward a singular purpose and in some ways as a single body.

In this chapter I will follow several scholars in arguing that collectives have affects in a Spinozist sense. The goal is to prove this not only theoretically, by discussing how Spinoza's metaphysics logically lead to this conclusion, but also to couple that theoretical reading with empirical examples of collective affect. By doing so, we will be able to analyze collectives through the same framework we established in

Chapter 1 for analyzing individual behavior. Then, by applying the tools discussed in Chapter 1, I will further argue that we can derive a political philosophy from Spinoza's philosophy of emotion by analyzing political entities (i.e., governments, institutions, etc.) from the perspective of this collective affect theory.

This affective political philosophy will culminate in a discussion of "collective nobility", the original contribution of this thesis. This will lay a foundation for a more empirical analysis in Chapter 3, where the drug war will be the subject of a comparative policy analysis on the basis of collective nobility.

### **Collective Affect and Collective Nobility**

In *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, Deleuze writes, "a body can be anything; it can be an animal, a body of sounds, [...] a social body, a collectivity."<sup>35</sup> This is because, as Deleuze points out, Spinoza's *Ethics* makes no distinction between the natural and the artificial, nor between humans and nature. Instead, all things are a part of the same *plane of immanence*. All things are constituted by the relationships between smaller things on this plane, and all things are modes of the singular substance. As a result, any feature that is true of a "body" in the human sense is also true of a "body" in these other senses. While this interpretation might seem difficult to understand at first, particularly as it relates to the idea of collective 'emotions', the primary task of this section will be to

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<sup>35</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2007), 122.

justify that interpretation textually and explain its implications for the purposes of this thesis.

Given the subject matter of this section, it is useful to first examine how Spinoza deals with the problem of smaller things coming together to form larger things. In Part Two of the *Ethics*, Spinoza refers to these entities as ‘compound bodies’, which he defines thus:

When any given bodies of the same or different magnitude are compelled by other bodies to remain in contact, or if they be moved at the same or different rates of speed, so that their mutual movements should preserve among themselves a certain fixed relation, we say that such bodies are in union, and that together they compose one body or individual, which is distinguished from other bodies by this fact of union.<sup>36</sup>

Through this definition we begin to understand how bodies might come together to form larger individuals in Spinoza’s estimation. Critical to this definition, for our purposes, is that the bodies need not *necessarily* be in contact, but rather merely preserve a “certain fixed relation.” Spinoza further expounds upon this notion by arguing that such unions are not merely limited to bodies which can only be distinguished by motion – instead, we can conceive of individuals formed of increasingly complex bodies *ad infinitum*, until we reach a point where we can conceive of all of nature as “one

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<sup>36</sup> E2DNBdef.

individual.”<sup>37</sup> It’s important to note, then, that each of these increasingly complex bodies retain all of the features that Spinoza notes bodies as having elsewhere in the *Ethics*. Most importantly, these include emotions: recall from chapter 1 that Spinoza defines them as the modifications of the body. This definition would therefore imply that any body experiences emotions insofar as that body experiences said modifications.

Though this realization has theoretical import in the overall schema of Spinozist metaphysics, it can be difficult to relate it to everyday experience when considered by itself. What does it mean for a more complex body to have “emotions”? In particular, what is that like for a complex body composed of multiple human beings? Here, we might find some assistance from a psychological explanation of “supra-individual” systems having emotions. Stephan et al. note that, as opposed to being merely a collection of individuals feeling a certain way, these systems have emotions which “are *emergent* in the sense that the affective states and actions of each individual member continuously and reciprocally influence each other and are themselves shaped and amplified in a top-down manner by the overall dynamics of the group as a whole.”<sup>38</sup> Keeping this in mind, a picture of a collective emotion starts to come together: it is not necessarily that a sort of ‘consciousness’ emerges out of the groups of people and *experiences* those emotions, but rather that the group as a whole is being modified continuously by the actions of each individual member, quickly spreading similar affective states across the body. We might compare this to how the constituent

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<sup>37</sup> E2I7.

<sup>38</sup> Achim Stephan, Sven Walter, and Wendy Wilutzky, “Emotions beyond Brain and Body,” *Philosophical Psychology* 27, no. 1 (January 2014), 77.

components of our body involved in 'feeling' (the senses, neurotransmitters, the heart, etc.) are all behaving and being modified in a certain way such that they reciprocally influence each other to produce the full experience of the emotion at the conscious level.

Stephan et al. discuss the example of lynch mobs as an easily visible collective that manifests this property, writing that "otherwise sensible and peaceful people can get carried away by the contagious nature of euphoria, panic, or the blind rage of lynch mobs as a consequence of 'deindividuation.'"<sup>39</sup> Violent anger becomes so strongly projected by every other member of the crowd that it begins to overtake the individual, rendering them into an extreme state of passivity that results in their participation in the mob's collective violent action. As a result, the mob's remarkable coordination and unity of purpose arises even without the efforts of conscious direction. Similar situations can be observed at concerts, parades, sporting events, and other intensely active group settings. The feelings in these situations are often greater than and different from any individual emotional reaction. Spinoza himself argues that an emotion caused by a greater number of concurrent causes is stronger than emotion caused by a lesser number of causes,<sup>40</sup> lending credence to the idea that a human being pulled by the crowd is liable to experience intense affects that overpower their reason.

While a mob is a highly visible and obvious form of collective, mob behavior alone cannot justify our broader application of Spinozist affect theory. While mobs have

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 77-78.

<sup>40</sup> E5p8.

strong emotional coordination and do seem to transmit emotional responses to their constituent members, that does not necessarily mean that more diffuse groups, such as a city or country, do. However, while the strong emotional content of a mob can create a state of extreme passivity, remember that emotions fill our lives even in smaller ways. Something as simple as becoming angry because of a news story on the television is an emotion – and, if it is part of a broader transmission of similar angry affects across an entire population, a manifestation of the very same collective emotions previously discussed. James discusses this sort of phenomena as a type of “affective imitation”; in many cases, “individuals who recognize that they share a range of affective dispositions independently imitate one another’s affects.”<sup>41</sup> Hearing that other humans are reacting in a certain way to a certain event changes the way that you react to that event, which only intensifies this emotional signal, causing others to imitate it, and so on and so forth. These larger, less obvious connections between bodies still constitute a compound body in Spinoza’s view, as he indicates by suggesting that all of nature is a singular compound body, and that such a unified body lies at the ultimate end of a chain of increasingly complex bodies with increasingly complex relationships among their constituent components.<sup>42</sup>

Like individual humans, human collectives are subject to being affected by external causes, which strip away freedom from the collective. The mob can be herded one way or another by police officers, and the nation might be moved to act one way or

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<sup>41</sup> Susan James, “Politically Mediated Affects,” In *Spinoza’s Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, edited by Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Hasana Sharp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2018), 65.

<sup>42</sup> E2I7s.

another because of the actions of other nations. It is important to note that when we discuss “emotions” in this context, we do not necessarily refer to the *human mind’s experience of emotions*, but rather Spinoza’s definition: that emotions are the modifications of the body and the ideas of those modifications. These modifications have the same place as our experienced emotions, metaphysically, but that does not necessarily imply that the collective has a consciousness which *experiences* those emotions in the same way that our mind does. In any case, we can still apply our understanding of activity and passivity here. In the cases where the collective is induced to modification by an external cause, it is experiencing a passive emotion and, further, is straying away from its *conatus*, or its principle aim to persist in its own being. As noted in Chapter 1, this aim exists for all individual things and, furthermore, this aim to persist in its own being is the essence of each thing.<sup>43</sup> In the cases where the collective itself can be said to be the adequate cause of its own emotions, it is acting in accordance with its essence.

Spinoza argues that this striving after one’s own existence is the same as the appetite, and that the appetite is the same as desire. He notes that the only difference between this aim and the word ‘desire’ is that desire is generally applied to humans, who have the capacity to become conscious of their own appetites. However, beyond this consciousness, there is no functional distinction between the essential aim of a thing, its appetite, and, if human, its desire.<sup>44</sup> Thus, we see how another area of

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<sup>43</sup> E3p6.

<sup>44</sup> E3p9s.

Spinoza's philosophy regarding individual behavior can be used in the analysis of collectives. Insofar as all things have this principal aim, all things also have appetite. Furthermore, that appetite is only separated from a human's desire, metaphysically, by the mere fact that humans are conscious of their appetite.

Through this analysis, we begin to see how the contours of Spinoza's ethical philosophy can be overlaid onto the collective. Recall from Chapter 1 that Spinoza sees virtue as arising out of our aim to exist and enhance ourselves – and that, therefore, understanding was the virtuous thing for the human mind to do, as through understanding, one minimizes passivity and maximizes activity. Insofar as the collectives we are concerned with are merely compound bodies of humans, they too are bound by the same ethical philosophy. With respect to the collective, the virtuous things for it to do are those things which arise from its aim to exist and enhance itself, insofar as those things are in accordance with reason.

It is here that a potential objection to my analytical framework might arise. If collectives have a certain set of aims from which virtue arises, and individuals also have those aims, it seems inevitable that some disconnect must occur between what an individual ought to do and what the collective they are a part of ought to do. In that case, it might seem that the framework breaks down, as part of the collective's compound body acts discordantly with it. However, I would respond to this objection by noting that the human body (which is a compound body, being composed of many different parts), is not any less of a singular 'individual' just because one part of it happens to work discordantly with the others. We wouldn't say that someone suffering from an

autoimmune disease, where the immune system attacks the body, is less of a singular individual than someone without such a disease. Furthermore, it would also seem ridiculous to argue that just because someone has an autoimmune disease, their immune system is no longer part of their body (especially given that the immune system will continue to complete the functions that are in accordance with the body in addition to those that are discordant with it). Even those with healthy bodies do not have parts acting as one, conscious body. Sharp writes of the multitudes of microorganisms that live inside the human body. From the perspective of these microorganisms, they “do not strive to be in order that we may live—their being is not a function of ours—but we form a composition with them, and thus our bodies and theirs persevere.”<sup>45</sup> Though the environment of the human body is necessary for their continued survival, it would be a case of extreme human exceptionalism to claim that somehow the purpose of these microorganisms is solely to sustain the being that we consider to be “ourselves.” Their primary function is, as Spinoza would indicate, to persevere in their *own* being – it just so happens that the tasks they complete along the way are beneficial to the broader human environment (as an example, some bacteria break down difficult-to-digest foods as part of their own feeding process, and human digestion is aided as a byproduct).

Indeed, in light of this context, to make the claim that a human is an essential individual that cannot be truly a part of another individual seems to reveal only a bias toward our particular perspective as humans. As Sharp argues, “The compositions that

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<sup>45</sup> Sharp, *Politics of Renaturalization*: 38.

we pick out as discrete individuals and the dependencies that we regard as essential vary according to habit and cultural milieu.”<sup>46</sup> If we considered nature from a larger or smaller scale, the things which we saw as the basis of individuality would change – it is easy to treat the Earth as a whole from the context of the broader universe, for example, and at that scope, individual humans would seem relatively insignificant.

Instead, it is important to note that just because a compound body should do one thing in accordance with its essence, it is not necessarily the case that that thing will be in accordance with the essence of each individual part of the body. As a result, I also would not claim that collective bodies experience total harmony, nor that it is reasonable to expect them to do so. Therefore, we must complete our analysis both with an understanding of the collective as a whole *and* with an understanding of the individuals that make up that collective and how they engage with the collective. To accomplish this task, I propose the notion of ‘collective nobility’, a particular reading of Spinoza’s *generositas* with respect to the collective.

*Generositas*, or nobility, is one of the two active emotions (the other being courage). Spinoza defines nobility as “the desire whereby every man endeavours, solely under the dictate of reason, to aid other men and to unite them to himself in friendship.”<sup>47</sup> The most interesting part of this definition, for our purposes, is the idea of “uniting” others to oneself in friendship. The union of two or more disparate individuals is, of course, at the root of our understanding of how human collectives form. In effect,

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>47</sup> E3p59s

when a body unites itself to another body, the two become a larger, compound body. The way in which this happens varies – Spinoza indicates that simple bodies join together through motion, but as compound bodies form and become more complex, “the number of ways in which it can be affected, without losing its nature, will be greatly multiplied.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, as bodies become more complex, the ways in which they can be joined to one another grow increasingly diverse. As a result, it is impossible to say exactly how this “joining” happens for any group of bodies. Nevertheless, what can be understood is that bodies form a union in this fashion by coming to be affected together as one body in some fashion while still retaining their individual essence. In the context of human relationships, James describes these unions as “complex patterns of mutual accommodation that are also grounded in the recognition that we are like one another,” wherein “friends or lovers strive to coordinate their affects.”<sup>49</sup>

To understand nobility, we can look to Spinoza’s idea that any person who is directed by reason will desire the good for others that they desire for themselves,<sup>50</sup> and, further, that this results in a person who is directed by reason striving after the common good. There are two reasons for this: first, that doing so will ensure that other humans are more useful to oneself, and secondly, that creating a community of those who love the same good makes it easier for the individual to sustain their fidelity to that good. As

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<sup>48</sup> E2I7s.

<sup>49</sup> James, *Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, 65-66.

<sup>50</sup> E4p37.

a result, those who are directed by reason seek to ensure that others are directed by reason, and that they join in friendship with others so as to ease their love of the good.

Spinoza writes that humans, “seeing as they are prey to their emotions, which far surpass human power or virtue,” are in need of mutual cooperation and aid with those who are “drawn in different directions” than them.<sup>51</sup> In this way, humans are actually in need of others to help them avoid becoming prey to their passive emotions – and, in fact, the diversity of human collectives in thought and emotion is precisely why they function to enable the activity of their members. If all members of a collective become moved in the same direction, then the collective is not a safeguard against the emotions, as the collective will move in that direction also. However, if a collective has discordant members, those members then serve as a check on one another – by moving in opposite directions, this discordance safeguards the collective, and thus individual people, from acting according to their passions. Thus, we might say that life in the collective is actually *central* to Spinoza’s notion of what we ought to do. If the only commonly held affects in the collective are those affects which are formed under the dictate of reason, then the collective will push its members toward the ends of reason, while the passive impulses of each member are tempered by the passive impulses of each other member. An example could be the creation of political checks and balances – it would be uncommon for people to voluntarily restrict their own political power, but they may accept those restrictions because they *also* restrict the political power of other

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<sup>51</sup> E4p37s2

members of the collective, whose impulses may run opposite to those of the first group. In such a case, only strong consensus overcomes institutional barriers to change, and, if that consensus is dictated by reason, all members of the collective will benefit. Nobility is the emotion of those who are cognizant of this reality and seek to unite with others to form useful, rational collectives.

At this juncture, it might be useful to describe a distinction between two main types of collectives as previously discussed. On the one hand there are “passive collectives”, which are vulnerable to and manipulated by the passions, and on the other hand there are “active collectives”, which act in accordance to active emotions and are formed under the guidance of reason. In both cases, collectives form by the coming together of humans to mutually accommodate each other’s affects. However, a passive collective accommodates passions, while active collectives accommodate active emotions: nobility and courage.

We can also say, following the same logic, that collectives ought to be invested in increasing the activity of their constituent parts. Having members who are powerful, active, and directed by reason is good for the collective, as nobility is strongest among such members, and nobility is the key to the bonds of mutual aid and cooperation that hold the collective together as a compound body. As such, a collective acting in accordance with its essence will seek to strengthen itself by strengthening its members and encouraging them to live in accordance with reason. Therefore, collectives themselves are acting ‘nobly’, seeking the common good. This is precisely what I mean by “collective nobility” – it is the glue that binds the interests of the individual and the

interests of the collective together. It ensures the relative harmony and benefit of all those involved. As we will discuss in the next section, it is essential to Spinoza's conception of the state and is a primary motivating force in our analysis of governance.

Remember that not all collectives are governed by this collective nobility. In the appendix to Part Four, Spinoza writes that "harmony is often the result of fear: but such harmony is insecure".<sup>52</sup> He also makes reference to compassion, noting that both fear and compassion "belong not to the exercise of reason". Collectives can become ruled by these and other forces, all of which contribute to its passivity and relative weakness. In much the same way as an individual, courage and nobility become the blueprint for a "virtuous" collective.

This vision of a collective in which members participate out of a reasoned acceptance that participation is better than solitude could be confused with a mere rephrasing of Enlightenment-era social contracts. That, however, would be mistaken – as Chantal Jaquet writes, "civil society and the commonwealth do not rely primarily on an agreement brought about by reason but on a common affect."<sup>53</sup> It is important to clarify that 'collective nobility' is a *common affect of nobility*, which is generated through the use of reason to modify and direct the affects, not merely a descriptor of a state in which all members participate because they have a well-reasoned agreement. This mirrors our understanding of individual affect theory in Chapter 1 and what distinguishes

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<sup>52</sup> E4a16

<sup>53</sup> Chantal Jaquet, "Longing (*desiderium*) for Vengeance as the Foundation of the Commonwealth," In *Spinoza's Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, edited by Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Hasana Sharp, 2018, 78.

it from the perspective that “emotions are bad, reason is good,” which one might derive from a superficial reading of Spinoza. The idea is not to become un-emotional as individuals, nor is that the idea for collectives; instead, we seek to modify the emotions in accordance with reason. The goal of collective nobility is that collectives, which are formed and held together by common affects, ought to be held together and directed by the *active* affect of nobility, which is just as much a feeling as any other emotion, rather than passions.

### **Political Collectives and Governance Through Nobility**

Now we will turn our attention to the specific collectives that form the basis of politics and policy. While we are part of many collectives in our lives (our family, groups of friends, institutions, etc.), it is the state and other governmental collectives that we are chiefly concerned with in this thesis. Spinoza himself argues that people guided by reason are freer when living within a state and governed by laws,<sup>54</sup> largely for the same reasons that were previously articulated: to be a law-abiding citizen of the state is to be concerned with the common good and to participate in a collective that checks back against our emotional impulses and the emotional impulses of others. However, Spinoza doesn't only write about how the individual ought to conduct themselves with regard to the state, but also how the state ought to conduct itself with regard to individuals. He writes that providing for the poor is a duty that falls upon the entire state,

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<sup>54</sup> E4p73.

as no one individual could possibly help all those who are poor.<sup>55</sup> In other words, there are some duties that are in accordance with the dictates of reason, like helping the poor, but which the individual cannot fulfill – thus, to seek the common good, the individual must seek the welfare of the state, and the state must seek the welfare of the individual. This relationship is the essence of a state that is governed by collective nobility: it is neither what Sharp describes as a system in which people “belong essentially to a whole and act only by virtue of that larger power,”<sup>56</sup> wherein individuals seek the welfare of the collective but the collective cares little for the individual, nor is it what she describes as a system in which “independence is paramount,” but rather a system in which humans are understood “neither as parts of wholes nor as irreducible atoms”<sup>57</sup> where good will flows in both directions.

However, a state can also possess traits that are inimical to the common good. These are a result of “collective passivity,” whereby the state is overtaken by external causes. We can observe the emotional behavior of the state by the ways in which it interacts with its constituent components – if it is a collective formed out of active affects, it will obey collective nobility, but if the collective is pushed away from reason by the passions of its members, it will by necessity be passive.

Spinoza argues that those who wish to live according to reason shouldn’t dwell on human weakness, but rather on human “virtue or power.”<sup>58</sup> Further, he argues that

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<sup>55</sup> E4a17.

<sup>56</sup> Sharp, *Politics of Denaturalization*: 34.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>58</sup> E4p25.

harmony is good, while anything that disrupts the harmony of the state is bad.<sup>59</sup> We can piece together a picture of how a state ought to conduct itself from these duties. First and foremost, a state's goal is to ensure the harmony of its members – to do so is to preserve itself, and thereby act according to its essence. However, it also must strengthen its constituent parts so as to strengthen itself, and as a result has the duty of protecting and aiding its citizens to empower them. What is contrary to its obligation is anything that would *weaken* its citizens or introduce disharmony into the state. While seemingly simple, this metric for evaluating state behavior can be extremely fruitful as I will demonstrate in Chapter 3.

It is this positive, nourishing view of the state that can be described as the critical and instructive component of the political philosophy we have derived from the *Ethics*. Rather than merely viewing the state as an instrument for ensuring harmony and safety, or viewing the state as a guarantor of some equality of opportunity among individuals who must still rise or fall independently, Spinoza's view of the state is more like a community that is actively interested in the welfare and success of its members. The Spinozist state is one that might be described as being built around a politics of friendship, in that friendship in accordance with reason is a productive union that empowers all parties. This is a natural conclusion following from what Sharp describes as Spinoza's "unequivocal valorization of human association and friendship,"<sup>60</sup> as in the case of the previously discussed definition of nobility, in which the critical component

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<sup>59</sup> E4p40.

<sup>60</sup> Sharp, *Politics of Renaturalization*: 86.

was that a noble person seeks friendship with others. It is key to remember that our working understanding of nobility, as established in Chapter 1, is as a *feeling* in which one genuinely *loves* the other, not a cold or unfeeling calculation. This is why “friendship” is an appropriate term, even more so than one which might be more traditionally suited to discussing the state, such as “rational cooperation.”

With regard to ensuring harmony, Spinoza notes that minds are “conquered by” love and nobility, rather than force.<sup>61</sup> In other words, the state can only ensure the stable obedience of its constituent minds if it acts with the sort of collective nobility we discussed earlier. While a state governed by fear might be able to conquer bodies – that is, to receive a form of physical obedience and harmony, such a state lacks the loyalty and investment of its members. That is what makes the state unstable, and its harmony short-lived. While the idea of a state ‘governed by fear’ might conjure images of a dystopian dictatorship, it can be far more subtle than that. Spinoza writes that the reader ought to be wary of those who are “more skilled in railing at vice than in instilling virtue, and who break rather than strengthen men's dispositions,”<sup>62</sup> saying that such people are hurtful to themselves and others. Our fear of another’s vice can render us into a state of passivity and pull us away from acting nobly; similarly, the state can become too invested in stamping out “negative” behaviors and disciplining its members that it fails to act in accordance with the good faith and friendship of collective nobility. Such actions are almost always undertaken on the basis of fear. Fear of criminality, deviance,

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<sup>61</sup> E4a11.

<sup>62</sup> E4a13.

treason, foreigners, etc. have all been found, at one time or another, to be the root of these sorts of overbearingly negative policy decisions.

With regard to the state's duty to nourish and empower its members, we might turn again to Spinoza's appendix to Part Four, regarding the right way of life. Spinoza argues that those humans governed by reason ought to train others to be governed by reason as well, out of the simple fact that it is useful to a person governed by reason to be around more people who are also governed by reason.<sup>63</sup> As discussed earlier, the state also benefits when its members begin to follow the dictates of reason and to be governed by their own activity. It is within the state's essence, then, to do what it can to protect people from being prey to external causes and to become empowered to follow reason. From this simple idea we can see the mandate for all sorts of government action: education to help those members understand, healthcare to prevent them from being unduly moved by external causes, etc.

At this juncture, it is important to consider a critical objection to this line of argument: until now, this thesis has merely used Spinoza to identify how governance *ought* to be constructed but has provided relatively little in terms of how such a perfect and harmonious collective could be constructed and maintained in the first place. Indeed, as James argues, Spinoza in his later writings "distances himself from this ideal," claiming that it cannot be perfectly realized as humans are "eaten up by divisive passions"<sup>64</sup> and are otherwise naturally inclined to be disharmonious. Throughout his

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<sup>63</sup> E4a9.

<sup>64</sup> Susan James, In *Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, 61.

later writings, Spinoza examines multiple avenues, such as religion and democracy, as possible methods for practically approaching the type of state outlined in the *Ethics*. Though those projects are not of direct interest to this thesis, being as they are situated in a vastly different historical context than our own, it is the spirit of those projects that can respond to this objection. Much as we noted that humans can never achieve perfect virtue in a Spinozist system, but nevertheless they can use it as an aspirational goal which directs them toward increasingly virtuous states of being, so too can the vision of the political collective entertained in the *Ethics* provide a lodestar for analyses of contemporary politics. Our goal, therefore, is not to create the perfectly harmonious state which exhibits perfect collective nobility (much as it is not our goal to create humans who exhibit perfect nobility at an individual level), but rather to infuse instances of collective nobility into the actions of the state so that it might become perpetually better than it has been in the past.

As we turn our attention to specific examples of state policy and bring our framework to bear in analyzing them, it is useful to bear in mind this twofold ambition of the state. Those policies which foster harmony out of love and nobility, rather than fear or mere compassion, are good, as are those policies which enable activity and a life in accordance with reason. On the other hand, those policies which act to disrupt these ends are bad.

## Chapter 3

### **Global Drug Policy: An Affective Analysis**

This chapter will take the theoretical understandings from the previous discussion of Spinoza's work and apply them to a contemporary case study: the war on drugs. In particular, this discussion will center around the affective orientations of policies and their comparative consequences. Furthermore, this case study will be used as a jumping-off point for a discussion of how this Spinozist conception of collective nobility can alter how governmental collectives (as discussed in Chapter 2) can become more virtuous by reshaping the ways in which they relate to their members.

The war on drugs will be discussed from the vantage point of the United States, where heavy criminalization of drugs, drug users, and drug dealers has been the commonplace response to drug crises in the past. This will be contrasted with public health approaches to resolving drug crises such as that exemplified by Portugal. The ambition of this chapter is to prove (a) that misguided affective motivations for US drug policy have been responsible for its failures and (b) that Portuguese policy can be understood as being guided by collective nobility.

Prior to engaging in this analysis, it is imperative that the reader have an idea of how "successful" drug policy is being defined in the context of this thesis. To do this, we ought to consider why circumventing drug use and addiction is in the interests of the state. As discussed in Chapter 2, the state has a vested interest in empowering the

activity of its members and helping them to be guided by reason, as doing so will strengthen the collective as a whole. Drug addiction weakens people by making them more vulnerable to external causes and diminishing their own power of activity. As a result, it is natural that the state would wish to minimize this situation.

However, the mere reduction of drug use alone cannot be an indicator for good policymaking. This is because the reduction in drug use must be evaluated according to the primary objectives of the state as a political collective as outlined in Chapter 2: to ensure harmony among the collective (and therefore preserve itself) and to strengthen the members of the state. Correspondingly, the state also ought to avoid disharmony and the weakening of its members. In situations where these negative consequences are inevitable, the state will have to make a calculation as to which course of affairs is, on balance, better suited to fulfilling its objectives. As a result, our evaluation of drug policy must not only be concerned with its impact on drug use specifically, but also the impact of the policy on collective harmony and power more generally.

Therefore, when discussing “successful” drug policy throughout this chapter, I will engage in an analysis of the *affective consequences* of each policy in addition to the more easily observed material consequences. If people are directed by their affects, and policy has the ability to change those affects, it stands to reason that good policy must also attempt to engender positive, rather than negative, affects.

## The War on Drugs – American Responses to Drug Use

In 2001, Peter Reuter summarized the state of American drug policy in an editorial in the journal *Addiction*, writing:

It is likely that enforcement has made drug use so expensive and inconvenient that a substantial segment of the population chooses abstinence [...] the critical question, however, is whether it is necessary to house 400,000 in jails and prisons and to give nearly a quarter of young black males in large cities a felony conviction for drug dealing [...] there is hardly any attempt to provide an empirical justification for this extraordinary deprivation of liberties.<sup>65</sup>

There are a few exceptional components of Reuter's analysis. First, Reuter points out that \$25 billion out of \$35 billion spent on drug control was dedicated entirely to criminal enforcement.<sup>66</sup> In other words, more than two thirds of all resources dedicated to the problem were focused on punishment and deterrence, rather than prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. Secondly, Reuter indicates that "hardly any attempt" had been made, at that point, to justify the extreme scale of drug enforcement through a cost-benefit analysis. Indeed, Reuter argues that "little research has been funded and its findings largely ignored."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Peter Reuter, "Why Does Research Have so Little Impact on American Drug Policy?" *Addiction (Abingdon, England)* 96, no. 3 (March 2001), 373.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.

Since that time, changes to American drug policy have been slow, and only recently has the government begun to re-evaluate its enforcement-focused approach to the issue. In 2017, Elizabeth Stone remarked that research detailing the drug war's failure "has been available for decades, but policymakers only began to reverse course in the last several years."<sup>68</sup>

Stone's article, which focuses on this reversal of course, how it occurred, and its significant limitations, provides a useful way to understand the time period in which Reuter's analysis was written: it was a time period in which the research community was beginning to clamor for the government to change drug policy based on its relative lack of evidentiary support, outsized material harms, and extreme expense. Nevertheless, as Reuter lamented, the government was almost entirely unmoved by the research community, as drug policy was not really empirically founded in the first place and did not require empirical support to continue to be politically popular. Enforcement-focused attitudes would remain dominant until a sudden shift in the mid-2010s, a shift Stone hypothesizes was brought on by changes in a wide array of factors regarding the political nature of the drug war, rather than in response to concrete policy literature.

Reuter's analysis identified a series of factors responsible for the relative marginalization of research in drug policy. First, he noted that interdiction was popular despite evidence of its ineffectiveness because it "put the responsibility for the drug

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<sup>68</sup> Elizabeth Stone, "Is There 'Hope for Every Addicted American'? The New U.S. War on Drugs," *Social Sciences*, no. 1 (2017): 3.

problem on foreigners.”<sup>69</sup> Law enforcement is a popular response because enforcement decisions are usually based on notions of “justice” and holding people responsible for their actions rather than a broader cost-benefit analysis that considers the role of enforcement as a tool to produce certain outcomes. Treatment and recovery programs were comparatively *unpopular* because the direct beneficiaries of the programs were “criminals” who were seen negatively by the broader public.

In effect, Reuter isolated several entirely affective reasons for the continued existence of the drug war – it is not as though the state was somehow unaware of research contradicting its efforts, but the emotional impulse to focus on punishing disobedient criminals as much as possible, both in policymakers and in voters, created a situation in which it was politically untenable to change to a more effective and compassionate policy alternative.

This dynamic is a critical reinforcement of the theoretical understanding of human behavior that we derived in Chapters 1 and 2. Recall that punishment and treatment of criminals more broadly is tightly linked to inadequate understandings of responsibility and causation. Because we only directly perceive the final link in the causal chain (a person ingesting an illicit substance), we assign responsibility for the resulting effects (drug addiction) entirely to that link, without taking into account the infinite array of factors that preceded it. Furthermore, these understandings of criminality rely on a notion of free will that is invalidated by Spinozist metaphysics: the idea is that, because

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<sup>69</sup> Reuter: 374

people freely choose to commit crimes, they *deserve* to be punished. That conception of deserved punishment comes prior to the analysis of any costs or benefits, and can be associated with Reuter's explanations of the factors sustaining the enforcement-focused policy regime.

Further, the factors that finally allowed for a change in policy to occur were also affective in nature. Stone focuses on the image of "drug addicts," and how that image has changed over time, in order to explain the political dynamics of the drug war. Beginning with the 1980s crack epidemic, increasingly strict drug enforcement was deployed, with most people conceiving of the "drug addict" as a "menacing, young, Black or Latino/a, urban, poor man or pregnant woman."<sup>70</sup> The opioid epidemic began to shift the national conversation to so-called "sympathetic addicts," those who more closely resembled people with social and political power in the United States. Stone writes, "the figurative 'addict' of the opioid epidemic is most often a sympathetic, young, white, suburban or rural, citizen, working- or middle-class man or woman."<sup>71</sup> Stone identifies this shift as being responsible for much of the change in lawmakers' attitudes toward the crisis, with even conservative representatives shifting from being "tough on crime" to using the rhetoric of disease, treatment, and recovery. As a result, it suddenly became possible for policy consensus to change dramatically in a very short time span – something that was never possible previously, despite the wealth of scientific evidence suggesting that such a change would be materially beneficial.

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<sup>70</sup> Stone: 6.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

In part, this change was made possible through the power of similarity. James isolates affective similarity as critical to human association in Spinozist thought, noting that the reason humans feel that they are connected with other humans is because they conceive of themselves as essentially similar – a belief which humans do not possess with regard to rocks, for example. This similarity describes all manner of phenomena, but perhaps most intriguing is James’ analysis when she writes, “The recognition that another person’s sadness is like your own arouses an answering sadness.”<sup>72</sup> Because those with political power began to view the victims of the drug crisis as more fundamentally similar to themselves (for a variety of race- and class-based reasons), it became easier to invoke a feeling of sympathy or “answering sadness” for the plight of those people. However, when people of color were the primary victims of substance abuse, this “answering sadness” had little room in the consciousness of the largely white majority. Centuries of dehumanization had resulted in a feeling of fundamental dissimilarity, e.g., the idea that the privileged classes of people could never become the “drug addict” in the way that people of color could. This dissimilarity prevented the majority from realizing that the sadness of substance abuse victims was “like [their] own”, providing little room for empathy. Instead, the fear of otherness, heightened by this belief that the drug crisis was a characteristic of people unlike oneself, opened up an avenue for racial resentment and fear to prey upon the collective’s policymaking apparatus.

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<sup>72</sup> Susan James, *Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*: 65.

The new direction of U.S. drug policy is characterized by an increase in treatment and recovery-focused programs, with criminalization being used as a force to push drug users into recovery. Stone describes the form of these new programs rather succinctly, writing, “recovery-oriented policies are state-funded, expert-directed interventions that blend medical and therapeutic treatment with criminal sanctions to ensure ‘addicts’ choose to internalize the etho-political practices of recovery—and to punish those who refuse.”<sup>73</sup> Accompanying these new recovery-focused policies is a *discourse* of recovery, which focuses on describing addiction as a disease and “addicts” as people who require medical attention. This new discourse has brought about positive affective changes, as Stone writes, “Research suggests ‘addiction’ disease and recovery discourse evokes sympathy and humanizes people who use drugs.”<sup>74</sup> From a Spinozist perspective, this outcome is extremely beneficial; recall Reuter’s contention that it is negative and unsympathetic perceptions of drug users which sustained the empirically unsubstantiated policy regime.

However, implicit within this new policy framework is the exact same attitude that created the original policy regime: the idea that it is fundamentally justifiable for people to be punished, criminally, for drug usage, and that the usage of law to discipline “addicts” is necessary to preserve public order. The primary distinction between the new policy regime and the old one is not that previously draconian enforcement policies were reversed in their entirety, but rather that “addicts” would now be given a choice –

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<sup>73</sup> Stone: 10.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 10.

either to enter and cooperate with a medical program whose fundamental goal is to impose a new identity and pattern of behavior on its subjects, or to subject oneself to the same draconian punishment regime that existed previously.

Stone highlights a few key areas in which substantial problems with American policy remain: first, cruel, coercive punishments remain the norm, often justified as being ‘humane’ interventions to help those who use drugs. Second, the idea of personal responsibility becomes even more important, as those who “refuse” to recover are seen as exceptionally unsympathetic when contrasted with those who are able to successfully recover. Third, it provides the state with cover to continue assigning the blame for drug crises to the victims of the crisis, as it contributes to “the narrative that failure to thrive is the result of an individual’s inability to make appropriate choices.”<sup>75</sup> Finally, recovery discourse locates drugs as the source of the problem and claims that breaking the cycle of addiction will improve a person’s life circumstances, which ignores the reality that often substance use disorders are not the cause *of*, but rather caused *by* “social, economic, and political dislocation,”<sup>76</sup> which would remain even after the subject successfully completes a recovery program.

In general, this analysis reinforces the affective theory of politics articulated in Chapter 2: collectives are held together, and act, on the basis of emotions. Government officials may utilize reasoned evidence and discussion when crafting policy to align with a particular goal, but those goals are usually mandated by the emotional impulses of the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 11.

collective. Because American drug discourse has retained the myth of free will, the phenomenon we dubbed “collective passivity” earlier has taken hold. The confused and inadequate ideas of the American public have led to the passions producing disastrous policy consequences, easily overpowering evidence and expertise.

Following in parallel with Spinoza’s ideas of individual affective change, increases in understanding and the development of adequate ideas at a collective level would, in turn, allow for the creation of policy that was less passive and more active. Stone’s work shows the importance of how drug users are conceived in the public imagination, as that conception is often responsible for the related affects among the voting public. Therefore, the American example teaches us not only that the collective ought to develop adequate ideas regarding responsibility and free will, but also to cultivate sympathetic conceptions of substance abuse victims.

### **Decriminalization and Humanization: Drug Policy in Portugal**

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, in the same year that Reuter published his editorial critique of American drug policy, Portugal was bringing into force legislation that would stake out a clear contrast in how the state should respond to and interact with drug users. The new law would “eliminate entirely the possibility of criminal sanctions for use,” instead choosing to call drug possession an “administrative

offense.”<sup>77</sup> Notably, the law chose to decriminalize all psychoactive substances, not merely those regarded as “soft”, and it also did not make a distinction between “private use” and “public use” – a distinction that generally favors those with the ability to consume drugs in “private” spaces, like a house, over those who face homelessness or a lack of a stable “private” environment in which to use.

Nevertheless, Portugal’s initiative should not be confused for a legalization law such as marijuana legalization laws passed in some U.S. states in recent years. Under Portuguese law, the cultivation and sale of drugs remains illegal, and those users found to possess amounts consistent with personal consumption receive administrative citations to appear before a Committee for the Dissuasion of Drug Addiction (CDT). These committees are composed of two health professionals and a legal expert, and they are separate from the criminal justice system.<sup>78</sup> The committee has the power to suspend hearings on a case entirely, impose monetary sanctions, or impose certain other non-criminal sanctions. What the committee does not have the power to do, under any circumstances, is impose criminal penalties. This is a sharp contrast with the United States, where criminalization is always considered to be an option and the righteous punishment of those who “refuse” recovery.

The committees are clearly created from a sympathetic position – their primary goal is not retribution for violating social norms against drug use, but rather to

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<sup>77</sup> Hannah Laqueur. “Uses and Abuses of Drug Decriminalization in Portugal,” *Law and Social Inquiry* 40 (July 1, 2015), 751.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 752, footnote 15

“determine what noncriminal sanction or treatment is best for each particular user.”<sup>79</sup>

This choice places the purpose of the committee as existing solely to enable and empower the wellbeing for drug users, *not* to treat their behavior as an anti-social aberration that must be corrected no matter the cost. Further, the choices to take the committee outside the criminal justice system and to place the majority of the power in the hands of healthcare providers, rather than judicial officers, reinforces this compassionate dynamic.

In addition to the formal effects of the law, changing attitudes in the judicial system affected even those elements of the drug trade that were still criminalized. The number of people incarcerated for trafficking or traffic-consumption (i.e., small-scale drug dealers who largely sell to enable their own consumption) has fallen dramatically, despite the fact that the number of sellers has remained relatively constant. Laqueur attributes this to a “retreat from the enforcement-oriented practices” that had characterized Portugal’s previous relationship to sellers.<sup>80</sup>

Perhaps even more significant than the change in criminalization were the other aspects of Portugal’s drug reforms, which substantially expanded treatment options and provision to drug users. These changes focused on “providing treatment, prevention, and reintegration” services, with the hope that decriminalization would act in concert with these programs as a way to destigmatize drug use and reduce barriers to seeking

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 752.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 757.

treatment.<sup>81</sup> The efforts to expand treatment have broadly been successful, and the number of users who have received treatment has expanded greatly.

One of the most interesting features of the Portuguese law, from the perspective of affective analysis, was the relative *lack* of formal significance compared to Portugal's previous drug regimes. Portuguese authorities were already reluctant to incarcerate drug users, with previous drug statutes having already possessed "language emphasizing treatment rather than punishment for drug users."<sup>82</sup> However, the Portuguese authorities were highly conscious of how the public's affective relationship to drug users could alter the lives and safety of those users, and also how access to treatment could affect their ability to heal and reintegrate into society. The National Strategy, the broad term for the package of reforms that came into force in 2001, "was framed as a humanistic, pragmatic, and health-oriented approach explicitly recognizing the addict as a *sick person* rather than a *criminal*,"<sup>83</sup> and had considerable success in achieving this as demonstrated by an increased willingness on the part of drug users to engage with the state and the medical system's treatment operations. Reflecting on the overall impact of the National Strategy, Laqueur writes, "as the Portugal case illustrates, legislative change can be practically small but generate significant symbolic import, and this, in turn, may produce dramatic change."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 768.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 748.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 750.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 776.

Overall, Portuguese drug policy can be said to exhibit “collective nobility” in several major ways. First, and perhaps most importantly, it is cognizant of the fact that the imperative of the state is to strengthen the activity of its members. Rather than merely withdrawing from the drug crisis entirely, Portugal attempted to craft a system which would avoid overly punishing drug users or unfairly blaming them for their illness while massively expanding supportive services – indicative of compassion and a desire for the good of the other on the part of governmental authorities. Secondly, the conscious act of prioritizing the reintegration of drug users shows an effort to ensure harmony in the collective and to empower each member of the collective. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it showed a deliberate effort to change the affective relationship of the public to drug users, and thereby bring the collective closer in line with nobility.

Recalling the discussion of perfectionist ethics in Chapters 1 and 2, it is important to recognize that Portugal’s policy is not perfect: doubtlessly, treatment options could be enhanced or improved in some ways, and the lack of a smooth reintegration pathway for drug traffickers still indicates some level of desire for punishment (though that desire has decreased, as shown by the significant reduction in incarceration). Nevertheless, it shows how collectives can change both their emotional and practical content to be more in line with nobility and less vulnerable to passivity.

## **Sketching the Future: Comparative Analysis**

The cases of the United States and Portugal reveal two systems which are fundamentally different. This difference can be understood practically, in that the United States still criminalizes drug use while Portugal does not, but it can also be understood affectively: fundamentally, the United States still centers inadequate and confused concepts of responsibility and punishment in both public discourse and public policy. Efforts to change the system are admirable but are mired in their lack of affective efficacy: the reality is that, despite referrals to treatment programs being more commonplace, most drug users are still heavily stigmatized and the state continues to imprison those who “refuse” treatment (a decision which, itself, is not a product of free will). Further, the fact that the United States only changed policy as the object of the drug war began to change from “unsympathetic figures” (people of color, members of the queer community, etc.) to more “sympathetic figures” (white, middle- or working-class people from suburban or rural communities) shows ever more distinctly that its drug policy is the product of passivity. The US still has failed to achieve a real affective reckoning with the racist and classist dimensions of its demonization of drug users at a public policy level, instead using the opioid crisis as a convenient excuse to refocus treatment options for drug users without making significant efforts to modify the public’s relationship to many communities which are still devastated by years of unsuccessful and overly extensive criminalization.

In contrast, the Portuguese system is based in activity, not passivity: it was devised as part of a carefully planned strategy to extend compassion and sympathy to a

group of people who had previously been heavily stigmatized, rather than a hasty reaction to changing external factors. Further, it uses penalties only for the purposes of increasing treatment usage, changing the justification of drug policy from punishing deviant behavior to rehabilitating and reintegrating those who have had their activity diminished through substance use.

Applying the definition of “successful” from the beginning of this chapter renders a relatively clear verdict. The United States’ changing policy has certainly improved in some ways, but it fails to extend basic compassion and sympathy to many drug users, fails to improve harmony, and continues massive and outsized costs in both loss of meaningful human potential (through incarceration) and monetary resources (through paying to sustain said incarceration). Meanwhile, as our analysis of Stone and Reuter indicates, the United States has had four decades of almost-continuous drug epidemics of one kind after another, always failing to meaningfully resolve the problem while refusing to adapt to changing evidence and policy research.

Portugal, on the other hand, has managed to increase treatment, reduce stigma, and promote reintegration by maintaining active and responsive policymaking based in noble love for Portuguese drug users rather than fear, anger, or disgust.

As we conclude our case study analysis, we can take away two major lessons from the case of Portugal: first, the affective roots of policymaking are critically important. Are policymakers acting out of noble love? If so, policy is all the more likely to be carefully planned and guided by evidence due to a genuine desire to improve lives –

if, instead, policymakers are gripped by inadequate and confused ideas, such as those that generate feelings of hatred, fear, and a desire to punish in the case of United States, they are much less likely to be able to respond to evidence-based policy research and, instead, are likely to be enthralled to whatever policy is most pleasing to their particular affective orientation.

Second, it is important that collectives' governing bodies take conscious and deliberate efforts to improve the affective relationships among their members and bring them closer to mutual noble love for one another. This *can* be affected by policy action, as demonstrated in Portugal, and viewing such emotional relationships as outside the purview of the state can only lead to a weakened collective.

Understanding policy in this way, through its affective roots and affective consequences, enables a deeper understanding of the political dimensions of public policy challenges. As demonstrated by Reuter, mere quantitative analyses of policy cannot overcome emotional foundations, and refusing to accept the symbolic power of government in reshaping the relationships of individuals leaves policymakers without critical tools to improve the lives of their constituents.

## Conclusion

### Affective Policy and Active Collectives

In this thesis, we have considered several critical insights in order to establish an affective framework for policy analysis. In Chapter 1, we discussed Spinozist metaphysics as it relates to human behavior. In particular, we noted that Spinoza's model of the universe does not leave room for free will, at least in the traditional sense. Instead, all human behavior is the result of an infinite chain of causality which determines human actions necessarily. This is because Spinoza firmly places the human mind in nature, rather than outside of it. As a result, we are vulnerable to a wide variety of external causes which can change our behavior – this fact is something Spinoza refers to as a condition of “bondage”. These external causes, in turn, produce our passive emotions, or passions, which lead us to take actions that are not in accordance with reason. For example, our anger at a criminal can lead us to make decisions about how to punish them that do not accord with the fact that a criminal becomes a criminal *necessarily*, and not through the exercise of some sort of free will which is transcendent to nature. In order to resolve this condition of bondage, it is necessary that we begin to develop active affects which are internally, rather than externally, caused – something which can only be achieved by striving to understand as much about nature as we possibly can. These active affects are identified as courage and nobility, *animositas* and *generositas*, which are the desire to strive for one's own

continued existence and improvement and the desire to make good things happen to others and to unite them to ourselves in friendship, respectively. Through a consideration of nobility in particular, we can achieve an understanding of how we ought to conduct ourselves in Spinozist ethics – desiring the good for others, seeking to build ourselves up through useful relationships and connections, and doing those things which will help others become free from affective bondage.

In Chapter 2, we considered how this affective analysis could be applied to groups of individuals, or collectives, first by returning to Spinozist metaphysics. Previous Spinoza scholarship has remarked on the ability for collectives to form out of smaller, less complex individuals. Each complex body is made up of a number of simpler bodies; humans are made out of cells, but those cells exist individually as well as together as a collective. These compound bodies can then together form even more complex bodies, and all of nature itself can be seen as one extraordinarily complex individual. We analyzed this process of compound body formation through the specific phenomenon of humans coming together to form collectives. These collectives can be both positive and negative forms of association, which we dubbed active and passive collectives, respectively. Passive collectives, like mobs, see each individual's capacity for reason being overwhelmed by the passions of those around them; in the case of the mob, this happens with anger, as each member of the mob feeds a reciprocal relationship that empowers the anger of others. An active collective, however, helps protect its members from becoming prey to the passions while also enabling them to build up their activity and encourages them to live in accordance with reason. These collectives have

affective states as characterized by their individual members – the mob can be said to feel hate, or pain accompanied by an external cause, and the active collective can be said to have courage and nobility.

It is this collective nobility which we chiefly concern ourselves with in the analysis of politics. From it, we can derive the duties of political collectives: they ought to concern themselves with harmony amongst their members, which helps to preserve the collective, and they ought to concern themselves with the nourishment and empowerment of individual members. These dual duties serve to protect the existence of helpful and loving collective associations, and they align the state with reason. Through those duties, we can analyze almost any policy the state undertakes on two fronts; first, how is the policy affecting the relationships between members, and second, how does the policy affect individuals.

In Chapter 3, we applied this analysis to drug policy by looking at the comparative cases of the United States and Portugal. In the United States, drug policy criminalizes and demonizes drug users, which sows discord, fear, and hatred among its members. Further, its criminalization has been empirically proven to fail the addicts themselves, who are often diminished considerably by the justice system without any significant increase in recovery. Though the United States has begun to change policy, it has done so not in response to reasoned analysis but rather as a passive response to the changing demographics of drug addiction. In contrast, Portugal established policy that helped to increase sympathy and concern for drug users, rather than fear and derision. Its policy placed recovery and healthcare first and foremost, and it was built

considered research rather than passion. These offer diverging models of collective passivity and collective activity: when the state begins to bow to the passionate impulses of its constituents, such as their fear of drug users, it can only be said to be acting passively. But when the state acts with love and concern for its members and encourages all of its members to coexist more harmoniously, it is conducting itself with nobility and activity.

### **Collective Nobility and the Future: Areas for Potential Application**

Together, these insights form a basis for understanding policy decisions and also understanding how to guide policy. Perhaps the most unique facet of this framework is its support for affective intervention, or the state choosing policy based on how it will affect the affects of its members. In Portugal, for example, the actual magnitude of the change was relatively small compared to previous drug policy. However, what the policy did do was provide a symbolic shift in how the state officially viewed drug users – in turn, this changed public opinion considerably. Spinozist affect theory teaches us that these “symbolic” changes, which might initially seem less significant than substantial material or legal shifts, can actually have incredible consequences on the ways in which people conduct their everyday lives.

The opposite is also possible. Policy decisions which may have favorable immediate consequences could have negative long-run affective consequences. For example, foreign policy decisions can shape the public’s affective response to countries

targeted – if the state cuts favorable deals with dictatorial regimes for short-run economic benefits, there could be a number of affective shifts: the public could warm to that regime, the citizens of that regime could change their opinions of the state, etc. These changes in affect present some of the major examples of places where an affective framework for policy analysis could prove useful in the future. Keeping in mind that all humans are at least occasionally susceptible to the passions, as discussed in Chapter 1, means that changing affective conditions will inevitably shape future behaviors. Positive views of one country over another can shape future foreign policy decisions, negative views of corporations may increase anti-capitalistic sentiment, negative perceptions of unions could result in lower rates of worker unionization, etc. For the state to conduct itself with nobility, it must take into consideration these emotional ramifications, not merely material consequences.

In addition to adding these emotional dimensions to policy analysis, an understanding of collective nobility can also result in shifts in desired end goals for policy action. For example, punishment itself is often seen as an end goal for many criminal justice systems. Criminals ought to be held responsible for their actions, the reasoning goes, and therefore punishment itself is good. However, Spinozist metaphysics clearly rebukes this view. To hold someone “responsible” for their actions is rooted in irrational conceptions of causality which view a person as the direct and immediate cause of all of their behavior, rather than merely the last link in an infinite chain of causality. Furthermore, it is an ambition that is rooted in a passionate hatred, rather than love, for the criminal in question. Collective nobility instead suggests that the

criminal justice system ought to consider its actions in terms of consequence – in other words, how does the criminal justice system itself shape the chain of causality. Criminal punishments are useful tools, not because they fulfil the public’s yearning for vengeance, but because it can deter crime and serve as a nexus for rehabilitation. With this changing end goal in mind, shifts in policy like those seen in Portugal are the natural result. Remember that Portugal did not abdicate its duty to protect its citizens from the harmful effects of addictive substances – it did not pass a legalization law, but rather merely changed the ways in which it tried to intervene in the lives of those suffering from substance abuse disorders.

These shifting end goals present another avenue for the further expansion of this work – as one example, consider welfare policy. If beholden to the notion that individuals are responsible for their own monetary failures, at least to some significant degree, the state is considerably less likely to invest in measures that would help those in need and aid them in increasing their capacity for self-sufficiency. However, if the state considers poverty as essentially a determined result of factors outside a person’s control, it is far more likely to act lovingly toward that person.

In all, the idea of a collective which can act either with noble love or with passive affect is a rich and fertile ground for the production of policy analyses. Particular attention ought to be paid to both the emotional origins and emotional consequences of any given policy decision. In doing so, it is possible to understand policy decisions as the product of a larger network of causes and effects rather than an isolated condition which exists in a vacuum.

## **Liberation and Freedom in Spinoza's Nobility**

As this thesis comes to its conclusion, it is important to place this political conversation back in the original context of the *Ethics*. While the state and its behavior did feature in parts of the text, it was not what Spinoza was chiefly concerned with throughout. Instead, Spinoza's analysis of emotion was deeply connected to human freedom. If the passions are a form of bondage, then the understanding and activity that Spinoza advocates for is a form of freedom and liberty that is crucial to human virtue. Recall our discussion in Chapter 1 of how Spinoza uses understanding as the basis of virtue. It is tempting to see this as another entry in a long list of philosophers attempting to valorize philosophy. However, when one understands the significance of understanding to Spinoza's freedom, it becomes clear why virtue and understanding are so linked – and why understanding is therefore at the center of any attempt to articulate the Spinozist ethics that the title of the work seems to implore us to find.

Beyond the in-text explanation that virtue corresponds to something's essence, and that the mind's essence is to understand, we must also consider what sort of person we think of as "virtuous". Virtuous people are those who undertake virtue as a deliberate and conscious process. If a person happens to unintentionally save the lives of hundreds of people by accident, it is difficult to describe that as a result of "virtue," though it is certainly a good thing. Similarly, if a person is moved to good behavior entirely on the basis of external causes, it is difficult to say they are "virtuous" – that

virtue arose only out of the external causes that affected a person. Therefore, it's difficult to see them as consistent, virtuous actors. For example, a hatred of criminals can lead a person to dedicate themselves to catching serial killers, which is surely a good thing in that it prevents future deaths, but that same hatred can *also* lead them to be overzealous in their prosecution of relatively benign crimes.

Spinoza's vision of understanding is key to humans actually gaining activity, or not being swayed by external causes, as was discussed in Chapter 1. This provides a level of consistency by basing all behavior, or at least as much behavior as is humanly possible, in the active emotions of nobility and courage. Because a person is acting in accordance with noble love, we are able to say that their character is virtuous, rather than that they merely happened to be moved to virtuous actions.

The cultivation of this virtue has reverberating positive impacts on all people. Those who show noble love often cultivate love in others as well, as we discussed in Chapter 2. The aim, therefore, is that a cascading effect of loving action will take hold. The state is only one instrument in creating and sustaining this process, and, as a result, it would be unwise to reduce the Spinozist project of affective liberation to be *only* about politics.

Instead, we want to inverse that tendency: rather than seeing affect as a tool for improving the state, we want to see the state as a tool for improving affect. Because behavior is shaped by emotion, the best possible outcome for a group of humans is for every single member to be possessed of positive and active emotions for as long as

possible. As shown in the case of Portugal, sometimes policy can directly affect these emotions to produce harmony. However, the state ought to also prioritize the creation of active and noble citizens in a direct fashion as well; not only because it moves those people to good behavior, but also because it is an internal freedom that can only be achieved through understanding. The cultivation of activity is an end in itself – and ideally, not only the state but all individuals ought to prioritize that as much as possible, through education, communication, and other endeavors. Bringing others in accordance with reason is a difficult and challenging prospect; often, it is those we disagree with, those we feel are hateful or evil, who we want to help the least. Nevertheless, genuine noble love must move us, not to coddle or feign respect for behavior with which we disagree, but to attempt to understand the causes of that behavior and instead help catalyze change. It is through this process that we may move towards collective nobility – not only from the perspective of the state, but from the perspective of individuals as well.

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