Bad Ideology: Spinozist Affects and the Power of Inadequate Ideas

Andrew Sorota
Advisors: Michael Della Rocca and Samuel Moyn

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What prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in certain marginal social conditions like old age, has become an everyday experience.

- Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

Spinoza or Nietzsche are philosophers whose critical and destructive powers are without equal, but this power always springs from affirmation, from joy, from a cult of affirmation and joy, from the exigency of life against those who would mutilate and mortify life. For me, that is philosophy itself.

- Giles Deleuze, *Desert Islands*

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INTRODUCTION

My childhood was shaped in many ways by powerful myths. The monsters hiding under my bed, the machinations of the tooth fairy, the luminous powers of vegetables—these stories held firm in my mind, forming the basis of some of my earliest memories. Ultimately, however, as I exited my youth, these falsehoods were revealed as such. The tooth fairy became nothing more than my mother sneaking a dollar under my pillow, the monsters under my bed nothing more than a dust bunny. Yet, it is worth asking: Was I merely *lucky* to uncover these ideas as mere figments of my imagination? Was the truth revealed to me as a matter of contingency? Or was it always *necessary* that the falsehoods would be repudiated, that the rational ideas would win out?

At its core, this thesis aims to address such questions. Do rational ideas always win out—if not in the short-term, at least in the long-term? If not, what are the conditions under which irrational ideas prevail? Can irrational ideas sustain power indefinitely, or must there necessarily come a breaking point? Finally, does the *kind* of idea matter in determining its staying power? Perhaps the inadequacies contained within my fragile idea of the tooth fairy were always destined to be revealed; I only needed to open my eyes as my mother snuck a dollar under my pillow to recognize its falsities. But what about irrational ideas whose inconsistencies cannot be observed so manifestly? What about the ideas, or rather the collections of ideas, which construct the entire foundation of how we view ourselves and our world? If these ideas end up being incomplete, does this incompleteness necessarily reveal itself on its own? If not, what responsibility do we have to recognize—and ultimately mend—these inadequacies? Is such enlightenment even possible?

This latter category of ideas—the ideas which fundamentally shape how we understand ourselves and our world, which I will later refer to as *ideologies*—are the focus of this project.

On August 11, 2017, a white supremacist rally took to the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia, with participants brandishing weapons, instigating violent encounters, and reciting racist and anti-Semitic chants like "Jews will not replace us!" Just one year prior, then presidential candidate Donald Trump attracted hundreds of thousands of fanatical supporters to his rallies behind the exclusionary, nativist message "Build that wall!" These emergences of right-wing ethnonationalism—frequently labeled, perhaps too reductively, by people including myself, as right-wing populism—have increased over the past two decades across national contexts. In each case, liberal pundits have been (rightfully) quick to denounce the populist aggressors—for the violence of their marches, for the harm of their chants, but most of all, for the *irrationality* of their ideology. Could the Charlottesville protesters not simply *see* that their anger was misplaced? Why were so many Trump supporters unable to recognize that their sense of precarity derived, not from working class immigrants, but from capitalistic and oligarchic forms of elite domination?

This thesis picks up those same questions—not from a position of paternalism or superiority, but from a position of understanding. Why might it actually be the case that certain ideologies can be so epistemically powerful, even if they are poor representations of the kinds of alienation they claim to embody? What are the conditions under which these irrational ideologies become more alluring and powerful than others? If these ideologies are truly irrational, is there necessarily a point at which they are replaced by more rational ideologies? And if the victory of rational ideologies is *not* metaphysically certain, then what can be done to strengthen their power? To answer these questions which lie at the foundation of political life, I turn to philosophy.

Crucially, this project builds on the tremendous work of previous scholars who have examined the allure of contemporary right-wing populist and authoritarian movements. These

analyses have predominantly approached right-wing populism through economic,[1] political,[2,3] and social,[4,5,6] lenses. I do not intend to dispute these analyses. In fact, I believe these analyses get many things right, and I hope that this thesis will be read in dialogue with these other works and disciplines. Ultimately, no ideology can be fully understood through one perspective alone. Yet still, I do believe there is much to be gained by approaching these matters from a distinctly *philosophical* perspective. To truly understand how ideologies form and gain power, we must first understand the relationship between ideologies and people, as well as what drives humans on a fundamental level. A comprehensive metaphysical framework not only allows us to understand the allure of contemporary right-wing populism; it similarly allows us to understand how certain inadequate ideologies have gained power across time periods, despite their inconsistencies.

If this project is, in a sense, a work of ideology critique, then what exactly is meant by the term "ideology"? As it is understood in this paper, an ideology is simply an inherited framework through which individuals and collectives make sense of the world.[7] The implications of this definition are twofold. First, ideologies are unavoidable, insofar as they are intrinsic to humans' ability to interpret the world. In this way, humans "make meaning" through their ideologies. Second, ideologies are not collections of thoughts that we consciously construct, but are rather frameworks that we unconsciously inherit through shared cultures, norms, and discourses—all of

[1] Charles Dumas, *Populism and Economics* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2018).
[2] Claudia Chwalisz, *The Populist Signal: Why Politics and Democracy Need to Change* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefied, 2015).
[3] Hélène Landemore, *Open Democracy: Reinventing Popular Rule for the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).
[4] Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).
[5] Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin, *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy* (London: Penguin Random House, 2018).
[6] Marisa Abrajano and Zoltan L. Hajnal, *White Backlash: Immigration, Race, and American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University press, 2017).
[7] Stuart Hall, "Racist Ideologies and the Media," *Media Studies: A Reader*, no. 2, 2000, 271-82.

which are shaped largely by our social and material conditions.[8] Importantly, however, this does not mean ideologies themselves are static. In fact, individuals have the capacity to adopt *different* ideologies—different ways to view the world—through conscious, rational processes. After all, a core aim of this thesis is to ascertain which kinds of ideologies we should strive to adopt.

This paper thus aims to develop three primary concepts, divided accordingly between three chapters: first, a theory of what fundamentally drives humans and what kinds of ideas exist in the world; second, a framework to understand what ideologies are and what makes some ideologies normatively preferable to others; and third, an examination of the conditions under which inadequate ideas and ideologies prevail—and what can be done to counteract this. To do this, I primarily work through the thought of seventeenth-century philosopher Benedict de Spinoza.

In contemporary academic literature, Spinoza has been a seminal thinker for two camps of scholars who both influenced the aims and approach of this project. First, Spinoza can be viewed as the foundational predecessor to the contemporary discipline of affect theory, which has gained wide popularity—commonly referred to as the "affective turn"—since the late twentieth century. Scholars in this field aim to uncover the ways in which individuals are perpetually affected by forces in their environments—ideas, affects sensoria, interpersonal relations, etc.—which they cannot consciously observe.[9] In Spinoza, we find the first account of such an effort. In the preface to Part III of the *Ethics*, he writes, "Most of those who have written about the affects, and men's way of living, seem to treat, not of natural things, which follow the common laws of Nature, but of things which are outside Nature…" He contends, however, that "The affects…follow with the same necessity and force of Nature as the other singular things."[10] Spinoza thus seeks to provide

[8] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1929).
[9] See Deleuze (1970/1988); Deleuze with Guattari (1980/1987); Barad (2007); Manning (2013); Massumi (2002); and Thrift (2004).
[10] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, translated by Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), III preface.

analytical framework through which we can understand how humans are moved by unconscious forces which exist outside of their being. Spinoza's account of the affects is thus crucial to the *descriptive* task of this thesis, since one of the main goals of this project is to uncover why inadequate ideologies may have the capacity to move individuals despite their inconsistencies.

Second, Spinoza has been central to a group of scholars in the neo-Marxist tradition. Perhaps most famously, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri present Spinoza as a radical democrat, whose metaphysics embraces the power of popular multitudes and finds "its true expression in spontaneous popular movements."[11,12,13] They argue that, according to Spinoza, the power of the multitude is the foundation of any political order,[14] based in part on Spinoza's claim that democracy is "the most natural form of state, approaching most closely that freedom which nature grants to every man."[15] Hardt and Negri's vision of radical democracy has been hugely influential for contemporary social movements, which shape their organizational structures in opposition to the vertical hierarchies of the past. More pointedly, in light of the failures of twentieth-century Marxism—namely, the reproduction of hierarchies through oppressive bureaucratization[16]—Hardt and Negri's conception of the power of the multitude critically seeks to undermine structures of

[11] Sandra Leonie Field, *Potentia: Hobbes and Spinoza on Power and Popular Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020): 8.
[12] See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 2000); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2009).
[13] Some scholars worry that Hardt and Negri's interpretation strays too far from Spinoza, and, in a sense, *misappropriates* his ideas. For example, in her book *Potentia*, Sandra Leonie Field argues that Hardt and Negri, as well as other scholars who read Spinoza as a radical democrat, misinterpret Spinoza by adopting an anti-institutionalist approach, in which power resides solely in spontaneous, decentralized social movements. Instead, she argues, Spinoza's understanding of the multitude constitutes the expressed power *within* governance structures. This distinction between different expressions of "popular power," however, is not relevant to my interpretation of Spinoza. The important takeaway for my thesis is that Spinoza emphasizes the power of the collective, and in particular, of our intersubjective relations to other beings. For my project, the precise manifestation of these relations is less important.
[14] Eugene Garver, "Spinoza's Democratic Imagination," *The European Legacy,* 19(7), 2014, 833-853).
[15] Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, translated by Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), 179.
[16] Simone Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, translated by Arthur Wills and John Petrie, 1958.

domination wherever they may emerge.[17] This thesis similarly draws on a radical democratic interpretation of Spinoza, albeit through a slightly different lens. As Hardt and Negri appreciate, Spinoza's metaphysics entails a fundamental interconnectedness between different beings, which largely accounts for the power vested in the multitude. This intersubjectivity plays an especially important role in the *prescriptive* portion of this thesis, when we begin to examine what kinds of political projects can displace inadequate ideologies by effectively mobilizing collective affects.

Hence, as I understand it, Spinoza's philosophy is particularly useful to us for two reasons: first, because it accounts for the ways in which humans are frequently affected by external things which we cannot fully comprehend; and second, because it presents a unique understanding of our intersubjectivity, in which our power is essentially connected to the power of others. Of course, it should be acknowledged that, while Spinoza is the central thinker of this thesis, the goal here is not to vindicate every claim he makes, nor to conceal my ideas behind his own. Rather, the point is to use Spinoza's metaphysical and psychological accounts to learn something new about how humans exist in the world, how we relate to one another, and how this implicates political ideologies. After all, Spinoza's philosophy transcends time and place. Through Spinoza, we can thus learn how certain ideas gain power and how we, too, can gain power through our ideas.

This thesis proceeds in three chapters. Chapter One aims to explicate Spinoza's metaphysics, including his important distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas. An adequate idea is a representation of a thing that clearly and distinctly presents the causes and relations of that thing—how it came into existence, what caused it to be a certain way, etc. An inadequate idea is a representation of a thing that does not fully present its causes; some feature of

[17] Sandra Leonie Field, *Potentia*, 11.

our understanding of the object is missing or malformed. When we have inadequate ideas, we are being acted *upon*, since an external force is shaping our perceptions. This, in turn, tends to diminish our power. To appreciate just how damaging this loss of power is for Spinoza, we must understand how the notion of power fits into his broader metaphysics. According to Spinoza, "each thing, as far as it can by its own power strives to persevere in its being."[18] This desire to acquire more power is the most essential feature of existence for Spinoza. Since inadequate ideas diminish our power, it is thus our nature to strive for the most adequate ideas. It is only once we have fully adequate ideas and reduce as far as possible the power of inadequate ideas that we can be "free," insofar as whatever happens to us will align with the dictates of reason and result purely from our own nature.

Chapter Two establishes our understanding of ideology by drawing on the works of Karl Mannheim, Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, and Stuart Hall. For the purposes of this paper, an ideology is understood as an inherited mode of thought through which we "make meaning." Next, I attempt to develop a framework through which we can critically and reliably evaluate ideologies based on Spinoza's metaphysics. In the previous chapter, it was established that humans perpetually strive to obtain adequate ideas, since adequate ideas increase our power to act. Yet, all ideologies, by my own definition, are to some extent inadequate, since they do not emerge from our own essences, but are rather imported onto us through external sources. And yet ideologies are also unavoidable, since, as finite beings who are perpetually overwhelmed by external forces, we need these frameworks to make sense of the world. Hence, if ideologies are both inadequate *and* unavoidable, it becomes imperative to interrogate how we can distinguish between different ideologies, so that we can identify the most adequate ones toward which we should strive.

[18] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIIp6.

Spinoza's theory of affects can help illuminate this distinction. An affect for Spinoza is simply any change in power. Changes in power that result from our own nature are considered actions, whereas those that rely on external forces are called passions. Importantly, however, not all passions necessarily diminish our power. Some passions allow our mind to pass to greater perfection—a process which subsequently produces joy within us. It can therefore be deduced that while all ideologies are to some degree bad, insofar as they reduce our power to act in some respects, they can also be good, since they can increase our power in other capacities. An ideology which allows us to see the world more clearly and distinctly would thus be considered a good ideology, whereas bad ideologies would be those which provide us with poor representations of the world that ultimately decrease our capacity to act. Moreover, it follows that we are able to detect the goodness of our ideologies based on the kinds of affects they produce within us.

Up to this point, we will have established: first, that all humans strive to have adequate ideas, since adequate ideas increase our power to act, which fulfils our most fundamental desire; and second, that while all ideologies act *on* us in some capacity, the ideologies which provide us with the most adequate representations of the world—therefore moving our mind to greater perfection and producing joyful affects—are the most preferable ones. But we have not yet addressed the most pressing question of this thesis, namely whether these desirable ideologies necessarily prevail. Chapter Three attempts to resolve this matter. In Spinoza's own thought, the answer is not manifestly clear. On the one hand, Spinoza contends that adequate ideas inherently contain a heightened degree of power compared to inadequate ideas, writing, "Affects arising from or aroused by reason are, if we take account of time, more powerful than those related to singular things we regard as absent."[19] On the other hand, Spinoza limits this assurance by saying that "the

[19] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, Vp7.

force by which a man persevered in existing is limited, and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes," meaning that humans are necessarily subject to inadequate ideas.[20] In the former, we see a version of what I later refer to as the supremacy of the good—the view that, in the end, the most adequate ideas and ideologies necessarily prevail. But in the latter, we see that the supremacy of the good might be conditional, or at least limited in particular circumstances.

To reconcile this tension, I propose an interpretation of Spinoza which holds that Spinoza's position regarding the intrinsic power of adequate ideas is actually less ambitious than is commonly construed. I contend that Spinoza is not saying that rational ideas *always* win out as a matter of metaphysical necessity. He is merely saying that, all else being equal, there is more intrinsic power in adequate ideas compared to inadequate ideas, since adequate ideas derive from our own essence, whereas inadequate ideas are produced externally to our being.[21] Yet, there are certainly conditions under which individuals and collectives can be overwhelmed by negative affects from the external world, leaving them susceptible to indoctrination by inadequate ideas and ideologies. And indeed, these instances may be less rare than we commonly assume. This chapter thus seeks to explore the conditions under which inadequate ideas and ideologies can prevail.

First, we begin on the level of individual, examining how, when individuals experience profound negative affects from the external world, they can be overwhelmed by inadequate ideas which obstruct their striving to persevere, since these ideas may be simpler or more proximate. Next, to extend this reasoning to the level of ideologies, we must examine the broader social,

[20] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp3.

[21] Some scholars, such as Richard Hofstadter in *The Age of Reform* (1955), contend that in certain historical circumstances, there is actually an *enhanced* power contained within irrationality. That is, the inconsistencies of a given ideology may actually work to reaffirm the ideology's truth. My interpretation of Spinoza can be easily reconciled with such positions. In fact, in my discussion of the conditions under which inadequate ideologies can be more affectively powerful, I make a similar point: that in an environment in which individuals are overwhelmed by negative affects, the inconsistencies contained within an ideology can actually strengthen it—at least in the short term—so long as the inconsistencies can describe an understanding of the world that is simpler and more proximate.

political, and economic conditions in which they reside. To do so, I invoke Hannah Arendt's analysis of twentieth century totalitarianism. In *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt illustrates how totalitarian ideologies became alluring despite their inconsistencies. She chiefly attributes this to the extensive sense of atomization which emerged in the twentieth century, as imperialism rapidly deteriorated existing social institutions and associations. The masses' pervasive loneliness overwhelmed them with negative affects, leaving them susceptible to indoctrination by inadequate ideologies like totalitarianism. Using the scholarship of Wendy Brown, I then explore the potential parallels between totalitarianism and right-wing populism. I argue that an analogous sense of atomization has emerged in the neoliberal era resulting from the economization of the social sphere, leaving individuals similarly vulnerable to inadequate ideologies like right-wing populism.

To close, I consider how, using a Spinozist metaphysical framework, bad ideologies can be displaced by better ones. Spinoza tells us that one affect can only be replaced by another affect. Since ideas derive their power from their corresponding affects, then a bad ideology can only be displaced by a competing ideology with stronger affects. I thus introduce the concept of relational liberalism, which is a form of liberalism that centers our intersubjectivity with other beings. Drawing on John Dewey and W.E.B. Du Bois, I show how relational liberalism recognizes the interdependence of the individual and the collective. Since Spinoza argues that we experience affects through others, I contend that relational liberalism, by way of focusing on our connections to other people, can effectively mobilize the collective affects needed to displace populism.

I hope the application of Spinoza's metaphysics to the political realm will augment our understanding of how bad ideologies can gain power despite their inadequacies, and how we can inculcate the good ones, particularly during this time of political uncertainty. Finally, I aim to revive a lost tradition that centers our intersubjectivity with other beings in the liberal imagination.

CHAPTER ONE: KNOWLEDGE, POWER, FREEDOM

In its simplest form, the goal of this thesis is to investigate the intrinsic power of rational ideas, and, by extension, ideologies. In the end, do rational ideologies necessarily prevail? If not, what is the scope of the power of rationality? That is, which socio-political circumstances may condition individuals to be drawn ideologies which are *less* rational, but which may be more affectively potent? To attempt to understand the power of different ideologies, we must first examine what kinds of ideas exist more broadly, how any idea gains power in the human mind, and thus what fundamentally drives humans. In other words, to understand what might fuel the allure of populist ideology, we must first address some of the most essential questions of human existence, which require a robust, cohesive metaphysical framework. In the context of this paper, I will accept the authority of Spinoza's metaphysical account—or at least certain key features of it—for reasons already established in the introduction.[22] Yet, I have not yet ascertained *what* his metaphysics entails, and how this relates to ideology. Hence, in this section, I will focus on the aspects of Spinoza's metaphysics which are most clearly implicated in the aims of this project.

Ethics, for Spinoza, is essentially ontology. He believes that one cannot attempt to develop a system of morality beyond the study of the human condition, that is, what drives humans and what humans naturally desire. Spinoza's *Ethics* therefore addresses deep metaphysical questions, including about the nature of God, the human mind, and social emotions. Each of these features is inextricably linked to one another, although they are not all directly pertinent to our task at hand. Accordingly, I will dig deeply into some aspects of Spinoza's metaphysics—namely his account

[22] The way in which Spinoza centers emotions to describe how ideas gain (epistemic) power has made his metaphysics appealing not only to myself, but to a rich history of renowned scholars, ranging from twentieth-century philosophers like Giles Deleuze and Henri Bergson to contemporary affect theorists like Brian Massumi and Ruth Leys.

of the human mind and the *conatus* in Part III of the *Ethics*—while only briefly addressing other (equally important) metaphysical considerations, such as his conception of God and causality.

This section will proceed in four parts, which aim to establish the philosophical features that form the foundation of this thesis: First, I will outline Spinoza's trilateral ontology, which consists of a singular substance, infinitely many attributes—two of which are accessible to humans, thought and extension—and infinitely many modes. I will also briefly address the relationship between mind and body in Spinoza's thought. Second, I will discuss how Spinoza's monist metaphysics supports his causal necessity and determinism. In this section, I will briefly deviate from the primary task of Chapter One—to merely explain Spinoza's metaphysics—to situate this paper within Spinoza's broader philosophy. Specifically, I will attempt to show why philosophical projects about ideas or ideologies can have profound world-making capabilities, even despite Spinoza's causal necessity and determinism. Third, I will establish what Spinoza understands to be the three different levels of knowledge, as well as the vital distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas. Finally, I will introduce Spinoza's argument for why the essence of things consists in their striving to persevere, as well as how this relates to the adequacy of ideas.

I. Substance, attributes, and modes

Perhaps most famously, Spinoza is known for his radical conception of God as portrayed in Part I of the *Ethics*. Spinoza writes against a backdrop of Judeo-Christian theological hegemony, which holds that God exists outside of the universe and created the universe according to his own will or objecitve. For Spinoza, however, God does not exist independent of the universe as a causal progenitor with divine intention. Rather, God *is* the totality of the natural world—hence his interchangeable use of the words "God" and "Nature"—and the universe exists from necessity as

opposed to divine will. Substance, for Spinoza, is "that whose essence involves existence, *or* that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing."[23] From there, it follows that substance is that which cannot be divided, and which comprises everything which can itself be divided.[24] As such, there is only one substance in the universe, namely God, and this substance exists necessarily. Given that only one substance exists under Spinoza's ontological framework, everything in the universe derives its nature from this substance and exists with the same necessity. This stands in stark contrast, not only to Judeo-Christian conceptions of God, but also to prevailing Cartesian notions of substance, which proposed the idea of dual substances, that is, mind and body.

As will be explored further in the following sections, given that all things—including human actions and human emotions—derive from the nature of God, not only do they exist necessarily, but they also behave necessarily, that is, in ways dictated by the laws of Nature. Spinoza writes, "In Nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine Nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way."[25] For Spinoza, humans have the ability to recognize two attributes of God, thought and extension, which correspond to the "modes" of the universe. Modes are the things which we conceive in the universe, and they are infinite in number. All modes share in one of the two perceptible attributes of God, and therefore modes of the same attribute have common features. Put more simply, we can understand the modes of thought and extension to be minds and bodies, respectively. Moreover, it is vital to keep in mind the trilateral nature of Spinoza's ontology—substance, attributes, and modes—as this is integral to his system of ideas, which will be explored later on.

[23] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics,* Id1.
[24] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, Ip12, Ip13.
[25] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, Ip29.

Spinoza's account of the relationship between mind and body, as well as the rich secondary literature which it has inspired, could itself be a sufficient foundation for a thesis of this scope. While I will not fully explicate these tenets of Spinoza's philosophy, the mind-body relation in Spinoza's thought has important implications for our understanding of the limits of human rationality. According to Spinoza, even though the mind and body are modes of the same substance—and indeed, he even describes the mind and the body as being "one and the same thing"[26]—they cannot directly interact since they do not exhibit the same attribute. Only extended modes (i.e., bodies) can affect extended modes, and similarly only thinking modes (i.e., minds) can affect thinking modes, even though all things ultimately have God as their cause.[27] Hence, in addition to rejecting Descartes' dualism, Spinoza also rejects Descartes' interactionism. It may be perplexing, then, how minds can develop an idea of the body if they have mutually exclusive attributes. Spinoza posits that the mind can only apprehend the body through ideas of the affections of the body. Crucially, ideas of the affections of the body do not involve adequate knowledge of an external body.[28] We will come back to what it means for an idea to be adequate or inadequate in section IV, but for now it is important to remember that the mind can only have incomplete ideas of extended modes or bodies; it is for this reason that the mind is susceptible to the passions.

II. Causal necessity, determinism, and the problem of teleology

It has now been established that, according to Spinoza, there exists only one substance in the universe, namely God or Nature, and all things derive from this substance. Crucially, Spinoza's monist metaphysics lays the foundation for his argument for causal necessity and determinism.

[26] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIIp2.
[27] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIIp2.
[28] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIp29.

Spinoza argues that substances can only be determined by themselves. This means God, a substance, is entirely determined by itself. And since God is the *singular* substance of which all things in the universe exist as modes, all things are thus determined by God, that is, by the laws of Nature without contingency. For Spinoza, all things, without exception, have causes. This means anything in the universe—even "the affects, and men's way of living"[29]—can be understood through a rational, systematic order. The notion that no actions can take place independent of (or contradictory to) the laws of Nature diverges starkly from common assumptions about free will, such as those in the mold of Sartre or Kant, which conceive free action as self-determination, that is, the possibility to act spontaneously or independently of determining causes. Perhaps Spinoza's conception of freedom can still be understood as self-determination of a sort, since he describes something as being free if it "exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone."[30] Put another way, freedom is the capacity to act entirely from one's own essence. Nonetheless, this differs from the aforementioned notions of freedom, insofar as one's actions would still be causally determined by one's own essence, rather than being spontaneous.[31]

From Spinoza's causal necessity, it thus follows that "From a given determinate cause there necessarily follows an effect." In other words, given the consistency of the laws of Nature, we can resolutely assume that if we correctly identify the causes of a given event, then the same causes will produce the same effects at a different time. Before moving forward, it is important to consider the implications of Spinoza's determinism in the context of this project. Spinoza's causal necessity suggests that, if we can correctly identify the conditions under which irrational ideologies are more

[29] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, III preface.
[30] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, Id7.
[31] Another key difference between Spinoza's understanding of freedom and more existentialist notions—one which will be discussed more fully later in this thesis—is that Spinoza conceives a certain impossibility to total freedom. That is, as finite beings who rely on external things, humans can never be entirely free—since we can never act solely out of our own nature—but we can nonetheless become *more* free, which is Spinoza's ultimate aim of the *Ethics*.

affectively or epistemically powerful than rational ones, then we can assume similar conditions at a different time will yield similar results, thus enhancing the importance of this project.

Yet, it would seem as if Spinoza's determinism also poses fundamental *obstacles* for the aims of this project. Some may ask: If all things in the universe, including human thought and action, are wholly determined by the laws of Nature, then what is the utility of a project aimed at reshaping how we understand the battle of ideologies? Better yet, what is the purpose of ideology critique as a methodological approach, if such efforts cannot affect the trajectory of ideologies, since, after all, they are dictated by the laws of Nature? These individuals may argue that Spinoza's metaphysics can seemingly provide us with the tools to *predict* when particular irrational ideologies may prevail, but not with the ability to actually *change* that course. Such accusations, however, rest on a misguided understanding of what it means for something to follow the laws of Nature. According to Spinoza, nothing in the universe can act in ways that contradict the laws of Nature, because all things derive from—or exist as modes of—God, or Nature itself. But this does not mean that things in the universe have no capacity to act. On the contrary, as will be explored in later sections, Spinoza's entire ethics is aimed at uncovering the source of this power to act and how to increase it. As such, uncovering the causes of a given ideology can in fact change the trajectory of history, even if this change is considered necessary or metaphysically determined.

This brings us back to our previous claim, that if the same causes are present at time A and time B, the same effects will ensue. And likewise, if the same causes which prime individuals for an irrational ideology at time A are also present at time B, then individuals will also be drawn toward an irrational ideology at time B. Hence, to avoid the replication of irrational ideologies across temporalities, the causes must change at a given time. Perhaps most obviously, one way this can be accomplished is by changing certain destructive or alienating material conditions. But,

crucially for Spinoza, ideas also have a powerful ability to move individuals. In this sense, new ideas or sources of knowledge can also act as causes, which produce different effects than seen in the past. Hence, if individuals have the ability to recognize how certain conditions may force them to act in an irrational way, then those individuals may cease to act this way, even if other causes still remain—because this idea, this source of enlightenment, is a *new* cause, and an important one.

Let us briefly consider a simple example to help us understand the causal power of ideas more clearly. Imagine I am buying my sister a gift for her birthday in two different worlds, which we will call world A and world B. These worlds are identical except for the fact that in world A, I have some idea of what my sister wants for her birthday, and in world B I do not have this knowledge. In world A, surely my idea of my sister's wish will influence my ultimate gift-making decision. This cause is not present in world B, and therefore a different action may be taken in this world. This does not mean I am acting outside of the laws of Nature in world A; the causes are simply different. From this example, we can clearly deduce the implications of this project and circumvent the alleged problem of teleology. In two analogous historical circumstances, where individuals are similarly alienated by their social, political, and economic conditions, if individuals are able to recognize how such conditions may prime them to be drawn toward harmful ideologies, then they may not be tethered to this same fate.[32] That, at least, is the hope of this project.

[32] On at least one reading of this section, I have presented a purely rationalist, perhaps neoliberal approach to politics. It would seem like I have made the claim that material conditions need not change for better political ideologies to prevail, so long as individuals have the rational capacity to recognize inadequate ideologies as such. This is not my intention. In fact, much of this thesis is devoted to examining the destructive material conditions which yield irrational ideologies, in the hope that they will be averted in the future. However, it is also important to acknowledge that these atomizing conditions *have* been—and may continue to be—reproduced across temporal contexts. In such cases, understanding how individuals can still resist the allure of irrational ideologies should be empowering, not obstructive.

III. On the different kinds of knowledge and ideas

We have now established: first, that Spinoza posits a monist metaphysics, in which everything in the universe derives from the substance of God; second, that this monism means everything follows the laws of Nature, and that the same causes will always yield the same effects; third, that if we want to have different effects, we must change the causes; and finally, that new ideas or forms of knowledge can serve as crucial causes in this regard. These claims allowed us to understand how projects of ideology critique can still have causal power despite Spinoza's determinism. But we have not yet begun to develop the philosophical foundation necessary to accomplish our principal task at hand, that is, to illuminate the conditions under which irrational ideologies may be more powerful than rational ones. Before we can delve into the realm of ideologies, however, we must first establish what we mean by ideas. If ideas have the capacity to move individuals—to act as causes which change the cycle of history—what exactly does Spinoza understand to be an idea, and how are different categories of ideas distinguished from one another?

Spinoza says there are three kinds of knowledge: imagination, reason, and intuition. Remember that Spinoza's ontology has three elements—substance, attributes, and modes—and each of these kinds of knowledge loosely corresponds to a different ontological level. Imagination focuses on the modes, reason focuses on attributes, and intuition is tied to knowledge of God.[33] Knowledge of the first kind, imagination, consists in our ability to recollect perceptions from sensory experience. Any idea we have that is inadequate or confused belongs to this first kind of knowledge, as it exists independent of the intellect. Knowledge of the second kind, reason, is related to the properties a thing has because of its attribute. For example, there are common

[33] These associations—between imagination and the modes, reason and the attributes, intuition and substance—are useful for developing a preliminarily understanding of the different kinds of knowledge. Yet, it should be noted that such associations are also rather reductive, and there can be crossover between the different kinds of knowledge. For instance, as shown in IIp40, imaginations or opinions can surely focus on substance, even if they are confused.

properties I can use reason to recognize in two different extended things—say, my dog Mila and the computer on which I am writing this thesis—by virtue of their being extended. The properties we recognize through reason thus do not point us to the essence of a particular thing, but rather illuminate features that are common to all things which share in the same attribute. Spinoza explains, for instance, that we can have an idea of the body of a thing—which is said to express the attributes of extension and thought—but this idea does not capture any of the other attributes of God, which would be necessary to understand the true essence of the thing.[34] Knowledge of the third kind, intuitive knowledge, provides us with an adequate idea of the essence of things, as it derives from an adequate idea of the essence of God. Accordingly, unlike knowledge of the first kind, knowledge of the second and third kinds are perfectly adequate and necessarily true.[35]

Yet, the distinction between different levels of knowledge is perhaps less important for the aims of this project, since we are primarily concerned with the various kinds of ideas which exist at the first level of imagination. After all, we are attempting to ascertain the bounds of rationality, that is, the conditions under which irrational ideas or ideologies may prevail over rational ones. Given that knowledge of the second and third kinds is necessarily true, the types of irrational ideologies which we are investigating here must consist in knowledge of the first kind.[36] Rather than fixating on the different levels of knowledge, therefore, I will focus on Spinoza's broader distinction between different kinds of *ideas*. An idea, for Spinoza, is nothing more than a mental conception formed by the mind; it is, in this sense, a mode of God's attribute of thought. And there are exclusively two kinds of ideas according to Spinoza: adequate ideas and inadequate ideas.

[34] Benedict de Spinoza, "Letter 64," 1675.
[35] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIp40.
[36] It is true that irrational ideologies—or *inadequate* ideologies through the typology of Spinoza—must necessarily belong to knowledge of the first kind. Yet, there is also good reason to believe that *all* ideologies, even the more rational ones, must also belong to the realm of imagination. The implications of this will be explored in Chapter Two.

Adequate ideas involve complete knowledge or understanding of their object, whereas inadequate ideas are incomplete or confused in some capacity. What makes an idea adequate is our ability to grasp the entirety of its causal connections to other objects through itself alone, without reference to additional external things. Even more importantly, when we have an adequate idea, we can recognize its place within the laws of Nature, that is, its relation to the attributes of God and to the infinite modes which follow from it. On the other hand, an inadequate idea cannot be fully understood through itself alone.[37] Put another way, an inadequate idea is a poor representation of an imagined object, and our epistemic foundation for the idea is lacking in some crucial capacity. To reiterate, it is important to remember that inadequate ideas are *lacking* something (i.e., something beyond the idea is needed to fully understand its causal connections). It is not the case that the inadequacy of an idea derives from something positively contained within the idea. In fact, according to Spinoza, "falsity consists only in the privation of knowledge."[38]

Perhaps it can be said inadequate ideas do not relate to God in the same way that adequate ideas do. By this, we mean that the inadequate ideas do not capture the infinite and eternal essence of God; they only conceive of their object as affecting the body, rather than as following from God. Of course, it should be said that all ideas, just like everything else in the universe, do in fact follow from God. After all, for Spinoza, nothing in the universe exists outside of God. Since inadequate ideas are inadequate solely because of a privation (rather than something distinctly *positive*)—and since God is a supremely perfect being with no privations—it thus follows that God contains only adequate ideas.[39] What determines an idea's adequacy, therefore, is not whether it

[37] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIId1.
[38] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIp35.
[39] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIp32.

"follows from" God—since all ideas follow from God—but rather how the human mind conceives it, that is, whether the mind is able to recognize the entirety of its causal relations through itself.

One of Spinoza's clearest examples of an inadequate idea emerges in Part IV of the *Ethics*, when Spinoza discusses our common assumptions about the proximity of the sun. He writes:

> For example, when we look at the sun, we imagine it to be about two hundred feet away from us. In this we are deceived so long as we are ignorant of its true distance; but when its distance is known, the error is removed, not the imagination, that is, the idea of the sun, which explains its nature only so far as the body is affected by it. And so, although we come to know the true distance, we shall nevertheless imagine it as near us. Thus, when the rays of sun, falling on the surface of the water, are reflected to our eyes, we imagine it as if it were in the water, even if we know its true place… So imaginations do not disappear through the presence of the true insofar as it is true, but because there occur others, stronger than them, which exclude the present existence of the things we imagine. [40]

So, when we initially look at the sun, we form an inadequate idea of it, because we solely conceive of the sun as it is affecting the body. As was already established in section II of this chapter, since the mind and the body are "mutually exclusive modes of the same substance," the mind can only ever have inadequate ideas of modes of extension.[41] Our imagination of the sun is thus incomplete; we have a critical privation of knowledge in this regard. But, when we subsequently learn the true distance of the sun, we form a new, more adequate idea of the sun based on this knowledge. Notwithstanding, our original imaginations of the sun do not go away, because we still experience the same ideas of the affections of the body. The important point, however, is that, according to Spinoza, the more adequate idea of the sun will be more powerful than our imaginations of it.[42] That is, the more adequate idea will be more prominent in our minds and have more staying power.

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[40] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp1.

[41] Bradley Robinson and Mel Kutner, "Spinoza and the Affective Turn: A Return to the Philosophical Origins of Affect," *Qualitative Inquiry,* 25(5), 2019, 111-117.

[42] Needless to say, a primary aim of this thesis is to ascertain whether or not this claim by Spinoza (i.e., that adequate ideas are more powerful than inadequate ones) is always true, sometimes true, or rarely true—and to look at how the answer may be complicated by particular social, economic, and political conditions. At this point, however, I will only restate Spinoza's claim without evaluation, since my hope here is merely to distinguish adequate and inadequate ideas.

IV. Being and striving

Having established the central distinction of the paper, that is, the distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas, we must now interrogate what the implications of this are for human life. What is the relationship between human freedom and the adequacy of our ideas, and why should humans actively seek adequate ideas? Let us begin with the normative question first, as this implicates the descriptive question as well. To determine precisely why humans "should"—or rather, in language better tailored to Spinoza's necessitarianism, to determine why humans are naturally predisposed to—seek adequate ideas, we must first develop an understanding of what end, at the most fundamental psychological level, humans naturally desire. For Spinoza, this answer lies in his conception of *conatus*, which he advances in Part III of the *Ethics*. According to Spinoza, "each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being."[43] Importantly, because Spinoza believes that humans do not exist outside of the laws of Nature, the desire to persevere, or *conatus*, applies to all things in Nature. Furthermore, striving to persevere is not merely something humans *do*. This striving, according to Spinoza, "is nothing but the actual essence of the thing."[44] Spinoza's argument for *conatus* can be understood in the following way:

1. All singular things, including humans, are modes of God, which express the power of God in a particular way (assumption).

The first premise should need little explanation beyond what is already written in section I of this chapter. Remember that Spinoza's ontology contains a singular substance, God, with all singular things in the universe being modes that follow from the nature of God and express God's power.

2. Things of a contrary nature cannot exist within the same subject (assumption).

[43] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics,* IIIp6.
[44] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics,* IIIp7.

The second premise is based on a *reductio ad absurdum* assumption, namely that it would be absurd if two contradictory things—understood as two things which are contrary in nature, such that one has the capacity to destroy the other—could exist within the same subject. This is absurd based on Spinoza's claim that "No thing can be destroyed except through an external cause."[45] For Spinoza, the definition of a thing necessarily affirms, and does not deny, its essence, and therefore if something gets destroyed, it must be from an external cause. If a thing can only be destroyed by an external cause, then it follows that contradictory things cannot exist within the same subject.

3. Singular things in the universe cannot contradict each other (from P1 and P2).

Since, in P2, we asserted that contradictory things cannot exist within the same subject, and in P1, we established that everything in the universe exists as a mode of God, then it naturally follows that singular things in the universe (i.e., modes of God) cannot contradict each other.

4. Each thing naturally opposes everything which contradicts it (from P4).

In P3, we argued that singular things cannot contradict each other. It thus follows that each thing opposes everything which contradicts it, insofar as it can be destroyed by contradictory things.

∴ Each thing fundamentally strives to persevere in its being (from P4).

Our conclusion is merely a reformulation of P4. If we can say that each thing naturally opposes things which contradict it, then we can equally say that each thing strives to persevere in its being.

We have just established that the essence of humans, just like all other things in Nature, consists in our striving to persevere, that is, in our perpetual desire to increase our power. We must now explore the relationship between power and the adequacy of ideas. How might our power be affected differently by adequate and inadequate ideas, and what does this tell us about which types of ideas we should strive to inculcate? According to Spinoza, our minds undergo different things

[45] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIIp4.

when we deal with adequate versus inadequate ideas. On the one hand, when we have an adequate idea, we are *acting*. This is because in such cases, we have the same idea as God. So, our mind and God are each the adequate cause of this idea. On the other hand, when we have an inadequate idea, we are being *acted upon*. This is because now, our idea is different from the idea of God, insofar as it has some privation. Hence, God—given that God contains not only our mind, but the minds of everything—is the adequate cause of this idea, whereas our mind exists only as a partial cause.[46]

An example may help illuminate these claims more intelligibly. Recall the hierarchy of knowledge that we established in section III of this chapter. The higher two levels of knowledge—intuition and reason—contain ideas that are necessarily true, whereas the lowest level of knowledge—imagination—also contains inadequate ideas. Consider first a mathematical example from Part II of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza expounds the distinction between reason and intuition:

> Suppose there are three numbers, and the problem is to find a fourth which is to the third as the second is to the first. Merchants do not hesitate to multiply the second by the third, and divide the product by the first, because they have not yet forgotten what they heard from their teacher about any demonstration, or because they have often found this in the simplest numbers, or from the force of the demonstration of P19 in Book VII of Euclid, namely, from the common property of proportional. But in the simplest numbers none of this is necessary. Given the numbers 1, 2, and 3, no one fails to see that the fourth number is 6—and we see this much more clearly because we infer the fourth number from the ration which, in one glance, we see the first number to have to the second.[47]

For our purposes, we are less concerned with the particular distinction between reason and intuition, both of which contain fully adequate ideas. The point is merely that when we have a simple mathematical problem, we can arrive at the answer *in one glance*. Without relying on the senses or reason, we can immediately grasp the essence of the answer, which is necessarily true. In this example, our mind operates with perfection, that is, on the same level as God. By virtue of

[46] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIIp1.
[47] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics,* IIp40.

asserting this knowledge, we are *acting*, and our power increases. Compare this now with the example of the sun we examined earlier. When I form my initial imagination of the sun, it is confused and mutilated, because my idea of the sun is based solely on my ideas of the affections of the body (which are necessarily lacking, since they deal with modes of extension). In this case, I cannot immediately grasp the essence of the sun, so my mind does not act with perfection, that is, on the same level as God. Since it is never the case that my mind *ceases* to act, in this example, my mind is merely being overpowered by the power of an external thing. Hence, it can be said that I am being *acted upon* by this external force (i.e., the sun), which ultimately reduces my power.

The key point here is that when we have an adequate idea we are positively acting, whereas when we have an inadequate idea, we are being acted upon. Put another way, adequate ideas increase our power to act and inadequate ideas typically diminish our power to act. As Spinoza understands goodness in terms of aiding or diminishing our power to act, we can thus categorize adequate ideas as "good."[48] Still more, humans naturally strive to obtain the most adequate ideas—to obtain perfection and to elevate our knowledge as close as possible to the level of God—as this fulfills our most fundamental psychological desire to persevere. Freedom, then, as we have said, requires that a thing be a fully adequate cause of its effect, as shown through our *conatus*. Thus, it is only once we have fully adequate ideas and reduce as far as possible the power of inadequate ideas that we can be "free," insofar as whatever happens to us will result purely from our essence.

In closing, this chapter has established much of the philosophical foundation which will be central to our analysis of political ideologies in the rest of this paper. Starting with Spinoza's most basic ontology, I outlined his conception of substance, attributes, and modes. I then explored how

[48] As a broad generalization, it is true that inadequate ideas generally decrease our power. In the next section, however, I will investigate whether this is absolutely true. In other words, I will see whether certain inadequate ideas—such as political ideologies—can ever move our mind to greater perfection and actually increase our power to act.

Spinoza's ontology leads to his three-tiered hierarchy of knowledge, as well as his classification of adequate and inadequate ideas. Finally, I considered the relationship between the adequacy of our ideas and human freedom, showing that to fulfill our most fundamental human desire of *conatus*, we must elevate our minds to the level of God and strive to have the most adequate ideas. In the next chapter, we will explore what it means to be free—and if this is ever truly possible, or if this is even the right conceptual framework to use—when we are in the realm of *ideologies*.

CHAPTER TWO: CONTENDING WITH IDEOLOGY

We closed Chapter One by establishing Spinoza's crucial distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas. In particular, we elucidated how adequate ideas align with our essence, whereas inadequate ideas derive from external things. Accordingly, adequate ideas increase our power to act more than inadequate ideas—at least in the long term—such that we strive for more adequate ideas through our *conatus*. While the principles established in this paper can certainly be applied to any category of ideas, we should remember that this thesis is principally concerned with a particular kind of idea, that is, an *ideology*. As will be explained in this chapter, ideologies are distinctive from other ideas, insofar as they represent more than a singular object; they provide us with the entire frameworks through which we perceive, interpret, and make sense of the world. Hence, this chapter aims to contextualize ideologies within the general scope of this project. This means I will situate ideologies within Spinoza's broader metaphysics and introduce the affective concepts which will be central to our analysis of ideological power in the following chapter.

As such, the chapter will proceed in three parts. First, I will establish precisely what I mean by an ideology. In particular, I will emphasize how ideologies are inherited from shared societal norms and discourses by both individuals and collectives. Second, using Spinoza's metaphysics, I will explain why ideologies are inherent to the human condition, and thus why humans cannot deny the existence of ideologies altogether. Third, I attempt to develop a framework through which we can distinguish preferable ideologies from less preferable ones—or, in my terminology, good ideologies from bad ones. In doing so, I will introduce Spinoza's theory of affects, which will crucially help us detect whether a given ideology aids or restrains our power to act. Spinoza's affects will also become highly relevant in the following chapter, when we investigate what makes a particular idea or ideology epistemically powerful, regardless of the adequacy of the idea.

I. What is an ideology?

In the previous chapter, we developed Spinoza's understanding of ideas, as well as his crucial distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas. An idea, for Spinoza, is simply a mental conception formed by the mind. And these mental concepts can be either adequate or inadequate. Put most simply, adequate ideas involve complete knowledge or understanding of their object, whereas inadequate ideas are incomplete or confused in some capacity. When we have an adequate idea, we can understand the entirety of its causal connections through itself alone. In other words, we can understand how we arrived at the idea and how the idea moves us in a particular way. On the other hand, we cannot wholly understand an inadequate idea through itself alone. We may not fully grasp the mechanisms through which we arrived at the inadequate idea, nor can we recognize all of the ways in which it moves us to act in particular ways. It can thus be said that adequate ideas align with our essence—since, as we established in Chapter One, our essence contains true knowledge—whereas inadequate ideas are forced onto us through external things, which hinder our ability to access our true knowledge. Hence, the adequacy of our ideas is intrinsically linked to our power to act, such that our *conatus* entails striving to increase the adequacy of our ideas.

But it has previously been suggested that ideologies are distinct from singular ideas, which may complicate our ability to categorize them cleanly as adequate or inadequate. Hence, before attempting to distinguish between adequate and inadequate—or good and bad—ideologies, we must first establish what we even mean by the term "ideology," and how ideologies fit into the broader metaphysical framework that we developed in the previous chapter. Spinoza does not talk about ideologies as such, since "ideology" as a modern concept was not introduced until the eighteenth century with the emergence of the "sociology of knowledge."[49] We must therefore

[49] Joseph S. Roucek, "A History of the Concept of Ideology," *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 5(5), 1994, 479-488.

incorporate other thinkers into our analysis of ideology. Through four thinkers—Karl Mannheim, Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, and Stuart Hall—this section will trace how the concept of ideology has been developed since the eighteenth century, ultimately arriving at an understanding of ideology that is based on two main premises: first, that ideologies are *collective* modes of thought, which provide frameworks through which groups make sense of the world; and second, that ideologies are always extra-personal, meaning they are produced in part by shared cultures and discourses which exist outside of the individual, and which the individual unconsciously inherits.

To begin, the first principle of the sociology of knowledge is that all thought is the expression of a specific social situation. Put another way, every social group "develops its own conceptual apparatus, certain peculiar methods and a specific 'style' of thinking adapted to its social position."[50] This conceptual apparatus of a social group can be understood to be the group's ideology. The social group's existence becomes bound up with its ideology, such that ideology is necessarily a collective construction. As German sociologist Karl Mannheim puts it in his 1929 book *Ideology and Utopia*, "Group existence in this sense can only mean that a group of persons, either in their immediate reactions to the same situation or as a result of direct psychic interaction, react similarly. Accordingly, conditioned by the same social situation, they are subject to the same illusions."[51] Individuals who are exposed to similar circumstances will thus develop analogous ideologies to explain some social fact or vision for society. Herein we can establish our first understanding of ideology as being the collective pattern of thought of a given social group.

But how exactly do these patterns of thought emerge? Through the sociology of knowledge, we first posited a certain inextricability between individuals' social positioning and their prevailing modes of thought. This conception—that one's materiality dictates one's

[50] Joseph S. Roucek, "A History of the Concept of Ideology," 479.
[51] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 58.

ideology—fits into an earlier Marxist tradition of historical materialism. In *The German Ideology*, Karl Marx presents his framework of historical materialism, asserting that the essence of an individual—including the way in which he thinks, or his "ideology"—stems from the material conditions in which he finds himself. Moreover, the physical organizations of a given society—and especially how material resources and capital are divided—determine how individuals produce their means of subsistence. And for Marx, this material production is the most fundamental expression of one's true self, thus shaping one's patterns of thought and perceptions of the world. He writes, "The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour."[52] If one's ideology is wholly determined by one's material conditions and modes of production, then it should logically follow that people from different positions on the socioeconomic hierarchy would interpret the world through different conceptual frameworks.

Yet, in practice, ideologies do not map on this cleanly to people's modes of production. In Marx's own thought, there is the crucial recognition of widespread false consciousness, that is, the instances in which an individual's conscious ideology *contradicts* her material conditions. According to Marx, this false consciousness obstructs the proletariat revolution, since members of the working class fail to recognize the true nature of their economic existence and thus foster desires which oppose their material advancement.[53] If the ideologies of individuals can be at odds

[52] Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (1845), in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (1978), 154.
[53] It should be noted that Marx's economic determinism holds that there will necessarily come a point at which true consciousness of the proletariat is reached, and when the contradictions contained within capitalist ideology reveal themselves. At this point in the thesis, we are not yet concerned with 1) whether Marx's categorization of good and bad (or true and false) ideologies is correct and 2) whether bad ideologies necessarily collapse; these will be addressed in the following section and chapter. Rather, the important point here is that, as Marx himself acknowledges, there is a vast preponderance of individuals who foster ideologies which are *not* solely products of their material circumstances, at the very least in the short term. Thus, when developing our comprehensive conception of ideology, it seems incumbent to consider what other factors might influence the formation of individuals' ideologies.

with their modes of production, then this suggests that there are factors *other* than individuals' material conditions which can influence their ideologies. Hence, here it becomes instructive to introduce the scholarship of twentieth-century Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to help illuminate the *immaterial* forces which can affect individuals' ability to act. Gramsci rejects a deterministic economic interpretation of history, or in his words, "mechanical historical materialism." [54] For Gramsci, like Spinoza, individuals are not only moved by physical force, but also by ideas. [55] As such, people's ideologies derive not only from their means of subsistence or their physical conditions, but also from the ideas, norms, and discourses which exist more widely in society.

According to Gramsci, these influential discourses—which are embedded into society and shape how people make sense of the world—have a particular character: they derive from the ruling class. Gramsci first presents this theory known as "cultural hegemony" in the *Prison Notebooks* in 1926. Here, Gramsci explains how the capitalist class maintains control, not just through political and economic coercion, but also ideologically, through a hegemonic culture in which the values of the bourgeoisie become internalized to be the "common sense" of everyone.[56] This hegemonic culture is what leads the working class to falsely identify their own good with the good of the ruling class, thus propagating the status quo.[57] It should be noted, however, that while the parallels can certainly be drawn, this project is not primarily a work of Marxist philosophy or critical theory. As such, the main takeaway here is not necessarily that all ideologies inherently

[54] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1926), ed., Quitin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers Co., 1971).
[55] This harkens back to a crucial point made in the previous chapter about the aims of this project. Ideology critique is not meant to undermine efforts to transform material conditions; it is meant to augment those efforts by illuminating the ways in which ideologies operate, often in conjunction with, but sometimes independent of, material conditions.
[56] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks.*
[57] Marx similarly recognizes how capitalism is reinforced by a dominance of ruling class ideology. In Chapter II of the *Communist Manifesto*, he writes, "the ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class." But for Marx, this ideological manipulation is but a mere corollary of economic theory. That is, the power of ideologies—an integral part of the Superstructure of society—can ultimately be reduced to their economic Base. For Gramsci, however, ideologies take on a power of their own, as they are influenced by ideas as much as by economic exploitation.

reproduce the status quo because they are dictated by the capitalist class, even if this may be true.[58] Instead, the crucial point, which I will soon elaborate, is that ideologies are fundamentally subject to external influences; they are shaped through preexisting discourses and therefore inherit the same flaws, blind spots, and power imbalances that are contained within those broader cultures.

This leads us to our final theorist, Stuart Hall, who builds on the work of Gramsci to provide the most straightforward conception of ideology which will guide us through the rest of this chapter and thesis. In his chapter "Racist Ideologies and the Media," Hall explains, "I am using the term [ideology] to refer to those images, concepts and premises which provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand and 'make sense' of some aspect of social existence."[59] In its simplest form, then, an ideology is an instrument that humans use to make sense of their world. But there is also a second component to Hall's understanding of ideology which is equally important: that they are not actively constructed by individuals, but rather always already exist in the world, constraining and facilitating the ways in which individuals speak and think. He writes:

> Ideological statements are made by individuals: but ideologies are not the product of individual consciousness or intention. Rather we formulate our intentions *within ideology*. They pre-date individuals, and from part of the determinate social formations and conditions in which individuals are born. We have to 'speak through' the ideologies which are active in our society and which provide us with the means of 'making sense' of social relations and our place in them.[60]

By existing in a society, individuals necessarily inherit foregoing ideologies through shared language, norms, and discourses. In this sense, the manner in which ideologies form is constitutive of ideology itself. In other words, it is not the case that some ideologies are manifestations of an

[58] This is to say, my position in this thesis is not that certain ideologies prevail simply because of the power of the ruling class, even though this is likely an important factor. Indeed, the entire next chapter is devoted to exploring the different affective and epistemological elements which can make ideologies powerful. As I will show, while these features are surely exacerbated by particular economic systems, they nonetheless tap into fundamental aspects of human nature. Through Spinoza's metaphysics, these features transcend circumstantial distributions of power.
[59] Stuart Hall, "Racist Ideologies and the Media," 271.
[60] Stuart Hall, "Racist Ideologies and the Media," 272.

individual's conscious thoughts, whereas others are externally generated. The fact that an ideology is produced extra-personally—that is, beyond the activities of a singular individual—is contained within the concept of ideology itself, and thus pertains to *all* ideologies, regardless of their content.

This has profound implications for our ability to distinguish adequate ideologies from inadequate ideologies. In the previous chapter, we established that adequate ideas derive from our essence, whereas inadequate ideas are forced upon us by external things. In this section, however, we posited that ideologies are the products of our collective social formations, and thus are always produced through things which exist outside of our own being. From this it follows that all ideologies are necessarily inadequate in some capacity, insofar as they do not flow solely from our essence. As such, the fact that ideologies are inadequate is constitutive of the concept of ideology itself, regardless of a particular ideology's content.[61] In other words, we can have a perfect ideology—which derives directly from the essence of God—and yet, to humans, this ideology would be inadequate, since it does not emerge from our being; since humans are finite beings, we would still be unable to fully understand all of the causal mechanisms by which the ideology operates. Therefore, we can now identify two key differences between ideas and ideologies: first, ideas represent singular things, whereas ideologies constitute the various concepts through which individuals make sense of the world; and second, ideas can be either adequate or inadequate, whereas ideologies are necessarily inadequate. Later in this chapter, we will attempt to ascertain how we can distinguish between good and bad ideologies if all ideologies are ultimately inadequate. Before doing that, however, we must address why humans need to hold any ideology at all, and why we cannot simply envision a world in which we have "moved beyond" ideology.

[61] Despite the inherent inadequacy of ideologies, there are nonetheless some ideologies which are *more* inadequate. The task of the third section of this chapter will thus be to ascertain how we can recognize these ideologies as such.

II. The inescapability of ideology

It has now been established that ideologies are the frameworks through which individuals make sense of the world—frameworks that do not stem from our own activity, but rather which we inherit from our shared cultures and discourses. Moreover, given that ideologies do not flow from our own essence, but in fact rely on external forces, then they must necessarily be inadequate. But in Chapter One, we described how our *conatus* fundamentally consists in striving toward more adequate ideas. Hence, a reader may suggest that, if ideologies are necessarily inadequate, then our goal here should be to *rid* ourselves entirely of our ideologies, not simply to inculcate those ideologies which may be *less* inadequate. But, using Spinoza's metaphysics, in this section I aim to show that it is inconceivable that humans should entirely rid ourselves of our ideologies, since ideologies of *some* form are intrinsic to the human condition. This is grounded in the fact that humans are finite creatures, perpetually subject to the powers and passions of the external world.

In Part IV of the *Ethics*, Spinoza writes, "There is no singular thing in Nature than which there is not another more powerful and stronger,"[62] and thus that "The force by which a man perseveres in existing is limited, and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes."[63] Humans exist precariously, continuously inundated and overwhelmed by external ideas and forces. Because of our finitude, we cannot act solely through our own power, and indeed need to rely in part on external things, such as ideologies. This is what leads Spinoza to later conclude, "Therefore, it is impossible that a man should undergo no other changes except those of which he himself is the adequate cause… From this it follows that man is necessarily always subject to passions, that he follows and obeys the common order of Nature, and accommodates himself to it

[62] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics,* IVa1.
[63] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp3.

as much as the nature of things requires."[64] Since humans are fundamentally vulnerable to the passions, we are exposed to varied perceptions of the world, leaving our minds confused and pulled in different directions. God does not need an ideology, since God is infinite and accesses all true knowledge. But, as finite beings, humans need to adopt patterns and heuristics to overcome our natural confusions and to make sense of the world; this is where ideologies come into the fore. It thus cannot be the case that humans simply disregard these inherited modes of thought entirely.

Because of our defining weightlessness against the external world, humans need ideologies to make our existence intelligible. Ideologies are, in this sense, intrinsic to the human condition. As Hall puts it, we "make meaning" through our ideologies, that is, we would not be able to communicate nor reflect without them. Crucially, however, while individuals cannot entirely rid themselves of *all* ideologies due to our finitude, we still have the capacity to choose from among different ideologies. In any given social formation, there are various kinds of discourses which exist, each of which yields its own ideology. Different discourses construct meaning differently, namely by normalizing certain behaviors or elevating some groups or individuals over others. These standards subconsciously affect the manner in which individuals understand the world, such that individuals will harness different ideologies depending on their media consumption.

Hall explains that, while mainstream media outlets may largely dictate which discourses are most prominent—leading individuals to garner similar ideologies from the outset—humans are not entirely agentless in shaping or reshaping our ideologies. It may be the case that humans do not internally produce our own ideologies, but we can nonetheless choose to undermine certain ideologies and replace them with others that already exist in our social formations. For Hall, this is achieved most effectively by "breaking the chain" of discourse. By this, Hall means "…changing

[64] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp4.

the terms of the argument, questioning the assumptions and starting points, and breaking the logic" which sustains the dominant ideology.[65] By "breaking the chain," humans can begin to dismantle a damaging or oppressive ideology and replace it with a more preferable one. If it is indeed possible to emancipate ourselves from bad ideologies and to embrace better ideologies, it now becomes necessary to uncover how exactly we can distinguish between the adequacy of different ideologies.

III. The affects and "good" ideologies

Up to this point we have established: first, that ideologies are inherited frameworks through which humans make sense of the world; and second, that while, as finite beings, humans cannot entirely rid ourselves of ideologies, there are nonetheless different ideologies which we can adopt, even if they may be constrained to our societal discourses. We are now tasked with the responsibility of ascertaining which kinds of ideologies we should work to adopt—a task which is not as straightforward as one might expect, given that we previously asserted that *all* ideologies are inadequate in some capacity. Before attempting to do this, however, we must resolve a potential tension which arises from Spinoza's metaphysical determinism. In Chapter One, we established that Spinoza contends everything that happens in the world follows the laws of Nature, that is, they are necessarily determined by God and could not be otherwise.[66] Since God is an infinite and perfect being, everything that happens *should* happen, since God cannot produce it any other way. In this way, Spinoza collapses the distinction between descriptive and normative valuations.

This ethical reduction may seem to obstruct our ability to distinguish between good and bad ideologies. If everything that happens is supposed to happen—since they are determined by the laws of Nature—then this could be taken to mean that, should a truly inadequate ideology

[65] Stuart Hall, "Racist Ideologies and the Media," 281-282.
[66] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics,* Ip33.

prevail, then this is what should happen. Yet, we have also said that our power to act is intrinsically linked to the adequacy of our ideas, such that we should strive for the most adequate ideas, since this is what aligns with our *conatus*. Hence, it seems as if these two points are at odds with each other. On the one hand, the ideologies which prevail are the ones which are "supposed" to prevail, and on the other hand, the good ideologies are the most adequate ones which increase our power to act. If Spinoza were to argue that the most adequate ideas *always* win out, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, then this supposed tension ceases to exist. In this case, the most adequate ideologies and the ideologies which prevail would be one and the same. However, a central point of this thesis is that it may not be the case that the most adequate ideologies necessarily prevail, at least not under certain conditions. In the case that the there is a divergence between the most adequate ideology and the ideology that prevails, which ideology should be categorized as the good one? Based on the metaphysical framework that we previously established, the dominant ideology *should* be the dominant one, regardless of the adequacy (or inadequacy) of its content.

Crucially, as was examined in Chapter One, Spinoza's determinism does not preclude people's ability to act. In fact, in Part IV of the *Ethics*, Spinoza asserts, "by virtue and power I understand the same thing, that is, virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is the essence, or nature, of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone."[67] Still more, much of the *Ethics* can be read principally as an attempt to uncover precisely how to maximize people's power to act. As was argued in the previous chapter, ideas function as causes for action, such that when new ideas are introduced, this can change the effect (all of which was ultimately determined by God, or the laws of Nature). In this way, Spinoza's *Ethics* attempts to make a tangible intervention in the trajectory of history by

[67] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics,* IVd8.

changing the way in which people understand their ideas, desires, and place in the world. Since Spinoza's determinism still includes an integral role for human action, this can be understood as effectively reconciling the aforementioned tension between the adequate ideologies and the ideologies that prevail. By illuminating which ideologies are the most adequate, this provides individuals with the conceptual tools they need to actively inculcate the best ideologies. Humans thus not only have the *ability* to make these things align—this is what reason *demands* of them.

Having now ascertained that Spinoza's determinism does not nullify any attempt to distinguish between adequate and inadequate, or even good and bad ideologies, we can finally begin to uncover which types of ideologies we should work to elevate. Earlier in this chapter, it was established that an ideology can be understood as an inherited pattern of thought that allows individuals and groups to make sense of the world. Since ideologies are produced externally, as opposed to flowing from the essence of people, all ideologies are necessarily inadequate in some capacity, since the adequacy of an idea depends on whether we are a total cause of it. Yet, while all ideologies are in some sense inadequate, there are still different levels to the inadequacy of our ideologies. That is, not all ideologies are *equally* inadequate, since some ideologies nevertheless provide *more* accurate portrayals of the world than do others. Any given event could be potentially explained by an endless number of factors, some of which are closer to the true causal force than others. Hence, different ideologies may be more or less obfuscating, depending on the accuracy of the causal explanations they purport. In turn, the accuracy of our ideologies implicates our power to act, since the least adequate explanations provide us with a cloudier understanding of the causal mechanisms affecting our existence, which therefore diminishes our striving to persevere.

As has been previously argued, however, ideologies do not solely diminish our power to act. After all, humans cannot make meaning without ideologies, which means that, despite their

inadequacies, ideologies help facilitate our comprehension of ourselves and our world. As was show in the previous section, the inevitability of ideologies stems from our finite and precarious existence, in which we come to rely on external things for our survival and flourishing. For Spinoza, humans cannot reach perfection in isolation, because of our inherent vulnerability to the passions in Nature. In this way, external things may be the source of human bondage, but they are also the source of human emancipation. The task for humans is thus to illuminate which external things aid our power and which diminish it, in the continuous pursuit of our striving to persevere. With regard to external things like ideologies, then, there are certain ideologies that obscure our reality in such a confused way that they undermine our power to act, whereas there are other ideologies which provide us with relatively accurate explanations of our existence and therefore move our mind to greater perfection. Both kinds of ideologies are inadequate in some sense since they derive from external sources, but they have very different implications for our *conatus*.

To understand precisely how external things move our mind to greater or lesser perfection, as well as how we can detect the adequacy of a given ideology, it becomes useful to formally introduce Spinoza's concept of the affects, which will be crucial to the rest of the analysis in this thesis. For Spinoza, an affect is simply something which aids or diminishes our striving to persevere, and these affects can be divided into actions and passions. He writes, "By affect I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections. *Therefore, if we can be the adequate cause of any of the affections, I understand by the affect an action; otherwise, a passion*."[68] In other words, if we are the cause of something which affects our *conatus*, this affect is considered an action, whereas we experience passions when we are affected by things of which

[68] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVd3.

we are not the adequate cause. Thus, when our perception of the world is shaped by external things, such as in the case of our inherited ideologies, we are necessarily exposed to the passions.

Yet, to reiterate, while some passions do inhibit our power to act, there are many other passions in Nature which aid our striving. For instance, imagine if, when I was driving, my friend pointed out a sharp piece of metal in the road that I did not notice prior. The knowledge would not be my own, and yet it would nonetheless benefit my being, as I could now avoid the trouble of getting a flat tire. Spinoza writes, "It follows that we can never bring it about that we require nothing outside ourselves to preserve our being," meaning that our power in part relies on these passions.[69] Different external things therefore produce different affects in us depending on how they impact our *conatus*. Spinoza asserts, "By *joy*, therefore, I shall understand in what follows that *passion by which the mind passes to a greater perfection*. And by *sadness*, that *passion by which it passes to a lesser perfection*."[70] Here, we see that different psychological responses are evoked by the passions depending on whether they move our mind to greater or lesser perfection. Hence, ideologies which move our mind to greater or lesser perfection produce different affective responses in us: joy in the former, sadness in the latter. In this sense, knowledge-acquisition or epistemic clarity is an inherently joy-producing endeavor. This affective framework allows us to easily distinguish between wholly inadequate and relatively adequate ideologies. The most adequate ideologies—the "good" ones, which we should try to inculcate—move our mind to greatest perfection and therefore produce the maximum amount of joy within us. This is the standard we can use to distinguish inadequate ideologies from seemingly more adequate ones.

Here, we ought to address an important concession. It has previously been argued that, while striving to increase our power, we should strive toward the most adequate ideologies, which

[69] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp18.
[70] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIIp11.

can be recognized through the joyful affects they produce in us, since they move our mind to greater perfection. Yet, humans are often quite bad at predicting which things will bring us maximum joy. Spinoza accounts for these instances of false joy, writing, "A desire which arises from a true knowledge of good and evil, insofar as this knowledge concerns the future, can be quite easily restrained or extinguished by a desire for the pleasures of the moment."[71] A desire is defined simply as an appetite—otherwise understood as our striving—paired with consciousness of the appetite.[72] So, our conscious striving to persevere can be overwhelmed by lesser sources of joy—meaning joyful affects which endure for less time and/or persist with a less constant degree of force—if those sources are more proximate to us; this point will become especially salient in the next chapter, when we investigate the scope conditions of desires from true knowledge (i.e., the cases in which adequate ideas are affectively weak compared to certain inadequate ideas).

Crucially, however, simply because there are instances of false joy, this does not mean that the joy produced in these cases is comparable to that of the joy from true knowledge. In other words, while we may sometimes be susceptible to desires from false joy, we are nonetheless able to recognize that this kind of joy is different in kind from joy that derives from our adequate ideas; the former is fleeting and superficial, whereas the latter is unwavering and deep. Spinoza writes, "Self-esteem can arise from reason, and only that self-esteem which does arise from reason is the greatest there can be."[73] The joy we experience from true knowledge thus has no equal counterpart. As a result, we are still able to detect when an ideology moves our mind to greater perfection, since this joy will be distinctive from the joy we experience from other simpler, less adequate ideologies.

[71] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp16.
[72] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIIp9.
[73] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp52.

In this chapter, we established the key concepts which will guide us through our subsequent analysis of inadequate ideologies and their epistemic power. First, we defined an ideology as being an inherited framework and mode of thought through which individuals and groups make sense of the world. Second, we explained why humans' precarious and finite existence makes us inherently reliant on ideologies, such that we cannot construct meaning without them. And finally, we introduced Spinoza's theory of affects to show that, while all ideologies are inadequate in some sense, certain ideologies can nonetheless move our mind to greater perfection. We are able to identify these good ideologies through the joyful affects they produce within us. Furthermore, not only do the affects allow us to detect whether a certain ideology provides us with an accurate representation of the world; as will be explored in the next chapter, the affects also determine the *power* of a given ideology, and thus the ability of that ideology to sustain itself over time.

CHAPTER THREE: WHEN BAD IDEOLOGIES PREVAIL

On January 20, 2021, Joe Biden delivered his presidential inaugural address to the American people. Although he acknowledged some concerns facing the country—such as the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and the fractured nature of American civil society—the speech did not lament the status of the country after Trump. Instead, the speech centered around a call for national unity, with an undeniably optimistic vision for the future. At the inflection point of the speech, Biden announced, "And I promise you this, as the Bible says: 'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'"[74] This quote is notable for several reasons, not the least of which is Biden's invocation of *the Bible*—since, after all, while Spinoza does not speak of "ideology" per se, he comes closest to such an account when he discusses the manipulative capacities of the Church.[75] Notwithstanding, this quote reveals, above all else, the *hopefulness* underlying Biden's conception of history. It is reminiscent of many others, including the popularized quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. which reads, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."[76,77] Hence, there may be a natural inclination among humans to believe there must necessarily be progress in the world—that, despite ephemeral divergences in the trajectory of history, the good actors, the good nations,[78] and the good ideologies will prevail.

[74] Joseph R. Biden, Jr., "Inaugural Address," 2021.
[75] Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 3.
[76] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," 1968.
[77] I would be remiss not to acknowledge that this quote, while hugely popularized in lay discourses and importantly instrumental for my point, presents a rather reductive view of Dr. King. Just a few lines preceding this one, Dr. King declared, "Somewhere we must come to see that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals who are willing to be co-workers of God. And without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the primitive forces of social stagnation." Thus, while Dr. King certainly believed that progress was *possible*, he did not altogether subscribe to a *necessary* direction to history.
[78] This, of course, presupposes that there can exist "good nations" within the narrow constraints of our current geopolitical order. My point, however, is not to say that wholly good nations actually exist—perhaps the entire idea of an exclusive nation-state is conceptually incompatible with goodness, even if we may be able hierarchize some nations along certain democratic and/or liberal ideals. Instead, my goal is to show that many people commonly *do* make such categorizations about nations (and people, and ideologies, etc.), and then proceed to assume that the "good" ones will triumph. It represents a certain hubris of the human condition, the soundness of which I seek to explore.

Yet merely because many people choose to believe in a progressive historical arc does not make it true. Perhaps this too, like religion, is just another fiction we tell ourselves to make this world more bearable. It is thus worth interrogating, through the thought of Spinoza and others, whether this blind faith in the supremacy of the good holds true, at least in the realm of ideologies; in other words, whether the adequate ideologies necessarily win out. In Chapter Two, we developed a framework through which we can evaluate different ideologies and determine which ones are the "good" ones. While all ideologies are inadequate in some capacity, insofar as they are imported onto us through external forces, some ideologies are nonetheless *more* adequate than others, since not all ideologies provide us with equally accurate perceptions of the world. In fact, it was shown that some ideologies—just like some passions more broadly—can actually move the mind to greater perfection, rather than obfuscate the truth. Finally, we established that the more adequate ideas (and, by extension, the more adequate ideologies) produce joyful affects in us, thus allowing us to recognize the adequacy of our ideologies based on the affects they evoke.

This chapter therefore seeks to address the central consideration of thesis, namely the intrinsic power of these good ideologies. In Chapter One, we established Spinoza's causal necessity and determinism. For Spinoza, every action and every historical development exists as part of the natural order. That is, they happen out of necessity, determined entirely by their causes. Hence, in trying to examine whether the better ideologies necessarily prevail, my goal is not to work *against* Spinoza's determinism as such. Rather, the goal is to uncover whether this determinism *includes* what I have previously referred to as the supremacy of the good. In other words, we already know that, according to Spinoza, every event is determined by its causes; but does this necessarily presuppose a consistent direction to history, and particularly, a *progressive* historical teleology? In the *Ethics,* Spinoza seems to come out against historical teleology as such.

He writes, "Not many words will be required now to show that Nature has no end set before it, and that all final causes are nothing but human fictions."[79] So, despite his metaphysical determinism, Spinoza does not believe there is a final end to history, and especially not a final end in which all adequate ideas have prevailed. Perhaps this is because, as established in Chapter One, such an end is inconceivable. For Spinoza, our ideas will never be fully adequate; his conception of freedom is perpetually unfinished. While we can never be wholly free, we can nonetheless become freer.

Notwithstanding, this does not preclude a *direction* to history. While there is no final end—no state in which full freedom has been achieved—perhaps it is still the case that history moves in the direction of freedom and progress—that, while our ideas will never be wholly adequate, they will naturally become increasingly so over time. If this is true, then the more adequate ideologies would necessarily win out in the public sphere. But the central point of this thesis is that perhaps it is *not* the case that the most adequate ideologies necessarily prevail—or so history would suggest that this need not be the case. This chapter thus attempts to accomplish five things: first, to illuminate whether Spinoza's thought presents a steadfast reliance on the supremacy of the good; second, if the most adequate ideas do *not* necessarily prevail, what could lead to inadequate ideas being more powerful on an individual psychological level; third, what conditions could make inadequate *ideologies* more powerful on a collective political level; fourth, how this analysis of inadequate ideologies can enrich our analyses of right-wing populism; and finally, what affect theory can *prescriptively* teach us about the kinds of political projects that can effectively displace right-wing populism. This chapter will also draw on other influential thinkers, especially in the instances when Spinoza's thought alone cannot provide fulfilling answers to the matters at hand.

[79] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, I appendix.

I. The (supposed) power of adequacy

A common interpretation of Spinoza in previous philosophy scholarship is that Spinoza embraces what I have previously referred to as the supremacy of the good—that is, the view that, in the end, the most adequate ideas necessarily prevail.[80] This interpretation is based largely on Spinoza's claim that "Affects arising from or aroused by reason are, if we take account of time, more powerful than those related to singular things we regard as absent."[81] Here, Spinoza asserts a certain faith in the dominance of adequate ideas, at least in the long-term. Since this claim implicates the temporality of ideas, we will return to it later in this chapter. First, however, we must establish what makes any idea powerful, and why adequate ideas may be intrinsically more powerful than inadequate ideas. The aforementioned IVp1 directly addresses both of these matters:

> For example, when we look at the sun, we imagine it to be about two hundred feet away from us. In this we are deceived so long as we are ignorant of its true distance; but when its distance is known, the error is removed, not the imagination, that is, the idea of the sun, which explains its nature only so far as the body is affected by it. And so, although we come to know the true distance, we shall nevertheless imagine it as near us. Thus, when the rays of sun, falling on the surface of the water, are reflected to our eyes, we imagine it as if it were in the water, even if we know its true place… So imaginations do not disappear through the presence of the true insofar as it is true, but because there occur others, stronger than them, which exclude the present existence of the things we imagine. [82]

In Chapter One, we examined this same excerpt to help establish Spinoza's distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas. In this example, our sensory imagining of the sun is inadequate, and our subsequent conception of the sun after learning its true distance, while perhaps not entirely adequate, is still *more* adequate than our initial imagination. Now, however, it is important to focus on a different aspect of this excerpt, namely the claims Spinoza makes about the intrinsic power of different kinds of ideas. Of particular interest to this project is the sentence, "So imaginations

[80] Michael LeBuffe, "Reason and Ethics 5p7," in *The Cambridge Critical Guide to Spinoza's Ethics*, Yitzhak Melamed, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 304-319.
[81] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, Vp7.
[82] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp1.

do not disappear through the presence of the true insofar as it is true, but because there occur others, stronger than them, which exclude the present existence of the things we imagine."

There are two crucial features of this sentence worth addressing. First, here Spinoza holds that adequate ideas are intrinsically more powerful than inadequate ideas. That is, all else being equal, adequate ideas have more holding power and will triumph in our minds. This is because, as was established in Chapter One, adequate ideas follow from the essence of individuals (and by extension God), whereas inadequate ideas are imported onto individuals from external things. In this way, humans are, to some degree, naturally predisposed to adequate ideas. This is similar to Spinoza's idea that desires which follow from joyful affects are more powerful than desires which follow from sad affects. Joyful desires contain the combined force of human power and the power of an external cause in the same direction—since they both align with the direction of our *conatus*—whereas sad desires contain only human power, since the power of the external cause goes in the opposite direction, that is, against our essential striving to persevere.[83] This is why our true knowledge of the sun is more powerful than our initial imagination of it: the true knowledge aligns with our essence and with the essence of God, whereas our imagination is externally generated. Yet, many readings of Spinoza stop here, assuming that a Spinozist framework contains the supremacy of the good, or the position that adequate ideas and positive desires always prevail.[84] It may be true that adequate ideas are intrinsically more powerful than inadequate ideas, and thus that humans are naturally predisposed to adequate ideas. But it does not logically follow that adequate ideas necessarily prevail under *all* conditions, which leads to our second point.

As we see in this excerpt, there is a certain staying power of our initial imaginations, even after we acquire more adequate conceptions of something. That is, our initial imaginations

[83] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics,* IVp18.
[84] Michael LeBuffe, "Reason and Ethics 5p7."

continue to affect us in some way, even if we know them to be wrong or malformed. So, even if we know our imagination of the sun is inadequate after learning the true distance of the sun, it nonetheless remains in our mind when we perceive the sun being reflected in the ocean; however, now it must compete with our more adequate idea of the sun based on our true knowledge. While I will not formally address right-wing populism and other bad ideologies until later in this chapter, the political implications of this point should be fairly evident. Let us say that an individual comes to believe that group X is responsible for his sense of alienation, when in reality, his alienation relates to cause Y. Based on his initial imagination, the individual comes to associate certain negative affects with group X, such that when the individual later learns that cause Y is actually to blame for his precarity, his negative affects directed toward group X may not be removed entirely. Negative affects can remain in human psyches even after rational thought reveals their inadequacies. This is why, in IVp14, Spinoza goes on the say, "No affect can be restrained by the true knowledge of good and evil insofar as it is true, but only insofar as it is considered an affect." This is because an affect "has nothing positive in it which could be removed by the presence of the true."[85] Hence, it is not the adequacy of true knowledge which can mitigate negative affects, but rather the *affects* generated by true knowledge which can do this. Crucially, as I will later show, whether the adequate or inadequate idea prevails depends on the strength of their respective affects.

After all, if adequate ideas always prevailed regardless of any other factors, then there would be no reason to fear the promulgation of inadequate ideas. There would be no basis for states to censor or restrain the rebellious speech acts of individuals—and indeed no need to even worry that such acts would yield any meaningful resistance to the state, which is among Spinoza's primary political concerns.[86] Yet this is ultimately not the position Spinoza takes. While an integral

[85] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp14.
[86] Michael Della Rocca, "Getting his hands dirty: Spinoza's criticism of the rebel," Chapter 9, 168-191.

feature of Spinoza's political philosophy is the inability (and thus undesirability) of the state to dictate how each individual acts and thinks, these individual rights for Spinoza are not absolute. In the *Theological-Political Treatise*, he writes, "So while to act against the sovereign's decree is definitely an infringement of his right, this is not the case with thinking, judging, and consequently with speaking, too, provided one does no more than express or communicate one's opinion, defending it through rational conviction alone, not through deceit, anger, hatred…"[87]

There are thus constraints on the individual's ability to act and speak as she sees fit, particularly pertaining to those speech acts which are directed against the sovereign and are communicated through the passions. Given that Spinoza prioritizes the authority of the sovereign and worries that passion-driven speech acts could meaningfully undermine the sovereign, it therefore follows that Spinoza believes there is something additionally powerful about communicating through the affects. This harkens back to the same point we established earlier. Presupposing that, for Spinoza, rebellious speech acts are necessarily inadequate and yet can still cause material uproar due to their affective potency, then speech acts do not solely gain their power from the adequacy or inadequacy of their content; their power also relies on the affects they evoke. The important point here is not that Spinoza's political philosophy is correct in holding that rebellious speech acts are always inadequate, nor that we should prioritize the authority of the sovereign[88] over the absolute freedoms of individuals. This is merely to display how there are other factors besides the adequacy of an idea, namely the affects, which can determine its power.

[87] Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 224.
[88] Unless, of course, we are talking about a sovereign which *is* the multitude of all individuals—that is, a truly democratic polity, in which undermining the sovereign would mean to undermine yourself and your comrades.

II. The conditions for the supremacy of the bad

In the previous section, it was established: first, that all else being equal, adequate ideas are intrinsically more powerful than inadequate ideas, because they derive from the essence of individuals and of God, whereas inadequate ideas are generated through external forces[89]; and yet also, that adequate ideas may not prevail under all conditions, because there are other affective features which can influence the power of ideas. We now arrive at a critical juncture in this project. Thus far, we have only established that things other than the adequacy of an idea can impact its epistemic power, but we have not yet determined the scope conditions of these other factors. That is, we have not yet determined the circumstances which may prompt inadequate ideas to be more powerful on both an individual and collective level. Beginning with Spinoza's metaphysics, I will attempt to ascertain these scope conditions on an individual psychological level, before moving into the political domain in the next section, working through the thought of Hannah Arendt.

The ability of inadequate ideas to overwhelm us, thus preventing us from increasing our power and becoming freer, relates to our external causes and the desires which they produce. First, let us reestablish the relationship between *conatus* and knowledge. In Chapter One, we established that humans are fundamentally driven by our striving to persevere and to increase the adequacy of our ideas. Remember, for Spinoza, "the human mind has an adequate knowledge of God's eternal and infinite essence."[90] That is, our essence already contains all true knowledge—or rather true knowledge of *God*, from which everything else follows—but this knowledge is perpetually

[89] It should be noted that this chapter has discussed adequate and inadequate *ideas* thus far, and yet this is a thesis about *ideologies*—which, we established in the previous chapter, are all inadequate to some degree. So, when I say that adequate ideas are intrinsically more powerful because they flow from God, this cannot be said of any ideology. Yet still, given that in the previous chapter we developed a framework through which we can evaluate the adequacy of different ideologies—in other words, to establish that some ideologies are in fact *more* adequate than others—then we can still draw a parallel here. That is, we can say that the more adequate ideologies are intrinsically more powerful because they align more closely with our essences, even if they do not entirely flow from the essence of God.

[90] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIp47

obfuscated by external forces. After all, humans are finite beings, and our existence necessarily relies on the things in Nature, including other people. As such, our actions cannot solely derive from our own essence. This reliance on things outside of our being makes us inherently vulnerable to inadequacies, or external influences. Spinoza explains, "it is impossible that a man should undergo no other changes except those of which he himself is the adequate cause… From this it follows that man is necessarily always subject to passions."[91] So, our reliance on things other than ourselves makes us subject to passions. But this does not yet tell us *when* the inadequacies prevail.

The question of scope conditions—that is, the conditions under which we can be overwhelmed by inadequate ideas—relies on the strength of our desires. In Chapter Two, we showed that our ideas—both adequate and inadequate alike—are affects, insofar as they aid or diminish our power to act.[92] Each of these affects subsequently produces a desire, the strength of which depends on the strength of its corresponding affect.[93] So, on the one hand, we do experience certain desires from our true knowledge. These are the desires which aid our striving to persevere. But on the other hand, we also experience opposing desires from external causes—causes of which we are only a partial cause, and therefore which are not fully "mine"—that go against our *conatus*. These opposing desires—which restrain our power to act—stem from the negative affects we experience from the external world, which can also be understood as false cognition. The stronger of these desires ultimately determines which kind of knowledge occupies our consciousness.

Since a desire from joy is inherently stronger than a desire from sadness[94]—or similarly, a desire from true knowledge is inherently stronger than a desire from false knowledge—humans have some ability to persist in our striving, even despite these external oppositional causes. Yet,

[91] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp4.
[92] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp8.
[93] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics,* IIIp37.
[94] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp18.

our ability to do so is restricted. There comes a point at which, if the oppositional external forces accumulate to such a degree, they can overwhelm us, as these negative affects—and thus their desires—would be stronger than the positive affects which our natural striving produces. After all, desires from true knowledge can be understood through our essence alone. This means that these desires can only be defined by human power, and human power is limited. Spinoza writes, "The force by which a man perseveres in existing is limited, and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes."[95] Therefore, our desires from true knowledge can be overcome by the desires forced onto us from the external world. In such severe cases—such as in the case of taking one's own life—we are essentially "conquered by external causes contrary to [our] nature," which draw us to act in ways that go against our *conatus*.[96] This is why Spinoza ultimately concludes, "A desire which arises from a true knowledge of good and evil can be extinguished or restrained by many other desires which arise from affects by which we are tormented."[97] When we are overwhelmed with negative affects from the external world, we thus lose our ability to strive toward perfection.

Let us consider some practical examples to fully register this point, as it is fundamental to this thesis. When I receive a poor grade on a paper, I surely experience some sadness from this. Perhaps, I initially direct this sadness toward my professor, feeling anger toward my professor for what I understand to be an unfair evaluation of my work. Ultimately, however, as time passes, the misdirected anger subsides. I no longer attribute the poor grade to the unfairness of the professor—indeed, an inadequate explanation—but rather understand it through its true cause, the shortcomings of my paper itself. I can then continue to strive toward perfection, no longer feeling

[95] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp3.
[96] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp18.
[97] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp15.

anger, but perhaps motivation to improve my writing. The external source of sadness was temporary and minor, and these affects were thus overridden by the positive affects of my *conatus*.

But now imagine if, instead of receiving a poor grade on an important piece of work, I was continually subjected to exploitative labor conditions—a strikingly different circumstance, of both magnitude and kind. This external source of sadness would not be minor nor temporary. I would be deeply and steadfastly tormented by affects contrary to my nature, which would subsume my striving. While corporations and capitalist structures would be the true source of my exploitation—and while, on some level, I would already have this true knowledge—I may be unable to recognize this as such, since the desires from my true knowledge would not be able to compete with the tormented affects from the external world. Instead, I may be driven to adopt alternative explanations for my exploitation, such as by blaming my fellow workers. Such an explanation would be wholly inadequate, but it would nonetheless be more proximate. After all, my coworkers are more salient to me. I physically see and interact with them every day, whereas I cannot as easily conceive of the economic systems in which I persist. Even more, perhaps I sometimes argue with my coworkers, and have *motive* to blame them for my suffering. Spinoza writes that "a desire which arises from a true knowledge…can be quite easily restrained or extinguished by a desire for the pleasures of the moment."[98] In this case, then, blaming my fellow workers would be a simpler, more immediate explanation than blaming an entire economic structure. And in this case, I would be so overwhelmed by tormented affects, that the easiest explanation may be the one that I adopt.

The difference between these two examples can be simplified in the following way: In the first case, despite experiencing some negative affects from my external conditions, my true knowledge produced a stronger desire which soon prevailed, allowing me to recognize the true

[98] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp16.

cause of my sadness. In the second case, however, the negative affects from my external conditions overwhelmed me. They were too powerful and persisted for too long, such that the affects from my own striving could not complete with them. I could no longer recognize the true cause of my suffering, which led me to misdirect my blame. Instead of accepting a more adequate explanation, I was led to accept the one which was simpler and more proximate. As will be explained in the following two sections, I argue that a similar phenomenon of misdirected blame can explain the allure of bad ideologies across time periods, including contemporary right-wing populism.

III. Loneliness, atomization, and ideological manipulation

In the previous section, we began to establish the scope conditions surrounding the power of inadequate ideas. That is, we began to uncover the conditions under which true knowledge is subsumed by external forces, leading us to act in ways that go against our *conatus*. More specifically, it was established that, while the desires from true knowledge have the capacity to displace certain negative affects, there are many other instances in which our external conditions overwhelm us with negative affects and undermine our ability to strive toward adequate knowledge. While we cannot precisely predict each instance in which inadequate knowledge will be more dominant, we can nonetheless ascertain certain patterns, especially those pertaining to the temporality and severity of oppositional affects. In other words, we can say with reasonable certainty that the conditions for the supremacy of the bad (i.e., the dominance of inadequate ideas) require a deep, extensive source of suffering that persists over an extended period of time; only then can the accumulation of negative affects overwhelm our essential striving to persevere.

But the previous section solely addressed the power of inadequate ideas on an individual psychological level. This thesis, however, seeks to apply philosophy to the political realm, and to

discuss *ideologies* in addition to ideas. Moreover, as we established in Chapter Two, ideologies do not operate on the level of individual consciousness. As Hall writes, "they pre-date individuals, and form part of the determinate social formations and conditions in which individuals are born."[99] Since ideologies are produced collectively, through our shared norms and discourses, we must similarly develop a framework of analysis that operates on the level of the collective. Thus, to truly understand how inadequate political projects can still gain power, we must look to the broader social, economic, and political conditions in which they emerge. Only then can we begin to understand what could draw not only individuals, but entire collectives to embrace such ideologies.

To do this, I will examine the case of twentieth-century totalitarianism, looking at how insights from Hannah Arendt can enrich the analysis we have begun to develop through Spinoza. This will proceed in three main steps. First, I will describe Arendt's diagnosis of the pervasive social atomization that preceded the totalitarian movements in Europe, as well as the broader political developments that yielded such atomization. Second, I will describe the methods used by totalitarian movements to inculcate their "bad ideologies" in the masses. I will critically consider *why* such strategies were so effective, drawing on Arendt's reflections on loneliness, and in particular the relationship between loneliness and totalitarian ideology. Finally, I will consider the parallels between Arendt and Spinoza, aiming to uncover how Arendt's political analysis can help us elevate Spinoza's psychological theory of the affects to the level of the collective. Together, I hope these thinkers can allow us to understand more clearly the conditions under which bad ideologies can be most powerful, not only in the twentieth century, but in any atomized context.

The first half of the twentieth century in Europe was characterized by the emergence of totalitarian movements in Germany and the Soviet Union. Nazism and Stalinism consolidated

[99] Stuart Hall, "Racist Ideologies and the Media," 271.

power with a speed and severity that widely surpassed the boundaries of authoritarian systems which preceded them. Arendt explains how these totalitarian movements derived their power from the mobilization of the masses.[100] While the masses are not normally mobilized by political movements, Arendt describes how they were effectively incorporated into totalitarianism. The category of "the masses," as Arendt expounds, includes individuals who cannot fit cleanly into ordinary societal distinctions, such as those having to do with class or political affiliations.[101] Notably, the masses "are not held together by a consciousness of common interest and they lack that specific class articulateness which is expressed in determined, and obtainable goals."[102] In other words, there is not a unifying ideology already present within the masses, such as the proletariat ideology which Marx theorized would naturally emerge from their material conditions.

On the contrary, the social conditions of the masses in the twentieth century left them particularly susceptible to ideologies which actively *contradicted* their material conditions. Arendt depicts the masses as having undergone an extensive process of "atomization," through which they become profoundly isolated and detached from other beings. She attributes this lack of belonging to the deterioration of social structures in Europe that accompanied imperialist expansion in the nineteenth century, leaving individuals yearning for some sense of social identity or connection. As countries across Europe attempted to cultivate broader spheres of influence abroad, this undermined domestic polities by dissolving existing political institutions and social associations. Imperialism replaced tradition with expansion, leaving no blueprint for collective life nor social engagement in its wake. Accordingly, Arendt asserts that the "chief characteristic of the mass man is not brutality and backwardness, but his isolation and lack of normal social relationships."[103]

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[100] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 307.
[101] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 316-317.
[102] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 311.
[103] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 317.

The masses, having been completely atomized by the hollowed-out structure of society following imperialism, were subsequently susceptible to totalitarian propaganda. While totalitarian propaganda is not novel in kind, totalitarian movements learned how to optimally utilize their propaganda to exploit the precarious position of the atomized individual.[104] Arendt argues that the elimination of social structures and seemingly any other form of communal relationships yielded an unbearable, isolated existence for the masses in Europe. This prompted them to desire an escape from reality, which was seamlessly promised by totalitarian movements. Arendt writes that totalitarianism's "man-made pattern of relative consistency," in addition to its strong sense of collectivity, was far more alluring than the material world in which the masses were forced to live, with exploitative economic conditions and a dearth of social relations.[105]

The appeal of simplistic explanations for an otherwise unintelligible world led the masses to embrace totalitarian ideologies, allowing these ideologies to envelop their entire perceptions of reality. Arendt explains that totalitarian movements demanded the "total, unrestricted, unconditional, and unalterable loyalty of the individual member," and this loyalty could be expected from none other but "the completely isolated human being who, without any other social ties to family, friends, comrades, or even mere acquaintances, derives his sense of having a place in the world only from his belonging to a movement, his membership in the party."[106] When the masses accepted the legitimacy of these totalitarian ideologies, they effectively stripped themselves of their autonomy and became mere agents of movement, unable to "experience" anything beyond the realm of the movement. The atomized individual, at once entirely removed from political forces, came to associate his entire reality with the totalitarian movement.

[104] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 351.
[105] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 352.
[106] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 323-324.

While all ideologies attempt to explain certain social norms and realities, not all ideologies are totalizing in this same manner. In *Ideology and Utopia*, Mannheim crucially distinguishes between "particular" ideologies and "total" ideologies. Particular ideologies are those which individuals adopt to help explain certain features of social existence. Individuals have the ability to look *beyond* particular ideologies, such as when common discourses frame issues in a way they had not previously been considered. Most ideologies are thus particular ideologies: they allow individuals to construct meaning out of a confused existence, but they are malleable and can change in response to changing conditions. Total ideologies are different, however, because they encompass the "total structure of the mind." The individual associates her entire being with the total ideology, such that there is no possibility to perceive the world outside of that ideology. All information is subsequently reformed to fit with the preexisting ideology.[107] Perhaps this is true to some extent of all ideologies, as humans generally avoid disrupting their world view in favor of a new ideology. But the difference, as I understand it, is that with most ideologies, there is at least the *possibility* to replace the ideology, since the essence of the individual is not reducible to the ideology. This is why Hall puts such a strong emphasis on the possibility to "break the chain" of existing ideologies. With total ideologies, this potentiality becomes less plausible. As such, Arendt firmly believes that the totalizing nature of these twentieth-century ideologies is distinctive, and crucially, that they could not have succeeded without the preceding atomizing material conditions.

In the previous section, we established that there are certain instances in which individuals may be overwhelmed by negative affects, leading them to adopt inadequate explanations that are either simpler or more proximate. In this section, given that this project attempts to investigate *ideologies*—a distinctive, collectively-produced kind of idea—we thus incorporated insights from

[107] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 56-57.

Hannah Arendt to see how a similar process could take place on the level of the collective. Through Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism*, we showed that imperialist expansion in nineteenth-century Europe left the masses atomized, easily susceptible to indoctrination by totalitarian ideologies. The deterioration of social institutions destabilized individuals' relations to other people. This relational privation made the masses yearn for social associations and clearer explanations for their profound sense of alienation—both of which were evidently provided by totalitarian ideologies.

Arendt's analysis is entirely compatible with Spinoza's theory of the affects, and indeed even uses analogous concepts. In the closing pages of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt invokes the language of "loneliness" to explain the broader process of atomization she has previously laid out. While Spinoza has no directly equivalent affect for loneliness, the closest parallel he presents is the affect of shame. Spinoza defines shame as the "affect of sadness accompanied by the idea of an internal cause." [108] This similarly describes the kind of alienation from other people which was essential to the allure of totalitarianism. For Arendt, totalitarianism tapped into a fundamental affective longing that was left by imperialism. She writes, "What prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in certain marginal social conditions like old age, has become an everyday experience."[109] These atomizing conditions—the everyday experience of loneliness—left individuals overwhelmed by negative affects and vulnerable to the allure of totalitarianism. In the following section, we will explore what lessons this can teach us about bad ideologies in different historical circumstances, including contemporary right-wing populism.

[108] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIIp30.
[109] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 478.

IV. On populism

Through Arendt's analysis of twentieth-century totalitarianism, we were able to develop an analytical framework that explained how inadequate ideologies can attract individuals and collectives under certain social, political, and economic conditions. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, imperialist expansion deteriorated existing social structures across Europe, leaving masses of individuals atomized and susceptible to totalitarian indoctrination. A pervasive sense of loneliness primed individuals to accept the simplest explanation of their reality— totalitarianism— despite its profound inadequacies. The masses were, in a sense, overwhelmed by negative affects from the external world, thus obstructing their ability to increase their power and persevere.

It now becomes imperative to investigate how this analysis may pertain to inadequate ideologies in the twenty-first century. In Chapter Two, we defined an inadequate ideology as one that diminishes our striving, insofar as it provides us with mutilated and confused perceptions of the world. Rather than moving our mind to greater perfection, these ideologies obfuscate our ability to persevere. As a result, bad ideologies produce distressing affects within us. In a contemporary political context, I understand right-wing populism to satisfy these requirements of inadequate ideologies. Rather than revealing the true causes of individuals' socioeconomic precarity—neoliberal atomization and the mass consolidation of capital in the hands of a few—it provides a host of alternative explanations—the refugee, the immigrant, the Jew, the Black American—all of whom become the subjects of misdirected blame. Still more, the violent and hostile nature of right-wing populist rallies over the past decade—in a sense, entirely taken over by negative affects—provides additional evidence to support the inadequacy of this ideology.

So, why might right-wing populism be an alluring ideological framework in our current socioeconomic circumstances, despite its inadequacies? To attempt to answer this crucial question,

I will proceed in three steps. First, I will examine the material conditions of the neoliberal era, looking at how they may produce an atomizing effect that parallels the one described by Arendt. Second, I will interrogate what exactly about populist ideology makes it more appealing amidst atomizing conditions compared to the most prominent alternative, neoliberalism. And finally, I will consider, if there are good reasons to believe that populist ideology is more appealing in our current conditions, whether it has the capacity to sustain this heightened power indefinitely.

First, I should say that, while we are drawing parallels here to the conditions of the twentieth century, we ought not to analogize the cases *in toto*. The material conditions of the twenty-first century clearly differ from those of one hundred years ago. If atomization in the twentieth century resulted from an overall dearth of "institutions"—as imperial expansion eroded domestic centralized institutions—the same cannot be said of the neoliberal era. While neoliberalism certainly contains some of these key features, such as perpetual movement and accumulation of capital, it is difficult to say that there is an *absence* of centralized institutions today. On the contrary, as Quin Slobodian explains in his genealogy of neoliberalism, the class of intellectuals who conceived neoliberalism explicitly prioritized the construction of supranational institutions in their global imagination. Their vision, since materialized, was for institutions that would insulate the market from volatile political forces—in other words, institutions which would entrench the global capitalist order, while simultaneously distancing states from the democratic demands of the masses.[110] Hence, the question of atomization today does not so much depend on *whether* centralized institutions exist, but rather what *kinds* of institutions exist, whether they are visible to ordinary citizens, and in particular what kinds of intersubjective relations they facilitate.

[110] Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

In Wendy Brown's essay "Neoliberalism's Frankenstein," she explains how, contrary to the visions of the twentieth-century neoliberal intellectuals, neoliberalism has become a breeding ground for new forms of authoritarianism—a byproduct of both the neoliberal ideals as well as the social and economic conditions in which they reside. Brown argues that, while the neoliberal intellectuals "dreamed of nations comprising free individuals lightly restrained by the rule of law, guided by moral and market rules of conduct, and disciplined by competition," what they instead produced was an authoritarian political culture supported by individuals who are displaced by globalization and neoliberal economization. [111] The anti-statist disposition of neoliberal reason, which vilifies all democratic encroachments on the market order, thus disguises pushes for equality as attacks on individual freedom. Brown writes, "as the expansion of markets and morals displaces discourses of society and democracy, the nation itself comes to be figured as owned rather than constituted by democratic citizenship."[112] The ideals once esteemed to form the basis of the public sphere come to be viewed as broods of totalitarianism. In the end, the neoliberal vision for freedom becomes transformed into antagonistic calls against unfairly-blamed marginalized communities.

Notably, Brown attributes this subversion of freedom to the broader social, political, and economic conditions which neoliberalism produces. Drawing on Friedrich Nietzsche and Herbert Marcuse, Brown explains how the atomizing socioeconomic conditions of the neoliberal era, paired with a pervasive sense of nihilism and "repressive desublimation," yields a unique form of reactionism, in which individuals desire an escape from their alienation, but lack any coherent moral or political framework through which they can advocate for material changes. As a result, they unleash their suffering through pure aggression directed at scapegoated groups. She writes,

[111] Wendy Brown, "Neoliberalism's Frankenstein," in *Authoritarianism: Three Inquiries in Critical Theory*, with Peter Gordon and Max Pensky (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018). 34.
[112] Wendy Brown, "Neoliberalism's Frankenstein," 34.

"Aggrieved by the socioeconomic displacements of neoliberalism and globalization, the reactive creature of a nihilistic age, with its desublimated will to power, is spurred to aggressions unfettered by concern for truth, for society, or for future."[113] Crucially for Brown, neoliberalism's propensity to undermine collective forms of value-making in favor of atomizing market forces leaves individuals susceptible to regressive ideologies like contemporary right-wing authoritarianism.

So, similar to the conditions of the twentieth century, there exists today a comparable sense of atomization across society, stemming from the way in which neoliberalism "economizes every sphere of human endeavor, replacing a model of society based on the justice-producing social contract with a conception of society organized as markets and of states oriented by market requirements."[114] Put another way, neoliberal rationality reduces all human relations to their market utility, subverting the social and political, and deteriorating the associations which were once integral to collective existence. The individual becomes unrecognizable beyond its capacity as an isolated consumer and producer. While centralized institutions may exist, their forces operate beyond the consciousness of individuals. This leaves people deeply atomized and devoid of connections to others, with no sense of agency or autonomy over their precarious conditions.[115]

Spinoza crucially tells us that we experience our affects through others. In Part III of the *Ethics*, he writes, "If we imagine a thing like us, toward which we have had no affect, to be affected with some affect, we are thereby affected with a like affect."[116] Spinoza thus conceives a certain

[113] Wendy Brown, "Neoliberalism's Frankenstein," 34-35.
[114] Wendy Brown, "Neoliberalism's Frankenstein," 12.
[115] This thesis focuses on the psychological and metaphysical features of right-wing populism and other bad ideologies. For this reason, my discussion of atomization pertains solely to the affective consequences of neoliberalism. It should still be noted, of course, that the widely-felt lack of autonomy results from more than the deterioration of social associations; this phenomenon also implicates the economic and the political spheres. For instance, in her book *Open Democracy: Reinventing Popular Rule for the Twenty-First Century,* Hélène Landemore crucially discusses the role that our democratic institutions—with their oligarchic structures and limited participatory features—play in this sense of alienation. As was stated in my introduction, this project seeks to augment such accounts, not discredit them.
[116] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIIp27.

intersubjectivity to our existence, such that our happiness relies on connections to others. Hence, when we lose these social connections through the economization of the social, we are left experiencing similar affects of loneliness that Arendt linked to the emergence of totalitarianism. As has been previously established, when these negative affects are experienced on a collective level, we are left vulnerable to things which oppose our striving, such as inadequate ideologies.

Yet, in addition to these precarious material conditions, there are also features of the populist ideology itself which make it alluring: first, its emphasis on collective identities, and second its simplicity. The neoliberal era has severed social relations, undermining our natural tendency to experience affects through other beings. As a result, when such collectives *do* arise, they are all the more alluring for individuals. This is why an essential feature of populism is its emphasis on collective identities. As Chantal Mouffe writes in her book *For a Left Populism*, all populism relies on a construction of a "people" distinguished from some kind of adversary.[117] In the case of right-wing populism, this group formation typically centers around a nation or race.

These collective identities evoke strong affects which can effectively mobilize its members. For instance, Spinoza writes "If someone has been affected with joy or sadness by someone of a class, *or* nation, different from his own… under the universal name of the class or nation, he will love or hate, not only that person, but everyone of the same class or nation." Hence, the collective identities formed around class and nation are so strong that they can dictate the affects we feel not only toward individuals, but to entire groups. This explains why, in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, when speaking of the Jews, Spinoza writes, "As to their continued existence for so many years when scattered and stateless, this is in no way surprising, since they have separated themselves from other nations to such a degree as to incur the hatred of all…"[118]

[117] Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (London: Verso Books, 2018).
[118] Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 45.

According to Spinoza, the separation of the Jews—in essence, their strong group identity—produced deep negative affects toward them from people beyond their collective. This is all to say, since we experience affects through others, collective identities yield a strong affective power for both in-group and out-group members—particularly in a highly atomized neoliberal context.

Additionally, there is the matter of the *simplicity* of populist ideology. Remember the earlier example of labor exploitation, when we established that "a desire which arises from a true knowledge… can be quite easily restrained or extinguished by a desire for the pleasures of the moment."[119] That is, rash desires—such as the desire to accept an inadequate, albeit simple and immediate explanation—can overcome our desires from true knowledge. As Arendt showed us, this simplicity accounted for the allure of totalitarian ideology in the twentieth century. In the case of populism, then, we can evidently see how it may be easier to blame one's alienation on an identifiable group—refugees, immigrants, Jews, Black Americans, etc.—than to problematize the entire political and economic systems in which we exist. This is another example of misdirected blame, similar to those we raised earlier in this chapter; however, in this case, our analysis of right-wing populism operates on the level of the collective, as opposed to the individual. Populism's simplicity, paired with its effective use of collective identities in an overwhelmingly atomized world, gives it the power to subsume people's striving. In the next section, we will address why neoliberalism in particular is not affectively potent enough to compete with these features.

Before we move on, however, there is one fundamental question which remains, regarding the temporality of bad ideologies. Thus far, we have established that there are conditions under which bad ideas and ideologies can be more powerful than true knowledge, and we have outlined the key features of those conditions. Yet, we must also consider how *long* those ideologies can

[119] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp16.

sustain power, or put more directly, whether there necessarily comes a point at which those ideologies collapse. Here, let us turn back to Vp7, in which Spinoza writes, "Affects arising from or aroused by reason are, if we take account of time, more powerful than those related to singular things we regard as absent." Hence, Spinoza holds that, even if we may be overwhelmed by a negative affect in the short term, the positive affect from true knowledge tends to be more powerful in the long term. Notice, however, how Spinoza compares "affects arising from or aroused by reason" to affects "from singular things we regard as absent." Yet, there are rarely instances in which *one* positive affect is compared to *one* negative affect. Instead, when we speak of being "overwhelmed" by inadequate ideas, it is typically due to the *accumulation* of negative affects. This is particularly true in the case of political ideologies, since, in the political realm, we never deal with affects from singular things. Rather, we deal with affects produced by entire social, political, and economic systems. And these systems are never "absent" as such, since we cannot simply remove ourselves from them. Hence, Vp7 does not give us the metaphysical assurances we would hope for regarding the supremacy of adequate ideologies—not even in the long term.

Similarly, in Arendt we see a conditional faith in the supremacy of the good, but one which does not provide us with any meaningful metaphysical certainty. Arendt maintains that once a totalitarian movement obtains power—as opposed to just being a reactionary movement—it becomes more difficult to sustain authority over individuals' perceptions of reality. She writes, "power means a direct confrontation with reality, and totalitarianism in power is constantly concerned with overcoming this challenge," since there are irreconcilable tensions between the fictitious vision dictated by the ideology and the individuals' material conditions.[120] When this

[120] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1968), 391.

process begins to unravel, propaganda alone will no longer suffice in grasping the masses' reality. Instead, "terror must be presented as an instrument for carrying out a specific ideology."[121]

Hence, on the one hand, it seems that Arendt believes that the breakdown of totalitarian ideologies was likely due to the deep contradictions contained within them. On the other hand, Arendt does not believe this breakdown was inevitable or necessary, for if the ideologies were supported by enough force, they could have been sustained. Perhaps in a similar vein, it can be said that populist ideology is undermined by its contradictions. But this does not mean that there is a *necessary* collapse of populism or other bad ideologies. After all, we have already established that Spinoza's metaphysics does not include a clear teleology or a final cause. Just like any other idea, whether an ideology prevails depends on the strength of its affects. So, while the tensions in an ideology may weaken its hold—especially as those contradictions become exacerbated over time—the ideology will not be displaced until there is an opposing ideology with stronger affects.

V. Toward a relational liberalism

So, if some opposing ideology is needed to displace right-wing populism, what would such an ideology entail? To reiterate, the first and most obvious point is that the opposing ideology must have stronger affects than right-wing populism. After all, as we have previously established, "no affect can be restrained by the true knowledge of good and evil insofar as it is true, but only insofar as it is considered as an affect."[122] That is, the adequacy of an ideology alone is insufficient to guarantee its dominance if the surrounding conditions overwhelm individuals with opposing affects. In the case of neoliberalism, then, even if this *were* the most adequate ideology—which is

[121] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 392.
[122] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp14.

a premise solely to be taken at face value—it would nonetheless be a weak ideological competitor for right-wing populism, affectively speaking, due to its atomizing and individualistic bent.

Mouffe recognizes the necessity of affects in her political theory when she calls for a "left populism." Much—but not all—of Mouffe's political theory aligns with a Spinozist framework. She seeks to conceptualize a political project constructed around a collective will, which mobilizes common affects in defence of equality and social justice. The difference between Mouffe's left populism and right-wing populism is that left populism would entail a "people" that is constructed democratically rather than on the basis of nation or race. She writes, "The objective of a left populist strategy is the creation of a popular majority to come to power and establish a progressive hegemony."[123] The "people" for Mouffe, however, is not entirely inclusive. Mouffe conceives of a collective which excludes individuals who reject her democratic ideals. In fact, the only unifying factor of Mouffe's collective *is* its shared adversary, that is, its racist and xenophobic right-wing counterpart. Without the right-wing populists, there is no left-wing populism to be formed.

This conceptual move is necessary for Mouffe, because she endorses an agonistic or Schmidtian view of politics, in which conflict is not only inevitable, but the central feature. Her starting point of politics is a distinction between "us" and "them," or in the case of populism, "people" and "adversary." This is why, for Mouffe, neoliberal hegemony—or, in her words, the "post-political"—was always unsustainable. Neoliberalism attempts to conceal the true nature of politics by reducing it to "a mere issue of managing the established order, a domain reserved for

[123] Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism*, 50.

experts."[124] But, for Mouffe, politics can never move beyond the adversarial relation, because this is what politics fundamentally *is*. As such, the return to "the political" was always inevitable.[125]

Indeed, as we saw through Spinoza's analysis of the Jews in the previous section, there is some validity to the claim that exclusive collectives can effectively mobilize the affects. But, for Spinoza, this is a matter of historical contingency, not metaphysical necessity. In other words, it may be true that exclusive collectives *can* mobilize—and historically *have* mobilized—the affects; but this is not the only way to do so, and in fact is not the most effective way to do so. Spinoza's intersubjectivity does not presuppose an outgroup; that is, our ability to experience positive affects through others does not rely on us expressing negative affects toward some. In the words of Giles Deleuze, Spinoza's philosophy is one which "springs from affirmation." In the *Ethics*, he writes,

> "Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body; that all should strive together, as far as they can, to preserve their being; and that all, together, should seek for themselves the common advantage of all. From this it follows that men who are governed by reason—that is, men who, from the guidance of reason, seek their own advantage—want nothing for themselves which they do not desire for other men."[126]

For Spinoza, then, it is clearly *rational* to see our fate connected with all others, and to seek their happiness and power in conjunction with our own. But this thesis has consistently shown that rationality does not prevail on its own; it must also be augmented by sufficiently powerful affects.

Fortunately, this intersubjectivity is not only rational. It also produces the strongest affects. Remember that, for Spinoza, a desire from joy is always more powerful than a desire from sadness, since it derives from our own essence. From this it follows that a collective built entirely around

[124] Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism*, 17.
[125] Because, for Mouffe, politics is necessarily adversarial, it is difficult to envisage what proceeds from a "progressive hegemony." For Mouffe, the political arena and collective identities are always already changing, making struggle of some kind inevitable, although the form of this struggle is impossible to predict preemptively.
[126] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp18.

affirmation—a truly inclusive collective—would be more affectively powerful than a collective built around negation. Since we experience joyful affects through other people, the inclusive collective would exude powerful affects of joy, whereas the exclusive collective would exude weaker affects of sadness. This is why Spinoza believes the power of the multitude is the foundation of any political order, writing that "democracy is the most natural form of state, approaching most closely that freedom which nature grants to every man."[127] As Hardt and Negri put it, Spinoza's "multitude" is a *global* collective, as opposed to a "people," which is understood through nation-states with strict borders. The problem with neoliberalism, therefore, is not the lack of adversarial conflict as Mouffe puts it, but rather the lack of intersubjective relations. It essentially neglects the importance and the power of social relations to our existence. As such, through Spinoza and others, we can conceive a formulation of liberalism that is entirely open and yet still affectively powerful. We shall call this ideology "relational liberalism," since its centers around our intersubjectivity, that is, our relations to and interconnectedness with all other people.

Our critique of neoliberalism's hyper-individualism, grounded in Spinoza's metaphysical intersubjectivity, embeds itself within a rich tradition of other liberal critiques—critiques from individuals who often identified as liberals (of a sort) themselves. It will thus help to contextualize this ideology within its wider history of political thought, so that we can see how previous thinkers have envisaged the shortcomings of various strands of liberalism and how relational liberalism can potentially fulfill those gaps. Only once we understand the multifaceted vision of relational liberalism can we fully understand its potential power within a contemporary political context. The two components of relational liberalism I will expound here—both because I believe they are the foundations of this ideology, as well as the clearest divergences from other forms of liberalism—

[127] Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 179.

are 1) the distinctive relation between the individual and the collective and 2) the rejection of a competitive ethos which pits individuals against each other in the pursuit of personal accumulation.

First, an integral feature of relational liberalism is that it does not presuppose that the individual precedes the collective. On the contrary, relational liberalism holds that the individual finds itself *in* the collective, and vice versa. That is, the flourishing of the individual relies on the flourishing of the collective, and vice versa. This can be understood in a material sense, of course; the natural world presents its own obstructions to our physical striving, and thus we enter into a social contract to help overcome them. But remember that, for Spinoza, striving to increase our power is not to be understood primarily in a material sense—such as through the accumulation of wealth or prestige—but rather in a metaphysical sense, namely through understanding more adequately our positionality in the world, as well as the causal forces behind our actions and our ideas. And since we are perpetually overwhelmed by external passions and confused by mutilated ideas, we rely on other people to reach a higher level of epistemological clarity and therefore metaphysical power. Understood in this way, our relations to others do not obstruct our individual freedom; they in fact *enhance* our freedom, such that we could never be free without them. In a Rousseauean lens, individual freedom is thus achieved through the *collective* expression of power.

This bidirectionality between the individual and the collective reflects an earlier critique of classical liberalism presented by twentieth-century philosopher and psychologist John Dewey. Dewey criticizes classical liberalism for conceiving of the individual as "something given, something already there," prior to the construction of society. He rejects the view that social institutions exist merely as instruments for coordinating the interests of pre-social individuals. Instead, he argues, social institutions are "means for creating individuals."[128] In a later article,

[128] John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Whithorn: Anodos Books, 1920), 190-192.

Dewey writes, "liberalism knows that an individual is nothing fixed, given ready-made. It is something achieved, and achieved not in isolation but with the aid and support of conditions, cultural and physical—including in 'cultural', economic, legal and political institutions as well as science and art."[129] Much of Dewey's work, then, focuses on conceptualizing the collectivist institutions which can guarantee the conditions of individual agency and autonomy. Similar to relational liberalism, he recognizes that the individual's existence is bound up with the collective, such that the perseverance and character of the individual is shaped by civilization. Hence, the structure and relations of a given society affect the individual's physical and metaphysical striving.

This leads directly into the second related component of relational liberalism, which is the prioritization of our intersubjectivity—in which the striving of the self is inherently connected to the striving of the other—over a distinctly competitive ethos. This rejection of a competitive ethos forms the basis of W.E.B. Du Bois' critique of liberalism in the late nineteenth century. Du Bois similarly writes against a backdrop of what I refer to as "classical liberalism," the central principles of which, while highly contested, I categorize as deriving from the writings of John Locke and Adam Smith, among others. Principally, these tenets include 1) individual rights secured by the rule of law and 2) laissez-faire economics, otherwise known as an economic system centered around the free market with limited government regulation. For Du Bois, a society crafted around free market competition subverts social relations, forcing individuals to continuously fabricate distinctions between self and other, the presumed competitor. The classical liberal economy manifests a competitive ethos that yields a deep-seated divisiveness in which we find ourselves naturally at odds with each other. This competitive ethos is thus the root of interpersonal animosity.

[129] John Dewey, "The Future of Liberalism," *The Journal of Philosophy*, XXXII(9), 1935, 227.

In a satirical piece he wrote during his graduate studies, Du Bois asserts that liberal society is "built upon the 'Eternal I' whose creed "is 'to put heel on the neck of man down'… not that I is above Thee but that I despises Thee."[130] Classical liberalism subverts interpersonal relations to such a degree that other people become not only things which exist outside of ourselves, but things which we must actively work to destroy. Moreover, for Du Bois, the most regrettable consequence of this competitive ethos is that it "greatly diminishes the prospects of concerted political intervention and any practical reconciliation of bourgeois society's purported internal contradictions."[131] The liberal ethos forces individuals to fixate on their hostility toward other people, as opposed grappling with the contradictions contained within their broader societal structures, thus propagating the oppressive status quo. This reflects the same sentiment expressed in our earlier example about misdirected blame among exploitative labor conditions. In that theoretical example, I was overwhelmed by the negative affects from my environment, obscuring my ability to diagnose the true source of my alienation. Instead, I wrongly blamed my precarity on my fellow workers—a markedly easier explanation, due to their close proximity to my being.

Regardless of whether this misdiagnosis is a product of classical liberalism's competitive ethos, or of our being overwhelmed by negative affects, or of both, we arrive at the same problem: we mistakenly view other individuals as obstacles to our success, as opposed to mutual collaborators. For Du Bois, these manufactured antagonisms between self and other are regrettable because they obstruct our ability to achieve meaningful political action and material change. Through Spinoza, we can add onto this an important metaphysical element: these negative distinctions also obstruct our striving, since we deprive ourselves of the very things which would

[130] W.E.B. Du Bois, 1889, 224-225.
[131] Andrew J. Douglas, "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Critique of the Competitive Society," *Du Bois Review*, 12(1), 2015, 25-40.

help us increase our power, that is, other people. In Part IV of the *Ethics*, he writes, "For if, for example, two individuals of entirely the same nature are joined to one another, they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one. To man, then, there is nothing more useful than man."[132]

Relational liberalism replaces the competitive ethos with an appreciation of our intrinsic intersubjectivity. In the spirit of Du Bois, it suggests that others should not be viewed as hindrances to our perseverance, but should instead be conceived as companions in our striving; and, in the spirit of Dewey, it recognizes how the liberal promise—of freedom, autonomy, and individuality—cannot be fulfilled so long as we view the individual as an already-existing being, isolated from the collective. As such, not only does relational liberalism produce the collective affects needed to displace right-wing populism; it also fulfills the shortcomings which have always been endemic to certain strands of classical liberalism, and which now plague neoliberalism in a similar fashion. The liberal imagination, as highlighted through thinkers like Dewey and Du Bois, need not be restricted to a narrow, individualistic tradition. Instead, we can expand the possibilities of a liberal future by centering the radical affirmation of the other without bounds. After all, in Spinoza we find an awareness of our place in Nature, and with it, of our essential connection to other beings.

[132] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp18.

CONCLUSION

Hanya Yanagihara's novel, *A Little Life*, traces the story of Jude Francis, a tragic protagonist whose life is colored by devastating trauma, including physical and sexual abuse. Jude's traumatic past corrupts his conception of self, festering a deep-seated self-hatred that leads him to self-harm and, in the end, take his own life. When asked about why Jude feels compelled to self-harm, he responds, "Sometimes it's because I feel so awful, or ashamed, and I need to make physical what I feel…and sometimes it's because I feel so many things and I need to feel nothing at all."[133] Jude feels so deeply tormented by the unyielding negative emotions emanating from his past, that he needs a physical release—even if this means harming himself. In Jude we thus see a literary encapsulation of someone who has become overwhelmed by negative affects from the external world, leading him to act in ways which overtly oppose his striving. While, according to Spinoza, "reason demands that everyone love himself," Jude is someone who has been "completely conquered by external causes contrary to [his] nature," which ultimately leads him to suicide.[134]

In a way, this thesis used Jude as its starting point. It began from the supposition that, despite the widely-held belief in the supremacy of the good, there are certainly instances in which the ideas that prevail are those which fundamentally obstruct our striving to persevere—both on an individual psychological level, as well as on a collective political level. We were therefore curious about what these conditions actually are. When might it be the case that people can be overwhelmed by inadequate ideas? And, especially, what can this tell us about the power of inadequate *ideologies?* To help answer these questions, we turned to Spinoza's metaphysics—with a particular focus on his account of the affects—paired with a host of other formative thinkers.

[133] Hanya Yanagihara, *A Little Life* (New York: Doubleday, 2015).
[134] Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVp18.

In Chapter One, we established that, for Spinoza, humans are driven by our *conatus*, that is, our essential striving to persevere in our existence. We also distinguished between adequate and inadequate ideas, showing that, when we strive to increase our power, we simultaneously strive toward more adequate ideas. In Chapter Two, we applied the distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas to the concept of ideologies. We defined an ideology as an inherited framework through which individuals and groups make sense of the world. We also showed that, while all ideologies are inadequate in some capacity, there are nevertheless *more* adequate ideologies, which provide us with more accurate representations of the world and even move our mind to greater perfection. Finally, in Chapter Three, we examined the conditions under which inadequate ideas and inadequate ideologies prevail. We showed that individuals can be susceptible to inadequate ideas when they are overwhelmed by negative affects from the external world. Drawing on Hannah Arendt, we argued that, on a political level, entire groups become vulnerable to bad ideologies when their material conditions leave them atomized and tormented by negative affects.

We then applied this analysis to a modern political context to uncover what parallels, if any, can be drawn between Arendt's analysis of twentieth-century totalitarianism and contemporary right-wing populism. We contended that, in a modern context, neoliberalism produces an analogous form of atomization through its economization of the social. Neoliberalism's severing of social relations leaves people vulnerable to manipulation by bad ideologies such as right-wing populism, which provide simplistic explanations of the world and powerful collective identities. Notably, my psychological diagnosis of populism is one of several viable explanations. Other prominent analyses have explained populism as a reaction to economic and/or political elite domination. These analyses may be equally or even more compelling. Hence, some readers may disagree with my contention that populism is, at least in part, a reaction to the

pervasive sense of loneliness produced by neoliberal atomization. Crucially, however, the crux of my argument does not rely on the soundness of this theory. That is, there could be infinite ways to explain the power bad ideologies, all of which are compatible with, and even provide evidence for, my main argument: that the scope conditions of the supremacy of the good are rather limited.

Finally, we considered which kinds of ideologies can displace bad ideologies if they are affectively powerful in certain contexts. Spinoza tells us that an idea—and therefore an ideology—can only be replaced by another if its corresponding affect is stronger. Hence, to compete with right-wing populism, there must be another ideology with more powerful affects. We thus closed by introducing the concept of "relational liberalism"—an ideology which, unlike neoliberalism, grounds itself in our intersubjective relations to other people. According to Spinoza, we experience our affects through others, such that our striving is intrinsically connected to that of other people. Since, for Spinoza, our joyful associations with others necessarily increase our own power, we contended that relational liberalism, with its boundless affirmation of the other, would therefore produce the *most* powerful affects. Such an ideology would not only displace rightwing populism; it would also revolutionize the way in which we understand our relations to those around us.

Later in *A Little Life*, Jude's father tells him, "There's not an expiration date on needing help, or needing people. You don't get to a certain age and it stops."[135] Our connections to and reliance on other people are not circumstantial; they are the products of our finite existence. As Jill Stauffer writes in *Ethical Loneliness*, "The mind-sets, views, and affective relations of human beings living in a shared world make a difference in what each of us thinks is possible, fitting, or just. A vast revolution can occur in that tiny space."[136] Only once we recognize our essential intersubjectivity can we fully strive to persevere in our being and reimagine the world anew.

[135] Hanya Yanagihara, *A Little Life*.
[136] Jill Stauffer, *Ethical Loneliness: Injustice of Not Being Heard* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 3.

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In Part IV of the *Ethics*, Spinoza writes, "if we consider our mind, our intellect would of course be more imperfect if the mind were alone and did not understand anything except itself." Above all, I am so very grateful that my mind was not alone for this project, thanks to all of you.