

Transcript

Marie Wuth - "Daily invectives: The state of bitter hate in Spinoza's TTP"

Marie Wuth:

I would like to take this as an opportunity to share what is not much more than an idea at the moment, so I'm very happy about comments and further suggestions. And let me start with an example that is not from the TTP but I'm sure it's quite familiar to you. In George Orwell's dystopia in 1984 the citizens of Oceania join in a public ritual of two minutes' hate every day. Within these two minutes hate becomes an irresistible force and advances to a most effective vehicle to support Big Brother's regime. The object of these daily invectives usually is Emmanuel Goldstein, the denouncer of the party sovereignty, who is daily assassinated in the minds of hundreds of people. I will epitomize the impeccable climax of the hate with the text passage: "their hate had started. As usual, the face of Emmanuel Goldstein, the enemy of the people, had flashed onto the screen. Before the hate had proceeded for 30 seconds, uncontrollable exclamations of rage were breaking out from half the people in the room. The sight or even the thought of Goldstein produced fear and anger automatically. He was an object of hatred. But what was strange was that although Goldstein was hated and despised by everybody, on platforms, on the telescreen, his influence never seemed to grow less. In the second minute the hate rose to a frenzy. People were leaping up and down in their places and shouting at the tops of their voices. The horrible thing about the two minutes hate was that it was impossible to avoid joining in", end of quote. The purpose of the daily invectives is to discharge the repressed feelings of fear and hate triggered by the miserable life under Big Brother's regime. By deflecting these feelings away from the government and projecting them onto external enemies, a form of effective sublimation transfer takes place. The government's incentive behind two minutes hate is to foster unity and produce sameness by manipulating the citizens affective dispositions. Importantly during these two minutes, expressing hate is not only allowed, but even requested. Hate is not an uncivil feeling. Quite contrary, it is an expression of loyalty and devotion. To disdain and insult the public enemy is seen as an expression of obedience and love.

The parallels between Orwell's texts and some passages of Spinoza's portrayal of the Hebrew Republic in Chapter 17 are striking. I quote: "After they transferred their right to God, they believed that their kingdom was God's kingdom, that they alone were God's children and that the other nations were God's enemies. As a result, they felt the most savage hatred toward the other nations, a hatred they also believed to be pious. So, the love of the Hebrews for their country was not a simple love with piety. Their daily worship so encouraged and fed this piety and this hatred for other nations that these affects had to become part of their nature. Their daily condemnation of foreigners had to

produce a continual hatred. No other hatred could be lodged more firmly in their hearts than this", end of quote. Both texts show that the intensity of the citizens' hatred for whoever was outside the nation can only be explained through the interconnection with patriotic love, piety and obedience. I figure the daily recurring publicly performed invectives described in both texts can be understood as forms of institutionalized hate, more concretely institutionalized ethnic hate.

Let me briefly say what I mean by this. I understand ethnic hate as defined in Ethics Part 3 P46 where Spinoza explains "if someone has been affected with sadness by someone of a group, class or nation different from his own, and the sadness is accompanied by the idea of that person as its cause, under the universal name of the class or nation, he will hate not only that person but everyone of the same class or nation". Thus, ethnic hate is bound to complex processes of attribution, identification and representation. When the human mind forms a concept of nationality, class or race, it removes the distinctions between an infinite number of individuals and reduces them under a universal notion. Now in order to speak of an affect as institutionalized, it must be dominant in everyday life and connected to everyday practices. It means that it is somehow embedded into the infrastructure of a polity and plays a part in organizing people's living together. In short when an affect becomes institutionalized, it guides our perception of the world and restructures our relations and responses just as in the two examples above.

In both texts hate is not merely an occasionally occurring sad passion but a central piece of the nation's narrative and part of everyday practices. In what follows I shall show that the Hebrews' hate for other nations was crucial for the social formation of their state, but contributed to its instability and eventual downfall. Some might find this contradictory to Spinoza's claim that it was precisely by virtue of the social formation that the Hebrew nation survived for so many years. But what I would like to carve out from the story of the Hebrew state as a trope, the state of bitter hate that I take to be a warning against institutionalized hate, especially ethnic hate.

In Chapter 17 of the TTP Spinoza states that "hearts are to some extent under the control of the supreme power which can bring it about in many ways that most men believe, love and hate whatever it wants them to". Spinoza contends that the supreme power controls hearts, not necessarily by direct command, but by the authority of its power and by guidance, that is, by its right. Spinoza explains this right includes to define what is piety. In the Hebrew republic it was love for their country, the sacred land, and hatred for all other nations they regarded as unclean and profane. It is needless to point out that these interpretations of piety grew from imaginary roots and involved dangerous universes that engendered stereotypes as well as distorted self and world perception. Nevertheless, the daily condemnation of foreigners was a distinctive custom, quote "to fortify the hearts of the Hebrews to endure all things for their country with unexamined steadfastness and valour", end of quote. their hate

was combined with great devotion and therefore not only especially stubborn but believed to be pious. Here hate is not primarily described as a destructive or antisocial force, but as a social tie that creates union and brings strength. However, as Balibar points out the sociability that arises from a common enemy is artificial and nothing else than the other side of hate. In contrast to natural sociability, this kind of sociability can only create unstable bonds that are based on imagination. As Balibar says, quote "our fellow men - that other individual with whom we can identify, whom religion refers to as our neighbour and politics as our fellow citizen - is constituted by imaginary identification". What Balibar describes here can be referred to as the construction of a national identity based on a certain shared narrative. In the Hebrews' case this narrative was their belief of being elected and loved by God as his children and therefore to be superior and have absolute right against all. In other words, hate for other nations was an aspect of complex social ties and a narrative that also involved joyful affective attachment and created unity. To an extent then, it is true that their hate identity construction brought strength and was connected to a kind of union. But this also came at the highest possible cost - that is, freedom.

I think the real tragic element included in Spinoza's retelling of the history of the Hebrew state is the affective complex of bitter hate. What he portrays is a society of people who are not free but enslaved to their passions and who not only tolerate their enslavement but actively fight for it. For sure, we need to take the circumstances of the governance of a state into account and Moses' legislation appeared to be freedom for the Hebrews who were accustomed to slavery, and it also enabled them to live in material prosperity. But the more general point I try to make is that to embed hate in everyday practice means to build epistemic barriers that are precisely not part of an environment that encourages citizens to use their reason, but triggers it to fall into a state of bitter hate. The open display of hate towards others day by day means to turn away from reason, cooperation and true joy, day by day. In a modified form Spinoza expresses this criticism in the introduction of the Treatise when he wonders about men who make boast of professing the Christian religion and display the bitterest hatred towards one another every day. In a sense the state of hate is a trope that encapsulates what Spinoza criticizes about religious dogma and organized religion being anti-rational and fatal threats to enlightenment and peace.

I think it would be misleading to assume that hate under any circumstances or in any effective combination, even or maybe especially with love, would be fit for the governance of hearts or to stabilize the social formation. Surely Spinoza argues that the right of the sovereign extends to everything he can successfully attempt to, but some images and sad passions are contradictory to the state's purposes. In Chapter 20 Spinoza declares the state's purpose to be security and freedom. Here freedom means to live according to one's nature, to use one's reason freely, which cannot be achieved by the domination of but rather the absence of fear and hate. So that every citizen can live

and act without harming herself or others. Therefore, I think the state should actually strive to prevent citizens from being affected by hate.

Furthermore, we could argue that by institutionalizing hate a state incorporates an element that threatens its inner and outer stability. Being one of our strongest passions, hate provides a fertile ground for superstition which inevitably will bring conflict, as the story of the Hebrew state also proves. Moreover, if we consider that stability is not just the absence of war, specifically civil war, but the harmony of minds then stability cannot be achieved for as long as hearts are filled with hate. I also think that hate is threatening a state's stability because it spells intolerance but due to time constraints I can only hint at that here.

Another argument for the toxicity of ethnic hate for the instability could follow from the basic dynamics of hate. In the Ethics Spinoza elaborates that hate is easily transferred, hard to control, and that it can be associated with many things, based on similarity as in cases of ethnic hate, and he might agree that this becomes even more complex in multinational, multi-racial, multi-ethnic societies. And what I want to say was next to similarity, affective association also takes place based on contiguity in time and space. Let me return to 1984 to illustrate this. During the public ritual of the two-minute hate, the protagonist Winston witnesses a desire to kill, to torture, to flow through the whole group of people that gains momentum. As Orwell writes, quote "it was even possible at moments to switch one's hatred this way or that by voluntary act. Suddenly Winston succeeded in transferring his hatred from the face on the screen to the dark-haired girl behind him. Vivid hallucinations flashed through his mind. He would flog her to death", end of quote. Hate in this sense has no limits other than our imagination. So, the hate we have for another nation does not necessarily stop there but can be transferred to someone next to us. Looking at the basic dynamics and mechanisms of hate, we cannot only see the danger of institutionalized hate to the inner stability of the state but also the danger to its existence and foreign policy context. Therefore, we need to take into account that one of the most fatal dynamics inherent to hatred is its reciprocation. Spinoza states not only did the Hebrews detest other nations, but the other nations were bound to hate them most savagely in return.

From this reciprocation follows the constant threat of war as well as the tendency for separation. The constant threat or even reality of war undoubtedly does not serve stability or freedom of the state. Separation moreover prevents the state from exchanging interaction with other states. To develop this argument, one would have to consolidate TP and I can only hint at it here. But if we assume that states are individuals for example following Lordon and Matheron or even Balibar, we can see that the genesis and preservation of the state as an individual is only possible through interaction with other states, in accordance with the principle that self-preservation is never possible in isolation.

I think that Spinoza offers us the tools to formulate an account against institutionalized ethnic hate that does not refer to the moral reprehensibility, but instead focuses on the state's purposes and the flourishing of the society. I think when Spinoza retells the story of the Hebrew state, he introduces a trope, the state of bitter hate that continues to haunt us and occasionally appears in different times, places and fictions. Spinoza found it in the Hebrew state as well as in forms of organized religion where people displayed the bitterest hatred towards one another. I found in an Orwell's dystopia where rational men are degraded to beast and automata, completely inhibited from rational judgment, and not able to live according to their nature. And I'm sure there are a lot more examples coming to mind are places where we see this bitter hate growing in today's political landscape. However, I figure the state of bitter hate is a dystopic trope that should not frighten us, but haunt us as a reminder how institutions should not be, as a warning that comes to mind when state institutions deteriorate and do not protect stability, peace and their citizens' freedom. Spinoza observes in the TTP, customs and laws that our institutions form individuals in ways that can lead a nation to have its particular mentality, its particular character and its particular prejudices. Therefore, we have to be attentive to the affects, images and narratives incorporated and promoted by institutions. Just as we say the free community of the wise men is utopian but still kind of ideal, the state of bitter hate is dystopian and therefore good to keep in mind. Thank you.