The Ethics of Affective Leadership: Organizing Good Encounters Without Leaders

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ABSTRACT: This article addresses the fundamental question of what is ethical leadership by rearticulating relations between leaders and followers in terms of "affective leadership." The article develops a Spinozian conception of ethics which is underpinned by a deep suspicion of ethical systems that hold obedience as a primary virtue. We argue that the existing research into ethical leadership tends to underplay the ethical capacities of followers by presuming that they are in need of direction or care by morally superior leaders. In contrast, affective leadership advocates a profoundly political version of ethics, which involves people in the pursuit of joyful encounters that augment our capacity to affect and be affected by others. Instead of being led by people in leadership positions, we are led by active affections that enhance our capacity for moral action.

KEY WORDS: affective ethics, care, leader-follower relations, leaderless leadership, power, Spinoza

> People are easily led … sometimes to adore their kings as gods, and at other times to scourge and detest them.
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> Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*

This article addresses the fundamental question, what is ethical leadership, by rearticulating relations between leaders and followers in terms of "affective leadership." Through an engagement with Spinoza's affective ethics, we argue that ethical leadership can neither be reduced to a question of imposing ethical standards and moral rule systems, nor to a matter of cultivating the virtuous conduct of individual leaders, nor recast in terms of leaders' unlimited obligation to take full responsibility for the "other." Rather, affective leadership rests on a profoundly political version of ethics, which concerns the organization of what Spinoza termed "joyful encounters" (Deleuze 1988; Hardt 1993). According to Spinoza's affective theory of ethics, joyful encounters are not simply a matter of following moral norms, but are characterized by joyful affections that increase our "power to act" (Hardt 1993, 94). Thus, ethics involves the collective pursuit of joyful encounters that augment our capacity to affect and be affected by others, and by so doing increase

our powers of action. Instead of being led by people in leadership positions, we are led by affective forces that enhance what we can do, or misled by sad affects that emerge from our "own lack of power" (Spinoza, DefAff26)[1] and thereby constrain what we can do.

Our interest here is therefore different from the existing literature on ethical leadership. Whereas the good and evil of leadership has been widely addressed in efforts to promote transformational leadership (Bass 1985; Bass and Steidlmeyer 1999; Burns 1978; Gardner, Avolio, and Walumbwa 2005) and scrutinize its dark side (e.g. Conger and Kanungo 1998; House and Howell 1992; Rosenthal and Pittinsky 2006; Tourish 2013; Tourish and Vatcha 2005), ethical leadership has recently emerged as a subject matter of its own. The contributions to ethical leadership can be broadly categorized according to the following themes: work seeking to define the ethical leader as a role model (e.g. Brown and Treviño 2006; Brown, Treviño, and Harrison 2005; Cunliffe 2009; Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011; see also Ciulla 1995); studies focusing on the role of the leader as a culprit in corporate scandals (e.g. Sims and Brinkmann 2003; Stein 2013; see also Adler 2002; Knights and O'Leary 2005; Mitchell and Scott 1987); and efforts to open up relations between leaders and followers by rethinking notions of care and responsibility (e.g. Knights and O'Leary 2006; Rhodes 2012), some of which dispute the very possibility of ethical leadership (Costas and Taheri 2012; Roberts 2001; Wray-Bliss 2013). What unites these approaches is the assumption that ethical leadership is a matter of caring and taking responsibility for others.

We argue that Spinoza's ethics and the concept of affective leadership that we unfold from his work enables us to more radically rearticulate the possibilities of ethical leadership, in theory and in practice, not just by rethinking the premises of ethics, but by opening up the very concept of leadership beyond leader-follower relations. As affective leadership involves people in relations of power that affect what they can and cannot do, the ethics of affective leadership is not primarily a matter of how leaders relate to followers, but how people relate to each other regardless of hierarchical status. Hence, the question of affective leadership needs to be examined in terms of the relationships that influence, enable, and lead people to act. Unlikely to come from one's manager or supervisor alone, such affective states emerge from a wide variety of relations within the multitude that makes up social life.

Affective leadership should not be confused with the currently fashionable doctrine of passionate leadership (see e.g. Blackmore 2004; Davies 2008; Day 2004; Elliott and Stead 2009). The passionate leadership fad asserts that leaders will be more successful at inspiring and motivating followers by being in touch with and leading through their own passions, typically ignoring that followers may not share the leader's passion, but instead be irritated, frustrated, and demotivated by them (Thanem 2013). In contrast, affective leadership takes a critical position towards the sad affects of passionate leadership and encourages us to pursue the good life through joyful affects and encounters that enhance our capacity to act and be acted upon. Whereas sad affects and passions turn us against ourselves, only active affects enhance our collective powers. But before we explore Spinoza's affective ethics and

how it may enable us to rearticulate the possibilities of ethical leadership, we need to outline our critique of extant writings on ethical leadership and their underlying idea that ethics is a matter of care and responsibility.

CARE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

A paradigmatic definition of ethical leadership is "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making" (Brown, Treviño, and Harrison 2005, 120). According to this definition, ethical leadership concerns how a leader influences the conduct of followers in terms of a given set of social norms, which typically involve being honest, caring, trustworthy, and "fair and balanced" (Brown and Treviño 2006, 597). Similar concerns can be found in accounts of transformational leadership (Bass 1985; Burns 1978), authentic leadership (Luthans and Avolio 2003), and spiritual leadership (Fry 2003), all of which highlight a concern for others, the personal integrity of the leader, and the importance of acting as a role model.

However, there is reason to question the reliance upon leaders as moral role models. Research into the role of leaders in corporate scandals challenges their presumed moral superiority as well as the idea that they should be relied upon to prevent unethical conduct in organizations and corporate scandals. Through the case of Enron, Sims and Brinkmann (2003) have shown that unethical and scandalous leadership behaviours create and reinforce organizational cultures of "greed, selfishness, and jealousy" (252), which cause organizational crisis and collapse. According to these authors, Enron collapsed because their executives pursued "profits, power, greed and influence" at all costs (247): by engaging in and rewarding lying, cheating, and other forms of rule-breaking; by punishing whistle-blowers and ridiculing under-performers who did not embrace rule-breaking; and by "shifting the blame and pointing fingers" instead of taking responsibility (248). Furthermore, corporate scandals and organizational collapse have been attributed to narcissistic leaders, who are seen to combine a sense of omnipotence and omniscience with a tendency to blame others for their own mistakes and seek revenge on those they blame (de Vries and Miller 1985; Stein 2003, 2013). For example, the narcissism of top management has been seen as a common factor in the collapse of financial institutions. According to Stein (2013), the downfall of Lehman Brothers and its role in the 2008 financial crisis was caused by CEO Dick Fuld's hubris and narcissism: when it was evident that the bank would fail, Fuld had nothing but contempt to show for his employees, and blamed short-sellers in the market rather than the bank's own questionable practices for its downfall. Yet, by focusing primarily upon the role of leaders in the genesis of corporate scandals, this literature tends to assume that their solution involves replacing immoral leaders with ones who supposedly are morally superior (see esp. Sims and Brinkmann 2003).

More philosophically orientated research has elaborated the relational dimension of ethical leadership. As argued by Cunliffe (2009), moral leadership consists of a set of values and practices that are explicitly tied in with who we are

in relation to others. While moral leadership involves values such as integrity and transparency, it also requires us to empathize with others and "giv[e] back to the community" (97), or, as Knights and O'Leary (2005, 365) have argued, it obliges us to pursue a virtue ethics of "community values and solidarity." Similar concerns have led commentators to take issue with the heroic accounts of the "great man" theory of leadership by defining leadership as an interactive process or co-constructed relationship between leaders and followers (Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien 2012; Uhl-Bien 2006), or by stressing that "leaders are morally accountable to others" (Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011, 1425). According to Cunliffe and Eriksen, people in leadership positions may therefore respond to and take moral responsibility for others through open dialogue. Echoing these concerns, Grandy and Sliwa (2017) have suggested that embodied and reflexive engagement make leaders skilled at helping followers connect to and care for people within and beyond the organization's boundaries.

Some critical literature within the field of business ethics has questioned assumptions that have been made about the unique moral competence of manager-leaders. Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) criticized the early literature on business ethics for its presumption that managerial position yields a peculiar kind of moral expertise. In a similar vein, Ciulla's (1995, 13) review of the literature on ethical leadership criticized influential work in the field for its assumption that "leaders are morally a head above everyone else."[2] Whilst such assumptions clearly do persist within the field, other scholars have found that the senior management of an organization do not in fact have much influence as ethical role models (Brown and Treviño 2014). However, even with this important proviso about the influence of senior management, these authors still argue that "top managers play an important role in shaping the ethical culture of their organizations" (Brown and Treviño 2014, 595) and highlight "the important role that managers … play in the development of ethical leaders" (Brown and Treviño 2014, 596). This suggests that the assumption of a relationship between managerial position and moral competence persists, even if surrounded by some major caveats. As we shall see later on, Spinoza's affective ethics makes no such assumptions and encourages all of us to strive to exercise our reason and powers in such a way that we collectively develop more ethical and joyful relations in settings of work and organization.

Meanwhile, other research has reframed the relational nature of ethical leadership in terms of the responsibility for "the other" by drawing on the theories of Levinas and Lacan. For example, Knights and O'Leary (2006) mobilized Levinas' (1969, 1998) ethics of self-other relations to challenge leaders' pre-occupation with the self and to overcome the separation between self and others, leaders, and followers, which is taken for granted in more conventional approaches. Levinas (1969) argues that it is through the primordial face-to-face encounter with the other that we become moral subjects in the first place, who recognize our unconditional and infinite responsibility to respect and care for the other. However, since relations of unconditional openness, care, and infinite responsibility may only be possible in intimate relations between two, he later advocates the need for justice—that is, the practical exercise of ethics in social and political life—for engaging with real ethical situations that involve many different others (Levinas 1998).

Admitting that settings of leadership and organization necessarily put us in situations where we are forced to engage ethically with different others and prioritize some others over other others, Levinasian commentators have questioned the instrumentalism that underpins many claims for ethical leadership. In this respect, Rhodes (2012) argues that "just leadership" should not be idealized as a "goal to be achieved" by individual leaders (1311), but appreciated as a continuous process where one questions the status of the self in relation to the others that one is responsible for. Rhodes questions whether it is possible to provide the same intensity of care and generosity for many different others, and as such, he concludes that it is impossible to deal with their conflicting demands in a way that will be perceived as fair and just for everybody involved. This has led other commentators to reject the idea of ethical or just leadership altogether. According to Wray-Bliss (2013), an ethical climate of caring and responsibility can only be cultivated without leaders, by seeking inspiration from community organizations which have a strong tradition of equality and grass-roots participation.

Lacanian thought has offered alternative explanations to the difficulties of exercising ethical leadership. As Roberts (2001) has argued, the narcissistic self that people form during the mirror stage of childhood development makes us unable to take responsibility for ourselves and for others. While ordinary employees may fail to do so because they seek to secure the self "by meeting the expectations of authoritative others" (Roberts 2001, 117), people in leadership positions fail because it is their narcissism rather than a genuine desire to love and care for others that leads them to pursue such positions in the first place. This failure is perhaps particularly problematic in leadership relations where leaders pride themselves on being ethical and authentic. Insofar as followers have an ingrained desire to obey, be cared for, and recognized by a leader, it has been suggested that followers may become more vulnerable to their seductions than to the repressions of openly authoritarian leaders because symbolic authority is replaced by promises of love, care, and humility that are never fulfilled (Costas and Taheri 2012).

Indeed, the ethic of care that informs most of the contributions discussed above—both the arguments for ethical leadership and the Levinasian and Lacanian critiques—actualizes a sense of pastoral care that is deeply invested with power. As Foucault (2007) maintained, the discourse of pastoral care is at the heart of an apparatus of pastoral power, which has historically underpinned the immense power of the church and the state. Like the shepherd caring for his flock, the caring leader is supposed to guide and govern the everyday conduct of those in his care whilst willing to suffer and sacrifice himself for them (see Sliwa et al. 2013). The ethic of care must therefore be considered within the wider social conditions under which it is practiced and understood (Tomkins and Simpson 2015). Today the priest has been replaced by the figure of the manager-leader in current expressions of pastoral care, and it is perhaps no coincidence that one of the few empirical studies of this kind of ethical leadership was found in the pastoral work performed by "leader-priests" (Grandy and Sliwa 2017).

We would not dispute the importance of caring for others in society. However, this becomes problematic when it is defined as an attribute of a particular class within

society, the leadership class, and when it neglects the apparatus of power that under-pins the practice of caring (see e.g., Brown, Treviño, and Harrison 2005; Cunliffe 2009; Grandy and Sliwa 2017). The present argument does not reject an ethics of care *in toto*, but highlights the political pitfalls of this approach and refocuses the question of leadership ethics in terms of an affirmative Spinozian ethics, which emphasizes how people act and are acted upon in good encounters that enhance our affective powers. It is to this project that we now turn.

SPINOZA'S AFFECTIVE ETHICS AND THE ORGANIZATION OF GOOD ENCOUNTERS

An important point that must be grasped before embarking upon a Spinozian con-ception of ethics is that in contrast to many other moral systems which are framed in terms of obligation, obedience, and constraint, Spinoza's ethics presents itself as "a theory of power" (Deleuze 1988, 104). Rather than focus on the peculiar char-acteristics of individual leaders as role models who possess a distinctive capacity for care, Spinoza's ethics focuses attention onto how we can enhance our collective powers of thought and action. An important dimension of Spinoza's ethics is his conception of power as *potentia*. *Potentia* is an immanent and constitutive power deriving from the actions of the multitude, which Spinoza contrasted with *potestas*, that is, the power of command that leaders or rulers derive from their institutional position. According to Spinoza, ethics and power do not lie in opposition to each other, but are mutually bound together as our constitutive *potentia* increases both our freedom and our ethical capacity for action.

The concept of desire plays an essential role here. Equating virtue with power (EIVDef8, EIVP20, EIVP22C)[3] and rejecting the mind's power to control the body (EIIIP2), Spinoza argues that we are defined by *conatus*, that is, by our appetite and "striv[ing] to persevere" (EIIIP6, P7). Thus, "we judge something to be good because we strive for it … and desire it" (EIIIP9S), and the good life is pursued as we strive to develop our constitutive powers of action and affection—"bringing about certain things" (EIVDef8) and enhancing our capacity to affect and be affected by others (EIVP38).[4,5]

This position rests on a deep suspicion of ethical systems and political actors that hold obedience as a primary virtue. Spinoza was particularly scathing of the tyrant, the priest, and the slave (see e.g. TTP preface, 18/5-7), who cut us off from enhanc-ing and exercising our capacities to act by "want[ing] … others to live according to his temperament" (EIIIP31S). Deleuze (1988) reminds us that the tyrant, the priest, and the slave "exploits … sad passions … to establish his power" (25). Sad passions are the feelings of slaves such as hatred, fear and mockery, despair, humility, vengeance, and cruelty. They stand in stark contrast to actions, or active affects (EIIIDef3), which are embodied in joys such as "the love of freedom" (Deleuze 1988, 26; see TP10/8) and friendship (EIIIP59S, EIVP37S1, P70, EVP10S; see also EIVP38-39; TTP16/5). Whereas active affects are joyful because they enhance what we can do, sad passions are passive affects that diminish what we can do (EIIIP11S, EIIIP37Dem, DefAff). It is through active affects that we act upon

others, and it is through passive affects that we are acted upon by others (EIIIDef3). Indeed, the ethical life is governed by active affects, while the unethical life is subject to sad affects and passions.

Throughout, Spinoza's ethics is concerned with the limits and possibilities of action and freedom, and he argues that reason plays a crucial role in conditioning our freedom and our affective powers: "Man's true power of acting, or virtue, is reason itself…. I call him free who is led by reason alone" (EIVP66S, 68Dem). More specifically, active affects are governed by the use of reason and "adequate ideas," whereby we can become the cause of our actions. In contrast, sad affects and passions are governed by inadequate, confused ideas, which lead us to be slaves to passion, tradition, and the wills and whims of others (EVP4S). Spinoza's ethics there-fore begs us to explore how we might enhance our collective freedom and capacity to act rather than live passively and obediently according to the commandments of moral rule systems and the dictates of political rulers.

Since freedom can best be pursued by understanding the limits of our freedom (EIVP37S1), Spinoza encourages us to cultivate our reason to understand the workings of desire—that is, to understand what causes us to act and what restricts us from acting. Consequently, Spinoza proceeds by examining how we are affected by a number of joyful affects including love, kindness, self-esteem, nobility, and cheerfulness, and sad passions including hate, envy, fear, humility, ambition, anger, mockery, and disdain. Joyful affects increase our powers of action, whereas sad affects and passions serve to decrease these powers. For example, Spinoza argues that "Self-esteem is a joy born out of the fact that a man considers his own power of acting" (DefAff25), in contrast to humility, which "is a sadness born of the fact that a man considers his own lack of power, or weakness" (DefAff26). However, the distinction between joyful and sad affects is not absolute. Both joy and sadness are passages rather than states of perfection and imperfection (DefAff2-3). Indeed, there would be no place for affects in a world, nor in a philosophical system, if joys were already states of perfection. Conversely, it would be pointless to embark on any ethical endeavour unless sadness could be relieved. Spinoza demonstrates how certain affects can be both joyful and sad. For example, compassion, which Spinoza defines as a form of love, is joyful if it involves the expression of love at someone else's fortune, but it is sad if it entails the expression of sadness at someone else's misfortune (DefAff24, 18). Hope and fear are "inconstant" expressions of joy and sadness respectively (DefAff12-13) because we can never be certain that they will be actualized. In a different vein, immoderate loves such as those for esteem (ambition), wealth (greed), and sexual union (lust) are themselves sad—because they are likely to create hatred in others rather than compassion, cheerfulness, love, and admiration (EIVP44S). These loves are complicated by the fact that they involve a sad longing for something which one will never fully possess (DefAff, EIIIP56S), and because they cut people off from other joyful affects (EIVP43-44).

As indicated above, it is by knowing how we are affected by various affects that we might understand the limits of our freedom and exercise our freedom. But since we by nature are "always subject to passions" (EIVP4C), and since our "power to moderate and restrain the affects" is highly limited (EIV preface), we can only do

so in the company of others who strive to do the same (EIVP35S). We must join forces with others to cultivate joyful affects that enhance our capacity for action (EIVP38; EIVP70Dem, P73; TP2/11; TTP16/10). In other words, we need to form friendships, which should not be confused with nepotistic favouritism or corrupt old boys networks. Indeed, "A free man strives to join other men to him in friendship … not to repay men with benefits which are equivalent in their eyes, but to lead himself and others by the free judgment of reason" (EIVP70Dem). Spinoza terms this the "principle of common life and common advantage" (EIVP73Dem), whereby "everyone who is led by reason desires for others also the good he wants for himself" (EIVP73S). According to Deleuze (1988, 55), this requires us to "select and organize good encounters." As we argue below, Spinoza advocates radical democratic relations to facilitate the exercise of reason and the organization of good encounters where individuals are free to voice their opinions without threat of sanction.

What makes this tricky is that people tend to agree very little with each other (EIApp) because they are strongly driven by their passions (EIVP32). Moreover, people can experience the same affect in different ways, and even for the same person the experience of an affect can change over time (EIIIP15, P51S). As Deleuze (1988) suggests, this means that we can only "organiz[e] good encounters [by] … experimenting" (119). In addition, we would argue that we need to exercise our reason, which Deleuze (1992) called our strongest affect, to develop "adequate ideas" about the cause of our actions and carefully evaluate how we are affected by different encounters. Insofar as we adequately understand how we are affected by a particular encounter, we become capable of affirmative joyful actions.

This is directly relevant to our understanding of leadership, and to the expression and experience of leadership, as it is not obvious that a certain instance of leadership will be joyful or sad. That depends on what kind of power is actualized—and the extent to which leadership enhances, or diminishes, our capacity to act. While much of the extant literature on ethical leadership seems to implicitly claim that ethical leaders enhance followers' capacity to act by respecting them, caring for them, supporting them, and motivating them, any investment of leadership in a certain organizational position involves, from a Spinozian perspective, an effort to exercise the power of decision over others, which necessarily diminishes their use of reason and freedom. A matter of *potestas* rather than *potentia*, it rests on sad passions in that it presumes that a leader is required to affect a change upon a willing but passive follower. One does not have to be a narcissist to exploit the sad passions of others. One merely has to act as if the other is lacking in some respect and believe in their essential incapacity and presumed need for leadership.[6]

What Spinoza called "sad passions" are just as central in the Levinasian literature which seeks to open up ethical leadership beyond given relations between leaders and followers. As Spinoza argued in his definition of the affects (DefAff), humility, pity, and even benevolence are sad passions. Since humility does not arise from reason or a true reflection of one's power, but from falsely considering one's lack of power, it is an outcome of ignorance and un-reason which diminishes our capacity to act (see also EIVP53). Pity, which is a form of compassion, is sadness

at another's misfortune, and benevolence, which might be translated as care, "is a desire to benefit someone we pity" (DefAff35). At the same time, compassion may be joyful insofar as we are "glad at another's fortune," and human kindness "is a desire to do what pleases men." As we have stressed above, joyful affects and sad passions are not total states of perfection and imperfection, but passages. We are not arguing that people should not show compassion or care for others, but we insist that care and compassion are joyful affects only to the extent that they enhance others' capacity to act.

The complexity of affective relations and the problem of organizing good encounters in practice is further developed in Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* and his *Political Treatise*. Both these books offer a battery of comments and contemplations that strike a direct chord with issues of leadership and organization. In the *Theological-Political Treatise* Spinoza does so by examining the organization of religion and the state. He is critical of religious obedience and remarked upon the shortcomings of charismatic leaders such as the prophets, who acted from imagination rather than understanding (TTP1/28-30, 2/1), and who relied on turbulent social conditions, fear, and purported miracles to acquire and maintain their power (TTP1, 2, 6).

In both treatises, he stresses the need to curtail the power and authority of rulers, but he also acknowledges that individual rights cannot be exercised without limits. According to Spinoza, it is neither necessary nor advisable to make sovereignty total (TTP17/1), because centralizing power in one ruler offers less stability than a distribution of power (TP8/3; see also TTP5/8). Spinoza establishes "common welfare" as the highest law (TP7/5), arguing that the wellbeing of the state depends on the wellbeing of its citizens (TTP19/6), and asserts the people's right to rebel against tyrants and corrupt states that threaten general welfare (TP4/6, TTP20/9). At the same time, democracy and the promotion of free citizens (TP4/5, TTP20/6) requires the transfer of some rights and capacities from individuals to the state (TP3/3, TTP16/8, 20/7-8), because a state that allows individuals to do as they please without limits (and act unreasonably, according to their own particular passions) will cease to exist (TP3/3). In a democracy, the rights of citizens have limits where these can be discussed and negotiated openly by these citizens (TTP20/7).

Perhaps the two most important conditions for the organization of good encounters are the existence of democratic social relations and the collective use of reason in arriving at decisions relating to the common good. In the *Theological-Political Treatise* Spinoza explicitly advocates radical democratic social relations by elaborating his critique of obedience and authority and detailing the conditions of freedom. He argues that since "human beings have very different minds, and find themselves comfortable with very different beliefs … everyone should be allowed the liberty of their own judgment" (TTP preface/12). This is a freedom of thought but not of conduct (TTP20/7), that is, a freedom to use one's intelligence and to think differently (TTP20/13):

> Freedom of judgment must necessarily be permitted and people must be governed in such a way that they can live in harmony, even though they hold different and contradictory opinions. We cannot doubt that this is the best way of ruling, and has the least

disadvantages, since it is the one most in harmony with human nature. In a democratic state (which is the one closest to the state of nature), all men agree … to act—but not to judge or think—according to the common decision (TTP20/14).

Spinoza emphasizes the social and reasonable nature of freedom. As we thrive on difference, and as freedom enables a stable, prosperous and just state, we need to combine to prosper (TTP20/16). The radical nature of Spinoza's programme is reinforced as Spinoza insists on the multitude's self-governance—that the multitude must exercise its powers of reason in formulating ethical laws that enables it to govern itself. In his own words:

> The only [genuinely] free person is the one who lives with his entire mind guided solely by reason. Acting on command, that is from obedience, does take away liberty in some sense, but it is not acting on command itself that makes someone a slave, but rather the reason for so acting. If the purpose of his action is not his own advantage but that of a ruler, then the agent is indeed a slave and useless to himself.…Everyone is … obliged to live solely by their own decisions (TTP 16/10).

Consequently, there is no place for an ethics which permits obedient followers here, and hence no ethical leadership as defined in the extant literature. As we have explained above, this argument also finds its correlate in the *Ethics*, where Spinoza is critical of those individuals who endeavour to influence the emotions of others:

> [When] each of us, by his nature, wants the others to live according to his temperament … they are like an obstacle to one another, and when all wish to be praised, or loved, by all, they hate one another (EIIIP31S).

For Spinoza, then, the ethical life rests on the collective use of reason. Here, good encounters and their joyful affections are organized by the collective, not by a leader. We do not deny that this is a complex and challenging endeavour, but if leadership is to be given a positive content, it must be in terms of the leadership of the multitude, or what we shall describe as the "affective leadership" of the multitude. In the *Theological-Political Treatise* Spinoza provides the example of the city as the ideal place for "organizing good encounters," where the power of expressing thought is an inalienable right of the multitude (Deleuze 1992, 267).

In order to appreciate the affective nature of this endeavour it is important that we remind ourselves of the corporeal underpinnings of Spinozian reason as articulated in the *Ethics* (see also Thanem and Wallenberg 2015). On our reading, the ethical and reasonable organization of good, joyful encounters can therefore not involve a transcendental or simply cognitive effort of the mind to overcome the appetites of the body (EIIIP2) and the conflicting passions of different people. Spinoza was highly critical of the mind/body dualism proposed by Descartes some decades earlier (EIII preface), insisting that reason is not contrary but in agreement with our nature and with our desire to persist with others (EIVP18S). We can only experience and know the causes of our affects, affections, and actions through our bodies, and it is only through our embodied experience and knowledge of our appetites that we might try and modify them so as to seek joyful encounters and avoid sad encounters

(EIIP19, P39). Thus, seeking to overcome the appetites of our bodies would not only be impossible, but futile and self-defeating because it would take us further away from understanding what causes us to act, and from understanding how we might pursue joyful encounters with others that enhance what we can do. Furthermore, Spinoza insisted that reason and the power of thought is itself a joyful affect that is both social and embodied: "For the more the body is capable of affecting, and being affected by, external bodies in a great many ways, the more the mind is capable of thinking" (EIVApp27).

AFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Now that we have examined the key ideas and arguments that constitute Spinoza's affective ethics, we are able to outline our notion of affective leadership in some more detail. Although Spinoza applies his ethical programme specifically to the organizational contexts of the city and the state, it has clear relevance for ethical relations in organizational life more broadly. As Spinoza makes us realize that people are led through affective forces that enhance our capacity to affect and be affected by others rather than by people who occupy leadership positions, leadership can be understood as the "organization of good encounters." Spinoza's ethics emphasizes the experimental and immanent nature of this organization. This is to say that it is not reliant upon the action of a leader or a sovereign, but emerges from the active, joyful affections of the multitude itself. This conception of ethics presents a major challenge to the prevailing notion of ethical leadership, where followers' capacity to be affected is not an expression of strength and freedom, but an inability to act without external prompting. Presuming that others are lacking in some respect, the extant literature renders followers incapable of joyful affections without encouragement from purportedly ethical leaders.

Sceptics might object that the liberating possibilities for self-organization and the creative powers of *potentia* are constrained by the discursive and institutional terrain of a hegemonic capitalist *potestas.* For example, neoliberalism has tended to conceive the process of self-organization in very narrow and managerialist terms where people market themselves as "brands," as entrepreneurial leaders, and as competitors in an economic game (McGee 2005; Munro 2012). However, Spinozian concepts such as those developed in this article can be used to show how alternative liberating possibilities may be developed. For instance, Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004, 2009) have drawn on Spinoza's idea of the active powers of the multitude in their criticism of post-Fordist capitalism and its tendency to lead and manage people externally. More specifically, they note that "any attempt at external organization only disrupts and corrupts the process of self-organization already functioning within the multitude" (2009, 302). Acts of "leadership" that rely on specific individuals to "lead" the rest of us as if we are passive followers are thus in danger of denuding and corrupting the self-organizing power that is immanent in the multitude. Hardt and Negri (2000, 2009) also remind us that Spinoza's ethics is not defined simply in terms of the intersubjective communication between individuals, but in terms of a common body, which shares common affects, through which this body strives

collectively for the common good of all. In particular, they observe that the creativity of the multitude is quite clear from its bodily capacities to create forms of social life such as language, habits, and new forms of immaterial labour such as peer-to-peer networks, none of which have required hierarchical leadership or capital to flourish.

Further on, thinkers who have been influenced by Spinoza, like Hardt and Negri, are suspicious of the idea that abstract discourse can be a vehicle for democratic practice, preferring instead activist exemplars, such as the Occupy Wall street movement (Hardt and Negri 2011) and the Zapatista rebels in Mexico (Hardt and Negri 2004). According to Hardt and Negri (2011), these experiments in radical democracy involve "a 'multitude form' [which is] … characterized by frequent assemblies and participatory decision-making structures." As communication is an element of the "affective intensity" (Taussig 2013, 40) of these radical-democratic experiments, it is less an expression of a universal ethical discourse than an embodied "insistence on being heard" (Mitchell 2013, 102), which is asserted through direct action and the bodily occupation of space by the multitude. This kind of communication is intensive, embodied and carnivalesque, such as the collective repetitions of arguments by the "human mic" in the Occupy Movement (Mitchell 2013), or the Zapatistas' rejection of parliamentary representation in favour of their occupation and creation of autonomous zones within Chiapas and the grass roots governance of these regions (Hardt and Negri 2004).

As these are leaderless experiments in the multitude's creation of new forms of self-organization, looking for ethical leadership in corporations that are characterized by hierarchical, exploitative relationships is therefore likely to prove a largely fruitless task. Rather, an affective notion of ethical leadership urges us to challenge corporate and organizational hierarchies. It has been argued that the development of an adequate conception of business ethics requires us to pay more attention to leaders in social movements, NGOs, and political organizations as well as to ordinary citizens and employees (Adler 2002). Indeed, extant research into ethical leadership has alluded to radical social movement leaders such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King, sometimes celebrating them as ideals of transformational leadership (e.g. Burns 1979; see also Ciulla 1995). While there is little discussion in this literature of the kinds of radical organizations that these charismatic leaders actually led, we would argue that a dependence on individual leadership, no matter how virtuous, may undermine rather than enhance people's freedom and collective power to exercise our capacities to act and be acted upon. The key aspect of these organizations is not the apparent virtues of their individual leaders, but the extent to which people in these organizations mobilized the affects of the multitude and the possibilities that they offered for increasing people's collective powers of action. Indeed, previous research on social movement organizations has suggested that leadership may be exercised without individual leaders within anarchic settings where activists engage in open dialogue and find agreement about new ideas that provide the basis for new initiatives of collective action (Sutherland, Land, and Böhm 2014).

The present inquiry is in some agreement with the "anti-leader" sentiments of this work, with the exception that affective leadership cannot be reduced to a matter of dialogue and meaning making. Although Spinoza highlighted that his argument for freedom was an argument for the freedom of thought and expression rather than

conduct, he was well aware that what we think and say is deeply related to the social and bodily experiences we make through our affective encounters with others. At the same time, he insisted that simply responding to our impulses and emotions would reduce us to ignorant slaves of our passions. Our argument for affective leadership must be understood on these premises. When we propose that leadership involves the organizing of good affective encounters, we suggest that people are led through encounters that not simply enhance our capacity to think and act freely, but to do so reasonably, in concert with others, and because we come to appreciate how we are affected through the encounter by subjecting our sentiments, temperaments, thoughts, and actions to reason and critique.

A key issue that must be addressed in the "organization of good encounters" concerns the dangers that arise from situations of collective decision making that lead to "mob justice" (Balibar 1998; Negri 2004). Spinoza himself did not believe that all group decisions or actions were necessarily moral, and throughout his works he took pains to distinguish between better and worse forms of self-rule. He was outraged at the death of his friend and liberal politician Jan DeWitt, who was lynched by a mob of a rival political group and he spoke out against the injustice of the mob (Balibar 1998; Negri 2004). Spinoza employed a particular term to describe the mob, which he called the *vulgus*. The *vulgus* is ruled not by love, joy, or reason but by sad passions such as fear, anger, hatred, and unreason (EIVP54S)—this was a defining characteristic of mob injustice at Spinoza's time just like it is a key feature of the neo-fascist populist movements that have come to dominate the political debates of Europe and the United States today. We are now witnessing the rise of increasingly authoritarian forms of leadership in Europe and the US fuelled by the sad passions of fear and insecurity which have become common under neo-liberal capitalism (see, e.g., Bloom 2016). In his own time, Spinoza himself warned that our freedom is grounded in our collective constitutive powers and it is a profound misunderstanding of both power and ethics to rely upon the mythical power of our leaders.

One of the most important questions for Spinoza was the extent to which the multitude could govern itself, given these dangers of the divisive mob (Balibar 1998, 58). Since leaders and authorities are no more capable of reason and love than anyone else, he stressed that they are no more qualified to exercise government. The active powers of self-government must therefore be found in the *potentia* of the multitude itself and the cultivation of reason and friendship which stems from active joyful affects such as love and kindness, devotion, and daring. Spinoza advocated the creation of institutions which fostered such active affects, and which permitted freedom of expression and the active use of reason in self-government. It was because he recognized the dangers and sad passions of the mob that he argued that the "organization of good encounters" requires the pursuit of reason, friendship, and freedom of opinion to foster the active affects of the multitude.

Spinoza's own writings are not without problems, as is evident in his explicit exclusion of women, foreigners, and children (TP11). It is therefore crucial that we do not simply apply Spinoza's writings as a template to the question of ethical leadership, but pose this question in relation to the political and economic circumstances confronting us today. While a capitalist political economy is largely taken for granted

in extant writings on ethical leadership, we therefore need to ask what affects are generated by the workings of contemporary global capitalism, which influences the daily lives of pretty much everybody and everything on planet earth. Given that our notion of affective leadership takes inspiration from the leaderless collectives of anti-capitalist movements, we also need to ask if affective leadership requires the development of non-capitalist reason, and question the extent to which good encounters may be organized within the boundaries of capitalism.

One of the major misunderstandings of neo-liberal capitalism is that the constitutive powers of the multitude and its capacity for self-organization must be defined and limited in terms of money or increased human capital. Negri's (1991, 83) account of Spinoza's ethics observes that the democratic "multitude" moves well beyond such capitalist myths that assume that the market is the end of history and the limit of human imagination and organization, in contrast to our active constituent powers through which "the infinite productivity of human labor searches for a new organization." This is particularly pressing as current discourse on business and leadership is blurring the boundaries between the joyful powers of *potentia* and the authoritarian powers of *potestas*, for example by luring us into intensive and disciplinary work regimes that channel our energies towards the interests of leaders and organizations by playing at our own personal insecurities and interests.

However, the perverse enjoyment that people may find in desiring our own exploitation and suppression is limited, and we are not entirely exhausted by the co-optation of joyful affects by sad passions. As Hardt and Negri (2000, 2009) have argued in their post-Marxist analysis of capitalism, a non-capitalist reason of the affective economy may be cultivated. We may resist capture, control, and exploitation by fostering the commons on which all social production is grounded, including our languages, our cultures, our cooperative relations, and our natural resources. By posing the question of ethical leadership in terms of affective leadership, we therefore struggle to develop a sense of leadership which blocks the sad passions of capitalism, but also the sad passions of right wing populism, racism, and religious extremism, which currently threaten our capacity and freedom to lead joyful and powerful lives perhaps even more acutely than capitalism.

In summary, we would argue that Spinoza's affective ethics enables us to conceptualize affective leadership as follows:

1. Affective leadership rests on a fundamental scepticism towards any obedience to individual leaders, as obedience to anything other than reason is slavish and unethical (e.g. TTP preface, TTP16/10, TTP16/21).
2. Affective leadership involves people as free members of the multitude, who are far from lacking with respect to a leader but capable of collective action without interference from "ethical leaders" (EIVP70Dem, EIVP73Dem, TTP20).
3. Affective leadership rests on the cultivation of joyful affects, which increase our collective powers of action, and the avoidance of sad passions, which decrease them (e.g. EIIIP11S, EIVP70Dem, EIVP73Dem; see also Deleuze 1990, 246).

4. Affective leadership emerges in joyful encounters that accord with our reason. Rather than being ignorant and passively affected by external causes, we enhance our capacity to affect and be affected as we experience and understand the limits of our freedom as well as the causes of joyful affects (EIVP37S1, DefAff, EIVAx1).

5. Affective leadership involves the organization of good encounters through the cultivation of friendships (e.g. EIIIP59S) that enable people to pursue their common advantage and welfare (TP7/5, EIVP73), and the development of democratic relations that enable people to think what they wish and say what they think (EIVP70Dem, TTP preface/14, TTP20; see also Deleuze 1992, 267). The sad affects, pain, and suffering generated by capitalist organizations and the individual leaders who typically represent them suggests that good encounters must be organized beyond the constraints of the capitalist political economy and the co-optation of ethics by leadership appeals to care and empowerment.

CONCLUSION

Much of the present thinking on leadership is underpinned by a leader-follower dialectic which assumes that one term must be privileged above the other; where the leader is granted a superfluidity of active traits, the follower must equally be assumed to be lacking in these very same traits. Without this primary imbalance, the riddle of the leadership fetish dissolves before our eyes. We agree that people should strive to "live a good life with others" (Cunliffe 2009, 97). However, in so doing we must be wary of the assumptions we make about the character of followers as well as leaders. Living well with others is not an unconditional obligation which pertains to leaders only. We have therefore proposed a Spinozian conception of ethics, which openly addresses the political aspects of ethics, and directly addresses the "sad passions" involved in conceiving persons as lacking capacity to lead themselves. If we want to avoid making such outrageous presumptions about leaders and followers, then we must separate the leadership discourse from the discourse of care, which is in danger of complicity with apparatuses of pastoral power and their emphasis on the passivity of followers.

Spinoza's ethics permits a radical re-evaluation of the field of ethical leadership. His conception of ethics allows us to diagnose the limitations of existing critical approaches to leadership in terms of the active affects or sad affects which underpin them. For instance, constructing ethical leadership in terms of care and humility reflects a sad passion, which risks representing a passive approach to ethics. In contrast, Spinoza's ethics alerts us to the role of active affects and reason in ethics, both of which present a radical challenge to the idea of leadership, which already presumes that followers are lacking in such capacities precisely because of their presumed status as followers. In addition to its diagnostic powers, Spinoza's ethics presents us with a distinctive normative approach to ethics. This affective ethics is distinctive because it frames the question of ethical leadership not in terms of the virtues of the leader, or the followers' obedience to a given moral code,

but in terms of affects that increase our collective powers of action. These collective powers require the "organization of good encounters" to promote the collective use of reason, by means of which the common good can be pursued.

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NOTES

1.   Henceforth, references to Spinoza's works are made as follows: In references to the *Ethics* (E), Roman numerals indicate the part of the *Ethics*, and Arabic numerals refer to propositions (P), postulates (Post), definitions (Def), axioms (Ax), lemma (L), proofs (Dem), corollaries (C), schola (S), and the definitions of the affects in part III (DefAff). References to the *Theological-Political Treatise* (TTP) and the *Political Treatise* (TP) refer to chapter number and paragraph number (e.g. TTP5/7; TP2/15). The translations used are Spinoza ([1677] 1994) for the *Ethics*, Spinoza ([1670] 2007) for the *Theological-Political Treatise*, and Spinoza ([1675-76] 2000) for the *Political Treatise*.

2.   The target of this particular quote is the highly influential and much cited work of Bennis and Nanus (1985).

3.   Desire is Spinoza's overarching concept for "all the strivings of human nature that we signify by the name of appetite, will, desire, or impulse" (DefAff1), but he also makes some contradictory claims that complicate the distinction between desire and appetite, both suggesting that desire involves being conscious of our appetite (DefAff1), and that "there is no difference" between the two (EIIIP9S) because "the appetite remains one and the same" whether we are conscious of it or not (DefAff1). Although certain commentators have found a theory of intentional action and purposive behaviour in Spinoza's ethics by emphasizing that Spinoza's notion of desire even implies that "appetite [is] *modified* by consciousness" (Kashap 1972, 346; emphasis in original) and claiming that "Having a desire … necessarily involves a self-conscious state" (347), we would argue that Spinoza's rejection of the mind/body dualism makes such readings untenable. Even though Spinoza argues that we need to know what causes us to act in order to act ethically (EIII preface; DefAff), our bodies cannot be caused to move or act in a certain way by our mind, willpower, or desire (EIIIP2).

4.   Whereas *affection* refers to "any constitution of [an] essence" (DefAff1), that is, to the sense in which any thing or being is moved towards greater or lesser perfection, capacity and power, *affects* refer to specific passages and "affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished" (EIIIDef3).

5.   The Spinozian concept of desire as excessive capacity is therefore in stark contrast to the notion of desire as lack which has informed Lacanian writings on leadership ethics. Despite some gesturing in the late Lacan towards "the freedom to desire" (Lacan 2006, 663; in Costas and Taheri 2012, 1211), desire, for Lacan, essentially undermines us because it leads us to seek recognition by the other, and desire "to become the object of the other's desire" (Roberts 2001, 115).

6.   The neoliberal rhetorics of empowerment and self-help are typical in this respect, as they identify supposed incapacities in individuals, such as a lack of competitiveness, a lack of will-power, a lack of time, powerlessness, and self-imposed victimhood (see McGee 2005).

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