

The Bright Lights on Self Identity and Positive Reciprocity: Spinoza's Ethics of the Other Focusing on Competency, Sustainability and the Divine Love

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"C'est ici peut-être que Dieu a été vu de plus près",
E. Renan, *Chronicon Spinozorum*, V (1927), p. XXVIII.

1. Introduction

To introduce what a philosopher could understand by identity and mutual recognition, we could first say that it make much of difference depending whether we focus on willing as much as the knowing self, in line with a Spinozist tradition keen in aligning rational grounds for ethics, or with Leibniz, Kant and Hegel to open the field of a subjective world of experience of the relation of ethical values, as given through our original trust in the world. In order to assess the importance of fine nuances in the overall sentiment of gratitude, we would like to present Spinoza's careful use of the term in his *Ethics*, in an optic different from Descartes' unconditional apology of the same. But, why to choose the early modern XVIIth Century Cartesian philosopher Baruch Spinoza to focus on moral sentiment ethics of mutual recognition?

There are certainly many ethical reasons to stop at Spinoza's Work: first we find here a pure demonstrative presentation on two cardinal ethical values: competency and sustainability. Second, we have an non anthropomorphic presentation of our relation to the earth, as englobing whole and godly emanation. Third, Spinoza presents the concept of positive reciprocity in such a convincing way, based on human affects and the alienation of passions through his realist constitution of values that we do the economy of idealism, without sacrificing on ethical values, but on the contrary focusing on the cognitive added benefit: the man is an ethical subject but also an intelligent agent, mirroring in enlightened decisions, the divine perfection. Fourth, business sectors and applied ethics in trading could find an important indication on how trust is being at the core human interactions, in a genealogy of utilitarian practices without reducing trust to instrumental commercial activities, but opening it to love as key metaphysical value.

We find inviting presentations of the value of Spinoza's ethics by important philosophers. We have certainly with Spinoza "the purest philosopher" "and the most effective moral code in the world" if we follow Nietzsche's commentary, who recommends him, on the ground of the apolitical character of what after Spinoza we could call rational moral agents as "free spirits"¹. Nietzsche opposes his ethics of a tragic-comic self-derision and laughter "ten times should you laugh in a day", and the Biblical image of the "laughing lion", to Spinoza's rigorous "vivisection of the affects", a very cautious control of the expression of affects, in an ethics of the

¹ Nietzsche, F. *Human All too Human, A Book for Free Spirits* (Ein Buch für freie Geister), VIII, No 475. See also : Ottmann, Henning (2000): *Nietzsche Handbuch*, Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler Verlag, 102.

“laughing-no-more” and “weeping-no-more” (“non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari sed intelligere”²). With Nietzsche we may add: where vivisection of the affects would make fully sense, there shouldn’t be any “harming of the affects”³. What does that mean to harm the affects?

E. von Hartmann, who nicely complements Nietzsche’s views on the meaning of affects for Spinoza, praises the precision and coherence of Spinoza’s views on ethics, but regret his extreme parsimony with regard to social affects based on moral principles other than reason based principles. Justification being that the focus on the social affect is extremely important for applied ethics, because it is grounding the very notion of equality of treatment, at the center of all philosophy of law, in the sentiment of a similar origin of shared social affects, and the negation of inequalities as center of the very notion of natural law with H. Grotius. One needs to add that neither Hartmann, nor Nietzsche refutes Spinoza’s formalism of the affects, they only observe the possibility, on the line developed by Leibniz, Kant and later Schopenhauer, to mark the limits of world of the subjective experience, what M. Scheler, E. Husserl would later develop as the phenomenological reduction of the first person experience. As example, the sentiment of repentance which is an important moral sentiment related to the experience of an inappropriate choice that could lead to wrongful consequences, is understood differently depending on whether we place the experience of the subject in the center of the picture or not.

Should repentance be considered as useful after a wrongdoing, considering that an amelioration and reconciliation is plausible based on the suffering related to the impossibility of undoing a wrong? Spinoza doubts the fundamental religious power of repentance, on the ground of his deterministic conception of our natural comprehension, contrary to Hartmann’s Christian emphasis on the importance of the process of free decision making, and of the careful distinguishing between natural inclination for repentance on one hand and ethical principle of repentance on the other, Spinoza delivers powerful arguments for prevailing against received authority, and yet, the starting proposition of his ethics is, regarding the relation of man to God is fundamental:

E2P10⁴. “The being of substance does not appertain to the essence of man--in other words, substance does not constitute the actual being ["Forma"] of man. Proof.--The being of substance involves necessary existence (E1P7). If, therefore, the being of substance appertains to the essence of man, substance being granted, man would necessarily be granted also (E2D2), and, consequently, man would necessarily exist, which is absurd (E2A1). Therefore, etc. Q.E.D.

E2P10, Note. --This proposition may also be proved from E1P5, in which it is shown that there cannot be two substances of the same nature; for as there

² Works, Ed. and translated by Edwin Curley, Vol. II, Spinoza’s *Political Treatise*, Introduction, IV, Princeton: UP, 505.

³ Nietzsche, F. (1886/1966): *Beyond Good and Evil*, transl. by W. Kaufmann, New York: Random House, No 198, 108.

⁴ Parts of Spinoza’s *Ethics* are referred to as: P(roposition), Sc.(holium), D(efinition) and the five parts of the *Ethics* are cited by Arabic numerals: thus E3P1 stands for the first proposition of the third part of the *Ethics*.

may be many men, the being of substance is not that which constitutes the actual being of man. Again, the proposition is evident from the other properties of substance-- namely, that substance is in its nature infinite, immutable, indivisible, etc., as anyone may see for himself.

E2P10, Corollary.--Hence it follows, that the essence of man is constituted by certain modifications of the attributes of God.

For (by the last Prop.E2P10) the being of substance does not belong to the essence of man. That essence therefore (by E1P15) is something which is in God, and which without God can neither be nor be conceived [...]"

In order to start thinking ethics as a system, one needs to bear in mind some basic principles, such as thinking particular essences such as the essence of spatiality is the exteriority of its parts, the essence of Man is to be a reasonable animal (or social, etc.) and then philosophers get confused because they then ask whether these essences are related to a first principle or independent to any first principle. Spinoza explains why these [mainly Cartesian] philosophers get puzzled when it comes to start thinking about ethics:

"I think the cause for such confusion is mainly, that they do not keep to the proper order of philosophic thinking. The nature of God, which should be reflected on first, inasmuch as it is prior both in the order of knowledge and the order of nature, they have taken to be last in the order of knowledge, and have put into the first place what they call the objects of sensation; hence, while they are considering natural phenomena, they give no attention at all to the divine nature, and, when afterwards they apply their mind to the study of the divine nature, they are quite unable to bear in mind the first hypotheses, with which they have overlaid the knowledge of natural phenomena, inasmuch as such hypotheses are no help towards understanding the Divine nature. So that it is hardly to be wondered at, that these persons contradict themselves freely." E2P10 Cor. Note.

Ethics starts by God or the divine, but it is also a purification of the understanding, meditation on the experience of joy as experience of the perfect character of love as it is related to competency, by opposition to weakness which leads to corruption and evil.

E3P11, Note. "--Thus we see, that the mind can undergo many changes, and can pass sometimes to a state of greater perfection, sometimes to a state of lesser perfection. These passive states of transition explain to us the emotions of pleasure and pain. By pleasure therefore in the following propositions I shall signify a passive state wherein the mind passes to a greater perfection. By pain I shall signify a passive state wherein the mind passes to a lesser perfection".

Practically we will show that we don't need to worry about the start, and what Spinoza writes on God. There are some provocative thoughts, around religion. Not only Spinoza denies the personality of God essential to the Christian faith. In the E4P53-54, Spinoza stated that humility and repentance are not virtues. But the idea behind is that nature envelops the existence: joy is related to the capacity to produce oneself completely therefor:

"Humility is not a virtue, or do es not arise from reason.

--Repentance is not a virtue, or does not arise from reason, but he who repents of an action is doubly wretched or infirm." "When the mind contemplates its own weakness, it feels pain thereat." (E3P55, S.P.B, n 58).

Humility, like repentance, remorse, etc. are depressing passions, which only tend to annihilate us. Is it better to be content with oneself? But, if it is to "talk about one's deeds", "to display strength of one's body and his soul," here we are led by a passionate joy" which makes men unbearable one to another". We see that envy is intoxicating mutual recognition, since this desire leads us to denigrate the other, because the other is very similar to us (E III, P.55, Cor.). Envy shows an important aspect of all passions: they are diversity by excellence because of the nature of sentiments and the fluctuation of desire, in narrow and wide forms, the depression of the desire is melancholy its exaltation revives us⁵. Vices such as envy show the affected nature of Man as Mode, in conformity with the idea, expressed previously that all Modes, including the Man, are finite and limited expressions of the Substance in the nature, except the Substance or *causa sui*. A failure or incapacity to realize a competency is failure of the expression of the Man, conceived as a capacity to develop, expansive power. In nature limited Modes are stable and express always the same thing, Man in comparison has a power of development that has much more elasticity, regenerated, elevated and amplified.

Although, Wickersham shows that Spinoza's intellectual love consisting in the mental comprehension of the necessary truths of the universe but it is "not to be compared with the glorious love of the Christian God which is shared and reciprocated by finite men in a personal union of spirit with the infinite God⁶", we find a poetical view of the world in Spinoza's concept of God's infinity as only causal ground of all Modes and Attributes, the essence of Man depending on God, and expresses God in an defined manner (E2P10, Cor). "Man thinks" (E2, A2) and "perceive that a certain body is affected in many ways" (ibid, A4). Since we don't live isolated but in society the mind "is fitted to perceive adequately more things, in proportion as its body has more in common with other bodies." (E2P39Cor.).

For Spinoza our identity is grounded on a universal egoistical anthropological assumption common in XVII century (as with Hobbes), also called a "possessive individualism". By contrast to hedonism, it has not pleasure as aim but the affirmation and expansion of the individual self: "l'amour propre", which become with the planning and calculation of the future will to power. Spinoza focuses on the desire, not to realize a transcendent value, but as sustainability of the individual in the existence and the accumulation of power on the world or *conatus*. But for Spinoza self-sustainability is not the assimilation with an instinct of conservation (as Hobbes derives it from vital and animal movement), it has to do with living "in suo esse", in one's being or essence, hence through the objectivation of values in a genealogical process related to passions. As Matheron shows, the consequence of this difference with the overcoming of the Hobbesian biological anthropology, which doesn't lead to an objectivation of values, is that the genetical definition of passions. is is a theory of the alienation of passions in an identification process. Passions have

⁵ Millet, Louis (1970) : *Pour connaître la pensée de Spinoza*, Paris: Bordas, 83.

⁶ Wickersham, Gordon Clement (1951): *Spinoza's concept of God's infinity*. Thesis (M.A.), Boston University, 97, see also: 77-81, <https://www.globethics.net/gel/6506745>

to do with a simple identification: we are glad to witness the conservation of an object which we love, and grieve its loss. In his important study Matheron shows the logic of mutual recognition in Spinoza's *Ethics* that could be called an egoistical mutual recognition⁷. Interhuman relations are assured by a system of obligation to give (E3P36), to take (E4P70) and to give back (E3P42). Gratitude tends to minimize in this process the joy that we first get from the surprise of receiving since the experience of the past service allows to better imagine future comportment of our partners and related benefits. From the point of view of Spinoza's definition of love, I necessarily love the merchant that gives me the object of my desire. This purely trade related sentiment of love is an interesting positive ethical optic and shows the valorization of trade⁸. If we take for granted that solidarity is interdependence, then the professional and economic sector of trade and business exchanges is given by the fact that each individual feels the interdependence and convergence of interests, each being in solidarity with all, individual prosperity depending on the prosperity of all with whom the trader is in professional relation, retailers, distributors, clients, funding partners, etc. But it is at this stage pure commercial interaction: traffic and piperie, "the goodwill, which men who are led by blind desire have for one another, is generally a bargaining or enticement, rather than pure goodwill." (E471Sc.)

Against the Cartesian dogma that the self should to be identified with the mind; both Spinoza and Schopenhauerian philosophy will ground the presupposition that the self is embodied and that it's integration into reality at large is thus made possible. By contrast to Spinoza, the Schopenhauerian particular phenomenological analysis proposed by Hartmann is only possible by avoiding to ask only to the rational faculty to make to good choice; von Hartmann thinks that moral sentiments and the ethical principle of taste, which are only conceived negatively by Spinoza, have a proactive role to play (E. v. Hartmann (1879/2006): *Die Gefühlsmoral*, Edited by J.-C. Wolf, see in particular the section: Moralprinzip des Geselligkeitstriebe, Hamburg: F. Meiner Verl., 53, 59, 83)⁹.

2. Spinoza's free spirits, loyalty as implying love based integrity trough shared competency

As we showed in the economic understanding of gratitude as interplay of desires to possess and desires to give and sell objects of desires, human trade based interaction tend to develop a strong solidarity of interdependencies and converging interests. How does the immanent-realist constitution of value arise from this dense tissue of human transactions and expectations: Spinoza introduces loyalty as related to the necessity to introduce institutions in order to add stability in the utility based motivations, utilitarian point of view that was inexistent at the origin of the human

⁷ Matheron, Alexandre (1969/1988) : *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 86, 204-5 ; "possessive individualism" as by Macpherson, C.B. (1962): *The political theory of possessive individualism*, Oxford.

⁸ Spinoza shows also that the more the predictability of this mutual recognition is given as in trade, more it is likely to find ignorance and the absence of free spirits. (See E4P71).

⁹ Read also further on similarities between Schopenhauer and Spinoza: Bunker, Jenny (2015): *Schopenhauer's Spinozism*, Thesis, Univ. Southampton, Sections on ethics: 99, and salvation 143.

interaction. But love based integrity through shared competency is how we can escape the instrumental abuse of power, which quickly may tempt the social actors. There is often a moment when the desire for glory intercedes on that of love, when Y doesn't feel obliged to X to pay his dues, to refer to a register of duties, to prevailing but largely tacit collective policies. *Mercatura seu aucupium*, not that corruption belongs to the essence of trading, but all trading without clear policies and sanctions turns quickly to conflict of interest and abuses. When X acknowledges the ingratitude of Y: "he who has conferred a benefit on anyone from motives of love or honour will feel pain, if he sees that the benefit is received without gratitude." (E3P42). We fall back to negative reciprocity as finely analyzed by Matheron (ibid, 206), but X and Y don't forget all of sudden the advantages resulting from their previous interactions, they stay for a while in a mixed feeling between love and hatred. "For, in so far as he conceives that he is an object of hatred, he is determined to hate his enemy in return [by E3P40]. But, by the hypothesis, he nevertheless loves him: wherefore he will be a prey to conflicting hatred and love." (E3P40Sc.) It is the principle aim of political ethics to stabilize the process in minimizing the fluctuations, to create rules in order to sustain positive reciprocity, and love based integrity in the interplay of shared competencies. (TTPXVI). All these fluctuations of the desire and ethical related propositions and solutions apply in similar manner to the relation Man-God, where the negative reciprocity leads to superstition and institutional corruption, whereas integrity based on the third kind of knowledge, in institutional consolidated solidarity and individual loyalty to the collective body not as passive obedience but as rationally based choice.

Gratitude is a tricky social virtue: how to deal with unexpected and sudden invitations, or with servile attitude such as loyalty in student-teacher interactions, or decisions on voluntary basis between church members and a church minister based to off-record expectations (where the intentions are not explicitly stated), or marks of employee-director deference. In some cases, familial language can treat individuals as social equals, although individuals may have several defined social responsibilities and limited freedom accepting new cooperation. In various situation where conflicts of interest is often a possible issue, socially constructed self-images of the individuals, interact in conflicting and potentially contradictory ways. Part of the ambiguity is specifically on the language or the form of communication.

But if we can also feel gratitude for God, as when we pray and thank God for living a good life, we should be aware, following some views Spinoza proposes on God's nature, that although God is often praised as a being full of mercy (and in some cases feared as not exempt of anger), most of human passions should not be attributed to God, although the Prophets who want to present God in a comparable manner to a legislator, a good steward or a king, do that simply for the sake of simplifying God's will, in order to make the message of the Scriptures communicable to the largest number of people¹⁰. If human being is understanding the parables of the Prophets, he is understanding the means or the tools used to reveal the Salvation caused by God, but doing so we focus on what the Prophets adapted in their words, we focus more on the tools than on the Truth that these are serving: to present the

¹⁰ *Correspondence Spinoza to Blyenbergh* (5 Jan. 1665), OPC 1177-1182.

great perfection of the nature of God¹¹. Gratitude is often in a similar manner related to either a mixed feeling, a feeling directly related to the means or the vehicle that serves to bring a mutual sense of love, but this vehicle without a knowledge of the right causes of the actions, is an empty shell, at best a conventional game, at worst a mask behind a hidden agenda of instrumental domination of the other, or servile deference to the authority.

On the one hand, on the subjective side of the moral sentiments, gratitude and mutual recognition have to do with the expression of love, solidarity and brotherhood. But the difficulty with love is that it is not only a subjective attitude, a moral sentiment based ethical principle. As principle of religious unity of the highest metaphysical harmony and perfection of the creation, love is an objective telos of all living being, directed to an eternal temporality, distinguished from what is sustaining in time, as we find it for example in Spinoza's both subjective and metaphysical *Ethics*.

In our text, we would like to show Spinoza's ethics of competency and sustainability, as a good proposition taking in account both subjective and objective metaphysical sense of the value of love and gratitude. On the subjective side, social interactions could be mainly displayed on the level of the interpretation of the language as means for a politeness comprehension of implicit power tensions of conflicting but hidden interests. Since for Spinoza an important character of social behavior is based on the recognition of social and political authorities or potestas (including the Churches): both the speaker and the hearer in any collaborative interaction, are depending on real social power relations. Spinoza goes as far as provocatively identifying faith related to salvation and liberation as way of submission, since faith without deeds are dead letters (*Theologico-Political Treatise*, XIV)!

Eventually as "slave of God" (*Short Treatise*, XVIII, 2), human being doesn't risk much to recognize this situation, as opposed to a world ruled by a devil, since God represents the first cause of the best of all possible worlds for Spinoza¹². As Kuno Fisher shows it well, Spinoza's rationalism doesn't suppose a process of development, it doesn't focus on the method of knowledge of the world and of the values, in a radical way the formalism is opposed to the very notion of experience and of any

¹¹ On the difference between the essence of God and what seventeen century philosophers call its attributes such as: being cause of all things, existing by itself, eternal, sovereign good, etc. see below the distinction between the substance, the attributes and the modes on the one hand, and the distinction between modes of the cognitive substance on the other hand: such as omniscient, merciful, wise that cannot exist and be understood without such a substance, contrary to Descartes point of view of an *a posteriori* demonstration of the existence of God, and of the *res cogitans*, by means of its attributes. God cannot consist in any derived attribute as only self-sustaining existence, or nothing else than being immutable and *causa sui*. Furthermore, God as highest genus and species, doesn't need a higher category to be defined by the logical rules of classification. *Short Treatise*, Ch. VII, 6-8.

¹² Spinoza, B. *Theological-Political Treatise*, Samuel Shirley, translator, second edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2001), XIV.

epistemic limits: being is given by God, and error is due to human limited capacities, mainly due to the affects, to the situation of the Fall of the Man and his suffering¹³.

On the contrary Hegel is opened to the experience and the situation of a struggle for social power and recognition, and as later we will see a hidden play of influence, that can best bring effective results and social progress or transformation. This is the reason why there is, distinct from rationalist union in a divine love a rather implicit master-slave dialectic in any mutual recognition ethical principle for Hegel, where despite of being simply decent and polite, a person would expect to get from social relations specific results from a hearer, similar to the restriction of negative freedom (but not without mirroring some new benefit), and without expressing positively a constraining intention or referring to a previous planning or record, as incurring *a debt*.

From this perspective, on the whole, in what has been called the “politeness theory” (Brown and Levinson, 1987), polite language is an exercise in ambiguity and manipulation: “encouraging a hearer to respond favourably to what is said or requested without them feeling they have been coerced”; the strategy has both positive and a negative components, the first being a desire to have positive reputation or self-image approved by interactants, the other being a freedom of imposition by others¹⁴.

2.1 Biographical excursus: Spinoza’s high standard of personal values

We know from the biographers that Spinoza was living in La Haye from 1670 to 1677¹⁵. In a letter of the 16th February 1673 from Louis Fabritius, Professor at the Academy of Heidelberg, Spinoza is invited to the post of Ordinary Professor at the Academy of La Haye on the behalf of the Elector of Palatine, where he could carry on his research in philosophy, without any particular constraint other than honoring a few hours of teaching to young students in philosophy¹⁶. Spinoza would receive the salary of any Professor, in similar situation. Surprisingly Spinoza refuses politely the offer, arguing that he would have to renounce partly to his research in order to teach, mentioning that *he has never had any desire to accept the responsibility of a university professor*. Spinoza’s resistance toward a very honest offer, that many researchers in philosophical ethics in similar situation would probably have accepted, without long reflections, is caused by difficulties met by his *Theological-Political Treatise*, and the fear Spinoza’s that once Fabritius or the Elector, knew about it, as Kuno Fischer shows, all freedom to teach would become void, even in such a tolerant environment

¹³ Kuno, Fisher (1898): *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie, Immanuel Kant und seine Lehre*, Spinozas Monismus, Bd. IV, 1. Theil, Heidelberg: C. Winter, p. 25.

¹⁴ Also known as the “positive” and “negative face” doctrine: Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, pp. 61-2.

¹⁵ *Spinoza's Short Treatise on God, Man, His Well-Being*, Transl. and ed. by A. Wolf, London: A. C. Black, 1910, lxxxi.

¹⁶ Correspondance, XLVII, Fabritius to Spinoza, 16th February 1673, XLVIII, The answer of Spinoza to Fabritius, the 30th March 1673. OPC, p. 1283-84.

as the Academy of La Haye¹⁷. This biographical episode shows behind the real reasons, the importance of the notion of the value of freedom and resistance to desires, in Spinoza's system of ethical values and his metaphysics of the Being, the substance and the modes. Spinoza not only has a very precise notion of ethical concepts, he also applies them in real life, which gives an untimely relevance for any ethics interested by the notions of competency, empowerment ethics, understood in the sense of empowering capabilities of the self or of others. By applying ethical values in his life Spinoza shows that he is aware of the hidden agenda behind such a polite invitation.

As Kuno Fischer shows well, Spinoza was subject of much criticism in particular after his political work on the freedom of thinking and expression received a very critical exposure, during his life, and before the posthumous edition of the *Ethics* in 1677. Of course for the sake of disputatio, many points of disagreement could be found, due to the philosopher's so called materialistic conception of the consciousness or personal identity, which derives (not only) from (bodily) motions, instead of (simply) a personal identity, or soul, conceived as an indivisible and immutable substance. Spinoza's adaptation of the Cartesian methodic skeptical reduction to religious matters, in particular revelation and prophetic insights has been much commented since Popkin's work¹⁸. Since personal identity is a grounding part of the question of how a philosopher understands social ethics, and since seventeenth century philosophers are used to ground human capacities on God or Nature, the question of the nature of God is an important grounding block of how ethical values are constructed, either on anthropological aspects such as human qualities, or on a non-anthropological substance or divine non caused cause of all existing social interactions¹⁹. Instead of "standing as judge over us", which can have only "deleterious effects on human freedom and activity, insofar as it fosters a life enslaved to hope and fear and the superstitions to which such emotions give rise", Spinoza is grounding all social ethics on the healthy ground of a philosophical faith. Of course this deep tendency of his work, which gave him the reputation of being an early modern Skeptical and materialist philosopher, was not without consequences

¹⁷ Fischer, Kuno (1898): *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie*, Bd. II, Descartes Schule. Spinozas Leben. Werke und Lehren, Carl Winter's Verl., 4. Verl., 168. Moreau, Joseph (1977): *Spinoza et le spinozisme*, Collection que sais-je ?, Paris : Presse Universitaire de France, 5.

¹⁸ Popkin, Richard H. (1979): *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, Berkeley: University of California Press. Spinoza is among others, accused of not recognizing the distinction between "moral motives" and "physical efficientes", latest being derived from self-motion, the former from a motive related to the activity of the understanding. See already: Samuel Clarke (1705/1738): *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, Vol. 2, 553. Also: *Short Treatise*, On the Immortality of the Soul, Ch. XXIII; on God and the creation as nature: Ch. VIII and IX.

¹⁹ It follows a strong determinism that doesn't exclude God's capacity to be uncaused, but God does not cause the world to come into being freely, without causal relations, even though nothing outside of God constrains him to bring all things and living creatures into existence. Spinoza denies that God creates the world by some arbitrary and undetermined act of free will, God could not have done otherwise. There are no possible alternatives to the actual world, no spontaneous creation of any order: everything is absolutely and necessarily determined.

for his life²⁰. As early as July 27 1656, Spinoza was issued a harsh ban or excommunication pronounced by the Sephardic community of Amsterdam, for unclear reasons, but we know from Spinoza's work that he most probably took position against the immortality of the soul, against the notion of a providential God, and that he refused that the Law was either literally given by God or any longer binding on Jews²¹. Leaving a comfortable professional situation in the family business and the security of his religious community, Spinoza's main intention is to come back to the radical principles philosophy.

2.2. Ethics of sustainability: an immanent onto-metaphysical foundation

Spinoza shows his deep understanding of sustaining values that are not only related to ethics, but part of a coherent system explaining the metaphysical hierarchy between what exist necessarily, by its proper nature "whereby the essence envelops the existence", and the being for which "essence envelops only a possible existence". This latter is divided in "substance" and "mode", as for example movement is the mode of the body, having a real being without which we cannot conceive a body, but not of the triangle to which movement is only an accident, as Spinoza famously demonstrates. It is from this metaphysical abstract structure that Spinoza derives further relations between what has eternal temporality, distinguished from what is *sustaining in time*: The existence and the sustaining character of objects are only "a distinction of reason", meaning not metaphysically distinct, but distinct as a mode of thinking that serves to recollect, to explain or imagine things that have been understood²².

From religious and metaphysical point of view the mind being related not only to the body which is the "foundation of our love" but also "to God who is inalterable, and thus remains inalterable", it would be more precise to call Spinoza's view panpsychist or pantheist than materialist (a kind of early non-reductive materialism), with two attributes of the material world and the spiritual and metaphysical world. God being the infinite, necessarily existing (that is, uncaused), unique substance of the universe, there is only one substance in the universe; it is God; and everything else that is, is in God. On the one hand *the natura naturata* understood by Spinoza as "movement in the matter" or "the sciences of nature" and on the other hand there is an understanding as thinking reality, but not as two different "substances". There is only one substance, a being that doesn't need

²⁰ Nadler, Steven, "Baruch Spinoza", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/spinoza/>>.

²¹ Coherent with Spinoza's definition of the nature or God (but not its attributes or modes), divine providence means only the second essential attribute of God, after being *causa sui* (and as perfect being cause of all things): being the effort the self-sustaining character of God's being, as "universal providence" the self-sustaining of all things, as part of the whole nature. The third attribute being the predestination of God, who cannot avoid doing what he is doing, having created all things so perfect that he cannot amend them and do them better. Cf. also: Nadler, Steven, "Baruch Spinoza", *ibid.*

²² Appendice Containing the Metaphysical Thoughts, Part I, Ch. I. "On the Real Being, the Being of Fiction and the Being of Reason." In French: OPC, p. 301.

anything other than his sole existence, God, or Spinoza's *natura naturans*. This is the key argument to ground sustainability on a divine love.

With the project of his *Ethics*, what Spinoza intends to demonstrate (in the strongest sense of that word) is the truth about God, nature and especially ourselves; and the highest principles of society, religion and political order. As one of the most radical Early Modernity thinker of social ethics, Spinoza's point of view on mutual recognition is very important not only in the context of Early Modern philosophy (and the dialogue with Descartes), but also eighteenth century Scottish Enlightenment and British philosophy, as for nineteenth century discussion about social values vs solipsism (with Jacobi, Hegel and Schelling) and contemporary research on the rational foundations of social ethics. Interestingly Spinoza has founded his anthropology on an non-altruistic basis that doesn't invite *prima facie* for social recognition. A superficial reading would be misleading.

3. Spinoza's realistic principle of an ethics of competency and sustainability: reflecting on the real formal causes

The most central notion of Spinoza's ethics regarding sustainability is the *conatus* understood not simply as a survival instinct with Hobbes but as the fundamental drive of any being, on a perfectionist path of empowerment. Other regarding attitudes such as love and care are derived from it, but since we focus on the pole of the ego, we need to explain socio-cognitive decentration, social virtues and generally speaking altruistic attitudes. First Spinoza presents dispositions related to love such as gratitude, defined as mutual love, but he adds in a provocative manner that these need to be accompanied by "a just cause for the love" for Spinoza, by contrast to the situation when a person would believe he/she is loved by another but believes that no cause for the love has been given.

Of course, one could imagine to love someone in return without a reflective attitude on the causes of love, as consequence of the fact that human body can move and dispose a great number of external bodies in a multitude of ways (as outlined in E2Post.6, E2P16). But to ground mutual recognition or gratefulness, human being are looking for good reasons, or a subjective-objective constitutional ground, not only for psychologically agreeable sentiments. One could answer to love by love on the basis of a reflex as the child, but in order to answer gratitude we need an additional causal condition that needs clarification:

"E3P16. If anyone conceives that he is loved by another, and believes that he has given no cause for such love, he will love that other in return. (Cf. E3P15Cor., and E3P16) [...] Note. — If he believes that he has given just cause for the love, he will take pride therein (E3P30 and note); this is what most often happens (E3P25III), and we said that its contrary took place whenever a man conceives himself to be hated by another. [...] This reciprocal love, and consequently the desire of benefiting him who loves us (E3P39III), and who endeavours to benefit us, is called gratitude or thankfulness. [...]"

Ethical resistance, facing unjustified benefits is important regarding the issue of (institutional) corruption of course or simple to avoid moral regression, but Spinoza relates social recognition in a realistic way to the development of competencies. Interestingly resistance is used in correlation to the Latin term *potentia*

(understood as empowerment, virtue ethics), by contrast to *potestas*: leadership understood as the realist account of the use of force and (legitimate) authority, (Casarino, 2017)²³.

The second condition for gratefulness is a right balance between the development of the self as fulfillment of our own capacities and competencies, and overcoming our limitations and extending our horizons, and the interference of authority or institutions to limit the fluctuation of the possessive passions. At an education institution, e. g. in a process of learning Spinoza could help to reflect on our self-knowledge, showing a possible polarity between authority and competency. The question, as Diogenes shows, is: "will students learn personal identity if teachers assign prescribed requirements?²⁴". How could a Christian education be seen as free, as Christians, if school members as church members, have a Lord "to whom they belong and to whom they are obedient?" (ibid.) Could we really think ourselves as free from desires if the goal of removing desire is itself a desire among many appetites which need to be concretely satisfied? We have desires of fulfillment and blessedness, understood as essential components of leaving a good life, just to name some important desires. We can easily think about a point in our existence that lacks a complete development and that generates a degree of suffering and frustration, regarding to these important goals, and therefor needing a religious or *philosophical consolation/purification* of the spirit with Spinoza.

How can we be free if we are ruled by a master? Probably there could be an art of leadership, of an enlightened master, who would not destroy the capacities of his disciples, students, family members or co-citizens.

If we follow Spinoza's naturalistic account of the self, we can find various dispositions either simple desires or objectified values but there is no antagonist wills to will at all. Contrary to Aquinas and Anselm for example, Spinoza strongly opposes the optic that, one will properly speaking doesn't exist which for the Medieval philosophers doesn't mean I am of two minds.

Competency is presented as grounded on sustainability. I am not of two minds, one good and one bad: my mind is aware of both in so far "as it has clear and distinct ideas, and also in so far as it has confused ideas", and my mind "endeavours to persist in its being for an indefinite period, and of this endeavour it is conscious." "This endeavour, when referred solely to the mind, is called will, when referred to the mind and body in conjunction it is called appetite; it is, in fact, nothing else but man's essence, from the nature of which necessarily follow all those results which tend to its preservation; and which man has thus been determined to perform. Further, between appetite and desire there is no difference, except that the term desire is generally applied to men, in so far as they are conscious of their appetite, and may accordingly be thus defined: Desire is appetite with consciousness thereof" (E3P9, Note). The human will is entire, it is not divided against itself, but knowledges of the second type (reason based) or the third type (divinely inspired), move us

²³ Casarino, Cesare (2017): "Grammars of Conatus" in: Kordela, Kiarina A. / Vardoulakis, Dimitris (ed.) (2017): *Spinoza's authority*. Vol. I, Resistance and power in ethics, Bloomsbury Academic, 57-85.

²⁴ Diogenes, Allen (1979): "The Paradox of Freedom and Authority", *Theology Today*, vol. 36, 2, Jul 1, 1979, 168, see also 167-175.

outside appetites and inclinations, reflected in the wills of our mind to persist in its being. The consequence for the notion of mutual recognition is, since we strive for preservation with unequal success against our desires: not all minds are able of sharing real ethical mutual recognition, only “free” – understand free as having formal conditions to know real constitutional motives, that supposes an ontological conditions to be a competent minds in a way reminding Kant’s Critique of practical reason, but without the transcendental deduction:

(E4P71) “Only free men are thoroughly grateful one to another.”

“Proof.—Only free men are thoroughly useful one to another, and associated among themselves by the closest necessity of friendship (E4P35, and Cor. 1.), only such men endeavour, with mutual zeal of love, to confer benefits on each other (E4P37), and, therefore, only they are thoroughly grateful one to another. Q.E.D.”

This concept of recognition²⁵, is based on Spinoza’s previous discussion on the difference between accepting benefits from those who could be considered as “ignorants”, who are considered outside of the group of the “free men” but who should in case of necessity be helped, since “human aid” is “the most excellent of things”, and consequently accept some favours in the limits of the requirements of “utility and courtesy”, in such a way as not giving ground for offence by trying to avoid ungrounded motives.

(E4P70). “The free man, who lives among the ignorant, strives, as far as he can, to avoid receiving favours from them.”

“Proof.—Everyone judges what is good according to his disposition (E3P39, note); wherefore an ignorant man, who has conferred a benefit on another, puts his own estimate upon it, and, if it appears to be estimated less highly by the receiver, will feel pain (E3P42). But the free man only desires to join other men to him in friendship (E4P37), not repaying their benefits with others reckoned as of like value, but guiding himself and others by the free decision of reason, and doing only such things as he knows to be of primary importance. Therefore the free man, lest he should become hateful to the ignorant, or follow their desires rather than reason, will endeavour, as far as he can, to avoid receiving their favours.”

(E4P72, Note) “For though men be ignorant, yet are they men, and in cases of necessity could afford us human aid, the most excellent of all things: therefore it is often necessary to accept favours from them, and consequently to repay such favours in kind; we must, therefore, exercise caution in declining favours, lest we should have the appearance of despising those who bestow them, or of being, from avaricious motives, unwilling to requite them, and so give ground for offence by the very fact of striving to avoid it. Thus, in declining favours, we must look to the requirements of utility and courtesy.”

When we turn to the *Short Treatise* Ch. XIII, we find some explanation on the reasons not to help in return, in some cases, and thus on reasons not to show gratitude based on “a rational ground”, which Spinoza opposes to ingratitude which would be not to

²⁵ “reconnaissance” in Spinoza French translation, *Oeuvres Complètes*, transl. R. Caillois, M. Francès, R. Misrahi, NRF Pléiade, 1954, p.606.

return any benefit received from the other without a rational ground to do so. Gratitude which is presented as close to receiving or giving a “favour” is:

“the inclinations which the soul has to wish and to do some good to ones neighbour. I say, to wish, [this happens] when good is returned to one who has done some good; I say, to do, [this is the case] when we ourselves have obtained or received some good. [I0] I am well aware that almost all people consider these affects to be good; but, notwithstanding this, I venture to say that they can have no place in a perfect man. For a perfect man is moved to help his fellow-man by sheer necessity only, and by no other cause, and therefore he feels it all the more to be his duty to help the most godless, seeing that his misery and need are so much greater. Ingratitude is a disregard * or shaking off * of Gratitude, as Shamelessness is of Shame, and that without any rational ground, but solely as the result either of greed or of [20] immoderate self-love; and that is why it can have no place in a perfect man²⁶.”

Spinoza would complete this distinction between desire based gratitude and the attitude of “a perfect man”, or “free spirit” (E4P71) in his *Ethics* by clarifying that the contrary, ingratitude, “is not an emotion” (E4P71Sc.). “Yet it is base, inasmuch as it generally shows, that a man is affected by excessive hatred, anger, pride, avarice, &c.” (Ibid.)

Solution proposed by Spinoza is a reflection on what is subject of change in the world and the proposed idea of a temporality that could be seen as not transient, not subject of becoming other than what he/she is. Spinoza introduces a principle of identity in a Godly being and says we should love our fellow-man for the sake of God only, instead of allowing us to payback favours and multiply signs of gratitude. :

“if we do not love that object which (nota bene) alone is worthy of being loved, namely, God, as we have said before, but things which through their very character and nature are transient, then (since the object is liable to so many accidents, ay, even to annihilation) there necessarily results hatred, sorrow, &c., according to the changes in the object loved. Hatred, when any one deprives him of what he loves. Sorrow, [20] when he happens to lose it. Glory, when he leans on selflove. Favour and Gratitude, when he does not love his fellow-man for the sake of God²⁷.”

Spinoza shows in the first part of his *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy Demonstrated in the Geometric Manner* how the notion of “existence is necessary in the concept of God” (Axiom VI), which is a sovereignly perfect being, existence being only “possible” in a limited being. We find in his introduction to the philosophical method *Treatise on the Reform of Understanding* (1677), more explanations on the “purification of the mind”, that brings the metaphysical level of understanding, in a booklet devoted on the methodological layer, that will be achieved in a complete whole in Spinoza’s monumental but posthumous *Ethics*²⁸.

²⁶ Spinoza, B. *Short Treatise* Ch. XIII, p. 98.

²⁷ Ibid. Ch. XIV, p. 100.

²⁸ Spinoza’s *Ethics*, finished in 1675, will stay unpublished until the death of the author 1677 for political and religious reasons; the work which was circulating during the life of Spinoza amongst his best friends being under the suspicion of atheism. An anonymous funding will

3.1 Critique to the non-monistic notion of identity, the transformative model of axiology, the excursus via the politeness theory

The Commentary to the Short Treatise shows that Spinoza here opposes the view of Descartes, who (De Pass. An. III. 194) considered gratitude “always virtuous as one of the chief bonds of human society.”²⁹ In *Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy Demonstrated in the Geometric Manner* (I, 60–62), we see how for Spinoza Descartes introduces an abusive distinction between: real distinctions, modal distinctions, and conceptual distinctions, in order to escape metaphysical monism of the identity. Only his discussions of the real distinction and the conceptual distinction are relevant. For Descartes, we have epistemic access to these distinctions by reflecting on what we can (or cannot) clearly and distinctly understand. It is only if we introduce such distinction on the epistemic level that we can start to think more widely and develop the subjective level of embeddedness of the self, after Descartes with Kant and Schopenhauer in a transcendental and empirical framework (also called later the phenomenal world). Instead of the rationalistic realism of Spinoza, we can further think of Hegelian and Schopenhauerian terms the transformative process underlining the cultural, communicational and social ethical level of subjectively constructed interactions, adding metaphysical flesh to the formal bones of Spinoza’s ethical system.

If we would want to understand ethics as transformative, we would need to go beyond the very notion of metaphysical identity as Spinoza grounded it, not necessarily by changing the single monistic description of the axiology of values as E. von Hartmann shows it well, but by thinking more in detail the characteristics of the self-sustaining nature of the being, through the principle of ethical and natural development, in a dialectical, evolutionary, transformative framework. If Spinoza introduces self-fulfillment within determinism, as Bunker shows well, transcendental metaphysics is necessary to introduce an ethics of compassion, which is also a pluralistic model of motivation opening to alterity, multiplicity and transformative change³⁰. Arbib shows finally that Spinoza could be reconciled with the philosophy of alterity Levinas, both having proposed an ethics: “Spinoza as the fulfillment of the essence by the love of the substance, Levinas as the assignment to our neighbor as the first philosophy³¹”.

3.2 Enlargement of Spinoza’s realistic reciprocal interactions: the politeness theory

In order to develop positive reciprocal interaction, as not only affectively grounded on desire but also on a refined psychological typology of what has been called politeness attitudes, we could take in consideration two symmetrical groups of attitudes the first based on love as positive politeness the second on the mixed

allow the first release of the work by Rieuwertz in Latin and soon in Dutch translation by Glazemaker.

²⁹ Commentary, p. 218-19.

³⁰ Bunker, pp. 17,114, *ibid.*

³¹ Arbib, Dan « Les deux voies de Spinoza : l’interprétation levinassienne de l’Éthique et du Traité théologico-politique », *Revue de l’histoire des religions*, 1 [our translation].

emotions, where love and hate are both part of the overall *Stimmung* of a mixed reciprocal interaction, in negative politeness: *Positive Politeness*: would entail such attitudes as noticing, attending to the other, exaggerate (interest, approval), use in-group markers, avoid disagreement, assert common good, presuppose knowledge of the other, offer, optimism, reciprocal inclusion, assume reciprocity, cooperation emphasis through gifts. On the contrary, *Negative Politeness*: would entail to be conventionally indirect, to question, be pessimistic, minimize the face threatening impositions, give deference, apologize, impersonalize the self and the other, nominalize, refer to on-record as incurring debt of the other³². Spinoza's reference to the debt as part of the negative reciprocal degradation of trust and love echoes such set of attitudes very well.

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³² We borrow the typology to Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*, *ibid.* This list of negative and positive politeness linguistic markers can be found in a very clear transposition of the politeness theory to the Ancient Testament by Edward J. Bridge in: The 'Slave' Is the 'Master': Jacob's Servile Language to Esau in Genesis 33.1-17, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 268-9.

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Abstract:

There are certainly many ethical reasons to stop at Spinoza's Work: first we find here a pure demonstrative presentation on two cardinal ethical values: competency and sustainability. Second, we have an non anthropomorphic presentation of our relation to the earth, as englobing whole and godly emanation. Third, Spinoza presents the concept of positive reciprocity in such a convincing way, based on human affects and the alienation of passions through his realist constitution of values that we do the

economy of idealism, without sacrificing on ethical values, but on the contrary focusing on the cognitive added benefit: the man is an ethical subject but also an intelligent agent, mirroring in enlightened decisions, the divine perfection. Fourth, business sectors and applied ethics in trading could find an important indication on how trust is being at the core human interactions, in a genealogy of utilitarian practices without reducing trust to instrumental commercial activities, but opening it to love as key metaphysical value.

Keywords:

Spinoza, philosophical ethics, competency, sustainability, love, XVIIth Century philosophy.