

# **THE BRIGHT LIGHTS ON SELF IDENTITY AND POSITIVE RECIPROCITY**

## **Spinoza's Ethics of the Other Focusing on Competency, Sustainability and Divine Love**

**Ignace Haaz<sup>\*</sup>**

***Abstract:*** The claim of this paper is to present Spinoza's view on self-esteem and positive reciprocity, which replaces the human being in a monistic psycho-dynamical affective framework, instead of a dualistic pedestal above nature. Without naturalising the human being in an eliminative materialistic view as many recent neuro-scientific conceptions of the mind do, Spinoza finds an important entry point in a panpsychist and holistic perspective, presenting the complexity of the human being, which is not reducible to the psycho-physiological conditions of life. From a panpsychist point of view, qualities and values emerge from the world, in a situation similar to what could be seen in animism, or early childhood psychology, where the original distance between the mind and the exterior thing is reduced ad minima, and both can even interrelate in a confusing manner. Human reality is nevertheless a social reality, it supposes a basis for shared competencies, that we will present as grounded on the one hand of the sustaining character of the essence of the animal-man as will-to-power. Negatively speaking we all share same asocial tendencies and affects. This aspect is not only negative but it is also a will to develop and master the environment, because values have an onto-metaphysical immanent dimension in nature, not because there is an individual bottom-up will to survive, but rather a will to live in harmony with the

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<sup>\*</sup>**Dr Ignace Haaz** had his Postdoctoral research on the philosophy and ethics of punishment (University of Fribourg Switzerland), PhD and MA in Philosophy (University of Geneva, Switzerland) in the areas of the philosophy of rhetoric and 19th Century philosophy. Since 2012, Ignace does project management for Globethics.net Foundation in Geneva as Executive Editor and ethics E-Librarian.

surrounding world. On the other hand, we shall see that Spinoza understood and described perfectly the power of the mind over the power of the affects, as a co-constituting dimension, which is alienating natural dependencies, leaving an inner space for the objectification of ethical values, not related to mere compensation mechanisms. We shall present the high standard of Spinoza's personal values and positive reciprocity, related to his crucial understanding of the concept of wholeness of life grounded in nature as the strong roots of a tree of life, but also the very metaphysical conditions for ethical values. The essential capacity of shared social affects is completed by a self-overcoming of the animal-man based passions, restraining and sometimes harming social or spiritual life. We are first going to present these proto-ethical conditions for the sustainability of life as affective and dynamic grounding into the immanent world, second we shall present realistic principles of an ethics of competency and see how far mutual recognition, as the concrete activity of mutually serving each other, has been presented in a convincing way by Spinoza.

**Keywords:** Competency, Philosophical Ethics, Love, Spinoza, Sustainability, 17th Century Philosophy.

## 1. Introduction

To introduce a constructive combination between the notions of the identity of the self and mutual recognition, we would like to present Spinoza's careful use of the terms "gratitude", "recognition", "gratefulness", "thankfulness" in his *Ethics*.

There are certainly two good reasons to dig into Spinoza's work on ethics: first we find a presentation of the relation between two cardinal ethical values: competency and sustainability, in a non-anthropomorphic framework of our presence on earth, as englobing whole and godly emanation. Second, Spinoza presents the concept of positive reciprocity and the sentiment of gratefulness as related to the holistic understanding of ethical stewardship, or human being as social beings, keen to being in the service of others. A true service is intimately grounded in a correct perception of the self and its

dependency to the englobing whole. We find in Spinoza’s ethics psychophysiological tendencies of the self, and the alienation of passions through a realist constitution of values, based on our capacity to understand our dependency as living being to the wholeness of life. It is not efficient to benefit from someone, as when we receive a gift, if the relation between equals is undermined for some hidden reasons, which are not transparently expressed. If someone may expect a benefit in return from a gift, which would semantically not be a gift anymore, the result would be the creation of a debt, which changes the relationship between equals. Positive reciprocity implies something different from the diminishing of the mutual equilibrium resulting from the possibility of hidden benefices or debts. In order to feel grateful we need to feel that the other has served us with the self, and not by imposing strength or any unexpected unilateral advantage, that we would owe in return. In recognising a service, we connect the experience with the totality of our experiences. Limitations serve, errors and wounds serve, even ignorance can serve, as the wholeness in us serves the wholeness in others and the wholeness in life, what Spinoza calls our intimate foundational relation to the Substance or God.

We find inviting presentations of the value of Spinoza’s ethics by important philosophers. We have certainly with Spinoza “the purest philosopher”<sup>1</sup> 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.”<sup>1</sup> 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 “laughing-no-more” and

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<sup>1</sup>Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Human All too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (*Ein Buch für freie Geister*), VIII, No 475, trans. Marion Faber with Stephen Lehmann, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. See also Henning Ottmann, *Nietzsche Handbuch*, Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler Verlag, 2000, 102.

"weeping-no-more."<sup>2</sup> With Nietzsche we may add: where vivisection of the affects would make fully sense, there shouldn't be any "harming of the affects."<sup>3</sup>

E. von Hartmann, another Schopenhauerian philosopher as Nietzsche, complements his views on the meaning of affects for Spinoza, praising the precision and coherence of Spinoza's views on ethics, but regretting his extreme parsimony with regard to the phenomenological description of social affects. For Hartmann many of them are reason based principles such as political rights and today we would focus on cultural rights; others legal rights and ethical principles.<sup>4</sup> But a first larger set of ethical principles, corresponding to the affective ground proposed by Spinoza, should be rather seen as subjective ethical principles, as the crucial role of an ethics of compassion, including other social moral sentiments. Social affects or subjective ethical principles are extremely important for applied ethics, because they help grounding the very notion of equality. 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 the world of subjective experience. In the 20th Century, Max Scheler and Edmund Husserl will later develop it as the phenomenological reduction of the first person experience. As example, the sentiment of repentance, which is an important moral sentiment related to the

<sup>2</sup>"Non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari sed intelligere." Translation by Coleridge: "I sedulously disciplined my mind neither to laugh at, or bewail, or detest, the actions of men; but to understand them." *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 4, (Part I), 166, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1969. Spinoza, *Works*, Vol. II, *Spinoza's Political Treatise*, "Introduction," IV, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley, Princeton: University Press, 505.

<sup>3</sup>Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. W. Kaufmann, New York: Random House, No 198, 1966, 108.

<sup>4</sup>Eduard von Hartmann, *Die Gefühlsmoral*, ed., J.C. Wolf, "Moralprinzip des Geselligkeitstriebes," Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1879/2006: 53, 59, 83.

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 centre 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 argument for prevailing against received authority, and yet, the starting proposition of his ethics, regarding the relation of the human being to God is fundamental:

E1P15: Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God. Dem.: Except for God, there neither is, nor can be conceived, any substance (by P14), i.e. (by D3), thing that is in itself and is conceived through itself. But modes (by D5) can neither be nor be conceived [30] without substance. So they can be in the divine nature alone, and can be conceived through it alone.

E2P10: *The being of substance does not pertain to the essence of man, or substance does not constitute the form of man.* [30] Dem.: For the being of substance involves necessary existence (by E1P7). Therefore, if the being of substance pertained to the essence of man, then substance being given, man would necessarily be given (by [II/93] D2), and consequently man would exist necessarily, which (by A1) is absurd, q.e.d. Schol.: This proposition is also demonstrated from E1P5, viz. that [5] there are not two substances of the same nature. Since a number of men can exist, what constitutes the form of man is not the being of substance. Further, this proposition is evident from the other properties of substance, viz. that substance is, by its nature, infinite, immutable, [10]

indivisible, etc., as anyone can easily see. Cor.: From this it follows that the essence of man is constituted by certain modifications of God's attributes.<sup>5</sup>

For (by E2P10) the being of substance does not belong to the essence of human being. That essence therefore (by E1P15) is something which is in God, and which without God can neither be nor be conceived. Spinoza gives some examples concerning the method of exposition he uses.

In order to start thinking ethics as a system, one needs to bear in mind some basic principles, such as thinking particular essences. The essence of spatiality is the exteriority of its parts, the essence of human being 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 initial thinking about ethics:

[30] The cause of this, I believe, was that they did not observe the [proper] order of Philosophizing. For they believed that the divine nature, which they should have contemplated before all else (because it is prior both in knowledge and in nature) is last in the order of knowledge, and that the things that are called objects of the senses are prior [35] to all. That is why, when they contemplated natural things, they thought of nothing less than they did of the divine nature; and when afterwards [II/94] they directed their minds to contemplating

<sup>5</sup>Curley's translation from Works vol. 1 *Ethics* is used but abbreviations are adapted as follow: 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*. The Collected Works of Spinoza, Ed. and translated by Edwin Curley, Princeton: UP. 1985/2016, 2nd printing. Spinoza uses the expression of "the Man" in conformity with 17th Century language, but at least in his *Ethics*, the Man stands for the generic term of the human being. Each man and woman should be able to reach the intellectual love of God and nature, or supreme goal, from a path of deepening of their being.

the divine nature, they could think of nothing less than of their first fictions, on which they had built the knowledge of natural things, because these could not assist knowledge of the divine nature. So it is no wonder that they have generally contradicted themselves (E2P10 Cor. Note).

Ethics starts for Spinoza by a metaphysical reflection on the importance and role of God or the divine, as a realistic foundation point of values. Ethics is also a purification of the understanding, meditation on the experience of joy as an experience of the perfect character of love as related to competency, by opposition to weakness, which leads to corruption and evil.<sup>6</sup>

(E3P11Sc.: We see, then, that the Mind can undergo great changes, and pass now to a greater, now to a lesser perfection. These passions, [II/149] indeed, explain to us the affects of Joy and Sadness. By Joy, therefore, I shall understand in what follows that passion by which the Mind passes to a greater perfection.

Practically, we do not need to worry about the metaphysical beginnings of ethics in God, to find in the third and fourth books of the *Ethics* most of the passions related to reciprocal recognition. Recognition is partly shared esteem but not necessarily dependent on others, it is “to imagine [oneself] to be praised by others” (E4P53), and passing from lesser to greater perfection, by “imagining” and “encouraging” its “power of acting”. In order to stay in this solitary and solipsist circle of generating joy for the self, one consequently needs to prevent the opposite: i.e., any sudden lack of positive identification. Saddening the imagination or limiting the self in such a way as to encourage oneself to imagine being blamed by others is the opposite of self-esteem:

(E3D26) Exp.: Self-esteem is opposed to humility, insofar as we understand by it a Joy born of the fact that we consider our power of acting. But insofar as we also understand by it a

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<sup>6</sup>Gordon Clement Wickersham, *Spinoza's Concept of God's Infinity*, MA Thesis, Boston University, 1951, 97, see also: 77-81, <<https://www.globethics.net/gel/6506745>> (3 May 2018).

Joy, accompanied by the idea of some deed which we believe we have done from a free decision of the [5] Mind, it is opposed to Repentance.

Negative self-esteem is related to humility, which “exists when someone knows his own imperfections, without regard to [others’] disdain of him.” Humility is similar to “despondency” (E4P57), as far as both are the opposite of “pride: when someone attributes to himself a perfection that is not to be found in him.”<sup>7</sup> And they both “are born of humility”(E3D29), but despondency is “Sadness born of a man’s false opinion that he is below others.” Since the nature of man rooted in his capacity to produce himself completely, “humility and despondency are very rare,” “human nature, considered in itself, strains against them, as far as it can” (E3D29):

So Humility, or the Sadness which arises from the fact that a man reflects on his own lack of power, does not arise from a true reflection, or reason, and is a passion, not a virtue q.e.d.

[II/250] E3P54: Repentance is not a virtue, or does not arise from reason, instead, he who repents what he has done is twice wretched or lacking power”(E3P55, S.P.B, n 58).

Humility, like repentance, remorse, etc. are depressing passions, which only tend to annihilate us. Overall, human being’s lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects is called “bondage” by Spinoza, who describes in the fourth part of the *Ethics*, “how man who is subject to affects is under the control, not of [10] himself, but of fortune” (E4 Preface).

It is slightly better to be content than sad: “A desire that arises from Joy is stronger, other things equal, than one that arises from Sadness” (E4P18); but “overestimation is thinking more highly of someone than is just, out of Love.” It differs from “scorn [which] is thinking less highly of someone than is just, out of Hate” (E3D21-22). But, “it happens that everyone is anxious to tell his own deeds, and show off his powers, both of body [5] and of mind—and that men, for this reason, are

<sup>7</sup>Spinoza, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, *Short Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being*, Ch. VIII, "On Esteem and Disdain."

troublesome to one another”(E3P55, Sc.). We see that envy is intoxicating mutual recognition. Human beings are by nature envious or “glad of their equals’ weakness and saddened by their equals’ virtue” (E3P55, Sc.). Envy shows an important aspect of all passions: they are diversity by excellence of the nature of sentiments and the fluctuation of desires, in narrow and wide forms. The ignorance and fading of the desire as a set of psychodynamic mental, emotional, or motivational forces, leads to melancholy, on the contrary its accentuation vivifies us.<sup>8</sup> Vices such as envy show the affected nature of the man as “mode” for Spinoza, in conformity with the idea that all modes, including the human being, 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 human being, conceived as a capacity to develop expansive power. In nature, limited modes are stable and express always the same thing; human being, in comparison has a power of development that has much more elasticity, regeneration, elevation and amplification.

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 an aim but the affirmation and expansion of the individual self: *l'amour propre*, which arises 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.<sup>9</sup> Opposed to the

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<sup>8</sup>Louis Millet, *Pour Connaitre la pensée de Spinoza*, Paris: Bordas, 1970, 83.

<sup>9</sup>“Objectivation of values” is a proposition used by Matheron to describe a situation where we cannot control objects that we seek to

Hobbesian biological anthropology, which does not lead to an objective representation of values, the genealogical definition of passions of Spinoza leads to a theory of the alienation of passions in an identification process which does. Passions have to do with a simple identification: we are glad to witness the conservation of an object, which we love, and grieve its loss.

Against the Cartesian dogma that the self should be identified with the mind Spinoza (and later Schopenhauerian philosophy) will ground the presupposition that the self is embodied and that its integration into reality at large is thus made possible. By contrast to Spinoza, later propositions as the phenomenological analysis proposed by Hartmann shows that it may not be possible to ask only to the rational faculty to make good choice; Hartmann thinks that moral sentiments and the ethical principle of taste, which are only conceived negatively by Spinoza, have a proactive role to play in helping the man to constitute higher and higher ethical values.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. "Hate is to be conquered by Love": Shared Competencies vs Integrity

In his important study, Matheron gives some additional indications on the logic of mutual recognition in Spinoza's *Ethics* that could be called egoistic. The key argument of Spinoza is that instead of autonomous choice based morals, we should concentrate on the knowledge of the virtues and their causes,

value but only evaluations for Spinoza. On the one side, the self is losing his ipseity, his wholeness of sensible being by being rational but on the other side the objective representation of values for Spinoza offers a firm grip on the sway that external objects and the passions exercise over our existence. Finally the wholeness of the self is experienced in seeking the deepest treasures of the human mind. Spinoza invites us to an *itinerarium mentis in Deo*, a perfectionist knowledge path, which is at the same time an intellectual love of God.

<sup>10</sup>E. v. Hartmann, *Die Gefühlsmoral*, ed., J.C. Wolf, op. cit. 53, 59, 83. Read also further on similarities between Schopenhauer and Spinoza: Jenny Bunker, *Schopenhauer's Spinozism*, Thesis, University of Southampton, 2015, Sections on "Ethics," 99, and "Salvation," 143.

and observation of rules, practice them, and direct most actions according to the command of reason.<sup>11</sup> What is Spinoza's understanding of mutual recognition or gratitude?

If there is a maxim for Spinoza as a rule of praxis it would be: “Hate is to be conquered by Love, or Nobility, not by repaying it with Hate in return” (E5P6), as presented in the fifth part of the *Ethics* “On the power of the intellect, or the human freedom.” Inter-human relations can be 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 us to imagine better the 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 trade.<sup>12</sup> In the economic sector of trade each individual feels the interdependence and convergence of interests, each being in solidarity with all. Individual prosperity is 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 a pure commercial interaction: “The thankfulness which men are led by blind Desire to [II/264] display toward one another is for the most part a business transaction or an entrapment, rather than thankfulness” (E4P71Sc.).

As we see in the economic understanding of gratitude as interplay of desires to possess and desires to give and sell objects of desires, human trade based interactions tend to develop a strong solidarity of interdependencies and converging interests,

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<sup>11</sup>Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 1969/1988, 86, 204-5 ; C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962.

<sup>12</sup>Spinoza shows also that the more the predictability of this mutual recognition is given as in trade the more likely it is to find ignorance and the absence of free spirits (See E4P71).

but with some limitations regarding gratitude. How does the immanent-realist constitution of value arise from this dense tissue of human transactions and expectations? Many gifts should not be accepted. On the contrary, "firmness of mind" is demonstrated by "who does not allow any gifts to corrupt him, to his or to the general ruin" (shared disgrace, lat.: *communem perniciem*). 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 adhere to prevailing collective policies.

*Commerce is of wildfowl (Mercatura, seu aucupium)*, not that corruption belongs to the essence of trading, but all trading without clear policies and sanctions turns quickly to conflicts of interest and abuses. When X acknowledges the ingratitude of Y: "He who has benefited someone—whether moved to do so by Love or by the hope of Esteem—will be saddened if he sees his benefit accepted in an ungrateful spirit" (E3P42). We fall back to negative reciprocity as finely analysed by Matheron,<sup>13</sup> but X and Y do not forget all of a sudden the advantages resulting from their previous interactions, they stay for a while in a mixed feeling between love and hatred. "So from imagining himself to be hated by someone, he will be affected with Sadness, accompanied by the idea of the one who hates him [as a cause of the sadness] or (by the same Scholium) he will hate the [15] other, q.e.d." (E3P40). "Given a just cause for this hatred, he will be affected by Shame (by P30)." "But (by hypothesis), he nevertheless loves him. So he will be tormented by Love and Hate together" (E3P40Sc.).

It is the principal aim of political ethics to stabilize the process in minimizing the fluctuations of affects, to create rules in order to sustain positive reciprocity. Contrary to Kantian future propositions, Spinoza does not use the virtue of integrity, which depends on practical imperatives based on a subjective free choice, in contradiction with his affirmation of absolute determinism. As indicative ethics, stabilization of affects has

<sup>13</sup>Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, 206.

nothing to do with morals, since good and bad are all necessary manifestations of God's providence, and wrongdoing should not be considered blameworthy but subject of disdain (*contemptus, versmading*). Contrary to Hobbes: “those things which we neither desire nor hate we said to contemn,” Spinoza follows Descartes' usage, as Edwin Curley shows well, “*contemptus* represents *mépris*” as opposed to *estime*, and is defined as an inclination to consider the baseness or smallness of what is *mépris*. So something closer to disesteem seems preferable.<sup>14</sup> Spinoza prefers such virtues as honesty, trust, reliability and faithfulness to describe the positive interplay of shared competencies (lat. *fides, fidelis, fidus*).

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 on 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 to accept new cooperation. In various situations where conflicts of interest are 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. We can also feel gratitude for God, as when we pray and thank God for living a good life.

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, but a moral sentiment based ethical principle. As principle of

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<sup>14</sup>Disdain, Glossary-Index, English-Latin-Dutch, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Ed. and translated by Edwin Curley, Vol. 1, Princeton: UP. 1985/2016, 2nd printing. Hobbes' quotation is from Thomas Hobbes *Leviathan*, Part I, Ch. 6, London: Penguin Classics, 1651, fourth ed. with Introduction by C. B. MacPherson, 1985, 120.

religious unity of the highest metaphysical harmony and perfection of the creation, love is an objective *telos* of all living beings, directed to an eternal temporality, distinguished from what is sustaining in time, as we find it for example in both Spinoza's subjective and metaphysical *Ethics*.

As Kuno Fisher shows it well, Spinoza's rationalism does not suppose a process of development; it does not focus on the method of knowledge of the world and on the phenomenal conditions of experience of the values. Although Spinoza doesn't contradict such views found after Kant's Copernican redefinition of the early modern *cogito* in particular with Schopenhauer's Neo-Kantian adaptation of the Spinozian immanent world, Spinoza's early modern formalism should be understood as the affirmation that all being is given by God or Nature. The later description of the subjective space and time as an essential structure of the experience, attached to an intersubjective component, will complement the rather minimalistic framework of the constitution of the human world within Spinoza's work.<sup>15</sup>

## 2.1 Spinoza's High Standard of Personal Values

We know from the biographers that Spinoza was living in La Haye from 1670 to 1677.<sup>16</sup> In a letter of 16<sup>th</sup> February 1673 from Louis Fabritius, Professor at the Academy of Heidelberg, Spinoza was 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 teaching a few hours to young students in philosophy.<sup>17</sup> Spinoza would receive the salary of

<sup>15</sup>Fisher Kuno, *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie, Immanuel Kant und seine Lehre*, Spinozas Monismus, Bd. IV, 1. Theil, Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1898, 25.

<sup>16</sup>Spinoza's *Short Treatise on God, Man, His Well-Being*, Transl. and ed. A. Wolf, London: A. C. Black, 1910, lxxxii.

<sup>17</sup>Correspondence, XLVII, Fabritius to Spinoza, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1673, XLVIII, The answer of Spinoza to Fabritius, the 30<sup>th</sup> March 1873. Spinoza, *Oeuvres Complètes*, transl. R. Caillois, M. Francès, R. Misrahi, NRF Pléiade, 1954, 1283-84.

any Professor, in similar situation. Surprisingly, Spinoza politely refused the offer, arguing that he would have to renounce partly his research in order to teach, also mentioning that he never had any desire to accept the responsibility of a university professor.

As Kuno Fischer shows well, Spinoza was subject of much criticism particularly after his political work on the freedom of thinking and expression, and before the posthumous edition of *Ethics* in 1677. Spinoza's adaptation of the Cartesian methodic sceptical reduction to religious matters, in particular revelation and prophetic insights, has been much commented upon since Popkin's work.<sup>18</sup> The philosophy of personal identity has been building personal identity on the top of the psycho-dynamic and affect oriented natural understanding of the psyche. A key aspect of the question how a philosopher understands social ethics is related to the kind of philosophy of history he/she places in the background of this interrogation. Seventeenth century philosophers are used to grounding human capacities on God or Nature, therefore the question of the nature of God is an important foundational block of how the historical development of ethical values are constructed. With Cartesian philosophy in general there are Stoic, Epicurean and Christian philosophical elements presupposed concerning ethics, philosophy of history and religion. With Spinoza in particular, anthropological aspects of God (theism) are mixed with non-anthropological aspects (deism).

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<sup>18</sup>Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979. Hobbes and to some extend Spinoza are accused of not recognizing the distinction between "moral motives" and "physical efficient", the latter being derived from self-motion, while the former from a motive related to the activity of the understanding. See Samuel Clarke (1738/2005): *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, Prop. X, "Of the Necessity of the Will's being determined by the last Judgment of the Understanding" Elibron Classics Replica, London: John and Paul Knapton, 99. *Short Treatise*, "On the Immortality of the Soul," Ch. XXIII; "On God and the Creation as Nature" Ch. VIII and IX.

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 placing 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 sceptic and materialist philosopher, was not without consequences for his life. As early as July 27 1656, Spinoza was issued a harsh ban or excommunication pronounced by the Sephardic community of Amsterdam, for unclear reasons.<sup>19</sup> 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 exists necessarily, by its proper nature “whereby the essence envelops the existence,” and the being for which “essence envelops only a possible existence.” This is later divided into “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

<sup>19</sup>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): God is the self-sustaining character of all 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 (2001): *Spinoza: a Life*, Cambridge: University Press, xi.

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 understood.<sup>20</sup>

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 rather 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 does not need 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.

### **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

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<sup>20</sup>“Appendice Containing the Metaphysical Thoughts,” Part I, Ch. I. “On the Real Being, the Being of Fiction and the Being of Reason.” In French: Spinoza, *Oeuvres Complètes*, op. cit. 301.

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, as presupposing a rational attitude grounded on the wholeness of life. Gratitude is appropriately expressed for Spinoza when a person is benefiting a service of someone being in the service of life, by opposition of helping in such a way that the one who helps feels the greatest satisfaction. A person who receives a service should not consider that something has been fixed, as a person should not be perceived as broken, but a person should keep the sense of worth, and gratitude related to the process of healing has been described by Remen as "integrative medicine". Integrative philosophical medicine is a path first explored by Spinoza's exigent view of gratitude and positive reciprocity. When Spinoza asks for "a just cause for the love" the philosopher has in mind similar situations when a person would falsely believe he/she is loved by another, because no cause for the love has been given. We could imagine that by helping a person "may inadvertently take away" from others more than he/she could ever give them, diminishing their self-esteem, their sense of worth.<sup>21</sup> The objectification of the desire to fix an issue passes by the awareness of being used in the service of something greater than a simple desire of overcoming an obstacle. The objectification of the desire to help into a caring for others implies serving the dimension of the wholeness of life.

Of course, one could imagine loving 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 beings are looking for good reasons, or a subjective-objective constitutional ground, not only for psychologically agreeable sentiments. One could answer love by loving on the basis of a reflex as the child, but in order to answer

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<sup>21</sup>Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, New York: Riverhead Books, 1996. <<http://www.rachelremen.com/>>

gratitude we need an additional causal condition that needs clarification:

[15] P41: If someone imagines that someone loves him, and does not believe he has given any cause for this, he will love [that person] in return. [20] Dem.: This Proposition is demonstrated in the same way as the preceding one. See also its scholium. Schol.: But if he believes that he has given just cause for this Love, he will exult at being esteemed (by P30 and P30S). This, indeed, [25] happens rather frequently (by P25) and is the opposite of what we said happens when someone imagines that someone hates him (see P40S). Next, this reciprocal Love, and consequent (by P39) striving to benefit one who loves us, and strives (by the same P39) to benefit us, is called Thankfulness, [30] or Gratitude (E3P41).

Ethical resistance against unjustified gratitude is one thing: we already gave some examples of conflicting affects occurring in this situation. But 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 fulfilment 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 these important goals, and therefore needing a religious or *philosophical consolation/purification* of the spirit with Spinoza.

Competency is therefore part of what grounds sustainability: that 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. In Spinoza's vocabulary mode (*Modus, wijz*) is the unsustainable property of things, as opposed to *attributum*, which designates essential, enduring properties of things. Modus is usually not used in the trivial sense of way or manner.

Spinoza introduces a principle of identity in a Godly being and says we should love others for the sake of God only, in his earliest work, *Short Treatise*:

For whenever we do not love that object which alone is worthy of being loved, i.e. (as we have already said), God, but love those things which through their own kind and nature are corruptible, there follow necessarily from that hate, sadness, etc., according to the changes in the object loved [30] (because the object is subject to many accidents, indeed to destruction itself). Hate: when someone takes the thing he loves away from him. Sadness: when he loses it. Love of Esteem: when he depends on love of himself. Favor and Gratitude: when he does not love his fellow man for the sake of God.<sup>22</sup>

Spinoza shows in the first part of his *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy Demonstrated in the Geometric Manner* how the notion of "necessary existence" is contained "in the concept of God" (Axiom VI), which is a sovereignly perfect being, existence being only "possible, in the concept of a limited thing"<sup>23</sup>. We discover a discrete sign of the heritage of Cartesian dualism in Spinoza's early reflections on ethics in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (1677), where Spinoza is juggling with two different perspectives at the same time: the notion of a naturally perfect being on his own, and the elimination of ideas that are coming from an external source, considered as contrary to this inner perfection. Spinoza understood by the philosophical aim of "a purification of the intellect" this dualistic early of point of view. But logically, in order to be purified, intellect cannot at the same time be both inherently pure and needing purification<sup>24</sup>. This methodological contradiction will be reassessed and resolved in

<sup>22</sup>Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being, Part. II, Ch. XIV.

<sup>23</sup>A6, Axioms Taken from Descartes, *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy Demonstrated in the Geometric Manner*, in: *Spinoza, Collected Works*, vol. 1.

<sup>24</sup>The translation of *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* is disputed for being too literal and close to the Latin: *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, when Purification of the Intellect is closer to the intention of the author, adopting a proposition closer to the Dutch *Handeling van de Verbetering van't Verstant*. This text is the first of the section Earliest Works of *Spinoza, Collected Works*, vol. 1.

a complete whole in Spinoza’s monumental but posthumous *Ethics*.

### 3.1 The Monistic Notion of Identity Related Mutual Recognition *vs* the Transformative Model

The Commentary on 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.”<sup>25</sup> It is only if we 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), that we find transformative models of ethical values. 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.

E. von Hartmann’s key work on the phenomenology of the ethical consciousness (*Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewusstseins*, 1879) shows an elegant understanding of how ethics could be further adapted as transformative, i.e., based on a historical process in development, without needing to go beyond the very notion of metaphysical identity as Spinoza grounded it.<sup>26</sup> As shown by the Berliner philosopher it would not be necessarily to change the monistic description of a hierarchy of values (called axiology), but only to think more in detail the characteristics of the self-sustaining nature of the being, through a dialectical,

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<sup>25</sup>Commentary, 218-19. René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, transl. S. Voss, section 193 "Gratitude," Indianapolis: Hackett, 1649/1989.

<sup>26</sup>E. v. Hartmann, *Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewusstseins. Prolegomena zu jeder künftigen Ethik*, Berlin: Carl Duncker's Verlag, 1879, 871pp. Cf. first part of our *Solidarité chez Hegel, von Hartmann, Tocqueville et Mill*, 2012, Paris: L'Harmattan, 11-190, where we apply this sort of monistic ethics to the philosophy of criminal law.

evolutional, transformative framework. If Spinoza introduces self-fulfilment within determinism, as Bunker shows well, transcendental metaphysic is necessary to introduce an ethics of compassion, which is also a pluralistic model of motivation opening to alterity, multiplicity and transformative change.<sup>27</sup> 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 philosophy."<sup>28</sup>

### **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 into consideration two symmetrical groups of attitudes, the first based on love as positive politeness, and the second on the mixed 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, and cooperation emphasis through gifts. On the contrary, *Negative Politeness* would entail being conventionally indirect, to question, be pessimistic, minimize the face threatening impositions, give deference, apologize, impersonalize the self and the other, nominalize, and refer to on-record as incurring debt of the other.<sup>29</sup> Spinoza's reference to the debt as part of the

<sup>27</sup>Bunker, *Schopenhauer's Spinozism*, 17, 114.

<sup>28</sup>Dan Arbib, "Les deux voies de Spinoza: l'interprétation levinassienne de l'Éthique et du Traité théologico-politique," *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 2 (2012), 275 [our translation].

<sup>29</sup>We borrow the typology to Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (1987):

negative reciprocal degradation of trust and love echoes such set of attitudes very well.

#### 4. Conclusion

Spinoza could be seen as outdated as some contemporary critical minds might think, because: “a systematic, comprehensive, even consoling view of the world, and of our place in it, has come to seem either too ambitious or just impossible.”<sup>30</sup> It is true that the ultimate attempts for systematic great groundings in philosophy are to be found in 17th Century works (as in v. Hartmann’s, Husserl’s work). We would nevertheless disagree on the idea that because great systems are implausible, that calm and systematic thinking is not increasing our understanding of ourselves and the world in which we live, and therefore are not at the very centre of the aim of education and research.

Knowledge is based on normative optimism that things around us in the world should be transformed to some extent, and human progress is desirable. Spinoza invites us to operate a qualified pessimistic view according to which, life is worth living, even though it involves overcoming many of our passions. Because we recognise egoism and distrust in the world, even among the wisest philosophers, we have therefore strong motives to build trust, and require assistance from the community. What does overcoming of passions mean? There should be first a “vivisection of the affects”, a realistic recognition that we are often “driven about in many ways by external causes”, in ways contrary to our ethical values. Reason for that is that we cannot acquire absolute mastery over all our passions. Consequently for Spinoza, the most central principle of

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Cambridge: University Press, 61, 101, 129, 210. This list of negative and positive politeness linguistic markers can be found in a very clear transposition of the politeness theory in Edward J. Bridge, "The 'Slave' Is the 'Master': Jacob's Servile Language to Esau in Genesis 33.1-17," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 38.3(2014), 268-9.

<sup>30</sup>Mason, R, "Why Spinoza?" *Philosophy Now*, Feb/Mar 2017, Issue 118 <[https://philosophynow.org/issues/35/Why\\_Spinoza](https://philosophynow.org/issues/35/Why_Spinoza)> (1 March 2018).

education and research which should start by identifying the immanent, bodily incorporated, socially constructed and environmentally contextualized conditions of what Spinoza calls "bondage" or the dependency on passions is to enter in social contract, in order to enjoy the benefits of civil society. The claim of this paper was not to present Spinoza's social contract solution, but simply to underline the coherence and internal value of an ethics built on self-esteem, where positive reciprocity or gratitude plays a key role. This role is comparable to ethics education which always impacts larger concept of sharing of benefits and costs of social collaboration, if an educator has succeeded to pass over a model of good life, it is likely that future generations will remember the good example. Spinoza's ethics is a philosophical ethical system which places the trustworthiness of ethics education in the center of civil life, by focusing not only on what *a philosophy* can give to education but to what *philosophy* is aiming for, and the hope to transform human being through philosophical models. Mutual recognition, gratitude, positive reciprocity are as competence and generosity not only the ethical virtues which allow to share esteem in an inclusive way at school, in a way that nobody is left behind, competence and gratitude are the very condition of any other ethical social values based on reciprocity. Cooperative services and responsibilities in education, as in many other sectors of human activities, are grounded on human beings' capacity to share esteem which is only understandable on a holistic global level with Spinoza, in a world where global standards are criticised on the ground of localism and petty politics. Spinoza uses the metaphor of God and nature to express a global dimension of ethics. The importance a *globally active nature* of the highest ethical values for the human being is defined as "*natura naturans*", as the presence of a divine model in life. The beauty of Spinoza's divine presence is related to the self-sustaining and immanentist view of the relation of the mind and body, where there is always a door open for a fruitful dialogue between life as a whole and the Englobing Whole. The symbolic entry door for community is not a swinging door model, or an invitation for

isolated contemplation of God, but common values lived in positive reciprocity, in search for reciprocal understanding, a precondition for any meaningful notion of social contract.