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SOME NOTES ON THE INDIVIDUAL PROCESS OF LIBERATION IN SPINOZA

Abstract: A central theme of Spinoza's *Ethica* is the description of the individual's exposition to the emergence of passions: the individual's mind is constitutively liable to being passive in relation to the influences exercised on the mind by reality since the mind is a part of nature. As regards the individual's condition, being passive means having passions: passions bring the individual to a condition of mental enslavement due to the influence coming from the external reality.

Spinoza tries to find a way out of the passions: through the analysis of the structure of reality and of the individual's mind, Spinoza shows that the development of knowledge of reality in the mind is the solution for the process of liberation of the mind. The power of the individual's mind consists in the knowledge of reality: therefore, the possibility, for the individual, to reach an authentic power of mind consists in the acquisition of the knowledge of reality. This acquisition comes about exclusively through the appropriate education. Through the knowledge, the individual becomes able to counteract his being acted on by the

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external reality: he can lead his life instead of being steadily led by the influences coming from outside.

We base our inquiry on Spinoza's *Ethica*.

Keywords: Knowledge, Spinoza, Liberation, *Ethica*, Imagination, Substance, Mode, Affect, Mind

A) INTRODUCTION

‘A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is not a meditation of death, but of life.’³

(*Ethica*, Part 4., Proposition LXVII)

A central theme of Spinoza's *Ethica* is the description of the individual's exposition to the emergence of passions: since the mind is a part of nature the individual's mind is constitutively liable to being passive in relation to the influences exercised on the mind by reality. As regards the individual's condition, being passive means having passions: passions bring the individual to a condition of mental enslavement due to the influence coming from the external reality.

Spinoza tries to find a way out of the passions: through the analysis of the structure of reality and of the individual's mind, Spinoza shows that the development of knowledge of reality in the mind is the solution for the process of liberation of the mind. The power of the individual's mind consists in the knowledge of reality: therefore, the possibility, for the individual, to reach an authentic power of mind consists in the acquisition of the knowledge of reality. The acquisition of this knowledge means the acquisition of a disposition: this acquisition comes about exclusively through the appropriate education. The knowledge of God diminishes the

³ As we shall see, one difficulty which is to be faced while interpreting Spinoza's thought consists in Spinoza's ambivalence of some concepts such as the affects. Affects can be active or passive, thus being actions or passions. In particular, affects such as desire and gladness can be active and passive, thus having profoundly different senses in Spinoza's thought.

influence of the passions on the individual's mind. Thus, reaching the knowledge of God means, for the individual, the strengthening of the mind against the individual's constitutive exposition to passions. Through the knowledge, the individual becomes able to counteract his being acted on by the external reality: he can – at least partially – lead his life instead of being steadily led by the influences coming from outside⁴.

The knowledge transforms the individual from being a completely passive entity to being an entity which is able to emendate its mind, thereby eliminating in the mind the already present confused ideas on reality, on the one hand, and contrasting the formation of new confused ideas, on the other hand. Through knowledge, the individual is transformed from the condition of being limited by a fragmentary vision of reality to the condition of possessing the knowledge of the structure of reality. Hence the individual needs to know his essence, his functions, his position in reality and his faculties in order to discover the road to self-development: he needs to become aware of his essence. Through the knowledge of reality, the individual's understanding of reality changes since the individual sees that he is a mode, i.e., an affection of reality: hence he cannot consider himself as being an entity independent of reality itself⁵.

Thus, in our contribution, we shall show aspects of the process through which, in Spinoza's view, the individual can find a form of liberation from his passions, thereby being transformed into

⁴ An interesting study which insists on the role of knowledge throughout the liberation process is the book of M. LeBuffe *From Bondage to Freedom. Spinoza on Human Excellence* (see especially chapter 1, *God, Human Individuals, and Human Morality in the Ethics*, which insists on the power of the mind consisting in the knowledge of the affects).

⁵ For the text of Spinoza's works we used the following edition: *Spinoza Opera. Im Auftrag der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften herausgegeben von Carl Gebhardt, 2. Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione. Ethica; Spinoza Opera. Im Auftrag der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften herausgegeben von Carl Gebhardt, 3. Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, Adnotationes ad Tractatum Theologico-Politicum, Tractatus Politicus.*

an at least partially active entity⁶: Spinoza's programme proves to be a programme for the development and enlightenment of the mind⁷.

B) PLAN OF INTERPRETATION

The present scheme represents the guideline of the interpretation which we shall propose throughout this analysis:

- Reality consists of the substance, the modes, and the attributes as proprieties of the substance.
- The individual is a mode, i.e., a dependent entity.
- Because he is a mode, the individual is passive. Being a mode means, among other things, being a mentally limited entity.
- To be passive means, for the individual, having passions such as desire, gladness, and sadness, thus being continuously exposed to vacillations of mind.
- The individual's first form of knowledge, imagination, is fragmentary, confused, and inadequate: it consigns the individual to the condition of passivity, of vacillation, of ignorance.
- Since passions are confused and inadequate ideas, liberation from passions consists in the acquisition of adequate ideas, i.e., in the acquisition of knowledge.

⁶ The responsibility for the interpretation which we present in our paper is, of course, ours alone.

⁷ The translations of the *Ethica* which we consulted for our study are the following ones: *The Chief Works of Benedict De Spinoza, Translated from the Latin, with an Introduction by R. H. M. Elwes. Vol. I. Introduction, Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, Tractatus Politicus. Revised Edition*; *The Chief Works of Benedict De Spinoza, Translated from the Latin, with an Introduction by R. H. M. Elwes. Vol. II. De Intellectus Emendatione – Ethica (Select Letters). Revised Edition*; *The Collected Works of Spinoza Princeton. Edited and Translated by Edwin Curley. Volume I*; *The Collected Works of Spinoza. Edited and Translated by Edwin Curley. Volume II*. We consulted the mentioned translations of Spinoza's *Ethica* without, however, entirely following any of them: we always tried to come up with our translation of the passages of Spinoza quoted in our study.

- To be able to liberate himself from passions, the individual needs knowledge.
- Through knowledge, the individual becomes aware of his mental dispositions and of his position in reality. He becomes aware that his initial condition of interpretation of reality is the condition of imagination.
- The knowledge brings about the emendation of the intellect. Through and thanks to the inquiry into the structure of reality and in the necessity of this structure, the individual frees himself from the condition of incertitude in which he is originally relegated by his ignorance.
- The individual needs to be aware of his limits in order to be able to control his negative aspects: Spinoza proceeds to the analysis of imagination, of knowledge, of passions, of adequate and inadequate ideas in order to clarify the structures which belong to the individual as such.

The human condition appears, in Spinoza's *Ethica*, to be constitutively disadvantaged, since men are, due to their essence, only modifications or only modes of the substance, God: consequently, men are ontologically dependent entities. The individual's being a mode implies his being a part of nature: thus, the individual is exposed to external causes which he does not know, at least not immediately.

A long way of mind education is needed in order that the mind could acquire knowledge. Thus, the mind's condition of the individual is exposed to an at least initial condition of ignorance of the external causes which exercise an influence on him. Therefore, the individual is liable to form confused and inadequate ideas of the processes of reality. Since inadequate ideas are, for Spinoza, as such, passions, the individual is constitutively exposed to the emergence of passions. This disadvantaged condition is constitutive of men; it is, as such, not eliminable, since it is a direct consequence of the individual's being a mode.

The individual develops himself through knowledge: the component of his mind represented by the active part increases so that

the proportion existing between being active and being passive progressively changes to the advantage of being active.

The individual has specific limits corresponding to his being a mode; nonetheless, through the process of acquisition of knowledge, the individual can limit his being passive and can progressively increase his being active. Therefore, the individual's condition is to be seen as potentially dynamic. Liberation is a process, it is not a definitive condition: since the individual is a part of nature, and since the individual is an entity belonging to nature, the individual cannot reach a condition of perfect liberation. The individual will always be and always remain an entity which has elements of passivity, and which is exposed to the formation of passions⁸.

C) SUBSTANCE AND MODE

The status of the individual is not the status of the substance. The individual ought to understand that he is constitutively in something else, i.e., that he constitutively depends on something else. Becoming aware of one's condition proves to be, for the individual, an indispensable step to see whether and how this condition can be improved. The contents of the *Ethica* lead the individual to become acquainted with his nature and to become aware of his nature. The incompatibility between the way of being of substance and the way of being of man is expressed in *Ethica*, Part 2., Proposition X:

‘The being of substance does not belong to the essence of man, or substance does not constitute the form of man.’

The being of substance is not the being of man: the essence of man does not consist in being substance. In the corollary of the X Proposition of the 2. Part of the *Ethica* Spinoza furthermore states, as regards the elements constituting the essence of man:

⁸ We used the commentary of Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza. Tome 1: Dieu (Éthique, livre I); tome 2: L'Âme (Éthique, livre II)* for the two first parts of Spinoza's *Ethica*.

‘Hence it follows that the essence of man is constituted by certain affections of the attributes of God.

For (by the preceding proposition) the being of substance does not belong to the essence of man. That essence therefore (by the proposition XV of part 1.) is something which is in God, and which, without God, can neither be, nor can be conceived, whether it be an affection (by the Corollary of proposition 25 of part I), or a mode which expresses God’s nature in a certain and determined manner.’

The essence of the individual corresponds to affections of the attributes of God. Individuals are, as such, exclusively modes of the substance (i.e., of Nature or of God). Being a mode means that the individual is only an affection of the substance. Individuals are not independent entities; they are not autonomous entities. On the contrary, individuals are constitutively dependent entities: hence they are constitutively exposed to the influence exercised from outside. This condition of dependence is not eliminable for the individual since it is a feature as such of being a mode. From the individual being a mode derives the condition of the individual as being a part of nature and, consequently, the condition of the individual as a passive entity, i.e., an entity which is subdued to the influence of nature. A first example of the individual’s condition in the reality can be given by the following statement of Spinoza, corresponding to the Proposition 2 of Part 4. of the *Ethica*:

‘We are inasmuch passive as we are a part of Nature, a part which cannot be conceived by itself and without other parts.’⁹

The individual is a part of nature which cannot be conceived as such by itself and independently of other parts: thence the individual is in another entity, is dependent on another entity, and is

⁹ The individual is passive constitutively, not accidentally. If something of which the individual is only a partial cause comes about in the individual, the individual is passive. All affects depend on the influence of the external influence: since the individual cannot eliminate the external influence, the individual will always have elements of passivity.

subjected to the influences exercised by the other entity on him. Spinoza reinforces his considerations with the following assertions, contained in the initial steps of Part 4. of the *Ethica*. In Proposition 4 of Part 4. of the *Ethica* Spinoza asserts:

‘It cannot be that man is not a part of Nature and that he could undergo no changes save those which can be understood through his nature alone and of which he is the adequate cause.’

The individual is a part of nature. He is necessarily a part of nature. Individuals are constitutively dependent entities: therefore, they are exposed to being passive¹⁰. The individual undergoes changes which are not due to his nature: a part of the changes which the individual experiences is due to external factors. The individual is subdued to the influence coming from outside because of the limitations which are inherent in his being a mode. The knowledge of the individual would therefore not be sufficient for the comprehension of the changes experienced by the individual.

The individual’s initial condition, the condition preceding the process of knowledge of reality, is a condition of total passivity. The individual’s being active can be developed only through the activity of reason and only through the consequent increase of knowledge of reality: therefore, the individual initial condition, before the beginning of the process of learning, is a condition of total passivity. The individual is, from the beginning, exposed to the emergence of passions; the capacity to be active comes about later since it can come about exclusively through the development of knowledge. Being active needs the development of knowledge: hence being active needs the engagement of the individual.

¹⁰ Men are not and cannot become a kingdom in a kingdom; they cannot be and cannot constitute a kind of autonomous dimension within a greater system. The autonomous dimension is not the human condition (see, for an explanation of these aspects, the preface of Part 3. of the *Ethica*; see also *Tractatus Politicus*, Chapter II, Paragraph 6). The individual is not able and will never be able to separate himself from reality: therefore, he can be independent of reality itself.

Being active is a condition within the range of potentiality of the individual but is not immediately actual: it needs to be realised through education. Education, which consists in the knowledge of the structure of reality, will progressively liberate the individual from confused ideas and therewith from passions¹¹. The contents of this education are not immediately given, though; the individual must gain them step after step. The contents of the *Ethica* illustrate how long, complex and difficult the road to education for any individual is. The main difficulty for the individual lies therefore in the fact that the individual finds himself at the beginning in a condition of total passivity, whereas he needs to develop his active part through knowledge. Spinoza strengthens his positions regarding the individual's being liable to passions through the contents which he expresses in the Corollary of the Proposition IV of Part 4. of the *Ethica*:

‘Hence it follows that it is necessary that man is always liable to the passions and that he follows the common order of Nature and that he obeys the same order and that he accommodates himself to the same order, as much as the nature of things demands.’

Individuals are necessarily subdued to passions: the constitutive dependence of the individual on nature brings about a condition of continuous liability towards passions. The coming about of these passions does not lie in the power of the individual. This aspect means that the sphere of the individual's being active is strongly limited. The individual can never be free from passions since the individual is a part of nature: the individual is constitutively passive since the individual is only a mode. Spinoza does not stop at the description of the initial condition of the individual, though: he analyses this condition in order to modify it. Passivity is for sure the

¹¹ For an interpretation of passions, we deeply recommend the text of M. Della Rocca, *Rationalism run amok: representation and the reality of emotions in Spinoza*. Further elements can be found in Della Rocca's volumes *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza* and *Spinoza*.

initial condition of the individual, but it does not represent a condemnation. The individual can have a development against his being passive: the source of change is knowledge.

D) DEFINITION OF AFFECTS

We would now like to investigate the effects of being passive for the individual: therefore, we would like to analyse the definition of affect given by Spinoza. The following is the definition of affect exposed by Spinoza in Definition 3 of Part 3. of the *Ethica*:

‘Under affect, I understand the affections of the body by which the power of the same body is increased or diminished, aided or constrained, and at the same time the ideas of such affections.

Explanation

Therefore, if we can be the adequate cause of any of these affections, I then understand under affect an action, I understand the other affections as passions.’¹²

We can immediately see that the notion of affect has a plurality of meanings. Affects can be both actions and passions. Correspondingly, the mind can be both active and passive as regards affects. If the mind is the adequate cause of the affection, the affect is an action. In case that the mind is no adequate cause of the affection, the affect is a passion: in this case, the individual cannot control the affect. In Proposition I of Part 3. of the *Ethica* further elements are given as regards the being active and the being passive of the mind:

‘Our mind is in certain cases active, and in certain cases passive. In so far as it has adequate ideas¹³, it is necessarily in certain cases

¹² The first definition of affect shows us the plurality of values for affect. Affects can be actions or passions depending on the individuals being the adequate cause or on their not being the adequate cause for the emergence of affects. Hence affects do not need to be necessarily evaluated in a negative way. On the contrary, affects of which the individual is an adequate cause can oppose passive affects.

active, and in so far as it has inadequate ideas, it is necessarily in certain cases passive.

Corollary.

Hence it follows that the mind is the more liable to passion, the more it possesses inadequate ideas, and, conversely, it is the more active, the more adequate ideas it possesses.'

Affects resulting from the individual's passivity will bring the individual to a condition of fluctuation: the individual does not control what is occurring in himself. Therefore, if the individual wants to lead himself, the individual needs to diminish the influence of passive affects. The individual needs to increase the extension of adequate ideas and to diminish the extension of inadequate ideas present in his mind. A change in the mind, obtained through education, proves to be necessary in order to diminish the extension of inadequate ideas.

Since passions are inadequate ideas, the battle for the liberation of the mind is a battle taking place in the mind of the individual. The individual needs to find a way to limit the force and the number of inadequate ideas. The acquisition of knowledge will step after step emendate inadequate ideas. The liberation from inadequate ideas needs to be arrived at: it is not something given. The disposition to the development of reason is constitutively given since the individual has specific faculties which enable him to reach the level of reason and the level of intuitive science. The development of reason as such is, on the contrary, not given: it needs to be reached through a long road of education. The development of reason depends on the choice of the individual: the individual ought to become aware of his condition in reality and to choose the road of education. Thus, the development of reason does not come about by itself: the

¹³ In Definition IV of Part 2. of the *Ethica* Spinoza expresses the concept of adequate idea:

'Under adequate idea, I understand an idea which, in so far as it is considered in itself, without relation to the object, has all the properties or intrinsic marks of a true idea.'

individual's continuous engagement is needed thereto. Hence the individual has the responsibility of the decision of beginning and then continuing the road to knowledge.

In *Ethica*, Part 3, General Definition of the Affects, Spinoza gives the following definition of affect, in this case limiting the definition of affect to the being passive of the individual:

‘Affect, which is called a passivity of the soul, is a confused idea, by which the mind affirms, concerning its body, or any part thereof, a force for existence greater or less than before, and by the presence of which the mind is determined to think of this rather than of that.’

In our opinion, it is interesting that Spinoza does not say that the affect is the consequence of a confused idea: he says that the affect is as such a confused idea; affects are directly confused ideas. The definition of affect as a confused idea implies that the affect can be eliminated in case of the transformation of the confused idea into an adequate idea. If an individual has confused ideas, he is already in the condition of being affected by passions. Hence, the elimination of the confused ideas would amount to the elimination of affects. The road to the limitation of affects has been thereby indicated. Immediately thereafter, Spinoza adds the following considerations in the explanation of the General Definition of the Affects:

‘I say, first, that affect, or passion, of the soul is a confused idea. For we showed that the mind is inasmuch passive (see Proposition 3 of this part), as it has inadequate or confused ideas.’

Having confused ideas is equivalent to being passive. Being passive means not having control over oneself. A passive individual steadily lacks autonomy in acting. Only the individual who has at least begun to proceed and to advance in the experience of knowledge succeeds in blocking passions and in organising his life. The consideration of passions as inadequate ideas means opening the way for the control of passions since eliminating inadequate ideas means eliminating passions.

E) KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE OF REALITY

The only way to achieve an active condition is, in Spinoza's view, the process of acquisition of the knowledge of reality. Spinoza distinguishes between three forms of knowledge in Part 2., Proposition 40, Note 2 of the *Ethica*:

- i. imagination,
- ii. reason,
- iii. intuitive science.

Imagination is a negative form of knowledge since imagination is a form of ignorance of the authentic constitution of reality. Imagination must be distinguished both from reason and intuitive science, since imagination directly consigns the individual to the vacillations of the mind, whereas reason and intuitive science liberate the mind from vacillations. Imagination consists of inadequate ideas, whereas both reason and intuitive science consist of adequate ideas.

In the following passage, Spinoza points out the negative aspects of imagination, on the one hand, and the positive aspects of reason and intuitive science, on the other hand:

'From all that has been said above it is clear that we perceive many things and form universal notions (1.) from particular things represented through our senses fragmentarily, confusedly and without order to our intellect (see the Corollary of the Proposition XXIX of this part), and therefore I use to call such perceptions knowledge which originates from inconstant experience¹⁴. (2.)

¹⁴ The kind of experience mentioned in the passage is inconstant. Since experience is not part of an order given by reason, experience produces a condition of instability in the mind. The work of the mind should consist in interpreting, ordering, and emending the influences coming from the external experience.

The Proposition XXXV of Part 2. of the *Ethica* expresses that falsity is, as such, a privation of knowledge. The privation of knowledge originates from defects characterizing the ideas of the mind:

'Falsity consists in the privation of knowledge which inadequate, or fragmentary, or confused ideas involve.'

From symbols, e.g., from the fact that, having read or heard certain words, we remember things and form certain ideas concerning them similar to those through which we imagine things (see Note of Proposition 18 of this part). I shall call henceforth both these ways of regarding things knowledge of the first kind, opinion, or imagination. (3.) Finally, from the fact that we have notions common to all men and adequate ideas of the properties of things (see Corollary of the Proposition XXXVIII, and Proposition XXXIX with the Corollary of this Proposition, and Proposition XL of this part), I shall call this way of regarding things reason and knowledge of the second kind. Besides these two kinds of knowledge there is, as I shall hereafter show, another, a third kind of knowledge, which we shall call intuitive science. And this kind of knowledge proceeds from the adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things.'

We can note the following characteristics for the three forms of knowledge described by Spinoza, whereby only negative characters are assigned to the imagination:

- The imagination is fragmented, confused, and without order.
- The reason is characterised by the presence of common notions and by the presence of adequate ideas of the properties of things.
- The intuitive science goes from the adequate essence of attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things. Intuitive science, proceeding from the inquiry and discovery of the attributes of God, reaches the knowledge of the essence of the things since things are modifications of God.

Since imagination, reason and intuitive science lead the activity of the mind, they are the foundation of the individual way of living. Imagination, reason, and intuitive science are therefore not only forms of knowledge of reality: they constitute ways of living; they constitute principles for the organisation of one's life. Individuals who live in the condition of imagination will organise

their lives on the basis of imagination, whereas individuals who live under the other forms of knowledge will organise their lives on the basis of the other forms of knowledge¹⁵.

We can observe that imagination is characterised by a condition of confusion in the mind: imagination is connected to confused ideas. Imagination is therefore the mind's disposition of an individual who lives under the dominance of passions. The individual who lives in the dimension of the imagination is an individual who has no stability and no authentic foundations: the condition of imagination belongs to an individual who steadily fluctuates between the elements of his imagination. The individual who has only a fragmentary knowledge of reality cannot see the cause of his passive affects. He cannot understand the cause which produces the affects and, therefore, he has no way to counteract this cause.

Before the achievement of reason and of intuitive science, the individual is only passive; after the beginning of reason, the individual is both passive and active. The individual is transformed through knowledge: there is not only one kind of individual and there is not only one kind of relation of the individual to reality. The individual who lives in the dimension of imagination lives another kind of life than the individual who lives in the dimension of reason. Imagination and reason are ways of life. The reality for the man with reason is another entity than for the man with imagination. The individual who has reached reason is not completely exposed to passions: reason is a way of living different from the way of living given by imagination.

¹⁵ The difference existing between the kinds of knowledge emerges in the Prop. XLI of Part 2. of the *Ethica*:

'Knowledge of the first kind is the only cause of falsity, knowledge of the second and third kind, on the other hand, is necessarily true.'

Imagination brings to falsity, whereas reason and intuitive science are true. The individual should therefore try to increase the forms of knowledge represented by reason and intuitive science and should try to diminish imagination.

The fundamental characteristic of Spinoza's way towards knowledge is Spinoza's conviction that to become moral the individual needs to know the structure of reality. The individual needs to reach the knowledge of reality and of his position in the reality¹⁶. Being active means having adequate ideas, i.e., reaching and improving one's knowledge of reality. The passivity of the individual can be eliminated through the process of learning the structures and the organisation of reality.

- The individual who does not know the structure of reality is the prey of his passions: he fluctuates since he has no fixed point.
- The individual who knows the structure of reality is able to understand the cause and origin of his affects and is in the condition of putting his affects under control.

The individual begins to lead himself by becoming aware that he has affects. The individual, before the investigation on the structure of reality, does not know what imagination is, what affect is, and what his mind limits are: if he does not know that he has passive affects, he does not know that he is exposed to these affects. The first step for the development of the individual consists in his becoming aware of his position in the reality.

F) THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE

Coming back to the description of the power of knowledge, we can see a first example of the power of knowledge from the

¹⁶ Through the Proposition XXVIII of Part 4. of the *Ethica* we can see that the highest good and the highest virtue of the mind consists in the knowledge of God. The knowledge of God is described by Spinoza as the highest happiness or beatitude in the last Note of Part 2. of the *Ethica*. In the IV Heading of the Appendix of Part 4. of the *Ethica* Spinoza defines beatitude as the contentment of spirit which originates from the intuitive knowledge of God. Beatitude consists in refining the intellect: to refine the intellect means understanding God, his attributes, and his actions.

following quotation, which corresponds to the Proposition III of Part 5. of the *Ethica*:

‘An affect, which is a passion, ceases to be a passion, as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea thereof.’

Affects are no longer passions when the individual understands them. The cause of passions is the privation of knowledge which consists in the formation of inadequate ideas: therefore, improvement in knowledge is as such a diminution of passivity; it is a constant process of liberation. Adequate ideas do not come about by themselves: adequate ideas come about in the mind only after and only through the development of reason and of intuitive science. The process of forming a clear and distinct idea of an affect is as such an emendation of the mind.

An emendation of the mind turns out to be indispensable in order that the individual could become aware of his limits: without this emendation, there cannot be any liberation of the mind from inadequate ideas. Although the individual will never be free from affects since he is a part of nature and since, as a part of nature, he will be always passive, through the acquisition of the knowledge of reality the individual will be able to react to the affects. Knowledge represents a kind of defence and of barrier against passions.

Before the development of knowledge, the individual's mind is only constituted by passions; after the development of knowledge, there is a disposition of reason in the individual which can limit the birth of passions, on the one hand, and can eliminate a part of the passions, on the other hand. A new faculty, which as such belongs to the potential dispositions of the individual, grows step after step. The process of knowledge changes the individual and gives the individual the instruments in order to oppose his passions and his natural being passive. The knowledge blocks immediately the formation of confused ideas and uncovers the confused ideas of the individual as false. As regards the mind's control of the affects, in the Corollary of the Proposition III of Part 5. of the *Ethica*, Spinoza asserts:

‘An affect, therefore, is the more under our control, and the mind is the less passive in respect to it, the more known it is to us.’

Herewith the power of the knowledge is illustrated: the knowledge of the affects diminishes the power of the affects. Through the last statement, the relationship between the acquisition of knowledge and the extension of passivity in the mind is clear: the growth of knowledge implies a diminution of passivity of the mind. The growth of knowledge is proportional to the diminution of passivity. In the Proposition VI of Part 5. of the *Ethica*, Spinoza affirms:

‘The mind has greater power over the affects or is less subject to them, inasmuch as it understands all things as necessary.’

Finally, in Proposition XXXVIII of the Part 5. of the *Ethica*, Spinoza says:

‘The more things the mind understands by the second and the third kind of knowledge, the less subject it is to those affects which are evil, and the less it is afraid of death.’

Knowledge is a process of limitation of passive affects and of the imagination¹⁷. The individual needs authentic knowledge in order to be able to give external influences the importance they deserve. This does not mean that individuals stop being passive because of knowledge: actually, individuals are and remain passive despite the degree of knowledge at which they can arrive; being passive is not eliminable.

The progressive condition of controlling and opposing passive affects is not, even at the end of the *Ethica*, a condition of complete freedom. It is, on the contrary, a process of continuous liberation. At the end of the *Ethica* Spinoza says, for instance, that the individual can control his lusts since he has reached the condition of Beatitude. See *Ethica*, Part 5., Proposition 42:

¹⁷ At the beginning of the Preface of Part 5. of the *Ethica*, Spinoza states that the individual cannot have absolute dominance of passions. The individual ought to become aware of his limits.

‘Beatitude is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself, neither do we rejoice in it because we control our lusts but, on the contrary, because we rejoice in it, therefore we are able to control our lusts.’

The statement shows that passions are always present since beatitude serves to fight against lusts. Beatitude consists in love towards God which comes about in the individual thanks to the third kind of knowledge¹⁸. Having adequate ideas means being active: the more adequate ideas the mind has, the more active the mind is and the more active affects the mind can produce. Beatitude does not derive from the individual’s capacity to control lusts but from the individual’s capacity to reach knowledge: beatitude is a direct consequence of reaching knowledge; it is an affect which comes about because of the mind’s being active. The knowledge produces a structure of affects which are independent of the passive affects and counteract them.

In general, the individual obtains the development of a new disposition through the development of knowledge. This new disposition forms a nucleus of power against imagination, confused ideas, and passions: it brings about a brightening of the obscure zone represented by inadequate ideas. The mind which knows is a mind engaged in the activity of inquiring into the reality: it is a mind which acts; it is not a mind which is completely led by the external sphere. The active affects counteract the presence of the passive affects. Before fulfilling the process of education, the individual has exclusively passive affects. After the fulfilment of this process, the individual has active affects too: the formation of active affects can come about exclusively after the faculty of reason has been developed. Active affects come about independently of the other affects: they build an apparatus of positive affects for the mind.

¹⁸ The definition of Beatitude is exposed by Spinoza in the Demonstration of the Proposition XLII of Part 5. of the *Ethica*.

G) DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL

As alluded to, we can observe, throughout the *Ethica*, a process of development of the individual. In order to give some examples of the development of the individual, we would like to begin with *Ethica*, Part 3., Proposition III:

‘The actions of the mind arise solely from adequate ideas; the passions, on the contrary, depend solely on inadequate ideas.’¹⁹

The distinction between adequate ideas and actions, on the one hand, and inadequate ideas and passions, on the other hand, is therewith clear. Only the process of knowledge, fulfilled through reason and intuitive science, can increase the being active of the mind since only affects deriving from knowledge are a form of being active. The condition for the arising of actions is to have adequate ideas. An increase in the mind’s being active means a greater percentage of self-mastery of the mind. It cannot mean, though, that the human mind can be, or become, completely active. A certain amount of passivity will always remain in the individual. The individual begins from a disadvantaged point his way towards at least a partial liberation from passive affects: individuals are immediately submerged by passions. Only step after step can the individual produce adequate ideas, i.e., only little by little can the individual use reason and reach authentic knowledge. Some passages in the Note of the Proposition 20 of Part 5. of the *Ethica* are illuminating:

‘For the strength of any affect is defined by the power of an external cause compared with ours (by the proposition V of part 4.). Now, the power of the mind is defined only by knowledge²⁰; its impotence or passion is assessed, on the other hand, only on

¹⁹ Adequate ideas are necessary to have actions of mind. Passions are inevitable since the individual has inadequate ideas until he succeeds in developing the second and the third kind of knowledge, i.e., reason and intuitive science.

²⁰ The power of the mind exclusively consists in the knowledge of reality.

the basis of the privation of knowledge²¹, i.e. on the basis of the factor through which ideas are said to be inadequate; from this it follows that that mind is most passive whose greatest part is made up of inadequate ideas, so that that mind is discerned more through that which it undergoes than through which that it does, and it follows that, on the contrary, that mind is most active whose greatest part is made up of adequate ideas, so that, although in this mind are present as many inadequate ideas as in that mind, it is discerned more through those ideas which are attributed to human virtue than through these ideas which reveal the human impotence. Then it must be observed that the spiritual illnesses and misfortunes originate above all from the excessive love for a thing which is liable to many variations and of which we can never be master. For no one is solicitous or anxious about anything save about that which he loves, neither do wrongs, suspicions, enmities and so on arise except in regard to things of which no one can be really master. From these considerations we easily conceive what the clear and distinct knowledge, and especially that third kind of knowledge, whose foundation the knowledge itself of God is, can do against the affects²² (see on this the note of the proposition XLVII of part 2.): if, without doubt, it does not eliminate them completely (see proposition III with the Note of the proposition IV of this part), in so far as they are passions, at least it brings about that they constitute the smallest part of the mind (see proposition XIV of this part).'

The passage clarifies the causes and origins of the power of the mind:

²¹ The impotence of the individual derives from the lack of knowledge. Spinoza interprets the opposition between power of mind and impotence of mind as exclusively consisting in the presence or absence of knowledge in the mind. Knowledge is therefore the field in which the possibility of development of the individual's mind resides.

²² The clear and distinct knowledge of God is knowledge of the reality: since this knowledge is knowledge of the reality it enables the individual to eliminate inadequate ideas.

- The power of the mind is defined exclusively by knowledge, whereas the impotence of the mind is defined exclusively by the privation of knowledge.
- The more inadequate ideas the mind has, the more passive the mind is.
- The more adequate ideas the mind has, the more active the mind is.

The mind can be and is both active and passive. The mind is active when it has adequate ideas: through adequate ideas, the mind can understand reality. The mind is passive when it has inadequate ideas, since in that case the mind does not give order to reality but is compelled to consign itself to imagination and fluctuation.

The third kind of knowledge arrives at the knowledge of God and, from this knowledge, at the knowledge of all things. In this way, this kind of knowledge arrives at the knowledge of the order of reality and is therefore in the condition of limiting his passivity. The mind is not condemned to become and to be the slave of passions: to be free from the influence of the passions, the human mind has, however, to go through an arduous process of self-emendation. Exclusively the conquest of higher degrees of knowledge, and only the growth of reason in the individual can lead the individual towards a progressive liberation from passions. The acquisition of knowledge is necessary to transform inadequate ideas into adequate ideas: exclusively knowledge constitutes the power of the mind. The power of the mind will be stronger if knowledge is stronger. A mind in which the privation of knowledge dominates is a mind which fluctuates without stability.

An active mind can contain as many inadequate ideas as a passive mind can have. Both the active and the passive mind contain inadequate ideas. The difference existing between the two minds is that the passive mind contains only inadequate ideas, whereas the active mind contains adequate ideas too so that the percentage of inadequate ideas in relation to the total amount of the ideas which are present in the mind diminishes. The wider the learning of the mind is,

the greater the extension of adequate ideas is. The more the percentage of inadequate ideas diminishes, the weaker the influence of the inadequate ideas is. The mind which has been transformed by the acquisition of the second and of the third kind of knowledge has inadequate ideas as any mind can have: it has not only inadequate ideas, though. Without knowledge, the individual cannot have any possibility to reach a condition of mind which is able to oppose passive affects. Knowledge cannot do everything, though, since knowledge cannot transform the individual into a substance. Reason produces its affects, thereby radically changing the internal composition of the mind. Increasing levels of being active correspond to increasing levels of perfection, as it is stated in *Ethica*, Part 5., Proposition XL:

‘The more of perfection each thing possesses, the more active and the less passive it is, and, conversely, the more active it is, the more perfect it is.’

Being active is the perfection of the mind. In order that the mind could become active, the work of transformation of the ideas is necessary. In order to understand the difference between those who do not know and those who know, we can take into consideration the description contained at the end of the *Ethica*: the ignorant is possessed by the external causes, has no contentment of the soul, ignores the structures of the reality; his way of living is a way of passion and of instability. Exclusively the individual who knows the necessity of nature reaches the contentment of the soul: for the mind, to know the necessity of nature means becoming free from all the feelings of incertitude which are caused by the mind’s ignorance. Spinoza’s statements regarding the differences between the ignorant man and the wise man in *Ethica*, Part 5., Proposition XLII, Note are the following:

‘Thus I completed all I had wished to show on the mind’s power over the affects and on the mind’s freedom. From these considerations it is evident how strong the wise man is and how more powerful he is than the ignorant man, who is driven only by his lust. For the ignorant man, apart from being moved in many

ways by external causes and apart from never possessing the true contentment of spirit, lives, moreover, practically unwitting of himself, and of God, and of things, and, as soon as he ceases to suffer, he at the same time ceases also to be. The wise man, on the contrary, in so far as he is regarded as such, is scarcely disturbed in spirit, but, being conscious of himself, and of God, and of things by a certain eternal necessity, never ceases to be, but always possesses true contentment of spirit.'

As regards the kind of life of the ignorant individual, we can see the following aspects:

- The life of the ignorant is passivity.
- The life of the ignorant is driven by lusts.
- The life of the ignorant is moved by external causes, i.e., this life lies in the power of external causes.

The difference of mind between the ignorant and the wise man is clear. The ignorant man is characterised by fluctuation and by the absence of contentment. The wise man is characterised by the absence of disturbance in his spirit and by the true contentment with himself. The individual who has reached the second and third kind of knowledge is an individual who is no longer completely passive.

H) ACTIVE AFFECTS

Spinoza aims to diminish the influence of some affects, but, at the same time, aims to increase the influence of the affects which come from reason. The structure of the mind is complex: affects which come from imagination are negative since they expose the individual to passivity. Affects which come from reason are positive, though, since they strengthen the power of the mind. The being positive and the being negative of affects for the individual depend on the origin and on the cause of these affects. If affects are a product of reason, affects are positive; if affects are a product of imagination, i.e., if they are a product of the individual's ignorance, they are negative. Only affects produced by the individual's reason, i.e., only affects originating in the individual as an effect of his being active,

can be positive. All affects caused by the individual's passivity are negative for the mind since they produce vacillations, instability, and fluctuations, i.e., a condition of servitude of the mind. Reason opens, for the individual, the possibility of having active affects; it is only through achieving the condition of reason that the individual can have active affects since it is only through reason that the individual can have adequate ideas, can become an adequate cause and can be active.

A plurality of significances for affects is therefore present in Spinoza. The plurality of significances depends on the different causes of affects. Affects, when they are produced by reason, are completely different from affects, insofar as they are produced by imagination. Positive affects fulfil an indispensable role in the moral development of individuals. In the Note of Proposition LIX of Part 3. of the *Ethica* we can see some examples of active affects:

'I refer all actions following from the affects, which are referred to the mind insofar as it understands, to the fortitude, which I divide into courage and highmindedness. Now, under courage, I understand the desire by which everyone strives to preserve his own being in accordance solely with the dictate of reason. Under highmindedness, on the other hand, I understand the desire through which everyone strives, in accordance solely with the dictate of reason, to aid the other men and to unite them to oneself in friendship. I refer, then, to courage those actions which aim solely at the good of the agent, and I refer to highmindedness those actions which aim at the good of others too. Thus temperance, sobriety, and presence of mind in dangers, and so on, are species of courage; modesty, clemency and so on, on the other hand, are species of highmindedness.'

The development of reason brings about the production of positive affects: courage and highmindedness are examples of active affects since they are produced by reason. In *Ethica*, Part 4., Prop. LII we can see another example of an affect which, since it is produced by reason, represents an active affect:

‘Contentment of oneself²³ can arise from reason, and only that contentment which arises from reason is the highest possible.’

Contentment of oneself is an example of an affect which arises from reason. It is an example of an affect which comes from the action of reason and which, therefore, is an active affect. In *Ethica*, Part 3., Proposition LVIII we can read Spinoza’s declaration stating that joy and desire²⁴ can be both active and passive affects:

²³ For the definition of Contentment of oneself see the xxv Definition in the Definition of Affects in Part 3. of the *Ethica*:

‘Contentment of oneself is the gladness arisen from the fact that the man contemplates himself and his power of acting.’

On the concept of Contentment of oneself (*acquiescentia in se ipso*), see the studies of C. Carlisle, *Spinoza’s Acquiescentia*, and *Spinoza’s Religion*. Carlisle illustrates in her inquiries, among other things, the different senses which *acquiescentia* has. These senses depend on the degree of knowledge reached by the subject.

²⁴ The definition of desire (*cupiditas*) given by Spinoza in the I Definition of the Definitions of Affects in Part 3. of the *Ethica* is as follows:

‘Desire is the actual essence of man, in so far as it is conceived as determined to a particular activity by some given modification of itself.’

As we can see, Spinoza states that the essence of the individual consists in desire. In the Demonstration of the Proposition LXI of Part 4. of the *Ethica* Spinoza confirms the definition of desire as the essence of the man, therein adding that the desire which arises from reason is the desire determined to that kind of acting which is conceived exclusively through the essence of the man. This aspect shows that, despite the fact that desire is the essence of man, the definition can have different implications depending on whether the desire derives from reason or whether the desire is a passion. The individual will lead profoundly different lives depending on his being a desire derived from reason and his being a desire as passion. The definition of the essence of a thing given by Spinoza can however be different within the *Ethica*: in the Proposition VII of Part 3. of the *Ethica* the actual essence of a thing is defined as the striving with which a thing strives to persist in its own being; in the Proposition XXVI of Part 4. of the *Ethica* Spinoza asserts that the striving for self-preservation is the essence of the thing. As regards specifically the essence of the mind of the individual, Spinoza says in the Note to Proposition XXXVI of Part 5. of the *Ethica* that the essence of the mind consists in knowledge: God is, in Spinoza’s view, the principle and the foundation of this knowledge. The supreme striving of the mind and the

‘Besides gladness and desire which are passions, there are other affects of gladness and of desire which are referred to us in so far as we are active.’

Moreover, in *Ethica*, Part 3., Proposition LIX Spinoza explains that active affects are those which derive from joy or desire:

‘Among all the affects which are referred to the mind in so far as it is active, there are no affects save those that are referred to joy or desire.’

The Proposition LXI of Part 4. of the *Ethica* confirms that desire can be brought about by reason. In particular, the highest desire of the individual who is guided by reason is described in the IV Heading of the Appendix of Part 4. of the *Ethica* as leading the individual to conceive adequately himself and all the things which can be the object of his intelligence. The opposition to passions comes about through the knowledge of the passions and of their causes, through the elimination of inadequate ideas and through the active affects. If active affects increase, the relative quantity of the passive affects diminishes.

The process of development in Spinoza’s conception of the mind could be compared, in our opinion, with a process of clarification of the obscurity present in the mind due to inadequate ideas. At the same time, the process of knowledge of the mind consists in the production of active affects which diminishes the power of the passive affects.

I) CONCLUSIONS

The aspects of the *Ethica* we have been dealing with are the following ones:

- The condition of men is that of modifications (modes) of the substance. Consequently, men are dependent entities. Men

supreme virtue or power of the mind consists in understanding things by the third kind of knowledge.

are, constitutively, exposed to passions and, therefore, they are exposed to the constitutive danger of servitude imposed on them by passive affects: they can always fall into the condition of the vacillation of mind.

- The fact that the individual is a part of nature and, consequently, is passive, does not mean, though, that the individual is exclusively passive. Through the development of knowledge, the individual can reach higher and higher levels of being active, thus opposing his condition of passivity.
- The individual will always have a component of passivity, but the presence of knowledge is a barrier against the dominance of passions.
- Knowledge (i.e., the second level of knowledge, reason, and the third level of knowledge, intuitive science) is the only form, the only way of liberation from passive affects. Knowledge is the only key to self-mastery²⁵.
- Before the development of knowledge, the mind has only inadequate ideas, i.e., passive affects. After the development of knowledge, the mind has adequate ideas too, i.e., active affects.
- Since passions are inadequate ideas, the acquisition of knowledge of reality represents a process of elimination of inadequate ideas.
- Liberation from passive affects is a continuous process. This means that liberation is not a definitive condition. There is no definitive liberation from passions; there is no definitively

²⁵ At the beginning of the Preface of Part 4. of the *Ethica* Spinoza describes the condition of the individual who is liable to his passions as the condition of servitude:

‘I name servitude the human impotence in moderating and checking affects; for the man liable to his affects is not his own master, but lies in the power of fortune in whose authority he is so that, although he sees that which is better for him, he is nevertheless often compelled to follow that which is worse.’

acquired autonomy from passions and no definitively acquired independence from passions. Since individuals, because of their constitution, are passive in relation to nature, passions will always come about again. The being passive of the individual cannot be eliminated; it can be only limited.

- The process of acquisition of knowledge will not come about by itself: the individual's engagement is needed for the development of reason. The development of the individual lies within the responsibility of the individual.
- Knowledge of reality gives stability since reality has a necessary order. The vision of reality as an ordered realm governed by necessity eliminates fluctuations.
- The individual proceeds from an initial condition of ignorance, passivity, and fluctuation through his education and knowledge process up to his process of liberation from his passions. We have a transformation of the individual from a totally passive individual to a partially active individual.

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NEKE PRIMEDBE O INDIVIDUALNOM PROCESU OSLOBAĐANJA KOD SPINOZE

Sažetak: Središnja tema Spinozine *Etike* jeste opis izloženosti individue nastanku strasti: duh individue konstitutivno je podložan bivanju pasivnim u odnosu na uticaje koje na njega ima stvarnost utoliko što je duh deo prirode. Kada je reč o stanju individue, biti pasivnim znači imati strasti (pasije): strasti pojedinca vode u stanje mentalnog ropstva usled uticaja koji potiču iz spoljašnje stvarnosti.

Spinoza nastoji da pronađe izlaz iz strasti: analizom ustrojstva stvarnosti i duha individue, Spinoza pokazuje da razvoj znanja o stvarnosti u duhu jeste rešenje za proces oslobađanja duha. Moć duha individue sastoji se u saznanju stvarnosti: stoga, mogućnost da individua dosegne autentičnu moć duha sadrži se u sticanju znanja o stvarnosti. To sticanje nastupa isključivo putem prikladnog obrazovanja. Pojedinaac saznanjem postaje sposoban da se suprotstavi svom bivanju potčinjenim delovanju spoljašnje stvarnosti: on može da vodi svoj život umesto da biva stalno vođen uticajima koji dolaze spolja.

Ključne reči: znanje, Spinoza, oslobađanje, *Etika*, mašta, supstancija, modus, afekat, duh

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