Interpretation of affects: Spinozist approach to the issue of human emotionality

Hynek Tippelt¹

Abstract

This paper deals with the possibilities of using the ethical considerations of Baruch Spinoza in a psychotherapeutic context. I begin the interpretation by defining the basic features of Spinoza's ethics and their connection with the whole of his philosophical system. The core of the study is the interpretation of Spinoza's theory of affectivity and especially his concept of the transformation of passive affects into active, and what role philosophical knowledge plays in this transformation. The third part of the study then tries to show how selected points of Spinoza's introduced ideas can be useful for psychotherapeutic work. As much as the connection between philosophical ethics and psychotherapy seems obvious to many non-experts, most professionals on both sides are vehemently opposed to it. I believe that Spinoza's thinking is an example of how the boundaries of these disciplines can be meaningfully bridged.

Keywords: Spinoza, affects, freedom, Andreas-Salomé, ethics of psychotherapy

Introduction

In the last few decades, we have seen a clear renewal of interest in the teachings of the seemingly forgotten philosopher of the seventeenth century, Baruch Spinoza. As a result of his excommunication from the Jewish community and the placement of most of his writings on the Vatican's list of banned books, his work remained relatively unknown until the late eighteenth century, when it was rediscovered by philosophers in the context of the German-language discussion of the issue of pantheism (the so-called *Pantheismusstreit*) (Sobotka, 1999). It is typical of the nature of Spinoza's work that the controversy was caused mainly by fears about the possible ethical consequences of his ontology. During the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century in the context of the critique of metaphysics, or what the Czech philosopher Jiřina Popelová aptly describes as the “disintegration of classical philosophy” (Popelová, 1968), interest in Spinoza's ideas largely declined, but since the second half of the twentieth century they have attracted a significant amount of scholarly attention. Surprisingly, the renewed interest can be observed in a wide range of differently oriented philosophical authors, both in terms of their starting points and the disciplines in which they seek to use the Spinozist inspiration.² It seems as if time, in a way, has matured in appreciating the true significance of Spinoza's work. This text focuses on the possibilities of applying Spinozism in psychotherapeutic theory and practice.

The synthesis of philosophical and psychological approaches has its pitfalls. Philosophers often try to avoid “psychologism”, which they see as a misrepresentation of their views and a misunderstanding of the philosophical way of thematization as such. On the other hand, there is a frequent fear of inappropriate “rationalization” among psychotherapists, which, from their point of view, is a defense mechanism blocking the therapeutic process. In contrast, this study is intended to show that Spinoza's ethics is an example of the common field of these disciplines, and that their cooperation can be fruitful. The use of philosophy in the field of psychotherapy is an obvious choice especially in the domain of so-called deep-psychological approaches, i.e., where the existence of unconsciousness is taken into account; where working with the client's rational insight into their problems and their causes is a part of the psychotherapeutic method; and where the emphasis is on the verbal aspect of the therapeutic process. The most typical

¹ Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem (Czech Republic); hynek.tippelt@ujep.cz; ORCID: 0000-0002-1497-0361

² Cf. research in the field of the history of philosophy (Wim Klever), ontology (Louis Althusser, Gilles Deleuze), political philosophy (Antonio Negri), environmental ethics (Genevieve Lloyd), etc.

examples that meet these criteria are psychoanalytic psychotherapy, relatively popular today in Central Europe, and the traditional form of psychoanalysis, which is considerably less widespread. Philosophy can be used in the context of psychotherapy in at least three ways: as theoretical and methodological support for therapists; as a starting point for formulating the ethical focus of therapeutic work; and as a technical tool for achieving psychological change and consolidating it through rational insights.

The discussed topic presents us with the question of boundaries and the relation of various disciplines in the humanities, their hierarchy, and the possibilities of their mutual use or application. In our case, the specifics of Spinoza's thought further complicate the already mentioned problematic aspects of the relationship between philosophy and psychology (and psychotherapy) in terms of the possibility of its disciplinary classification. Although the title of his most famous work, *Ethics* (which will be the main subject of the following analysis), suggests that while the main perspective used is ethical, many authors question the clarity of this derivation. For example, Petrufová Joppová says that Spinoza's "thinking could be characterized as more meta-ethical than ethical" (Petrufová Joppová, 2018, p. 41); Garrett terms it "metaphysics of blessedness" (Garrett, 2018, p. 11); and Pereboom construes it as psychotherapy (Pereboom, 1994). In my opinion, the fundamental theses of Spinoza's philosophy (which will be discussed in the following chapter) imply that disciplinary distinctions are not appropriate for understanding his thought. In accordance with his monistic (or holistic) assumptions, anything can be properly understood only from its relationship to the whole; in other words, it is not possible to meaningfully focus only on a particular section of reality. However, certain questions, approaches, and concepts are traditionally assigned to certain disciplines; thus, we can understand Spinoza's *Ethics* as an interpretation of a philosophical system that begins with ontology, continues with gnoseology, anthropology, and psychology, and culminates in ethics in the sense of teaching about virtue, freedom, and goodness. Proceeding in a similar direction, the present text begins with an interpretation of Spinoza's ethically relevant ontological theses, continues with his psychology, and culminates in his ethics. However, it is always necessary to keep in mind the fundamental complexity and versatility of his thinking, which entails that it largely depends on the reader whether, for example, they will understand the proposition from the fifth part of *Ethics* as psychological, ethical, or psychotherapeutic statements.

According to Spinoza, we are subject to innumerable illusions, and one of those that baffle us the most is that we think we have free will. We are aware of our decisions, but "not even in our dreams" do we notice that (and to what extent) these are determined by the unconscious dynamics of our psychic life (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 239). Spinoza builds the interpretation of the logic of these mental movements on the concept of affects and the ideas by which affects are shaped. As much as free will is a dream for Spinoza, he understands that an essential prerequisite of a joyful and meaningful life is the liberation we attain with reason. If we want to free ourselves, our goal cannot be to escape our own nature that sets clear limits to our possibilities. However, we can use our mental abilities to purposefully transform our conception of the world, life, and the mind, and in consequence of these changes, the corresponding movements in our affectivity will necessarily take place. According to Spinoza, the strengthening and stability of the mind leads to the highest satisfaction associated with maximizing the performance of intellectual and other abilities.³ The foundations of Spinoza's ethics are outlined below in the chapter "Ontological character of Spinoza's ethics".

The chapter "Spinoza's Treatment of Affects" introduces Spinoza's concept of a complex process of mental maturation, which he calls *emendation of the Intellect*. It will be shown how, according to Spinoza, rational means of analysis and interpretation can be used for the overall

³ Cf. Spinoza, 2002a, Part V, pp. 363–382.

transformation of personality. Spinoza's ethics has the same goal as psychoanalysis, i.e. liberation, not just external but permanent. External liberation, liberation by external means, does not abolish addiction, but on the contrary deepens it. However, the intimate character of liberation does not mean that it has no external manifestations. When we recognize the independence of our affective states from external affairs and become aware of the role of our own conception of the world and mind as they shape our approach to the outside, we are driven to some degree of objective detachment from illusory – and by various fantasies – manipulated space, resulting from the ability to control our projections and their urgency through awareness of the mechanisms of which they are part. This perspective is a product of Spinozistic reasoning, and an insight immediately accompanied by emotions in a psychoanalytic situation.

The aim of the chapter “Spinoza as a philosopher of psychoanalysis” is to show in what respects Spinoza's ethical thinking may be relevant for psychoanalysis. It will be demonstrated that in addition to the assumptions of the existence of the unconscious and the possibility of targeted work with its contents, there are many other links between the thinking of Spinoza and Freud. Deleuze and Guattari refer to the kind of innocence contained in a Spinozistic perspective when they suggest that Spinozism is simply a matter of becoming a child (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013). The same motif of being deprived of social convention can be found, at least as an ideal, in the character of the psychoanalytic situation, which is naturally reflected in the final mood in which the client leaves therapy. The advantages of Spinoza's philosophy for the *philosophical* needs of psychoanalysis are related to the holistic nature of his reasoning and philosophical system, which was also reflected in the fact that his philosophy is a kind of meta-philosophy and he is a philosopher of philosophers. One of the defining features of Spinoza's ethics is the rejection of Cartesian dualism, of which contemporary Western civilization, in its predominant conception of the relationship between the mind and the body, is still a direct heir. A characteristic feature of Spinoza's conception of affectivity is that he does not understand it in isolation from the issue of knowledge. The decisive ontologically substantiated principle of Spinoza's anthropology of affects as directly shaped by knowledge explains the close connection within the whole of Spinoza's themes, which entitled him to call his completely elaborated system *Ethics* (Spinoza, 2002a). Naturally, even his ethics, in the narrower sense of how we can change our affectivity in the direction of joy, satisfaction, and peace of mind, is closely related to his ontological views, e.g. when he shows how mastering a deterministic interpretation leads to a certain degree of steadfastness. Spinoza's ethics can be understood as psychotherapy by philosophical means and, especially some passages of the last part of his central work, almost as a catalog of possible psychotherapeutic systems.

An endless line of prophets and visionaries have long encouraged us to realize the power of the way we look at the world and some of the opportunities we can unlock by changing our perspective. Spinoza complements his appeal with a detailed system of alternative world perception, thorough arguments for the claim that such changes are anthropologically possible and socially, psychologically, and metaphysically desirable, and detailed guidance on how to think if we want to achieve the highest possible satisfaction in affect, which he calls *intellectual love of God* and which can be described as “the definitive aha moment”.

Ontological character of Spinoza's ethics

Spinoza's thinking is distinguished by its admirable integrity. His most famous work, *Ethics Interpreted in a Geometric Way* (referred to as *Ethics*) is fascinating, among other things, in that it presents not only ethical considerations but an entire philosophical system, of which ethics is the most important outgrowth. His interpretation always refers to the essential ontological premises; according to his system, all “special” philosophical disciplines are derived from ontology. Spinoza's interpretation begins with a set of metaphysical claims, their central concept being substance – a term that covers the basic characteristics of God, which is

not materially different from Nature. Spinoza's ontology is traditionally referred to as monism, its theological analogy being pantheism. In *Ethics*, this concept, including its gnoseological aspect, is formulated by the key statement: "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God" (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 224). If substance is a subject of ontology, everything derives from it, and therefore no philosophical question can be addressed outside the context of fundamental ontological truths.

For the application of Spinoza's thinking in ethics and psychology, his conception of so-called psycho-physical parallelism, which follows from his monism and characterizes the relationship between body and mind, is crucial. In *Ethics*, it is formulated succinctly: "... mind and body are one and the same thing..." (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 280). In speaking of these two "spheres of being" as the same thing, Spinoza does not just mean unity in the sense of an inseparable union of two distinct parts: for him, mind is not a superficial epiphenomenon of matter, nor is it its opposite. The mind is also not united with the body in the sense of closeness, because it is not connected with it at all. The mind and the body are one and the same thing, not just two parts of the same thing. This important contribution of Spinozism was observed and convincingly described by Freud's student and colleague Lou Andreas-Salomé:

To grasp Spinoza it is only necessary to think through to its conclusion the concept that the physical and mental manifestations are representations of one another. That is quite a different thing from systematic parallelism, which the deepest wisdom now styles as 'cerebral localization' and the like. It is rather the conscious inward contemplation of the integrity and presentness of two worlds – as we reckon – which nowhere exclude or determine each other, because they are but one. It is the philosophical step that goes far beyond Freud (Andreas-Salomé, 1964, p. 75).

Spinoza defines his conception of the relationship between the mind and the body with the help of the concept of attribute, i.e. the way in which a substance can be manifested and understood: "...mind and body are one and the same thing, conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension..." (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 280). Thus, the mind is not causally connected to the body, because the mind, as well as the body, is no-thing. They are both aspects of the same thing as detected from different perspectives. There neither is nor can be a causal relationship between the mind and the body, more precisely between the mode (arrangement) of the corporeality (attribute of vastness) and the idea of this mode, because the mind and the body are not two things but one. For us as heirs of the Cartesian, i.e. dualistic, worldview, this concept can be quite counter-intuitive. Spinoza's conception can be interpreted by the fact that his theory of attributes speaks of their infinite number: "... nothing can be clearer than this, too, that an absolutely infinite entity must necessarily be defined... as an entity consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses a definite essence, eternal and infinite" (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 221).

The difficult notion of psycho-physical parallelism is to capture the fact that physical and psychological determination takes place in a sense independently of each other, and yet simultaneously, in parallel – the determination is neither psycho-physical nor physical-psychic. In *Ethics*, Spinoza expresses it unequivocally: "The body cannot determine the mind to think, nor can the mind determine the body to motion or rest, or to anything else (if there is anything else)" (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 279). With this ontology, Spinoza deliberately transcends the "stumbling block" of Cartesianism, that is, the impression of an impenetrable barrier between two fundamentally irreconcilable worlds – the body and the mind. The mental contents that constitute a particular mind are independent of the states of the respective body only in the sense of being another expression of the same and only because the contents and the states cannot be mutual causes. Spinoza further specifies; "So that which determines the mind to think

is a mode of Thinking, and not of Extension; that is..., it is not the body” (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 279).

In this sense, the mind has its own network of causes and effects, and the body has its own. The changes that take place in the mind are then understandable from the mind itself, as is the case with movements and changes of the body. The order of causes and effects is one, because the thing is also one the two aspects of which are the body and the mind. Spinoza presents this concept in *Ethics* by stating:

The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things” (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 247). In an explanatory note, he clarifies: “... whatever can be perceived by infinite intellect as constituting the essence of substance pertains entirely to the one sole substance. Consequently, thinking substance and extended substance are one and the same substance, comprehended now under this attribute, now under that. So, too, a mode of Extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, expressed in two ways (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 247).

Psychophysical parallelism (which results from monism) has an ethically and psychologically important consequence, which lies in the necessity of the existence of the unconscious. If the human psyche fully corresponds to the human body – i.e. if the mind is an idea of the body, then in the mind there is an infinite number of ideas corresponding to an infinite number of body parts, components, their relationships and changes. However, no one knows their body perfectly and is not aware of it in its complexity in a single moment, so if the mind is the same thing as the body, all that remains is to acknowledge the existence of unconscious ideas. It is essential in the context of ethical issues in that it excludes freedom of will: “... all men are born ignorant of the causes of things... men believe that they are free, precisely because they are conscious of their volitions and desires; yet concerning the causes that have determined them to desire and will they do not think, not even dream about, because they are ignorant of them” (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 239).

In Spinoza’s teaching on the unconscious determination of our will, his conception of the essence of a thing, the so-called *conatus* (from the Latin original of Spinoza’s formulation *conatus in suo esse perseverandi*), has a central position: “Each thing, insofar as it is in itself, endeavors to persist in its own being” (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 283). It might seem that everyone is aware of a certain drive for self-preservation, so that there is no need to invoke some “unconscious mind” right away. What exactly does the term *essence* mean? Spinoza’s definition reads: “I say that there pertains to the essence of a thing that which, when granted, the thing is necessarily posited, and by the annulling of which the thing is necessarily annulled; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and, vice versa, that which cannot be or be conceived without the thing” (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 244). It is therefore not a simple instinct of self-preservation, but an ontological principle from which the instinct of self-preservation is derived. In accordance with this principle, everything constantly strives to increase its energy, to assert more of its interests, to resist debilitating external influences. All the activities of the mind and the body are always a function of the *conatus*, even when it might seem that the thing is doing something that is destructive to it.

From the above definition of essence, it follows that we will understand our mental states and changes only when we consider their connection – of which we are normally unaware – with our effort to remain in existence, by which they are determined. This point of the present interpretation is not generally accepted, e.g., Michael Della Rocca rejects this possibility, arguing that the *conatus* is always conscious (Della Rocca, 2003). Among Czech authors, for example, Martin Vrabec believes that “for Spinoza, indeed, all thinking is conscious: it is conscious knowledge, whether adequate or inadequate” (Vrabec, 2005, p. 52). In contrast, Jerome Neu asserts that “Spinoza leaves room for unconscious desires, and the operation of

confused and inadequate ideas, in his terms, is very like the operation of unconscious ones, but he does not have a theory of repression and the unconscious. Passive emotions may be due to (unconscious) processes of association, and ideas may be determined by other ideas of which the mind is not aware” (Neu, 1977, p. 148). It can be argued that the views of the “deniers of the unconscious” have not been influenced by what psychoanalysis calls resistance, i.e. the reaction of the ego to displaced contents, of which to become conscious may cause a certain degree of anxiety.

In denying the existence of free will, is Spinoza not a simple immoralist or fatalist, a philosopher of ethical nihilism? If we look at his central work, *Ethics*, we find the term *freedom* in the title of the fifth, final part: “Of the power of the intellect, or of human freedom” [“De potentia intellectus seu de libertate humana”]. Spinoza certainly believes that freedom in a sense is possible. He clarifies his understanding of free will in the introduction of the whole book: “That thing is said to be free [liber] which exists solely from the necessity of its own nature, and is determined to action by itself” (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 217). How is the absence of free will and freedom as self-determination compatible? The title of the fifth part of *Ethics* suggests that the role of reason is crucial here. Liberation is not a change in will, but a change in understanding. To understand the power of this change, we must now become acquainted with what Spinoza says we can control with reason, that is, affect.

Spinoza’s remedies for the affects

The mind can be viewed statically, that is, as a set of thoughts or psychic data that Spinoza refers to as ideas. His basic concept for describing the dynamic and changeable side of the mind is an affect. The long dualistic tradition tends to understand these concepts in a competitive way. The heirs to this tradition can easily imagine that the “power of reason”, which Spinoza discusses in the last part of *Ethics*, consists in trying to overcome and suppress affects with the help of some abstract and inanimate ideas, which may be so vivid as to make us tremble. This is seemingly indicated by the introductory sentences of this section, where Spinoza promises that he “shall be dealing with the power of reason, pointing out the degree of control reason has over the emotions” (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 363). However, it was precisely this misunderstanding that Spinoza thought it necessary to address in the following paragraphs of the introduction to the final part of *Ethics*. In his conception, the notions of reason and emotion do not occupy the role of opposites, so there is no struggle between them in his teaching. Rather, the relationship between ideas and affects is construed in terms of implication: affects are shaped by ideas. It is through this constitutive relationship that Spinoza develops the possibility of “the power of reason over affect”. Thus, when in one of his books he speaks of the “emendation of the Intellect” (Spinoza, 2002b), it is a matter of transforming the “ideological basis” of what we perceive as feelings, emotions, and passions. Such an “ideological transformation”, which can become the basis of an emotional transformation, is a matter of extensive thought work on a complete / holistic revision of our view of the world and human being in it. Let us now turn to the central relevant definitions: “By emotion [affectus] I understand the affections of the body by which the body’s power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections” (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 278).

To understand the meaning of Spinoza’s concept of liberation through the power of reason over affect, we need to understand the key distinction between the two kinds of affect –passive and active. The second definition, which precedes the previous one in this text, introduces a distinction between activity and passivity:

I say that we are active when something takes place, in us or externally to us, of which we are the adequate cause; that is, (by preceding Def.), when from our nature there follows in us or externally to us something which can be clearly and distinctly understood through our nature alone. On the other hand, I say that we are passive when

something takes place in us, or follows from our nature, of which we are only the partial cause (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 278).

In this definition, Spinoza refers to the following: “I call that an adequate cause whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through the said cause. I call that an inadequate or partial cause whose effect cannot be understood through the said cause alone” (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 278). A distinction remains between active and passive effects: “... if we can be the adequate cause of one of these affections, then by emotion I understand activity, otherwise passivity” (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 278).

According to Spinoza, the possibility of liberation lies precisely in the possibility of transforming our passive affect into active affect. I would call this point the very core of Spinoza’s ethics in terms of possible ways in which we can shape the quality of our lives. In addition to it, Spinoza contemplates other ways. To understand them we need to clarify the second fundamental difference between two opposite types of affect – joy (or pleasure) and sorrow (or pain):

We see then that the mind can undergo considerable changes, and can pass now to a state of greater perfection, now to one of less perfection, and it is these passive transitions [passiones] that explicate for us the emotions of Pleasure [laetitia] and Pain [tristitia]. So in what follows I shall understand by pleasure “the passive transition of the mind to a state of greater perfection”, and by pain “the passive transition of the mind to state of less perfection” (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 285).

This could baffle the reader, as the subject here is only passive affects. However, several pages further on, Spinoza adds: “Besides the pleasure and desire that are passive emotions, there are other emotions of pleasure and desire that are related to us insofar as we are active” (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 309).

The distinction is therefore between passive desire, joy, and sadness on the one hand, and active desire and joy on the other. Spinoza does not propose an active counterpart to grief. The defining difference between active and passive affects is based on the difference between adequate and inadequate ideas: “... an emotion, or passivity of the mind, is a ‘confused idea’. For we have demonstrated ... that the mind is passive only to the extent that it has inadequate or confused ideas” (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 319). The power of reason over affects lies in replacing inadequate ideas with adequate ones. Thus, intellectual knowledge acquires an ethical dimension, as it increases the level of joy and activity at the expense of sadness and passivity, which for Spinoza is the intention of all ethical efforts. At the same time, knowledge is the best way to achieve these goals, because if we used other ways, we would be more or less dependent on external causes: “... there is available to us no more excellent remedy for the emotions than that which consists in a true knowledge of them, since there is no other power of the mind than the power of thought and of forming adequate ideas...” (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 367).

Since the idea of a certain state lies in the identification of its causes, the power of reason over affect, Spinoza’s “therapeutic tool”, rests in the power of reason to re-understand the causes of things differently. For example, the affect of love, according to Spinoza, is the affect of joy accompanied by the cause of joy. If the cause of joy is understood as external, the affect is passive (and thus can easily turn into sorrow), while if it is understood as internal, the affect is active (so there is no danger of it fluctuating).

The range of techniques by which – in Spinoza’s view – affectivity can be tempered, and passive effects reduced or turned into active ones, is very clearly classified by Jon Wetlesen. The title of this chapter refers to Spinoza’s literal designation of these techniques, i.e. “remedies for the affects” [remedia affectuum]. From Wetlesen’s detailed analysis, I would mention here his distinction between two types of so-called liberation strategies, several *gradual* and one *instantaneous*: “The gradual strategies are based on the values and norms of reason, and on the

basic law of motivation which states that an affect ‘cannot be checked or destroyed except by a contrary emotion which is stronger than the emotion which is to be checked’” (Wetlesen, 1979, p. 5).

While gradual strategies of liberation are aimed at changing the degree of the joyfulness of an affect, the sudden strategy completely changes our state from passive to active. Gradual strategies focus on norms and refinements, while the sudden strategy transcends all norms and does not allow for further refinements. Gradual strategies are based on recognizing the relationships between feelings and ideas and on realizing the context within the mind instead of relating internal states to external objects:

If we remove an agitation of the mind, or emotion, from the thought of its external cause, and join it to other thoughts, then love or hatred toward the external cause, and also vacillations, that arise from these emotions will be destroyed (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 365).

An emotion toward a thing which we imagine merely in itself, and not as necessary, possible, or contingent, is the greatest of all emotions, other things being equal (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 367).

Insofar as the mind understands all things as governed by necessity, to that extent it has greater power over emotions, i.e. it is less passive in respect of them” (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 367).

As we correct our opinions about the world and the workings of the mind, we gradually liberate ourselves, thus alleviating the confusion of our affects and their dependence on notions of external events.

Wetlesen’s instantaneous strategy then consists in the possibility of completely changing our state by a radical change of our worldview. This strategy consists in realizing that each of our states is related to the overall state of the universe and to each thing separately, and that in this sense it expresses God’s action. It is actually adopting or recalling the fundamental Spinozistic teaching that everything is contained in God. This knowledge forms in the mind a state of the happiest and most active affect, *amor Dei intellectualis*, the intellectual love of God. Of the propositions that belong to Spinoza’s “remedies”, Wetlesen attributes a sudden strategy to this one: “A passive emotion ceases to be a passive emotion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea” (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 366).

If we realize what an affect is, in what sense it depends on God, and what God is, we will see that the affect is not passive, but God of necessity creates it. This awareness opens the way to conscious identification with God. God as the cause of God is free, and so in finding our oneness with God we also find our freedom.

Instantaneous strategy does not actually function as an aid to change our state – from passive to active, from non-free to free, etc. – but paradoxically shows that no change is needed. From the point of view of eternity, our states are not passive, but active, and their subject is not ourselves as modes, but the substance itself. The sudden strategy reveals that freedom is something we always have without knowing it. The “royal technique of liberation” leads to the view that all states are active because they are states of a single substance that is determined only by itself. The mind that knows these truths is experiencing a state of rational love for God. This love is the joy that reality forms a whole of interconnected things. It is complete satisfaction, because the mind is aware in this state that it is eternal, and it is also the highest activity, because its source is the very essence of the mind – its oneness with God.

It might seem that the presented “treatment of affects” has nothing to do with ethics in the sense of caring for moral values, that it completely misses morality, humanity, and even the simplest effort to “be good”. I will leave the verification of this suspicion to the reader. I would

just like to point out that in the opinion of Albert Einstein, Spinoza's "point of view has not gained general acceptance by all those striving for clarity and logical rigor only because it requires not only consistency of thought but also unusual integrity, magnanimity and – modesty" (Jammer, 2002, p. 45).

Spinoza as a philosopher of psychoanalysis

The first thing that attracts the psychoanalytically trained reader of Spinoza's *Ethics* is perhaps the largely identical ethos that connects the two areas. The uncompromisingly deterministic conception of the psyche leads to a certain "collision" of the usual "too human" ambitions and comforting notions of exclusivity. While Spinoza removes the belief in the noble election of man and his exclusive position in the whole of creation altogether, psychoanalysis "undermines" it in the particulars of ordinary experience. While Spinoza was frequently seen as a destroyer of all morality, psychoanalysis is haunted by the reputation of a "dangerous method" (Kerr, 1994), and the psychoanalyst often becomes a target of hatred for interpretations that destroy the client's narcissistic illusions and defensive rationalizations. However, there is no real immoralism here: it is another kind of morality distinct from the usual norm. Although its realization is not anti-social at all, its values are not derived from any regard for society or the other. Selfishness is the last thing that would be the subject of shyness here; on the contrary, the hypocrisy of altruism is understood as what is pernicious. Being oneself and being self-aware is what matters because it is a path to contentment, morality, and happiness, all of which will of course be reflected in social benefits, relationship stability, and sensitivity to the needs of others.

The reserve to the majority morality and the suspicious attitude towards its ulterior motives may give the impression of moral primitivism: "There is nothing good or bad in things as they are in themselves. Nothing is wrong with our passions except the suffering they cause us" (Gilead, 1999, p. 175). Gilead further updates Spinoza's teachings with the help of the metaphysical concept of panenmentalism (Gilead, 2003). However, both the Spinozist and the psychoanalyst proudly declare such moral "simplicity": "What primitive man knew all along, that life is all we have to obey, that 'joy is perfection' (Spinoza), we rediscover only in states of untrammelled ecstasy antithetical to morality – inspired states of the noblest egoism" (Andreas-Salomé, 1964, p. 36). The Freudians could be quite foreign to Spinoza's claim to the knowledge of the highest good, which, according to him, lies in the knowledge of God. Andreas-Salomé points to this religious aspect at the heart of the seemingly boundless immoralism of natural morality when she mentions the grandeur of egoism, which, in its quest for joy, meets the commitment to serve life. Spinozism can thus point psychoanalysis to a dimension for which Freud's conception of morality had no understanding. While morality is always a sensitive area for Freud, because it is a set of prohibitions expressing efforts to suppress desires and directives to regulate them, for Spinoza and Andreas-Salomé it is a guide to a happy and contented life.

Spinoza and Freud both saw rational reasoning as the best way to deal with the conflicts that our mental lives entail. According to them, general insight of the laws of the functioning of the psyche, and the understanding of specific determinations, have the potential to liberate us from annoying feelings, undesirable habits, and destructive tendencies. Neither of them made the naive assumption that it was possible to change oneself or another simply by telling the truth. Real awareness and recognition of thought processes, especially conflicting ones, is a long-term mission. Although Spinoza apparently believed in the power of reason more than Freud did, he did not think that our passions could be silenced by the "voice of reason". The psychoanalysts Ostrow and Scharfstein believe to have found in Spinoza's approach an exaggerated emphasis on order in a way of overcompensation balanced by an excessive willingness to resist order (Ostrow & Scharfstein, 1952, p. 232). The emphasis on following the rules is certainly in line

with Spinoza's entire philosophy, but to a large extent it is also typical of psychoanalytic techniques. According to them, *Ethics* is a book that blends the sheer number of contradictions and surprisingly obvious mistakes with the illusion of precise argumentation. The contradiction between necessary immutability and sudden freedom can, in their view, be seen in Spinoza's theory of passive and active affects and in his determinism, an uneasy fit with his doctrine of freedom as being in the power of reason (Ostrow & Scharfstein, 1952, p. 235). However, it is not appropriate to describe Spinoza's "freedom" as sudden, because the only freedom that comes to mind is God's eternal freedom of being God's own cause. It is also misleading to understand Spinoza's concepts of passive and active affects in terms of opposing positions, between which the mind somehow mysteriously shifts. Spinoza's concept, on the other hand, makes it possible to understand the graded nature of affectivity, which shows liberating change as a gradual process of overcoming passivity and expanding and deepening activity.

One of those who appreciated the potential of the Spinozist approach to emotionality was the renowned Californian philosopher and psychoanalyst Jerome Neu: "If thoughts and beliefs are essential constituents of emotions, we can go some way towards understanding how psychoanalytic therapies (as opposed to 'non-rational' behaviorist manipulations) can alter emotional life by changing beliefs" (Neu, 1977, p. 2). Spinoza's belief that the greatest power of the mind lies in knowing the essence of things corresponds to the psychoanalytic emphasis on the rational elaboration of insights into the nature of individual psychic phenomena, which leads to their integration into a coherent system of representations and motives. One advantage of the psychoanalytic approach in psychotherapy is that in addition to changes in behavior and experience, it also leads to an understanding of the therapeutic process itself. Since key psychoanalytic concepts can be interpreted within Spinoza's theory of mind, Spinoza's philosophy can be expected to explain what can only be considered as an axiom or empirically observed in psychoanalysis. Therefore, Neu concludes that in Spinoza we can find a way to understand how psychoanalysis works (Neu, 1977, p. 2).

Spinozistic substantive monism, as well as its derived psychophysical parallelism, lead us to the concept of the mind, which forms a single whole in which no bifurcation of causes is possible, but in which all contents are connected by a single network of mutual determination. According to this concept, the mental state is never affected by the physical state, although it corresponds to it structurally, because the former is an idea of the latter. Such a concept justifies a psychoanalytic approach, which does not exclude "empty words" from the field of possible interpretation, and according to which even silence is always filled with the densest content. It might seem that the deterministic conception of the mind shared by Spinoza and Freud fundamentally precludes the meaningfulness of any effective effort for psychological change. However, such a resignation does not in any way result from such a concept, where the ego, self, or anything else, which we understand as the center of our activity, is not excluded from general determinism, while Spinozist ontology does not allow any such exceptions. Precisely because there is only one order of the whole, we have access to it. Conversely, the popular biological concept in which psychic processes are derived from physical ones, or a religious-dualistic concept that would separate us from what concerns us in the manner of an immortal soul independent of the transient body, could be the basis for a misunderstanding called fatalism.

Precisely because it is part of the same causal network as emotionality, mental activity can lead to liberation from unwanted affects and thus to happiness. At the same time, reason is not in the position of a competitor of affects, a force that should suppress them. Spinoza's "remedies for the emotion" [*remedia affectuum*] are not intended to displace unwanted effects, but to consciously mitigate or reduce them, complemented by one "royal technique" of forming the affect he justified as the most desirable and which he called *intellectual love of God*. In an atheistic interpretation, which is more acceptable to most practicing psychoanalysts, we can

understand the concept of intellectual love for God as the joy that comes from the view that everything is related to everything. The joy of such a view is understandable because it is the fact of the impenetrable connection of everything with everything that is the guarantee of our power. The patient's experience in viewing the newly discovered connections of previously "incompatible" (conflicting) psychic facts (memories and demands of the superego, etc.) has the character of relief and liberation, as it includes acknowledging our own contribution to mental formation and disintegrating the illusion of being a victim of the past, circumstances, or other external pressures.

The concept of change in affectivity as resulting from change in the understanding of causes corresponds to Freud's principle: "Where id was, there ego shall be" (Freud, 1973, p. 112). Freud speaks about changing the center of mental activity. While we are usually determined by our unconscious instinctual component or, on the other hand, by the equally unconscious component of morality, duties, and obligations, which are closely related to instincts in their genesis through Oedipus complex, the goal of the psychoanalytic process should be to become relatively conscious subjects of our mental activities. In the spirit of nuanced understanding of affectivity, where the black-and-white contrast does not pitch the extremes against one another, Freud points out that the boundaries between individual mental instances – id, ego, superego – are not as clearly defined as the artificial boundaries of political geography. Instead, he compares them to modern paintings, in which colored surfaces overlap and merge in different ways. He concedes that what was initially sharply separated must also be left to the possibility of merging; that the boundaries between individual instances may change significantly during individual development; and that these changes may take a different form in different personalities. In his view, this applies especially phylogenetically to the youngest of these divisions, namely the boundaries between the ego and the superego (Freud, 1973).

"Insofar as the mind understands all things as governed by necessity, to that extent it has greater power over emotions, i.e. it is less passive in respect of them" (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 367). As soon as we understand clearly that the feelings we suffer were not caused by chance, but that they are the result of necessary causes, we will cease to suffer from them. For example, if we believe that the thief who robbed us was determined by his hunger or the need to feed his child, we certainly feel less angry than if we imagine that he impoverished us out of envy, some other resentment, or "pleasure". However, this example illustrates only relatively little progress in "mitigating affects" because, when imagining what was on the thief's mind, we assume that the cause of our feelings lies somewhere outside of us. Only if we focus on the dynamics that take place within ourselves can we free ourselves from the feelings that engulf us: why actually do we mind that someone robbed us? The less we are aware of the causes of our emotional reactions, the more upset we will become by the event of robbery, and we will be powerless against our anger. We will perceive similar situations as narcissistic injuries (threats to our value and self-love), and in our understanding of what is going on, we will stop at the fact that something like this "just shouldn't have happened". On the other hand, if we become aware of the inner causes of feeling threatened, and if we look at our interests and understand the situation in which such a thief put us, we will be able to control our affect and calm our minds.

Certainly, such an introspective effort can be risky. We may find that the thief reminded us of ourselves in moments we would rather forget. Even with such a view, however, the path to reconciliation can begin, for it assures us that, in the end, it can be none other than us who is to blame for what is happening to us. It shows us that we only thought we were passive. In fact, we ourselves were the only cause, so we were active without realizing it. We could say that the process of understanding ourselves is not about turning passive effects into active ones, but about realizing that we have always been active. A reinterpretation of the affects which reveals their inner source does not lead to any fatalism, but awakens us to activity, because if it were us who shaped our affects, it could be us again who will change it. The objection that this is

just a kind of a relatively hidden activity because it is oriented only to our heart can be easily refuted. Our mind is not separated from our body; both are the same thing. Therefore, if there are changes in the psyche, there are necessarily physical changes. It is not possible to change the experience without changing the behavior. Active feelings are necessarily reflected in active behavior.

Conclusion

The idea of combining Spinozism and psychoanalysis is not new. First introduced by Lou Andreas-Salomé, it was echoed by several authors, most notably Jerome Neu. While Andreas-Salomé's contributions are mostly in the form of sketchy ideas of a genius privy to the psychoanalytic practice who does not need to elaborate on her unique intuition, Neu intended to defend his theses, but at some points he misconstrued Spinoza – for example, in terms of the question of the existence of unconsciousness. The aim of the present study is to summarize in a nutshell the available considerations presented in this regard that could be useful in terms of inspiration and guidance in two ways: to explain to philosophers how Spinoza's ethics can be implemented in the field of psychotherapy; to introduce psychoanalytic psychotherapists into the possibility of philosophical grounding and conceptual refinement of the procedures they use, which may suffer from a certain uncertainty or hesitation without similar support. Regarding the possibility of psychoanalytic work with unconscious content, two points that Spinoza's philosophy justifies play a key role: first, the holistic nature of the psyche, and second, the connection between idea and affect. The former implies the usefulness of the free association technique, through which material relevant to the understanding of symptoms can be obtained; the latter, the possibility of transforming affectivity into rational knowledge (psychoanalysis uses the terms *interpretation* and *construction*).

In addition to contributing to the systematic question of which type of psychotherapy represents an adequate application of Spinoza's ethics, and in addition to partial inspirations for psychoanalysts groping about the philosophical foundations of their therapeutic approach, the ethical benefit of this study lies in clarifying that interpretations focused on the unconscious inner causes of emotional states do not necessarily lead to fatalistic resignation, but on the contrary shed light on the meaning and reality of the activity, thus arousing courage. From the point of view of everyday experience, it may seem that fear protects us. But fear is a passive affect and as such can and should be overcome. When we are part of a single whole, a single thing, we are always determined and at the same time always active; we are constantly changing, but we are eternal. However, is it "realistically" possible to get around without fear and other negative – or, to use Spinoza's term: sad – emotions? Spinoza responds with an assertion that "in the case of all actions to which we are determined by a passive emotion, we can be determined thereto by reason without that emotion" (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 351). How can we imagine this? The following example from Spinoza may lead us to answer: "This corollary can be illustrated by the example of the sick man and the healthy man. The sick man eats what he dislikes through fear of death. The healthy man takes pleasure in his food and thus enjoys a better life than if he were to fear death and directly seek to avoid it. Likewise, the judge who condemns a man to death not through hatred or anger but solely through love of public welfare is guided only by reason" (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 353). It turns out that the ultimate answer that Spinoza's ethics can give to all such questions is nothing but love of life, which is not surprising given that he also claims that the primary motive for everything is the effort to remain in existence.

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