

The ethical significance of substance-God difference in Spinoza's Ethics I

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You cannot think of eternity
Think of it like time
You try to think, you try to count
You just mess up your mind

Well I think about life, we don't know
Whether it all could be in vain
Look through time, it's for sure
It's the greatest gift to man
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Abstract:

Following paper argues for such a reading of first two books of Spinoza's Ethics that would better correspond to the last two books, namely connecting the ontological views with the ethical accounts. As a mean serves the notion of conatus, which I understand as a bridge between Spinoza's ontology and ethic. If we understand conatus in its active meaning of in suo esse perseverare, than we can better show the unity of Spinoza's Ethics and moreover explain why is his ontological account needed for interpreting his moral philosophy and ethics.

Key words:

Spinoza – conatus – ethics – ontology – God - substance

Introduction

In the following paper I will present an argument that puts forward one possible explanation of the role of the God and the 'God – substance' relation in the first book of Spinoza's *Ethics*. The role and the distinction can be more easily conceived if we have a look on later parts of the *Ethics* that deals with the position of human beings within the order of the world (i.e. bondage, freedom, knowledge and well-being). Some interpreters such as Edwin Curley or Henry E. Allison¹ don't show this important link between the first and the last book of the *Ethics* in explicate way. As a result the metaphysics and the ontology come out as the most important issue of the book called *Ethics*. In my view this link forms essential part in understanding Spinoza's concern in this book. Since man, as any other existing entity, actively persists in its own being (*conatus*), he has some inner activity and power to do so. It is pleasure (or joy) that is always good and increases our power. And the highest good is the intellectual love (knowledge) of the God. Therefore in order to persist in our being we gain the power and activity to do so from the love of God. And since it is hard to imagine loving an abstract and totally impersonal substance or nature, Spinoza must introduce such a

¹ Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, Princeton University Press, 1986 [further Curley]. Henry E. Allison, *Benedict de Spinoza: An Introduction*, Yale University Press, 1987; [further Allison].

conception, where the God would be the possible object of the highest possible intellectual and emotional effort of the men – the intellectual love.

Deus, sive substantia, necessario existit?

While reading the first book of Spinoza's most known work we have to deal with two problems obvious on first look. Why Spinoza calls his book the *Ethics* and consequently what is the role of the first, mostly metaphysical and ontological, part within this book? Second, why he introduces several definitions (EId1, 3 & 6) when further in the book he gives several arguments for the identity of the objects of these definitions? Not that those would be the only problems, but they are usually the first ones coming into our mind when we glance behind the veil of scholastic terminology and geometrical method of Spinoza's work.

For the first question, which itself demands a broad examination of the whole Spinoza's work, I can give now only several hints and show one of them in detail during the argument of this paper. First we have to understand that the *Ethics* is not compound of several distinct 'Books' presenting different parts of the philosophical system (i.e. an ontology or a theology; an epistemology with a physics, and a physiology, politics and finally an ethics).² The whole title of the book is: "*Ethics demonstrated in geometric order and divided into five parts*", the whole book is the ethic and it is presented in the geometrical form. So the first passages constitute the fundamental grounds for the ethic as such and thus form its inevitable part. We are given some bases on which we can further build the ethical system up to its highest point. Thus the entire argument of the *Ethics* culminates in the intellectual love of God, which gives both a power to the human mind to persist in its own being and a possibility to transcend its finitude and be united with the eternal. This, I hope, will be clearer from the whole paper, which will follow in a certain way similar structure as the *Ethics* – it will start with the ontology *sive* theology and finish with the ethical account.

Let me introduce the theme of the God by a brief account upon the Cartesian conception to which Spinoza had to react in his writings. Descartes introduces the concept of God in the *First Meditation*; the God is there described as my creator and as omnipotent being. Further he declares that God is said to be extremely good, so he would not deceive me. Late in the *Third Meditation* he defines God as a supremely perfect and infinite being. So we can clearly conclude that if the God is supremely perfect, we cannot conceive him as lacking any property, which involves any perfection (that avoids God of possessing bad properties or any imperfectness) and each of these positive properties he possesses without any further limitation.

In the conception and the description of the God in the *Ethics*, Spinoza on the one hand uses several Cartesian's motives, especially while giving an argument for the existence of God, on the other hand the entire result clearly contradicts the vision of the God as the

² For following argument cf.: Pierre Macherey, *From Action to Production of Effects*, [further Macherey] in Spinoza : critical assessments, (ed.) Genevieve Lloyd, New York: Routledge, 2001. [161-180] p. 162.

Creator. That means he contradicts the vision that was present throughout the whole scholastic tradition and that is still present in Descartes.³ The definition of God comes due to the geometrical order as the sixth one. If we insist that geometrical order shows us not only the successive order of fundamentality of different entities, i.e. from the most fundamental and general to the more complex entities, but also the importance of these entities (those two ‘orders’ are perhaps for Spinoza one and the same) then we can clearly see that freedom and eternity are the two most complex and important themes to which the demonstration of the *Ethics* leads.

Spinoza’s defines God in following way:

By *God*, I mean a being absolutely infinite - that is, a substance consisting in infinite attributes, of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality.
(EID6)⁴

Already in this definition we see that the God is identified with the substance. We see that Spinoza adopts only several abstract parts of Cartesian conception and he definitely does not treat God as somehow external to other things, which is needed by the scholastical and Cartesian theory of the God (cf. the impossibility of creation in EIP6).

Here we have to give a brief account on the conception of substance, with which is the God identified. Spinoza’s substance is explained (EID3) in its ontological and gnoseological (conceptual) independence. It does not only ‘exists in itself’, but also ‘must be conceived in itself’. According to EIP5 there cannot be any plurality of the substances with the same attributes⁵ and further Spinoza shows that there cannot be any plurality of substances with different attributes. Since:

One substance cannot be produced by another substance,
(EIP6)
and
Existence belongs to the nature of substance, (EIP7)
and
Every substance is necessarily infinite. (EIP8)

It is clear that no substance is finite. It is indeed infinite in the absolute sense. So it is basically proved that there is one infinite substance (which might be already by EID6 called

³ Allison: pp. 59-61.

⁴ For English translation of the *Ethics* I am using the text by R.H.M. Elwes available in MTSU Philosophy WebWorks Hypertext Edition © 1997.

⁵ To the problem of the substance – attribute relation see Curley: pp. 23 – 38; or Allison: 48 – 53. Curley gives brief summary of the relations between the substance, its attributes and modes. He does not go into the depth of the several problems (e.g. the Leibnizian problem with ‘principle of indiscernibles’); Allison tries to suggest a solution according to which we have to treat the substance as a necessary and universal order of the things. Attributes would then be different forms in which the order is expressed or different perspectives from which it can be viewed (Allison: 49-50). Although this suggestion has my sympathy I cannot avoid a doubt how could such attributes – perspectives possibly constitute the essence of the substance in the strong ontological sense. Then we have to identify the attributes with the substance in the sense: “*each of them is substance*,”

God, but Spinoza gives even further proofs for it in EIP11S) and no other can exist or be conceived (EIP11 & P14). In EIP6 Spinoza refuses the concept of creation known from the Judeo-Christian tradition. This proposition is supported by the argument, that “two substances, whose attributes are different, have nothing in common,” (EIP2) and “Things, which have nothing in common, cannot be one the cause of the other.” (EIP3), perhaps ones more supported by EIA6: “Things which have nothing in common cannot be understood, the one by means of the other; the conception of one does not involve the conception of the other.”

This would be perhaps too weak proof for the existence of God. The whole argument would be based on the identification of the God with the substance in the sixth definition. So far it was proved that there is only one substance. Now in proofs and a note to EIP11, Spinoza puts forward several arguments for the existence of God.⁶ Although the demonstration of EIP11 uses the definition of God there are at least three different demonstration or arguments for God’s existence given further in the text. The fact that no other proposition in the *Ethics* has more then two demonstrations shows that the God and God’s existence play a crucial role within the Spinozian system.

According to the first demonstration we cannot think about God as not existing, while in this case his essence would not involve his existence (cf. EIA7) and since the God is defined as the substance (EID6) and substances by their nature exist (EIP7), it is clearly absurd to conceive of God as nonexistent. Although there is no direct textual evidence to confirm this, we can suppose that in his first proof Spinoza uses Descartes’ description of God given in the *Fifth Metitation* in the connection with so-called ontological argument: the most perfect being must exist. “Of everything whatsoever a cause or reason must be assigned, either for its existence, or for its non-existence,” says the first sentence of the second argument. While there cannot be conceived any reason or cause (Spinoza uses the connection of terms ‘cause sive reason’ here) for God’s nonexistence, he therefore must exist. And in order to avoid possible infinite regress Spinoza introduced the God as a ‘*causa sui*’⁷ – there is no possible cause for God’s non-existence and if he is cause of his own existence (because he is a substance), there is no other way for him then to exist. In the third demonstration we are told, that to exist is ‘having power’, while not to exist is ‘lacking power’. And since, as we have seen above, the God is the most perfect being he cannot lack any power, while the ordinary finite things exist, than the more and most perfect Being must exist as well. Because of this

albeit substance as grasped from a particular point of view” (Allison: 50). If it is so simple, why than wouldn’t be mentioned by Spinoza himself or anyhow pointed out in the text of the *Ethics*.

⁶ The definite number might vary if we do or do not accept the proof in the note as independent one. Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *The Coherence of Spinoza’s Definitions of God in Ethics I, Proposition 11*, in *Spinoza : critical assessments*, (ed.) Genevieve Lloyd, New York: Routledge, 2001. [61-77].

⁷ ‘*Causa sui*’ is the first term defined in the *Ethics*. It is the last *fundus* or principle assuring not only the existence of all other things but by self-causality its own origin as well. Cf. Allison p. 61; the God as ‘*causa sui*’ is needed in the Spinozian epistemology as well, since knowledge is knowledge of the causes (EIA4).

procedure from finite things to infinite God's being Spinoza calls it in the *scholium* to this demonstration 'an *aposteriori* proof'.

In the following proposition (EIP14) Spinoza writes: "*besides God no substance can be granted or conceived*". This is derived from the definition of the God mentioned above (EID6) and is supported by EIP11, which was examined in detail in the previous paragraph and from EIP5: "*there cannot exist in the universe two or more substances having the same nature or attribute.*"⁸ Therefore we are left with kind of monistic idea of the One, which has to be further structured and analyzed.

So far we have seen that God exists and Spinoza identifies him with the substance and the '*causa sui*'. This identification was used in the arguments for God's existence, but it must be proved in a more demonstrable way. First we can see that Spinoza identifies the substance and the '*causa sui*', the entities which are at the demonstrations for EIP11 both identified with God:

Existence belongs to the nature (essence) of substance.

(EIP7)⁹

Substance is by nature prior to its modifications. (EIP1)

Together with the definition of '*causa sui*':

By '*causa sui*' I mean that of which the essence involves existence, or that of which the nature is only conceivable as existent. (EID1)

According to this argument the substance and whatever the substance is, is '*causa sui*' there is no external cause for the existence of any substance. The actual essence of any substance includes its existence because of its self-causality, while there could be nothing else prior to substance, what could be its cause. Furthermore from the proved existence of the God (EIP11) with the help of the definition of the God as a being consisting of infinite number of attributes (EID6) and EIP5:

There cannot exist in the universe two or more substances having the same nature or attribute,

which was discussed above as well, we can conclude the identity of God and the substance. Further identification of the God and the '*causa sui*' can be done by simple logical rule [if $A = B$ & $B = C$ then $A = C$]. Textual evidence for such a move in the argumentation can be found not only at the demonstration of EIP11, but for example in corollary for EIP24:

... God is cause of the being of things (*essendi rerum*). For whether things exist, or do not exist, whenever we

⁸ Further argument for EIP5 can be composed from following: definitions EIDD3, 4 & 5 and axioms EIA1 & 6; detailed presentation of the argument can be found in Curley, pp. 10-19.

⁹ For interpretation of this proposition see: Alexander Matheron, *Essence, Existence and Power in Ethics I.*, [further Matheron] in Spinoza : critical assessments, (ed.) Genevieve Lloyd, New York: Routledge, 2001 [23-34].

contemplate their essence, we see that it involves neither existence nor duration; consequently, it cannot be the cause of either the one or the other. God must be the sole cause, inasmuch as to him alone does existence appertain.

We can find further textual evidence for this supposition in the proof for the EIP34: “*from the sole necessity of the essence of God it follows that the God is the cause of himself.*” In the *scholium* for EIP29 Spinoza adds the identification of God with the nature in the sense of *natura naturans*, active principle behind the ordinary things, *natura naturata*, which are according to EIP25C nothing but affections of God’s attributes, or modes by which God’s attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way. This proposition, as we shall see, has far reaching ethical connotation as well, although these connotations might be now absolutely unclear and mysterious. So we can see that the God is a self-cause and therefore free cause (EIP17C2) and he produces and acts on things other than God in virtue of the laws of his own nature.¹⁰

So far we have seen the strict monistic vision following from certain interpretation of the first book of the *Ethics*. In my point of view the substance, nature (as ‘*natura naturans*’) and God are one and the same entity, *ens absolutum*, as a fundamental self-causing active principle. Each of these is *ens absolutum*, albeit *ens absolutum* as grasped from a particular point of view. This absolute being manifests itself in different ways and as such must be conceived, but it cannot be conceived in an adequate way if we do not see the unity of these different manifestations. In following sections it will be described why Spinoza wants to hold the difference among these three entities (although he constructs their unity and gives several arguments, as we have seen). This will be shown on the example of God and his role within Spinozian pursuit of happiness and satisfaction of human beings.

In suo esse perseverare!

In the third book of his *Ethics* Spinoza tells us that there is certain effort of each thing to persist in its own being. This principle is valid both for ordinary, particular things as well as for human beings, in simple words for any thing. We are told that:

Everything, in so far as it is in itself, endeavours to persist in its own being. (EIIID6)¹¹

Now, there are two possible ways how to interpret this proposition. One possible interpretation follows from the affinity of *conatus* (endeavor to persist) with the notion from

¹⁰ Cf. Curley p. 46: “These laws are **infinite** in the same sense that the laws involved in the attributes are: they apply throughout nature, **without limitation** to any particular time and place. They are **eternal** in the sense that their **existence is necessary**.” Emphasis added.

¹¹ Curley, p. 107, translates as follows: “Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being.” The Latin original: “*Unaquaeque res, quantum in se est, in suo esse perseverare conatur.*” Curley associates different parts of the proposition with Hobbes’ theory. Curiously enough his own translation of EIIIP6 helps to argue against his own interpretation of *conatus* as will be showed within this paper.

Cartesian physics '*conatus ad motum*': the tendency bodies have to persist in a state either of rest or of uniform motion in a straight line. According to this interpretation, which we can find in Curley's *Behind the Geometrical Method*,¹² the conception of *conatus* is derived from the fact that each thing is opposed to everything, which can take its existence away. Curley finds an argument for such a conception in EIIP5, which is supposed to follow from EIIP4.¹³ According to the argument for EIIP4 we see that while we attend only to the thing itself, and not to external causes, we will not be able to find anything in it what could destroy it.

Very similar way of interpreting the *conatus* can be found in Allison's *Benedict de Spinoza*.¹⁴ It is true that inside the thing, in its nature, there is nothing what could destroy it. That would mean some contradiction within the nature and such a thing could not exist at all. But the finite mode is not self-sufficient and it is part of the whole it is always under the influence of external causes. So there is only the extrinsic source of the corruption or death for any thing.

I am not satisfied with both of these interpretations. Both attempts to interpret the *conatus* are based merely on the previous proposition EIIP4. If that would be the final state of Spinozian conception of *conatus*, then it would not mean anything more than that each thing has reactive force to resist to the external things. In the most simplest vision, it would be as if two moving bodies resist to each other when they meet on their tracks. This deprives the conception of *conatus* from 'persisting in its own being' on 'resisting in its own being'. But Spinoza continues and, from my point of view, shows the active aspect of the conception of *conatus* as at least as important as the reactive one:

The endeavour, wherewith everything endeavours to persist in its own being, is nothing else but the actual essence of the thing in question. (EIIIP7)

According to this proposition and its demonstration there is a certain activity, the active principle which not only reacts to the external causes of its possible corruption, but the thing 'holds' itself in its being. The 'actual' in the Latin original¹⁵ of proposition 7 has to be understood as coming from its root '*actus*', 'an act', and its verbal form 'to act'. The essence of a given thing is thus the active principle or power of a given thing, not only the force reacting to possible external causes. For if the role of the *conatus* would be merely reactive (according to EIIP4), we could imagine a situation when there would be no external causes acting upon a given thing. What would then be its nature or essence? And even if we suppose that everything, every finite mode is within the order of the things, as Allison does, then there would be problem with the essence or nature of this very order, with the nature of substance

¹² Cf. Curley, Chapter III, pp. 107 – 112.

¹³ EIIP4: "*Nothing can be destroyed, except by a cause external to itself.*" EIIP5: "*Things are naturally contrary, that is, cannot exist in the same object, in so far as one is capable of destroying the other.*"

¹⁴ Cf. Allison, Chapter IV, pp. 132 – 136.

¹⁵ EIIP7: "*Conatus, quo unaquaeque res in suo esse perseverare conatur, nihil est praeter ipsius rei actualem essentiam.*"

as such. Because there can be no external causes acting upon the substance.¹⁶ Therefore we must understand propositions 4-7 of the third book as putting forward the active principle within each nature or essence of a thing.

The conception of the power or the active essence is presupposed already during the arguments in the first book of the *Ethics*. As Alexander Matheron shows, while to be able not to exist is to lack power, and conversely, to be able to exist is to have power (cf. EP11D3), existence involves power and activity.¹⁷ For substances to exist is to produce effects without being subject to any external causality. Here we can see the strict correlation between substance's power of existence, their causal power and the degree of the perfection of their essence. In short, to exist is to produce effects, which brings Matheron to the last statement in his essay, namely that this brings us directly to the theory of the *conatus*, for which *Ethics* I as a whole provides a rigorous foundation. What Matheron says about the substance can be found behind the demonstration of EIIP6, where we read: "*things ... express in a given determinate manner the power of God, whereby God is and acts.*" So the things express in a certain way the same power and being as the God *sive* substance does, and which is essentially active. Our *conatus* is thus always the nature of our power to act as such. The variations of *conatus* as it is determined by this or that affection or external cause are the dynamic variations of our power of action (cf. EIIP57: *potentia seu conatus*).¹⁸

But the Spinozian conception of the *conatus* has not only ontological significance. The same what was said about the substance or particular things is said about human beings as well. The human body can be conceived as persisting in its own being as any other extended thing now we have to show the same for mind in order to have the picture complete.¹⁹ All what the human mind does is the expression of its effort to persists in its own being:

The mind, both in so far as it has clear and distinct ideas, and also in so far as it has confused ideas, endeavours to persist in its being for an indefinite period, and of this endeavour it is conscious. (EIIP9)

Essential to the understanding of this is the conception of the mind as the idea of the body. So when the mind is affirming its own existence, it affirms the existence of the body as well. Just as the body, in its endeavor to persist in its being, tends to reject any change or affect contrary to its nature, so the mind tends to reject the idea of anything contrary to the existence or well-being of the body (cf. EIIP10).²⁰ Already with the term of well-being

¹⁶ I suppose that even the substance as such persists in its own being while already according EIP8S1: "*infinite existence is the absolute affirmation of the given nature*" and this affirmation, according to the *scholium*, must be active within any infinite substance.

¹⁷ Cf. Matheron, pp. 30-31.

¹⁸ For strictly active interpretation of *conatus* cf.: Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, [further Deleuze] Zone Books, 1990; p. 230nn.

¹⁹ Since analogy or identity between the mind and the body is not the topic of this paper I will not proceed by showing this analogy, but I where it is possible I will rather use direct textual evidence.

²⁰ Cf. Allison, p. 136.

comes the notion of something more ethical than ontological into our consideration. Similarly, as Curley notes,²¹ the Stoics made some kind of *conatus* doctrine to be their fundamental part of their interpretation of human nature:

As soon as a living thing is born it feels an attachment for itself and an inclination to preserve itself and its condition, and to love those things, which tend to preserve its condition, while it is averse to its destruction and to those things, which seem to lead to destruction.
(Cicero, *De Finibus*, iii, v. in Curley p. 114)

Spinoza, either with or without any knowledge of this particular Stoic doctrine, makes very similar claim when through the notion of *conatus* binds together his ontology and ethics. In the third book he incorporates into the concept of *conatus* not only striving for own existence, but also for greater perfection, understood as an increase in power of action, which is what Spinoza understands to be pleasure or joy. That is obvious from the following proposition and its *scholia*:

Whatsoever increases or diminishes, helps or hinders the power of activity in our body, the idea thereof increases or diminishes, helps or hinders the power of thought in our mind. (EIIIP11)

By pleasure therefore in the following propositions I shall signify a passive state wherein the mind passes to a greater perfection. By pain I shall signify a passive state wherein the mind passes to a lesser perfection. (EIIIP11S)

Here we can see the point that leads us to the final part of our argument. The *conatus*, the active power to act that is holding each thing in its own being, the fact that thing actively persists in its own being, forms the last step between the ontology and the ethics. Coherently speaking within the conception of *conatus* it is clear, why Spinoza needs proper ontological ground and fundaments for his ethics. Therefore, it is clearer to see the coherence within the *Ethics* and to interpret different books not as separate treaties but as inevitable parts of a whole. Now I have to show why the distinction between the God and the substance presented in the first book of the *Ethics* is so much needed and important here.

Sed omnia praeclara tam difficilia, quam rara sunt ...

Before I start the final part of my argument for the importance of such a concept of the God, which differs from the substance or is expressed, manifested in different way than the substance or the *natura naturans*, there has to be short account on some features of the theory

²¹ Cf. Curley, p. 114.

of passions in Spinoza. This theory and the definitions of different passions occupy most of the third and forth book of the *Ethics*.

The previous Cartesian concept of the passions and soul differs from the older views that almost all can be searched for their paradigm back to Plato or Aristotle. For Descartes there is only one simple soul, which has no parts whatsoever, and the same soul is both sensitive and reasonable and all its appetites are volitions.²² The indivisible soul is thus united to all the parts of the body (according to Descartes in *The Passions of Soul* §30), from which one – the pineal gland – plays more special role. In the pineal gland the soul comes into the interaction with so-called “animal spirits” and potential psychological conflict is the outcome of the contradiction or differences among the acting of the soul and the animal spirits upon this pineal gland in our brain.

Insofar as the soul is thought of in the relation to the body, Descartes writes, the natural use of the passions is to move the soul to consent and “*contribute to the actions which can help to preserve the body or to render it in some way more perfect.*”²³ From that point of view it seems that the hate and sadness would be more important than the positive passions, while it is more important to reject the things that can harm the body, because in order to improve the body it must exist. But hate is never harmless, since hatred of a known evil never incites us to an action to which we would not better be led by love of a known good.²⁴

Spinoza rarely mentions any other philosophers in his works or makes any references, but in the introductory sections of the third and the fifth book of the *Ethics* he mentions Descartes and the context of his theory of passions. Spinoza criticizes his conception for two reasons: first Descartes considered man to be a state within a state, i.e. to certain measure unbound with the necessity of the surrounding order of the things; and further Spinoza thinks that Descartes’ attempts to show how the mind or reason could rule over passions are insufficient. Spinoza forms his account on the affections in order to understand how to avoid falling victim to them and achieve the degree of freedom of which we are, as a finite modes, capable. The first remarkable difference from Descartes is that Spinoza does not consider actions and passions to be two names for one and the same thing from different perspectives; these are two different states of affairs (EIIID2). The term affect has in the *Ethic* reference both to the body and to the mind. Emotions in the mental sense are ideas corresponding to the states of the body, in which the power of that body is affected either positively or negatively. If we can be adequate cause of any of these affections the affect is action (*agere*), otherwise it is passion.

At the end of the last section on the theme of *conatus*, we have seen that the mind can by adequate ideas make the active power of the body greater. Yet at the proposition EIVP8 and its demonstration we read:

²² Cf. Descartes, *The Passions of Soul*, [further PS] §47.

²³ PS; §137.

The knowledge of good and evil is nothing else but the emotions of pleasure or pain, in so far as we are conscious thereof. (EIVP8)

We call a thing good or evil, when it is of service or the reverse in preserving our being (EIVDD1&2), that is (EIIIP7), when it increases or diminishes, helps or hinders, our power of activity. Thus, in so far as we perceive that a thing affects us with pleasure or pain, we call it good or evil; wherefore the knowledge of good and evil is nothing else but the idea of the pleasure or pain, which necessarily follows from that pleasurable or painful emotion (EIIIP22). (EIVP8D)

Here is the origin of the moral terms 'good' and 'bad' in Spinoza obviously connected with certain kind of knowledge, namely the knowledge of good and evil. The knowledge brings us the pleasure that increases the power of our essence. The real power in human existence is thus the power of reason, not the power of will. Since pleasure is an emotion that reflects and causes, in the attribute of thought, an increase in the essence or power of activity, whereas pain reflects precisely the opposite, it follows that the former is always good and the later always bad. Now these two principles ('good' and 'bad') oppose each other in order to increase or destroy our power to persist in our being.

Optimistic – according to my view of our life – account can be found in the proposition EIVP18, which says that the desire following from the pleasure is stronger, then the desire from any sadness. So we can conclude that the pleasure or the joy may be stronger and then the sadness as such. Therefore we have to look for such knowledge of the good that would give us the greatest power to our essence, greatest pleasure and so it would fill our life with happiness and joy. And according to the proposition EIVP65 and EIVP66S man living such a life could be called free as well, because living under the guidance of the reason or knowledge means we do what we know that the principle and order of life is and so we do that what we desire at most.

The mind's highest good is the knowledge of God, and the mind's highest virtue is to know God. (EIVP28)

With this proposition it seems that we have discovered what we needed. But we cannot forget that:

An emotion can only be controlled or destroyed only by another emotion contrary thereto, and with more power for controlling emotion. (EIVP7)

²⁴ For more detailed introduction into Cartesian theory of passions and its relation to Spinoza see Curley, pp. 91-95; or Allison, pp. 124-160.

Therefore we must search for such a knowledge of good that would be the emotion as well and at the same time must be the greatest pleasure to be capable to control or destroy any opposite emotion. Spinoza maintains that the virtuous, good and happy or free life is the life under the guidance of reason (EIVP66S), but only a stronger and contrary emotion can control any other emotion, and hence, the possibility of reason controlling the passions depends on reason itself possessing an emotive force. Such kind of knowledge with emotional force is described in the demonstration for the proposition EVP20:

Love towards God is the highest good which we can seek for under the guidance of reason (EIVP28), it is common to all men (EIVP26), and we desire that all should rejoice therein (EIVP37); therefore (Def. of the Emotions 23), it cannot be stained by the emotion envy nor by, the emotion of jealousy, (EVP18 see definition of Jealousy, EIIIDE35S); but, contrariwise, it must needs be the more fostered, in proportion as we conceive a greater number of men to rejoice therein. (EVP20D)

This love of God is the highest and purest of all possible human knowledge and assures us happy and free life.²⁵ There are, as far as I can see, two possible aspects of the way by which Spinoza thinks we can love God with all the beautiful consequences following from it for our life. Both are based on the knowledge and the power of reason. The first one, according to EVP15, is based on the knowledge of our emotions and ourselves. Someone who can clearly and distinctly understand himself and his emotions therefore necessarily loves God and as he gains more and more knowledge, the more he loves him.²⁶ This is based on propositions EVP3, 4 & 14. While according to the first book of the *Ethics* everything is in the God and cannot be or be fully conceived without him (EIP15), our mind can relate all sources of emotions to the God. It is possible because there is not such a state of the body *sive* such a source of the emotion, which could not be considered under the clear and distinct notion, i.e. cease to be an emotion.

The other aspect of the very same way for the joy and freedom is the knowledge about the external particular things and their place within the order of being (EVP24). The more we understand the things around us, the more we understand the God and therefore love him as the highest and greatest source of the joy and pleasure, increasing our power to persist in our own being (cf. with the third kind of knowledge, EVP33). This proposition is based within the ontology of the first book, namely on the corollary to the EIP25: “*Individual things are*

²⁵ For political and social connotations of the intellectual love of God and freedom see appendix of the fourth book of the *Ethics* and EIVPP70-73.

²⁶ ‘*Search [or know] thyself*’ was the old sign on the Delphic oratory. Spinoza makes here very similar conclusions as Plato in the *Phaedo*. The adequate knowledge of oneself brings person nearer to God. According to Plato man becomes similar to God, in Spinoza man will love God and God will love him by the very same love (EVP36C): “*The love we feel for God is the love God feels for himself insofar as he is explicated through our own essence, and so the love he feels for our essence itself,*” concludes Deleuze (Deleuze: 309).

nothing but modifications of the attributes of God, or modes by which the attributes of God are expressed in a fixed and definite manner. The proof appears from EIP15 and EID5.” From both of the propositions from the first book we can conceive that God is the free cause acting immanently in the things that is by his essence.²⁷

So now we can ‘clearly and distinctly’ see that the ontological foundation from the first book of the *Ethics* form its inevitable part in the respect to its main aim: pursuit of ethical, happy and free life of every man. The first link was made by the conception of *conatus* that had both ontological and ethical meaning. It functions as an effort or endeavor to persist in its own being of a given thing as well as in a particular mind or body, i.e. particular man. This active power that holds us in our being and living can be increased by means of absolutely good pleasure and joy. Here we are already on the field of the ethics and we have found a principle, which enables us to greater our power, pleasure and freedom: the intellectual love of the God. In order to make the love of the God possible, he cannot be merely a substance. For we know that love is nothing else but joy or pleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause (EIIIP13S; EIIIDE6) and it would be unbearable to request love, which would have its external cause in abstract and merely impersonal substance. Therefore the distinction between the aspects of substance as ‘*causa sui*’ within the monistic structure of the first book of the *Ethics* is necessarily. Further we have seen that it was necessary to construct such a concept of the God, which would entail the propositions EIP25, and its corollary, and EIP15. While all the things are modifications of the God’s attributes and none of them could be (*esse*) or be fully and adequately conceived without him. We can finally agree with those authors who consider the fundamental doctrines of Spinoza’s metaphysics as deadly blows to the traditional anthropocentric views,²⁸ but we must immediately correct them: Spinoza destroys the classical anthropocentric view in order to save the life of men.²⁹

²⁷ Cf. Macherey pp. 165-166.

²⁸ E.g. Herman De Dijn, *Metaphysics as Ethics*, in Spinoza : critical assessments, (ed.) Genevieve Lloyd, New York: Routledge, 2001; [121-131].

²⁹ Finally I agree with De Dijn that one of the biggest problems within Spinoza is certainly the absence of a proper notion of subjectivity. I think that this can be shown on the brief suggestion about so-called eternal life of human mind that is suggested by EVP23. According to EVP21 no memory last without the body that is definitely mortal and subject of corruption. The idea of a given body necessarily exists within the God’s mind (EVP22). And while human mind is certain part of the infinite mind of God, what is strongly suggested by EIIIP11C, and therefore when God loves himself he loves people and these loves are one and the same one (EVP36C), we can conclude that human mind is immortal as being an aspect or part of the God’s mind. Human mind as a part of infinite and eternal God’s mind cannot be damaged or destroyed, from this perspective it is eternal. I agree, it is not much, but it is the last stage that can be found within the monistic system without the concept of the creation and traditional Christian or Judaic notion of personal resurrection.

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