

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, EMPOWERMENT OF THE MIND AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE SUBJECT IN SPINOZA*

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Abstract: *A central theme of Spinoza's Ethica is the description of the individual's exposition to the emergence of passions. Passions bring the individual to a condition of mental enslavement. Spinoza tries to find a way out of the passions: through the analysis of the structure of reality and through the inquiry into the structure of the individual's mind, Spinoza shows that the development of knowledge of reality in the mind is the solution to the process of liberation of the mind. The possibility, for the individual, to reach an authentic power of mind consists in the acquisition of the knowledge of reality. This acquisition needs to be developed through the appropriate education. The knowledge of the whole reality increases the power of the individual's mind, thus contemporarily diminishing the influence of passions on the individual's mind. Through the knowledge the individual can emendate his mind: thereby the individual becomes able to eliminate in his mind the already present confused ideas on reality, on the one hand, and to oppose the formation of new confused ideas, on the other hand. The main text of our investigation will be Spinoza's Ethica; we shall refer also to the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus and to the Tractatus Politicus.*

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.'¹

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¹ Spinoza's original text is: 'Homo liber de nulla re minus, quam de morte cogitat, et eius sapientia non mortis, sed vitae meditatio est.' We decided to begin our analysis with this quotation since this statement of Spinoza seems to us to be a good presentation of his whole meditation. In Spinoza's *Ethica*, any proposition is followed by a demonstration. In this study, we are not going to expose the demonstrations of the propositions which we shall quote; we are not going to discuss

(*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: 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 the whole nature. Since he is a part of nature, the individual is exposed to the influences of the outside reality; he is constitutively passive in relation to nature. Being passive means having passions: passions bring the individual to a condition of mental enslavement due to the influence coming from the external reality. The individual is acted on by the external reality through passions. Thus, any individual was born a slave as regards the constitution of his mind.

Spinoza tries to find a way out of the passions: through the analysis of the structure of reality and through the inquiry into the structure of the individual's mind, Spinoza shows that the development of knowledge of reality in the mind is the solution to 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

whether these demonstrations function or do not function. We shall concentrate our attention on Spinoza's description of the individual's condition. We shall inquire into the limits naturally connected to the individual's condition. We shall investigate Spinoza's proposals for a partial liberation from these limits.

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 the whole complex of Spinoza's thought. The difference between active affect and passive affect has consequences even for the essence of the individual: Since, for instance, as we shall see in this analysis, desire is the essence of the individual, if the individual's desire is passive, his essence will be a passive essence. If, on the contrary, an individual has, as his essence, desire as active affect, his essence will be active. Correspondingly, the first individual will have a generally passive life, as he will be led in his life by a desire which is founded on passion and not on reason. The second individual, whose essence is desire in the active value of desire, will have a generally active life, founded on knowledge and on reason. The two individuals will conduct lives which will be very different from each other. Hence, the seemingly same concept can have in Spinoza profoundly different senses.

of this knowledge means the acquisition of a new nature: this acquisition lies in the potentiality of the individual since the individual possesses a disposition for knowledge; this acquisition needs nonetheless to be developed through the appropriate education.

The knowledge of God, which corresponds to the knowledge of the whole reality, immediately increases the power of the individual's mind, thus contemporarily diminishing the influence of the passions on the individual's mind. Reaching the knowledge of God means, for the individual, the empowerment of the mind against the individual's constitutive exposition to passions. Through the knowledge, the individual frees himself from ignorance: he becomes able to counteract his being acted on by the external reality and, correspondingly, he becomes able to independently act on: he can conduct his own life instead of being steadily conducted by the influences coming from outside.

The knowledge transforms the individual from a completely passive entity into being an entity which is able to emendate its mind: thereby the individual becomes able to eliminate in his mind the already present confused ideas on reality, on the one hand, and to oppose the formation of new confused ideas, on the other hand. Through the process of acquisition of knowledge, the individual is transformed step after step from the condition of being limited by a fragmentary vision of reality to the condition of possessing a complete interpretation of reality. Hence the individual needs to know his essence, his functions, his position in the reality and his faculties in order to discover the road to self-development: he needs to become aware of his constitution.

Through the knowledge of reality, the subject changes and the subject's understanding of reality changes: the individual changes since he lets grow in himself a whole disposition of being active; the individual's comprehension of reality changes, since the individual sees that he is a mode, i.e., an affection of the whole reality: hence, the individual cannot consider himself as being an entity independent of the reality itself. The individual needs to be aware that he is a part of reality: at the beginning, he is not acquainted with anything regarding both the structure of reality, in general, and his position in the reality, in particular.

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 an at least partially

active entity²: Spinoza's programme proves to be a programme for the development and enlightenment of the mind. The main text of our analysis will be Spinoza's *Ethica*³; we shall refer also to the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and to the *Tractatus Politicus*⁴.

b) Scheme 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.

² Our intent is directed to the analysis of the programme for the education of the individual and for the modification of his understanding of reality. As a consequence, our analysis will not primarily deal with the foundations of Spinoza's ontology such as substance, attribute, mode, or God. We shall for sure mention the definition of substance and God, but we shall concentrate our attention rather on the process of transformation of the individual from his being passive to his reaching a progressively higher level of being active. We shall mention the notions of substance, attribute, mode, or God in order to have elements for the interpretation of the individual's essence.

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

³ 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*.

⁴ The translations of the *Ethica* which we consulted for our study are the following: *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 own translation of the passages of Spinoza quoted in our study. The mention of pages of Spinoza's works refers to Elwes' translations.

- Since 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 (cupiditas), gladness (laetitia), and sadness (tristitia), 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.

- In order to be able to liberate himself from passions, the individual needs authentic knowledge.

- Through knowledge, the individual becomes aware of his mental dispositions, of his conditions and of his position in the 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 into the necessity of this structure, the individual frees himself from the condition of uncertainty in which he is originally relegated by his ignorance.

- The individual needs to be aware of his constitution and his limits in order to be able to fight against them: Spinoza proceeds to the analysis of imagination, of knowledge, of passion, 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: as a consequence, men are only ontologically dependent entities. The individual's being a mode implies his being a part of nature: as a consequence, 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 acquires knowledge. 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 and subjected to 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.

Throughout Spinoza's *Ethica*, the process of transformation of the individual consists in the development of the individual constitution from having only inadequate ideas as regards the structure of reality⁵ to acquiring adequate ideas as regards the structure of reality: thus the individual becomes an entity which has greater and greater levels of being active. The individual develops himself through knowledge: the component of his mind represented by the active part increases: therewith the proportion existing between being active and being passive progressively changes to the advantage of being active. The condition of the individual is therefore not statical: it is not immutable. Likewise, the essence of the individual is not immutable: the transformation brought about by the acquisition of knowledge changes the constitution of the individual.

The individual has specific limits which correspond 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. The individual's condition is to be seen as a potentially dynamic one. Liberation is a process, it is not a definitive condition: since the individual is a part of nature, and since the individual is in nature, the individual cannot reach a condition of perfect liberation. The individual will always be and always remain an entity having elements of passivity and exposed to the formation of passions.

In order to develop a programme of education for the individual, an investigation into the whole reality, therein including the individual's mind, is needed. For instance, the individual needs to learn the organisation of reality in substance, modes and attributes; he needs to learn what he constitutively is; he needs to learn the notion of adequate and of inadequate ideas; he needs to know the definition and the formation of passions and of actions. The individual needs to learn the way of functioning of his mind: the notion of imagination, reason and intuitive science should necessarily belong to the individual's orientation as regards his relation to reality and his cognitive development. Any aspect of reality must be inquired in its completeness: the duty of the individual, as long as he is ready to walk on the road of intellectual and ethical development, consists in becoming aware of his condition and his position in the reality.

⁵ In this case the individual is a completely passive entity.

c) On the definition of substance and mode

The organisation of reality needs to be analysed in order that the individual's condition in the reality could be immediately clear. First of all, we aim to show the difference which exists between the substance and the mode, since the difference between substance and mode can immediately deliver elements for the comprehension of the individual's condition in the reality. Substance, on the one hand, is not a dependent entity: the mode is, on the other hand, a dependent entity. Thus, between the two kinds of entities, there is a rigid difference due to their mutually incompatible features. The definition of substance which we find in *Ethica*, Part 1., Definition III is as follows:

'Under substance, I understand that which is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not need the concept of another thing by which it must be formed.'⁶

The substance is an independent entity. It is an entity which is in itself and not in something else: therefore, it does not need another entity in order to exist and in order to be conceived. The substance is not referred to another entity as the cause and as the basis of its existence. On the other hand, through the definition of mode, we can read the definition of a dependent entity. Spinoza's definition of mode is the following one (*Ethica* Part 1., Definition V):

'Under mode, I understand the affections of substance or that which is in something else, through which it is conceived too.'⁷

⁶ The original text is as follows: 'Per substantiam intelligo id quod in se est et per se concipitur hoc est id cujus conceptus non indiget conceptu alterius rei a quo formari debeat.'

⁷ The original text is the following one: 'Per modum intelligo substantiae affectiones sive id quod in alio est, per quod etiam concipitur.' In the Proposition XV of Part 1. of the *Ethica* Spinoza states that everything which is, is in God and that nothing can be or be conceived without God: the Proposition clearly expresses the dependence of all entities from the only substance, God. Proposition XIV of Part 1. of the *Ethica* expresses that besides God no substance can be granted or conceived.

Modes are affections; they are constitutively in something else. As they are in something else, they depend on another substance in order to exist. Modes are, therefore, constitutively dependent entities⁸.

Through the two quoted definitions we can observe the incompatibility existing between substance and mode. In particular, the status of the individual is not the status of the substance⁹. The individual ought to understand that he is constitutively in something else, i.e., that he constitutively depends on something else: only by understanding his position in the reality can the individual understand the possible way out of his limitations¹⁰. Becoming aware of one's condition proves to be, for the individual, an indispensable step in order to see whether and how this condition can be improved. The whole exposition of the *Ethica* leads the individual to become acquainted with and aware of his nature. The incompatibility between the way of being of substance and the way of being of man is clearly 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.'¹¹

⁸ The definition of attribute too is important, even though we are not going to investigate it. In Definition IV of Part 1. of the *Ethica*, Spinoza exposes the essence of the attribute as follows: 'Per attributum intelligo id quod intellectus de substantia percipit tanquam ejusdem essentiam constituens (Under attribute I understand that which the intellect perceives, as regards the substance, as constituting the essence of it).'

⁹ In the Corollary of the Proposition XXV of Part 1. of the *Ethica* we can find some further explanations regarding the modes: 'Particular things are nothing but modifications of the attributes of God, or modes by which the attributes of God are expressed in a fixed and definite manner.'

¹⁰ The condition of dependence of the individual is already implicit in Definition I of Part 1. of the *Ethica* when Spinoza expresses the definition of cause of itself: 'Per causam sui intelligo id cujus essentia involvit existentiam sive id cujus natura non potest concipi nisi existens (Under cause of itself I understand that whose essence involves existence, or that whose nature cannot be conceived save as existent).'

Since the essence of any individual does not involve the existence and since the nature of any individual can be conceived as non-existent, the individual is not the cause of himself. The road to the consideration of the individual as a dependent entity is already open.

¹¹ The original text is:

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:

‘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.’¹²

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 God¹³). To be a mode means that the individual is only an

‘Ad essentiam hominis non pertinet esse substantiæ sive substantia formam hominis non constituit.’

¹² The original text expresses the following contents: ‘Hinc sequitur essentiam hominis constitui a certis Dei attributorum modificationibus. Nam esse substantiæ (per propositionem præcedentem) ad essentiam hominis non pertinet. Est ergo (per propositionem 15 partis I) aliquid quod in Deo est et quod sine Deo nec esse nec concipi potest sive (per corollarium propositionis 25 partis I) affectio sive modus qui Dei naturam certo et determinato modo exprimit.’

¹³ See, for the definition of God as substance, the Definition VI of Part 1. of the *Ethica*: ‘Under God, I understand a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of infinite attributes, any of which expresses an eternal and infinite essence.’ Spinoza demonstrates in the Proposition XIV of Part 1. of the *Ethica* that only one substance possessing infinite attributes exists: hence, God is the only substance of reality. In the reality only substance, attributes and modes exist, therefore all entities, including the individuals, are modes of God. Through a specific definition of substance, Spinoza identifies the substance with God: since exclusively the entity which is in itself can be regarded as substance, only God can be rightly considered as being substance since only God is an entity which is in itself. All other entities cannot be considered as being substances since they are in other and are conceived through other. Spinoza considers God and nature as equivalent, as it emerges from the Preface of Part 4. of the *Ethica* and from the Proposition IV of Part 4. of the *Ethica*. As regards the relation of God with the other entities, the following statements of Prop. XV, Part 1. of the *Ethica* are useful: ‘Whatever is, is in God, and, without God, nothing can be, or can be conceived.’ Modes are in God: they depend on God

affection of the substance. Individuals are not independent entities; they are not autonomous entities. On the contrary, individuals are constitutively dependent entities: therefore, 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 mode¹⁴. From the individual being a mode derives the condition of the individual as being a part of nature and, as a consequence, the condition of the individual as a passive entity, i.e., an entity which is subdued to the influence of nature¹⁵. A first example of the individual's condition in the reality can be given by the following statement of Spinoza, which correspond 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.'¹⁶

The individual is a part of nature which cannot be conceived as such by

for their being and for their existence. Without God, modes cannot be conceived. Applied to the particular condition of the individual, the definition of mode implies that the individual cannot be conceived without God.

¹⁴ The Axiom I of Part 1. of the *Ethica* can be useful as regards the way of existence of the entities: 'Everything which is, is either in itself or in something else.' From the first axiom of Part 1. of *Ethica* onwards, there is a rigid separation between kinds of entities: entities which are in themselves are independent entities; entities which are in something else are dependent entities. The substance, God, is the only entity of Spinoza's ontology which exists in itself. All other entities exist in God, i.e., they are dependent on God. In particular, individuals as modes exist in God, i.e., they are dependent on Him: the constitution of an individual is a dependent constitution. Therefore, the individual must be aware of the influences which come from outside his essence: he is constitutively exposed to being passive. The whole process of acquisition of knowledge is an antidote to this congenital exposition.

¹⁵ As alluded to, the condition of passivity is constitutive for the individual, since he is a mode. To be a mode, nevertheless, does not imply that the individual cannot have a development towards becoming active and progressively diminishing his passivity.

¹⁶ The original text is: 'Nos eatenus patimur quatenus Naturae sumus pars quae per se absque aliis non potest concipi.' 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.

itself and independently of other parts: thence, the individual is in another entity, is dependent on another entity, and is subjected to the influences exercised by the other entity on him.

The individual finds himself in a passive condition since the individual was born passive and remains passive up to the point of the development of the individual's reason. Thus, individuals do not start their lives and their possible development from a neutral condition; they begin their development from a passive condition. 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.'¹⁷

The individual is a part of nature: it is impossible that the individual is not a part of nature. Individuals are constitutively dependent entities: therefore, they are exposed to being passive¹⁸. It is not an accident that they are exposed to being passive. 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. Thus, the individual undergoes changes which cannot be referred to his being an adequate cause. The individual is subdued to the influence coming from outside because of the limitations which are inherent in his being a mode. The individual undergoes changes which are due to external causes: he cannot be the cause of all the changes that he experiences. The knowledge of the individual alone would therefore not be sufficient for the comprehension of the changes experienced by the individual. The sphere of the individual cannot be explained with exclusive reference to the individual.

¹⁷ The original text is: 'Fieri non potest ut homo non sit Naturae pars et ut nullas possit pati mutationes nisi quae per solam suam naturam possint intelligi quarumque adaequata sit causa.'

¹⁸ Men are not and cannot become a kingdom in a kingdom; they cannot be and cannot become a kind of autonomous dimension within a greater system. This 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: hence, he cannot be independent of reality.

The individual's initial condition, the condition preceding the process of knowledge of reality, is a condition of total passivity. The absence of knowledge strongly limits the individual's capacity of forming adequate ideas. The individual's becoming active can be initiated and then 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 passivity¹⁹.

The individual is from the beginning exposed to the emergence of

¹⁹ The Definition VII of Part 1. of the *Ethica* expresses the notion of freedom for Spinoza: 'That thing is called free which exists solely by the necessity of its own nature and is determined to act by itself alone. On the other hand, that thing is necessary, or rather constrained, which is determined by something else to exist and to operate in a particular and determined manner.' In Spinoza's view, freedom has no connection with free choice. For an entity, being free consists in being determined by itself alone and not by other factors. The substance is the only entity which is free within Spinoza's conception of freedom: substance is the only entity which, since it is in itself, does not depend on any other entity: hence it is not exposed to the influence of other entities; substance is determined to act by itself alone. Entities which are determined by factors which are external to themselves exist, on the contrary, in a condition of constriction. In particular, individuals, due to their being modes of the substance, are always necessitated by factors existing outside themselves. Thus, the individual ought to be aware of the fact that his condition is not a condition of self-determination, but a condition of determination through external factors. The individual is determined by something else to exist and to operate in a specific way. Spinoza clearly states in the Proposition XXIX of Part 1. of the *Ethica* that, in the reality, there is no space for contingency. Everything is necessitated either by itself or by something else: 'In the reality there is nothing contingent, but all things are determined to exist and to operate in a particular manner by the necessity of the divine nature.' In the Corollary I. of Proposition XLIV of Part 2. of the *Ethica*, Spinoza states that individuals are led by their imagination to consider the existence of contingency in the reality. In the Proposition XLIV of Part 2. of the *Ethica*, Spinoza states that Reason lets individuals regard things not as contingent, but as necessary. A problem for Spinoza is to justify how the individual can be the author of the modifications of his dispositions if everything in the reality is necessitated. Modes are necessitated: therefore, the individual is already determined to do what he does. It seems, therefore, that there is no space for the individual choice. On the contrary, Spinoza's *Ethica* gives the impression that the individual can change his condition of passivity if he chooses to acquire knowledge: the individual can choose to acquire knowledge.

passions; the capacity to be active comes about later since it can come about exclusively through the development of knowledge. Being active needs, on the contrary, the development of knowledge: hence, being active needs the engagement of the individual. To be 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 passions. The contents of this education are not immediately given, though; the individual must gain them step after step: the whole exposition of the *Ethica* illustrates 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 the active part of himself 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.’²⁰

²⁰ The exposition of the individuals to passions emerges from the original text: ‘Hinc sequitur hominem necessario passionibus esse semper obnoxium communemque Naturae ordinem sequi et eidem parere seseque eidem quantum rerum natura exigit, accommodare.’ In the Note of Proposition LIX of Part 3. of the *Ethica* Spinoza describes the effects on the individual produced by the passive affects: ‘And I think that I thereby explained and displayed through their primary causes the principal affects and vacillations of spirit which arise from the combination of the three primary affects, to wit, desire, gladness and sadness. It is thereby evident that we are in many ways driven about by external causes and that, like waves of the sea driven by contrary winds, we toss to and fro unwitting of our issue and of our fate.’ All affects derive from the basic three affects. The condition of the individual in the reality is that of an entity which lives under the influence of external causes: he is constitutively driven by the force of affects and fluctuations. Spinoza’s detailed inquiry into affects shows the way in which the individual can become acquainted with the functioning of his mind. He, first of all, comes to know that he has affects. To counteract affects, the individual needs first of all to become aware that he has them. The individual is able to learn to counteract this initial condition;

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 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 the change is knowledge.

d) 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 affect²¹, 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.

the condition in which he begins to live is nonetheless a condition of being influenced by the passive affects. This condition is constitutive for the individual. Spinoza's whole analysis of affects and of human servitude aims to expose the ways of the individual liability to passions. The extension of Spinoza's inquiry demonstrates that the individual is exposed to many affects in many ways. The individual ought to become aware of this aspect since only through being aware of his liability can the individual find a solution to at least partially counteract this liability itself.

²¹ At the end of Part 3. of the *Ethica*, Spinoza gives a definition of the affects, listing as affects the following states of mind: desire, gladness, sadness, wonder, contempt, love, hatred, inclination, aversion, devotion, derision, hope, fear, confidence, despair, joy, disappointment, pity, approval, indignation, partiality, disparagement, envy, sympathy, self-approval, humility, repentance, pride, self-abasement, honour, shame, regret, emulation, thankfulness or gratitude, benevolence, anger, revenge, cruelty or savageness, timidity, daring, cowardice, consternation, courtesy or deference, ambition, luxury, intemperance, avarice, lust. Not all these affects can have an active value. Already through observing the nature and

Explanation

Therefore, if we can be the adequate cause²² of any of these affections, I then understand under affect an action, I understand the other affections as passions.²³

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

the multiplicity of the mentioned affects, we can see that the individual is exposed in many ways to the affects.

²² For the definition of adequate and inadequate cause, see, for instance, the definitions given by Spinoza in Definition 1 of Part 3. of the *Ethica*: 'Causam adaequatam appello eam cujus effectus potest clare et distincte per eandem percipi. Inadaequatam autem seu partialem illam voco cujus effectus per ipsam solam intelligi nequit. I name adequate cause that cause whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through the cause itself. I call inadequate or partial cause, on the other hand, that cause whose effect cannot be understood through it alone.' The individuals cannot be the adequate cause of their passive affects, since these affects depend on the external nature as their cause. Passive affects cannot be understood only through the essence and the action of the individual. Moreover, since the individual is a part of nature, the condition of inadequacy as cause is not eliminable. Individuals are inadequate causes constitutively, not accidentally, since the individuals are exposed to the influence of external factors. In the immediately subsequent Definition II, Spinoza adds the following considerations regarding our being active and our being passive: 'I say that we act then, when something takes place, either within us or externally to us, of which we are the adequate cause, i.e., (by the foregoing definition) when, through our nature, something takes place, within us or externally to us, which can, through our nature alone, be clearly and distinctly understood. On the other hand, I say that we are passive when something takes place within us, or follows from our nature, of which we are only the partial cause.'

²³ The first definition of affect introduces us to 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 the affects:

'Per affectum intelligo corporis affectiones quibus ipsius corporis agendi potentia augetur vel minuitur, juvatur vel coercetur et simul harum affectionum ideas.

explicatio

Si itaque alicujus harum affectionum adaequata possimus esse causa, tum per affectum actionem intelligo, alias passionem.' Hence, affects do not need to be necessarily evaluated negatively. On the contrary, the affects of which the individual is an adequate cause can oppose passive affects.

no adequate cause of the affection, the affect is a passion: in this case, the individual cannot master the affects. 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 ideas²⁴, it is necessarily in certain cases 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 master what is happening in himself. Therefore, if the individual wants to master himself, the individual needs to diminish the influence of passive affects and to eliminate them. If possible, 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, turns out to be necessary in order to diminish the extension of inadequate ideas.

Since passions are inadequate ideas, the battle for the liberation of the minds is a battle taking place in the mind of the individual. The individual needs to find a way for eliminating or at least for limiting 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 levels of reason and 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 education²⁵. The development

²⁴ 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.’

²⁵ The individual does possess the capacity of developing good dispositions, but they must engage themselves to develop them. For instance, in the *Tractatus Politicus*, Chapter V, Paragraph 2, Spinoza asserts that men were not born civil; they become civil.

of reason depends on the choice of the individual: the individual ought to become aware of his condition in the reality and ought to choose the road to education. Thus, the development of reason does not come about by itself: the individual's continuous engagement is needed. The individual has therefore the whole responsibility regarding 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.'²⁶

It is interesting, in our opinion, 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. As a consequence, the elimination of the confused ideas would amount to the elimination of the affects. The road to the limitation of affects has been thereby indicated. Immediately thereafter, Spinoza adds the following observation in the section which deals with 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.'²⁷

²⁶ The quotation of the original text illustrates Spinoza's vocabulary: 'Affectus, qui animi pathema dicitur, est confusa idea, qua mens maiorem vel minorem sui corporis vel alicuius eius partis existendi vim, quam antea, affirmat, et qua data ipsa mens ad hoc potius, quam ad illud cogitandum determinatur.'

²⁷ Passion is a confused idea. The correspondence between the being passive of mind, on the one hand, and the mind's having inadequate and confused ideas, on the other hand, clearly emerges: 'Dico primo affectum seu passionem animi esse "confusam ideam". Nam mentem eatenus tantum pati ostendimus (vide propositionem 3 huius), quatenus ideas inadaequatas sive confusas habet.' Inadequate or

Having confused ideas is equivalent to being passive. Being passive means not having control over oneself. An individual who is passive 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 own life. To consider passions as inadequate ideas means opening the way for the control of passions since to eliminate inadequate ideas means eliminating passions.

The difference between God as substance and individuals as modes should always be considered: the individual is not God, the individual is both active and passive. Since the individual is a part of nature, the individual has very many ways in which he is passive. For the individual, freedom from passions is not a state, it is not a definitive condition: freedom from passions consists in the continuous process of emending the mind. Individuals cannot be or become isolated from external influences: since they are modes, they will be always under the influence of nature, i.e., of the whole reality. Hence, being passive is a constitutive feature of men. Since the position of man in the reality condemns him to be a passive entity, men will always be liable to passions, i.e., to affects which as such prove to be negative for the stability of the mind. Liberation from passions consists in the steady emendation of the mind: emendation of the mind means analysis of ideas, recognition of adequate and inadequate ideas and elimination of inadequate ideas.

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 rather a negative form of knowledge since imagination is a form of ignorance of the authentic constitution of reality. Imagination must be distinguished from reason and from intuitive science, since imagination directly consigns the individual to the vacillations of the mind,

confused ideas are passions: therefore, the way out of passions consists in the acquisition of knowledge of reality.

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 side, and the positive aspects of reason and intuitive science, on the other side:

‘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 intellect²⁸ (see the Corollary of the Proposition XXIX of this part), and therefore I use to call such perceptions knowledge which originates from inconstant experience²⁹. (2.) 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 imagination³⁰. (3.) Finally, from the fact that we

²⁸ The original text witnesses the defects of representation of the imagination:

‘ex singularibus nobis per sensus mutilate, confuse et sine ordine ad intellectum repraesentatis.’

²⁹ The kind of experience mentioned in the passage is inconstant: ‘et ideo tales perceptiones cognitionem ab experientia vaga vocari consuevi.’ As 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 be a steady engagement in the interpretation, ordering and emendation of the 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 characterising the ideas of the mind: ‘Falsity consists in the privation of knowledge which inadequate, or fragmentary, or confused ideas involve.’ Moreover, the Proposition XLI of Part 2. of the *Ethica* Spinoza states that the imagination is false, whereas reason and intuitive science are necessarily true: it is impossible to make mistakes through reason and through intuitive science. To free the mind from falsity or to diminish the component of falsity present in the mind, a reform of the mind is necessary through which inadequate, fragmentary or confused ideas are eliminated. The process of extension of the knowledge of reality is the way to eliminate inadequate, fragmentary or confused ideas.

³⁰ ‘Utrumque hunc res contemplandi modum cognitionem primi generis, opinionem, vel imaginationem in posterum vocabo.’ Spinoza calls imagination a form of knowledge in spite of the fact that he recognises that imagination is a privation of the authentic knowledge of reality.

have notions common to all men³¹ 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 kind³². Besides these two kinds of knowledge there is, as I shall hereafter show, another, a third kind of knowledge, which we shall call intuitive science³³. 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 things³⁴.

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

- Imagination is fragmented, confused, and without order³⁵.

³¹ The common features of reality enable the individual to go beyond his particularity: to acknowledge the common features of reality is to be in the condition of recognising the structure of reality as such.

³² Reason is therefore the second form of knowledge, as the original text tells: 'Atque hunc rationem, et secundi generis cognitionem vocabo.'

³³ Intuitive science is the third form of knowledge: 'Praeter haec duo cognitionis genera datur, ut in sequentibus ostendam, aliud tertium quod scientiam intuitivam vocabimus.'

³⁴ The way of proceeding of intuitive science functions in the following way: 'Atque hoc cognoscendi genus procedit ab adaequata idea essentiae formalis quorundam Dei attributorum ad adaequatam cognitionem essentiae rerum.' From the knowledge of the essence of God the essence of things can be correctly derived.

³⁵ It is of course possible that imagination is a stage which belongs the whole process of knowledge and which the individual cannot help experiencing. Coming into contact with affections means, for the individual, coming into contact with not immediately clear data of experience: the first form of knowledge of new data of experience cannot but be incomplete, and therefore cannot but be confused, fragmented, without order. Only reason and intuitive science will be able to transform the incomplete interpretation of experience into a clear and adequate knowledge of reality. The first contact with the external reality is probably always an incomplete contact in the sense that the individual is not immediately able to interpret all the elements in the right way; a certain degree of inadequateness and confusion will always be present in the individual experiencing the reality. At the same time, it is not to be forgotten that the contact with the reality of the individual who has remained at the level of the imagination is profoundly different from the contact with reality which the individual that has reached the level of reason and of the

- Reason is characterised by the presence of common notions and by the presence of adequate ideas of the properties of things.

- Intuitive science goes from the adequate essence of attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things³⁶. 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 own life. The individuals living in the condition of imagination will organise their lives on the basis of imagination, whereas those living under the other forms of knowledge will organise their lives on the basis of the other forms of knowledge³⁷.

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

intuitive science has: the individual who is able to reach reason and intuitive science has a whole apparatus of science elements at his disposal; he is, in any case, less vulnerable to the data coming from experience. The mind constitution of the individual living in the imagination is different from the mind's constitution of the individual who has reached the level of reason and of intuitive science. Since imagination is a fragmentary knowledge, the individual who lives under the power of imagination is exposed to manipulations: he does not dispose of authentic knowledge which enables him to distinguish between true and false opinions.

³⁶ In the Proposition XXVII of Part 5. of the *Ethica* Spinoza states that the third kind of knowledge brings to the individual the highest mental contentment that the individual can reach.

³⁷ The difference existing between the kinds of knowledge emerges through 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.

steadily fluctuates between the elements of his imagination³⁸. 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 emergence and development 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 imagination lives another kind of life than the subject who lives in reason. Imagination and reason are ways of life. The reality for the individual with reason is another entity than for the individual with imagination: the interpretation of reality of an individual who has developed his reason is completely different from the interpretation of reality of an individual who has remained at the level of 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. The individual who lives under imagination is the prey of the passions: he has no way to counteract passions since he is not aware of his position in the reality. For the individual, to be acquainted with his position in the reality means being aware that he is constitutively limited and therefore always exposed to passions; it means having acquired a full apparatus of concepts regarding reality. The formation of the individual means a complete transformation of the mind.

³⁸ The ignorance which regards the authentic essence of God and which is produced by imagination leads the individual to a false conception of God as it is exposed in the Appendix of Part 1. of the *Ethica*. The demasking of the final cause at the end of the first part of the *Ethica* is an example of liberation from false views: the reaching of the view that God does not do anything following a final cause frees the individual from all false representations of God in which God is presented as doing something for an end. The analysis of the absence of final causes can free the individual from all fears connected to the belief in the unforeseeable actions of God. The interpretation of reality changes through the knowledge of reality, and correspondingly the way of living in the reality changes too. The emendation of the inadequate ideas of the mind involves the whole interpretation of reality: hence, the interpretation of God's essence too belongs to Spinoza's project of the emendation of the confused ideas of the mind: one of the aims of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* consists in the correction of false interpretations of God's essence.

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 reality³⁹. Being active means having adequate ideas, i.e., reaching the 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 structures 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 master 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 transformation of the individual consists in becoming aware of his position in the reality.

The progressive acquisition of knowledge of the principles of reality, which brings about the transformation of inadequate ideas into adequate ideas, changes the condition of the individual. The individual whose mind has inadequate ideas is more exposed to passivity than a mind which has adequate ideas. A mind which has inadequate ideas fluctuates in ignorance: it is not master of itself; it cannot react to the influence from outside. A mind which knows the structure of reality is, on the contrary, able to control and neutralise passions. Knowledge of reality means control of reality since it is awareness of the external influences and therewith elimination of them.

³⁹ 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: 'Summum mentis bonum est Dei cognitio et summa mentis virtus Deum cognoscere (The mind's highest good is the knowledge of God, and the mind's highest virtue is to know 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.

The individual possesses a disposition for knowledge and for the development of the mind. Through the knowledge, the individual becomes able to understand how his mind functions, which his dispositions are, what imagination is, and how the affects are produced: the knowledge consists, among other things, in the analysis of the individual mind's structures. Thereby, he becomes able to understand his position in the reality. Through the hard work employed in understanding the mechanism of this own affects, the individual can see whether and how affects can be controlled.

Being active is caused by knowledge. Knowledge will not come to the individual alone: to have a development in one's mind, the individual ought to be engaged in the acquisition of knowledge. No development of knowledge will come about without the due engagement of the individual. The engagement of the individual will be always needed.

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 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 the passions is the privation of knowledge which consists in the formation of inadequate ideas: therefore, improvement in the 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. Even though the individual is never 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 is, among other things, an instrument of defence: it is a 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 completely changes the individual: it gives the individual the instruments 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. The knowledge of reality brings about an emendation of the intellect in the sense that knowledge implies the discovery of the individual's inadequate ideas as inadequate. 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. The way to put the affects under control is to know them. 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 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 affect and of the imagination⁴⁰. The individual needs authentic knowledge in order to be able to give the external influences the importance which they deserve. This does not mean that individuals stop being passive because of knowledge: actually,

⁴⁰ At the beginning of the Preface of Part 5. of the *Ethica*, Spinoza states that the individual cannot have absolute dominance of the passions. The individual ought to become aware of his limits.

individuals are and remain passive despite the degree of knowledge at which they can arrive; being passive is not completely eliminable. Only the individuals who have reached the due level of knowledge have their conditions under control since they can direct their lives on the basis of the knowledge which they have reached.

The progressive condition of controlling and opposing passive affect 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:

'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.'⁴¹

The statement shows that passions are always present since beatitude serves to fight against lust. Beatitude consists in love towards God which comes about in the subject thanks to the third kind of knowledge⁴². To adequate ideas corresponds the condition of being active: the more adequate ideas the mind has, the more active the mind is and the more active affects it can produce. Beatitude does not derive from the individual's capacity of controlling lusts but from the individual's capacity of reaching knowledge: beatitude is a direct consequence of reaching knowledge; it is an affect which comes about because of the being active of the mind. 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 nature through the development of knowledge: knowledge represents the formation of a new constitution within the individual. This new constitution forms a nucleus of power against imagination, confused ideas and passions: it brings about a brightening of the obscure zone represented by in-

⁴¹ The original text is as follows: 'Beatitudo non est virtutis praemium sed ipsa virtus nec eadem gaudemus quia libidines coercemus sed contra quia eadem gaudemus, ideo libidines coercere possumus.' In Chapter III, *Of the vocation of the Hebrews, and whether the gift of prophecy was peculiar to them*, of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, p. 48, Spinoza says that the authentic beatitude consists in wisdom and in the knowledge of the truth.

⁴² The definition of Beatitude is exposed by Spinoza in the Demonstration of the Proposition XLII of Part 5. of the *Ethica*.

adequate 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 led by the external sphere. The active affects counteract the presence of the passive affects. Before fulfilling the process of education, the subject has only 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.

The difference between the condition of the individuals before the process of knowledge and the condition of the individuals after the process of knowledge is not a condition of elimination of the passive affects: since the individual is a part of nature and is affected in many ways, new passions come steadily about. The difference between the individual before the process of knowledge and the individual after the process of knowledge is that the knowing individual can understand himself, his essence, his position in the reality, the significance of imagination and of knowledge. He can understand the affects and their mechanism: he is thus able to oppose passive affects. Individuals possessing knowledge can react to the passive affects, can understand their origin, can see their cause and can dominate them. Liberation from the passive affects is a continuous action.

g) Transformation of the individual

As alluded to, we can observe, throughout the *Ethica*, a process of transformation of the individual. To give some examples of the transformation 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.’⁴³

⁴³ Spinoza’s original text clarifies that the separation between actions and passions is due, among other things, to their different origin: ‘Mentis actiones ex solis ideis adaequatis oriuntur, passiones autem a solis inadaequatis pendent.’ 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. In the Proposition XXIII of Part 4. of the *Ethica* Spinoza states that the individual does not act by following

The distinction between adequate ideas and actions, on the one hand, and inadequate ideas and passions, on the other hand, is therewith clear. In the Note to this last Proposition, Spinoza adds some important elements concerning the relations between the individual's mind having passion and the individual's mind having elements of negation in itself. The condition of having passions refers to the individual mind since the individual's mind has elements of negation in itself, i.e., since the individual's mind is considered as being a part of the nature:

'Thus we see that passions are not referred to the mind, except in so far as it contains something involving negation, or in so far as it is regarded as a part of nature which cannot be clearly and distinctly perceived through itself without other parts...'

For the individual mind, to have passion is due to its being a part of nature; insofar as the individual's mind is a part of nature, the individual's mind is negated, i.e., limited as to its being active by the nature. Having passions amounts, therefore, for the individual, to having a minor degree of reality and a minor degree of perfection.

Only the process of knowledge, fulfilled through reason and intuitive science, can increase the being active of the mind since only those affects which derive from knowledge are a form of being active.. An increase in the being active of the mind 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 individual⁴⁴. The individual begins his way towards at least a partial liberation from passive affects from a disadvantaged point: individuals are immediately submerged by passions. Only step after step can the individual produce adequate ideas, i.e., only little by little can the individuals 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

virtue if he acts due to inadequate ideas; only the individual who possesses intellectual knowledge acts by following virtue.

⁴⁴ In the *Tractatus Politicus*, Chapter I, Paragraph 5, for instance, Spinoza confirms that individuals are necessarily exposed to passions.

mind is defined only by knowledge⁴⁵; its impotence or passion is assessed, on the other hand, only on the basis of the privation of knowledge⁴⁶, 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 ideas⁴⁷, so that that mind is discerned more through that which it undergoes than through that which it does⁴⁸, and it follows that, on the contrary, that mind is most active whose greatest part is made up of adequate ideas⁴⁹, 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 impotence⁵⁰. 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 which we can never be master of. 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 affects⁵¹ (see on this the note of the proposition XLVII of part 2.):

⁴⁵ The power of the mind exclusively consists in the knowledge of reality.

⁴⁶ As we can see through the following quotation, Spinoza clearly states that impotence or passion exclusively derives from the privation of knowledge: *'impotentia autem seu passio a sola cognitionis privatione'* The impotence of the individual derives from the lack of knowledge. Spinoza interprets the opposition between the 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.

⁴⁷ Spinoza's statement clarifies the connection between the extension of passions and the extension of inadequate ideas: *'Ex quo sequitur, mentem illam maxime pati, cuius maximam partem ideae inadaequatae constituunt'*

⁴⁸ *'ita ut magis per id, quod patitur, quam per id quod agit, dignoscatur'*

⁴⁹ *'et illam contra maxime agere, cuius maximam partem ideae adaequatae constituunt'*

⁵⁰ *'ita ut, quamvis huic tot inadaequatae ideae, quam illi insint, magis tamen per illas, quae humanae virtuti tribuuntur, quam per has, quae humanam impotentiam arguunt, dignoscatur'*

⁵¹ The clear and distinct knowledge of God is knowledge of the whole reality: since this knowledge is knowledge of the whole reality it enables the individual to eliminate inadequate ideas.

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 passions⁵², at least it brings about that they constitute the smallest part of the mind⁵³ (see proposition XIV of this part).’

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

- The power of the mind is defined only by knowledge, whereas the impotence of the mind is defined only by the privation of knowledge.
- The more inadequate ideas the mind has, the more characterised by passive states the mind is.
- The more adequate ideas the mind has, the more characterised by virtue 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 master 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 the whole reality and is therefore in the condition of limiting his passivity⁵⁴. 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 a long process of self-emendation. Only 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 in order to transform inadequate ideas into ade-

⁵² ‘quos nempe, quatenus passiones sunt, si non absolute tollit’

⁵³ ‘saltem efficit, ut minimam mentis partem constituent’

⁵⁴ In Chapter II, Of Prophets, of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, p. 27, Spinoza considers imagination and intellect as being inversely proportional in individuals: the greater the imagination is in an individual, the littler is the capacity for abstract reasoning and, conversely, the more developed the capacity for abstract reasoning is, the weaker the force of imagination is. The cause of this is that the individuals who have developed their intellect want to check the force of imagination since they want to avoid that the imagination disturbs their reason. The way to the limitation of the imagination, which, as such, keeps the individuals in the servitude of the passions, ought to go through the growth of the intellect.

quate ideas: only knowledge makes 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. 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: hence, 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 is⁵⁵. The mind which has been transformed by the acquisition of the second and of the third kind of knowledge has inadequate ideas as any other mind has: it does not have 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; anyway, knowledge cannot do everything, 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 clearly 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. To become active, the work of transformation of the ideas is necessary. 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. Only the individual who knows the necessity of nature reaches the contentment of the soul: for the mind, to know the necessity of nature

⁵⁵ See on this theme, for instance, also the Proposition XXXVIII of Part 5. of the *Ethica*: Spinoza states that the more things the mind understands by the second and the third kind of knowledge, the less the mind is exposed to the affects which are evil since the part of the mind which is not touched by the negative affects becomes greater.

means becoming free from all feelings of incertitude caused by the mind's incertitude. 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 spirit⁵⁶.'

On 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 lust.
- The life of the ignorant is moved by external causes, i.e., it is being 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 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. His constitution is the constitution of an active entity.

The notion of God is common to all individuals in the sense that the notion of God is accessible to everybody as long as the individual is ready to walk on the road of knowledge. The knowledge of God is common: hence, this knowledge can unify individuals with each other. Whereas passions are a source of division of the individuals from each other, the knowledge of God is a source of emendation of the confused ideas in each individual and of unification of the individuals with each other, since it is common to all individuals.

⁵⁶ 'vera animi acquiescentia'.

The knowledge of God is the supreme beatitude⁵⁷: this knowledge is the origin of adequate ideas; it is the principle of enlightenment of the individual's mind and the cause of the emendation of the mind from inadequate ideas. Since the knowledge of God can be common to all individuals, the knowledge of God represents the origin of a process of liberation from the passions and therewith from the cause of divisions between the individuals⁵⁸: the knowledge of God is the foundation of the power of the mind and the foundation of the process of liberation from passions, i.e., of liberation from all factors which leads to the reciprocal hostility between individuals⁵⁹.

⁵⁷ In the Proposition XXVIII of Part 4. of the *Ethica* Spinoza asserts that the highest good and the highest virtue of the mind consists in the knowledge of God: 'Summum mentis bonum est Dei cognitio et summa mentis virtus Deum cognoscere (The mind's highest good is the knowledge of God, and the mind's highest virtue is to know God).' Spinoza likewise defines the knowledge of God as the highest happiness or beatitude in the last Note of Part 2. of the *Ethica*.

⁵⁸ In the Proposition XXXII of Part 4. of the *Ethica*, Spinoza states that the individuals, since they are the prey to the passions, cannot be said to be in harmony with each other as regards their being the prey to passions. In the Proposition XXXIII of Part 4. f the *Ethica*, Spinoza adds that individuals can differ in nature since they are the prey to passions. Furthermore, in the Proposition XXXIV of Part 4. of the *Ethica* Spinoza states that individuals can be contrary to each other since they are liable to passions. Thus, the presence of passions is a ground for division between individuals. Thereafter, Spinoza asserts in the Proposition XXXV of Part 4. of the *Ethica* that individuals agree in nature with each other when they follow reason. In *Tractatus Politicus*, Chapter II, Paragraph 14, p. 296, Spinoza states that, since individuals are liable to negative passions, they are natural enemies: this assertion confirms that the power of passions can produce a negative condition as regards the relationships which hold between individuals. Passions are bound to the experiences which are peculiar to an individual: therefore, they cannot be the origin of notions which are common to everybody. On the contrary, the knowledge of God, being accessible to everyone and common to everyone, is a factor of unity for all individuals.

⁵⁹ Spinoza states in Chapter V., *On the ceremonial law*, of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, p. 73, that, if the individuals followed reason, laws would not be necessary. In the *Tractatus Politicus*, Chapter II., Paragraph V., p. 292, Spinoza asserts that if the individuals lived following reason, the natural right would exclusively consist in the power of reason. Both passages show that the majority of individuals is not able to follow reason: therefore, laws are needed.

To sum up, the individual who possesses intuitive science becomes acquainted with the necessary structure of reality. He knows how reality is organised: therewith he becomes able to eliminate his confused ideas. He is no more condemned to incertitude, vacillations, doubts and fluctuations.

h) Active affects

Spinoza aims to diminish the influence of some of the 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 can be negative since they expose the individual to passivity. Affects can be positive 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, 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 reaching the level 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, insofar as 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 understands⁶⁰, to the fortitude⁶¹, which I divide into courage⁶²

⁶⁰ 'quatenus intelligit'.

⁶¹ 'ad fortitudinem refero'.

⁶² 'animositatem'.

and highmindedness⁶³. Now, under courage, I understand the desire by which everyone strives to preserve his own being in accordance solely with the dictate of reason⁶⁴. 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 temperance⁶⁵, sobriety⁶⁶, and presence of mind in dangers⁶⁷, and so on, are species of courage; modesty⁶⁸, clemency⁶⁹ 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 oneself⁷⁰ can arise from reason, and only that contentment which arises from reason is the highest possible.’⁷¹

⁶³ ‘generositatem’.

⁶⁴ ‘ex solo rationis dictamine’.

⁶⁵ ‘temperantia’.

⁶⁶ ‘sobrietas’.

⁶⁷ ‘animi in periculis praesentia’.

⁶⁸ ‘modestia’.

⁶⁹ ‘clementia’.

⁷⁰ For the definition of Contentment of oneself see the xxv Definition in the Definition of Affects in Part 3. of the *Ethica*: ‘Acquiescentia in se ipso est laetitia orta ex eo quod homo se ipsum suamque agendi potentiam contemplatur.’ (Contentment of oneself is the gladness arisen from the fact that the man contemplates himself and his power of acting). The translation of Spinoza’s expression *Acquiescentia in se ipso* is a problem. We opted for the translation “Contentment of oneself” since we interpret the condition of *Acquiescentia in se ipso* as the condition of mind which arises when the individual, having reached the knowledge of himself in relation to the whole structure of reality, finds himself, in virtue of this acquisition of knowledge, in a condition of peace with himself and with his own nature. Spinoza states in Proposition XXVII of Part 5. of the *Ethica* that the highest possible contentment of mind arises from the third kind of knowledge since reaching the third kind of knowledge brings about the contentment of having reached this level of knowledge.

⁷¹ The connection between the contentment of oneself and reason as the source of the contentment of oneself comes out clearly in the original text: ‘Acquiescentia in

The 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 that, therefore, is an active affect. In *Ethica*, Part 3., Proposition LVIII we can read Spinoza's declaration stating that gladness⁷² and desire⁷³ can be both active and passive affects:

se ipso ex ratione oriri potest et ea sola acquiescentia quae ex ratione oritur, summa est quae potest dari.'

⁷² The definition of gladness expressed by Spinoza in the II Definition of the Definitions of Affects in Part 3. of the *Ethica* is as follows: 'Laetitia est hominis transitio a minore ad maiorem perfectionem (Gladness is the transition of a man from a less to a greater perfection).' The opposite of gladness is sadness, which is defined in the III Definition of the Definition of Affects in Part 3. of the *Ethica* in the following way: 'Tristitia est hominis transitio a maiore ad minorem perfectionem (Sadness is the transition of a man from a greater to a less perfection).'

⁷³ The definition of desire given by Spinoza in the I Definition of the Definitions of Affects in Part 3. of the *Ethica* is as follows: 'Cupiditas est ipsa hominis essentia quatenus ex data quacunquē ejus affectione determinata concipitur ad aliquid agendum (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 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 man. This aspect shows that, in spite of 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 conduct profoundly different lives depending on his essence being a desire derived by reason or on his essence 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 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 supreme virtue or power of the mind consists in understanding things by the third kind of knowledge.

'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.'⁷⁴

Moreover, in *Ethica*, Part 3., Proposition LIX Spinoza explains that active affects are those which derive from gladness 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 which are referred to gladness or desire.'⁷⁵

The Proposition LXI of Part 4. of the *Ethica* confirms that desire can be brought about by reason⁷⁶. 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. The individual is transformed through the passage from passions to actions: his constitution becomes something else through the acquisition of knowledge since reason modifies and transforms into an active affect the desire, which is the essence of the individual and which, in the ignorant individuals, remains a passive affect.

⁷⁴ 'Praeter laetitiam et cupiditatem quae passiones sunt, alii laetitiae et cupiditatis affectus dantur qui ad nos quatenus agimus, referuntur.'

⁷⁵ 'Inter omnes affectus qui ad mentem quatenus agit referuntur, nulli alii sunt quam qui ad laetitiam vel cupiditatem referuntur.'

⁷⁶ The fact that desire can be brought about by reason can open the way to a further question. Since desire is the essence of man, and since Desire can be both a passive and an active affect, it seems to follow that the essence of the individual can change depending on the presence or absence of active desire in the individual. In other words, the essence of the individual who, having reached the knowledge of the second and of the third kind, is able to promote the emergence of active desire, is different from the essence of the ignorant.

i) Conclusions

Spinoza's *Ethica* turns out to be, among other things, an analysis of the condition of the mind and a programme for the change of the initial condition of the mind. The power of knowledge is the central point. The knowledge enables the individual to successfully oppose the affects. Knowledge is the antidote to passions: knowledge leads the individual to a radical transformation and to a complete change as regards his vision of reality. The condition of servitude represented by the dominance of passions is constitutive of the individual essence: this condition represents, though, no absolute condemnation. An at least partial way out from the condition of servitude exists: this way out from servitude and towards freedom is the knowledge of reality. Knowledge of reality entails, at the same time, knowledge of the foundations of reality, of the individual's condition in the reality, of the individual constitutive exposition to passions and of the way of limitation of passions.

The development of knowledge of reality brings about a programme for the individual liberation from the servitude represented by passions: the acquisition of this knowledge and the progress in the extension of this knowledge have, as their consequence, the process of emendation of the individual's mind and the progressive liberation of the mind itself from the condition of servitude. Since passions are inadequate ideas, i.e., inadequate notions, any development in the knowledge of reality represents a neutralisation of inadequate ideas and, as a consequence, a form of liberation from the passions.

The process of acquisition of knowledge turns out to be, therefore, a process of acquisition of a new constitution in the individual: the development of reason and of intuitive science in the individual is a process of acquisition of new orientations towards the passions present in the individual. Individual liberation can be only partial, though, since the passive constitution of the individual can never be completely eliminated. The individual can never reach a condition of complete dominance of passions.

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

- The condition of men is that of modifications (modes) of the substance. As a consequence, men are dependent entities. Men 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, as a consequence, 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-mastery⁷⁷.

- 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 brightening in the mind of the obscurity represented by 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 acquired autonomy from passions and no definitively acquired independence of passions: since individuals, because of their constitution, are passive in relation to nature, passions will always come about again. The individual's being passive cannot be eliminated.

- 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 range of responsibility of the individual.

- The subject is not given, at least not completely. The subject who develops active affects is profoundly different from the subject who remains in the condition of passive affects. The subject who develops the active af-

⁷⁷ 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.'

fects leads, at least partially, his own life, whereas the subject who remains in passivity is the slave of external influences.

- 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 subject 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 subject from a totally passive subject to a partially active subject.

- Imagination and knowledge are ways of living since they are connected to the affects. Imagination is connected to passive affects; knowledge is connected to active affects.

We would like to end this investigation by quoting Spinoza's final considerations of the *Ethica*, expressed in Part 5, Proposition XLII, Note:

'Hence, if the way which I pointed out as leading to this result seems extremely hard, it may nevertheless be found. And certainly that which is discovered so seldom must be hard. If salvation were ready to our hand and could without great labour be discovered, how could it happen that it be neglected by almost all men? But all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare.'

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