

SPINOZA'S DUAL VIEW ON HUMAN FREEDOM

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INTRODUCTION

In history of philosophy, Spinoza is well known as radical determinist. According to that determinism, every thing that exists and acts does it in only one possible way determined from eternity. This doctrine provoked severe criticism addressed to Spinoza because it clearly jeopardized traditional understanding of freedom as capability of choice.¹ Opposition of many critics Spinoza could not attenuate by offering his concept of freedom: action determined by proper nature. However, didn't Spinoza, with his philosophy, called for exactly that traditional concept of freedom officially and explicitly denied by him?

I'll show, in my article, that Spinoza promotes both concepts of freedom: official and unofficial one. The official concept follows from his ontological and anthropological premises; the unofficial one is required and implied by the prescriptiveness of his ethics. Although it was much discussed about whether Spinoza teaches ethical descriptiveness or prescriptiveness, I'll show that he certainly teaches, implicitly at least, prescriptiveness.

Actually, Spinoza promotes dual strategy: on objective-ontological level, man can be free only in sense of Spinoza's official concept of freedom; on subjective-practical level, Spinoza promotes freedom (CC). It is interesting to note that he uses the same strategy regarding issue that was probably the most important in whole his philosophy: man's activity. Regardless of his insisting that God is the only source of all activity in reality, he ascribes to man too, implicitly, the power of acting. His ethical prescriptiveness calls for man's activity too.

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1 For this traditional understanding of freedom, I'll use the shorter expression: freedom (CC), where "CC" stands for „Capability of Choice“.

1. SPINOZA'S OFFICIAL CONCEPT OF FREEDOM

In order to understand what, according Spinoza, consists man's freedom in, we must first see the basic ontological and anthropological premises which offer us an answer to question what human freedom could be anyway. Among those premises there are certainly determinism, deanthropomorfized God and substance monism.

Substance monism and determinism represent two basic features of Spinoza's ontology. While substance monism determines ontological status of every thing, determinism shows in which way every thing, including man, acts. These two aspects are, of course, deeply intertwined and must be always taken together. According to substance monism, God is the unique substance or reality and all other things, including man, are solely particular expressions or modes of that reality under different attributes.

When building his determinism, Spinoza particularly took as ideal mathematics as it was presented in Euclid's *Elements*. Whole mathematical system was developed in manner that definitions, postulates and axioms were taken as basic starting points from which there were deduced, through strict deduction, theorems and propositions. There holds, in whole this construction, strict deductiveness which assures to deduced propositions the same certainty that basic premises have. It seems that determinism assures, on ontological level, such a deductiveness and certainty of the whole system: from the actual constitution of reality it is possible only one future constitution. The world, as we know it, was determined from eternity to be now exactly in way it actually is and it will be in the future exactly in one possible way because Spinoza's God doesn't have intellect and freedom for evaluating different possible worlds and then choosing one of them. It was traditional understanding that all things are not

strictly determined in their being and acting, that is, God and man have capability of acting in this or that way. Spinoza's explicit and resolute reaction is: No! He offers his concept of divine and human freedom taking into account basic ontological premises as exposed in the first part of *Ethics*.

Spinoza defines free and constrained thing as follows:

That thing is said to be free [*liber*] which exists solely from the necessity of its own nature, and is determined to action by itself alone. A thing is said to be necessary [*necessarius*] or rather, constrained [*coactus*], if it is determined by another thing to exist and to act in a definite and determinate way (E1Def7).

Spinoza in both definitions says that a thing is "determined" (*determinatur*) to exist and to act, which means that determination or determinedness is not a property by which constrained thing differs from the free one. Essential difference is in the fact whether a thing is determined by itself or some external thing. In first case, a thing is free; in second case, a thing is not free.

It is obviously that the first definition refers exclusively to God since solely God exists by necessity of his nature and is by his nature determined to act. It cannot be otherwise since he is the only one substance, that is, there is, outside God, no other thing with which he would be in interaction and which could affect him or act with him co-causally. So, God is – in his acting – determined solely by his nature and in that fact lays excellence and fullness of his freedom: "God acts solely from the laws of his own nature, constrained by none" (E1P17); or, "God alone is a free cause" (E1P17C2). We can see that Spinoza in no way conceives freedom in libertarian sense of nonexistence of determinedness but put the accent on being determined by proper nature. The source of all determinedness is God's essence (cf. E1P17Dm,C1,C2 and S; E1P29Dm).

What about human freedom? Spinoza first, in the first sentence of Preface of the fifth part of *Ethics* promises us "the method or way leading to freedom" while he previously stated that only God was free because he is the only one who acts solely by his nature. Man is, on the other hand, only one little part of Nature and is

always, because of interaction with other little parts, subjected to passive emotions or passions and must obey the general order of Nature (cf. E4P4C). If man is subjected to passions, he is not free but is slave: "I assign the term 'bondage' to man's lack of power to control and check the emotions" (E4Praef). When man is subjected to passions, his effects are more or less explained through other, external causes and not only by his nature (cf. E4P5Dm). Even more, for people who think to possess free will and to be able to act through their free decisions he says:

So these mental decisions arise in the mind from the same necessity as the ideas of things existing in actuality, and those who believe that they speak, or keep silent, or do anything from the free mental decision are dreaming with their eyes open (E1P17C2).

Why, then, Spinoza, and in which sense, promises the way that leads to freedom if such a freedom is unavailable from beginning? Obviously, we should conceive human freedom as gradual (cf. E4P73Dm). It means that man is as more free as his acts are more caused and explicable solely by his nature (because they arise from his nature; cf. E1Def1). However, when it is about freedom in a sense of determinedness by proper nature Spinoza stresses something more: if, before Spinoza, it was usually said that freedom was cause that moved to specific action although intellect had found out that something else should have been done, Spinoza promotes essentially different, intellectualistic, conception.

First of all, he makes it clear that will is mere thought construct, something abstract that does not exist in reality but arises by generalization of volitions which really exist, in the same way as the intellect is actually constructed by generalization of particular ideas which intellect has (cf. E2P48S). It doesn't mean that Spinoza eliminates completely the word "will" but he explicates its precise meaning:

by the will I mean the faculty of affirming and denying, and not desire. I mean, I repeat, the faculty whereby the mind affirms or denies what is true or what is false, not the desire whereby the mind seeks things or shuns them (ibid)

If we still use concept "will", we must understand by it particular volitions, "this or that affirmation or this or that negation" (E2P49Dm).

Spinoza says that affirmation or negation is not possible without what is affirmed or negated (cf. *ibid*). Idea and its affirmation/negation is actually so close and interdependent that Spinoza concludes that every volition is “nothing but idea” (*ibid*), or, “will and intellect are one and the same thing” (E2P49C). Identity of will and intellect should be seen on basis of deeper identity of mind and body which are “one and the same thing, conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension” (E3P2S). This means that between order and linking of mind’s actions/passions there exists strict parallelism with order and linking of body’s actions/passions. In another words, Spinoza identify mind’s appetite/decision with body’s disposition (cf. *ibid*). Body’s disposition depends on how it is affected by external bodies, and specific affections are manifested in mind as specific ideas.² External things ordinarily affect the mind, but Spinoza thinks the mind has power in determining the whole man’s behavior, that is, man – through intellect – can gain interactions with external things in which he is less dependent. Intellectualistic identification of mind and will enables Spinoza to bind man’s freedom essentially with knowledge: “A passive emotion ceases to be a passive emotion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it” (E5P3). Both freedom and knowledge have one common feature: self-determination. Self-determination implies, *per se*, power of acting or activity because man performs, in that case, acts that at greater length arise from his nature, that is, they are determined by his nature.³ The categories of freedom, knowledge and activity are closely intertwined.

So, when it is about freedom, what is unavoidable is intellect: “A free man, that is, he who lives solely according to the dictates of reason” (E4P67Dm); or, a free man “tries to

2 M. Kisner nicely describes relationship mind-proper body-external bodies as follows: “human beings, understood at the most basic level, are collections of finite modes, which are determined by other finite modes. More specifically, our minds are collections of ideas, representing a particular body, which is determined by its interactions with other bodies”. (KISNER, Matthew. **Spinoza on Human Freedom.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 232).

3 Cf. KISNER, Matthew. **Spinoza on...**, op. cit., pp. 80 and 165.

guide himself and others by the free judgement of reason and to do only those things that he himself knows to be of primary importance” (E4P70Dm). So, without knowledge there is neither freedom, that is, freedom essentially depends on reason’s power, and this fact is testified by the title of the fifth part of *Ethics*. The crucial question is: why would freedom be proportional to the reason’s power? Or, how knowledge can change or attenuate passions which a man is subjected to and which make him live in bondage? Isn’t knowledge only one of man’s capabilities that serves for evaluating different options – whether he will live by dictate of passions or by dictate of reason – while the will is capability thanks to which a man can chose this or that life style?

First of all, man should adequately know his passions in their true nature and in context of the whole reality, because passion is not passion any more as soon as we form clear and distinct idea thereof; or, true knowledge is best remedy for passions: “since the power of mind is defined solely by the understanding... we shall determine solely by the knowledge of the mind the remedies for the emotions” (E5Praef). Spinoza, at the beginning of the fifth part of *Ethics* offers different remedies for the emotions, but we could say that man confronts these emotions only “from outside”, that is, emotions are only attenuated in their strength. “Direct” confrontation with passive emotions takes place only after they are attenuated and this confrontation is possible because the knowledge itself is a kind of emotion: “An emotion cannot be checked or destroyed except by a contrary emotion which is stronger than the emotion which is to be checked” (E4P7). We should recall that emotions are “affections of the body by which the body’s power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections” (E3Def3). Body’s affection can vary, depending on natures of external bodies that affect it and on man’s corporeal-spiritual constitution itself. So, emotion implies not only specific affection of body but idea of it as well. Interaction with external world is manifested in this emotion and this emotion can be twofold: action and passion.

In short, freedom means man’s condition in which he is less subjected to the influence of external things and is in greater part cause of his acts. To achieve such a condition, man

has knowledge on disposition. This helps him attenuate passions through which he manifests dependency on external things. Knowledge is, by itself, emotion or arises emotion and emotions are those that determine man to act in this or that way. True knowledge not only gives to man the greatest pleasure but manifests the greatest man's perfection, and perfection implies the power of action. True knowledge can, as emotion that moves to action, destroy some bad emotion and here we can see the intellectualistic aspect of Spinoza's ethics. If such a knowledge enables man to live more actively, that is, determined by his nature, than it is deeply connected with freedom which is exactly acting by own nature.

This is Spinoza's official concept of freedom which differs essentially from traditional concept of freedom (CC). However, did Spinoza completely rejected the concept of freedom (CC) or is it perhaps implicit in spinozism? More over, doesn't Spinoza need exactly freedom (CC) and doesn't he promote it implicitly? To be able to give answers to these questions, we must see first whether Spinoza teaches, in his ethics, descriptiveness of prescriptiveness.

2. DESCRIPTIVENESS/PRESCRIPTIVENESS OF SPINOZA'S ETHICS

We can adduce two pillars on which Spinoza builds prescriptiveness of his ethics: "dictates of reason" and "model of human nature". He opens and mainly keep writing his main work using sober and non-partial language trying to persuade his readers that things are exactly the way he describes they are. In that sense, we can and must talk about descriptiveness. This is how things are: there is only one substance which acts in a way strictly determined by its nature; every other thing is a mode that expresses the activity of divine substance; man is one of these modes expressed through mind and body between which there is conceptual and causal barrier; man endeavors to keep in his being and to increase his power of action; man's emotions a essentially co-determined by external causes with which man is in perpetual interaction; if in man there are two or more opposite emotions, the stronger will prevail; man seeks goods which are projected by his actual constitution, etc. However, this descriptive way of teaching

steps back at moment in which Spinoza starts to talk about what man "should" do, as different to what he does in fact.

a) Dictates of reason

Dictates of reason have eminent place and role because

since reason demands nothing contrary to nature, it therefore demands that every man himself should seek his own advantage (I mean his real advantage), should aim at whatever really leads a man toward greater perfection (E4P18S).

Let's recall some concrete dictates of reason. Spinoza invites us to recompense other's hatred with love (cf. E4P46) although we are willing to recompense other's hatred with hatred and revenge. Hatred is itself pain, and this pain means transition to lower perfection. Then, dictates of reason have important function because man can, through them, refuse present lesser good for greater future good (cf. E4P26 and 66). Then, if we act according to the dictates of reason, we shall seek for understanding through which we affirm the essence of our mind (cf. E4P26 and Dm). Important segment of Spinoza's philosophy was the quality of people's coexistence in community. People will live in concordance only if they seek for that what is common to them, that is, if they act from the laws of their nature, where dictates of reason offer important directions (cf. E4P35Dm and C; E4P73Dm; E4P40Dm). Then, life by the guidance of reason opens the door for sort of altruism, since "He who lives by the guidance of reason desires for another, too, the good that he seeks for himself" (E4P51Dm2). Let's see now some important implications of Spinoza's speech of reason's dictates.

First, Spinoza accomplishes, through them, de-subjectivization or objectivization of goods. When Spinoza speaks of "good", he firstly explicates and describes it in purely subjectivist meaning insofar as

we do not desire a thing because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we call the object of our desire good, and consequently the object of our aversion bad. Therefore, it is according to his emotion that everyone judges or deems what is good, bad, better, worse, best, or worst (E3P39S)

There is no mention here of some “objective” criterion according to which we should all be obliged to follow some “objective” good. In the same manner, if before Spinoza God was conceived as the ultimate authority who has right to prescribe objective goods that all men, as God’s creatures, had to follow, then such an argumentation doesn’t take place in spinozism: Spinoza’s God is not personal creator of universe who gives to men commandments how they should behavior. The state possibly can proscribe some general norms of citizens’ behavior but these norms don’t cover many cases when men have to evaluate what is good and to act accordingly. Besides, in a case of citizen laws, it is supposed that citizens are enough enlightened to be able to understand that these laws are really useful to them and not something imposed from outside.

So, when Spinoza addresses “good” in purely descriptive way, he only describes how man finds what he conceives or puts as good, that is, on basis of his fortuitous emotions (cf. E3P51S). The consequence of such a subjectivist consideration of good and tendency to achieve them is not something that can truly make men happy because in that case

“we are in many respects at the mercy of external causes and are tossed about like the waves of the sea when driven by contrary winds, unsure of the outcome and of our fate” (E3P59S)

No matter how much it is not pleasant to watch other people in their pathetic condition of being “tossed about like the waves”, it was certainly more problematic for Spinoza another consequence of man’s acting when he is guided by subjectivist good: discord and hostility among men. Namely, insofar as men act according to their passive emotions “they can be different in nature... and contrary to one another” (E4P35Dm). From such diversity and confrontation arise emotions like hatred, anger, envy etc., as well as the tendency of many men toward some competitive good. Therefore it is not surprising that Spinoza, although in Preface of the fourth part of *Ethics* still says that good and bad

indicate nothing positive in things considered in themselves, and are nothing but modes of thinking, or notions which we form from comparing things with one another. For one and the same thing can at

the same time be good and bad, and also different,

he very soon offers qualitatively different definition of “good” and “bad”:

By *good* I understand that which we certainly know to be useful to us” and “By *bad* I understand that which we certainly know to be an obstacle to our attainment of some good (E4Def1 and 2)

Importance and value of dictates of reason lay in fact that we, through them, know that something is really useful to us. What is really useful to us? That what truly affirm our nature. In that sense, acting by dictates of reason has universal value and contributes to harmonious coexistence because

insofar as men live under the guidance of reason, to that extent only do they necessarily do the things which are necessarily good for human nature and consequently for every single man; that is ... which agree with the nature of every single man. So men also are necessarily in agreement insofar as they live under the guidance of reason (E4P35Dm)

No matter how much Spinoza is unclear about human nature, it is clear from aforesaid that his idea was that all men have the same nature, under the condition that this nature be understood in its deepest core which we affirm when we act under the guidance of reason. In that we should see universality of those dictates insofar as they help every man in realizing what is truly good for him. Spinoza made, in that way, important step toward de-subjectivization of “good” and thereby of ethical behavior although he probably jeopardized mechanism of mere “projection” of “goods” from the actual man’s constitution or affection.

Then, it is introduced, through dictates of reason, some sort of normativity. If objectivity is gained by stressing the common element of human nature which we affirm when realizing goods explicated by reason, normativity is achieved by stressing the fact that only true good assures self-preservation and increasing of power. Objectivity and normativity are, of course, deeply intertwined insofar as normativity justifies objectivity to be stressed.

Man’s basic striving consists in self-preservation and increasing of power of action.

Both things man can realize in two basic ways: following apparent good or following true good. In first case, if he gains desired good (wealth, honor, sensual pleasure), it is about apparent happiness because the thing man is connected with is itself imperfect and shaking. In such a situation, man is slave of fate and those scenarios that fate brings to him. In a case of true good (knowledge of God and ourselves), man's happiness can only be increased and in no way can it vanishes because the thing man is connected with and opened to (God or Nature) is, by itself, perfect and unshakable.

Since these two goods (and behaviors arising from tendency toward one or another) manifest essential difference between them, there is also essential difference between ways how man realizes his *conatus perseverandi*. Granted that reader of Spinoza's philosophy is persuaded of validity of Spinoza's arguments and conclusions, it is reasonable to expect that he will also accept and realize them because we can suppose that every reasonable man can't be indifferent regarding the way how to realize his conatus. So, if I know that knowledge of God and myself in context of the whole Nature will help me to gain the highest happiness and perfection, then such truly good is binding for me like a norm I have to follow. Normativity of reason's dictates and superiority of goods those dictates direct to consist, therefore, in qualitative superiority of true goods in face of apparent goods which man tends to with his inadequate knowledge. We can talk about normativity on basis of distinction between "untrue" knowledge of good and bad, based on subjective perception (cf. E4P8) and "true" knowledge of good and bad (cf. E4P14). In such a context it is, of course, of crucial importance whether Spinoza offered good and persuasive enough arguments why we should call some good "true" instead of "untrue" or "apparent". It is, therefore, one of the most important issue whether a reader has accepted his statement that "the essence of reason is nothing other than our mind insofar as it clearly and distinctly understands" (E4P26Dm), which means that mind will preserve his being best and most efficaciously if understands as more and distinct as possible and not by abandoning itself to sensual pleasures and inadequate knowledge.

Spinoza's try to construct his ethics in objectivizing and prescriptive light we can also find in his statements about "model of human nature":

So in what follows I shall mean by 'good' that which we certainly know to be the means of our approaching nearer to the model of human nature that we set before ourselves, and by 'bad' that which we certainly know prevents us from reproducing the said model. Again, we shall say that men are more perfect or less perfect insofar as they are nearer to or farther from this model (E4Praef)

This "model of human nature" refers, first of all, to "free man" who Spinoza describes in many places. Particularity of free man comes forward if we compare him with slave: slave "is guided only by emotion or belief", while free man is "guided by reason" (E4P66S). Or, slave "whether he will or not, performs actions of which he is completely ignorant", while free man "does no one's will but his own, and does only what he knows to be of greatest importance in life, which he therefore desires above all" (ibid). But, particularity of spinozistic freedom consists above all in being caused by proper nature and not by external causes. Unapproachable model of freedom is God, but Spinoza invites man to achieve as much as possible higher level of freedom because in that case he will be not tossed like wave of the sea.

Life in freedom manifest other advantages too: free man has no fear of death (cf. E4P67); he knows, in concrete situations, how to find out the right action (cf. E4P69C); he will bind himself with other free man through true friendship (cf. E4P71Dm and S); free man is veracious (cf. E4P72); free men live harmoniously in society (cf. E4P73Dm); besides, Spinoza equates our freedom with our salvation or blessedness:

From this we clearly understand in what our salvation or blessedness or freedom consists, namely, in the constant and eternal love toward God, that is, in God's love toward men (E5P36S).

If reader is not convinced completely by those Spinoza's arguments of why he should act according to the reason's dictates, Spinoza has another trump card: wise man. The wise man can function as model of human nature insofar

as he manifests the life style by which should be attracted every reasonable man who truly wants to preserve in being and increase his power of action. Spinoza is not proponent of any sort of asceticism but he promotes modesty in all body's activities and pleasures. The body must be so disposed as to be able to be affected by as great pleasure as possible, because that's the only way of our passing to greater perfection and our greater participation in divine nature, while our mind being readier for understanding many things (cf. E4P45S2). Therefore, wise man is not an ascetic but prudent and moderate hedonist:

It is, I repeat, the part of a wise man to refresh and invigorate himself in moderation with good food and drink, as also with perfumes, with the beauty of blossoming plants, with dress, music, sporting activities, theaters, and the like, in which every man can indulge without harm to another (ibid)

Besides, a wise man manifests one nobler life style. Namely, the whole Spinoza's ethical project is about helping people to – by use of adequate knowledge – leave their slavery and enter the condition of freedom in which reason's power steps forward. While ignorant, because of his inadequate knowledge, is being tossed like wave and because of that he cannot gain the true satisfaction of mind,

the wise man, insofar as he is considered as such, suffers scarcely any disturbance of spirit, but being conscious, by virtue of a certain eternal necessity, of himself, of God and of things, never ceases to be, but always possesses true spiritual contentment (E5P42S).

To make conclusion, “reason's dictates” and “model of human nature” have a common element which is, by itself, very important for every man: they are connected with behavior's model which is superior to merely subjectivist-relativistic model based exclusively on subjective evaluation of a man what is useful to him or isn't. This “objectivistic” model is the only one that makes it possible for man to proceed in freedom, happiness, activity, virtue etc., and offers the best realization of man's *conatus perseverandi* and his tendency to increase his power. It also brings, to that extent, obligation to be accepted and applied in practice. But, does it suffice for conclusion that Spinoza's ethics is prescriptive indeed?

The fact that Spinoza, through his determinism, teaches the man's basic passivity regarding what happens with him and around him and, on the other side, the fact that he still invites man to take his destiny in his hands and to adjust his behavior to objectivist model result with different interpretations regarding compatibility of his ethics' prescriptiveness and determinism (but other elements too). And so we have commentators who consider Spinoza consequent in his descriptive account of ethics as well as those who think that Spinoza promotes some sort of prescriptiveness or, at least, shows tendency toward it. It seems that this second group is bigger. Rightly!

Among the former, I'll sort out D. Garrett.⁴ Garrett thinks, in principle, that Spinoza, although in the title of his master piece says that he wants to demonstrate ethics, he doesn't do it because ethics is a prescriptive discipline and Spinoza's axioms and definitions are, by themselves, descriptive.⁵ He also rightly notes that in *Ethics* there are almost completely missing words like “should”, “must”, “may” etc. Then, in spinozism we can easily find the use of words “good” and “bad” in purely subjectivist meaning like, for example, when he says that “it is by the sovereign natural right that every man judges what is good and what is bad, and has regard for his own advantage according to his own way of thinking” (E4P37S2). Then, some main ethical categories often have non-ethical meaning.⁶ Spinoza so defines “good” as that what is useful or what brings to self-preservation; “virtue” is man's power (cf. E4P20Dm), and man is more virtuous as he tries and succeeds in self-preservation (cf. E4P20); “free” man is adequate or complete cause of his actions (cf. E1Def7); the level of perfection is equated with the level of reality (cf. E2Def6) etc. All this makes Garrett to conclude:

The ethical propositions of the *Ethics* themselves do not command, exhort, or entreat the reader. Rather, they evaluate, using four primary terms of positive

4 Cf. GARRETT, Don. Spinoza's ethical theory. In: GARRETT, Don (ed). **The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 285-297.

5 Cf. GARRETT, Don. Spinoza's ethical..., op. cit., p. 285.

6 Cf. GARRETT, Don. Spinoza's ethical..., op. cit., p. 286.

ethical evaluation: 'good', 'virtue', 'guided by reason', and 'free man'. As Spinoza uses these terms, each is, or can be, defined naturalistically – that is, in natural, descriptive, nonethical terms.⁷

This would mean that Spinoza's ethical account fits within broader naturalistic context since ethical matter doesn't differ essentially from study of nature.

It is well known that Spinoza teaches that man's so called "ends" are created by projection of some good on basis of actual man's constitution or disposition. This attitude would today be termed as "emotivism" regarding the use of "good" and "bad", and Garrett says that

applications of these terms are neither true nor false, but rather are primarily *expressions* of desire, rather than, for example, descriptions of desires, or statements concerning objective features of the objects evaluated.⁸

Then, prescriptiveness of basic ethical expressions seems to be – according to Garrett – relativized by their coextensiveness.⁹ Namely, Spinoza identifies, in some places, these expressions and so says: "To act in absolute conformity with virtue is nothing else in us but to act, to live, to preserve one's own being... under the guidance of reason" (E4P24), and "to be guided by reason" is the same as "to be free" (cf. E4P66S). Aforementioned coextensiveness would allow us to pick up expression by which we shall denote some action, and this open up possibility for non-ethical interpretation of that action.

Additional reason for descriptiveness of Spinoza's ethics is Spinoza's problematic account of "free" man¹⁰ insofar as he builds on that concept certain ethical maxims (for example: "the free man never acts deceitfully, but always with good faith"; E4P72). That is, when speaking about those maxims, Spinoza obviously calls for using our imagination because he refers to imagining completely ideal man whom we could imitate as "model of human nature". Problem is in that that concept of perfectly free man is inconsistent in

itself. Man, to be completely free, must act solely from his own nature, or he has to be complete cause of his actions which would be explained only by his nature. Spinoza, on the other side, explicitly says that it is impossible for man to be completely without influence of external things (cf. E4P4). These and similar considerations made Garrett to conclude: "description of a free man is to be understood as a description of the condition and behaviour human beings approach 'insofar as' they are free".¹¹

Problematicity of Spinoza's concept of "good" is also present in some specific situations when it is put together with freedom. Spinoza says that "good" is that what promotes a long life (cf. E4P39) and, on the other side, says that "the free man never acts deceitfully, but always with good faith" (E4P72). But what if we have to lie in order to save our lives? Therefore, "we are still obliged to recognize that, in Spinoza's ethical theory, a good action can *sometimes* differ from the action of a free man".¹² This incongruence would show that "good" and "free man" are not so fixed and univocal terms as we are used to think and therefore cannot be interpreted in strictly prescriptive sense.

Garrett adduces interesting argument against prescriptiveness of Spinoza's ethics referring to essential connection between representational and affective aspects of ideas.¹³ These are two aspects of the same "mental events or entities".¹⁴ In another words, the mere perceiving of some thing as useful functions as moving. Mind doesn't consist of solely representational contents to which the tendency would be added. Garrett makes conclusion:

this inherent practicality of reason, in turn, explains how Spinoza can conceive of ethical knowledge as both naturalistic and intrinsically motivating. There is no need, and no purpose, for Spinoza to command, exhort, or entreat his readers – the reader's own reason effectively does this for him.¹⁵

7 GARRETT, Don. Spinoza's ethical..., op. cit., p. 286.

8 GARRETT, Don. Spinoza's ethical..., op. cit., p. 287.

9 GARRETT, Don. Spinoza's ethical..., op. cit., pp. 288-289.

10 Cf. GARRETT, Don. Spinoza's ethical..., op. cit., pp. 288-290.

11 GARRETT, Don. Spinoza's ethical..., op. cit., p. 290. M. Kisner will say that „free“ man is thinkable only as thought experiment and as ethical model (cf. KISNER, Matthew. **Spinoza on...**, op. cit., pp. 175-177).

12 GARRETT, Don. Spinoza's ethical..., op. cit., p. 295.

13 Cf. GARRETT, Don. Spinoza's ethical..., op. cit., pp. 296-297.

14 GARRETT, Don. Spinoza's ethical..., op. cit., p. 296.

15 GARRETT, Don. Spinoza's ethical..., op. cit., pp. 296-297.

The only thing that Spinoza had to do is to show to readers the consequences of their actions and since every person strives for self-preservation “Ethics merely shows in what that self-preservation consists and what are the most effective means to it”.¹⁶

Main arguments that can be adduced for prescriptiveness of Spinoza's ethics arise from the fact that man's essence is, in its deepest core, specific expression of God's essence, which is unlimited power. Man's actual essence, expressed through his *conatus perseverandi*, manifests itself primarily in his power of acting.¹⁷ A man can realize his power of action or activity in different ways, depending whether he was successful in doing that or not. Will he be successful or not, it depends essentially on whether he tends toward true good or apparent good.

If he tends to true good, he affirms his ontologically basic core of his being: power. Only then does he manifest greater similarity to God and, as for his practical and everyday life, he lives in more serene, peaceful, content way. Man tends toward true good if he lives under the guidance of reason, and it is exactly in this context that reason's dictates have their value and role. They refer to this anthropological core common to all people and it is therefore understandable Spinoza's trying to persuade his readers that it is in their interest to live under the guidance of reason. Since reason's dictates refer to aforementioned anthropological core, Spinoza can develop his project of de-subjectivization and universalization of “good”. Now we have no more descriptive approach according to which every man determines for himself what is good for him depending on actual constitution of body and mind or his affection but we have a move toward prescriptive

approach by which Spinoza wants to persuade reader that it is in his interest to follow the good he realized to be the true one. Here we can see the importance of adequate knowledge whereby reader of Spinoza's philosophy can understand and accept the fact that it is truly in his interest to live guided by reason. He can understand and accept this fact only after having considered himself in context of the whole Nature. In such a frame we can see as justified Spinoza's building his system starting from ontology and then, through anthropology and epistemology, arriving to correctly understood ethics. Because only starting from the doctrine of divine nature, which is power, and man's reality as one of innumerable modes which expresses that nature, man can be aware of the fact in what consists his nature and that, respecting that fact, can correctly understand which one of different possible actualizations of his nature is the only one that is correct. Actualization of his nature on basis of inadequate knowledge and passion certainly is not the correct way of man's persevering in being and increasing his power. Therefore, man becomes aware, through adequate knowledge of Nature and himself, of the fact that his actual and passive tendency for self-preservation and increasing activity doesn't match with tendency that would truly realize his power, which is the core of his essence. Exactly “this difference nourishes the value judgement about human striving in the fourth part, which transcends its mere description”.¹⁸

Therefore, we can say that Spinoza's ethical project depends on whether his reader has understood and accepted his basic ontological and anthropological premises. If we realize that it is in our true interest to live according to reason's dictates, then we should feel obligation to live that way. If we realize that we shall gain more activity, freedom, perfection and happiness if we live guided by reason, then we should feel obligation to live according to them and not according to our fortuitous tendencies. In the same manner, if we realize that it is in our interest to get as closer as possible to the model of human nature, then it can be expected that we act that way. That's why B. Smith concludes:

16 GARRETT, Don. Spinoza's ethical..., op. cit., p. 297.

17 This basic anthropological fact is nicely summarized by Bartuschat: “Activity is the essential determining characteristic of man, because, and this stands in the background of all of Spinoza's reflections, man (just as any other entity) is a modus of God, who is essentially power (1p34), so that man only brings the essence of God, power, to expression if he himself is essentially power and therein, as modified *potentia Dei*, essentially activity”. (BARTUSCHAT, Wolfgang. The Theory of the Good in Part 4 of the *Ethics*. In: HAMPE, M., RENZ, U. and SCHNEPF R. (eds), **Spinoza's Ethics. A Collective Commentary**, Leiden: Brill, 2011, p. 239).

18 BARTUSCHAT, Wolfgang. The Theory..., op. cit., pp. 240-241.

The *exemplar* clearly serves a normative function, allowing us to judge the quality of our lives and identify the obstacles that stand in the way of achieving this ideal.¹⁹

For the reason's commandments it can be said that they present information of whether some good truly contribute to self-preservation and increasing of activity or not. However, such information are not, *per se*, value neutral because they manifest superiority when compared with those made on basis of subjectivist model of defining goods based on projection of apparent goods we are used to follow. By the way, speaking of true good implies privileged point of view from which we can talk about such a good.²⁰ Spinoza expects from us to notice such a superiority:

But Spinoza is concerned with information which he thinks *must* have the same effect on *everyone* who believes it, and that entitles him to call it 'prescriptive' in a fairly strong sense.²¹

Such an information *must* have effect on man insofar as it manifests superiority in comparison to directions for behavior based on irrational tendency arisen from passion, and it must have the same effect on *everyone* because all men share basically the same essence. This essence also implies possibility of knowledge of true good in its comparative value.

Prescriptiveness implied in reason's dictates can be also shown by putting question to man who was acquainted with spinozism: "Do you really want to preserve your being and increase you power of action?" Since one can expect affirmative answer, then reason's dictates cannot function as merely value neutral information or mere direction how to live that would be on the same level of importance like the direction arisen from inadequate knowledge and passive emotions. In that sense, reason's dictates are hypothetical imperatives which, if better

understood, show themselves to be categorical. That's why E. Curley says:

His prescriptions are hypothetical imperatives with necessary antecedents, and so, in effect categorical. If you want 'to preserve your being', strive to hate no one. Well, you do want to preserve your being, and it is not a contingent fact that you do. So the command is not in any way conditional.²²

However, a reason's dictate cannot, as such, "redirect" man's behavior in a way that he simply abandons his usual practice of indulging passive emotions. This dictate must be, by itself, an emotion that can prevail over passive emotion under condition to be stronger (cf. E4P7). When a man accepts and brings about what his reason requires from him, he begins to conceive that dictate not as some norm that would be external to actual realization of his *conatus perseverandi*.²³ In that sense, we could say that prescriptiveness should turn into factual realization of *conatus perseverandi*. Only then is resolved the problem of ontological dichotomy between "to be" and "should be", or this thesis would be valid: "if his striving is led by reason, man reaches the goal" instead of thesis: "in order that man reaches his goal, which he does not necessarily reach by merely acting, he *ought* to use reason".²⁴

I believe to have shown the main reasons for descriptiveness or prescriptiveness of Spinoza's ethics. Although we can find, among scholars of Spinoza's philosophy, a greater number of those who are proponents of prescriptiveness it doesn't mean that arguments for descriptiveness are invalid or that prescriptiveness has advantage because we can probably find more scholars defending prescriptiveness instead of descriptiveness. To shed some additional light on this dilemma, it is useful to consider two additional arguments for prescriptiveness: the

19 SMITH, Steven B. **Spinoza's Book of Life. Freedom and Redemption in the Ethics**. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 135.

20 Cf. JARRETT, Charles. Spinoza on the Relativity of Good and Evil. In: KOISTINEN, O. and BIRO J. (eds). **Spinoza's Metaphysical Themes**. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 161.

21 BENNETT, Jonathan. **A Study of Spinoza's Ethics**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 307.

22 Quoted from: BENNETT, Jonathan. **A Study...**, op.cit., p. 307. Among commentators who explicitly talk about prescriptiveness of Spinoza's ethics, we can include M. Lin who, regarding some psychological principles promoted by Spinoza (E3P27C3; E3P28 and E4P46), concludes: „Psychological principles such as these form the heart of Spinoza's moral psychology and normative ethics“ (LIN, Martin. Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza. In: **The Philosophical Review**. 115:3 (2006), p. 321.

23 Cf. BENNETT, Jonathan. **A Study...**, op.cit., p.246.

24 BARTUSCHAT, Wolfgang. The Theory..., op.cit., p. 244.

first arises from Spinoza's doctrine of ethical egoism; the second from his doctrine of mind's eternity.

But first it must be said that he was, of course, aware of the problem that prescriptiveness doesn't fit, in principle, in his ontological-deterministic conception. According to this conception, man is not substance that could, in cases of being pulled in two or more different directions, freely choose what it should do instead of what it actually tends to. On ontological level, man is one expression of divine substance and he is, in every action, completely determined to do what he exactly has done, what he actually does or what will do. If he would be faced with requirement to do this and not that because his reason tells him that, he should have capability of making decision in view of true good and not apparent good he is used to follow. But freedom of choice can be proclaimed, in spinozism, only fiction based on man's ignorance of the way in which he is determined. In another words, on ontological level, dichotomy between factual realization of *conatus* and realization that should be is forbidden. This realization always was, always is and always will be only one, according to implacable determinism that permeates every single part of reality, including man with his behavior.

It doesn't mean that man will not (sometimes, at least) act according to reason's dictates although he is used to follow apparent good. However, even in these cases it is again at work the same determinism which makes man to act according to true good. If one stresses the consequentialist aspect of Spinoza's ethics in a sense that suffice it to show the consequences of tending towards apparent or true good, it should be said again that not all men are determined to get in touch with Spinoza's thinking and that not all of those who were lucky of getting acquainted with it are ready to accept his arguments and conclusions. For those who are determined in a way of having readiness to accept Spinoza's thoughts it will be sufficient to expose the consequences to which lead tendency toward this or that good. But even in their cases it is not, ontologically speaking, about their capability of choosing true good. They are simply determined in a way that Spinoza's thoughts are sufficiently convincing for them to do what Spinoza recommends.

Our philosopher knew that things worked, on ontological level, that way and that prescriptiveness didn't fit within his system. However, he was not permitted to present things that way because he should have stated, in that case, this: "Situation, on ontological level, is such and such and reason's dictates will follow only those who are predetermined from eternity to get acquainted with my philosophy and to have affinity with it". This would be strictly elitist approach or elitist message that Spinoza couldn't afford. Why? The answer lies first of all in his doctrine known as "ethical egoism".

No matter how aforementioned elitism was undeniable fact ("All things excellent are as difficult as they are"; E5P42S), it is also undeniable that all men have, in their nature, something in common which is, *per se*, the most precious element of man's nature and which is in connection not only to "reason's dictates" and "model of human nature" but to his whole philosophy: capability of understanding. That's why Spinoza could rightly expect that all men were capable, potentially at least, of understanding and accepting his philosophy. Strictly elitist message would probably, from the very beginning, reject many people to study spinozism at all and would be additional motive and argument in hands of his opponents and enemies.

Then, explicit elitist message could have negative effects in society too. Namely, a man who lives under the guidance of reason is most useful to community because he contributes to its homogenization and harmonious coexistence. Many citizens, who are not prone to live according to reason's dictates could easily, because of their infantile inertia,²⁵ interpret them in a manner that they don't feel or don't see themselves predetermined in a sense of belonging to the elitist circle and that all what is left to them is to keep on trying to gain apparent and competitive goods. In another words, it was not in Spinoza's interest to promote radically strict determinism when it is about man's behavior because he could easily provoke resigned fatalism and passive

25 By „infantile inertia“ I understand men's proneness to live according to apparent goods, although in that case they are under strong influence of external causes like little child which depends completely on other men (cf. E5P39S).

delivering to fate and own infantile inertia. Some sort of improvement, especially of greater number of persons, he could expect if he left some room for prescriptiveness and freedom (CC) although both of them imply contingency of things. But, on the other side, it is obviously that, when speaking of practical behavior, contingency is not only desirable but unavoidable:

we plainly have no knowledge as to the actual co-ordination and interconnection of things – that is, the way in which things are in actual fact ordered and connected – so that for practical purposes it is better, indeed, it is essential, to consider things as contingent (TTP, IV, p. 427)

Besides, he was sticking to the rule:

To speak to the understanding of the multitude and to engage in all those activities that do not hinder the attainment of our aim. For we can gain no little advantage from the multitude, provided that we accommodate ourselves as far as possible to their level of understanding. Furthermore, in this way they will give a more favourable hearing to the truth (TIE, §17).

Of course, it is possible to speak about prescriptiveness and freedom (CC) only on subjective-practical level: it is understandable for ordinary man to have freedom of choosing something that he is obliged, from inside or outside, to follow; or, he will easier improve himself if he has feeling to be able to choose what his reason dictates then if he has to recognize the fact that all what he can do is to get acquainted with Spinoza's philosophy and eventually see whether he is determined in a way of having proneness to accept it and realize it in practical life. In that sense, Spinoza – faced with dilemma how to articulate his ethics: to develop objective-ontological elitism based on descriptiveness and consequentialism or subjective-practical populism based on prescriptiveness – chooses the later option. The basic reason for such a choice is anthropological and ethical fact known as "egoism".

Spinoza teaches us that every thing tries to preserve in its being, but he also says that "Nobody endeavors to preserve his being for the sake of some other thing" (E4P25), which is a corner-stone of ethical egoism. If egoism is the basic law that every thing has

to obey, then Spinoza himself had to obey it when developing his ethics. Let's put simple question: was it in Spinoza's interest that people understand "reason's dictates" and "model of human nature" in mere descriptive sense or in some obligatory and prescriptive sense? If we take in consideration that prescriptiveness offers better chances for improving greater number of persons, then the answer is clear. If Spinoza had estimated that greater number of persons would have lived guided by reason in case of exposing his ethics in purely descriptive light, he wouldn't have talked about reason's "commandments" or "dictates" but about "recommendations" or, more precisely, about "messages" insofar as reason – in merely descriptive and consequentialist sense – only offer to reader useful information about consequences to which true goods lead. Such an approach would be compatible with strict determinism but it would be, on the other side, less effective in "waking" people from their infantile inertia and in motivating to action according to true goods as defined by Spinoza. So, why it was in Spinoza's interest to achieve greater number of persons to accept his doctrine? To get some clearer answer, let us see some dramatic episodes of his life.

Spinoza, thanks to his radical religious-philosophical views, entered very early in conflict with Jewish community in Amsterdam. Spinoza's views were unacceptable and scandalous for Jewish from Amsterdam and he was excommunicated in age of 24 years. He was excommunicated by the greatest possible anathema. There were many who hated him and, allegedly, one radical Jewish even tried to kill him. There were many consequences of such an excommunication: other Jewish were not allowed to communicate with him; to welcome him in their house or to help him in some other way; to read anything written by him etc. Very soon, he was even expelled from Amsterdam.

Since he wanted to help people in their liberation from superstitions, prejudices and fears, and since he wanted to assure freedom of philosophy from theology and generally freedom of thinking and expressing in public place, he published, anonymously, his *Theological-Political Treatise* in 1670. However, reactions were much more unfavourable than he expected. Not only that theological influence was not diminished but

so desired freedom of thinking and expressing didn't increase. He only additionally fostered hatred against himself.

It is well known tragic episode with Spinoza's political protector Jan de Witt. He was regent of Netherland, with liberal worldview and, as such, meritorious for possibility that progressive book, like Spinoza's one, could be published at all. On the other side, such a book was a thorn in flesh to many influent orthodox Calvinists and church people. The mob was incited against De Witt and he was murdered in 1672. This incident made Spinoza so angry that he wanted to get out on public place and hung inscription against the mob: *Ultimi barbarorum*. Spinoza was dreaming about more tolerant and rational society where he could develop his philosophy without disturbance and fear.

Spinoza adduced, in his *Ethics*, many reasons why people should choose true good in sense how he describes it. This true good had to be presented in prescriptive light so that people would indeed choose it. In this manner, Spinoza could expect that his philosophy would have bigger effect than if he presented his doctrine descriptively, in sense of ontological-objective elitism. Namely, Spinoza was not surrounded by rational men ready for non-partial evaluating arguments *pro et contra* but with uneducated mob subjected to passive emotions, inadequate knowledge and prejudices. However, greater "rationality" didn't show either many philosophers and theologians who addressed to him severe criticism and accusations inciting mob against him. So, Spinoza could expect greater success of his enterprise if he adjusted himself to that mob (but to many educated persons as well). For this mob, it is understood that man has freedom to choose what has known as something that should be done: to ordinary man, concept of freedom (CC) and prescriptiveness is something completely understandable. That means that it was in Spinoza's interest to leave some room for prescriptiveness and freedom (CC).

If people accepted Spinoza's arguments and conclusions explicated in *Theological-Political Treatise*, he would have had advantage in sense of greater freedom for developing, communicating and possibly correcting his

thoughts. In that sense, we can say that he would have had "minimal" advantage insofar as he wouldn't be disturbed in his developing of philosophy. If this basic condition was fulfilled, he would certainly have published, in his life, his main work where he exposed directions which could motivate other people to get closer to model he talked about. If Spinoza's contemporaries notably approached to model of human nature, they could have served as example for Spinoza and additional motivation for his approaching to that model. In that sense, we can talk about "maximal" advantage Spinoza would have had if people accepted and lived his doctrine to greater extent. I repeat the basic point: Spinoza could count on greater efficacy of his messages if he presented them in prescriptive sense regardless of the fact that prescriptiveness is actually incompatible with the rest of his philosophy. In the same manner, he could count on people's feeling to be free (CC) to choose what they are persuaded to be more useful to them. In that manner, he could incite readers in easier way to act according to his suggestions no matter of how much their feeling to be free (CC) was fiction. To conclude: he had strong reasons for descriptiveness but even stronger reasons for prescriptiveness insofar as it was in his interest to persuade as many people as possible to embrace ethical life proposed by him.

Another important reason for Spinoza to permit prescriptiveness arises from his doctrine of mind's "eternity". Namely, he practically demotivated, with this doctrine, people to strive for true goods. What was the problem? Doesn't "mind's eternity" mean the same as "soul's immortality" in religious sense?

Spinoza talks very critically and ironically about mob's belief that it will be, after death, rewarded for good deeds and punished for bad deeds (cf. E5P41S). This belief essentially depends on belief that man's soul exists even after death and that man should foster the feeling of duty and piety in order to be able to fulfill God's commandments and gain the heaven:

And if men did not have this hope and this fear, and if they believed on the contrary that minds perish with bodies and that they, miserable creatures, worn out by the burden of piety, had no prospect of future existence, they would return to their own inclinations

and decide to shape their lives according to their lusts, and to be ruled by fortune rather than by themselves (E5P41S).

According to Spinoza, virtue has its value and importance in this life, that is: it is not “burden” which people must carry or pay out in this life in order to earn eternal blessedness in afterlife. For Spinoza, blessedness is not some goal achieved by living virtuously: “Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself” (E5P42). If “mind’s eternity” is not the same as “soul’s immortality”, then the question remains how to understand it.

Things get clearer when we see that Spinoza conceive things under two perspectives: under perspective of their atemporal or eternal essence and under perspective of this essence’s actual realization: “Nevertheless, there is necessarily in God an idea which expresses the essence of this or that human body under a form of eternity” (E5P22). Body’s essence, in a state of its spatial-temporal actualization, also has it correlate under attribute of thought: a concrete mind which is idea of this body. On basis of Spinoza’s parallelism, mind passes, in a deep ontological sense, the same fortune of its body; it, as idea of its body, is born and perishes together with its body. When body dies, body’s eternal essence remains together with its atemporal idea contained in divine intellect. Therefore, the essence of body can be conceived under the perspective of eternity or temporality; the essence of mind too (cf. E5P23Dm and S). From Spinoza’s philosophy there follows temporal and atemporal existence of mind and body.

Mind’s “eternity” refers to set of adequate knowledges or ideas that mind has when conceiving its body under the perspective of eternity (cf. E5P31Dm). All these adequate ideas make up eternal divine intellect (cf. E5P40S). Therefore, mind’s “eternity” does not refer to man’s person, self-consciousness or selfhood and can’t be understood as immortality of soul. In another words, human mind – after death – doesn’t survive its body. What are implications of such a doctrine on the ethical prescriptiveness?

It, objectively speaking, makes the speech about prescriptiveness – within spinozism – more urgent. Namely, every reason’s commandment shows the consequences to which a good action

leads. No matter of how much such an information be true (in sense that it helps man in achieving his true happiness), it can not move man to action unless it is emotion. However, ordinary reader who realizes that acting according to reason will not affect his condition after death (because mind does not survive the body) can easily find excuses for indulging his infantile inertia instead of acting guided by reason. Namely, he does not act like some machine without flash and blood equally prone for true or apparent goods. He is used to act according to his infantile inertia and acting according to reason’s commandments requires, on the other side, self-denial and unpleasant discipline. So it is easy to imagine situation in which an ordinary man will think this why: Why would I struggle to live guided by reason if my behavior does not affect my next life? Then, even if Spinoza says that living by reason leads to true happiness in this life, why would I trust him? And, even if he is right, who can guarantee that I shall achieve such a condition especially if it takes many years of unpleasant self-denial? What if I try hard to follow his suggestions and die before achieving the desirable condition? Since Spinoza’s doctrine of mind’s “eternity” can easily demotivate man in his following true goods, Spinoza had to insist on some kind of prescriptiveness so that he could count on some kind of improvement of greater part of his readers. Much efficacious approach to such a problem had Platone, who taught – in his *Phaedon* – that the way of ethical behavior in this life will certainly affect man’s condition in afterlife. The immortality of soul is the strongest and implacable mechanism which provides just punishment or reward for deeds in this life. It means that bad men will not avoid their punishment in afterlife (cf. *Phaed* 107c5-d2). So, the soul’s immortality is the reason number one why man should live by virtue (and knowledge) in this life.

This lack of motivation for living according to reason can be recompensed, at least partly, by prescriptively (and not descriptively) presented ethics, especially if Spinoza’s readers take concept of prescriptiveness and freedom (CC) for granted. It seems that prescriptiveness is unavoidable means for reaching such a sublime ethical habitus which makes it possible man’s following reason’s dictates as something natural

and not as “obligation” and in which there vanishes difference between prescriptiveness and descriptiveness. So we can conclude: Spinoza had good reasons for descriptiveness but even stronger reasons for prescriptiveness insofar as it is about efficaciousness of his ethics (and not, first of all, about compatibility of his ethics with ontology and anthropology).

3) SPINOZA'S UNOFFICIAL CONCEPT OF FREEDOM

We can see, from afore said, that ethical prescriptiveness is certainly present in Spinoza's ethical project. Of course, this prescriptiveness is not explicit, but it is present anyway. It is not of great importance whether we'll call it “soft”, “implicit” or “moderate”, but it is important that Spinoza in some way promoted it, counted on it and that it can influence man's behavior.

Insofar as a man initially perceives and conceives true good not like neutral being which can equally easily follow apparent or true goods, he has to make effort and “choose” to follow true goods after realizing that he will have more advantage if acting that way although it requires self-denial (this “self-denial” is, of course, actually self-affirmation or leads to self-affirmation because man, when guided by reason, actually affirms his essence, but it inevitably appears as self-denial to all those who have to abandon their pleasant and infantile habits). In that way, we have basic precondition for acting freely (CC). In another words, the fact that man, at least sometimes, sets apart for true goods although he has habit to act by his infantile inertia, shows that he functions like thing that, in principle, can take destiny in his hands and direct his action toward good that is truly useful to him.

Spinoza spoke of many free man's advantages, but he spoke of “free” man as a “goal” that all should approach as much as possible in order to be more active and perfect. It is supposed that man, in achieving that goal, can set apart for this goal no matter of how much it is difficult to redirect one's own life. To put it in another way, man – in order to achieve that goal – has to set apart for true goods in his life many times because his infantile inertia does not allow him to resolve this dilemma once for all. Man begins his life odyssey by being completely passive, that is, by being completely exposed to

external things and depending on them. This manner of actualization of proper *conatus* is later, by inertia, additionally confirmed and rooted if man – by following apparent goods – develops habits of exposing and connecting himself to unstable and limited external goods. But Spinoza teaches us that this way of self-preservation and increasing of power isn't good and that man should choose another way. In another words, he calls man to set apart for true goods and get closer to model of human nature. He practically sends a message: You should set apart for true good because it is truly useful for you, and you can do it!

But what about determinism as one of basic constituents of his system? How can we make compatible that man's “capability” of choosing true good although being prone to choose apparent good with doctrine that man is, in his every act, determined by God and not by himself (cf. E1P26)? Or how can we insert man's “capability” to set apart for this or that good in overall causal network in which every thing is, in its existing and acting, determined by another thing (cf. E1P28 and P33)?

Next answer seems to be the only one that satisfies: we must approach this problem from objective-ontological and subjective-practical perspective or level. On the first level, man has no capability of setting apart for something instead of something else. However he, on subjective-practical level, seems to set apart for something. Even more, he is urged – if he realized what was truly useful for him although he still has tendency to act according to his infantile inertia – to choose. How is it possible? It is possible because man does not (and can not) know in which way he is, on objective-ontological level, determined; that is, he does not know whether he is determined to act this or that way. On the other side, he is pushed to act somehow because doing nothing is not the best way of realizing his *conatus* and increasing his power of action. All what he is aware of is coexistence, in him, different tendencies every one of which offers its reasons why to be preferred instead of the other one: tendency to apparent goods offers comfortable life according to infantile inertia and tendency to true goods offers a higher level of freedom/activity/perfection/happiness. It is also possible because man feels himself to be some sort of substance and source of his actions.

Dual view on human being (on objective-ontological and subjective-practical level) refers in no way only to human freedom. It refers to much more important and ontologically deeper aspect of human behavior: activity. We must notice one important thing: Spinoza promotes greater man's activity in every field he was employed with. Let's see some examples.

As far as ethics concerns, Spinoza defines basic ethical categories under the aspect of activity: "we call good or evil that which is the cause of pleasure or pain..., that is..., which increases or diminishes, assists or checks our power of activity" (E4P29Dm). In another place, he says: "the emotion of pain is... the act of transition to a state of less perfection; that is, the actuality whereby a man's power of activity is diminished or checked" (E3DA3E). Apparent goods are not true goods because we are, in that case, exposed to the unpredictable changes of things on which our happiness depend (cf. E5P20S). Even more, Spinoza severely criticizes men who tend toward apparent goods: "avarice, ambition, lust, etc. are kinds of madness, although they are not accounted as diseases" (E4P44S). True goods bring man to what is really useful to him; that is, they bring to increasing of his perfection and power of action (cf. E4P18S).

Activity is essential moment of freedom because freedom means acting from own nature (cf. E1Def7), in which case man is active. He is passive if his actions are caused and explained by external things. In order to achieve greater level of freedom, man has, on his disposition, knowledge which helps him in moderating his passions through which he is addicted to external things and depends on them. Knowledge, on the other side, is itself emotion or incites emotion and emotions are those that determine man to specific action.

Virtue is ethical category in which it is even more evident the role of activity in Spinoza's ethics:

By *virtue* and power I mean the same thing; that is..., virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is man's very essence, or nature, insofar as he has power to bring about that which can be understood solely through the laws of his own nature (E4Def8).

It is important to actualize proper *conatus* in a way of as great as possible independence from external things. This is the only way of achieving own activity. The value and importance of acts that are brought about only by proper nature is in fact that they surely bring to man's self-preservation (cf. E3P9S). In another words, the more man's acts depend on external causes the more questionable is his self-preservation (cf. E4P37S1). Therefore, man is safest in his self-preservation when he acts solely from his nature because there can not exist in it contradictory or auto-destructive elements (cf. E3P4 and P5). When we act following solely the laws of our own nature, we certainly do what is useful for us, that is, we manifest activity or virtue. Virtue is not some label that we put on people from outside according to their actions which we find ethically worthy, but is "*power of each individual to actualize its essence*".²⁶ We actualize our essence only when we act by commandments of reason which order only what is truly useful for us.

As far as epistemology concerns, Spinoza teaches that, in the first or the lowest level of knowledge, man has inadequate knowledges because he achieves them through permanently changeable, fortuitous and subjective affections of own body (cf. E2P35S). Adequate knowledges man has in cases of the second and third kind of knowledge. Second kind of knowledge is based on what is common to all things (cf. E2P37 and P38C). In that case, he does not depend so much on changeable external things but takes in account unchangeable elements of reality. In the third kind of knowledge, or intuitive knowledge, which consists in knowing the innermost essence (cf. TIE, §95), man achieves even higher level of activity and perfection. Spinoza says that the greatest pleasure man can have in

contemplation of himself and his power of activity... Now man's true power of activity, or his virtue, is reason itself..., with which man regards clearly and distinctly... Therefore self-contentment arises from reason. Again, in contemplating himself a man perceives clearly and distinctly, that is, adequately, only what follows from his power of activity (E4P52Dm).

26 LORD, Beth. **Spinoza's Ethics.** Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010, p.108.

As far as political level concerns, Spinoza is proponent of democracy as an ideal organization of society. In such an organization, man approaches closest to the power of action which he had in natural state. Advantage of democracy, in comparison to monarchy and aristocracy is in fact that man can be more active because he can be elected to govern, together with others, the state or he has right to elect his representative.

Therefore, Spinoza sends to his readers clear message: You are active but you can (and should) be even more active! Nice! However, what does it mean that man has activity in context of substance monism and strict determinism? Namely, in context of substance monism and determinism the existence and action of every thing or mode depends essentially on God's essence or power:

Whatever exists expresses God's nature or essence in a definite and determinate way...; that is..., whatever exists expresses God's power, which is the cause of all things, in a definite and determinate way, and so... some effect must follow from it (E1P36Dm)

Man is expression of God's essence or power, and God's essence doesn't consist only in necessary existence but in necessary acting too (cf. E1P20 and P36). Man, with his actual essence, exemplifies, concretizes, or expresses God's power. In that sense, we can say that man is, speaking of his actions, specific medium through which God's power or infinite activity is expressed:

Finite individuals can be conceived as specifically determined centers of causal activity and power, individual essences operating as modifiers determining the way in which substance and its efficacy or total power is distributed²⁷

In other words, man is one of specific media through which God's power is expressed in a

27 VILJANEN, Valtteri. **Spinoza's Dynamics of Being. The Concept of Power and its Role in Spinoza's Metaphysics.** Turku: Painosalama Oy, 2007, p.105. Although Viljanen uses term „center“, I prefer term „medium“ because „center“ could eventually insinuate its reading in the sense of the „source“ of man's activity while this possibility is excluded if we talk about man as „medium“ through which God's power is expressed. In other words, man's basic passivity or lack of activity is better expressed – I think – by term „medium“.

concrete way. He, as such – or, if we conceive things on objective-ontological level – has no (and can not have) in himself the source of his activity (because he is not substance) but is, in his existence and acting, determined completely from outside: from God. Therefore, man is not active on that basic, objective-ontological, level although he can, on subjective-practical level, feel and conceive himself as an active substance.²⁸

Spinoza counts on this dichotomy and applies it implicitly when speaking of man's activity and his freedom. Although he conceives man and other modes as expressions of God's essence, he treats man implicitly as “quasi-substance”²⁹ which has in itself the source of its activity and which can choose this or that direction of acting. However, like man can be – on objective-ontological level – only pseudo-substance in the same way he can only be pseudo-active. All the activity or power of actions belongs solely to God.

SUMMARY

We could see that Spinoza put some goals or ideals that man could and should realize in order to affirm his essence as more efficaciously as possible, or in order to preserve in his being and increase his power of acting as efficaciously as possible. Because of his infantile inertia, man can more easily chase apparent goods instead of accepting and living true goods although the second option is better not only for him but for the other people as well.

Spinoza tries to assure reader that it is good, first of all for him, to follow what is truly useful to him. Doing that, Spinoza puts aside the basic ontological premises according to which man is neither substance; nor he has the source of his activity in himself; nor he has capability of choosing this or that. However, it seems that Spinoza didn't have alternative choice but to allow, implicitly and on subjective-practical level, possibility of man's actively acting in a sense of choosing by himself, almost as being substance, this or that good. It seems that it was

28 Cf. DELEUZE, Gilles. **Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza.** New York: Zone Books, 1990, p.306.

29 Cf. GARRETT, Don. Spinoza's Conatus Argument. In: KOISTINEN O. and BIRO J. (eds). **Spinoza. Metaphysical themes,** New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p.150.

important to him not to stress the difference between objective-ontological and subjective-practical level because he wanted to achieve his goal: intellectual and ethical improvement of men. In that way it happens that freedom becomes, in Spinoza's system, the goal which man can gradually achieve by applying freedom in traditional sense of capability of choice. So we can speak of two concepts of freedom in spinozism: official and unofficial.



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