

## Friendship, Strength of Emotion, and Freedom in Spinoza

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I am sure for all of us gathered here, that it is great to be able to contemplate Spinoza in the town he lived in for so long and where he died 300 years ago today. It is natural to imagine how many others would cherish such a moment at this place, but who cannot be here for the same reason that Spinoza is not here. I think of Spinoza's good old friends and his young friend Georg Hermann Schuller, who, rather than Lodewijk Meyer, is now considered to have been the person who was with Spinoza at the moment he passed away. Of the older friends, I would like to mention Jarig Jelles, De Vries, and his landlord Van der Spyck. We would all of us here like, I suppose, to call ourselves friends of Spinoza, but these people were fortunate in being able to live out their friendship. Spinoza's two contemporary biographers, Jean Maximalian Lucas and Colerus, should also be mentioned.

The anniversary of his death is perhaps a sad occasion for sending these contemporaries of Spinoza a greeting. But everything we know about Spinoza supports the belief that he retained his equanimity to the very last. He calls upon us to contemplate death with calmness, if at all. His dying was not of the dramatic kind suffered by another great, but more pessimistic investigator of the human predicament, Sigmund Freud. "My world," he said in his last days, "is an island of pain in a sea of indifference."

Thinking of who else would have liked to be here, not in honour of Spinoza, since he neither needed nor sought honours, but in terms of warmth and friendship first and foremost come to mind the many anonymous people who have found in Spinoza a source of inspiration

and of increased trust in themselves, in others, and in the laws of Nature. But let us also recall the astonishing diversity and number of *well known* spirits who could be mentioned. I think of Goethe, Herder, Schelling, Lessing, Hegel, and many scientists and rationalists from Spinoza's own day to Albert Einstein in the twentieth century. I would like to mention friends of Spinoza in the Soviet Union, Alexander Deborin and others.

As I recall the work done for Spinoza in the form of editing and the critical study of texts and the patient, loving investigation of sources, the names of Jan Rieuwertsz, Carl Gebhardt, Dunin-Borkowski, Freudenthal Boscherini, come to my mind. Many others could be mentioned.

## II

There is a special reason why the expression "friends of Spinoza" can be used without raising any qualms as to exactly who they are. After the death of great philosophers there are usually heated controversies about who are the real inheritors of their ideas. For centuries after the death of Socrates, school fought school, each of them detesting the other. Hegelians split into right and left. Nothing of the kind has so far happened since the death of Spinoza. There are many reasons for this, some rather interesting. But the main thing for all of us at this moment is the ability to form a community of friends of Spinoza and each other despite all the differences in our philosophies. I presume we do not belong to sects quarrelling with each other unduly about how to interpret "the master." Whatever the disagreements, something emanating both from the personality of Spinoza and from his *Ethics sub specie aeternitatis* may well contribute to this lack of fanaticism.

## III

But let me not continue in a spirit that Spinoza might deem slightly sentimental. Let me mention one of the reasons why the system of Spinoza cannot easily be accepted as a whole, or even in part, by Western academic philosophers. The *Ethics* contains several hundred proofs, and the analytically minded report, generally *with regret*, that according to modern formal logic, the conclusions practically never follow from the premises. There also seems to be a number of logical inconsistencies.

It is a special pleasure for me to report that the status of the proofs is likely to improve this memorable year. A systematic formal logical reconstruction of the whole of Part One of the *Ethics* will soon be published. What are lacking, according to the author, are additional

premises mostly of a rather trivial kind. Only a very small proportion of the 161 additional premises are open to doubt as to whether Spinoza himself would accept them. Interestingly enough some of these are introduced to bolster Spinoza's version of the ontological proof for the existence of God. As I see it, it would not matter much whether or not this proof were included in the system.

The reconstruction using calculus of propositions and predicates results in a logically *consistent* version of Part One of the *Ethics*. I do not know how much importance, if any, you attach to this result. Spinoza will scarcely win many more friends because of such a cold victory. But it could lead to painstaking studies of Spinoza being increasingly taken up in philosophical departments where formal clarity and consistency are demanded and cherished more than relevance to life. Anyhow, some of the so-called proofs in the *Ethics* are so loosely formulated that Spinoza could not possibly have pretended *quod erat demonstrandum* to be *formal* proof.

#### IV

The question of why there are no competing schools of Spinozism has led me astray. Instead, let us consider friendship. Clearly Spinoza's intellectual sobriety favours *friendship rather than worship*. I wish to pursue the question for a moment of what his system might mean to friendship. Is it not so that Spinoza both through his person and in his system advises against strong passions, intensive emotions, or affects. Does he favour calmness? Does he consider friendship to be something calm? The last question may be answered tentatively in the positive. But there remains the question of whether calmness implies weakness. I think the opposite of strong affects is weak affects, not calmness in the important sense of equanimity. In what follows I shall argue that Spinoza is in favour of *strong affects as a more powerful way* to increase one's level of freedom and understanding, rather than weak affects. But even the strongest affect should not disturb one's basic equanimity, a balance characterizing the integrated personality.

But before I take up that argument, let us see what place Spinoza accords friendship in his social philosophy.

"The free man is intent upon joining other free men in friendship," says Spinoza in the proof to Proposition 70, Part 4 of the *Ethics*. In the proof of Proposition 71, he says that free men are united by the closest bond of friendship and seek to benefit each other with the same eagerness of love. According to the first note to Proposition 37, free men joined in friendship are led by reason; they live under the guidance of reason, *ex*

*ductu rationis*. The eagerness of love is therefore not incompatible with such a life. Spinoza's deep and colourful concept of reason has little to do with the contemporary narrow intellectualistic notion.

Today it is difficult to avoid the question: does Spinoza, by free men, mean the same as free males? Does he exclude women? I shall not try to argue, but only mention that my conclusion, based on the texts of Spinoza, is that the community of free men envisaged by him includes women. He takes for granted that men and women can join in friendship. Incidentally, if Freudenthal is right in his biography of Spinoza, Spinoza had female friends.

In the note to Proposition 59 in Part 3, Spinoza accords great conceptual weight to "friendship": he *defines* the basic "generosity" through the notion of friendship, not the other way round. Generosity is an intimate synthesis of cupidity and drive, led by reason to help in establishing bonds of friendship. According to the first note to Proposition 37 in Part 4, the definition of virtue, in the sense of the Latin *virtus*, presupposes the concept of friendship. Virtue is indirectly defined in part by means of the concept of friendship.

V

In the light of the foregoing, one may conclude that friendship is the basic social relation between members of the community of free men. But, says Spinoza, our capacity is limited and we cannot be friends of all inhabitants of a country. This implies that all groups of underprivileged, including the very poor, cannot be helped effectively merely through friendship. The help must be organized by the community, that is, by a kind of central administration. Spinoza rejects the modern anarchism of small groups of friends in opposition to the establishment. He sees the necessity of large societies with central administration. The friendly crisscross relations between members must develop within the larger framework.

So much for warm friendship. I shall now permit myself to go into a wider problem concerning both Spinoza as a man and his system.

Is the stress on friendship and mutual help in understanding his famous appeal to control and coerce the emotions an indicator of a general so-called stoic doctrine of fighting the strength of emotions? I shall try to argue or even "prove," in the sense of Spinoza, that, on the contrary, he implies that rapid gain in power, joy, understanding, and freedom presuppose strong affects.

Let us take as point of departure definition 3 of Part 3 and proceed very slowly and carefully:

By affects, affectus, I understand the affections, of a body by which the power of acting of that body is increased, diminished, helped, or hindered, together with the ideas of these affections.

For our limited purpose the definition can be somewhat simplified without loss.

One of the affects is intellectual, or better, understanding, love of God. A state of such love is a state of a body experiencing love, but it is certainly also a state of the mind. This is in accordance with Spinoza's general view of mind and body acting together.

In 3P12 and 3P12Dem both the mind's and body's power of action are mentioned. What is said strongly supports that the first power only increased (or decreases) if the second does, and vice versa. There is no affect which increases only the power of action of the body. From 3P11 it is seen that the power of action of the mind is the same as its power to think. I shall assume that this is the same as the power to understand.

At the time of Spinoza, psychology did not postulate any marked distinction between cognitive and conative functions of the mind and body. Unhappily, there is still today a tendency in philosophy to adhere to such a marked distinction and, accordingly, use a very narrowly cognitive consensus of combined cognitive and conative import. If this is not remembered, the above theorems and concepts of Spinoza seem to confuse emotion, action, and understanding. On the contrary, they clarify issues very much in the spirit of the best in modern psychology and psychiatry.

According to the above, we need not in the definition separate body from mind or idea. The definition may therefore be thus reformulated:

By affects I understand an affection (state) by which the power of action is increased or decreased.

Spinoza uses many complex power-terms: power of acting, conceiving, thinking, understanding, reasoning, imagining and existing. Conceptually, these powers are not identical, but in terms of denotation most of them are. The power gained through intellectual love of God is surely a power of acting *and* understanding, not only of acting in a narrow sense. Similar complex power gains or losses adhere to other

affects. Thus we may undertake one more step of simplification of the definition:

By an affect I understand a state or process by which power is increased or decreased.

## VI

Already this definition of affect should protect us from the view that Spinoza warns against strong affects in general.

In the note to Proposition 11, Part 3 Spinoza says:

In what follows I understand by joy, *laelitia*, the affect, *passio*, through which the mind passes to greater perfection. By sorrow, *tristitia*, on the other hand, I understand the affect through which it passes to smaller perfection.

These definitions are repeated in his list of definitions, but with a remarkable difference. Spinoza seems to *identify* joy or sorrow with the change in level of perfection: “Joy *is* man’s transition from a smaller to greater perfection.” At any rate we are compelled to assume an internal relation between the transition and the affects, not a mere instrumental or other kind of external relation. Thus, we should avoid the expression that the transition is *associated* with joy, or produces joy.

The change of level of power and the change of level of perfection are conceptually or intentionally distinguishable, but scarcely on the level of corresponding change of the other. Thus change of level of the one implies mutually corresponding change of the other. Thus, by an affect, Spinoza also understands a state by which perfection increases or decreases.

One may ask whether man may pass to greater power or perfection through any of other processes than through certain kinds of joy. There is in the *Ethics* no mention of an alternative. Love is defined as a joy, therefore the understanding love of God is no exception. An increase of understanding of this kind occurs through joy, that is, with joy as internal property. The term “understanding love” is a new translation of *amor intellectualis*. The old translation “intellectual love” is misleading because the modern terms “intellectual” and “intellect” are very narrow and more or less opposed to “emotional” and “motivational” and “affective.” The adjective *intellectualis* derives from the verb *intelligere*, “to understand” taken in a wide sense *not* opposed to affectivity.

All affects either arise (*oriri*) from joy, sorrow, or desire, according to Spinoza. We may therefore be confident that basic properties that hold with regards to the three will hold for the rest.

Let us contemplate what Spinoza says in the note to the second corollary to Proposition 45 in Part 4:

The greater the joy wherewith we are affected, the greater the perfection whereto we pass; in other words, the more must we partake of the divine nature.<sup>1</sup>

By greatness of an affect I propose to understand intensity, richness and deepness. The last two dimensions measure how a great part of our personality is affected and how deep the affect penetrates into the hidden parts of it.

The expression “passing to a greater perfection” I understand to indicate a gain in level of perfection, the latter term being interpreted in close regard to the Latin *perfacere*, and measuring primarily how far we arrive at being a whole, an integrated person. The more perfected is the more completed and accomplished. We need not go outside ourselves, but just be ourselves, wholly and honestly—preserving what Spinoza calls our *essence*.

Going back to our consideration of affects as power generators, we may introduce a new proportionality theorem:

The greater the active affect, the greater the gain in power.

Since the road to greater freedom and greater perfection is the same, we may also assert the greater the active affect, the greater the gain in level of freedom.

Lastly, considering the internal relation between gain in freedom and power, and gain in understanding, we arrive at the important proportionality of greatness of active affect and gain in understanding. The gain does not imply accumulation of knowledge. Like the joy inherent in understanding, the gain in understanding itself may be said to proceed along three dimensions, *intensity*, *richness*, and *depth*. The gain is primarily in quality, not quantity.

But what if we are affected with a strong passive affect, a passion in the negative usage of the word? We should, according to Spinoza, as much as possible, get to know it and make it superbly conscious in all its ramifications. As we succeed, we are already on the way to turning the passive affect into an active one. Moreover, the transformation will not

decrease the strength of our affects. The victory over the passivity depends on the strength of the activeness that can be turned into the battle. The influence of the relative strength of affects is also treated in 3P37 Dem.

The greater the joy, the greater the gain of power.

Somebody who avoids sorrow, but thereby also avoids great joys, gains less in power, understanding, and freedom than one who seeks great joys. But, some would think, does not the search for excruciatingly intense, rich, and deep joys invite disaster? No, Spinoza would answer. The nature of human beings strengthens joys that are relatively independent of the common order of things, that is, what happens in the world around us—more or less unpredictable events. The greatest joys will be experiences in the greatest acts of understanding, and the more we realize this the more we desire. Thus we are led from Part 3 through 4, to Part 5 with the theory of the understanding love of *God* or *Nature* with a capital N.

One may interpret this active love to be a kind of mystic contemplation, in loneliness or with carefully selected friends, but one may also interpret it ultimately to embrace helpful social and political action. The Eastern parallel is in Mahayana Buddhism, in which, to reach the highest levels of freedom, an individual must work to free all others.

The theoretical problems of active versus passive lead to the investigation of Spinoza's frequent reflections about parts of the body. The quality and therefore activeness of an affect seems to be roughly proportional to how many parts of the body it relates to. The short proof Proposition 16, Part 5, opens with the assertion that love of God is joined, *unctus*, to *all* the affections of the body, and cherished *fovetur*, by all.<sup>2</sup> But let us see how the part/whole distinction works within Spinoza's theory of the dynamics of emotion.

## VII

The use of the whole/part distinction in relation to *quality* of emotions is a powerful tool for Spinoza and is in the very best relations to modern psychology of the integrated person. The integrated person is characterized by functioning always as a whole however strong the emotions stirring mind and body.

The whole/part distinction applied to joy furnishes the important distinction between joy engaging all parts of the body equally, which therefore does not prevent joys connected with other parts to make



themselves dominate and subdue joys connected with other parts. The former, which is always good and can never be excessive, never too strong, Spinoza calls *hilaritas*. The latter, which can be excessive and too strong, he calls *titillatio*. Both are species of *laetitia*.

Whereas joy, *laetitia*, is a positive kind of affect, that is, increases power, sorrow, *tristitia*, is a negative kind. It decreases power.

For my present argument, the important point is that positive emotions which engage the total personality, that is, *all* parts of it, increase power, and, the stronger it is, the greater the increase, the weaker, the smaller the increase.

If, as is likely to be Spinoza's opinion, we start with a very low level of power, understanding, and freedom, being slaves of passions in the sense of negative emotion, the way towards high levels is long. How far we come will depend on two characteristics of our emotions, the strength of our positive and the weakness of our negative emotions. As the negative emotions can only be overcome by other emotions, that is, the positive ones, we may conclude that the stronger our active emotions, the faster we reach higher levels, and the further in that direction we are able to proceed.

Freedom and understanding being proportional to power, the *strength* of active emotions determines how far we can reach in these respects also.

In the light of these results it is highly misleading to say that Spinoza favours *moderately* strong emotions, or that he favours quiet or modest ones. Moderation in terms of harmonious development of all emotional resources is implied in the whole/part conception. But this does not relate to strength.

Applied to life styles, I think Spinoza would favour an active life in the sense of a life likely to lead a person into crucial situations for the development of his life or her emotions. *Kinds of situations would have to be sought in which strong active emotions are likely to arise.* A person who chooses a life that protects him from the impact of emotional situations, protects not only from the negative, but also from the positive emotions. This means that the person will show *stagnation* in his or her development towards higher levels of power, understanding, and freedom.

There are of course great *risks* involved in seeking out the jobs and circumstances likely to elicit strong emotion. For example, it may turn out that we overrate our capacity for positive response with generosity. To our consternation we may react with hatred, greed, or what not. The risks to be taken will therefore have to be calculated risks. But I cannot see any other solution to the problem of how to reach a high level than by testing one self.

### VIII

One sometimes gets the impression that authors expressing their warm feelings for Spinoza perhaps unconsciously take him to have been meek-hearted, soft, mild as milk and water, tame, gentle as a lamb, unassuming. In a situation of some importance for him, whether religious or practical, this way of seeing and feeling him is misguided. And even if external circumstances, the hatred of orthodox Jews of his day and his bad health, restricted his own activity, one must not think that his *message* to the readers of his works is to live as he himself did.

Even worse is what is sometimes assumed to be his advice against passions: That we should aspire to be unruffled, poised, sedate, cool as a cucumber and quiet as a mouse. I am of course not the first to object to this bloodless image of Spinoza. In a Festschrift for Spinoza in 1932, Jakob Klatzkin stressed his passionate nature. But the greatest passion was the *Vernunftsliebe* (love of rationality). Well said, but *ratio* is that of his time and culture, not of our affluent consumer societies.

### IX

I have permitted myself to go into some professional details (on the strength of emotions) because I think that even in a commemoration lecture in a place like this, cool analysis is appropriate when Spinoza is the object of our commemoration. He looked for clarification of truth and was enthusiastic whenever he thought he had found a new friend with whom to discuss the most difficult questions. He ends his first letter to Blyenbergh saying:

This, sir, is all that I can now submit in answer to your question . . . But if you still find difficulty, then I beg you to let me know, in order to see if I can remove it . . . as long as you do not consider yourself satisfied, I would like nothing better than to know the reasons thereof, so that truth may dawn at last.

It is this inheritance that should animate us, we who have the temerity to call ourselves friends of Spinoza.

In 1927 and 1932 there were commemorations of Spinoza all over the world. Since then things have happened that have made Spinoza more up to date than ever. The rise and fall of the Third Reich with all its fanaticism and atrocities made many feel Spinoza as the ultimate guiding star and source of consolation. The contrast between his ideas and those of fascism could not be greater.

Among the other things that have happened, I have personal reasons to mention the birth of the great and deep ecology movement about 15 years ago. At the philosophical center of this discussion we have the question of industrial man's imperfect concept and relation to nature. Spinoza denied ever having identified God with the debased notion of a certain mass or with corporeal matter (Letter 73). The Nature (with a capital N) that Spinoza identified with God has the main features needed in the deep ecology movement. This, and an astonishing variety of related features, makes Spinoza's philosophy a valuable frame for ecological thinking.

Ending up with the theme for friendship, I would like to stress the ecological concept of symbiosis as opposed to cutthroat competition: both in Spinoza, and in the thinking of the field ecologist, there is respect for the extreme diversity of beings capable of living together in an intricate web of relations. It is the special responsibility and source of happiness for humans that we can bring this into light of consciousness and contemplate and cultivate the unity in diversity.

In short, this 300 anniversary commemoration will not be the last. Spinoza seems to be an inexhaustible source. We certainly will not be able to partake, let us say, in the next 300 commemorations, and perhaps we shall regret this. We appreciate and enjoy the thought that our friend, the great philosopher, has a vast future in which to help and influence our confused species towards higher levels of joy and perfection.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The first part of the quotation asserts a proportionality between the greatness of an affect and the gain in perfection. Joy in the sense of *laetitia* is not always something wholly good; it is not always an active affect. In the passage quoted we must think of an active joy. Or else, we must take increases of perfection to be as ambivalent as *laetitia*- sometimes a good thing, sometimes a bad.

<sup>2</sup> The term *jungere*, incidentally, corresponds to the Sanskrit *yuj*, perfectum participium, *yukta*, and well known in the form *yoga*. The Spinoza scholar Jon Wetlesen has related the proof quoted to certain methods of Buddhist meditation,

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based on the intense awareness of the body, that is, on getting a clear and distant awareness of the affections and affects of the body.