

## **becoming concrete: spinoza's third kind of knowledge**

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The philosophy of Spinoza, although long established as an object of academic research, still has the potential to be heretical or heterodox. Where does this potential lie, today, when the critique of a personal God of creation, i.e. heresy in the classical sense, leaves us rather cold and disinterested? The persistent provocativeness of Spinoza's philosophy is to be found within his radical critique of prejudices; and not only of such prejudices that one can dispense with through so-called higher cultivation. These prejudices which Spinoza has in sight are, for example, the special position accorded to mankind within nature; or the separation of rationality and affect or cognition and action: these are (in his view) misguided efforts to describe reality without the use of a unified vocabulary. Instead, Spinoza provides a philosophical project in which the central concept of nature *and* an ethical pathway to self-refinement are willfully combined in thought (something which, in Spinoza's own time, as well as the time of the Spinoza feuds of the 18th century in Europe, caused—and, in contemporary times, still causes—disquietude).

My focus in this article is a type of philosophical provocation that refers to the *scientia intuitiva* [i.e. 'intuitive knowledge'], classified by Spinoza as the third kind of knowledge. The core of the provocation lies within Spinoza's radical critique of abstraction, the point of which is the following insight: philosophical knowledge requires affective work otherwise it remains in abstraction. This abstraction has

two different faces and therefore it is also assigned various kinds of knowing. The first type of abstraction is described in terms of truncation and distortion. This means mistaking the human perspective as such, or the perspectives of individual people, for reality itself and therefore truncating and distorting the cognition of reality through the projection of simple patterns. This method of distorted abstraction, which marks our everyday form of life, is termed *imaginatio* by Spinoza (*E II*, P35S).<sup>1</sup>

The second form of abstraction is a conscious method of abandoning concrete differences and focusing on commonalities. Therewith, a knowledge of law and rule is developed (Spinoza calls this *ratio*), through which a part of reality, namely that of individual particularity, remains misunderstood (*E II*, P37). The abstraction of rule-based knowledge shows itself in questions of ways of life or, more specifically, in the lack of power to initiate concrete changes.

According to Spinoza, there is also a specific kind of knowledge which makes general rules effective *within* one's specific concrete praxis. This is no mere tacked-on application of rule-based insight. Thereby, a transition will be carried out: that of general rules to the extent that they are expressed in a certain and specific way.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the third kind of knowledge is self-knowledge of the modes (in which the substance expresses itself in certain and particular ways). This self-knowledge is however no free-floating cognitive state; it is something which is first reached in the concrete affective work of a mode. The tendencies inherent in affective human nature—those of distorting and isolating abstraction—must be concretely altered. Thereby, a mode of affectivity peculiar to the third kind of knowledge emerges—deprived of the logic of effectuation and counter-effectuation, of strengthening and weakening—which can be established as the affectivity of self-purposiveness (i.e. autotely).

In the following, I would like to unfold and explain this analysis of the third type of knowledge. To this end, I will go through the following stages. Spinoza's philosophical framework makes it possible to understand knowledge and cognition as forms of praxis. Theoretical insight and individual as well as collective ways of life form, properly speaking, an interrelation. The form of praxis in which we conventionally live is, however, in itself very problematic and leads to individual as well as collective difficulties. Due to this, a kind of knowledge (and a related form of praxis) is necessary through which one can illuminate these difficulties and construct other possibilities. Illumination and construction, however, are not so-

lutions for these difficulties and not realizations of a form of praxis in absence of these difficulties. Only the concrete execution of techniques of change can bring about a new form of praxis and it is exactly this which the third kind of knowledge, the *scientia intuitiva*, achieves.

## 1. SPINOZA'S FRAMEWORK: A PHILOSOPHY OF IMMANENCE

Spinoza's philosophy has for some time been increasingly distinguished as a voice which can provide an important contribution to the theoretical and practical concerns of the present day. The Spinozan delimitation of the concept of power as a unified central concept of reality *in toto* makes it possible to analyze the multiplicity of self-organizing cycles of power, which increase their effectiveness through coordination but can also block and dissolve. Order is achieved through coordination of this multiplicity which must withstand constant threats. The fecundity of this perspective has been discussed in political philosophy under the heading of *multitudo* and Spinoza is profiled as an author who can show to what extent political order can arise at all democratically through the self-organized coordination of multiplicity. Therefore, no shared values or leading culture are necessary, which is highly relevant for our current political climate. Identities also develop out of the cooperation of (or even because of) highly diverse actors and fall apart when the interaction dissolves.

Spinoza offers an ontology which on the one hand allows for a maximal general perspective on all areas of reality but on the other resists the temptations of transcendence, namely ultimate justifications, categorical distinctions or even seeking after supernatural authorities. Spinoza develops an ontology of immanence which can describe, explain and analyze, with the most general terms, a small number of constitutional processes and regularities of beings. Such a starting point now has considerable consequences for all topics and areas of philosophy. One important consequence is to even-handedly criticize and transform, in terms of the theory of power, a widespread theoretical figure as well as our own conventional understanding. Humans are not actors who recognize and operate and stand in interactive relationships and enforce their wills; instead, they are the expression of general effective relations which apply equally to the human and non-human. Accomplishing this is exactly a fundamental concern of the *Ethics*.

The framework is formed by an indeterminate and dynamic concept of field: nature. Spinoza himself uses various expressions for this which create their own

semantic realm: in addition to the term nature, namely, also substance, God and power, i.e. effectivity (*potentia*). Within this field, various constellations of efficacy are built through connections, which Spinoza calls modes, in each of which nature, or substance, expresses itself in specific ways. For each mode, the following applies: on the one hand each mode is determined by other modes and on the other each mode is itself effective, i.e. itself a kind of power center. Each of these indescribably many and varied power centers also stands, on the one hand, in a complex causal relation and is constantly being changed by other modes and, on the other hand, each power center has its own structure which is a manifestation of the form of the reactions to external influences, as well as its own influence on others, i.e. its activities. Reactions and actions exist in the effort to maintain its own structure and increase the radius or capacity for action (*potentia agendi*) and prevent weakening. Increases or decreases create affects, i.e. types of pleasure and pain, which display the significance of the changes for each of the modes. What or who an individual is, is shown therefore in what they do and what their affects are—there is no core of existence behind it.

Human cognition and action have access to two forms of expression of this field within which their individual modes can take shape—thought and extension. Every mode appears in the one form of expression as an idea and in the other as a body. Each mode has therefore to some extent a double articulation with its own logic. Cognition as such and also human cognition take place in the form of expression of thought and the object of our ideas is our body (including the experience of other bodies conveyed by it). These ideas now have bodily equivalents in the form of expression of extension. Cognition is a form of increase of the activities of a mode and hence also always affective. To consider cognition free of affect is impossible within Spinoza's philosophical framework. Insights, reactions, actions and affects form as such an indissoluble connection and therefore it makes sense to understand forms of cognition as forms of praxis.

## 2. COGNITION AS A FORM OF PRAXIS

A form of praxis is a combination of shared openings onto reality in which modes (and in the following I consider only one particular type of mode, namely humans) live, recognize, act and feel. Through their own implementations of their lives, as well as the cognitive acts and actions, the modes sustain these connections which enable their own self-understanding. Forms of praxis therefore are both collective and individual. Individuals are developed within and through shared forms of

praxis and can also maintain and change them respectively.

How is the human form of praxis properly determined (or does it make more sense to speak of praxis forms in the plural)? To some degree, the singular is appropriate if praxis is understood as boundary, i.e. the horizon, of human being and action. However, within this lies an inner moment of differentiation, which Spinoza does not derive social-theoretically through cultural influence, lifestyle or levels, but instead via various ways of knowing, hence to interpret and form oneself and reality and to behave accordingly. Human knowledge, dealt with in the second book of the *Ethics*, can now, while belonging to this field of acting forces, take three courses.

The first possibility is to access reality solely from the perspective of the respective effects of increase or decrease. The second possibility marks the opening of reality through the commonalities between the various power constellations. And the third possibility creates a type of synthesis between both of the overly abstract views and puts into question the ways and methods of emergence (*procedere*) of specific power constellations as the concretization of general effective relations.

These cognitive perspectives, which Spinoza presents as the three kinds of knowledge, are not only the cognitive appropriation of reality, but are themselves ways of living and acting and of having a strengthening or weakening effect on oneself and others. This is shown in the consequences for the affective nature of humankind, treated in the third and fourth books of the *Ethics*, as well as the special spaces which the third kind of knowledge, as way of life or form of praxis, opens up. This is the subject of the comparatively short fifth and final book of the *Ethics*.

For each of these forms of praxis, various activities of cognition are especially important: shared forms of praxis are formed from their coordinated execution and affective dynamics which are sustained by individuals, groups and institutions. As I interpret Spinoza, for each form of praxis there is the corresponding generation of a form of theory surrounding oneself, on the meaning of the self and world, which should have a stabilizing, generalizing and legitimating effect.

The most unclear of Spinoza's statements definitely concerns the third kind of knowledge; it has therefore experienced the most varied, extremely distinct interpretations. At first glance, the presentation of the three kinds of knowledge as cognitive acts follows a hierarchical order. The first kind appears as the lowest

and the third as the highest. If one observes, however, in the complete framework of the *Ethics*, that the first kind, the *imaginatio*, provides a type of natural constitution of man, and that the complete *Ethics* lays out to a certain degree a path of critical self-transformation, then the classification of the kinds into first, second and third instead describes a way of change of forms of praxis.

### 3. WHAT DO WE DO WHEN WE IMAGINE? *IMAGINATIO* AS A FORM OF PRAXIS

The first kind of knowledge is determined like an unquestionable starting point which arises through the ideas of interactions of bodies. Through the encounter of one's own body and those of others, one's body is affected and can affect others. To be affected means incorporating, integrating and changing oneself. The traces of these influences of other bodies belong to one's own body. And to affect means influencing other bodies and initiating changes. A constant exchange is thereby enacted. In the attribute of thought, these acts of affecting and being affected are ideas of affections which present a mixture of one's own and foreign bodies. We perceive something and do this by means of our bodies as well as our processing mechanisms. What thereby comes about, and how it does so, i.e. what belongs on the side of the object and what belongs on the side of our processing, is not differentiable and there is no reason for the *imaginatio* to distinguish this.

Perceptions do not take place in an isolated form, one following the other; instead, they always exist within associative connections. Our perceptual history shapes our perceptual present as well as future and forms perceptual habits: stable patterns which can stand for complex relations and grant us orientation. The two most important tasks of the *imaginatio* are hence to perceive and associate.

These activities then constitute praxis when they are not viewed in isolation as modes of knowing, but instead considered in terms of their interaction with and consequences for our affective nature. For Spinoza, this is expressed by *conatus*: i.e. the striving of each mode, whether human, institutional or a cluster of cells, to maintain itself in its being and increase everything that is experienced as conducive to this as well as to prevent all that is detrimental to the process. If such increase succeeds, the positive affects of joy or pleasure are produced. If they fail, what occurs is sadness or pain. The *conatus*, the quest for self-preservation, is not a new theoretical element which is introduced as a new and quasi-external factor in the third book of the *Ethics*. Rather, each mode's self-preserving effort

expresses the power of God in a certain and determined way.<sup>3</sup>

The activities of the *imaginatio*—to perceive as well as feel and associate—are carried out to increase our power to sustain ourselves. In this way, we cultivate our habits to repeat, and thereby stabilize, what has already been perceived as such an increase. This concerns not only individual habitual behaviors but also (and perhaps preferentially) interactions with others. For Spinoza, as such, there is no alternative to the increase of our capacity for action through cooperation with others. We learn, on the one hand, how certain interactions and the development of and participation in collective structures strengthen us: we try to repeat them; on the other, we learn how other interactions such as the participation in different collective structures weaken us: we attempt to avoid these and keep ourselves far from them (and perhaps even to work on their destruction and dissolution). Assessing which interactions and forms of participation have which effects is based on past experience and present sensations and can always fail. The *imaginatio* acts as the center and assesses everything according to the standards that arise from this perspective.

The ambivalence and inner instability of the form of praxis of the *imaginatio* becomes especially clear through the dynamics of our affective lives, namely through the imitation of affects. Spinoza is a ruthless analyst of the ambivalence of our conventional forms of praxis which is attested to in the following diagnosis: “And so we see that each of us, by his nature, wants the others to live according to his temperament; when all alike want this, they are alike an obstacle to one another, and when all wish to be praised, *or* loved, by all, they hate one another” (*E* III, P31S).<sup>4</sup>

This form of praxis suggests certain interpretive patterns of reality and therefore part of the *imaginatio*, in a certain sense, is the development of a theory about itself, through which the radius of application is widened, a claim to universality gains justification and the interpretive frame is stabilized. The theoretical activity which can achieve this is the formation of patterns and types (*notiones universales*) through *abstraction*.

The following notions follow from the application of the activity of such abstractions:

1. We humans strive to maintain and strengthen ourselves. We experience

ourselves thereby as active, free beings. *Thus*, we have a free will.

2. We evaluate our environment so as to determine if it meets our purpose—to persevere and enhance ourselves—or not. *Thus*, everything in reality has a function as well as the purpose of being useful to us.

3. Whatever is useful for the achievement of our purpose is also good in reality and whatever is detrimental to the fulfillment of this aim is also bad in reality.

This interpretation of reality, which occurs through the bracketing of perspective, is that which, according to Spinoza, requires the *most intensive critique*. Spinoza calls the prejudices of free will, the purposiveness of nature and objective values an *asylum ignorantiae*.<sup>5</sup> This does not mean, however, that the activities of the *imaginatio*, perception and association, must (or even can) be subjected to the same critique. We perceive and associate constantly. As these activities have the tendency to produce a form of problematical excess of theory however, which exacerbates and cements the instability of this form of praxis, it is necessary to observe this exactly in order to better understand and change it. And for this reason, the *imaginatio* points beyond itself to another form of cognition which Spinoza calls *ratio*.

#### 4. WHAT DO WE DO WHEN WE REASON? *RATIO* AS A FORM OF PRAXIS OF COMMUNALITY

*Ratio* can be understood as a direct criticism and revision of *imaginatio*. While the *imaginatio* reveals the world according to one's own habits and interpretive patterns and neither investigates nor is interested in the conditions of formation, the *ratio* is characterized by the decentering of one's own perspective. The specific activities are comparison and concluding. Through the comparison of one's own experience with the experience of others and through the comparison of various events and circumstances, similarities can be deduced. The tasks of comparison and concluding lead to the activity of establishing commonalities in the form of common notions (*notiones communes*), conceived not as singular concepts but more as shared structures and regularities. These describe such comprehensive regularities as those of the laws of nature for the attribute of extension as well as elementary inferential principles for the attribute of thought. These activities can however also be applied to more limited contexts insofar as the commonalities between humans or between animals (or even sectors of society or of institutions) are made the object of rational consideration.



Rational forms of praxis also encompass the scientific exploration of nature including human behaviors, as well as the design of one's own environment and life. Exploration and design are connected as only the investigation of structures and regularities allows one to understand the natural environment and human nature as well as their interrelation. The principles of perception and association also belong to human nature as well as the affective dynamics of self-preservation, i.e. rational elucidation of the mechanisms of the *imaginatio*. These critical insights allow the formulation of expedient rules for the rational organization of political communities as well as individual conduct of life. Rational design consists of the orientation toward commonalities, whether between human nature and surrounding (and conditioning) nature; between one's own body and others' bodies; between all humans; or between humans of one region or institution. Put bluntly, one could perhaps say that one such rational person is also a political individual, who stands for participation and cooperation. This type of human is guided by the experience that strong affects are created through this orientation, i.e. toward communal participation, which can have an influence on other affects. The insight that one's own capacity for action can be increased through cooperation with many actors makes it possible to counteract the tendencies of the *imaginatio*: to absolutize one's own perspective and overlook common interests due to fixation on personal ones. Making the *ratio*, and therewith the orientation toward the collective, effective in terms of action, is a long and difficult route which Spinoza calls the path to perfection (*perfectio*). A rational person, in this sense, is one who has understood that the real striving toward self-preservation converges with the striving of all others. The *ratio* constructs the idea of the good and derives therefrom the claims of reason to which the recommendation of a certain affective life belongs. Affects such as gratitude, nobility, moderation and sobriety should make up the recommended affective life of the rational person.

In this rational form of praxis, there exists, according to Spinoza, a serious structural problem, which makes it insufficient and in need of broadening. And this problem lies precisely in the characteristics of rational construction and claims of the *ratio*. Constructions transcend reality and claims are negative toward lived reality. The claims and constructions of the good or better are weak and cause a structural rift in human nature. They suggest the reduction of human nature to a deficiency. Added to this, concentrating on general claims and rules ignores the differences between people, events and circumstances. Therein one finds the problematic abstractness of *ratio*.<sup>6</sup>

In connection with the question of the powerlessness of the *ratio* in contrast to the powerful force of the *imaginatio*, Spinoza quotes Ovid: “I see and approve the better, but follow the worse” (E IV, P17S). These words of Medea, with which she attempts to resist her sudden passion for Jason, are the *locus classicus* for the phenomenon which is then discussed in relation to Aristotle’s notion of *akrasia* or weakness of will. *Akrasia* is mainly reserved for an action carried out *in spite of* the conviction that another act is the best. The akratic considers action A to be the best, however does something different, which she in fact considers to be worse. Aristotle explains this in terms of the emergence of strong passions through which the agent is to a certain extent forced toward action B, which is judged as worse. Spinoza considers this discussion completely misguided. The ‘Medea’ phenomenon is not a question of strength or weakness of the will. The concept of the will emanates from a truncated and distorted abstraction of the *imaginatio*. The ‘Medea’ phenomenon must therefore be placed in the proper conceptual frame, as the concept of will is empty and to be rejected from a philosophical standpoint. The question is rather that of the structural irritability and weakness of general claims, which the *ratio* formulates. The ‘Medea’ phenomenon is a problem of the specific abstractness of the *ratio*. It does not require any strengthening or training of will power, which should exert the mysterious effect that thinking is supposed to have on the body (in this manner, Spinoza is able to satirize Descartes in the preface to the fifth book). This is excluded in Spinoza’s theory of parallelism and as such the concept of will is deprived of its ontological basis.

Against this, Spinoza develops the third kind of knowledge, which involves exploring the concrete active force in a mode and creating concrete conditions in order to bring the insights of the *ratio* into effect. This is a distinct form of cognition which Spinoza terms ‘intuitive.’<sup>7</sup>

## 5. WHAT DO WE DO WHEN WE INTUIT INTELLECTUALLY? THEORY AS PRAXIS

### 5.1 *The third kind of knowledge as critique of abstraction*

The third kind of knowledge is critical of the tendencies toward abstraction found in the other two kinds. With the help of *ratio* and its structure-generating abstractions, it becomes possible to criticize the distortions and reductions of the *imaginatio*. The affective logic and tendencies toward distortion and reduction are made transparent within *ratio* in their fundamental functioning. This allows,

on the one hand, critical insight, insofar as the general regularities can be applied to isolated cases. The knowledge surrounding the regularities goes hand-in-hand with the knowledge of applicability: i.e. the ability to subsume single cases under these regularities. This enables both critique of jealous, angry or otherwise affect-driven actions of others or one's own affective action. However, the process of subsumption is abstract as the specifics of content of the concrete circumstances are disregarded in the subordination of a concrete state of affairs under given, general rules. Distinctiveness is reduced to a logical relation of the subordination of particular judgments under general ones, subject to rules of inference. If one such subordination is conducted, there is no gain in knowledge of the particularities of the case. Abstractness here means, therefore, that the distinctive features of objects are not taken into consideration—particularities are intentionally disregarded—and the objects and circumstances are taken as given and are therefore isolated from the generating acts of reflection.

The insights that can be gained by way of the *ratio* are nonetheless not only of an explanatory and diagnostic type. General guidelines for improvement can also be attained via this comprehension (*dictamina*, E IV, P62; *praecepta*, E IV, P18S), for example general life rules (E IV, P46), which are treated in the fifth book: hate is “to be conquered by love, or nobility; not by repaying it with hate in return” (E V, P10S).<sup>8</sup> Such guidelines are abstract as they are not intrinsically effective: they are followed sometimes and at other times not. In concrete situations, counteractive forces are often present which prove to be stronger. As long as the conditions are not subjected to thinking, under which conditions power and strength can develop in the field of counteraction, such *praecepta* remain abstract in a problematic way.

## 5.2 Transitional knowledge

Understanding the third kind of knowledge as transitional is based on its formulaic determination which Spinoza provides in the second book of the *Ethics* (E II, P40S) and concretizes in the fifth: “And this kind of knowing proceeds (*procedit*) from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the [NS: formal] essence of things.”<sup>9</sup> This “proceeding” (*procedere*) proves in the fifth book to be the concretization of the insights of *ratio*, which were established in the third and fourth books of the *Ethics*. A process of concretization does not allow itself to be described abstractly; this lies in the nature of things. As such, it is by starting with something concrete: the con-

crete affective nature of humans as well as the experiences which we undertake in the *imaginatio*. The critical insights on the functioning of the *imaginatio* and the generation of suffering that is linked to it, which can be obtained in the *ratio*, are what are to be concretized therein. Through this concretization, the general guidelines—the *praecepta* or *dictamina*, obtained in the *ratio*—change into *remedia* (*E V*, Preface), i.e. remedies that receive a transformative power which is lacking in the *praecepta*.

The term *remedia* is proximal to medicinal usage semantically, which Spinoza draws on but also relativizes.<sup>10</sup> In the preface to the fifth part of the *Ethics*, two distinctions are made which make clear how one is *not* to understand the process of concretization described in propositions 1–20. The path (*via*) to freedom is differentiated from a path of somatic cultivation (i.e. medicine) and one of the mind (i.e. logic). The path with which the fifth book is concerned does not consist of the further development of bodily or mental potentialities, but the critical work on one's own prejudices and the realization of the general insights of the *ratio*: concrete affective work is necessary.

Spinoza distinguishes this from the affective work of the Stoics as well as Cartesian work on willpower. The affective work which Spinoza demonstrates in the fifth book does not at all concern freeing oneself of one's own nature through effort and discipline and acquiring a different one. This model of affective work is visualized through the Stoic image of making a hound out of a domesticated dog and vice versa. The dominion (*imperium*) over the affects which Spinoza is concerned with however is not that of the stoical victory over one's own nature and its determinations, a victory of the disciplinarian power of the mind against the limitations of nature. The ontological principles set out in book one of the *Ethics* make clear that such a model and such a conception of dominion are without foundation.

The borderline to the Cartesian model is equally sharp as the dominance of the affects proceeds from the authority of the will, which for Spinoza is nothing other than a mysterious point of influence which emanates between mind and body. This demarcation also follows the ontological framework from the *Ethics*.

Spinoza shows in the fifth book of the *Ethics* how the power over the affects is now to be thought, which follows the ontological framework and concretizes it. In propositions 1–20, the step-by-step procedure is shown whereby the critical

insights and guidelines obtained by the *ratio* can become concretized.

There is a large gap between merely informing oneself about the path and actually taking it. The latter takes place within the third kind of knowledge and the effects which thereby successively occur are specified in the propositions. The following evidences Spinoza's retrospection on the path: "From what we have said, we easily conceive what clear and distinct knowledge—and especially that third kind of knowledge (see *E II*, P47S), whose foundation is the knowledge of God itself—can accomplish against the affects" (*E V*, P20S).<sup>11</sup> While in the first part of the fifth book (propositions 1–20) the type of functioning of the third kind of knowledge is said to be made clear in "this present life" (*praesentam hanc vitam*), the thematic of the second half of the fifth book (propositions 21–42) concerns describing the affective consequences which arise when the path of concretization is carried out completely. The consequences are to be found in the realization of the transindividuality<sup>12</sup> of the mode which is accompanied by a wholly specific affective dynamic.

### 5.3 *Ontology of change*

The two axioms at the start of the fifth book have the function of qualifying the following path both as consequences of the ontological, epistemological and affective-theoretic principles and as their concretization. It remains to be shown how change is possible and necessary, as this is the sole condition under which remedies (*remedia*) can work. Changes are possible through an investigation into the natural power dynamics, as this shows how impulses can be strengthened and others weakened. Exactly this is achieved with both axioms; one could call them the "Law of contradiction concerning action" and "Law of immanence." The former formulates the following: changes occur when two contrary actions (*actio*) are generated in one subject; and the latter the following: that the power of an effect (or its essence, with respect to the determination of the essence of a mode as its *conatus*; see *E III*, P7) is dictated by the power of its cause (or its essence).

Therefore, in order to achieve change, it is not necessary to develop goals with specific contents that should be realized or achieved and nor is it necessary to control affects through reason, in order to conquer them. Instead, the conditions of the affective dynamics must be analyzed and modified. The direction of the modification is the concretization of the insights of the *ratio* in the individual mode. This is shown exactly in the determination of the third kind of knowledge

in the second book insofar as the epistemological foundations for the path of change are set in place (E II, P40S2).

#### 5.4 Pragmatics of change

On the basis of these axioms, the concretization process, the pragmatics of change, can be implemented. There is much to be said on the choreography of propositions 1–20; in the following, only a few steps of the sequence have been selected. To understand the status of these propositions, and their difference to those in books 1–4, it's crucial to remember their designation as remedy (*remedia*) and to follow the consequent metaphorical implications. Therapeutically effective remedies are those which are given to provide relief to a harmful, limiting condition. The suffering which arises through the *imaginatio* and its affective dynamics can be seen as one such condition. Remedies which should be helpful against suffering can be administered by healers who understand sicknesses as well as health in their functions and mechanisms in the following ways: a) in the form of substances or dietetic measures; b) in the form of interventions; or c) in the form of instructions to do some things differently than one would usually.

The question then arises: what kind of remedies are presented in propositions 1–20 and who decrees them to whom? It is obvious that these cannot be substances or dietetic measures, as Spinoza points out, since it is “*the power of the mind (mentis potentia) ... defined only by understanding*” that is in need of determination and not the power of the body. Therefore, the two possibilities of b and c remain.

Who, however, can intervene here (and in regard to whom) and give instruction? Spinoza does not advocate finding a sage who gives advice or tells stories; this would be a means of externalizing the *ratio* and receiving the *praecepta* of others, instead of through the power of one's own thought processes. This does not change the problematic of the *praecepta* and cannot be considered as concretization. Therefore, nothing other can be meant than the self-relation between an instance which determines the interventions or gives the assignation and an instance in which the interventions are undertaken and show effects, i.e. which follows the procedure laid out.

However, if it concerns a self-relation, then option b is eliminated, as the interventions of a healer upon a sufferer are mostly incomprehensible for the latter, who rather surrenders completely to the expertise of the former. The most plau-

sible option is therefore the third, according to which propositions 1–20 form instructions for a concrete praxis that refer specifically to the situation of the sufferer and can be applied to it.

How then are propositions 1–20 to be understood, within a self-relation that provides the directive of an instance, in which distance from one’s own suffering (and therefore general knowledge on affective dynamics) is achieved, in relation to an instance which is exposed to the enlacing and sufferance-generating power of affect?

If we take the second proposition<sup>13</sup> and read it as a coherent set of instructions, the following may be deduced: separate the affects from the thought of an external cause. How can such a directive be followed and what should be done? First of all, a starting point is necessary, for example the above-mentioned affective dynamic which shows the suffering of the *imaginatio* particularly clearly:

And so we see that each of us, by his nature, wants the others to live according to his temperament; when all alike want this, they are alike an obstacle to one another, and when all wish to be praised, *or* loved, by all, they hate one another. (E III, P31S)

This is a critical insight into the functioning of the *imaginatio*, which in turn was gained by way of the *ratio*. The concretization to be brought to fruition through the third kind of knowledge obliges us to describe a concrete situation in which this dynamic is manifested.<sup>14</sup> An example: *we live in a relationship and want our preferences to be realized (for instance, to sleep longer on the weekend). This is in conflict with the preferences of our partner, who wants to fill the weekend spending time together engaging in joint activities. We prevail in our wish by simply sleeping, however we feel that this makes our partner unhappy and causes an atmosphere of silent reproach to cloud over the weekend. This repeats itself each weekend with variations which creates increasing anger for each of us.* This may seem like a banal situation from everyday living however it is one of an endless series of concrete examples on the desires of our nature: everyone, and in this case our partner, should live according to our plan. The affect which arises here is a gradation of what Spinoza describes as hate, which is caused when we expect everyone to live according to our ideas and preferences. He determines hate as follows: “Hate is a sadness, accompanied by the idea of an external cause” (E III, D7).<sup>15</sup>

To offer advice in such a situation, through the wise counsel and authority within us, to understand the partner and find a compromise, to arrange the weekends alternately according to the preferences of one person and then the other, would probably remain abstract and ineffective. In the best case scenario, there would be the attempt to displace the achievement of one's own agenda onto another topic: e.g. food, clothing, a holiday, political orientation.

Therefore, the crucial step in the complex instructions that Spinoza provides in proposition 2, is precisely to separate (*amovere*) the affect of anger from the object toward which it is directed—here, the behavior of the partner—and to connect it with other thoughts. What should be done here? Through this separation from the external object we free up, by way of the action of thought applied to the concrete situation (such as the one described), the affect of anger toward our partner, i.e. the external cause of the disturbance. What then remains is namely the affect of anger arising from the disapproving reaction toward the enacting of our own wishes. This separation must be carried out concretely and its success can be seen in the described effect: the anger toward the partner dissipates. Spinoza, who here merely outlines the basic facets of concrete affective work, leaves open the question of which concrete variations have to be completed to bring the separation into effect. It is possible, and in fact highly likely, that a single intellectual act is by no means enough to resolve the affect of anger toward the partner or to prevent the problem becoming displaced onto other topics. Therefore it is indeed necessary to enact and repeat this separation in variations and to remember situations which had a similar structure, in order to thematize one's own affective habits. Only then can the insights become concrete (i.e. it is not our partner who has set into motion the affect of anger, and thereby is responsible for this, but the fact that we repeat our own affective habits).

If this becomes concretely clear and explicit, we experience the way in which the anger toward the partner dissolves and then our activities, and the affects associated with them, become liberated. This occurs however only when the effects can be brought about and the anger toward the partner is destroyed (*destruere*).

The other propositions (3–20) could also be broken down in this way into concretized procedures, i.e. always questioning with regard to examples of concrete situations what exactly should be done, what the effects are and how they can be presented. When we can follow this—the best case being by means of a situation to which we can apply our own experiences—and understand the effects which



Spinoza successively describes with each step, then we can see that the second part of the fifth book represents nothing else than, again and especially, observing effects on the mind—separated from the concrete steps which had to be carried out in the concretization procedure and through which the thoughts and ideas of the mind received a new order as was the case with the “images of things” (*imagines*) in the body (*E V, P1*).<sup>16</sup>

### 5.5 Affectivity of change

When an individual has repeatedly undergone this procedure of concretization, has gathered experience with dissipating passions, what arise as the affective effects? In the second part of the fifth book, Spinoza describes a fundamental change in the logic of affect. The affective experiences of one who is able to intuitively cognize show that these affects are spread out, inclusive and self-reinforcing. The familiar, emphatically charged terms for transindividual affects from the second part of the fifth book—such as *amor Dei intellectualis* or *sub specie aeternitatis*—describe the transition from concrete, individual affective work to the experience of transindividuality.

To make this plausible as a concrete experiential quality, I would like to again tie in the example situation. Let us assume that the effect presented in proposition 2 occurs and the anger toward our partner dissipates. Perhaps this is accompanied by regret concerning our previous suffering and also the suffering that has arisen in our partner. At the same time, we bring into effect our partner’s potential to change her affective habits as well as the power to learn about and develop her own affect. We learn, from this power over our own affects, about our interrelations with others, whereas through the assertion of our partialities we learn about separation from others.

By means of the concrete and individually fulfilled resolution of our urge to push our individual prejudices through, we learn to consider ourselves as the expression of activity (*potentia agendi*), which we share with others and through which we experience, as part of nature as a whole, the confusing field of modes and their processes of change. And this is exactly a dimension of that which Balibar attempts to grasp through the concept of transindividuality, which is founded on the conceptual reciprocity of individuality and substance:

In Spinoza's philosophy, not only is individuality a central notion, but it is the very form of *actual existence*. In the strong sense of the term ... only individuals really exist. As a consequence, 'substance' and 'individuality' are reciprocal concepts. ... [S]ubstance (or God, or Nature) is an infinite process or production of multiple individuals, whereas 'individuals', being all different and all causally dependent, are the necessary existence of the substance.<sup>17</sup>

In the fifth book of the *Ethics*, Spinoza makes the attempt to sketch a concrete path in which this relationship of individuality to substance is synthesized within a lived experience. Whether those who do indeed go down this path achieve eternal bliss is however unlikely. Instead, the third kind of knowledge shows us a course of practice, which requires great, and constantly repeated, effort: how, namely, in the midst of our imprisonment within the blind assertive fury of our partialities, we can undergo the experience of transindividuality.

What is then provocative about the third kind of knowledge? The provocation lies in the necessary transgressive shift of philosophy into non-philosophy, into concrete affective work. Spinozan philosophy demands exactly this of us.

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## NOTES

1. For the explicit characterization of the *imaginatio* as abstract see also *E I*, P15S.
2. I am referring here to the designation of modes in *E I*, P25C: “Particular things are nothing but affections of God’s attributes, or modes by which God’s attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way.” (*Res particulares nihil sunt nisi Dei attributorum affectiones sive modi, quibus Dei attributa certo et determinato modo exprimentur.*) All English quotations are drawn from Spinoza, *Ethics. The Collected Works of Spinoza*. Ed. and trans. Edwin M. Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, vol. 1, 408–617.
3. Compare the established and widely used determination of modes in *E I*, P25C: “[M]odes by which God’s attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way.” (*[M]odi, quibus Dei attributa certo et determinato modo exprimentur.*)
4. (*[A]tque adeo videmus unumquemque ex natura appetere, ut reliqui ex ipsius ingenio vivant, quod dum omnes pariter appetunt, pariter sibi impedimento, et dum omnes ab omnibus laudari seu amari volunt, odio invicem sunt.*) This passage is adopted again in *E V*, P4S.
5. *E I*, A.
6. This critique of the abstractness of *ratio* can already be found in the early work *TIE*, in which Spinoza differentiates a further four kinds of knowledge. For a more detailed analysis, see Katrin Wille, “Transformatives Erkennen im *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione*. Funktion, Legitimation und Evaluation der vier *modi percipiendi*”, in: *Metaphysik und Methode: Descartes, Spinoza und Leibniz im Vergleich*. Ed. Thomas Kisser. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2010, 69–100, especially 87–90.
7. Spinoza critically ties in the concept of intuition from Descartes’ *Regulae*. Thereby, the criteria of “clare et distincte,” and, contained within this, above all, the aspect of the overview of the whole at once (*tota simul*), are taken into account. By way of the metaphoricality of sight and the use of Descartes’ newly coined term ‘intuitive,’ Spinoza critically appraises Descartes’ claim, from the *Regulae*, to have offered the highest and most reliable mode of knowledge, i.e. *intuitus* (*Regulae* 3, 6; *AT X*, 369). In complete contradistinction to Descartes, a simple thing, produced through methodical separation, cannot be intuitively recognized according to Spinoza; instead, a concrete relation is seen as an *expression* of its constitutive relationality. These relations are however condensed—‘contracted’—and thereby, in a certain way, simultaneously captured in a single glance.
8. (*[O]dium amore seu generositate vincendum, non autem reciproco odio compensandum.*)
9. (*Atque hoc cognoscendi genus procedit ab adaequata idea essentiae formalis quorundam Dei attributorum ad adaequatam cognitionem essentiae rerum.*)
10. In his article “Individual Identity in Spinoza” (in the current issue of *Parrhesia*), François Zourabichvili shows the importance of medicine as dietetics and the experimental investigation of individual cases for a Spinozan concept of individuality based on this section of the preface to the fifth book. Medicine appears here as akin to the science of individuals as the body has somewhat of a privilege in the realization of individuality. With the third kind of knowledge, which should supposedly be the cognition of singular essences, the mind oddly turns away from the body. This widespread reading, which emphasizes the mysteriousness of the third kind of knowledge, does not recognize the interrelation of both sections of the fifth book. I would like in connection with this—but also to demarcate Zourabichvili’s thoughts, which adhere to an asymmetry of body and mind—to venture the hypothesis that there is a gap in the theoretical arrangement of the *Ethics*. This consists in a liberation of the body which is similar—systematically—to the liberation of the mind conducted in the fifth book.

11. (*Ex his itaque facile concipimus, quid clara et distincta cognitio et praecipue tertium illud cognitionis genus (de quo vide schol. prop. 47. p. 2), cujus fundamentum est ipsa Dei cognitio, in affectus potest.*) The passage that he refers back to proceeds as follows:

From this we see that God's infinite essence and his eternity are known to all. And since all things are in God and are conceived through God, it follows that we can deduce from this knowledge a great many things which we know adequately, and so can form that third kind of knowledge of which we spoke in P40S2 and of whose excellence and utility we shall speak in Part V.

12. Etienne Balibar takes this expression from Gilbert Simondon and therewith conceptualizes the various dynamics of the transgression in individuation processes through their consistent pursuit which always consists of an integration of others. See Etienne Balibar, *Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality*. Delft: Eburon, 1997.

13. "If we separate emotions, or affects, from the thought of an external cause, and join them to other thoughts, then the love, or hate, toward the external cause is destroyed, as are the vacillations of mind arising from these affects" (E V, P2). (*Si animi commotiones seu affectus a causae externae cogitatione amoveamus et aliis jungamus cogitationibus, tum amor seu odium erga causam externam ut et animi fluctuationes, quae ex his affectibus oriuntur, destruentur.*) In order to make the executable perspective of the concretization procedure linguistically clear, I have switched to the grammatical form of the first person plural (we).

14. For this first step, I would like to include this apt formulation from Zourabichvili with reference to E V, P22: "[K]nowledge of the third kind does not consist in grasping the essence of a human body in general, but the essence of this body—mine".

15. (*Oidium est tristitia concomitante idea causae externae.*)

16. Spinoza's comment on the transition is as follows: "So it is time now to pass to those things which pertain to the mind's duration without relation to the body" (E V, P20S). (*Tempus igitur jam est, ut ad illa transeam, quae ad mentem sine relatione ad durationem corporis pertinent.*)

17. See Balibar, *From Individuality to Transindividuality*, 8.