

rational and affective genesis of sociability: balibar's reading of spinoza

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In his writings on Spinoza, Balibar has repeatedly returned to Proposition 37 of Part IV of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza lays out, in two demonstrations, “the foundations of the state (*civitas*)” (*E* IV, P37S1).¹ Balibar famously interpreted these two demonstrations as providing a rational and an affective genesis of sociability. In his view, this analysis of sociability is crucial because it shows, in a very condensed way, how the social and political problematic can be derived from a philosophical anthropology or, indeed, a relational ontology of transindividuality.² According to this reading, sociability is constructed by a dialectic of reason and passion “just like” the construction of individualities, which occurs through the passionate and rational exchanges with others. The cause of sociability is ultimately the individual striving for self-preservation (*conatus*), which is best realised in the rational determination of one’s actions and reciprocal usefulness to one another. The common good is thus to be found in mutual utility, that is, the exchange of goods and the communication of ideas and knowledge. In the final analysis, what we find in Spinoza is a “a highly original philosophy of communication.”³

This paper aims to highlight some difficulties with this reading of Spinoza, in addition to those that Balibar himself mentions in a recent essay.⁴ While Balibar tries to establish what could be called a ‘politics of the second kind,’ which proposes mutual utility, virtue and friendship as a common “communicable good,” this reading seems to disregard what Spinoza himself defined as the greatest good

which alone secures “satisfaction of mind” (E IV, Ap.IV) and the only “principle which will be able to produce peace and concord among men”⁵: the knowledge and intellectual love of God (E IV, P28). For Balibar, the emergence of this third kind of knowledge “represents a *leap* outside the social and political problematic that had found its fulfilment in the propositions of Part IV of the *Ethics* on *convenientia* and the mutual utility of men.”⁶ However, the idea of God is already at the heart of the very proposition that contains Spinoza’s analysis of sociability. A close reading of Proposition 37 will show that Spinoza’s socio-political analysis is firmly anchored in his ontology of the One-All, or rather One-Infinity, of substance.

Furthermore, Balibar’s reconstruction of the two demonstrations of Proposition 37 as two “antithetical narratives”⁷ of the genesis of sociability opposes the faculties of rationality on the one hand, and passions and imagination on the other, as two antithetical political tendencies for the association of human beings. However, Spinoza does not consider affectivity as the opposite of rationality: there are affects that arise from reason and wherein the mind is not passive (E IV, P63). In other words, there are joys and desires that are active because they are not determined by external encounters (E III, P58). These active affects and desires not only play an indispensable role in the so-called “rational genesis” of sociability: the greatest and most constant of all affects, the intellectual love of God, is a key element of the “affective genesis.” Ultimately, what will be shown is that the two demonstrations are *alternative* proofs for the genesis of sociability, drawing their resources from a (rational) morality and (universal) religion rather than from genuine political considerations.

BALIBAR’S ‘POLITICS OF THE SECOND KIND’

In Part IV, Proposition 37, we find the most substantial account of Spinoza’s political ideas in the *Ethics*. It is there, in the demonstrations and scholia, that he brings together the findings of his ontological and anthropological reflections with the question of the foundations of sociability (*civitas*). The proposition and the two demonstrations read as follows:

P37: The good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men; and this Desire is greater as his knowledge of God is greater.

Dem.: Insofar as men live according to the guidance of reason, they are most useful to man (by P35C1); hence (by P19), according to the guidance of reason, we necessarily strive to bring it about that men live according to the guidance of reason. Now, the good which everyone who lives according

to the dictate of reason (i.e., by P24, who seeks virtue) wants for himself is understanding (by P26). Therefore, the good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men. Next, Desire, insofar as it is related to the Mind, is the very essence of the mind (by Def. Aff. I). Now the essence of the Mind consists in knowledge (by *E II*, P11), which involves knowledge of God (by *E II*, P47). Without this [knowledge the mind] can neither be nor be conceived (by *E I*, P15). Hence, as the Mind's essence involves a greater knowledge of God, so will the Desire also be greater by which one who seeks virtue desires for another the good he wants for himself, q.e.d.

Alternative dem.: The good which man wants for himself and loves, he will love more constantly if he sees that others love it (by *E III*, P31). So (by *E III*, P31C), he will strive to have the others love the same thing. And because this good is common to all (by P36), and all can enjoy it, he will therefore (by the same reason) strive that all may enjoy it. And this striving will be the greater, the more he enjoys this good (by *E III*, P37), q.e.d.

Some preliminary remarks are necessary to prepare the ground for understanding the two demonstrations. First of all, we need to recall Spinoza's ontological and anthropological assumption that the essence of the human being is desire, which is to say, a striving (*conatus*) to persevere in one's being. Because of this *conatus*, human beings will necessarily strive for what is useful to them. In Proposition 35, Part IV, Spinoza demonstrated that nothing is more useful for a human being than another human being who lives according to the guidance of reason. This is so because when we are driven by passions, we can easily be at variance with one another. Affects are inconstant and changeable, insofar as they arise within a play of external forces. Spinoza has shown at some length how affects of joy and sadness, love and hatred can be moderated or restrained by their opposite affect. Furthermore, they can be undermined (for instance through the influence of a third person) in such a way that we find ourselves in a state of ambivalence. For instance, if we imagine that someone is "averse to what we love, or the opposite [NS: that he loves what we hate], then we shall undergo vacillation of mind" (*E III*, P31).

Imaginary agreement is of an equally inconstant nature, which has to do with the temporal structure of the faculty of imagination and its dependence on perceptual signs. It first asserts the presence of its object, but then it might be affected in such a way that the presence of the object is excluded. The object appears as

contingent, as an uncertain event. Thus the faculty of imagination enters into a state of “vacillation,” fluctuating between the image of the object and the causes that precisely exclude its existence. The object of imagination carries with it the risk of its own dissipation over time.

It seems that neither common passions nor imaginary agreements have a stabilizing social function. However, when we are guided by reason, our action can be understood through our nature alone. We are no longer tossed to and fro in our affects, driven about by external causes, but act according to our own nature, that is, freely. Freedom for Spinoza refers to a power of action that arises out of adequate ideas, i.e. an adequate knowledge of causes. If human beings always acted in accordance with what is confirmed by reason as their true interest, society would need no laws: peace and tranquillity would prevail in a community of rational beings that would be bound together in mutual friendship and love. In such a utopian society, the common good would also be plain for everyone, since whatever we strive for under the guidance of reason is good. Spinoza explains that we call something ‘good’ not because it has some intrinsic value but because it is useful to us with regard to preserving our being and increasing our power of acting. Now, “the mind, insofar as it reasons, cannot conceive anything to be good for itself except what leads to understanding” (*E IV, P26D*). This striving for understanding is the very essence, or nature, of the human mind. Moreover, understanding is a good that can be shared by all without rivalry or loss. It involves an adequate knowledge of God, or infinite substance.

The first demonstration of Proposition 37 is precisely based on this claim: The good that everyone seeks for himself, namely understanding, is a common good that can be shared equally without causing rivalries, resentment or hatred. Spinoza imagines someone objecting to him: “what if the greatest good of those who seek virtue were not common to all? Would it not follow from that, as above (see P34), that men who live according to the guidance of reason, that is (by P35), men, insofar as they agree in nature, would be contrary to one another?” (*E IV, P36S*). To this Spinoza responds that it is by definition that true knowledge, that is, adequate knowledge of the common good, is universal, because “man could neither be nor be conceived if he did not have the power to enjoy this greatest good. For it pertains to the essence of the human Mind (by *E II, P47*) to have an adequate knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence” (*E IV, P36S*).

The knowledge that Spinoza refers to in his reply does not seem to be a progressive knowledge that we accumulate in the course of our lives and that has proven

its utility. Rather, it is a kind of knowledge that we necessarily possess (or, if I may say so, that we *are*) inasmuch as “our mind, with respect both to essence and existence, follows from the divine nature, and continually depends on God” (*E V*, P36S). The human mind is nothing but a mode, an immanent modification of the infinite substance, an internal effect in the attribute of thought; as such its essence cannot involve existence. Only the essence of substance contains the cause of its existence within its definition (*E I*, P7). As a mode, the human mind depends on the absolutely infinite substance as immanent cause, on account of which it exists. It does so inasmuch as it pertains to the attribute of thought, which envelops an infinite causal chain of eternal modes of thinking. An individual human mind is just one effect, determined by another eternal mode of thinking, which is again determined by another: “so that together, they all constitute God’s eternal and infinite intellect” (see *E V*, P40S), which is an infinite mode of the thought-attribute. In this way, by anchoring the formal being (*esse formale*) of the human mind in God, Spinoza not only attempts to prove its eternity but also to ground an intuitive knowledge of God: “So (by P30) insofar as it is eternal, it has knowledge of God, knowledge which is necessarily adequate (by *E II*, P46)” (*E V*, P31Pr). Indeed, Spinoza argues that everyone must have knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence (*E II*, P47S), and if this knowledge is not clear to everyone to the same degree, then this is so because we tend to conceive of God abstractly or superficially, as we imagine bodies. Spinoza’s *Ethics* can be read as an attempt to restrict the imagination to its proper place (the encounter of bodies), to modify the play of affects such that joyous passions that agree with reason (*E IV*, P59Pr) and desires that arise from reason (*E IV*, P63Pr2) prevail, and finally to assist true understanding by means of demonstrations of mathematical rigour: “For the eyes of the mind, by which it sees and observes things, are the demonstrations themselves” (*E V*, P23S).

In short, Spinoza’s reasons for why the greatest good, the knowledge of God, can only be desired unanimously are the following: firstly it pertains to the essence of the human mind to strive for adequate knowledge. Secondly, “the human mind has an adequate knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence” (*E II*, P47). This is so because all things are in God and nothing can be nor be conceived without God (*E I*, P15). Thirdly, this knowledge of God forms the third kind of knowledge, which exceeds the other kinds of knowledge in excellence and utility, because it enables the human mind to know of all those things which can follow from this given knowledge of God (*E II*, P40). If this argument seems somehow circular, this is indeed the case, and necessarily so: Spinoza has guaranteed through the ontological metastructure (the immanence of each singular mode in God) that

the idea of God is indeed universal. The difficulty in fully grasping the idea of God in its objective being (*esse objective*) seems to lie in the fact that we need to follow a bottom-up approach, if we are not lucky enough to have an intuitive grasp of it: “The more we understand singular things, the more we understand God” (*E V*, P24). The mind has to have ideas of itself, the body and external things as actually existing and as following necessarily from God as cause “insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which the things are modes” (*E II*, P45). In other words, the mind has to conceive things under a species of eternity (*E II*, P44C2), for which it requires common notions as the foundations of reasoning (see *E II*, P40S1).

This discussion of the idea of God and knowledge of the third kind was necessary in order to better mark the distinction between the concept of the common good, as presented above, and Balibar’s concept of the common “communicable good”. As Balibar rightly remarks, the third kind of knowledge considers singular things, or “singularities [that] *as such* are known as necessary.”⁸ This necessity, I would argue, is the eternal existence of each mode, whereby existence here is not to be understood in spatio-temporal terms but as immanence in God.⁹ What we thus understand in the third kind of knowledge is the equality of modes in their eternal being; their immanence to an infinite One without will, interests, or affects, from whose essence everything follows by necessity; an eternal truth that can be understood with mathematical clarity (*more geometrico*).

Balibar’s interpretation of the third kind of knowledge, instead of emphasising the equality and eternity of modes, focuses on the contingent differences of singular individuals:

Rational communication requires that individuals know each other as different individuals who have much in common. “Under the guidance of Reason,” humans know that their fellow humans are irreducible to one another, each having what Spinoza calls a specific *ingenium* [character or temperament], while being mutually *convenientes* more than any other beings.¹⁰

Thus, in Balibar’s view, rational knowledge of the third kind is precisely a valuing of difference on the common ground that we share with one another (*convenientia*). Through our differences, i.e. differences in powers and capacities, we can be mutually beneficial and increase security and prosperity for all. We benefit from the exchange of knowledge, services and goods. According to Balibar’s reading,

sociability results from this rational insight into reciprocal utility, which is based on “difference in similarity.”¹¹ What leads human beings to this insight is not a sort of “transcendent reason”¹² but rather a cumulative *economic* reason that comprehends the reciprocal usefulness of human beings to one another. It depends on imagination (to imagine others as similar to oneself), experience (to recognise others in their empirical differences as actually existing, spatio-temporal beings), and common notions. Consequently, the idea of the common good, in Balibar’s reading, relies on the first and second kind of knowledge. It is not a universal and true idea (idea of God), but a communicable, economically rational idea (mutual utility). As Balibar says, “in the final analysis, there is no other cause of sociability than the striving of individuals to achieve self-preservation and, therefore, mutual utility.”¹³ It is in this sense that he interprets the first demonstration of proposition 37 as a *rational genesis* of sociability.¹⁴

The idea of politics that underlies this reconstruction of the rational genesis of sociability can be called a ‘politics of the second kind’ for the reason that Balibar establishes a correspondence between the three orders of knowledge and different regimes of communication that represent distinct ways of life.

And that “way of life” is nothing other than a given *regime of communication* (affective, economic or intellectual) with other individuals. The different regimes of communication form a sequence through which a collective effort is being worked out – the effort to transform the mode of communication, to move from relationships of identification (that is, from the mode of *communion*) to relationships based on *exchange* of goods and of knowledge. The political state itself is essentially one such regime.¹⁵

Balibar seems to understand the second order of knowledge as basically an economic regime of communication, on account of the exchange of goods and of knowledge.¹⁶ In other words, the relationships are based on reciprocal utility and difference in similarity. But clearly, in the *Ethics*, this is not the highest form of knowledge. In Part V of the *Ethics* Spinoza elaborates on the intuitive knowledge and intellectual love of God, “which we really fully possess” (*E V*, P20S). Spinoza emphasises that “the essence of our mind consists only in knowledge, of which God is the beginning and foundation (by *E I*, P15 and *II*, P47S)” and he takes pains to prove “how much the knowledge of singular things I have called intuitive, *or* knowledge of the third kind (see *E II*, P40S2), can accomplish, and how much more powerful it is than the universal knowledge I have called knowledge of the second kind” (*E V*, P36S).

From the beginning of the *Ethics*, Spinoza prepares the reader, through constructing his ontological metastructure of immanence, for accepting our relation to God – if not immediate then at least mediate – as immanent cause, and for the kind of knowledge founded in God.¹⁷ The idea of God has no beginning and no other foundation than God himself; it is universal and not general (as in the sense of continuously being improved through communication). In the first demonstration of Proposition 37 of Part IV, Spinoza carefully guides the reader through the insights of economic reason to the intellectual truths, which can only be seen through the mind's eye. He shows that seeking one's own advantage is not in conflict with sociability, on the contrary, one's personal interest is best realised in relationships of mutual utility, virtue and friendship. Next, self-preservation is nothing but striving for understanding under the guidance of reason, and understanding is a good, which can be shared by all equally. In fact, understanding involves knowledge of God and as such it is the greatest good that the mind can strive for (*E IV*, P28). Depending on the degree with which it occupies the human mind, it necessarily fills the mind with intellectual love as well as with the desire that everyone else may participate in this knowledge and intellectual love of God. Hence the principle that is able to unite everyone in mutual love (not mutual utility) is the properly universal idea and love of God. As Guyau puts it:

There is, therefore, a coincidence between interest and disinterestedness, between self-love and love towards others. For Spinoza's God is ultimately ourselves, in our eternal substance. Hence, to love God is to love oneself and all others, it is one and the same love. The ethics of particular utility strives to identify itself to a universal ethics.¹⁸

With his conception of the common good as the recognition of mutual utility, Balibar remains on the level of a 'politics of the second kind.' It is striking that he does not include Part V of the *Ethics* in the discussion, but prefers to consider the analysis of sociability as "the very core" of the *Ethics*, i.e. Proposition 37 of Part IV.¹⁹ He briefly mentions the idea of God, only to dismiss it as soon as possible.²⁰ While Balibar's reading is ingenious enough in the way it renders Spinoza's philosophy relevant for readers today, for whom considerations of utility will be paramount, it certainly conflicts with Spinoza's own understanding of the primacy and pre-eminence of the intuitive or third kind of knowledge. It is true that for Balibar (as well as for Spinoza), calculating utility does not mean the pure reign of self-interest in the sense that Adam Smith depicts it. Balibar particularly emphasises the free circulation of ideas, access to knowledge, education for all, and transparency in political affairs.²¹ However, the concept of utility seems not well suited today for

an emancipatory politics. By the way, neither does a ‘politics of the third kind’, guided by the idea of God or knowledge of the third kind. Spinoza himself seemed to be rather pessimistic with regard to the practical political consequences of the third kind of knowledge: thus in the absence of any free and equal community of wise human individuals, “the true goal of politics” can only be, as Guyau explains, “to organise the strongest possible physical power to prevent passion from tearing man apart; and, at the same time, ... to make this physical power increasingly useless, replacing it with the power [*puissance*] of reason.”²²

TWO “ANTITHETICAL NARRATIVES” OF THE GENESIS OF SOCIABILITY

The second demonstration of Proposition 37, Part IV of the *Ethics*, provides, as Balibar argues, an account of the *affective genesis* of sociability. Key to understanding this genesis, rooted in passions, is an affective mechanism that Spinoza coined “imitation of the affects” (*imitatio affectuum*): “If we imagine a thing like us, toward which we have had no affect, to be affected with some affect, we are thereby affected with a like affect” (E III, P27S). For instance, we are affected with a joyful affect simply because someone “like us” is filled with joy, or conversely, we are affected with a sad affect because the other is filled with sadness. Spinoza holds this to be true not only with regard to people to whom we have personal relationships, i.e. people we love (friends or family), but also with regard to people “toward which we have had no affect,” provided they have something in common with us. This relation of similarity (i.e. partial identification) is produced by the imagination, on account of the likenesses that we perceive among people that embrace the same habits and affective structures by sharing a common form of life. We can assume that the ‘imitation of the affects’ works the better, the more the other person, by whose image we are affected, is “like us.”

From the imitation of the affects further affective mechanisms can be deduced. For instance, we might feel encouraged and confirmed in our love for some thing, if others love the same thing, and thereupon our love for it can even be increased (E III, P31D). Or we might have the “ambition” (*ambitio*) to make others love the same thing that we hold in esteem, or the reverse, make others hate what we hate (E III, P29S). However, “ambition is a fundamentally ambivalent affect; it is both intensified and destroyed by the fundamental imitation of the affects.”²³ This is so because when all love the same thing and “all alike want this, they are alike an obstacle to one another” (E III, P31C). The common desire for some material goods that are a scarce resource, or for those “finite and unstable objects, such as wealth, honour, and love”²⁴ can cause division and rivalry between people.

Thus while they “rejoice to sing the praises of the thing they love, they fear to be believed” (*E IV, P37S1*). They will try to appropriate and monopolise the good, as well as secure exclusive access only for themselves. Even if the desired good is of an ideal nature and thus partable or communicable, the passionate accord that it engenders remains tenuous and at risk of collapsing into its opposite, given that the definition of the common ideal or the measures of its implementation may be contested.

From the analysis of the affective mechanisms such as identification, imitation and ambition, Balibar concludes that human beings are drawn into ambiguous and unstable relationships. Contrary to what one might assume, neither the imitation of the affects nor ambition lead to friendship or greater social harmony. Rather, these fluctuating passions and imaginations generate a *conflictual sociability* but a sociability nonetheless. Balibar argues that the affective mechanisms of identification and imitation can, for instance, found a religious community, a class or a nation, yet only under the condition of “fear and misappreciation of the difference between individuals.”²⁵ These mechanisms ultimately lead to the exclusion of those we imagine not to be “like us,” thus generating religious fundamentalism, class animosities or nationalism.²⁶ Spinoza admits that passions, such as fear and hope of the masses, can be the driving force for the foundation of a state. But the kind of harmony that results is unstable and risks being undermined by the dynamic antagonism of passions. “Harmony is also commonly born of Fear, but then it is without trust. Add to this that Fear arises from weakness of mind, and therefore does not pertain to the exercise of reason” (*E IV, Ap.16*). The *affective genesis* of the state cannot ensure social cohesion and stability. Balibar points out that what is required are institutional processes, the instantiation of a juridical apparatus of laws and civil rights. In order for the juridical apparatus to be effective, the state has to be invested with sufficient power to make and maintain common law, and to *force* citizens to agree and be compatible – “not by reason, which cannot restrain affects (by *P17S*), but by threats,” as Spinoza outlines in the second Scholium of Proposition 37.

Such is Balibar’s interpretation of the second demonstration referring to the affective genesis of sociability, which is necessarily a conflictual sociability. In the final analysis, Balibar presents the two demonstrations of Proposition 37 as two *antithetical accounts of sociability* that have to be taken together as the dialectic foundation of the City: both rational agreement and imaginary ambivalence generate “the real-imaginary complexity of social relationships.”²⁷ He thus concludes:

We must therefore understand that these two antithetical narratives of the genesis of the City do not correspond to two types of City, and even less to some opposition between an ideal city (which is, in some sense, “celestial”) and real cities (which are irremediably “earthly”). They represent two aspects of a single dialectic. Every real city is always founded simultaneously on both an active genesis and a passive genesis: on a “free” (or rather, a liberating) rational agreement, on the one hand, and an imaginary agreement whose intrinsic ambivalence supposes the existence of a constraint, on the other.²⁸

Therefore, sociability has to be constructed by a dialectic of reason and passions, of utility and conflict. While in this early text, Balibar rather thinks of the dialectical relation between reason and passions as an opposition and the two narratives of the genesis of sociability as “antithetical,” in his recent revision he claims instead a “circle of reciprocal presupposition” between the two. There is a “chiasm” between rational and passionate sociability:

The idea of a city entirely constituted by logics of passionate imitation is absurd: a rational utility must not only be “immanent” but recognized by the citizens, which is the function of institutions. But the idea of a rational city, without an affective and imaginary “base”, is just as devoid of signification. I believe that this thesis is implicit in the very way in which Spinoza uses the strategic category of the “similar” [*semblable*] to define the “common good” as a model of life “according to the guidance of reason”.²⁹

This recent interpretation of the two demonstrations is preferable to the earlier one of “antithetical narratives,” which built on the traditional dichotomies between reason/passions or reason/imagination as two antithetical political tendencies. The problem with this latter reading is that it neglects the role of active affects or desires that spring from reason. In particular, it disregards the intellectual love of God, which is free from any ambivalence or uncertainty that define the affective relations to finite and unstable objects of desire. Lastly, it cannot explain why Spinoza labels the second demonstration as an “alternative demonstration” (*aliter*): Spinoza claims to explain the same thing or action only in a different way. He does not mark these two demonstrations as an antithesis. In what follows I will address these difficulties in turn.

In general, Spinoza considers the play of passions as an obstacle to understanding and seeks for remedies to restrain their power. He asserts that human beings are in many ways driven by external causes “like waves on the sea driven by contrary winds” (*E III*, P59S). Insofar as they are assailed by affects, which are passions, they can be contrary to one another (*E IV*, P34). By contrast, human beings become alike, insofar as they live under the guidance of reason. However, unlike those philosophers who subject human affectivity to moral judgment and condemnation, and who seek methods how to gain absolute power over the affects, Spinoza claims that it is impossible to subdue or control them absolutely, as we are beings that depend on a permanent exchange with other things and are subject to external forces (*E IV*, P18S). What is more, he acknowledges a positive power of the affects: joyful affects increase our power of thinking and acting.³⁰ In Spinoza’s words: “By *Joy*, therefore, I shall understand in what follows that *passion by which the Mind passes to a greater perfection*. And by *Sadness*, that *passion by which it passes to a lesser perfection*” (*E III*, P11S). Indeed, a joy can even be called ‘good,’ insofar as “it agrees with reason (for it consists in this, that a man’s power of acting is increased or aided), and is not a passion except insofar as the man’s power of acting is not increased to the point where he conceives himself and his actions adequately” (*E IV*, P59Pr).

It is true that affects, insofar as they indicate affections of our body that result from external encounters, remain passions and can only lead to inadequate ideas. Inadequate ideas amount to partial knowledge, that is, knowledge of the effects suffered from external bodies, and cannot give us knowledge of the causes, for instance, the nature of those external bodies. However, Spinoza explicitly specifies joys and desires that are *active*: they are not determined by external encounters but related to us insofar as we act. This is to say, whenever the mind conceives a true or adequate idea, this action is accompanied by an active affection (or self-affection) of joy. In this case, we are ourselves the adequate cause of the affection and Spinoza defines the corresponding affect as an action (*E III*, D3). He names a few of these active affects; all of them are derived from joy. One example is self-esteem (*acquiescentia in se ipso*), which “is a Joy born of the fact that a man considers himself and his own power of acting” (*E III*, Def. Aff. XXV; see also *E IV*, P52). In fact, Spinoza claims that self-esteem, which arises from reason, “is really the highest thing we can hope for. For (as we have shown in P25) no one strives to preserve his being for the sake of any end.” He concludes that “we are guided most by love of esteem and can hardly bear a life in disgrace” (*E IV*, P52S). Spinoza enumerates as further examples moderation, sobriety, chastity, which “are not affects *or* passions, but indicate the power of the mind, a power which moderates

[excessive] affects” (E III, P56S). Spinoza counts those three also as active affects, which becomes clear in the Scholium of Proposition 59, Part III of the *Ethics*:

All actions that follow from affects related to the Mind insofar as it understands I relate to Strength of character, which I divide into Tenacity and Nobility. For by Tenacity I understand the Desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to preserve his being. By Nobility I understand the Desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to aid other men and join them to him in friendship. Those actions, therefore, which aim only at the agent’s advantage, I relate to Tenacity, and those which aim at another’s advantage, I relate to Nobility. So Moderation, Sobriety, presence of mind in danger, and so forth, are species of Tenacity, whereas Courtesy, Mercy, and so forth, are species of Nobility. (E III, P59S)

Those active affects, which Spinoza enumerates, all agree with the rules of reason or are *born* of reason. Apart from affects, there are also desires that are related to us, insofar as we act or understand something, and which are called *active*. In fact, our knowledge would be weak and ineffective, if there were no desire or striving related to it. Spinoza explicitly acknowledges affects or desires that arise from reason (E IV, P63Pr2).

If we now go back to the first demonstration of Proposition 37, Part IV, we are able to see that the supposedly ‘rational genesis’ of sociability indeed involves active affects and desires. As Spinoza explicates in Scholium 1: “he who strives from reason to guide others acts not by impulse, but kindly, generously, and with the greatest steadfastness of mind” (E IV, P37S1), that is, by tenacity and nobility. And in the following passage he declares that the knowledge from reason generates in us the “Desire to do good” as well as the desire “to the formation of friendship” (E IV, P37S1).

The psychic economy that Balibar identifies in the second demonstration, dedicated to the affective genesis, can only lead to a highly unstable and conflictual sociability, because it is rooted in imaginary ambivalence and the fluctuation of passions. Balibar seems to agree with Pierre Macherey who maintains that “all passions without exception ... [tend] towards a *fluctuatio animi* [a vacillation or fluctuation of the mind].”³¹ Affects of joys are not exempt to this general principle: passionate joys, “which are in fact imaginary joys linked to encounters with external bodies, cannot be assembled into a coherent stable aggregate, but rather tend inevitably to conflict, tending not towards composition but towards

decomposition.”³² However, if we look at the second demonstration more closely, there is no mention of any fluctuation between love and hatred.

Alternative dem.: The good which man wants for himself and loves, he will love more constantly if he sees that others love it (by *E III*, P31). So (by *E III*, P31C), he will strive to have the others love the same thing. And because this good is common to all (by P36), and all can enjoy it, he will therefore (by the same reason) strive that all may enjoy it. And this striving will be the greater, the more he enjoys this good (by *E III*, P37), q.e.d. (*E IV*, P37Pr2)

It is true that the psychic mechanisms involved here are the imitation of the affects and ambition, and in Proposition 31, Part III, Spinoza has indeed emphasised the risk that one’s feeling of love might collapse, when it is connected with an image of someone who is averse to one’s object of love. But the desired good that Spinoza refers to in Proposition 37, Part IV, is not just any imaginary object, but a good common to all, the greatest good, which is according to the previous proposition (P36) the knowledge of God. “From this kind of knowledge there arises the greatest satisfaction of Mind there can be” (*E V*, P32), and this joy is necessarily an active joy, because it is “accompanied by the idea of oneself”. Since self-knowledge (by *E V*, P30) implies knowledge of God, Spinoza concludes that “it is also accompanied by the idea of God, as its cause” (*E V*, P32Pr). The joy related to the idea of God as its cause is what Spinoza calls the “intellectual love of God” (*E V*, P32C).³³ As regards this intellectual love, it cannot be undermined by any other affect. As Spinoza states in Proposition 37, Part V, “[t]here is nothing in Nature which is contrary to this intellectual love, or which can take it away”. It is the most constant affect of all and cannot be destroyed. “This Love toward God cannot be tainted by an affect of Envy or Jealousy: instead, the more men we imagine to be joined to God by the same bond of Love, the more it is encouraged” (*E V*, P20). This is precisely the affective mechanism, which is referred to in the second demonstration of Proposition 37, Part IV, and which is necessary to bring people together in mutual love. For therein consists “our greatest happiness, or blessedness,” as Spinoza reminds us: “namely in the knowledge of God alone, by which we are led to do only those things which love and morality advise” (*E II*, P49S). He tells us how advantageous this doctrine is in individual as well as social or political life:

This doctrine contributes to social life, insofar as it teaches us to hate no one, to disesteem no one, to mock no one, to be angry at no one, to envy no

one; and also insofar as it teaches that each of us should be content with his own things, and should be helpful to his neighbor, not from unmanly compassion, partiality, or superstition, but from the guidance of reason, as the time and occasion demand. I shall show this in the Fourth Part. (E II, P49S)

Spinoza's conclusions for socio-political life, at least in the *Ethics*, draw primarily from his conceptions of the knowledge and intellectual love of God. As he emphasises, "especially necessary to bring people together in love, are the things which concern Religion and Morality. On this, see P37S1 and S2, P46S, and P73S" (E IV, Ap.XV). Of course, religion and morality in the sense that Spinoza embraces them have to be understood in terms of a universal and rational ethics. In the *Theological-Political Treatise* he was highly critical of superstition, the reign of dogmatic opinion and the authority of the Church. However, Spinoza's ontology is still "theological," if only in the sense that he upholds an ontology of the One (absolutely infinite substance). As several philosophers of our time have argued, the crucial problem of contemporary thought is how to think the multiple. Instead of embarking on this broader discussion, however, I will simply recall some of the well-known problems that follow from deducing, by way of a philosophy of nature that explains nature as One, governed by causal necessity, the foundations of social and political life. These difficulties revolve around the naturalisation of the political, the analogical transfer of natural causality into the human realm, and the gesture of grounding politics in a naturalised figure of the human.

CONCLUSION

Balibar contends that in Spinoza, politics and philosophy are closely intertwined.³⁴ On the basis of Spinoza's philosophical anthropology, which explains the constitution of human individuals through rational and passionate exchanges, he proposes an account of the rational and the affective genesis of sociability. Political life thus emerges from the dialectical relation between two opposing political tendencies: ideological, imaginary and passionate mechanisms on the one hand, and a liberating rational agreement on the other. In combination, following a certain logic of proportion [*ratio*], these tendencies account for the constitution of any sociability.

Spinoza seems to suggest that the foundation of sociability can be achieved either way: through reason *or* through affects. Elsewhere, he states that "to every action to which we are determined from an affect which is a passion, we can be determined

by reason, without that affect” (E IV, P59). Nevertheless, Spinoza seems to have a preference for the guidance by reason, because “every desire, which arises from an affect which is a passion” is “blind” (E IV, P59S). While Balibar dissolves this tension by claiming that both passions and reason are constitutive of sociability, according to a certain ratio, I have shown in this paper that there is no rigid distinction between rationality and affects, since Spinoza also considers active affects and desires that spring from reason. Specifically, what Spinoza calls the intellectual love of God (E V, P32C) is a universal and rational affect, free from any ambivalence or threat by contrary affects. It is this affect that is attached to the ‘common good,’ i.e. the knowledge of God, and on account of which people can be united in mutual friendship and love, as demonstrated in the second proof of Proposition 37. The first proof equally refers to the idea of God, without which a human mind cannot be nor be conceived. There are ideas that actively exclude certain other ideas (see E III, P10) and certainly, the idea of God excludes any rejection, just as the love of God excludes any counter-affect. In the knowledge and intellectual love of God Spinoza seeks the principle for the foundation of sociability.

In a less idealist but rather materialist reading, Balibar interprets the ‘common good’ as resulting from a utilitarian reason that takes the differences between human individuals (their skills and knowledges) into account and seeks to harmonise each individual’s striving through “the necessary establishment of a *commercium* with other man.”³⁵ This is what I have called a ‘politics of the second kind.’ One might raise the question whether one can reasonably talk about a ‘politics of the third kind,’ or whether the alternative is simply, as Guyau suggests, a universal ethics. A ‘politics of the third kind’ would have to be one that upholds a universal idea of the common good, that does not consist in a generalisation of the particular interests of those who govern, nor a consensus between conflicting interests. It would have to be the idea of an equality that goes beyond the contingent anthropological “differences in similarity.” Here it would be useful to look at Balibar’s elaboration of the idea of equaliberty in his later work. The main problem, however, in reconciling a politics of the idea (for instance, of equaliberty) with Spinoza’s philosophy is that, due to the ontological metastructure of the *Ethics*, the universality of the idea is already, and necessarily, given. By contrast, within a social and political context a truly political idea should be conceived as the historical and political result of a struggle. The question whether one could extract a ‘politics of the third kind,’ a politics of the idea, from Spinoza must be, it would seem, answered in the negative.

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NOTES

1. I use Curley's translation of the *Ethics*, which appears in the *Collected Works of Spinoza*. Ed. and trans. Edwin Curley. Vol. 1, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985.
2. Etienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*. Trans. Peter Snowdon. London, New York: Verso, 1998, 76. See also Etienne Balibar, *Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality*. Delft: Eburon, 1997, 7.
3. Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 99.
4. Etienne Balibar, "Philosophies of the Transindividual: Spinoza, Marx, Freud." *Australasian Philosophical Review* 2:1. Eds Mark Kelly and Dimitris Vardoulakis (2018), pp. 5-25. One of the problems Balibar notes is the *anthropomorphic* analogy between the construction of singular human individuals and of the political body as "quasi-individual". He acknowledges that the qualifier "quasi-" indicates a different logic, which he spells out in a number of points.
5. See Jean-Marie Guyau, "Spinoza: A Synthesis of Epicureanism and Stoicism," in this volume.
6. Balibar, "Philosophies of the Transindividual."
7. Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 112.
8. Balibar, *From Individuality to Transindividuality*, 30.
9. See Spinoza's distinction of two types of existence in *E V*, P29S.
10. Balibar, *From Individuality to Transindividuality*, 30, translation modified, D.V. See also Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 110.
11. Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 111.
12. Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 83.
13. Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 112-13.
14. Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 110.
15. Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 124.
16. Elsewhere he characterises the three successive orders of knowledge as corresponding to "imagination, scientific reason and 'intellectual love of God'" respectively. Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 97.
17. On the immediate causation of infinite things, where God is the absolutely proximate cause, and causation of finite things that depend on the mediation of these first things, see *E I*, P28S. On the problematic of the infinite and the finite in Spinoza, see Alain Badiou, "Spinoza's Closed Ontology." *Theoretical Writings*. Eds. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano. London, New York: Continuum, 2004, 81-93.
18. See Guyau, "Spinoza: A Synthesis," in this volume.
19. Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 103.
20. Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 81: "Let us begin by looking at the first demonstration. On the surface, the reasoning seems to follow a predictable course. Sociability is defined as reciprocity of participation in the greatest good, which is determined by reason. It is through the knowledge of truth (and thus of God, and thus of things) that men are disposed to desire this common Good, and thus their reciprocal usefulness – or in other words, to love one another. So it is not surprising that scholium 1 refers to this 'rational' mode of Desire as Religion and Morality. But this demonstration depends upon two prior propositions ..."
21. Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 121.
22. Guyau, "Spinoza: A Synthesis," in this volume.
23. Jason Read, *The Politics of Transindividuality*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016, 150.
24. Read, *The Politics of Transindividuality*, 150.
25. Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 111.

26. “If someone has been affected with joy or sadness by someone of a class, or nation, different from his own, and this joy or sadness is accompanied by the idea of that person as its cause, under the universal name of the class or nation, he will love or hate, not only that person, but everyone of the same class or nation” (E III, P46).
27. Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 96.
28. Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 112.
29. Balibar, “Philosophies of the Transindividual.”
30. Deleuze first pointed to the positive role of joyful passions and showed “that from every passive joy there may arise an active joy distinguished from it only by its cause.” Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. New York: Zone Books, 1992, 275.
31. Pierre Macherey, *Introduction à l’Éthique de Spinoza*. Paris: PUF, 1995, 155. My translation, D.V.
32. Macherey, *Introduction à l’Éthique*, 154.
33. Spinoza shows some hesitation to call the intellectual love of God actually ‘joy’: “insofar as it [this satisfaction of mind] is related to God (by P35), it is joy (if I may still be permitted to use this term), accompanied by the idea of himself [as its cause]” (E V, P36S).
34. Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 76.
35. Balibar, *From Individuality to Transindividuality*, 28.