

**NON FRANGERE SED FIRMARE:  
SPINOZA, A TEACHER WITHOUT PEDAGOGY**

**NON FRANGERE SED FIRMARE:  
SPINOZA, UN MAESTRO SIN PEDAGOGÍA**

CRISTINA ZALTIERI

**Abstract**

*The present paper claims that Spinoza's thought is crucial for a radical criticism of the different aspects in the formative apparatus of the Netherlands in the XVII<sup>th</sup> century. Spinoza can be considered as a 'master of suspicion' against those educators who instead of forming their students de-form them. His alternative paideutic project is not compatible with the principles of pedagogy understood as a science. This is because Spinoza's notion of form is not identifiable with a universal, but is always inseparable from the embodied singularity of the mode. Standard readings interpret Spinoza as an enemy of authoritarian education or as a philosopher who rejects the sad passions. But these readings are partial as they do not grasp the broader pedagogical design implicit in Spinoza's work. This design puts forth an original conception of the body as a singularity; it requires continuous work on the mnestic connections and has evident political implications that are well expressed in the concept of accommodatio.*

**Keywords:** pedagogical apparatus, technicians of formation, *Bildung*, form, affective power, individual body, the correction of memory, *accomodatio*.

### Resumen

*El siguiente ensayo sostiene que el pensamiento de Spinoza es crucial para una crítica radical de los diferentes aspectos de los aparatos formativos de la Holanda del siglo XVII. Spinoza puede ser considerado como un ‘maestro de la sospecha’ en contra de aquellos educadores que de-forman en vez de formar sus estudiantes. Su propuesta paidéutica alternativa no es compatible con los principios de la pedagogía entendida como ciencia. Esto se debe a que la noción de forma que utiliza Spinoza no se puede identificar con un universal, sino que es siempre inseparable de la singularidad encarnada del modo. Interpretaciones habituales colocan a Spinoza como un enemigo de la educación autoritaria o como un filósofo que rechaza las pasiones tristes. Pero estas lecturas son parciales ya que no captan el amplio diseño pedagógico implícito en las obras de Spinoza. Este diseño presenta una concepción original del cuerpo como singularidad; requiere un trabajo continuo sobre las conexiones mnemónicas y tiene implicaciones políticas evidentes que están bien expresadas en el concepto de *accomodatio*.*

**Palabras clave:** aparatos pedagógicos, técnicas de formación, *Bildung*, forma, potencia afectiva, cuerpo individual, la corrección de la memoria, *accomodatio*.

### Contents

1. Introduction: Philosopher and Pedagogical Apparatus: A difficult Relationship – 2. Spinoza against the Bad Teachers – 3. A Spinozistic Pedagogy? – 4. *Caute!* Against Pedagogical Stereotypes – 5. Moving out of Childhood: For a *Bildung* without Pedagogy – 5.1. The Individual Body – 5.2. The Work on Memory – 5.3. *Bildung* as a Search for *Accomodatio*

*Your educators can be only your liberators  
Friedrich Nietzsche, Schopenhauer as Educator*

## 1. Introduction: Philosopher and Pedagogical Apparatus: A difficult Relationship

Although Michel Foucault has never given a genealogical account of Western pedagogy, his entire work seems to imply that the pedagogical systems of modern Western societies is one of the most powerful *apparatuses* regulating the discipline of society. At the outset of the Italian edition of the 1977 collection of interviews and essays entitled *Microphysics of Power*, Foucault explains the importance that the pedagogical apparatus has acquired in modern societies. This began with a *coupure épistémologique* that intervened in the Modern age after the change of power's demands on individuals. Foucault claims that in feudal societies power demanded that individuals manifested different signs of loyalty (e.g. rituals, ceremonies) and contributed with different goods (e.g. taxation, raids, hunting, war). In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, power begins expressing itself through the demand of productive performances. Thus, the "embodiment" of power becomes necessary; the dressage of the body becomes necessary, and the gestures, the daily habits of conduct become more and more respondent to the requests of the pre-capitalist society. It is at this time that school disciplines become more important and tend to turn children's bodies into objects of very complex forms of manipulation and conditioning<sup>1</sup>.

In particular, schools assume a central function in modern society. Foucault claims that schools have become *politically hypersensitive* areas after they became places where citizens, producers, consumers, and all subjects are educated and formed; in other words, they are places of subjectivization. Subjectivization has a twofold meaning in Foucault: it means the constitution of a subject but, at the same time, the subjugation of subjects, bodies, and minds to something else (in a word, discipline).

These introductory remarks on Foucault are important to put the Netherlands of the Golden Age into focus. Spinoza's brief life took place

---

<sup>1</sup> Foucault 1977, 19.

there. In that nation special attention towards children and education<sup>2</sup> developed, most likely due to the financial development of its commercial society and to the political context of the newly born Republic. In my reading, Spinoza is in contrast with the pedagogical apparatus of his time. In fact, it is possible to find in his thought a criticism of Dutch pedagogical institutions and a project for a new and revolutionary kind of pedagogy that is worth considering also today.

Before moving to Spinoza, it is necessary to clarify that the conflict between the philosopher and pedagogical institutions emerges within philosophy itself. The epoch-making events of the history of Western philosophy can be read as an attempt to counterbalance the inadequacies of the educational systems of their time; we might even say that the construction of a new philosophy has its deepest motivation in the crisis of an anthropo- paideutic order, or in the unfulfilled promises of a *Bildung*. It is easy to find in a philosophical project the answer to the failure of the dominant *paideia*, of the formative expectations of a culture. Plato's case is emblematic. Is not Plato's philosophy the powerful, magnificent answer to the failure of Pericles's pedagogical project? The Periclean generation that had produced the ancient democracy, a moment considered extraordinary in the history of Athens and in the entire history of the West, was unable to use Plato's words, to teach what virtue is. For this reason, it had failed its paideutic mission. Plato lived in his own flesh the failure of that pedagogical project; he witnessed the degeneration of the tyranny of the thirty, the shadows of the democracy that sentenced Socrates to death, and the unstoppable affirmation of the 'technicians of formation', the sophists.

But we can easily speak of more modern examples: Descartes who reacts to the Jesuitical education of La Flèche, Nietzsche who argues against German academic pedagogy and observes the worrisome birth of mass culture...

---

<sup>2</sup> See Schama 1987.

It seems to me that the conflict between the philosopher and the pedagogical apparatus becomes even more evident in Spinoza. Spinoza faced the failure of two pedagogical enterprises, which had powerful consequences on his philosophy: first, as a child and a teenager, he attended the rabbinic school of Amsterdam, of which he was a very promising student. This experience ended with a painful rupture, as we all know well. But he was also disappointed by the *Bildung* offered by the newly born 17<sup>th</sup> century free Republic of the Netherlands, which promised liberty and tolerance. Spinoza praises the Republic in the *TTP*. In this book, he declares his pride for being a citizen of the Republic. He witnesses the fall of the promises of the Republic, the rise of the tyranny of the Orangism, and the incapacity of the tolerant culture of the Republic to contrast the degenerations of the growing uncompromising Calvinism. This was the sign for him of the paideutic failure of the Republic, as exemplified dramatically by the barbaric Dutch *multitudo* with the cruel and despicable mass lynching of what were –according to Spinoza– two just men, the De Witt brothers.

## 2. Spinoza against the Bad Teachers

The vibrant pages of the Preface of a «militant» work such as the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*<sup>3</sup> sound like a vehement charge against the ‘bad teachers’, in particular the doctors of the Church, «none of them actuated by desire to instruct the people» (*TTP*, preface). Let us follow the opening remarks of Spinoza’s work. The topic discussed is the superstition about the dangerous and hard events of life, which raise an uncontrollable fear in intellectually weak human beings. All regimes aiming

---

<sup>3</sup> Riccardo Caporali describes the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* as a «militant» work in his discussion of Steven Nadler’s *A Book Forged in the Hell. Spinoza’s Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of Secular Age* (2011). He objects to Nadler that the political meaning of *TTP* (that is, the desire for a criticism of the monarchic and theocratic degeneration of the Dutch Republic represented by Orangism, including the official Calvinist church and the rabbinic community) is not simply one of the many facets of the book, but is instead its pivotal point. (Caporali 2013, 293-300.)

at subduing human beings have always concealed under the name of religion various strategies for making men grow in fear, «so that they will fight for their servitude as if for salvation» (*TTP*, preface). That power behaves in such a way is not surprising to Spinoza. He admits being «amazed» by those men who, while professing the Christian faith, live in the name of hatred and iniquity. What is the cause of all this? Why do the doctors of the Church –only moved by passions, that is, by the desire of being publicly admired as orators capable of leading the masses and by the will of vengeance toward those who disagree with them– teach how to despise reason, to go against the intellect? Why is religion only credulity and prejudice?

The same criticism is also present in other passages of the text. In one of these passages Spinoza observes that «so many quite contradictory beliefs are taught by different sects as articles of faith» (*TTP*, XIV) due to the incapacity to discern in the Scriptures what is doctrine of faith and what is simply an adaptation of the thought of the Prophets to the limited comprehension of their people. Spinoza concludes:

However, I will not level the charge of impiety against those sectaries simply because they adapt the words of Scripture to their own beliefs. Just as Scripture was once adapted to the understanding of the people of that time, in the same way anyone may now adapt it to his own beliefs if he feels that this will enable him to obey God with heartier will in those matters that pertain to justice and charity. My accusation against them is this, that they refuse to grant this same freedom to others. All those who do not share their opinions, however righteous and truly virtuous the dissenters may be, they persecute as God's enemies, while those who follow their lead, however dissolute they may be, they cherish as God's elect. Surely nothing more damnable than this, and more fraught with danger to the state, can be devised. (*TTP*, XIV).

Therefore, doctors of the church and interpreters of the Scriptures instead of performing their function of leaders of their people, working for the growth of each individual's rationality and insight, make their

passions overflow, with destructive and self-destructive consequences. Given this distressing scenario, who can be considered trustworthy? What ideal should be followed? At the end of the Preface, Spinoza reveals that the interlocutors of his *Tractatus*, his ideal readers, are not those men «who are victims of the same emotional attitudes» (*TTP*, Preface) of the preachers. He invokes a philosopher-reader (*lector philosophus*). Now, given the «militant» aim of the work to influence the political life of the Netherlands and to go against its growing fanaticism, the intention of the text cannot be simply to strengthen of the capacity for rationality of a few philosophers. I believe that the «philosopher reader» of Spinoza should be identified with the new teacher of the *multitudo*. Spinoza's ideal reader is the person who by reading his work will improve not only her life, but also that of other people. The 'philosopher readers' of Spinoza are not supposed to become slavish peddlers of the *Tractatus*: repeating what the teacher says is not crucial (Spinoza observes how the doctors of the Church who have become bad teachers have transformed the temple into a theater where they behave like leading actors); only the conduct, the lifestyle is essential. Thus, those who learn how to live according to charity and justice by reading the correct interpretation of the Scriptures in the *Tractatus* witness with their own deeds (this is a motif in Spinoza) the goodness and effectiveness of the abstract teaching.

Also in the *Ethics* Spinoza criticizes the pedagogic ideology of his time. Calvinism, as Simon Schama has reminded us in his work on the Netherlands of the Golden Age, demanded extreme rigor in education and denied any kind of indulgence for the fragility of children and human weakness in general. Spinoza refers explicitly to the Calvinist rigorists when he writes the famous words of the Preface to the third book of the *Ethics*:

Again, they assign the cause of human weakness and frailty not to the power of Nature in general, but to some defect in human nature, which they therefore bemoan, ridicule, despise, or, as is most frequently the case, abuse. [...] (*Eth.*, III, praef.).

Spinoza's criticism of those who judge human weakness mercilessly and with no attempt to empathize, perfectly matches another trait typical

of bad educators. What Spinoza indicates as bad educators are those who value the sad passions and look with suspicion at the joyful passions; they see these manifestations of joy as the sign of insufficient contrition for their meager human nature and of a depraved inclination. Spinoza comments:

The principle that guides me and shapes my attitude to life is this: no deity, nor anyone else but the envious, takes pleasure in my weakness and my misfortune, nor does he take to be a virtue our tears, sobs, fearfulness, and other such things that are a mark of a weak spirit. On the contrary, the more we are affected with pleasure, the more we pass to state of greater perfection; that is, the more we necessarily participate in the divine nature. (*Eth.*, IV, 45 sch.).

In the *Ethics* we find the same critical reflections of the *TTP* against those who only know how to deprecate vice and cannot teach virtue; these people do not lead others with the power of reason but only with the fear of punishment (*Eth.*, IV, 63 sch.); they infect with their own misery those who should be helped by them, extending to others their own slavery made of sad passions. On the contrary, someone «who desires to help others by word or deed to enjoy the highest good along with him» will «dwell on human virtue, or power, and the means to perfect it» (*Eth.*, IV, app. 25) instead of speaking all the time of human vices and weaknesses.

Spinoza's charge against the bad teachers of his time is expressed beautifully in one formula, a sort of synthesis of his paideutic criticism: *non firmare sed frangere* (*Eth.*, IV, 13 cap):<sup>4</sup> this formula –that in the title of the present essay we have overturned in order to come up with a sort of anthropagogic motto of Spinozism– constitutes Spinoza's condemnation of bad education. According to Spinoza, bad teachers break the soul of the young instead of strengthening it, instead of marking

---

<sup>4</sup> G, II, 269: *At qui contra homines carpere, et vitia potius exprobare, quàm virtutes docere, et hominum animos non firmare sed frangere norunt, ii et sibi, et reliquis molesti sunt; [...].*



their bodies and minds with formative traces; they influence the students in a violent and absurd way because they do not respect their form and in so doing they end up de-forming them. Spinoza tells us that the ultimate and overarching goal of every formative praxis cannot be the correction of vice. Education must aim instead at the full explication of human potency<sup>5</sup>. In the Scholium to proposition 10 of the fifth part of the *Ethics* Spinoza engages the bad teachers in a final battle:

It is therefore certain that those who raise the loudest outcry about the abuse of honor and about worldly vanity are most eager for honor. Nor is this trait confined to the ambitious: it is shared by all who meet with adverse fortune and are weak in spirit. For the miser, too, who is in poverty, does not cease to talk of the abuse of money and the vices of the rich, with the result that he merely torments himself and makes it clear that he resents not only his own poverty but also the wealth of others. So, too, those who have been ill received by a sweetheart are obsessed by thoughts of the fickleness and deceitfulness of women and the other faults commonly attributed to them, but immediately forget about all this as soon as they again find favor with their sweetheart. (*Eth*, V, 10 sch.).

This long passage is crucial to Spinoza's criticism of the pedagogical practices of this time. The context of this psychologically insightful passage is Spinoza's attempt to formulate some general rules for making the order of the affections of the body match with that of the intellect. Spinoza suggests that we organize our thoughts and our images starting from the good that can be found in everything, so that we can be moved by a joyful affect. On the contrary, the judgments and actions of castigators are only motivated by sad affects.

---

<sup>5</sup> We find on this point one of the many congruities between Spinoza and Nietzsche, where also for the German philosopher formation should be understood as the full explication of the nature of the individual, of her nucleus beyond correction, as he explains in the third of the untimely meditations, *Schopenhauer as educator*. For an analysis of the congruities between Spinoza's and Nietzsche's paideutic projects, see Zaltieri 2013.

It might seem surprising at first that Spinoza stigmatizes those who deprecate the three «false goods» on which Spinoza himself has reflected at the outset of the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* (*On the Improvement of the Understanding*): glory, wealth, and sex. According to the *communis institutum vitae*, these three goods tend to become the ultimate end of human life. Thus, Spinoza's journey of conversion toward the *novum institutum* will also begin with a deep criticism of a life totally devoted to the accumulation of glory, money, and sexual pleasure. A man can turn toward «true and sharable goods» only by recognizing the vanity and futility of those ends. Given that the polemical target is the same, what is the difference between Spinoza and the bad teachers he attacks?

The difference lies in what we could call the different 'affective attitude' of the bad teachers compared to the philosopher. The affective attitude of the moralists is labeled with precision in Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals: ressentiment*. *Ressentiment* is the reactive production of values based on the deprecation of other people's actions caused by the envy and weakness we experience when we do not know how to emulate them<sup>6</sup>. However, if envy is for the most part conscious, resentment is on the contrary much more devious; it is often accompanied by a false conscience. The moralist, wounded by someone else's glory for which he is incapable of experiencing any joy; by someone else's wealth from which he is excluded; by the sexual pleasure that he finds repugnant in other people's existence because his own life does not have any; the moralist, I was saying, builds a set of values based on his sad passions, which tend to annihilate the power of body and mind.

But we do not find any trace of this in the intense and moving pages of *On the Improvement of the Understanding*. Spinoza is neither motivated by the envy for other people's lives lived under the *communis institutum*, nor by deprecations and moralistic judgments of them; in his incredible analyses of the ill-fated dependence that some people develop

---

<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche 1887.

for the above mentioned three common goods, Spinoza always uses the first person plural, «we». Thus, Spinoza does not hide his own weakness; he does not neglect the disorientation that catches him when confronted with the fact that seeking glory and public acknowledgment often implies lying to many people in order to please them; he does not overlook that we become slaves of the pleasures we seek. Spinoza does not want to portray himself as a solitary ascetic and tower over the masses, victims of futile and idle things; rather, he is led to his ethical transformation by his own suffering; by the anxiety that assails him as if he were «terminally ill». In short, what moves him is not the condemnation of other people. This affective attitude, characterized by a love of freedom, by the refusal of dependence, «with the joy that arises from the true knowledge» (*Eth*, V, 10 sch), is the only ethical attitude capable of leading to a genuine *Bildung*. It is not simply one element among many others in our character; rather, it is, as I have suggested, a fundamental attitude or ‘habit,’ and most importantly it requires *askesis*, self-discipline, and the capacity to govern one’s *conatus intelligendi* towards a constant knowledge of one’s self and one’s affects. It is at once a never-ending journey and an exercise in self-formation (*Eth*, V, 15)<sup>7</sup>.

### 3. A Spinozistic Pedagogy?

The manifold criticism that Spinoza moves to the paideutic apparatus of his time is not limited to the complex relationship between his philosophy and his education. Spinoza is not only a master of suspicion of the formation that de-forms. His main concern is to indicate a path of perfection for the human being.

---

<sup>7</sup> Since the knowledge of one’s self and of one’s affects is achieved for Spinoza not through a solipsistic gesture, such as that of Descartes’ Cogito, but only through the effects of the encounters with others on one’s self, I agree with Juliana Merçon when she speaks of an «ética pensada como um aprendizado afetivo» and «o aprendizado afetivo como uma arte do encontro: um aprender sobre o que diminui nossas forças ou nos potencializa». (Merçon, 2009, 22).

We should pause a minute on the fact that for Spinoza it is in a certain sense meaningless to talk of a being as perfect or imperfect because every being, if understood as a finite mode of the infinite divine power, is just as it is supposed to be. In this sense, a being is never lacking. However, continues Spinoza, the *humana imbecillitas*—expression that Spinoza takes from Seneca, namely the inborn weakness of our mind that prevents man from conceiving the order of all things— at the same time is accompanied by the ‘force’ (the one is not without the other) of being capable of conceiving a greater perfection of itself (TIE § 13). We can conceive this ‘model’ of the human in Spinozist terms only as the perfect expression of the singular nature of every body and every mind. Thus, to every man a path to self- improvement is available; Spinoza defines this path as a «*transire ad maiorem perfectionem*». (*Eth*, III, 11 sch). In this sense, every singularity can be thought as a ‘perfectible perfection’.

So, Spinoza’s entire philosophical project can be legitimately interpreted as a project for the enhancement of the human being. But does this legitimize us to speak of a ‘Spinozistic pedagogy’? Spinoza shows great attention to the topic of education, both to point out the flaws of extant systems or to point toward better alternatives. For example, Spinoza observes that again, «since among particular things we know of nothing more excellent than a man who is guided by reason, nowhere can each individual display the extent of his skill and genius more than in so educating men that they come at last to live under the sway of their own reason» (*Eth*, IV, app. 9).

When considering the necessity of a journey toward «the achievement of the highest human perfection» (TIE, § 16), Spinoza observes that this journey cannot be solipsistic. Other people must be involved in this process. Sometimes he even attempts to trace the guidelines for this enterprise and ties them to the necessity of building a desirable society, of implementing the available medical and mechanical sciences, and of putting technology more and more at the service of human beings. In this context, Spinoza observes that «attention must be paid to moral philosophy and likewise the theory of education of children» (TIE, § 15).

François Zourabichvili, one of the most insightful and original interpreters of Spinoza, concludes from the above statement that, if Spinoza had not died so young, his next step in philosophy after the *Tractatus* would have probably been the elaboration of a pedagogical model.<sup>8</sup> Zourabichvili even proposes the major lines of a possible Spinozistic pedagogy relying on the following four principles: 1) cultivating the attitudes of the body and those of the mind in the same way; 2) stimulating hope more than fear by using immanent rewards; 3) adjusting to the capacity for comprehension of the student by using the Spinozistic concept of *prophetism*, that is, by moving from the nucleus present in all religions (love for the other, justice, charity) to the mathematics, which have tremendously fruitful properties for the formation of the mind; 4) always keeping in mind the connection between affects and reason. My tenet is that although these four guidelines can be hardly disputed in their generality it is problematic to agree with Zourabichvili on the idea of a ‘Spinozistic pedagogy’. The problem here is the very character and foundations of pedagogy as a science of formation. Western science is born undoubtedly with a well-defined vocation, which we could describe as nomomorphic: its aim is the construction of laws; science is where a universal *logos* is found; it has always been since Aristotle the knowledge of the secondary substance, the universal. Pedagogy understood as the science of formation does not escape the law-based character of this tradition. In this precise sense, Spinoza should instead be considered the champion of a project of ‘anti-pedagogical’ formation. In fact, for Spinoza it is impossible to find a pedagogical *logos*, a universal knowledge about education, a correct enhancement strategy for the human that can be invariably applied to every singular case. At the basis of this conviction is Spinoza’s specific idea of form.<sup>9</sup>

As is well known, Spinoza, together with other Modern philosophers, rejected the Aristotelian and Scholastic concept of ‘substantial form’ as

---

<sup>8</sup> Zourabichvili 2002 II, 163.

<sup>9</sup> Zourabichvili himself, in his monograph *Spinoza. Une physique de la pensée*, offers a complete analysis of the idea of form. (Zourabichvili 2002 I).

non-rigorous and unscientific. Universals in Platonic and Aristotelian sense are only inadequate modes of thinking. Spinoza repeats over and over again that only individual things have a cause and that universals are uncaused and as a consequence cannot be found in individuals. For the same reason, they constitute the innermost nature of things (*KV*, I, VI, [7]). The universal concept of ‘man’ is for Spinoza a truncated and confused notion derived from the incapacity of the mind to retain all the defining characters of each particular singularity (*Eth*, II, 40, 1 sch).

Thus, Spinoza’s idea of ‘form’ should not be understood in the sense of the ‘substantial form’ or universal. This notion occurs in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* and in the *Political Treatise*, where *forma imperii* (or *facies* or *fabrica*) means the structures of the state, and also in the *Ethics*. But Spinoza deals with the problem of the form also when he is dealing with different (but related) concepts, such as *fabrica* or *facies*, which indicates what is essential for a being to express what it is in a complete way, in accordance with the laws of nature that determine its power.<sup>10</sup> In the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, the form of each being, completely inseparable from the being itself, is presented as the balance between rest and motion. This physical and biological reading of the idea of form, deeply rooted in the bodily nature of the being, is presented with more details in the *Ethics*, where Spinoza introduces the notion of *conatus*. *Conatus* is the affective power or capacity of affecting others and being affected by them. With the *conatus* the form acquires an energetic-relational meaning: it is a unique, singular, degree of affective power that manifests itself in encounters; it is destined to vary because it grows or decreases depending on the kinds of encounters.

Spinoza points out that men share certain traits and practices that are the expression of their own specific character. In this sense, the third formulation of form in *Ethics*, «man is virtue», leads us to an aspect of

---

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion in France of the plausibility in Spinoza of the idea of form applied to the human being, see Moreau 1994, 27-35; in Suhamy 2003 the author analyses all the available interpretations.

form that can be considered as exclusively human. Virtue is *conatus* —«to act, to live, to preserve one's own being»— but guided by reason (*Eth* IV, 24). Reason is here not a principle superior to *conatus*, but a part of it, a dimension of it. It has certain special features: it is a power seeking conveniences (through the common notions); it is anti-idiosyncratic; it allows man to have access to ideas that are not restrained by the limits of his individual imagination; it is the 'ethical' dimension of thought which always takes into account the web relationships in which each one of us is placed; it allows us to make our deeds appropriate and not subject to the received drives of passion.

This inevitable schematic digression should however be helpful to aid us in understanding that the notion of form, always rooted in the singularity of a body both as a specific relationship of rest and motion and of *conatus* and virtue (or as a unique expression of affective power, guided by reason, manifesting only in relations, in actual encounters) is not suited to become the subject matter of a pedagogical science aiming at the universal.

#### 4. *Caute!* Against Pedagogical Stereotypes

Besides appreciating Spinoza's notion of form, it is important to avoid the pedagogical stereotypes that are incompatible with Spinoza's genuine message. In this section I consider two recurrent stereotypes of the Spinozistic *vulgata*.

The first recurrent stereotype is the image of Spinoza as the champion of an antiauthoritarian pedagogy. This interpretation tends to have the regrettable outcome of crystallizing some aspects of Spinoza's thought. In many passages, Spinoza criticizes the pedagogical strategies based on the exercise of authority and power. For instance, he remarks that:

doubtless more frequent and more bitter quarrels are wont to arise between parents and children than between masters and slaves. Yet it is not to the advantage of household management to change paternal right into the right of ownership and to treat children as if they were slaves. (*TP*, VI, §4).

Spinoza is not concerned here specifically with authority; more broadly, in his view it is always necessary to criticize the goals of the pedagogical action: is education's goal to develop docile bodies, ready to serve other people's aims (slaves) or to promote the growth of autonomous individuals? The problem of treating «children as if they were slaves» is not only a problem of authoritarian systems of education. Rather, it is a problem any time sons and students are not educated for the development of their own autonomy and utility, and are kept subject to someone else's utility. We find a confirmation of this interpretation in the *TTP*:

Now perhaps it will be thought that in this way we are turning subjects into slaves, the slave being one who acts under orders and the free man one who does as he pleases. But this is not completely true, for the real slave is one who lives under pleasure's sway and can neither see nor do what is for his own good, and only he is free who lives whole-heartedly under the sole guidance of reason. Action under orders –that is, obedience– is indeed to some extent an infringement of freedom, but it does not automatically make a man a slave; the reason for the action must enter into account. If the purpose of the action is not to the advantage of the doer but of him who commands, then the doer is a slave, and does not serve his own interest. [...] Similarly, although children are in duty bound to obey all the commands of their parents, they are not slaves; for the parents' commands have as their chief aim the good of the children. We therefore recognize a great difference between a slave, a son, and a subject, who accordingly may be defined as follows. A slave is one who has to obey his master's commands which look only to the interests of him who commands; a son is one who by his father's command does what is to his own good; a subject is one who, by command of the sovereign power, acts for the common good, and therefore for his own good also. (*TTP*, XVI).

We can also find further confirmation of this reading in the analysis of the formative action of Moses. In the *TTP*, Moses is clearly presented not only as a prophet and political leader, but also as a teacher, or as the



ethical and moral guide of his people. Spinoza recounts that the Jewish people after the Egyptian captivity are in a condition of rational impotence and lack the capacity for self-government due to the prolonged slavery. They are almost reduced to the condition of infants. Moses guides his people with a command that he has obtained due to his proven virtue, and enforces it to the fullest extent of the law. Spinoza adds to this: «But in so doing he made every effort to see that the people should do their duty willingly rather than through fear» (*TTP*, V). Moses was a real teacher because his authority was based on the capacity to make the desire of his people adhere to the Law that they took as useful and just. He exercised his authority as a means to bring his people to a condition of greater maturity, self-government, and autonomy.<sup>11</sup>

The second recurrent stereotype is Spinoza's alleged condemnation of the 'sad passions'. It is important to analyze this topic in all its complex nature instead of applying to it a ready-made interpretation.

There is no doubt that the ethical trajectory of Spinoza's work is ideally oriented to the liberation of the human being from the subjection to his sad passions. In fact, the sad passions weaken the *conatus*. At the same time, however, it is extremely important to point out that Spinoza is well aware of the paideutic and communitarian value that the sad passions have. We have here something like an 'affective strategy'<sup>12</sup> that every educational path must follow. Not even the wise man will ever be able to eradicate his passions from his soul completely, including the sad ones, and the majority of men will have to deal with them constantly. Thus, it becomes necessary to use them in the best way possible, namely, to

---

<sup>11</sup> As a confirmation of the idea that it is impossible to apply the same rule of action to different cases, Spinoza finds useful to point out that the Mosaic model is at the antipodes of the Dutch aspiration and would not work if applied to a situation different from that of the Jewish people killed during the Egyptian captivity. (*TTP*, XVIII).

<sup>12</sup> The concept of 'stratégie du conatus' is due to Laurent Bove, who has studied its political aspects. This concept indicates the necessity, pointed out by Spinoza, to consider the finitude of one's own potency and to create the conditions for its implementation through virtuous relations. (Bove 1996).

exploit their practical force, in order to realize the perfection not only of the wise but of anybody else in the human community. Spinoza says that the path to perfection cannot be solitary and solipsistic; although different for each mode, it can succeed only if it involves the greatest number of men. Modes are forever in the hands of an infinity of intermodal relations and even the encounters among modes liberated by the sad passions are able to increase their power in a certain way.

Let us focus now on Spinoza's strategies to make the sad passions less destructive, to contain and shape the weakening produced by them. First, the preliminary work to do is an exercise of demystification, as it is expressed in the clear and blunt propositions of the third book of the *Ethics*, where the traditional valorization of the sad passions is disputed. Spinoza tells us that fear and hope (an affect of joy but unstable because it is based on an imaginary projection on the future) are not good in themselves because the former feeds the sense of impotence and the latter is always accompanied by fear; commiseration is detrimental and useless if it is not conducive to help the one who is commiserated in a concrete way; humility is not a virtue if it is a growth of power because humility is born out of the recognition of one's weaknesses and then inhibits our action; repentance should not be exalted because it is simply the repetition of the weakness of the mode, who is crushed first by evil cupidity and then by the sadness of the repentance; self-contempt has the same overwhelming effect as the highest pride, and neither one nor the other stands for a real self-knowledge, and the ignorance that they manifest is only the sign of impotence. . . . All these reflections play a critical function in the educational path of Spinoza; we can appreciate in fact that it is impossible to bring perfection to anybody when an educational path is based on a system of value aiming at weakening body and mind. However, we still have to wonder whether there is some advantage in the sad passions, given the fact that a humanity where there is no trace of sad passions resembles a utopia in which Spinoza does not believe. Therefore, Spinoza suggests a possible path to perfection both for the wise and for those whose nature is not suited for wisdom. Here's what he says regarding some of the sad passions that he has just stigmatized:

As men seldom live according to the dictates of reason, these two emotions, humility and repentance, and also hope and fear, bring more advantage than harm; and thus, if sin we must, it is better to sin in their direction. For if men of weak spirit should all equally be subject to pride, and should be ashamed of nothing and afraid of nothing, by what bonds could they be held together and bound? The mob is fearsome, if it does not fear. So it is not surprising that the prophets, who had regard for the good of the whole community, and not of the few, have been so zealous in commending humility, repentance, and reverence. And in fact those who are subject to these emotions [*hisce affectibus sunt obnoxii*] can be far more readily induced than others to live by the guidance of reason in the end, that is, to become free men and enjoy the life of the blessed. (*Eth*, IV, 54 sch.).

Spinoza makes us understand what a strategic use of the sad passions might look like. These affects can be used for the binding power that they manifest, for the coercive strength that leads individuals—mainly if they show weakness of heart, impotency, infantilism—to feel part of the same community. Shame, for instance, as Lévinas has clearly shown,<sup>13</sup> implies a twofold movement of the subject: on the one hand, the subject acts as the judge of himself (the movement of subjectivation in which we are the subject of a judgment on ourselves) and, on the other hand, the subject is captured in a process of de-subjectivization (where we are the object of shame). This split implies, as Spinoza teaches us, the contribution of the imagination to make the other somewhat present, for without an other shame would not be possible. Thus, shame is a sad passion, but it is also capable of forcing the individual to overcome the tight borders of solipsism and impotence. «By what bonds could they [men of weak spirit] be held together and bound?» then if not by sad passions such as shame or fear or hope?

---

<sup>13</sup> Lévinas, E. (1982). *De l'évasion*, in «Recherches Philosophique», V (1935/36), 373-392, reprinted in a volume by J. Rolland, Fata Morgana, Montpellier.

It is important to clarify that the power that sad passions have to conjoin people should not be confused with the fact that all human beings share a rational condition, nor in the «being-in-common» that is given in the intellect, in the *amor dei intellectualis*. It is rather a conjunction that we would define as ‘projective’, imaginative: this projective conjunction is at work where the dividing force of the sad passions is manifested: shame separates myself from the other that I imagine judging me, and in this way leads to a certain bond; shame evokes the other who judges me imaginatively, and in this way a bond is formed, even in the absence of ‘convergence’ or ‘convenience’. It is clear that this projective push that creates mutual bonds among men happens according to a sort of weaving of our imagination, which, although limited and incomplete, connects the multiplicity of the modes, preventing in this way any monadic solipsism, and moving the mind, even though still in the inadequate form of imagination, toward the ontological connection of the modes in the Substance and with the Substance. Spinoza does not deprecate or deride the sad passions; instead he tries to comprehend them rationally (*non ridere, non lugere, nesque detestari, sed intelligere*) and manages to single out their paideutic aspects. These passions can be the occasion for leading men to abandon the solipsism that weakens their mind and body; it pushes them—even though only through projection, imaginatively—to constitute bonds in the community, the very same community that an effective educational path requires and at once contributes to build. A *paideia* does not have to shelter itself from the sad passions, or simply criticize them a priori, but must transform them into a strength and commit itself to temper them. However, since these passions always have the capacity to weaken and isolate, singular modes should be prevented from exhausting their powers in these sad passions. For the same reason, it is impossible to elaborate an ethics based on them, since they would produce in the long run a weakening of the minds and bodies of whoever is subject to it.

The joyful passions play a positive function in the path conducive to perfection. The worst case of a system of monoaffectivity<sup>14</sup> is that of a sad affect: think about the generalized aversion of the misanthrope for every human being, the sadness that pervades every gesture of the depressed. Even the monoaffectivity of a joyful passion can be dangerous. This is shown in the first pages of *On the Improvement of the Understanding* where Spinoza analyses the exclusive love for a finite and transient object: pleasure (lust), wealth (greed), honor (glory). The danger of the *institutum vitae* based on one of these passions lies in the fixation of the passion on only one object. In fact, the passions connected to our seeking pleasure in a moderate way, to a moderate use of resources, to the legitimate need of interlocutors who agree with us and appreciate us should not be condemned: Spinoza is not an ascetic.<sup>15</sup> What is dangerous according to Spinoza, what constitutes a threat for a stable happiness and leads to existential failure, is the monoidetic system that the lustful, the greedy, or the glory-thirsty builds as his *institutum vitae*. Thus, the obsession that we find sometimes in a joyful passion, as for example the love for another finite mode when this mode monopolizes the entirety of our affective power, can be as dangerous for a real education as a sad affection: in both cases we are in a condition of slavery, of dependence.

To conclude, we trivialize Spinoza's philosophy when we reduce it to a criticism of the sad passions and to an exaltation of the joyful ones. If educating means having always to do with a multitude of passions, with 'pathic' modifications, acting in a formative way implies an affective strategy that must always take into account the singularity of the paideutic encounter. Only the active affects (actions) increase the power of the individual; however, while we receive the sad and joyful passions with our existence,

---

<sup>14</sup> Matheron 1969 speaks of a *monoidéisme catastrophique* to describe the situation of an individual subject to a single strong affect that becomes the filter of every experience.

<sup>15</sup> For an analysis of sexuality in Spinoza according to which the moderation of lust should not lead to chastity, see Matheron, A. (1986). «Spinoza et la sexualité», in *Anthropologie et politique au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Vrin, Paris, 209-230.

the active affects are, on the contrary, only a slow and difficult achievement; they are the goal of that ‘transformation’ of the individual that should accompany every formation worthy of this name. The ethical end that Spinoza ideally indicates to the wise is the liberation from the dominion of the sad passions, which decrease the *conatus* and keep us away from achieving the domain of reason. However, at the same time, Spinoza invites us to value the political and educational meaning that some of the sad passions inherently bring.

### **5. Moving out of Childhood: For a *Bildung* without Pedagogy**

Zourabichvili suggests that we read Spinoza as a philosopher fighting to liberate human beings from two poisonous illusions: that of the *infans adultus* and that of the God-King. Fighting these illusions, human beings can aspire to overcome childhood as an age of immaturity and dependence. Abandoning the illusion of the *infans adultus*, the individual learns how to read childhood not as a lacking state (i.e. a state lacking adulthood), but in its specific ‘perfection’ and, at the same time, how to follow the right path in order to get to a complete realization of his power in adulthood. But also the community, by freeing itself from the illusion of the God-King, overcomes the superstition of a God understood as a judge and lord and of sovereignty conceived as an absolute. In this way, the members of a community have finally access to a full and realized citizenship. ‘Individuals and societies overcoming childhood’: this could be a good definition of the overarching finality of Spinoza’s work. Overcoming childhood as a state of immaturity is the goal where both the philosophical-ethical and the political projects of Spinoza meet: the former exemplified by the new ethos of *On the Improvement of the Understanding* and of the *Ethics*, the latter by the project of a full sovereignty of the *multitudo* in the *Theological-Political Treatise* and the *Political Treatise*. It is hard then not to agree with Zourabichvili on the image of Spinoza as a liberator. If we agree with Nietzsche when he says in *Schopenhauer as Educator* that «your educators can be only

your liberators»,<sup>16</sup> then the definition of ‘educator’ or ‘teacher’ applies perfectly to Spinoza.

However, as I have tried to show, Spinoza remains a teacher without a scientific pedagogy. In fact, the broad and liberal educational path indicated by his philosophy is not suited to be restrained within a pedagogic *logos* or within a scientifically rigorous method. In this sense, *Bildung* is perhaps the best term to describe the formative path suggested by Spinoza, at least if we listen to what Goethe says about the meaning of *Bildung*. Goethe explains that German has two words to describe the development of a living being: *Gestalt* and *Bildung*. The former means the fixity and completeness of the form achieved, the latter has in itself the idea of a continuous transformation of the living being, the flux of its ongoing change.<sup>17</sup>

But also the concept of *ars educandi* is well-suited to convey the idea of a formative activity that needs to be always tailored on the individual, the art of leaving educational traces on the other modes and at the same time of being marked by them,<sup>18</sup> constantly dealing with the elaboration of a strategy (that of the implementation of the *conatus*) based on moves for which a creative rationality, and not simply the mere obedience to ready-made rules, is necessary.

I now introduce the implications for a theory of *Bildung* that, according to my interpretation, follows from Spinoza’s text.

---

<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche 1876, §2.

<sup>17</sup> «The Germans have a word for the complex of existence presented by a physical organism: *Gestalt*. With this expression they exclude what is changeable and assume that an interrelated whole is identified, defined, and fixed in character. But if we look at all these *Gestalten*, especially the organic ones, we will discover that *nothing in them is permanent*, nothing is at rest or defined – everything is in a flux of continual motion. This is why German frequently and fittingly makes use of the word *Bildung* to describe the end product and what is in process of production as well». (*Goethe on Science. An Anthology of Goethe’s Scientific Writings*, 1996, Selected and introduced by Jeremy Naydler, with a foreword by Henri Bortoft, Edinburgh UK: Floris.)

<sup>18</sup> Spinoza’s concept of trace (*vestigium*) is analyzed brilliantly in Vinciguerra 2012.

### 5.1. *The Individual Body*

Since Deleuze,<sup>19</sup> the topic, dear to Spinoza, of what a body can do has become one of the most debated problems in the scholarship. Spinoza, going decidedly against the Platonic-Christian idea of the body as the source of constant trouble and interference for our reason, teaches that the power of the body, far from being an obstacle for the power of the mind, makes it grow (*Eth* II, 13 sch.). The constant reference to the body in the *Ethics* makes it impossible to dephysicalize the *Bildung* understood as the perfection of the mode. The complex nature of a *Bildung* can never amount to a mere practice of thought, to a purely mental inference. We can understand the deep unity between mind and body if we pause on what we could call the ‘anomalous monism’ about the mind-body relation that Spinoza presents in the *Ethics*.<sup>20</sup> Spinoza’s position can be classified as ‘monism’ because mind and body are not taken as two different Substances; and his monism is ‘anomalous’ because it rejects both the reduction of the mind to a product of the body, as a coarse materialism would be inclined to think, and the reduction of the body to a tool of the mind, as held for instance by a certain popularized Platonism. Thus, his monism demands that we acknowledge the specific nature of both modes, the mode of thought and that of the body.

Spinoza invites us to acknowledge that human judgments and interpretations go first unconsciously through the body (or, more precisely,

---

<sup>19</sup> G. Deleuze 1990.

<sup>20</sup> Reading Spinoza’s theory of the mind-body relation as an ‘anomalous monism’ does not mean using this concept in the same way as Donald Davidson 1970. Davidson’s anomalous monism is incompatible with Spinoza’s view because it implies an interaction between physical and mental events, which is unconceivable for Spinoza; moreover, the anomaly of which Davidson speaks concerns the mental level where the causal relations do not follow the laws of physics and are in this sense ‘anomalous’. The anomaly I am talking about refers instead to Spinoza’s subversive idea of the mind-body relation if seen in light of the Western tradition. Spinoza’s stance does not fit any of the traditional views: it is neither (Platonic) dualism nor materialism. In this sense, Spinoza’s thought induces us to elaborate a physics of the bodies in connection with a physics of thought, both understood as different expressions of one and the same nature. And *this* idea is a philosophical anomaly. On this see Zaltieri 2012.



through the bodily reactions) and from there to the traces that the affects, stimulated by the encounters with the other modes, have disseminated on it. We have to also remember that the work of imagination proceeds from the affections of the body (*Eth*, II, 18). In relation to this, the famous example of the soldier (*miles*) and the farmer (*rusticus*) who, looking at the horse tracks on the sand, have different thoughts, in consequence of their different practices of the body: the *miles* will think about the war; the *rusticus* will think about plowing a field (*Eth*, II, 18, sch). It remains true that Spinoza is speaking of the connections internal to imagination, not of those of reason or intellect; nevertheless, imagination is also the expression of the power of the mind. Although imagination is the cause of inadequate knowledge, it accompanies us throughout our entire life.

The importance of the body for the implementation of the mind is certainly an unusual reading in the context of our tradition, which could be well defined as ‘somatophobic’.<sup>21</sup> This reading turns Spinoza into a forerunner of the rehabilitation of the body as the pivotal point of human reason that in the last century has had some of the most insightful supporters in the fathers of philosophical anthropology and ethno-anthropological science.

In order to appreciate Spinoza’s originality it might be helpful to conduct a brief survey of Plessner’s and Gehlen’s philosophical anthropology and Leroi-Gourhan’s paleontology. Helmuth Plessner, already in his first work *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*<sup>22</sup>, identifies the specificity of the human being in the special relation he has to his body: a man is a body, but at the same time he has a body, that is, he lives at a distance from it, he can objectify it as a tool and experience its limits and also its ‘unrelatedness’ to consciousness, its impossibility to be subject to a full control. It is in this reaction to the body that the human being experiences his own ‘eccentric’ nature: mediation, not immediacy, is the mark of his life.

---

<sup>21</sup> For a comparison with Western somatophobia, cf. Zaltieri 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Plessner 2003.

Arnold Gehlen, in his major work *Der Mensch. Seine Natur und Seine Stellung in der Welt* (1940), individuates the originality of the human being in the special biological features of his corporeity; if, on the one hand, they make him a lacking organism, on the other hand, they make him capable, due to the plasticity of his body, of using his primitivisms and his lack of specialized functions positively. In the space created by the mechanism of exoneration (*Entlastung*), technical mediation and habit turn certain bodily responses into mechanisms, freeing in this way energies for higher functions.

According to the French ethnologist and archeologist Leroi-Gourhan, the tool for the hand and the language for the face emerge in the prehistory of man as the two poles of the same apparatus.<sup>23</sup> Language and writing are then the main instruments for the construction of rationality. They are born together. Crucial for this development is the achievement of the erect posture, which frees the hand from ambulation and the phonetic apparatus from the function of seeking food. Thus, it is in the specificity of the human body that we find the origin of man's rationality and cultural history.

It is necessary to clarify, however, that Spinoza's position is unequivocally original if compared to the fathers of XX<sup>th</sup> century philosophical anthropology. In fact, when Plessner, Gehlen, and Leroi-Gourhan reflect on the body, they speak of the body of the species. On the contrary, Spinoza's radical alternative consists in the fact that he focuses on the conformation and power of the single body as the elements constituting individuality. For Spinoza, the mind is the individual idea of an individual body. When he speaks of a body that «contains more reality» (*Eth*, II, 13 sch), he wants to say that for a body to contain more reality means «to act or be acted upon simultaneously in many ways» (*Eth*, II, 13 sch), namely, having more power means having more reality which in turn means it can produce more effects. (*Eth*, II, 13 sch). The greater the power of the body—which is always an individual *conatus*—the greater

---

<sup>23</sup> Leroi-Gourhan 1965.

the power of the mind, also unique. In this sense, the Spinozistic conception of the body is different from Nietzsche's, who is the inspiration behind Gehlen's and Plessner's reflection. Nietzsche is aware that the features of each physical constitution cannot be reduced to a general notion of the body, common to all men. This awareness is extremely explicit when Nietzsche considers his own physiology, in particular the need that his health and thinking have for the daily attention to food, landscape, temperature, climate, and humidity, all elements that can strengthen or weaken both body and thought. However, Nietzsche's special approach to the problem of the body consists in the construction of some bodily 'types' corresponding to different expressions of thought. In this way, the artist, the ascetic, the priest, all correspond to different bodies and to different systems of values. Their morals and thought are in a sense the metabolism of their bodily type.

The topic of the singularity of the body, indistinguishable from the individual expression of the mind, is then the original trait of Spinoza's reflection on the body. Every *Bildung* should take into account the special nature of that individual body and value its capacities and the specific and unique modalities of expression of its nature. Only in this way will the specific features of a mind develop accordingly. It is necessary to remember that for Spinoza the power of the body is not a mere liberation of force, but the capacity to produce many effects, organizing different competencies, both active and passive, capable of acting but also of being acted upon.

## 5.2. *The Work on Memory*

Freud claims that educating, governing, and analyzing are «impossible» professions (*Unmöglichen Berufe*).<sup>24</sup> The reason would be that their unsatisfactory outcome is already known in advance. He believes that it is not possible to reach the full and definitive realization of their

---

<sup>24</sup> Freud 1937.

corresponding ends: perfectly realized individuality, harmonious and just polish, psychical balance. What we find interesting in this triad is that all the three practices require (in education, in politics, and analysis) a transformation of the subject and of his memory. Education must transform childhood memory, which tends to link every stimulus to its immediate satisfaction believing that this connection is the only satisfactory one, in the memory of an adult, capable of links that transcend the immediate satisfaction and realize what is truly useful. The art of the good government should correct through good laws, good administration, and good examples, the mnestic connections underpinning collective and private habits, based on fear, greed, enslavement of the soul. It should lay the foundation for a new memory, based on collective virtuous habits. Finally, this psychotherapy is to some extent also an exercise in the ‘correction’ of memory; its scope is not simply to modify the state of affairs and the events of a life, but also to change the evaluation of those events encoded in the memory and to eliminate the mnestic fixation of the trauma.

Memory plays a critical role for Spinoza in the formation of the individual modes. In order to understand how, it is important, first, to comprehend how the changes in the mnestic connections affect the pathic transitions that are so fundamental in Spinozist *Bildung*. Spinoza clearly shows that every change of a mode, both its bodily and mental expression, has to do with a mnestic change.<sup>25</sup> In *On the Improvement*, Spinoza reflects on the particular nature of memory; according to his analysis, memory is incremented when it follows a ‘logical’ order, or the order of the intellect, which also relies on bodily traces. In fact, we remember better a series of sentences logically connected, for instance a narration, than a disconnected group of words. (*TIE*, 81). Spinoza adds to this that our memory benefits from an unrepeatable encounter in its uniqueness (the first love comedy that we have read), while when many analogous memories occupy the mind (several other love comedies), then we will

---

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Vinciguerra: «life, the identity of a body, is in the memory that this body has of its practices, and in particular of those that have built its characteristic *ethos*» (Vinciguerra 2012, 58).

get confused and our memory will not be as lucid (*TIE*, [82]). However, memory does not coincide with intellect, given that logical order is not absolutely essential to it. «What, then, is memory?» – wonders Spinoza. He provides the following answer: «It is nothing but the sensation of impressions in the brain together with the thought of the determinate duration of the sensation». (*TIE*, [83]) Thus, memory is a connection, an order between something physical impressed from the outside and the thought of its duration, which turns that impression into something that lasts. While it is true that the durable trace can be understood without the work of the intellect, the reverse is not the case: it is not possible to think all the concatenations of ideas without a capacity already in place to retain the traces that the encounters with the modes impress upon each singularity. Retaining the traces is the work of the body; Spinoza says this explicitly: «Yet it is impossible that we should remember that we existed before the body, since neither can there be any traces of this in the body [...]». (*Eth* V, 23, sch.). Building associations and mnemonic orders implies several different practices: building traces in the encounters with the other modes, comparing similar traces and developing criteria of resemblance based on the same affectivity so that corresponding habits will be formed... Memory is an achievement obtained through all these activities; it is the slow constitution of the capacity to establish the duration and to let it sediment. This constitutes a great part of our identity. This is why every change of our identity, such as the change due to our *Bildung*, is essentially a change in our memory and requires a modification of our practices. In the relation between the modification of the mnemonic connections and the increment of the *conatus essendi*, a central role is played by the *Scholium* of proposition 10 of the fifth part of the *Ethics*, which we have already commented in relation to our criticism of the moral judgments based on resentment. The first part of this long *Scholium* is devoted to the process of transformation of our style of life toward a more rational conduct capable of implementing our *conatus intelligendi*. Spinoza moves from the idea that the mnemonic connections that link the affections of the body according to the order of the intellect are stronger, less subject to sad passions if compared to the connections based on vague and uncertain affects. Spinoza observes:

Therefore the best course we can adopt, as long as we do not have perfect knowledge of our emotions, is to conceive a right method of living, or fixed rules of life, and to commit them to memory and continually apply them to particular situations that are frequently encountered in life, so that our casual thinking is thoroughly permeated by them and they are always ready to hand. (*Eth* V, 10 sch.)

Building new habits on affects that are not in opposition to our conatus is the only way to transform or re-form our memory. Zourabichvili observes on this that changing the order of our associations is the same thing as changing the *institutum vitae*.<sup>26</sup> I would add that this is true because in both cases it is necessary to change our practices, and modifying these practices means modifying our subjectivity; in fact, as Spinoza stresses at different points, only our actions can manifest what we are. We are what we do; we are our own practices.

When I introduced Spinoza's criticism of the bad masters who are motivated by resentment I evoked the idea that the philosopher-educator needs a 'correct attitude'; we have now all the elements to appreciate in what that attitude consists: it consists in a constant attention to the affective modifications to which we are subject in the intermodal encounters, in the adoption of the habits of life that limit the sad passions and in the consequent enhancement of the mnemonic connections capable of perfecting our *conatus essendi*; as in a virtuous circle, we become then more and more capable of conscious actions and less and less passive.

It is easy to find in Spinoza a 'pragmatist' motif: we know someone only through his actions (*TTP*, V and XI). Spinoza loves to cite St. James when he says that it is not the profession of faith that makes someone a real believer but his actions (*TTP*, XIV). This point mirrors interestingly the interpretation of form as effectuality: what a being is lies in its power and in the effects that thence follow. If actions (based on the love for the other person, charity, and justice) are necessary to identify the true believer,

---

<sup>26</sup> Zourabichvili 2002 II, 112.

they are also fundamental to the truly good master. His attitude, then, will have to be ‘alethurgic’, in the sense that Foucault explains in his last course at the Collège de France: «alethurgy would be the production of truth, the act by which truth is manifested».<sup>27</sup>

### 5.3. *Bildung as a Search for Accomodatio*

The formation of the human being, understood in the Spinozist sense of a transition toward a greater perfection, implies also a search for the conveniences, namely, the possible correspondences with the other modes capable of implementing our power. In Heidegger’s terms, we are thrown in a being-together since our birth. But it is difficult to find in Spinoza’s thought a fracture, such as the one present in Heidegger’s work, between an alleged inauthentic dimension of existence (the anonymous public dimension of the ‘one’) and a mirroring authentic dimension of the Self to which we can get to only by rejecting the ‘one’. We could say that in Spinoza the Self, the constitution of a free and responsible individual, can find the occasion of its full expression only in the public ‘one’ to which he belongs and out of which he cannot get.<sup>28</sup> Spinoza writes:

Hence it follows that man is necessarily always subject to passive emotions, and that he follows the common order of Nature, and obeys it, and accommodates himself to it as far as the nature of things demands. (*Eth*, IV, 4 cor.).

The verb ‘to accommodate’ translates the Latin *accomodare* and refers to the noun *accomodatio*, which is used by Spinoza in letter 6 to Oldenburg in an exclusively physical sense. It stands for that process for which the encounters of the modes, from the niter to the carbonate or the

---

<sup>27</sup> Foucault 2011, 3. The alethurgic function of the educator is fundamental also for Nietzsche in *Schopenhauer as Educator*. Nietzsche sees in Schopenhauer the embodiment of this function.

<sup>28</sup> Vittorio Morfino puts forth a reading of Spinoza based on the primacy of the encounter (i.e. the relation) over the form, so that the form depends on the series of its encounters (Morfino 2014).

water of the experiments detailed in the letter, are combined together. In this physical sense *accomodatio* is at the basis of essential processes such as nutrition, breathing... , in great part mechanical and nonreflexive. The *accomodatio* among human beings has further relational implications; it becomes part of the ethical sphere where the human being consciously seeks his convenient disposition; this requires us to abandon every individualistic narcissism but also every anthropocentrism, in order to recognize that our health, understood in a broad, both medical and psycho-existential sense, depends on the goodness of our disposition to comprehend that the world is not tailored around us and that the other modes can also benefit from our weakening and destruction. The most efficacious response to this situation is not in the immune closure to all that is external to us, but rather in a more adequate and complete knowledge of how the other can enhance or weaken us.

The problem is then how to act in order to realize an *accommodatio* understood as the correct disposition of our gestures, our practices, our habits of life, in relation to the infinite number of beings that we encounter every day. Besides its ethical and political implications, as Zourabichvili has pointed out,<sup>29</sup> *accomodatio* is a very important pedagogical subject, capable of drawing the pedagogical implications of Spinoza's motto *Caute*. The knowledge of the other modes that we encounter is the first fundamental step for our conservation and enhancement: this is how every *accomodatio* must proceed. The 'Know Thyself' of the Socratic-Platonic tradition loses its meaning in light of the essential idea of *accommodatio*. Spinoza's framework is better expressed by a different motto: 'Know the one you are going to encounter', in order to try to find the possible convergences, conveniences, that can improve both your Self and the other. Moreover, the knowledge of the effects that every encounter produces on the self is the only effective way to proceed in a path of self-awareness. In this way we do not underplay the Delphic motto, but we

---

<sup>29</sup> «L'*accomodatio*, comme dans les lettres 6 et 32, désigne le processus par lequel une convenance se découvre et par conséquent, une union est rendue possible: il s'agit clairement d'une problématique de communauté [...]» (Zourabichvili 2002 I, 58).



clarify that the knowledge of one's self grows together with the knowledge of the other; this knowledge has a pragmatic rather than introspective nature: it emerges only in the effects that are produced by the self in every encounter with the other modes.

The search for *accomodatio* can be read as the junction between education and politics; it shows their crossing destinies. There cannot be education without the cautious and constant effort of *accomodatio* regarding the entire *ethos* of formation. This is why education has a political nature: because in its orienting the subject toward the other and in its striving to find convergences and conveniences, the constitution of the community is always at stake.

*Dottore in ricerca, Cattedra di Filosofia Morale,  
Università degli Studi di Bergamo*

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Spinoza, B. *Complete Works*, transl. by S. Shirley, ed. by M. L. Morgan, Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 2002.

### Abbreviations

*E*: *Letters* (Epistolae) (followed by arabic numeral).

*Eth*: *Ethics* (Ethica) (followed by roman numeral for part and arabic numeral for proposition).

*TIE*: *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*) (followed by arabic numeral for paragraph).

*TP*: *Political Treatise* (*Tractatus Politicus*) (followed by roman numeral for chapter and arabic number for paragraph).

*TTP*: *Theological-Political Treatise* (*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*) (followed by arabic number for chapter).

### Internal References

App.: Appendix

Cor.: Corollary

Sch.: Scholium

Pref.: Preface

Bove, L. (1996). *La stratégie du conatus. Affirmation et résistance chez Spinoza*. Vrin, Paris.

Caporali, R. (2013). «Il Trattato teologico-politico di Spinoza, tra filosofia e militanza (a partire da un recente volume di Steven Nadler)». In *Etica & Politica/Ethics & Politics*, XV, 2013, 2, 293-300.

Davidson, D. (1970). *Mental Events* in (1980) *Essays on Actions and Events*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Deleuze, G. (1990). «What Can a Body Do? ». In *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, Zone of Book, New York.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Microfisica del potere*, Einaudi, Torino.

Foucault, M. (2011). *The Courage of the Truth (The Government of Self and Others II)*, «Lectures at the College de France». Ed. by Gros, F. transl. By Burchell, G., Palgrave Mac Millian, Basingstoke.

Freud, S. (1937). «Die endliche und die unendliche Analyse». In *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* 23 (1937), 209-240; transl. By Riviere, J. In *International Journal of Psycho-analysis* 4 (1937).

Leroi-Gourhan, A. (1965). *Le geste et la parole. La mémoire et les rythmes*. Éditions Albin Michel, Paris.

Matheron, A. (1969). *Individu et Communauté*. Les Editions de Minuit, Paris.

Matheron, A. (1986). «Spinoza et la sexualité», in *Anthropologie et politique au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Vrin, Paris.

Merçon, J. (2009). *Aprendizado ético-afetivo. Uma leitura spinozana da educação*. Campinas, Átomo & Alinea.

Moreau, P.-F. (1994). «The Metaphysics of Substance and the Metaphysics of Forms». In Yovel, Y. (ed.). *Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind («Ethica» II)*, Papers Presented at The Second Jerusalem Conference, E. J. Brill, Leiden-New York-Köln, 27-35.

Morfinò, V. (2005). *Il tempo della moltitudine. Materialismo e politica prima e dopo Spinoza*. Manifestolibri, Roma 2005; translated by Peña León, E. (2014) *El tiempo de la multitud* Madrid, Tierradenadie Ediciones.

Nietzsche, F. (1876). *Schopenhauer als Erzieher; Schopenhauer as Educator*. In *Untimely Meditations*, translated by Hollingdale, R. J. (1983) Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Nietzsche, F. (1887). *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1887); *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Ed. by R. C. Holub, translated by Scarpitti, M. A. (2013) Penguin, London.

Plessner, H. (2003). *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*. In H. Plessner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. IV, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M.

Schama, S. (1987). *The Embarrassment of Riches. An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. A. A. Knopf, New York.

Suhamy, A. (2003). «Comment définir l'homme? La communauté du souverain bien dans l'»Éthique», IV, 36 et scolie». In Jaquet, C., Sévérac, P., Suhamy, A. (ed.) *Fortitudo et servitudo. Lectures de L'»Éthique IV» de Spinoza*. Editions Kimé, Paris.

Vinciguerra, L. (2012). *La semiotica di Spinoza*. ETS, Pisa.

Zaltieri, C. (2011). *L'invenzione del corpo*. Negretto Editore, Mantova.

Zaltieri, C. (2012). «Per un materialismo plurale trasformativo», Presentation of Zourabichvili, F. *Spinoza. Una fisica del pensiero*, translated by Bassani, F., Negretto Editore, Mantova.

Zaltieri, C. (2013). *Il divenire della Bildung in Nietzsche e in Spinoza*, Mimesis, Milano.

Zourabichvili, F. (2002 I). *Spinoza. Une physique de la pensée*. PUF, Paris.

Zourabichvili, F. (2002 II). *Le conservatisme paradoxal de Spinoza. Enfance et royauté*, PUF, Paris.