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INTRODUCTION
THE INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONS ON COGNITION IN EARLY
MODERN PHILOSOPHY

INVITED EDITOR, LYNDA GAUDEMARD

*As I said at the beginning of this tale, I
divided each soul into three-two horses
and a charioteer; and one of the horses
was good and the other bad (...)*

Plato, *Phaedrus*, 253d

1. Overview

Reason and emotion have long been opposed to each other, both in Western philosophy and cognitive sciences. However, the latest scientific discoveries show that emotions play a significant role for knowledge and that the traditional antagonism between reason and emotions should be overcome. In recent decades, a number of philosophical and neuroscientific works have suggested that emotions play a significant role in reasonings, rational beliefs, desires, and decisions (de Sousa 1987; Kahneman *et al.* 1999; Panksepp 1999). It was shown that patients with damage to the ventromedial prefrontal cortex face difficulties in making decisions (Damasio 1994/2006). The philosophical literature dedicated to “epistemic feelings”, such as feeling of doubt, feeling of certainty, feeling of knowing, and to “epistemic emotions” such as curiosity (Loewenstein 1994), or surprise (Lorini & Castelfranchi 2007; Reisenzein 2000) is growing. Affective processes are now viewed as an integral

component of problem solving in scientific practice (Thagard 2002; Osbeck and Nersessian 2011).

It has long been assumed that emotions and reason are two antagonistic sides in the human soul because emotions disturb rationality. As recalled by Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1102a 26-28), the distinction between rational and irrational powers was familiar in Greek thinking. Despite there is no concept of emotion in Plato strictly speaking (and, maybe, no theory of emotion), the conflict between emotions and reason may have its roots in his work. Let us recall that besides to reason (*logistikon*), and bodily appetite (*epithumêtikon*), Plato added a third principle in the soul, spiritedness (*thumoeides*), closely related to appetites (*Republic*, 439e-441c). The *thumoeides* is the seat of emotions playing a mediate role between the appetitive and the rational part. As a charioteer must control his horses, the soul must master its appetitive part. *Pathê* (affections) are a kind of spontaneous motion which includes the body. They are psychophysical spontaneous reactions that should be kept under our control because they disturb the soul. However, in *The Laws*, Plato also assigns to some passions a significant positive role if they are mediated by education. The notion of *pathê* includes what we consider today as emotions (fear, anger, love sadness, shame jealousy, envy...), but also desires, pain, and pleasure. While the term "emotion" is sometimes used to translate *pathê*, the issue of whether our contemporary notion of emotion corresponds to the ancient concept of *pathê* is still disputed (Cairns 2008).

Medieval theories of emotions were mainly based on ancient philosophy. The terms *passio*, *affectus* or *affection* were used to refer to emotions. The Thomistic view on emotions locates the passions within the appetitive powers of the soul which all animals have. According to this Aquinas, the passions are movements of the appetite (*Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 22). Passions have intentionality because they are caused by cognitions but they take no part in cognitive processes.

In the early modern period, a range of words were used to refer to emotions: "affects", "appetites", "passions", "sentiments", "feelings" and "emotions". The term "emotion" in the 16th century originated in the Latin word for "movement". Emotions are passive and are not in our control, which may be taken to suggest that they are separated from

cognition. Contemporary neuroscientists widespread this received view. For example, Damasio (1994/2006) claims that, for Descartes, rational decisions are “the product of logic alone”, without the support of emotions.

While historians of philosophy mainly focus on the causal/motivational role of emotions, there was little attention within the history of philosophy to the role of emotions in the cognitive processes, with the exception of stoic philosophy. Yet, recent philosophical studies show that early modern philosophy has a key role in the rise of the contemporary understanding of emotions. For thirty years, several illuminating studies on early modern theories of emotions have been published (Kambouchner 1996; James 1997; Gaukroger 1998; Alanen 2003; Boros 2006; Pickavé and Shapiro 2012; Boros, Szalai and Toth 2017; Broomhall 2017). This literature shows that, for early modern philosophers, emotions do not only motivate our actions. The claim that curiosity, wonder, joy and are part of cognition was already supported. The view that emotions in Descartes and Spinoza are both motivational and perceptual (Shapiro 2012) is closed to the contemporary theories on emotions that are challenging the Western philosophical tradition defining emotions as opposed to reason.

2. About this issue

This issue arises from the selection of the articles based on the presentations delivered at the international seminar “Feel to Know: Emotion and Cognition in Early Modern Philosophy” I organised at the Institute of History of Philosophy (Aix-Marseille University), in Fall 2021. Participants included Gabor Boros (KRE, University of Budapest), Pablo Montosa (University of Barcelona), Saja Parvizian (Coastal Carolina University), Guillem Sales Vitalta (University of Barcelona), Oana Serban (University of Bucharest), Lisa Shapiro (Simon Fraser University), Alice Simionato (Nanyang Technological University of Singapore), and Laetitia Simonetta (ENS, Lyon).

The main aim of the seminar was to investigate the way seventeenth and eighteenth theories of emotions dealt with the role of

affective states in cognition; not only emotions positively influence the “conduct of life”; they are also involved in epistemic processes. Of course, to focus on the motivational role of emotions does not necessarily lead to neglect their relevance to cognition, as if both were disconnected realms. Indeed, passions are relevant to cognition because of their motivational role. For example, according to Malebranche, wonder helps us fix (voluntarily) our attention and to consider objects objectively (*The Search After Truth*, 375). To fix attention is a cognitive act.

The selected papers intend to provide a contribution to historical scholarship on the role of emotions in cognition. They focus on the nature of emotions, their taxonomy and their epistemic relevance. These papers show that early modern and modern philosophy foreruns recent neuroscience research claiming that emotions are included in cognitive processes such as attention, memory, decision and reasoning. The aim of this issue is not to provide a systematic survey but to present research findings on seventeenth and eighteenth philosophy of emotions, currently conducted in different countries.

Gabor Boros challenges the view in the history of European philosophy, according to which feelings are subordinated to reason, a conception contrasting with the 20th century phenomenology and cognitive sciences, supporting that cognition is accessible through feelings. According to Boros, Descartes has an underestimated ambivalent role in this history. Indeed, contrary to what Damasio claims, Descartes provided a theory of passions that is close to contemporary cognitivism since it is not at our disposal to accept or to reject our feelings before knowing.

Saja Parvizian focuses on Descartes’s conception of the nature of the Self. For Parvizian, the Cartesian self is not a *res cogitans* but a *res volans*. Indeed, when Descartes defines the passion of generosity in the *Passions of the Soul*, he claims that the only thing that truly belongs to the generous person is her free will. Parvizian argues that what Descartes means in the “truly belongs” locution is that free will constitutes the activity – not passivity – of the mind. Thus, free will appears to be the most important property in the essence of a mental substance.

Guillem Sales Vitala provides a reconstruction of Moses Mendelssohn’s second work, the *Briefe über die Empfindungen* (1755)

which has mainly to do with sentiments. Mendelssohn distinguishes between three different types of such sentiments: the pleasant sentiments resulting from corporal processes, the pleasant sentiments emerging when contemplating beautiful objects, and the pleasant sentiments inherent to knowledge. Sales Vitalta argues that, in Mendelssohn's analysis of pleasant sentiments, cognitive elements (namely, objectual representations) are indispensable for the experience of pleasure.

Alice Simionato discusses the relation between emotions and reason in Spinoza's *Ethics*, and especially on the role of the knowledge of the emotions. She argues that adequate knowledge of *affectus*, provided by reason, is actually knowledge of human nature. Indeed, emotions refer to causal relations and signal the way we are bound to nature. Thus, emotions provide adequate knowledge about the metaphysical status of individuals as modes of God or nature. The adequate knowledge of the emotions also provides us with ethical knowledge.

Finally, **Laetitia Simonetta** takes a fresh look at Malebranche's conception of the role of affections for knowledge. While Malebranche opposes knowledge based on ideas, to feelings which are obscure perceptions, he also supports an "instinctive knowledge" (instinct of sentiment). The role of the instinctive knowledge is to reveal our union with God. Laetitia Simonetta argues that, beside to its moral function, this knowledge has a cognitive role. For example, the passion of admiration enables us to fix our attention on the object of knowledge (a claim supported by Descartes in his *Passions of the Soul*). This view, supported by contemporary neuroscientists, leads us to reconsider the way early modern philosophy considered the relationship between knowledge of the soul and affectivity.

I hope that these articles will interest both historians of philosophy and contemporary philosophers working on the relation between cognition and emotions. I would like to thank the participants and contributors, and especially Oana Serban (University of Bucharest) who invited me as a guest editor. You can find updates and videos of the seminar on <https://earlymodernseminaraix.wordpress.com/>

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FEEL (UNFREE) TO KNOW (YOURSELF). EARLY MODERN *VERSUS* 20th CENTURY APPROACHES

GÁBOR BOROS¹

Abstract

This paper will tackle, first, the history of the “original stance” in the history of European philosophy, in which feelings had to be subordinated to reason-based knowledge. Afterwards I will have a first look at 20th century phenomenology and neuro-sciences in order to show the apparition and prevalence of the new stance expressed by the imperative “Feel to know”. I will, then, return to Descartes pointing out his ambivalent role in this history: he provided us with a complex theory of love on the one hand whereas, on the other, he introduced the *en Physicien* intention in the theory of passions that rendered him the forerunner of contemporary neuro-scientists (*pace* the “erroneous” Damasio), and the protagonist of the philosophies of life from Dilthey to Michel Henry. Involving Pascal and Malebranche will enrich the picture before the second look at the phenomenologists’ and the scientists’ attitudes to Descartes and the problems of emotions.

Keywords: *Augustin, Pascal, Descartes, Malebranche, Damasio, Heidegger, Sartre, love of God, being-in-the-world, somatic marker.*

The original version of the present paper was prepared for the seminar organised by Lynda Gaudemard the general title of which was *Feel to know. Emotion and Cognition in Early Modern Philosophy*. This title has provided the participants with an excellent orientation, and it has also inspired me to conceive the general frame of the paper: first to recall the long periods in which the phenomena variously called feelings, passions, sentiments, emotions were almost unanimously suppressed by

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philosophers and theologians referring to the closed circle of the eternal laws of reason or intellect graspable by way of a special rational or intellectual mode of cognition. Christian theologically-minded thinkers had at their disposal the idea of the unique, personal God providentially directing the earthly events; an idea by way of which they thought to be capable of supporting these laws by way of recurring to God the law-giver who issued them as divine commands. With respect to these periods, in which philosophers and theologians completed the circle by presupposing a cognitive faculty to serve as the foundation for all spheres of human life including that of the desires one could forge imperatives such as “know (yourself) to free yourself from the dominance of feelings!”, or “know yourself to become capable of freeing yourself from your feelings!” When Socrates interviewed by Phaedo about his belief in the ancient myths mentioned the chthonic monster Typho as someone who by all philosophical means ought to be excluded from the direction of our lives, he probably meant precisely the wish to avoid to become a being driven by uncontrolled passions similarly to Augustine’s later *caveat*:

“Augustine: Thus a human being should be called ‘in order’ when these self-same impulses of the soul are dominated by reason. For it should not be called the right order, or even ‘order’ at all, when the better are controlled by the worse. Do you not think so?

Evodius: It is clear.

Augustine: Therefore, when reason (or mind or spirit) governs irrational mental impulses, a human being is dominated by the very thing whose dominance is prescribed by the law we have found to be eternal.

Evodius: I understand and agree.” (Augustine 2010, 16; 1.8 18.64-65)

In my view, even the well-known motto of the intellectualist – “dialectical” – theologians, *credo ut intelligam* – I believe so that I may understand – emphasised *volens-nolens* the intellectual aspect, at least in the final analysis of their arguments that proceeded toward the intellectual grasp of the content of faith valued more than the pure faith at least implicitly. Instead of a *felt* certainty on the *sole* basis of the believer’s *trust* in God, the dialecticians’ belief meant rather something of a *preliminary* character, the necessary presupposition of the *knowledge*

of God the accomplished version of which would be given to the blessed in heaven while one could hope for an anticipation of it through rendering earthly knowledge, especially of God, more and more perfect. Understanding, *intelligere*, also meant a weapon, perhaps *the* weapon and medicament at the same time against the destructive feelings, passions as the example of Abelard testifies it through his *Historia calamitatum*, who took up his scholarly activities immediately after the night of his castration.

And if we turn to the early modern and modern period, we can certainly find some cultural tendencies in which we can discover clear signs of attributing a greater role to the feelings than earlier, such as the 18th century “sentimentalism”. However, the main trend remained the intellectualist approach now strengthened by its linkage to a scientific-technical attitude to human nature and society instead of being bound by faith. Rarely do we see thinkers such as Pascal who opposes, and attests precisely by this opposition, *ex negativo* as it were, the dominance of the intellectualist approach. Pascal’s opposition means the tendency to put the emphasis, as far as the role of faith is concerned, on the *felt* aspect of it, instead of the rational or intellectual knowledge about its contents. This becomes evident for instance when Pascal posits at least the divine truths in a sphere in which feelings are primordial:

“I am not speaking here of divine truths, which I would take care not to include under the art of persuasion, since they are infinitely superior to nature. Only God can put them into the soul, and *in the way he thinks fit*.

I know that *he wanted them to enter from the heart into the mind, and not from the mind into the heart*, in order to humiliate the proud power of reasoning which claims it ought to be the judge of what is chosen by the will, and to heel that feeble will which is completely corrupted by vile attachments. Hence, instead of speaking about human matters that they have to be known before they can be loved, which has become a proverb, the saints, speaking of divine matters, say *that you have to love them in order to know them*, and that you enter *into truth only by charity*, which they have made one of their most useful pronouncements.”²

² Emphases added.

Undoubtedly, this is the most prominent of the early modern initiatives to re-set the trend concerning the relation between feelings and knowledge. Our participation in the divine truths, if conceived in a way that gives precedence to the feelings brings us closer to a feeling-centred approach to knowledge in life taken as a whole, not limited to the religious context; for Jansenism was a religious movement that attempted to make the divine truths the foundation for everyday life, and it was within this movement where Pascal's famous reasons of the heart, "which reason itself does not know"³ (Pascal 1999, 158) originated.

Thus, when in the 20th century not only prominent thinkers but also scientists (Damasio 1994, 200) discovered Pascal's "reasons of the heart", their attempts to accommodate his *dictum* to their own systematic context – philosophic or scientific – were certainly legitimate in a *formal* sense although the *contents* they forced in the Pascalean frame were their own, far from Pascal's deeply religious surrender to God.

Probably the first to make use of the "reasons of the heart" was Max Scheler, one of the key figures of the early phenomenological movement. He made use of it when referring to the primordial role of feelings not so much in cognition in general as in the particular sphere of *ethical* cognition belonging to and accessible through the feelings (Damasio 1994, 200). Especially in his Christian period, Scheler could even claim to appropriate Pascal's *dictum* more authentically than others: he argued for the necessity of a *supernatural* revelation prior to and independent of *philosophical-intellectual* concepts of God in order to establish the community of love with God. In spite of this robust religious claim, he offered a genuine philosophical interpretation of God as the "person of persons" who corresponds to the macrocosm, i.e. the world above and comprising the perspective-dependent microcosms constituted by the finite persons.

As is well-known, the global background of our above quotation from Pascal's *Art of Persuasion* is the series of critical remarks in his *Pensées* in which he resolutely denounces Descartes as the founder of a reason-based anthropo- or even ego-centric system, which he famously

³ Fr. 277 (Brunschvig) *Le Cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point.*

labels as “uncertain and futile”. Re-interpreter of the theorem of the reasons of the heart, Scheler also appropriates Pascal’s critic of Descartes in his *The Human Place in the Cosmos* on purely philosophical basis, and so does Heidegger in *Being and Time*, as we will see later. They are the most prominent adversaries of Descartes in the tradition of the so-called “continental” philosophy, basis of the general handbook-style reception of Descartes in which Pascal’s label has been taken almost at face value.

Undeniably, this overall critique has some foundation in Descartes’ system. However, there are important segments of this system that seem to be neglected by such a criticism. Descartes and the 17th century in general are more complex than the usual handbooks or other philosophical interpretations in Pascal’s vein would like their readers to believe. Let me refer, on the one hand, to Denis Kambouchner who did considerable efforts to change the one-sided and distorted picture of Descartes prevalent in the so-called “post-modern” era (Cf. Kambouchner 2015) while on the other hand, I myself have also elaborated on early modern concepts of emotions, the concept of love and especially love of God in Descartes and other 17th century thinkers in several publications that can help us to arrive at a more complete picture of those philosophies.⁴ In what follows, I will summarize some main points concerning Descartes and Malebranche in order to counterbalance the usual picture that neglects the weighty 17th century concepts of love and its conceptual contexts when considering the relationship between feeling and knowledge. I will focus solely on the love of God according to *The Passions of the Soul* in order to compare it to Malebranche’s concept of a love of God, and contrast it with Pascal’s reproaches to Descartes.

My main points of reference will be the passages from the *Passions of the Soul* and Descartes’ correspondence with Elisabeth and Chanut.

In his *Passions of the Soul*, Descartes defines love as “an emotion of the soul caused by a movement of the spirits, which impels the soul

⁴ Marion transfers the general critique on the critique of the cartesian concept of love mainly in his *Phenomene erotique*. My objections to this critique can be found in Boros 2015.

to join itself willingly to objects that appear to be agreeable to it" (§ 79, Descartes 1985, 356).

The next article prepares the cognitive treatment of love insofar as Descartes distinguishes it from *desire* and emphasizes the will's unique role in his account of love:

"[I]n using the word 'willingly' I am not speaking of desire [...]. I mean rather the assent by which we consider ourselves henceforth as joined with what we love in such a manner that we imagine a whole, of which we take ourselves to be only one part, and the thing loved to be the other." (*Ibid.*)

If we search for the reasons for the distinguished role of the will we can refer, on the one hand, to the somewhat enigmatic statement in the *Rules for the direction of the mind*, "Rule 3":

"[...] what has been revealed by God is more certain than any knowledge, since faith in these matters, as in anything obscure, is an act of the will rather than an act of the understanding." (Descartes 1985, 15)

Putting aside the "hermeneutics of suspicion" for a moment, we can see in this statement a reformulation of the *credo ut intelligam* principle. On the other hand, technically speaking, § 80 refers to *Meditation 4* according to which "will" is the soul's active faculty of assenting to what has been presented to it by the understanding. If we assent in love to the *previously known* object we will love the object i.e. we will be *motivated to act* for the sake of the *whole* consisting of the lover and the beloved, within which the lover *willingly* acknowledges to be but a *part*, and possibly the smaller part.⁵ The ego *assents* to its own limitation with respect to the other part, obliging oneself not to act egotistically.⁶

⁵ Relying on the passage from Rule 3, we can unearth a hidden distinction between the case of the finite objects attracting us through the natural ways of cognition, and the love of the infinite God that can be triggered either by the will itself, if its origin is supranatural, or by the understanding, if its origin is in our understanding.

⁶ In his *Elements of the Philosophy of Rights*, Hegel would eventually make use of a quite similar construction against Kant's "individualistic" concept of love conceived as a contract. For some brushstrokes cf. Boros 2019.

Descartes claims that the lovers' voluntary acts are measurable, and the general rule is that the greater part determines the joint behaviour of the whole: the interests of the "greater" will determine the actions of the whole that the "smaller" will have to accept automatically. Obviously, there can be three basic relations of magnitude between the lover and the beloved. Accordingly, Descartes distinguishes three types of love. I confine myself to the third type: when we have more esteem for the object we love, "our passion may be called 'devotion'."⁷

As mentioned above, explaining the *essence* of love by way of the voluntary assent means for Descartes the explanation of our value-orientation in our action-readiness: when we are in love,

"we consider ourselves as joined and united to the thing loved, and so we are always ready to abandon the lesser part of the whole that we compose with it so as to preserve the other part."⁸

And when our love is of the type of devotion, the "interests" of the "greater" part, principally God, and the whole we entered in through our assent ought to be valued more than the interests of the "lesser" part, i.e. ourselves considered in isolation, without our relationship with God. Accepting this line of argument, we accept that "*pure description*" establishes *moral evaluation*, and so it makes us act according to the values established in the act of assenting.

When investigating devotion as the third kind of love, one must take into consideration that the first and third kinds are virtually the same viewed from complementary perspectives: they represent the basic love-relationship between *unequal* parties, within which the love of the lesser part toward the greater is *devotion* while that of the greater toward the lesser is *affection*. This scheme makes us understand the examples of the extreme self-sacrifice:

"In the case of devotion [...] we prefer the thing loved so strongly that we are not afraid to die in order to preserve it." (*Ibid.*)

⁷ See *Passions of the Soul* § 83, Descartes 1985, 357.

⁸ Emphasis added.

From a metaphysical perspective, we can also see a hidden dynamic of love in the mutual completion of the first and third kind of love that makes us see love enfolding in a circular movement. God loves us first, as Descartes assumes aligning with the great tradition at least from St. Bernard of Clairvaux to J.-L. Marion. God's love is principally love toward *all* creatures, as Descartes' letter to Chanut (6 June 1647) on cosmic-metaphysical love indicates.⁹ However, the human being is unique amidst all created beings not only in the sense of having *le bon sens* but also insofar as the highest activity of her as a thinking being, *res cogitans* is to *feel* love toward God, to devote herself to God. Yet, *feeling* this love is not the first in us: it appears after and on the basis of what we *have learnt*, i.e. *knowing* that God is the most perfect being.

From this point of view, love is a cosmic principle connecting Nature and God, i.e. the most valuable, the most lovable object of love with the bounds of a mutual and circular love. One is tempted to reproach Pascal to have neglected this most important aspect of Descartes' concept of passions. Yet, as I have emphasised, the first step in Descartes is *knowing* God, and it is on the basis of our knowledge that we love Him. This structure can be seen at work in the end of *Meditation 3* where Descartes prompts the reader to make a halt in the process of investigation in order to admire and take delight in Him – *after His existence has been proved, and the doctrine of continuous creation has been established in a rational manner*. In contrast with Pascal, therefore, Descartes sees God having chosen our reason as the appropriate faculty in which our love toward Him is to be aroused. It is the will *led by the intellect* that proves to be *the* powerful device to arrive to the love toward God. Therefore, the emphasis put on the priority of the love of God does not lead him to accept a *traditional* religious concept of the love of God that Pascal misses in his system – rightly from his perspective. We can term Descartes' attitude, as I have suggested elsewhere,¹⁰ *philotheistic*. It consists in the conviction that *our natural human intellect is capable of*

⁹ "I do not see that the mystery of the Incarnation, and all the other favours God has done to man, rule out his having done countless other great favours to an infinity of other creatures" (Descartes 1991, 321).

¹⁰ Cf. for instance Boros 2019, 650 sqq.

guiding us to a reliable knowledge, and even further to a knowledge-based love of God.

The most important Cartesian thinker of the 17th century, Malebranche has also developed a concept of the love of God as the *most perfect* being, and it will be fruitful to have a look at this concept, and to determine its relationship to Descartes' *philoteist* concept and Pascal's reproach for it from the point of view of the relationship between feeling and knowing.

Similarly to Descartes, Malebranche also presupposed that God loves us first, and our task is to find the adequate response to his gratuitous love. The starting point of his philosophy of love is the presence of *natural inclinations* "in" the will that direct the intellect to have its *general* tendency to knowledge focused on *particular* objects. They are the impressions of God's will in the mind that God gives us to provide the means through which we are directed toward the good in the deepest layer of our being. Thus, there is a peculiar circularity in Malebranche's concept of love as well, although not identical with the one we have seen in Descartes: God impresses the inclinations in the human will as acts of His *gratuitous* love to render us capable of acting as He expects us to act, namely as His representatives in this world, guiding the worldly events to their ends that are natural, on the one hand, but "provisioned", as it were in a theological and teleological way, on the other. As Malebranche formulates:

"The love of the good *in general* is the source of all our *particular* loves because, in effect, this love is but our will, for, [...] the will is nothing other than the continuous impression of the Author of nature that leads the mind of man toward the good in general."¹¹ (Malebranche 1997, Ch. 1, § 3, 267)

What we have in Descartes as the continuous creation of both bodily and mental events and processes, becomes focused on the mental sphere in Malebranche. However, there is also a sharper contrast between them. Descartes as "philoteist" interprets the relationship between God and the human being in *general philosophical* terms, disregarding its *unique character* from the religious point of view

¹¹ Emphases added.

whereas for Malebranche, the *exclusivity* of this relationship is the indispensable basis of our whole thinking especially in the moral domain. For, it is by way of “the grace of Jesus Christ” that we “resist the disorderly pleasures” (Malebranche 1992, 1052)¹². The medicaments Malebranche offers against exorbitant passions rely on the *supernatural* grace that appears *exclusively in Jesus Christ*, the real cause of enlightened joy in us, human beings.

In spite of this clear line of argument that has its foundation in the transcendence of God, in his *Traité de l'amour de Dieu* Malebranche expressly holds that the divine *perfection attracts* man and *incites* him to *love Him* in a *natural* manner.

“[B]ecause the Order [...] is nothing but the relation between the divine perfections, [...] it is clear that the love of Order is but the love of God and of all things, in so far as we consider them through their relation to God. Because loving the Order is nothing but loving God and all things in so far as they stay in relation to the divine perfections [...]” (Malebranche 1992, 1050)

As the first step of explaining the arousal of the love of God as a transcendence-based and a natural event at the same time, Malebranche maintains that God loves himself because He takes joy in Himself: the beauty of the orderly relation of His own perfections makes Him feel pleasure. And we love Him because He continually ingrains in us the natural inclination to love Him. Things attracting us express this inclination *due to their place in the hierarchy of perfection*, i.e., in proportion to the things' *own* perfection, to their own relationship to God. As already mentioned, however, an essential feature of Malebranche's explanation is his connecting this *natural* love to the *gratuitous divine love* expressed in Jesus Christ. Its apex is the point where it incites us to love God *as charitable*, which is *different* from the love of God *as the highest good*. It corresponds rather to the love of *justice*, “love of the Order,” because

“the idea of God as the highest justice is more apt to regulate our love than all other ideas of God that our imagination could make corrupt, in this way evoking illusions in us.” (*Ibid.*)

¹² *Traité de l'amour de Dieu*, my translations.

As for the above mentioned sharper contrast between Malebranche and Descartes, we can characterise it by way of a reference to their different accounts of the perspective of this-worldly existence, on the one hand, and that of the afterlife in heaven, on the other. Descartes concentrates on the former whereas Malebranche tries to conceive the latter *philosophically*:

“Now there is a fight between the love of beatitude and that of perfection, because the present age is the time of merit, and the aim of the soul’s being in her body is to be put on the test.” (Malebranche 1992, 1055)

Malebranche speaks about the saints not as a *philotheist* such as Descartes, who confines his perspective to the this-worldly existence but in a *theo-logical* manner. It is the perspective of the life to come that Malebranche articulates:

“But in the heavens all that we will like will render us more perfect: all our pleasures will be pure, and we will be united with the true cause that produces them.” (Malebranche 1992, 1055 sq.)

He adds to it that the soul finds its satisfaction in this good due to its unification with it. When speaking about the unification, he even embraces the terminology of the annihilation of the soul used by the contemporary partisans of the idea of *amour pur* (Cf. Malebranche 1992, 1056). When he talks about the *annihilation* of the lover it is the *theological* reformulation of what Descartes wrote about devotion *philosophically* in a *philotheist* manner. Thus, in spite of his involving in the philosophical discourse the life-to-come in heaven, Malebranche remains loyal to the basic Cartesian idea of the ego as a centre of value in its own right. The pleasure of enjoying the order of the divine perfections, “this infinitely sweet and calm pleasure”, the tasting of “even the substance of the divine being itself”, remains intact after the lover has transformed himself in the beloved *together with the will*, due to Malebranche’s concept of the love of God as a *non-natural* love: the act of the will cannot be annihilated. He believes that both the freedom *and* the purity of the love of God must be retained, and they must be harmonized:

“The love of beatitude is a natural impression; [...] Love of the objective beatitude, love of God is my choice [...]. Pure love is nothing but the perfect conformity of our wills to God’s will.” (Malebranche 1992, 1057-8)

Although Malebranche emphasises the independence of the act of the will when loving, his concept of love as a distinguished feeling remains bound to the accomplishment of the intellect necessary to identify the objective, as opposed to an illusory, perfection, beatitude. Between Pascal who unanimously expresses his *deeply-felt* religiosity, and Descartes the *philotheist* guided by the intellect to the love of the most perfect being Malebranche occupies the middle place of a *theo-logically-minded* philosopher.

Having had a look at two versions of the characteristically 17th century concepts of love with respect to their different ways of distinguishing cognition as opposed to feeling, we can now turn to the 20th century, the thinkers who contributed in a significant way to the rearrangement of these two modes of being-in-the-world. Some of these thinkers also compared their own concepts with the ideas of 17th century thinkers.

As the not haphazardly chosen term “being-in-the-world” suggests, Heidegger is the first thinker whom I intend to mention. One way of conceiving his early *chef-d’œuvre* *Being and Time* is to consider it an important document of an “emotivist turn”. Heidegger himself emphasises this turn as partly an accomplishment by, partly a promise of his existential analysis of *Dasein*.

“The phenomena [the different modes of State-of-mind <*Befindlichkeit*>] have long been well-known ontically under the terms *affects* and *feelings* and have always been under consideration in philosophy. It is not an accident that the earliest systematic interpretation of affects [...] is not treated in the framework of ‘psychology’. Aristotle investigates the *páthé* (affects) in the second book of his *Rhetoric*. [...] The basic ontological interpretation of the affective life in general has been able to make scarcely one forward step worthy of mention since Aristotle. On the contrary, affects and feelings come under the theme of psychical phenomena, functioning as a third class of these, usually along with ideation [*Vorstellen*] and volition. They sink to the level of accompanying phenomena.

It has been one of the merits of phenomenological research that it has again brought these phenomena more unrestrictedly into our sight. Not only that: Scheler, accepting the challenges of Augustine and Pascal, has guided the problematic to a consideration of how acts which 'represent' and acts which 'take an interest' are interconnected in their foundations." (Heidegger 2001, 178)

In Heidegger's view, therefore, no forward step was taken in the theory of affects after Aristotle. Although he mentions Augustine and Pascal as exceptions, the only thing he must have had in mind is that they are less to be blamed for the overall failure than the other thinkers from Aristotle to Scheler. Scheler himself appears in *Being and Time* always as the phenomenologist who contributed most to the renewal of philosophy although he failed to recognise the necessity of fundamental ontology, which *Being and Time* was dedicated to. Heidegger's claim and even his wording reminds the reader to Kant famously convinced that in Logic, no further step was taken after Aristotle. Aristotle and Descartes were, therefore, the crucial figures in the opposite sense. Kant praises the "theoretical", Heidegger the "practical" philosophy of Aristotle while both were convinced that Descartes made capital errors: he substantialised the *ego cogitans* (Kant), on the one hand, and identified the extension and the extended substance with the world (Heidegger), on the other.

Today readers can, however, be surprised at seeing that Heidegger ignores the whole 17th century radical renewal of the theory of emotions¹³ – radical, insofar as its representatives even forged a new term for denoting in a morally neutral manner the affective phenomena. The word "emotion" that was only used in political contexts became a term in the theory of affects after Montaigne's *Essays* and their contemporary English translation.¹⁴ This surprising *lacuna* will, however, cease to be a riddle as soon as we remember how unanimously the thinkers of the whole "phenomenological movement" have been ready to blame Descartes and his contemporaries for the alienation of the human being from herself and making her analysable in the same

¹³ Not to mention Thomas Aquinas' theory of affects in the second part of his *Summa theologiae*.

¹⁴ Cf. Boros 2011, 182 sqq, with references to G. Soós and H.-J. Diller.

manner as the inorganic bodies are treated. Descartes' promise in the *Lettre-Preface* to his *Passions of the Soul* to treat the passions *en Physicien* instead of analysing them *en Orateur* or *en Philosophe moral* means for the phenomenologists the extension of the scope of natural sciences to the human being, and so the failure to take cognizance of the radical difference between the mode of being of a human being and that of the inorganic objects of the world.

This being said, we would expect that at least our contemporary cognitive scientists, the heirs of the treatment *en Physicien* in Descartes and Hobbes or *en Géomètre* in Spinoza¹⁵ do fill the *lacuna* and duly pay respect to them. Yet, this is only more or less the case. Famously or infamously, Damasio seems to be biased so much by Descartes' mind-body dualism and the thesis of their real distinction that he even titled his otherwise pioneering book "*Descartes' Error*", and thus he failed to grasp those features of Descartes' theory that in a sense prefigured his own concepts. And here I return to the topic of the seminar hosting the original version of this paper, "feel to know" that I have arbitrarily modified in my title to have "feel (unfree) to know (yourself)!" Today scientists, including Damasio who do research in the affective phenomena maintain that it is not at our disposal to choose our starting point, *to feel* or *not to feel*, to accept or to suppress our feelings before knowing. There is a structure in the brain the function of which is to monitor the whole body and its co-habitation and collaboration with its surrounding in order to be able to adjust the bodily processes to the from moment to moment renewed circumstances. Damasio calls the basic feeling originating from this monitoring the *feeling of being*, which is the basis for the function he terms "somatic marker", a function of the feelings to serve as a foundation for any further rational deliberation.

In my view, we can consider Descartes prefiguring this thesis insofar as we find a parallel "feeling of being" in Descartes, at least functionally, not anatomically. In Part 5 of the treatise *On Method* he explains that reason is the "universal instrument" that makes the difference between animals he identifies with automata and real human beings. Human beings can fit themselves in the continually changing

¹⁵ Cf. the Preface to Spinoza's *Ethics*.

environment, both physical and linguistic by virtue of their faculty of adjusting their physical and linguistic behaviour to the changing situations, whereas animals are capable of performing only the same actions the performance of which has been programmed in them. However, such a continual adjustment even to the continually changing situations cannot be accounted for without a basic *feeling of being* in a sense not dissimilar to that of Damasio, in spite of the fact that Descartes and Damasio link it to different domains within their basically different physiological-neurological theories. One can even go further and maintain that there is also an analogue of the “marker” in Descartes’ philosophy, although it is much less “somatic” than in Damasio, in spite of the fact that it also depends from the corporeal nature of human beings. The theorem in which I believe we can discover a “disguised” marker is the will’s infinite extension overcoming the finite intellect’s *dictamina* by virtue of the inner drive to make decisions even in situations where the intellect is unable to know the circumstances as fully as it is needed in order to make a considered decision. The last passage of the *Meditations* talks about this inner drive as a necessary feature of human existence originating in its finite nature:

“But since the pressure of things to be done does not always allow us to stop and make such a meticulous check, it must be admitted that in this human life we are often liable to make mistakes about particular things, and we must acknowledge the weakness of our nature.” (CSM 2, 62)

It is revealing that Descartes calls this drive weakness, and circumscribes it with terms alluding to negativity such as “pressure of things”, “liable to make mistakes”, “weakness”, and so it seems that he would rather eliminate it, considered *en Physicien*. Yet, this pressure can also be regarded as the warrant of our flexibility we are badly in need of in order to make decisions in most of the situations of everyday life characterised precisely by not having enough rational knowledge to decide. And so we can discover in Descartes the functional analogue of Damasio’s somatic marker.¹⁶

¹⁶ This makes me think that the unanimous protest of the *dix-septemistes* against Damasio’s one-sided treatment of Descartes was perfectly justified, on the one hand,

Approaching the conclusion, we can also mention Sartre in this context to point out a feature of his and Heidegger's existential analytic that could also be transposed on the "ontic level", and so interpreted as presupposing a kind of "feeling of being". When Sartre summarizes the outlines of his phenomenological psychology, he says:

"We have said in our introduction that the signification of a fact of consciousness comes down to this: that it always indicates the total humanreality which becomes moved, attentive, perceiving, willing, etc. The study of emotions has quite verified this principle: an emotion refers back to what it signifies. And, in effect, what it signifies is the totality of the relationships of the human reality to the world." (Sartre 1993, 93)

What both Sartre, and Heidegger call "facticity" on the "ontological level", to use Heidegger's terminology, means, I suppose, on the "ontic level" that the affective-behavioural responses to our respective ever-transforming situations are always and principally the results emerging from our becoming aware of the new situations that presupposes necessarily a previous "feeling of being", feeling of, and partaking in the process whereby the new situations have become given *for us*.

To sum up my argument, first I hinted at the opposition of the traditional and the contemporary views concerning the hierarchy of feeling and knowing. Second, I differentiated between Pascal's, Descartes', and Malebranche's stances toward this problem, showing that all of them acknowledge some kind of priority of feeling in our this-worldly state although following different motives – religious, philotheist, theo-logical – and – at least Descartes and Malebranche – stressing the regrettable and provisional character of this priority. Third I referred to 20th century thinkers and scholars who are not at all concerned with the life-to-come in heaven, and unanimously distinguish feeling against knowing, although they use very different methods, scientific on the one hand, and phenomenological, on the other. Finally,

and that, on the other hand, perhaps this led to composing his book on Spinoza, another 17th century thinker strongly occupied with the study and arrangement of affects, whom he did credit with prefiguring his own theory of emotions.

however, I pointed out those features of Descartes' theory that can be considered prefiguring some of the 20th century tenets.

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DESCARTES ON WHAT “TRULY BELONGS” TO US

SAJA PARVIZIAN¹

Abstract

In recent literature commentators have challenged the standard interpretation that the Cartesian Self is a *res cogitans*. Various modifications have been proposed: the will should be regarded as an essential feature of thought as well (not just the intellect), and even the body – in some sense – belongs to the Cartesian Self. While these modifications are important, commentators have neglected Descartes’ wholly different conception of the Self in the *Passions of the Soul*. In his definition of generosity, Descartes claims that the Cartesian Self is a *res volans*: the *only thing that truly belongs* to the generous person is her *free will*. I aim to unpack what Descartes means in the “truly belongs” locution (TBL), ultimately arguing for what I call the *weak essentialist reading*. Descartes’ grounds for claiming that free will truly belongs to the Cartesian Self is that free will constitutes the *activity* – not *passivity* – of the mind. And that is the most important property in the essence of a mental substance.

Keywords: *res volans, res cogitans, Cartesian Self, essentialist reading.*

1. *Res Cogitans* or *Res Volans*?

On the canonical understanding, the Cartesian Self is a *res cogitans* (see, e.g., *Preface to the reader*, AT VII: 7-8/CSM II: 7; *Third Meditation*, AT VII 50/CSM II 35; *Sixth Meditation*, AT VII 86/CSM II 59)². In recent

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² I employ the following abbreviations for primary texts: ‘AG’: *Philosophical Essays* (cited by page), Ariew and Garber (1989); ‘AT’: *Oeuvres de Descartes* (cited by volume and page), Adam and Tannery (1996); ‘CSM’: *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (cited by

years, however, commentators have started to challenge the standard view, arguing that Descartes recognizes different conceptions of the Self. Much of this important work revolves around the nature of the *res cogitans*, and whether the body is constitutive of the Cartesian Self as well. For example, some commentators have argued that the *res cogitans* should not be considered solely as an intellectual substance, for the will is also constitutive of the Cartesian Self (Mihali 2011). But much of the recent discussion aims at unpacking the sense in which the body belongs to the Cartesian Self as well, which is purportedly learned in the Sixth Meditation (Brown 2006, 2014; Chamberlain 2019, 2020; cf. Simmons 2017).

However, in the *Passions of the Soul*, Descartes offers a wholly alternative account of the Cartesian Self that has, for the most part, been neglected by commentators. This account is *prima facie* inconsistent with these alternative interpretations, and seems to turn that entire discussion on its head. In his account of the first component of the *passion* and *virtue* of generosity (*générosité*), Descartes claims that the only thing that *truly belongs* to us is *our freedom to dispose of our volitions*, that is, free will (*Passions* III.153, AT XI: 445-6/CSM I: 384). Insofar as Descartes is making a claim about what truly belongs to *us*, he should be read as making a claim about the nature of the Cartesian Self. This constitutes his last published claim about the Self, and thus deserves our attention. Following some commentators who have picked up on this claim – but not necessarily all of the revisionary implications – we might say that Descartes’ final view is that the true Cartesian Self is a *res volans*, not a *res cogitans* (Boehm 2014; Brown 2006; Mihali 2011; Parvizian 2016).

The key to understanding the first component, I contend, is the *truly belongs locution* (TBL). But in the *Passions*, Descartes is unclear about his intended meaning of TBL; indeed, he uses TBL only once in that treatise. In other texts, however, Descartes frequently uses similar locutions – *really does belong*, *nothing else belongs*, etc. – to make a metaphysical claim about what constitutes the essence of a substance³.

volume and page), Cottingham *et al.* (1985); ‘CSMK’: *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* [correspondence] (cited by page), Cottingham *et al.* (1991).

³ See, e.g., *Preface to the reader*, AT VII: 7-8/CSM II: 7; *Synopsis to the Meditations*, AT VII: 12-3/CSM II: 9; *Second Meditation*, AT VII: 28-9/CSM II: 19, AT VII: 31/CSM II: 20; *Fifth*

But simply reading the *Passions* in light of those unique TBL-type expressions generates an interpretive problem. If free will is the only thing that *truly* belongs to us, then it *seems* that all the other features that are standardly attributed to the essence of the Cartesian Self, and all the features that commentators have tried to now build into the Cartesian Self, do not truly belong to it.

I aim to reconstruct Descartes' intended understanding of TBL and thus an interpretation of the first component of generosity. To be clear, this is a speculative and reconstructive task. Nowhere does Descartes explicitly flag how we ought to understand TBL in the *Passions of the Soul*, although many texts are helpful. But as indicated earlier, Descartes does use similar locutions elsewhere, which may serve as a starting point. My strategy is to identify the problems and virtues of two extant readings of TBL (Boehm 2014; Parvizian 2016), to help us identify a path forward to the right interpretation. My standard for establishing Descartes' considered view is the right combination of textual evidence against systematic considerations.

The task of achieving a plausible and consistent interpretation should not, however, leave us with a reading of TBL that loses its moral significance and depth. I will not claim, for example, that the addition of "truly" was merely rhetorical flourish, not indicating anything of philosophical and moral significance. That *would* be a solution to the purported inconsistency, in some sense, but not Descartes' considered view. Rather, my aim is to find a reading of TBL that is (1) consistent with Descartes' claims elsewhere about the nature of the Self, (2) fits with his fundamental epistemological and metaphysical commitments, and (3) has explanatory power in his ethics.

To anticipate – salvaging pieces from Boehm (2014) and Parvizian's (2016) readings of TBL – I will propose a *weak essentialist reading* of TBL. The weak essentialist reading depends on an implicit Cartesian distinction

Meditation, AT VII: 65/CSM II: 45; *First Replies*, AT VII: 115/CSM II: 83, AT VII: 121/CSM II: 86; *Second Replies*, AT VII: 149-60/CSM II: 107, AT VII: 161/CSM II: 114, *Third Replies*, AT VII: 175-6/CSM II: 124, *Fourth Replies*, AT VII: 219/CSM II: 155, AT VII: 223-4/CSM II: 157-8, AT VII: 225/CSM II: 158, AT VII: 226/CSM II: 159, AT VII: 228/CSM II: 160; *Fifth Replies*, AT VII: 355/CSM II: 245, AT VII: 257/CSM II: 247; *The Search for Truth*, AT X: 520-1 CSM II: 414.

between an *essential property* and a *truly essential property*. Descartes is claiming, on my view, that free will truly belongs to us because it is the source of our *activity*. But this does not preclude that other properties that are *passive* in nature – e.g. the intellect or even the body – belong to us as well in some sense.

II. Desiderata on The First Component of Generosity

Descartes claims that generosity,

“Which causes a person’s self-esteem to be as great as it may legitimately be, has only two components. The first consists in his knowing [*connaît*] that nothing truly belongs to him [*qu’il n’y a rien qui véritablement lui appartienne*] but this freedom to dispose his volitions, and that he ought to be praised or blamed for no other reason than his using this freedom well or badly. The second consists in his feeling within himself a firm and constant resolution to use it well – that is, never to lack the will to undertake and carry out whatever he judges to be best. To do that is to pursue virtue in a perfect manner.” (*Passions* III.153, AT XI: 445-6/CSM I: 384)

My focus for now is the first component, not the second component concerning the pursuit of virtue. The first component actually involves a conjunction:

[FIRST COMPONENT]: For any generous subject, *S*, *S* knows that:

- (1) The only property truly belonging to *S* is free will.
- (2) The only property for which *S* can be legitimately praised or blamed for is *S*’s use of free will. (cf. Shapiro 1999)

A few observations are in order. First, notice that the first component is *epistemic*. It consists of two distinct items of knowledge: (1) and (2). Insofar as the first component amounts to *Cartesian knowledge*, we must ask what *kind* of knowledge is involved here. The *Passions* is written in French, and Descartes uses ‘*connaît*’ here. As is well-known, however, Descartes has less conceptual and linguistic machinery in French to express the subtleties of his epistemology. Descartes’ technical epistemological terms are offered in Latin, where he distinguishes

(broadly speaking) between *scientia/perfect scire* (perfect knowledge), *cognitio* (awareness), and *persuasio* (opinion or conviction)⁴. We must decide (or at least assume) what kind of knowledge Descartes has in mind here. This is crucial, for in Descartes' classic philosophical system, metaphysical claims can be read off the right kind of epistemic claims (in particular, *scientia* claims). Second, *S*'s knowledge of (1) is clearly primary and explanatory of her knowledge of (2). *S* cannot know (2) before she knows (1)⁵. This priority relation demands explanation as well. Third, we want to know how the generous subject, *S*, attains knowledge of (1) and (2). Fourth, we need a specific understanding of TBL that is consistent with Descartes' fundamental epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical commitments.

I propose, then, the following (minimal) desiderata on a satisfactory theory of the FIRST COMPONENT. While I think there is some proper order of discovery here, I will leave that open for now. Thus, in no specific order, we need an account of:

1. *Epistemic Status*: the kind of knowledge possessed by the generous subject, *S*.
2. *Epistemic Relation*: the relation between *S*'s knowledge of (1) and (2).
3. *Acquisition*: how *S* acquires knowledge of (1) and (2).
4. *TBL Unpacked*: a specific and systematic understanding of TBL.

In general, the few commentators who have tackled the FIRST COMPONENT head straight to an account of *TBL Unpacked*, based on some (usually quick) analysis of *Epistemic Status*, *Epistemic Relation*, or *Acquisition*.⁶ Dialectically, I would like to examine some of those interpretations first, so as to demonstrate textual and systematic

⁴ For an analysis of the different epistemic terms in Descartes' epistemology, see Clark (2019).

⁵ Some readers may not agree that there is such an epistemic priority relation between (1) and (2) because there is no distinction between (1) and (2). However, the texts here are limited, and I see no texts that would suggest such a collapse. Moreover, the content of (1) and (2) on just a baseline reading are different: (1) is an epistemic claim about the properties of a subject, and (2) is an epistemic claim about moral responsibility.

⁶ Boehm (2014), Shapiro (2005), and Parvizian (2016) all have thoughts on *Acquisition*, although Boehm is the only commentator who addresses *Epistemic Status*.

problems with those interpretations, which will then shed light on a way forward. Then, I will begin working through the desiderata on my own, building out my alternative interpretation. The proper order of discovery will be revealed after working through the existent interpretations.

III. The Essentialist and Evaluative Readings for TBL *Unpacked*

Generosity has been discussed in a variety of contexts, and commentators are, of course, aware of TBL. However, there are only two commentators who have tried to examine TBL in any detail, namely, Omri Boehm (2014) and Saja Parvizian (2016). Boehm offers an *essentialist reading*, while Parvizian – in response to Boehm – offers an *evaluative reading*. Both interpretations have virtues. But I will argue, on textual and systematic grounds, that both interpretations are problematic and should be ultimately abandoned⁷.

III.i Boehm's Essentialist Reading

According to Boehm, TBL should be read metaphysically, along the same lines of Descartes' other uses of TBL in his metaphysics. As Boehm writes, "If property φ is the only property truly belonging to S , it is also the only property belonging to its nature or essence" (2014, 718). Accordingly, he offers the following interpretation of TBL *Unpacked*:

"If I come to experience *générosité* – know that nothing truly belongs to me but my freedom – I come to know what essentially I am. Using strong terms such as 'know' (*connaît*) and 'truly' (*véritablement*), the definition of *générosité* defines not merely what *générosité* is but what we are." (2014, 718-19; cf. Cassirer 1995, 93)

This is the *essentialist reading*:

[ESSENTIALIST READING]: property φ is the only property truly belonging to subject S IFF φ alone constitutes the essence of S . (*Ibid.*)

⁷ I will follow Parvizian's (2016) reconstruction of the *essentialist* and *evaluative* readings, and also present his objection to the essentialist reading, as I agree with him here. However, I will present an independent argument against Parvizian's *evaluative reading*.

A few clarifications are in order. The ESSENTIALIST READING is inferred from an epistemological interpretation of the FIRST COMPONENT, that is, an account of *Epistemic Status*. On Boehm's reading of the French, Descartes is claiming that the generous subject, *S*, has *scientia* of (1) and (2) in the FIRST COMPONENT. And *scientia* that *p*, of course, allows one to make a metaphysical claim that *p* is the case (i.e. the referent of *p* exists). In other words, Descartes is implying that free will (or freedom) is the only property that metaphysically belongs to *S*. Given the essentialist reading of TBL, this means that free will alone constitutes the essence of *S*⁸.

The ESSENTIALIST READING has virtues. For example, it gives us an explicit account of TBL *Unpacked* and *Epistemic Status* (I will not address whether that is right or not, I am just noting that certain desiderata are being addressed). However, following Parvizian (2016, 232-3), I agree that the essentialist reading is untenable. Knowledge of an essence is determined by a clear and distinct perception. If the generous subject, *S*, has *scientia* that the only property truly belonging to *S* is free will (1), then *S* must have a clear and distinct perception that the essence of *S* is free will. But possession of a clear and distinct perception of (1) requires that *S* is capable of *distinctly* perceiving (1), that is, *excluding* other properties – via the *method of exclusion* – from the nature of the Self (*Principles* I.60, AT VIIIA: 28-9 CSM I: 213; *Fourth Replies*, AT VII: 223/CSM II: 157)⁹.

But Descartes is explicit, in many places, about the metaphysical essence of the Self. For example: “*my essence* consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing [*res cogitans*]” (Sixth Meditation, AT VII: 78/CSM II: 54; emphasis added). A *Res cogitans* possesses various faculties: intellect, will, the senses, memory, and imagination. Now

⁸ It is important to note that Boehm is not making a claim about judgments or volitions that are issued by free will. Rather, the claim is that the faculty of free will (from which these mental states proceed) constitutes the essence of the mind. As a referee has rightly pointed out, if Boehm claimed that judgments were essential to the mind, then that would include an aspect of the intellect, for judgments are a combination of both volitions and perceptions. Indeed, that is an alternative reading, and one that I will not consider, for it will be *a fortiori* ruled out by my preferred weak essentialist reading (see section VI, and footnote 11).

⁹ On the method of exclusion and theory of distinction see Wells (1966); Murdoch (1993); Nolan (1997); Hoffman (2002).

Descartes does claim that some of these faculties – e.g. the senses and imagination – are not essential to the mind because they have physiological origins: “I can clearly and distinctly understand myself as a whole without these faculties” (*Ibid.*). However, the intellect and the will are essential attributes of the mind (Sixth Meditation, AT VII: 72-3/CSM II: 50-1; *Principles* I.32, AT VIII: 17/CSM I: 204). In short, the method of exclusion must fail for the ESSENTIALIST READING: one cannot clearly and distinctly perceive the intellect without the will and vice versa. The intellect and the will are, as Descartes would put it, *conceptually* – but not *modally* – *distinct* (*Principles* I.61-2, AT VIII: 29-30/CSM I: 213-5). But here, following Hoffman (2002) – pace Nelson (1997) and Nolan (1997) – I would claim that a conceptual distinction entails *inseparability*, not *identity*. As such, the intellect and will are metaphysically inseparable, but not identical. In short, Boehm’s reading does entail an *ultima facie* tension between the *Passions* and the *Mediations*¹⁰.

III.ii Parvizian’s Evaluative Reading

Parvizian’s (2016) alternative reading reduces TBL to knowledge of a normative claim grounded in the true source of legitimate praise and blame. According to Parvizian, the key to TBL *Unpacked* is *Passions* III.152, which immediately precedes the account of generosity:

“I see only one thing in us which could give us good reason for esteeming ourselves, namely, the exercise of our free will and the control we have over our volitions. For we can reasonably be praised or blamed only for actions that depend upon this free will.” (AT XI: 445/CSM I: 384)

On Parvizian’s reading (2016, 234-5), the reason why Descartes says that the only thing that truly belongs to us is free will, is because we ought to only be praised or blamed for how we use our free will. Put differently, the generous subject, *S*, knows that free will is the only thing that truly belongs to her, because free will is the only legitimate source

¹⁰ Boehm is aware of the tension, but claims he cannot full address why Descartes’ views may have changed over time. For his preliminary response see (2014, 719). For Parvizian’s response to Boehm’s – albeit first pass – explanation see (2016, 233-4)

of self-esteem. Only our volitions are under our control and power, while all of our other properties are ultimately circumstantial and outside the purview of the will (cf. Letter to Princess Elizabeth 4 August 1645, AT IV: 264–5/CSMK: 257). The other aspects of my Self do not truly belong to me, because the Cartesian Self cannot legitimately be held accountable for them.

This is the *evaluative reading*:

[EVALUATIVE READING]: property φ is the only property truly belonging to subject S IFF φ alone is worthy of esteem by S . (Parvizian 2016, 235)

The EVALUATIVE READING is supposed to be preferable to the ESSENTIALIST READING because it does not generate a tension between the *Meditations* and the *Passions*. While the EVALUATIVE READING admits that free will is essential to the mind, it does not deny that other faculties can belong to it as well (but perhaps in a different sense, especially when it comes to the body). As Parvizian puts it: “Metaphysically speaking, we are *res cogitantes*. Morally speaking, we are *res volantes*” (2016, 235; cf. Brown 2006, 25).

While the EVALUATIVE READING clearly has virtues as well, it is also untenable. Parvizian violates the priority relation between conjuncts (1) and (2) in the FIRST COMPONENT. Recall the desideratum of *Epistemic Relation*: we wanted an account of how (1), i.e. S 's knowledge that the only property truly belonging to her is free will, is prior to her knowledge of (2), i.e. S 's knowledge that the only property for which S can be legitimately praised or blamed for is S 's use of free will. But on Parvizian's reading the knowledge in (2) actually explains how we should read the knowledge in (1) – indeed it seems that (1) actually reduces to (2) on Parvizian's reading. We ultimately did not achieve the right analysis for TBL *Unpacked*.

In the remainder of the paper, I turn to my alternative reading for TBL *Unpacked*, the *weak essentialist reading*. On the weak essentialist reading, the intellect and even the body can belong to the Cartesian self. However, there remains a sense in which free will truly belongs – in a deeper sense – to the Cartesian self. This is because free will constitutes the *activity* of the Self (whereas the intellect and body constitute its

passivity). In trying to identify the true nature of the Self, it is our active – not passive – nature that matters.

In arriving at this reading, I propose the following order of discovery: *Acquisition*, *Epistemic Status*, *Epistemic Relation*, and finally TBL *Unpacked*. My rationale for this order is as follows: by examining Descartes' method for generosity, we will get a sense of the epistemic requirements for inducing generosity in the soul. By understanding these epistemic requirements, we will be in a position to unpack the *Epistemic Status* of the FIRST COMPONENT. Once we are settled on *Epistemic Status* then we will be able to unveil the right reading of TBL *Unpacked*, that is, an account of (1) in the FIRST COMPONENT. And once that is established, we can quickly see the *Epistemic Relation* between (1) and (2). It is important to stay faithful to this order of discovery, and to not beg the question. That is, build in the desired reading of TBL from the get-go, e.g. at the stage of analyzing *Acquisition*.

IV. *Acquisition*

There are currently three interpretations of how generosity is acquired (Shapiro 2005, 2008; Boehm 2015; Parvizian 2016). I will assume – following Parvizian – that Shapiro and Boehm's accounts are problematic. According to Shapiro, generosity is acquired in the Fourth Meditation, while Boehm claims that generosity is acquired in the Second Meditation. Parvizian offers a close analysis of Descartes' account of *Acquisition*, which shows that the unique epistemic requirements for *Acquisition* preclude the meditator from acquiring generosity in either the Second or Fourth Meditation. The meditator simply does not have enough on the table – *epistemically speaking* – to know that free will is the only thing that truly belongs to her, regardless of how one decides to read *Epistemic Status*, *Epistemic Relation*, and TBL *Unpacked*. Nonetheless, while I will follow Parvizian's reconstruction of the method for acquiring generosity, I will modify it as well so that it helps us understand *Epistemic Status*, which Parvizian does not address. Finally, while I will explain Descartes' account of *Acquisition*, I will not give an account as to why *Acquisition* give rise to the FIRST COMPONENT, for

there is a worry of begging the question. Methodologically, it is best to address *Epistemic Status*, and then TBL *Unpacked*.

In *Passions* III.161, Descartes offers an account of *Acquisition*:

“If we occupy ourselves frequently in considering the nature of free will and the many advantages which proceed from a firm resolution to make good use of it – while also considering, on the other hand, the many vain and useless cares which trouble ambitious people – we may arouse the passion of generosity in ourselves and then acquire the virtue.” (AT XI: 453-4/CSM I: 388)

According to Parvzian, *Acquisition* consists of two distinct “meditations on the will” (2016, 224-5) First, there is the *metaphysical meditation on the will*, which involves frequent meditation on the nature of free will. Second, there is the *consequential meditation on the will*, that is, frequent meditation on the advantages and disadvantages that come from a virtuous and vicious use of the will, respectively.

As Parvzian argues, the metaphysical meditation on the will does, in some sense, occur in the Fourth Meditation (*Ibid.*) However, the consequential meditation on the will presupposes both a certain degree of epistemic progress, as well as a combined theoretical and empirical capacity to evaluate the actions of others that the meditator is simply not in a position to accomplish.

Given that the consequential meditation on the will asks us to meditate on the virtuous and vicious behavior of other moral agents, we must know how to identify virtue and vice. And that requires knowing the distinction between vice and virtue, which also requires understanding of a whole host of truths about the existence of God and divine providence, the real distinction between mind and body, the immensity of the universe, and the interconnectedness of the parts of the universe – which Descartes describes as *knowledge of the truth* in a letter to Princess Elizabeth (Letter to Princess Elizabeth 15 September 1645, AT IV: 291-5/CSMK: 265-7). Knowing these truths is necessary for theoretically distinguishing between virtue and vice. But the consequential meditation on the will requires us to use our knowledge of the truth to evaluate the actions of others, which involves a whole host of sensory, visual, and imaginative perceptions that are, arguably, not of the clear and distinct variety. In short, while there are *a priori*

truths involved in the consequential meditation on the will, this meditation is also an a *posteriori* activity.

V. Epistemic Status

The metaphysical meditation on the will is grounded in *scientia* of the existence and nature of free will. But there may be a worry that the consequential meditation on the will precludes *Acquisition* from generating *scientia* in the FIRST COMPONENT. This is because the distinct truths that comprise what Descartes calls "knowledge of the truth" cannot all amount to *scientia*. The existence of God and the real distinction between mind and body do amount to *scientia*. However, the knowledge of physics that Descartes mentions in the September 1645 Letter to Elizabeth (i.e. *Principles* III), and the interconnectedness of the universe falls under the scope of natural (and possibly moral and political) philosophy. But as Descartes claims at the end of *Principles* IV, scientific knowledge is, at best, *morally certain* (*Principles* IV.205–6, AT VIII A: 327–9/CSM I: 289–291).

As such, the so-called "theoretical" knowledge required for the consequential meditation on the will does not, on a whole, amount to a body of *scientia*. Moreover, the consequential meditation on the will requires applying this theoretical knowledge to assess a body of sensory, visual, and imaginative perceptions concerning the actions of other moral agents. Given that non-clear and distinct perceptions are figuring into the grounds for our first-order moral judgments about other agents' moral activities, it seems that the consequential meditation on the will cannot lead us to *scientia*, even though these first-order moral judgments are in part guided by items of *scientia*. Let alone the fact that Descartes clearly claims elsewhere that all first-order moral judgments can only achieve moral certainty, not absolute certainty (*Principles* IV.205, AT VIII A: 327/CSM I: 289, fn. 2; see also Letter to Princess Elizabeth 6 October 1645, AT IV 308/CSMK: 269).

However, it would be rash to say that meditating on some combination of true and absolutely certain judgments (*scientia*) and morally certain first-order moral judgments could not induce a distinct item of *scientia*, i.e. *scientia* that the only thing that truly belongs to the

generous subject, *S*, is her free will. Indeed, if we think of Cartesian meditation as consisting in a set of well-ordered *cognitive exercises* (Hatfield 1986), as opposed to *demonstrative proofs* require fully justified premises, then one can read the *Meditations* as a set of cognitive exercises that require the meditator to engage a variety of content-types (both clear and distinct, and obscure and confused). Such cognitive exercises can ultimately terminate in further clear and distinct perceptions and thus the acquisition of *scientia*.

In short, there is nothing about *Acquisition* – and Descartes' broader epistemological commitments – that would prevent *Acquisition* from generating an item of *scientia*. As such, I will follow Boehm here, and claim that the language used in describing the First Component – albeit vague in the French – is best interpreted in terms of *scientia*. But I should be clear that this is also a dialectical choice. The project at hand is most interesting when we read the FIRST COMPONENT as making a rigorous *scientia* claim. For if the FIRST COMPONENT merely amounts to (say) *cognitio*, then there really is *no tension* between the *Passions* and the *Meditations*. One could say that the meditator has *scientia* that she is a *res cogitans*, while the generous subject has *cognitio* that she is a *res volans*. While that is in some sense interesting, there is no inconsistency that needs to be explained away. Perhaps my preferred analysis of *Epistemic Status* is ultimately an assumption. If so, defending that assumption on independent grounds is a project for another day. For now, let us stay focused on the self-imposed challenge at hand, and play the game.

VI. TBL *Unpacked*

So, here is where we stand. The FIRST COMPONENT amounts to *scientia*. The generous subject, *S*, has *scientia* that the only thing that truly belongs to her is free will. But now recall my earlier methodological claim about the relationship between epistemic and metaphysical claims in Descartes' system. If a subject, *S*, has *scientia* that *p*, then *S* is entitled to make some kind of claim about the existence of the referent of *p*. In contemporary terminology, we might say that for Descartes, *scientia* is a *success term*. Suppose the meditator has *scientia* that *bodies exist*. This entails, metaphysically, that *bodies exist*. Similarly, if the FIRST

COMPONENT amounts to *scientia*, then it follows *metaphysically* that the only thing that truly belongs to the Cartesian Self is free will.

But now notice that the inconsistency Boehm faced between the *Passions* and the *Meditations* becomes lives again. Solving that inconsistency is where the prize lies. The *Passions* claims that the essence of the Cartesian Self is a *res volans*, whereas the *Meditations* claims that the essence of the Cartesian Self is a *res cogitans*. A *res volans*, it seems, excludes the intellect from its essence, whereas a *res cogitans* does not.

We can thread the needle. What we need is a distinction between what is *essential* (or metaphysically belongs) to the Self, and what is *truly essential* (or what truly metaphysically belongs). Indeed, I think this is the exact kind of distinction that Descartes is tacitly gesturing at in his account of generosity. Let us spell out the distinction on his behalf:

[ESSENTIAL PROPERTY]: property φ belongs to the essence of a substance, C , IFF φ cannot be conceptually excluded from a clear and distinct understanding of C .

[TRULY ESSENTIAL PROPERTY]: property φ truly belongs to the essence of a substance, C , IFF φ satisfies ESSENTIAL PROPERTY and has metaphysical priority within the essence of C .

ESSENTIAL PROPERTY is standard fare, and does not require defense. TRULY ESSENTIAL PROPERTY, however, requires defense.

In order to attribute TRULY ESSENTIAL PROPERTY to Descartes, we need evidence that he would acknowledge that there can be an ESSENTIAL PROPERTY that has *metaphysical priority* in the essence of a substance (more on the notion of 'metaphysical priority' below). I claim that he does. The avenue to seeing this is Descartes' distinction between *activity* and *passivity*, and implicitly the distinction he would make between *essential active properties* and *essential passive properties*¹¹.

¹¹ For texts on activity and passivity see, e.g., *Appendix to Fifth Objections and Replies*, AT VII: 206/CSM II: 271-2; *Passions* I.12, AT XI: 337/CSM I: 332-3; *Passions* I.13, AT XI:

According to Descartes, some properties instantiated in a substance (whatever those properties may be) are passive in nature. By 'passive' Descartes means that the property obtains in a substance due to that substance being affected by some other cause. For example, when body *A*'s motion causes motion in body *B*, we would say that body *A* is the *agent* and its motion an *action*, while body *B* is the *patient* and its change in motion a *passion*¹². We can make a structurally analogous distinction for mental states, particularly, sensations and passions or emotions (both of which are *passions* in a general sense). For example, when a distal body *A** causes damage to bodily part *B** of the mind-body composite, this ultimately terminates in the mind-body composite undergoing a *pain sensation, P*. Body *A** (say, a sword) is the *agent*, and its motion that causes the damage an *action*, while bodily part *B** (say, the abdomen) is a *patient* and the damage incurred (say, tissue damage) is a *passion*, which leads the nervous system to form a brain impression that gives rise to the pain, *P*.

In short, *passivity* consists in the capacity to undergo *passive perceptions* (note the distinction between passivity in general and token passive mental states). The mind's passivity is an ESSENTIAL PROPERTY of the mind, indeed it is required due to the very finitude of the mind. Of course, we can conceive of a disembodied mind that does not experience passions and sensations that have physiological origins. But even a disembodied mind that only has clear and distinct perceptions is still passive, for the mind is still be affected in clear and distinct perception. Indeed, the intellect is the ultimate source of the mind's passivity (*Principles* I.32, AT VIII A: 17/CSM I: 204), whether that mind is embodied or disembodied.

Conversely, some mental states are *actions*. These are *judgments or volitions*. Consider judgments. These are formed when the (free) will either affirms or denies some perception supplied by the intellect. The will is the *agent*, the judgment the *action*, and (although the details are

338/CSM I: 333; *Passions* I.41, AT XI: 359-60/CSM I: 343; *Rules*.XII, AT X: 412/CSM I: 40. See also fn. 9 below.

¹² I am not concerned with explaining the source of activity in *res extensa*, although that is a topic of extended discussion in Descartes' physics. See, e.g., Gabbey (1980), Garber (1992), Hatfield (1979), Hattab (2007).

tricky) in some sense we must say that the perception supplied by the intellect, or the *mind as a whole* is the *patient*. In short, the source of the mind-body composite's activity is the faculty of free will (note the distinction between activity in general and token active mental states). And the faculty of free will is clearly an ESSENTIAL PROPERTY of the mind. One cannot conceive of a mind without a will. As Descartes writes to Regius:

"For strictly speaking, understanding is the passivity of the mind and willing is its activity; but because we cannot will anything without understanding what we will, and we scarcely ever understand something without at the same time willing something, we do not easily distinguish in this matter passivity from activity." (Letter to Regius May 1641, AT III: 372/CSMK: 182)¹³

But the faculty of free will – that is, the source of the mind's activity – is also a TRULY ESSENTIAL PROPERTY, because it has metaphysical priority within the metaphysics of the mind. To be clear, by 'metaphysical priority', I do not mean causal, logical, or temporal priority. That is, I do mean that the activity of the mind is somehow causally responsible for the passivity of the mind, or that particular volitions are logically or temporally prior to perceptions. Rather, I mean that it is truly the activity of the mind that makes the mind a substance. The passivity of the mind is a necessary consequence of our finitude.

¹³ There are texts, of course, where Descartes says that ultimately *token* actions and passions are two sides of the same coin, i.e. they are identical in some sense and that when we think of a mental state or corporeal event as a passion or an action we are making some kind of *abstraction* (see, e.g., Letter to Hyperaspistes August 1641 AT III: 428/CSMK: 193; *Passions* I.1, AT XI: 328/CSM I: 328). But here, I am talking about the *sources* of actions and passions, namely, the will and the intellect. While perceptions may be logically prior to volitions, that is independent and wholly consistent with my claim that the faculty of the will is metaphysically more essential to the mind than the intellect and any other faculties of perception. Moreover, Descartes does not in this text or similar texts (and ought not) make any kind of identification between the powers of activity and passivity (i.e. the will and intellect). To do that would be to create fundamental confusions in his metaphysics and epistemology (e.g. the theory of judgment in the Fourth Meditation). But for a discussion of the identity of token actions and passions see Schickle (2011).

Here, I think that Descartes anticipates Leibniz. What makes a substance *a substance* according to Leibniz is that it has power, force, or activity (see, e.g., *Discourse on Metaphysics*.15, AG: 48; *Monadology*.11-19, AG: 214-5). While a substance also must have passivity – the monad requires both perceptions and appetites – the real explanatory power lies on the side of activity (see, e.g., Mercer 2001, 85). Descartes concurs in his own way. What makes a substance *independent* – the real criterion for a substance in Cartesian metaphysics (*Principles* I.51, AT VIIIA: 24/CSM I: 210) – is activity, which is free will¹⁴. It is through activity or free will that we create independence from other “substances” in the universe, and what prevents us from being “things” that are wholly passive, that is, merely affected by the actions of other substances. Again, that is not to say that passions and the source of passivity – i.e. the intellect – are not essential to the mind. The claim is that the intellect is merely an ESSENTIAL PROPERTY, not a TRULY ESSENTIAL PROPERTY. And this, I contend, is what Descartes meant to express in the FIRST COMPONENT of generosity (and what the other commentators are ultimately trying to get at as well).

Indeed, we clearly can have *scientia* of the mind’s activity, which – albeit elliptically – shows that my alleged assumption about *Epistemic Status*, namely, that the FIRST COMPONENT consists of *scientia*, is well-founded. Thus, I propose the following reading of TBL *Unpacked*:

[WEAK ESSENTIALIST READING]: property φ is the only property truly belonging to subject S IFF φ is the *only* TRULY ESSENTIAL PROPERTY of S .

The WEAK ESSENTIALIST READING should be read as an advancement of Boehm’s ESSENTIALIST READING. Boehm was right that Descartes was indicating the true essence of the mind in the FIRST COMPONENT. His lapse – albeit – understandable given Descartes’

¹⁴ While the notion of metaphysical priority developed here is related the criterion of metaphysical independence in Descartes’ theory of substance, I will bracket spelling out the full relationship between metaphysical priority and metaphysical independence here, as that will require a full discussion of the relationship *between substances* within Descartes’ system. For a recent analysis of the independence of Cartesian substances see Schectman (2016, 187-199).

imprecision – was not making a distinction between an ESSENTIAL PROPERTY and a TRULY ESSENTIAL PROPERTY. Once that distinction is drawn, we see that there is no *ultima facie* tension between the claim in the *Meditations* that the Cartesian Self is a *res cogitans*, and the claim in the *Passions* that the Cartesian Self is a *res volans*. The WEAK ESSENTIALIST READING is weak with respect to Boehm's ESSENTIALIST READING, because it does not claim that free will *alone* is essential to the Cartesian Self.

VII. Epistemic Relation

We are now in a position to explain the priority relation between (1) and (2) in the FIRST COMPONENT. Because the generous person, *S*, knows that free will is a TRULY ESSENTIAL PROPERTY, *S* also knows that she can only be legitimately praised or blamed for her use of free will. This is where we can salvage some of Parvizian's EVALUATIVE READING. Parvizian writes:

"If I am to be legitimately praised or blamed for something, whether it be one of my actions or features, then I must be responsible for its existence. I am responsible, in the right way, for an action or feature if my free volitions produced it. If an action or feature does not (or could not) be causally traced back to my will, then I cannot be legitimately praised or blamed for it. For example, I can be praised or blamed for pursuing philosophy, because this action depends on my will; but I cannot be praised or blamed for naturally having brown hair, because this feature does not depend on my will." (2016, 234-5)

We can see that Parvizian is gesturing at the fundamental grounds of legitimate praise and blame, namely, the activity of free will. But once those substitutions are made, we can see that Parvizian is spot on. I cannot be legitimately praised or blamed merely for my passivity (be they essential or non-essential passions). I can only be praised or blamed for my virtuous or vicious use of my activity, i.e. free will. Indeed, once we read Descartes' account of generosity against the activity and passivity distinction, much of the discussion in the *Passions* surrounding generosity begins to make sense. For example:

“I see only one thing in us which could give us good reason for esteeming ourselves, namely, the exercise of our free will and the control we have over our volitions. For we can reasonably be praised or blamed only for actions that depend upon this free will. It renders us in a certain way like God by making us masters of ourselves, provided we do not lose the rights it gives us through timidity.” (*Passions* III.152, AT XI: 445/CSM I: 384)

Helping myself to a Leibnizian reading once again, the reason why Descartes claims that free will renders us similar to God, is because free will is ultimately a (*finite*) instantiation of the very same (*infinite*) activity or power in God. And that is what makes us masters of ourselves, and what renders us *human beings* – not passive *biological automatons* – in the first place.

VII. The Weak Essentialist Reading and Descartes’ Ethics

I believe I have sufficiently addressed how the WEAK ESSENTIALIST READING fits with the epistemological and metaphysical commitments of Descartes’ system. In closing, I would like to address how the WEAK ESSENTIALIST READING helps us understand Descartes’ ethics, in particular, the account of generosity and his virtue theory more generally.

For the purposes of this paper, I bracketed discussion of the SECOND COMPONENT of generosity, which claims that the generous person, *S*, must have a firm and constant resolution to carry out whatever she judges (via free will) to be the best (in the “conduct of life”). The SECOND COMPONENT of generosity encapsulates the heart of Descartes’ theory of virtue, and the WEAK ESSENTIALIST READING helps us understand why Descartes claims that virtue is our *supreme good*, and that we should set virtue as our end (Letter to Princess Elizabeth 6 October 1645, AT IV: 305/CSMK: 268, Letter to Queen Christina 20 November 1647, AT V: 83/CSMK: 325).

If free will is the TRULY ESSENTIAL PROPERTY of the Cartesian Self, then the Cartesian virtuous agent must pursue the cultivation and perfection of that property. As Descartes makes clear, it is not merely possession of free will – as a TRULY ESSENTIAL PROPERTY – that generates maximal justified self-esteem in generosity. Rather, it is a virtuous use of

that will. So, once we realize that our true value lies in our virtuous activity, then we will be motivated to set on the ethical path Descartes envisions in his mature ethical writings: regulating the passions, prioritizing intellectual pursuits over bodily pursuits, abandoning fear of death, inculcating and practicing love toward all parts of the universe even at the expense of one's own interests, and perhaps more importantly, helping secure the conditions for other mind-body composites to acquire their own degrees of virtue, well-being, and happiness. If the WEAK ESSENTIALIST READING is right, there is much more fruitful work to be done in reconceiving Descartes' *perfect moral system (la morale)* in the tree of philosophy (French Preface to the *Principles*, AT IXB: 14/CSM I: 186).

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**NO FEELING WITHOUT COGNITION. MOSES MENDELSSOHN'S
ANALYSIS OF PLEASANT SENTIMENTS IN
THE BRIEFE ÜBER DIE EMPFINDUNGEN¹
(1755)**

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Abstract

Mendelssohn's second work, the *Briefe über die Empfindungen* (*Letters on Sentiments*), has mainly to do with sentiments experimented by human subjects. Nevertheless, the generalist, broad scope of the title might bring about some confusion: the work is not devoted to sentiments in general, but to sentiments of pleasure in particular. Mendelssohn distinguishes between three different types of such sentiments: (i) the pleasant sentiments resulting from corporal processes; (ii) the pleasant sentiments emerging when contemplating beautiful objects; (iii) the pleasant sentiments inherent to knowledge. The aim of this work is to argue that, in Mendelssohn's analysis of pleasant sentiments, cognitive elements (namely, objectual representations, *Vorstellungen*³) are

¹ I would like to thank Professor Heiner Klemme for allowing me to discuss a preliminary version of the text within his *Oberseminar* at Martin Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg (January 2022). The accurate comments made by professors Klemme, John Walsh, Michael Walschots and by Daniel Stadler and Emanuel Lanzini (to whom I specially thank his attentive and constructive reading of the text) turned out to be very useful in improving the paper and giving it its final shape. I also want to thank Eric Sancho and Martí Bridgewater for their very accurate and helpful comments (both regarding the content and the form of the text).

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³ I say representations to be cognitive insofar they give information about the objects that constitute reality. As we will see, the kind of information that they provide is totally dependent on their degree of clarity: for Mendelssohn, real knowledge can only consist in the clear and distinct representations produced by the intellect. Sensations and images lack such precision: based on them, we manage to cognize some aspects of

indispensable for the experience of pleasure. In order to show that, I will pay attention to the explanation Mendelssohn gives for each type of pleasant sentiment to see what sort of mental representation is involved in every case. Therefore, the paper will be divided into 4 sections: after briefly contextualizing the *Briefe*, I will devote one section to each of the pleasant sentiments following Mendelssohn's exposition of them and a last section to a synthetic, general overview. The paper will be ended with some conclusive remarks on the extent to which Mendelssohn's analysis is innovative in regard to his German philosophical context.

Keywords: *Moses Mendelssohn, sentiments, cognition, pleasure, affects, representations.*

Introduction: background, structure and beginning of the dialogue between Theocles and Euphranor

The *Briefe über die Empfindungen* is a piece of epistolary literature, consisting of a total amount of fifteen letters between Theocles and Euphranor⁴. Theocles's role as a leading voice is clear. He writes eleven of the fifteen letters compounding the *Briefe* in a first series comprising letters three to seven, and then a second series comprising the letters ten to fifteen. In fact, both series arise in response to Euphranor's opinions and questions: it is therefore reasonable to consider Theocles's words as the main vehicle of Mendelssohn's own ideas⁵. The brief introduction both characters receive seems to attest to this hermeneutical approach. Theocles is presented as an English philosopher who is disappointed with the persuasive imagination [*verführerische Einbildungskraft*] and

reality in a less concrete, definite manner. Nonetheless, and to the extent that they stand for and give access to real objects, they can justly be said to be cognitive. In respect to this, we must not forget that two of Mendelssohn's main philosophical sources, Wolff and Baumgarten, considered sensibility and imagination to be part of the "lower cognitive faculty" [*facultas cognitiva inferior*]. See Wolff 1968, 20-165 [§29-232]; Baumgarten 2013, 201-240 [§519-650].

⁴ In the first, 1755 edition of the *Briefe*, Euphranor's companion is called Palemon; Theocles is the name given to him from the 1761 edition onwards; this paper is based on the 1771 edition (JubA 1, 233-334). I will use the acronym 'JubA 1, 10' to refer to Mendelssohn's works critical edition, the so called *Jubiläumsaufgabe*: Mendelssohn, M. 1971. *Gesammelte Schriften. Jubiläumsausgabe* (Bd. 1). Berlin, Frommann-Holzog.

⁵ However, Euphranor's speeches are an important dialogical component that must not be underestimated at all: Euphranor is, no more and no less, the character setting the topics for discussion.

frivolity [*Leichtsinn*] of allegedly French origin that prevail in his country: such frivolity incites him to visit Germany, the homeland of Metaphysics and deep, speculative discussion. However, he is disappointed again after noticing that frivolity and vanity are also present in many German intellectual circles⁶. Euphranor is presented much more concisely as a young aristocrat entirely devoted to courtly issues. (JubA 1, 235-236)

Euphranor's reflections in the first two letters mark the beginning of the dialogue⁷. He seems not to share his friend's conviction that it is possible to control one's own sentiments by an insight [*Einsicht*] into the nature of pleasures [*Vergnügen*]. According to Euphranor, pleasant sentiments disappear when we reflect by using our reason [*Vernunft*] on them and attempt to trace the emergence [*Entstehung*] of pleasure in us⁸. Happiness [*Glückseligkeit*] involves enjoyment [*Genüsse*] which, in turn, results from the spontaneous, surprising sentiment that agreeable objects produce in us. As soon as we analyze enjoyment scientifically, Euphranor claims, it ceases to be a vivid experience and becomes a mere object of inquiry. From the young aristocrat's point of view, the case of beauty exemplifies the question paradigmatically. The pleasure resulting from looking at a beautiful face disappears when, instead of enjoying the nice image before us, we analyze the way the physical processes by which the eye, the lips or the nose function. Thus, beauty [*Schönheit*] must consist of an indistinct representation of a perfection [*undeutlichen Vorstellung einer Vollkommenheit*], In contrast to Theocles,

⁶ It is worth noting that at the beginning of the second dialogue within the *Philosophische Gespräche*, Mendelssohn speaks in almost identical terms. JubA 1, 13-14.

⁷ The words by which the first letter begins reveal Euphranor's flaws. Euphranor is tired of the obligations that bind him to the tumultuous court, preferring instead to indulge in the joys [*Freude*] of youth and jovial friendship. Deprived of such pleasures, Euphranor devotes himself to reflecting on the last letter that Theocles sent him, a seemingly less amusing task that, nevertheless, he should not neglect. As Euphranor puts it, "now I can pour myself freely into the arms of the muses and meditation" ("jetzt kann ich mich frey in die Arme der Musse und der Betrachtung wersen"; JubA 1, 237.

⁸ The young aristocrat considers reason to be a "killer" or "destroyer" [*Stöhrerin*] of pleasure.

then, Euphranor holds that expertise in sentiments is only acquired by living them with no intention of inquiring into them⁹ (JubA 1, 235-241).

Because of the central role that the notion of representation [*Vorstellung*] has along the whole dialogue, it is necessary to briefly refer to the Wolffian definition to which the Mendelssohnian approach is indebted. In the chapter on Empirical Psychology within his *German Metaphysics* (1719), Wolff analyzes the nature of thoughts [*Gedanke*] defined, in turn, as changes occurring to the soul. As Wolff puts it, a thought has always to do with external or internal objects, whether present [*gegenwartige*] or absent [*abwesende*]. All thought is *a thought about something* that stands before us, about something that we represent [*wir stellen*]: to the extent that they represent objects, thoughts can be justly considered to be representations of reality. It is based on how the objects that are contained in these representations appear to us that such representations can be distinguished and categorized. A representation is clear [*klar*] when one knows with certainty [*wohl wissen*] what the representation is about, that is, when the object A presented by the thought is clearly separable and distinguishable from other objects (B, C ...). When, apart from grasping [*bemerken*] the object A as a single and individual whole, we also grasp each of the parts [*Theile*] that make it up, the representation of A is clear and distinct [*deutlich*]: the more multiplicity [*Mannigfaltigkeit*] of parts we discover in A, the greater the distinction with which we gain a representation of it. The relationship between darkness [*Dunkelheit*] and confusion [*Undeutlichkeit*] is analogous to the link between clarity and distinction: when a certain thing A is not presented to us as a distinctly individualized unit, the representation of A is obscure; when the parts of A appear obscurely to us, it is confusing (Wolff 1983,106-120).

⁹ At the end of the passage, Euphranors summarizes his position as a “jovial moral” [*jugendliche Sittenlehre*]: living in accordance with such moral involves assuming happiness [*Glückseligkeit*] as the sole purpose of human life and looking for it by means of the spontaneous experience of pleasant sentiments. JubA 1, 237-238.

1. The pleasure resulting from the contemplation of beauty

Theocles corrects what he considers to be Euphranor's errors in letters three to seven. Along this first series of letters, Theocles introduces two of the three types of pleasant sentiments that will be featured in the whole *Briefe*: the pleasant sentiments emerging when contemplating beautiful objects (the so called "sentiments of beauty", *Gefühle der Schönheit*) and the pleasant sentiments inherent to knowledge. Sentiments caused by beauty are incompatible with the clear and distinct concepts defining knowledge because, when contemplating a beautiful object, the mind only apprehends the object as a whole and pays no attention to its multiplicity [*Mannigfaltigkeit*]. However, this does not mean that sentiments of beauty are caused by obscure concepts: if the experience of beauty was only driven by obscure concepts, it would be impossible to see the object as a determined unity, constituted by a plurality of notes or traits. Thus, the representations at stake must be "expansively clear" [*ausgebreitet klare Vorstellung*], so that the object appears to the mind as a clearly representable unity, but is formed by a diversity of obscure, undistinguishable traits¹⁰. Contemplating something beautiful thus requires limits [*Grenzen*] and, to that extent, a peculiar kind of clarity, which is named 'expansive' to differentiate it from the clarity of knowledge (that is, clarity conjuncted with distinction). In this respect, the intervention of the imagination [*Einbildungskraft*] is crucial:

"The imagination is able to confine the smallest and the largest object to the appropriate limits [...] until we are able to grasp the requisite manifold all at once."¹¹ (Mendelssohn 1997, 15).

¹⁰ It is important to note that the concept of expansively clear representation does not come from Wolff, but from Baumgartian. See for instance: Guyer 2014, 318-341.

¹¹ "Die Einbildungskraft kann [...] den Gegenstand zwischen die gehörigen Grenzen einzuschränken [...] bis wir die erforderliche Mannigfaltigkeit auf einmal fassen können" (JubA 1, 243). Mendelssohn introduces here an interesting distinction between (i) that which has limits and can be considered beautiful, and (ii) that which is immense and, having therefore no apprehensible limits, exceeds the scope of beauty. In connection with this, Theocles reflects on the extent to which the immense universe [*unermessliches*], unapprehensible as a whole because of its unlimited extension, can be said to be beautiful. According to Theocles, it can be said that *the structure of the universe*

The contemplation of beautiful objects by means of extensively clear representations involves four steps according to Theocles. (i) First of all, it is necessary to choose and focus the attention on an object (or set of objects; *Gegenstand*); (ii) by doing so, the subject senses the object [*sie empfinden*] and gains an “intuitive concept” [*anschauende Begriffe*] of it; (iii) when having such a concept, it is possible to reflect on it [*überdenken*] to see the relations and connections [*Verhältnisse und Beziehungen*] by which the parts give rise to the object as a whole; (iv) at this stage, the act of enjoyment [*genussen*] provoked by the unitary object finally occurs¹². When enjoying, Mendelssohn insists, the individual parts or traits become secondary and subordinated to the concept of totality [*Begriff des Ganzen*], that is, the representation of the object as a unity that the imagination produces after reflecting on it. Even though the plurality inherent to the object remains obscure, Theocles emphasizes that this obscurity is not the cause of the happy sentiment [*fröhlich Empfindung*]. Otherwise, creatures with a higher intelligence (with no sensible faculty nor obscure representations), could not have access to this happiness:

“Regarded as a determination of the mind and cut off from its fleshy companion, from sensual rapture, the pure gratification of the soul must be grounded in the positive powers of our soul and not in its incapacity, not in the limitation of these original Powers.”¹³ (Mendelssohn 1997, 19).

is beautiful when, based on the existing order between the components of the universe grasped by reason [*Vernunft*] and sensory perception [*Wahrnehmung*], the imagination takes such ordered parts of the universe and brings them together in a structured harmony [*Ebenmasse*]. When representing the structure of the universe in these terms, an invaluable source of pleasure [*Quelle des Vergnügens*] emerges which brings us closer to the privileged, provident position of God. JubA 1, 244-245.

¹² To put it more briefly, contemplation involves four different steps: (i) to choose [*wählen*], (ii) to feel [*empfinden*], (iii) to reflect [*überdenken*], (iv) to enjoy [*geniessen*]. JubA 1, 246-247.

¹³ “Die reine Seelenlust, als eine Bestimmung des Geistes betrachtet, und abgesondert von ihrer fleischlichen Begleiterinn, von der sinnlichen Wollust, muss in den positiven Kräften unsrer Seele, und nicht in ihrem Unvermögen, nicht in der Einschränkung dieser ursprünglichen Kräfte gegründet seyn” (JubA 1, 248)

Theocles claims that it is the soul's capacity [*Kraft*] to produce representations that is the real source of the pleasure: after producing a complex and complete representation, the soul becomes proud of its success and feels impelled to keep on producing representations. Such a progressive *modus operandi*, as Theocles puts it, is a sign of the impulse to perfection [*Neigung zur Vollkommenheit*] shared by all thinking beings¹⁴ (JubA 1, 242-249).

2. The pleasure resulting from knowing

The aforementioned notion of perfection becomes Theocles' second focus of analysis: the concept of perfection is key to singularize knowledge and its resulting pleasure from the contemplation of beauty. As seen, a beautiful object causes pleasure because it appears as a unity in plurality [*Einerley in Manigfaltigen*]. However, it retains a certain degree of obscurity and imperfection, insofar as we do not grasp each and every part of the object *per se*, but only as they relate to each other to constitute the object. The limited or "imperfect" perfection of beautiful objects is thus overcome by a superior and more genuine perfection: the one emerging when, by means of reason, we understand the function of each and every part of the object and their necessary harmony [*Übereinstimmung*] in constituting it¹⁵. From the 1761 edition onwards,

¹⁴ At this point, Mendelssohn criticizes the way J.G. Sulzer conceives this human tendency towards perfection in his work "Recherche sur l'origine des sentiments agréables et désagréables" (1751). Mendelssohn believes that, paradoxically, Sulzer has based this impulse to perfection on an inability or defect: for Sulzer, since the soul seeks rather objects that generate comprehensible concepts with a minimal effort [*Muhe*], its tendency toward perfection would be explained because, in perfect objects, the harmony of the whole synthesizes and "eliminates" the heavy multiplicity of features that requires a great attention of the mind to be grasped. JubA 1, 248-249. The notion of human tendency to perfection will be of great importance in Mendelssohn's later career: it will be the core of his enthusiastic review of the 1763 edition of *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (1748) by J.J. Spalding (*Orakel, die Bestimmung des Menschen betreffend*, 1764) and also a key theoretical element within his *Phaedon* (1767).

¹⁵ For Theocles, then, sensible beauty [*sinnliche Schönheit*] cannot be the main and vehicular purpose [*Zweck*] of divine creation. At most, sensible beauty can be seen as a trait God gives to the forms of things [*Gestalt der Dinge*] to offer a first source of

Mendelssohn clarifies the difference between the two strata by categorizing beauty as “sensible perfection” [*sinnliche Vollkommenheit*] below the “intellectual perfection” [*verständliche Vollkommenheit*] underlying knowledge (JubA 1, 250-251).

The difference between contemplating beauty and having knowledge becomes especially clear after Theocles following example. The British philosopher makes us suppose that a man puts his reason at work when looking at a fir. In that case, the leaves, the branches or the trunk will not remain obscure elements contributing to the whole that causes aesthetic gratification. Quite differently, each and every part’s function will be understood within the whole: leaves are said to realize photosynthetic processes; such leaves could not exist without branches sustaining and transporting the nourishment coming from the roots and transported through the trunk to them... In other words: comprehending the fir as a unity involves now having clear representations of its parts and, because of that, understanding that all of them are harmonically united to accomplish the same shared goal [*gemeinschaftliches Endzweck*], that is, making the fir a living, organic individual being. Indeed, the person capable of achieving such knowledge can even go a step further. The fir as a living unit is related to many others living unities: all of them are divine creatures, that is, constituent parts of the eternal harmony [*gegenseitiger Übereinstimmung*] presiding the divinely shaped universe. At this stage, the gratification [*Wollust*] resulting from uncovering the rational structure of reality is superlative and entails no imperfection¹⁶. From Theocles’s point of view, then, the scientific approach to the world (understanding the nature of an object and its place within the universe) is superior to the aesthetic one (JubA 1, 250-253).

In the last two letters of the first series by Theocles (letters six and seven), the British philosopher defends rational understanding and its

pleasures for rational beings, supposed to go a step further aesthetic gratification to understand the world rationally.

¹⁶ “Here you will attain intuitive knowledge of an authentic perfection, a pleasure that depends not on your weakness” (Mendelssohn 1997, 24) (“Hier erlangst du das anschauende Erkenntnis einer ächten Vollkommenheit; ein Vergnügen, das sich nicht auf deine Schwachheit, [...] stützt”. JubA 1, 253)

benefits in response to skeptics questioning the power of reason. The sixth letter has mainly an autobiographical interest: Theocles criticizes all-too-much technical inquiries (such as R-A.F Reámur studies on metals) and vindicates the philosophies of Leibniz, Wolff and Locke and their uncovering of basic metaphysical truths¹⁷. As Theocles puts it, these philosophers helped him to discover that, because God had created the universe rationally, all human creatures inhere an innate tendency to perfection [*Neigung zur Vollkommenheit*] which can only be accomplished by seeking moral virtue [*Tugend*] by means of rational deliberation¹⁸. The rational character of God's creation, that is, Providence [*Vorsehung*], is discussed in the seventh letter. God, omniscient and benevolent, looks always for the best and makes his creation as good as possible. Because of his infinite intelligence, God must create a world conformed by a series of events [*Begebenheiten*] in which every event is grounded [*gegründet*] by another event. In other

¹⁷ We must not forget that, as said in the prologue to the *Briefe*, Theocles is a British philosopher who decided to visit Germany so as to find there some philosophical truths that might help him overcoming the serious doubts and worries that he had. The testimony of his learning is as much dramatic as historiographically interesting to understand Mendelssohn's own progress in the study of philosophy: "Like hellish furies, cruel doubts about providence tortured me; indeed, I can confess, without skittishness, that they were doubts about the existence of God and the blessedness of virtue. At that point I was prepared to give rein to all vile desires I was in danger, like someone drunk, of reeling into the wretched abyss into which the slaves of vice slide ever more deeply with every passing hour. [...] Thanks be to those true guides who have guided me back to true knowledge and to virtue. Thanks to you, Locke and Wolff! To you, immortal Leibniz! I [...] Without your help I would have been lost forever... [...] Your immortal writings [...] steered me on the sure path to genuine philosophy, to knowledge of my very self and my origin." (Mendelssohn 1997, 27) ("Mich quälten, wie hellischen Furien, grausame Zweifel and der Vorsehung; ja, dir kann ich es ohne Scheu gestehen an der Dasein Gottes und an der Seeligkeit des Tugends [...] Jetzt stund ich in Gefahr, wie ein Betrunkener, in den unseeligen Abgrung zu taumeln, darinn die Sklaven des Lasters stündlich tieser gleiten. [...] Dank sei jenen Wegweisern, die mich zur wahren Erketnnis und zur Tugend zuruck geführet haben: Euch Locke und Wolff! Dir unsterblicher Leibniz! [...] Ohne eure Hilfe wäre ich auf ewig verloren. [...] Allein eure unvergängliche Schriften [...] haben mich auf den sichern Weg zur wahren Weltweisheit, zur Erketnnis meiner Selbst und meines Ursprung geleitet". JubA 1, 256)

¹⁸ For a precise and contextualized approach to Mendelssohn's moral intellectualism, see: Albrecht 2000.

words: the universe is said to be a perfectly organized structure, in which anything must be the cause of something else and nothing can exist without a cause grounding it¹⁹.

3. Corporal pleasure

After the first series of Theocles's reflections, Euphranor seems convinced that reflecting on the origin of pleasure does not mean giving up the real experience of pleasure. However, the young aristocrat ignores the incision by which the sixth letter was closed (Theocles suggested the existence of a third and final type of pleasure: that dependent on bodily satisfaction) and accuses his friend of unjustly neglecting sensitive pleasure [*sinnliche Lust*]. Young people, alien to adult seriousness and abstruse scholastic doctrines [*Schulmeinung*], enjoy [*genüssen*] a great multiplicity of purely sensual, mundane pleasures. This kind of pleasures evince how, contrary to Theocles's opinion, the experience of pleasure does not necessarily rely on the representation of sensible (realm of beauty) nor intellectual (realm of knowledge) perfections²⁰. In the ninth letter, in turn, the young aristocrat asks the English philosopher, a seemingly accurate defender of divine Providence, to help him refute the harmful reasons on the grounds of which some thinkers argue for the legitimacy of suicide [*Selbstmord*]. In short, the jovial Euphranor is terrified by the example of those who, old and exhausted, fall into spite [*Verzweiflung*] and only wish for death. Euphranor is specially worried by Charles Giddon's arguments for suicide²¹. From Gildon's point of view, since God created us to

¹⁹ Mendelssohn's indebtedness to Wolff in respect to the notions of world and order is specially clear under the light of the last of his *Philosophische Gespräche* (1755). See: JubA 1, 29-38

²⁰ By anticipating the core content of the *Rhapsodie, oder Suzätze an den Briefe über die Empfindungen* (1761), Euphranor points out that certain harmful or painful objects [*traurige*] can also be pleasant, such as a huge reef (as much spectacular as dangerous) or the recreation of bloody battles. Sometimes, nature acquires a terrible appearance [*schreckliche Natur*] that might please us. JubA 1, 268.

²¹ In his *Miscellaneous Works* (1695), published under the pseudonym 'Lyndamour', Gildon tries to justify the writer Charles Blount's suicide.

systematically seek out what is good for us, it is reasonable to consider suicide an acceptable option when nefarious living conditions prevent us from fulfilling the divine imperative²² (JubA 1, 265-275)

Following Euphranor's observations, Theocles first sets out his thesis on the third and final type of pleasant sentiments: sentiments resulting from bodily satisfaction. In the case of sensible pleasure, the English philosopher clarifies, soul and body are equally necessary for pleasure to emerge. Given that the intricate network of nerve connections keeps the different parts of the body [*Glied, Theil*] communicated, when a certain alteration [*Veränderung*] occurs in a body part, the effect is transmitted to the other limbs with more or less intensity. Suppose, then, that a sensitive object [*sinnliche Gegenstand*] pleasantly stimulates [*sanft gereizt*] a certain part of the body: thanks to the nervous network, the gratification emerging in the affected part will be distributed harmoniously, affecting therefore the whole body²³. Some experiences of sensitive pleasure makes the mechanics of pleasure proposed by Theocles plausible: this is the case for the relaxation caused by the wine after being ingested, or the comfort felt when the breeze blows gently during a sultry evening. As soon as this "general gratification" invades the body, the soul represents indistinctly such perfection or improvement [*Verbesserung*] of bodily condition: the soul, in short, generates an indistinct yet alive representation of the perfection that occurs in the body [*eine undeutliche aber lebhaftere Vorstellung von der Vollkommenheit*] (JubA 1, 276-283).

²² Following the *resumée* offered by Euphranor, Gildon draws on a mathematical analogy. Goods can be compared to positive quantities; evils, with negative quantities; and death, with no quantity (0). An individual can opt for death (0) as long as life offers him only negatively quantifiable evils (-1, -2, -3 ...). In these circumstances, friends should put aside their selfish desire to enjoy his friend's company and understand that his suicide is not at odds with the imperative that compels us to look for the best, since 0 is higher than any negative number. JubA 1, 273-274.

²³ Theocles calls this harmonic distribution of the sensory stimulus caused by the nervous network 'tone' [*Thon*], probably based on Santorio Santorio's *De statica medicina* (1725). JubA 1, 277-279.

4. Final overview: the distinction of pleasures based on their correlative representations

Once the three major typologies of pleasure have been differentiated, Theocles summarizes his theses regarding the nature of pleasant sentiments. As said, sensitive pleasure is based on the existing correlation between (i) the physical gratification that invades a certain limb and is subsequently extended to the whole body (ii) the sensitive representation of the bodily state that the soul generates. This resultant gratification is the third and last type of pleasure, different both from the pleasure resulting from beauty (based on the perception of unity in diversity; *Einerley in Mannigfaltigen*), and from the one depending on intellectual perfection (which involves the understanding of harmony underlying multiplicity *Einhelligkeit des Mannigfaltigen*). Therefore, each kind of pleasures is singularized by the mental representation on which it is based and the object the representation stands for:

1. Sensitive pleasure is produced by an indistinct yet vivid representation [*undeutliche aber lebhaftere Vorstellung*] of a perfection occurring in the body (a state of gratification emerging in a limb and transmitted to the whole body).
2. Pleasure caused by beauty requires of an extensively clear representation [*ausgebreitet klare Vorstellung*] of a perfection relative to the aspect or figure of physical bodies (the object appears to us as nice, agreeable unit)
3. Pleasure resulting from knowing needs a clear representation [*klare Vorstellung*] of the “highest perfection”, that is, the particular harmony relative both to each created being and to the universe that they all make up²⁴.

²⁴ At this point, Theocles considers music to be the only art capable of producing the three types of pleasure characterized in the *Briefe*: “The imitations of human passions; the artful combination of discordant tones: sources of perfection! The simple proportions within oscillations, the symmetry in the relations of the parts to one another and to the whole; the way it occupies the powers of the spirit in doubting, surmising, and predicting: sources of beauty! The tension of the vessels of the nerves harmonizing with every chord: a source of sensuous gratification” (Mendelssohn 1997, 48). (“Die Nachahmungen der menschlichen Leidenschaften; die künstliche

In the twelfth letter, Theocles clarifies the extent to which soul and body are coordinated to make sensible pleasure possible. In the human body, causes [*Ursachen*] and effects [*Würckungen*] remain so intricately intertwined that their functions can be reversed in some cases: given two objects O_1 and O_2 , it may be the case that O_1 is the cause of O_2 and, conversely, that O_1 turns out to be an effect produced by O_2 . This principle seems particularly valid with regard to the relationship between the bodily organs (seat of the movements transmitted by the nerves) and the brain (*Gehirne*, seat of the representations²⁵): it is as possible for nervous movements to induce a certain representation as for representations to induce the emergence of bodily movements²⁶. Consequently, just as sensible pleasure or improvement of bodily state enables an indistinct representation [*undeutliche Vorstellung*] of such improvement, representation can also cause sensible pleasure: it is when this second “causal order” is realized that one experiences an emotion or

Verbindung zwischen den widersinnigsten Übellauten: Quellen der Vollkommenheit! Die leichten Verhältnisse in den Schwingungen; das Ebenmass in den Beziehungen der Theile auf einander und auf das Ganze; die Beschäftigung der Geisteskräfte in Zweifeln, Vermuthen und Vorhersehen: Quellen der Schönheit! Die mi tallen Saiten harmonische Spannung der nervigsten Gesässe: eine Quelle der sinnlichen Lust!"; JubA 1, 280) The two last sources of pleasure do not appear in the 1755 edition, but only in the 1761 one and subsequents.

As Theocles puts it, Newton's genial contributions to Optics might help painting and drawing to get a similar degree of artistic perfection in the future: current efforts made by authors like P.Louis Bertrand Castel (*L'optique des couleurs, fondée sur les simples observations...*, 1740) and William Hogarth (*Analysis of Beauty*, 1753) are a good testimony of the difficulties that painters and drawers must face in that respect. JubA 1, 281-283. Mendelssohn's enthusiasm for music will be further developed in his future aesthetic writings.

Concerning Mendelssohn's musical interests, see: Lütterken 2000; Gerhard 1999.

²⁵ Mendelssohn seems to attribute something immaterial (the representations produced by the soul) to a corporeal entity (the brain). However, it should be noted that Mendelssohn does not claim that the brain “produces” representations, but that it is the “home” or “seat” [*Behalter*], that is, the bodily place where the processes correlating to the immaterial representations of the soul take place. JubA 1, 285.

²⁶ This would be the case for dreams [*Traume*] in which a variety of images [*Einbildung*] appear successively producing different sensations in the sleeping individual. JubA 1, 286.

affect [*Affekt*²⁷]. The dynamics of affects are clear: (i) whether the representation of a spiritual perfection [*geistige Vollkommenheit*], the memory [*Erinnerung*] of a past bodily gratification or any imagination [*Einbildung*], harmoniously stimulate the nerves connected with the brain; (ii) the resulting harmonic tension [*harmonische Spannung*] is communicated to the rest of the body; (iii) a pleasing affection [*angenehme Affekt*] invades us. Very importantly, representations of rational perfections and beautiful images can also stimulate brain fibers, extend by means of the nervous network, and give rise, in the end, to a pleasant sentiment. The example of the mathematician putting the letter to an end seems to corroborate this interpretation:

“The senses do not participate in the enjoyment [of the mathematician] to the extent that the mathematician laboriously advances from truth to truth. [...] If, however, [the mathematician] thinks all of a sudden about the chain of inferences he has made, if he thinks about how truths can be found united in the most perfect order, and how a truth follows from the rest and the rest from this one; what a sensitive pleasure will emerge in the brain and be transmitted to the rest of the body!”²⁸ (Mendelssohn 1997, 54)

²⁷ The Mendelssohnian link between affects and feelings occurs very similarly in Kant’s Anthropology. In Kant’s case, however, the notion of affect acquires a rather negative meaning: “passion [*Leidenschaft*] is a desire that makes us incapable of seeing the sum of all desires; affect is rather a feeling, which makes us incapable of consulting the sum of feelings” (Frierson 2014, 95). For the terminological complexity of the debate on feelings in Kant’s time, see: Nuzzo 2014, 88-107. The ambiguity and terminological complexity observed by Nuzzo are to a large extent also traceable in Mendelssohn’s account of pleasant sentiments: for instance, Mendelssohn refers to the enjoyment involved in feeling pleasure by using at least three different substantives (namely, *Genusse*, *Freude* and *Wollust*). I am deeply grateful to Professor Michael Walschots for his helpful comments concerning this topic.

²⁸ “Allein die Sinne nehmen an der Freude keinen Antheil, so Lange er von Wahrheit bis Wahrheit fohrschreitet. [...] Wenn er aber die Kette der Schlüsse, die er durchgearbeitet, auf einmal überdenkt, wenn er überschlägt, wie die Wahrheiten in der besten Ordnung Glied an Glied gehsestet sind, wie eine aus allen und alle aus einer fliessen; welche Fülle der sinnlichen Lust muss sich alsdann aus seinem Gehirne auf den ganzen Körper ergtessen” (JubA 1, 286) .

Conclusion

In Mendelssohn's account of pleasant sentiments as depicted in the previous sections, cognitive elements turn out to be indispensable. Whether obscure, expansively clear or clear and distinct, representations are a fundamental condition for pleasures to occur: each and every type of pleasure is defined specifically by a peculiar sort of representation about reality. In turn, the final reference to the twelfth letter of the *Briefe* has let us understand how representations can bring about a pleasant sensation to the whole body. Mendelssohn says nothing about how mental, immaterial processes can cause the stimulation of corporeal, nervous fibers: we must therefore assume that representations, as changings or movements occurring to the soul, induce physical movements in some unclarified way. Be that as it may, Mendelssohn dialectical strategy can be seen as a particular expression of what Wolff considers to be Rational Psychology: after all, his main purpose is to give an account, to offer an explanation of the types of pleasant sentiments experimented by humans. In this respect, it is important to emphasize that Mendelssohn main psychological theses in the *Briefe* are traceable in Wolff. This is the case for: (i) the fundamental link between the experience of pleasure and the psychic representation of some kind of perfection; (ii) the classification of such psychic representations according to the binomials "clear/obscure" and "distinct/confused"; (iii) the consideration that the essential or defining trait of the soul is its force to represent the world; or (iv) the belief that the soul seeks by definition that which perfects it, that is to say, that which increases its essential representative force²⁹.

The relevant Wolffian background of the *Briefe* is also key to understand Mendelssohn's links with one of the most important Wolffians of the context, namely A.G. Baumgarten³⁰. It is from

²⁹ The exposition of these theses offered by Wolff in his *German Metaphysics* (1719) was certainly read by Mendelssohn. See: Altmann 1973, 29.

³⁰ It is important to note that Baumgarten's reception of Wolffianism is relevantly singularized by the strong Pietistic atmosphere presiding his formative years (see for instance: Fugate and Hymers 2013; Goldenbaum 2011). To that extent, Baumgarten can be said to achieve a peculiar "connubium" between two mostly antagonistic

Baumgarten that Mendelssohn takes the concept of “extensive clarity” and the clear differentiation between representations grounding the contemplation of beauty and representations involved in scientific inquiry³¹. At this point, one might rise justly the following question: if Mendelssohn takes the crucial concepts and theses of his approach from Wolff and Baumgarten, do the *Briefe* contain anything innovative and original? As it seems to me, Mendelssohn’s innovations in the *Briefe* are subtle but cannot be neglected at all. Mendelssohn’s indebtedness to Wolff and his accolades is unquestionable from a *material* point of view³². Notwithstanding, the *form* of Mendelssohn’s very first works from 1755 (the *Briefe* and the *Philosophische Gespräche* as well) evince a crucial departure from Wolffian, scholar tradition. Systematic exposition ceases to be the main issue at stake: although concepts must preserve the rigor and clarity that Wolff and Baumgarten gave them, their depiction in an elegant, nice manner turns out to be as much as relevant³³. In this respect, Theocles’s status and character is fundamental: the leading character of the *Briefe* is no German, but an English philosopher aiming at concurring German speculative circles.

At first, it might seem that such a rhetorical detail has little importance. However, characterizing Theocles as a British is no coincidence: according to the testimony offered by Mendelssohn’s son, Josep, the amusement provoked by his reading of *The Moralists* (1709) by Shaftesbury determined crucially the literary form of Mendelssohn’s first works from 1755 (Altmann 1973, 39). In a context in which British

intellectual poles. Regarding the complex influence of Pietism on Enlightened philosophers at Halle, Baumgarten’s *alma mater*, see: Hinske 1989.

³¹ For Mendelssohn’s Baumgartian background on this issue, see: Cataldi Madona 2011.

³² For Wolff’s great influence on eighteenth century German philosophers, see: Gerlach, 2001.

³³ Regarding the hermeneutical difficulties resulting from Mendelssohn literary approach to philosophy, see: Goetschel 2011, 21-37. Very interestingly, Goetschel suggests that “While Mendelssohn is usually read as an author of straightforward texts, his texts resist easy translation. This resistance is integral to his writing and it is by encouraging the reader to work through this resistance, I argue, that Mendelssohn’s texts elicit a critical move of rethinking the terms of philosophy in critical fashion. Critical not exactly in the way Kant would define the term but with sufficient affinity that we could nevertheless speak of a certain family resemblance.” (Goetschel 2011, 22).

philosophy began to gain presence within the German lands³⁴, Mendelssohn discovered new ways of rendering ideas and developing discussions. Such less systematic modes of exposition contribute to a more dynamic and fluid thinking, characterized by the complex interplaying of multiple sources and philosophical perspectives³⁵. The case of the *Philosophische Gespräche* make the question very clear. As Mendelssohn puts it, Spinoza, a forerunner of the Leibnizian prestablished harmony, must be corrected under the light of Leibniz's ingenious philosophy; however, Leibniz made some mistakes as well, so that reading both his acutest critics (such as Pierre Bayle) and his supposedly greatest accolades (namely Christian Wolff) is key to fulfill the philosophical gaps that Leibniz left³⁶. The importance of resourcing to different philosophers can also be traced in the *Briefe*, where Leibniz, Wolff and Locke are presented as equally important influences on Theocles:

"Thanks to you, Locke and Wolff! To you, immortal Leibniz! I [...] Without your help I would have been lost forever... [...] Your immortal writings [...] steered me on the sure path to genuine philosophy, to knowledge."³⁷

The formal novelty of the *Philosophische Gespräche* and the *Briefe* set very favorable conditions for the developing of philosophical innovations. Such innovations are still weak in the *Gespräche*: its dynamic philosophical dialogue is still a germen, a seed to blossom in forthcoming works and to give rise to relevant, non-Wolffian nor

³⁴ For a general overview on the influence that British philosophers had on German Enlightened thinkers, see: Kuehn 1996, 252-273.

³⁵ In regards to the multiplicity of philosophical sources that Mendelssohn had access to in Berlin (from 1743 onwards), see: Altmann 1973, 21-29; Feiner 2010, 17-34 and 35-55.

³⁶ The *Philosophische Gespräche* are a genuinely fascinating *opera prima*. As it seems to me, this very first work by Mendelssohn is a nice, stylish testimony of the state of German philosophy by the time Mendelssohn begins his career. This historical significance moved me to offer a Catalan translation with a preliminary study that may serve the reader aiming to find out more about the *Gespräche*: Mendelssohn, M. 2022 (forthcoming). *Diàlegs filosòfics*. Barcelona, Anuari de la Societat Catalana de Filosofia, XXXIII. For a recent interpretation of the work's historical significance, I also recommend: Dyck, 2018.

³⁷ For the full citation, see note 16.

Baumgartian thesis. Nonetheless, this seed appears to grow just a few months afterwards, that is, by the time the *Briefe* are written and published. Mendelssohn devotes a whole work to reflect on feelings [*Empfindungen*]. As it seems to me, Mendelssohn's autonomous and detailed treatment of feeling anticipates the threefold faculty scheme depicted in the unpublished work *Über das Erkenntnis-, das Empfinden- und das Begehungsvermögen* (1776). Mendelssohn's following statement from his *Betrachtungen über die Quellen und die Verbindungen den Schönen Künste und Wissenschaften* (1757) attests to the fact that, in contrast to the traditional Wolffian distinction between cognitive and appetitive faculties, this threefold division between knowledge, feeling and desire is already at stake in his very first philosophical works from the 1750's:

"Beauty is the self empowered mistress of all our sentiments, [...] the animating spirit which transforms speculative knowledge of the truth into sentiments and incites us to active decision."³⁸ (Mendelssohn 1997, 169-170)

As much early as 1755, Mendelssohn takes feeling to be a peculiar psychic phenomenon deserving an autonomous treatment apart from knowledge and volition. However, the "autonomizing" of feeling is not the only innovation occurring in the *Briefe*. As Ursula Goldenbaum puts out very acutely (see Goldenbaum 2011), Mendelssohn's analysis of pleasure involves a crucial rehabilitation of corporeal lust alien to Baumgarten's approach to pleasure. From Mendelssohn's point of view, corporal pleasure is as much worth of explanation as the pleasure inherent to knowledge since they both result from the same psychic process, namely, the mental representation of a perfection. In fact, the Mendelssohnian concept of perfection [*Vollkommenheit*] also entails a non-negligible novelty with respect to the Wolffian one, namely, the differentiation between "sensible perfection" [*sinnliche Vollkommenheit*] and "intellectual perfection" [*verständliche Vollkommenheit*]³⁹. Because of

³⁸ "Die Schönheit ist die eigenmächtige Beherrscherinn aller unserer Empfindungen, [...] der beseelende Geist, der die *speculative Erkenntniß* der Wahrheit in *Empfindung* verwandelt, und zu *thätiger Entschließung* anfeuert." (JubA 1, 166-167; my emphasis).

³⁹ I am deeply grateful to Emanuel Lanzini for his helpful comments concerning this topic.

such subtle innovations, it is clear after all that the *Briefe über die Empfindungen* contain thesis and concepts going beyond Wolff and Baumgarten. Both his formal and material originality make the *Briefe* a genuinely interesting work, a subtle and smart expression of Mendelssohn's philosophical skills and, to that extent, of Mendelssohn's significance for the developing of post-Wolffian Enlightened philosophy.

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MAPS OF BECOMING: EMOTIONS AND REASON IN SPINOZA'S *ETHICS*

ALICE SIMIONATO¹

Abstract

In this paper, I argue that Spinoza's theory of emotions as developed in his *Ethics* provides a theory of becoming. In particular, I argue that adequate knowledge of the emotions attained through reason provides human beings with a twofold insight; on the one hand, adequate knowledge of *affectus* provides metaphysical insight while, on the other hand, it provides ethical insight. The metaphysical insight stems from an adequate understanding of the directionality of individual desires which knowledge of the emotions provides in terms of self-knowledge. At the same time, the ethical insight consists in the adequate understanding of what counts with certainty as increasing an individual's power of acting as deriving from the metaphysical understanding of the affection of one's *conatus*. Overall, I argue that the adequate knowledge of emotions provided by reason lies at the core of Spinoza's project of formulating guidelines for the attainment of human flourishing, that is, freedom.

Keywords: Spinoza, emotions, reason, self-knowledge, moral knowledge.

Introduction

Spinoza's theory of emotions (*affectus*) plays a crucial role in his overall ethical project; this is because, in the context of the *Ethics*, knowledge of the emotions appears to be the very requirement for attaining freedom – that is, knowledge of God or Nature. The latter, which consists in the “supreme happiness” of the mind (E2, p49s), is both metaphysical and ethical. In what follows, I argue that adequate

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knowledge of the emotions as described in the *Ethics* provides metaphysical and ethical insight into human nature, and thus ultimately provides a map of becoming aimed at human flourishing. In the first section of this paper I discuss Spinoza's definition of an emotion as a psychophysiological notion. In order to do so, I discuss the notions of mind and body in light of Spinoza's theory of attributes, for which they are understood as two ways of conceiving the same individual. In the second section I consider the notion of *conatus* (i.e. power) and its relation to the emotions, with particular reference to Spinoza's discussion about the difference between action and passion. In order to explain the latter, I provide a discussion on Spinoza's unique understanding of ideas as actions of the mind and his formulation of adequate and inadequate knowledge. At this stage, I argue that an adequate knowledge of the emotions provides adequate knowledge about the metaphysical status of individuals as modes of God or Nature. In the third and concluding section, I consider Spinoza's notion of pleasure and pain in relation to his moral philosophy; at this stage, I argue that adequate knowledge of the emotions leads to the capacity of individuating moral principles as derivative from the constitution of human nature.

1. *Affectus*: The Transitions of Mind and Body

Part five of the *Ethics* discusses the culmination of Spinoza's project, that is, the attainment of human freedom. To be sure, Spinoza's main concern does not lie in defining freedom per se, but rather in describing "the method, i.e. the way" which leads to it (E5, Preface). Key to the latter, as explained in the preface of part five, is mastering the power of reason in controlling the emotions. In this perspective, the relation between reason and the emotions lies at the very core of Spinoza's philosophical project as deriving from his metaphysics and, at the same time, as grounding his moral philosophy. A fundamental premise in grasping such 'method' thus lies in understanding Spinoza's theory of emotions. The latter is discussed in part three of the *Ethics* and is based upon the following definition:

"By emotion (*affectus*) I understand the affections (*affectiones*) by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, helped or hindered, and at the same time the ideas of these affections. If, therefore, we can be the adequate cause of one of these affections, then I understand by the emotion an action; otherwise, I understand it to be a passion." (E3, d3)

While emotions seem to be here identified with the affections of the body, the two terms should not be conflated. *Affectio* refers to a state; in particular, it indicates the state of an affected body which involves, at the same time, the affecting body by which a subject is affected. In this sense, affections are states of modification of a body that result from the causal interactions of things and beings. *Affectus*, on the other hand, indicates a transition or a passage through which the power of both the mind and the body is increased or diminished. In this sense, an affect implies an affection in the same way that an effect is implied by a cause (Deleuze 1988, 49). For Spinoza, then, the emotions are psychophysiological notions that refer equally to the mind and the body, which implies that these two are somehow united. For Spinoza, such union derives from specific metaphysical arguments regarding the nature of substance (God or Nature) and, in particular, from the theory of attributes, to which I shall now turn.

An attribute is defined in part one as "that which intellect perceives of substance, as constituting its essence" (E1, d4). According to Spinoza, the attributes which express the essence of God or Nature are infinite as God itself is "an absolutely infinite entity" (E1, d6), but the infinity of attributes can only be perceived by an infinite intellect, that is God's intellect. With regards to human beings, or finite minds, Spinoza holds that it is possible to perceive only two attributes, namely, thought and extension. The essence of substance is defined by Spinoza as identical with its existence (E1, p20)², which means that attributes are actually existing ways in which substance is expressed. As a consequence, when considered under the attribute of thought, the mind perceives God or Nature as an actually thinking entity while, under the attribute of extension, the mind perceives it as actually extended (E2, p1-2). It is important to note that an attribute is not defined *in itself*, but in relation

² The existence of substance is also identified with its power in E1, p34.

to the intellect, and this is because attributes are not metaphysical entities. In fact, Spinoza notes that the only entities which are metaphysically possible are substance and modes since each thing must exist "either in itself or in something else" (E1, a1). Accordingly, Nature is defined as that which exists in itself and is conceived through itself (E1, d3) while particular beings exist in Nature and depend on the latter to exist and be conceived (E1, d5). Attributes, on the other hand, are that which express the essence of substance and, as such, are not metaphysically differentiated from it; rather, they are different expressions of the same essence. Importantly, even though all attributes are expressions of the essence of the one substance, Spinoza states that each attribute must be conceived independently or "through itself" (E1, p10). This conceptual barrier derives from the fact that attributes, as expressing that which is conceived through itself, are self-explanatory and do not require another concept to be conceived; this also means, at the same time, that they cannot be reduced to one another. Thus, when speaking of bodies, for example, we necessarily speak of substance as understood through the attribute of extension while, when speaking of minds, we necessarily speak of substance as understood through the attribute of thought. Importantly, even though attributes are conceived as "really distinct" (E1, p10s), it cannot be inferred from this distinction that they are separate entities since, as mentioned earlier, attributes are different expressions of the same essence of God or Nature³. This means that Spinoza rejects the possibility that conceptual independence implies metaphysical distinction or, as noted by Crane and Sandler, that "the distinction between substance and attributes is not a real [i.e. metaphysical] distinction but merely a conceptual distinction" (2005, 196).

³ This position is grounded upon Spinoza's argument for which there can possibly exist only one substance (E1, p11 and alternative proofs). The absolutely infinite essence of the one substance, which is the only entity being conceived 'in itself', is also indivisible (E1p13). Thus, according to Spinoza, "No attribute of a substance can truly be conceived from which it follows that substance can be divided." (E1, p12). Spinoza's position with regards to the indivisibility of substance is not, as noted by Parkinson, that it is not composed of parts; indeed, substance is highly composite and has internal complexity. The point is that from complexity one cannot infer divisibility (Parkinson 2000, 327).

Translating this framework at the level of modes has two consequences with regards to Spinoza's conception of the mind and the body: firstly, mind and body are conceived as really distinct and cannot be reduced to one another: secondly, mind and body are not incommensurable, but rather one and the same thing understood by means of two attributes. Accordingly, Spinoza defines the body as "a mode which expresses in a certain and determinate way the essence of God, in so far as it is considered an extended thing" (E2, d1), while the mind is defined as the idea of an "actually existing mode of extension" (E2, p13). But while these are conceived as distinct, Spinoza also states that "the mind and the body are one and the same individual [*idem esse Individuum*] conceived now under the attribute of thought and now under the attribute of extension" (E2, p21s). The union of mind and body as formulated by Spinoza is commonly known as 'psychophysical parallelism' (or simply 'parallelism')⁴ and is based upon the inter-attribute identity of causal relations by which "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things" (E2, p7). The notion of 'parallelism' – which is not found in the *Ethics* itself but is generally accepted by commentators and historians – has been discussed by Chantal Jaquet as being reductive and not serving well the purpose of identifying Spinoza's theory of the mind-body union (2015). While I share this criticism, since a detailed discussion of this theme goes beyond the purpose of the present discussion I am here referring to 'parallelism' as a way of conceptualizing the unity of mind and body without implying reciprocal causality. Considering this framework, in which Spinoza's theory of the emotions is inscribed, it is possible to better appreciate *affectus* as referring to the individual in terms of both thought and extension or, stated differently, as being a psychophysiological notion.

In his definition, Spinoza states that the emotions are affections through which the "body's power of acting is increased or diminished, helped or hindered, and at the same time the ideas of these affections." When mentioning the body's "power of acting", Spinoza is referring to the notion of *conatus*, namely, the endeavor through which each thing

⁴ See, for example, Della Rocca 1996.

perseveres in being (E3, p7). *Conatus* is a strife for self-preservation and self-development that is proper of each mode of substance, and amounts to the translation in metaphysical terms of the principle of inertia, for which a body tends to preserve its motion and direction unless subjected to external forces which determine it to do otherwise (Cristoforini 2020). For Spinoza, the *conatus* of particular things, which is also identified with their power, amounts to their “actual essence” (*realem essentiam*, E3, p7); thus, the endeavor by which a given thing X perseveres in being is that which posits its existence and, at the same time, its identity condition. With specific regards to human beings, this means that each mind endeavors to persevere in thought and each body in extension, and it is precisely this endeavor which identifies each mind and each body⁵. According to Spinoza, when *conatus* refers to one’s mind and body simultaneously it is called ‘appetite’ or ‘desire’, which is “nothing other than the very essence of man, from the nature of which there necessarily follow those things that contribute to his preservation” (E3, p9s). Appetite and desire both indicate one’s *conatus* but they are different with regards to awareness: appetite is unconscious, while desire “is appetite together with a consciousness of the appetite” (*Ibid.*). In relation to Spinoza’s definition of the emotions, then, *affectus* amount to transitions in power of acting, by which an individual (in terms of both mind and body)⁶ becomes more or less capable of persevering in its own being. The emotions thus have a fundamental importance with regards to one’s own self-preservation and self-development, as they are that which determines one’s “force of existing” (E4, GdE). Accordingly, the two primary emotions of pleasure and pain, from which all the others can be derived, are defined by Spinoza as a “transition to a lesser to a greater perfection” and a “transition to a greater to a lesser perfection”

⁵ It is important to remind that, as I discussed above, the mind is the idea of the body – so even though the mind perseveres in thought and the body in extension, the mind and the body of a person concur in endeavoring in the same *conatus*. This unity in endeavor, however, does not imply that the mind and the body can be affected in different ways and degrees.

⁶ “Whatever increases or diminishes, helps or hinders, our body’s power of acting, the idea of the same thing increases or diminishes, helps or hinders, our mind’s power of acting.” (E3, p11)

respectively. (E3, DE 2-3). And since Spinoza understands 'perfection' and 'reality' as being one and the same (E2, d6), transitions in degrees of perfection correspond to transitions in degrees of reality. Thus, in his *General Definition of the Emotions* at the end of part three, Spinoza states:

"It must be noted that when I say, 'a greater or less force of existing than before', I do not understand that the mind compares the present constitution of the body with a past one, but that the idea that constitutes the form of the emotion affirms something of the body, which genuinely involves more or less reality than before."

Importantly, one of the main concerns moving the project of the *Ethics* lies in the fact that one's natural tendency to self-preservation and self-development does not guarantee that one will succeed in this endeavor. As reported in the definition of the emotions, Spinoza differentiates between *affectus* that are actions and those that are passions. According to him, an emotion is understood as an action when a subject can be "adequate cause" of her affections, otherwise it is understood to be a passion. More specifically, an adequate cause is explained as a cause "whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through itself" while, conversely, an inadequate or partial cause is one "whose effect cannot be understood through itself alone" (E3, d1). Accordingly, Spinoza holds that one can properly be said to act when the affection of a subject (either internal or external) follow from her nature, or "can be understood clearly and distinctly through that nature alone" (E3, d2). Conversely, a subject is passive when she is "only a partial cause" of her affections and the latter cannot be explained by her nature alone (*Ibid*). These definitions can be better appreciated in light of two main points regarding Spinoza's view on causation. Firstly, causal relations amount to the fundamental dynamic which underpins the whole Spinozistic universe; this is already exemplified by the fact that the very definition of God or Nature is formulated – whether as substance or modes – in terms of causal relations (substance is self-caused, *causa sui*, while modes are caused by something other than themselves). In addition to this, Spinoza generally holds that things are determined (i.e. caused) to be and operate in a certain way as part of an infinite

chain⁷ whereby “From a given determinate cause there necessarily follows an effect” (E1, a3), and in which “there exists nothing contingent, but all things have been determined by the necessity of the divine nature to exist and operate in a certain way” (E1, p29). It is precisely because of this notion of causal relations as underpinning the whole of reality that Spinoza famously rejects the position for which our actions are caused by nothing other than “free decrees of the mind” (E3, p2s) – a view which, according to him, is only due to the fact that we are conscious of our endeavor but ignore the causes by which it is determined (*Ibid*). Secondly, as noted by Della Rocca, it is important to consider that Spinoza’s notion of causation amounts to “conceivability or intelligibility” (2003, 81): this means that to say that Y is caused by X is to say that Y is understood or conceived through X. In the same way, causal necessity is tantamount to logical necessity whereby if X is a cause, then Y necessarily follows as its effect.

These features of Spinoza’s notion of causation provide a better context for understanding his definition of an “adequate cause”. According to the latter, one is said to act when she is adequate cause of one of her affections, or, in other words, when she experiences a certain modification which is intelligible as related to her nature and thus can be explained through it. But causation alone, arguably, does not fully exhaust Spinoza’s differentiation between actions and passions; as the latter is also grounded upon intelligibility, it is also necessary to take account of Spinoza’s epistemological views, to which I shall now turn.

2. Knowledge: The Actions of the Mind

Given the notion of causation understood in terms of conceivability or intelligibility, it is clear that being adequate cause of one’s affections

⁷ “Every particular thing, or anything which is finite and has a determinate existence, cannot exist or be determined to operate unless it is determined to existence and operation by another cause, which is also finite and has determinate existence; and again, the latter cause can also not exist or be determined to operation unless it is determined to existence and operation by another cause, which is also finite and has determinate existence, and so on to infinity.” (E1, p28)

depends on the way in which one conceives the affections themselves, which means that actions depend on knowledge. This is clear from Spinoza's notion of "adequate" and "inadequate" ideas, which follow his differentiation between actions and passions. According to him,

"In so far as [our mind] has adequate ideas, so far it necessarily acts, and in so far as it has inadequate ideas, so far it is necessarily passive." (E3, p1)

In order to grasp such differentiation, it is necessary to look at the way in which Spinoza understands the very notion of an idea. In the third definition of part two, it is said that by 'idea' Spinoza understands "a conception of the mind, which the mind forms on account of the fact that it is a thinking thing." He then goes on explaining that he says "*conception (conceptum)* rather than 'perception' (*perceptionem*) because the word 'perception' seems to indicate that the mind is in a passive relation to its object; but conception seems to express an *action of the mind*"⁸ (E2, d3). Thus, in the context of the *Ethics*, ideas are not images of the mind; on the contrary, Spinoza explicitly states that "the essence of words and images is constituted solely by corporeal motions, which are far from involving the concept of thought" (E2, p49s). Rather, ideas are actions that imply judgment, for which having an idea of X means to affirm or negate something about the nature of X. The consequence of such a peculiar conception of ideas, is that Spinoza famously denies the separation of the will and the intellect because judgment (usually ascribed to the will) is intrinsically contained in the activity of the intellect itself:

⁸ As noted by Giovanni Gentile, this theory of ideas as actions of the mind is very different from that found in the *Short Treatise*; this also signals the abandonment of the doctrine of *influxus physicus* (roughly maintaining the possibility of causal interaction between mind and body). The theory also signals Spinoza's detachment from the Scholastic and the Cartesian tradition. (Durante, Gentile and Radetti 2017, 724). Parkinson too notes that the theory takes great distance from Descartes, who did entertain the notion of ideas as activity of the mind (*Meditations*), but ultimately held that ideas are "whatever is immediately perceived by the mind." (*Reply to Second Objection*, Parkinson 2000, 330).

“There is in the mind no volition, or, no affirmation or negation, apart from that which an idea involves in so far as it is an idea.” (E2, p49)

Adequate and inadequate ideas, then, are acts of judgment. An adequate idea is said to have the same properties of a true idea (E2, d4), with the difference that true ideas are considered in relation to their object while adequate ideas are considered in themselves (i.e. without relation to the object of which they are the idea). It should be noted that the fact that Spinoza holds that true ideas must agree with their object (E1, a6) does not imply that he ascribes to some correspondence theory of truth, as he also states that “someone that has a true idea knows at the same time that he has a true idea” (E2, p43)⁹. In the scholium of the same proposition it is clarified that ‘true’ does not refer to a one-to-one correspondence between an idea and its object, but rather to knowing something “perfectly” or “in the best way”. Stated differently, a true idea is an action of the mind through which the nature of the object at issue is affirmed in the best way possible, and the same goes for adequate ideas as considered in themselves. Inadequate ideas, on the other hand, are confused and mutilated and, as such, they are source of falsity (E2, p35). In line with what I said about adequate and true ideas, having an inadequate idea of X can be thought in terms of ‘not knowing X perfectly or in the best way possible’; this means that inadequate ideas do not posit absolute ignorance, but rather a “privation of knowledge” (*Ibid*). Thus, having an inadequate idea of X does not equate to not knowing X, but rather to judge X in a way whereby the latter cannot be explained clearly and distinctly. An example of an inadequate conception of the mind is that of free will, through which an individual affirms her actions but, at the same time, ignores the causes by which those actions are determined (E2, p35s).

The differentiation between adequate/inadequate ideas and, accordingly, between actions and passion of the mind underpins the whole of Spinoza’s theory of knowledge. As it is well known, he

⁹ The correspondence interpretation is problematized even more by a statement found in the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*: “If someone says that Peter exists, but does not know that Peter exists, then his utterance is false even if Peter exists” (Parkinson 2009, 31).

articulates three kinds of knowledge, namely, the imagination, reason, and intuitive knowledge (E2, p40s). The imagination¹⁰ (or first kind of knowledge) includes both inconstant experience (specifically, sense perception and inductive knowledge) and signs (i.e. our use of language), and since it is based on inadequate ideas it necessarily leads to inadequate knowledge. On the other hand, reason and intuition (second and third kinds of knowledge, respectively) are both source of adequate and true ideas (E2, p41). While intuitive knowledge is said to proceed from an adequate knowledge of the attributes of substance to an adequate knowledge of the essence of particular things, reason is described as that by which the intellect perceives “common notions”, that is, properties that are common to all things. (E2, p38).¹¹ Once again, in articulating the imagination as a source of inadequate knowledge Spinoza does not hold that sense perception does not provide knowledge at all; the point he makes is that the confused ideas deriving from imaginations do not provide us with the intellectual order that is required to understand Nature. Reason, on the other hand, is that by which the mind grasps the necessity of all the affections of substance that necessarily follow from the nature of God in such a way that the mind is able to “perceive things under a certain species of eternity” (*sub specie aeternitatis*) (E2, p44c2).

Now, according to Spinoza, the mind necessarily conceives both adequate and inadequate ideas since they both follow from the same necessity: we conceive adequately when our ideas are related to God or Nature while we conceive inadequately when relating to a particular mode, i.e. without relation to God (E2, p36d). A chief case that exemplifies the necessity of inadequate ideas is found in how, according to Spinoza, we conceive our minds and bodies. He holds that we do not have an adequate knowledge of these two because we know the mind and the

¹⁰ Also called “opinion” in E2, p40s.

¹¹ The difference between intuitive knowledge and reason, which has long been debated by scholars, goes beyond the purpose of the present discussion. It suffices to point that some scholars argue that the difference lies in the method of apprehension of the two types of knowledge, some state that it is a difference in the content of the apprehension, and some other state it is both. For a detailed yet concise discussion of this issue; see Soyarslan 2013.

body not in themselves (meaning with direct access to the object of knowledge) but through their affections, that is, we know the mind and the body as they are affected by others. Thus, Spinoza states that “the human mind does not know the human body, nor does it know that it exists, except through the ideas of the affections by which the body is affected” (E2, p19), and that “the human body exists as we sense (*sentimus*) it” (E2, p13c). From these propositions, I think, it is possible to derive an important consideration regarding self-knowledge in the context of the *Ethics*, namely, that our capacity for self-knowledge is grounded upon our capacity for being affected; in other words, we can come to know our mind and body *because* we are determined by relations with other modes, by which we are affected. To be sure, I am not stating that the affections grant self-knowledge – the success, as I will discuss in a moment, is dependent upon our capacity to act (i.e. forming adequate ideas of those affections). Rather, I am pointing out the fact that the self of the *Ethics* is necessarily a relational self, not only in terms of metaphysics but also epistemologically, since we know ourselves *as* we know others. Such relational character seems to be implied by the following proposition:

“The idea of any mode, by which the human body is affected by external bodies, must involve the nature of the human body and at the same time the nature of the external body.” (E2, p16)

Importantly, the possibility of self-knowledge does not only relate to the constitutions of the mind and the body, but also (and perhaps more importantly) to *conatus*, namely, one’s essence. This is because, by means of relating to other modes and being affected in different ways by them, one can enter relations of compositions or decompositions, depending on whether the *relata* are conceived as agreeing in nature or not. But how does one know whether something agrees with her nature and thus forms a relation of composition, or whether she does not harmonize with that by which she is affected? The short answer to this question, I believe, lies in understanding the *affectus*. As I have explained earlier, the two primary emotions of pleasure and pain (as well as all those derived from them) are *transitions* from a lesser to a greater state of

perfection and vice versa: as such, the emotions are the source by which one is able to know her essence or *conatus* by means of awareness. Once again, the emotions themselves do not grant self-knowledge: on the contrary, Spinoza notes that they can be source of great confusion,

"For each person regulates everything in accordance with his emotion, and those who are harassed by contrary emotions do not know what they want, but those who are harassed by no emotions are easily driven this or that way." (E3, p2s)

I have earlier explained that the *affectus* imply and follow from one's affections in the same way as an effect follows from a cause, and since, according to Spinoza, "Knowledge of an effect depends on the knowledge of the cause, and involves it" (E1, a4), in the same way an adequate knowledge of the emotions depends on understanding the affections from which they derive. Formulated in this way it might seem that understanding the emotions is a straightforward task; however, that is not the case, and I think that, in reading the *Ethics*, it is possible to individuate three main reasons why grasping the emotions is a difficult endeavor. The first two reasons derive from prejudice: the first concerns the deeply rooted misconception for which actions are not determined by networks of causal relations but by "free decrees of the mind", while the second concerns the misconception by which ideas are images that are assessed by the will when judgment is already implied by each and every idea. Even though other factors may be listed (such as Spinoza's criticism of final causes), I believe these are the two prejudices that, in the context of the *Ethics*, represents the greatest impairment to understanding both others and the self. First, the misconception of causal relations prevents the possibility of understanding the self as a relational entity which depends on Nature for its existence and, at the same time, is determined to act in this or that way by it. Second, conceiving ideas as passive images of the mind overshadows their power of (self) determination, while the notion of an autonomous will corroborates the illusion for which we act according to free decrees of the mind. In addition to these prejudices, the third reason for which an adequate understanding of the emotions might be prevented concerns the nature of perception itself: as Spinoza explains, the ideas of the affections of the

body always involve both the nature of the affected body and the nature of the affecting body. Indeed, when conceiving this apprehension (which can also involve several bodies at the same time) there may or may not be intellectual order, which means that one may or may not be able to individuate the affections as causes of the emotions or, conversely, individuate the emotions as deriving from some given affections. The lack of intellectual order, as I previously discussed, stems from the confused ideas of the imagination; but while the latter is not enough to understand the order of Nature as displayed in causal relations, it has nevertheless a fundamental role with regards to gaining knowledge of particular beings¹².

According to Spinoza, the inability to conceive the emotions as causally related to some given affections results in being determined 'externally', that is, being subjected to external causes which are not conceived as related to one's own nature. This is formulated in the scholium of E2, p29:

"I say expressly that the mind has an adequate knowledge neither of itself, nor of its bodies, nor of external bodies, but only a confused knowledge, whenever it perceives things through the common order of Nature; that is, whenever it is determined externally, namely by its fortuitous contact with things, to regard this or that, and not whenever it is determined internally, namely by the fact that it regards things at the same time, to an understanding of their agreements, differences, and oppositions. For as often as it is determined internally in this or in some other way, it regards things clearly and distinctly."

This can be related to the definition of *affectus* to better explain Spinoza's differentiation between actions and passions. When emotions are not understood in a confused way (i.e. without relation between the affection and one's own nature) they determine the individual 'externally' and thus are said to be passions, whereby the individual is only a partial or inadequate cause in the order of Nature. On the other hand, when emotions are understood adequately (i.e. as following from some given affection of one's own nature) then the individual *internally* determines the agreements and distinctions between one's

¹² This is especially true with regards to knowledge of particular beings in general, since the definition of a mode does not, in itself, imply existence.

conatus and that of the affecting body; when concurring in this 'internal' determination, emotions are said to be actions¹³. The internal determination is actualized by means of reason, the *modus operandi* which determines the common properties shared by all minds and bodies in the necessary order of Nature. Importantly, it is by determining the commonalities shared by all modes that one can conceive emotions adequately: this is because, whether it be a matter of opposition, agreement, or distinction, things that have nothing in common cannot causally interact (E1, a5)¹⁴. In this sense, the active understanding of the emotions already implies the individuation of common properties, thus undermining the opposition between oneself and other modes.

In light of the metaphysical and epistemological elements discussed so far, I think that adequate knowledge of the emotions, as articulated in the *Ethics*, represents the main source for individual self-knowledge. Specifically, I think that adequate knowledge of the emotions provides metaphysical insight into the nature of the self in two ways. First, an understanding of the emotions as relational transitions of power leads, in turn, to understanding the self as relational, or, as a union of mind and body which is determined to exist and be conceived by other modes; in this sense, knowledge of the emotions also involve knowledge of causal interactions in terms of conceptual dependence. Second, understanding the emotions leads to understanding one's own essence or *conatus*; as the emotions involve some affirmation or negation of the self that result in transitions of power of existing (depending on how the latter is affected), an adequate knowledge of *affectus* provides a map of one's essence as outlined on the basis of the ways in which affections are conceived. In short, understanding the emotions provide metaphysical awareness. Such awareness has been defined by Deleuze

¹³ Even though Spinoza specifically speaks of the mind in the quotation reported above, I here speak of individual (including both mind and body) in light of E2, p28, where he states that "the ideas of the affections of the body, in so far as they are related to the human mind alone, are not clear and distinct, but confused."

¹⁴ Also E4, p29: "Any particular thing whose nature is entirely different from ours can neither help nor hinder our power of acting, and in absolute terms no things can be good or bad for us unless it has something in common with us."

as ‘consciousness’, in the sense of the continual awareness stemming from greater or lesser transitions of power “as a witness of the variations and determinations of the *conatus* functioning in relation to other bodies and other ideas” (1988, 21). On the basis of such awareness, I shall now turn to discuss my second claim regarding how the metaphysical insight provided by the emotions is related to knowledge of moral principles.

3. Knowledge of the Emotions as Moral Knowledge

One could say that Spinoza derives his theory of ethics from the metaphysics of God or Nature in the same way as the ‘good’ or ‘bad’ functioning of a system depends on its constitution. What I mean to indicate with this image is that he does not attribute absolute value to notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’: he states that “these indicate nothing positive in things considered in themselves” (E4, preface) but they are, instead, “ways of thinking” that are formed by means of comparison, so that the same thing can be bad, good, or neither¹⁵ (*Ibid*). In the same preface, however, Spinoza also recognizes that these notions as useful in delineating an exemplar of human nature that can be pursued with the purpose of living a flourishing life. Accordingly, he defines ‘good’ and ‘bad’ as follows:

“I shall understand by ‘good’ that which we know with certainty to be a means by which we may approach more and more closely that exemplar of human nature which we set before ourselves. By ‘bad’ I shall understand that which we know with certainty to hinder us from reaching that exemplar.” (*Ibid*)

While these definitions, arguably, might seem too loose to provide an explicit account of moral principles, they indicate two important aspects of Spinoza’s ethical theory: first, while it might be argued that Spinoza ascribes to a type of egoism, he surely does not ascribe to moral relativism. This is clearly seen when considering that ‘good’ and ‘bad’

¹⁵ Spinoza takes music as an example to illustrate such comparative value: “For one and the same thing can at the same time be good, bad, and indifferent. For example, music is good to someone who is melancholy, bad to a mourner, but neither good nor bad to someone who is deaf.” (E4, preface)

are defined to the purpose of delineating a human exemplar and, as such, these notions can indicate some common properties of all minds and bodies. Second, as 'good' and 'bad' are "ways of thinking" they can also be understood as actions of the mind, or ideas that intrinsically involve judgment; thus (similarly to affections), 'good' and 'bad' can be determined 'externally' or 'internally' depending on one's way of conceiving causal interactions.

The comparative character of notions of 'good' and 'bad' is further defined in the first two definitions of part four, where the good is defined as that which "we know with certainty to be useful (*esse utile*) to us", while 'bad' as that which "we know with certainty to hinder us from possessing something good". Specifically, what is useful to us is whatever concurs in increasing our *conatus* or our power of existing, while that which hinders us from persevering in being in terms of self-preservation and self-development is harmful. This means that something X is defined as 'good' or 'bad' in reference to one's *conatus* and depending on whether X is conceived as opposing or as agreeing with one's own nature; this is why, according to Spinoza, we do not desire something because we conceive it as good but, on the contrary, we conceive it as good because we desire it (E3, p9s). As the essence of the human being is to persevere in existing, it follows that an individual naturally seeks what is useful to her and avoids as much as possible those things which hinder her endeavor¹⁶. Despite this, one might be unsuccessful in becoming active or more powerful because of lack of understanding about "what is really (*revera*) to our own advantage" and "what truly leads man to greater perfection" (E4, p18s). In order to better understand this point, let us reconsider Spinoza's differentiated understanding of *affectus*.

Even though the general position of the *Ethics* is that pleasure is a passage from a lesser to a greater perfection and pain from a lesser to a greater perfection, it should be noted that this does not entail that Spinoza holds that all pleasure is good and all pain is bad. A good example of a differentiated understanding of the emotions is provided

¹⁶ E4, p19: "Each person, by the laws of his nature, necessarily either seeks or is averse to what he judges to be good or bad."

in E4, p43d where it is explained that when pleasure relates to only one part of the body (such as in the case of “titillation”) it can harm the body as a whole while, on the other hand, localized pain (such as “anguish”) can help restraining what damages the body. In such a case, pleasure is a passion because it directs the mind to conceive the body inadequately or in a confused way by relating to only one part of it rather than to the body as a whole, thus affirming of the individual a lesser power of existing¹⁷. In this sense, emotions are passions in so far as they are conceived in such a way that the individual “cannot think of other things” other than a given affection (ignoring all the other affections which direct one’s *conatus*). Spinoza discusses this as follows:

“An emotion which is related to several different causes, which the mind contemplates simultaneously with the emotion itself, is less harmful, and we suffer less through it and are less affected towards each cause, than another equally great emotion that is related to fewer causes, or to one cause alone.”
(E5, p9)

It is clear here that the causal network determining an individual – which, by Spinoza’s understanding of causality as intelligibility, is identical with her conceptual network – can be greater or lesser depending on whether one is able to form adequate ideas of the emotions or not. In other words, what really differentiates emotions as passions and emotions as actions is, once again, knowledge: by apprehending the emotions solely through the imagination (that is, without considering the cause of the emotion) one will affirm herself only partially, thus hindering her endeavor of persevering in self-preservation and self-development. On the other hand, by understanding the emotions through reason, one will affirm of her mind and body a greater force of existing by relating her nature to that of as many affections as possible: it is in this sense that Spinoza holds that, when the mind acts (i.e. understands) it experiences no other emotions apart from those deriving from pleasure and desire (E3, p59). Furthermore, since reason perceives the common properties of things (which are equally in the part and in the whole), Spinoza also affirms

¹⁷ See E3, General Definition of the Emotions.

that the emotions related to the active mind can never be excessive (E4, p61).

The emotions and their differentiated understanding set the ground for Spinoza's articulation of moral knowledge in such a way that, in proposition eight of book four, he identifies knowledge of "good" and "bad" with the *conscious* emotions of pleasure and pain:

"Knowledge of 'good' and 'bad' is simply the emotion of pleasure and pain, in so far as we are conscious of it."¹⁸

This important identity is based on the reasoning for which as one's power of acting is increased or diminished, one experiences pleasure or pain respectively together with the ideas of these *affectus*; and since 'good' is that which increases one's conatus and 'bad' is that which hinders it, the ideas of 'good' and 'bad' are not "really distinguished" from the emotions themselves (E4, p8d). It is of key importance to note that, in this proposition, Spinoza is not identifying moral knowledge with the emotions as such. Indeed, that would be directly contradicting his differentiated discussion on *affectus* as both actions and passions. Rather, Spinoza is here referring to pleasure and pain as transitions in one's power of existing in so far as one is *aware* of those transitions. As I have discussed in the previous section, such awareness depends on one's ability to be determined 'internally', that is, forming adequate ideas of the affections by which one is determined to act in this or that way through understanding the agreements and differences that emerge from causal relations. In this context, reason acquires fundamental importance as the *modus operandi* in which conceptual relations are necessarily conceived adequately. By means of reason, according to Spinoza, the individual is able to distinguish between truth and falsity and, as a consequence, is able to know *with certainty* what leads to a flourishing life, i.e. what is truly useful to one's self-preservation and self-development. As the essence of the mind is to persevere in thought and succeeding in understanding as much as possible, Spinoza states that "We know with certainty to be good or bad

¹⁸ My emphasis.

nothing but that which truly leads to understanding, or which can hinder us from understanding" (E4, p27). This implies that adequate knowledge of things is not an instrumental *praxis* but, instead, is "good for itself" as it fulfils the very essence of the mind, namely, persevering in understanding (E4, p26d). It is for these reasons that Spinoza considers the endeavor of understanding as "the primary and sole basis for virtue". (*Ibid*)

Arguably, this ethical framework based on the emotions seems to be grounded on egoism, as it is primarily based on individual capacity for self-preservation and self-development. At the same time, however, it should be considered that Spinoza's *conatus* is inscribed in a metaphysics which does not admit of isolated individuals: as I discussed earlier, each mode is dependent upon others (by which it is defined) and, overall, each particular being is dependent upon Nature. The order of causal relations and conceptual necessity is precisely that which is grasped by reason, a mode of knowledge in which the active mind understands things under a "certain species of eternity" and conceives the common properties shared equally by particular beings and nature as a whole. In this sense, Spinoza's rational life is mapped around the underpinning awareness that the self is part of a greater and more composite whole (God or Nature). By grasping the common properties of things, then, the rational mind is necessarily other-regarding, agrees in nature with others (E4, p35) and pursues what is common to all. (E4, p36). As noted by Newland, this framework reveals that "the referent of the 'self' that is pursuing self-interest may shift" (2018, 193)¹⁹.

All this considered, it is possible to better appreciate how adequate knowledge of the emotions, for Spinoza, lies at the foundation of ethical knowledge. This is because, as I noted above, it is through understanding *affectus* that we can 'know with certainty' what is 'good' and 'bad' in such a way that we can approach more and more closely the exemplar of human nature that we set before ourselves in pursuing the good. In this sense, understanding the emotions as conceived in the

¹⁹ On the contrary, those who are determined 'externally' and do not understand the causes of their emotions necessarily live in opposition to each other, as they are unable to identify the common properties of all minds and bodies: "In so far as man are liable to passions, to that extent they cannot be said to agree in nature." (E4, p32)

Ethics provides a map of becoming in which the 'good' can be traced in accordance with Nature.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that the adequate knowledge of the emotions provided by reason, as described in Spinoza's *Ethics*, is important in two ways: first, as transitions of power determined by causal relations, understanding the emotions provide us with a metaphysical insight into human nature as a relational entity; second, adequate knowledge of the emotions provides us with ethical knowledge, since understanding pleasure and pain also amounts to understanding "with certainty" what is most useful to self-preservation and self-development. Overall, I have argued that knowledge of the emotions as discussed by Spinoza lies at the core of the virtuous life and, as such, can provide a map of becoming directed to the actualization of a human exemplar.

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MALEBRANCHE AND KNOWLEDGE BY INSTINCT

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Abstract

In *La Recherche de la vérité*, Malebranche succeeds Descartes in entitling the affections of pleasure and pain to a practical role. However, he also speaks of instinct as “knowledge” and “proof”. This vocabulary is all the more surprising as it keeps opposing *knowledge*, based on ideas, to *feeling*, which only consists of obscure perceptions. It will thus be about examining the cognitive range that affectivity receives in this philosophy yet known for its rationalism and its intellectualism.

Keywords: Malebranche, passions, metaphysics, God, sentiment.

Introduction

Amongst the Cartesians, Malebranche was one of those who most insisted on the union of the body and soul. Although his theory of knowledge and moral philosophy embody an intellectualist ideal, he took the submission of the mind to the body very seriously and understood it as a relationship of true dependence. In recent years, scholars such as Delphine Antoine-Mahut and Angela Ferraro (2019) have accordingly been able to identify materialist re-appropriations of Malebranche in the 18th century. Compared to Descartes, who was unable to complete his *Treatise on Man*, it is as if Malebranche succeeded in proposing a comprehensive “science of man” in the *Recherche de la vérité*, in that it brings together a theory of the sciences as well as a

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description of human passions and inclinations. His examination of moral issues forced him to acknowledge the limits of intellectualism in his theory of the mind: for the man who applies himself to the sciences and to the vision of God is subject to his own body². Malebranche's anthropology of the fall determines and alters his theory of knowledge.

Malebranche was interested in the specific way in which the soul knows itself and its own modifications or affections. He understands consciousness as an inner sentiment marked by confusion and obscurity. In contrast to Descartes, he views consciousness as the privileged medium of the relationship to oneself, similarly to La Forge and Desgabets³. This relationship is not representative and mediated by ideas – it is immediate and without distance. On the one hand, it establishes the impossibility for the soul united to the body to know itself in this life. On the other hand, it allows for the particular way the soul has of apprehending its interiority and “flow of consciousness”, in spite of everything: it does so by internal experience. Inner sentiment tells us with certainty what goes on within us. It is in its affections and emotions that the soul knows itself, even if knowledge here takes on a broad meaning which is ill-adjusted to Malebranche's thought.

Malebranche was the first to designate “sentiment”, that is to say an affection or passive impression, as a *sui generis* mode of knowledge. As Jean-Christophe Bardout writes, recalling Michel Henry's interpretation, Malebranche “rediscovered the original phenomenality of a true psychic universe freed from the constraints of a mathematisation of reality as well as from the epistemic structures of metaphysics” (Bardout 1999, 271). Malebranche does not see this as a great discovery, however, but as the mark of an irremediable flaw.

² On this point we refer to Gouhier 1926; Alquié 1974, in particular, part. III, chap. VII; Simonetta 2018, part. II, chap. IV.

³ The expression “inner sentiment” rather suggests that the influence is exerted from La Forge and Desgabets on Malebranche: indeed, as Jean-Christophe Bardout points out, the addition of the phrase “inner sentiment” to that of “consciousness” is mainly due to the later editions of the *Recherche*. The first two editions most often mention only “consciousness” to designate the mode by which the soul knows itself. See note 6, in Lanion 2019, 85-86.

In theorising sentiment in this way, Malebranche breaks new ground in comparison to Descartes. In §189 of the fourth part of the *Principles of Philosophy*, sentiment refers to the perception in the mind of movements transmitted by the nerves⁴. “Sentiment” is thus a generic term for all the perceptions of the soul arising from the senses – the term “sensation” not yet being in use⁵. The word translates the Latin word “sensus”, which is found for example in the Latin text of the *Principia*, and which indiscriminately refers to all sensitive perceptions. Senses can be internal, when sentiments refer to natural appetites and passions, or external, when sentiments are the sensitive perceptions caused by the impression of external bodies on our organs.

Malebranche takes up this terminology while introducing a distinction between sentiment and sensation that had only been sketched by Descartes in the Latin version of the *Principles*: sensation refers to the perceptions of the senses, i.e. those impressions in the soul that are mixed with a judgement relating to the objects distinguished from the soul, that is the body or bodies. Sentiments simply refer to the states that the soul immediately experiences in itself. Malebranche emphasises the intentionality contained in sensations on the one hand, and the inner character of sentiment on the other⁶. He thus opens up a new space for knowledge, that of affective interiority. Yet he concomitantly puts it beyond the reach of rational knowledge. It is literature that will take it upon itself to explore affective interiority from the end of the 18th century.

⁴ “The movements which thus pass, through the nerves, to the place in the brain to which our soul is closely joined and united, cause it to have various thoughts, by reason of the diversities which are in them; and finally, that it is these various thoughts of our soul, which come immediately from the movements which are excited through the nerves in the brain, that we properly call our sentiments, or the perceptions of our senses”, Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, IV, §189, AT IX-2, 310.

⁵ On this point, see De Calan, Ronan 2012, 16-22.

⁶ See *Answers to the Sixth Objections*, AT IX-1, 238: “[...] although this sense makes us judge that a stick is straight, and that by that way of judging to which we are accustomed from our childhood, and which consequently can be called *sentiment*, nevertheless it is not enough to correct the error of sight”. Descartes therefore does not distinguish between deceptive sensations and sentiment: both refer to a sensitive impression mixed with a judgment.

For Malebranche, however, inner sentiment does not mean a sentiment that relates solely to the properties of the soul considered independently of the body. To associate consciousness with a sentiment, even if it is interior, is to insist on the impossibility of knowing the soul independently of its relationship to the body. Malebranche uses the notion of sentiment, following La Forge, to speak of the soul's knowledge of itself. He thus manifests his awareness of the soul's constant relationship with the body, which Arnauld, and Locke after him, will precisely disregard when speaking of consciousness.

This new approach to sentiment renews how classical philosophy thinks about the relationship between knowledge of the soul and affectivity. Alongside it, Malebranche retains the Cartesian idea that sentiments, understood as modalities of pleasure and pain ranging from sensations to passions, are institutions of nature useful for the preservation of the body – but which we must not project into objects insofar as they are always relative to us. It is this second aspect that we will further explore.

Malebranche's ideas lead us to pose two problems regarding the relationship between sentiment and knowledge. Firstly, starting from the idea of consciousness or inner sentiment: should we generalise to all sentiment this essential inability to turn us away from ourselves and make us know something other than ourselves? Secondly, is the relative character of the affections, which is useful for the preservation of our being, an absolute obstruction to objective knowledge? In this case, would emotions, passions and sentiments only be obstacles to knowledge or, at best, adjuvants, without ever delivering knowledge in themselves?

We will first recall Malebranche's pessimistic view of the capacity to know of the soul united to the body, and the way in which the passions accompany and often hinder knowledge, going beyond their initial function of practical guidance. We will then examine how sentiment delivers a knowledge that does not only concern the soul and its interiority (in which case this knowledge would remain purely psychological), but also the relationships that structure man's existence, even though it is opposed to the light of reason. Sentiment generically designates here the modalities of affective life such as pleasure, pain,

and passions. Such relationships cannot be known otherwise than in the affective life.

I. The observation of fallen nature or the troublesome presence of passions in cognitive life

It is because Malebranche takes very seriously the incarnation of the soul – the fact that man is not a pure spirit and the fall of Adam – that he gives a great deal of space in his thinking to the relationship between affectivity and knowledge. The analysis of the passions is an essential part of the presentation of the conditions for the search for truth, insofar as the passions are one of the main reasons why individuals pay little attention to the divine truth that always speaks in themselves. Malebranche defines them in a general way as emotions or impressions which men experience on the occasion of the movements of the animal spirits and which attach them to their bodies and to the goods which are useful for their preservation.

Far from being a corruption, these are willed by God for the preservation of his creatures; it is sin that transforms this natural union into a bondage. Sin has made us subject to our bodies, and through our bodies has made us dependent on all things sensitive. Henceforth, the understanding depends on the will. It receives its direction from the will, it is the will that determines it and applies it to certain objects rather than others. The mind has become so material, writes Malebranche, that it cannot be touched by abstract truths that do not touch it (Malebranche, 1979-1992, t. I, 489)⁷. Man “[...] often believes that these [things] are the truest, the most useful, the most agreeable, and the most affecting” (RV, IV, II, §iii, 394).

The major problem for the search for truth is therefore the tendency to confuse the truth of things with their usefulness, the relationship they have with each other with the relationship they have with him. The passions corrupt reason: they represent things to it not according to what they are in themselves or according to the truth, but

⁷ Unless otherwise indicated, we will cite Malebranche’s works in this edition as RV, then the book and chapter in Roman numerals. See RV, IV, XI.

according to the relationship they have with us. This explains the inability of men to reach certain truths which are obvious to the mind that applies itself to them: the truths of geometry, of metaphysics but also of morality. The moral principle that one must love God in order to be virtuous and happy is unknown to most “because they do not taste it, or because they become disgusted with it too soon after they have tasted it. This principle is abstract, metaphysical, purely intelligible; it cannot be felt or imagined” (452).

The same is true of the immortality of the soul, a truth that is too abstract, impossible to taste, and yet of interest to our existence. *A fortiori*, how ignorant men must be of truths that have no relation to them, such as algebra and arithmetic! It is therefore the tendency to relate everything to ourselves through our sensibility, to relate everything to ourselves, that deepens our ignorance. Malebranche deplores the extent to which “we judge all things according to our passions, and consequently we are mistaken in all things; the judgments of the passions never agreeing with the judgments of truth” (RV, V, VI, 533). The Oratorian denounces here for the passions the tendency already revealed by Descartes concerning sensations in relation to the objects that cause them, i.e. we attribute to the objects that seem to cause our passions all the dispositions of our heart: our goodness, our gentleness, our malice, our love or our hatred, *etc.* We project onto the objects properties of our passions, which are not the same as those of the objects that cause them. We project onto the objects properties of our soul. Malebranche thus contrasts two models for relating to objects: that of knowledge proper, which examines by reason the ideas of objects and their relations in themselves in divine wisdom, and that of inner sentiment, containing sensations, passions, and sentiments, according to which we always judge in relation to ourselves, from what we experience, without being able to establish distinct relations between the changes we experience. We are then reduced to a confused and obscure experience.

This second point of view is, however, legitimate for the conduct of life, for what concerns our existence. First, concerning the inner sentiment: the inner testimony of the conscience is certainly insufficient to make us know the essence of our soul, its substance, but it is sufficient

to know “immortality, spirituality, freedom, and some other attributes which it is necessary for us to know”. When it is confined to the properties of the soul itself that are useful for salvation, the inner sentiment is neither false nor misleading⁸, unlike the confused sentiments that manifest the changes that take place in the soul on the occasion of the movements of the bodies.

Secondly, concerning the sentiments resulting from the movements of the bodies, Malebranche assimilates them to an instinct warning man of what is good for his preservation. In a development aimed at explaining the disorders of sin, Malebranche reminds us that man is marked by a double union and is thus destined for two types of goods, respectively known by the spirit and by the sentiment. We then read that the pains and pleasures caused by physical objects and felt in the body – even if they are only modifications of the soul – are willed by God in accordance with the natural laws of the union of soul and body, so that the mind is warned “by the short and unmistakable voice of sentiment”⁹ of what is useful to the body to which it is united.

In this, Malebranche is faithful to Descartes¹⁰ (pleasant or unpleasant sentiments allow men to know the relationships of convenience which they entertain with bodies). But he underlines the ambivalence of this physical sensitivity, which he says is also the cause of sin and the ensuing perversion¹¹: from being informative, pleasures and pains

⁸ See also *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, III, II, XXXVIII, *Works* II, 136: “But I cannot bring myself to push metaphysics to the expense of morality, to assure as unquestionable truths, opinions contrary to the inner sentiment I have of myself, or finally to speak to the ears a certain language, which, it seems to me, says nothing clear to the mind.”

⁹ “The goods of the body do not deserve the application of a mind, which God made only for itself: it is necessary, therefore, that the mind should recognise such goods without examination, and by the short and incontestable proof of sentiment.” (*Ibid.*, I, V, 49).

¹⁰ *Ibid.* In this Malebranche is merely developing what Descartes already set out in the Sixth Meditation: “Moreover I felt that this body was placed between many others, from which it was capable of receiving various conveniences and inconveniences, and I noticed these conveniences by a certain sentiment of pleasure or delight, and these inconveniences by a sentiment of pain”, AT IX-1, 59.

¹¹ We will not return to Malebranche's explanation of sin. Let us quickly recall that God wanted to be loved with a free love and not with a love of instinct. He did not give Adam any preventive sentiments with regard to spiritual goods. The vivacity of

become prescriptive. Man must obey them¹², insofar as his adherence to sensitive goods no longer concerns only his body but also gains his soul, deceived by what Malebranche calls “proofs of sentiment”¹³. These make him believe that bodies, and not God, are the true cause of the pleasures or pains he feels.

If he recognises that these sentiments have a usefulness, as in Descartes, he also thinks that they have a metaphysical value, if one may say so, in that they dispense us from devoting the capacity of our minds to bodies. Far from pointing to a defect in creation, they remain a proof of divine wisdom insofar as they are instituted to make us know quickly and efficiently the composition of bodies and their usefulness to us¹⁴. Hence, the short and sure way of sentiment makes us know which bodies we should unite with without needing to develop our knowledge of them. Understood as shortcuts to knowledge, pleasure and pain are, it is true, a form of deprivation in relation to the knowledge of light. What is commendable when it comes to bodies, becomes regrettable when it comes to our relationship with Order.

In the *Treatise on Morals*, the Oratorian also acknowledges the power and advantage of the short and sure voice of sentiments of joy or remorse to instruct us when we follow or abandon the unchanging order of perfections in the absence of light on this moral order, but then he deplores that we are not able to apply our reason to the truths contained in divine wisdom. In morality – as in metaphysics and mathematics – rational knowledge by ideas remains the model of knowledge¹⁵.

sensitive pleasures gradually occupied all of Adam's attention, turning him away from Adam's attention, distracting him from the union with God which was known to him only by the light of reason.

¹² “Thus the senses and the passions do not derive their birth from sin, but only that power which they have to tyrannise sinners: and this power is not so much a disorder of the senses, as of the mind and will of men [...]”, RV, I, V, 51.

¹³ *Ibid*, V, V, 528.

¹⁴ See *Entretiens sur la métaphysique et la religion*, IV, XIV, *Œuvres* II, 731-732.

¹⁵ “Nothing, therefore, is more certain than the light: one cannot dwell too much on clear ideas; and although one may allow oneself to be animated by sentiment, one must never allow oneself to be led by it. We must contemplate the Order in itself, and only suffer sentiment to sustain our attention by the movement it excites in us”, *Treatise on Morals*, I, V, XXI, *Works* II, 470.

Is affectivity, then, only a stopgap to the knowledge of light? We endeavour to show that the passions have more than just a practical role and that their cognitive value is not limited to the power they have to apply the mind to certain truths. There is more to it than that, and the texts indicate that a certain relationship to truth is also played out *in* our passions and sentiments, inaccessible by any other means than the affective one. To show this, we will be particularly attentive to the lexicon of conviction and persuasion that runs through the texts when Malebranche speaks of instinctual knowledge.

II. Exploiting the relativity of affects for the knowledge of our unions

Sensibility, understood in the broad sense of the faculty of being affected by the presence of external bodies, in addition to playing a role in the conservation of man, occupies, in Malebranche's philosophy, a function in the metaphysical knowledge that man has of himself. In Malebranche's philosophy, sensibility, in addition to playing a role in the preservation of man, has a function in the metaphysical knowledge that man has of himself: it reveals to him what he is united with, what he is part of. It reveals to him *his existential relationships*, and in the first place, those of his union with bodies in general and with his body in particular. This union, however, remains accidental and secondary to the union that essentially unites him to God through his spirit, as Malebranche explains in the preface to the *Recherche*¹⁶. Here lies one of the great breaks in his philosophy in relation to that of Descartes: the Oratorian begins his philosophical research by placing man in the order of Creation. To know man, the goal Malebranche gives to the *Research* in the preface, is to study him in his relationship with his Creator on the

¹⁶ "It is true that it [the soul] is united to the body. It is true that it [the soul] is united to the body, and that it is naturally its form; but it is also true that it is united to God in a much closer and more essential way", RV, Preface, 4.

one hand, and in his relationship with other creatures on the other¹⁷. It is in this perspective that sentiment is called upon to go beyond its function as a guide to conservation.

II. 1. The passions and the union with bodies

Malebranche develops the theme of union with bodies in Book V of the *Research* dealing with the passions. He distinguishes between the natural inclinations, studied in Book IV, and the passions. The natural inclinations are the natural movements of the mind received independently of the body and common to all intelligences: the inclination for the good in general, for being and well-being, for other creatures useful to our preservation. The passions, on the other hand, reinforce the union we have with the bodies. They designate all the emotions that the soul naturally feels on the occasion of the extraordinary movements of animal spirits.

They incline us to love our bodies and everything that is useful for their preservation. The human world is described as a chain of bodily dependencies, from the body itself to the surrounding bodies – living bodies (relatives, friends, neighbours, prince, animals) and inanimate bodies (homeland, wealth, physical world) – on which man relies for his existence (V, II). Chapter II thus deals with the union of the mind with sensitive objects, or the force and extent of the passions in general.

“But God has given us a body and through this body has united us to all sensitive things. It is the order of nature, it is the will of the Creator, that all the beings he has made should hold to one another. We are united in some way with the whole universe, and it was the sin of the first man that made us dependent on all the beings to which God had only united us. Thus there is no one at present who is not in some way united and subject to his body, and through his body to his parents, his friends, his city, his prince, his country, his dress, his house, his land, his horse, his dog, the whole earth, the sun, the stars, and all the heavens.”
(V, II, 493)

¹⁷“The spirit of man is by its nature situated between its Creator and corporeal creatures [...]”, *ibid.*, 3; “The subject of this work is the spirit of man as a whole. It is considered in itself, in relation to the bodies and in relation to God”, *Ibid.*, 13.

There is indeed a union to be known, “a natural union” which does not depend on our will and which is the will of God. The economy of the senses and passions for the preservation of the body is, according to Malebranche, “just and marvellous” (*Ibid*, 491) and should not be taken as a corruption of nature but rather as its first institution. The order of grace is not intended to destroy this order of nature. God still wants the will that makes the order of nature. So God wants the passions, because in their trial the knowledge that man takes of himself is ultimately at stake. This realist anthropology denigrates those who diminish the importance of the passions, like the Stoics¹⁸.

It is as ridiculous to tell us not to feel pain when we are hit, as it is to tell us not to be distressed by the death of a father: Stoic philosophy is a philosophy that tries to ignore the unions of which we are a part (with our body and bodies). Unlike them, Christians consider what the passions teach them, they recognise that the soul depends on its body:

“This is not how Christians philosophise. They do not deny that pain is an evil; that there is pain in the disunion of things to which we are united by nature, and that it is difficult to free ourselves from the slavery to which sin has reduced us. [...] True Christians or true philosophers say nothing that is not in accordance with common sense and experience; but the whole of nature constantly resists the opinion or pride of the stoics.” (495)

According to Malebranche, “[...] almost all the actions of men are sensitive and demonstrative proofs of this” (*Ibid*. 495), i.e. prove this truth that men are united by nature to all sensitive things – and are dependent on them since sin. Among these practical proofs, one could mention our reactions to the misfortune of others. Malebranche speaks of this in relation to the natural inclination of friendship for other men. For Malebranche, it is “the strongest natural union that God has put between us and his works” (IV, XIII, 477).

¹⁸ “It is therefore ridiculous to tell men that it depends on them to be happy, to be wise, to be free; and it is a mockery to seriously warn them not to grieve over the loss of their friends or their property.” (*Ibid.*, 494).

The love of choice by which we love others is sustained by a natural love that God imprints in us. According to him, we are bound by invisible ties which “oblige us as necessarily to love them; to look after their preservation as if it were our own; to regard them as necessary parts of the whole which we compose with them, and without which we could not subsist” (477). The natural connection between the cry we make when we feel pain and the inclination of others to help us without thinking about it proves this. Pity, thus described, is a passion that reveals to us the invisible link we have with other men.

“It is principally through the passions that the soul spreads outwards, and feels that it is indeed connected with all that surrounds it; just as it is principally through sentiment that it spreads into its body, and recognises that it is united with all the parts that compose it.” (476)

Whether it is the passions that bind us to other bodies or the sentiment that binds us to our own body, which we will discuss below, the logic is the same: these affections have not only a dynamic, practical effect of attaching us to the wholes of which we are a part (society and the body) – “spreads outwards and into one’s own body” – but also a cognitive value, if we understand this term in a non-rational sense. Passions and sentiment respectively make the soul *feel* that it is attached to everything around it and *recognise* that it is united with it. It is in the affective experience that man recognises the relationships that structure his existence.

II.2. Union with our body

In addition to the knowledge that we are united with other bodies, whether those of other men or those of inanimate objects, there is the even more useful knowledge that we are united with *our* body. When Malebranche distinguishes these two orientations in the union that our soul has with the body in general, he reserves the notion of sentiment for the second, that which turns the soul towards its individual body to distinguish it from the passions that turn its being towards external bodies. For Malebranche we relate without fail the sentiments of pleasure and pain to an inner state by virtue of the liveliness that

characterises them (*Ibid.* I, XII, 103-104)¹⁹. It is not surprising that it is also through these affective modalities that sentiment makes the soul aware of the union it has with the body that belongs to it. Thus, it is “by the instinct of sentiment that I am persuaded that my soul is united to my body or that my body is part of my being: I have no evidence of this” (*Ibid.* V, V, 528-529).

The place given to instinct introduces the same difficulty as when it marked man’s union with external bodies: it is both vital and It is both vital for the life of the individual and a source of error. Let us remember here its persuasive character: through the modalities of pleasure and pain, I know by sentiment the union of my soul with my body. But instinctual knowledge is at the same time depreciated in relation to the evidence of reason: it makes one believe in what is not. Malebranche insists on the error into which the instinct of sentiment makes us fall: through it we extend our being to parts that are nevertheless distinct from it and go so far as to apprehend this heterogeneous whole as a whole, even though the part that is really essential to us is an indivisible spiritual unity. However, even the wise, according to him, must surrender to this sensitive proof, at the risk of speaking against experience, like the Stoics. As far as our existence is concerned, it seems wiser to surrender to what our sentiment shows us.

At this stage, sensibility and its power of persuasion are opposed to reason and its power of conviction, like error to truth²⁰. This semantics seems to be in line with the one used at the time, if we rely on the dictionary of the Académie Française from 1694. Persuade is defined as “to carry, induce, determine someone to believe, to do something” and

¹⁹ “But for vivid sensations like pain and pleasure, we easily judge that they are in us, because we feel that they touch us; and that we do not need to know them by their ideas, to know that they belong to us”.

²⁰ See also: “Now, of all the pleasures we enjoy here below, the most sensitive are those which we imagine we receive through bodies. We therefore judge without much reflection that bodies can be and are indeed our good. For it is very difficult to fight against the instinct of nature and to resist the proofs of sentiment: we do not even notice them. One does not think of the disorder of sin; one does not reflect that bodies can only act on the mind as occasional causes [...] These truths, though very obvious to attentive minds, are not so powerful in convincing us as the deceptive experience of sensitive impression”. *Ibid.*, 528.

the examples in the article suggest that persuasion makes one believe in something false or act in a wrong way. Thus, “our heart easily persuades us of what it desires. He who persuades another to do a crime is hardly less guilty than he who commits it. We naturally blame our faults on the one who persuaded us to do them”.²¹

To convince, on the other hand, is to “reduce someone by reasoning, or by sensitive, obvious evidence, to agree with a truth he could not understand, with a fact he wanted to deny”²². To convince is to accept a truth, whereas to persuade has less of a theoretical dimension than a practical one, and can lead to action, even if it is in the direction of error and evil. Precisely, the instinct of sentiment, in the form of pleasure or even more so of pain, will appear to be very effective in making man aware of the relationships that are essential to his existence in this life, but above all in *attaching* men to the other beings with whom he is linked. If the passions are, in this respect, indispensable to make society possible and to bind men together, they are also an essential means for fallen man to convert to God. While the lexicon of persuasion may lead one to believe that Malebranche deplores this use of the passions and of “instinctual knowledge”, we shall see that it reveals above all the determining value of the affections for knowledge.

II.3. Union with God and physical and supernatural sensitivity: the grace of sentiment

In the continuation of Book V of the *Recherche*, in which Malebranche insists on the importance of the instinct of sentiment to persuade the soul of its union with the body, he states that of sentiment to persuade the soul of its union with the body. In the continuation of Book V of the *Recherche*, in which Malebranche insists on the importance of the instinct of sentiment to persuade the soul of its union with the

²¹ See the article “Persuader” in the first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* of 1694, available at: <https://artfl.atilf.fr/cgi-bin/dico1look.pl?strippedhw=persuader&dicoid=ACAD 1694&headword=&dicoid=ACAD1694>, last time accessed on December 1, 2021.

²² See the article “Convaincre” on the same site.

body, it appears that the instinct is also decisive in making man know his essential union with God:

“It is not by the instinct of sentiment that we are persuaded that God is our all, if it is not the grace of Jesus Christ, which causes this sentiment in certain persons, in order to help them to overcome the contrary sentiment by which they are united to the body. For God as the Author of nature brings spirits to his love by a knowledge of light, and not by a knowledge of instinct: and according to all appearances, it is only since sin that he adds as the Author of grace the instinct, the prevenient delight to the light, because our light is now much diminished, and is incapable of bringing us to God, and the effort of pleasure or of the contrary instinct constantly weakens it and renders it ineffective.” (RV V, V, *Oeuvres* I, 529-530)

The union that man must have with God presents this dialectic that runs through the whole of Malebranche’s work: on the one hand, God must be known by a knowledge of light, that is to say by reason. On the other hand, sin makes man only attentive to what is sensitive to him and loves what provokes pleasure in him. In the order of nature instituted at the outset, man’s union with God is not sensitive, unlike the union he has with the bodies. It is only intelligible and apprehensible by reason. *In fact*, it remains mostly unnoticed, given the liveliness of the sentiment that unites man with physical realities. It is only by virtue of the order of grace established by God after sin for the salvation of man that man receives the sentiment of his union with God through the intermediary of a pleasure called “prevenient delight”. Through it he receives a sensitive impression of spiritual goods.

This sentiment, described as “instinctual knowledge”, even if it is devalued in comparison with “knowledge of light”, is necessary to bring the fallen man back to God. If Malebranche denounces proofs of sentiment or warned against instinctual knowledge concerning bodies, he does not consider sensitive experience or proofs of sentiment to be misleading when it comes to union with God. This passage allows us to consider that instinctual knowledge is not necessarily false and that the sensibility/reason, persuasion/conviction, error/truth split is not always true. The interest of instinctive knowledge when it takes the form of the grace of sentiment is to reveal our union with God while *bringing us to it* (Alquié 1974, 320-324). Affective knowledge has a dynamic as well as a

cognitive virtue, with the meaning of persuasion coming close here to its Ciceronian meaning of adherence to a truth through non-rational motives.

The cognitive value of sentiments through the notion of persuasion appears in the chapter dealing with admiration. It is a passion that is an exception in the search for truth, insofar as it is the only one of the passions that applies the mind and enlightens it at the same time. If we do not admire the object we are studying, we cannot apply our mind to it:

“No matter how much we are told to be attentive, we cannot be, or we cannot be for long, even though we are convinced, from a certain abstract persuasion that does not agitate the mind, that the thing is very much worth our attention.” (RV, V, VIII, 557-558.)

We understand that what essentially defines persuasion in relation to conviction is not the possibility of error but the fact that judgment is aided by the passions. An “abstract persuasion”, as we can see, is only a conviction that does not move us. That is why, when the will is pure reason and the animal spirits are subjugated by the passions, we need “a special grace to know the truth” (558) which gives us the power to resist the weight of the body. This is of such force in Malebranche’s eyes that only a grace can bring persuasion to the will of pure reason, for it brings with it the force of passion and its positive valence²³, and thus the movement of minds. In *contrast*, the defect of conviction is that it is not accompanied by passion and lacks the movement of animal spirits. Thus, although “everyone [is] *convinced* that the knowledge of truth and the love of virtue make the mind more perfect” (*Ibid.*, V, V, 524)²⁴, we nevertheless seek only union with sensitive things. A mere conviction, even if it is complete, remains a vain idea, without effect on our mind.

²³ Passion has the advantage of always conveying sweetness and pleasure: “Passions always try to justify themselves, and they insensibly persuade us that we are right to follow them. The sweetness and pleasure they give to the mind, which must be their judge, corrupt it in their favour” (*Ibid.*, 560).

²⁴ Emphasis added.

Just as the fibres of the brain must be shaken to bring about the movement of animal spirits, “thoughts in which the body has some part”, in other words “sentiments”, are needed to give rise to passions. This is why, writes Malebranche, only sentiments “sensitively convince that one holds to certain things for which they excite love” (532). The phrase “to convince sensibly” is the counterpart of “to persuade abstractly”, which we encountered above. To convince sensibly means to persuade; when the heart is inclined to love the truth which it recognises at the same time, love appears to be the condition for the recognition of this truth.

These passages confirm that it is not so much the criteria of truth and falsity that distinguish persuasion and conviction as the presence or absence of the liveliness of evidence and desire. To be persuaded of the truth of something is not only to recognise its truth by non-rational means (sensation or imagination) but to recognise it by loving, to be carried body and soul towards a reality, to the point that we desire to strengthen our union with it. This is why it was necessary, according to Malebranche, for the Truth to be made sensitive in Jesus Christ; this explains why we find, at the heart of the treatise on the passions that constitutes book V of the *Recherche*, considerations on incarnation (531). If the passions are one of the greatest obstacles to the mind’s attention and to the search for truth, *access* to the truth *par excellence* – in the sense of both knowledge and attainment – cannot be achieved without passions.

Conclusion

Sentiment unites sinful men with God as well as with bodies, with spiritual goods as well as with sensitive goods. For Malebranche, to know the soul by sentiment is therefore to feel its inner modifications and discern them in relation to each other, and also to feel the soul’s relations with the beings that are superior or inferior to it. Understood under this last aspect, its sentiments teach the soul that it is united and even dependent, for its existence, on God on the one hand and on bodies on the other. From a theoretical point of view, Malebranche distinguishes sentiment from understanding by the former’s incapacity

to establish relationships. From a point of view that could be called "existential", however, he makes the instinct of sentiment an organ of perception through which man feels his relations with bodies, his body, and, finally, God.

The human condition thus consists of a set of dependencies which man does not know by clear idea but which he knows by sentiment. By this very fact, and in spite of himself, Malebranche exploits that property of sentiment which at the same time disqualifies it for objective knowledge: its relative character. This makes sentiment a form of primitive notion intended to apprehend relationships, whether between God and man or between external bodies and our body, and not only between body and mind. Nevertheless, sentiment only makes man aware of these relationships that structure his existence in the affective modalities of pleasure and pain. In conferring this power on sentiment, God is merely adapting to the fallen nature of man whose attention depends on sensitive interest.

In the post-lapsarian state, sentiment is thus a yardstick of man's double union. Since union is nothing other than a relationship, the sentiments of pleasure and pain that accompany sensations and passions are given a privileged status in order to indicate the different forms of union that structure human existence. Insofar as they indicate that an object is good or bad for us who experience them, pleasure and pain indicate *par excellence* the existence of a relationship between this object and ourselves, as well as its value. The pleasure or displeasure that they provoke arouses in us the desire to strengthen or weaken our relationship with the object in question. In this movement by which we seek an object appears the union we have with it. Therefore, the knowledge of the unions that constitute man is a knowledge of a special kind, which cannot unfold in a purely theoretical way and outside of him, but relies to a great extent on his affectivity and on the persuasive force of passions and sentiments. Only affectivity can *persuade* us of certain truths which, without the passions, would remain unknown to us.

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ST. ANTHIM THE IBERIAN: THE ETHOS AND POETICS OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT¹

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Abstract

The ethos of the Enlightenment implies the recognition of the primacy of an autonomous *Cogito*. It also implies the recognition of the primacy of so-called “genius” – the power of proper imagination of unconditional free game. The study shows that St. Anthim the Iberian’s poetics, in his artistic creativity, requires an understanding of “post-byzantine” theological landmarks, perspectives, and codes of conduct for early modern European culture. St. Anthim’s poetical discourse is an image of the pathos of distance, differing from the mainstream aesthetics of his epoch.

Keywords: St. Anthim the Iberian, poetic legacy, the cathartic effect of textuality.

1. The Poetics of the Typographer

“My will to the printers is to hand down this trade from generation to generation.”
St. Anthim the Iberian

The contribution made by St. Anthim the Iberian – a great theologian, orator, master of printing and translation, a church-builder,

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and educator – to Romanian Christian culture is well known amongst Romanians, and his heritage and deeds are studied and evaluated in numerous academic works by Romanian authors⁴. As is well known, although St. Anthim was Georgian by his origin, he addressed his flock in Romanian. His sermons and speeches were always warm and elevated, poetic and eloquent. The stylistic comparisons he used and metaphors, plastic expressions, and epithets he favored make him an outstanding figure in the literature of his period. St. Anthim's figurativeness is characterized by constant care for words, loyalty to preserving the purity of language, and the beauty of the world revealed in language. Accordingly, theologians and academics consider him one of the founders of the Romanian ecclesiastical language and the Romanian literary language.

A translation of part of St. Anthim's heritage into Georgian made his works available lately also to Georgian scholars. Despite the multiplication of valuable studies dedicated to him, we believe that one aspect of his legacy requires further analysis and evaluation by scholars, be they Romanian, Georgian, or elsewhere.

St. Anthim's heritage is conventionally divided into various categories: sermons, treatises, translations, letters and correspondence, prayers, and poetry. It is the last aspect of St. Anthim's heritage that has been less well known and studied. This can be attributed to the fact that the principal direction of St. Anthim's intellectual heritage is first and foremost marked by a strong emphasis on his theological and educational activities. Therefore, it should not be surprising that St. Anthim's artistic imagination, his aesthetic spirit, found a broad application in architectural decoration and the adornment of printed productions rather than in poetry itself.

A study reveals that the language of St. Anthim the Iberian's religious discourse is an outstanding example of figurative imagery.

St. Anthim's motto was "education and freedom." His legacy chronologically and by its subject matter belongs to the early modern epoch in Europe when language brought new attitudes to existence. Contemporary studies of the intellectual history of 17th and 18th century

⁴ See, for example: Ştrempel 1997 (fundamental research on St. Anthim); Picioruş 2010.

Europe demonstrate that the spread and continuous propagation of “education” dominated the discourse of contemporary Europe, not least that of St. Anthim (and others), who worked on the outskirts of Europe in the Balkans.

After the Reformation, Catholicism, in competing with Protestantism, founded its modernization on the aesthetic aspirations of man – “artistic substance” realized in architecture and works of fine art, opening new horizons within the parameters of which a foretaste of man’s future infinite freedom is understood and expressed.

Changes occurred even in the understanding of sacredness itself. The emphasis shifted from the taboo system to the Biblical narrative, thus establishing new possibilities of catharsis in European culture and society. St. Anthim’s works also prove these major changes in the Eastern Christian (post-Byzantine) world.

The taboo system directed towards food and sexuality moves to the background of St. Anthim’s *Didache*, thus marking a shift from the law of the Old Testament to the Evangelical field. It means that the barter system of taboos and sacrifices moved into moral codes and to the *poiesis* of the free self-creation of the individual from his/her own self. A person’s irreplaceable absolute responsibility is expressed by St. Anthim as follows: “Jeremiah sheds more tears for you than he once shed for the ruined walls of Jerusalem.” (Anthim the Iberian 2016, 258)

The medium through which the divine should proceed is given in human culture only. St. Anthim is not lost in the labyrinth of his own phantasies like Don Quixote, who moves within the realm of likeness – windmills resemble giants, pubs, castles, etc., but he becomes a “typographer.” For him, it represents a whole ensemble of activities. Among these activities, *poiesis* (ποίησις) holds an important role.

St. Anthim organized the printing industry in the whole Eastern Christian world.⁵ He founded Anthim’s Monastery, a particular analogue

⁵ St. Anthim the Iberian’s wide-ranging reformatory projects and activities were directly coordinated with and related to contemporary Georgia’s reformatory and educational movement initiated by King Vakhtang VI and his tutor and principal advisor Sul Khan-Saba Orbeliani, and with Saba’s work *Journey to Europe*. There is hard evidence for such an association: St. Anthim sent one of his pupils and printing equipment to Tbilisi and brought about the establishment of the first printing house in Tbilisi, where

of a monastic republic.⁶ In the Balkans with a self-governing typicon, a public library, a free school for children from low-income families, and a printing house – all based on principles of housekeeping and communitarian law and having a polyphonic artistic design.

According to him, the post-Diluvian man is a citizen of a civil-political body, although the idea of justice is part of Biblical Revelation. Hierocracy and politeia are nourished from their own sources. St. Anthim stresses this everywhere, i.e., in sermons, verses, and correspondence. According to him, the political rule is necessary to deal with evil. Unlike Plato's political philosophy, which implies copying an eternal idea in order to set up the supreme good as an example (Plato 2006, 223), St. Anthim never says that *politeia* is the shadow of an eternal idea on the earth. Earthly and heavenly "policies" are sharply differentiated so that dramatic discord between philosophy and poetry is resolved and also resolved Plato's thesis that art is the imitation of appearance (See Book 10, 317). St. Anthim's "poetics" falls within the parameters of *praxis*. Like a Biblical narrator, he achieves the cathartic effect of textuality through rhetorical *poesis*. He begins his "Images of the Old and New Testament" with a verse prayer, a ritual prelude⁷.

such milestone texts of Georgian religion and culture as the Gospels, Psalms, and *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* were published.

⁶ According to St. Anthim's typicon, secular persons also participated in ruling and governing his monastery. The monastery's Father Superior was to have a board of advisors, members of which were honorable and trustworthy citizens. St. Anthim himself named the first five members. Among the functions they fulfilled was overseeing financial affairs – in case of any violations, the board was authorized, with the consent of the Metropolitan, to replace the Father Superior. i.e., a check and balance system of mutually responsible organs of government was established. See Kshutashvili, 1973, 114-123 (in Georgian).

⁷ Here we can see a trace of the 12th century Georgian poem *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* by Shota Rustaveli: its ritual Introduction, a poetic equivalent of Genesis, interprets poetry as a "branch" of wisdom. It is notable that 12-13th century Georgian literature, in the main, imitates Rustaveli's poem. Korneli Kekelidze discusses this issue in *A History of Ancient Georgian Literature*, v. II (1981, 551-617) (in Georgian). Additions to "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" and versions created by folk storytellers, copyists, and epigones were also widespread. In the same work, the same author builds a robust argumentative basis for this idea (365-369). To our mind, the peak of Georgian aesthetic thought, "The Knight in the Panther's Skin," to use Jung's

The Biblical narrator versifies the Introduction. At the same time, the Bible as a textual unity, as a complete phenomenon, is given in a versified form, presenting Jesus's prayer in context, i.e., a paradigmatic code of "Our Father." In the Aramaic original, it had a rhythmic-singing form. St. Anthim's poetics differs essentially from forbidding the artistic representation of God as in Judaism or Islam and also from the worshiping and deifying works of art to be found in Hellenistic aesthetic religion. St. Anthim's conception can be characterized by words from the Introduction to Hegel's *Aesthetics* "besides, no natural being is able, as art is, to present the divine Ideal." (Hegel 1975, 29)

2. Byzantine Legacy

Before discussing St. Anthim's figurativeness in particular, it should be briefly observed that poetic writing is not the main form of expression of Christian discourse in general. Poetic language is not the primary tool for putting across religious teaching or texts of theological content. After the Edict of Milan, which is associated with the complete legalization of Christianity and the freedom to create corresponding artifacts, it became possible to speak properly about Christian poetry⁸.

terminology, played the role of an archetypal structure of the collective unconscious in St. Anthim's life and works. In the first Georgian printing house established in 1709 by St. Anthim's pupil Mikhail Ishtvanovich, sent to Georgia according to his project, and with his funding, the Gospels and *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* were printed, revealing his particular interest in this poem. This fact is acknowledged by many scholars, among whom are the Romanian Gabriel Ștrempel and Georgian Otar Gvinchadze (see the latter's *Anthim the Iberian*, 1973, 155-205, in Georgian). In addition, special studies reveal the impact of Georgian architecture, frescos, and carving on St. Anthim's works (e.g., Ioan Nanu's "A History of Georgian and Romanian Art," *Sabtchota Sakartvelo*, 1963/ # 84, 19-38, in Georgian). The influence is also quite strong in the sphere of heraldry. See Gaiparashvili 1973, 102-109 (in Georgian). Such influence is evident in the whole poetic legacy of St. Anthim: traces of Georgian hymnography, translations as well as original works (VI-XIII cc.), ecclesiastical chants, poetry, rules of versification, and symbolic thinking are clearly seen. See also Nestan Sulava's works on Georgian hymnography, available at <http://kartvelologi.tsu.ge/public/ge/arqive/13/10>, retrieved 2020, September 10.

⁸ In earlier epochs, figurativeness was no stranger to expressing theological thought in texts. One of the major books of the Old Testament, Solomon's "Song of Songs"

However, the fountainhead of Christian poetry is Holy Writ itself which presents the continuum of all genres of literature. Christian culture, the core of which is man, his spiritual world, strivings, passions, emotions, the experience of personal self-knowledge, and self-study, enhances the creation of poetic texts of spiritual content.

Poetic forms are met within the New Testament: Luke's Gospel, chants, hymns. St. Paul, in his epistles, preserves the rhythm of the first Christian hymns (see, e.g., "The Epistle to the Philippians").

During the apologetic epoch, the Christian spirit was clearly opposed to Greek and Latin poetry traditions with their pagan world outlook. However, antique poetry was known. St. Paul, addressing an audience gathered in Athens on the Areopagus, refers to their poets in negative terms: "For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your poets have said, for we are also his offspring" (Acts, 17:28)⁹. Scholars explain that here the pagan poets Aratus and Epimenides are meant. Later such explanations disappeared, although classic forms characteristic of antique poetry were preserved.

It is certain, and many scholars have observed the fact, that antique aesthetics and poetic genres and forms of this epoch influenced the form of classic Christian poetry. As to content, it is essentially a re-interpreted picture of man's inner world, a personal portrait; Christian poetry stresses and reveals man's ontological essence and moves it to the foreground.

An example of this type of poetic thinking is found in the works of St. Ambrose of Milan (340-397), the founder of Latin hymnography and the syllabic-tonic poetic system. He introduced antiphonal chanting into ecclesiastical practice when two groups of singers sing in alternation. The hymn was a celebratory, glorifying chanting. It was a poetic musical insertion used to decorate a liturgical service. Hymns are divided into rhythm, meters, and sequences according to poetic form. To Ambrose's rhythms belong hymns composed of short lines of syllabo-tonic iambs and trochees. The invention of hymns constructed from classic antique

(approximately 1020 BC), is a vivid example of Biblical figurativeness, its motifs, and topics.

⁹ All citations from The Bible are taken from <https://kartvelo.me/book/Habak/3> (last time accessed on August 12, 2021).

strophes – sapphic, asclepiadic, and dactylic hexameters – is associated with the name of the Spanish Christian poet of the 4th century, Prudentius.

The Cappadocian fathers and Gregory of Nazianzen, in particular, are known by the name of theologian-poets. It seems that the immediate source of St. Anthim's poetics was St. Dionysius the Areopagite's mystical (apophatic) theology, which was sung only, and as well as the tradition of Cappadocian Patristics; the main pattern of his poetic discourse is associated with the poetry of St. Gregory the Theologian.

The Christian metaphorical system acknowledges various genres. Important examples of Medieval Christian poetry are the so-called *narrative spiritual poems*. Juvenius, a poet of the 4th century, renders Biblical events poetically in his works, which are distinguished for laconism and lively and dynamic drama. It is the first attempt to create a versified epos.

The experience of the early Christian Fathers is essential as well. Liturgical chants created by the St. Romanos the Melodist (called the 'Sweet-Singer') or St. Andrew of Crete are brilliant examples of Christian poetry. Also relevant are *Confessions* by St. Augustine or *On Famous Men* by St. Jerome, in which, on the one hand, the Latinized character of the sources which influenced them is evident, but which, on the other hand, carry significant innovative findings.

3. Prayers, Rhetoric, Lyrics

St. Anthim expresses the linguo-religious or linguo-prayerful existence of man through the visual language of art – in architecture, mural painting, engraving, fretwork, heraldry, and verbal forms of art: rhetoric, lyrics, prose.

The categorial logic of ancient rhetoric is replaced in his works by a special form of public address – sermons. Their primary purpose was to bring education to the community. St. Anthim, together with different genres of literature, also uses prose. It was the period when the modern novel¹⁰ was being born. An interesting parallel could be drawn between

¹⁰ The novel's origins and its discursive frame are discussed in detail in Bakhtin 2009.

the intellectual interpretation of the “fishers of men” [Math., 4:19] by St. Anthim and Dostoevsky. *The Brothers Karamazov* and St. Anthim’s sermon “On the Sunday of Forgiveness” (2016, 109-115) demonstrate how those “pulled out” from the whirlpool of sin “by means of a teaching knitted with God’s words ... prepare for God a big feast pleasing to Him.”¹¹

Important innovations characterize St. Anthim’s figurativeness. Interestingly, he rejects Latin versification. He mainly composes Christian verses in Greek and translates them into Romanian.

Among the material surviving today, there are only eight poems composed by St. Anthim. Four are dedications, one is a song of praise to God, and three are dedicated to the great holy martyr Prince of Romania Constantine Brâncoveanu.

In the artistic world of St. Anthim, man created by God is the most important and highest stage of the hierarchy in the visible world, and the object of his poetic inspiration is Prince Constantine. His aesthetic image appears in every metaphor and symbol.

One is a version in verse of the “Genesis” story, which precedes St. Anthim’s work “Images of the Old and New Testament.” (2022, 11-16)

Among other lyrical genres of Christian poetry, prayer – given in various poetic forms – *acathistus, troparion and kontakion, ipakon, icos, akolatia, bedtime prayers* – was particularly developed. Christ’s passions, the Virgin Mary, the saints, and the crucifixion are sources of poetic inspiration in them.

Prayers have special importance for St. Anthim, for whom the duties of a tutor, religious practice, and prayer are especially significant. The latter is a special means of communication; it is an essential part of man’s spiritual life. Prayer, first of all, implies intention – a spiritual and

¹¹ In order to track the parallels, we suggest a comparison of a passage in “Odour of Decay,” ch. 9 of *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which the novice Alyosha Karamazov’s return to the monastery after a severe crisis is described. Alyosha is kneeling in prayer by the corpse of his “spiritual fisher,” Zosima. In the midst of fervent prayer, he has a vision of Zosima and Christ sitting at Cana of Galilee’s wedding feast. Entering the garden of the secluded monastery, Alyosha sees the Milky Way in a sky full of bright stars. It is a metaphor for apophatic *theosis*.

bodily movement aimed at establishing immediate contact with God and readiness to receive His answer. The Christian addresses the saints and pleads with them for assistance, help, or mercy. Jesus Christ's appeal: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" [Math. 26:41] is one of the principal regulators of behaviour for Christians. Jesus Christ Himself taught the Apostles the first prayer. It is not rare in religion that the verbal part of prayers is connected with music and hymns.

St. Theophan the Recluse says that prayer is the dedication of the heart and mind to God, a plea uttered to soothe both spirit and body. As a rule, a prayer is given in a verbal form that can be internal or external. Jesus's prayer is particularly important in Christian practice; holy Fathers attach great significance to it. Jesus's name is stronger than steel and firmer than granite. There is no shield or weapon more powerful in battle than Jesus's prayer. St. Theophan says that it is necessary to keep attention in the heart and stand in front of God without leaving because at such moments you will notice even the slightest change¹².

For St. John Climacus, prayer is the mother and daughter of tears; it is by nature a dialog and a union of man with God. Its effect is to hold the world together; it achieves a reconciliation with God. In the 28th step of his work, he says it is an expiation of sin, a bridge across temptation, and a bulwark against affliction. It wipes out conflict, is the work of angels, and is the nourishment of everything spiritual (Cimacus 1982, 274).

St. Anthim's contemporaries bear witness to his being always deep in Jesus's prayer. He believed that in this way the apostles' appeal to "Pray without ceasing" [1Thes. 5:17] is fulfilled.

Enumerating the necessary actions to reach spiritual strength, St. Anthim assigns a unique role to prayer:

"Therefore, in preparing to wrestle against the enemies of our souls, we should have with us five things a certain spiritual supply of which is necessary when

¹² St. Theophan the Recluse, *On Prayer*. From the *Letters of Bishop Theophan the Recluse*, available at http://orthodoxinfo.com/praxis/theoph_prayer.aspx (last time accessed on June 29, 2021).

we are in misfortune. These are confession, prayer, fasting, mercy, and love.” (2016, 50)

In one of his sermons, he calls upon his congregation to pray: “Let us pray and beseech our Lord to save our souls, and He will assuredly grant it to us for Jesus Christ Himself said: ‘Ask, and it shall be given to thee.’ Remember that fervent prayer from the depth of your heart opens Heaven and reaches God’s hearing. As Saint John Chrysostom says, where prayers are uttered with gratitude, the grace of the Holy Spirit is granted there, the devils are driven away, and the whole power of the devil departs from man. He also says that praying protects chastity, seals virginity, tames wrath, reins in arrogance, defeats envy, arranges difficulties, and establishes peace; in short, he who prays, talks to God” (50).

There is no work of St. Anthim either in the form of a special volume or a monograph, or even a manuscript dedicated exclusively to prayers. This fact is also admitted by those researchers who thoroughly studied his works (Ştrempel, Stanchevich, Stanciu, etc.).

Nevertheless, we meet plenty of his appeals to pray in various works. Prayers to Holy Trinity, Saviour Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary, and other saints are often met in his *Didache*, *Teaching on the Mystery of Repentance*, *Christian-Political Advices to the Governor*, etc. His prayers are distinguished by a high level of figurativeness and musicality.

Depending on the content, prayers are traditionally divided into Prayers of Praise, Prayers of Thanksgiving, Prayers of Supplication, and Prayers of Repentance.

Prayers of Praise are, in general, considered the most important genre of psalms. Among them, Psalm 103, which is acknowledged as a sample of praise prayer, stands out. The holy Fathers created many praise prayers glorifying God, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary. St. Anthim preserved this tradition and, in the main, composed prayers of this genre.

Prayers of Repentance are akin to prayers of supplication. Psalm 50, Jesus’s prayer, and St. Andrew of Crete’s extensive canon of repentance occupy a special place among them. In his *Didache* and in “The Teaching on the Mystery of Repentance,” St. Anthim dedicated several prayers to repentance.

In the Prayers of Supplication, the person praying addresses God, the Holy Trinity, the Saviour, the Virgin Mary, or the Saints and asks for help in spiritual and material trouble. Prayers of this genre, as well as prayers of thanksgiving, are given in St. Anthim's sermons.

Is it possible to speak of a trace of gnomic poetry? We believe that it is quite possible. To illustrate this point, let us address the *Didache* in particular; many of the sermons are written in blank verse and, at the same time, are vivid examples of didactic teaching.

In his study "Poetry and Style in the *Didache* – Linguistic Ornaments and Embellishments of St Anthim's Sermons," which introduces St. Anthim the Iberian's *Didache* published in 2014 in Romanian, Mihail Stanciu asserts that "there are works whose style is individual because they are outside the limits of literature (...). Their strength is not nourished only by unique themes of artistic-aesthetic techniques. Employing the everyday language, they render the mysteries and beauties of God. It is as though language takes off the burden of this world and becomes a bright image of the realized word." (2016, 34)

It can be argued that St. Anthim's works carry all these signs. They are distinguished by elevated spirituality, intensity, expressiveness, and elaborate configurations of form in such a manner that the discursive construction of the text is directed towards fulfilling the main objective of Christian ethics – the use of figurativeness to save man's soul. The theological design of texts is intertwined in a masterly fashion with the core issues of Christian morality. Every word used in the sermons is selected thoughtfully, with the utmost self-consciousness and responsibility; you will never encounter phrases emptied of content, the obscurity of expression, excessive pomposity, foreign words, or unfamiliar terms. He does not attempt to make us good Christians like him because of the especially rich theological knowledge that he had. The type of figurativeness that St. Anthim employs is straightforward and easy to comprehend. He believes that the main thing is to allow other communication participants to easily grasp the essence of the text, open and remember it, transcend to the metaphysical sphere, partake of the transcendental, and eventually merge with it.

In sum, St. Anthim exploits two traditional ways of literary-historical and allegoric-mystical interpretation often used by the holy Fathers and unites them in a masterly fashion.

4. The Spectrum of Artistic Means

St. Anthim's figurativeness is based on a multi-colour palette of artistic means. Epithets are among them. There are numerous simple epithets, among which we especially single out four that may seem unusual to present-day taste: "good meekness", "true faith", "kind hope", "humble silence", and "warm prayers". These combinations are not arrived at casually but are a means through which he tells us that not every meekness is good, not every faith is true, not every hope is good for man, not every silence is the fruit of humility, and not every prayer comes from a heart full of love.

Frequently used tools of his artistic discourse are comparisons. Due to this style's thought-provoking and flexible features, the compared object acquires a clear, dynamic expression; abstract issues are presented through concrete elements familiar to everyone.

St. Anthim often resorts to comparisons because he aims to enrich the spiritual perception of believers. Creating lyrical pictures in verbal form ("the world will blow up like a wound", "these miracles shine like sunlight", "drunk with the love of this beauty", "galloping like wild horses"), he notes not only sensibility but thought which is provoked by means of setting an unexpected association between the object of comparison and the thing.

Generally speaking, using metaphors and allegories in aesthetic texts is considered a sign of artistic taste. In metaphor, we use words, utterances, or phrases not in their dictionary meanings but indirectly, i.e., in their figurative meanings. In allegories, it is possible to use words and phrases in their dictionary meanings though the entire content is understood indirectly. St Anthim is a virtuoso of metaphor, and his talent for the word multiplied by the love of God is revealed in abundance in this sphere. We will not discuss in detail his many metaphors, like "a stick of words", "a net of teaching", "ears of divine mercy", "sieve of thinking", "flowers of goodness", "flowers of God's

desires”, “time of the beautiful” etc. We want to single out only his attempts to switch words of the Romanian language to a higher lexical-liturgical trajectory to render the comeliness of the heavenly life through homiletic language.

Allegory is defined as a rhetorical symbol used to render a certain reality through which a man can indicate a reality quite different from it. It strengthens the message and moves it to an even more clear exposition. For instance, we have an allegorical interpretation of the Bible. According to Saint Ambrose, allegory is something through which something other is expressed and formed: *Allegoria est, cum aliud geritur et aliud figuratur*. The theocratization of the Biblical allegory by Origen is given not in his exegetical works but in his philosophical masterpiece *On First Principles*, especially in book 4¹³.

St Anthim’s *Didachai* are distinguished for their use of allegories. Among them, the sermon “On the Earthquake of October 26, on the Feast Day of the Holy Great Martyr Demetrius the Myrobyte” is outstanding:

“Life’s calamities do not grant man either tranquility or rest. Boats floating among the waves of the sea are kingdoms, regions, provinces, towns, multitudes of people, states, minions, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, who are traveling on the sea and are in danger. A great tempest that creates stormy waves on the sea represents those calamities and dangers that happen to us every day. Clouds that darken the sky, lightning that blinds our eyes, thunderstorms that scare even bold hearts represent various occasions: unexpected danger, calamities planned by enemies, much grief caused by others; robberies, slavery, heavy and unexpected taxes, all of which are sent by the Lord to test our faith and patience.” (2016, 147)

In the second homily dedicated to the Holy Great Martyr Demetrius, the hierarch asks the Saint to intercede before the Lord: “Help us Worthy, as we are unworthy, help us Beloved by God, for our disobedience and transgression of commandments, for our not loving God.” (168) St. Anthim binds the opposite structures and thus synthesizes the Old with the News, the heavenly with the earthly. This method is often used in homilies. Furthermore, through the association

¹³ See on this issue McKim, 1998.

of opposing elements, such an apparently paradoxical synthesis stresses various situations and spiritual states.

For instance, his sermon "On the Birth of Our Saviour Jesus Christ, December 25" is wholly constructed according to this principle. St. Anthim says:

"What can be greater and more wonderful than this birth? Man's mind is blurred with astonishment, and it cannot understand how a virgin gave birth to a boy. In this great gift which was bestowed on this world, two donations were hidden: the first implies that the Creator of the world originates from His creation, the virgin who has not known a man is herself surprised at the fruit of her womb; the second is that a woman becomes the origin of her own origin. I do not know what I should be surprised at first - at conception without semen or delivery during which virginity was glorified? It is not surprising that she remained a holy virgin even after delivery, for she gave birth to Him who is the origin of virginity and holiness." (188)

Sarcasm is considered one of the stylistic forms of obscurity. Socrates used this method. His obstinate irony directed at men or situations, as the main means, serves to state the truth. St. Anthim, who had a profound and fundamental knowledge of Antiquity, believes that it is fruitful to use this method. The hue of his linguistic pallet is to awaken moral consciousness. He hopes to develop self-consciousness in man, to form the ability to protect one's own self from evil habits, and to liberate himself from humiliating behaviour:

"And we who call ourselves Christians through what good deeds can we demonstrate our Christianity and righteousness, and at the same time demonstrate our difference from the tribes whom we call gentiles? We can say that we deceive ourselves, and in fact, we do not have faith: for if we had faith, we would love God and observe his words and commandments as well as we could. For it is said in chapter 14 of the Gospel of John: 'If ye love me, keep my commandments' [John, 14:15], but instead of loving Him and observing His commandments, we curse Him, laugh at Him and make a fool of Him. As if His word were a fairy tale. And if you ask how we curse Him, I will answer that when we curse someone's faith, and we curse God. I have already told you that faith is only of one kind, and every man believes in God that God is faith and the creator of faith; therefore, when we curse faith, we curse God, and that is why we say that we do not have faith. (...) Vain and mundane matters blind us, and nothing pleases us more than doing shady business; like a wheel rolling down the slope of

a mountain, we all are hurrying towards evil and are unable to stop. And like swine, we sink in the filthy pleasures of this world." (34-6)¹⁴

In the same sermon, St. Anthim states the causes of man's immoral thinking and life and continues to use sarcastic phrases:

"like a Pharaoh of the Old Testament our hearts turned to stone, and we walk around boldly as do unbridled and unbroken horses until we fall into an abyss and die. Do we boast of such deeds saying that we are Christians? Alas, woe to us! What do we have in common with Christianity if we think we can be saved only because we call ourselves Christians! It will not happen! Just the opposite, we will be punished more severely." (36)

The use of fables, or parables, is a favourite mode of poetical discourse for St. Anthim. The characteristic feature of fables is to render truth by symbolic, allegorical means. It is not difficult to decode the text, and it is easy to understand and remember the idea. Jesus Christ often uses parables in which profound truths are presented. Parables retain their style throughout the discourse, thus gaining the believers' trust and encouraging their self-reflection.

In the sermon "On the Feast of Revelation of God," he tells a parable about a hedgehog and evokes spiritual nobility:

"do as a hedgehog does when it creeps into the vineyard, and at first eats plenty and then shakes the vine and gathers the grapes that fall and carries them home to feed its children. So, let us take home to our children and others who could not come to church the words from the Holy Gospel and other books which we hear here, so that we give them spiritual food as well. After it, let us protect our minds from evil thoughts and our bodies from any filthiness. Let us love everybody, give alms to those in need, be hospitable, and visit the sick and prisoners. Be kind to our enemies, as our Saviour Christ teaches us." (93)

As another example, in "On the Day of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, June 29," St. Anthim resorts again to an allegorical style of narration:

¹⁴ Sermon "On Pharisee and the Publican Sunday".

“The warmth of the sun has a natural feature, and it gives trees, grass, precious stones and fruit of the earth the power to live, grow and bear fruit. Likewise, the same features characterize Peter the Apostle’s life-giving warmth of the secret Sun; for even the smallest ray that he sent to the man who was crippled from birth and sat at the famous gate of the Jerusalem Temple known as ‘Beautiful,’ cured him immediately, the moment he said the words ‘look on us’ his feet and calves gained strength.” (67)

Summing up the above, we can state that St. Anthim the Iberian’s poetics reflects “post-byzantine” theological landmarks, perspectives, and codes of actions for early modern European culture. St. Anthim’s poetical discourse represents the pathos of distance, different from the current mainstream aesthetics.

According to him, the word is “part of Heaven”. Thus, his works are characterized by the constant care for texts, the purity of everyday language, the desire to adequately express the beauty of the world revealed in writing, and the comeliness and holiness of man. The figurativeness of St. Anthim’s poetical texts is not a self-sufficient one. These texts are free of aesthetic formalism. The elements of artistic composition and the artistic-aesthetic methods used here are not selected according to a pre-calculated, pre-selected design or pattern. He freely created his texts thanks to his poetic inspiration and divine talent.

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INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF MODALITY: TRACKING THE RELEVANCE OF INTELLECTUAL CHARACTER TRAITS IN MODAL EPISTEMOLOGY

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Abstract

The domain of modal epistemology tackles questions regarding the sources of our knowledge of modalities (i.e., possibility and necessity), and what justifies our beliefs about modalities. Virtue epistemology, on the other hand, aims at explaining epistemological concepts like knowledge and justification in terms of properties of the epistemic subject, i.e., cognitive capacities and character traits. While there is extensive literature on both domains, almost all attempts to analyze modal knowledge elude the importance of the agent's intellectual character traits in justifying beliefs about what is possible or necessary. My aim in this paper is to argue that intellectual traits of character, like thoroughness, autonomy, epistemic courage and open-mindedness, are relevant to modal epistemology.

Keywords: modal epistemology, epistemology of modality, virtue epistemology, responsibilism, character traits

1. Introduction

The domain of modal epistemology tackles questions regarding the sources of our knowledge of modalities (e.g., possibility and necessity²), and what justifies beliefs about modalities. We know that our laptops could have had a different color, but what is the source of this piece of knowledge? If we believe that philosophical zombies are

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² This paper will be concerned with metaphysical modalities. Wherever unspecified, I refer to metaphysical possibility and necessity.

metaphysically possible, or, if we believe that they are not, what could serve as justification?

Virtue epistemology, on the other hand, aims at explaining epistemological concepts like knowledge and justification in terms of properties of the epistemic subject, i.e., intellectual capacities and character traits (Battaly 2018, 1; Turri *et al.* 2021). While there is extensive literature on both domains, almost all attempts to analyze modal knowledge (see, *inter alia*, Chalmers 2002; Geirsson 2005, 2014; Gregory 2004, 2010; Hawke 2011; Kung 2010, 2016; Yablo 1993) elude the importance of the agent's intellectual traits of character in explaining modal knowledge and justifying beliefs about what is possible or necessary³.

The aim of this paper is to argue that intellectual traits of character, like thoroughness, attentiveness, epistemic autonomy, courage and open-mindedness, are relevant for modal epistemology. The following two sections will be devoted to short descriptions of the fields of virtue epistemology and modal epistemology. Regarding the former, I will highlight the classic distinction between reliabilist virtues (i.e., truth-conducive faculties or capacities) and responsibilist virtues (i.e., traits of character). Regarding the latter, I will highlight the central role of imagination in justifying beliefs about what is metaphysically possible. In the fourth section I will track the relevance of exercising intellectual traits of character in the practice of justifying beliefs about possibilities. As I will show in the first three subsections of section 4, employing the faculties or capacities involved in imagining is, in some cases, insufficient to gather justification, unless we exercise various responsibilist intellectual virtues, like thoroughness, patience, diligence, care, perseverance, creativity, commitment to find the truth, sensitivity to detail etc. In the fourth subsection I will point, guided by the intuitions of Van Inwagen (1998) and Geirsson (2014), to the social nature of our practice of acquiring modal justification. I will argue that, in some cases, only by showing epistemic autonomy, open-mindedness and courage, we can mitigate the effect of various perceived social, reputational or professional harms, and counter negative social

³ One notable exception is Menzies' (1998) account of metaphysical modalities in terms of response-dependent concepts.

influences on our epistemic activities (i.e., forming, sustaining or rejecting modal beliefs).

2. Virtue epistemologies: the reliabilist and responsibilist varieties

Virtue epistemologists explain and define normative epistemic notions like knowledge and justification in terms of the agent's traits, i.e., faculties, capacities, abilities, or traits of character (Battaly 2018, 1; Turri *et al.* 2021). In a nutshell, the main idea is that an epistemic agent S knows that P if and only if S believes that P as a result of exercising a cognitive or intellectual virtue V, and P is true. Epistemologists have distinguished two varieties of virtue epistemology based on what they took to be an intellectual virtue: *reliabilist* and *responsibilist* virtue epistemology. I will discuss these two in the following paragraphs.

According to reliabilist virtue epistemology, intellectual virtues are those faculties of an epistemic subject that are reliable in forming or sustaining true beliefs (Baehr 2006; Goldman 1993; Greco 2000, 2003; Sosa 1980, 1991). What makes a faculty an intellectual virtue is its truth-conduciveness or success in attaining true beliefs (Greco 2000; Sosa 1991, 138). Typical faculty virtues acknowledged by reliabilists are perception, memory, introspection and logical reasoning (Goldman 1993, 278; Baehr 2006, 193). A common tenet in the virtue epistemology literature is that the reliability of any virtue is relative to (Baehr 2006, 208; Greco 2003, 130; Sosa 1991, 138):

- (a) certain circumstances, or environments, and
- (b) certain kinds of propositions⁴.

As an example, our visual faculty is reliable with regard to propositions *about* visual properties of objects (Baehr 2006, 208; Sosa

⁴ In the words of Ernest Sosa (1991): "Let us define an intellectual virtue or faculty as a competence in virtue in which one would mostly attain the truth and avoid error in a certain field of propositions F, when in certain conditions C. Subject S believes proposition P at time t out of intellectual virtue only if there is a field of propositions F, and there are conditions C, such that: (a) P is in F; (b) S is in C with respect to P; and (c) S would most likely be right if S believed a proposition X in field F when in conditions C with respect to X." (138)

1991, 138), and only in circumstances that are *suitable* for the correct evaluation of visual properties. Clearly, our visual system cannot be trusted to be accurate or truth-conducive when applying it to find truths about sounds, smells, abstract objects etc., when applying it in improper or unfavorable circumstances, e.g., while wearing the wrong glasses, in the dark, under sodium lighting (Pettit 1999)⁵, or in an environment where, like the one described in the Fake Barns Case (Goldman 1976), only by luck one comes to form a true belief (Greco 2003, 129-130).

However, although exercising one's faculties is useful when intending to acquire knowledge about one's immediate surroundings, it is not sufficient to acquire what Baehr (2006, 208) calls "higher grade knowledge", i.e., knowledge about subject matters that are abstract, conceptually and theoretically laden.

As anticipated above, not all virtue epistemologists are reliabilists. Let's see some scenarios that ought to persuade that exercising faculty virtues is not sufficient for knowledge acquisition:

(Needle in the haystack) As a result of losing a bet, you are tasked to find whether there is a needle in a haystack. Your eyes are fine, you see each straw of hay that comes before your eyes, but it is a tiresome task and you get bored with it rather fast. After an hour of looking, as a result of boredom and losing your focus, you miss the needle, in spite of looking right in its direction. Consequently, you form the belief that there is no needle in the haystack.

Regarding the above case, the failure of not finding the needle is due to insufficient perseverance, patience, attentiveness or thoroughness, but not a lack of good eyesight. Given that we are not in a proper circumstance for using the faculty of vision, finding the needle would only be due to the exercise of the aforementioned virtues.

In the following case, according to Baehr (2006, 200), what best explains the historian's reaching the truth is not her visual acuity, logical reasoning or memory, but rather her thoroughness, fair-mindedness, impartiality, commitment to find the truth and open-mindedness:

⁵ According to Pettit (1999), the list of unfavorable conditions is permanently open to revision and potentially infinite.

“A historian has garnered international recognition and praise for a book in which she defends a certain view of how the religious faith of one of America’s ‘founding fathers’ influenced his politics. While researching her next book, she runs across some previously unexamined personal letters of this figure which blatantly contradict her own account of his theology and its effects on his political thought and behaviour. She does not ignore or suppress the letters, but rather examines them fairly and thoroughly. Because she is more interested in believing and writing what is true than she is in receiving the praise of her colleagues and readers, she repudiates her influential account, both privately and in print.” (Baehr 2006, 200)

What these two cases show is that the use of our faculties may not be sufficient for knowledge and justification acquisition. As shown, in order to gain knowledge, it is necessary for the epistemic agent to exercise perseverance, patience, attentiveness, thoroughness, fair-mindedness, and impartiality. Note that these traits are not faculties (like vision, memory, reasoning etc.), but intellectual character traits of an epistemic agent. Faculties and intellectual character traits were carefully distinguished by epistemologists: as opposed to faculties, character traits are acquired, and exercising them involves an effort on part of the epistemic subject, whose agency is also implied (Baehr 2006, 197; Grasswick 2018, 196). Moreover, lacking any of these traits is blameworthy, while lacking a faculty is not (Zagzebski 1996, 104)⁶. To conclude this section, responsibilist virtue epistemologists argue that traits of intellectual character ought to count as intellectual virtues, while reliabilists take the set of virtues to be limited to truth-conducive faculties.

3. Modal epistemology and the role of imagination in justifying modal beliefs

Let us consider the following two propositions:

- (1) This paper could have had a different word count.

⁶ According to Zagzebski (1996), intellectual virtues are character traits with the following properties: they are acquired, reliable, deep and enduring cognitive excellences, they involve a motivational component, and they define one’s identity.

(2) Philosophical zombies are metaphysically possible entities.

Certainly, we know that (1), as we know many other things about what is possible: for example, we could have taken a longer stroll in the park, that we could have started different careers, and so on. Modal epistemologists are interested in finding out the source of all this wealth of knowledge about modalities that we possess. Regarding (2), there is an intense philosophical debate regarding its truth value. Even so, what would justify a belief that (2) is true?

How do we explain our knowledge of modalities and how do we justify our beliefs about what is possible? Part of the tradition in modal epistemology is to adhere to (and improve upon) an epistemic variant of Hume's Principle, i.e., that anything imaginable is possible:

(Hume's Epistemic Principle) If S can imagine that P, then S is justified to believe that P is possible.

In this tradition, many contemporary modal epistemologists (see, *inter alia*, Geirsson 2005, 2014; Kung 2010, 2016; Gregory 2004, 2010; Yablo 1993) consider that imagination⁷ plays a central role in justifying modal beliefs and as a source of modal knowledge. In the following, I will succinctly explain the link between imagination and justification for modal beliefs, and what an act of imagining might consist in.

Following Geirsson (2005, 2014), imagination is a defeasible guide to possibility, and justification comes in degrees⁸. Typically, in order to acquire justification for a belief that P is possible, we have to imagine a scenario in which P is true. By filling the scenario with more detail, we can either strengthen our justification, or encounter a defeater that renders our belief unjustified. Say that we want to gather evidence that Hesperus could have been brighter than Phosphorus. We would have to imagine a scenario in which the two are distinct entities, and the first is brighter than the latter. According to Geirsson (2005, 295-7), before

⁷ I will use the terms "imaginability" and "imagination" in their widest meaning, and not distinguish between imaginability and conceivability, or between acts of imagining and acts of conceiving. Consequently, I will treat "imaginability" and "conceivability" as interchangeable.

⁸ Hawke (2011, 359) also adheres to the idea that our justification for modal statements comes in degrees.

discovering that they are a single entity, the belief would have been justified by the imagining. However, this discovery acts as a defeater, since filling the imagined scenario with this detail makes it inconsistent with the initial supposition of distinctness (Geirsson 2005, 297).

Let us see now what imagining consists in. According to Kung (2010, 2016) and Gregory (2004, 2010), all acts of imagining involve two kinds of content: basic qualitative content⁹ and assigned, or stipulative, content. Typical basic qualitative content includes perceptual or sensorial properties, while assigned or stipulative content includes background knowledge, suppositions (see Kung 2016, 108; Gregory 2010, 328) and theoretical properties like “exists” and “is identical with” (Kung 2010, 643). This distinction between kinds of content is crucial in explaining our ability to imagine various statements and scenarios that do not involve any sensorial properties. Clearly, seeing a red apple, we can imagine that it could have been green: we just have to picture it in our minds with a different color. Likewise, we can imagine that apples could have smelled like oranges do. But what about imagining that there are 5-dimensional conscious beings, that there is an even number greater than 2 that is not the sum of two primes, or that there are more than six types of quarks? Intuitively, we can imagine all these, even though there is nothing sensorial we can conjure up in our minds, and the explanation of the fact that they are imaginable involves our ability to assign content, i.e., to make stipulations and suppositions.

But is any kind of imagining that P sufficient for justifying a belief that P is possible? Kung further distinguishes between *probative* and *non-probative acts* of imagining. If an act of imagining is probative for a possibility statement P, then it justifies believing that P. In order for an imagining act to be probative, P must not be derived solely from the assignments or stipulations involved in the imagining. The intuition, also shared by Hawke (2011) and Gregory (2004, 2010), is that deriving P

⁹ These are the terms used by Kung in (2010) and (2016). Following the same intuition, Gregory distinguishes between “qualitative representations of visual phenomena” and suppositions in (2004, 329), and between “sensory imaginings” and “nonimagistic imagining” in (2010, 328). Nonimagistic imagining involves suppositions and labellings (2010, 330). For a discussion and comparison between Kung’s and Gregory’s theories of imagination, see Lam (2018).

from imagining-by-stipulating that P would be circular, as in the case of believing that P solely from supposing that P holds.

Recall that reliabilist epistemologists consider reasoning and memory to be faculty virtues. At this point, it is important to note that justifying modal beliefs by imagining acts involves at least two faculties or cognitive capacities: reasoning and memory. The faculty of reasoning is largely exercised when checking the assigned content for contradiction: if one can derive a contradiction from the stipulations or suppositions, then, clearly, what one has imagined is not evidential for a possibility. And, obviously, the epistemic subject needs to have a good working memory to ensure that the possibility of P is not derived from a set of stipulations including P. In the following, I will track the necessity of exercising responsibilist virtues in our acts of justifying beliefs about what is possible. As a result, I will show that, alongside faculties like reasoning and memory, traits of intellectual character play an important role in modal epistemology.

4. Tracking the relevance of character traits in modal epistemology

The main lines of my argumentation are the following:

(1) As shown in the previous section, imagining plays a central role in justifying modal beliefs, and the set of faculties used to imagine that P includes reasoning and memory. I will argue that an exercise of reasoning and memory is, in some cases, insufficient for justifying modal claims. Furthermore, I will point that only when exercising some character traits alongside the faculties of reasoning and memory we can gather justification for modal beliefs. Consequently, I will present the following: (a) the argument from the case of reasoning, (b) the argument from the case of memory, and (c) the argument from the case of filling scenarios.

(2) The second line of argumentation stems from the idea that our epistemic activities of forming, sustaining, and rejecting modal beliefs are subject to social influences. Van Inwagen (1998) and Geirsson (2014) argue that we may face peer pressure or various kinds of threats to

accept certain modal beliefs for which there is no clear evidence. I will point that by exercising certain traits of intellectual character like autonomy, open-mindedness and courage we can mitigate these influences on our epistemic activities, and increase the chances of adopting only those modal beliefs that are justified. Consequently, I will present (d) the argument from the social nature of modal justification.

4.1. The argument from the case of reasoning

Since gathering justification by an act of imagining involves making deductions from assigned and qualitative content, our reasoning faculty is involved in justifying our beliefs about what is possible. Say that we need to decide the possibility of Russell's barber who shaves all and only those who do not shave themselves. Visual imagination is not useful in this case, as it can mislead us into thinking that a barber as such is possible. Only working through the logical form and implications of the stipulations (that there is a barber, and that this barber satisfies the property of shaving all and only those who do not shave themselves) will result in deriving a contradiction. Note that there are few stipulations and variables¹⁰ in the description of this scenario. Clearly, the difficulty of checking for inconsistency increases with the number of stipulations and variables: consider trying to decide whether it is possible to cross only once Euler's Seven Bridges of Königsberg, whether it is possible to construct a 19-sided regular polygon with ruler and compass¹¹ or whether a cartographer can color any map with at most four colors in such a way that no neighboring countries share the same color.¹² Finding the contradiction underlying the first two cases required extensive mathematical knowledge and practice, and proving that that latter is possible was achieved only with the help of a computer proof.

¹⁰ A first-order logical representation involves only two variables, see (Cusmariu 1979, 365).

¹¹ See (Lewis 1986, 90) for a discussion of this example.

¹² This statement corresponds to the Four-Color Problem. See (Tymoczko 1979) for a discussion of the theorem.

To conclude, I gather that simply possessing and exercising our reasoning faculty would be insufficient when evaluating complex scenarios involving many stipulations and variables. In this case, it is necessary to exercise the character traits needed for providing logical and mathematical proofs. Such character traits include thoroughness, perseverance, creativity and diligence, as Tanswell and Kidd (2021, 413) proposed for the case of mathematics. Since checking the internal consistency of the assigned content is similar to working out mathematical proofs, and since the activity of proving requires various character traits, I gather that an imaginer, set to identify whether a modal belief is justified or not, ought to exercise the same set of responsibility virtues.

4.2. The argument from the case of memory

Recall that Hawke (2011), Kung (2010, 2016) and Gregory (2004, 2010) point out that our acts of imagining involve stipulations, and deriving that P only from stipulations does not offer justification for believing the possibility of P . On the contrary, we would just base our belief on a circular argument. Now let us consider the following case:

S tries to gather justification for the modal belief that P and she stipulates in an imagining act that Q_1, \dots, Q_N , where some Q_i is P and N is a large number. Since S has stipulated that P , the imagining act does not offer evidence for believing that P is possible. However, since N is a large number, S forgets that she stipulated that P , and she erroneously takes Q_1, \dots, Q_N to support the possibility of P .

In the above case, the method of justifying beliefs about what is possible is taken to an extreme, since the number of stipulations is very large. The chances that the imaginer erroneously derives a conclusion that P from a set of suppositions that includes P increase with the cardinality of the set of stipulations. Intuitively, if the number of stipulations is large, the chances that one would forget that the derived conclusion is part of the assigned content are high. Nevertheless, I gather that patience, attentiveness, carefulness and a commitment to find the truth decrease these chances. An imaginer committed to finding the truth and knowing the undertaken risks would be doubtful that their

first attempt was valid, and will repeat the experiment with more attention and care to detail, or check it with their peers. Consequently, I gather that character traits like patience, attentiveness, carefulness, commitment to find the truth are required to mitigate the risks of using the faculty of memory in improper circumstances. In the above case, should S have exercised these traits of character, it is more likely that she would not have taken the imagining act to justify that P is possible.

4.3. The argument from the case of filling scenarios

Recall that, for Geirsson, an epistemic subject S is justified to believe that P is possible in case S has imagined a scenario in which P is true, and the justification for modal belief P comes in degrees. The degree in which S is justified to believe that P is possible varies with the degree of detail put in the scenario:

“First, justification comes in degrees, i.e., one can be more or less justified in believing P. This fits nicely with the fact that scenarios can be more or less determinate and can vary in how complete they are. As a general rule, the more determinate the relevant scenario I imagine and the more complete it is, the higher degree of justification it confers on my belief that it is possible that P. Second, the justification is defeasible by additional evidence.” (Geirsson 2005, 296).

To justify a modal belief we need to fill the scenario with all the relevant information, scientific laws and facts included (Geirsson 2005, 295). A consequence of completing a scenario might be encountering a defeater, i.e., a proposition that once added to the scenario makes it inconsistent. As such, the result would cancel the justificatory effect of the scenario, and, consequently, losing the justification for the modal belief (Geirsson 2005, 296). Let us take some examples: the proposition that no speed can be higher than the speed of light makes inconsistent the scenario in which a spaceship travels the Universe at warp 3, the fact that Sir Andrew Wiles proved Fermat’s Last Theorem is inconsistent with a scenario in which one bright Oxford mathematician proves that Fermat was wrong, the fact that water is composed of hydrogen and oxygen makes a scenario in which alchemists discover hydrogen-less water inconsistent. Additionally, the imaginer needs to reason using the

laws of logic (propositional, first-order, modal etc.) and have a good knowledge of semantics (Geirsson 2005, 282). For example, not taking into consideration that proper names are rigid designators might lead one into believing that although Hesperus is actually Phosphorus, it is possible to construct a scenario in which they are distinct (Geirsson 2005, 297).

Given the above, I gather that good reasoning, memory, and strong sensorial imagination are not sufficient for acquiring strong justification for modal beliefs. It seems easy to start believing that spaceships could travel with speeds greater than the speed of light, as we can easily picture Star Trek's Enterprise voyaging through the Universe. Or out of wishfully thinking that the scenario can be consistently completed¹³. A thorough and committed imaginer will add the relevant physical laws in the scenario and thus avoid jumping to wrong modal conclusions. All in all, I gather that Zagzebski's (1996,114) list of intellectual virtues, including "the ability to recognize the salient facts; sensitivity to detail", "intellectual perseverance, diligence, care and thoroughness," is relevant to modal justification. The exercise of these character traits is necessary for increasing modal justification by filling scenarios, and for identifying defeaters.

4.4. The argument from the social nature of modal knowledge and justification

Drawing on an analogy between perceiving and imagining, Van Inwagen (1998) argues that just as our knowledge of mundane perceptual matters is accurate (we are rather accurate when evaluating the distance between our eyes and our laptop screens), so is our knowledge of mundane modal matters, e.g., that our laptops could have had a different color and so on. Now, just as perception is not accurate when evaluating very large distances, so is our ability to form true modal beliefs when the subject matter consists of non-mundane matters, e.g., we are not in the position to accurately judge whether zombies, disembodied minds, purple cows, transparent iron are possible. What

¹³ Wishful thinking is taken by Zagzebski (1996, 152) to be an intellectual vice.

do philosophers who believe in such possibilities owe their credence to? Here, Van Inwagen (1998, 73) distinguishes:

“[those] modal judgments [that] are products of [their] ordinary human powers of “modalization” from those that are based on [their] immersion in a certain philosophical environment – an environment composed of philosophers who unthinkingly make all sorts of fanciful modal judgments because *they’ve* always been surrounded by philosophers who unthinkingly make the same sorts of fanciful modal judgments.” (Van Inwagen 1998, 73)

The idea is that two sources of modal beliefs are distinguishable - a natural power that we all possess and that we owe our knowledge of basic possibilities, and “immersion in a certain philosophical environment” or “professional socialization” that, according to Van Inwagen, influences the set of beliefs about non-basic possibilities:

“[Mundane or basic modal beliefs] have their source in our ordinary human powers of “modalization” ... [non-mundane or non-basic modal beliefs] have their source in his professional socialization, in “what his peers will let him get away with saying.” (Van Inwagen 1998, 73)

According to Hawke, Van Inwagen “sets out to expose a philosophical culture that he sees as having grown accustomed to accepting far-out possibility claims on the basis of mere intuition” (2011, 352). Although I agree with Hawke, there is much more to draw from Van Inwagen’s claim: he also deplores an epistemically dangerous and faulty way to form, sustain and justify beliefs about what is possible solely on the ground that they are shared by a number of peers. From a virtue-theoretic point of view, what is deplorable about such a “philosophical culture” is:

(1) The presence of certain epistemic vices like intellectual conformism (manifested in non-self-reliance) and closed-mindedness, and

(2) The absence of certain epistemic virtues like intellectual autonomy (to be manifested in self-reliance) and open-mindedness.

In the following, I will discuss these intellectual vices and virtues, and show their relevance for modal epistemology.

As mentioned above, one of the pitfalls that Van Inwagen warns about is the vice of intellectual conformism. Intellectual conformists are not interested in forming true beliefs, but merely in conforming their set of beliefs to that of other epistemic agents, or groups. Fairweather describes a case of conformism in his (2001):

“Let us consider the case of Conrad, the Doxastic Conformist. Conrad’s primary cognitive goal is that a class of his beliefs largely overlap with the beliefs of Mr. Cool. If Mr. Cool believes *P*, then Conrad will believe *P*. Conrad forms beliefs in this way not because he thinks Mr. Cool is a reliable guide to the truth, but because Mr. Cool is cool and Conrad wants to be cool. Conrad has become so obsessed with bringing his belief system into conformity with Mr. Cool’s that he is no longer sensitive to the alethic properties of his own beliefs or the alethic properties of Mr. Cool’s beliefs.” (Fairweather 2001, 74)

Drawing on Van Inwagen’s contention, Conrad the “Modal Doxastic Conformist” would come to hold the belief that *P* is possible on account of its being a common and popular belief in his community. Or, in Van Inwagen’s terms, Modal Conrad would come to hold certain beliefs about what is possible as a result of his “immersion in a certain philosophical environment” (Van Inwagen 1998 73). What would lack on part of Modal Conrad is intellectual autonomy, manifested in a lack of epistemic self-reliance. Epistemically self-reliant agents typically form and sustain their beliefs relying on their own faculty and character-virtues, albeit not unreasonably excluding the influence of other epistemic agents on their beliefs (Byerly 2013, 55; Roberts & Wood 2007, 260).

It is, of course, practically impossible to rely only on yourself when forming or sustaining your beliefs, since checking every piece of information is both time-consuming, and, in many cases, beyond our abilities. Note that we have formed a large set of beliefs based on listening to our teachers and professors, that it is a common practice of scientists to verify their work with their peers, and that we often rely on the epistemic authority of experts. As Roberts and Wood say in their (2007), “knowledge builds on knowledge” (261), since there is a relation of dependence between our beliefs and those of other agents. However, showing self-reliance in certain circumstances is a virtuous trait, as, first,

such dependence is not necessary in many cases, and, second, we may put ourselves at risk when depending on irresponsible or inadequate epistemic agents:

“[epistemic self-reliance] is epistemically valuable insofar as it can protect agents from an undue dependence on others for one’s beliefs. In depending on others in forming my beliefs, I make myself vulnerable to the possibility that they may be poor inquirers (perhaps simply not positioned well) or irresponsible inquirers (not employing the appropriate epistemic virtues).” (Grasswick 2018, 196)

A self-relying, intellectually autonomous Modal Conrad would not form, nor sustain, a belief about the possibility of P simply based on the fact that the belief is widely shared in his group. Nor would he take the complacency of the group as a ground for accepting some popular modal statements in his set of beliefs.

Another virtue that is necessary when forming beliefs about possibilities is that of open-mindedness. Following Baehr (2011, 152, 266) and Riggs (2018, 150), an open-minded epistemic subject is able and willing to go beyond their cognitive standpoint and take into consideration the opposite ones¹⁴. An epistemic agent that takes for granted the possibility of, say, zombies, disembodied minds or transparent iron, while not taking into consideration the arguments aimed at showing that either such entities are not imaginable, or that their imaginability is not evidential for their possibility, clearly displays a lack of open-mindedness. Returning to Modal Conrad, the virtue of open-mindedness would cancel out or mitigate the strong influence of the community on his belief system. Although a belief that P is possible may be popular in their group, open-minded epistemic agents take into consideration the opposing stance on the possibility of P, and individually decide whether they should form or sustain the belief.

Now let us turn to Geirsson’s similar view on how modal beliefs and justification are influenced by social factors. In his (2014) paper, he

¹⁴ “An open-minded person is characteristically (a) willing and (within limits) able (b) to transcend a default cognitive standpoint (c) in order to take up or take seriously the merits of (d) a distinct cognitive standpoint.” (Baehr 2011, 152).

notes that there is a certain stigma associated with not finding certain statements conceivable:

“I am placing myself in a somewhat unfortunate position when admitting that I am skeptical about the conceivability of zombies: namely, I am admitting that I have a hard time conceiving of something that many others claim they can conceive of. Ever since Anselm presented his ontological argument there has been a stigma associated with not being able to conceive of what others claim to be able to conceive of. Even the fool, Anselm claimed, can conceive of God and so it took courage to admit that one was even worse off than the fool and could not conceive of what the fool could conceive of.” (Geirsson 2014, 212)

What Geirsson says is not that we are pushed into believing that certain entities are conceivable, since we can believe that they are conceivable while not being able to conceive them ourselves, but that we are pushed into affirming that *we* find them conceivable. The arguments for the conceivability of certain entities carry a powerful rhetorical component that associates stigma – being, say, “foolish” – with not being able to conceive them: unless we can conceive them, there is something wrong with *us*. As Geirsson points out, it takes courage to affirm that we cannot conceive or imagine certain entities. In the following, I will bring into discussion the notion of intellectual courage, as understood in virtue epistemology, and argue that exercising intellectual courage is necessary for justifying modal beliefs.

According to Baehr (2011) and Kidd (2018), an agent *S* manifests intellectual courage in their epistemic activities (e.g., in adopting, sustaining or rejecting a belief) in case they pursue an epistemic good (e.g., knowledge, justification, understanding etc.) despite *S*'s belief that the pursuit of the epistemic good can be harmful to them (Baehr 2011, 169, 171, 176; Kidd 2018, 245). There are various kinds of harms that threaten the pursuit of epistemic goods: they can be social, political, professional or involving bodily integrity (Baehr 2011, 172). In the following excerpt of his (2011, 174-5), Baehr notes that one can face pressure to accept a certain belief, *P*, in spite of the fact that the available reasons point to the opposite belief, not-*P*, and that an exercise of courage can explain an epistemic agent's accepting the right belief:

“Suppose my epistemic community accepts that P, that I am presently on good terms with the other members of this community, but that *they would frown upon me* [emphasis added] if I came to reject P. I have, however, arrived at what seem to me to be genuinely cogent reasons in support of not-P. My situation is *lamentable* [emphasis added]. I have a lot to lose by embracing not-P; nonetheless, I recognize that accepting not-P is the only intellectually respectable course, and in the face of intense pressure to ignore or to try to forget about my reasons for not-P, I proceed instead to countenance these reasons, to bring them before my mind, to focus on them, reminding and reassuring myself of their logical force. The immediate result is that I come genuinely to accept not-P. Clearly this process might involve intellectual courage.” (Baehr 2011, 174-5)

To exemplify, Baehr (2011, 167-8) points to the intellectual courage of John Bahcall and Raymond Davis, two physicists who conducted the Homestake Experiment, an experiment aimed at calculating the number of solar neutrinos. After Bahcall’s theoretical predictions were not matched by the experimental results of Raymond Davis, they started searching for an explanation of the discrepancy. This search lasted for 30 years, while facing “considerable pressure within the profession to alter or abandon their views.” (Baehr 2011,167) For Baehr, their success was due to their exercise of intellectual courage, manifested in persevering, in spite of the potential social and professional harms.

Kidd (2018, 244) points to the intellectual courage manifested by Michael Mann, a climatologist who obtained a strong argument for the anthropogenic global warming hypothesis. The result was met with incredulity and outright aggressive attitude, as Mann received numerous death threats (McKie 2012), and his university was pressured to fire him. In spite of the large number of threats and attempts at discrediting his work and character (Kidd 2018, 244), he persevered to support and disseminate his results, while conscious of all reputational and professional harms.

Drawing from the above, in some situations we are pushed, perhaps at the risk of reputational, social, or professional harms, to adopt certain beliefs. In the case noted by Geirsson, we are pushed to refrain from admitting that we cannot imagine philosophical zombies. If certain entities are generally thought to be imaginable, then we might find ourselves in the “lamentable” situation that Baehr (2011, 174-5) describes: the other members of the community would “frown upon us”

when claiming that we cannot imagine what they can. But, clearly, claiming that we can imagine things when we cannot would be a sign of vicious conformism. Given the social pressure, an exercise of intellectual courage counters this type of conformism and leaves open the possibility of adopting properly justified modal beliefs.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to argue that intellectual traits of character, or responsibilist virtues, are relevant for modal epistemology. I have dedicated sections 2 and 3 to short presentations of the domains of virtue epistemology and modal epistemology, with an emphasis on distinguishing between reliabilist virtues and responsibilist virtues, and presenting the link between imaginability and justifying beliefs about what is metaphysically possible. Following the work of Kung (2010, 2016) and Gregory (2004, 2010), I pointed that imagining involves two faculties or capacities, i.e., reasoning and memory. In the fourth section I have tracked the relevance of responsibilist virtues in our practice of justifying modal beliefs, by means of four arguments: the argument from the case of reasoning, the argument from the case of memory, the argument from the case of filling scenarios and, finally, the argument from the social nature of modal knowledge.

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