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SPINOZA'S GEOMETRY OF AFFECTIVE RELATIONS,
THE BODY POLITIC, AND THE SOCIAL GRAMMAR
OF INTOLERANCE: A MINIMALIST THEORY OF TOLERATION

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationships between individuals, including the intersubjectivity inherent to the body politic, are also affective relationships: such is the thesis that we postulate to reconstruct, *more geometrico*, as demonstrated by Benedictus de Spinoza in his philosophical system. According to Spinoza's concept of affectivity and bodily life, affection refers to a state of the affected body and implies the presence of the affecting body, while affect refers to the transition from one state to another, taking into account the correlative variation of affective bodies, that is, the affect is always a passage or variation in the intensity of our power to exist and act—the increase or decrease, the favoring or the restraint of our power to exist and act. As Deleuze (2003, 68) aptly remarked, “The *affectio* refers to a state of the affected body and implies the presence of the affecting body, while the *affectus* refers to the passage from one state to another, taking into account the correlative variation of the affecting bodies.”¹ We are thus following the recommendation of

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¹ “L'affectio renvoie à un état du corps affecté et implique la présence du corps affectant, tandis que l'affectus renvoie au passage d'un état à un autre, compte tenu de la variation correlative des corps affectants.”

Robert Misrahi (SPINOZA 2005, 406ff.), when he reminds us that Spinoza defines *affectus* and *affectio* in a differentiated and consistent way, so as to avoid the common confusion between their passive and active senses, keeping in mind that the *affectus* is the *idea affectionis* (SPINOZA 2005, 440).² Hence, we can glimpse in what sense a geometry of affective relations in Spinoza contributes to a political theory of democracy, and more specifically, to a minimalist theory of tolerance.

Although the Latin word *tolerantia* happens to be a *hapax legomenon* in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (in fact, in the whole Spinozan *corpus*, one can barely count four or five occurrences of the adjective “tolerable”, “intolerable” or related verbal forms “tolerate” or “tolerated”, depending on the translation adopted) and there is no consensus among the commentators whether, after all, a theory of tolerance is to be found in Spinoza, there is no doubt that his systematic defense of freedom of thought and belief can be seen as a scathing critique of the religious intolerance of his time, hence a prefiguration of democratic theories of liberal tolerance, as Bayle, Locke, Voltaire, and Montesquieu would formulate it more explicitly later on (MENDUS 1999; FORST 2003). To be sure, Spinoza had not yet explicitly articulated a rapprochement of modern liberal ideals, such as fundamental freedoms and the very idea of toleration, with republican undertones of inclusive participation and popular sovereignty. Indeed, the biggest problem for any Spinozist philosophy of tolerance consists precisely in inserting it into its reformulation of the body politic and the sovereign in the face of individual freedoms, as opposed to a virtuous conception of human flourishing within an emerging republican polity (ROSENTHAL 2001). In this essay, we propose a minimalist reading of tolerance in the light of Spinoza’s articulation of the social body as consisting of intersubjective, affective relations. We have drawn from his critical appropriation of Medieval and Renaissance conceptions, showing—since they did not yet include the idea of religious tolerance—that this would have been one of the innovations of Spinoza’s political thought, as recognized by contemporary thinkers as different as Karl Popper (1945), John Rawls (1971), and Rainer Forst (2003).

Indeed, inspired by a critical reading of Maimonides, Crescas, Gersonides and the Iberian kabbalists, Spinoza defended a far more radical moral universalism than those offered by orthodox and conservative interpretations of

² We are using the following editions of Spinoza’s *Ethics*: Latin (GEBHARDT 1972), English (CURLEY 1984; 2005), and French (MISRAHI 2005), adopting Curley’s standard system of abbreviations.

Judaism and Christianity, precisely because of his anticipation of an ever-broadening conception of tolerance (NADLER 2014). Contrary to the popular myth that tolerance is a by-product of modernity, we propose thus that it turns out to be the reverse (BEJCZY 1997), as the modern, liberal, and revolutionary ideals of freedom, equality and civic solidarity, as well as that of the emancipation of the sovereign state, combined with natural law, the doctrine of the two kingdoms, and a morality of reciprocity, are all indebted to the gradual and radical change wrought by tolerance until it is more widely adopted by society in the 17th and 18th centuries (FORST 2007). In this sense, there is a historical, semantic problem beyond revisionist interpretations and anachronisms, which we have dubbed “the social grammar of intolerance” referring, in the final analysis, to the social ethos that kept entire communities and small groups together, under the same rationale that resisted social transformation, attested by philosophical sources that would eventually pave the way for the modern problem of moral progress (NEDERMAN and LAURSEN 1996). In effect, Spinoza’s highly controversial and peculiar views of political obedience and social contract allow for a minimalist understanding of tolerance that avoids the conservative-liberal opposition and progressive, inclusionary dogmas of liberal theories of democracy (RAMOND 2016). Furthermore, it must be kept in mind that even the Christian historiography of Medieval philosophy as the given background for a Marrano’s approach to these philosophical concepts must be critically reviewed, as Yitzhak Melamed (2015, 2) aptly observed:

In fact, the major medieval Jewish philosophers—Maimonides, Gersonides, and Hasdai Crescas—openly advocated views which hardly any Cartesian would dare entertain due to their heretic perception in the Christian context. On the other hand, we find the ideological construct of “Philonic philosophy” by Harry A. Wolfson (1962), who virtually effaced any difference between Spinoza and his medieval predecessors (as well as between the various medieval philosophers themselves) in an attempt to provide a counter-narrative to Hegel’s Christian historiography of the history of philosophy.

2. SPINOZA AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF TOLERATION

Although he does not usually mention Crescas by name, like many philosophers with whom he agrees, it is well known how much Spinoza made use of criticisms of medieval Jewish tradition. According to Warren Zev

Harvey, Gersonides was not the first Jewish philosopher who went beyond the *Guide of the Perplexed* (*More Nevukhim*), and attributed passionate love to God, but he was certainly the most significant. After Gersonides, many Jewish philosophers did likewise, and some of them, like Rabbi Hasdai Crescas (c. 1340–1410/11), who rejected the concept of intellectual love, and Leon Ebreo (c. 1465–after 1523), who accepted it, had a distinct influence on Spinoza’s theory of *amor Dei intellectualis* (NADLER 2014, 104). Noa Lahav Ayalon (2021) has convincingly argued for a single concept of essence that can be conceived rationally as shared or unique, as Spinoza’s accounts of essence point to “a single, specific, and unequivocal notion that has various expressions and can be perceived in different ways.” Neither dualistic nor monadological, the individual cannot thus be evoked in a Hobbesian-like methodological atomism that allows for the civic constitution of the body politic, but rather refers us back to “human essence as an idea with shared properties between individual humans” (AYALON 2021, 33), including friendship, commonwealth, and love. Because we usually think of tolerance when it comes to social, cultural, racial, gender, and religious differences and collective identities (including rooting for different football teams!), we tend to think of it in terms of the diversity of personal and collective beliefs, usually associated with emotional states of empathy and disgust. Hence, if we assume that empathy is an emotional process in which individuals and social groups internalize an external emotion and expresses their internal, emotional state outward, we tend to think of disgust as a process in which individuals and groups inhibit an unpleasant external stimulus (PRINZ 2004).

Elainy Costa da Silva (2020, 23) has convincingly shown that reflexivity is developed out of affectivity, insofar as the reinforced *conatus*, the joy, and the desire that derive from it prepare and help us to reach states and acts of reflexivity (including judgment), which allows us to understand the importance of agreement and tolerance (MISRAHI 1972). Affective relationships are, after all, affective states in a cognitivist and non-cognitivist sense of emotional states and feelings in general, and of interpersonal and collective emotions and feelings, in a strictly social sense of intersubjectivity, socializing, and qua object of passive socialization. The contemporary contributions of Damasio (2003), Prinz (2004) and Lordon (2013) corroborate our intuition that social and collective emotions are mobilized by the same mechanisms identified in a Cartesian-Spinozan reading of passions. Thus, starting from a Spinozistic geometry of affective relationships, articulating the political body with a moral grammar of intolerance, we may arrive at

a minimalist reading of tolerance in order to do justice to a rather unusual and oblique approach to this highly relevant theme. Just as theories of justice need to be articulated against the concrete, social background of injustice in order to be taken seriously, a defensible theory of toleration must be worked out from the historical, ubiquitous reality of intolerance (FORST 2017).

If we take into account the cultural, temporal contexts of Spinoza's "age of radical Enlightenment," we may set the circumstances of toleration within the historical period from the late Renaissance through the modern context of the American and French revolutions, when normative claims for broader and more inclusive tolerance can be found in representative texts (NADLER 2006). And yet, as pointed out by Idit Dobbs-Weinstein (2015, 43), even in republican champions of freedom and equality we still find rather limited conceptions of tolerance:

Kant repeatedly claims both in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* and in *Lectures on Ethics* that the Jews are a nation of cowards and liars, a national constitution whose origin he attributes to the Talmud, and one which in the *Anthropology* is also claimed to constitute the Jews as a nation of merchants. It is for this reason that Kant argues that whereas a well-governed commonwealth can protect a multiplicity of religions, it cannot extend this toleration to the Jews.

The Radical Enlightenment must be, in effect, defined as an intellectual trend combining two fundamental components: "the rejection of the religious authority of law, politics and education, on the one hand, and the democratization of republican social and political programs, on the other hand" (ISRAEL 2001, 45). It should, furthermore, be noted that tolerance becomes more global and more comprehensive as democracy becomes more and more inclusive and representative of minority groups and human rights (a very instructive case is the so-called "Jewish question", *Judenfrage*, or the gradual emancipation of Jews in the USA and in several European countries after the American and French revolutions, as well as the feminist, black, liberation movements and LGBTQIAP+ struggles for recognition), as human rights are extended to a growing number of social groups and individuals. As Jonathan Israel (2019, 335) has well observed, all modern scholars who study the Spinozist circle link the phenomenon of this group, the emergence of the radical Enlightenment framework in its first manifestation, to the fact that the United Provinces were republican and not monarchical, were religiously multifaceted and non-uniform, lacked a strong state church, and were a society with relatively weak censorship (ROVERE 2017). To this, Israel can further

add that the ruling oligarchy lacked genuinely aristocratic credentials and was primarily an informal rentier oligarchy. There is therefore in Spinoza a freedom-liberation problematic that turns out to be very important, as Pierre Macherey (1994) has clearly identified, for the understanding of this phenomenon of tolerance, which is as dynamic as it keeps changing in time and space, as humans continue to reflect upon themselves and on different interpretations of given, received, and transmitted traditions (ZAC 1965). Or, as Elhanan Yakira (2015, 23) put it so felicitously, much of Spinoza's struggle against dogmatic theology was cast, in the *Tractatus Theologico-politicus*, "as a quarrel over the correct method of interpreting Scripture," of which orthodoxy and fundamentalism turn out to be the institutional *punctum dolens* of tolerance. Moreover, as Yakira (2015, 38) insightfully observed,

toleration presupposes an authority that is neutral on the questions debated. The liberal state can be said to be such an authority, which provides a space where all opinions, true and untrue, are tolerated. Hence, toleration is a political and not a philosophical virtue. In fact, in the Spinozistic state, theology and religion enjoy only relative toleration.

One might say that, thanks to Spinoza, the problem of toleration shifted the focus from internal, somewhat private disputes (say, of theological, ecclesiastical issues among communities of believers) towards the external, public use of reason which allows for an ever-growing number of participants in the polity to rationally express their views (ZAC 1979). It is in this sense that Spinoza's critique of religion is radical, going to the roots of human experience, piety, and devotion so as to bring about a radical ethos of democracy in which we must situate the question of tolerance in Spinoza. Hence, such an idea of a radical Enlightenment is not without paradoxes, as Charles Ramond (2021, 31) remarkably put it,

only the clever (or the sage, to use the Spinozist term), who obeys the law without subjecting it to a work of external "justification," religious or moral, arrives from time to time at the liberation engendered by the separation of the theological (or moral) and the political. In this sense, skeptical obedience to democratic laws, that is to say, obedience to the law of counting, liberates and emancipates us in that it delivers us from all transcendence. For all these reasons, it seems to me that our contemporary democracies, so attracted by republican "values" and their transcendent dimension, still have a long way

to go before arriving at the immanence and formal democracy that Spinoza called "the absolute regime," or *imperium absolutum*.

As Marilena Chauí (1999) remarks, little is known of Spinoza's childhood. It is said that his father, a very sensible man, was the first to teach him not to confuse devotion with superstition. It is also known that in adolescence he was educated like other young Marranos from a middle-class background. He was destined for the mercantile profession, but that did not exclude the study of Hebrew, the Bible, and the history of the Jewish people. These studies were carried out at the *Arvore da Vida* (*Etz Haim*, Tree of Life) school. He also attended the Academy of the Crown and the Law, where he penetrated the great problems of Judaism. He was greatly impressed by Abraham Ibn Ezra, the first to arouse in him doubts about the unity of the Torah; these doubts increased when he came across Gersonides, who points out chronological discrepancies in the Holy Books. At the Academy of the Crown and the Law, Spinoza became acquainted with the work of Maimonides and read Chasdai Crescas and Leon Ebreo. The latter tried to reconcile Judaism and Renaissance culture, especially renewed Platonism, and proposed a conception of the world based on love as a cosmic force. Spinoza's theory of the intellectual love of God shows clear influence from Leon Ebreo. At the same time, Spinoza studied with Saul Levi Morteira, the greatest Talmudist of the Amsterdam community, and got to know Kabbalah, which he would later treat with the greatest contempt, considering it as another form of superstition (ROVERE 2019). All these elements of his formative period were, to a certain extent, contradictory, just as was the controversial Jewish world in which he was raised.

Chauí (1999, 448) also reminds us that the very reason why Spinoza's family and antecessors had successively left Spain, Portugal, and France for the Netherlands was related to intolerance, keeping in mind that in 1492, shortly after the end of the Granada War, the Catholic Monarchs signed the decree of expulsion of the Jews in Granada, which was sent to all the cities, towns, and lordships of their kingdoms with strict orders. Then Jews were also forced to convert to Catholicism in Portugal in 1497 (keeping in mind that the Inquisition took place not only in Spain and Portugal but also in Brazil), and following a new French edict of 1615 which forbade Christians, under the penalty of death and confiscation, to shelter Jews or to converse with them, a veritable Sephardic diaspora reached the United Provinces and the Americas (starting with Recife, in Northeastern Brazil, where flourished

the first *kehilah* of the Americas), North Africa, and Italy. As it happened with the African diaspora following the North Atlantic slavery system, physical oppression, political persecution, and social death, even if mitigated by a certain degree of freedom, were also experienced by Marranos, *crístãos novos*, and crypto-Jews who migrated to different countries, regions, and continents, as they also developed a peculiar sense of self-identity that existentially sought to overcome alienation and suffering by remembering and even reenacting somehow the Babylonian exile of 586 BCE, traditionally regarded as the first significant Jewish Diaspora. To be sure, the very Exodus and the Pesach story were also kept in mind as a dynamic narrative of liberation that could eventually foster different interpretations of political messianism and spiritual salvation (DE OLIVEIRA 2016). Spinoza's reading of this Hebrew saga turns out to be a radical hermeneutics of a spiritual motif that is eventually deconstructed and secularized from within. As Yakira (2015, 19) summed it up,

If the TTP can be seen as a gesture of liberation—as the liberation of political theory from theology as a source of theoretical understanding and legitimation—the TP would be an attempt to elaborate what has been only foreshadowed in the TTP, namely, the positive content of the political as a quasi-*sui generis* or irreducible theoretical sphere.

3. THE SOCIAL, POLITICAL BODY

According to Spinoza (1984, TdIE 27), the mind is the idea of the body and the idea of this idea (E II P29), that is, the idea of itself, reflective cognition, and in a certain sense, consciousness of itself (*cognitionem reflexivam, aut ideam ideae*). Thus, the mind forms an idea of everything that affects its body, that is, of everything that increases or decreases the potency of its own body, psychically experiencing the affects, or what increases or decreases, favors or harms its potency (*potentia*). Therefore, the relationship between the mind and the body and of both with the world is an affective relationship, because we humans are in relationship with everything that surrounds us, and those that surround us are also causes or forces that act upon us (SÉVÉRAC 1998). Discussing the body politic and the geometry of its affective relationships might help us rethink how these relationships develop, or rather, how they arise, and Spinoza offers us a thought-provoking understanding of it. First, before exposing his view on affects, Spinoza presents

two important records in two works, *Ethics* and *Political Treatise*, respectively, where he examines the way in which metaphysics, common sense, and theology agree with the condemnation of affects and the position of human nature to be essentially vicious. Contrary to any and all hostility to affections, Spinoza (E III Pref) seeks to understand and explain them, unveiling them from all guilt, vice and superstition, and considering them exactly as if they were a matter of lines, surfaces or bodies.

Treating affects in *Ethics* III as a matter of lines and surfaces defines the way in which Spinoza exposes the subject, as the Marrano philosopher employs the Euclidean geometrical method as a coherent model of deductive reasoning to deal with complex issues such as God, nature, and human passions, as well as metaphysics, ethics, and political philosophy, to be handled rationally. Spinoza's resort to the geometrical method entails thus a mathematically demonstrated, explanatory order of reasons, a knowledge to be arrived at and demonstrated *a priori*, that is, from cause to effect, the former being understood as an efficient internal cause necessary to produce the latter, so as to account for the essence or nature of the effect and for all its properties. Therefore, a kind of knowledge in which the knowledge of the effect depends on the knowledge of the cause and involves it (CHAUI 1999, 168). The use of the geometric order indicates that true knowledge is causal, as well as showing that the action of the intellect takes place within the true. "Knowledge of the first kind is the only cause of falsity, whereas knowledge of the second and of the third kind is necessarily true" (EIIIP41). In other words, Spinoza's proposal is to rationally explain and demonstrate affections, which for a long time were considered irrational or human deviations and vices, presenting them now as intelligible and having a cause that can be adequately known. In this way, the intelligibility of affects through the geometric order makes it possible to speak of a "science of affects." On Spinoza's account, the human being is a finite mode of Substance, that is, a modification of it, in which s/he actively participates, expressing it in a peculiar way. The human body and the other existing bodies are modes of Substance and only exist and are determined in and by it, since apart from Substance and its modes nothing strictly exists: "For there is nothing except substance and its modes (by A1, D3, and D5) and modes (by P25C) are nothing but affections of God's attributes" (EIP28Dem). However, how does Spinoza define the body? According to the Luso-Dutch philosopher, the body is a mode of the Extension attribute, a complex constituted by an infinity of soft, hard, and fluid corpuscles that relate to one other through the harmony and bal-

ance of their motion and rest relations, or a singular thing, which is distinguished from each other by motion and rest: “By body I understand a mode that in a certain and determinate way expresses God’s essence insofar as he is considered as an extended thing” (EIID1; cf. IP25C).

Spinoza dedicates *Ethics* II to the nature and origin of the human mind, whose investigation is gradually developed until the important conclusion of proposition 13: “For the things we have shown so far are completely general and do not pertain more to man than to other Individuals, all of which, though in different degrees, are nevertheless animate. For of each thing there is necessarily an idea in God, of which God is the cause in the same way as he is of the idea of the human Body” (EIIIP13S). The premises involving the little physics of bodies in proposition 13 are divided into three sections:

- a) theory of simple bodies (axioms 1 and 2; lemmas 1, 2 and 3 and corollary; axioms 1 and 2);
- b) theory of composite bodies or individuals (definition; axiom 3; lemmas 4, 5, 6, 7 and scholium);
- c) theory of the human body (postulates). For the purpose of our article, we will only highlight the theory of composite bodies or individuals.

The theory of composite bodies or individuals is essential for the assimilation of intersubjective and, therefore, affective relationships in the body politic. Generically, this theory exposes the way in which composite bodies or individuals differ from others and maintain their constitution through transformations of figure, motion, and size, that is, how their shape or nature remains. From this, the aim of *Ethics* is fully observed, as a philosophy of action or acting, in search for what strengthens us and contributes to our perseverance in existence, which in fact is already present in Part I of the work, but which finds its effectiveness in the later parts. In other words, the theory of composite bodies or individuals is the basis for what we observe in the body politic, that is, the intersubjective relationships between human beings and their efforts to persevere in existence or maintain their constitution. In effect, according to Spinoza, the *humanum* is not in nature like a “State within the State” (*hominem in natura, veluti imperium in imperio, concipere videntur*, *Ethics* III preface), as quoted above, because humans are ultimately linked to God, that is to say to nature (*Deus sive natura*), and by consequence to others with whom they maintain ties of dependence which make reciprocal utility necessary. This human interdependence can be also found in other occurrences of the formula *imperium in imperio*, which as Gebhardt (V, 99–100) points out, are frequent in politico-religious controversies in the

seventeenth century, such as in Hobbes and De la Court, where the major issue is whether religious authorities within a state are juridically independent of the political authority. It occurs also in a different context in TTP XXVII and TP ii, 6. Furthermore, as Charles Ramond remarked, there is an ambiguity in the usage of the term *imperium*, translated sometimes as “sovereignty,” as a kind of right, other times as “state,” when used to classify the different forms of government.

As Ramond (2007, 105) rightly pointed out, the individual is clearly conceived by Spinoza on the model of bodies, or modes of extension: “Individual identity will not be altered either by nutrition (II 13, lemma 4), or by growth (lemma 5), nor by movements in space (lemmas 6 and 7), provided that a precisely determined relation” is maintained, that is to say, fixed and unique (CT II pref, n. 1, §XIV; E II 8 sc; III 57 sc), of motion and rest between the parts that compose it. An individual is therefore composed of other individuals, themselves possessing that fixed proportion of movement and rest which defines their own individuality. The human body, for example, is composed of individualized parts (CT dialogue 2 §5; E IV 60 sc): moreover, men often pursue with delirious obstinacy the satisfaction of desires linked to this or that part of their body (IV 44 sc), as if the component individual could gradually impose itself on the composite individual. In Spinoza’s (E III Def.) own words,

When a number of bodies, whether of the same or of different size, are so constrained by other bodies that they lie upon one another, or if they so move, whether with the same degree or different degrees of speed, that they communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner, we shall say that those bodies are united with one another and that they all together compose one body or Individual, which is distinguished from the others by this union of bodies.

For now, limiting ourselves only to the constitution of composite bodies, the definition of axiom 2 of proposition 13 of *Ethics* II presents the general notion of this type of body, which is characterized by the union of bodies and, therefore, an individual. In other words, the composite or individual body consists in all those bodies that are constituted by the union of other bodies, which communicate their motions in a certain proportion; or again, an individual is constituted when some bodies are determined to move or to rest by the action of other bodies, which have also been determined in this way, applying to one another and communicating their movements to one another. From this definition, we observe how the concept of individual is

interconnected to the concept of singularity or singular thing, which in Spinoza's words refer to those things that are finite and that have a determined existence, or even, when several individuals contribute to a single action, in such a way that they are all together the cause of a single effect (E II Def). Having said that, what initially may suggest that the individual is just a gathering of other bodies in a quantitative perspective, that is, a mere numerical composition forming a whole, now it appears, as Chauí (2003, 132) points out, as a union of bodies, due to the communicability or relationships between them, so as to obtain the same effect, that is, all as a common cause of a single effect. This common causality is what defines the uniqueness of the individual, or rather, all its constituent parts acting as a common cause of a single effect. Thus, the singular individual, as a union of constituent parts that are brought together as the only cause for the performance of the same action, is a power to act (*potentia agendi*).

Therefore, an individual is always composed of an infinity of extensive parts that are determined from the outside to enter into a certain relationship that corresponds to its essence or to its degree of potency. These parts (simple bodies) are not individuals, there is no essence of each one, they are defined solely by their external determinism, and they are always very numerous, but they constitute an existing individual insofar as an infinity of them enters this or that relationship that characterizes it. this or that essence of modes; they constitute the infinitely varied modal matter of existence (DELEUZE 2003, 138). In other words, this power to act constitutes the very essence of the individual, because as a relationship between the constituent parts, it posits him or her; however, as this relationship is broken, the individual is suppressed. Thus, "singular things can neither be nor be conceived without God, and nevertheless, God does not pertain to their essence. But I have said that what necessarily constitutes the essence of a thing is that which, if it is given, the thing is posited, and if it is taken away, the thing is taken away, i.e., the essence is what the thing can neither be nor be conceived without, and vice versa, what can neither be nor be conceived without the thing" (EIIP10S2). Therefore, by virtue of the idea of complex singularity, individuals or composite bodies are a singular essence or power to act, or rather, a degree of power, a capacity to affect and be affected, which in *Ethics* III, Spinoza determines as *conatus*.

4. INDIVIDUAL, COMMUNITY, AND TOLERANCE

It's been generally recognized the difficulty of making sense of the individual vis à vis the social, the collective, and the community in Spinoza's political thought. The social dimension of human existence is by nature determined by this inherent drive to persevere in its being, both at an individual and at a collective level of *conatus*. We note in passing that the individual is a complex singularity and in continuous relationship with other singularities—it is a system of reciprocal affections between the constituents of a body and external bodies, therefore, a unit, whose relationship of its constituents performs an intracorporeal operation, when the internal parts of a body act on each other, as well as an intercorporeal operation, when bodies act on external bodies and these act on it, or rather, when it is affected or moved by them, since it needs many others that regenerate and preserve it in existence, being able to affect the other bodies in countless ways. In this sense, from the physics of the individual, we can deduce the constitution of the political body, as a singular collective individual or multitude, which in the *Theological-Political Treatise* and in the *Political Treatise* defines the political subject.

However, the constitution of the body politic is not only part of the corporeal singularity, but also of a connection of ideas (*connexio idearum*), which necessarily refers to Spinoza's conception of *mens* (mind) as a complexity and not as something simple. The mind, as an idea of the body, and the body itself can be arranged in various ways, according to its internal and external dispositions, so that the idea of all bodily affections or dispositions can be thus conceived. In other words, the human mind has an idea of everything that affects its body, as Spinoza states in proposition 15 of *Ethics* II, as the idea that constitutes the formal being of the mind is not simple, but composed of many ideas. Thus, the human mind is also constituted as a power, or rather, a power of thinking that imagines, perceives, and understands a diversity of things, because it is in itself a plurality. Hence the body politic results from the physics of the individual and the psychology that surrounds him or her, since the human being, as a union of bodies and a connection of ideas and, therefore, a power to act and think, establishes relationships with other human beings by effecting a dynamics of the potencies and of their intensity, which, when increased, unite them and, when diminished, distance them from each other.

The *conatus* is presented in *Ethics* III, whose discourse deals with the origin and nature of affections, although the term is present in a specific part

of psychology, but is not limited only to the psychological panorama; on the contrary, it is a key concept that assumes a fundamental position in the interconnection of other fields of knowledge within Spinoza's system, in addition to being an expression of absolute immanence. In other words, more than the effort for its own existence, the Spinozan *conatus* is resistance to its own destruction, an ontological resistance that expresses the immanent relationship of Nature or God and everything that exists. In Proposition 36 of *Ethics* I, Spinoza affirms that everything that exists expresses in a certain and determined way the essence of God, that is, whatever exists expresses in a certain and determined way the potency of God, which is ultimately the cause of all things, and therefore of everything that exists. Therefore, if finite modes are expressions of infinite potency, even if not immediately, this means that they are effects and parts of this potency and, therefore, they are also causes that produce necessary effects, that is, they are potencies. The essence of the mode is a degree of potency or intensive part, that is, a part of God's potency. As Deleuze (2003, 100) put it so well, "essences are neither logical possibilities nor geometric structures; they are parts of power, that is to say, degrees of physical intensity. They have no parts, but they are themselves parts, parts of power, like intensive quantities which are not composed of smaller quantities."³

This essence expresses itself in a characteristic relation concerning existence, that is, when several extensive parts are determined from the outside to enter into a relation that characterizes this or that mode, so that only in this way is this essence determined as *conatus*. Therefore, the essence of the finite mode or the finite mode itself is a singular thing, since they are several constituent parts that together are the cause of a single effect, that is, extensive parts that enter into a certain relationship that together are a potency, or rather a *conatus*.

Proposition 7, whose assertion is that the effort by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing other than the actual essence of the thing itself, definitively revalidating the *conatus* as the essence of a singular thing, in addition to being an affirmation of relevant consequences. In this proposition, Spinoza demonstrates that the *conatus* is not a free will, or rather, according to the Portuguese-Dutch thinker, there is a distinction regarding the essence of a singular thing, which means that there is both an actual essence (given essence)

³ "Les essences ne sont ni des possibilités logiques ni des structures géométriques; ce sont des parties de puissance, c'est-à-dire des degrés d'intensité physiques. Elles n'ont pas de parties, mais elles sont elles-mêmes des parties, parties de puissance, à l'instar des quantités intensives qui ne se composent pas de quantités plus petites."

and an ideal essence in every thing. The actual essence is that to which proposition 7 refers and is identified with the effort or *conatus* of the singular thing, and the ideal essence is mentioned in the *Political Treatise* (II.2):

So just as the beginning of a natural thing's existence can't be inferred from its definition, neither can its perseverance in existing. For the ideal essence of these things is the same after they've begun to exist as it was before. So as their beginning to exist can't follow from their essence, neither can their perseverance in existing. The same power they require to begin to exist, they also require to continue to exist.

As explained in Ep 9, to Simon de Vries, Spinoza understands it as the “conception of a thing in the mind, unrelated to its existence or non-existence outside the mind”, that is, one must make a distinction between actual essence and ideal essence as a definition can, respectively, “explain a thing that is outside the intellect, or explain a thing as it is or as it can be conceived by us.” Therefore, the actual essence and the ideal essence of a singular thing are, respectively, the real structure that a thing currently has, that is, the current way in which it is, and the structure not necessarily real, but conceivable by the mind. That is why to say that a thing has an actual structure is also to say that this structure is necessarily given to it, that is, that without such a structure the thing could not even be what it is, as Spinoza asserts that the essence is that without which the existing thing cannot be conceived, and vice-versa.

We know that every single thing has an actual essence, and some effects necessarily follow from it, hence Spinoza points out another important consequence of proposition 7, that is, he identifies the *conatus* with the actual essence of the thing, which is conceivable from definitions 2 and 7 from *Ethics* II and from the little physics of bodies demonstrated in proposition 13 of the same part. The effort towards perseverance is so essential that it is not something accidental attributable to singular things, but rather constitutes their necessary composition, making the very *conatus* of the thing identical to it, which is why defining the *conatus* as actual essence means affirming it as a singularity in act—there is no virtuality or inclinations, but it is itself a potentiality present and always in action. Thus, the *conatus* is not subject to the will, in fact, it is far from it, since there is no decision-making power in possessing the *conatus*, since it is a necessary power that integrates the composition of singular things, being, thus, above any power of choice. This will be reflected in Spinoza's account of *tolerantia* as endurance, as the sustaina-

bility of social being must be sought at the conjunction of individual liberty and a rational view of the polity, including the Jewish *kehila* and the Christian *ecclesia*. As Edwin Curley (SPINOZA 1984, p. 1912) aptly remarked, “In general, Spinoza does not use *tolerantia* with the meaning their English cognate now generally has: the practice of being, or disposition to be, patient with or indulgent to, the opinions or practices of others (*Oxford English Dictionary*). But *tolerare* does occur in that sense in Van Velthuysen, where tolerance of different forms of worship is approved (Letter 42, IV/215/32) and in Spinoza, where tolerance of absurdities, like the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist, is not approved (Letter 76, IV/319/11).”

As a natural effort to maintain its own existence and to conserve itself in it, *conatus* is a positive and intrinsically indestructible force, therefore, its duration is unlimited, until stronger external causes destroy it, as “the striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being involves no finite time, but an indefinite time” (EIIIP8). Such proposition complements the previous proposition, demonstrating that the actual essence of each thing, which is the effort by which it perseveres in its being, has an indefinite time, as well as reaffirms the *conatus* as part of the infinite potency of God. In other words, just as Spinoza states in the proof of proposition 8 that a being will continue to persevere in existence by virtue of the same power through which it now exists, he takes up this again in the *Political Treatise* (II.2) when he says that “the power through which natural things exist and by which they consequently operate can be none other than the eternal potency of God.”

This is to say that the *conatus* as part of God’s infinite nature, or rather, as part of God’s infinite potency, cannot involve any finite time—which fits definition 5 of *Ethics* II when Spinoza states that duration is the indefinite continuation of existence. Therefore, since the *conatus* does not involve a finite time, we must not understand it as a tendency to come into existence, since it is not a possible or a virtual tendency, but a power that affirms and maintains existence.

5. *CONATUS*, DESIRE, AND THE GOOD

In proposition 9, Spinoza also exposes *conatus* as an effort of self-preservation exercised by the mind itself, which means that while *conatus* it tends to remain thinking, that is, it is a power of thinking. “The mind,

whether while it has clear and distinct ideas, or while it has confused ideas, strives to persevere in its being for an indefinite duration, and is conscious of this effort.” What Spinoza exposes in this proposition is that both the body and the mind are forces, or rather, intrinsically indestructible and affirmative potencies and, therefore, *conatus*, which within their respective realities, follow the same order and connection, that is, according to proposition 7 of *Ethics* II, the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things, being thus, in the same way as things, or rather bodies, according to the physics of proposition 13 of the *Ethics* II, have a natural disposition to motion until an external cause constrains them, thought also tends to mental movement and, therefore, such “motion” will be continuous regardless of whether the mind has adequate or inadequate ideas, which means that the *conatus* acts both in action and in passion.

Recognizing the mind as *conatus*, Spinoza identifies in it a psychological dimension that *Ethics* III announces, namely, that the *conatus* is not only about the physical, but also the psychic, thus making it possible to discuss the nature and strength of affections, especially on human beings from the standpoint of affectivity. When this effort or *conatus* is concerned solely with the mind, it is called will (*voluntas*); when it is simultaneously referred to mind and body, it is called appetite (*appetitus*), which Spinoza makes no distinction from desire (*cupiditas*), except that the latter is generally related to human beings, for they are conscious of their desire, that is, we are only aware of it insofar as the ideas of affections determine our *conatus*, so that the affection, which derives from it, has in turn the property of reflecting in the same way that the idea determines it. Thus, the psychological nature of the *conatus* becomes evident when Spinoza identifies it with desire, whose functioning acts as a kind of “moving engine” of the *conatus*, always seeking what can increase its potency. For this reason, it is in the nature of the *conatus* to express itself through desire, that is, through the search for things that are capable of expanding its potency and assisting in its perseverance.

Finally, in propositions 10 and 11 of Book III of *Ethics*, Spinoza demonstrates that the *conatus* simultaneously refers to both the body and the mind, refusing any possibility of internal contradiction in the human being in relation to the consciousness that the mind has of the body. In proposition 10, Spinoza states that “an idea that excludes the existence of our body cannot exist in our mind, but is contrary to it,” “since (by IIP11 and P13) the first thing that constitutes the essence of the Mind is the idea of an actually existing Body, the first and principal [tendency] of the striving of our Mind (by

P7) is to affirm the existence of our Body. And so an idea that denies the existence of our Body is contrary to our Mind.” (EIIIP10D) In addition, and reaffirming the isonomy between body and mind, Spinoza attests that “whatever increases or decreases, favors or restrains the power of our body to act, the idea of this same thing increases or decreases, favors or restrains the power of thinking of our mind” (EIIIP11), which means that what affects the body by increasing or decreasing its power to act also increases or decreases the thinking power of the mind, and this psychic-bodily identity is the fundamental basis for all human affections, which Spinoza defines as “the affections of the body by which its power to act is increased or decreased, stimulated or restrained, as well as the ideas of these affections” (E III Def 3). Thus, this variation in the intensity of the power to act and think is what Spinoza calls affect, which, although it is an effect on the mind, as it necessarily involves an idea of an affection of the body, it is a simultaneous psychic and bodily event. Identity and tolerance are somehow correlates of the same Spinozist philosophy of body politic.

Therefore, although each one has its definition established, the terms *conatus*, will, appetite, and desire are closely related, since they all have in common the general meaning of a struggle for self-preservation and a search for the means that favor the fruition of this self-preservation. This struggle is not a free act, by which an affirmation or denial is made, but rather an act which follows from the eternal nature of God. That is why Spinoza is accurate in saying that we do not desire something because we think it is good, as if things were good in themselves or that we look for them because they have already been judged as such, on the contrary, it is precisely because we strive for it and wish it, that we consider it good. Thus, because in human beings the *conatus* is exclusively taken as desire, as they are the only ones aware of their appetite, they are essentially desiring beings, and in this sense, their desire becomes a primary affect in their mind, from which all other affects derive.

Spinoza defines the *conatus* plus the awareness of desire, which is specifically attributed to human beings, therefore, desire is the very essence of human beings, while it is conceived as determined by an affection of theirs to do something (E III Ad 1). Unlike the thinkers who preceded him and who followed him, Spinoza is far from defining desire as a lack, defect, illness or emptiness that seeks fulfillment. The misunderstanding regarding the definition of the concept of desire, or at least its not so accurate notion, are inappropriate legacies that Platonism and Christianity left us, hence the im-

portance of redefining this concept, since desire as a lack presents a meaning that just expresses human impotence. However, as a thinker whose philosophy aims to value life and human potency, Spinoza argues instead that to become human we have to affirm our desiring nature.

Certainly, affirming our desiring nature does not mean indulging in inconsequential or irresponsible behavior, acting in a frivolous way, whose desire, understood as a lack, must be instantly satiated. On the contrary, when Spinoza emphasizes the affirmation of our desiring nature, he refers to desire as a force, a force that produces and reinvents itself, manifesting the human essence. That's why the human being must appropriate desire, because, in Spinoza's perspective, it is revolutionary, in the sense of bringing about change. In other words, it is through desire that changes occur, and in this sense, not only a simple conservation, but also a force of expansion that produces countless events. Hence, Spinoza emphasizes desire as the human essence determined to do something for oneself with a view to one's subsisting.

Therefore, desire is a driving effort, as it is the inclination for something that we think is useful for our conservation, as well as the effort to remove everything that harms or does not help our preservation. Desire is determined to preserve our body and mind, so we do not act out of will, but out of the necessity of our desire. It is our essence, the efficient cause of our actions and passions. Understanding the dynamic movement of desire requires a careful observation of how affective life develops. This is nothing else than the relationships between subjectivities, or rather, intersubjective relationships, human existence with others. Affective life is simultaneously an intracorporeal life and an intercorporeal life—the former because our bodies are made up of an infinity of other bodies, all of which are in relationship. “The human body is made up of very many individuals (of different nature), each of which is quite composite” (EIIP13Post1); and the latter because our body is a system of affections, which express the way it affects and is affected by other external bodies. And as the mind is the idea of the body and, therefore, everything that affects it is simultaneously perceived by it through the ideas of the affections of its own body, that is, our mind only perceives our own body and other bodies as existing in act through the ideas of the affections of our own body, psychic life takes place as awareness, whether imaginative or rational, of bodily affections and, therefore, as a relationship with all the external things that affect us and that we affect. Just as intracorporeal life is original or natural, since the composition of bodies arises from the relationships between the bodies that constitute them, the

same occurs with intersubjectivity, as self-consciousness formed simultaneously with the awareness we have of others.

Although desire and *conatus* are very close—and somehow they are synonyms—both are explained in different ways, each in its own way. Both are an effort to persevere in being; however, desire is an affective determination of the *conatus*, that is, it affectively determines the *conatus* and its world. In other words, through their intersubjective relationships, individuals affect and are affected in countless ways by other individuals and, consequently, what affects them can increase (joy) their power to act—“joy is the passage of man from a lesser to a greater perfection” (EIIIAD2)—or to diminish it (sadness), as “sadness is the passage of man from a greater to a lesser perfection” (EIIIAD3), while they desire or despise what affects them, judging it like good or bad. Indeed, Spinoza identifies three primary affects: desire, joy, and sadness, so that all other secondary affects are derivatives of these three. Thus, joy is the affection we have from the increase in our power to exist and act or from the strong realization of our being; sadness is the affection we have from the decrease in our power to exist and act or from the weak realization of our being; and desire is the affect that determines us to exist and act in a determined way. That is why variations in the intensity of the particular *conatus* (human beings, in this case) determine the agreement or conflict between them, so that in the affective field, where political and social life also takes place, everything can, by accident, be a cause of everything and anything in particular, depending on the conditions or circumstances in which it affects us. However, these affects can only exist if we previously had the idea of this affect, that is, the idea of the thing loved, admired, hated, etc. In other words, the idea precedes the affect (Deleuze 2003, 69).⁴

6. *CONATUS*, DESIRE, AND SOCIAL EMOTIONS

In fact, acting as a kind of moving motor of the *conatus* or determining it affectively, desire operates both as an adequate cause and as an inadequate cause, that is, to be an adequate cause is to find in the potency of our body

⁴ “D’une idée comme idée d’affectio découlent toujours des affects. Mais, si l’idée est adéquate au lieu d’être une image confuse, si elle exprime directement l’essence du corps affectant au lieu de l’envelopper indirectement dans notre état, si elle est l’idée d’une affectio interne ou d’une auto-affectio qui marque la convenance intérieure de notre essence, des autres essences et de l’essence de Dieu (troisième genre de connaissance), alors les affects qui en découlent sont eux-mêmes des actions (III, 1).”

and mind the cause of the our desire, or when our *conatus* is the total cause of what we do, think and feel; while to be an inadequate cause is to look for the cause of our desire in exteriority, or when our *conatus* is a partial cause of what we do, think and feel. "I call an adequate cause that whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived by itself. I call an inadequate or partial cause, on the other hand, the one whose effect cannot be understood by it alone" (EIIIDef1). This means that such notions allow us to define the quality of our desire, that is, in the relationships we establish with other human beings, we express our *conatus* through affections and affections, since as an internal efficient cause, it produces necessary internal and external effects, as we act passively when we are the partial cause of internal and external effects (passion) because the other part of the causality is carried out by external forces or by powers alien to ours. Conversely, it is active when we are the total cause of internal or external effects (action), that is, when acting, thinking, and feeling have our own potency as their total cause. In this way, the quality of desire depends on how we relate to externality, or rather, to external powers, which are greater in number and more powerful than us.

It is for this reason that desire operates both as an adequate cause and as an inadequate cause, because while determined to act in some way as a function of an affection of its own, it strives, or rather, affects affectively, the *conatus*, directing it to everything that increases, helps and strengthens its power to act, that is, everything that contributes to its self-preservation. However, desire involves consciousness when we know or imagine knowing the cause of our appetites—when the cause of these is imaginary. In other words, when desire is based on the desired—that which is outside of us—and not on the desiring, our desire is passion. But when its cause is real, that is, the desiring itself, we say that our desire is *action*. We need to highlight that passion and action are not placed by Spinoza as wrong and right, respectively. In fact, the difference between the two lies in their intrinsic quality, that is, both in passivity and in activity we accomplish the same thing, namely, we seek self-preservation. However, in passivity we are the partial cause of what we do and feel, because exteriority dominates us, directing and impelling us. Hence we have a mutilated and partial knowledge of the cause of our desire, for we imagine as cause what is external to us, the desired object, and not ourselves. In activity, on the other hand, we are the total cause of what we do and feel, because although we are related to exteriority, we are not directed and dominated by it. We recognize as the cause of our desire not the desired object, but ourselves. Therefore, passivity does not have our rela-

tionship with exteriority as its cause, just as activity does not derive from the absence of a relationship with something external, in fact, in the Spinozana perspective, this possible isolation or removal from the external is absurd, therefore, both passivity and activity are intrinsic qualities of the way we relate to exteriority.

However, despite being in a constant relationship with exteriority, it is not always that the effects of this relationship are necessarily positive, that is, we are often in an affective struggle with external powers that surpass us in strength and number, causing encounters that can diminish or weaken our *conatus*. Affectively, such encounters are manifested through sad affections, that is, when our *conatus* is weakened and totally dependent on exteriority. In other words, we are faced with what Spinoza calls human servitude. In fact, the relationship with exteriority and the affective dynamics that results from it, in which the *conatus* is involved, puts us in relationships or encounters that often diminish, weaken and impair our power to act and think, leaving us powerless in the face of events and the ability to regulate affections. Thus, when we are submitted to the force of affections, since our *conatus* is coerced, we are powerless to regulate and order them, so we become vulnerable to chance, that is, we lose the discernment of what is good and what is bad for us. In this way, servitude is defined when our *conatus* is too weakened because of the action of external forces and submits to them, or we imagine submitting to them.

That is why Spinoza is so precise when he refers to the quality of our desire, since it is not mistaken, as desire determines the *conatus* for what contributes to its very conservation, for whatever is useful to it or strives to preserve it. In this way, desire seeks joy or everything that increases and strengthens our power to act, because joy and all the affections that derive from it feed back our desire, our power (*potentia*). Hence Spinoza finds in joy the human being's way out of servitude, because it is through joy and the most varied affections that originate from it that the power of acting and thinking is stimulated and strengthened, or rather, it is through joy and its derived affections that we overcome sadness and sad affections. "An affect cannot be restrained or suppressed except by an affect that is contrary and stronger than the affect to be restrained" (EIVP7). Furthermore, Spinoza is still explicit in stating that "the knowledge of good and evil is nothing more than the affect of joy or sadness insofar as we are aware of it" (EIVP8), which means that we recognize or have the perception when we are affected by joy or sadness, in this way, it is in the dynamics of affections and in the

affective struggle with the outside powers that we must redirect our desire, seeking, at least, a small good encounter or a minimum joy, because these are tools able to take us out of the state of servitude. “The desire that originates from joy is stronger (other conditions being equal) than the desire that originates from sadness” (EIVP18). Obviously, because we are immersed in an affective life of constant clashes of feelings, such a task is not the easiest. On the contrary, it requires a frequent effort, but it is exactly there that desire is found: it is effort, it is the force that it leans towards what we deem useful for the conservation of our body and mind, that’s why we don’t act out of will, but out of the necessity of our desire, after all, we are desiring beings. And if it is possible to speak of some kind of purpose which desire intends, this would be indeed its most opportune definition.

This stronger, reflective sense of *tolerantia* contrasts with the weaker one of “endurance,” for example, in Paul’s epistle to the Colossians (3:13, “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any,” according to the King James Version), but which certainly goes in the direction of a harmonious coexistence in unity, as in the primitive *ecclesia* and medieval *conviventia*. This meaning can also be found in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (MELAMED and ROSENTHAL 2010), but it serves rather to render the word *sustinere* in the weak sense of “support.”

Like Hobbes, Spinoza used the organic metaphor of the body of Christ for the Church, where the head, corresponding to the sovereign, and the members to organic parts of the same body, allow for a circuit of affects to circulate the power of cohesion, which will be evoked later in the classic study by Ernst Kantorowitz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, originally published in 1957. As Kantorowitz (2016, 261) famously observed, the “mystical body of the Church the head of which is Christ” has been deliberately replaced, in the writings of medieval jurists, by the “mystical body of *the respublica* the head of which is the Prince.” And he will show in the same meticulous study (KANTOROWITZ 2016, 506) that one can perceive a gradual change from the Pauline *corpus Christi* to the medieval *corpus ecclesiae mysticum*, “thence to the *corpus reipublicae mysticum* which was equated with the *corpus morale et politicum* of the commonwealth, until finally (though confused by the notion of *Dignitas*) the slogan emerged saying that every abbot was a mystical body” or a “body politic,” and that accordingly the king, too, was, or had, a body politic which “never died.” Now, we know that Spinoza himself drew heavily on John Calvin in his approaches to *affectus* and the need for an organic cohesion of

the “body of Christ.” Among the 160 works in his personal library, Spinoza also had the four volumes of Calvin’s *Institution de la Religion Chrétienne* (not the original Latin version of 1536 or the author’s own translation into French of 1541, but the Spanish version of 1597) and Spinoza knew them well, as several of his writings attest, especially the *Korte Verhandeling* (Short Treatise) and the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. Thus Spinoza somehow turned to Calvin to refute and oppose the mainstream versions of Calvinism in the Netherlands, or Reformed orthodoxy. Once again, these mainstream versions follow the decisive victory of the Counter-Remonstrants at the Synod of Dort (1618–1619), as Calvinists who wielded significant influence in the mid-17th century United Provinces were then responsible for the legislation on the heresy under which Spinoza and other Collegiants and philosophers would be persecuted. Collegians began to gather after the synod of Dort, where tolerance and freedom of religion were restricted in the United Provinces. What brought the participants together was not necessarily shared religious beliefs, but rather a community of intellectual and spiritual resources and a culture of study and debate. We therefore agree with Bagley (2008, 21) in that the Judeo-Christian emphasis on charity and justice might entail a certain tolerance of intellectual freedom, including the freedom to philosophize, which is in fact an element of piety or loyalty. Although we will not develop this point here, the word *theologia* must be understood primarily as “philosophical theology” in Spinoza’s context, which, with its philosophical psychology and its philosophical cosmology, integrates the special metaphysical counterpart to the general metaphysics of ontology properly conceived. It should also be remembered that when in 1660 Spinoza moved to the village of Rijnsburg, near Leyden, a circle of studies was organized around him with non-Calvinist reformers (so-called Collegiants) who became his friends: Jarig Jelles, Simon de Vries and Peter Balling. It should also be remembered that for Spinoza, Judaism (the set of beliefs and practices around the texts attributed in the 17th century to Moses) is legislation for a State, enriched by a simply moral appeal to justice and to charity; it is therefore only valid for a Jewish state.

Christianity, as Misrahi shows, for its part, is only the pursuit of this same moral exhortation (and not primarily based on a philosophical knowledge of Being) whose call to practice justice and charity is now universal in scope. Finally, it must be kept in mind that as a Marrano, the young Bento would have known different degrees of tolerance in Amsterdam and that within the Portuguese Jewish community of his time, this Sephardic

origin was not exactly that of rabbinic orthodoxy. Yirmyahu Yovel (1989, 28) perceptively remarked that the main patterns of Marrano experience that could be discerned in Spinoza are: (1) the heterodoxy and transcendence of revealed religion; (2) a skill in ambiguity and doublespeak; (3) an inner and outer double life; (4) a dual career with a break; (5) tolerance against the Inquisition; (6) a zeal for salvation, to be won by means alternative to that of tradition, and coupled with this—worldliness, secularism, and the denial of transcendence. All of these Marrano characteristics can be found in Spinoza, even in a somewhat different form. They are reflected not only in his thought but even more in his life.

7. CONCLUSION: TOLERANCE AND THE SOCIETY OF AFFECTS

According to Frédéric Lordon, societies are essentially circuits of affects. As a system of material reproduction of hegemonic life forms, societies endow these forms with the force of adhesion by constantly producing affections (emotions and feelings shared in society, in particular fear and hope, following Spinoza's intuitions), which encourage us to assume certain forms of life (*Lebensformen*) to the detriment of others. We must always bear in mind that certain forms of life are based on specific affections, that is, they need such affections to continue repeating themselves, to impose their ordering patterns, defining thus the field of possibilities. According to Lordon, it is certainly a social adhesion built through affections, even if there are no moral feelings or sense of injustice given. From the third part of the *Ethics*, "Of the origin and nature of affects", where Spinoza affirms that human beings follow the order of nature, since they have a causal nature similar to that of other ordinary objects (other "finite modes"), it can be shown that, for both Spinoza and neuroscience, human psychology is at the origin of moral concepts (including the concepts of good, evil, virtue and perfection), effects that are based on a physics of the human body, conceived as a complex individual. Following the neuroscientific turn of the philosophy of mind and social psychology, we propose to recast Spinoza's theory of affects in order to account for the role of emotions and social feelings in political philosophy today.

Antonio Damasio was also struck by this sentence of Spinoza: "The foundation of virtue is the very effort to preserve one's own being ... and happiness consists for man in wanting to preserve his being." According to Dama-

sio (2003), “Spinoza had a biological intuition of the nature of man.” This is very much in line with what neuroscientists today call naturalism. According to Damasio, the failure of past social engineering is due to the sheer folly of human corruption and erroneous ideas of the human mind that led to misconceptions in a demand for human sacrifices that most humans find today difficult or impossible to perform: now that we are fully aware of the aspects of biological, homeostatic regulation that Spinoza intuitively perceived in the *conatus* and in the dark side of social emotions, we have the means to combat tribalism, racism, tyranny, and religious fanaticism (DAMASIO 2003; NUSSBAUM 2013). Therefore, we can understand today that human reason depends on multiple brain systems, working in concert at multiple levels of neural organization, rather than a single center in the brain. Feelings, associated with emotions and understood in the somatic and monistic context of Spinoza’s affects, allow us to understand the cognitive and neural mechanisms that underlie reasoning and decision-making, so that emotions can explain these characteristics to be both cognitive and non-cognitive as they contribute together to a culture of tolerance, civilized, and cooperative social relations. Thus, in order to account for the normative significance of emotions, feelings, passions, and affects in politics, we may also argue for the primacy of the social (*das Soziale*) over the political (*das Politische*), in light of evolutionary neurobiological findings linking basic emotions to social, moral feelings, and social evolution, and in full agreement of Spinoza’s geometry of the body politic. Social normativity thus appears as co-constitutive of moral agency, insofar as the characteristics of pre-theoretical practices and social relations in the concrete world are prior to institutional and systemic arrangements such as the state, governmental, legal, and contractarian structures and policies (SAAR 2013). It is therefore a question of reconstructing the links between the political imagination and social emotions at the very level of free societal actions (SAAR 2014), while following Spinoza, insofar as affections, including emotions and feelings, lend themselves to establishment of such a link between politics and the powers of the imagination (SAAR 2002), thus allowing emancipatory perspectives of the imaginary and the public affirmation of freedom.

The whole debate around the reading of Spinoza by contemporary authors on the problem of tolerance opens up the way to another vision of the so-called paradox of tolerance, following the reading of Popper by Rawls. The paradox of tolerance states that if a society is tolerant without limit, its capacity to be tolerant is ultimately seized or destroyed by the intolerant. Pop-

per (1945) described it as the seemingly paradoxical idea that to maintain a tolerant society, society must retain the right to be intolerant towards intolerance. Popper says he was then opposing Plato's idea of a benevolent despotism, which would be revived during the European Enlightenment, as enlightened absolutists could exercise their political power based on Enlightenment principles in rather non-democratic and authoritarian terms. Adorno and Horkheimer could well see the ruse of dialectical reason at work here. In our own Luso-Brazilian history, the Marquis of Pombal, then Prime Minister of Portugal, used Enlightenment ideas and practices not only to achieve reforms, but also to strengthen autocracy, crush opposition, suppress criticism, advancing colonial economic exploitation and consolidating personal control and profit—not to mention that he expelled from Brazil a religious order (Jesuits) who were the only ones who actually cared about education and human flourishing in the *tristes tropiques*. Drawing on his studies of Rawls and the contexts of justice, Rainer Forst (2017) went on to point out that there are two boundaries involved in the contemporary interpretation of the concept of tolerance, allowing for three normative domains in a context of tolerance, namely: the first lies between (1) the normative realm of practices and beliefs that one agrees with and (2) the realm of practices and beliefs that one finds wrong but can still tolerate; the second border is between this last domain and (3) the domain of the intolerable which is strictly rejected (BROWN and FORST 2014).

Rawls (1996) observed quite instructively that Luther and Calvin were as dogmatic and intolerant as the Roman Catholic Church had been before them, despite its recognition of the 16th-century Reformation as the most important movement that definitively ushered in pluralism and religious tolerance in the modern Western world (DE OLIVEIRA 2001). If the Greeks, as well as the polytheistic religions in general, seemed to be much more tolerant than the peoples who would adhere to the monotheistic religions, in particular Christianity after the conversion of Constantine, it was not until the Reformation that the problem of political liberalism was fully articulated, namely, "How is it possible that there exists in time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens deeply divided by reasonable religious, philosophical and moral doctrines?" According to Rawls (1971), the freedom of the ancients differs from that of the moderns not only by the emergence of a new paradigm of subjectivity (the political individual, his civil rights, and his fundamental freedoms) but also—and more fundamentally—by the introduction of this clash between salvationist, doctrinal, and expansionist theis-

tic religions and by the internalization of such a latent and irreconcilable conflict. Rawls (1996) notes that prior to the peaceful and successful practice of tolerance in societies with liberal institutions, there was no way of knowing the existence of the possibility of a stable and reasonably harmonious pluralistic society. This is why intolerance was accepted for so many decades, even after the Reformation, as a condition of social order and stability. Certainly, secularization—and this is a process that has gradually developed from liberal conceptions in theological circles—would crown once and for all the specificity of political liberalism, self-differentiated from the problem of the supreme good. This is how we can understand the hermeneutical contexts of tolerance in several of Spinoza's (1984, 1202) accounts in the TTP:

For as soon as this abuse began in the Church, the worst men immediately acquired a great desire to administer the sacred offices; the love of propagating divine religion degenerated into sordid greed and ambition; and the temple itself became a Theater, where one hears, not learned ecclesiastics, but orators, each possessed by a longing, not to teach the people, but to carry them away with admiration for himself, to censure publicly those who disagree, and to teach only those new and unfamiliar doctrines which the common people most wonder at. This had to lead to great dissension, envy, and hatred, whose violence no passage of time could lessen. It's no wonder, then, that nothing has remained of the old Religion but its external ceremony, by which the common people seem more to flatter God than to worship him. No wonder faith is nothing now but credulity and prejudices. And what prejudices!

Spinoza clearly perceived that religious practices, which could be inadequate means of manipulating people's beliefs, are also adequate means of leading people towards the Supreme Good insofar as they act on the external conditions which usually prevent individuals from naturally developing their intellectual faculties. According to Spinoza, "a Desire which arises from Joy is, other things being equal, stronger than a Desire which arises from Sadness" because "Desire [*Cupiditas*] is the very essence of man (by Def. 1 of the Affects), that is to say (by Prop. 7, Part. III) an effort [*conatus*] by which man strives to persevere in his being."

As Robert Misrahi remarks, Spinoza (2005, 425 n. 22) explicitly states the consequence of the preceding analyses centered on the critique of the traditional notion of morality, on the critique of intellectualism, and illusory promises of liberation, and finally on the critique of the imagination. Here is

this consequence: servitude does not originate from Desire, but from certain imaginative forms of Desire; liberation will therefore not consist in struggling against Desire, but in knowing it and directing it properly (read “adequately”); the affective force indispensable to this liberation will come from Desire itself, when it is a desire for Joy—it is this last consequence which is the subject of Proposition 18:

Desire is the very essence of man (by Def. Aff. I), i.e. (by IIP7), a striving by which a man strives to persevere in his being. So a Desire that arises from Joy is aided or increased by the affect of Joy itself (by the Def. of Joy in IIP11S), whereas one that arises from Sadness is diminished or restrained by the affect of Sadness (by the same Schol.). And so the force of a Desire that arises from Joy must be defined both by human power and the power of the external cause, whereas the force of a Desire that arises from Sadness must be defined by human power alone. The former, therefore, is stronger than the latter, q.e.d.

The modern emergence of self-conscious subjectivity, as individuals become protagonists of their own normative claims for freedom, equality, and justice, is what allows for a new understanding of the sociality working through power networks and structures of sovereignty (*dominium*). The major argument in TTP consists precisely in rescuing the freedom to think what one wants and to say what one thinks as correlated to obedience to Scripture. Such a paradoxical approach to both religion and politics in the TTP, as Ramond (2016, 350) convincingly argued, renders it “an anti-rebellion treatise, according to which the salvation of the ignorant by *obedience* is the central and primary aim of Scripture.” We believe thus that a Spinozistic, minimalist conception of tolerance may impel us to follow Salomon Maimon and adopt, in Melamed’s (2004, 73) most suitable words, “a much more cautious attitude” towards the harsh issues and hard cases that divide our polarized, liberal democracies nowadays.

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SPINOZA'S GEOMETRY OF AFFECTIVE RELATIONS,
THE BODY POLITIC,
AND THE SOCIAL GRAMMAR OF INTOLERANCE:
A MINIMALIST THEORY OF TOLERATION

Summary

In this paper, we set out to show that the relationships between individuals, including the intersubjectivity inherent to the body politic, are also affective relationships, so as to reconstruct Spinoza's minimalist theory of tolerance. According to Spinoza's concept of affectivity and bodily life, affection refers to a state of the affected body and implies the presence of the affecting body, while affect refers to the transition from one state to another, taking into account the correlative variation of affective bodies, that is, the affect is always a passage or variation in the intensity of our power to exist and act—the increase or decrease, the favoring or the restraint of our power to exist and act. We argue that Spinoza's geometry of affective relations decisively contributes to a political theory of democracy, insofar as it anticipates modern, liberal conceptions of tolerance.

Keywords: affections; intersubjectivity; political body; Spinoza; tolerance.

SPINOZJAŃSKA GEOMETRIA RELACJI UCZUCIOWYCH, CIAŁO POLITYCZNE
I SPOŁECZNA GRAMATYKA NIETOLERANCJI.
MINIMALISTYCZNA TEORIA TOLERANCJI

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest pokazanie, że relacje między jednostkami, włączając w to również intersubiektywność właściwą dla ciała politycznego, są relacjami afektywnymi, co pozwala zrekonstruować minimalistyczną teorię tolerancji u Spinozy. Zgodnie ze Spinozjańską koncepcją życia cielesnego, afektywność jest stanem ciała podlegającego afektowi i implikuje obecność tego ciała, natomiast afekt odnosi się do przejścia od jednego stanu do drugiego, biorąc pod uwagę równoległą zmienność ciał podlegających afektom – inaczej mówiąc, afekt jest zawsze przejściem czy zmianą w intensywności naszej mocy istnienia i działania – wzrostem lub spadkiem, wspieraniem lub ograniczaniem naszej mocy istnienia i działania. Autorzy argumentują, że Spinozjańska koncepcja afektów wnosi istotny wkład do politycznej teorii demokracji, ponieważ wyprzedza współczesne, liberalne koncepcje tolerancji.

Słowa kluczowe: uczucia; intersubiektywność; ciało polityczne; Spinoza; tolerancja.