

Spinoza's proposal for a doctrine of children's education

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this article is to analyze the conceptual connection between the Doctrine of Children's Education, briefly mentioned in Spinoza's *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* (TIE), and the concept of emendation present at the very center of this Treatise's title. A close textual exegesis of the opening paragraphs of TIE reveals why such a doctrine cannot be the ascetic renunciation of the content of ordinary life. We shall see instead that a new institution of life shall be possible only through a deep plunge into the understanding of ordinary confused life. A Spinozan Doctrine of Children's Education shall then be conceived as a pedagogy guided by an error mapping principle, i.e., a pedagogy capable of amending the mistaken beliefs of students through their understanding of the way these are produced as real events in the world. This would be an immanent pedagogy, which could be relevant to any form of contemporary thought that seeks a truly liberating education.

KEYWORDS

Emendation; immanence;
true good; supreme good;
error mapping

ARTICLE HISTORY

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Introduction

In his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, TIE) Spinoza briefly proposes a 'Doctrine of Children's Education'. In this article I show how Spinoza's proposal can be understood in relation to the concept of emendation or '*emendatio*'. Emendation sounds somewhat awkward to contemporary ears, but it is crucial for making sense of Spinoza's contribution to a theory of learning. What does this term mean? And how might it reconfigure our understanding of how children learn? The term can be defined in various ways. On a purely lexical level, the word '*emendatio*' primarily means, 'correction, amendment and improvement', according to Lewis and Short's Latin–English dictionary (1969). But according to L. Quicherat's Latin–French dictionary (1910), it also expresses the idea of 'reprimand'. If we look at the verb entry from which the noun derives, this nuance acquires more importance, because '*emendo*', especially in the post-classical Latin, signifies 'to correct by punishment, to chastise', as seen in both Lewis and Short and Quicherat. These two dictionaries also register a medical sense for this verb, which makes us think of a painful cure or a bitter medication. On the historical level of TIE's reception, these latter meanings of '*emendatio*' and '*emendo*' are associated with an ascetic life, particularly present in late eighteenth century through the nineteenth century German readings of Spinoza. Schopenhauer (2012, Part IV, §68), for instance, characterizes the TIE as a text which expresses, in the emblematic form of an autobiographical narrative, the essence of suffering, renunciation and voluntary mortification. Hegel and even Kant see Spinoza's ethics as an echo of Eastern asceticism.¹

On the exegetical level, however, the meaning of Spinoza's '*emendatio*' must be derived from a close study of the *Treatise* itself. This exegesis—very attentive to the letter and the order of the text—is what I intend do in the following two sections, focusing on the opening paragraphs.

Although the content of the doctrine of children's education is not elaborated by Spinoza, it is possible to grasp—based upon the mentioned exegesis of the TIE—something about the principles of his proposed doctrine. In section one, I show why an ascetic interpretation of the TIE is unacceptable. In section II, I discuss the principles of a Spinozan pedagogy of immanence, and I argue that Spinoza's theory of learning is grounded in an affirmative process of understanding ordinary confused life. Aspiring to the 'true good' and emending the intellect must entail this careful attention to our confused embodied perceptions. A Spinozan Doctrine of Children's Education shall then be conceived as a pedagogy guided by an error mapping principle, i.e., a pedagogy capable of amending the mistaken beliefs of students through their understanding of the way these are produced as real events in the world.²

Against asceticism

Is Spinoza talking about a pedagogy that corrects children through reprimand, punishment, and chastisement? Does a doctrine of children's education intend to eliminate their moral and cognitive errors through painful treatment with bitter remedies, leading students away from life's mundane distractions? Or is he referring to something quite different? Some passages in the TIE do indeed have a certain undertone of asceticism, beginning with §1, in which Spinoza presents the final goal of his treatise in the following terms:

After experience had taught me that all the things which regularly occur in ordinary life (*in communi vitâ*) are empty and futile (*vana et futilia*), and I saw that all the things which were the cause or object of my fear had nothing of good or bad in themselves (*nihil neque boni, neque mali in se habere*), except insofar as [my] mind (*animus*) was moved (*movebatur*) by them, I resolved at last (*tandem constitui*) to try to find out (*inquirere*) whether there was anything (*aliquid*) which would be the true good (*verum bonum*), capable of communicating itself (*sui communicabile*), and which alone (*solo*) would affect the mind (*animus*), all others being rejected (*rejectis caeteris omnibus*), whether there was something (*aliquid*) which, once found (*invento*) and acquired (*acquisito*), would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity (*continuâ ac summâ in aeternum fruerer laetitiâ*)³

This treatise is configured as a quest, an inquiry (*inquirere*) that searches something (*aliquid*) called 'verum bonum', the true good, the acquisition of which depends on an emendation of intellect and includes an educational project. At this point in the text this *aliquid* appears as something abstract: a name is given to it and some of its properties are anticipated; but the thing which receives this name—the proprietary of these properties—is still unknown. So, at this first moment, the exclusivity of this true good, and the corresponding rejection of all other goods, due to the emptiness and futility of common life, compared to the plenitude of joy, cannot be fully understood. It is only from §10 on that the thing sought will begin to be positively known: first as a generic and still abstract 'eternal and infinite thing' and finally, at §14, as the concrete whole of Nature. That is why the opening paragraphs can be considered as the progressive acquirement of determinations of this something, making our knowledge of it more and more concrete, and thus overcoming this first abstract point of view.

In §2, the narrator—a kind of synecdoche of all men (Zweerman, 1987)—stresses the fact that, at his departure in search of the true good, it seemed a hasty decision to reject—in the name of a true undiscovered good—the other seemingly certain goods already available. Giving up that which is certain is undeniably a risky business and a cause for fear and hope. The narrator affirms that such ordinary goods can be reduced to the following three: honor (*honor*), wealth (*divitiae*) and sensual pleasure (*libido*). He recounts how it did not seem possible that someone could devote oneself to these three and, at the same time, embark on a serious quest to institute a new life. Thus the narrator insists:

I wondered whether perhaps it would be possible to reach my new goal—or at least the certainty of attaining it—without changing the conduct and plan of my common life. Often I tried this, but in vain.

Tried in vain, because the ordinary goods are said to be incompatible with the ‘true good’; in other words, an initial assumption of total disjunction between the actual and the new *institutum vitae*. Learning seems to entail this radical abandonment of actually present goods for an uncertain future. But why should that be? The narrator replies that these attempts fail because ordinary goods are misunderstood as a supreme good, and are thus sought for themselves, distracting the mind so much that it cannot share the slightest thought of any other good. Indeed, it was the taking of these ordinary goods as supreme goods that demanded exclusiveness and rejection of everything else. Incompatibility occurred only because ordinary goods, desired for their own sake, were closed to otherness and became, so to speak, causes of obsession (Cf. §§4–5).

Among these three ordinary goods, honor is described as the most dangerous one, ‘for this is always assumed to be good through itself, and the ultimate end toward which everything is directed’ and, unlike pleasure, it does not entail boredom and repentance after fruition, but incites men to an increasingly intense dedication. In §5, honor is also presented as a paradigmatic case of incapacity for multiplicity or difference, since it prohibits qualitatively differentiated, independent or singular behaviors. Honor requires a standardization of conduct, since the life of those who seek honor must be directed necessarily according to the judgment of men: fleeing what they commonly flee and seeking what they commonly seek. And wealth, although it is greatly harmful when desired for its own sake, has nevertheless a more explicit versatility for its use, and therefore does not lead so automatically to such closure.

So, initially, common life, dedicated mainly to the pursuit of these three ordinary goods, seems to be filled by an exuberant multiplicity. But, after a more accurate consideration, we find an obsessive concentration, which diminishes the aptitude of the body and the mind for simultaneous multiplicity. This impoverishing closure to otherness is experienced as restless pursuits, agitation, fluctuation of mind, fear and hope. But, in ordinary life, there is just more and more of the same things. Multiplicity and movement become nothing more than troubled monotony in such a life.

This conclusion about common or ordinary life is important because it shows that the fundamental limitation of ordinary goods—their finitude as goods—consists of the fact that, when desired by them-selves, they suppress every other object of desire. Conversely, something can only be infinitely good if, instead of generating the obsessive enslavement of desire, it generates its expansion into a multiplicity of different and simultaneous interactions. This expansion leads one’s affective life to produce an internal complexity corresponding to this eternal and infinite thing which is Nature. An infinite good does not require a narrow devotion. On the contrary, an infinite good is something that sought for its own sake—*ipso facto*—restores everything else, as an authentic and positive infinity maintaining all the unlimited finite entities within a system consistent with itself.

Spinoza then suggests ‘we must reject that which throws us into an impoverishing rejection of everything else; and must affect our mind exclusively with that which improves our aptitude for simultaneous multiplicity’. In a reversal that could qualify as dialectical, ‘rejection’ and ‘exclusiveness’ are now replaced as ‘rejection of the rejection’ and ‘exclusiveness of inclusion’. The true good must allow this simultaneous multiplicity. It does not remain closed within itself, in its own corner, as ordinary goods do. Not only is such a ‘communicable true good’ what can be shared by all men at the same time, but is also what connects all the states of one and the same man through time, when he is passing from the old to the new way of life.

We can find this yearning communicative character of the true good once more in §6, where the narrator says that he was forced to ask what would be most useful (*utilius*) to him. If those ordinary goods were opposed to the true good because of their closure to otherness, we would conceptualize this demand of utility not only as the implementation of a rational calculation of

losses and gains (Spinoza, 1992, p. 153), but mainly as focusing on what leads to something else. Honor and wealth can, sometimes, have an opening to otherness; but these goods always cause the destruction of those who fail to use them and become possessed or ‘used’ by them (Cf. §7).

Finite objects are susceptible to obsessive closures, give rise to strife and sadness if they perish, envy if they are possessed by another person, and in general fear and hate (Cf §9). In terms of learning, and the pursuit of the true good, however, this situation pertains only as we continue to imagine a generic and abstract approach to the eternal and infinite thing—that is to say, the very vagueness of the pursuit is problematic, and cause of akratic consequence at §10:

For though I perceived these things so clearly in my mind (*mente adeo clare perciperem*), I still could not, on that account (*ideo*), put aside all greed (*avaritiam*), desire for sensual pleasure (*libidinem*) and love of esteem (*gloriam*).

Spinoza’s doctrine of ‘modes of perception’ helps clarify how learning should thus proceed. This doctrine warns of a kind of perception—the second kind of perception, also called Rational kind of knowledge—that infers the essence of something from its coextensive properties (*propria*)⁴ or infers the presence of a cause from its exclusive effects. Though providing a kind of knowledge that is clear, doubtless and free from error, this mode of perception fails to adequately know, either the essence, or the true cause (Cf. §19). When this mode of perception is employed we understand nothing about the cause except what we have already considered in the effect, and we understand nothing about the essence except what we have already considered in its coextensive properties. The issue is central to the question of emendation, and drives Spinoza’s comments on how conventional rationality fails to connect properly with the everyday. Rational knowledge of this kind, explains essence and cause only through very general or negative terms.

Consider, for instance, how the narrator in §10 infers correctly and with clarity of mind, what he shall love if he pursues a true good. But he still fails to see the essence of a particular thing. So, there is nothing concrete for him to love as yet; at least nothing beyond the content of common or ordinary life. Such rational inference will not lead to the new institution of life, because it fails to adequately engage with affect. Reason will fail to provide a new way of living; another kind of knowledge adequate to the task must be ‘like an enjoyment of, and immediate union with’ a concrete infinite and eternal thing. Spinoza similarly states in EIV P14: ‘No affect can be restrained by the true knowledge of good and evil insofar as it is true, but only insofar as it is considered as an affect’. Therefore, education, in the context of the emendation of the intellect, must also grapple with affect, rather than just provide valid rational inferences.

Up to now, the true good, rationally inferred, was merely a non-ordinary good (conceived negatively), and that is why a disarticulation between the two ways of life was produced, and an aporia—literally an impasse—preventing the passage from one to another.

But finally another kind of knowledge makes an entry and radically alters the cognitive and emotional ambience. Here, the narrator goes beyond the ‘true knowledge of good and evil insofar as it is true’, that is, beyond truth as a mere external correspondence. According to Rousset, here we find ‘nothing less than the revelation of immanence, which consists in the self-sufficiency of reflection and will gradually be defined as the autonomy of the Intellect’ (1992, p. 159). In this paragraph one can discern the principles of the Doctrine of Children’s Education:

I saw this, however: that so long as the mind (*quod, quamdiu mens*) was turned toward these⁵ thoughts, at the same while (*tamdiu*)⁶ it was turned away from those things,⁷ and was thinking seriously about the new life institution. That was a great comfort to me. For I saw that those evils would not refuse to yield to remedies. And although in the beginning these intervals were rare, and lasted a very short time, nevertheless, after the true good became more and more known to me (*postquam tamen verum bonum magis ac magis mihi innotuit*), the intervals became more frequent and longer—especially (*praesertim*) after I saw that the acquisition of money, sensual pleasure, and esteem are only obstacles so long (*tandiu*) as they are sought for their own sakes (*quandiu quaeruntur propter se*), and not as means to other things (*et non tamquam media ad alia*).

But if they are sought as means (*Si tamquam media quaeruntur*), then they will have [moderation]⁸ (*modum tunc habebunt*), and will not be obstacles at all (*et minime oberunt*). On the contrary, they will be of great use in attaining the end on account of which they are sought (*multum conducent ad finem, propter quem quaeruntur*), as we shall show in its place.

The following four aspects should be highlighted in this important paragraph: (i) the presence of a new mode of perception; (ii) the relation of proportion between the temporal aspects of the process; (iii) the performative character of this liberation process; (iv) the maintenance of the content of ordinary life.

- (i) The presence of another mode of perception concerning the *true good* is described as follows: ‘the true good more and more became known (*innotuit*) to me’. This last verb—*innotesco*—signifies ‘to become known, noted, noteworthy’. Despite it not being etymologically connected to the notion of intuition which instantiates the fourth mode of perception—or *Scientia Intuitiva*, in the *Ethic’s* terminology, or *Intellectus*, in the *Short Treatise*—it is clearly different from a rational inference or conclusion of one thing from another. And indeed it has the power to overcome the passion’s strength, by its intimate relationship and union with the object.
- (ii) If we look at the temporal terms ‘*tandiu/quandiu*’—which can also be interpreted as condition/ conditioned—we are directed to consider two processes running through time, tending to a passage from intermittence to continuity. The narrator here is not dealing with a new kind of distraction (*distractio*), because the more the mind performs the act of thinking about that eternal and infinite thing, the more it lives an opening to otherness. And the more it opens itself to otherness, the more it is liberated to think about that infinite thing, in a virtuous circle. It is the continuity foreseen in the first paragraph of the treatise:—the desire for ‘*continua laetitia*’.
- (iii) The performative dynamic of such reflection constitutes an emotional-cognitive process. The idea of true good has no affective impact insofar as it is merely representative—i.e. having an extrinsic relation of correspondence with its object—but only insofar as it is performed as a temporally unfolding intellectual investment. To actually perform the adequate idea of true good produces a mental praxis which is already a fruition of a kind of life which—albeit incipient and lasting only for rare intervals—truly deserves to be called good. What liberates the narrator’s *animus* is not the representative kind of truth and its extrinsic relationship with the appropriate object of love; it is the intellectual experience of producing the adequate idea of true good that provided a transformation of the affective forces in the scene.
- (iv) And this scene remains replete with the same multiplicity that populated ordinary life. That is why Spinoza emphasizes, using the adverb *praesertim* (above all), that money, sensual pleasure, and honor would not have to be eliminated, but only reintegrated as means. There is no longer an abstract and negative idea of what the true good should be in opposition to ordinary goods, but rather a concrete experience of the communicability of true good.

How the intellect becomes what it already was

Having established the significance of an intellectual praxis of thinking in relation to the idea of an infinite and eternal thing, ordinary goods are restored in their utility, desired as means rather than suppressed, and become of great use in attaining happiness. Ordinary goods are true insofar as they are subordinated to the intrinsically adequate idea of the infinite and eternal thing, when they are taken as means which actually conduct men toward that end. And whatever can be a means to attaining the end is now considered a true good. Thus, ordinary goods are now surprisingly⁹ revealed as true goods, provided they are under the guard of the intellectual mode of perception.

The narrator therefore was initially correct in §2, in considering as hasty and ill-advised the decision to simply reject the objects which populate common life, for if he had rejected them, he would have deprived himself of the only existing means for reaching the ultimate goal. Such rejection would have thrown him into asceticism. The project of a new *institutum vitae* outlined in the Treatise is not and cannot be that of the suppression of the content of ordinary life, i.e., a sort of ascetic renunciation of the love of pleasure, money and social recognition. A new institution of life is made possible only through this deep plunge into the understanding, not only of how and why ordinary life tends to be futile and vain, but also of how the ordinary content *already given* within that life can be restored.

The goal of emendation has always been conceived as a new kind of life. But now, under the name of *summum bonum*, it is defined as a fruition of a certain human nature. In order to explain just which human nature this supreme good should be, Spinoza says that nothing, considered in its own nature, could be called good or bad, perfect or imperfect, 'especially (*praesertim*) after we have recognized that everything that happens, happens according to the eternal order, and according to certain laws of Nature'. This excerpt is a compact version of the well-known Spinozan necessitarianism, which asserts that 'in nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way' EIP29. However, men, because of the weakness of their minds, fail to grasp that necessity in everything that happens. Through emendation, man conceives a much stronger and more enduring human nature, which would be capable of doing so. And this stronger human nature is the one whose fruition constitutes the supreme good.

Once the hypostatization of good and evil is removed, a continuous happiness—which was what the possession of the true good was supposed to provide from the very beginning—becomes possible emerging from anything. The world, the whole of Nature, with all the singular things which can now be taken as true goods, is the infinite and eternal thing. Nature is itself the thing (*res*), the object or content of happiness. And it is only after the occurrence of this realization, that the anticipated properties of true good finally find their concrete owner: true good is unique, communicable, infinite and eternal in the way that the whole of Nature is unique, communicable, infinite and eternal. But supreme good is the knowledge which enables men to rearrange anything inside Nature, including wealth, pleasure and honor, in the most useful way that maximizes the potentiality of our being. Or rather, supreme good is possession or fruition of a *human nature* capable of such knowledge. It is so to speak the form of happiness, that welcomes, contains and organizes all the things already available as true goods in a consistent and dynamic structure which implicates the human. So, Nature is the content of men's happiness, and that specific human nature is its form. Therefore, the same man can seek both types of goods at the same time because he does not seek them in the same manner. He seeks one as a means and the other as an end, and both coexist as, respectively, the content and the form of one and the same life.

It is precisely at this moment in the text that the philosopher presents two groups of tasks which are necessary for the collective and coherent fruition of the already described human nature: (I) 'to understand as much of Nature as suffices for acquiring such a nature' and (II) 'to form a society of the kind which is desirable, so that as many as possible may attain it as easily and surely as possible'. And as a subordinate group of tasks, we finally find, in §15, the enumeration in which the Doctrine of Children's Education is included:

Third, attention must be paid to Moral Philosophy and the Doctrine of Children's Education¹⁰. Because Health is no small means to achieving this end, *fourthly*, the whole of Medicine must be worked out. And because many difficult things are rendered easy by ingenuity (*ars*), and we can gain much time and convenience in this life, *fifthly*, Mechanics is in no way to be despised.

Devising a doctrine of children's education, an activity closely connected with moral philosophy, is a particularly strategic task for the collective harmonization of intellect and desire. And yet here it is mentioned alongside medicine and mechanics. This to-do list of five tasks is not intended to be a

well connected sequencing of the sciences as a system of knowledge, such as the Cartesian tree. However, it is not entirely correct to completely minimize its internal unity, as Rousset (Spinoza, 1992) does, for example, when he says that on the list offered, there is effectively no genetic order, no deductive link, no constructive transition linking disciplines to one another. Rather, this grouping is linked directly to the ordinary objects of desire that were initially presented as impediments to the acquisition of happiness. And if I am correct in this reading, we may then attribute to Spinoza's Doctrine of Children's Education a way of incorporating everyday goods that had been initially cast out. Moreover, this recovery which restores and redefines these elements, would be at the heart of the very notion of *emendatio*, so that a certain involution of errors or 'error mapping' was deemed necessary, in order to fully integrate mind with truth.

If this mapping and restoration of possibly deleterious elements is, as I claim, crucial to the Spinozan project of an emendation of the intellect, then it must be compatible, first, with the type of therapeutic prescribed throughout the text by the medical metaphor. In §16, Spinoza takes up this medical metaphor and says that 'we must devise a way of healing the intellect (*medendi intellectus*), and purifying it (*ipsumque expurgandi*), as much as we can in the beginning, so that it understands things successfully, without error and as well as possible'. This is a very problematic excerpt because, if the intellect requires healing and purification, then we should perhaps conclude that it is sick, which once again returns us to the ascetic reading. And if it is sick, then we would not have been able to use its power to defeat the passions' strength in §11. Moreover, it is a well-known Spinozan thesis that the intellect has a native force to know the truth.

The ancient Greek tradition regarding diseases and remedies, however, as Jaeger (1986) has appropriately shown, conceives of healing much more as a promotion of health than as an elimination of disease, more as a cultivation of what is naturally healthy in us rather than as fighting against an element supposedly harmful in itself. And that is why the pathological condition was called *monarchia*, whereas health was called *isomoiria* (proportional equality of the natural parts) and *isonomia* (equality of laws governing relations between the very same parts). Spinoza knew this tradition and had Hippocratic treatises in his personal library. I would like, thus, to highlight, in the same spirit of this ancient Greek medicine, the verb *colo, -ere* (to cultivate, to plow, to take care of, to occupy, to inhabit, to frequent) which is employed by Spinoza in *Political Treatise* (VIII, §49) to describe the aim of a good school: to develop native abilities (*ingenia colenda*). The Latin past participle *cultum* is derived from *colo*, as is also the English verb *colonize* (to occupy and take possession by farming). This range of meanings is important for characterizing medicine—and through association, education—as a practice of cultivation. The emendation of the intellect, as a '*medicina mentis*', does not follow the model of a fight against an antigen, but rather, the model of cultivating the garden of the soul. The same would also occur in education. Thus, healing and purifying the intellect would be, then, like cultivating the intellect's intelligence by the full practice of its own nature. In this sense, Spinoza emphasizes that the intellect does not need to acquire anything new that is not already there.

In order to understand the character of Spinoza's brief reference to a doctrine of children's education, we must now observe that Spinoza introduces three rules of life in §17, each one of which deals precisely with each one of the three ordinary goods initially regarded as pernicious. The first rule prescribes that we speak and perform our daily activities 'according to the power of understanding of ordinary people' provided we remain consistent with our original purpose. By doing so, we can gain considerable advantages, because these ordinary people will give a favorable hearing to the truth. The second rule prescribes that we enjoy pleasures just so far as suffices for safeguarding our health. And the third rule prescribes that we search for sufficient money or anything else to preserve our lives and our health and to imitate the customs of the city that are not opposed to our scope. The first rule is the moderation of the search for honor, which, immoderately, compels man to seek what is commonly sought and to avoid what is commonly avoided. Again, true goodness is communicable because it is not outside, separate and counterposed against ordinary life, but emerges within it, redeeming what it already possesses. Social and political dimensions are

tied precisely to the moderation of the dangerous love for honor which already existed. The second rule, concerning the mundane delights, is an evident moderation of pleasure. And the third rule, regarding money, is clearly a moderation in the pursuit and use of wealth.

Looking more closely, it is possible to perceive that the tasks listed in §15 above—education, medicine and mechanics—resonate with these three rules. Moral Philosophy and the Doctrine of Children’s Education now appear as a generous and ingenious attention to the ‘vulgar’, from which truth-loving ears can be expected if we address them with respect to their specificities. The time to bring back the intellect to the right path and to pursue the supreme good is not, therefore, anterior, posterior or in any way anachronistic regarding the presence of ordinary life, but simultaneous and articulated with its content, which can now be used as a precious collection of actually available means. And also the tasks listed in §15 can now be seen not as preliminary or preparatory expedients, because they must remain as parts of the collective life sought after. As long as this collective life is going on, daily work must be devoted to morality, education of children, medicine and mechanics. In other words, the rules in §17 are a consequence of Spinoza’s commitment to immanence, which finds in each thing, even in the futility and vanity of ordinary life, a degree of perfection. In the long run, by perfection and reality he understands the same thing (Cf. EIID6).

Once this is settled, Spinoza will no longer speak of expurgating and medicating, but of amending the intellect. Amending the intellect is nothing other than rendering it capable of understanding things in the way that the attainment of supreme good commands. We know already that understanding things in this way is to overcome an abstract kind of knowledge and a mere representative kind of truth by actually performing the mental praxis of thinking an adequate idea and prevailing over the akratic aporia. And we also know that rendering *intellectus* capable of *intelligere*—i.e. rendering understanding capable of understanding—is not an acquisition of new predicates, but a matter of letting the intellect become what it is, and liberating men’s minds of the ill-fated pursuit of ideals of perfection that are external to it. Therefore, instead of a renunciation and voluntary mortification, the *emendatio* must be the removal of transcendent models of perfection, truth, and happiness. These models are, in fact, those truly responsible for the ascetic renunciation of immanent perfection of every real thing.

Conclusion: Error and emendation

Just as health is not the destruction of disease, peace is not the suppression of war, supreme good is not the rejection of ordinary goods, and happiness is not the extinction of passions, so the *emendatio* will not be an elimination of error. The Spinozan concept of *emendatio* operates precisely according to a strategy of immanence, always recovering something through what it possesses that is effective and positive in itself. From paragraph 18 onwards, emendation is not a matter of eliminating falsehoods, but rather a kind of phenomenology of error, describing in detail how and why errors are produced. By using a certain pedagogical jargon in a constructivist style, I believe that it is perfectly permissible to speak here of error mapping, monitoring and envelopment, a kind of care that must precede and control any corrective or imperative expedient—e.g. commands, instructions, controls or even reprimands, punishments and chastisement—since otherwise the learner would be subordinated to an external canon of learning, and the learning, in turn, would degenerate into mere behavioral training.

A Spinozan Doctrine of Children’s Education is consistent with the elaboration of a theory of knowledge and a method of learning which does not immediately assume an imperative voice in order to enunciate a duty. This doctrine need not eradicate ‘primitive’ modes of knowledge, for in so doing it would subtract the understanding of how, after all, one can learn something. Education would then entail the same ill-advised and hasty elimination of ordinary goods in the ethical context. And in the epistemic context, it is worth remembering the well-known comparison made by Spinoza between the construction of knowledge by intellectual instruments and the forging of

iron by corporal instruments (TIE §§30–31). In this comparison, the constructive process of knowledge progressively evolves from a native force to primitive instruments and from these to new forces and to new and ever more potent and potentializing instruments. Thus, with regard to the pedagogical applicability of Spinoza's ethics and epistemology, one of the most appropriate attitudes to deal with error or confusion would be to consider it as part of a continuous process of learning. Error, as a real event, has its reasons for being, and these must be considered so that knowledge 'without error' does not become the result of a negative, extrinsic and abstract method which produces nothing but the memorization of stereotypical behavior. To map and understand errors is not to be led by them, but rather to examine their genesis and correct them only by understanding the laws that govern their actual occurrence, because everything, including error, occurs according to laws and order of Nature. Error misrepresents Nature but is part of this very Nature that it fails to represent, although expressing it inexorably. Error is thus corrected internally, from that within which it is real, positive and perfect in itself.

Notes

1. See Kant's *The End of All Things* (cited by Macherey, 2011, p. 223), where, anticipating Hegel, he links Spinozism with Eastern asceticism as if, according to Spinoza, sovereign good and supreme happiness were the resorption of the singular individuals in the single substance from which they came—what is nothing but the abolition of all intelligence, a cessation even of all thought.
2. In standard translations of Spinoza's works into English, the Latin term '*error, erroris*' is translated as 'error' instead of 'mistake' (Spinoza, 1988). In seventeenth century philosophy, an 'error' is the epistemic result of a judgment made according to falsehood. A good example is the belief, based on mere empirical observation that the Sun orbits around the Earth.
3. TIE §1. All translations into English are from Edwin Curley (Spinoza, 1988). All Latin quotes are from Gebhardt's edition (Spinoza, 1972). The introduction of Latin words intermingled to Curley's translation will always be my initiative in order to highlight and set the terms which will be discussed or reinterpreted below.
4. Cf Aristotle, *Topica*, I, 5. 102a 19 (Aristotle, 1960).
5. Sc. Toward the thoughts on the eternal and infinite thing spoken of in §10.
6. Curley doesn't translate this adverb which is very important for my interpretation regarding the temporal articulation between the two ways of life during the passage from one to other. Thus I make this slight addition here.
7. Sc. Greed, desire for sensual pleasure, and love of esteem.
8. I altered Curley's original translation 'limit' to moderation because '*modus*' is more than a mere 'limit'. On an etymological level, *modus*, according to Lewis and Short (1969), is connected precisely to the ideas of measurement, adjustment, regulation and manner. Through the adverb *mode* it transmits the idea of a conditional clause within the expressions 'neither more nor less', 'insofar as', 'in proportion to', 'since', 'only if'. And through the verb *Modular, ari*, it refers to measuring, regularizing, establishing a rhythm.
9. Some interpreters have been quite confused by this change of treatment concerning the concepts of '*verum bonum*' and '*summum bonum*'. See Joachim (1958, pp. 20, 21).
10. I changed Curley's translation here ('Instruction concerning the Education of children') for the sake of literality.

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