

## Transindividuality and Philosophical Enquiry in Schools: A Spinozist Perspective

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*We suggest in this paper that the practice of philosophy with children can be fruitfully understood as an example of a transindividual system. The adoption of the term 'transindividuality' serves two main purposes: it allows us to focus on individuation as a process and at the same time to problematise some of the classical antinomies of Western philosophy that continue to inform our understanding of the relation between individuality and community. We argue that the practice of philosophical inquiry with children, when interpreted in terms of Spinoza's conceptions of relational individuality and affective reason, offers a compelling example of how shared thinking operates as an individuating process in that knowledge and affect, interiority and exteriority, individuality and collectivity can be experienced in action and thought as complementary aspects of the same process.*

The reality of individuals seems incontestable. We tend to perceive the world as consisting of discrete things, units of cohesive matter which we identify as clearly bounded objects or living beings. Traditionally, individuality has been theorised either via a substantialist perspective, whereby being is considered consistent in its unity, given to itself, and resistant to what it is not,<sup>1</sup> or through a hylomorphic<sup>2</sup> approach, whereby the individual is conceived as the perfecting form or *telos* of matter. The self-centred substantialism of individuals is here opposed to the bipolarity of the hylomorphic schema. In both cases, however, the existent individual is the starting point of investigation, and an ontological privilege is granted to the constituted individual (see Simondon, 2005).

What sort of theory would emerge if our inquiry did not focus primarily on constituted individuals, but on the very processes of constitution that enable individuation<sup>3</sup> to occur? The work of Gilbert Simondon represents a recent response to that query. His objective is to understand the system of reality that permits individuals to become separated from the environment—the individual is thus considered as what is to be explained rather than the starting point of inquiry. For Simondon, the individual and the collective correspond to effects in a process of individuation. Individual and collective do not succeed one another, but are, rather,

synchronic, participating in the same process that engenders interiority and exteriority. Both individuations, the psychic and the collective, are reciprocal to each other. Their reciprocity defines the transindividual: ‘a systematic unity of the interior (psychic) individuation and the exterior (collective) individuation’ (Simondon, 2005, p. 23).

The term transindividuality thus refers to the mutual constitution or reciprocal determination of the psychic and the collective. From the notion of the transindividual another key concept emerges in Simondon’s theory: that of *relation*. The transindividual understood as relation is not what occurs between individuated terms, but is a dimension of individuation itself. Relation is, according to this perspective, what constitutes individuals and not the reverse. In sum, the concept of the transindividual is characterised by the primacy of processes of individuation over constituted individuals and of relations over *relata*.

Etienne Balibar suggests that Simondon’s arguments for transindividuality are ‘truly spinozistic’ and, indeed, that Spinoza’s striking rejection of abstract oppositions is best described in terms of Simondon’s notion of transindividuality. Following Balibar’s suggestion that Spinoza can be fruitfully understood as a ‘theoretician of transindividuality’ (Balibar, 1997, p. 11), our objective is to demonstrate that Spinoza’s version of transindividuality challenges traditional dichotomies in a way that sheds new light on some of the processes that take place in the philosophical community of inquiry in the classroom. Spinoza is one of the few philosophers to have formulated a consistent critique of the dualisms that form the conceptual infrastructure of post-Cartesian Western thought. In understanding his challenge to the dualisms of mind and body, knowledge and affect, interior and exterior, individual and collectivity through the notion of transindividuality, these classical antinomies are more clearly reconfigured. Given the productive connection between Simondon’s notion of transindividuality and Spinoza’s philosophy, the suspicion that moves the present paper is the following: if we conceive of philosophical inquiries with children as complex psycho-social or transindividual processes, we will be better able to understand how the aforementioned distinctions are, in fact, not dichotomies, but reciprocally actualised and maintained through a complementary dynamic.

Spinoza is often portrayed as an arch rationalist. The undeniable significance of reason in his philosophy, however, should not blind us to the pivotal role played by the affects<sup>4</sup> and desire in his philosophical system. Reason, like imagination, is a form of knowledge that corresponds to a type of bodily experience. According to Spinoza, body and mind are modes of the attributes of a single substance that express the same individual power. *Conatus* is the name given to this power—it is our striving to persevere in existence, our complex drives and dispositions, which are also identified with our desire. The understanding of an individual’s *conatus* as a reciprocal dynamic between the power to affect and to be affected (between productivity and receptivity) will serve as the centrepiece of the discussion of Spinoza’s conception of individuality in the first part of the paper.

The second part of the paper examines the relation between two types of knowledge or ways of knowing: imagination and reason. From a Spinozist perspective, *imagination* refers to an immediate, partial and non-causal form of knowledge, whereas *reason* involves adequate ideas about causes. We argue that the complex rational explanations that occur in philosophical discussions with school children can be understood as a rational transindividual system from which relatively stable singular and collective forms emerge. Philosophical inquiry is thus understood as an individuating process that gives rise to individuals and communities. A paradoxical process emerges from this dynamic system: integration is enhanced (that is, individuation is diminished) while difference is highlighted (that is, individuality is reinforced). Thinking as a social process fosters self-determination or individuality, just as the increase in the intellectual powers of individuals enhances a certain kind of social integration. Since different forms of thinking seem to be directly associated with the formation of distinct types of community, we conclude this paper with reflections on some of the 'political' implications of the practice of philosophy with children.

## **SPINOZA AND INDIVIDUALITY**

Spinoza's philosophy has been subjected to radically different interpretations. Genevieve Lloyd (1996) and Christopher Norris (2006) argue that the fact that significantly different readings may display exegetical thoroughness and argumentative rigour, and that strong evidence can be mustered to support opposing claims, indicates how inassimilable Spinoza's thinking is to mainstream classification. If, for instance, Spinoza is classified as a rationalist on the grounds that he maintains that true wisdom can only be achieved through a reasoned critique of common-sense notions or self-evident ideas,<sup>5</sup> he can equally be considered a radical naturalist or materialist, according to whom such wisdom consists in due recognition of the various physical, causal, and socio-political factors that are the material conditions of knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

In agreement with Balibar (1997), we maintain that the apparent incoherence detected in Spinoza's philosophy indicates the difficulty readers have in comprehending a perspective that challenges some of the most ingrained antinomies of classical metaphysics and ethics. This challenge is nowhere more apparent than in Spinoza's notion of individuality as essentially relational. Spinoza's relational individual is not the originating and sole source of reason or the affects. Rather, it is situated in, and constituted by, social imaginary and rational systems that hamper or promote its powers of action and thought. Spinoza thus invites us to rethink the identity and activity of individuals as correlated with extended interrelations.

What then is a human individual for Spinoza? Our response to this question focuses on three main aspects of Spinoza's theory of individuality: (1) the concept of finite modes; (2) the doctrine of

psychophysical parallelism; and (3) the identification of an individual's essence with its *conatus* or desire.

Spinoza conceives of the human individual as a union of body and mind (EII P21 S).<sup>7</sup> In striking contrast to Descartes, body and mind are not defined as separate substances but as finite modes or modifications of the attributes of a single substance or all-encompassing reality.<sup>8</sup> A mode is not self-causing but is 'that which is in another through which it is also conceived' (EI D5)—it is, in other words, existentially and conceptually dependent. A mode is limited by other modes of its kind (bodies limit bodies and ideas limit ideas). The finitude of a mode means that it has no absolute self-sufficiency; it can only be comprehended through its relations with other modes. In short, the concept of a mode indicates a constitutive openness: bodies and minds are not understood as atomic or self-contained, but as constitutively relational.

The totality of bodies and minds corresponds to *natura naturata*—that is, the set of all individuals. All that exists is an effect of *natura naturans*—that is, Nature's immanent and incessant production of existing individuals (EI P29 S). Nature understood as constant production or *natura naturans* is the process of individuation on which this paper focuses. In sum, Substance or Nature (the two are equivalent for Spinoza) is nothing but this infinite process of production of multiple individuals, whereas individuals, being all interrelated, are the necessary existence of substance. The multiplicity of individuals and the unity of substance are reciprocal for Spinoza (Balibar, 1997, p. 8).

As modes of the attributes of Substance, mind and body have not only the same order and connection (EIIP7), but also the same *being*. Moreover, as modes of the autonomous attributes of thought and extension, there can be no causal interaction between them. Instead, their connection is explicated as a union or identity, which is expressed in Spinoza's claim that mind is the idea of the body. In other words, mind or idea and body are the same thing represented from the point of view of either thought or extension. An important consequence of Spinoza's denial of psychophysical interaction is the refusal of the eminence of mind over body, with the result that the agency or action of modes or singular things can no longer be understood in Cartesian fashion as a function of the voluntary power of the mind—or will—over bodily motions. Spinoza's so-called 'parallelism' of mind and body thus challenges the classic dualist dichotomy that divides the human being into the higher faculty of active mind and the passive animal drives and passions. Spinoza replaces this dualistic, hierarchical model of mind-body relations with one that attends to the psychophysical whole.

To define the mind as idea or awareness of an actually existing body (EII P13), is to say that the mind is reflective and expressive of its own body. Its activity (or the activity that it is)<sup>9</sup> corresponds, in the first instance, to the series of states of its body object (EII P11). Since the body, of which the mind is an idea, is continuously affecting other bodies and being affected by them, the mind is the idea not only of the body to which it corresponds, but also of the ongoing relation between the body and its

immediate environment. The mind, therefore, is not an isolated unit set against an external world that it apprehends, but is the process of encompassing the relations between body and world in thought.

For Spinoza, the essence of human individuals is their very desire (EIII Def Aff I Exp), which is in turn defined as their appetite or *conatus*—that is, their striving to persevere in existence—together with awareness of their dispositions (EIII P6). For the spinozist individual to maintain its identity—or exist—it must necessarily be connected to other body-minds within a complex network of causal and affective relations. Spinoza's theory of *conatus* explains what it means to exist as the inherent striving of the individual to maintain identity in and through such exchanges with its environment. He understands *conatus* or desire as a principle of determination and differentiation, and not of unification: 'the desire of each individual differs from the desire of another as much as the nature, or essence, of the one differs from the essence of the other' (EIII P57 D). Spinoza thus eschews appeal to a universal human essence, and instead refers to the singularity of individuals—to their multiple forms of affection and striving—in order to define them.

Having briefly characterised the spinozist human individual as a finite mode, a union of body and mind, and a complex network of strivings or desire, it is now important to address Spinoza's understanding of reason. For Spinoza, the more an individual exercises its power of thinking the more it is said to be active. Our 'conative power' finds its maximum expression in reason, that is, in our power to adequately understand the causal order.<sup>10</sup> Adequate understanding is not the same as theoretical knowledge; to understand more adequately is not simply to change one's intellectual perspective. It is, rather, a form of affective therapy that involves a change in one's existential stance, activity and desire. Reason is always affective, necessarily involving a dimension of corporeal assimilation or sensitivity. In fact, affecting and being affected constitute a single power operation for Spinoza. Spinoza claims that a defining characteristic of more complex and powerful bodies is a capacity for 'being acted on in many ways at once' (EII P13 S.). The growing complexity of the body is accompanied by an expansion in the mind's power to assimilate impressions. A body that is capable of being affected in a great number of ways shares a multitude of things with other bodies and is thus more capable of regarding a greater number of things at once and of comprehending the relations of agreement, difference and opposition between them (EII P29 S.).

The interdependence of productivity and receptivity may seem paradoxical insofar as it reconfigures the traditional dichotomy between autonomy and heteronomy by affirming the compatibility of self-determination with sensitivity or exposure to the world: any possible separation delineated by individual powers cannot be dissociated from the individual's open and fluid communication with other bodies and minds. In this sense, we can affirm, with Hans Jonas, that 'only by being sensitive can a body and mind be active, only by exposing themselves can they be self-determined' (Jonas, 1973, p. 278). A powerful, productive or active body is not one that is

invulnerable to the world's determining causes. Activity is not the result of a process of 'disaffection' or 'desensitisation', but is the expression of a flexible, vigorous, and multiply-determined form of sensitivity.

If we give Spinoza's theory of body-mind correspondence any credit, our desire to develop our intellectual power cannot but imply the cultivation of our corporeal sensitivity. Likewise, since individual bodies and minds are interdependent, the more other individuals increase their sensitive power and their associated power of thinking, the more our capacities expand and vice versa. Sensitivity and productivity, like sociality and individuality are reciprocal processes in the individuation of the body-mind.<sup>11</sup>

Lipman and others have argued in various (and often contrasting) ways for the general idea that sociality informs (and forms) individual identity.<sup>12</sup> Vygotsky's social learning theory, Davidov's theory of activity, the social psychology of George H. Mead, systems and process theories, and hermeneutics, among other theoretical strands, have assisted researchers in constructing a description of philosophical inquiry with children that is neither one-dimensional (precluding the individual or the collective) nor simplistic (refusing to analyse the connections between these two realms). It is generally accepted that individual reasoning results from a complex process of internalisation of collective speech/thinking. Communal discussion implies adjustments in an individual's mode of thinking, just as self-correction and interventions that improve the reasoning applied by an individual in a philosophical dialogue promote the development of the student group as a whole.

Thinking is a process that relies on a system of signs, socially shared meanings and forms of communication. Individual body-minds participate in that system being both its products and partial producers. Turning our attention to individuation or to the transindividual nature of individuals allows us to focus not on what one is or thinks, but on the processes of individual/collective thinking that lead to temporarily stable personal/social forms. From this perspective, the practice of philosophy with children can be interpreted as a unique relational space where personal and communal intellectual transformations are rapidly and intensely experienced. As a systematic communicative process, philosophical dialogues with children can be said to correspond to transindividual systems of thinking that contribute to the formation of individuals. Of course, the same claim could be made about any number of social influences operating on the individual, including for example, groups of friends, the family, various social institutions, and the media. In order to identify what is unique about the formative process of the practice of philosophy with children we need to understand what sort of individuating system it is. The distinction between imagination and reason is central to our response to this question.

## **IMAGINATION AND REASON AS TRANSINDIVIDUAL SYSTEMS**

Imagination and reason are, for Spinoza, forms of knowledge through which we understand the world around us. They are also thinking

processes through which distinct kinds of sociality and individuality are engendered. Against the conventional view of imagination as creative, Spinoza defines it as inadequate knowledge that is a function of the various alterations that the body undergoes in its interactions with its immediate environment. It is considered inadequate because the reality that immediate awareness grasps is local, partial, and non-causal.

Spinoza claims that ‘as our bodies retain traces of the changes brought about by other bodies, the mind regards the other bodies as present even when they no longer exist’ (EII P17 D, C). Imagination consists in the mind regarding bodies in this way. Its inadequacy resides in the confused perception that we have of other bodies and our own since we are aware of the effects of other bodies on our own but not of the true causes of these effects. The contents of imaginary knowledge are, therefore, like ‘conclusions without premises’ (EII P28 D).

Imaginative knowledge derives primarily from memory, which is a result of the fortuitous order of affections experienced by our bodies (EII P18 S). It operates through accidental and unexamined associations: ‘when our body has once been affected by two or more bodies at the same time, when the mind subsequently imagines one of them, it will immediately recollect the others also’ (EII P18). Furthermore, in future encounters, when the body is affected by one of the affects that occurred simultaneously in the past, it will also be affected by the others (EIII P14). These associations created by imagination explain, for instance, why we love or hate certain things out of sympathy or antipathy without understanding the causes of our feelings (EIII P15 S). Operating via contiguity or similarity, imaginative associations thus expose us to accidental and arbitrary affects.

Another central mechanism of imaginary life is affective imitation. Spinoza appeals to the notion of affective imitation in order to account for the way in which the resemblances individuals perceive between themselves and others form the basis of imaginary identifications. Spinoza explains that ‘if we imagine a thing like us, toward which we have had no affect, to be affected with some affect, we are thereby affected with a like affect’ (EIII P27). This affective mimetism is, for Spinoza, an automatic or pre-reflexive mechanism—it does not involve any comparative thought between us and the things we imagine to be similar to us. Moreover, because, for Spinoza, the mind’s initial ideas or imaginings are not a reflection of the body’s affections, but are these affections under the attribute of thought, it is our whole psychophysical state that is modified as we interact with external bodies. Thus, we cannot help but affectively imitate others because to be affected by the affects of others with whom we identify just is to express a certain state of our body and mind like that of the affecting individual. This mimetic principle constitutes the affective basis of pre-conscious social bonds. Imaginative processes are thus not only the result of personal and idiosyncratic experiences, but also of shared socio-cultural contents, inherited conceptions and collective fictions that are affectively reproduced through sociability.

Spinoza maintains that true or adequate understanding entails a transition from the knowledge of the immediacy of bodily alterations to

the knowledge of the corporeal and mental causal order, that is, to reason. This transition is facilitated by the fact that imagination and reason are distinct but not opposed forms of understanding.<sup>13</sup> Rational thinking is considered adequate because causal explanations are produced—this form of understanding offers, for Spinoza, a genetic description of things. Thus, instead of reproducing in *idea* the body's responses to the immediate surroundings, the human individual can think of the causal extensional order so as to understand the very genesis of its own bodily affects. When the mind incorporates its causes or the genesis of its ideas and bodily modifications, the individual becomes a complete or adequate cause of its thoughts. As Heidi Ravven points out, it is not that one's thinking of reality is then transformed but 'it is the very reality of one's mind that changes' (Ravven, 2002, p. 239). In other words, in thinking adequately, the mind does not mirror or represent an external reality. Rather, the individual really becomes more integrated into the causal order of nature and is able to identify with an increasingly inclusive perspective.

When the mind knows according to reason, it is 'determined internally, from the fact that it regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions' (EII P29 S). Reason and imagination are ways of relating to the world, and imply different qualities of individual and collective life. In this sense, Balibar (1997, pp. 30–31) suggests that both imagination and reason are not to be conceived as faculties of the mind, but as 'transindividual systems' in which different minds are mutually implicated. Imagination and reason as such are processes and the individuals involved correspond to moments in these processes, at different levels of integration.

In the case of reason, integration is enhanced. As ideas become increasingly adequate, individuation, that is, what separates or distinguishes individuals is correspondingly diminished. Individuals are thus able to understand and experience the world not so much as a series of physical/psychological self-contained units, but from an increasingly expansive, inclusive and common perspective. Nevertheless, as Amelie Rorty argues, it is important to note that in this process individuality is not extinguished, but, indeed, enhanced: in diminishing what separates them; namely, inadequate ideas, individuals do not diminish their individuality (Rorty, 2001, pp. 289–290). In fact, individuality—one's singularity and self-determining power—is augmented in direct proportion to the decrease of differentiation, as the inadequate ideas that separate individuals are absorbed into the co-determinative system of adequate ideas.

This striking paradox describes what occurs in the most engaging philosophical inquiries with children. When rational thinking is intensely shared and communal understanding allows each individual to expand their own ideas, the group becomes an increasingly integrated whole, with each member participating in a shared thinking process, which is enhanced by the contribution of different individual perspectives. Unity and plurality become complementary. Thinking as a social process fosters self-determination or individuality, just as the increase in individual intellectual power promotes social cohesion through the linking threads of



dialogue. Thinking and understanding are actively shared while personal contributions remain noticeably singular. It is in this sense that Ann Sharp asserts that ‘the success of the community is compatible with, and dependent on, the unique expression of individuality’ (Sharp, 1991, p. 33). On a similar note, Gabriela Traverso suggests that the community of inquiry involves two interdependent dimensions: one refers to ‘the development that each individual gains on her or his own thanks to the interaction with the rest of the group’, and the other to ‘the strengthening of the community as a function of the interpersonal enrichment gained from dialogue’ (Traverso, 1997, p. 21).

In a circular manner, the perception and experience of corporeal/mental boundaries is a product of our understanding of reality just as the perception and experience of divisions and continuities (in)form our thinking. In this sense, collective philosophical dialogues with children serve to question and reconfigure conventional limits between interiority and exteriority. As thinking becomes increasingly communal the participation of others functions as an important condition for one’s own intellectual empowerment. In other words, one’s ‘interiority’ and empowerment is a result of sociality and can be said to be expanded through shared thinking processes. Conversely, the more one exercises one’s own thinking, actively participating in philosophical dialogues, the more ‘exterior’ dialogues become a part of one’s ‘interior’ processes. Philosophical dialogues foster the externalisation of active thinking, just as shared active thinking is internalised by individuals through philosophical inquiry (see Jenkins, 1988). It is this reciprocal dynamic between individual empowerment and social integration that differentiates philosophical communities of inquiry from other forms of socialisation and sociality. The formative influence of the various social institutions (family, neighbourhood, church and nation) that shape individuality is often not correlated with individual empowerment and the strengthening of individual autonomy. From Spinoza’s point of view, this is because such forms of belonging are often parochial, narrow and exclusive and so fail to foster the broadening of individual understanding to encompass the widest possible web of relations. What facilitates the enlargement of individual understanding in philosophical dialogue is the practice and procedure of inquiry.

Laurance Splitter argues that whilst communities—with their bonds of trust, collaboration, risk-taking and a sense of common purpose—can be formed and developed without inquiry, inquiry in schools depends on the formation of a dialogic community in order to occur (Splitter, 2007, pp. 12–13). This is explained by the fact that inquiry as a mode of thinking has a dialogical structure and as such is ‘problem-focused, self-correcting, empathetic and multi-perspectival’ (p. 13). Moreover, Karin Murriss claims that what distinguishes *philosophical* inquiry from similar theme or problem focused forms of collective inquiry is that it entails reflection about thinking itself, that is, about the very procedures of the dialogue (Murriss, 2008, p. 670). Meta-thinking, or what Lipman calls ‘complex thinking’ (Lipman, 1996, pp. 23–24), is an essential characteristic of the

type of dialogue that takes place in collective philosophical inquiries with children. Reflecting on dialogue as a process, on how thoughts are being expressed by others and oneself, is a way of reinforcing the rational, non-automatic and open-to-scrutiny nature of inquiry (Murriss and Haynes, 2000). Dialogues about the criteria and procedures involved in formulating and choosing a question for discussion, about how speech should be distributed, about the facilitation performed by teachers, and other meta-dialogical issues prevents automatic thinking; that is, thinking that merely passively reproduces authoritative opinion or proceeds by accidental associations. By the same token, meta-dialogical reflection also strengthens active or rational thought; that is, thinking that understands its own mental and material conditions and is, in that sense, self-generated.

### **CONCLUSION: THE POLITICS OF THINKING**

What kind of community is formed in and by the systematic practice of philosophising with children? Due to the social nature of our bodily/mental affects, to our finitude as modes of Nature, and to our limited understanding, imaginative knowledge is an ineradicable dimension of all human communities. On the other hand, knowledge will never be exclusively immediate, reactive or restricted to automatic responses to our physical and psychological environment. A completely irrational community is as unimaginable as a totally rational one. Philosophy with children fosters more rational communities, that is, forms of sociability in which affective reason plays a significant role in the reciprocal dynamic between self-determination and cooperative integration. Philosophy with children can be said to facilitate the transition from more passive and imaginary forms of sociality to more active and rational forms of community. How should we understand this transition?

Let us consider, for instance, the influential role exercised by teachers and facilitators in the classroom. In the traditional classroom teachers are the primary source of authority both with respect to children's behaviour in class and with respect to their thinking. We can say, then, that student's identities are partially shaped by images/ideas that explicitly or implicitly derive from the teacher (who in turn complexly embodies ideas from certain institutions and pedagogical theories). Students respond (either positively or negatively) to what is imagined as the teacher's expectations: identities are constructed in relation to what students perceive as the model they are expected to conform to in thought and action. Modelling and authoritative expectations, often reinforced by rewards and punishments, are an important imaginary and affective component of all classroom communities, including philosophical communities of inquiry.

Although the traditional classroom relies on techniques of external regulation of students in order to promote obedience to authority and cooperative behaviour, and therefore involves a degree of passivity, it would be wrong to construe this passivity as a hindrance to the development of active, rational thought. On the contrary, passivity, that

is, the external regulation of student's desires and powers that is achieved by encouraging imaginary identification with a model, serves as an enabling condition for the development of individual and collective power. Imaginary identification and unexamined affective bonds function here to promote a form of non-rational connectivity that serves to strengthen and build cooperative and harmonious relations. From Spinoza's perspective, cooperative and mutually beneficial relations between individuals can be said to accord with reason, even if they don't follow from a rational understanding of one's advantage, because such relations ensure that individuals are more likely to experience joyful passions, and to act on the basis of desires born of joy. Spinoza explains the link between joyful passions and reason in the *Ethics*. Joy, he says,

... agrees with reason (for it consists in this, that a man's power of acting is increased or aided, and is not a passion except insofar as the man's power of acting is not increased to the point where he conceived himself and his actions adequately. So if a man affected with Joy were led to such a great perfection that he conceived himself and his actions adequately, he would be capable—indeed more capable of the same actions to which he is now determined from affects which are passions (EIVP59D).

In this passage Spinoza indicates that there is only a small gap separating joyful passive affections from adequate activity. External material circumstances can bring about a passive increase of our powers, and this passive increase can bring us to brink of more adequate understanding and action. The establishment of cooperative and cohesive relations by passive means nevertheless ensures that individuals have something in common and Spinoza tells us that 'the mind is more capable of perceiving many things adequately as its body has many things in common with other bodies.' (EIIIP39). To participate in a community, and to enjoy harmonious relation with others who 'agree with our nature' (EIVAppVII) is to be affected in ways that increase our capacities for rational thought and action. In other words, the degree of activity and independence individuals enjoy depends on supportive interactions and favourable external influences. In short, for Spinoza, passive and active power are complexly related rather than opposed.

On the basis of this general description of the complex interweaving of passive and active power in Spinoza's thinking, we can examine in more detail the relation between the practice of philosophy in the classroom and the imaginative and affective interrelations that are the social basis and condition for this practice. Our claim would be that the practice of philosophy contributes to the creation of more active and rational forms of community by means of an immanent critique of, and reflection on, those imaginary preconditions. The immanent critique of the epistemic and social processes that encompass the practice of philosophy with children is what prevents the community from being predominantly constituted by coercive forms of power, dogmatic opinions, and social automatisms. Moreover, this meta-reflection or complex thinking allows intrinsic

rational mechanisms to self-regulate individuals and the group, setting the directions for personal and social transformation. Reason, for Spinoza, is equivalent to the active understanding of the causes that shape one's body and mind. In this sense, thinking about what, how and why we think promotes the understanding of how philosophy individuates at the same time that it participates in the formation of more active and self-determined communities.

From a spinozist perspective, we could affirm that the more rational processes such as 'philosophy for children' are shared, the more the individuals and social groups that are engendered by these processes exert their singular powers in a more compatible way. Breaking from a tradition of ethical and political polarities, Spinoza explicitly advocates for a relational conception in which the individual's rational pursuit of her/his own advantage is not the foundation of conflict or unsociability, but the same movement through which more virtuous communities are formed. In their operation as transindividual systems, philosophical inquiries with children engender forms of integration based on mutual convenience: each individual's striving to expand their own power is reinforced by the *conatus* of others, thus mutually engaging in empowering interactions without suppressing their self-determination. In communities constructed through the practice of philosophy, the growing autonomy of the individual (greater self-determination and singularity) is reciprocal to closer association with other individuals.

In conclusion, we can now note how the epistemological, ethical and political realms are inextricably linked in transindividual systems. Individuals and social formations—their corporeal conducts and associated forms of understanding—are constituted in/by relational networks of imaginary and rational ideas. The practice of philosophical inquiries with children offers us a compelling example of how shared reason operates as an individuating system whereby knowledge and affect, interiority and exteriority, individuality and collectivity can be experienced in action/thought as reciprocal or complementary aspects of the same process. The communities that derive from these philosophical educational experiences are evidence of the interdependent movement between a growing unity and a flourishing plurality: a common world in which many worlds co-exist.<sup>14</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Plato's archetypal forms (which give priority to the invariants outside the individual) are the inspiration for this long standing tradition.

2. From the Greek ὕλο- *hulo-*, which means wood, thus matter, and morphic, from μορφή, *morphe*, that is, form. The priority given by Aristotle to the inner perfection of the individual is the ancient touchstone for this conception of individuality.
3. By individuation we mean that individuals become separated from the environment, which is made of numerous other inanimate and living individuals.
4. Affect (*affectus*) is a central concept in Spinoza's philosophy. It is, simultaneously, an affection (*affectio*) of the body that increases or decreases, aids or restrains its power to act, and the idea of this affection. Extension and intellect, materiality and thought are indissolubly involved in the notion of affect. An affect is thus a passage from a lesser to a greater or from a greater to a lesser corporeal power to act just as it is, at the same time, a transition in our power to think.
5. Some of those who see Spinoza's philosophy as primarily rationalist include G. H. Parkinson (1953), Alan Donagan (1988), and Steven B. Smith (1997).
6. Louis Althusser (1976), for instance, attributes to Spinozism a privileged role in the prehistory of dialectical materialism. Other commentators who understand Spinozism as fundamentally materialist in orientation include Alexandre Matheron (1988); Pierre Macherey (1979); and Antonio Negri (1991).
7. 'The mind and the body are one and the same individual, which is conceived now under the attribute of thought, now under the attribute of extension' (EII P21 S). The following abbreviated notation will be used to refer to Spinoza's *Ethics*: EI (II, III, IV, V) for *Ethics*, Part I (Roman numerals refer to the Parts of the *Ethics*); A for axiom; C for corollary; D for demonstration (or definition if followed by an Arabic numeral); L for lemma; P for proposition; Pref. for preface; S for scholium (Arabic numerals denote the lemma, proposition or scholium number); and, Ap for appendix. Citations from the *Ethics* are quoted from *The Ethics and Other Works. A Spinoza Reader* (Spinoza, 1994 [1677]).
8. Substance is what 'is in itself and is conceived through itself, that is, that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed' (EI D3). In this sense, there is only one substance for Spinoza, namely God or Nature. The identification of God with Nature entails the rejection of any anthropomorphic projection onto God. Spinoza's God has no will and no goals—it is simply the matrix of law governed relations, or Nature.
9. 'The idea of the mind and the mind itself are one and the same thing' (EII P21 S).
10. Spinoza understands adequate knowledge as Aristotle does: knowing a thing adequately corresponds to knowing its causes. The more we understand how things are determined the more we are able to act effectively within causal networks.
11. For a more detailed discussion about Spinoza's conception of relational individuality and the challenge it poses to the distinction between activity and passivity, see Armstrong, 2009.
12. See, for instance, Lipman, 1996; Margolis, 1996; Kohan, 1996; Kennedy, 1999; Splitter, 2007; and Stoyanova and Kennedy, 2010.
13. It is beyond the scope of this paper to demonstrate how imagination and reason are contiguous forms of knowledge in Spinoza's system. For more on that topic see Genevieve Lloyd's *Spinoza and the Ethics* (Lloyd, 1996), and 'Spinoza and the Education of the Imagination' (Lloyd, 1998).
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