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Articles

Moral Self-Realization in Kant and Spinoza

Moralinė savirealizacija Kanto ir Spinozos filosofijoje

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Abstract: Spinoza and Kant are considered to be polar opposites with respect to ethics. The radical difference between them is supposed to consist in Spinoza's ethical egoism, or interest-based *Strebensethik*, and Kant's duty-cantered, deontological *Sollensethik*. I challenge this opposition and argue that both in Kant and Spinoza we deal with a notion of the self's realization that is "interest"-based and therefore does not involve self-sacrifice. I show, on the one hand, that the *streben* in Spinoza's *Strebensethik* consists in realising one's essentially human interest, which resides in ethical-rational action, and, on the other hand, that *sollen* in Kant's *Sollensethik* is in fact a *streben* of the Kantian "proper self" (*eigentliches Selbst*) after the realization of its ethical-rational interest.

Keywords: Spinoza, Kant, self-realization, self-sacrifice, interest, enlightenment.

Summary: Spinoza ir Kantas etikos požiūriu laikomi visiškomis priešingybėmis. Manoma, kad esminis skirtumas tarp jų yra etinis Spinozos egoizmas, arba interesais pagrįstas Strebensethik, ir Kanto pagrįstas pareigomis, deontologinis Sollensethik. Straipsnyje ši opozicija kvestionuojama. Teigiama, kad tiek Kanto, tiek ir Spinozos filosofijoje susiduriame su savirealizacijos samprata, kuri yra pagrįsta „interesais" ir todėl nėra susijusi su pasiaukojimu. Viena vertus, parodoma, kad streben Spinozos Strebensethik iš esmės kreipia į žmogiškojo intereso, glūdinčio etiniame-racionaliame veiksme, įgyvendinimą; antra vertus, atskleidžiama, kad sollen Kanto Sollensethik iš tikrųjų yra kantiškojo „tikrojo aš" (eigentliches Selbst) streben, išliekantis po to, kai jau įgyvendintas savasis etinis-racionalus interesas.

Keywords: Spinoza, Kantas, savirealizacija, pasiaukojimas, interesas, Apšvieta.

Introduction

A revisionist perspective on Spinoza's attitude toward religion – i.e., one that emphasizes Spinoza's sincere engagement with religious issues – is already well-established (see Levene 2004; Huenmenan 2014; Hunter 2017; Carlisle 2021), and the Straussian type of "hermeneutics of suspicion" is in decline (see e.g. Carlisle 2021: 12–14) [1]. The situation also begins to change with respect to Spinoza's ethical commitments. Recent books by Steven Nadler (2022) and Andrew Yupa (2020) no longer operate on the ages-old image of Spinoza as an "immoralist." This paper attempts to contribute to this emerging branch of Spinoza scholarship. In doing so, I compare Spinoza's moral thought with Kant's and thus illuminate hitherto unrecognized (or barely recognized) interdependencies between their ethical views.

The paper has two parts. The first one delivers a historical propaedeutic which should facilitate and put in context the subsequent argument.

The second part argues, contrary to the prevalent interpretation, for the claim that Kant and Spinoza share the same ideal of moral action as self-realization rather than self-sacrifice. Frequent references of Kant to the necessity of self-sacrifice in morality I attempt to make understandable by invoking Spinoza's notion of the proper order of philosophizing. This attempt comes at the very end of the paper.

1.

In 1901, German theologian and philosopher Carl Friedrich Heman wrote that "fire and water cannot be compared; just as the dogmatist Spinoza cannot be compared with Kant, the critic (Heman 1901: 319)" [2]. According to Heman, the radical incommensurability between the thought of Kant and Spinoza takes place not only in the field of theoretical philosophy, but pertains to ethics and anthropology as well:

> The main difference in the general conception of man in the two philosophers is that in Spinoza man is only a transient product of nature, whereas in Kant he is an innate moral personality, created for eternal spiritual life (ibid.: 335).

In effect, Heman concludes, nothing more can be done toward establishing commonality between Kant and Spinoza than to indicate some "superficial similarities" (ibid.). This view went largely uncontested for a long time. More than three decades after Heman's publication, Leo Polak said (alluding to Constantin Brunner's *Spinoza gegen Kant*): "We have heard in all variations: Kant or Spinoza, Spinoza versus Kant, Kant versus Spinoza" (Polak 1933: 286). Even though Polak himself attempted to problematize this picture, it was challenged more systematically and comprehensively as recently as 2014 by Omri Boehm [3]. In opposition to Heman's conclusions, Boehm's book makes a systematic case for the similarity between the metaphysics of Kant and Spinoza and thereby constitutes a milestone in the history of the reception of their thought. Regrettably, while showing the untenability of the *clichés* that obstruct a clear-headed comparative interpretation of their theoretical philosophy, Boehm retains the "irreconcilability claim" in the realm of Kant's and Spinoza's moral philosophy. He traditionally pictures Spinoza and Kant along the subjectivist-objectivist spectrum (cf. Boehm 2014: xxvii).

This view of Spinoza as an utter "immoralist" (and hence the antipode of Kant's "deontological" ethics) is widely spread in contemporary scholarship [4] and goes back to the direct reception of Spinoza's philosophy [5]. This notwithstanding, some noteworthy undertakings to bring (at least partially) ethical conceptions of Kant and Spinoza together have been made. Leo Polak stresses the "ethical purity of Spinoza's teaching" and states that both Kant and Spinoza "in grounding ontology and ethics, fundamentally reject any heteronomy" (Polak 1933: 287). An earlier example is Richard Giessler's 1878 Latin dissertation, where the author notes that while at the end of the presentation of his moral theory (i.e. in the notion of the highest good from the *Critique of Practical Reason*) Kant seems to subvert the idea of moral autonomy, in the case

of Spinoza, by contrast, the doctrine of autonomy only emerges toward the end of the *Ethics* (cf. Giessler 1878: 29). Considerable effort has also been made recently to unearth the similarities with respect to Kant's and Spinoza's understanding of religion. Shlomo Pines's discussion of the "limited similarity between [Spinoza's] religious dogmas [from the chapter XIV of the *Tractatus*] and Kant's moral postulates" (Pines 1997: 35) is one prominent example. Anna Tomaszewska (2017), in turn, described Kant's and Spinoza's shared commitment to the religion of reason and their respective views of the only "auxiliary" function of the statutory religion. For my part, I have attempted (elaborating on Polak's insight) to grapple with the view of Spinoza's ethics as "heteronomous" (Kozyra 2018).

Yet the primary place in the endeavour of debunking the stereotype about the lack of any commonality between Kant's and Spinoza's moral thought belongs to *Motivationen für das Selbst. Kant und Spinoza im Vergleich* – a joint publication edited by Anne Tilkorn, which includes especially relevant contributions by Ursula Renz and Manfred Walther. This volume is the only existing book devoted to the comparative analysis of Kant's and Spinoza's moral thought. Despite the similarities between Kant's and Spinoza's moral theory emphasised by Renz and Walther, both scholars nevertheless stress the crucial difference between Spinoza's *Strebensethik* and Kant's *Sollensethik* (Walther 2012: 110; Renz 2012: 81).

Similar ambivalence accompanies Matthew Kisner in his book *Spinoza on Human Freedom*, where Spinoza's moral thought is constantly compared with Kant's. Kisner even declares that it is one of his aims to show that "Spinoza's ethics comes far closer to capturing [the idea of Kantian moral autonomy] than is usually recognized" (Kisner 2011: 12). His work is of great value also because it recognises the very existence of Spinoza's distinctive human-oriented practical philosophy, as well as his refreshing methodology, which breaks with the interpretation that narrowly follows the order of the *Ethics* and by the end of the book 3 is already incapable of assimilating any new ideas (ibid.:15). Wolfgang Bartuschat (although he draws no direct comparison with Kant) also bears merit for challenging the interpretative tradition that perceives the human being in Spinoza as a "subjektloses Geschechens" (Bartuschat 1992: xiv) or a mere "vergängliches Naturprodukt" (in Heman's phrasing) with no special standing against nature. I think that Kisner in particular is right in granting autonomy to the fourth and fifth books of Spinoza's work, which pertain strictly to the practical realm. This helps him to avoid the danger of "getting stuck" in books 1–3 and subsequently (mis)treating the two following books as nothing more than an insignificant appendix, just as Yitzhak Melamed – arguably – did. He stereotypically thinks of Spinoza as an "amoralist" who fosters mere "theory of prudence" (Melamed 2011: 158). Not surprisingly, Melamed also insists that "the most fundamental doctrine of Spinoza's 'moral theory' appears already in the third part of the *Ethics*" (ibid.: 159).

His methodological insight notwithstanding, Kisner still confers several schematic judgments upon Spinoza's moral thought, which I find problematic. Most importantly, he says that Spinoza offers "prescriptions for individual self-fulfilment, which rule out a [Kantian] conception of morality as concerned with obligation and requirements that arise independently of our self-interested perspective" (Kisner 2011: 83). This is the same thing Walther and Renz were concerned with: the duty-based *Sollensethik* of Kant versus the interest-based *Strebensethik* of Spinoza. In what follows, I want to undermine *this* opposition and show that the construal of the human being's genuine identity fundamentally intersects in both Kant and Spinoza: it consists in realising what Spinoza calls human being's "true utility" and Kant "interest of practical reason". I will argue, on the one hand, that the *streben* in Spinoza's *Strebensethik* consists in realising one's essentially human interest, which resides in *ethical-rational* action, and, on the other hand, that *sollen* in Kant's *Sollensethik* is in fact a *streben* of the Kantian "proper self" (*eigentliches Selbst*) after the realization of its ethical-rational *interest*. In *both* cases the idea of self-sacrifice for morality's sake falls out of the picture.

2.

There are some interesting instances of the "almost" in Beth Lord's claim that "[the 4th and 5th book of the *Ethics*] were almost entirely ignored by the late-eighteenth century readers of Spinoza" (Lord 2011: 18). Except for Herder, who is sympathetic towards Spinoza and mentioned by Lord herself, one should also note Jacobi's negative comments, which nevertheless show his concern with the moral part of the *Ethics*. In his book on Spinoza, Jacobi says that

> Spinoza [...] had to wriggle quite a bit to hide his fatalism when he turned to human conduct, especially in his fourth and fifth Parts [of the Ethics – G. d. Giovanni] where I could say that he degrades himself to a sophist here and there (Jacobi 1994: 194).

One must keep in mind that for Jacobi the term "fatalism" means first and foremost simply a denial of freedom, while he understands freedom in a voluntaristic, "Molinian" [6] fashion as an exemption from *all* determination. This is why he cannot appreciate Spinoza's rationalist notion of human freedom as a specific *kind* of determination. He ridicules this notion by referring to proposition 72 from the fourth book of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza insists that a "free man" will not lie even for the sake of saving her life. Importantly, as Walther showed (2012), Spinoza argues for this claim in a distinctively Kantian way by invoking the impossibility of the universalization of the deceptive maxim. Jacobi has no sympathy for this "spirit of syllogism". He says in the supplement to the *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza* from 1789:

> This is how [i.e. "syllogistically"] Spinoza proved that man, so far as he is a rational being, would rather give up his life [...] than save himself from death through a lie. And in abstracto Spinoza is right. It is just as impossible for a man of pure reason

> to lie or to cheat, as for the three angles of a triangle not to equal two right angles (Jacobi 1994: 347).

Jacobi's reference to the "man of *pure reason*" is an obvious allusion to Kant's ethical stance analogous to Spinoza's – an analogy that the second Critique supports (cf. the example of a man who finds it "at least possible" to give his life for the sake of avoiding perjury) and which will be forcefully vindicated four years later by *On the Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy* (henceforth VRML). This analogy is of particular importance for my purpose.To prepare the ground for discussing it, it is worthwhile to turn to Kisner's reading of proposition 72 from book 4 of the *Ethics* where Spinoza states that the free man, "as long as he is free", would rather die than deceive.

Kisner rejects the EIVP72 as presenting the model for human behaviour. He says that the free man, rather than demonstrating to a human being what she has to do as far as she attempts to be free, constitutes only "a kind of thought experiment" that serves "as the basis for deriving claims about the nature of reason" (Kisner 2011: 175) [7] . In line with this, Kinser claims that "if we acted like free men, then we would not lie to save our own lives, which would clearly violate Spinoza's ethical egoism" (ibid.: 164). This marks a misunderstanding concerning the relation between Kant's and Spinoza's ethics. Let us hear it once again from Kisner, this time in different wording: "Spinoza's moral philosophy, unlike Kant's, does not require us to act selflessly. On the contrary, Spinoza holds that practical normative claims are based on self-interest" (ibid.: 130). It is, of course, true that for Spinoza "normative claims are based in self-interest", but Kisner's and other similar readings – misled by the language of *Strebensethik* and the concept of morality as involving sacrifice – do not capture the real meaning of Spinoza's *true* interest. They also do not recognize, misled by the presumption of monism on Spinoza's behalf, a crucial *dualistic* moment in Spinoza's anthropology [8] : his differentiation between human being's conatus (/essence/self) "determined [...] to do what the common constitution of external things demands" (EIVP37) and her conatus (/essence/self) "considered in itself" [9] under the laws of reason. In EIVP72 Spinoza *exemplifies* how the *latter* conatus– "the part of us which is defined by understanding, i.e., the better part of us" (EIVS32) – is to be preserved so that nobody thinks he proposes interest-based ethics as the foundation of immorality. As he explains:

> I began to demonstrate them [i.e. the dictates of reason] [...] to win, if possible, the attention of those who believe that this principle – that everyone is bound to seek his own advantage – is the foundation, not of virtue and morality, but of immorality [...] I have shown [...] that the contrary is true (EIVS18). [10]

And indeed, the *contrary* is true, which is precisely what EIVP72 proves!

In his newest book, Steven Nadler takes Spinoza's notion of a free man seriously. He admits that it does pose an ideal recommending itself to those who have an understanding of "what they truly are" (Nadler 2020:

34). So what do they need to do to realize it? EIVP72 addresses this question. They must rather die than deceive. And they must do that to *preserve* their "power" of acting. Words like "power", as Eisenberg notes, are confusing here because they suggest a non-ethical context (Eisenberg 1977: 116).Therefore one is inclined to say that the "increase of power of acting" or "realization of one's own interest" make no sense where their very subject ceases to exist upon fulfilment of their conditions. But this reservation betrays the radical misreading of Spinoza's intention. Spinoza attempts to show what the human "power of acting" or "interest" *really* consists in. His view in that regard is as astonishing as in the case of the real meaning of the concept of God: to follow our real advantage means for us to act for the sake of the eternal (rational) in us which may necessitate the termination of our duration in time. In such a scenario – which EIVP72 envisages – what becomes preserved is a person's eternal essence, which, by the way, fits well with Spinoza's notion of immortality developed in the book 5 of the *Ethics* (a theme I cannot discuss here). Accordingly, Spinoza uses words like "interest" or "power" to clarify that the principle of "seeking one's own advantage"grounds virtue (even radical examples of it, as evidenced by EIVP72) devoid of self-sacrifice rather than sanctions immorality. In general, Spinoza states that those who preserve their conatus "from the guidance of reason" want "nothing for themselves that they do not desire for other men. Hence, they are just, honest, and honourable" (EIVS18), i.e., moral. Once we conceive of our rational-moral selves in abstraction from our "phenomenal" temporality, our true (moral) *interest* emerges, including the necessity of exceptionless truthfulness. If we identify ourselves with our rational "better part" and consequently realize *its* interest – which at the same time is *our* innermost interest – we will be prepared to die rather than deceive *for the sake of self-preservation*. This reading of EIVP72 explains the sense in which reason can demand "nothing contrary to nature" or to what is "*really* useful" for human beings, as Spinoza insists in EIVP18. In particular, reason demanding the elevation of truthfulness above life requires nothing contrary to human nature *as such* or to our *real* advantage which, as we saw, may consist in rationality overriding the prolongation of our biological facticity: "no singular thing – Spinoza adds in the preface to the EIV – can be called more perfect for having persevered in existing for a longer time". Let me remark at this point that it is noteworthy that the most important instance of Spinoza making himself clear (i.e. EIVP72) about what rational self-preservation amounts to is almost universally either ignored or taken for an obstacle that has to be accommodated to the image of Spinoza as an "immoralist".

Once we understand the Spinozian notion of the *vere utile*, we will be able to address Kisner's bewilderment with Spinoza's "ethical recommendations", which supposedly only blur his conception of the "free and virtuous life" instead of introducing clarity to it (Kisner 2011: 165). But this is precisely what they would do for Kisner, if he abandoned the assumption about Spinoza's indifference to the moral realm (ibid.: 81). Admittedly, if Spinoza is not concerned with morality,

then a great deal of specifically moral prescriptions that we find in the *Ethics* must provoke dissonance. However, given that the interpretation which integrates Spinoza's concern with morality (which he openly proclaims) with his preoccupation with "interest-seeking" is available, Kisner's assumption, which renders a lot fromthe *Ethics* unintelligible, should be dropped.

Not only does *Ethics* testify to Spinoza's concern with reason prescribing moral rules – in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* (TPT) Spinoza insists that nobody can be truly called "just" unless her actions are informed by the internalization of reason's laws, while somebody who acts morally only because she "fears the gallows" cannot be described as just (Spinoza 2007: 58). This goes beyond the "mere theory of prudence" that Melamed assumed Spinoza's ethics to be. Moreover, it is not an isolated theme in Spinoza's writings. It can be found in the *Ethics* (EIVP18) and Spinoza's correspondence, while TPT itself includes many places where Spinoza attaches critical importance to performing what justice prescribes not only "legally", as Kant would say, but also with the right "conviction of the mind" (*consesnu animi*), that is "morally" (cf. Spinoza 2007: 69). Spinoza in fact agrees with Simeon ben Azzai's statement from the *Pirkei Avot*: "the reward for performing a commandment is another commandment and the reward for committing a transgression is a transgression" (*Avot* 4: 2). In explaining what religion is to Jacob Ostens, Spinoza improvises on the Midrashic theme: "reward of virtue is virtue itself, whereas the punishment of folly and weakness is folly itself" (Spinoza 2016: 386). "The punishment of folly" must be understood here as the awareness of the subversion of one's true (moral) identity, which is necessarily accompanied by the feeling of self-*dissatisfaction*. The same holds for Kant; as Renz and Walther emphasize: for both philosophers the virtuous action is necessarily accompanied by the feeling of self-satisfaction (*acquiescentia in se ipso*). On the other hand, from the point of view of reason, the merely empirical *Glückseligkeit* is an equally worthless magnitude for Spinoza as it is for Kant: for the former, it makes human will "passive", and for the latter – "heteronomous", which in both cases signifies an alien (non-rational) kind of determination.When Spinoza famously says that we do not "enjoy [blessedness] because we restrain our lusts; on the contrary, because we enjoy it, we are able to restrain them" (EIVP42) he does not by far equate *beatitudo* (sometimes rendered in English as "happiness", which only adds to the confusion) with *Glückseligkeit*, as interpreters attached to the "hedonistic" picture of Spinoza would like to think. In fact, "lusts" in the above quotation fall under *Glückseligkeit*, a drive toward which has to be *overcome* by *beatitudo* standing for a rational-moral *affect* (for Spinoza an affect can be overcome only by an affect; EIVP14; EIVP37). *Beatitudo* amounts thus to a moral character, indeed, it is "a virtue itself" (EVP42). Like Kant's respect, *beatitudo* must not be considered an incentive to rationality (Kant 1996a: 201) but rationality itself under a guise it assumes in a being whom reason does not exhaust.

Let us conclude the problem of the tension between *Strebensethik* and *Sollensethik* in Kant. The analogy between EIVP72 and VRML is clear. Even though Spinoza talks about giving up one's own life and Kant – about endangering the life of somebody else (see Kant 1996f), both thinkers argue in the same way (as Walther emphasised) for the categorical necessity of truthfulness. In Spinoza, this necessity lies in the *vere utile* of a human being, which she recognizes unless she misidentifies herself with her temporality and in consequence attaches primary value to her duration in time. This dualistic anthropology is all the more visible in Kant. For the sake of the argument, let us assume that the "free man" from the EIVP72 is a Kantian subject from the VRML (Kant himself, as I already remarked, discusses the problem of giving up one's own life for the sake of avoiding perjury in the second Critique). The question that interests me is what, according to Kant, is being "sacrificed" to the moral law when the person follows its command and dies in consequence. It is, I posit, her *phenomenal* temporality centered around happiness that terminates, and it is only from this *irresistible* but ultimately inaccurate perspective rooted in temporality that death for the sake of morality can be considered a sacrifice (as far as sacrifice means giving up one's genuine interest for the sake of other values). Spinoza, by the way, also emphasizes that the human being cannot become one with her rationality and thus permanently free herself from the force of passivity (EIVP4). In Kant's words, the human will can be at most "pure" ("relatively" rational), but it can never be "holy" ("absolutely" rational). Based on assuming the irremovable imperfection of man, both philosophers accuse the Stoics of misconstruing the human capacity for overcoming sensibility. [11] However, strictly speaking, in Kant's view to identify oneself with the hedonistic-temporal (striving for *Glückseligkeit* presupposes duration in time) interest of the *homo phaenomenon* must amount to *misidentifying* oneself as long as one's "proper" or "invisible" self (Kant 1996a: 269) is the noumenal self under the moral law. *The Groundwork* argues that "as intelligence" a person is her "proper self" of which "human being [as a phaenomenon] is merely an appearance" while "the [moral] law interests because it is valid for us as human beings [here in the sense of *homo noumenon*], since it arose from our will as intelligence and so from our proper self" (Kant 1996b: 106).This self (as far as it is "embodied" [12]) has an interest in its innermost property– the moral law, which as a *factum* "arose from our will as intelligence". Marcus Willaschek stresses the transcendental ego's "interests" in the sphere of "facts"as such (Willaschek 1991: 177–180). For Kant *factum* is distinguished from a mere *datum* by being *produced* by transcendental subjectivity. This takes place in both the theoretical and the practical realms. In the first Critique, the "empirical derivation" of pure concepts of understanding is "refuted by the fact" of the synthetic a priori cognition (Kant 1998: 226). On the other hand, empiricism in morality is refuted by the actuality of the moral law, that is by the *factum* or a *deed* .*Tat*sache) of the pure practical reason.This *factum* is the product of our rational will and so it is in our interest to strive for its preservation, while the inclinations are

mere *data*, which stand in opposition to our *active* self, which unfolds as moral objectivity. The Kantian subject is in fact free only when it is *active*, and it is active only when it is moral. [13] Kant asserts that "the faculty for willing the known evil is [...] not really a faculty [of acting], but a possibility of being acted upon" (Kant 2005: 90), while "freedom consists in the capacity to act independently of external determining grounds in accordance with the intellectual power of choice [i.e. the pure practical reason]" (Kant 2005: 91). Similarly to Spinoza (cf. Bartuschat 1992: 7–9), Kant sees moral reason not merely as regulative for action (in a sense in which traffic rules are regulative for traffic because there can be traffic in absence of these rules) but as *constitutive* of it: there is no *action* properly understood outside of reason's moral precepts (like there is no game of chess outside of the rules of chess). Morality is the mode of human *agere* and everything else – immoral actions in particular – is an expression of our default "pathological" state. This gives substance to Spinoza's claim that the destruction comes only from without (EIIIP4). For instance, we can be sized by anger or hate (and to that extent abolished *qua* human beings) as far as they are alien determinations that we *suffer* as part of general nature, but we cannot be taken over by honesty or impartiality, which both mark our capacity to *actively* – i.e. *from* our (true) self and *for the sake* of it – resist the inertia of the sensual and achieve a glimpse of moral sovereignty within the temporal realm. This resistance, given that the correct self-knowledge is in place, will not be considered a sacrifice.

Kant seems to vindicate this dynamic on the political plane when he says that the properly republican statehood does not necessitate a *compromise*, which entails sacrificing something to gain something else. Rather, one has to "relinquish [*verlassen*] entirely" her "lawless freedom" and the apparent utility connected with it, and enter in the "rightful condition" (Kant 1996e: 459), in which she can flourish as a human being and thus act in accordance with what Spinoza would call her "real advantage". Kant emphasises that freedom in the political condition is rather actualized than "diminished" because the state's legal structure derives from the rational will of the citizens and thus in obeying the law they obey their "better" selves. There seems to be no reason why this kind of substitution of *Verlassung* for *Aufopferung* should not be retrospectively projected onto Kant's earlier moral writings, which are permeated by what Paolo D. Bubbio (2014) dubbed "suppressive sacrifice" [14]. However, already in the *What does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?* from the '80s Kant states – letting his latent commitment to the *Strebensethik* come forward – that the categorical imperative is "the maxim of reason's self-preservation" (Kant 1996e: 18). In the second Critique, in turn, Kant denigrates the moral importance of the "kindly inclination", banishing it to the realm of mere phaenomena and insists that reason, "disregarding it altogether, must attend solely to its own interest as pure practical reason" (Kant 1996a: 235). This is what reason does in VRML – it "attends to its own interest" while "disregarding the kindly inclination altogether". It, therefore, voids the sacrifice-centred perspective that presupposes a vital concern with the sensual inclination

that must be eventually *sacrificed* to the *alien* interest. Accordingly, acting from the categorical imperative appears as contributing to the preservation of our rational proper self [15] and thus to the realization of our *true* (practical/moral) interest. As Jakub Kloc-Konkolwicz aptly observes: "Kant's approach is not to say that ethical action requeries 'inner sacrifice'– abandoning one kind of self-interest in favor of another kind of self-interest, but to say that morality is the interest that is most proper to the human being" (Kloc-Konkołowicz 2007: 89). The interest of moral reason in Kant expresses the human being's *vere utile* (in Spinoza's sense) – consisting in preserving and perpetuating her genuine identity – which she recognizes as such as long as she identifies with the vocation of her proper self and consequently drops the sacrificial consciousness situating its authentic utility in something different from morality.

That being said, I acknowledge that this particular similarity between Kant and Spinoza is not easy to discern due to the predominance of the categories of the *Sollensethik* in Kant's moral philosophy. I believe that the tension at hand may be understood in terms of a certain quasi-methodological discrepancy between Spinoza and many of the representatives of the western philosophical tradition, Kant in particular. Spinoza himself mentions this difference in the *Ethics* when he accuses his predecessors – mainly Descartes – of not holding to "the proper order of philosophising". Melamed explains (this time hitting the nail on the head):

> According to Spinoza, you cannot arrive at God (or the ultimate reality) at the end of a process of purification of your concepts, as, for example, Diotima memorably suggests in the Symposium. For Spinoza, if you begin your epistemological journey with the beauty of Callias, you will end up with the purified beauty of Callias, which is still all too human. If you arrive at God at the end of the process, you are likely to have a conception of God cast in the image of the things with which you began your journey (Melamed 2013: xvi-xvii).

Spinoza's philosophy starts with the "noumenal" sphere, to use a Kantian term; the *Ethics* commences with *God*. Not with "beauty of Callias" or Plato's caveman, and neither with the Aristotelian *physis* nor with the Cartesian *cogito*. In all these cases the *ordo cognoscendi* – the order of cognition – precedes the *ordo essendi*, the order of essence; the latter being the aim of cognition's gradual ascendance. In Spinoza, on the contrary, the essence has to accompany cognition from the very beginning for cognition to come out right and not to construe the intelligible realm in "all too human" terms. Importantly for us, in Spinoza's view, the human being, in particular, must perceive herself "*sub specie aeternitatis*" for morality not appear to her as a sacrifice to a foreign power but as an expression of her innermost self. It is of course true that Kant does depict ethics as necessitating the sacrifice of happiness (see Kant 1996a: 171, 208–209, 261–262; see also Kant 1996c: 182–183) [16], as if happiness lay in the Kantian subject's authentic interest – but it does not. The genuine identity of the human being – her identity as a *homo noumenon* – for Kant resides not in happiness but morality. The thought of morality as sacrifice betrays the lack of self-knowledge that Kant himself (as enmeshed in

the actuality of the *homo phaenomenon* upon the misconstrued *ordo philosophandi*) often exemplifies, for this thought presupposes the belief that by pursuing the dictates of the categorical imperative, one's real interest is *subverted* instead of being *realized*. And this can happen only in the wake of a *failed self-identification* – an identification with oneself as a hedonistically-oriented *homo phaenomenon*.

I posit that the terms of the *Strebensethik* being eclipsed (however incompletely) by the sense of duty and sacrifice in Kant's case can be seen as caused by what Spinoza dubs "the wrong order of philosophising". Kant departs in his reflection from man as a phaenomenon with her hedonistic interest, which then is described by him in terms often indicating the necessity of placing it on the altar of the categorical imperative. However, this only marks the inertia of the primordial experience of the *homo phaenomenon*, which Kant did not anticipate with the understanding of the human being's moral nature. He suffered through the *homo phaenomenon* to reach the *homo noumenon*, which he ultimately did, but at the same time, he never recovered from the trauma of the struggle. Regardless of his *ex post* procedural postulate that "metaphysics of morals cannot be based upon anthropology" (Kant 1996d: 372), Kant's very thinking only *ascends* to the *homo noumenon* and therefore must make sacrifices *en route* to the *homo phaenomenon's* – Kant's own – "inauthentic" but persistent will to happiness. For Spinoza, on the other hand, this is not an issue, because he obeys the proper *ordo philosophandi*. In effect, Kant "anthropomorphizes" the *homo noumenon* and thereby creates an ultimately false impression of morality involving sacrifice, while Spinoza – who *descends* to the human being's moral-rational essence [17] – pre-empts the language of sacrifice and the agony of renunciation with knowledge about the ultimate reality.

Conclusion

Kant's ethics can be considered as based on an idiosyncratically construed notion of "self-interest" and thus as *Strebensethik* in the distinctively Spinozian meaning of the term presented above. In demonstrating this, this essay undermines the supposed opposition between Spinoza as a proponent of egoistic self-interest and Kant as an advocate of self-sacrifice in the name of duty. In other words, to use Kinser's formulation again, it challenges the view that Spinoza's "prescriptions for individual self-fulfilment... rule out a [Kantian] conception of morality as concerned with obligation and requirements that arise independently of our self-interested perspective" (Kisner 2011: 83). Instead, it has been argued that in both cases it lies in the interest of reason, which is identical with the genuine interest of the human being, to act morally in order to preserve and realize one's innermost self.

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Notes

1 Edwin Curley, however, has attempted a "resurrection of Leo Strauss" (see Curly 2015).

2 All translations of quotes from Heman 1901 and Polak 1933 are mine.

3 This conviction about the lack of commonality between Kant and Spinoza was initially fuelled by Hamann's letter to Jacobi, where the former reports that Kant told him he "never studied" Spinoza (see Heman 1901: 296), as well as by Kant's strong desire to distance himself from Spinoza's philosophy, which toward the end of the 18th century was still considered to epitomize subversiveness.

4 Kisner enumerates such readings in *Spinoza on Human Freedom* (Kisner 2011: 4).

5 The problem of Spinoza's fatalism as a threat to morality had already been emphasized by Leibniz (Bayle's famous article from the *Dictionnaire*, on the other hand, takes little pains to portray Spinoza as a morally subversive fatalist – it is rather concerned with the "absurdities" of Spinoza's metaphysics) and then by his rationalist successor Christian Wolff (who, paradoxically, was himself accused of fatalism by his orthodox-pietist opponents because of his rationalism). The controversial Johann Conrad Dippel also did much to spread the message of Spinoza's fatalism in early Enlightenment Germany (Bell 1984: 9–12). Spinoza's supposed amorality and denial of freedom, however, was not "canonically" articulated until Jacobi's *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza* (1785), the book that evoked the *Spinozastreit* and which, according to Beth Lord, was crucial to Kant's understanding of Spinoza (Lord 2011: 1). It also contains a clear expression of Spinoza's supposed reduction of the good to the desired (Jacobi 1994: 211).

6 It is thought-provoking that the irrationalist Jacobi defends the scholastic notion of freedom against Spinoza's essentially Lutheran denial of free will.

7 Although Andrea Sangiacomo is more nuanced than Kisner at this point, he nevertheless ultimately recognizes Kisner's interpretation as valid (see Sangiacomo 2019: 183). Andrew Yopua, on the other hand, does admit the

difficulty with explaining away the free man as non-relevant for the question of how real humans ought to behave (Youpa 2020: 93).

8 With an exception, for instance, of Bartuschat, who speaks at this point of "Perspektiven-Dualismus" (Bartuschat 1992: x).

9 All quotations from the *Ethics* come from the volume one of *The Collected Works of Spinoza* (Spinoza 1985).

10 Curley translates here Latin *pietas* not as "piety" but as "morality" which may seem controversial and possibly misleading, but in fact is accurate. *Pietas* originally signified a "Roman virtue" which "can be defined as 'the feeling of duty,' or more exactly as the 'disposition to fulfill one's duty toward that to which one owes it'" and was not limited to the religious sphere, as the word "piety" would suggest (Colot 2014:783–785). It is safe to assume that Spinoza, who was well versed in classical Latin literature, retains this – concerned with the "inner disposition" (*consesu animi*, in Spinoza's language) meaning of *pietas* (which agrees with contemporary connotations of "morality", hence Curly's translation) and prefers it over more ambivalent at this point *moralis* (cf. Cassin et al. 2014: 692-695.; as Spinoza himself clarifies the question in EIVS37 (defining *pietas* in moral-rational rather than religious terms),"the desire to do good generated in us by our living according to the guidance of reason, I call morality [*pietas*]".

11 Importantly, however, they do not say that a human being cannot master her sensibility at all – far from it, they only emphasise, against the supposed position of the Stoics, that she cannot do it at a stroke and for good (Kant 1998: 552).

12 Kant thinks that for (moral) interest to emerge a *competing* "interest"– that of sensual inclinations – must also be given. He says: "The dependence of the faculty of desire upon feelings is called inclination... The dependence of a contingently determinable will onprinciples of reason... is called an interest [*Interesse*]. This, accordingly, is present only in thecase of a dependent will, which is not of itself always in conformity with reason; in the case of the divine will we cannot think of any interest."(Kant 1996b: 67).

13 Even though Kant's notion of freedom seems irremediably equivocal, I argued that it should be read as supporting the rationalist conception of freedom as a specific (moral) kind of determination. And this, again, brings Kant closer to Spinoza (Kozyra 2018: 51–60).

14 Bubbio also notices the relevant tension between the *Metaphysics of Morals* and earlier *Graundwork* and the second Critique (Bubbio 2014: 30-31).

15 It is worth noting that the Kantian "true self" in no way allows for an individuation as a particular "token" of humanity. As Heinz Heimsoeth remarked in 1922: "Every interpretation of the categorical imperative [...] in an individualistic sense changes its meaning and essentially misinterprets Kant's intent. For Kant [...] everything comes down to a community of rational beings, which is made possible by the fact that all of them will essentially the same thing and that in the spiritual-rational core of their being they are totally alike. Only 'empirical' self is individual in the sense of something unique; the special character of individuals is merely a fact; it is not itself something of importance and value" (quoted in Hunter 2003: 287–288). Notably, Spinoza is "anti-individualist" in the same way: he insists that people who follow reason necessarily agree with one another "in nature" (EIVP35) and thus make up one moral *corpus*. Given Spinoza's influence on Rousseau (Eckstein 1944), it is not surprising to observe that in the *Social Contract* Rousseau insists on giving up merely physical individuality and entering into a civil state as a moral and partial being under "general will", which stands for the rational will of the people. As is widely recognized, these ideas had a great influence on Kant. It is therefore all the more important to emphasise their origin in Spinoza from whom – through Rousseau – they found expression in the writings of the Kant.

16 This is, of course, not always the case, since Kant does not claim that for an action to be moral, it *must* violate the happiness of the individual (as Frierdrich Schiller famously believed).

17 With Bartuschat's crucial reservation that he does not attempt to derive it from God's nature.