

Article

A CLINICAL SEMINAR ON SPINOZA AND BION: A CONVERSATION BETWEEN MILLER AND KORITAR

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The present transcript follows an online discussion held on April 3, 2022, between Ian Miller, author of *Clinical Spinoza: Integrating His Philosophy with Contemporary Therapeutic Practice* (2022), and Endre Koritar.

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Endre Koritar: Thank you, Ian, for introducing me to Spinoza in what has been something of a revelation and reading your book was an experience in itself. I've got to say that initially, I felt a kind of bewilderment—a fog of ideas was coming up, surrounding me in definitional concepts that were very mathematical—Euclidean. So, there were a lot of, let's call it, "pre-thoughts" or "alpha elements," floating around. But as I read on, the fog dissipated, and the disparate elements came together into realizations of his conceptual constructions.

The scope of Spinoza's work was quite astounding, and very much in line with contemporary psychoanalysis. I hope we'll have some time to elaborate on that. Essentially, what I am saying is that the structure of your book follows the line of developing thought from pre-thought—or alpha elements—to constant conjunctions of preconceptions and realizations forming selected facts. The concepts are Bion's as outlined in his Grid (Bion, 1989) but reproduced in the experience of reading, and the process of digesting Spinoza's ideas.

But let's go back to beginnings: how did you get interested in Spinoza?

Ian Miller: Endre, right before we began this discussion, as I was settling into my office, I pulled a thin volume of poetry from the bookshelf. Until I read

it, I had only a vague notion of what I was looking for. It's from a poem by Yehuda Amichai called "The Precision of Pain and the Blurriness of Joy" (Amichai, 1998, pp. 101–105). And you'll recognize its linkage with Spinoza in two ways. The first is that Spinoza was a great observer of underlying meaning in associative processes. A memorable example (Morgan, 2002, II. Proposition 18. Scholium, p. 258) is the discernment of horse-tracks on a beach by two very different people, one a farmer (who associated to the act of plowing a field) and the other a soldier (who associated to the act of a martial attack). The other is in Spinoza's fundamental affective triad including Pain, Joy, and Desire. Mediating between the poles of pain and joy is human striving—what Spinoza calls "conatus," an idea that is also called "going on being" by Winnicott (Abram, 1996), "Orpha" by Ferenczi (Gurevich, 2016) and the "urge to exist" by Bion (Bion, 1994).

My partial awareness of what I was seeking, still oblivious to that goal until I recognized it clearly in re-reading the poem, answers to the first of these ideas. Amichai's clear articulation of pain and joy answers to the second.

The precision of pain and the blurriness of joy. I'm thinking how precise people are when they describe their pain in a doctor's office. Even those who haven't learned to read and write are precise:

"This one's a throbbing pain, that one's a wrenching pain, this one gnaws, that one burns, this is a sharp pain and that—a dull one. Right here. Precisely here, yes, yes." Joy blurs everything. I've heard people say after nights of love and feasting, "It was great, I was in seventh heaven." Even the spaceman who floated in outer space, tethered to a spaceship, could say only, "Great, wonderful. I have no words."

The blurriness of joy and the precision of pain-

I want to describe, with a sharp pain's precision, happiness and blurry joy. I learned to speak among the pains. (Amichai, 1998, p.105).

I realize also, in listening to what I'm reading, Endre, that quite unremembered by me—that is, present if in a state of amnesia, so subject to acts of new reacquaintance and reconnection—is this poem's idea of "blurry joy:" and that too, is close to my discernment of Spinoza's "cloudy mathematics" (Miller, 2022, p. 185; Morgan, 2002, II. Proposition 28, Scholium, p. 262), the approximation, the approximation to a general law which can be articulated within the particularities of the patient's language, by the analyst, that I see as central both within Spinoza's dynamic

psychology, and to Bion's famous algorithm, linking the movement P/S>D (Bion, 1962; Miller & Sweet, 2018) at different moments of time.

But first, perhaps it would be prudent for me to explain the clinical perspective from which I read Spinoza. It is through the lens of a 3-ply psychoanalytic cord of meaning. The first strand represents the multiple theories of mind and unconscious experience. The second strand represents the different techniques and approaches aimed at the mitigation of human psychological suffering; and based more or less on the first strand's theories. The third strand is the value-system represented by psychoanalysis. This orientation has probably been the most successful cultural contribution of psychoanalysis in the 20th and 21st centuries.

In reading Spinoza, my orientation is toward the second, clinical strand; and I've delineated its various elements by crowd-sourcing (Miller, 2016)! Today, we have at our fingertips the most comprehensive psychoanalytic library of all time in the Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing archive (PEP). Along with more than a million pages of text, this archive provides a 'best seller' list of the most popular papers read by the library's psychoanalytic users during the last five years.

The statistics reflect that there are two authors whose papers comprise half of today's psychoanalytic best sellers! They both wrote more than sixty years ago, so psychoanalysis is kind of slow-moving in the trickle down of theoretical ideas that come to typify the next analytic generation's orientation. I call this the contemporary "vernacular expression" (Miller, 2016, p. 9) of psychoanalysis—and its chief theorists are D. W. Winnicott and W. R. Bion. It is from these five papers (Bion, 1959, 1962; Winnicott, 1947, 1953, 1960) both in their formal characteristics and in their conceptually generative ideas, that my psychoanalytic lens is ground.

Having described my clinical perspective, I return to your question about my own "discovery" of Spinoza. Actually, my pathway to Spinoza begins with Freud's (1905) work, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. His first example is the famous story told by Heine, of a Jewish convert to Christianity named Hirsch-Hyacinth (Miller, 2019). It struck me that like his character, Heine had a doubled-name: Harry and Heinrich. And too, Freud had renamed himself at the age of 13, shortening his name Sigismund—which was apparently a dead giveaway that he was Jewish—to Sigmund Freud, as if that wasn't. And both Heine and Freud refer to Spinoza—who had three names (!)—as their "fellow un-believer." (Freud, 1905, p. 77). This took me down the path of social persecution in relation to conceptualizing the unconscious—but perhaps more of that, later.

I got around to reading *Ethics* (Morgan, 2002), for the first time on a Christmas holiday in Tenerife. I remember sitting on a sun-filled balcony, overlooking the Atlantic, when I experienced what Gilles Deleuze calls the

“flash” of recognizing something profound, in Spinoza (Deleuze, 1981, p. 129). In this moment of epiphany, I understood Spinoza as a hinge between very ancient thought and what is most contemporary in psychoanalysis.

I was thrilled; and wanted to know more. My next stop was a now forgotten history within psychoanalytic development: a broad current of Spinoza study beginning with Freud and his generation in the German language writing of psychoanalysis, together with its subsequent jump to English, across the Channel, and then across the Atlantic to the United States. The American development extends from roughly 1900 to 1980, when it suddenly peters out: which led me to wonder why, with special attention to the German development of *Bildung*, or educational self-formation (Sorkin, 1983), which was the cultural crucible of psychoanalytic development.

Psychoanalytic readers have been very confused about the form through which Spinoza writes. I’m thrilled, Endre, that you weathered the experience of being thrown into this muddle and swimming your way out. That’s a very modern approach to Spinoza. Early psychologically minded readers either assumed that Spinoza was simply emulating Euclid’s demonstrative model from 400 BCE (Miller, 2022, p. 191), or else, that he was being difficult in approaching an important contemporary subject by way of an intentionally complicated approach. By contrast, Harry Austryn Wolfson, writing about what he terms the “latent” understanding of Spinoza in 1934—a notion already culturally familiar through the Freudian binary of conscious and unconscious processes—suggests that Spinoza presents us with an “apperceptive mass” which Wolfson likens to iron filings (Wolfson, 1934, p. 5). And the conjunction of our mental functions—perception, feeling, imagination, will, and practical reason—operates as a magnet, causing us to differentiate between different configurations of filings; over time, we finally come to understanding through this winnowing process.

Fifty years later, the French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze (1981), suggests that everyone reading Spinoza begins, like you Endre, from the middle. That’s also much the same way each of us encounters therapy—whether in the first session or later in treatment. We are always thrown into the middle of something into which and from which we have to swim in order to make sense. So, I begin my reading with this formal aspect of Spinoza, which also aligns with what we do, clinically.

This brings us to a notion of Freud’s, taken from Aristotle, that psychoanalysis moves us from bewilderment to enlightenment. Freud continues, observing that we are affected by the joke’s forceful immediacy; and that with this recognition, we understand that something seemingly

insignificant instead, bears enormous meaning: this is the step to the enlightenment Freud describes (1905).

I'll say one more thing, before reverting to you, Endre. It is an example that Spinoza extends, borrowing Maimonides' interpretation of the biblical verse, Proverbs 25:11 (Maimonides, 1955, p. 12). The idea is that the object of our thought is like a silver filigreed apple through the apertures of which, the individual glimpses a flash of gold. This speaks to the notion of there being a hidden unconscious, at least as it is hermeneutically revealed. But Spinoza then adds something which is utterly brilliant; and shifts for us, the whole notion of what his geometric demonstration is. While we think of demonstration as a large formal structure—and Spinoza makes full use of its axioms, propositions, scholia, etc.—he also breaks down what is demonstrated into geometric illustrations, congruent with the Enlightenment's New Science that was contemporary in his time (Miller, 2022, p. 167). So, he pairs the hermeneutically derived filigreed apple with the diagram of a circle in which the viewer is encouraged to imagine an infinite number of inscribed rectangles: both examples point to an infinite unconscious, similar to the infinitely unknown first cause of Spinozan substance.

Throughout the book, I argue that this method of scientific advancement points to general laws that trickle down through verbal use, in interpretive communication. This is the idea of mathematical formulation in psychology as advanced by Kurt Lewin in the 1930's (Lewin, 1933), and later, through Bion's algorithmic extension of Melanie Klein's model PS>D (Miller & Sweet, 2018). Remember that Bion, like Spinoza, also regards our capacity for linguistic explanatory communication concerning mind as a rough and ready, degraded channel, employing words originally conceived for other uses (Bion, 1994, 2005; Miller, 2022, p. 191).

Bion provides a royal road for understanding therapeutic process, in the shifting from moments of wariness and persecution together with emotional withdrawal, toward a reconciliation with reality at "time one;" and then shifts through an iterative process, forward to "time two" and "time three," etc. (Miller & Sweet, 2018). Whether we're experiencing it in an active way or in a passive way, we may observe such moments of change in the therapeutic process. What I found was that Spinoza does the same thing (Miller, 2022).

EK: Its always interesting to hear about beginnings. How a kernel of an idea got started. At this point, I would like to get into some of the meat of your book: essentially his concepts, his ideas, and why they are so contemporary. The thing I'd like to talk about is our modern concept of body and mind. Spinoza refers to this as a conception of substance, with extension, the soul/psyche (Miller, 2022, p. 155).

Here, he equates God to the forces of Nature and natural law (Miller, 2022, p. 154). So embedded in the discourse on man's divine nature is reference to the extension of substance to both his biological heritage and psychic expression of substance. Spinoza conceives of the human experience as monistic and different expressions of the same substance. This is quite different from the dualism of Freudian metapsychology as the interplay between life and death drives. Spinoza goes on to expound on the extension of substance in the world as conatus. Could you say more about conatus (Miller, 2022, p. 164, n. 17)?

IM: Certainly. The notion of conatus, or a *going on being*, is for Spinoza, simply what we humans do in persevering to live. And, while dependent upon our biology, human striving is consolidated in the realm of mind. Descartes earlier employed the term "conatus" (Miller, 2022, p. 217)—but under Spinoza's reading, body and mind are a singularity rather than a duality, a parallel to his relation of substance-to-extension.

For Spinoza, the idea of conatus also derives from the Hebrew of the 13th century philosopher/astronomer, Gersonides, with the term originally used in the 2nd century rabbinic ethical work, "Sayings of the Fathers," (Miller, 2022, p. 217) where its meaning is also *endeavoring*.

We find the same kind of impulse to thrive, to persevere in our being, in Ferenczi, Winnicott, and Bion: that ruthless pursuit of being alive, with an intrinsic affirmation or denial of what we know of ourselves and the world through perception.

That is, together with this *will* or human endeavoring, perception is the mind's gateway to the body, whose processes such as neural transmission are unknown to mind. As Lou Andreas Salomé observed, unlike Freud, Spinoza accounts for psychology itself, without the drive-demands of biological causation (Andreas-Salome, 1964). It's hard enough to think about the functions of mind, which for Spinoza are the experience-near domains of perception, will (or conatus), feeling, imagination and practical reason—without accounting for biological drive, which itself leads us into the problem of infinite regression because the idea of drive must be itself predicated upon as-yet unknown brain functions, themselves experientially foreign to mind. This is the beauty of the Jacksonian hierarchy, dependent concomitance: while reliant on a precursor level of functioning, mind or psyche has its own experience-near, qualities of function and relatedness: mind as differentiated from brain.

While Freud similarly utilizes Hughlings Jackson's neuronal idea (Grossman, 1992) unlike Spinoza, he opts for a Cartesian dualism, and posits the biological fantasy of drives. This is where Spinoza seems more modern than Freud; and in his fusion of the thinker, thought, and the thought's object, Spinoza's notion is intrinsically object-related.

Like Bion, who similarly employs the notion of “conjunction” (Bion, 1992), Spinoza generates a conjunctive, dynamic psychology with only a few functional elements. Conatus, operating upon perception, weighs pleasure and pain. Conjoined with these functions are the mind’s capacity for feeling states and imaginative representation, as well as reflective reason.

And Spinoza also considers the action of projection, the extension of mental functioning into the external world. There, the internal registration of joy becomes love and sadness becomes hate. The going on being of our internal worlds is extended into appetite, and our consciousness of appetite is what Spinoza calls “desire” (Miller, 2022, p. 145).

While he does not generate a process of internalization—leaving that for Ferenczi at the turn of the 20th century (Ferenczi, 1909)—such internalization is implied in Spinoza. The experience of our actions in the world, what Edward Thorndike famously called the law of “effect” (Thorndike, 1898), is again registered in the sphere of perception, where it contrasts, conflicts, and consolidates with ongoing conjunctions of mental function: and so, also implied is a kind of structuralization relative to our development of personality—at least in asserting the pseudo-truth of opinion and fragmented, deformed or distorted thinking, our Sullivanian *parataxes* (Sullivan, 1953) or Bionian *paramnesias* (Bion, 2005).

Today, we recognize this continuously iterative action in Bion’s post-Kleinian algorithm. In reading Spinoza, I came to understand it as a “cloudy mathematics”—a mathematically generated law, the kind Bruno Latour (2010), commenting on the development of science, calls both maximally immutable and mobile—in flexible allowance for particular or idiopathic expression. But my adjective *cloudy* derives from Spinoza’s literary reference. Linking his description of monism to Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*, a 12th century text in Jewish philosophy, Spinoza observes that the children of Israel perceived God as thinker, thought, and thought’s object, as if through a cloud (Maimonides, 1955, I. 68, p. 163).

Like with Bion’s algorithm, Spinoza posits a unified system of functional process, itself observable both from self-analysis and from the therapeutic position of the analyst’s participant observation! These functions work together, giving us a shape and form to think about, but without precise exactitude. That is, without passing the so-called evidence-based test.

What it passes is the test of the patient’s understanding when we attempt to stumble out some language, accessible to the patient. Spinoza, like Bion, recognizes that our language is ambiguous, often tintured with personal meanings, with parataxis. So, going on a step further, Spinoza looks at three levels of thought: (1) opinion, which is full of partial and distorted ideas; (2) hearsay, which is received thought without the benefit of lived, thought-

through experience; and (3) intuition, with its fuller scope of what is true (Miller, 2022, p. 191).

Such intuition, considering Bion's idea of the *significant fact*, returns us to the contemporary psychoanalytic playing-field. What differs today from Spinoza's approximation to what he called *greater perfection*, an Aristotelian idea, is that today, we recognize that such moments of arrival are only transitory; and often, their bounded rationality changes with new inputs.

Bruno Latour (2010) suggests that such clashes of received *constants* and moments of heterogeneous, temporally-constructed *existents*, run along the same line as Bion's caesurae (Bion, 1989). That is, ideas, all ideas, run a risk of surviving or failing across various gaps, hiatuses, and leaps of thought accented in the contexts of evolving cultures and times. What we have in any moment are transient notions with very long tails reflective of long workouts in the zigzagging paths of ideas. I suspect that this is how, while Spinozan thought once influenced nascent psychoanalytic thought, the continued prospecting of psychoanalytic ideas reveals constancies and clinical truths closer to the Spinozan original: transient existents drop away as constants emerge.

EK: That's a great summing-up. Spinoza's goal seems to be toward what he calls the emendation of intellect or attempting to arrive at a more "perfect" thought free of distortions (Miller, 2022, p. 191). This is achieved through self-reflection and self-analysis, thus arriving at an idea which is closer to truth, but the truth being defined as that which is closer to one's substance; and, that which takes you closer to your substance is pleasurable, whereas distortions of truth take you away from your substance and are experienced as painful. This is a different conception of the life and death instincts, as discussed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920).

IM: It's difficult not returning to Cartesian thought; but there are no life and death instincts in Spinoza. For psychoanalysis, the correction from this metapsychological fantasy takes us right back to the experience—near functionalities of mind, easily discernable to patients. Incidentally, in his *Tavistock Seminars*, Bion (2005) also recognizes that Freud's biological model is a usefully illustrative fantasy.

If I'm at all successful, my approach to Spinoza functions as a guidebook, based on my own subjective experience, leading through the perplexities of apprehending Spinoza: because there are many levels of definition, themselves intersected by Spinoza's more directive commentaries. It is like pursuing a line of inquiry that suddenly changes along the lines of a Bionian caesura (1989) or Latour's hiatus (2010) when another conjunctive idea shoots through it, changing direction. What Bion (2005), at Tavistock, calls the zig-zagging of ideas. And continuously, in that shifting between

bewilderment and enlightenment, one suddenly understands what was only foggy before. That's the bonanza, the intuitive experience of reading Spinoza.

EK: I'm thinking about the selected fact and Bion's Alimentary Theory of Thinking (Grotstein, 2007, p. 319). He uses the analogy of eating, digesting, and excreting as representative of how thinking occurs. A person bites into something, chews on it, swallows it, and a process of digestion works over the material ingested and either absorbs it or excretes it. Bion refers to a selected fact as occurring once a preconception meets a realization to form a constant conjunction or a fixed idea. And the realization takes place through what he would call digestion. But it takes time to digest the preconception before arriving at realization. I was challenged at arriving at selected facts, having to review parts over again, before digestion could occur. I want to say that I experienced selected facts several times in reading your book. So, thank you very much.

IM: Yes. Bion, like Seneca two thousand years ago (Seneca, n.d., 2015), recognizes that this process of change requires time. He illustrates with a quote from the book of Ecclesiasticus or Ben Sira, a work of ancient Jewish wisdom literature (Bion, 2005). And at the same time, as you point out with the illustration of digestion, Bion borrows from the Freudian biological model.

If we, as readers, digest Spinoza's conjunctive model of mind, together with the three strands of psychoanalysis I mentioned earlier, we arrive at a very useful scheme, all based in our strivings. As therapists, we all, together with Freud, Ferenczi, Winnicott, Bion, and Spinoza in his depth philosophy, operate from a position of extended conatus, desire. First, we pursue our inquires as (1) Aspiration. Next, we link the object of our inquiries, blended with Aspiration—such as the desire to mitigate psychological suffering and strengthen our capacity to think—as (2) Method, a self-disciplining of conatus, imagination, and extended action. And, from the conjunction of Aspiration and Method, we arrive (3) at our clinical Observations, focally integrating perception and feeling, as well as our redoubled imagination. Telescopically, Spinoza's model of mind extends this way to the therapeutic pair and its multiple relational forms.

But I realize now that I haven't more fully satisfied your first question, how it was that I happened to bring Spinoza along with me on a winter holiday, in order to read *Ethics* on a Spanish balcony, listening to the roar of the ocean: and the moment I recognized his centrality to our work.

As I mentioned earlier, I began with the doubling of names in the face of social persecution, reflected in Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). I became really interested in the phenomenon of

social doubling in reflecting that an aspect of one's identity was proscribed within one's dominant culture.

And then, through Spinoza's reliance on Maimonides, I began to understand how the same process is mirrored in literature: pointing, of course, to the layers of meaning under what we take to be consciousness.

Deleuze (1981) points out that in the 17th century, Spinoza's time, it was common for writers, like Pierre Bayle, to comment in a multi-dimensional, layered way in order to evade persecutory condemnation, the charge of heresy. The 11th century polymath, Abraham ibn Ezra, comments on this too, through the idea that "he who understands will understand," (Miller, 2022, p. 105, n. 2) implying the acquisition of wisdom, just as Maimonides uses the example of glimpsing gold within the silver apple.

Researching such literary and social histories, precursors to our current psychoanalytic reception, often had me ping-ponging across two millennia.

EK: If I may elaborate on that a little bit. Spinoza's writings and ideas were the outcome of rather tolerant Dutch policies in freedom of expression. Very different from, the Spanish Inquisition during which freedom of speech was repressed. We are experiencing similar types of repression today, in various places in the world. Such repression sparks even more, the desire for the individual to speak freely. This is what allowed Spinoza to utilize his experience of growing up in Amsterdam and formulating his theory of thinking whereas, if he was still writing in Portugal, he might have been burnt at the stake as a heretic. Thankfully, there are still places in the world where such freedom of expression is highly valued.

IM: Yes, however with a footnote. It was also in Amsterdam that Spinoza was excluded from the Synagogue (Miller, 2022, p. 102). And that writ of expulsion remains in place 300 years later! His writings, too, were published only posthumously, for fear of reprisal.

My thought, though, is that coming from a familial background of Crypto-Jewishness (Nadler, 1999), originally forced to convert under the persecutory power of the Inquisition, and now growing up, surrounded by a community of "New Jews," themselves schooled in Latin rather than Hebrew, and originally educated as Catholics, Spinoza himself was among the first generation in perhaps three hundred years, primarily educated through Hebrew texts. While surrounded by Latin readers, he only learned his Latin late in adolescence. I reckon that the Inquisition itself, severely loosened the primacy of religious doctrine for Jews who one day, suddenly became Catholics; and then, generations later, striving to regain their identity, found refuge in religiously tolerant Holland, after its Protestant turning from Spain. Further, the kind of heresy for which Spinoza was expelled, was also articulated by other members of his Jewish Congregation—and so, the Synagogue too, however Jewish rather than Catholic—

through its doctrinal rigidity, further loosened Spinoza's adherence to doctrine. However, he was indeed fortunate, to be raised at the ideal moment when Holland was asserting its religious departure from Catholicism: and his skills in biblical Hebrew were greatly appreciated by Dissenter Protestants!

This historical moment, facilitates Spinoza's emergence as the first modern Jewish individual, defined by his own thinking rather than by community authority. Remarkably too, is his philosophical shift from traditional notions of virtue and vice, implied in ethical works before his time, and the rather psychodynamic formulations Spinoza provides in *Ethics*. Human action would be based ultimately on the registration of pleasure and pain in the context of going on being, integrated with what Federn would later call *ego feeling* (Federn, 1926) and fantasy, externalized into our relations with the world.

Through repetitive iterations, and registrations of the contingencies of our actions, Spinoza generates a glossary of fifty-two affective-behavioral schemes, themselves paralleling historical philosophical examples of virtue and vice.

By understanding how we come to think, we achieve a limited freedom of thought: recognizing the overdetermination of our actions. Spinoza operates from the aspiration to explode human ignorance and our defensive deployment of arrogant omniscience. He recognizes that at best, what we know is limited and acquired by hard graft; and that we hide from the anxiety of our larger ignorance, loudly asserting the fictional *paramnesias* and *parataxes* of our opinions. Such defensiveness assures false security through its impermeability to learning.

Like Bion's exhortations that we tolerate or contain our anxieties as we confront the unknown (2005), Spinoza's psychology too, rests on the idea you mentioned earlier, Endre: that the first cause, God or Substance, is ultimately unknowable in completeness. We only learn little-by-little, acquiring bounded pools of wisdom, always to be challenged by our capacity for doubt, for practical reasoning.

Spinoza is appalled at our human greed, envy, and the murderous, hurtful consequences of our desire for social position and so-called honor (Miller, 2022, p. 112). By the way, with this last consideration, he also departs from Seneca's stoical conception of thinking, while retaining for himself, its ideas of necessity and sufficiency. However, like Seneca and later, Maimonides, his practical philosophy is extended in the service of a therapeutic technology of the self.

But this reminds me, Endre, that I'd not elaborated on Spinoza's basic psychological move. Just as you were speaking about the movement from Substance to Extension, Spinoza depicts a psychology based in projective

processes. The conclusion of the first Part of *Ethics* bears considerable illustrative similarity to the projective identification of Melanie Klein (Miller, 2022, pp. 145–150), while focusing on the error of human construction of an anthropomorphic God!

Thinking about our own challenges today, in the Anthropocene, Spinoza presents a psychological orientation well-suited to the attainment of what Seneca would term a “settled mind,” (Seneca, 2015, Book 1, Letter 1), the acquisition of always limited understanding and so, freedom, in the face of radical uncertainty. His psychology not only influences the development of psychoanalysis, but also meets our challenges today.

EK: That’s why Andreas-Salome (1964) calls him the “Philosopher of Psychoanalysis” (Miller, 2022, pp. 10–17).

IM: Exactly. If we read Spinoza clinically, we arrive at an extraordinary three-dimensional system of thinking, built of a very few elements: pleasure, pain, conatus, perception, imagination, reflection; plus, the relation to objects of thought, both inside the mind and outside, through projection; and at different moments of time (Miller, 2020).

Extending this one-person set up to the two-person fact of psychotherapy, we can observe both general laws of process and the particulars of what goes on between people.

Spinoza’s is a relational philosophy. *Ethics* concerns what one mind makes of another mind. The examples are many. If I love you and somebody does something to cause you pain, not only do I too, feel sadness, but I also relate through my own hurt to the person who’s caused you hurt. Internal joy is externalized as Love. Internal pain is externalized as Hate. We generate all these complex motivations based on how our objects mind themselves and are minded by others.

Endre, this discussion has been a terrific workout. Thanks!

NOTES

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