IDENTITY, AGREEMENT AND 'OTHERING': SPINOZA'S POLITICS OF RECOGNITION

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Abstract: I argue in this paper that Spinoza's philosophy gives us a useful perspective on identity politics. His political works reveal cultural imaginaries as essentially contrary. On the one hand, they enact elements of genuine recognition of agreement in nature and reinforce this by providing a basis for reinforcing likeness among people within a society or community. On the other, in enacting and delineating partial recognitions of agreement in nature, such imaginaries necessarily also generate division and potential conflict, in that they construct likeness within a community relative to, and by contrast with, outsiders. Thus realising the genuine advantages of likeness, through cultivating some specific identity or agreement in nature, entails a process of 'othering' towards those who are not recognised as 'like'. Spinoza's analysis of affect and identification of epistemic and political virtues indicates how the advantages of identity may be realised without incurring the adverse effects of conflict.

Keywords: Spinoza, recognition, identity, politics, inadequate idea.

Readers of Spinoza often struggle with how his political writings, with their lessons from history and pragmatic prescriptions, should be understood in relation to the deep philosophical project of the *Ethics*. Interpretations of the *Tractatus Theologico Politicus* (*TTP*) and the *Tractatus Politicus* (*TP*) vary widely in their assessments – for some, Spinoza's primary concern in these works is to identify the kinds of political configurations which are most apt for supporting philosophers in their vital work; for others, the political writings demonstrate that the worldly domain of politics can never aspire to true philosophy, and that the business of politics is merely a pragmatic question of finding the right balance between coercion and licence to keep the peace[1].

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[1] Variations on the first strand of interpretation include Tom SORREL, *Spinoza's Unstable Politics of Freedom*, in C. HUENMANN (ed.), *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008, pp. 147-165; Eugene GARVER, *Why Can't We All Just Get Along?: the Reasonable vs the Rational According to Spinoza*, in "Political Theory", n. 38, v. 6, year 2010, pp. 838-858; Sandra FIELD, *The State: Spinoza's Institutional Turn*, in A. SANTOS CAMPOS *Spinoza: Basic Concepts*, Imprint Academic, Exeter 2015, pp. 198-214; examples of the second include Douglas DEN UYL,

Either way, in Anglophone readings of Spinoza the political works are nearly always taken to occupy a conceptual space separate from, and lesser than, the *Ethics*[2].

Here I argue that the reverse is the case: that the political is vitally important to Spinoza, and that his political works are in a sense the culmination of his philosophy. I propose that Spinoza's political prescriptions, from the call for state support of the freedom to philosophise in the *TTP* to the boundaries to political participation drawn in the *TP*, can be traced directly to his account of the workings of the human mind in Parts 2 and 3 of the *Ethics*. Further, I suggest that the blessedness to which Spinoza directs us in Part 5 of the *Ethics* is determined within the forms of life available to those who seek blessedness: that is, human beings. The political, as the domain in which human freedom is framed, lived, and constantly re-imagined, is the arena for our realisation of the highest human good. In other words, we come to know blessedness through knowing ourselves, and we come to know ourselves through the ways in which we live with others, that is, through our relations with those who share in or are outside the ways of life we desire and create for ourselves.

For this reason, I characterise Spinoza's political philosophy as a philosophy of recognition. However, some clarification is required here. The recognition we find in Spinoza's philosophy is not a proto-Hegelian recognition, in which what we recognise is something essential about another which corresponds to something essential in ourselves, generating an agonistic playing-out of conflict towards dialectical resolution. Rather, we recognise *effects* brought about by another as similar to our own, and in this recognition become aware of the potential for engaging in shared projects.

Power, State, and Freedom, Van Gorcum, Assen, 1983; Aaron GARRET, *Knowing the Essence of the State in Spinoza's Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, in "European Journal of Philosophy", n. 20, v. 1, year 2012, pp. 50–73; Julie COOPER, *Statesmen versus Philosophers: Experience and Method in Spinoza's Political Treatise*, in Y. Y. MELAMED and H. SHARP (eds.), *Spinoza's Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2018, pp. 29-46.

[2] European currents of interpretation tend to a more holistic understanding of Spinoza's politics: see for example Étienne BALIBAR, *Spinoza and Politics*, Verso, London 2008; Antonio NEGRI, *Subversive Spinoza: (Un)Contemporary Variations*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2004; Francesco DEL LUCCHESE, *Conflict, Power, and Multitude in Machiavelli and Spinoza*, Continuum, London 2009; Frederika SPINDLER, *Multitude and Democracy*, in M. Sá C. SCHUBACK and L. C. PEREIRA (eds.) *Time and Form: Essays on Philosophy, Logic, Art and Politics*, Axl Books, Stockholm, 2014, pp. 127-139. In such readings, what Spinoza has to say about the mechanics of political formation tends to take second place to consideration of the ontology and expression of social forces.

Recognition is the means by which we enact the agreements in nature which are our means to empowerment through overcoming the divisions fostered by affect.

Nonetheless, recognition may take problematic forms. Indeed Sharp[3], while conceding that political contexts in some sense actualise mutual recognition among people, has questioned whether we should in fact understand Spinoza's politics as being about recognition. She has suggested that a politics of recognition tends to crystallise identities – tribes, nationalities, genders, species – in ways which appear inimical to Spinoza's holistic conception of nature. As an alternative, she proposes that Spinoza gives us a politics of denaturalisation in which, as parts of nature, we realise mental harmony and blessedness by navigating the conflicts which are a necessary part of our place in nature so as to realise a "differentiated unity characteristic of true harmony"[4].

I appreciate Sharp's insight that there is a tension between the deliverances of mechanisms of recognition – what recognition gives us – and our ontological standing, as modes of a single substance, within Spinoza's metaphysics. Indeed, this paper owes much to that insight. Nonetheless, I shall make the case for seeing the concept of recognition as playing a vital role in Spinoza's political philosophy. On the one hand, understanding what recognition consists in makes sense of the necessary imperfection of political institutions and customs: they are intermediate entities, never complete or uncontested, but nonetheless explicable in terms of their origins. On the other, the advantages of recognition come at a price: those whose effects are not recognised as 'like', or as in agreement with our own, do not merely stand beyond the boundaries of our shared projects but are actively kept out of and estranged from them as we shore up their defences. Thus conflict is the product, not of recognition itself but of the means by which we seek to defend the gains we have made through recognition. We overcome our enslavement to affect only by binding ourselves to the particular forms of association which manifest a limited recognition of agreements in nature. On my interpretation of Spinoza, therefore, recognition is first of all the means by which we may become more free and, at the same time, the source of self-imposed constraints on further recognition and thus on our likelihood of increasing our freedom. Such

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[3] Hasana SHARP, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2011.

[4] Hasana SHARP, *Family Quarrels and Mental Harmony: Spinoza's Oikos-Polis Analogy*, in Y. Y. MELAMED and H. SHARP (eds.) *Spinoza's Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2018, pp. 93-110.

constraints can only be overcome by cultivating receptivity to others so as to improve our understanding.

Commentators on Spinoza's political philosophy have identified the central role given to the state in forming its citizens' behaviours and values and in cultivating epistemic virtues such as openness and sincerity in consideration of new or challenging ideas[5]. Developing these lines of interpretation, Armstrong[6] identifies cultivating agreement with others as a means by which people successfully increase their autonomy – that is, increase their power to act in reliably self-enhancing ways and decrease their subjection to the arbitrary power of external forces, or affects. As a manifestation of such cultivated agreement, the state is therefore the locus of human freedom not merely insofar as it protects those within it from threat by other people or from the inconveniences of the state of nature, but positively, in providing a context for agreement and cooperation. In other words, the freedom represented by the state is not limited to the negative freedom of protection from interference; the state also facilitates the creation of a new, broader repertoire of freedom which is essentially relational, coming about through the cultivation of empowering relations with other people.

Like other readers of Spinoza who are interested in the co-constitution of states and subjects, Armstrong rightly draws our attention to the pivotal role which the state plays in Spinoza's account of how human beings enhance their freedom. The state is the arena in which human beings can cultivate ways of being which are based on agreement, and to characterise such agreements as fictions – however rich and enabling – does not do justice to the role they must play in Spinoza's political philosophy. But whereas Armstrong discusses the formation of such cultivated agreement primarily in epistemological terms – cultivated agreement is the outcome of our deploying our reason – I want to press the case for seeing the many and varied forms of cultivated agreement among human beings as ontologically significant.

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[5] Leading examples of this strand of Spinoza interpretation are to be found in Susan JAMES, *Creating Rational Understanding: Spinoza as a Social Epistemologist*, in "Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume" n. 85, year 2011, pp. 181-199 and Moira GATENS, *The Politics of the Imagination,* in M. GATENS (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Benedict de Spinoza*, Penn State University Press, University Park 2009, pp. 189-210.

[6] Aurelia ARMSTRONG, *Spinoza's Ethics and Politics of Freedom: Active and Passive Power*, in A. K. KORDELA and D. VARDOULAKIS (eds.), *Spinoza's Authority Volume I: Resistance and Power in Ethics*, Bloomsbury, London 2017, pp. 33-56.

I suggest that what we see in states and other social groupings is the formation of entities whose composition is enabled and constituted by agreement among people; and that the agreement which matters in this composition is not discursive agreement, but the varying extent of our recognition of actual – that is, ontological – agreement in nature. Of course, this does not count it out that discursive agreement may be *involved* in creating and shaping political entities; but such discursive agreement is itself possible only on the basis of certain effects of our actual agreement in nature, and is structured and expressed only in those ways which reflect our recognition of those effects. Armstrong argues that we achieve the situation of being protected within the state by seeking agreement in nature through reasoned discourse. And of course, in the good case that may happen: a large assembly, in which everyone is equally able to voice their opinions and to be heard as equals is, at least according to Spinoza, likely to avoid the greatest absurdities. But there are less good cases – cases of coercion, conquest, colonisation – in which discursive agreement clearly takes at best second place to the blatant exploitation of imbalances in power. Indeed, from a historical perspective we might think that such cases are considerably more numerous; and for Spinoza, a state formed forcibly is just as much a shared project among those who live in it as a state formed through negotiation and reasoned discourse, notwithstanding the variable extent of agency available to different participants in that project. Further, Spinoza does not limit the right of the state and those who wield its power to those actions which are undertaken in the positive interest of all citizens. On the contrary, he concedes that the right of the sovereign powers extends to everything they can successfully attempt – the fact that such attempts may ultimately prove to be self-destructive is no moral or actual constraint on their actions.

In other words, Spinoza does not exclude the possibility that states may be formed which have little or no commitment to acting in the interests of all their citizens. Nonetheless, such entities could not come into being *at all* if there were no agreement in nature among those who find themselves embraced by their laws. Agreement in nature in this sense is nothing to do with discourse or finding a common cause. It is conceivable that human societies could be formed by deliberative or practical consensus, as Spinoza hypothesizes in Chapter 16 of the *TTP*. But Spinoza's insistence that people must obey the laws of the state in which they live (for example *TTP*4[7]; *TTP*16[26]-[27]; *TP*3.1, *TP*3.3) apply regardless of how that state came into being: Spinoza does not concede that people may owe less obedience to the law if they live

in a state which is oppressive. Discursive agreement, then, seems dispensable, even if it may be desirable.

Agreement in nature, on the other hand, is indispensable: without such agreement shared projects such as states simply could not come about. This raises the question of what it means to say that a political entity manifests some true agreement in nature among people. I said earlier that recognising agreement in nature should not be understood as relying on a coincidence of essence in the parties to recognition[7]; nor can mutual recognition be taken as necessarily available to things which in fact do agree in nature. Indeed, the consequence of our existence as finite modes is that we are poorly situated to recognise the truth of our ontological standing: that is, that we are parts of nature and that the bewildering array of other things which we encounter as we make our way in the world are also part of the same nature. Further, the simple fact of this truth, even if we know it – maybe if we have read Part 1 of Spinoza's *Ethics*, for example – will not help us much in the business of making our way in the world. For the fact that all modes are parts of the same nature – modes of one substance – does not make lions less fierce, or webcap mushrooms less poisonous, or water more buoyant, or moving vehicles less apt to knock one down. To be a finite mode is to be something which is differentiated from other finite modes, and which faces significant epistemic and affective barriers to recognising even those beings most like – that is, agreeing in nature with – oneself. It is also to be something which strives to persist in being and which constantly encounters other finite modes which are also striving to persist in being and whose strivings may get in the way of our own. In such conditions, agreement in nature can seem overwhelmingly difficult to perceive. Indeed, Spinoza insists that human beings are driven apart by affect (*E*4p33d), and since experiencing affect is something we cannot avoid it seems that seeking to enact whatever agreement in nature is present between ourselves and other beings will be fraught with difficulty.

Nonetheless, agreements in nature are indeed enacted, all the time. Any finite mode which is a composite entity is itself an enactment of agreement in nature, as the Physical Interlude following *E*2p13 makes clear. For what brings about such composition is that

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[7] On my interpretation, Spinoza's philosophy contains no substantive concept of essence for dependent finite modes. Rather, every individual existent mode expresses God's essence (*E*1p25), and not some individual essence particular to it. When Spinoza alludes to the varying 'natures' of things, such as to human nature and equine nature (*E*3p57s) this is not a postulation of essences but an allusion to the universals which are categorisations of our imagination (*E*2p40s1).

bodies are affected by some thing common among them – some shared property or fact (*E*2p13s, l3a2"d). The existence of a composite entity, then, is evidence of the presence of genuine commonalities, or agreements in nature, among its constituent entities, however much these constituent entities vary in their composition or capabilities. A human body, for example, is composed of entities – including entities, such as bacteria in the gut, which are identifiable as separate (but not independent) living beings – which bear no surface similarity or resemblance to a human being but which have sufficient commonalities with that human body to sustain a shared existence with it. I take it that we should understand states and social formations within Spinoza's philosophy as being comparable composite entities: entities which, for all their diversity in appearance, expression and effect must be grounded in some genuine agreement in nature. This, however, is not to claim that they are organic and self-organising: while Spinoza's philosophy certainly suggests that coexistence with other human beings is intrinsic to living a good life (*E*4p18d; *TP*3.5; *TTP*16[12]), this principle does not entail any specific manifestation of the social. Rather, actual social formations of varying kinds are brought into being through distinctively human actions and interactions (*TTP* chapters 17, 18; *TP* chapters 5, 7, 8, 9): they are products of human agency. The question to be answered in the political domain, then, is not whether the existence of social formations *per se* indicates commonality among human beings, but how we should understand social formations as created entities which enact and express both commonalities and differences among the people who live within them. This in turn will give rise to philosophical considerations concerning the consequences of particular ways of enacting and expressing commonality and difference which are brought about or sanctioned within such entities.

To clarify this point, it is helpful to consider how less complex entities are brought into being through human agency. For example, in order to increase her power, someone might perceive that there are things in the world around her which would be good for making a shelter (let's say she has gone hiking and is stranded in fog, so her best course of action is to stay where she is and protect herself as far as she can). It is possible for her to form any idea of a shelter just because of the real commonalities she shares with other entities, in that she and they are all part of the same nature, and the real commonalities her body shares with other bodies, in that they are all modes of extension. But this very general, high-level commonality is not sufficient to form the idea of any particular shelter, much less to bring such a shelter into being. Our hiker

must also be able to identify which of the various items around her may be suitable for her purposes, and which features of their composition make them suitable for the different components required for a shelter. She needs also to conceive of how those items may be removed from their existing position and relations with other things, and be rearranged so as to create a structure which offers the protection she seeks; and she needs to impose her own needs on the materials she finds around her. The real commonalities between our hiker and other things in the world are thus a necessary condition for her being able to conceive of a shelter existing where currently there is none, but not a sufficient condition for the shelter actually to come into existence. To make a shelter, the hiker must go beyond her recognition of the commonalities among entities and make use of the *differences* she perceives: differences among the things which make up her surroundings, and differences between herself and those things. Thus she needs to act on her partial imaginative understanding of the world and its constituents, and of what relations she may form with them. In consequence, once she has built her shelter this new entity is one which embodies not only her adequate ideas of commonality, expressed in her relation to other entities in general, but her *inadequate* ideas of her surroundings and how they may be adapted to meet the particular requirements for her striving to persist in being in that situation. As such, the shelter *partially* manifests agreement in nature between the person and the things she has encountered in the world and incorporated into her shelter.

The domain of sociability is the locus of people's ability to increase their power by joining forces with other people (*E*4p35; *TTP*16[13-25]; *TP*13). All such actions of joining forces rely on a recognition of something genuinely in common among human beings. At the same time, they also involve imaginations of shared goals, of what relations with other people are possible, of what lesser danger looks like or what empowering project may be realised. As with the shelter, people could not join forces at all in the absence of real similarities – agreement in nature – between them; and we may (at least in Spinoza's system) infer from their similar bodies and capacities that people ought to agree in nature with other people more than they do with branches, leaves, rocks and so forth. On this basis, the potential for people achieving gains in power through cooperation with each other is greater than their potential for increasing their power by making use of non-human entities. But the extent of empowerment they actually achieve will depend on the factors shaping their imaginative capacities, such as their preconceptions about how desirable it is to cooperate and what may be

achieved through doing so. Social formations, like shelters, are thus entities whose composition manifests *both* real agreement in nature among people *and* their inadequate, imaginative understandings of each other. For this reason, a social formation only *partially* manifests the agreement in nature among the human beings who create it. Its partiality makes it fragile and unstable – like an improvised temporary shelter. But if it has brought genuine benefit to some or all of the people whose cooperation has brought it about, those people will then take steps to make it more robust: including through the creation of sustaining imaginaries or fictions which justify it and celebrate its advantages.

I understand Spinoza's political philosophy as reflecting a conception of the state as a social formation grounded in just such partial recognition of agreement in nature. His political works certainly do include both pragmatic and ethical injunctions as to the conduct of politics, but the underpinning ontology is that the state *qua* entity is a social formation which only partially reflects the agreement in nature which makes its existence possible at all. And this conception of the state has certain consequences. First, that we recognise each other and cultivate fellow-feeling and solidarity at least as much through our imagined similarities, as through the real agreement in our nature. Those imagined similarities include basic perceptions of bodily similarity and ideas of what we may or may not be able to achieve through shared projects. More significantly – for us – they also include institutions, rituals, customs and signs by which we reimagine, mark and consolidate the identity which being part of some particular shared project confers on us. There is no suggestion here that the shared project need benefit all people within it equally, or for them to have agreed on how it will be formed and move forward. Indeed, social entities such as institutions and rituals are notoriously effective at binding people into their circumstances and excluding ideas of improvement, as Spinoza regularly acknowledges (see, for example, *TTP*17[8], 20[4]; *TP*2.19, 5.4).

The state is thus imbued with affective content: the ongoing affective relations of people living within it; the enduring traces of the affects, empowering and disempowering, bound up in the origination of that particular set of social formations; and the affective ties generated by the consolidated imaginaries which help to perpetuate its existence. The affective heritage of the state, as it were, is an intrinsic aspect of its existence as the composite entity it is. Spinoza argues in Part 3 of the *Ethics* that human beings strive to get others to love what they love and to hate what they hate

(*E*3p31c); and identities generated within social formations reflect the working out of this and other recursive affective processes.

Spinoza gives us numerous examples of how social existence generates solidarity and cohesion, and these are seldom unambiguously positive. Indeed, they tend to demonstrate that the cost of gaining an empowering identity is that of losing connection with – or rather, of actively 'othering' – those who do not themselves share in it. Recognisable symbols of social belonging represented by circumcision, on the part of Jewish men, and wearing the hair in a pigtail, on the part of Chinese men (*TTP* 3[55], [56])[8], are shown both to confirm shared identity and to mark those people out in an enduring manner, for good or (Spinoza is more inclined to think) for ill. Perhaps the most striking account of the complexity inherent in effects of social formation is given in Chapter 17 of the *TTP*. After offering his own summary of the Biblical story of the origins of the Hebrew state, first as democracy and subsequently as theocracy, Spinoza argues that its existence was consolidated by its people's adherence to their institutions and customs. This adherence took the form of simple obedience, on the one hand; and Spinoza also makes clear that it the Hebrews had a joyful affective attachment to their state, because for them it represented the realisation of their freedom. On the other hand, the affective dimension of their relation to their state was also embodied in a contrary aspect, their hatred of other nations. The Hebrews gained victories through the ferocity of their armies, fuelled in part by their joyful attachment to their state and their religion, but in equal part, and relatedly, by their hatred of people who were not part of their state and did not share their religion. For Spinoza, hatred always marks a decrease in power (*E*4p45). Thus the empowering effects of the Hebrews' enactment of a common way of life and an identity for themselves were inextricably bound up with the converse, disempowering, effect of generating a hatred towards peoples who they perceived not to agree with them in nature. The very form of their empowerment – that of creating shared rituals and practices which enabled them to live better in difficult circumstances and defend themselves against potential adversaries – generated affective content which brought about the unequivocal disempowerment associated with hatred.

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[8] I have been unable to ascertain whether the extent of pigtail-wearing among Chinese men was as extensive in the seventeenth century as Spinoza implies.

What Spinoza wishes to show in this account, I suggest, is not merely that states can become corrupted in situations where power is abused, or the reasons for institutions and customs are forgotten (although he certainly does suggest that strongly). Rather, it is that the ties which bind us in social formations are inherently contrary because they are only partial recognitions of our agreement in nature. They are partial in that they can only partially embody the extent of our agreement with those whose social identity we share; more importantly, they are also partial in respect of their scope, in that they fall short of recognising all of the potentially empowering agreement in nature which is available to us. Further, these social ties create and consolidate ongoing recognition not only through the enactment of similarity and agreement within a social group but also through deliberate contrasts with and exclusion of those outside that group. In other words, our social ties and symbols of recognition may act to bring about a systematic denial of the wider agreements in nature which we could in principle recognise, and by which we could, in principle, be further empowered.

In summary, I have suggested that Spinoza posits political and social life as a process in which human beings form identities on the basis of perceptions which involve recognition of some agreement in nature among ourselves. In that those perceptions are imaginations, they are comprised of inadequate ideas, and this entails that we only partially recognise the agreement among us: the true extent of our agreement in nature extends both more deeply and more widely. Nonetheless, such partial recognition of agreement is genuinely empowering in itself and as such is highly valuable, motivating us both to shore up those identities with imaginaries which typically exaggerate their benefits to us. Those imaginaries themselves are empowering too, in that they consolidate the gains of our social identities. But they also always contain within them some contrary aspect, in that they are affectively driven and reify the inadequate ideas embedded in our understanding of those identities. In this contrariness, they are inherently fragile in themselves. Further, the social identities which empower us are gained only at the cost of excluding or 'othering' people or things which do in fact agree with us in nature to some extent but who happen not to share our cultivated identity. The empowerment gained through recognition thus comes at a price – the price of missing out on further potential empowerment due to the exclusion of relevant 'others' in our imaginative and affective maintenance of boundaries for the identities created by the recognitions we are prepared to acknowledge. As the finite modes we

are, the social is our only route to empowerment and, ultimately, blessedness. Increasing our freedom is therefore necessarily a relational matter.

It is my contention that this philosophical understanding of our social ties as inherently contrary and unstable is at the heart of all of Spinoza's political philosophy. We see it in his insistence that laws both command obedience and are constituted by it – a law that is not obeyed is no law at all. We also see it in his exploration of a typology of political organisations in the *TP*. Social ties partially enact, and indeed reinforce, agreement between us; in doing so, they may have the paradoxical effect of isolating us from other relations which have the potential to empower us further. It articulates a view of politics in which – *contra* Hobbes – authority is never legitimised as such, only – temporarily and contingently – successful or unsuccessful in empowering those people who are within its domain; and a view in which those very people have the capacity for building on the empowerment they experience in ways which can overcome, rather than consolidate, the restrictions embodied in their empowerment.

When we think about the prominence of narratives of identity in today's political scene – for example of gender, race, sexuality, faith, nationality, of generation or of place – we can appreciate the force of Spinoza's complex theorising of the political. The identities which shape our understanding of ourselves may be inherited and adhered to from our earliest childhood or discovered as we develop our imaginative understandings of the world around us. Identities mark recognised likeness or agreement among those who share them, and recognised difference from those who do not: in Spinozistic terms, they are imaginations which supply the means by which we are able to partially enact the agreements in nature which we share with others. An identity is always empowering to some extent: it offers a place in a community of other people and a way of life which offers form and meaning to life. At the same time, an identity is always potentially disempowering: whether internally – in situations where the structures or practices involved in that identity give more advantage to some group members than to others – or externally – where the means of cultivating the identity result in isolation from or hostility towards those who do not share it. The fact of only partial recognition of likeness inherent in identities has the consequence that one's acceptance or adoption of an identity necessarily puts one in a position of facing epistemic barriers to perceiving one's agreement in nature with people who do not also profess that identity. However, this does not make such barriers fatal to extending one's

perception of agreement in nature: practising Spinoza's epistemic virtue of openness and seeking joyful affect (*E*4p26-p27; *E*5p10) will be a remedy for the self-imposed limitations involved in identity. One may say conceptually that identity is empowering, whereas 'othering' is not; only insofar as 'othering' is an intrinsic aspect of the actual identities we create and adhere to, do those identities impede us from further empowerment.

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