

ARTICLE

Education for power or the art of good meetings three or four ideas about Espinosa and education¹

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ABSTRACT

Starting from some of the ideas present in *Ethics*, such as desire as a human essence, the theory of affections and the psychophysical parallelism, we explore some possible relationships between Espinosa's philosophy and education, with the aim of making the teaching-learning process a emancipatory somato-affective experience based on good encounters between bodies-subjects with a view to building an ethical path for both students and teachers.

KEYWORDS

Espinosa; philosophy; education; body.

1 This article was prepared based on text from the postdoctoral stage of the Postgraduate Program in Clinical Psychology at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, Brazil).

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EDUCAÇÃO PARA A POTÊNCIA OU A ARTE DOS BONS ENCONTROS: TRÊS OU QUATRO IDEIAS SOBRE ESPINOSA E EDUCAÇÃO

RESUMO

Partindo de algumas das ideias presentes na *Ética*, como o desejo enquanto essência humana, a teoria dos afetos e o paralelismo psicofísico, exploramos algumas possíveis relações entre a filosofia de Espinosa e a educação, com o objetivo de fazer do processo de ensino-aprendizagem uma experiência somato-afetiva emancipadora baseada nos bons encontros dos corpos-sujeitos com vistas à construção de um percurso ético tanto de discentes como de docentes.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Espinosa; filosofia; educação; corpo.

EDUCACIÓN PARA LA POTENCIA O EL ARTE DE LOS BUENOS ENCUENTROS: TRES O CUATRO IDEAS SOBRE ESPINOSA Y LA EDUCACIÓN

RESUMEN

Partiendo de algunas de las ideas presentes en la *Ética*, como el deseo como esencia humana, la teoría de los afectos y el paralelismo psicofísico, exploramos algunas posibles relaciones entre la filosofía y la educación de Espinosa, con el objetivo de hacer del proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje una experiencia emancipadora somato-afectiva basada en buenos encuentros entre cuerpos-sujetos con el fin de construir un camino ético tanto para estudiantes como para profesores.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Espinosa; filosofía; educación; cuerpo.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a challenging practice. Even more challenging is teaching teenagers between the ages of 15 and 17. Certainly, challenges stem from working conditions and pay, always falling short of what could be expected in a country where education is an unanimity more rhetorical than practical. Rhetoric aside, the biggest challenge, at least in this age group, is what is often called *motivation*. We believe that every teacher enters the classroom concerned about the motivation of their students. It is said that school does not motivate, either by content, method, or even by the objective which it proposes. The fact is that the results that school achieves — and this can be interpreted in different ways — fall far short of what we could expect. Even in the most conservative analyses, which, in general, are the ones that prevail in public debate, school has weak results. Critics are not few who say that there is an inadequacy between school and the world of which it is a part.

In fact, in a broader view, few institutions have progressed as slowly over the past 50 years. Family has changed, business has changed, religion has changed, technology has changed, but school has basically been the same for decades. It is true that we have innovative schools, many with bold projects and good results. Few of them, however, are public. School in general, and public school in particular, is still overly traditional: expository classes based on the transmission of information from a predetermined curriculum, of little significance, which favors *thinking* to the detriment of *feeling*. We can affirm that, even in the 21st century, not only from a methodological point of view but also epistemological, our school is still strongly Cartesian. By this, we mean that school still conceives knowledge as an essentially mental process, understood as purely rational, despite the fact that we already have theories that postulate something beyond that (Illeris, 2013). By this point alone, we can raise an astonishing issue: that in the teaching-learning process, from the perspective of the Cartesian school, neither feelings nor bodies participate, neither of students nor teachers. Body and affect simply do not hold any relevant epistemological roles in the traditional teaching-learning process. Furthermore, when they do enter the scene, they do so either occupying the role of obstacle to “true” learning, as occurs with affect, or occupying a secondary role, as is the case with bodies, seen as mechanical artifacts that function as “support of the mind.” Moreover, affect and bodies must be silenced/paralyzed for the rational mind to “work.”

We can multiply the problem and also discuss the didactic aspects, such as pre-established encyclopedic curriculum, universalizing method, evaluation cycle geared towards “grades,” competitive individualization in the school experience, decontextualization of the content in relation to the students’ lives, and many other issues. Underlying them is the great question regarding the purpose of education — a question that seems somewhat *démodé* in a world governed by capitalist pragmatism —: what good is school, afterall?

All these issues, and the inevitable questioning for the possible ways out, led us to the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (or Bento de Espinosa), author for whom there is no knowledge without affect or body. In addition to this disconcerting obviousness, ignored by traditional schooling, we find in Espinosa’s work a power

that was able to affect authors such as Nietzsche, Bergson, Reich, Deleuze, Damásio, Maturana, and Varela, who left in their respective areas, among other contributions, important critical reflections on Cartesian rationalism. This power allowed us to envision as promising the attempt to link Espinosa with education, not in terms of educational or learning theories, but rather in the direct teacher-student experience.

Thus, the present text aims to find within the views of the philosopher Bento de Espinosa, and in alignment with him, tools that help to break down the educational act towards an experience that generates autonomy, for teachers or students, that is, to make the teaching-learning process an exercise of good encounters capable of increasing the power of those involved and, thereby, favor the production of the self — of bodies, affect, and thoughts — towards affirming ethics of life as a permanent process of creation.

Perhaps the influence of the Spinozist work will affect the bodies and minds of more educators (and students). After all, what can be more appropriate for education than a philosophy that affirms desire, body, and thought as immanent to life, capable of surpassing the idea of knowledge as a strictly rational exercise, therefore inseparable from bodies and affects, and that seeks the active emancipation of each one towards a singularity that makes life an ethical exercise?

ESPINOSA'S ANTHROPOLOGY OF DESIRE

Espinosa's work has been appropriated by many, in many ways, in different fields of knowledge, not infrequently, with quite fruitful results. The exception seems to be in the field of education. Few are the authors who have sought in the Dutch philosopher elements to study in this important field. One of the reasons may be that Espinosa does not specifically address this topic in his work, which seems to be the consensus among his educator readers (Merçon, 2009; Abreu, 2013; Costa-Pinto and Rodrigues, 2013; Novikoff and Cavalcanti, 2015; Oliveira, 2019). Some argue that there is, even if implicitly, pedagogy in Espinosa. This is the case, for example, of Abreu (2013, p. 10, our translation), for whom “[...] the Spinozian system contains pedagogical principles of fundamental relevance to the educational process [...]”, constituting in the whole of his work what he calls a “pedagogy of freedom”. There are those who see in Espinosa's work elements for a true libertarian pedagogy (Oliveira, 2019).

In fact, there are good reasons for us to bring Espinosa and his philosophy into the field of education, even if the ideas in question are not specific to this field. The first lies in his affirmation of *desire as inherent in life*. However, to understand the possible relationship between desire in Espinosa and education, we need to penetrate the intricacies of his hermetic philosophy, especially via his main work, *Ethics* (Espinosa, 2018), completed in the year 1675, although begun much earlier, in 1661.

In it, Espinosa (2018) affirms that there is one and only one *substance*, which exists in itself and through itself, independently of anything else, being eternal, infinite, and indivisible,² and from which everything that exists derives. This sin-

2 Remembering that, for Espinosa: a) no substance can have a beginning; b) a substance cannot produce another; and c) no two substances can be the same.

gular substance he calls *God*. “Whatsoever is, is in God, and without God nothing can be, or be conceived.” (Espinosa, 2018, p. 22, our translation). God, therefore, is the efficient or immanent cause of all things. There is nothing beyond the infinite nature of God or outside of it, thus affirming a *monistic* conception that there is a single originating element.

Espinosa further states that God is a substance to whose nature existence belongs, which means that the essence intrinsically involves existence, given that in Espinosa’s work there is no distinction between *to be* and *to act* (Ramond, 2010). In other words, God necessarily exists, as his existence and his essence are one and the same, therefore God is always in act. This essence equally means *power*, a central concept for Espinosa and which takes on a positive meaning in his work, since all power is power in act.³ The power of God is nothing but his acting essence, an absolute power of occurring, an absolute power of creating, incessantly. This power of occurring has neither an origin nor a purpose. It does not act as a means to an end, but because of its ability to occur, which is its *nature*.

Throughout *Ethics*, Espinosa (2018) identifies the substance God with Nature (*Deus sive Natura*), so that, for him, God and Nature are *the same thing*, that is, the only existing substance, from which everything that exists originates, an innovative idea, considered by some as Espinosa’s great theoretical thesis (Deleuze, 2002). The infinite substance, whose essence is a permanent and necessary creation of all that exists, is Nature itself. The true religion of Espinosa is, therefore, to follow the laws of Nature, the same as following the laws of God. Pure *immanence*.

Espinosa denominates this God-Nature as *naturing Nature*, an expression that refers to scholastic terminology and appears in his work already in the book *Breve tratado de Deus, do homem e do seu bem-estar* (Espinosa, 2017). As a secular version of the substance, Espinosa’s *naturing Nature* is equally capable of occurring in infinite ways from the variations of its attributes, producing infinite variations or *modes*.⁴ The modes do not exist by themselves, needing something else to exist, in this case, the attributes of God. Thus, they constitute *determined and defined* expressions of these attributes, which operate as a mediating element, a “common means,” which is a modification, an affirmation of the difference that leads to singular modes. In other words, modes are affections or variations of the attributes that create everything that exists, having God or *naturing Nature* as the ultimate and necessary cause.⁵ Espinosa’s *naturing Nature* is, thus, an absolute power of cre-

3 Unlike Aristotle, Espinosa considers all power as actual, that is, power in act, which is effective not as a possibility, but as a necessity, in that there is no power that is not realized.

4 In the Western tradition, *substance* is that which exists in itself. The *accident*, on the other hand, is that which exists in another, in the substance itself. Instead of accident, Espinosa uses the term *mode*.

5 Espinosa (2018a, p. 37, our translation) states that everything that exists is determined by divine nature, not only to exist, but to exist and operate in a *defined way*, which means that there is nothing contingent, so that “[...] things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced.”. Everything that exists, exists necessarily and in the way it should be.

ating, a veritable reality-producing “factory,” that ceaselessly produces its necessary existence through its infinite attributes from which all existing things or modes come, which he calls *natured Nature*. For Espinosa, therefore, there is only a single substance, the naturing Nature, which is God or Nature, from which is created natured Nature or the infinite modes.

The modes are expressions of the absolute power of the substance or naturing Nature, being that, between the power of the substance and the power of the modes, there is a difference of degree and perfection, which makes the power of the modes vary, unlike the perfect power of the substance. Modes, therefore, have equally the capacity of creating, modifying, and modifying themselves, for, like the substance, they are power in act, that is, they have an essence, which is their power, and an existence, which is their act. This essence, as we saw, is positive, in the sense that “[...] each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being.” (Espinosa, 2018, p. 105, our translation), being that this effort is nothing more than its essence. Espinosa calls this *conatus*.

Given that substance is that which exists in itself and given that the human being does not exist in himself but in another, it follows that he is not a substance. Therefore, the human being is one of the existing modes, a modification of the extension and thought attributes of the naturing Nature, whose essence expresses its nature in a fixed and determined way and brings with it the effort to persevere, or *conatus*, which, in the human being, Espinosa calls *desire*. “Desire,” he says, “is the very essence of man insofar as his essence is conceived as determined to any action from a given affection of itself.” (*ibidem*, p. 140, our translation). As a mode, that is, as a degree of the power of creation of the naturing Nature, the *human is a desiring being*, an equally creating force, capable of varying, modifying, and modifying and constructing itself, as long as it is linked to its essence, that is, to the infinite power of creating. This results in a *vitalist anthropology*, whose creating nature can make from encounters with others an experience of modifying oneself and the world, producing singularity.

FIRST IDEA: EDUCATION AS EMANCIPATION

Thus, starting from the general (and generic) assumption that education arises from the need to teach young people to become active members of their social group, the first Spinozist idea that we can refer to education is the one that allows us to conceive it as a process of emancipation towards the ethical exercise of self-production. Is there a nobler goal in education?

By emancipation here we understand, however, something distinct from what our schools, generally, understand. Political-pedagogical projects (PPP) and even school course projects talk a lot about the *emancipation* of the student. It is one of those magic words that are mandatory in official documents. However, when we look at the structure of the school courses, we see that it is an empty word, insofar as they are mostly organized on the basis of traditional education: pre-defined curriculum by the teacher, classes based on the transmission of content unrelated to the student’s life, single and imposed methodology, work en masse, evaluations

more quantitative than reflective. Now, what is emancipatory about that? Who leaves a course structure like this that can be considered emancipated? As Costa-Pinto (*apud* Novikoff and Cavalcanti, 2015, p. 103, our translation) states:

[...] since, according to Espinosa, each one decides what is good or bad according to his affects, a prescriptive/normative education that decides what, how, and when something should be learned is disempowering, as it stimulates the passivity of the person, generates sad passions, insofar as it distances the learner from his own power of thinking.

In fact, what underlies the beautiful and empty official words is the idea that the young student is an incomplete person, someone who has yet to reach a greater condition, a condition considered “complete.” What is sought to be “emancipated,” in fact, is this condition of incompleteness of the youth towards the adult condition (Rocha *apud* Merçon, 2009). In other words, for the school — and for the family —, the student is a *non-person*, as he *lacks something* that would be up to the school to provide, making him a complete person, according to the moralizing understanding that school and family have of this. The school does not see the student as a powerful being, whose life is presented there, at that moment, in act, permeated with affects, ideas, fears, doubts, desires, and insecurities, or, when it sees him, considers all this symptoms of his immaturity/incompleteness, as if the adult — imagine — were someone mature and complete.

In her work, Merçon (2009) speaks of three myths of formal education, which operate as justifying elements of its activity, namely, the *lack* of knowledge, capacity, and power, which education promises to repair, reduce, or eliminate; the *method*, or the set of processes that regulate the transmission of knowledge from those who know to those who do not know; and the *purpose*, which can range from the most venal utility to the ideals of emancipation. They correspond, respectively, to questions of *why*, *how*, and *for what to educate*, and constitute, according to the author, “[...] a complex moral system through which impotence is propagated and passivized experiences are constituted.” (Merçon, 2009, p. 145, our translation).

The previously stated issue fits into Merçon’s (2009) first and third myths. In the case of the first myth, there would be something supposedly lacking, an idealized condition that the student does not yet have and that must be acquired via the educational act. There is, therefore, a loss of the ongoing condition in favor of an imaginary ideal. Merçon (2009, p. 149, our translation) reminds us, however, that “[...] the lacking exists only with our judgment, with the attribution of something foreign that would, supposedly, come to accommodate what is to what should be. If we consider, however, things as they are, and the fact that they always express the power that belongs to them in that moment, there is nothing lacking,” and complements: “[...] operating in conjunction with norms or ideals, with the judgments and comparisons on which it depends, lacking is a moral and moralizing way of life, a living that accentuates impotence as the mark of being and teaches us to desire passively.” (Merçon, 2009, p. 149, our translation)

Now, we have here two positions: the transcendent position and the immanent one. The former, moralizing and subjecting, typical of traditional schooling,

ends up displacing the meaning of the educational experience from the present to the ideal future, by definition, unattainable, not only making school a meaningless experience in the present, but also generating inevitable frustration, as we will always fall short of the ideal. John Dewey (1933) said that education is life itself, not a preparation for it. It is here and now, in the present, that the questions to which students seek answers are posed. This is the life that matters to them and this is the life that school — and family —, in general, ignore. The latter position, on the other hand, understands that *students lack nothing*, since they are “modes in variation of power” in contact with their own forces, ready to be intensified if the school knows how to truly emancipate, promoting good encounters, which means there is no ideal to be achieved, nor gap to be filled. We are not referring to content here. We are referring to *forces*. It is of this emancipation that we speak: emancipation of our forces towards an ethic of the self, something that goes beyond school life, *but that is found entirely within it*. In other words, education for power presupposes a thought not as a mere intellectual, omnipotent, and self-sufficient exercise, but rather as an expression of a *way of life*, which, from power, is articulated with affects and the body, making the search for knowledge an ethical process. The school does not cultivate intellects; it cultivates people in becoming ethical, and *it is this cultivation that we here call emancipation*, therefore the antithesis of the notion of emancipation employed in official documents, pure subjection.

As for the myth of purpose, it makes education a static and predetermined process, aborting the possible experimentations that constantly arise along the way and that constitute the soul of an education for power. Everything that contradicts the pre-established purpose — getting an X grade, finishing the Y chapter, fulfilling the lesson plan, preparing for the (Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio (ENEM)/ *vestibular* (Brazilian version of the ACT/SAT) — is ignored or sabotaged. In education for power (or affective learning, as Merçon (2009) prefers), the end is always provisional and singular, “The effect of our desire or *conatus*, of our efforts to actualize and expand our powers.” (*ibidem*, p. 162, our translation).

Many will say that this is a subversion of the pragmatic and central role of school, which is to prepare the student professionally. They are absolutely right. It is, in fact, a subversion of values, but anyone who thinks that this diminishes the intellectual formative role of the student towards his professional life is mistaken. On the contrary. Unless, of course, we keep insisting that the main purpose of school is to transmit content so that students pass the entrance exams to higher education. If that were the case, we would end this text here. However, if the goal is to educate people towards their ethical emancipation, people capable of seeking what increases their life power, then there seems to be no doubt that there is no contradiction between education for power and a good professional training, as long as we know how to live no longer subjected to fear and moral hope. It is crucial that this is made clear. In the light of Espinosa’s work, there is no separation between knowledge and affectivity; rather, there are different genres of knowledge based on different affective regimes that, together, make up a way of life. Hence why knowledge can become an ethical exercise.

However, the ethical construction of the self or, as we call it here, the process of emancipation is not a guarantee, since it depends on a certain dynamic of relationships. This is because, although we are carriers of a vital and creative constitution, we are subject to the traps of relationships with others, which can distance us from our power, leading us to the slavery of passions, a central issue for Espinosa. Here we return to the work of the Dutch philosopher, more precisely to his theory of affects, in order to understand this dynamic.

FREEDOM AND PASSIONS IN THE SPINOZIST THEORY OF AFFECTS

We have seen that, as a mode, the human being is a desiring and creative being, as long as it is connected to its essence/power. So it is if human beings are free, if they act according to their nature. For Espinosa, human beings are not born free but captive, although they believe they are free. This condition of captivity does not arise from the action of others, but from the ignorance and, consequently, misuse of one's own affects that, hence, lead to acting without brakes and determines our behaviors. States the philosopher: "[...] lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects I call bondage. For the man who is subject to affects is under the control, not of himself, but of fortune, in whose power he so greatly is that often, though he sees the better for himself, he is still forced to follow the worse." (Espinosa, 2018, p. 155, our translation)

Espinosa places the question of freedom and bondage in an entirely new field in relation to the philosophical tradition of his time (Ulpiano, [n.d.]). Freedom, for him, is explained by the absence of constraint.⁶ Free is he who is not constrained by anything, who is not subject to the chance of extrinsic forces, so that, when he acts, he effectuates his nature. It is the case of God/Nature, whose existence realizes its absolute power of creating. The human being, on the other hand, whose power is a part of the infinite power of Nature, is not only subject to the movements of his own constitution, but also to that of external forces, that is to say, of *what affects him from the outside*. Espinosa (2018) says that we can be moved by *intrinsic* or *extrinsic* forces. All beings who need extrinsic forces to constitute themselves are passionate beings, that is, constrained by forces of fortune and, therefore, captive.

The question Espinosa poses is whether men are capable of constituting themselves from their own forces, or, in other words, whether men can be *free*. He responds by saying that although it is not easy, it is possible. To understand how we can become free, we need to delve into the Spinozist theory of affects and understand the laws that govern the dynamic of encounters, which requires starting from the definitions that Espinosa makes of the body and mind.

6 There are those who disagree with Ulpiano, not in Espinosa placing the problem of freedom in an entirely new field, but in where the novelty lies. This is the case of Marilena Chauí (2016, p. 507), for whom "[...] differently from what Descartes (and Hobbes) thought, what differentiates constraint and freedom is not the absence (in it) or the presence (in it) of necessity, but the interiority or exteriority of the cause that incites to exist and act."

Espinosa (2018, p. 51, our translation) understands by *body* “[...] a mode that expresses in a definite and determinate way God’s essence insofar as he is considered as an extended thing.” Everything that belongs to the extension attribute is a body, which can be simple or compounded, in this case, formed by multiple other bodies, sometimes equally compounded, as is the case with the *human body*. Bodies are determinate and distinguished from each other not by their form or substantiality but by their ability to affect and be affected, as well as by the relationship of movement-rest, speed-slowness of their parts (Iafelice, 2013), a determination imposed by the other bodies, which each body needs to preserve itself, being continuously regenerated by them. Therefore, one body can affect the other bodies or be affected by them in multiple ways, affections that leave marks both on the affected body and on the affecting body(ies).

Since life is an endless succession of fortuitous encounters between our bodies and other bodies, we are permanently subject to the affections resulting from these encounters.⁷ Espinosa differentiates between two types of affections. Affection of the body (*affectio*), for him, is any modification of the body,⁸ caused by encounters with other bodies, and that alters, whether increasing or decreasing, its power.

Encounters produce not only an affect in the body, but also affect any emotion in the mind (*affectus*), which is not only the affection of the body, but also the idea associated with it. “By affect, I understand affections of the body by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and, *at the same time*, the ideas of these affections.” (Espinosa, 2018, p. 98, our highlight, our translation). It is a variation in desire or power, increasing or decreasing, according to an affection of the body, which is simultaneously accompanied by an idea as a mental experience (Ramond, 2010). These fluctuations are basically three: *joy, sadness, and desire*, which Espinosa considers to be primary emotions and from which the rest derive.

Thus, the *mind*, which is a mode of the thought attribute, forms ideas from the affections of the body, which is its object: “[...] the object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, or a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else.” (Espinosa, 2018, p. 61, our translation). The affection that affects the body is accompanied by the affect that affects the mind. This is because “[...] the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.” (*ibidem*, p. 55, our translation).

Hence, when my body meets another body, my idea another idea, there are two initial possibilities:

1. there can be a *compounding* of forces, and, in this case, there is an increase in my capacity to exist, an increase in reality, and I experience a *joyful*

7 It is impossible to live without encountering other bodies and without depending on them. This is not bad. Espinosa goes so far as to say that a (good) compounding of bodies can make us twice as powerful. Thus, other bodies and the encounters we have with them are not only inevitable, but also necessary and empowering.

8 Strictly speaking, affection is a modification of any particular thing, but Espinosa uses the term generally in relation to the human body.

- passion*. It is a *good encounter*, and my mind goes from a lesser perfection to a greater perfection;
2. there may be a *decompounding* (partial or total) of forces, and in this case my capacity to exist is diminished, and I experience a *sad passion*. It is a *bad encounter* and my mind goes from a greater perfection to a lesser perfection.⁹

Thus, that which externally determines my desire and increases my capacity to exist produces a *joyful* passion; whereas that which externally determines my desire and decreases my capacity to exist produces a *sad* passion. Let us note that, in both cases, *I am externally determined* and, therefore, I am subject to the action of the passions, which puts me in a position of passivity, inasmuch as I subject myself to the external element which can vary independently of me. Even if I have a good encounter and my power of existing is increased, I am determined by external forces, thus, passive.

There is, however, a third possibility. Affect can be passion, joyful, if it increases my power; sad, if it diminishes it; but it can also be *action*. We are filled by passions (passivity) or by actions. Action, however, depends on the correct understanding of events, that is, on the mind being able to have an *adequate idea*, that is to say, clear and distinct, of the effective cause of what happens to me. If the mind has inadequate ideas, as we have seen, we remain in the field of passion, since “[...] the idea of any affection of the human body does not involve an adequate knowledge of an external body.” (*ibidem*, p. 74, our translation). Therefore, “[...] the activities of the mind arise solely from adequate ideas; the passive states of the mind depend solely on inadequate ideas.” (*ibidem*, p. 104, our translation).

The condition of passivity begins in the inadequate understanding of the nature of encounters, in the inability of the mind to have clear ideas regarding the dynamic of the forces present there and that keep it attached to passions, even to joyful passions that increase power. This is because passions produce in the mind confused ideas that lead to inadequate causes: “An affect that is called a passion [*pathema*] of the mind is a confused idea by which the mind affirms of its body, or some part of it, a greater or lesser power of existing [*existendi vis*] than before, which, when it is given determines the mind to think of this rather than that.” (*ibidem*, p. 152, our translation).

Captured by passions and producing inadequate ideas, the mind is unable to understand the true cause of the affections that affect the body, focusing only on their *effects*¹⁰ — the passions themselves and the marks they leave —, not their true causes,

9 This variation always refers to the previous condition, as Espinosa emphasizes the term *passage*, since it is not the condition of perfection itself that is joyful or sad, but the passage to more or less, that is, the variation. In the case of sadness, the power decreases because part of it is directed to the containment of one’s own sadness affect.

10 For Espinosa — starting a line of thought that will later be followed by authors such as Nietzsche and Deleuze — consciousness is one of the effects of the marks from the fortuitous encounters of bodies, which means that it is much more reactive than active. The man of conscience is attached to the marks and based on them creates a whole illusory set of rules that keeps him connected to sad passions and generates a lot of suffering. Therefore, the man of consciousness is a passionate being, a man in bondage.

taking the effects as cause and confusing desire with what happens to it. That is the point. Espinosa says that men are aware of their actions and appetites, however, they are unaware of the causes which led to them. That is why they are not free.

This error Espinosa (*ibidem*, p. 14, our translation) points out in the beginning of *Ethics*, in one of its axioms, when he says that “[...] the knowledge of an effect depends on and involves the knowledge of a cause.” One cannot know the cause by the effect. On the contrary, one only knows the effect by the cause. The knowledge of the effect is presupposed and implied by that of the cause, which produces it and from which it derives. It is, therefore, a mistake to fixate on the effect and to take it as cause, for the more ignorant of the causes, the more man imagines himself free, although he remains captive. This is what Espinosa calls *illusion of free decisions*. I believe that I am free and make my own decisions when, in fact, I am determined by the passions that affect me. This illusion is allied to another, which he calls *illusion of final causes*, which puts others in the condition of intentional agents of what has affected me. It is a projection of intentionality that makes the other a function of my life, a powerless life. Powerless life has the need to organize itself from an external reference, which can be the many people I meet, the law, the nation, money, or a transcendent God. The consequence of this is that there will always be someone else held responsible for what happens to me and, not infrequently, to blame for it. In the case of increased power and of joy, I consider the other to be the cause of it and I love him; in the case of decreased power and of sadness, what we call a bad encounter, I consider him to be the cause of it and I hate him, since “[...] love is a joy, accompanied by the idea of an external cause. Hate is a sadness, accompanied by the idea of an external cause.” (*ibidem*, p. 108, our translation). We understand, then, how it can happen that we love or hate certain things without knowing what their efficient cause is. We only have to imagine that the thing associated with the affect is its cause and attribute to it the intention of causing us what we feel, “[...] the mere fact that we imagine a thing to have some likeness to an object which usually affects the mind with joy or sadness, we love it or hate it, even though that in which the thing is like the object is not the efficient cause of these affects.” (*ibidem*, p. 110, our translation).

Thus, we establish an existence in which, at every moment, we elect a friend or enemy as responsible for our sadness, our hatred, or our love, exempting ourselves from any responsibility in any event. This is powerlessness or a passive life for Espinosa. He shows that the real cause of what happens to me is not from the other, but from a certain *compounding of relationship of forces*, a good or bad way in encounters with others, which depends *entirely* on my power, that is, it is in the intensive and unintentional plane that we must seek the key to the dynamics of events.

Due to not understanding the causes of what affects us, we do not act, we suffer and react, moved by passions. The more filled with the capacity to suffer, the less we act; the more filled with the capacity to act, the less we suffer.¹¹ In the first case, we are slaves; in the second, free.

11 However, my desire will always be fulfilled, necessarily. This is why Espinosa says that desire lacks nothing, as it does not lack an *object*. The object of desire is *the event itself*.

However, once the mind is capable of having adequate ideas, it becomes possible to convert a passion into action: “[...] an emotion, which is a passion, ceases to be a passion, as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea thereof.” (*ibidem*, p. 216, our translation). The more inadequate ideas the mind has, the more subject it is to passions, and, on the contrary, “[...] insofar as it has adequate ideas it is necessarily active.” (*ibidem*, p. 100, our translation). The more it acts, the more its power increases. Hence:

I say that we act when anything takes place, either within us or externally to us, whereof we are the adequate cause; that is (by the foregoing definition) when through our nature something takes place within us or externally to us, which can through our nature alone be clearly and distinctly understood. On the other hand, I say that we are passive as regards something when that something takes place within us, or follows from our nature externally, we being only the partial cause. (*ibidem*, p. 98, our translation)

Action is a modification of desire operated by its own nature, by its own power, which is increased in the relationship it establishes with something else, modifying it and modifying itself. This power, in its effort to exist, produces, creates, the mode of relationship from what is being experienced. Espinosa calls this an *immanent act*. It is a good encounter, an encounter that produces joy, never sadness, but different from that which involves a joyful passion, in which case we are passive, for, when in action, we are active and therefore free.

Espinosa thus makes a distinction between two types of act that actualize power: an act that is passion and an act that is action. Passion is something that affects my desire, makes my power vary, from the outside and, with it, modifies my capacity to feel, think, and act. I feel, think, and act by extrinsic determination, not by force of my nature. In the Spinozist sense, *there is no action*. There is action when there is an intrinsic determination, an immanent act, which implies all my power and makes me internally disposed.

It is by the expressive qualities of my power, whether a sad passion, a joyful passion, or an action, that I become more or less capable of existing. This is because each power corresponds to a capacity to affect and be affected, to modify and be modified, and to differentiate itself, that is, to exist, from the countless encounters with other bodies, a capacity that increases or decreases depending on the quality of these encounters.

Espinosa correlates the power of the body in being affected, the power of the mind in having clear and distinct ideas, and the power of knowing the nature of things, a condition for what he understands as action (a condition for what he also understands as knowledge).

SECOND IDEA: EDUCATION AS AN EXERCISE OF GOOD ENCOUNTERS

The second Spinozist idea here applied to education is that which articulates good encounters with the teaching-learning process, more precisely, that makes the former the dynamics of the latter. We believe it is clear that a Spinozist-inspired

education can only be conceived based on the central idea that teaching-learning is, first and foremost, an encounter between people, and it is through encounters that we constitute ourselves, that is, that we become who we are. Therefore, there is nothing more central than learning to deal with one's passions and one's power.

Thus, instead of a whole range of pre-defining elements of the teaching-learning relationship, such as prescribed curricula, encyclopedic content, and universalizing didactics, good encounters capable of increasing the power of those involved (all of them), promoting creative action towards new experiences of self, generating diversity of perceptions, intensities, and thoughts.

When we refer to encounters and their affections, we think, above all, of openness in relation to the different, the disruptive, the new, that which takes me out of my comfort zone, because the more open to otherness I am, the more my body is affected, the more my mind will be capable of thinking and producing ideas.

Iafelice (2013) says, referring Deleuze, a reader of Espinosa, that thought is the product of encounters with affects and signs, as it is in the passage between states, generated by the encounter with other bodies and ideas, that thought appears in all its power. After all, how could there be thought without the encounter with that which is different? It is precisely this different that acts as an impactful, violent force, capable of taking us beyond our own opinions and limits, that sets thought in motion. Hence, something is necessary to force us to think, something that violates thought. However, states Iafelice (2013, p. 14, our translation):

Our school education, in general, seems to be unaware of the value of the encounter, the involuntary, the affects, and the signs that impel us to think. On the contrary, it seems to recognize only the truths learned by representation or by recognition that have as foundation only images and similarities with something already-known, an already-thought, with an already-ready and finished knowledge.

Here the author highlights the difference between *knowledge* and *knowing*. While knowledge relates to the passage between states, hence, to an intensive movement that produces transformation, knowing relates to what was already determined and learned, connecting to contents representative of thinking. Knowing is a kind of safe haven that is not open to uncertainty, to the flow of experimentation which is in the very essence of learning. School, not infrequently, driven by the "pedagogy of response," confuses knowing with knowledge, making the teaching-learning process a reproduction of that which is already established.

The intention of placing the focus of the teaching-learning process on good encounters is not, obviously, to make it a merely fun experience, but to help the student to select their experiences, avoiding sad encounters in favor of joyful encounters which increase the power to act, and thus transition from the imaginative passionate condition, characteristic of bondage, to the exercise of active intelligence, characteristic of freedom, which Espinosa understands as becoming ethical. As Yonezawa (2015) says, perhaps this is what a school can best teach its students: to seek the good encounters that increase their powers to exist. For this,

it is necessary to be in the encounter, to perceive it happening, in immanence, and to open oneself to the affections that are produced there. How is this done? Doing, taking risks, that is, seeking good encounters that increase our power of existing, of students, teachers, and others involved, which is not always achieved, but the search for which constitutes the difficult and didactic lesson to be learned, the art of the ethical construction of oneself.

It is worth mentioning that encounters are, first and foremost, encounters of bodies, each affecting and being affected by others, so that, when we talk about education, “[...] it is necessary to understand the causes and results of the encounters of bodies — of teacher and student —, as well as the compounding and the decomposing that these bodies can generate when they encounter.” (Novikoff and Cavalcanti, 2015, p. 90, our translation). This brings us to the question of the role of the body in the educational process and even beyond it. This relationship becomes clearer from the Spinozist idea of psychophysical parallelism.

THE PSYCHOPHYSICAL PARALLELISM

We saw above that body and mind, for Espinosa, are modes linked to distinct attributes, the former to the extension attribute, the latter to the thought attribute, which makes them modes independent of each other. This means that a body, as extended matter, is not limited by a thought, nor a thought by a body. A body can only be affected by another body, as an idea by another idea. As such, Espinosa (2018, p. 56, our translation) affirms there is an autonomy between them:

I said that God is the cause of an idea — for instance, of the idea of a circle —, in so far as he is a thinking thing; and of a circle, in so far as he is an extended thing, simply because the actual being of the idea of a circle can only be perceived as a proximate cause through another mode of thinking, and that again through another, and so on to infinity; so that, so long as we consider things as modes of thinking, we must explain the order of the whole of nature, or the whole chain of causes, through the attribute of thought only. And, in so far as we consider things as modes of extension, we must explain the order of the whole of nature through the attribute of extension only; and so on, in the case of other attributes.

Neither the body can determine the mind to think, nor the mind can determine the body to move or be at rest.

However, to say that attributes are autonomous does not mean that they are distinct substances. Espinosa states that the idea of the body (thought) and the body itself (extension) are, in fact, *one and the same individual* (one and the same thing), conceived under two distinct attributes. Returning to the example of the circle, the idea of a circle and the circle itself are the same thing explained according to each of the different attributes. Furthermore, one does not exist without the other. There is no circle without its corresponding idea, nor the idea without a

circle. In the Scholium of Proposition 10 of Book 1, Espinosa (*ibidem*, p. 18, our highlight, our translation) says that:

From this it is obvious that, although two attributes are conceived as really distinct (that is, the one is conceived without the help of the other), we cannot conclude that they constitute two beings, or two different substances. It is of the nature of substance that each of its attributes is conceived through itself. All the attributes it has were always in it together, and one could not have been produced by another. *Each of them expresses the reality or being of substance.*

This is a clear allusion to Descartes' bisubstantialist conception according to which thought and extension constitute distinct substances, an idea rejected by Espinosa. Breaking from a rationalist philosophical tradition that not only separates mind and body as two substances, but also defends the superiority of the former in relation to the latter, Espinosa affirms the *substantial unity with equivalence of the attributes*, according to which, if there is no superiority of the mind over the body, there is neither the inverse of it, the superiority of the body over the mind (Deleuze, 2002).

Therefore, thought and extension are distinct, autonomous, and equivalent expressions of *one and the same substance*. This is the foundation of Espinosa's *psychophysical parallelism*, according to which an affection in the body corresponds to an idea in the mind, which cannot be separated except conceptually, given that there is no affection without its equivalent idea.¹²

The key to understanding Espinosa's psychophysical parallelism lies in the idea that the relationship between body and mind is not causal, as both are modes of a single substance, but, rather, *intensive*, given by *power*. This is because "[...] as every 'affection' of our body increases or reduces its power to act, also, in parallel, the corresponding affect will increase or decrease our power to think." (Ramond, 2010, p. 18-19, our translation). Mind and body are in direct relation to the power which functions as the common element between them and through which they interact. The alteration of power provoked by any encounter corresponds to an affection in the body *at the same time* as an affect, which is the idea of affection in the mind. Affect (mind) and affection (body) express the same experience in different ways based on a variation of power, which means that they do so simultaneously: "[...] the order of states of activity and passivity in our body is simultaneous in nature with the order of states of activity and passivity in the mind." (Espinosa, 2018a, p. 100, our translation). According to the philosopher, there is no doubt that

[...] a mental decision and a bodily appetite, or determined state, are simultaneous, or rather are *one and the same thing*, which we call decision, when it is

12 It is interesting to note that Espinosa's psychophysical parallelism, articulated in the 17th century, has influenced, beyond Philosophy, important scientists in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, with regard to discussions about the relationship between mind and body, being supported by the most current research in neuroscience. An example is Portuguese neuroscientist António Damásio (1996; 2004).

regarded under and explained through the attribute of thought, and a conditioned state, when it is regarded under the attribute of extension, and deduced from the laws of motion and rest. (*ibidem*, p. 103, our highlight, our translation)

Hence, the thinking power of the mind is, by nature, equal to and simultaneous with the acting power of the body.

Espinosa goes further. We saw that the object of the mind is the body. It is through the ideas formed from the affections of the body that the mind, whose essence consists precisely in affirming the current existence of the body, can perceive it: “[...] the human mind does not perceive any external body as actually existing, except through the idea of the affections of its own body.” (*ibidem*, p. 70, our translation), says Espinosa. At the same time that it perceives the body through ideas, the mind perceives itself: “[...] the mind does not know itself, except insofar as it perceives the ideas of the affections of the body.” (*ibidem*, p. 72, our translation). So, it follows that “[...] man has no knowledge of himself apart from the affections of his body and by the ideas of those affections.” (*ibidem*, p. 133, our translation), so that all knowledge of himself passes through his own body and through the ideas that the mind has of it.

The mind perceives not only the nature of its own body, but of other bodies. It happens that, once again, the perception that the mind has of other bodies passes first through *the body itself*, via its affections, more precisely via the ideas of the affections. “The mind does not perceive any external body except through the ideas of affections of its own body.” (*ibidem*, p. 73, our translation), states Espinosa. Thus, for him, there is no knowledge, either of the self or of the world, that does not pass through our body, as well as through the affects associated with its affections.

There is, therefore, an indissociable relationship between the dynamic of the affections of the body and the affects of the mind and our capacity to know ourselves and all things. Now, by placing these two modes, the mind (mode of the thought attribute) and the body (mode of the extension attribute) under a relationship of equivalence, based on the notion of power, we open the possibility of thinking of education under entirely new basis, more precisely, we can confer to the body, an element long neglected by Cartesian educational theories, a role of centrality in the teaching-learning process, starting to assume a new epistemological statute with regard to the production of knowledge, which leads us to the third Spinozist idea applied to education.

THIRD IDEA: THE KNOWLEDGE-PRODUCING BODY

The third idea concerns exactly the role of the body in the teaching-learning process. According to Deleuze (2002), Espinosa proposes to philosophers the *body* as a new paradigm. In this sense, the French author interprets Espinosa's position on the indetermination of the body's capacity as a provocation to the extreme valuation that philosophers make of consciousness. They talk a lot about consciousness, he says, but they hardly know what the body is capable of. And because they do not know, they ramble, says Deleuze, evoking a quote from Nietzsche (*apud* Deleuze,

2002, p. 24, our translation), another great ally in this critique, according to which, “[...] what surprises is, above all, the body [...]”. This is a critique of the philosophies of consciousness for which the body would be a minor matter, an obstacle to reason and knowledge.

By making such a statement, Espinosa evokes a body whose possibilities are still unknown and which may surprise us, given that we do not know its structure, presenting us with another perspective according to which, far from representing the most precarious or smallest human dimension, the body shows itself as the most elaborate thing we have. Thus, he praises the bodily capacities that surpass the mind, including in animals, and highlights that the structural ingenuity of the human body far exceeds all the things that man is capable of building¹³ (Espinosa, 2018a).

For Deleuze (2002), the practical significance of the Spinozist psychophysical parallelism appears precisely in the inversion of this principle dear to the philosophies of consciousness, which condition the action of the soul to the suffering of the body and vice versa, presenting them as antithetical elements, while Espinosa’s (2018a) *Ethics* affirms that the action or passion in the soul is equally action or passion in the body, operating as elements of the same power. With this, Espinosa, restores to the body a central role in our lives, in general, and in the process of knowledge, in particular. The greater the capacity for affection of the body, the more we know, because the greater its power. Furthermore, the more powerful the body, the more powerful the thought will be. “The idea of anything that increases or diminishes, aids or restrains our body’s power of acting, increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our mind’s power of thinking.” (Espinosa, 2018a, p. 106, our translation). Thus, the more a body is capable of acting simultaneously on a greater number of things, the more its mind is capable, comparatively to other minds, to perceive simultaneously a greater number of things. The greater the complexity of the body and, consequently, its capacity to suffer affections, that is, to affect and be affected, the more powerful the thought will be. Not because one affects the other, as we have seen previously, but because the increase in power produces effects on the body and mind. The production of knowledge not only does not eliminate the body and bodily affections, but also demands them as necessary for its mediation. In other words, *the body is a condition for knowledge*.

Paraphrasing Novikoff and Cavalcanti (2015), knowledge does not begin in the mind, it begins in the arousal of the body, in the skin, in the viscera, in the muscles, in the chest. To study is to infatuate, to fall in love with something, an idea, a topic, a book, a discipline, a teacher, anything that affects us, beginning with the body, not an act for practical reasons or future calculation; it is made of encoun-

13 It is worth remembering that the defense of the body presented by Espinosa is shared by many contemporary authors, such as Atlan, Damásio, Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty, Morin, Maturana, Reich and Serres, some of whom were directly inspired by the Dutch philosopher. It concerns the innumerable vital capacities and abilities of the human body that make efficient action possible and that are irreducible to the conscious – therefore rational and reflective – instances of control, combining with them in different ways and to different degrees. Cf. Barreto (2021).

ters with things that cross us and agitate the intensities of the body, something capable of inciting us to think, something that needs to be produced, achieved, desired. A classroom — or any other educational space — is a meeting point of forces (people, human bodies, ideas, disciplines, objects, contents), a pure circuit of affective intensities. Likewise, Larrosa (2003) says that a book is a force that acts on other forces producing variable effects in them. Reading, here, is revealed not as an exercise that is performed only with the eyes and the mind, but that is done with the whole body. It is an experience full of senses. It is this whole field of forces, this circuit of affects, that Espinosa shows us with clarity and that places the body in a position of centrality in life and in educational spaces.

Now, this is the antithesis of our Cartesian school in which bodies must be paralyzed and restrained in order for the “mind to function.” Gaya (2006) points out that the body, reduced to the condition of lesser *res extensa*, passivized, disciplined, and epistemologically ignored, is absent in intellectualist school pedagogy, so it is time to reinvent bodies. For this, it is necessary to overcome the instrumentalizing conceptions of the body in education, making it an epistemological principle “[...] capable of resignifying our cognitive landscapes and altering social and educational goals.” (Nóbrega, 2005, p. 610, our translation). It is necessary to start from the beginning, from the obvious. To consider the role of the body in education means, first of all, highlighting the challenge of perceiving ourselves as corporeal beings, no longer in the merely ordinary or phenomenic sense, but in the epistemic sense. Hence, a rearrangement of the elements is necessary so that bodies and affects, two great absentees of the Cartesian school, occupy their rightful place in an institution that promotes knowledge. There is much to consider here, but this issue certainly requires a different physical arrangement of learning spaces, as well as greater freedom of movement by those involved. Similarly, says Nóbrega (*ibidem*, p. 613, our translation):

The agenda of the body in education and curriculum must necessarily alter spaces and temporalities, considering the educational act an event that takes place in existentialized bodies and is crossed by the desires and needs of the body and that, surely, is not the property of any curricular discipline, but that can be offered, not without resistance, as a project of unusual collaborations in this space and time of education that we understand as curriculum.

Finally, we want to make a brief reflection on the second myth of which Merçon (2009) speaks, namely, the myth of the method. It assumes that there are not only certain contents, materials, precedents, and evaluations, but also dispositions of bodies and control of gestures, capable of establishing the right way to teach someone. The problem here, as is known, is the idea that there is only one and better way to teach students and that, once identified, it becomes, in advance, the basis of the teaching-learning process. The method, thus, imposes itself as a supposedly better means of learning, previously defined and imposed on students, forming a regime of commands and obedience. In other words, the problem with the method is that it is universalizing and prescriptive.

Now, those who teach know that there is no better method capable of fully encompassing a collective of students, given that students have different abilities and learn in different ways and at different paces. Espinosa reminds us that each body is affected in multiple ways and no body is affected in the same way as another body, since what affects the individual and makes him think is always something singular and not generic, although ideas can be understood and shared among many bodies-minds.

The fact is that learning happens under barely-controllable conditions and no teacher knows for sure how or when his students learn — not infrequently in the interstices of formal classes, moments when the method “is not being applied.” The teacher may know of one or another, but hardly of all of them. The adoption of a single method is, in fact, an institutional violence insofar as it creates a cut-off line above which those who, for countless and different reasons, manage to overcome become the “good students,” while those who do not succeed become the “bad students,” establishing the entire hierarchization of the school system we know, a system that feedbacks, habitually, reinforcing the same “good” and “bad” students, turning school into an institution that produces inequality, albeit claiming the opposite (Illich, 1985; Rancière, 2020). There are no bad students. There are students with different capacities and paces, there are disinterested students, and there is, above all, the inability of the school to handle their singularities. Anyone is capable of learning, if the one who teaches involves themselves in the process and establishes a relationship with the student in which both allow themselves to be affected in order to find what is in common between them, a starting point for a good encounter, in the Spinozist sense.

Thus, instead of *the* method, we think of fluctuating *microstrategies* appropriate to each significant experience with the student or group of them in a system of self-learning or mutual teaching,¹⁴ and, in this sense, it is important that we keep asking ourselves at all times, on each occasion, what entails a teaching that desires to activate thoughts. In the same direction as Merçon (2009), we understand that the path (method) is the one that is created with others and not the one that is created by others, characteristic of a moralizing education. The idea here is to create together, given that the other is a necessary condition for the existence of our own power, even if the other can also represent our annihilation, depending on the way we deal with him, since external forces can greatly overcome our own forces. The central matter, let us remember, is the creation of conditions that favor relationships that increase our power against those that aim to diminish it.

Having said all this, we should ask, playing with the provocation of Espinosa to the philosophers of consciousness, after all, what can a student and a teacher in the process of teaching-learning do? In fact, no one knows, in that we are left with the risk of exploring good encounters, willing to affect and let ourselves be affected,

14 This is a resource widely used by libertarian pedagogues who bet on co-education between students, that is, on student-student interaction as a horizontal way of learning (Oliveira, 2019).

towards joy that increases our power of existing and make of it a way of life, that is, an ethical journey. Nothing seems to us more transformative and necessary in a world where anti-life forces have insisted on manifesting themselves, becoming so commonplace and banal.

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Conflicts of interest: The authors declare they don't have any commercial or associative interest that represents conflict of interests in relation to the manuscript.

Funding: The study didn't receive funding.

Authors' contributions: Methodology: Barreto, A. V. B.; Pelbart, P. P. Supervision: Pelbart, P. P. Writing – Original Draft: Barreto, A. V. B.

Received on September 26, 2021

Approved on July 14, 2022

