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What can bodies do?
Reading Spinoza for an affective ethics of organizational life

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Abstract

Recent attempts to develop an embodied understanding of ethics in organizations have tended to mobilize a Levinasian and 'im/possible' ethics of recognition, which separates ethics and embodiment from politics and organization. We argue that this separation is unrealistic, unsustainable, and an unhelpful starting point for an embodied ethics of organizations. Instead of rescuing and modifying the ethics of recognition, we propose an embodied ethics of organizational life through Spinoza's affective ethics. Neither a moral rule system nor an infinite duty to recognize the other, Spinoza offers a theory of the good, powerful and joyful life by asking what bodies can do. Rather than an unrestrained, irresponsible and individualistic quest for power and freedom, this suggests that we enhance our capacities to affect and be affected by relating to a variety of different bodies. We first scrutinize recent attempts to develop an ethics of recognition and embodiment in organization studies. We then explore key concepts and central arguments of Spinozian ethics. Finally, we discuss what a Spinozian ethics means for the theory and practice of embodied ethics in organizational life.

Keywords: Affectivity, diversity in organizations, embodied ethics, freedom, power, recognition, responsibility, Spinoza.

Introduction

At last, it has become more difficult for organizational scholars to speak in the name of rationalist ethics. Rationalist formulations have come under increasing attack, for assuming that ethics requires control of our passions, emotions and bodies, and for maintaining that ethical problems can be finally resolved by following rules, maximizing utility or acting virtuously (see, for example, Parker, 1998; Ten Bos and Willmott, 2001). Instead, it has become more widely accepted to view ethics as an on-going, imperfect and unfinished project, and this has opened up for a number of attempts to construe ethics, in a Levinasian manner, as a pre-rational, pre-reflective, emotional and embodied process (e.g. Hancock, 2008; Pullen and Rhodes, 2010).

It now seems virtually impossible to engage critically with ethics in organization studies without engaging Levinas' embodied ethics of recognition. Meanwhile, Levinasian ethics is itself an ethics of impossibility. In pursuit of a proto-ethics, that is, an ethics of ethics, Levinas sought to draw up the limits of ethics and establish the primacy of ethics (Jones, 2003). For Levinas, the

ethical encounter between self and other is primordial, preceding ontology and politics. Ethics is a matter of fully recognizing the other, and it is the self's embodied encounter with the other that enables it to do so—to be unconditionally open to the other, to put the other before the self, and to exercise infinite responsibility for the other without being polluted by politics and without first being-in-itself and being-for-itself. Placing infinite demands on the self to be for the other, Levinasian ethics is an ongoing and impossible project because it can never be fully realized and finally completed.

This has inspired attempts in organization studies to modify the Levinasian project: rejecting the primordially of ethics (Hancock, 2008), admitting that ethics can only be realized with politics (McMurray et al., 2011; Rhodes, 2012), hinting at the affective dimension of ethics (Bevan and Corvellec, 2007; Rhodes, 2012), and sketching out ethical organizational guidelines from Levinasian principles (Bevan and Corvellec, 2007; Wray-Bliss, 2013). Nonetheless, as the ethics of recognition remains central if not perfectly intact in these contributions, we find it more fruitful

to make a new start, to develop an affectively embodied ethics of organizations by utilizing ideas that long precede Levinas. At the risk of reconstructing ethics beyond recognition, we turn to the *enfant terrible* of ethics: Benedict de Spinoza (1632–1677). Doing so, we focus on his *magnum opus*, the *Ethics* (Spinoza, 1994 [1677]), but we also draw on his political writings, the *Theological-Political Treatise* (Spinoza, 2007 [1670]) and the *Political Treatise* (Spinoza, 2000 [1675–1676]).¹

From an affective ethics of the good, powerful and joyful life, Spinoza offers radical ways to rework the possibilities and limits of embodied ethics: to reconsider basic assumptions regarding the relations between rationality and embodiment, ethics, ontology and politics; to rethink key ethical concepts of freedom, responsibility, difference and affectivity; and to re-imagine ethical practices within and around organizations. Rather than a moral rule system or an infinite duty to recognize the other, Spinoza asks what bodies can do. However, this does not imply an unrestrained, irresponsible and individualistic quest for power and freedom, but

suggests that we enhance our capacities to affect and be affected by relating to a variety of different bodies.

This is not the first attempt to engage with Spinoza in organization studies (see Spoelstra, 2007) or to rework organizational ethics through Spinoza (see Thanem, 2011). Still, previous stabs at a Spinozian ethics of organizational life remain rudimentary, and more needs to be done to position Spinozian ethics in relation to the Levinasian and otherwise critical literature on organizational ethics, and to articulate its possibilities and limits in the context of organizational life. Hence, we realize that several questions in the Levinasian literature cannot be simply ignored or rejected, but provide points of departure for further engagement: Does ethics come before ontology and politics? Is embodiment opposed to rationality? Is it possible to practice an affectively embodied ethics in organizations? And if so, how may this influence how people in organizations relate to themselves and to others?

Given the wave of Levinasian writings on organizational ethics, this may seem a daunting task. The primordial status

Levinas attributes to ethics and his separation of ethics from politics is a reversal of Spinozianism. And although Levinas did not engage in depth with Spinoza, he openly critiqued Spinoza, denouncing his atheism (Levinas, 1990 [1955]), misreading him as a rationalist (Levinas, 1969 [1961]), viewing his notion of eternity as a totality excluding the other (Levinas, 1969 [1961]), and reducing the ‘Spinozan [sic] *conatus essendi*’ to a matter of self-interest and self-preservation leading to a war of all against all (Levinas, 1998 [1991]: xii; see Lefebvre, 2006; Juffé, 2008).

While self-interest and self-preservation continue to receive bad press in the organizational ethics literature (Ten Bos and Willmott, 2001), Spinozianism has ‘always’ been under attack. In 1656, Spinoza was knife-attacked on the steps of the local synagogue and excommunicated for his ‘monstrous deeds’ (Lloyd, 1996). In Bayle’s (1826 [1697]) influential dictionary, he was attacked for his atheist concept of God, and in the 18th century, it became common practice ‘to insult Spinoza and his theory before discussing it’ (Popkin, 1979: 67). Indeed, Hume (1739) is likely to only have read Bayle when, in the *Treatise of Human Nature*,

rejecting Spinoza's 'hideous hypothesis' of a contradictory God as *unitary* substance productive of *different* modifications in our passions and souls (p. 241ff; Popkin, 1979). And even though Hume did not explicitly reject Spinoza's move from ontological speculation to ethical practice, Hume's guillotine against moves from the is to the ought has recently been repeated in this journal to rebuff arguments for Spinozian ethics (see Parker, 2012).

Despite such discouragement, we argue that Spinozian ethics, which is inseparable from ontology and politics, enables an affectively embodied ethics of organizations more realistic and sustainable than any ethics of recognition. Doing so, we extend our reading of Spinoza into the philosophical works of Balibar, Deleuze, Gatens and Lloyd. This is no obvious choice. Spinoza's convoluted style and contradictory arguments have enabled several competing interpretations: (i) Spinoza's geometric method of logical deduction and discussion of the virtues of reason has led mainstream historians of philosophy and analytic philosophers to view Spinoza as a rationalist (Bennett, 1984; Hampshire, 1951; Koistinen, 2009); (ii) liberalist commentators in political

philosophy have taken Spinoza's emphasis on the freedom of thought as a precursor to the 18th century Enlightenment (Israel, 2007) and economic liberalism (Feuer, 1958; Smith, 1997); (iii) neo-Marxists have celebrated Spinoza's implicit emphasis on class antagonism (Althusser, 1970) while post-Marxists have reiterated the Spinozian multitude as a subject of political resistance and transformation (Hardt and Negri, 2004); and (iv) the affective turn in cultural and social thought has, among other things, utilized Spinoza to theorize social affect beyond the dualism of personal feelings and collective emotions (Seyfert, 2012).

This variety of readings highlights the difficulty of interpreting Spinoza's ideas and bringing them into organization studies. We therefore make no claim to offer a representative account of Spinoza's work. Rather, we admit inspiration from Deleuze's (1995) philosophical buggery, and attempt a selective reading for an affectively embodied ethics of organizational life. As we pursue a Spinozian ethics contrary to rationalist and liberalist commentaries and against Levinas, we do so despite the risk that this might make Spinoza unrecognizable to Deleuze and

to our other interlocutors. Still, Deleuze's expressionist reading helps us pose an ethics larger than morality and grounded in the material politics of affective relations between bodies. Gatens and Lloyd's feminist reading helps us reiterate issues of difference, freedom and responsibility and move beyond the Levinasian caricature of Spinozianism as the self-interested pursuit of power, freedom and sameness, and Balibar's post-Marxist reading helps us relate Spinoza's writings to the historical-political context he worked in and connect Spinoza to practical questions of organizational ethics. Like Gatens and Lloyd (1999), we realize that Spinoza excluded women, foreigners, slaves, children and criminals because he did not foresee that they could become independent, reasonable and free. Rather than dismissing Spinoza on these grounds, it is important that we think with and beyond Spinoza: despite his limited politics, his concepts are useful.

In what follows, we first interrogate recent attempts at an ethics of recognition and embodiment in organization studies. We then explore key concepts and central arguments of Spinozian

ethics. Finally, we discuss what this means for the theory and practice of embodied ethics in organizational life.

Ethics of recognition and embodiment

Sometimes speaking out 'against ethics', commentators on organizational ethics have denounced the certainties and moral perfectionism associated with the rationalist frameworks of utilitarian, deontological and virtue-based ethics, and their respective assumptions that ethical problems can be resolved by calculating aggregated costs and benefits, imposing rules and codes of conduct, or cultivating pre-defined virtues (see e.g. Parker, 1998; Rhodes, 2012; Ten Bos and Willmott, 2001; Wray-Bliss, 2013). Instead, the argument is for an ethics that does not pass final judgement or reach final ethical decisions, but constitutes an on-going and forever unfinished project of critically engaging with real ethical problems (see also Jones et al., 2005): since we cannot truthfully and completely know the world, we cannot know once and for all how to act morally in the world (Parker, 1998).

For several commentators, the on-going and unfinished nature of ethics is related to the emotional and embodied character of human existence. In opposition to rationalist ethics, which demotes our bodies, desires, passions and emotions to a dark, disorderly side of non-rationality, untrustworthiness and immorality (Ten Bos and Willmott, 2001), it is argued that a detached and disembodied ethics cannot recognize and do justice to the otherness of real others (Wray-Bliss, 2013), and that ethics cannot be exercised without feelings of love, guilt and shame (Fineman, 1993). Rather, it is our physical proximity to the other and our wrestling with feelings of love, guilt and shame that make us struggle to decide how to act morally in given situations (Ten Bos and Willmott, 2001).

Although some of this literature has rejected the dualisms of rationalist and anti-rationalist ethics (Ten Bos and Willmott, 2001), much of it works from a Levinasian position that construes ethics and embodiment as contrary to rationality, as non-rationalizable, and as primary (e.g. Bevan and Corvellec, 2007; Rhodes, 2012). According to Levinas, ethics and the ethical face-

to-face encounter with the other comes before everything else – before ontology and politics. For Levinas, there is no being before we ethically encounter the other, and there can be no ethics after or entangled with politics, because politics contaminates. Whereas Levinas views ethics as a pre-reflective, pre-rational, unconditional and open response to the other, he views politics as a conscious, conditional, closed and judgmental response whereby the self selects and decides how to respond (Diprose, 2002). Politics, then, is a ‘homogenising and totalising’ force (Wray-Bliss, 2013: 93), which, geared to organize society for survival (Diprose, 2002: 169), closes down ethics. Some commentators have extended this dichotomy to the relationship between bodies and organizations in a way which ignores that organizations are made up of people with bodies and contradicts Levinas’ separation of pre-reflective ethics from conscious politics: According to Bevan and Corvellec (2007: 212), Levinasian ethics is not only contrary to management hierarchies, but organizations are ‘bereft of corporeal subjectivity’ and cannot be open towards the other

because they are 'bloodless, insensible, incapable of consciousness or intention'.

Admittedly, the primordially of ethics is not accepted by all Levinasians in organization studies (e.g. Hancock, 2008). Still, the ethics of recognition implied by the face-to-face encounter between self and other remains fundamental in this literature. The face-to-face encounter with the other is a given which demands absolute recognition of the other, infinite responsibility for the other (Bevan and Corvellec, 2007), respect for the difference of the other (Rhodes, 2012), and radical openness to the gift of the other, even, according to some commentators, at the risk of violence and death (Jones, 2003). As Levinas puts the other before the self, he makes the ethical self not just open to the other but fundamentally vulnerable—a hostage to the other (Diprose, 2002), required to 'do the impossible' and separated from our 'capacity to act' (Smith, 2007: 68).

Openness to the gift of the other is a key point in recent attempts to develop an ethics of corporeal generosity in organizations with Levinasian ethics. Diprose's (2002) work has

been influential here. While rejecting the Levinasian primordality of ethics, Diprose and her followers in organization studies (Hancock, 2008; Pullen and Rhodes, 2010) argue that corporeal generosity and openness towards the other implies full recognition of the other without being demanded and without any Maussian expectation of mutual exchange, reciprocation and return. Rather, the given generosity of the other invites recognition and response by the self in the first place, and the self's recognition of the other opens the self up to the gift of the other. Operating 'in relations between bodies' (Diprose in Hancock, 2008: 1368), it is argued that such generosity may open ethical communities to cultural difference, and transform subjectivities and the social imaginaries that govern how we view and relate to ourselves and to others. Furthermore, it is argued that organizations can nurture such generosity by celebrating and recognizing the embodied generosity involved as employees raise children and care for others (Hancock, 2008). Unfortunately, more emphasis is on the self's generous giving to the other than on the

self's openness to be transformed by the gift of the other, which necessarily would make the self more vulnerable (Thanem, 2011).

This may be one reason why Levinasian contributions have recognized that such ethical relations, when realized in everyday life and organizations, are in tension with though not completely opposed to or separate from politics. Rather, ethics gives rise to politics. As ethics necessitates the exercise of power to attend to others and compromise between the competing demands of other others (Rhodes, 2012), politics is 'the attempt to articulate responsibility' for the other (Wray-Bliss, 2013: 93) that enables us to respond ethically, take action in response to injustice, and realize the ethical demand of changing how things are organized (McMurray et al., 2011). While taking political action in order to attend to others violates ethics because it displaces attention from other others, it is claimed that this is no ground for abandoning Levinasian ethics but instead good reason for moving from the pure impossibility of ethics to the real possibilities of politics (McMurray et al., 2011). Allegedly, this may take various forms, from preparing to answer and make an effort to respond to the

other, to ethically redesigning organizations through legislation, enhanced representation of labour, and strengthening of community responsibilities (Wray-Bliss, 2013).

This creates at least two problems. First, and if political action involves preparing to answer and respond to the other, how can one make sure such efforts do not end up as empty justifications for injustice? Second, Levinasian ethics depersonalizes (Diprose, 2002) and disembodies politics in ways that depend on social relations of domination and injustice. On Levinas' notion of unconditional generosity, it makes no difference who the other is and what she or he has done, as the other includes ruling others who have gained their position by ungenerously exploiting, dominating and enacting closure on the other. Moreover, we remain unconvinced by the initial separation of ethics from politics—why start out from an ethics separate from politics if they have to be connected once we find ourselves dealing with concrete practices in real ethical relations?

Finally, Levinasian commentators have hinted at an affective dimension in Levinasian ethics involving 'pre-rational affective

relations between people' (Rhodes, 2012: 1311) and an 'affective, nearly sensual, approach to the Other' (Bevan and Corvellec, 2007: 210). Although the sensual, the emotional and the pre-rational are inseparable from a Spinozian account of affectivity too, Spinozian affectivity embodies power relations, which remain absent in the Levinasian literature. As bodies are related in and prosper from their desire to affect and be affected by one another (EIVP38-40; TP2/15; TTP5/7, TTP16/5, TTP20), it makes no sense to separate ethics from ontology and politics.

Affective ethics

Deleuze's expressive (1992 [1968]) and ethological (1988 [1970]) rereading of Spinoza's Ethics interrupts the rationalist stream in Spinoza studies. It is not unproblematic, however. Spinoza never mentions 'ethology' and never discusses 'expression' as such (Macherey, 1996), despite his concern with how God and his attributes express eternal essence (e.g. EIP11), how the body expresses God's essence (EIIDef1), and how ideas express 'a constitution of the body' (EIIIDefAff). Nevertheless, Deleuze

(1992: 41-51) teases out how Spinozian rationality, reason and ethics is entangled with materiality, embodiment and passion, from a starting point where everything is generated by and expressive of one and the same primordial substance (EIP11, P15), the source of all things and ideas, which Spinoza called God but possibly meant Nature (Lloyd, 1996).

A crucial point for Deleuze (1988, 1992) is Spinoza's (EIP11, P13) rejection of the mind-body dualism and the assumption that the mind can rationally control the passionate body. But equally important is Spinoza's (EIIIP2S) reformulation of ethics as a 'theory of power' (Deleuze, 1988: 104), as an affective question of power and capacity, of 'what the body can do', rather than a matter of moral rules aimed to define and govern good and evil (Deleuze, 1992: 217-34, 1988: 17-29). Indeed, Spinoza equated right with power (EIVP37; TP2/3; TTP16/3), and consistently depicted a political reality of conflictual relations between bodies, which precedes and enables ethics (EIP11S4; TP10/10).

The first point rejects Levinas' assumption that embodiment precedes mind. According to Spinoza, thought and extension are two parallel attributes of the same primordial substance (EIIP1-2), of which the human mind and body are two parallel modes of substance (EIIP11, P13). Neither dominated by nor preceding the mind, the body is what the mind knows (EIIP13), albeit inadequately (EIIP19, P24). This involves mind and body, reason and emotion, in an interdependent union fundamentally different from Cartesianism and Levinasianism.

The second point refuses Levinas' privileging and separation of ethics from politics and ontology. But while certain commentators have accused Deleuze of an incoherent, relativist and immoralist reading of Spinoza (e.g. Norris, 1991), Deleuze's (1992) concern with what a body can do is no simple matter of self-survival, self-persistence or the expansion of individual power and freedom. Deleuze (1988: 69) emphasizes that Spinoza rejected free will as an illusion that neglects the external and internal forces that affect and govern human conduct (EIP32, EIApp3, EIIP48). As we discuss below, Gatens and Lloyd (1999) go

further, arguing that Spinoza's affective understanding of freedom implies a genuine concern with responsibility. Again, this is not unproblematic, as Spinoza never used the term 'responsibility'. But before returning to these issues, let us examine Spinoza's concept of affectivity, which underpins his understanding of embodiment, power and freedom.

Affectivity

Deleuze's reading of Spinozian ethics as an ethological and affective theory of power rather than a moral philosophy emphasizes the question of what a body can do, which Spinoza (EIIIP2S) poses as follows:

no one has yet determined what the body can do, that is, experience has not yet taught anyone what the body can do from the laws of Nature alone, insofar as Nature is only considered to be corporeal, and what the body can do only if it is determined by the mind. For no one has yet come to know the structure of the body so accurately that he could explain

all its functions [...] This shows well enough that the body itself, simply from the laws of its own nature, can do many things which its mind wonders at.

Beyond challenging the mind–body dualism, this highlights the dynamic capacities of the body. This is a question of the body’s power to affect and be affected by other bodies, independently of any will power of the mind. Moreover, it involves a complex reality of affective relations between bodies who all seek the good, powerful and joyful life by enhancing their capacity to affect and be affected by others.

The underlying politics here cannot be exaggerated. Not only is a body’s capacity to exist a result of its power (EIP11S3-4): ‘every right of each one is defined by his [sic] [...] power’ (EIVP37; our emphasis), and ‘every natural thing has as much right from Nature as it has power to exist and to act’ (TP2/3). However, this further suggests that power, right and the capacity to affect and be affected is unequally distributed. And since the power of each body is ‘infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes’

(EIVP3), bodies seek to persevere by entering into affective relations with other bodies that enhance their capacities (EIVP38).

Borrowing from the Stoics, Spinoza calls this 'indefinite', unpredictable and uncontrollable striving to persevere the *conatus*, and argues that 'Each thing, as far as it can by its power, strives to persevere in its being' (EIIIP6, P8). Although the *conatus* has been subject to considerable discussion in Spinoza studies, we would argue, with Deleuze (1992: 230–31) and Lloyd (1996: 9), that Spinoza's *conatus* is non-teleological. At once ontological essence and ethical aim of the body, the *conatus* defines the body by its immanent striving rather than by what it strives towards: the body is not striving towards the good, but striving is itself good.

The *conatus* puts human bodies into affective relations with other bodies, and Spinoza emphasizes that human bodies are composite bodies, which, unlike simple bodies, 'can be affected in many ways, and still preserve their nature' (EIIIP13L7S). Human bodies, then, affect others through active affects, or actions, 'of

which we are the adequate cause'. Conversely, we are affected by others through passive affects, or passions, 'of which we are only partial cause' (EIIIDef2-3). Whereas actions enhance a body's capacities, passions tend to diminish them. Not that all passions are negative: passions can be joyful or sad (EIIIP11S). Sad passions include feelings of pain, hatred and envy, which diminish our power of acting (EIIIP11S, P37, DefAff). Joyful passions include feelings of pleasure, love and compassion, which enhance our power of acting (though Spinoza (DefAff25-26, 28) does problematize 'joyful' passions such as self-esteem and pride).

As humans tend to seek joy and avert sadness (EIIIP28), Spinoza further argues that we need others, and many others in a variety of ways: 'Whatever so disposes the human body that it can be affected in a great many ways, or renders it capable of affecting external bodies in a great many ways, is useful' (EIVP38). Indeed, 'To be preserved, the human body requires a great many other bodies' (EIVP39Dem). While insisting on the necessity of this good social process in a world where humans are initially powerless and vulnerable (EIVP3), he acknowledges the difficulty of getting

humans to join in larger composite bodies by emphasizing the conflictual and passionate nature of affective relations: humans tend to agree very little (EIApp), and we are strongly driven by our passions (EIVP32).

This generates an ethical project quite different from the Levinasian, which defines ethical communities as a pre-rational outcome of embodied difference and alterity. In contrast, the powerful, joyful and ethical life and community Spinoza outlines requires agreement, harmony, and reason: bodies contrary to our nature cause sadness and diminish our power (EIVP30); bodies that agree with our nature are good and useful to our power (EIVP31). However, it is only by living in accordance with reason that people can agree (EIVP35), 'live harmoniously' and 'be of assistance to one another' (EIVP37, P40).

The strive for harmonious relations strikes an apparent discord with the critical tradition in organization studies, and readers hoping for an embodied and politicized ethics might now worry that all this talk about reason, agreement and harmony takes us down a path of disembodied, apolitical rationalism. We

shall return to this in a moment, but first need to elaborate the affective relations that foreground reasonable relations.

On Deleuze's (1992: 236–37) reading, affective relations between bodies is a matter of composing joyful encounters with bodies that agree. Since sad, disagreeable encounters means that one body will decompose the other, their relationship, or both bodies, bodies tend to seek joy by trying to repeat agreeable encounters (EIIIP36; Deleuze, 1992: 257; Hardt, 1993). Yet, repetition is impossible: in addition to our limited power (EIVP3, App32) and uncontrollable *conatus* (EIIIP8), people may be differently affected by the same thing (EIIIP15, P51S). At this stage, agreement and disagreement are therefore outcomes of chance encounters between bodies (EIIIP15; Deleuze, 1992: 238) rather than products of causal regularities. Because it is impossible to know up front which encounters will generate joy, one cannot plan for joyful encounters and harmonious alliances. Instead, one must experiment (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 103) with a variety of bodies and encounters. After all, harmony assumes variation, not sameness (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 55, 128), and a

body can only enhance its capacities by connecting to other bodies with different capacities (EIVP38).

Reason

For Spinoza, the key to pursue joyful encounters and develop powerful, harmonious alliances is reason (EIVP18S, P37S2), which Deleuze (1988: 55) redefines as ‘an effort to select and organize good encounters’. Initially, this seems to put Spinoza at odds with embodied ethics. However, reason is not a purely epistemic matter, but always already embodied, social and political. Reason is not contrary to but part of our nature and desire (EIVP18S). Hence, it involves a ‘bodily awareness’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 48), which enables us to be conscious of our appetites (DefAff1). It could even be argued that Spinoza construed reason as a most powerful affect, which enables people to develop an affective rather than a merely cognitive understanding of the passions (EIVP40-73; Deleuze, 1992: 255–72; Gatens and Lloyd, 1999: 144).

It should be acknowledged, however, that the embodied nature of reason is less explicit in what Spinoza says about reason in part IV of the Ethics, and more apparent in what he says in part II about the relationship between mind and body. As noted above, Spinoza's mind-body parallelism insists that the mind is the idea of the body and the body is what the mind knows (EIIP13). While this means that the mind can only know the body through its modifications and encounters (EIIP19, P39), it further unables the mind from determining the body and vice versa (EIIIP2).

This rejects the Cartesian tenet that the active mind knows and can change the passive body, and the Levinasian tendency to reverse the mind-body dualism and reduce reason to a simple precursor of rational closure. But more importantly, we read this to say that we know ourselves, and others, through our embodied experiences and encounters. Rather than imposing the power of reason to get rid of the passions, it becomes important to develop the power of reason to affectively understand how we experience particular encounters, how we experience the passions they cause, and how they affect our capacities.

Deleuze (1992: 273–88) further embodies Spinoza’s concept of reason by highlighting the role of the common notions—that ‘the mind is the more capable of perceiving many things adequately as its body has many things in common with other bodies’ (EIIIP39C). In particular, this emphasizes the mind’s and the body’s mutual grasp of what the body has in common with other bodies. However, common notions do not preclude disagreement. While common notions emerge from our efforts to seek joyful encounters and form harmonious alliances, they may be more or less universal (EIIIP40S1-2). The less universal ones, which enable us to grasp things from our own perspective, are most immediately useful. The more universal ones, which we share even with bodies that disagree with our nature, are not, but they may enable reasonable bodies to even understand and experience joy from bodies that disagree so much that they appear contrary.

The bodily, social and political aspects at play here are significant. First, a body is reasonable insofar as it knows itself and the diverse bodies in its surroundings. Second, reasonable

bodies are able to join with other bodies, despite some disagreement, and compose larger, more powerful, yet more heterogeneous bodies, which incorporate the capacities that made them different in the first place (EIVP38):

For the more the body is capable of affecting, and being affected by, external bodies in a great many ways, the more the mind is capable of thinking. (EIVApp27)

Freedom and responsibility

Reason remains central to Spinoza's understanding of freedom: it is a corrective to the imagination and its erroneous illusion of the free will (EIP32, App3, EIIP48), it enables us to understand the limits of our freedom (EIVP37S1), and it is crucial to the pursuit of a good, free and sociable life (EIVP70Dem, P73; TP2/11; TTP16/10). Spinoza, then, operates far from the liberalist discourse of individual rights and free will. As Lloyd (1996: 101) suggests, this defines freedom in terms of the contexts we embody, and Spinoza is careful to remind us of our limited power and understanding and our 'part of the whole of Nature, whose

order we follow' (EIVApp32). Enhancing our capacities and freedom requires us to understand the conditions of our freedom. According to Gatens and Lloyd (1999: 49, 54–55), this includes the internal and external forces that condition our freedom—our passions and social relations that are ignored by illusory constructs of the free will. Similarly, Balibar (1998) states that Spinoza's rejection of the free will does not reject the striving for freedom, but enables him to define 'the real conditions of freedom' (p. 117) and the social relations wherein freedom is cultivated: freedom cannot be achieved by individuals living and striving in isolation.

Spinoza's socially embedded notion of freedom is closely connected to his understanding of the individual, and Balibar (1997) borrows a concept from Simondon (1989) to argue that Spinozian individuality is better conceptualized as a process of 'transindividuality', where individuals are singular, unique and separate yet related in 'an infinite multiplicity of other individuals' (p. 11).² As individuals, humans incorporate other individuals such as air and water molecules, nutrients and bacteria, and are

incorporated into larger social individuals such as organizations and communities. Via part IV of the Ethics, Balibar (1997: 15) argues that such relations make individuals more complex, interdependent and autonomous: 'The more complex an individual is, the more relationships it will have with the external world' (EIVAx), the more it will have in common with others, and the better capable will it be to join with others in 'a "collective" or superior individual' which does not curtail its freedom (EIVP38-40). Consequently, Spinoza enables us to reject the dichotomy between individual and community, and conceive of a collective freedom beyond egoism and altruism where others are useful because of their difference.

Gatens and Lloyd (1999) extend the concept of transindividuality to show how Spinoza's understanding of freedom is coupled to respect and responsibility for the freedom of others. Although Gatens and Lloyd are vague about where in Spinoza they find an understanding of respect and responsibility, we agree that Spinoza's emphasis on the sociable character of freedom and affectivity in part IV of the Ethics has interesting

implications for rethinking these issues. As Gatens (1996: 111) points out in an earlier work, we necessarily seek to ‘assert and extend’ ourselves in the face of others who ‘strive to do likewise’. Enhancing our freedom, power and capacities to affect and be affected requires us to understand and evaluate how we affect and are affected by others. Gatens and Lloyd (1999) further argue that our responsibilities are not universally given or freely decided by individuals but come from those who continue to be harmed and suffer. We are therefore responsible to enhance our capacities and exercise freedom in ways that respect others—in ways that do not harm others or diminish their responsibilities, but take responsibility to create and support conditions that help others enhance their capacities.

This understanding of freedom and responsibility shares, with Levinas, a concern with openness, difference and respect for others that challenges the boundaries of the self. However, the political ontology underpinning these Spinozian concepts is fundamentally different. Agreement, harmony and joy, freedom and responsibility do not arise out of recognition but out of

memory and necessity. Consequently, we do not form harmonious alliances with others because we recognize the other in the self and the self in the other, but because our bodies retain traces of past encounters with other bodies (EIIP17C, EIIPost2). Recalling how we changed because of affective encounters with others, we remember joyful affects that enhanced our capacities (EIIP36). And since our memories are as limited (EIIP18) as our power (EIVApp32), reason (EIVApp13) and capacity to repeat past encounters (EIIP51), this requires experimentation (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999) as well as skilful organizing of good encounters (EIVApp13; Deleuze, 1988).

Furthermore, Gatens and Lloyd (1999) suggest that we must revisit our past encounters and scrutinize how they continue to affect ourselves and others. While this compels us to take responsibility for our encounters with others, it neither involves a set of commandments that can be imposed on us nor a wish-list that we can expect people to take up out of generosity for the other. Rather, this implies a realistic and brutally honest ethics, where we take responsibility for how we affect others because we

remember how we enjoyed their company and because our prospering is intricately related to theirs.

This emphasis on usefulness could open Spinozian ethics to allegations that it is a utilitarian consequentialism and instrumentalism in disguise. Spinozian ethics is consequentialist, yes, but not utilitarian or instrumentalist. Although bodies seek joy and avert sadness, joyfulness cannot be achieved through cost-benefit analysis. Doing so would privilege the benefit maximization of selfish individuals and narrow-minded majorities. As Gatens and Lloyd (1999) stress, Spinozianism does not allow consequences to be aggregated and averaged in a quantitative manner—consequences can only be evaluated affectively and qualitatively in terms of what implications they have for all relations. Maximizing the joy of some at the cost of others will be unethical because it creates harm and suffering in others, but also because it cuts us off from affects that otherwise would enhance our capacities to affect and be affected. Moreover, it is unfeasible because it creates disagreement, resistance, disharmony and decomposition.

Affective ethics in organizational life

As noted above, the on-going and unfinished nature of ethics has led certain contributors to frame ethics as an impossible and unreal project: impossible because it can never be fully accomplished (e.g. Jones, 2003; Parker, 1998; Rhodes, 2012), unreal because it requires movement beyond current reality (Jones et al., 2005). We acknowledge the rhetorical appeal in this, but are troubled by its presupposed ontology of transcendence, which separates the real from the possible and assumes that ethics is only possible by overcoming reality, a move already deemed impossible.

It is more helpful to consider how the questions discussed above are not impossible but real questions with practical implications for embodied ethics in organizational life. They are certainly given a practical and organizational guise in Spinoza's political writings. Spinoza opens the Political Treatise by promising to show 'how a community [...] should be organised [...] if [...] the Peace and Freedom of its citizens is to remain inviolate', and by critiquing political philosophers for 'conceiv[ing] men [sic]

not as they are but as they would like them to be' and for 'never work[ing] out a political theory that can have practical application' (TP1/1). Meanwhile, Spinoza's Ethics was never 'just' an ontological or proto-ethical exercise, but, as Balibar (1998) argues, a foundation and elaboration of his political writings.

Balibar further relates Spinoza's writings to his engagement in contemporary politics. Spinoza grew up in a bourgeois Sephardic family in Amsterdam and was well connected to the bourgeois regents of the Free Dutch Republic—through his family's trade relations and through personal friendships. Through its pursuit of freedom of speech and freedom of religion, the Free Republic may have pioneered key principles and institutions associated with later versions of modern democracy (Balibar, 1998). However, the Republic was under threat from the Orange-autocratic coalition of rural-aristocratic groups, and Spinoza's notion of right as power was a warning to 'Holland's rightful rulers' that they underestimated the power of their opponents (Montag, 1998). It is also likely that Spinoza critiqued the bourgeois regents for their limited, idealistic and

individualistic notion of freedom based on a belief in free will, and that he worried about their disconnection from the Dutch populace (Balibar, 1998).

Spinoza provided principles for a rightful, powerful, reasonable and sustainable form of government beyond the naïve libertarianism of the Free Republic and the repressive threat of the Orange autocrats. Spinoza's questions posed in the Ethics of 'how to cultivate joyful passions and a harmonious society' should therefore be seen in relation to his arguments that 'the most stable state is not all-powerful' (Balibar, 1998: 92; TP8/1; TTP5/8), that successful institutions promote free citizens (TP4/5; TTP20/6), and that the wise polity enables people to participate in institutions where their passions and differences are negotiated (TTP20/7), even though a stable government capable of protecting its citizens requires the transferral of rights from individuals to the state (TP3/3; TTP20/7-8). Whereas ethics involves the striving to enhance our embodied capacities to affect and be affected in ways that help ourselves and others flourish, politics is the struggle to embody and embed the different desires,

imaginings and capacities of different people in just institutions. And while democratic and autocratic institutions are necessarily underpinned by the embodied passions, desires and interests of those who govern them (TP1/5, TP5/2), this ethico-political struggle is advanced by cultivating an embodied reason whereby rulers and ruled understand our passions and agreements with others and limit our individualistic strive for freedom and power.

Viewing Spinozian ethics in light of these arguments is helpful when considering the implications of Spinozian ethics for the theory and practice of embodied ethics within and around organizations. This does not mean that bringing Spinozian ethics into organizational life is unproblematic. First, Spinoza pursues a dual emphasis on power—as capacity (*potentia*) in the Ethics (EIP11D2, EIIP3S, EIIP7Dem) and as authority (*potestas*) in his political writings (TTP16; TP2) (see Terpstra, 1993)—and it may be argued that applying Spinozian ethics to organizations takes bodies into a setting where power is a matter of authority, of exercising power over others, which undercuts the capacities of bodies to more openly engage in affective relations with others.

Second, it may be argued, with Deleuze, that this involves a move from the expressive to the representational, which restricts the expressive capacities of bodies to affect and be affected by others.

Whereas the Political Treatise deals with political representation and government organization in some detail, Deleuze's (1992) expressive reading of the Ethics is a critique of representation, which stresses how expression exceeds and escapes representation, and how bodies exceed and escape the mind. Deleuze (1988) continues this critique in his ethological reading, separating expression and representation by associating the former with life, bodies and immanent material reality, and the latter with transcendental formal ideality. Although Deleuze is helpful to us in other respects, this is a point where we care to disagree. We are not denying the representational, restricted and repressive powers of organizations, but find his dichotomy between life and organization, body and mind unhelpful. Instead of reducing organizational life to representation, bringing Spinoza into organizational life helps understand how life happens in the midst of organizations, and how people exercise embodied

capacities in the midst of authority while seeking to understand and take responsibility for how we affect and are affected by others.

Colleagues in organization studies have confronted us with similar problems. Despite the field's frequent rejection of dualism over the past few decades, our previous presentations on Spinozian ethics have been met by questions of impossibility and implicit dichotomies between expression and representation, capacity and authority, reality and possibility: 'How can joyful encounters even be possible in organizations, where there is so much domination and exploitation, so little regard for the truly different, and so little genuine joy?' 'And when did you last have a joyful encounter?'

In light of the ongoing and unfinished nature of ethics, we admit that it may be difficult to identify joyful encounters without turning to clichés. However, Spinozian ethics is not purist, and few, if any, joyful encounters are purely joyful (DefAff2-3). Rather than a weakness, this is what makes Spinozian ethics sustainable. There is no illusion that the self will feel compelled to be

completely open to the other, fully recognize the other and take infinite responsibility for the other. Instead, the pursuit of a joyful organizational life requires us to enhance our powers in ways that enhance the powers of more or less agreeable others, for instance by striking alliances with unlikeable colleagues against more unlikeable managers, or getting to know and learn from someone who at first seemed to have nothing in common with us. This may put limits on openness and difference, but also on domination, exploitation and exclusion.

It is problematic to assume that joyful encounters are less likely and less tenable in organizations. Sure, organizations are powerful institutions that continue to dominate, exploit and exclude employees and external stakeholders. However, being employed and incorporated in an organization may be a greater source of joy than being unemployed, left out and ignored as useless and irrelevant. Our answer to the question of whether joyful encounters are possible within organizations therefore has to be a conditional yes, which depends on how our inclusion in the organization puts us into contact with bodies and ideas that

enhance our capacities to affect and be affected by others. This cannot be assumed up front, but requires careful investigation and evaluation.

Hence, it is unhelpful to romanticize or demonize organizations as such. While we sometimes feel dominated, exploited and excluded in the university organization we work for, this organization has also enabled us to meet students and colleagues from different countries and cultures, to be intimidated and saddened by them, but also enthused, energized and enchanted. It has enabled us to learn from them, and to develop new friendships, habits and ways of expressing ourselves. Furthermore, our organizational couplings have enabled us to do fieldwork with people who we might otherwise have ignored—whether consultants we have gone running with, homeless people we have had lunch with, or transvestites we have dressed up with. They have all triggered feelings of joy, though not with a complete absence of sadness, and they have created memories of embodied encounters that we strive to repeat, however imperfectly and irregularly. Such encounters are necessarily different for different

people, and we resist the temptation to be more specific at this point.

Of course, organizations frequently give rise to sad encounters. For us, this is increasingly related to tightening performance pressures. Such pressures reduce our opportunities to enhance our own bodily capacities and cut us off from engaging in meaningful encounters with embodied others through teaching, fieldwork and collegiality. Moreover, they facilitate a narcissistic and egoistic concern with individual rights and achievements, among colleagues, students, and ourselves. For many others, organizations constitute powerful arenas of domination, exploitation and exclusion. Following Gatens (1996), this is related to how dominant groups tend to have similar bodies, similar capacities and similar relationships to others—to people who are similar and therefore belong to the same dominant group, and to people who are different and therefore outside the dominant group. While the managerial and executive echelons of organizational life have become more bodily diverse in recent years in terms of gender, sexuality and ethnicity, persistent homo-

social reproduction means that male-dominated groups in organizations continue to prefer their own company and relate to others in reductionist ways. We also know from our empirical research that straight white and able-bodied men and women managers and professionals have not stopped to underestimate the skills and knowledge of disabled user groups, express suspicion towards ethnic minority job-seekers, demonize homeless stakeholders, or question the professionalism of transgender employees.

If Spinozian ethics is misread as a one-way process of crafting harmonious relations by minimizing difference or a selfish quest for freedom, and if too much emphasis is put on his occasional claim that unreasonable people must be forced into reasonable behaviour (TP3/8), it is unlikely to offer much advice for ending unjust practices in organizations. However, if we take seriously the collective responsibility to mutually enhance our own and others' embodied capacities to affect and be affected, it convinces us that domination, exploitation and exclusion, like individualistic freedom, are not just unethical but unsustainable.

As organizations dominate, exploit and exclude people, they treat people in reductionist ways that cut off organizations and those they exclude from opportunities to exercise their full capacities. And as individual employees and managers insist on an unrestrained freedom to do whatever they like, they undermine any fruitful social relations. Excess power and freedom causes harm and suffering and provokes disagreement and resistance, which inevitably decomposes relations between people and organizations.

Hence, connections between organizations and people neither can nor should be maintained at all cost. Although excluding initially peaceful others might create further harm and suffering, disagreement and resistance, those same people might gain more power, freedom and joy from cutting or re-negotiating the link. The current resistance against big business, financial institutions and oppressive governments cries out that people are fed up and ready to cut the link with dominant, exploitative, harmful and sad forms of government and organization. And without denying the significance of discursive forms of resistance,

it is likely that resistance in organizational life may be reinforced as people feel the pain that these regimes inflict on our bodies—through the poverty they generate, the natural resources they appropriate and pollute, the landscapes they destroy, and the health problems they cause. There are even signs that people again pursue joyful encounters and harmonious relations independently of organizations, whether growing our own vegetables, bartering old clothes and furniture, or exchanging household favours.

At the same time, Spinozian ethics sits well with an argument for more diverse organizations—at least insofar as they enhance the capacities of traditionally marginalized groups to affect how things are organized, managed and decided, and not least because marginalized groups tend to have different bodily experiences of joy and suffering, from life, work and organizations. However, such a move is not sufficient to create more joyful and more differently embodied organizations. Institutions and organizations can only become more joyful and sustainable if those who manage them and work in them open

ourselves up to be affected by people whose bodies and embodied experiences are truly different from our own. Impossible in homogeneous groups, this instigates us to develop embodied forms of reason in concert with others, which enhance our capacities to remember, critically reflect about and take responsibility for transforming ourselves as well as the conditions that have enabled us to dominate, exploit and exclude others within and around organizations. In our own work, this encourages us to engage students and research participants in embodied, face-to-face interaction, remembering and striving to recreate joyful encounters, where humility is expressed through our bodies, and where we engage in conversations and projects without dominating them—not because we recognize the other, but because we enjoy their company and understand that we might learn more from listening and conversing than from interrupting. We would be wary of opening up equally to anyone, though, particularly to colleagues who appear similar in terms of class, age and ethnicity, who share too many of our own

experiences, yet constantly turn their backs at us, laugh sarcastically, and twist our words for their own careerist benefit.

In conclusion

Acknowledging the many conflicting readings of Spinoza's philosophy, we have mobilized a limited number of Spinozian concepts to argue for an affectively embodied ethics of organizational life. Despite the problems and challenges this poses, it has enabled us to explore key questions relating to organizational ethics and the theory and practice of embodied ethics. Spinozian ethics is neither a normative ethics of moral rules and guidelines, nor merely a diagnostic analytical framework. Rather, it offers a theory of the good, joyful and powerful life, which helps us analyse, enact and hopefully enhance the affective relations we embody within and around organizations.

Furthermore, reading Spinoza has enabled us to deal critically with the Levinasian literature that hitherto has dominated the pursuit of embodied ethics in organization studies,

to argue against the Levinasian ethics of impossibility and recognition where ethics is posited against organization, and to dispute wider claims against ethics. That we cannot devise clear-cut rules or finite guidelines for ethical practice does not make ethics impractical, impossible, or contrary to itself. Instead of being against ethics or construing ethics as an on-going and impossible project separate from politics, ontology and organization, Spinozian ethics is a real and practical project. It is just as on-going and almost as open as Levinasian ethics, but without separating itself from ontology and politics. On Spinozian ethics, it is the entanglement of ethics with embodied and political reality which makes it on-going and unfinished; it is its on-going and unfinished nature which necessitates practical action for our mutual striving and flourishing within and beyond organizations; and it is the emphasis on mutual striving which makes it brutally honest and more realistic than any ethics of recognition.

As bodies are related in our strivings to affect and be affected by others, ethics involves enhancing our affective capacities to do so. While this appetite leads individual bodies to

seek to enhance their power and freedom, Spinoza suggests that joyful and powerful ethical relations can only be crafted and sustained by communities of reasonable individuals who take responsibility for honouring and nurturing the difference and freedom of others. As we embody terrains within and beyond organizations, this compels us to try and understand the limits of our freedom, take responsibility for how we affect and are affected by others, and pursue encounters that enhance our own and others' bodily capacities. We can never be rid of the bodily desires and passions that guide and thwart joyful and powerful relations or fully understand them. But experimenting with how we relate to our own bodies and to embodied others, and remembering the joyful encounters this produced, nurtures an embodied sense of reason that enhances our capacity to understand what causes such relations. This is not possible unless we open ourselves up to affect and be affected by a variety of different bodies in a variety of ways. And even though organizations frequently diminish our opportunities to do so, we must strive to subvert the organizational powers that restrict

joyful encounters, and exercise our bodily capacities in concert with others, in the midst of, yet as far away as possible from organizational authoritarianism and selfish individualism—not because we recognise the other, but for our mutual and open-ended flourishing.

Let us end where we began. Since ‘the body itself [...] can do many things which its mind wonders at’ (EIIIP2S), our musings here can only begin to explore the Spinozian question of what bodies can do. Hopefully, this may provoke friends, colleagues and adversaries to further explore the possibilities and limits of Spinozian philosophy to theorize and practice an affectively embodied ethics in organizational life.

Notes

1. References to Spinoza’s works are made as follows: In references to the Ethics (E), Roman numerals indicate the part of the Ethics, and Arabic numerals refer to propositions (P), postulates (Post), definitions (Def), axioms (Ax), lemma (L), proofs (Dem), corollaries (C), schola (S), and the definitions of

the affects in part III (DefAff). References to the Theological-Political Treatise (TTP) and the Political Treatise (TP) refer to chapter number and paragraph number (e.g. TTP5/7; TP2/15).

2. As Balibar notes, however, Simondon denied any inspiration from Spinoza and rejected him as a pantheist.

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