Spinoza’s *Ethics* gives us an unparalleled account of how reason is imbricated in the complex, dynamic and tumultuous emotional life of desiring bodies striving to persist in their being by means of inadequate ideas. This paper seeks to focus on the fascinating role that love can play in this drama. Specifically, the author would like to mine the erotic potential of propositions 43 and 44 of Part III: Concerning the Nature and Origin of the Emotions, where Spinoza affirmed the following: Proposition 43: Hatred is increased by reciprocal hatred, and may on the other hand be destroyed by love; and Proposition 44: Hatred that is fully overcome by love passes into love, and the love will therefore be greater than if it had not been preceded by hatred. With specific reference to Marcuse’s discussion of the performance principle and the manner in which our erotic performances are brought into line with our societal performances (Marcuse, 1966, p. 46), the author would like to sketch out how such reversals of hatred into love can be seen actually to work within those performances (both through what we claim to hate and what we claim to love). This enables us to see in a clearer way how our unreasonable passionate attachments are the true site of transformation.

Keywords: love, hatred, ethics, work, Spinoza, Marcuse

Aversion to the Way Things Are

What follows is a part of a continuing attempt to measure the weight of Marx’s 11th thesis while remaining committed to philosophical enquiry. If the latter remains interpretive at its core, one can still engage it mindful of Marx’s point. At a minimum, this means appreciating the efforts put into changing the world as one interprets. Does philosophy itself contribute to that effort? The author does not know. What it does and can do is help situate reason in those on-going efforts.

Most of his work is in the philosophy of history, and recently, re-reading Hayden White, the author was struck by a comment he made concerning all those modern ideologies that pretend to give meaning to history and find, as in Hegel’s famous introductory lectures, “reason in history”. Such efforts are in fact desperate and he suggests in the precise sense that they remove the essential role of human hopefulness in making sense of our lives. He said this because of, to the extent that these ideologies are successful in imputing that:

A meaning to history that renders its manifest confusion comprehensible to either reason, understanding or aesthetic sensibility, then these ideologies deprive history of the kind of meaninglessness that alone can goad living human beings to make their lives different for themselves and their children, which is to say, to endow their lives with a meaning for which they only are fully responsible. One can never move with any politically effective confidence from an apprehension of the
The author thinks this is important, because it reminds us that our efforts to make sense of our world is not solely a function of our reason but rather of those reasoning efforts that take place with the broader context of our emotional lives, which include feelings, such as repugnance and aversion to what those lives encounter in the world and that such repugnance and aversion are no doubt necessary to effect any real change in the world. Having said that, such feelings themselves are not free-standing as it were, called up at will, but rather they are tied to other emotions, often the very opposite emotions like attraction and love, which are also ingredient in any attempt to change the world. And of course, the whole complex of emotions itself is not very stable and dependent, as it is on the vicissitudes of life in the world.

But, perhaps more insight can be gained by focusing on these particular emotions, the ones that express repugnance and aversion at the way things are and insight that can assist our efforts in changing the world for the better. The idea is to see how this particular form of repugnance and aversion, indeed hatred of the way things are is indicative of our erotic engagement in the world, as expressive of the more basic forms of our desire.

**Spinoza and the Structure of Emotional Life**

The work of Spinoza will be useful here, specifically his *Ethics* (Spinoza, 1992), which are after all an “ethics” which, like all ethics in the author’s view, are devoted to comprehending our lives as free. Spinoza understood the central role that our emotional lives play in structuring our relation to the world. Indeed, the focus on emotional life is in Part III, which is the central section of the five-part *Ethics*. Entitled “Concerning the Origin and Nature of the Emotions”, this part of the book provides the focus needed to understand better how we might situate our reasoning efforts within the overall dynamic of our lives. The first part (Concerning God) gives a technically substantial account of the necessary oneness of the reality of the world, while the second part (Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind) articulates how we are particular modifications of that reality through the two expressive attributes of thought and extension, a kind of embodied thoughtfulness, as it were. That thoughtfulness, as embodied, is in fact quite confused about the nature of reality, pushed and pulled, as it is by the inadequate ideas that it forms with regard to it. This is the point emphasized in Part III which connects emotions to the confusion ensuing from the formation of inadequate ideas. (The author is bracketing the prefix in order to underscore how, for Spinoza, any idea is first, as an idea, an adequate idea insofar as it is first in God and only becomes inadequate when its formation includes contingent matters, such as our own contingent, i.e., confused, experience of the world). The relative confusion in the formation of (in)adequate ideas describes our emotional lives, indeed our emotional engagement with each other and the world, and this engagement is properly erotic insofar, as it is suffused with and composed of our desires (which are themselves modifications of the more basic desire that we are in essence, namely our conatus). The author will return to this point in a moment. The next part of the book (“Of Human Bondage, or the Strength of the Emotions”) deals more specifically with what might be called the more properly ethical question of our enslavement (or bondage) to the structures of our emotional lives and articulates ways that can help us determine the right way to live (which the author would characterize as displaying a particular kind of thoughtfulness, one intent on the formation of adequate ideas, i.e., reasoning). This leads to the final part (“Of the Power of the Human Intellect, or Of Human Freedom”) which articulates the kind of blessedness open to us when we properly appreciate our own power to think through our emotional lives.
Love and Hatred, Joy and Sadness

Let the author now return to the consideration of the particular emotion of hatred (aversion and repugnance), and in this case, of “The world as it is”. Applying our reasoning to such a case is not an attempt to explain the emotion away, but precisely to think it through the broader context of our emotional commitments and engagements. Specifically, the author wants here to connect it to two propositions that Spinoza articulated in Part III of the Ethics. They are:

Proposition 43: Hatred is increased by reciprocal hatred, and may on the other hand be destroyed by love.

Proposition 44: Hatred that is fully overcome by love passes into love, and the love will therefore be greater than if it had not been preceded by hatred. (pp. 91-92)

Now, obviously, the formulation of Proposition 43 presupposes as the particular object of hatred matters connected to particular others (for example, actions, perceived intentions insofar as the hatred provoked can be reciprocal) and not something like “The world as it is”. But of course the idea of “The world as it is” is not a particularly clear idea, even if and as it provokes such a feeling of aversion. We all sense what “The world as it is” means in the context of hating it, but admittedly that meaning is somewhat obscure: an inadequate idea if ever there was one. This is another way of saying that the feeling or emotion is no doubt real and yet, it is necessarily inadequate as an idea. How do we work through this inadequacy? By seeing how this particular emotion links up to the more basic emotional structures of our lives.

At the beginning of Part III, Spinoza sets up this basic structure as it relates to the relative inadequacy of our ideas: “Proposition 1—Our mind is in some instances active and in other instances passive” (p. 103). Insofar as it has adequate ideas, it is necessarily active and insofar as it has inadequate ideas, it is necessarily passive. As connected to our emotional lives, our minds (our embodied thoughtfulness) will in actuality be a mixture of both passivity and activity; indeed, this mixture is precisely how we should understand the very idea of having an emotional life, that is, a mode of being that is, as actually existing, dynamic and fluctuating. Recall that that is how Spinoza situates us: as a mode (a modification) of being itself (the one substance). It is important to appreciate how substantial being is thus conceived as essentially dynamic and not static. This dynamism at the core of being itself is expressed by Spinoza as the conatus of each thing: “Proposition 6—Each thing, insofar as it is in itself, endeavors to persist in its own being” (p. 106). Now, as far as we are concerned, that is, as far as embodied thoughtfulness is concerned, we are conscious of this basic striving at the core of actual existence insofar, as we recognize in our appetites and desires. Explicit recognition of this appetitive striving is what Spinoza will call desire per se. However, the point is that there is no difference between appetite and desire (cupiditas) except that desire is usually related to men insofar as they are conscious of this appetite (Proposition 9, Scholium, p. 109).

Now, as we all know (from bitter and sweet experience), our consciousness of this core striving is a pretty confused, if sometimes exhilarating, business, that is, it is made up of inadequate ideas. The inadequacy and confusion of these ideas is expressed within our embodied thoughtfulness through our relative power of activity, which itself is expressed emotionally in terms of our relative joy (laetitia) and sadness (tristitia). The author prefers to use the translations “joy” and “sadness” rather than “pain” and “pleasure”, because in the author’s mind, they better capture both the flux of our emotional lives and relate that flux more clearly to increases and decreases in our power of activity. Joy more clearly captures the engagement in the world than pleasure does
LOVE, HATRED AND THE PROMISE OF EROTIC LIFE IN SPINOZA AND MARCUSE

(which seems to the author to be a more “passive” notion), and perhaps even more evidently, the notion of sadness better captures the disengagement and decrease in one’s power of activity than does the notion of pain. In any case, these three notions together (desire, joy and sadness) are what Spinoza calls the “primary emotions” in the sense that all the others can best be understood as arising out of them. By tracking how our different emotions relate to these primary emotions, we can see more clearly how they signal our relatively inadequate sense of how to persist in our being through our power of our activity. Thus, for example, in the various definitions of emotions that Spinoza gave at the end of Part III, he wrote:

30. Honor is pleasure (joy; laetitia) accompanied by the idea of some action of ours which we think that others praise.

31. Shame is pain (sadness; tristitia) accompanied by the idea of some action of ours that we think that others censure.

(pp. 121-122)

Thus, the honor we feel as we bask in what we perceive to be others’ praise increases our sense of ourselves and of our power of accomplishment, but as soon as we might have reason to doubt that praise (perhaps as quickly as it ceases to be expressed out loud), then already that power is diminished and this is expressed in our diminished joy; or alternatively, our joy is diminished inasmuch as the effects of the action itself fade from view.

Closely connected to the primary emotions are the emotions of love and hatred. This is because they are very general emotions applicable to all kinds of objects and relational situations. Indeed, as defined at the end of Part III, they come very close to being primary emotions at least in terms of their scope. Spinoza tells us that: “6. Love is pleasure (joy; laetitia) accompanied by the idea of an external cause. 7. Hatred is pain (sadness; tristitia) accompanied by the idea of an external cause” (pp. 142-143). This means that anything can be an object of our love or hatred and, indeed, this is the case insofar as our joy or sadness is connected to something we relate to in the world. (Note, however, that because love and hatred depend upon a perception of external causes, they cannot properly be said to be primary emotions.) It is on the strength of these particular definitions that the author wants to claim that our basic relation to the world is an erotic one, that is, a fluctuating joyful investment into that which we love and saddened disengagement from what is hateful as these relate to the basic reality of our essential desire (to persist in our being).

Now, one might wonder if these definitions accurately reflect our experience of emotions, such as hatred, especially inasmuch, as it connects the latter to a kind of sadness which signals a decrease in our power of activity. Cannot hatred be a spur to activity, even if that activity has destructive aims? The author thinks Spinoza would say that the spur to activity with destructive aims would be tied to the idea of the destruction of the hated thing which gives us pleasure or joy, and it is that pleasure or joy that fuels the power of activity. But as any soap-opera writer will tell you, the path leading to the destruction of the hated object, even as it animated by joyful scheming, is fraught with dangers.

**Turning Things Around**

We are now in a better position to look at Propositions 43 and 44 and the interesting relation Spinoza notes about love and hate. And the author wants to do so in connection with White’s concern about not explaining away what is hateful in the world as we ponder its meaning. In order to do this, the author wants to make use of Herbert Marcuse’s discussion of Freud’s work in *Eros and Civilization*, specifically his development of the notion of the performance principle and the manner in which our erotic performances are
brought into line with our societal performances (Marcuse, 1966, p. 46). The author needs to be brief here, but in essence the performance principle is the contemporary form taken by the reality principle which, of course, is the repression of the archaic (both ontogenetically and phylogenetically speaking) demand for immediate and integral satisfaction that animates the pleasure principle. Marcuse develops this notion in order to account for the distinctiveness of the repressiveness of what he calls contemporary civilization and he calls it a “performance principle in order to emphasize that under its rule society is stratified according to the competitive economic performances of its members” (Marcuse, 1966, p. 44). This focus on economic performances allows him to characterize our basic relation to the world in terms of both efficiency, on the one hand, and alienation on the other. He wrote:

For a long way, the interests of domination and the interests of the whole coincide: the profitable utilization of the productive apparatus fulfills the needs and faculties of the individuals. For the vast majority of the population, the scope and mode of satisfaction are determined by their own labor; but their labor is work for an apparatus which they do not control, which operates as an independent power to which individuals must submit in order to live. And it becomes the more alien the more specialized the division of labor becomes. Men do not live their own lives but perform pre-established functions. While they work, they do not fulfill their own needs and faculties but work in “alienation”. Work has now become “general”, and so has the restrictions placed upon the libido: labor time, which is the largest part of the individual’s life time, is painful time, for alienated labor is absence of gratification, negation of the pleasure principle. Libido is diverted for socially useful performances in which the individual works for himself only in so far as he works for the apparatus, engaged in activities that mostly do not coincide with his own faculties and desires. (p. 45)

However, Marcuse immediately goes on to discuss how the development of these economic performances has led to an interesting situation in terms of the repressive function of the reality principle.

The restrictions imposed upon the libido appear as the more rational, the more universal they become, and the more they permeate the whole of society. They operate on the individual as external objective laws and an externalized force: the societal authority is absorbed into the conscience and into the unconscious of the individual and works as his own desire, morality and fulfillment. In the normal development, the individual lives his repression freely as his own life: (1) He desires what he is supposed to desire; (2) His gratifications are profitable to him and to others; and (3) He is reasonably and often exuberantly happy. This happiness, which takes place part-time not only during the few hours of leisure between the working days or nights, but also sometimes during work, enables him to continue his performance, which in turn perpetuates his labor and that of the others. His erotic performance is brought in line with his societal performance. Repression disappears in the grand objective order of things which rewards more or less adequately complying individuals and, in doing so, reproduces more or less adequately society as a whole. (p. 46)

The author does not think it is too much of a stretch to say that, given the efficiencies achieved through the development of these societal performances in terms of responding to, indeed overcoming, the conditions of scarcity that originally called forth the repressive function of the reality principle, Marcuse is intent in Eros and Civilization (but also in other works, like An Essay on Liberation, 1969) on arguing for the possibility of reversing the manner in which our erotic performances are brought into line with our societal performances, notably by laying bare the surplus-repression at work in the organization of those societal performances and by reframing the erotic energy that manifests itself through the limitations imposed by that organization.

It is with this effort of reversal in mind that the author appeals to Spinoza’s Propositions 43 and 44. Marcuse’s appeal to the notion of alienation and labor within Freud’s overall erotic framework underscores the external relations that we insist upon in organizing our social and natural lives. Through the manipulation of those relations as object relations, we have succeeded in creating very productive relations (in terms of wealth and commodities). That, of course, does not diminish their relative inadequacy in Spinoza’s terms given
precisely their dependence on external relations. And that inadequacy is expressed in the emotional or erotic dynamics of our alienated productive relations. Given the way that those productive relations are divided between work-time and free-time, the idea here is to examine the emotional or erotic dynamics these relations provoke and specifically suggest that we consider what is hateful about them. Remember, for Spinoza, hate is sadness (pain; tristitia) accompanied by the idea of an external cause and such sadness/pain diminishes our power of activity (but not necessarily our productivity, as increasingly “efficient” programs of division of labor have shown). Most of us have experienced such sadness at the prospect of having to go to work and be gainfully employed, at the prospect of losing one’s job, of being unemployed; and most of us compensate for that pain and sadness by focusing on things that please us in our free time. But that pleasure is largely inadequate insofar, as it depends on external factors and thus is not a function of our own power of activity and in that sense is also framed by a kind of hatefulness/sadness/pain.

But, here is where Spinoza’s reversal becomes relevant. And we must note the role that reason (understood as the specifically “thinking” power of the mind) can play in effecting this reversal. As Spinoza says in Part III, Proposition 12: “The mind, so far as it can, endeavors to think of those things that increase or assist the body’s power of activity” (Spinoza, 1992, p. 111). In the alienated world of work, one’s activity is only relatively under one’s control, and therefore, it is to be expected that one does not invest one’s thinking efforts into that work. On the contrary, for many, what get one through the day are the (relative) power of the paycheck and the thought of the projects one has for one’s leisure time (Marcuse’s discussion of phantasy and daydreaming comes to mind here). And insofar as we do this, that is, we accept the division of work and leisure in this way, and then we buttress the alienating structures of our world and more or less stabilize its emotional and erotic dynamics. However, such structures remain inadequate to a thinking mind, in as much, as they are seen to rest on contingent and external causes. And insofar as we continue to try and think about how those external causes contribute to the relative lack of our power of activity, the more hateful (sad, painful) things will begin to appear. Not surprisingly, as Spinoza puts it in the next proposition (Proposition 13): “When the mind thinks of those things that diminish or check the body’s power of activity, it endeavors, as far as it can, to call to mind those things that exclude the existence of the former” (p. 111). Again, as Marcuse has shown us, the success of the present system of alienation and exploitation is that it fosters a mode of existence that, even as it is alienating and exploitative, allows a great number of us sufficient opportunity to call to mind those things that exclude the existence of that which diminishes our power of activity (the ideas of the particular enjoyments that structure our leisure time), all the while maintaining the basic and productive structures of alienation and exploitation in place (a great number of us are prepared to accept to go to work under the conditions that maintain them). However, if we consider the remaining overall (in)adequacy in the very idea of such a system (it remains dependent on external factors; for one, the compliance of those who are exploited and alienated) and we try to consider the causes that make it work, a closer attention to what is hateful about it (what ideas of external causes sadden or pain us) leads to further consideration of what might exclude those hateful things (this is what a mind does, insofar as it endeavors to think) and reaffirm our power of activity.

**Power and Ability**

Here is where the power of love can play an important role. Spinoza’s (admittedly rather unromantic) understanding of love is the joy/pleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause and this joy/pleasure itself is indicative of our increased power of activity and thus in tune with our conatus. This is what makes it
powerful (more powerful than hatred). In the example discussed above, it was suggested that most of us are not erotically engaged in the work we do. On the contrary, if we think about it, we see how it forms part of an alienating and exploitative production system, and the only reason many of us do work is for the money we need to satisfy our needs and procure things that please us. What would it take to reverse this instead of “hating” work, one actually “loved” it, by which engage in it erotically, investing it with our erotic energy? In Spinoza’s view, it would mean, in connection with work, to experience a joy/pleasure accompanied by an idea of it as an external cause. How might we envisage this possibility? There are any numbers of possibilities here, because we are after all dealing with relatively inadequate ideas, given that we are concerned with external causes. The point, though, is to increase our power of activity and think joyfully (and thus, better exclude that which is hateful). Is there any sense in which the author can imagine that he/she love his/her work? Yes, because it gives he a paycheck. Why does he receive a paycheck? Because of the work the author does, but what of the work itself? No, he does not love it, because it is tedious, repetitive, uninspiring and painful. Therefore, the author’s mind wants to exclude the tediousness, the repetitiveness and the lack of inspiration, and they only diminish the power of his activity. Many of us recognize this and seek more rewarding work. But that in itself does not exclude the tediousness and repetitiveness and lack of inspiration that accompanies so many forms of work. It is not “more rewarding works” that the author needs to imagine, but rather “work that is rewarding”. Of course, in a sense, we already have that: We are rewarded for our work with a paycheck. But the paycheck itself does not exclude the hateful features of the work itself (its tediousness, its repetitiveness and its lack of inspiration). Therefore, the idea of the paycheck does not succeed in excluding the idea of work as hateful. What needs to be excluded is the tediousness, the repetitiveness and the lack of inspiration. How can the idea of the work that the author does exclude those hateful features? It is having it increase the power of my ability, not diminishing it. Is the author’s work inherently tedious, or is it tedious because it diminishes the power of the author’s ability to do other things that he is perfectly capable of doing? How can he do the work that excludes the tediousness and increases the power of my ability to do things? Note here that the author is not giving up on the work that he do; why would he? He loves it; it rewards him/her (albeit for the moment primarily with a paycheck). What the author wants to do excludes its hateful features so that it increases the power of his ability and joy in engaging it.

The author thinks something like this is at the heart of what he believes to be Marcuse’s ultimate aim in reversing the way in which contemporary modes of organizing our productive abilities (through various forms of surplus-repression) have us bring our erotic performances, the ways we shape our desires into lives lived, into line with societal performances. He wants us to see that those societal performances nevertheless depend on our erotic performances on the investment of our desire and that desire, because the wealth and know-how it has produced, can re-affirm itself in transformative ways. He is urging us to bring our societal performances, for example, the work that we do, into line with our erotic performances.

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