

Spinoza on Active Love

In this paper, I argue that Spinoza's philosophy has room for active affective love and that the way in which he argues for that exhibits structural similarities to contemporary polyamorist arguments.

For Spinoza, affective love is joy attributed to an external cause. For example, one's love of wine is the joy that one takes to be caused by drinking wine. A love is active if the external cause of joy is correctly identified (i.e., it was really caused by drinking wine) and it is completely under the lover's control (i.e., it can never motivate the lover to actions that cause sadness). Affective love is by finite beings toward finite beings, which are corruptible and changeable, which makes affective love transient. If we drink too much wine or the wine gets sour, we stop enjoying it. It is argued that only intellectual love of God can be active because God is the uniquely unchangeable object of love (Rorty 2009; Kambouchner 2019; Alanen 2016). The proposal is that affective love can be active if the lover is ready to stop loving as soon as the object of love stops bringing them joy (i.e., if the lover knows when they have had enough wine or when the wine starts to sour). I proceed in four steps.

In the first step, I argue that Spinoza's notion of intellectual love of God is categorically different from his notion of affective love. As Spinoza states, God loves no one with affective love (E5p17c), but the intellectual love of God is the very love with which God loves himself (E5p36), the intellectual love of God is thus not an affective love.

In the second step, I argue that Spinoza's notion of intellectual love of God is modeled on Descartes's notion of love. As Gábor Boros (2014) shows, Descartes defines love in the *Passions of the Soul* as an appreciation of objective goodness that makes the lover conceive themselves as part of a greater whole, of which the loved one is the other part. As Descartes explains in his letter to Chanut, doing so makes the lover transfer the care they normally take of themselves to the whole so that it is the lover's perfection to die for the loved one if the loved one is more perfect. In the case of Spinoza's intellectual love of God, the lover also transfers the care they took of themselves to the whole and is ready to sacrifice themselves for the loved one, as Spinoza's claim in E5p18cs shows: if the lover recognizes that their sadness was caused by God, their sadness turns into joy.

In the third step, I argue that Spinoza defines his notion of affective love as a rejection of Descartes's notion of love. Spinoza accepts the wording of Descartes's definition of love as a description of a necessary property of love but reinterprets it as *acquiescentia*, which is a joy accompanied by the self as its cause (Carlisle 2017). It is a necessary property of love that the lover takes it to be in their own interest. Unlike in the case of intellectual love, the affective lover does not rejoice once they learn that the loved one causes their sadness but stops loving.

In the fourth step, I argue that an affective love can be active if it is based on adequate self-knowledge and adequate knowledge of the object of love. Even though the loved one affecting the lover is necessary for the love, that the affection is joyful is due to the nature of the loved one. It is who the lover takes themselves to be that makes the affection joyful (an anti-alcoholic does not enjoy drinking wine). If one knows who one is and what affects one, one enjoys only affections the enjoyment of which is in one's interest, i.e., one experiences only love that is fully under one's control. This is analogous to contemporary polyamorist arguments rejecting the notion of love based on care for the loved one (Frankfurt 1998, 2006) in favor of a love based on self-care (Emmens 2004; Loh 2023).

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