



CONATUS AND HOMEOSTASIS: THE PROBLEM OF LIFE REGULATION IN SPINOZA AND DAMASIO

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SUMMARY

Our work in this article consists of analyzing the theme of the regulation of life in the thought of Spinoza and Damasio. This theoretical problem arises when Spinoza formulates a philosophy of immanence that denies the existence of a soul that promotes life in beings. In Spinozist philosophy, this power of existence that is responsible for life is called *conatus* and is identified as the effort of each being to persevere in itself. Damásio accepts this concept and applies it in his development of the theme of *homeostasis*. He understands that the concept of *conatus* was a very precise intuition of Spinoza's regarding the biological apparatus that living beings possess to innately resolve many challenges inherent to life and its continuity. From this, we will analyze the key concepts, *conatus* and *homeostasis*, as well as the concepts of desire and will in Spinoza and the notions of emotion and feeling in Damasio's literature. All this with a view to understanding how each of these two authors deals with the theme of the maintenance of life, what concepts they use and what paths they point to for solving this problem. Finally, we will visualize the theoretical continuity between Spinoza and Damasio regarding the theme of the struggle of living beings to maintain their existence.

Keywords: 1 Conatus. 2 Homeostasis. 3 Neuroscience. 4 Affects. 5 Behavior.

ABSTRACT

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Our work in this article is to analyze the theme of life regulation in the thinking of Spinoza and Damasio. This theoretical problem arises when Spinoza's formula is a philosophy of immanence where the existence of a soul that promotes life in beings is denied. In Spinozist philosophy, this potency of existence that is responsible for life is called *conatus* and is identified as the effort of each being to persevere in itself. Damasio welcomes this concept and the application in the development of the *homeostasis* theme. He understands that the concept of *conatus* was a very precise intuition by Spinoza about the biological apparatus that living beings have to innately solve the many challenges inherent in life and its continuity. From this, we will analyze the key concepts, *conatus* and *homeostasis*, as well as the concepts of desire and will in Spinoza and also the notions of emotion and feeling in Damasio's literature. All this in order to understand how each of these two authors deals with the theme of maintaining life, which concepts they use and which paths point to solve this problem and, finally, to visualize the theoretical continuity between Spinoza and Damasio, in what it says to the theme of the effort of living beings to maintain their existence.

Keywords: 1 Conatus. 2 Homeostasis. 3 Neuroscience. 4 Affections. 5 Behavior.

1 INTRODUCTION

The central theme of our work is the problem of regulating life and as it appears in the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza and in the neurophilosophy of Antonio Damasio. To address this topic, the question that guides the entire process of theoretical construction of this work is: How Spinoza and Damasio articulate a solution to the problem of promoting and maintaining life? From this guidance, our work consists of three specific objectives, the first is analyze the main concepts that support the discussion of this topic in Spinoza's philosophy. The second is to expose some points in which Damasio takes up Spinozist philosophy. Finally, the third is to discuss self-development that Damasio brings to the theme.

Our research will focus on two fundamental texts, *Ethics* and *In search of Spinoza* (DAMÁSIO, 2004; SPINOZA, 2017). The theoretical path to be followed passes through key concepts of Spinoza's philosophy such as *conatus*, desire, will and affect. In Damasio's text, we will need to explore the meanings about drives, emotions and feelings. Understanding how these concepts are related, within the thematic field, in each system in

would allow us to have a more solid vision of the theme of life and how these two authors work on this throughout the chosen works.

It is worth clarifying in advance that it is not our intention to try to do of Damasio, a commentator on Spinoza's work, since he states that his work is not focused on philosophy, but on neurology. Namely: "Given that I am a philosopher and the purpose of this book is not to discuss Spinoza's philosophy, it is legitimate question: why Spinoza? The short answer is easy. Spinoza is profoundly relevant to any discussion of human emotion and feelings." (DAMÁSIO 2004, p. 12). Nor is it our intention to evaluate whether Damásio's reception of Spinoza's concepts is correct from a philosophical point of view or in agreement with the Spinozist tradition. The path is to show that there is a reception of concepts and that many of Spinoza's statements appear in Damasio's work and that this, in a certain way, scientifically legitimizes many aspects that Spinoza was only possible to deduce. Which demonstrates the perspicacity of this philosopher so alone and rejected, or as Nietzsche once said: this thinker, the most outside the norm and the loneliest³.

Damásio presents not just one Spinoza, but four. The first the most accessible, learned man who disagreed with the Jewish religious tradition and presented a new concept of God. The second, the political philosopher who debate on democracy and the ideal state. And the third is the least accessible everyone, the philosopher who used scientific facts, intuition and a method based on Euclidean geometry to formulate his conception of the world and of human beings (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 16; SPINOZA, 2017, p. 13, 79, 163). Damásio works with the fourth Spinoza, and it is on this one that we will also seek to focus: the *protobiologist*. It is described that this Spinoza's proposal is consistent with the evolution of the science of affects and the study of feelings. According to Damásio, This philosopher is the heir of Aristotle, but with much more fixed biological pillars (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 16, 17).

Having made these delimitations, we can visualize the beginning of this discussion in each of the authors. This problem arises when, in Spinoza's philosophy, the idea that a soul keeps the being alive is extended. Damásio welcomes

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this thought and further develops the Spinozan solution that affirmed the existence of a power that animates living beings from within itself biological/immanent composition of the same. This is the genesis of what we can call it the problem of the regulation of life, or in other words, the problem around how life occurs and strives to continue occurring. Although our focus is to analyze this topic in a more focused way in its performance in human being, it is important to keep in mind that this issue around potency to exist is not inherent only to human beings, but to all living beings in general. Respecting an order that allows us to understand more clearly the sense of continuity of the theme, we will work first with the philosophy of Spinoza and from the analysis of Spinozist concepts we will move on to the Damasio's neurophilosophy.

2 THE CONATUS IN PART III OF ETHICS

Ethics is Spinoza's main work, and is divided into five parts, as the subtitle itself indicates: *Demonstrated by Geometrical Order and in five distinct parts*⁴. The first part is entitled *God*, where Spinoza bases his theory of the *One Substance*. The second part, *The Nature and Origin of Mind*, investigates the notions of body and mind, as well as parallelism and also the problem concerning the nature of the will. The third part is rightly entitled as *the origin and nature of affects* by dealing with Spinoza's theory of affects, as described by the author himself, in the form of lines and planes, that is, from of its inherent determinations in nature itself, not as something separate of nature. In this part of the work, Spinoza presents and investigates the concept of *conatus*. The notion of human beings as an integral part of nature and not as an empire within an empire (*imperium in império*) is revisited (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 161). This distinction is fundamental to understanding that Spinoza wants to work on the affections, feelings and emotions based on the determinations of nature, the relationship of "organic integrity between body and mind" (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 146).

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4 *Ordine geometrico demonstrata et in five distinct parts.*

Spinoza begins, in the definitions of the third part of *Ethics*, by explaining the notion of affect and predicting the *conatus*. Affects are the affections of the body and ideas of these affections in the mind (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 163). The affections in turn are the cause of an increase or decrease in the being's power to act human. When there is an increase, it is called an action, otherwise, it is there is a decrease in this power, it is characterized as a passion. The philosopher Frenchman Gilles Deleuze, in his relevant interpretation of Spinoza given in the work *Spinoza: practical philosophy*, will affirm that this is a kinetic relationship of movement and rest, speed and slowness (DELEUZE, 2002, p. 128). We understand here that there is a prediction of *conatus* precisely while this relationship of power gain or loss is directly related to the *conatus* properly speaking, or in other words, it is he himself who expands or contracts in this relationship of movement between passions and actions of the body and mind.

It is essential to have a clear understanding that mind and body go hand in hand in Spinoza's system; this is the concept of *parallelism*⁵. If for Descartes body and mind are two different substances linked by a certain gland⁶ (DESCARTES, 2005, p. 238, 239), for Spinoza, by proposition 13 of the II part of *Ethics*, the mind (*lies*)⁷ is the idea of the body and the body is the object of the mind. They are different ways of expressing the same substance, the only one that exists. This implies that in this system neither of the two prevails over the other, but they are in a relationship of equality (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 97; JAQUET, 2011, p. 21). This joint action is called *parallelism* precisely because if the mind is the idea of the body, everything that affects the body modifies the idea that the mind forms the same, that is, body and mind affect each other in a way reciprocal, both in gain and loss of power (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 371; JAQUET, 2011, p. 24).

Even though acting as an inseparable unit (*unitam*)⁸, mind and body maintains an alterity between itself (JAQUET, 2011, p. 24). Why is this

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⁵ Jaquet presents a debate about the term *parallelism* and its correspondence with Spinoza's model; however, this discussion goes beyond the centrality of this work.

⁶ Pineal Gland.

⁷ It is important to point out that Spinoza already used the Latin term *mente* and not *alma*, nor *res cogitans*, "thinking" substance.

⁸ The Latin term *unitam* indicates precisely this inseparable condition between body and mind, different from a notion of soul that could be detached from the body.

important? Because in proposition 2 of part III of *Ethics* Spinoza states that neither the body can determine the mind to think, nor the mind determine the body to movement or rest (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 167). Firstly, this proposition highlights this state of alterity between body and mind, but above all, here Spinoza is continuing his work of deconstruction of theories that claim that it is the mind that has control about the body. He states: “they are firmly persuaded that the body, by a simple command of the mind, sometimes it sets in motion, sometimes it returns to rest.” Spinozist theory of affects is a work of implosion of this type of theory. In his view, “The body leaves the position of an inert thing, to which only passivity remains [...] and begins to occupy the position of something active, something that expresses a essence of God, which expresses a *quantum* of God’s power.” (FERREIRA, 2018, p. 155; SPINOZA, 2017, p. 167). What determines the mind to think is only the mode of thought and what determines the body to act is only the mode of extension, there is no causal relationship between the attributes, therefore also does not exist in the modes. Gueroult, in his second book on Spinoza, states that the central point of this is the autonomy of attributes, the ideas that, being things, they mutually cause each other (GUEROULT, 1974, p. 67). There is an implicit moral function here, because if there were a relationship of causality between body and mind, the system would fall back into the assumption of a freedom of will that would affirm the mind's ability to act on the body, which was traditionally a notion of virtue (CHAUÍ, 2016, p. 300).

However, in the scholium of proposition II it is stated that the order of actions and passions of the body is simultaneous in nature with the order of actions and passions of the mind. This is because both the mind and the body are substantially equal (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 167). One cannot determine the other, but the determinations of one are also those of the other, which is why Spinoza makes it clear that this order of actions and passions is simultaneous *in nature*. This is inherent in notion of distinct modes, by demonstrating proposition 19 of Part II of the *Ethics*: “The human mind, in effect, is the very idea, or the knowledge of human body”. This proposition makes it clear that the body and its idea are inseparable and that in the dynamics of actions and passions they are affected mutually (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 113). Still in the same proposition there is a attempt to fully clarify how this relationship occurs. This explanation is

necessary, as it is easy to fall into mistakes or doubts on this point, because if body and mind follow an identical concatenation in the dynamics of actions and passions, but one cannot determine the other, how does this happen? The answer to this question is in Part II of *Ethics* and is intrinsic to a characteristic fundamental of Spinoza's metaphysics. The relationship between mind and body occurs in Nature and this is only possible because Spinoza's concept of Nature is that of an absolutely infinite *Substance* consisting of infinite attributes, by definition 6 of part I (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 13). Therefore, in the scholium of the proposition 2 of Part III he makes it clear that they are simultaneous in nature. Spinoza follows in the demonstration of proposition 19 of part II:

Or again, since the human body depends on many other bodies, by which it is continually regenerated, and since the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of causes, this idea will exist in God, insofar as he is considered as affected by the ideas of many singular things. God thus has the idea of the human body, that is, he knows the human body insofar as it is affected by many other ideas and not insofar as it constitutes the nature of the human mind, that is, the human mind does not know the human body. However, the ideas of the affections of the body exist in God, insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human mind, that is, the human mind perceives these affections and, consequently, perceives the human body itself, and perceives it as existing in act. It is, therefore, only as such that the human mind perceives the human body itself (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 113).

Body and mind are integrated in their relationship with Nature (*Natura*)⁹. Otherness is maintained without harming the union between them. If the mind perceives the affections of the body, it perceives them in Substance. From this it follows that the body is capable of doing things without the mind interfering. This is what the scholium of proposition 2 of III departs from continuity and questions when it raises the question of what the body can do: "what the body, exclusively by the laws of nature (*naturae*)¹⁰ while considered corporally, without being determined by the mind can do." (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 167). To demonstrate all that was postulated, Spinoza lists here some examples such as sagacity of animals, the lack of control of drunkards, the activity of sleepwalkers, etc., all this to say that in moments when the mind is suspended, as in the example of the sleepwalker, yet the body is still capable of acting,

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9 Nature naturantes as Substance or God, following proposition 11 of Part I of *Ethics* (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 25).

10 Nature Naturada. Spinoza uses *naturae* when referring to attributes and modes, while he uses *natura* to refer to God or Substance.

move, walk and even talk. He again refutes the notion that the mind has a dominion (*imperium*)¹¹ over the body. While he asks for what can the body, is delimiting the territory of action of the mind. When consider the body as something inert, the mind ends up being inferred to be responsible by actions that are not of their nature. The less one understands or seeks understand what the body can do solely by its nature, that is, by laws of motion and rest, the more power and dominion is attributed to the mind. Less is attributed to the body than it really can do and more is attributed to the mind. than what it can (FERREIRA, 2016, p. 157). Spinoza is surgical in point out, in the scholium of proposition 49 of Part II, that the essence of words and images is constituted by bodily movements, which do not involve the concept of thought (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 149). This means that the act of speaking belongs only to extension and not to thought, that is, it belongs to the body and does not in any way presuppose an activity of the mind. Therefore, drunk cannot restrain his impulse to talk and does not simply stop talking when your consciousness is already inactive (JAQUET, 2011, p. 28; SPINOZA, 2017, p. 171). It is worth highlighting once again that an activity of the body does not presupposes a passivity of the mind, quite the contrary, Spinoza will say that the mind's power to think is, by nature, equal (*aequalis*)¹² and simultaneously the power of the body to act (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 197).

Having this relationship between body and mind been initially clarified, we can then dedicate all our focus to the *conatus*. First, we need to be clear about the meaning of this concept and we find this in proposition 6 of Part III of *Ethics*. This proposition tells us: Each thing strives (*conatur*)¹³, as much as it is in itself, to persevere in its being. The proposition 7 follows on from the previous one and states that the effort by which each thing strives

¹¹ *Imperium* appears here as an unconditional power of command (CHAUÍ, 2016, p. 308-309).

¹² It is important to emphasize that Spinoza uses the concept of equality (*aequalis*) very precisely in this proposition. It was previously stated that the *parallelist* model is a didactic way of explaining the relationship between mind and body. Now, in this proposition, he could have stated that the powers of action and thought are parallel; however, the concept used is equality. The powers of action and thought are always considered equal, whether referring to humankind or God. The concept of parallelism is quite didactic, but it is in the notion of equality that a more faithful interpretation of the scheme developed by Spinoza to explain this equivalence resides (JAQUET, 2011, p. 31, 32). Given this distinction and its theoretical and didactic importance, from now on we will use the concepts of parallelism and equality as equivalent, respecting the term employed by the commentator at each point.

¹³ Declension of *conatus*: effort.



by persevering in your being is your ever-present essence. And proposition 8 closes this initial triad on the concept of *conatus*, making it clear that this effort does not involve a finite time, but an indefinite time, that is, that while the being exists the *conatus* is acting constantly and uninterruptedly (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 173, 175). With these three propositions Spinoza clarifies that firstly *conatus* is an effort of life affirmation inherent to all living beings. Secondly, that this effort is the essence of all singular things. Finally, that time does not determine the *conatus*, or in other words, that regardless of how long the being exists, it will always be continually striving to preserve your life. The kinetic relationship of increase and decrease in effort is linked to the dynamics of actions and passions of the body and mind and not with the lifespan of that individual being. The effort of being is not static, it is not just a persevering in its current state. It is much more dynamic than that, that is, the effort often presupposes the alteration of certain states. Gleizer, in an important study on the human affectivity in Spinoza's philosophy, will state that: "the human *conatus*, therefore, it is not only a principle of self-preservation, but also of self-expansion" (GLEIZER, 2005, p. 31).

The *conatus* is decisive for the entire theory of affects, since it is the ever-present essence of the human being as a singular thing. Essence of the mind, who is always conscious of this effort whether adequately or inadequately and essence of the body. Spinoza works with a dynamic of active and passive affects, all under the aegis of three primary affects: sadness, joy, and desire. It is made clear in proposition 11 of Part III that joy is understood as a passion by which the mind passes to a greater perfection and by sadness, a passion by which the mind passes to a lesser perfection. Joy refers to a gain of power and sadness to a loss. Finally, he writes very directly that: "Apart from these three, I know of no other primary affect. In fact, I will demonstrate, in what follows, that from these three all the others come." (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 177, 179). There is no shortage of examples of affections and they are all always guided by these three, I bring here an example used by the Spinoza and that is quite clear:

Love is nothing more than joy accompanied by the idea of an external cause, and hate is nothing more than sadness accompanied by the idea of an external cause. We see, moreover, that he who

He who loves necessarily strives to keep in mind and preserve the thing he loves. And, conversely, he who hates strives to remove and destroy the thing he hates (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 181).

We see the three affects in this proposition, 13 of the III part, acting in a way to explain two distinct affects and, concomitantly with this, the effort acting in the preservation of life, sometimes affirming the affection that enhances it, sometimes rejecting the affection that causes a diminishment. About sadness and joy, we will stick to what has been said for now, however, as far as desire is concerned, it is necessary to dwell a little more, while the concept of desire plays a very special and peculiar role in Spinoza's philosophy. The first step, then, is to understand the difference between desire and will.

2.1 ON WILL AND ITS DIFFERENCE FROM DESIRE

To clearly understand Spinoza's theory of desire it is necessary to fundamental to have established the difference between desire and will. To this end, we will begin analyzing the concept of will in the *Brief Treatise* and the confluence between this and Ethics . In chapter XVI the notion of will initially appears and right from the start something very important is expressed: "it is necessary to investigate what the will is and in which it is distinguished from desire." (SPINOZA, 2017b, p. 121). The first information then is that there is a distinction between desire and will, but in what does it consist of? Spinoza immediately gives us a first definition of desire, he says that desire is an inclination of the mind towards something that it evaluates as good, from which it follows that firstly it is a kind of disposition internal. "before our desire is directed towards something external, it produces in us a conclusion that this is good" (SPINOZA, 2017b, p. 121). Desire produces a a kind of internal affirmation, which is called will. Highlighting that this conclusion can be positive or negative, as stated below: "This affirmation, or, generally speaking, the power of affirming and denying, is called will." (SPINOZA, 2017b, p. 121). This differentiation between will and desire is very important, as it ends up exposing an identification between will and intelligence as singular volitions and ideas. Gallina, in an article on the concept of will in Spinoza's philosophy, comments: "From this it follows that the the above distinction not only establishes that the will, as volition, is

a singular idea, that is, the will is of a strictly mental nature”

(GALLINA, 2016, p. 312).

Following this path, the next question raised by Spinoza is about the freedom of the will, that is, whether something external can determine the will. It is a fundamental feature of Spinoza's metaphysics, elucidated in proposition 24 of Part I of the *Ethics*, that the essence of everything that is produced by Substance does not involve existence, that is, that only Substance is *causa sui*.¹⁴ All other things depend on the existence of other things and, as is clear from the proposition 15 of Part I, by necessity exist in the Substance and depend of her to be conceived (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 31, 47). The will, therefore, must have an external cause by which it can exist, given that its essence does not belong to existence. About this, in his book dedicated to exploring the theme of the government of affects in Spinoza, say Fernández and Cámara: “From this point of view, the will conceived by Spinoza is impure to the extent that it does not ground itself (FERNÁNDEZ & CÁMARA, 2007, p. 191). The Substance is the efficient cause of all things, by proposition 25 of Part I. Given this, the immediate external cause that determines the will is also not a free cause, since it is determined by another cause prior to and external to it and this on the other hand, and so on within this circuit where everything is determined by Nature (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 49; 2017b, p. 122).

Having already clarified what will is and that it is not free, Spinoza goes on to affirm that it is not a real thing, it is not something in Nature, but is only an idea of a will, a way of thinking. This is quite explicit in *Ethics*, more precisely in proposition 32 of part I, when it says that the will and other natural things, given that nothing escapes nature, do not belong to nature of God (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 57). This means that Nature for Spinoza is not endowed with Will, but that the human will is conditioned by the laws of motion and rest, that is, by the modes and attributes. Even if the will is not a faculty of Substance, it still determines it. Since the will is a way of thinking¹⁵, Spinoza further states when dealing with the intellect as a defined mode of

14 Cause of itself.

15 Mode as a synonym for manner, not in the metaphysical sense of Spinoza's *mode*.

think: "it must be referring to the nature naturalized and not the nature naturant, the same occurring with other ways of thinking." (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 55). As Gallina states: "The will, when related to Nature, is nothing more than the power of understanding, which is a mode of Substance and not a attribute of its essence." (GALLINA, 2016, p. 304). The argument about the will has two clear objectives, the first is to deny the idea of a Nature endowed with will and the second is to say that the will is not a kind of human faculty and is not the cause of anything and only a conclusion about of something. This becomes clearer when we look at the last two propositions, 48 and 49, of Part II of the *Ethics*. In 48 we find the statement that there is no absolute will in the mind; there is therefore something that determines the mind to want what you want. Still in this proposition it is said that there is no such thing in the mind no absolute faculty, neither desire nor understanding. The proposition 49 goes even further and demonstrates that there are no free volitions and that no wanting is absolute whereas there are only singular volitions and wants of the in the same way that only these or those singular ideas exist. The fulcrum of this argument is the notion that will and intellect are one and the same thing. As Gallina tells us about Spinoza's argument: "By will understands the act of choosing between possible opposites. What Spinoza actually refusal is the idea of a power of self-determination for action" (GALLINA, 2016, p. 311; SPINOZA, 2017, p. 145, 147). Spinoza says: "it is only an idea¹⁶ of such and such a will and only a way of thinking, an entity of reason and not a real being" and, therefore, he concludes that nothing can be caused by it, *nam ex nihilo nihil fit*¹⁷ (SPINOZA, 2017b, p. 123). Concluding this chapter of the *Brief treatise*, once again the difference between will and desire is brought into focus. This distinction is expressed in the following formula:

The will – for those who admit it – is only the action of the intellect by which we affirm or deny something about a thing, without taking into account the good and the bad; on the contrary, desire is a form (disposition) in the mind to pursue or achieve a thing, taking into account the good and the bad that are seen in it (SPINOZA, 2017b, 124).

¹⁶ We know that the concept of *idea* in Spinoza is very deep and has several propositions dedicated to explaining it, however, it is not within the scope of this research to debate or analyze such a concept.

¹⁷ Because nothing comes from nothing.

At first glance it seems that the will is somewhat undervalued in relation to desire within this system, but as Fernández and Cámara say: “Precisely because there is will, there is power to determine ourselves to leave a state of passivity.” (FERNÁNDEZ & CÁMARA, 2007, p. 189).

Without this activity of the will, according to these commentators, the human being would reduce inertia because even if it is not something real in nature, it still thus it is a type of action by which power unfolds and which, therefore, exists a kind of connection between the will and the *conatus*. They affirm: “With everything this means that there would be a kind of *continuum* of will that begins with the most primary impulses such as *conatus* and desire” (FERNÁNDEZ & CÁMARA, 2007, p. 188). For these commentators, this capacity to act

which is inherent in the concept of will is based precisely on the fact that it does not be something absolute, but limited, because only then can it know its power and its limits. As we are told: “The true meaning of a will endowed with

a determined power to act consists in renouncing the absolute, because an active faculty knows what it can do and the limits to which it is subject.”

(FERNÁNDEZ & CÁMARA, 2007, p. 191). They also reiterate that the will is not a human faculty, but is part of the faculty of judgment. In sequence, the commentators reaffirm this link between the will and the regulation of life:

“Precisely, the statement that the will is at the service of life responds to this utilitarian correlation of all knowledge in relation to life, namely, that it can only affirm it.” (FERNÁNDEZ & CÁMARA, 2007, p. 191).

It is also interesting to note that, in Fernández and Cámara's view, a primacy of desire is established in relation to the will, but not a devaluation. This primacy is due to the fact that the decision of the will is only possible after the biological disposition of the mind has begun to consider in to accomplish something, in view of the distinction made by Spinoza himself. “The will and the not wanting are desires and, as such, distinct from affirming and denying.” (GALLINA, 2016, p. 312). Having these points clear, we can then look carefully special for the concept of desire.

To discuss the theory of desire in Spinoza's philosophy, we will use proposition 9 of Part III of *Ethics as our guide*. "The mind, whether it has ideas clear and distinct, whether while having confused ideas, strive to persevere in his being for an indefinite duration, and is conscious of this effort." (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 175). The mind, as much as it has clear ideas as it has confused ideas, is always a type of operation of the *conatus*, which is always the cause adequate of this¹⁸. The mind is always conscious of this effort. About this mental awareness of effort, Chauí, in volume II of his work *The Nerve of the real*, which is dedicated to extensively investigating Spinoza's thought, states: "passions and actions, effects of inadequate or adequate causality, are an effort to persevere in existence." Still according to Chauí, it is this fact that mind being aware of your effort that makes it possible to name it. (CHAUÍ, 2016, p. 318). Gleizer, when dealing with affectivity in Spinoza's philosophy, provides us with a apparatus to think about this nomenclature:

The *conatus* receives different names when it refers only to the soul¹⁹ or to the soul and body simultaneously. When referring only to the soul, it is called *will*. Thus, we see that the will is not a faculty of choice, but the effort contained in the ideas that constitute the soul. When referring to the soul and body, that is, to man, it is called appetite. This, in turn, when accompanied by self-awareness, is called desire. Thus, desire is defined as the very essence of man, insofar as it is determined to perform acts that serve its preservation (GLEIZER, 2005, p. 31).

Gleizer states that this definition is related to desire without taking into account any excitement that may occur to him. With this in mind, the desire, according to him, is an original impulse that *ontologically* precedes the its multiple defined manifestations. To verify this further, let us return to the scholium of proposition 9. Regarding this, Chauí states that it is interesting the fact that it begins with the concept of will and concludes with that of desire. According to her, from the perspective of affections, will is identified with desire (CHAUÍ, 2016, p. 319; SPINOZA, 2017, p. 177). It follows that desire and will are the same thing? The answer is no. As previously stated, there is a very important distinction between them and this scholium is the key to understanding what desire is and how it differs from will. Of course, we have already discussed this difference, but from the perspective of will, therefore

¹⁸ The *conatus* is always an adequate cause, therefore it is the mind that forms inadequate ideas.
¹⁹ Soul appears throughout this quote as equivalent to mind.

when we talk about differentiating will and desire it is now from desire as referential. Chauí reinforces that will is a cognitive act. The mind is aware of his effort at self-preservation through ideas. The first The name of this effort is the identification between idea and volition, that is, will. When the reference point for *conatus* is the union between body and mind in sense of an action²⁰, is called *appetite*. The mind being conscious of yourself and what happens to your body, this awareness, which is in short awareness of appetites, is called desire (CHAUÍ, 2016, p. 319).

This striving, insofar as it concerns the mind alone, is called will; but insofar as it concerns both the mind and the body, it is called appetite; which, therefore, is nothing else than the essence of man, from whose nature necessarily follow those things which serve for his preservation, and which he is thus determined to accomplish. Moreover, between appetite and desire there is no difference, except that desire commonly concerns men insofar as they are conscious of their appetites (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 177).

Chauí emphasizes that human beings are aware of their desires, but not always of its causes. Proposition 9, in the demonstration, makes it clear that *conatus* is carried out by the mind regardless of *whether* ideas are clear or confused. This means that desire does not always presuppose adequate ideas. It follows from this that desire can be the cause of passions, otherwise, that is, if desire did not also arise from confused ideas, then it could never become effective in a passion and would always be an action, always the cause of an increase in the power to exist (CHAUÍ, 2016, p. 319). Thus, we perceive a identification between the aforementioned comments by Gleizer and Chauí. Both express a confluent analysis of the scholia of proposition 9. Let us return to our look at a very important point in Gleizer's passage: "Thus the desire is defined as the very essence of man, while this is determined by perform acts that serve its conservation." (GLEIZER, 2005, p. 31). Chauí states that this identification between desire and appetite as the essence of being human is the central point of this scolium. According to this commentator: "appetite and desire, determined expressions of *conatus*, are ontologically founded in the current power of self-perseverance" (CHAUÍ, 2016, p. 319). The self perseverance is inherent in all finite modes, for they are all animated in

20 A "doing something" (CHAUÍ, 2016, p. 319).

a certain degree, which guarantees the activity of the body without the empire of the mind, as already was previously demonstrated.

From the moment we understand that appetite and desire are determined expressions of *conatus*, the relevance of this is quite clear discussion for our entire work. To talk about the regulation of life in Spinoza it is necessary to understand how the effort of the being to preserve in being appears in the III part of *Ethics*, since this effort is the ever-present essence of the human being as a singular thing. In other words, *the conatus* is the efficient cause of all the theory of affects and at the moment when Spinoza presents desire and appetite as the first expressions of this effort, these come to be seen as determinants of all human affections and actions, therefore, of regulation, maintenance and expansion of life. Chauí is extremely accurate in confirming this when analyzing the scholium of proposition 9:

From this power necessarily follows what serves the preservation of a man and therefore determines him to do so. In other words, appetite and desire, determined to do something by the efficient causality of *conatus*, are themselves efficient causes. Just as the deduction of *conatus* as actual power dispels the image of the potentiality to be actualized toward an end, so too does the deduction of appetite and desire as what determines us to do something dispel their images as operations determined by final causes. In other words, appetite and desire are not the attainment of an end but rather the efficient cause of the operations performed by the body and mind (CHAUÍ, 2016, p. 320).

She is very clear in stating that desire and appetite are determining factors within of the science of affects, which is why this concept is so valuable for us to understand the *conatus* and the problem of the regulation of life in Spinoza's philosophy, which is a of the fundamental aims of this research. Spinoza himself is emphatic, at the end of this same scholium, on this absolute determination of desire over the human actions and affections, stating that "It is not because we judge a good thing that we strive for, that we want it, that we desire it, that we desire it, but, on the contrary, it is because we strive for it, because we desire it, by desiring it we judge it to be good." (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 177). Desire is not determined by a value judgment, but on the contrary, it is the judgments that are determined by the force of desire. Spinoza shows himself committed to denying the notion of desire as lack and attribute to it the character of a productive force, positive, affirmative. Always current essence. Necessary tendency to conservation and expansion of life. The *conatus*, or its expressions

determined, are actuality and intrinsic positivity. Affects are, therefore, an increase or decrease in this power that is affirmative as long as there is life (CHAUÍ, 2016, p. 321). Proposition 10 makes the affirmative force of desire even more evident. Spinoza writes: “An idea that excludes existence of our body cannot exist in our mind, but is contrary to it.” (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 177). Chauí comments on this proposition saying that it states something very important, that ontologically, the mind can never be a desire for suppression or destruction of one's body. The notion of a desire for destruction of the body is contrary to the Spinozist argument that the *conatus* constitutes the essence of the human being. In other words, the essence of the being human is to persevere in one's existence, to strive for it, therefore, The essence of the mind is to strive to exist. Since the mind is the idea of the body, its first effort is precisely to affirm its existence (CHAUÍ, 2016, p. 322).

Throughout this first part, we took a theoretical journey through philosophy of Spinoza who went through the notion of body and mind, then by emergence and implications of the concept of *conatus* and which ultimately unfolds in discussions about will, appetites and desire. Having well fixed these aspects of Spinoza's philosophy, throughout the next part of this work, let us understand why Spinoza is so appreciated by Damasio and why even calls the philosopher a *protobiologist*, after all, in the 17th century, he intuited a fundamental problem surrounding the regulation of life, that is, the effort, powers, and affects that operate in human life and determine it. It is to address this problem that Damásio will work in a focused manner around *homeostasis*. Talk about this reception and explain some concepts specific to Damásio will therefore be our commitment from that moment on.

3 CONATUS AND HOMEOSTASIS: NEUROBIOLOGY OF STRESS

The basic work that will guide this part of the work is *In Search of Spinoza*²¹, by Antônio Damásio. This is a work of neurology, where he

21 This work is limited to this basic work by Damasio, as it is the first in which he directly builds a bridge with Spinoza's philosophy. The discussion of the theme of *homeostasis* is resumed and updated in one of his most recent works, *The Strange Order of Things*:



chooses precisely Spinoza as an interlocutor to discuss two themes central: the regulation of life and the role of emotions and feelings in this process. It is not a book about Spinoza, but Spinozist philosophy is chosen as a point of articulation, since, according to Damásio, it deals with the theme of affections and the effort of beings to maintain their existence, the *conatus*, based on the science of the time and on a logical and philosophical rigor typical of Spinoza (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 12). The concept of *conatus* appears received by Damásio in the work, for the first time, translated as a tendency and placed in relation to *homeostasis*²².

Damásio begins his argument by stating that this effort for balance in life is a fundamental feature of human existence. He then refers to Spinoza: "This is what Spinoza tells us, who goes further and calls this attempt the first reality of our existence, a reality that he describes as the relentless effort of self-preservation present in any being." (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 31). It is quite clear that he is referring to propositions 6, 7 and 8 of the III part of the *Ethics*. From Damásio's perspective, which starts from his apparatus

contemporary scientist writing his work, what Spinoza intuited is that every living organism has a constitution that compels it to fight for its life in front of to any threat. This effort is not only about conservation, but also about maintaining the coherence of all its functions and structures (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 31).

Conatus refers not only to the urge for self-preservation, but also to the set of acts of self-preservation that maintain the integrity of a body. Despite all the transformations a living body undergoes as it develops, replaces its constituent parts, and ages, *conatus* is responsible for respecting the same structural plan in all these operations and, thus, maintaining the same individual. And what is Spinoza's *conatus* in contemporary biological terms? *Conatus* is the aggregate of dispositions present in brain circuits that, once activated,

biological origins of feelings and culture (DAMÁSIO, 2018). We will not consider the meanings of this work to avoid anachronisms, given Damásio's enormous progress in his research in the time that separates one work from the other. We can say that each of these two works is part of a specific phase of Damásio's studies. The objective of this work is not to deal strictly with the evolution of this concept throughout the author's various phases, but rather to analyze his reception of Spinoza's philosophy in the specific context of the source text.

Therefore, it is also beyond the scope of this work to analyze Damasian studies on the topic of consciousness. Regarding this, we will focus only on what was discussed in the base text, without delving into the work "*Self Comes to Mind*" (DAMÁSIO, 2010).

²² Homeostasis or Homeostasis: State of internal balance of the organism, which results mainly from the functional synergy of its different devices and systems and the physical-chemical stability of its fluids (blood, lymph, extracellular and intracellular fluids, etc.) (ZACHARIAS, M & ZACHARIAS, E, 1991, p. 242).

due to certain conditions of the internal or external environment, lead to the search for survival and well-being (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 31).

The activity of the *conatus* and its multiple aspects are systematically represented in the human brain in the form of maps. These maps, in turn, turn, are formed by nerve cells spread across various areas of the brain (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 31). At this point, we cannot continue without first pausing to talk about *homeostasis*, after all, the *conatus* is received here as a prediction of this concept and that is precisely what demonstrates the importance of Spinoza for Damasio. Clarify the main features of this notion should be our greatest effort at this time.

Damásio speaks for the first time about *homeostasis* precisely in one item that works on the difference between emotions and feelings. For him, emotions precede feelings for a biological reason. In the course of evolution, emotions came before feelings. This is because emotions are reactions simple measures that aim to promote a kind of survival of the organism. Therefore later I will bring the definition of feeling, as it is in a deeper relationship with *homeostasis* (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 26). Before, evolutionarily, beings possessed some type of intelligence or ability to think something more elaborate form, or even before they had a brain, nature formed to cling to life, even if at a very rudimentary level of same. About this, Damásio states:

All living organisms, from the humble amoeba to human beings, are born with devices that automatically solve, without any prior reasoning, the basic problems of life. These problems are: finding energy sources; incorporating and transforming energy; maintaining a chemical balance within the organism compatible with life; replacing subcomponents that age and die in order to maintain the organism's structure; and defending the organism from disease and physical injury. The word "homeostasis" describes this set of regulatory processes and, at the same time, the resulting state of well-regulated life (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 26).

Soon after, Damásio himself names the set of all these innate apparatuses that function to govern life: *homeostatic machine*. According to him, throughout the natural process of evolution this *machine homeostatics* became increasingly complex and capable of operations more delicate and sophisticated. According to him, didactically, we can understand *homeostasis* in the form of a tree. At the base are the



operations that are, biologically, first in terms of evolution. There are the immune responses, the most basic reflexes and regulations metabolic systems such as the body's temperature regulation system. Just above would be the pain and pleasure behaviors. Next, the drives and motivations. Finally, at the top of the tree would be emotions. completeness of the tree is linked to how complex the organism is, that is, simplest organisms have only the lowest part of the tree while mammals and especially humans have all of it (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 27). Let us briefly discuss the trunk of the tree: it indicates *drives*²³ and motivations. The main examples of these drives are hunger, thirst, environmental exploration behaviors and behaviors sexual. As the philosopher and psychologist Skinner²⁴ points out: “the organism drinks because you need water, take a walk because you need exercise, breathe more quickly and deeply because it lacks air and eats voraciously because it has very hungry” (SKINNER, 1994, p. 144). He identifies these activities with a series of nomenclatures: Needs, impulses, desires and appetites. For him, appetites and impulses would commonly be conceived as being more physiological than the others (SKINNER, 1994, p. 145). Why are these positions of Skinner relevant here? Because his use of the terms appetites and drives is very similar to what Damásio uses and what he infers about the Spinozist philosophy. According to Damásio, all that he puts under the name of drives Spinoza would have called appetites. He goes further, stating that Spinoza uses the word desire to refer to a conscious *feeling* of an appetite and to its consummation or not. Appetite would be a behavioral state of a organism affected by one of the drives. He is clearly referring to the scholia of proposition 9 of Part III of the *Ethics*. It is interesting to note that in proposition 9 three terms appear, appetite, desire and will, but the last one does not appears at this point in the text, because according to Spinoza it is an act cognitive and as such is not part of the purely biological structure, in the sense strictest term, of the brain. To conclude, Damásio states that this

23 Not in the psychoanalytic sense of the term.

24 Burrhus Frederick Skinner is one of the forerunners of the philosophical movement known as *radical behaviorism*. This philosophical line is fundamental to the development of behavioral psychology or, as it is commonly known, behavior analysis.



the distinction that Spinoza makes is similar to the distinction he himself makes between emotions and feelings. For him, appetites and desire are linked to emotions and feelings (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 29; SPINOZA, 2017, p. 177).

3.1 EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS IN THE HOMEOSTATIC TREE

At the top of the tree are emotions, but they are not alone. It is at the top that there are also feelings. Damásio identifies some of the emotions as joy, sorrow, fear, pride, shame, and sympathy. According to him, thanks to the genome²⁵, all this apparatus is already ready and active when we are born and need practically no type of learning to be biologically executed. Learning helps us to perfect the use of these feelings and the more complex the reaction, the more learning will be necessary. He states: "Reactions like crying and sobbing are ready in date of birth, but the reasons why we cry or sob throughout life vary with our experience." (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 30). The most important thing about this is that all these reactions have a single purpose²⁶: regulate life, even if not all of them have the same effectiveness in producing the well-being immediately. Damásio states that behaviors of pleasure and pain, drives, motivations and emotions themselves are identified often to a single word: emotion. For him this is acceptable given the fact that that all this has a formal similarity and serves the same purpose, which is *homeostasis*. This statement also appears in the chapter on emotions in Skinner's work: "We note that the fields of motivation and emotion are very close. In fact, they can overlap. Any external deprivation acts probably as an emotional operation." (SKINNER, 1994, p. 165). According to him, when a human being is very hungry, it is necessarily frustrated and fearful. We see that hunger is among the drives and motivations while fear and frustration are in the realm of feelings, however, there is a strong correlation between them. The idea of the tree is not a hierarchy, but of the *homeostatic* apparatus as an interrelated organism where all

²⁵ Set of all the organism's genes, that is, the complete sequence of its DNA.

²⁶ Not in the teleological sense, but in a determination inherent in its nature that needs to be executed.

the parts work together and simultaneously. This interrelationship presupposes that the simplest parts of the process are incorporated into the most complex ones, forming thus a system that is able to respond to internal and external stimuli and provide responses that favor survival (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 33-34).

This entire apparatus of the *homeostatic machine* is an effort that goes a long way beyond just maintaining life, but producing well-being. We see a reception very strong *conatus* in this statement, after all the effort of the being is not simply in persevering in existence, but in always seeking a state more powerful than itself, as Gleizer already noted when he stated that the principle of self-preservation is also an impulse of expansion and not something inert (GLEIZER, 2005, p. 31). Some authors understand *homeostasis* as a “simple” biological process that keeps the living being balanced and, therefore, reductionist, such as Victor Frankl who writes: “I consider it dangerous and the notion of mental hygiene that presupposes that a person needs to first place of balance, or, as they say in biology, of *homeostasis*, that is, of a state free of tension.” (FRANKL, 2018, p. 130). It is important to highlight the difference in time and scientific apparatus between Damásio and Frankl so as not to fall in the error of being anachronistic, but this is one of the many cases in which the *homeostasis* is reduced to the maintenance of the body and everything that it says respect for feelings and emotions is left out. This is deeply relevant, as it is a notion of body and mind as an organic integrality that allows Damásio to build this *homeostatic* system in the form of a tree encompassing the affective life, otherwise, that is, if he considered the mind as something that is beyond the body, as in a dualistic theory for example, this whole system would collapse.

Spinoza, in *the Ethics*, asks “what can a body do?”, and Damasio gropes for clues as to what Spinozist philosophy was asking. Emotions and feelings play a role in this. The example used is that of a *paramecium*. that swims in its habitat and readily increases its speed upon detecting some danger. This danger could be a very high water temperature or a unexpected vibration. Just as it reacts to danger, it also reacts to

27 A single-celled organism. According to Damásio himself: “all made of body, no brain and even less of mind” (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 35).

food, swimming towards the place where it appears to be most abundant. All these reactions are part of his innate effort to stay alive, he did not need to learn this anywhere. The paramecium does not need consciousness, reasoning or decision (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 35). The second example is that of the fly²⁸, a living being without a spine, but with a modest nervous system. The fly expresses angry behavior when escaping from an attack, otherwise it will show happy behavior when landing about sugar. Flies have emotions, but that doesn't mean they feel these emotions. This leads us to the notion that emotions are *reflex responses*²⁹. The set of emotions can range from a rudimentary level such as from paramecium to an extremely elaborate level like in humans (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 36). For Damásio, an emotion is a collection of chemical and neural responses that form a distinct pattern (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 44). These chemical responses act so that we can evaluate the environment and react to it in an adapted way. In humans, thanks to the interrelation of *homeostatic processes*, consciousness still plays a strong role in this evaluation, as it is capable of linking the relationships of each object in the environment between themselves and also with the past. This set allows us to have quite elaborate emotional reactions (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 45).

Previously, the understanding of feeling was not made explicit, therefore now let's talk about it. It was necessary to expose this whole scheme before assembled by Damásio to talk about *homeostasis* and how emotions and feelings play roles in this. Feelings are central within this theoretical construction, as they are the mental expression of all other levels of homeostatic regulation. They are a deeper layer of *homeostasis* (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 32). Saying that feelings are mental expressions does not mean saying that they are thoughts. In fact, feelings

²⁸ What Damásio is discussing by using the example of animals is the autonomy between *homeostasis* and consciousness, that is, that *homeostasis* occurs purely bodily, albeit at a more rudimentary level. The paramecium lacks any biological nervous apparatus, whereas the fly does, but the latter does not develop any kind of awareness of these stimuli or of the emotions occurring within its body. It becomes clear that *homeostasis* is not a strictly human or brain problem, but concerns life in general. This exposes the various levels of the *homeostatic machinery*, making it clear that the only prerequisite for the existence of life and its regulation is the existence of a body in which it can occur.

²⁹ Linked to immediate reflexes. Unlike reflective activities, which require a mind to think and reflect on them.



are different from any kind of thinking, they are a kind of mental *representation* of the body functioning. As is made clear by the body itself Damásio: “The feeling of an emotion, in its purest and narrowest meaning, was the idea of the body functioning in a certain way.” (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 65). The word idea means a type of perception. He goes on to explain: “What I propose is that the various *homeostatic reactions*, from the most simple to the most complex, are necessarily accompanied by states of the body that are quite distinct.” (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 65). The central point of this everything is the effort to demonstrate that feelings are perceptions, which are linked to brain maps of body states.

In the construction of a feeling, the perception of the body's state is thus accompanied by the perception of themes consonant with that state and by the perception of a certain way of thinking. These two accompaniments result from the construction of metarepresentations in our mental process, a high-level operation in which one part of our mind represents another part of that same mind. It is this high-level process that allows us to perceive that our thoughts are more or less slow, that more or less attention is devoted to them. In conclusion, my working hypothesis on what feelings are indicates that a feeling is a perception of a certain body state, accompanied by the perception of thoughts with certain themes and by the perception of a certain way of thinking. This entire perceptive set refers to the cause that gave rise to it. Feelings emerge when the accumulation of details mapped in the brain reaches a certain level. (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 66)

Feelings carry with them two assumptions. A certain degree of brain development is required for the brain to be able to form these representations. And it takes a body for this brain to be able to perceive and represent. If feelings were just a grouping of thoughts, would not need the body and, therefore, would be something alien to emotions and the rest of the *homeostasis chain of processes*. Damásio is direct in this point when stating that if we removed the bodily essence of feelings it would be impossible to say that we feel happy and we would have to say that we think we are happy. And to an even more drastic degree, without the body, the affirmation itself to think that being happy would be meaningless, as it is the bodily experience of certain states that we consider good and positive that promote happiness (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 66, 67). Damásio goes deep into the Spinozist proposal of mind as an idea of the body, after all, for him the perceptions that constitute the essence of our thoughts are directly linked to this mapping that



brain makes of the body itself. This mapping is constant. The contents
These perceptions range from tension in the muscles to certain states of internal organs such as
heartbeats (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 67).

To experience a feeling, such as a feeling of pleasure, consists in
having a perception of the body in a certain state, and to have a
perception of the body in any state requires the presence of sensory
maps in which certain neural patterns can be executed and from which
certain mental images can be constructed.
(DAMASIO, 2004, p. 67).

This chapter of the basic work concludes with a clear reference to Spinoza. It states that
feelings are a bodily state mapped by certain regions of the brain based on a mental image of the
body. In essence,
feeling is an idea of the body. A feeling of an emotion is an idea of the body when it is affected by
an emotional process (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 68). That is why feeling is so closely related to the
regulation of
life, because it is the reading of all the *homeostasis* that occurs in this being
determined. From drives, motivations to emotions, all of this is
continuously mapped by the brain and this, in turn, expresses feelings
of these perceptions. Not that we will have a specific feeling for each
pulse or for each time the organism adjusts the temperature, but the set
all of this interferes with our bodily well-being, which generates a representation
in the form of a feeling of happiness or contentment, thus the
feelings fit into the *homeostatic machine* as an accurate reading
of the sets of these operations and therefore contribute to the regulation of
life.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

We followed a path that introduced us to the concept of *conatus* in Part III of *Ethics*, as
well as its main developments, that is, the concept of will and the concept of desire. Furthermore,
we were able to visualize a
interaction between this notion of effort and the theme of *homeostasis* and how this
reaches the realm of emotions and feelings. As a consequence,
it was possible to shed some light on the problem that this work was dedicated to
analyze. Namely, “How Spinoza and Damasio articulate a solution to the
problem of the promotion and maintenance of life?” After seeing what *conatus is*, the



effort of the being to persevere in being (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 173, 175), we can realize that Damásio receives this concept as part of the apparatus biological of living beings. “The *conatus* is the aggregate of dispositions present in brain circuits that, once activated by certain conditions of the internal or external environment, lead to the search for survival and well-being.” (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 31). Just as will and desire are determined expressions of this effort, emotions and feelings are part of this series of provisions that keep living beings, especially human beings, in a constant process of searching for life and well-being (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 45, 64; SPINOZA, 2017, p. 177). If in *Ethics*, the will is a cognitive activity and desire is the consciousness of appetites, a determined expression of *conatus*, in work *In Search of Spinoza*, emotions are a collection of responses chemical and neural structures that form a distinct pattern that helps us read the environments and guide us and feelings are the mental expression of all *homeostasis* (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 32, 44; SPINOZA, 2017, p. 177). What they have in common? They all have a single function, that is, they work in a single meaning: the regulation of life, the effort of every being to continue existing and seeking a more powerful state of oneself, a state of well-being.

Damásio is not concerned with a kind of philosophical fidelity to Spinoza, which is sometimes a source of criticism. An example of this is the criticism made by the commentator of Spinoza's work, Chantal Jaquet, who states that: “Damasio is not always up to the standard of its model and sometimes lacks rigor” (JAQUET, 2011, p. 188). The choice that Damásio makes for Spinoza moves in the direction of explain how the third part of *Ethics* resonates in their research, due to its centrality and depth with which the theme of affections is developed. This demonstrates that despite the distances of time and science, the relevance of the topic of regulation of life remains current. Spinoza kicked things off by proposing that human beings possess in their essence the necessary and always current power to exist and persevere in their existence (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 175) and neurology contemporary continues to debate this topic and finds more and more developments. What Spinoza exposed was not only this biological process of life maintenance, but the way in which this dynamic determines the being human and their emotional life. Damásio identifies this and makes a point of emphasizing the relevance of this philosopher for the development of this theme. There is a



strong continuity between the discussion of *conatus* and the reception and updating that Damásio uses this concept through his research on *homeostasis*. Much of this is due to the fact that Spinoza tried to develop a science of affections based precisely on the laws of nature, such as “lines and planes” (SPINOZA, 2017, p. 163). It is precisely about biological nature that Damásio bases his entire neurological theory on feelings, emotions, ethical behaviors and even culture, this bias scientific is the same as what Spinoza sought to propose. A bias that passes directly through the use of reason to answer questions inherent in the world, beliefs and human determinations. As Deleuze wrote, the living seer is Spinoza (DELEUZE, 2011, p. 45), a philosopher with very different aspirations ahead of their time, which still reverberate in the most sophisticated discussions contemporary. An authentic *protobiologist* whose theory of affects remains ever current (DAMÁSIO, 2004, p. 17).

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