

Spinoza's Role in Reshaping the Concepts of "Power" and "Rights" of Freedom

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Abstract: This paper examines Spinoza's philosophical contributions to the discussion on democratic governance, emphasising his endorsement of individual autonomy, reason, and natural law, while also criticising authoritarianism. Spinoza's views provide valuable insights into the intricate relationship between human nature, societal structures, and political authority, within the context of historical discussions on freedom and governance. The research seeks to clarify the potential consequences of Spinoza's philosophical framework for modern political thought and practice through analysis. Spinoza argues that persons, being a part of nature, are subject to its laws and have intrinsic entitlements to self-preservation and liberty. He promotes the use of reason in guiding individual behaviour and society organisation, emphasising the significance of rational government. Nevertheless, Spinoza's theory exposes its shortcomings in addressing social disparities and systematic injustices, hence reproducing the biases prevalent throughout his day. Notwithstanding these limitations, his focus on rationality and freedom continues to have a significant impact on current debates over democracy, rights, and social justice. This study enhances our comprehension of the intricacies related to freedom, governance, and societal progress by conducting a thorough examination of Spinoza's works and relevant secondary sources.

Keywords: Spinoza, Democracy, Liberty, Reason, Natural law

1. Introduction

In the realm of political philosophy, Spinoza's theories serve as a guiding light illuminating the path toward democratic governance and individual freedom. His deep understanding of the relationship between reason, liberty, and the state has had a lasting impact on contemporary political philosophy. The paper thoroughly examines Spinoza's philosophical framework, focusing on his support for democratic principles and his criticism of authoritarian regimes. The research holds considerable importance due to its potential to provide invaluable insights into the fundamental tenets that support democratic societies. An analysis of Spinoza's beliefs allows us to develop a more profound comprehension of the inherent relationship between natural law, state authority, and human rights. This, in turn, contributes to current debates on governance, citizenship, and individual freedom. Furthermore, this study serves as a reminder of the lasting significance of historical philosophical ideas in influencing our contemporary political environment. Moreover, this research offers a clear plan for future scholars and policymakers who are interested in promoting democratic principles and

cultivating fairer and more progressive communities. This study seeks to provide helpful direction for managing the complexity of governance in an increasingly interconnected and diverse world by clarifying the implications of Spinoza's philosophy for modern political practice.

2. Introduction to Spinoza's Philosophy

2.1. Human Nature and Freedom

Spinoza argues that as humans are an integral component of nature, they are obligated to adhere to its governing principles. The concept of natural law, or inherent human rights, can be summarised as the idea that everything, in its essence, has an inherent drive to maintain its existence [1]. In other words, a human natural right refers to the freedom to employ one's own capabilities in order to safeguard their own essence, which ultimately entails safeguarding one's own life. This liberty also encompasses the autonomy to pursue any course of action through whatsoever means one's own rationality and discernment will suggest. Therefore, he demonstrated that freedom is the fundamental concept, which forms the core principles of his theory, including entity, attribute, style, and reason. Spinoza's philosophy is oriented towards the attainment of freedom. Spinoza's epistemology is founded upon his ethics, which centre around the correlation between necessity and freedom. Spinoza made a distinction between two meanings of nature that serve as the basis for human freedom: "nature that creates nature" and "nature that is created by nature." A good example is seen in chemistry, where components like water, which are made of hydrogen and oxygen, are "nature that is produced by nature," and atoms, which make up the world, are "nature that produces nature." He argued that all things can be likened to a chemical reaction involving water and other elements, which ultimately results in the creation of a specific substance. He emphasised the distinctions between these two components and the sequence in which they are attained. According to Justin, if humans fully comprehend the order of existence, they would realise that everything is as essential as a mathematical argument [2]. Since causes and effects in nature are always one-way and nature is immutable, "nature that produces nature" and "nature that is produced by nature" are instances of the creator and the created. He perceived this command as the indispensable and inherent will of God. As a component of the natural world, humans are also subject to the principles that govern nature, such as the processes of birth, ageing, illness, and death. He establishes a solid basis for defining nature and understanding its origins by illustrating that humanity has been influenced by nature in its pursuit of liberty and self-preservation.

2.2. The Concept of Nature in Spinoza's Philosophy

Individuals possess the right to freedom as a result of natural relations, often known as natural law. Moreover, nature demonstrates a systematic arrangement, mirroring the boundless essence of God. According to Spinoza's philosophy, the most important thing is the main entity, as all occurrences and events require distinct subjects [1]. The absence of the first entity renders the existence of anything else impossible. These self-sufficient entities, which exist within or through their histories, are the basis for all others and are therefore called entities. Entities maintain their distinctiveness in the face of change, emphasising their essential nature rather than their characteristics. In contrast to Platonic Idealism, which suggests the existence of absolute concepts that are independent of existence [3]. Though he disagrees with Aristotle's view of the main thing as a set of separate things, Spinoza agrees with the subject-predicate relationship paradigm. Spinoza's worldview posits that the genuine qualitative disparity among items is rooted in their resemblances or differences, going beyond non-essential attributes. Therefore, an entity is indivisible and cannot be broken down into separate conceptions as Aristotle imagined [3]. According to Spinoza, who is an adherent to entity monism, there is a singular, all-powerful being called God who manifests in all things [4]. God, possessing

unlimited power and not occurring by chance, determines the existence and shapes of all occurrences. Spinoza's concept of God serves as the inherent source of all things, challenging the idea of a symbolic divine being. Spinoza thus challenges Descartes' mind-body dualism and advances a monism in which extension and cognition are characteristics of the same thing. He rejects the concept of free will, perceiving judgement as an inherent process rather than a result of consciousness [4]. Spinoza argues that recognising determinism does not invalidate freedom. Since individuals are inherently connected to nature, they have the potential to someday embody the free qualities of God. Therefore, a precise comprehension of reason is crucial for freedom, as individuals can only exercise their freedom when they precisely understand their nature [4]. Spinoza employs monism to prove the boundless nature of God and to justify the basis of the state, individual autonomy, and rational ethics.

2.3. The Role of Reason in Spinoza's Ethics

Exercising self-control through rationality is a fundamental element of Spinoza's ethical framework. He believes that people may only attain true self-preservation, inherent rights, and liberty if they are directed by reason. The fundamental principle of human nature is the innate tendency to avoid damage. Every individual endeavours to maintain their own well-being, resulting in all individuals behaving in accordance with their own wishes. Human rights are not derived from rationality, but rather from a conflict of desires and abilities. In order to avoid a society characterised by hostility and suffering, individuals must establish a social contract. Citizens willingly surrender a portion of their rights to the state in order to achieve the collective welfare and prevent harm [2]. Contracts are created with the main purpose of offering usefulness and offering an escape from a harmful situation [2]. If the contract is determined to be ineffective, it becomes null and void, and the legal validity backing it ceases to exist [2]. Thus, a logical state is formed to fulfil humanity's need for harmonious cohabitation. When every individual endowed with inherent rights relinquishes their power to the state, the state acquires legitimate authority over all matters. Therefore, it is imperative for every guy to adhere or else suffer repercussions. Given that the instructions from the governing power are intrinsically logical, it is the duty of all persons to adhere to them without exception. Each individual possesses the liberty to safeguard their own survival, but this liberty is limited by the commands of the governing authority and entrusted to the ruling authority to act on its behalf [2]. Although Spinoza contends that people who are driven by pleasure and have no regard for their own interests impede true freedom, his statement may appear to restrict freedom [2]. Complete liberation is attained via totally embracing the guidance of rationality. Freedom is derived from accurate comprehension, and accurate comprehension is founded on rationality. When we comprehend how to behave in alignment with our inherent disposition, we exercise autonomy. According to Spinoza, the governing authority of the state is based on reason, and individuals become more rational and gain greater freedom as they complete their obligations under the social contract. Undoubtedly, there are instances of illogical directives issued by the government. Spinoza recognised that obeying orders can be perceived as a restriction on freedom, but he argued that it does not inherently classify someone as a slave. The result is dependent on the purpose behind the activity. If an action is performed with the intention of benefiting the State rather than the individual carrying it out, then that individual can be considered a slave and does not derive any personal benefits from it. In a community that prioritises the welfare of the entire population over the ruler's interests, obeying the highest authority does not make an individual submissive for personal benefit, but rather grants them the status of a citizen. The most liberated nations are those that have legal systems grounded in rationality, which grant freedom to each constituent. The State, which was founded with the purpose of safeguarding inherent and lawful rights, comprises the natural rights of every individual and therefore possesses all inherent and lawful powers, including the authority to govern its populace. The logical natural rights approach is the

cornerstone of the state. The greater the capacity of the populace to uphold the social contract, the greater their degree of freedom. Freedom is a product of rationality.

The traditional concept of natural moral law asserts that moral principles are derived from the inherent power and order of nature. This power refers to the natural rights that persons possess in order to preserve themselves [5]. The theory of the moral law of nature elucidates the origins of the state as a power structure in nature and the transformation of natural rights into social rights. It fails to go beyond the division between nature and culture. Spinoza's perspective distinguishes between natural and rational law, rather than focusing on authority and rights. The foundation of traditional natural law moral philosophy is in the preservation of human life in the natural world, leading to the establishment of natural law and moral responsibilities [5]. Spinoza's perspective is that natural law is solely a law of cause and effect, devoid of any moral considerations. Human reason is the foundation of morality in individuals. This perspective challenges the conventional notion of "correct". He undermines the authority of natural power as a hierarchical system for humans, drawing on Spinoza's monism, which posits that nature is God, our physical bodies are intimately linked to nature, and our rights are the manifestation of natural power within us. Spinoza posited that natural law and natural rights were synonymous, as they both represented manifestations of God's infinite power and timeless order.

3. Spinoza's Political Philosophy

3.1. Natural Rights and Civil Society

Spinoza's theory elucidates the extension of rights and demonstrates how individuals maintain fundamental rights within civilised societies, hence highlighting its progressiveness. He challenged Hobbes' dichotomy between nature and culture and advocated for the protection of individual rights within society. He promoted the idea of logical autonomy and self-defense. Spinoza posited that individuals maintain inherent rights even after being part of a civilised society. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes proposes total governmental rule, with the social compact shielding individuals from the most fundamental human need—death [6]. Every individual surrenders their inherent natural rights to the government in order to maintain social order and exterior defence, while retaining solely the right to life without jeopardy. Hobbes posited that individuals willingly relinquish their inherent rights to the governing body, so establishing a clear distinction between civilised society and the state of nature. Spinoza aimed to achieve self-preservation and autonomy via the use of reason. He disagreed with Hobbes' division between nature and culture and instead supported the idea of natural rights within society [7]. This perspective was in opposition to a government that possesses boundless authority and instead pushed for a government that safeguards individual rights, fosters equality, and propels societal progress. Contrary to relinquishing all their dues to the government, Spinoza believed in granting individuals a certain degree of autonomy within society. This political perspective, which is both balanced and democratic, places a strong emphasis on individual rights and state authority, while also advocating for social progress.

3.2. The Fusion of Rights and Power

Spinoza's philosophy challenges conventional notions of "rights" and broadens the comprehension of freedom. He holds the belief that the inherent characteristics of an object or entity dictate its capabilities. Spinoza combines the concepts of right and power. Contrary to Hobbes' concept of the social contract in *Leviathan*, Spinoza posits that individuals have the ability to refuse oppressive power structures when they recognise that these systems impede their own interests. This demonstrates the individual's autonomy in the presence of power, allowing them to make a conscious decision to collaborate according to their personal principles. This viewpoint prioritises personal

autonomy and respect for individuals while advocating for active involvement in society and the ability to make one's own choices [5]. Spinoza's expansive and all-encompassing perspective on rights underscores the person's constructive influence on society and the government while safeguarding individual rights. Spinoza's worldview prioritises reason as the primary means of achieving self-preservation and freedom, hence enhancing morality. He promoted the principles of reason, self-discipline, and rational distribution of authority. He holds the belief that reason serves as a cognitive and moral compass, directing individuals towards sound judgements.

3.3. Toward a Liberal Society

Spinoza sees a society that is fair and just, where legal limitations, individual freedom, and rational decision-making are valued. Social interactions in this culture are more democratic and open, and rights are dispersed more fairly. In this utopian society, social rights are advocated to enhance human liberty, dignity, and social cohesion. Spinoza's concept introduces a novel perspective on social justice by emphasising the need of self-preservation and freedom achieved via rationality. He influenced political ideology and offered valuable perspectives on future social philosophy. Spinoza's views promoted the progression of social rights and the establishment of equality in social interactions [2]. Spinoza pushed for a state with liberal power, which granted citizens the ability to protect their rights and oppose injustice. In the classical model of absolute power in a state, the state's authority is supreme, individual freedoms are restricted, and rights are frequently violated. Spinoza's concept empowers individuals with greater self-governance and self-reliance in their pursuit of asserting their rights. Spinoza's ideology advocates for a liberal form of governance that safeguards the rights of individuals and empowers them to speak out against unfairness. This approach advocates for the protection of individual rights and the advancement of society. People living in free power states are able to use the legal system to protect their rights and interests, express their will and wishes, and engage in society. Spinoza's political philosophy advocates for the principles of liberty and egalitarianism, safeguarding the rights of individuals and fostering harmony within society. Spinoza's philosophy challenges the unrestricted authority of the state and advocates for a more equitable and democratic societal structure to foster social advancement.

4. Critique and Perspectives

4.1. Liberty and Its Practical Constraints

According to Spinoza, liberty is the manifestation of God inside individuals through the operation of natural laws. It downplays how rights have changed in tandem with changing social norms and oversimplifies the right to liberty by claiming it is solely grounded in reason, despite rationality's practical limitations. Similar to Hobbes, he endeavours to transcend the bourgeois framework of thinking that associates freedom with individualism and overlooks the servitude of the proletariat, which has the potential to lead to social unrest [8]. His quest for rationality disregarded the disparities in educational resources, rendering his perspectives challenging to implement. Spinoza ascribes freedom to a monistic "God" in pursuit of theoretical soundness and resilience, disregarding the influence of social norms on the fluctuation of rights. The entitlement to freedom and liberty expands in tandem with the progress of society, rather than being based on intrinsic regulations. The concept of freedom has undergone transformation in parallel with the development of civilization. The concept of freedom has evolved from the individual's pursuit of independence in the natural world to encompass democracy, equality, and human rights in contemporary society [8]. Spinoza's limited viewpoint on the right to liberty may have resulted from his disregard for the influence of social institutions. The extent of freedom can be subject to variation based on political, economic, and cultural factors. In order to comprehend the concept of freedom, it is important to assess the historical

development of society and the evolving demands and interests of its inhabitants. Spinoza's method distinguishes between theory and practice by acknowledging individuals' capacity for rational thinking while disregarding reason's impact on actual circumstances. This setback hinders the promotion of freedom.

4.2. Social Context and Limitations of Spinoza's Philosophy

Spinoza's theory is influenced by bourgeois thinking, which associates freedom with individualism and prioritises individual freedom while disregarding the conditions of the working class [8]. The theory is constrained and has the potential to incite social upheaval, impeding the progress of civil rights. Ignoring the reality that laws and social norms frequently restrict individual rights, Spinoza is adamant that people can freely pursue their rights and reject injustice. Socioeconomic disparities can hinder individuals from enjoying their rights, leading to societal turmoil. Spinoza's theory advocates for individual autonomy while disregarding social class disparities and institutional injustices, providing no remedies. In order to enhance personal liberty, it is crucial for society to give importance to equity and impartiality, thereby advancing the rights of individuals and fostering social stability and prosperity [5]. Although Spinoza emphasises the importance of reason in behaviour and decision-making, the privileged class dominates its imagination [5]. Spinoza's images were predominantly preferred by the upper class. He was perplexed by society's inequitable distribution of educational resources, which impeded the practical application of rationality. Spinoza posited that logic serves as a guiding principle for individuals in their pursuit of self-preservation and freedom. He disregards the reality that educational resources are dispersed unevenly. Socioeconomic disparities in educational resources might hinder certain groups from fully accessing education, impeding their cognitive growth and personal fulfilment. The inequitable allocation of educational resources can exacerbate disparities in social status and income, impeding rationality. Spinoza's theory fails to consider the existence of educational disparity and hinders the development of rational thinking. Fairness in the distribution of educational resources must be enhanced in order to promote rationality. This ensures that all individuals have sufficient educational opportunities to actively engage in social activities and decision-making processes, as well as to develop a sense of self-value.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has predominantly examined the philosophical framework of Spinoza, specifically focusing on his viewpoints regarding human nature, liberty, and political philosophy. By virtue of the monism of nature and God, Spinoza establishes that human is inherently free, that reason invariably leads to the correct course of action, and that the state is rationalised by preserving the inherent and instrumental natural rights of every individual. Human's freedom lies in his ability to recognise needs. According to Spinoza, an individual's rights and capabilities are essentially the same. Nature dictates that the limits of someone's authority are determined by what is within their control. Simultaneously, he expressed disapproval of the separation between humans and the natural world (where the state was granted complete control over natural rights) and envisioned a society that is more equal and liberated. However, Spinoza also falls victim to the upper class's perspective and presents a top-down vision, ignoring the fact that social formations have led to varying interpretations of the right to liberty that do not adhere to the laws of nature as they are constant and the unequal distribution of resources that renders his ideal of sanity inaccessible to everyone. Spinoza's philosophy delves deeply into the connection between nature and freedom, offering a crucial theoretical basis for people's quest for virtue and happiness. Spinoza considers humans as an integral part of the natural order and establishes the rights of freedom based on natural laws. This grants individuals the essential rights to seek freedom and self-fulfillment. The idea places great emphasis

on the significance of reason, asserting that genuine self-preservation and freedom can only be attained by following the guidance of reason. In addition, Spinoza's philosophical framework provides deep insights into the harmonisation of personal autonomy and governmental power within societal systems, offering vital guidance for the construction of a fair, liberated, and egalitarian community. Future research might investigate the application of Spinoza's theory to contemporary governance practices, assessing its efficacy in promoting individual pleasure and societal well-being, and performing thorough examinations of its methodology and its connections with other philosophical frameworks. For instance, inquiries could explore the correlation between Spinoza's philosophy and Derrida's post-structuralist ideology, along with discussions including Locke's idea of inherent entitlements. By juxtaposing diverse philosophical perspectives and approaches, one might attain a more profound comprehension of Spinoza's ideas, hence providing wider outlooks for interdisciplinary investigation and theoretical amalgamation. Furthermore, conducting comprehensive research on the correlation between Spinoza's philosophy and areas such as environmental ethics, social justice, and comparative political theory would enhance comprehension of his concepts and offer wider viewpoints for interdisciplinary investigation and theoretical integration.

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