

God, mind and authority in spinozian thought

Deus, mente e autoridade no pensamento espinozano

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ABSTRACT

Religion has a relevant role in the framing of social life throughout human history. In all organized and non-organized societies, the influence of religion in the organization of the social life of the individual really great. In addition to the legal ties that bind people together in the society, religious ties are also important. In short, the statement “The history of humanity is shaped by the profound influence of religion” is a statement that should not be underestimated. This study is based on how Spinoza defines the concepts of God, mind and authority in his thought.

Keywords: Spinoza. Mind. Authority. Individual.

RESUMO

A religião tem um relevante papel de modelagem da vida social na história humana. Em todas as sociedades organizadas e não organizadas, a influência da religião na organização da vida social do indivíduo é realmente grande. Além dos laços legais que unem as pessoas na sociedade, os laços religiosos também são importantes. Em suma, a afirmação “A história da humanidade é moldada pela profunda influência da religião” não deve ser subestimada. Este estudo aborda como Spinoza define os conceitos de Deus, mente e autoridade.

Palavras-chave: Spinoza. Mente. Autoridade. Indivíduo.

Introduction

Raised with a tendency in accordance with Jewish theology in the environment where he was born and developed, Spinoza developed his world of thought by being influenced by the political and religious environment of the period. Although it is obvious that Spinoza is influenced by the teaching of pantheism, which suggests that the existence of God is not independent of the universe, his mind-based propositions and criticisms of mystical, cabalist beliefs have placed him in a different position. Spinoza, who distinguishes philosophy and theology from each other, is seen in his works that he places religion and politics on different levels in parallel with the same idea. Religious authority “church”, “synagogue” etc. and political authority are not only a sharp distinction in different positions, but religious authority has come under the control and regulation of political authority. In Spinoza, religion, as a spiritual bond between people and the creator, has ceased to be a regulatory phenomenon in terms of the political system. Spinoza, who expressed the natural situation with turmoil and political orderlike Hobbes, predicted that there was no obstacle to the use of the mind of every person who constituted the society, unless they took an action that disrupted the political order at the limit of their thoughts and expression. Spinoza, who attributed rights to individuals in providing this environment of freedom, obliged the political authority to protect the “order” and to ensure the continuity of the “order”.

This study, which tries to analyze the bond between power and the individual based on the concepts of God, mind and authority in Spinozian thought, consists of three subheadings. In this context, firstly, general information about Spinoza’s life was given and his political thought was tried to be explained in general terms, and then Spinoza’s political thought was evaluated through the concept of mind, the relationship between God, mind and authority.

Fundamentals of Spinoza’s political thought

Benedictus de Spinoza (Portuguese, Bendo de Espinosa; Hebrew, Baruch), whose name is widely mentioned in contemporary philosophy, was born on 24 November 1632 in Amsterdam as the child of a Jewish family who had to settle in the Netherlands from Spain due to religious oppression. Spinoza was educated in accordance with Jewish theology under the influence of the environment in which he was born and developed. Spinoza started his education by studying theology in 1638 at the Talmud Torah (Law Reviews) school founded by the Jews who settled in Amsterdam from Portugal in 1616 (SPINOZA, 2004, p. 5). In the 1650s, Spinoza, who was not satisfied with the intensive religious education in his school, continued his education in the school of Franciscus van den Enden, who would introduce him to the works of thinkers such as Descartes and Giordano Bruno. Spinoza, who settled in Rijnsburg in 1660, had the chance to tell his theses to the community of different political thoughts and professions. Spinoza’s knowledge of Hebrew and Dutch, as well as Spanish, Portuguese and Latin, has made it easier for Europe’s few scholars and philosophers to access their works (AGAOGULLARI *et. al.*, 2011, p. 457-458). In 1663, Spinoza moved to Voorrburg near La Haye, where he published the book *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, an explanation of Descartes metaphysics. Within the same years, he started to work on *Etica*, which is known as the masterpiece. However, he mentions his work on *Tractatus Theologic Politicus*, another work of his, to his pen pal, Oldenburg. In 1670, he settled in La Hey and published *Tractatus Theologic Politicus*. This work causes very violent discussions and is prohibited by the Reformation Church Council (RIZK, 2012, p. 18). At the same time, this work caused him to be excommunicated from his own congregation.

Spinoza lived a simple life. He was earning his living by doing the “lens processing for optical instruments” that he had learned at the Jewish school. His work caused the progression of the disease that he genetically carried and adversely affected his health. Meanwhile, he began to write *Tractus Politicus*. He died in 1677 at the age of 45 before completing this work due to his health condition. The manuscript of the *Brief Examination on the God, Man and Happiness of Man* written in Dutch was found in the drawer after his death (AGAOGULLARI *et. al.*, 2011, p. 457-458).

The relationship between God, memory and mind in spinozian thought

Spinoza begins in *Ethica*, by saying “I understand the substance, what does not need anything else to exist and does not need any other concept to be considered.” Based on this definition, he continues his statement as the cause of the substance is itself, if it was due to no other reason than itself, it would not be the substance. “The substance is infinite, meaning that if it were finite, it would depend on the cause of another substance,” he revealed. Since we are talking about a substance that is not bound to anything, there is only one substance that follows everything (SPINOZA, 2011, p. 33-34). Other things we witness in the universe are different modifications of this substance. The things we encounter are actually various reflections of the unbound substance (FRANSEZ, 2012, p. 26). Substance is the thing which God has an infinite number of attributes and these attributes express his eternal essence. However, we can only know two of these attributes: thought and extension. Our knowledge of reality is limited and our lack of knowledge is unlimited. (BENN, 2010, p. 51). This is exactly where Descartes’ philosophy of Cartesian dualism, which formed its foundations, moved away from Descartes. Descartes claims that God is the substance, and that other beings are the substance created by gaining meaning with the God substance, which is an infinite being. Spinoza argues that God is a single substance, and this substance, which is not connected to anything, is a single substance as a result of its own uniqueness (WEBER, 1998, p. 229). As the substance is one and it depends on nothing, it is absolutely free. His freedom is not freedom from oppression, but freedom from his own existence. Spinoza thinks that behind the visible reality there is a basic reality that cannot be reached by daily observation and experiment, and which can only be grasped by philosophers and scholars by means of reason. In fact, knowledge in Spinoza includes a transcendental understanding. A virtuous mind is needed to reach its substance. Spinoza speaks of a material mind monism - apart from Descartes’ dualism of matter and reason. In any case, a transcendental understanding is also valid here (AGAOGULLARI *et. al.*, 2011, p. 461). With a pantheist attitude; this is an intrinsic reason, a relative reason, a reason that ensures the continuity of the existence, not a temporary one... Spinoza, who is positioned in a rational tradition such as Descartes, argued that his political obligation, like Hobbes in political philosophy, derives from a social contract. According to Spinoza, who believed that it was consent rather than fear that established the power of authority in political management, the purpose of political power was to provide a political system based on freedom-based consent (CEVİZCI, 2017, p. 405). Only in this way, people could give up their natural rights and transfer their rights to a sovereign. The system in which people transformed from the natural state to the state of subjects was called democracy. The individual who became a subject in democracy could use all his power in this system as a whole. Fear of irrational orders was less common in the community, which transformed into holistic power. Because it was almost impossible for large communities to agree on an irrational proposal (SPINOZA, 2011, p. 230).

Spinoza predicts that no one in democracies will completely overthrow their natural right. It transfers some of the "natural right" to the majority of the society in which it is included. Therefore, they remain equal within the community, as they are in the natural state. The mind has to form the basis of this system where people can live in peace and tranquility. The subjects are in strict obedience in this system. They cannot take any action that would undermine the authority of the sovereign without the knowledge of the sovereign. Although this is an act of good faith, it will not change. The only exception is that no power or obstacle can prevent the free thought and expression of people. It is the duty of the sovereign to provide this environment. If the sovereign cannot provide this environment, people can return to their natural state. It's not his hatred that makes a man an enemy. It is the state that reveals the will of hostility. The state has to put the justice system on a solid footing. The only power that can protect the individual against the power of the sovereign is the rational justice system (SPINOZA, 2011, p. 231-235).

No attribute and quality is attributed to God in Spinozian thought because the essence/god is not defined by human attributes. The concept of God is tried to be explained and interpreted by mind analysis. According to Spinoza, individuals' independent thinking power can be reached not through revelation or tradition, but on the basis of knowledge, within a deductive system derived from an obvious set of definitions and axioms (CEVIZCI, 2017, p. 21). The axioms of individuals do not depend on the understanding of the transcendental God. Here, nature is identified with God, and the originality of free thought emerges by immersing human mind and behavior with nature. The understanding that the substance and soul in Cartesian thought are two opposing substances is made intrinsic to individuals with the Spinozian approach. According to him, the substance is absolutely infinite. There is nothing but substance, and each of its attributes is relatively infinite (WEBER, 1998, p. 231). According to Spinoza, the point that needs to be understood from belonging to the essence of something is that the understanding of existence and being belongs to the existence and understanding of that thing (SPINOZA, 2011, p. 157). God is an essence, and the essence is not a God different from what he creates, but the sum of everything that is one. Therefore, God cannot be thought in a body in any way. Attributes belonging to God, Essence, cannot be associated with human beings (SPINOZA, 2011, p. 65-69). Spinoza is of the opinion that the essence of God is infinite and it is not possible to perceive God with human emotions. According to him, God can only be understood with a superior mind. This superiority arises from the divine mind itself. The fact that God is a thinking being is because he can form both the idea of his own essence and the ideas of what comes out of this essence (SPINOZA, 2011, p. 167). In this context, the human mind is the ideas themselves. The relationship between mind and ideas is similar to the relationship between God and beings. If God and all beings are the same, the human mind is not independent of their thoughts (FRANSEZ, 2012, p. 152-153). In short, Spinoza states that, unlike Descartes, matter, mind and soul come from a single substance and cannot be considered separately from each other.

As it can be understood from these definitions, Spinoza's understanding of God reveals that all objects are essence and cause, not as a result of objects with independent thinking power. In addition, the formal existence of ideas is due to the fact that he defines God as a thinking being (SPINOZA, 2011, p. 169). God, the source of all essence, can only be grasped by reason. The individual needs to have a pure and natural mind in grasping God. The individual's access to independent power of thinking emerges as a method of improving and purifying his/her mind and gaining his/her natural power to the mind.

Spinoza, who collects what he sees as an obstacle to gaining the natural power of the mind and what is seen as absolute good for people under three headings, explains "wealth,

reputation and ambition" as ordinary desires that move people's appetite (SPINOZA, 2019, p. 17-19). Spinoza asserts that wealth, reputation and passion confuse the mind as temporary desires, and in this context, he sees wealth, reputation and passion as a veil of fog in front of the mind in finding the real good. Apart from these desires, the mind makes remarkable analyzes in reaching competence and natural power. According to him, the source of our happiness or unhappiness is completely subject to the nature of the object we are attached to with love (SPINOZA, 2019, p. 20-23).

The quality of the object affects our ability to make. If the object that we are emotionally attached to gives us unhappiness, it reduces our ability to act. This situation becomes an obstacle to our access to real information. On the contrary, if the object that we are emotionally attached to gives us joy, our power to act begins to increase. These changes in emotional status are also effective in accessing information in rational thinking (ROBINSON AND KUTNER, 2019, p. 115).

Love for what is eternal, that is, "love of God" nourishes the soul with joy, it is considered as genuine love that is superior to the temporary love that we see as the goal. The real and absolute well-being of human beings takes place with this competent way of thinking (SPINOZA, 2019, p. 25-27). The knowledge and accumulation created by human beings by connecting hearsay information and experiences to temporary objects in order to reach competence in thought stands as a cover in front of the true mind. In order to lift the lid off, the mind must be connected to the permanent and real object. When determining the correct thinking method, it is important what the concepts we create in our minds are. With this method, the concept of correct thinking is distinguished from other concepts. Within this concept, it is necessary to determine certain rules that will guide our mind and to determine the method of the mind to act according to the criterion of correct information (SPINOZA, 2019, p. 51). In this way, the mind will access the knowledge of the most competent entity, and at the same time, it will become the most competent. In short, Spinoza has proved and reinforced that reasoning is correct by using the right mind. In order to do this correctly, he suggested that we perceive a right concept, distinguish it from all other perceptions, determine the rules that will perceive according to the right concept, and determine a style in order not to think about unnecessary things (SPINOZA, 2019, p. 57; 61). As a result, Spinoza tried to reach the information of the substance from bottom to top, from the particular to the universal, towards the essence of the correct information in order to reach the information.

The concept of authority and the relationship between authority and individual in spinozian thought

In Spinozian thought, absolute authority belongs to God. God is a substance, all beings are immanent in this substance. These beings, which are immanent, feed on God in continuity. God gave importance to the universe he created and to everything in the universe. Therefore, it is not possible to distinguish between God and nature. This definition also means that there can be no distinction between body and soul. Since God is not a being with a personality, he cannot be burdened with human emotions. God neither hates nor fears nor rewards nor punishes man. From this point of view, Spinoza breaks away from the Orthodox religious tradition that draws a line between God and nature and brings a rational perspective to the concept of God and this style of explanation causes him to be accused of being an atheist (AĞAOĞULLARI *et. al.*, 2011, p. 462-463). When evaluated in terms of the period he lived, it can be said that Spinozian thought laid the foundations of secular thought in the transcendence of Church authority and in the

understanding of the God universe. This was a quite remarkable effort for that period. During Spinoza's life time democracy was associated with fanaticism and intolerance rather than free thought in religion (BENN, 2010, p. 46). Spinoza's political theory, known to have read Thomas Hobbes's books *De Cive* and *Leviathan*, has some features similar to Hobbes' political views. The concept of right and power forms the basis of the philosopher's political theory. The natural state of humans is a right. Natural right is understood as the power of nature itself. It is also the result of this right that people use force to survive in their natural state. Spinoza differs from Hobbes with this view. According to Hobbes, the laws of nature are the rules of the mind that apply to all people. Spinoza, on the other hand, defines the laws of nature not with reason, but with the will and desire that compels people to act (SPINOZA, 2011, p. 37).

According to Spinoza, the state of nature is a state of slavery. In slavery, people use reason to form a social contract. A person who wants to protect his natural rights with a social contract transfers some of his powers to a legal-rational sovereign power, that is, to the power of the state. Spinoza's state is a state of virtues equipped with reason. The fact that people leave the natural state and live in this state is a state of liberation (AGAOGULLARI *et. al.*, 2011, p. 457-458). Sovereignty is a natural right defined not by the power of each of the citizens, but by the power of the people united under the same thought. This means that the state, which is a whole with its body and soul, has the right to the extent of its power. Just as people have rights in the natural state, the state naturally has this right based on the substance that is the reason for its existence (SPINOZA, 2011, p. 49). Obedience to sovereign authority cannot be sustained by mere fear. Authority makes rational laws to keep people together. While obedience to the law is reciprocated as a virtuous act, disobedience to the law is defined as a bad state. Since the state society will be less bad than the state of nature in every condition, people will prefer this bad to the other because in democracies there is less fear of irrational orders. The reason for this is that it is almost impossible for the majority of the people to reach a consensus on an irrational arrangement. The basis of democracies is to prevent irrational requests and to keep people under control in order to ensure that people can live in peace and tranquility. If this foundation disappears, the whole structure will collapse (SPINOZA, 2004, p. 77- 80).

In his work *Tractatus Theologic Politicus* (TTP), Spinoza laid the foundations of the state and evaluated the rights of individuals, natural, civil and dominant power in a remarkable perspective. In TTP, the power of nature is the power of God, it has a right that is sovereign and supreme over all things. The power of nature equals the power of individuals in total. Therefore, each individual has the right to dominate and do everything he/she can. It is certain that his right is equal to his power (SPINOZA, 2011, p. 225). In fact, Spinoza tried to show in the first fifteen parts of the TTP that God allows people to express their thoughts freely and respect them within the framework of their own thoughts (AGAOGULLARI *et. al.*, 2017, p. 55).

According to Spinoza's political theory, there is no right or wrong in the state of nature. He advocates the necessity of using his mind and living in mutual cooperation in order to get rid of the state of nature. If two people in a state of nature agree and join forces, they have more rights over nature than they alone would have. The more this association is, the more the right to nature will increase proportionally (SPINOZA, 2018, p. 42). Collective power creates the natural states of the person. The political will that constitutes the existence of power and unites everyone under this existence stems from the natural desire and desire of individuals (RIZK, 2012, p. 201).

In addition, human acts according to the law of his nature in civil society as in the case of nature. The fact that human beings are in civil society does not mean that they do not have a sense of hope and fear arising from their natural state. Civil society will also take action under the

influence of these emotions. The difference is that within civil society, people share the same feelings collectively, not as individuals. This situation will lead us to the conclusion that the citizen is not independent alone. No one alone can decide what is right, what is wrong, what is moral, what is immoral. On the contrary, the state decides that all individuals are the sum of their collective will and each individual lives in line with this decision (SPINOZA, 2018, p. 50).

It is the most fundamental right of an individual to ensure his/her safety and to live in peace and tranquility. In order to defend this right, a peaceful order is established with a social contract. Ensuring a peaceful order will be by the hand of public law. Public law should create an environment where individuals can freely say their destructive and non-hating words against their sovereign authority. In this order, people are under the assurance of authority against the words they say freely. The sovereign has protected its authority by law in actions against the political order and in a way that shakes the authority. Here, we see the relationship between the freedom of individuals and the benefit of society. Spinoza actually sees the reconciliation of the sovereignty of the state and the freedom of the individual as unnecessary. Because they are already naturally in agreement and do not contradict each other (BALIBAR, 2010, p. 44).

The sovereign authority holds the power of the public as the sole determinant of what everyone will and will not do. The determinant and practitioner of all public services is this sovereign authority. It is the sovereign authority that will declare war, determine the conditions of peace, and enact and implement laws to establish and protect the public order. Since it is the sovereign's responsibility to look at or implement public affairs, individuals cannot deal with a public issue without the knowledge of the authority, otherwise they will seize power (SPINOZA, 2018, p. 60). Spinoza is against all forms of rebellion (including civil disobedience). Because obedience is to do what must be done in accordance with the common right of authority. Even when management is bad, Spinoza does not favor people's rebellion against management. In order to prevent conflict, the state has to secure free thought. If the sovereign power cannot provide this environment by using its authority, the emergence of conflict is absolute. As restrictions on individual freedom become harsher, the reaction to those restrictions will become harsher. Naturally, the productive power of thought will become destructive as each is forced to think like the other in some way (BALIBAR, 2010, p. 45).

The right of the sovereign belongs to the one who has this power. Since ensuring the continuity of order is the main role assigned to the sovereign in Spinoza's political philosophy, the sovereign is responsible for individuals to develop their abilities in society, live in harmony and be free. In line with this basic goal, the state should be organized in a way that ensures stability and establishes the balance of power. The interests of executives and governed people can be kept in balance by linking the system (JARRET, 2007, p. 193). Although Spinoza resembles Hobbes, who explains the political order with a social contract arising from natural life, he does not agree with Hobbes when he considers democracy as the most natural form of government while defending that the subject should not sacrifice all his rights to the ruler (RUSSEL, 2020, p. 142-143).

Spinoza's concept of right and power refers to what the individual can think and do. Here, the individual's right, like everyone's right, is the individual's power to act on all parts (*potentia*). In other words, right arises from power. If there are disruptions in the power of people or if the power of people is not sufficient, the sovereign should support the power of people. Thus, it can be seen that the foundations of a system that provides interpersonal equality of democracies are tried to be developed with Spinozian thought. The measure of right is also the measure of individuality. Individuals will have unequal powers unless a power "potestas" to equalize them comes into play (BALIBAR, 2010, p. 79-80). As a result, Spinoza makes a distinction from power and power. Power is a mechanism that separates us from our power and reduces our power, whether it comes from

God or from a natural situation. In civil societies, the power to do things goes through the hands of individuals, and this power passes to a state or a ruler. Each entity is in an effort to maintain its own existence. Everything that supports this effort is a state of liberation.

Conclusion

Spinoza's theo is understood via mind. The experience of mind suggests that the individual separated from emotions should take political action within the rational dimension. Fictional truth is realized by mind. Beliefs can play an important role in the search for salvation and individual action. But once it takes political action, mind has to be a precursor. No authority belonging to the clergy can take precedence over mind. It is the essence/god that forms the source of its authority, no other authority can take its place. The individual in the authority of the mind exhibits a free attitude in his/her political actions and constitutes an organic integrity at the point of sharing power.

Political participation is not only an understanding of democracy by choice, it requires a continuous interaction from top to bottom between the individual and power. If this interaction cannot be achieved, the sovereign authority that uses power may exhibit incomplete attitudes in its actions and decisions. This can also cause a deep break. Organic integrity can be compromised. The peaceful environment that needs to be provided in the society is interrupted. This is the reason for the individual to return to the "natural state" again. In order to prevent all these drawbacks, the understanding of democracy needs to spread over a wide background.

In the characteristics of Spinoza's "democratic state", all people have the right to vote and stand on an order in which everyone can come to public duties. As long as it does not undermine the public authority of individuals, all kinds of political thoughts and discourses are secured. In this context, the thoughts of Spinoza on the state and the freedom environment, the mind-based analysis between authority and the individual can contribute to the spread of the understanding of democracy on a wide basis. In addition, all these constructions about civil society can contribute to the further strengthening of the democratic bond between the individual and the state. The "individual", who provides his/her democratic immanence with "power", realizes his/her inner self in the public sphere, thus sits on a solid ground in the political sphere.

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