

Is Spinozism a Form of Libertarian Education?*

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Abstract

The present article intends to discuss whether the philosophy of Benedict de Spinoza may be regarded as a form of libertarian education. Spinoza, a thinker of the seventeenth century, placed human freedom as the great ethical and political problem of his work. Contemporary pedagogies, which are seen as libertarian, emerged in the nineteenth century and proposed a form of education that stood out for fostering children's freedom, as well as teachers' freedom of teaching. By conducting in-depth bibliographical research on this general thematic similarity between libertarians and the Spinozan philosophy, we conclude that Spinozism can be seen as a form of libertarian education in that its writings agree with and provide foundations (from a philosophical viewpoint) to theses that are valid for this type of practice, as advocated by educators such as Paul Robin, Sébastien Faure and Franscesc Ferrer, among others. Our arguments take into account the historical contexts in which the theories in question were created, and involve, by their nature, the historical and philosophical dimensions of education.

Keywords

Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677) – Libertarian education – Philosophy of contemporary education.

Introduction

To say that Spinozism is a form of libertarian education is no absurdity. From the beginning of the twentieth to the beginning of the twenty-first century, there was no shortage of commentators willing to demonstrate how, although there is no systematized philosophy of education in Spinozan thought, Spinozism is, in its very status of a philosophy, a form of education for freedom. The interpreters of Spinoza's philosophy, based only on canonical commentaries, may possibly not understand this statement,

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especially if they do not bear in mind the context of seventeenth-century education and some basic information about the history of libertarian education.

It is quite true that before we set about pursuing this objective, namely, to show whether Spinozism can be considered a form of libertarian education, we must at least mention the debated problem about the possibility of education in Spinoza's work. This controversial point, analyzed in depth since 1911 at the beginning of William Rabenort's book, *Spinoza as educator*, can be summarized as follows: the absolute Spinozan determinism, based on the thesis of the immanence of the cause of all things in all their effects, necessarily entails that no space actually remains for human action. It would be impossible, therefore, to propose a Spinozan pedagogy that might eventually escape from the necessary and fatal order of all things.

To break with the thesis of the impossibility of education in Spinoza's work – a task we will not carry out here – implies reviewing and understanding a certain image of Spinozism created in the seventeenth century by Leibniz (1989, p. 281), who humorously described it as a kind of “neo-naturalist” or “stoic neo-materialist” sect. In this respect, it is not enough to demonstrate with philosophical speculations that there is no such thing as the conformist fatalism that many perceive in Spinoza; it is also necessary to point out the ideological interest behind promoting this image as truth.

Our intention here, a more pedagogical than philosophical one, is to start from the assertion found several times in Spinoza's writings according to which the act of educating reveals an essential dimension of liberation necessary for building societies in which freedom of thought and the practice of mutual assistance are the prevalent rule. The philosopher, as will be seen below, says that by educating the human being for a life under the rule of his own reason (freedom) do we attain our maximum social utility. We intend, therefore, to conduct an examination of these affirmations by combining them with the pedagogical practices the philosopher himself conducted, in order to finally show how Spinozism agrees with the central theses of libertarian pedagogy.

For a Libertarian Spinozism²

The effort to bring Spinozism closer to a particular conception of education for freedom is not new. According to Adolfo Ravà, the Italian commentator Martinetti, who studied the problem of freedom in Spinoza's work, pointed out as early as in 1926 that

[...] the Spinozan system is too often distorted by interpretations that see it as pure determinism or a kind of naturalistic fatalism: an essential part of this system is the doctrine of the liberating action of knowledge, through which man, using his intelligence, extends the domains of his spirit and the scope of his freedom, thus gaining awareness of the rationality of things, in which his will identifies and is appeased. (MARTINETTI, 1926 apud RAVÀ, 2013, p. 274).

2- The references to Spinoza's works will be accompanied by the codes for the standard Latin edition organized by Carl Gebhardt (see SPINOZA, 1972); they will be indicated by the initial “G” followed by the volume number in Roman numerals and the page number in Arabic numerals.

Before this argument was even presented, William Rabenort (1911, p. 61) had already argued that at the basis of Spinozism's political foundation lies the idea of an education understood as a process of mutual liberation. He asserted that, in Spinoza, education is the "process of mutual liberation from whatever checks the application of reason to the affairs of human life, progressively pursued in co-operation".

Five years ago, Luís Machado de Abreu was more explicit in that intention:

The Spinozan system contains pedagogical principles of fundamental relevance for the educational process, and one can also speak of a pedagogical practice through epistolary exchanges and Spinoza's philosophy, both in the Ethics and in the political treatises, to present itself as a pedagogy of freedom. (ABREU, 2013, p. 11).

The doctrine of the liberating action of knowledge by which, according to Martinetti, man can reach the limits of his freedom, as well as the theory of mutual liberation mentioned by Rabenort and the pedagogy of freedom defined by Abreu, show in common a clear turn in Spinoza's thought towards a libertarian education. But is that really so?

This appeal for liberation, to which the most intimate purpose of Spinoza's philosophy is linked, has been expressed since the earliest writings of the young philosopher. The Short Treatise on God, Man & His Well-Being (ST) is an example of this. At the very end of it, the reader finds the caveat:

To bring all this to an end, it remains only for me to say to the friends to whom I write this: do not be surprised at these novelties, for you know very well that it is no obstacle to the truth of a thing that it is not accepted by many. And as you are also aware of the character of the age in which we live, I would ask you urgently to be very careful about communicating these things to others. I do not mean that you should keep them altogether to yourselves, but only that if you ever begin to communicate them to someone, you should have no other aim or motive than the salvation of your fellow man, and make as sure as possible that you will not work in vain. (SPINOZA, 2012, p. 153. ST, Conclusion; GI, p. 112).

Salvation (of oneself and of others), the stated objective of the philosophy contained in ST, is human freedom, "to be able to taste union with God, produce true ideas in myself, and make all these things known to my fellow men also." "For we can all", Spinoza writes, "share equally in this salvation, as happens when this produces in them the same desire that is in me, bringing it about thereby that their will and mine are one and the same, and producing one and the same nature, agreeing always in all things" (SPINOZA, 2012, p. 152. ST, II, 26, §8; GI, p. 110)³.

The text is repeated along the same line, but in Latin words, in the Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect (TEI), another work of his youth, probably previous to ST. Spinoza says:

3- In a note on this paragraph, Spinoza could not be more libertarian: "The servitude of a thing consists in being subjected to external causes, freedom, on the contrary, is not being subjected to them, but freed from them".

This, then is the end I aim at: to acquire such a nature [*talem... natura*], and to strive that many acquire it with me. That is, it is part of my happiness to take pains that many others may understand as I understand so that their intellect and desire agree entirely with my intellect and desire. (ESPINOSA, 2015a, p. 33. TEI, Paragraph 14; GII, p. 8).

The nature that Spinoza intends to approach carefully further on in his writing consists in knowing the union of the mind with the whole Nature. The goal to be achieved is, therefore, common salvation or, in other words, common liberation.

To avoid perceptions that the proposition of a philosophy as a practice of libertarian education was an idea he advocated only in his youth, we can find in paragraph 49 of Chapter 8 of his Theological-Political Treatise (TPT) – a late work left unfinished – a authentic manifesto for the freedom to teach, written precisely in the century of the birth of religious public education.⁴ Spinoza argues that academies created at the expense of the Republic serve more to coerce human ingenuities than to cultivate them, and, on the contrary, in a free republic, every educator must be given permission to teach publicly (ESPINOSA, 2009, p. 118. TPT, 8, §49; GIII, p. 346).

Spinoza's famous refusal to take the chair of Philosophy at the University of Heidelberg took place, it is worth noting, in the name of freedom to philosophize, that is, to teach philosophy. In his thanking Fabritius's invitation (Letter 48), the philosopher presents his refusal, fearing the restraints on the freedom to teach that were common to institutions controlled by the Church; he confesses never to have had an interest in engaging in the agitation of public school life for the sake of tranquility. This was in 1673, four years before Spinoza's death (ESPINOSA, 2008, p. 113).

The last chapter of the Theological-Political Treatise (TPT), published in 1670, aims to close the demonstration of the thesis that defines the treatise as a whole: there is full compatibility between the freedom to philosophize and the preservation of piety and peace in an empire. In this chapter, Spinoza develops a reasoning that seems to fit exactly the designs of his libertarian interpreters. He says:

If, therefore, no one can give up his title to judge and to think as he lists, but every one by a supreme law of nature is master of his own thoughts, it follows that an attempt can never be made without the most disastrous consequences to the Commonwealth, to make all men, though possessed by nature of the most various and even opposite sentiments, to utter no word save upon the prescription of their governors. (ESPINOSA, 2003, p. 302. TPT, 20; GIII, p. 240).

According to Spinoza, it is not possible to force all citizens to speak and think only what is in line with civil laws. The more one seeks to withdraw from human beings their freedom of expression, the more they will resist. The avaricious, the flatterers and other numskulls (who are used to thinking one thing and saying another) will certainly have broad space in such an empire; on the other hand, "those whom good education, sound

4- About the history of public education in the seventeenth century, cf. Luzuriaga (1959).

morality and virtue have rendered more free”, will have no space in it (ESPINOSA, 2003, p. 306. TPT, 20; GIII, p. 244).

Now we can see that it is not only in its individual dimension of salvation, but also in its political and pedagogical contours that freedom appears as the purpose of the empire and of education in a republic where peace and harmony rule. However, merely advocating an education for freedom could pertain, for example, to a liberal education practice.

Some have taken a similar position. Abreu (1993, p. 118) identified in this way of thinking about education (expressed in the PT) the Spinozan intent to establish an empire in which, in the field of education, there might be the presence of the “private sector sanctioned by the State and the public opinion”. Abreu’s view sounds coherent, since Spinoza indeed placed the guarantee of the freedom to teach not in the idea of a strong State, but in the teacher’s own ability to be reputed as a good teacher. In the free empire, Spinoza wrote, each individual will be given the freedom to teach “at their own expense and the peril of their own reputation.” (ESPINOSA, 2009, p. 118. PT, 8, §49; GIII, p. 346).

At first glance, this seems to be pure germinal liberalism, since it is based on the idea of individual-private educational funding and on accepting a meritocracy based on the teacher’s reputation with students. However, from another perspective, this analysis can be regarded as anachronistic, insofar as it interprets the Spinozan thesis through the lens of the historical experience of liberalism’s consolidation, a state of things that Spinoza never actually experienced completely.

More rigorously, it is convenient to interpret the Spinozan proposition of an education at the expense of the teacher as a kind of self-management independent from the empire. The introduction of the notion of self-management here would also be a form of anachronism if its conceptualization, according to the libertarian thought delineated throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, did not correspond so clearly to what Spinoza meant in paragraph 49 of chapter 8 of PT. According to Silvio Gallo, social self-management is the libertarian principle arising from the uncompromising defense of individual freedom and autonomy, which denies institutionalized power over individual freedoms of thought, judgment and speech, and opposes forms of hierarchization (GALLO, 2000, p. 34) with power over the teacher’s profession. Spinoza is harshly criticizing, just as Proudhon would later do, the control, inspection, direction, regulation, taxation and censorship of instituted powers over the citizen’s right to think, teach and judge (PROUDHON, 1983, p. 79).

Establishing the problem of teachers’ reputation or fame as the driver of freedom to teach is not based on the idea of merit or on proposing a scenario of free competition. Spinoza, as demonstrated by Diego Tatián (2004), is averse to the notion of merit. In fact, the conception that the teacher will be responsible for managing his own work implies that the only criterion for his teaching is his approval or disapproval by the students. Here, it might be objected that the flattering, populist teacher, more concerned with pleasing than teaching students, would gain a good reputation. However, it is precisely against this type that, let us not forget, the arguments are developed in TPT, thus obliging the author to advocate (in the terms he does) freedom of thought and speech, i.e., freedom to teach what

one thinks. A freely developed education, as Spinozism advocates, established in a free republic will rightly promote honesty and justice as opposed to the profile of the flatterer.

It is not enough, however, to stick to conceptual speculations in favor of Spinozism as a particular form of libertarian education; it is necessary to show that the main topics advocated by libertarian pedagogues since the twentieth century also find a basis in Spinoza's work.

Libertarian Education and Spinozism

Briefly, we can establish four pillars of the libertarian pedagogical thinking, especially regarding the anarchist-inspired libertarianism, which we will address here with greater emphasis: (1) integral education, its first and most solid foundation; (2) education-cooperation, its most explicit practical determinant; (3) a rational and anticlerical education as opposed to prejudices and superstitions; and, finally, (4) education by strengthening reason against prizes and punishments. We will explore each of the topics above to show how Spinoza demonstrated them in his own way with unique rigor.

The exposition of arguments will be mainly guided by three libertarian thinkers of education: Max Stirner (German, 1806-1856) with his pamphlet *The false principle of our Education* (1842), Sébastien Faure (French, 1859-1942), who wrote *The hive* (1904), and Francesc Ferrer (Spanish, 1859-1909), the author of *The modern school* (1901).

Integral Education

The defense of an integral education was the theme of a relevant writing by anarchist thinker Mikhail Bakunin. Published on the July/August 1869 issue of the *L'Egalité* newspaper, *Integral Education* comprises fundamental assumptions for advocating an education that is able to go beyond the type of education the bourgeois socialists demanded.

Now we see why the bourgeois socialists demand only a little education for the people, a soupcon more than they currently receive; whereas we socialist democrats demand, on the people's behalf, complete and integral education, an education as full as the power of intellect today permits, so that henceforth, there may not be any class over the workers by virtue of superior education and therefore able to dominate and exploit them. (BAKUNIN, 2003, p. 60).

Bakunin was then concerned with the increasing relevance and gradual universalization of the model that was called the dualistic school, which consisted in separating intellectual education (for the elites) from vocational education (for factory workers). The dualistic school, analyzed in detail in its French model, fragmented school education and reinforced the historical consolidation of the different classes existing in a condition of inequality (BAUDELLOT; ESTABLET, 1971). Bakunin's enemy is the typical enemy of the second half of the nineteenth century: the industrial development whose accumulation thrived at the expense of the ignorance and exploitation of workers. Therefore, it flew the flag of a scientific or theoretical education accompanied by industrial

or practical education. Both should comprise two stages: a general and a specific one. It was thus aimed at providing individuals with a holistic education, regardless of their social class.⁵

Spinoza, who published his work nearly two centuries earlier, did not witness the establishment of the industrial society; his time, as commentators usually prefer to define, was that of mercantilism, the stage of mercantile capitalism still in a process of definition. In his work, however, we can find a call for an integral development of the human body and human health, i.e., a development that does not take into account only part of the body's aptitudes, but the body as a whole.

The statement of Proposition 60 in Part IV of Ethics is clear: "Desire arising from a pleasure or pain that is not attributable to the whole body, but only to one or certain parts thereof, is without utility in respect to man as a whole (*totius hominis*)" (ESPINOSA, 2015b, p. 472. IV, Prop. 60; GII, p. 255). The utility of man as a whole, and not just of a particular part of it, invigorates human power in a solid way, thus cultivating ingenuity so it may be fit for increasingly multiple encounters. Therefore, desire arising from a joyful affect concerning just a single part of the body (and not all of its parts) does not take into account the human being as a whole.⁶ Since according to Spinoza these affects are the most frequent, "we generally desire to preserve our being without taking into consideration our health as a whole" (ESPINOSA, 2015b, p. 473. EIV, Prop. 60, note; GII, p. 256).

In his Ethics, Spinoza addresses human health in order to think about the utility of the human body as a whole. Health, a matter he addresses in Medicine, contributes along with his doctrine on children's education and other knowledge areas to the search for true good, which the TEI intended to achieve, namely the union of the mind with the whole nature.⁷ Health and education are mixed again in part IV, in the appendix chapters. In chapter 20, Spinoza alludes to marriage, procreation and the upbringing of children and encourages parents to unite out of freedom of soul rather than beauty. Taken as the sole cause, beauty is the motive of sexual love, i.e., of mere lust of copulation – in other words, an affect that pleases just one part the body and often produces discord and hatred (ESPINOSA, 2015b, p. 504. EIV, Appendix, 20; GII, pp. 271-272). In chapter 27, a little later, Spinoza reaffirms that the utility of things external to the human being applies mainly to the preservation of the body; the most useful things for maintaining bodily life are taken from that "which can so feed and nourish the body, that all its parts may rightly fulfil their functions". By nourishing all parts of the body equally and continuously, the human being will be able to be affected by other bodies and also affect other bodies in

5- As Moraes, Calsavara e Martins (2012, p. 999) note, "despite the conflicts between the different political currents, the conception of an integral, egalitarian education was consensually assumed as a priority requirement by the First International, by Bakunin and Marx, and by the trends that both represented".

6- Both in the proof of and in the note on this conception, Spinoza explains the reason why a part of the body that is favored in particular over the others by an external cause will not endeavor to yield its own powers to the other parts so they could perform their work; otherwise, he says, that part would have the power to lose its own powers, which is absurd. (ESPINOSA, 2015b, p. 473. EIV, Prop. 60, proof; GII, p. 256).

7- In the order proposed in the TEI, education comes before health in the set of items required to form that "nature". The text reads: "[...] We must [thirdly] seek the assistance of Moral Philosophy and the Theory of Education; further, as health is no insignificant means for attaining our end, we must also [fourthly] include the whole science of Medicine [...]". (ESPINOSA, 2015a, p. 35. TEI, Paragraph 15; GII, p. 9).

multiple ways; consequently, all the fitter its mind will be for thinking. Therefore, the philosopher concludes, one must nourish one's body with "many foods of diverse nature" so that all its many parts may be equally satisfied and its mind may be equally fit for conceiving many things (ESPINOSA, 2015b, p. 509. EIV, Appendix, 27; GIL, p. 273-274).

The explanation we can draw from these and other passages of the Spinozan work points to the need for the integral development of the human being; his arguments, though they may not seem to have historically grounded libertarian thinkers, can be considered a foundation.

An exclusively general and theoretical education based on the submission of the body to very strict discipline rules can atrophy the apprentice's physical potentials; so too can an exclusively practical and specific education extensively develop certain qualities in the student's body and yet block the overall development of his intelligence. Not for no reason, today's vocational-industrial education is aimed at the so-called manual work, a designation that shows how this type of instruction is interested in improving in particular the arms, hands and fingers of the individual who receives it; on the other hand, an exclusively scientific education can expand the power of the mind to think about certain things, while inhibiting the enhancement of bodily qualities.

Spinoza's support for an entire development of the human being is easily associated with the project of an integral education as conceived, for example, by Ferrer in his *Escola Moderna*. For him, by "establishing an abyss where there should be a healthy, beautiful continuity", the dualistic school has created "a morbid state that fights the laws of the human body", culminating in a "divorce between thinking and wanting" (FERRER, 2010, p. 11). Ferrer resumes the notion of integral education of Bakunin and Paul Robin (1837-1912), the celebrated man who created the libertarian educational experience at the Cempuis mixed orphanage (1880-1894), which consolidated the concept of integral education as a revolutionary pedagogical resource (SAFON, 2003, p. 13-14).

According to Codello (2007, p. 117), integral education is a "revolutionary and effective means to building a libertarian society" at two levels: (1) the integration between manual and intellectual education in the individual's instruction; and (2) the dissemination of this complete education to as many individuals as possible. At the second level, Codello stresses, "it is necessary to prevent science and the arts from basing their benefits only on a small part of humanity, so they may belong to all".

Spinozism, a philosophy of identity between idea and volition,⁸ counters the divorce between thinking and wanting which Ferrer denounced; at the same time, it supports a political project that promotes the free development of the sciences and arts. We have mentioned earlier Spinoza's desire that many individuals might achieve with him the union of the mind with the whole nature. In his *Ethics*, this ideal is repeated in a nuclear manner,⁹ but it is in the *TPT* that it appears in political traits. In dealing with freedom of thought and its possible harm to social life, the philosopher does recognize that it is "absolutely essential to the advancement of the arts and sciences", which can be "cultivated

8 - In this respect, see the end of *Ethics*, II.

9 - See more about this in proposition 36 of part IV of the *Ethics*: "The highest good of those who follow after virtue is common to all, and therefore all can equally rejoice therein". (ESPINOSA, 2015b, p. 429. Gil, p. 234).

with success” by individuals “with a free and unfettered judgement” (ESPINOSA, 2003, p. 305. *TPT*, 20; GIII, p. 243). Free-thinking individuals live in a free republic, where – as stated in paragraph 49 of the eighth chapter of the *PT* – the arts and sciences are taught to promote power, not impotence.

Education-cooperation

The free cultivation of the arts and sciences towards the integral development of the human being in a free society requires education, or rather, good education, as Spinoza says in the *TPT*. The aim of this education cannot, for this very reason, be limited to the individual as an isolated part of the society. That is why libertarian educators have insisted on the use of mutual education. Unlike the Lancasterian mutual teaching method, which is entirely hierarchical and oppressive, the libertarians focused on coeducation between students, since they believe in the student-student interaction as a horizontal way of learning. The method of mutual teaching or monitoring created by Lancaster and Bell during times of teacher shortage in England,¹⁰ consisted in a teaching dynamic whereby the most advanced pupils in a school (called monitors) taught the others by transmitting what they had learned from a teacher shortly before, in a private session; under the supervision of an inspector, monitors are always eventually punished or rewarded by the teachers who direct the process (MIRANDA, 1975, p. 45).¹¹

Libertarian educators, not necessarily because of a shortage of teachers, but because of a determined political option for a model of education based on cooperation and mutual assistance, have established a variety of non-hierarchical teaching dynamics between children. Seldom would the creators of experimental schools find teachers already affiliated with and trained in the rationalist conception of education. However, they did keep the centrality of the teacher as a ratio of the pedagogical process, as shown in Ferrer’s concern with teacher-related questions.¹² The libertarian pedagogy overcomes the difficulty to train rationalist teachers by creating Normal Rationalist Schools in which young teachers learn to understand the importance, for a particular child, of another child of the same age or of the same age group, to interact with her with freedom and without the imposition of a vigilant authority. In the act of education-cooperation, the teacher is a true mediator.

Nothing could agree more with Spinoza’s reasoning in chapter 9 of the appendix to part IV of the *Ethics*:

Nothing can be more in harmony with the nature of any given thing than other individuals of the same species; therefore for man [...] there is nothing more useful than his fellow-man who is led by reason. Further, as we know not anything among individual things which is more excellent

10- The method of Lancaster and Bell was brought to Brazil by the Imperial Decree of 1827 (XAVIER, 1980, p. 42).

11- Larroyo says that “a severe system of punishments and rewards keeps discipline among students. The teacher resembles a factory manager [...]. It gives lessons only to monitors and youths who want to become teachers” (LARROYO, 1970, p.620).

12- It is true that some libertarian school experiences tended to break with the need for a teacher-student relationship (FAURE, 2015). Ferrer, on the other hand, insisted on the relationship between students as an educational activity, yet having the teacher as the driving force of the process, without being attached to control or vigilance actions (FERRER, 2010, p. 82).

than a man led by reason, no man can better display the power of his skill and disposition, than in so training men, that they come at last to live under the dominion of their own reason. (ESPINOSA, 2015b, p. 497. GII, p. 268-269).

This short chapter goes through two situations of harmony, from the most generic and least useful to the most useful and least generic: the former is harmony between individuals that are simply of the same species (for example, between two human beings, whether it be adult-adult, child-child or adult-child); the latter is harmony of a human being with another human being who is led by reason. In the latter case, this reason-led individual is of crucial importance to “display the power of his skill and disposition” in “so training men” that everyone may “at last” – i.e., at the end of a particular pedagogical process – live under the dominion of their own reason. The dominion of reason, according to Spinoza, is what is defined by common notions, i.e., the ideas of the common properties of things which present themselves equally in the whole and in their parts, and do not privately constitute the essence of any singular thing (ESPINOSA, 2015b, p. 193. EII, Prop. 38-39. GII p. 118-119). In other words, what develops as reason does not become the property of a singular entity, but remains always common to all.

Certainly, this conception of education as a means through which individuals in circumstances of mutual assistance are mutually supportive and cooperative has a foundation on the emblematic thesis of the note to proposition 18 of part IV: there is nothing more useful for man than his fellow-man (ESPINOSA, 2015b, p. 407. GII, p. 223), as perceived by Rabernort in the excerpt already mentioned here.

All textual evidence leads to the convergence of Spinoza’s pedagogical thought with the general principle of the libertarian mutual teaching. As some contemporary commentators have noted,¹³ the philosopher kept an epistolary exchange to which he attributed a meaning of mutual instruction. In announcing his vehement disagreements with the ideas of his correspondent Bleyenbergh, he pointed out that the practice of mutual instruction can only be fostered when the interlocutors start from common principles.¹⁴ Therefore, even in the most particular dimension of how the nature of the education-cooperation process is to be perceived, i.e., as mutual and common assistance, libertarians may find a possible foundation in Spinozism.

Rational and Anticlerical Education (Against Prejudices and Superstitions)

The value of the reason-led man, a striking character in Part IV of the *Ethics*, may be enough to place Spinoza among those in favor of a rational education. The usefulness of the human being *ex ratione ducitur* deserves, in the *Ethics*, the superlative *utilissimi*: “Men, in so far as they live in obedience to reason, are most useful to their fellow men [...]”

13- About this point, see Ferreira (2012, p. 13-22) and Abreu (2013, p. 11).

14- Spinoza writes to Bleyenbergh: “When I read your first letter, I thought that our opinions almost coincided. But from the second, which was delivered to me on the 21st of this month, I see that the matter stands far otherwise, for I perceive that we disagree, not only in remote inferences from first principles, but also in first principles themselves; so that I can hardly think that we can derive any mutual instruction from further correspondence”. (SPINOZA, 1988, p. 192. Letter 21; GIV, p. 126).

therefore [...], we shall in obedience to reason necessarily endeavor to bring about that men should live in obedience to reason (ESPINOSA, 2015b, p. 431. EIV, Prop. 37, proof; GII, p. 235). However, it would be too vague to say that this endeavor consists, in short, in a project of rational teaching or an education of reason conducted by reason-led individuals. From Plato to Descartes, rational education is referred to, and it may be impossible to find a modern pedagogical method that is not willing to consider reason to some extent. Nevertheless, what identifies libertarian rational education and separates it from other streams of rational or rationalist education is its radical opposition to any form of clerical or religious instruction. Let us follow, in this respect, the argumentative synchronicity between seventeenth-century Spinoza and certain contemporary libertarians, beginning with Max Stirner.

In his pamphlet *The false principle of our Education*, Stirner considers that his time has finally attained freedom of thought, but now it is necessary to complete it in the form of a freedom of will in order to turn freedom of thought into the principle of a new era. The purpose of education can no longer be Knowledge, but the Will that is born from Knowledge (STIRNER, 2001, p. 75). The educational institutions managed and contained by the Church's dogmatic education gave way to institutions that were now directly oppressed by the state. Jean Barraué, in commenting on Stirner's philosophy of education, explains how an education aimed at personality emergence, as he stresses, contrasts with the personality training promoted by religious and state institutions. We are at the origin of Stirner's position on education, and the question is: should the school foster personality emergence or personality training?

Stirner's answer is unequivocal... For centuries, schools and the university relied on authoritarian principles: dogmatic teaching, infallibility of teachers, strict control by the Churches and States, and suffocation of the spirits. [...] If religion weighed with a lighter burden, the State, on the other hand, exerted an ever growing oppression. The purpose of education was to turn the child into a submissive citizen, a *usable citizen*. (BARRUÉ, 2001, p. 31-32, emphasis in original).

The fundamental drive in Stirner's reflection on education agrees with Spinoza's sentiment expressed in the PT about universities. By the mid nineteenth century, the Church seemed to be no longer the main tormentor of the free development of personalities. The suffocation (Stirner's term) or coercing (Spinoza's term) of spirits in educational institutions should give way to learning experienced in a particular kind of teacher-student relationship, balanced in such a way that even when it became necessary to restrict the student's freedom, the teacher would never prevent the emergence of the student's personality in its singularity (BARRUÉ, 2001, p. 35).

Ferrer was perhaps the most austere and violent of libertarian educators against clerical teaching, against clergy and religion in general (SAFÓN, 2003, p. 19). The pedagogue from the Barcelona school spread the anticlerical element throughout his book and, as far as we know, liked to reaffirm in his writings that "the enemies of Jesuitism and conventional lies, as well as the errors transmitted by tradition and routine, will find in our publications the truth sanctioned by evidence" (FERRER, 2010, p. 41). It was therefore

the need to oppose the clericalism of the education of his time that led him to formulate a theory of rational education; its motto is “to educate and instruct the nascent generation in the purely humanistic principles and in the positive and rational knowledge about this nature of which it is part”, thus acting “against the evils produced by the generations submerged in error and superstition, which many succeed in ridding themselves of just to fall into antisocial skepticism” (FERRER, 2010, p. 61).

The problem of prejudices and superstitions was frontally attacked by Ferrer both in school education and in domestic upbringing. He emphasized the need for parents and teachers to repulse as much as they could any expression of religious fear in children’s upbringing. The call for applications to teacher positions at the Escola Moderna was clear: they were looking for teachers who were “free from absurd traditional preoccupations, superstitions and beliefs” (FERRER, 2010, p. 28).

Ferrer intended to educate, through the principle of co-education between the sexes, girls who would constitute a generation of mothers capable of providing their children with rational explanations on the phenomena of nature and life without infusing them with prejudices and religious delusions.

Women so educated will be mothers in the true natural and social sense, not transmitters of traditional superstitions, and they will teach their children the integrity of life, the dignity of freedom, social solidarity, rather than respect for doctrines annihilated and sterilized by exhaustion, or submission to absolutely illegitimate hierarchies. (FERRER, 2010, p. 61-62).

Ferrer’s remark connects to a great extent with Spinoza’s warning about the upbringing of children in the Appendix to Part IV of the *Ethics*; these are doubtless two theories of teaching that start from the refusal of the clerical education then applied to the training of pupils, to offer a critique of superstitions and prejudices. It is not necessary to review each point of Spinoza’s deconstruction of the superstition scheme in the appendix to Part I of the *Ethics* to finally show Spinoza’s agreement with libertarians.¹⁵

Educating by Strengthening Reason (Against Prizes and Punishments)

In explaining the method of Lancaster and Bell earlier in the present text, we said it was entirely based on a reward-punishment game, and that libertarian pedagogues, while engaged in mutual teaching, were against the use of rewards or penalties in the educational process.

In the Escola Moderna there were no prizes, no punishments, no evidence to allow some pupils to draw arrogance from an ‘A’, a mediocre group contented with a ‘pass’, or the unhappy ones who suffered the shame of being depreciated as incapable. These differences, supported by and practiced in official, religious and industrial schools in keeping with the environment

15- Luís Machado de Abreu (2008, p. 405) says that Spinoza’s anticlericalism is “radical and devastating”. In his opinion, “the true and universal religion which he opposes to all forms of superstition means and announces the end of the clergy as they have existed and continue to exist in positive religions”.

and essentially stationary, could not be admitted in the Escola Moderna. (FERRER, 2010, p. 33, emphasis in original).

The same practice of denying the system of examinations and refusing punitive or disciplinary practices was repeated in various libertarian schools. As much as parents might suffer because they wanted some grade attributed to their children, they gradually came to understand that the incentive to study should be enjoyment with one's own knowledge rather than a goal external to the act of learning. Exhausted by having to repeat to new parents time and again what the Escola Moderna thought about the examination system, Ferrer wrote:

These acts [tests and examinations], which clothe themselves with ridiculous solemnities, seem to be instituted to satisfy the unhealthy self-esteem of parents, the extreme vanity and selfish interest of many teachers, and to inflict tortures on children before the test, and afterwards some more or less premature diseases. (FERRER, 2010, p. 34).

In reviewing Ferrer's critique of school prizes and punishments, Maurício Tragtenberg (1978, p. 33) says that "competitiveness, the education system's spring which propels learners to seek superiors to admire or inferiors to despise", is always a pursuit for "being more than others". Competitive teaching leads to "an excess of intellectual and physical work, which deforms intellects, thereby developing certain tendencies and atrophying others" (FERRER, 2010, p. 33).

Spinoza never pondered on school exams or assessments. However, his ethical thought announces the critique of those who entice others to virtuous life only by stimulating a thirst for honor and the affection of envy. Proposition 55 of Part III of the *Ethics* addresses the sadness we feel when we regard our own impotence, a feeling common to students who, after taking a test, are faced with a low grade or an irregular performance. In a note to this proposition where he attempts to show how comparing our own acts with those of others can lead us to an acute contemplation of our own powerlessness, the philosopher recalls that education can further complicate this situation: "For parents", he writes, "generally spur their children on to virtue only by the incentive of honor and envy" (ESPINOSA, 2015b, p. 325. GII, p. 183). In this respect, in their care for their children's studies, parents often fail to teach them the pursuit of knowledge for the pleasure of knowing, or for that will born of knowledge which Stirner praises; instead, they instigate their children to study for a desire of superiority and for an aversion to inferiority at any cost, even if they have to defraud the test.

In Spinoza's view, knowledge is the strongest of affects, and the mind's greatest virtue is knowing (ESPINOSA, 2015b, p. 417. GII, p. 228). An education that does not arouse a taste for knowledge, but teaches the student to study always motivated by rewards or punishments can only make sense in a society whose citizens are not educated for freedom, but for submission. Spinoza would certainly be closer to libertarians who, according to the ideas of the English thinker John Ruskin, wish to see a child assessed – if we may use that term – not by her outcomes, but by her effort; such an effort, conceived

outside the meritocratic and pious image of the dutiful pupil, is an action oriented to knowing and attaining freedom of the mind.¹⁶

Conclusion

No undoubted argument can state conclusively that Spinoza elaborated his work to invent a method of libertarian education; something of this kind would perhaps be pure anachronism. However, in proposing a philosophy such as the one he proposed, he allowed himself to be read in the light of the great pillars of libertarian education, at once acclaimed and fought in the period subsequent to the industrial revolution. This leads us to conclude that Spinozism can be read as a form of libertarian education, though this is not the only possible reading.

The final warning in ST (already mentioned) and the final message of the last note in the *Ethics* are also relevant to this observation. At the decisive moment of the final text of his great book, from the distinction between wise and ignorant, Spinoza resumes the purpose of salvation – freedom of the mind – through which reason attains its dominion in individuals. Before stating explicitly a geometric and assertive conclusion about freedom, Spinoza is concerned with mobilizing the construction of freedom itself in practice.¹⁷

It is true that unlike Robin, Faure and Ferrer, Spinoza never set about creating an experimental school of the libertarian type, nor can we imagine that his collegium (a group of friends who met to study his writings in Amsterdam and corresponded with him about their doubts and objections) was something close to a libertarian practice, as we find in the Colmeia or in the Escola Moderna. Simon de Vries, one of Spinoza's closest disciples, wrote to him about how the collegium was organized and what the purpose of its members was.

As regards our club, the following is its order. One of us (that is everyone by turn) reads through and, as far as he understands it, expounds and also demonstrates the whole of your work, according to the sequence and order of your propositions. Then if it happens if on any point we cannot satisfy one another, we have resolved to make a note of it and to write to you, so that, if possible, it may be made clearer to us, and we may be able under your guidance to defend the truth against those who are superstitiously religious and Christian, and to stand against the attacks of the whole. (SPINOZA, 1988, p. 114. Letter 8; GIV, p. 39).

We can see, after all, that the practice of studies in Spinoza's circle in Amsterdam was kept without hierarchies or tutorships. There was no monitor to provide the "less capable" with the truth about what they were examining together. Everyone had their turn in reading and explaining; they all wrote equally about their doubts and sent their points of disagreement to the philosopher. It was a heterogeneous group formed by students,

16- John Ruskin, an English thinker of the early nineteenth century, was the theoretical foundation of Adelino de Pinho, a Brazilian anarchist educator. The interpretation in this passage was inspired by de Pinho (JOMINI, 1990, p. 113).

17- "If the way which, as I have shown, leads hither seem very difficult, it can nevertheless be found. It must indeed be difficult, since it is so seldom discovered, for if salvation lay ready to hand and could be discovered without great labor, how could it be possible that it should be neglected almost by everybody? But all noble things are as difficult as they are rare." (ESPINOSA, 2015b, p. 579. EV, Prop. 42, note; Gil, p. 308).

merchants, doctors, lawyers, among others. Therefore, Spinoza's pedagogical experience in the collegium anticipated to some extent the principle of co-education of social classes that was so dear to Ferrer's school. Although it was not specifically a form of libertarian education like that which the nineteenth and twentieth centuries came to know, the practice with the collegium members took place in order to fight religious prejudices and defend the truth; a task in itself libertarian.

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