

SPİNOZA FELSEFESİNİN HALKLA İLİŞKİLER ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİLERİ

Simge ÜNLÜ KURT¹

Öz

Spinoza felsefesinin halkla ilişkilerle olan yakın ilişkisinin incelendiği bu çalışmada felsefi düşüncenin halkla ilişkiler üzerindeki etkileri ortaya konulmaktadır. Bu bağlamda 16. yüzyıl filozoflarından Benedict de Spinoza'nın insan doğası, din, ifade özgürlüğü, etik ve ideal devlet anlayışı üzerine görüşleri halkla ilişkiler disiplini çerçevesinde tartışılacak ve bu görüşlerin halkla ilişkilerin temellerini atan isimler üzerindeki etkisi ortaya koyulacaktır. Döneminde çağdaşları tarafından görüşleri pek anlaşılammış ve sıklıkla eleştiri almış olsa da insanlık düşün tarihinde kendisine önemli bir yer edinen Spinoza, özellikle kendine özgü insan doğası ve etik anlayışıyla halkla ilişkiler anlayışına yön veren isimlerden biri olarak anılmaktadır. Öyle ki, filozofun insan doğasına ilişkin görüşleri ilk halkla ilişkiler uygulamalarında kanaatlerin şekillendirilmesi bağlamında, etik ve ifade özgürlüğüne ilişkin görüşleri ise iki yönlü simetrik halkla ilişkiler uygulamalarının temel ilkelerinin köklerinde kendisini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Halkla İlişkiler, Felsefe, Spinoza, Etik, İnsan Doğası

THE IMPACTS OF SPINOZA'S PHILOSOPHY ON PUBLIC RELATIONS

Abstract

In this study, the close relationship of Spinoza's philosophy with public relations will be examined, to present the effects of philosophical thought on public relations. In this context, the views of Benedict de Spinoza, one of the 16th century philosophers, on human nature, religion, freedom of expression, ethics and ideal state will be discussed within the framework of the discipline of public relations and the impact of these views on the names that set the foundations of public relations will be discussed. Spinoza, who has taken an important place in the history of human thought, is known as one of the names that guided the understanding of public relations through its own unique understanding of human nature and ethics, although his views were not understood much by his contemporaries during his time and criticized frequently. Such that, the philosopher's views on human nature show themselves in the context of shaping the opinions in the initial public relations practices, and his views on ethics and freedom of

¹ Arş. Gör. Dr., Sakarya Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Halkla İlişkiler ve Reklamcılık Bölümü. mail: simgeunlu@sakarya.edu.tr

expression show themselves at the root of the principles of two-way symmetric public relations practices.

Keywords: *Public Relations, Spinoza, Philosophy, Ethics, Human Nature*

Introduction

In this study, a literature research was carried out on Spinoza philosophy in order to demonstrate the philosophy underlying public relations practices. As an important name that shaped the world of thought of mankind with its continuing influence over the 16th century and our period, Spinoza is considered to be one of the few names that have managed to influence many aspects of social life. This important name, who is referred to in different fields of social sciences, has ideas that can be associated with public relations and management disciplines.

Spinoza talks about weaknesses arising from the nature of man, while on the other hand, he refers how these weaknesses can be turned into gain through reason and virtue. In this double-sided approach, the philosopher does not only identify the problem, but also develops solutions to this problem. In this respect, people can only refute themselves and the society in which they live if they stop being guided by their emotions and passions, and follow the path of wisdom and virtue.

Otherwise, the individual will constantly flow through his/her inner impulses and be open to external influences and the individual in this situation will not have the possibility of making long-term contributions neither to himself nor to society. The accuracy of Spinoza's views, which he stated in the 16th century, is frequently seen in manipulative practices especially for the masses in the 20th century. In this period, individuals were motivated, persuaded, and even directed to behaviours through "easy" ways. Although such practices are partially accepted in the fields of propaganda and advertising, they are seen as methods that are absolutely not accepted in today's public relations practices. What is essential in the understanding of perfect public relations is the follow up of a two-way process in which rational methods are followed, as Spinoza states in his ideal management approach, with mutual reasoning and exchange of ideas with the people.

1. Philosophy of Baruch Spinoza

Spinoza, who was born in Amsterdam in 1632, was influenced in the shaping of his world of thought, from the period he lived in, which was a period of artistic, scientific and philosophical revolution. Such that, in this period, Spinoza coincided with the time of the birth of Isaac Newton, John Locke, and Louis the 16th, when Rene Descartes began to prepare his first philosophical work, and when Rembrandt painted his paintings, which would bring him a great deal of fame, and when Galileo was held in prison for insisting that the world revolved around the sun. At the same time, Spinoza, born in a Jewish family, has witnessed in his early years that European countries accepting Jews did not allow them full citizenship status and participation in the local economy, nor even live their religion freely (Lord 2010: 5). On the one hand, developments in the period, on the other hand, the pressure environment in which he lived can be seen as the fundamental determinants of the opinions of thinkers such as ethics, religion, politics and freedom of thought, as explained in the later parts of this study.

When the views of human nature are examined, Spinoza states that people acted in their own interest because of their mistakes in perception and behaviour and therefore they cannot choose the way of reason and logic as "themselves" when they are given a chance for public benefit. According to this "pessimistic" thought structure developed by the philosopher regarding human nature, while people tend to be virtuous, they may be deprived of their ability to distinguish between images, words and ideas (Garcia, 2015, p. 2). Here, Spinoza's criticism of human nature is at the point of selfishness. According to this, people go after their own interests and passions and avoid activities related to the good of society, throwing aside the comfort and happiness of the whole and chase their own instant pleasures. This situation, which is considered to be irrational, is a setback in the emergence process of mutual ideas, words and images, which are seen as determinants of social relations.

At the source of this selfish structure of man lies an "error" as mentioned above. However, this error is not regarded as a phenomenon that can be easily resolved or discarded from human nature. Spinoza expressed this issue as follows: "It is impossible to explain any tendency of the human body in a way that is separated and clarified" (Spinoza, 1996, p. 163).

A self-existing structure that can be called “God or nature” enables everything to happen, either directly or indirectly. Therefore, this self-contained structure has also created people. In this context, feelings, passions and immoralities of people cause happiness or pain just as in the cause-effect relationships in the laws of physics (Garcia, 2015, p. 3). As it can be seen, man holds “goodness” and “evil”, “virtue” and “unvirtuousness”, “wisdom” and “unwiseness” simultaneously and from the beginning of creation. Such that, people who can choose to behave well, virtuous and intelligent can stay away from instant pleasures and live in accordance with social norms, while people who are in bad, unvirtuous and unreasonable actions can put the society into the background by putting their own interests and tastes into the forefront. The choice between these two possibilities will return to the individual as either happiness or pain in the short or long run.

The key concept of this choice is considered to be emotions. Spinoza, by separating emotions into two as active and passive; stated that active emotions develop consciously and can be understood in a rational way, while passive emotions are not conscious and rational. However, people can transform their passive feelings into active emotions through “reflection” and information. According to this, if people can be equipped with systematic knowledge, and keep their statements under complete control in their relations with others, they can liberate their mind and attain happiness (Garcia, 2015, p. 2). Here, the separation of active and passive feelings underlined can be assessed regarding the “awareness” issue. So that people who are driven after their passion can only live a random life and keep away from the ultimate happiness. In this context, the first suggestion is to observe the cause-effect relationship and take responsibility for its actions by behaving rationally at a higher level of awareness. Another proposal is called “reflection” and is to provide participation in society through ideas that will provide order and prosperity along with social relations.

In this context, Sunat (2012) explained Spinoza's views on the subject as follows: “If people lived under the guidance of the mind, they would be able to exercise their rights without harm to anyone else. However, because people are exposed to feelings that transcend human power or virtue, although they need to help each other mutually, they fall into different corners and engage in conflict. Therefore, in order for people to live in peace and help each other,

they must sacrifice something of their natural rights and guarantee that they will not take any action that could harm another”.

Although he is referred to as an “atheist” by his contemporaries, Spinoza is considered to be a great advocate of freedom of religion and expression. Seeing political life as a field of conflict, tension and struggle, Spinoza pointed out that “crowds” may have positive-negative or rational-irrational roles, just like individuals. Developing his social conceptualization in the same direction as Plato, the philosopher argues that people do not realize their real potential as free individuals unless they are truly aware of their own environment and are only interested in their own problems. In this context, Spinoza has positioned his philosophy on the perspective and understanding of tolerance that enables individuals to see the world as it is. According to him, individuals should be able to freely express what they want and what they think, so that the common benefit and order can be provided in society (Del Lucchese, 2009; Bivins, 2009, p. 103). This structure of thought underlines the issue of awareness as mentioned in the part on human nature and strengthens the thesis that rational behaviour will provide the good of society. Political life is already considered as a complex and challenging process, and it should be taken into account that the positive or negative impacts of the conscious or unconscious behaviours of the masses of individuals can affect the society and the state as a whole.

The other issue emphasized above is freedom. Spinoza has used the following statements on this subject: “Those are the people who destroy peace in a free state and restrict the freedom of the judiciary to which they cannot rule over the real persons” (Bivins, 2009, p. 103). When assessed in this respect, the power owners, who are afraid of the power of change and revolution of the conscious masses, try to maintain their sovereignty by restricting freedom of thought and expression (Soncu, 2017, p. 77-78). This points to the selfishness and immorality that are emphasized above. The power owners, who act in their own interests instead of the good of society, are fed by the conflicts that lead society to a worse path, the silenced individuals and the passive public as a whole.

2. Impacts of Spinoza's Philosophy on Public Relations

Before examining the impacts of Spinoza on the names carrying out studies on direct public relations, it would be enlightening to examine the thought structure of the philosopher in general with the development of public relations as a whole.

In this respect, it is emphasized that persuasive public relations models are directly proportional to Spinoza's "pessimistic" approach related to the nature of people and Spinoza's thoughts on freedom of thought, "approach to others" and the way to establish a relationship can be said to be effective in the models of two-way communication and non-persuasive public relations that developed in the following periods (Garcia, 2015, p. 3; Işık, 2013, p. 6).

Examining the first periods of public relations practices in the historical process, it is observed that one of the methods frequently used is manipulation. According to this, the process of persuasion was taking place by means of messages that could attract people's attention and the people who followed their pleasures accepted the messages without questioning them and did not refrain from displaying irrational behaviour in order to live in small happiness. In the next process, public relations, in line with Spinoza's ideal view of society and state, has gained a form that adds the function of informing itself, adopts an honest and open approach towards the target groups, takes their views and reshapes their activities in line with these views. Although Spinoza is the first person to state that the principle of honesty, which is the fundamental principle of public relations, is an unchanging principle of ethical considerations; he recognizes that the concept of "honest" and "true" is a "false" variable that varies according to the interests of the individual and the social group at that time (Allison, 1975, p. 132).

Spinoza states that people are driven in their own interests, and that no one can make completely rational decisions when they are distracted by public affairs (Strauss, 1965, p. 249). Concordantly to this discourse, Marvin Olasky states that practitioners of public relations, at some time inevitably, have to accept the "facts" as dictated by their superiors (1985, p. 43). According to this, although it is a duty of public relations practitioners to convey the facts and inform people, it can be assessed that practitioners are not able to perform their activities in a completely manner in accordance with their principles due to the fact that they are also human beings. As a matter of fact, practitioners can act against ethical principles because

of their professional and financial concerns, as well as the indoctrinations of authority holders in the opposite direction.

However, it is not appropriate to assign a good or bad role to public relations discipline and profession solely for this reason. Such that, Spinoza suggests that the “good” and “bad” comparison only depends on subjective approaches. While music could be good and beautiful for a melancholic person, could be bad and disturbing for someone mourning, and could be neither good nor bad for a deaf person. With a more institutional example, the “forced” transport of a fishing port to build a hotel on the beach is bad for fishermen, while it is good for land planners and all internal and external stakeholders who will benefit from the hotel's facilities (Lord, 2010, p. 106-107). While hotel owners have a “bad” impression on the fact that causing fishermen to leave their jobs and establish a new order, they have a “good” impression on the fact that they have established businesses in the officially allocated area and, moreover, that they have increased regional employment and tourism revenues.

In connection with this subject, Spinoza has entered into ethical values and mentioned suicide, which he defined as self-destruction of the individual. According to this principle, the most fundamental virtue is the protection of man's own essence and existence. The person who committed suicide is totally under external influences and chooses not to struggle but to get rid of his own essence. Within the framework of the ethical aspect of public relations, as mentioned above, it is far from being an impartial assessment that the institution considers itself as “bad” according to subjective judgments and be expected to destroy itself. Such that, as Spinoza states, virtue is to think of the well-being of others, but does not to ignore self well-being in doing so (Lord, 2010, p. 110-112).

Apart from honesty and ethics, Spinoza's views on ideal government management are easily adaptable to public relations discipline. These views can be listed as follows:

Any state that wants to be stable should give its individuals the freedom of thought and expression as much as possible.

The name of the order created by the transformation of thought and word into action is ‘democracy’.

The disintegration of the states is not a pre-determined outcome. But disintegration is neither coincidental: “Even if this has happened as a result of ‘encountering a stronger external enemy’, the main reason for this situation is the development of internal hostilities that harm institutions and release multitudino passions.”

The power of religion to give orders springs to life by the decision of the sovereign. In the name of social welfare and peace, the sovereign has the power and authority to determine the measures of how to act religiously and how to worship God. In other words, the way to worship God and treat the neighbours religiously is through obedience to the sovereign who takes care of the public interest (Sunat, 2012).

When these views are examined from the point of view of public relations to institutions and organizations, the following determinations can be made. If the first and second views are interpreted together, it is seen that corporate success and sustainability can only be maintained through bilateral communication and participation. Such that, according to these principles, which are the basis of Grunig and Hunt's excellent public relations approach, a perfect public relations understanding can only be achieved through feedback from the target audience. The third point acts like a warning to organizations. According to this, the reason that leads organizations to collapse is due to their stakeholders. Here, the function of public relations in in-house communication becomes prominent. The correct message strategies to be implemented for stakeholders and the practices to get to know them in a real sense play a key role in making them not to share information against the organization, not to damage the organization and ultimately to sustain success.

Although the last view is related to religion, it is actually related to the transmission of the messages of the administration. This is due to the correct transmission and arrangement of the messages of the management staff towards the target groups and stakeholders in order to ensure internal or external stability. Public relations is not only a strategic communication management process but also a management function and the responsibility for this function is the same as the transfer of the commandments of religion, as well as the transfer of the messages of the administration in full and in accordance with the mental structure of the target masses.

Given his contributions to the important names of the field, as well as contributing to Grunig and Hunt's core values of perfect public relations understanding as mentioned above, Spinoza has influenced Walter Lippmann on the concepts of communication, public opinion and stereotypes, with his reflections on the role of passions in influencing human judgments, and on the differences between words, images, and ideas. While the roots of Lippmann's

ideas about the influence of humanity by "tyranny" of the majority, or the public can be based on Spinoza, at the same time, the impacts of the philosopher can be seen in the perceptual distinction between words, visuals and symbols, which are the main indicators of the individual's knowledge (Garcia, 2015, p. 4).

Walter Lippmann, by putting a similar approach to Spinoza on awareness, argues that people can't see the outer world in a rational way. Describing the public as pictures in the minds of individuals; about themselves, others, needs, goals and relationships, Lippmann claims that these pictures are stereotypes shaped by interests and subjective judgments that shape the individual's thinking structure with external influences (Lippmann, 1922, p. 18; Anık, 2014). Here, the similarity between both Spinoza and Lippmann's views can be seen. The fact that these images are squeezed in certain patterns and focused in one direction blinds the individual's mental structure, prevents him/her from making rational decisions and thinking long-term, and leads the individual to a fixed point.

Similarly to Lippmann, despite the fact that he knows that repression is not good for human nature, Spinoza (2007, p. 73) argued that "no society can exist without government, and force, and laws to restrain and repress men's desires and immoderate impulses"

Spinoza states that the reason for human ignorance is that their perceptions of reality and the real characteristics of objects are mixed together. According to him, people are prisoners of passive influences and do not know what is right, beautiful or moral, they can only manifest with their physical passions. For this reason, it is perfectly normal for people to feel free in their actions, but they are not aware of the reasons that led them to do so (Spinoza, 1996, p. 73). Spinoza exemplifies this process as follows: While eating an apple increases its action capacity by providing energy and vitamins to the body, eating a poison-ridden apple can disrupt the integrity of the body and limit its ability to take action in whole or in part. In the apple – poisonous apple separation in this example, the individual's allowing the outside world to determine his own actions is defined as "passion", and the act is defined as "action" (Lord, 2010, p. 85). Here, the point that needs to be underlined and that makes the issue important in terms of public relations is that the mind is more inclined to "inappropriate" thoughts that are far from pushing the individual into an active world of thought and behaviour. The more

the mind is confronted with images in the form of clutter, the more it is influenced by the external effects and the illusion that these effects will create passion in itself. Therefore, the individual is kept away from the production and usage processes and in the world of thought created by its subjective misconceptions, he/she perceives his/her likings and dreams as reality (Allendesalazar, 1987, p. 36).

In this context, Edward Bernays, who brought together Lippmann's theories of communication and Freud's psychoanalysis methods, was interested in the role of emotions in human behaviour and in the irrational aspect of these emotions. This approach of Bernays' show similarity with Spinoza's in most cases. Bernays, like Spinoza, expressed that people were guided by their "passive" feelings, and that these passive emotions were alienating individuals from making rational decisions (Gobert, 2009, p. 62).

In addition, Bernays has organized messages and campaigns in order to direct people to specific behaviours and to shape perceptions within the context of public relations practices by taking advantage of psychoanalysis methods. Accordingly, people are motivated to perform an action with their emotions without being aware of the process (Cameron et al. 2008). The process mentioned here is similar to the aforementioned "apple" example. A message that looks and feels very useful and delicious, such as an apple, can be used to influence, take advantage of, or manipulate it in a genuine sense and direct it to certain behaviours such as poisoning the individual with a poison-ridden apple.

Another common point between Spinoza and Bernays' views is that people have perceptions of a group of thoughts or experiences that are merely summarised by a number of clichés. According to them, the image formed by the mind towards ideas can easily be shaped by human emotions (Garcia, 2015, p. 5; Bernays, 1952, p. 166). Because the human, who is controlled by passive emotions is in a position to be completely open to external influences, and instead of reason and logic, he / she sustains his / her life based on his / her emotions, makes his / her choices and makes assessments.

Conclusion

In this study, the opinions of Spinoza philosophy on ethics, freedom of expression and government management were presented and these opinions were reconciled with public relations. Then, the impacts of the philosopher's' views on public relations were presented. Such that, Spinoza's views on human nature and his

interpretation of his surroundings show how individuals are inclined to be deceived and fooled by their own passions.

The initial periods of public relations practices coincide with a period in which “weakness” is frequently abused by practitioners, similar to advertising and propaganda. However, as stated in the study, Spinoza, aware of the danger posed by this situation, has offered some suggestions to the ideal state and government. These relate to freedom of expression, participation, relationships with stakeholders and the ways to communicate messages. Business and communication targets communicated through these ways are connected to the two-way communication process, however, it is necessary to inform the stakeholders within the framework of ethical rules. Because these ethical rules are especially prominent as the fundamental values of modern two-way symmetric public relations and professional practices in this direction.

On the other hand, Spinoza states that the danger can only be overcome by raising awareness about the environment of the individual, leading a virtuous life and, most importantly, by making “rational” decisions. According to the thinker, if these preconditions are gained, the individual will have the courage and competence to participate and will continue to exist in society as a “full” individual. This approach corresponds to the target audience approach which is defined “active” in public relations. Active target refers to individuals who are aware of the current situation and who are conscious of taking action to solve the problem and thereby improve both the functioning of the institution and the quality of the service they receive.

In conclusion, it has been observed that some of the roots of understanding, which is the basis of both the initial public relations practices and the excellent public relations approach, are embodied in Spinoza philosophy; however, it has been concluded that the philosopher’s views in the direction of two-way communication and rationalism are more valuable in terms of public relations.

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