

Spinoza's Critique of Descartes' Dualism and the Relevance of Both in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT: The digital era presents complex philosophical and ethical challenges, prompting an evaluation of traditional frameworks like mind-body dualism for new ethical foundations. This paper critically examines Baruch Spinoza's critique of René Descartes' dualism and their contemporary relevance in addressing the ethical and existential challenges of the digital age. Employing library research and a critical-philosophical approach, this study analyzes primary and secondary texts. This research finds that while Descartes' rationalism laid the groundwork for modern scientific epistemology, its inherent dualism contributes to digital ethical and existential crises. Conversely, Spinoza's monistic ethics of unity and natural order offer an alternative framework for navigating the moral dilemmas of a digital society. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of synthesizing individual and relational rationality as a strong ethical foundation for human progress amidst rapid technological advancement.

Keywords: Descartes, dualism, digital age, ethics, Spinoza.



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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has taken place since the 1980s, marking the beginning of an information technology revolution that changed almost all aspects of (Reza A A Wattimena, 2023), so that in the midst of the dominance of social media like this 20th century, human existence is no longer solely shaped by physical reality, but also by the digital track record that they continue to build. At the same time, a new challenge has arisen related to human ethics, identity, and existential meaning that calls into question the relevance of the principle of René Descartes, known through the narrative that describes his figure *as cogito ergo sum (I think, then I exist)* (Usis Fadhlullah et al., 2023). However, the digital age has revolutionized the way humans interact, think, and act.

Identity, traditionally shaped by personal and social factors, is now enriched by a new dimension: digital identity, as social media emerges in the 21st century. This phenomenon raises questions about the consistency of the online and offline self, where digital identities are often temporary representations modified in search of validation, potentially obscuring the true self. If previously confession required real interaction, now individuals can define themselves specifically through online profiles. Consequently, identity is vulnerable to crisis because there.

are various 'versions of yourself' that must be displayed and managed. Furthermore, the dominance of foreign cultures in digital media can erode the identity and pride of local culture, risking triggering an identity crisis among the younger generation who are more exposed to global trends than their own cultural heritage.

The above is in line with the words of Wattimena, (2025), that we are now in the peak era of the digital revolution which makes us the object of technological development that is taking place so quickly. In the midst of the rapid flow of information and technological developments today, it is very important to review the epistemology-philosophy inherited by René Descartes, as the father of radical rationalism (Sholihat et al., 2020), which places the rational subject at the center of reality, known through two different substances. First, thinking (*res cogitans*), which is the world of ideas and consciousness. Second, substance has the dimension of space, the world of matter or physical objects (*res extensa*) (Sholihat et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, Baruch Spinoza, a rationalist philosopher (Sholihat et al., 2020), sharply criticized Descartes' Cartesian dualism. Spinoza rejected Descartes' dualism and asserted that there is only one true substance, God. According to Spinoza, there is no other substance besides God. The soul and the body, in his view, are not stand-alone substances, but merely attributes of that single substance. He defines substance as something that exists of itself and can be understood through itself (Simon Petrus L. Tjahyadi, 2004; Simon Petrus L. Tjahyadi, 2007).

Several studies related to Spinoza Thought and Descartes' Dualism were found, including; Patrisius Juwantri Badri Dinggit writes about the Harmony of Man and Nature: The Implications of Spinoza's Philosophy on Environmental Ethics. Abdul Rokhmat Sairah, wrote about, Modernization of Science Towards Psychology: A Study of the Influence of Rene Descartes' (1596-1650) Thought on the Development of Psychologists. Rika, writes about, The Substance of Baruch de Spinoza's Perspective. Revina Rahmadina, wrote about, The Influence of Rene Descartes' Theory on the Change of Theocentric Theology Towards Anthropocentrism. Fauzan Anwar Sandiah, writes about, Rationalism and Contemporary Relevance (Fauzan Anwar Sandiah, 2025).

The various studies above have partially discussed the thought of Spinoza and Descartes—both in terms of environmental ethics, contributions to modern psychology, to changes in theological paradigms and philosophy of substance. However, as far as the author is concerned, no studies have been found that specifically address Spinoza's critique of Cartesian dualism in the context of its relevance in the digital age which is full of algorithmic rationality and existential crises. Therefore, this research is important to bridge the philosophical heritage of these two figures with contemporary challenges, especially in examining how Descartes' rationalism and Spinoza's monism can be used as critical reflections on human relations, technology, and the meaning of life in the midst of the rapid flow of digitalization.

Based on these problems, this study will answer the question: How can Descartes' rationalism and Spinoza's monism be used as critical reflections on human relations, technology, and the meaning of life in the midst of the rapid flow of digitalization, especially in revisiting the relevance of Cartesian dualism?

The author will examine the radical philosopher Spinoza's sharp criticism of Descartes' dualism and its implications for the foundations of modern rationality and the development of science until the digital age. The main focus lies in the analysis of whether the thinking of the two is contradictory or can be compromised. This historical and philosophical relevance is reviewed in the context of identity crises, loss of meaning, and ethical tensions faced by modern humans amid rapid technological advances.

METHOD

This research uses the library research method, by examining in depth various relevant primary and secondary literature sources, such as works of classical philosophy, scientific journals, academic articles, and historical documents discussing the thought of René Descartes and Baruch Spinoza. This approach allows the author to reconstruct the development of the idea of rationalism and Cartesian dualism and to examine Spinoza's monistic critique of them, in the context of epistemological and existential changes in the digital age. The analysis is carried out critically through interpretive and comparative approaches, in order to reveal the relevance and potential of dialogue between the two ideas in responding to contemporary challenges, especially those related to the crisis of identity, ethics, and the meaning of human existence in the midst of information technology advances.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Definition of Identity Crisis, Ethics, and Existential Meaning in the Digital Age

To settle the matter of this writing, the author first explains these six terms so that there is no misconception. First, the definition of crisis is a dangerous, severe, precarious, and gloomy situation. Webster's New World (1996) defines a crisis as "A turning point in the course of anything". According to Renald Khasali (1994: 222), a crisis is a turning point that can bring problems in a better direction (for better) or worse (for worse). Second, the definition of identity, according to KBBI, is a person's special characteristics or circumstances. In psychology, "identity" is most often used to describe a personal identity, or a quality or trait that makes a person unique.

From this understanding, it can be concluded that when the two words are combined, the meaning becomes, "A critical turning point in a person's life when he experiences confusion or loss of direction about who he is and what the meaning of his existence is."

Third, the meaning of ethics according to KBBI is the knowledge of what is good and what is bad and about moral rights and obligations (morals). Ethics comes from the Greek *ethice* which means a person's behavior, customs (habits), inner feelings, disposition, and tendency, to do an action. In addition, the term ethics is also understood as the study of human behavior, about what is good or bad, right or wrong, intentional or not. Hamzah Ya'qub (1983: 12) states ethics as a science that investigates what is good and what is bad by paying attention to the deeds of human deeds as far

as the intellect can know. M. Amin Abdullah (2002: 15) defines ethics as a science that studies good and bad (Harry Saptarianto, 2024).

Based on this understanding, the author concludes that the definition of ethics can be briefly defined as: "The science that studies the good and bad of human behavior based on considerations of reason and moral values." *Fourth*, the meaning of meaning in KBBI has two meanings; the meaning and intent of the conversation or writer, the meaning given to a form to the language. *Fifth*, the meaning of existence, this word comes from the English language, namely *excitence*; from the Latin *existere* which means to appear, exist, arise, choose actual existence. In philosophy, the term existence has several meanings. First, what is there. Second, what has actuality (exists). Third, everything that humans experience (Lalu Abdurrahman Wahid et al., 2022).

Sixth, the definition of the digital era, this is a period when information is easily and quickly obtained and disseminated using digital technology. The digital era is an era in which an era has experienced rapid progress leading to digital. This era is marked by such quick and easy access to information. Rapidly developing technology brings many significant changes (Harry Saptarianto, 2024).

Based on this description, the author defines existence in the digital age briefly as: "The actual existence of a person that is recognized, felt, and responded to in a fast-paced and connected digital space."

Changing Consciousness and Identity Crisis in the Digital Era

The digital age has revolutionized the way humans shape and understand self-identity. The dominance of digital track records makes every online activity—such as social media uploads, information searches, and online interactions—part of the construction of an individual's identity. Every click, comment, and upload is no longer just a casual act, but rather part of a narrative that shapes a person's self-image in front of a virtual public. In this context, digital identity becomes a kind of "social mask" that is adapted to the algorithms and expectations of the cyberspace, often contradicting the realities of everyday life. As a result, individuals are in a dilemma: between being the real self or an ideal version that is digitally curated for validation and recognition.

Nowadays, social media platforms have become an integral part of daily life and greatly influence the way individuals shape and display their identity. According to Goffman, digital identity refers to a person's representation of the online world, encompassing various aspects of self-presentation, social interaction, and digital footprints left behind. The advent of social media has opened up great opportunities for self-expression and identity experimentation, allowing individuals to organize and disseminate certain sides of themselves to a global audience (Anita Rosana & Irfan Fauzi, 2024). Social media shapes a person's digital identity through self-expression, interaction, and digital footprint. This identity can be different from reality.

The transition from physical to digital reality causes individuals to spend more time in cyberspace, which has an impact on changing the way they interact and communicate. Interactions that were previously in-person are now shifting to digital platforms, influencing the way individuals form social relationships and understand themselves and their own culture. Additionally, digital

identities play a crucial role in facilitating various forms of social interaction, from casual conversations to deep connections in online communities (Anita Rosana & Irfan Fauzi, 2024). The dynamic nature of digital identities shows their important role in modern social life, as they enable individuals to deal with the complexities of social interaction in an increasingly digitized world.

Disorientation of meaning and purpose in life is a consequence of excessive exposure to information in the digital era. Individuals often experience confusion in determining their values and life goals due to a variety of contradictory information and unfiltered content flows. This can disrupt the process of forming a stable and meaningful identity. Reza A.A. Wattimena criticized the phenomenon of dehumanization in the digital era, where humans tend to lose their existential depth due to dependence on technology. According to him, in the digital world, humans are often stuck in meaningless routines, which obscure the understanding of self and the purpose of life (Reza A A Wattimena, 2023).

The role of algorithms in directing awareness is an important factor in identity formation in the digital age. Social media algorithms, such as bubble filters and echo chambers, serve content that matches user preferences, which can reinforce bias and inhibit exposure to diverse perspectives. This limits the space for deep reflection and self-understanding (Wulandari et al., 2021). Awareness of the impact of the digital era on self-identity is important to be developed. Individuals need to build critical digital literacy, understand how algorithms work, and maintain a balance between digital life and the real world. Thus, authentic and meaningful identities can be maintained in the midst of a heavy flow of information (Surmelioglu & Seferoglu, 2019).

Between Reality and Simulation: A Pseudo-World

In today's digital age, the boundaries between physical and digital reality are increasingly blurred. Humans now live in a world shaped by images, videos, and algorithms, where it is difficult to distinguish between what is real and what is false. This phenomenon leads to a crisis of meaning and truth, as described by Jean Baudrillard in his theory of simulacra and hyperreality. According to him, modern society has replaced all reality and meaning with symbols and signs, so that human experience becomes a simulation of reality (Dr. Elena Violaris, 2025). In this context, social media and digital technology create a pseudo-world that influences human social perception and interaction.

The manipulation of perception through technology has created a *post-truth society*, where personal emotions and opinions are more dominant than objective facts. Social media plays a huge role in this phenomenon, with algorithms presenting information as per the user's preferences, reinforcing biases and creating information bubbles (Wulandari et al., 2021). As a result, individuals tend to be stuck in a reality constructed by algorithms, narrow-minded, blurring the line between fact and fiction (Wulandari et al., 2021). This poses a big challenge in distinguishing between truth and lies in the digital age.

Technology also plays a role in creating a pseudo-world through the spread of false and manipulative information. The phenomenon of *deepfakes* and realistic AI content is making it increasingly difficult for individuals to distinguish between reality and digital engineering. This has

an impact on public trust in information and institutions, as well as influencing decision-making in daily life. In this situation, it is important for individuals to develop digital literacy and critical thinking skills to face the challenges of the *post-truth era* (Michael Graziano, 2025).

In facing the crisis of meaning and truth in the digital era, a multidisciplinary approach involving education, technology, and public policy is needed. Education must emphasize the importance of media literacy and critical thinking skills from an early age. Technology needs to be developed by considering ethics and its impact on society. Meanwhile, public policy must ensure regulations that protect the public from the spread of false and manipulative information. With these steps, it is hoped that the public can be better prepared to face challenges in the digital era and maintain the integrity of reality in daily life.

Algorithms will never be completely abolished, given the diverse benefits that can be derived from them. In fact, it is not impossible that in the future this algorithm will actually be more sophisticated in terms of relevance and accuracy, so that it is able to present content more sensitive to user needs, without ignoring the original intent or purpose of the content (Wulandari et al., 2021). Facing the crisis of meaning and truth in the digital age requires collaboration between education, technology, and public policy. Media literacy and critical thinking must be taught from an early age, technology is developed ethically, and regulations need to protect the public from false information. Thus, the integrity of reality can be maintained.

Ethics and the Politics of Digital Awareness

Cyberspace has become a significant new terrain of power, where opinions are formed, truths are twisted, and ethics are tested. Social media is now a key tool for political campaigns, where politicians use it to convey messages and build an image. Buzzers, i.e. parties who are paid to disseminate information, often do so without considering truth or ethics (Aulia et al., 2024). The phenomenon of political buzzers shows how individuals or groups can influence public opinion through social media by intensively and systematically disseminating content, which can influence public emotions and thoughts through sophisticated tactics. They play a big role in shaping political discourse on social media and influencing voter perception. However, their strategic role often reaps controversy due to ethical and transparency issues (Aulia et al., 2024).

Digital should be a democratic space, but with the presence of buzzers and cyber manipulation, it has contributed to the destruction of public discourse. Social media, which is supposed to be a space for a healthy exchange of ideas, often turns into an arena of polarization and conflict. The polarization of multicultural identities mixed with the issue of political marginalization, creates an atmosphere of unproductive discussion and hinders cooperation outside of cyberspace. Memes, viral messages, *trolling*, and *cyber-bullying* are obstacles in building a healthy digital democracy. User anonymity drives the emergence of *a democracy of nothing*—a digital crowd filled with nothing but political gossip without substance (Sunaryo et al., 2016).

Further, hidden power in digital infrastructure poses a crisis of shared rationality and ethical challenges. The algorithms that govern the content we see on social media can reinforce bias and create information bubbles, where individuals are only exposed to views that align with them. This blurs the line between facts and opinions, and threatens people's ability to make rational and

informed decisions (Nguyen, 2022). The democratic process now does not only take place offline, but also penetrates into virtual space. The candidates formed a *cyber army* to build an image and control discourse in digital media (Sunaryo et al., 2016).

In this context, freedom of thought faces serious challenges from algorithmic dominance. Freedom of thought gives the right not to allow one's opinion to be manipulated or influenced unconsciously. However, the algorithms that govern the information we receive can limit our view and influence our opinions without us realizing it. It also encourages us to feel our group is the most righteous, while the other side is perceived to be politically and morally wrong (Wulandari et al., 2021). This author raises ethical questions about; who exactly controls digital spaces and how they affect the collective consciousness of society.

Overall, the digital realm has become a new terrain of power where views are manipulated, reality is distorted, and ethical boundaries are blurred. To maintain the integrity of democracy and freedom of thought, it is important for society to develop digital literacy and critical thinking skills, as well as to demand transparency and accountability from those who control digital infrastructure. This is in line with UNESCO on methods of improving literacy, namely by finding relevant sources, assessing the credibility of content, processing and sharing information ethically, and using technology ethically (FX. Lilik Dwi Marjianto et al., 2022)..

Spinoza's Rationality of Connectedness: A Critique of Dualistic Rationalism

René Descartes (born March 31, 1596) in The Hague, France, was a Catholic philosopher, although he was influenced by Galileo's views, which at that time were still opposed by the authority of the Church (Mursyid Fikri, 2018). Descartes wrote many important works, expressing dissatisfaction with the philosophy and science he had been studying. According to him, the only thing that is considered certain is the exact science, mathematics (Mursyid Fikri, 2018). But over time, Descartes began to doubt everything, including the senses and mathematics because the results of the calculations could be wrong. So he finally found one thing that could not be doubted: his existence as a subject in doubt. Even if it is misled, it still proves the existence of a "me" that is being misled. From this was born the principle known as *cogito ergo sum*—"I think, then I exist." (Jujun S. Suriasumantri, 2003).

Through the above principle, René Descartes, established the basis for modern rationalism that: first, the mind and body are separate which is called by the term dualism between *res cogitans* (thinking substance) and *res extensa* (extended substance), In this view, the mind is considered as a non-existent entity.-Materials that are separate from the physical body, creating a dichotomy between subject and object. This concept became the foundation for much later Western philosophical thought, but it also raised questions about how the mind and body interact with each other.

Meanwhile, Spinoza, through his principle of monism, criticized the problem of Descartes' dualism. He states that the soul and body are actually one and the same reality, understood only through two different attributes: the mind and the vastness. In this sense, the human self is a part of the whole of reality which is the result of the modification of the attributes of mind (soul) and

vastness (body). Since the soul and the body are one and the same, every change in the soul is also a change in the body, and vice versa. Therefore, Spinoza saw every physical event at once as a mental event. This kind of view is known as 'panpsychism' (Rika, 2019)..

Baruch Spinoza rejected Descartes' dualism by proposing the concept of a single substance, in which God or Nature is the only substance that exists. According to Spinoza, the mind and body are not two separate entities, but rather two attributes of the same substance. That is, he rejects the separation between soul and body, and emphasizes that everything that exists is part of one integrated reality. This approach leads to an understanding that human beings are not isolated entities, but rather part of an entire interconnected universe. Spinoza's view differs from monotheistic religion because it rejects the concept of God as personal and separate from His creation. For Spinoza, the universe is a direct manifestation of God (F. Budi Hardiman, 2007).

To understand Spinoza's views further, he offers an alternative form of rationalism that emphasizes the understanding of the interconnectedness of all things through true knowledge. According to him, it is not about the dominance of the subject over the object, but rather about understanding our position in a complex network of relationships. In this context, knowledge is not only theoretical, but also practical, since it helps individuals realize their relationship to the world and act according to that understanding. This is what Rene Descartes later called human beings as thinking creatures because they have a special position among all beings because they have a soul to be knowledgeable through thinking and communicating with language, in contrast to animals, plants and other creatures that do not have these abilities (Rahmadina et al., 2023).

Second, Descartes is of the view that human freedom is closely related to the ability of free will and ratio. Descartes believed that man has absolute freedom in his will, even greater than the ability to understand. In his work *Meditations on First Philosophy and Passions of the Soul*, he states that freedom is the ability to affirm or reject, to choose or not to choose, without external coercion. Spinoza had a strict deterministic view, in which there is no absolute freedom in the physical or mental world.

All human actions, including the decisions of the mind, occur due to definite cause-and-effect relationships, like the motion of the planets. Since the soul and body are one and the same, our mind is also determined by physical desires. Therefore, Spinoza rejected human freedom in the sense of being free from cause. For Spinoza, the only one who is truly free is only God, because only God whose existence is not caused by anything. While humans act because of emotional impulses—such as desire, pleasure, and pain—which are passive in nature and come from outside the self (Rika, 2019).

However, Spinoza still gives place to freedom through the concept of consciousness. The more active a person is and has adequate knowledge of the causes of his actions, the more he becomes aware of himself, and the more free he is to do things. This means that freedom does not mean being free from the law of cause and effect, but understanding and realizing the law. Free people are those who are able to conquer emotions and turn them into rational consciousness. Only in this way can one achieve true happiness according to Spinoza and that is inseparable from knowledge.

In essence, although Descartes and Spinoza both emphasized the role of rationality in ethics and freedom, they had different grounds. Descartes viewed freedom as the ability of the will to choose autonomously, even when knowledge was imperfect, so that freedom lies in the will itself. Meanwhile, Spinoza rejected the idea of free will and instead saw true freedom as the result of a rational understanding of the natural laws that govern everything. If for Descartes freedom is the independence of the subject in making choices, then for Spinoza freedom is a deep awareness of the causal relationship in the universe system.

Within Spinoza's framework of thought, the position of man is no longer seen as the center of the universe that has absolute authority over nature, as in the Cartesian paradigm, but as part of an interconnected existential network. Spinoza saw man as a node in a cosmic system subject to the same laws of nature as everything that exists. This means that human existence and action are inseparable from the universal causes and effects that govern the whole of reality.

Thus, freedom is not obtained through domination over nature or unlimited freedom of choice, but through a rational understanding of the position and role of human beings in the natural order. This perspective fosters a humble attitude and an ethics of interconnection, in which man is no longer the ruler of nature, but rather a conscious and responsible partner in maintaining cosmic harmony.

Reorganizing Identity, Ethics, and Existence in the Digital Era

In the digital age, human identity undergoes a significant transformation, moving from physical entities to complex digital representations. The concept of digital identity includes avatars, personal data, and digital footprints spread across various online platforms. This phenomenon creates existential fragmentation, where individuals must manage different versions of themselves in the virtual world. Identity in the metaverse faces challenges such as interoperability, legal implications, privacy, and identity management, as well as the psychological impact of identity fragmentation. This requires a holistic approach to understanding and managing digital identities to safeguard the well-being of individuals in cyberspace, various other problems (Agustinus Agrolis Longko Nadu, 2024).

Ethical crises also arise along with the development of information technology, especially in the political context. The use of political buzzers and the spread of disinformation have obscured individual and collective moral responsibility. This phenomenon creates an information environment full of manipulation and confusion, threatening the integrity of democracy and public trust. According to Sunaryo, (2016), the systematic spread of false information can undermine the democratic process and strengthen social polarization. Therefore, a joint effort is needed to build strong digital literacy and information ethics to face these challenges. One way is to comply with the policies of the Electronic Information and Transaction Law (ITE Law) (Sunaryo et al., 2016).

Digital existence has shifted Descartes' paradigm from "I think" to "I am connected", where the existence of individuals is increasingly determined by online connectivity and interaction. In this context, Spinoza offers a relevant perspective on deterministic ethics. He emphasized that true freedom is obtained through an understanding of the laws of nature that govern the universe. By understanding the relationship between cause and effect, individuals can act ethically and in

harmony with the order of nature. This approach can be the foundation for digital value and integrity updates, encouraging individuals to act with awareness and responsibility in cyberspace.

Through the analysis of Descartes versus Spinoza thought below, it can open a new lens in understanding existential challenges in the era of information technology. By integrating the concepts of digital identity, ethical crisis, and digital existence within Spinoza's ethical framework, we can develop a more holistic and sustainable approach to dealing with the dynamics of the digital world. This is important to build a more equitable, inclusive, and ethical digital society.

Descartes' Dualism in the Digital Paradigm

Cartesian dualism—which separates the mind (*res cogitans*) and the body (*res extensa*)—still influences the way we understand the relationship between humans and technology, particularly in the context of artificial intelligence (AI) and dataficing. Descartes argued that the mind and the body are two distinct substances, where the mind is a non-physical entity that cannot be materially measured, whereas the body is a physical entity that can be measured and divided. This view creates a framework of thinking in which the mental and physical aspects are considered separate, which then influences the way we view technology and the representation of digital humans (Justin Skirry, 2024).

In AI and datafication practices, this subject-object separation is reflected in the way data is collected and analyzed. Data about human behavior is collected as a measurable and explainable object, while the interpretation and meaning of such data is often overlooked. This creates a situation where humans are reduced to a set of data that can be processed by machines, without considering the context and complexity of the human experience. This approach ignores the subjective and emotional aspects of humans, which cannot be fully captured by quantitative data.

In addition, in virtual spaces, human identities are often fragmented. One can have a variety of digital representations on social media, forums, and other online platforms, each of which reflects a different aspect of themselves. This fragmentation creates challenges in maintaining identity integrity, as individuals must navigate various digital personas that may not be consistent with each other. This can lead to identity confusion and difficulty in building authentic relationships in cyberspace.

The concept of "fragmented self" in the digital context shows that human identity is no longer complete and consistent, but consists of various separate parts. This problem raises the question of how individuals can maintain a cohesive sense of self amidst a variety of different digital representations. In addition, this phenomenon also highlights the importance of considering ethical and philosophical aspects in the development of technology, so as not to ignore the complexity and depth of the human experience (Tripathi RL, 2024).

Therefore, Cartesian dualism still has a significant impact on the way we understand and interact with digital technologies. The separation between mind and body, as well as between subject and object, is reflected in AI and dataficial practices, as well as in the way human identities are represented in virtual spaces. To address these challenges, a more holistic and integrative approach is needed, one that recognizes the complexity and integrity of the human experience in the digital context.

Spinoza and the Critique of False Freedom in the Digital World

In the digital age, freedom is often defined as the ability to choose and access various information or platforms independently. However, in Spinoza's frame of mind, such freedom is an illusion if it is not accompanied by an understanding of the causes and effects underlying the choice. Social media, search engines, and other digital platforms shape the space of user choice through algorithms designed to maximize engagement, not expand awareness. Spinoza taught that a person can only be called free if he understands the laws of nature that cause his actions—not just to feel free. Thus, when a user is unaware of how an algorithmic system shapes his behavior, he or she is not actually a free agent, but a part of digital determinism (Moa De Lucia Dahlbeck, 2021).

Spinoza also stated that humans are basically driven by affection, which is an emotional impulse that can be passive (passion) or active (action). This affection is exploited by social media algorithms that respond to clicks, likes, or comments by presenting more similar content to trigger the same emotions. Sylvia IV, (2024) says that anger and sensational content spreads faster and more widely than neutral information (Sylvia, 2024). That is, the user is trapped in a cycle of passive affection that makes them reactive, not reflective. For Spinoza, freedom demands the transformation of passive affection into active affection—by being aware of and understanding the causes of one's own emotions. Thus, digital emotional literacy is an important part of Spinozistic ethics in the age of algorithms.

Spinoza viewed freedom not as freedom to act as it pleased, but as the ability to act on the basis of one's essence and self-understanding (Abd Rahman Badawi, 1984). Something is said to be free if its existence arises from the necessity of its own nature and its action is determined by itself, not by external factors. This means that one is not completely free if only reacts to algorithms or social media pressure. True freedom is achieved when individuals understand the way the system works and act consciously in accordance with their reason and order. In other words, Spinoza's version of digital freedom is not about choosing as you will on the internet, but about acting in harmony with reason and awareness of the laws of cause and effect that govern the digital space itself.

Spinoza also underlined the importance of understanding the causal structure of life. Digital users' decisions towards information or bold actions are often shaped by complex, invisible algorithms. When the user is not aware of the causes that affect his preferences and decisions, he becomes a passive agent in the system. Spinoza taught that freedom does not mean being without influence, but being fully aware of that influence (Michael LeBuffe, 2025). Thus, the understanding of algorithms—as the "natural law" of the digital world—is an important part of the self-transmission of technological determination.

Within Spinoza's ethical framework, freedom is only possible when a person acts genuinely in accordance with his own nature and understanding, not because of external impulses. This view also influenced the way Spinoza understood the concepts of good and evil. For him, both are not the absolute nature of a thing, but rather the result of the way we view and compare things in a particular context. A thing can be considered good, bad, or neutral depending on its impact on the individual. Like music—which can be pleasant for the melancholy, painful for the anxious, and meaningless for the deaf—moral judgment is relative to conditions and relationships (Michael LeBuffe, 2025). Therefore, in a digital space full of perception manipulation, a deep understanding

of the self and context is the main requirement to act freely and ethically according to Spinoza ethics.

One of Spinoza's criticisms of Cartesian philosophy is the assumption that the human subject is rational and absolutely neutral. In the digital world, this illusion is reflected in the assumption that users are rational agents capable of making decisions autonomously based solely on available information. But in reality, digital systems encompass the social, psychological, and affective complexities that shape those decisions. When users are considered neutral and rational, we ignore that systems also influence the way we think, feel, and choose. Spinoza asserted that man is not autonomous from his world, and that only through an understanding of interconnections can freedom and ethics begin. This is a philosophical correction to the myth of technological neutrality and digital awareness.

Finally, Spinoza's framework helps us understand that to be truly free in the digital world, we must go beyond the illusion of choice and dive into the causal systems hidden behind technology. Freedom lies not in the amount of content accessible, but in how aware we are of the power structures, affections, and logic of the algorithms that drive our actions. With Spinoza's deterministic approach to ethics, we are not only asked to be critical of technology, but also of ourselves as part of that system. That's why, digital ethics is not just a matter of regulation, but a matter of ontological awareness.

Modern Rationality between the Instrument of Power and Emancipatory Consciousness

Modern rationality has become a tug-of-war between the tools of domination and emancipatory consciousness. The thinking of René Descartes and Baruch Spinoza showed how rationality can be used to control or liberate. Meanwhile, the digital era opens up opportunities for transformative rationalism.

1. Rationality as a Tool of Domination: Descartes' Legacy

Descartes' dualism asserts that God and man are two entities that exist separately and independently—God exists because of himself, and man is also considered to exist because of natural processes or because of himself, not because he was created. This view became the foundation for modern rationalism, in which the human mind is placed as the center of truth and the source of existential autonomy (Abdul Kadir Riyadi, 2017). In the context of the digital world, this legacy is evident through the dominance of technological rationality that places humans as the creators of autonomous digital reality, independent of transcendent values. The virtual world is a space where virtual existence is created and controlled by humans as if without moral or spiritual attachments, representing how Descartes-style rationality is transformed into a tool of domination over reality and even over the meaning of existence itself.

One of the main criticisms of Descartes' dualism is the problem of the interaction between mind and body. If the two are different substances, how can they interact? This problem, known as the "interaction problem," has been a long-debated issue in philosophy and shows a weakness in Descartes' dualistic view. Howard Robinson said that critics view this thinking as having ignored

the complexity of the relationship between the physical and mental aspects of man, which are intertwined and inseparable (Howard Robinson, 2020).

A perspective that views the existence of the world as a whole, between the visible and the invisible, between the sensory and spiritual dimensions, human existence is always related to *the divine* source. God created man, and man lives in a relationship as a servant who is connected to Him inwardly. However, Descartes' teachings shift this view by offering a dualism that explicitly separates God and man. He places God and man as two separate substances—God exists because of himself, and man is considered to exist not because he was created, but because of himself or through natural processes (Abdul Kadir Riyadi, 2017).

This means that the legacy of Descartes' thought creates a gap between the spiritual and the material, makes rationality the only tool to understand existence, and breaks the existential connection between creation and the Creator. This view is criticized by the author for reducing human nature to a mere thinking entity without the dimension of spiritual submission, and paving the way for the dominance of reason as the center of control, as seen in today's digital reality.

Although Descartes made a major contribution to the development of rationalism, his approach also opened up opportunities for the use of rationality as a tool of domination. Criticisms of this approach highlight the importance of considering emotional, social, and experiential aspects in understanding the whole human being, as well as the need for a more holistic approach in philosophy and science.

2. Spinoza's Contribution to Interconnectedness-Based Ethics

Baruch Spinoza offers a radical and holistic ethical perspective through the concept of interconnectedness in a single substance, namely God or Nature (*Deus sive Natura*). In his work *Ethics*, Spinoza rejected the Cartesian dualism between mind and body, as well as between man and nature, stating that everything is part of one common reality. This approach emphasizes that an understanding of our position in a deterministic network of causation can lead individuals to true freedom through self-knowledge and understanding.

Spinoza introduced the concept of *conatus*, which is the inherent impulse in every entity to maintain its existence. *Conatus* reflects the effort to understand and integrate oneself in the whole of nature. By recognizing that everything is interconnected, individuals can develop an ethics that values interconnectedness and balance in life, as well as reducing the selfish dominance that separates humans from nature and others (Badri Dinggit, 2025).

Furthermore, Spinoza emphasized the importance of knowledge in achieving freedom. He distinguishes three types of knowledge: knowledge of opinion or imagination, rational knowledge, and intuitive knowledge. Rational knowledge allows individuals to understand the laws of nature and the interconnectedness between phenomena, while intuitive knowledge provides a direct understanding of the essence of everything as a manifestation of God or Nature. Through this knowledge, individuals can overcome negative emotions and achieve true happiness (Rika, 2019).

In Spinoza's ethical framework, freedom is not freedom of free will, but freedom that arises from an understanding of the determination of nature and the integration of the self into the whole. By

realizing that everything happens according to the inevitable laws of nature, individuals can accept reality calmly and act according to reason, rather than being driven by unbridled emotions or desires.

The concept of interconnectedness in Spinoza's ethics is particularly relevant in the modern context, especially in the face of global challenges such as environmental crises and social inequality. By understanding that humans are an integral part of nature and society, this

ethical approach encourages responsible and sustainable action. Spinoza's ethics invites us to see ourselves not as separate entities, but as part of an interconnected network of life, in which the well-being of the individual depends on the well-being of the whole.

3. Comparison of Views on Political Ethics, Cyber Manipulation, and the Role of Rationality Vs Spinoza

René Descartes emphasized the importance of individual freedom and rationality in determining moral actions. He believed that creation arose from a firm determination to use the will correctly, regardless of emotional temptations or external pressures. In the realm of cyber manipulation, Descartes highlights the need for critical education and strengthening the capacity of individuals to assess information independently and rationally.

Meanwhile, Baruch Spinoza rejected Descartes' view of dualism and argued that man is an integral part of a single nature. He emphasized that imagination lies in an adequate understanding of oneself and the world, as well as in the ability to act in accordance with reason and understand the interconnectedness of all things. As for the realm of cyber manipulation, Spinoza highlighted the importance of building a society that supports mutual understanding and collaboration, as well as reducing the dominance of negative emotions that can be exploited by information manipulation.

In politics, Descartes tended to favor hierarchical structures that suppressed individual autonomy and freedom of thought. On the contrary, Spinoza advocated democracy and freedom of thought as the foundation of a stable and just society. He argues that freedom of thought does not threaten social stability, but rather strengthens it. In the face of cyber manipulation, Spinoza's approach emphasizes the importance of social structures that support participation and mutual understanding, while Descartes' approach emphasizes the need for rational and independent individuals (Justin Steinberg, 2024).

Cyber manipulation utilizes emotions and cognitive biases to influence individual and societal behavior. Through Descartes' principles, individuals can control emotions and use common sense in assessing information. However, this approach may not be enough to handle the scale and complexity that exists today. It takes a Spinoza approach, which emphasizes an understanding of emotions and social connectedness, which offers additional insights into building resilience to cyber manipulation through community strengthening and mutual understanding.

Combining Descartes and Spinoza's approaches could result in a more holistic digital political ethics. From Descartes, we learn the importance of individual autonomy and the use of common sense in dealing with information. From Spinoza, we understand the importance of social connectedness and mutual understanding in building a society that is resistant to manipulation. In

the digital age, effective political ethics must combine strengthening individual capacity with the construction of social structures that support collaboration and mutual understanding.

4. Buzzer Ethics Challenges and Truth Construction

René Descartes emphasized the importance of ratio and free will in determining moral actions. When talking buzzers, individuals are expected to use common sense to judge the information being disseminated. However, when buzzers spread misleading information, they exploit the weaknesses of individual rationality, blurring the line between facts and opinions. This problem raises ethical questions about the extent to which individuals can maintain their moral autonomy in the midst of a manipulated flow of information.

Buzzers can spread information massively and quickly, creating the illusion of truth through repetition and virality. This challenges the concept of objective truth upheld by Descartes, where truth is supposed to be based on evidence and logic. When misinformation is widely disseminated, individuals have difficulty distinguishing between facts and opinions, obscuring the basis of rationality in moral decision-making.

Baruch Spinoza saw humans as part of an interconnected nature, in which emotions play an important role in human actions. In the case of buzzers, emotions such as fear or anger can be leveraged to influence public opinion. Spinoza emphasized the importance of a rational understanding of emotions in order to achieve true freedom. Therefore, the dissemination of information by buzzers that manipulate public emotions is contrary to Spinoza's ethics which prioritizes increasing the capacity of the mind and body to act, while inhibiting rational understanding and individual freedom (Togdogan, 2018).

Spinoza emphasized the importance of freedom of thought and expression in a democratic society. But ironically, when buzzers are used to silence critical voices or spread propaganda, they undermine the foundations of that freedom. Manipulation of information by buzzers can create an atmosphere of fear or confusion, hindering rational discussion and healthy public participation. That is what Spinoza's vision of requiring society to rely on rational understanding and individual freedom is opposed.

Faced with the challenges of buzzers and information manipulation, it is important to develop a digital ethics that combines the thinking of Descartes and Spinoza. From Descartes, we learn the importance of rationality and free will in assessing information. From Spinoza, we will understand the role of emotions and social connectedness in shaping public opinion. By integrating these two perspectives, we can build a more critical, free, and ethical digital society in the face of complex information flows.

The Urgency of Communal Rationality and Collective Consciousness

Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* rationalism emphasizes that true knowledge can only be achieved through an autonomous and reflective mind. Descartes established individual consciousness as the starting point of knowledge. However, the authors see that this overemphasis on individual subjects tends to close the space for social relations and collective consciousness in the

construction of truth, especially in the digital age, leading to the fragmentation of information, as each individual feels satisfied with his or her personal rationality without involvement in social verification that impacts pettiness of thinking (Wulandari et al., 2021).

Spinoza offers a contrasting approach by seeing man not as a separate entity from God or fellow man, but as part of an interconnected whole (Rika, 2019).. Rationality according to Spinoza is not only a matter of thinking for oneself, but about understanding the interconnectedness of human beings in a network of universal causality. In the socio-political context, of course, this thinking emphasizes the importance of communal rationality: prioritizing the common interests formed by collective reason, not the will of the individual.

In a plural and interconnected society through social media like today, the need for collective awareness has become increasingly important. Spinoza asserted that freedom is only possible if humans live in a rational society—where laws and policies are derived from collective reason (Patrisius Juwantri Badri Dinggit, 2025). Not the emotions of the masses or the manipulation of the elite. Collective consciousness, in this sense, must be built on the foundation of public rationality that thinks about the welfare of all parties, not just based on majority opinion.

However, Descartes' approach remains relevant as a tool for criticism of digital information that is manipulative and filled with hoaxes and disinformation. Descartes' method of skepticism will help individuals refrain from believing or disseminating information. However, this methodical doubt is only truly productive when it is accompanied by an awareness of the social responsibility in conveying information—something reinforced by Spinoza's rational-communal approach. The combination of these two approaches allows the digital society to be more critical and at the same time empathetic.

The importance of combining the individual rationality embraced by Descartes and Spinoza-style collectives is also seen in today's challenges of digital democracy. People can no longer rely only on their personal intellect to determine political attitudes, but also need a rational and open space for collective dialogue. In a social structure full of algorithmic manipulation and identity polarization, only a common sense-based collective consciousness can prevent disintegration. This kind of awareness is not something that is born automatically, but must be continuously actively built through education, digital literacy, and public ethics.

CONCLUSION

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that Descartes' rationalism, although fundamental to modern science, also caused ethical and existential crises in the digital age, manifested in the fragmentation of identity and the illusion of digital freedom. In contrast, Spinoza's monism offers an ethic of unity and an understanding of true freedom that is crucial to addressing moral challenges in a digital society. Therefore, this study affirms the importance of synthesizing Descartes' individual rationality with Spinoza's relational rationality as a solid ethical foundation for navigating fragmented identities, digital ethics, and maintaining human integrity in the midst of digitalization currents.

The integration of the two philosophers' thinking provides a deep critical lens for understanding the moral and existential challenges of modern humans, pushing for a more just and ethical digital society. For further studies, it is recommended that this research be further developed into the realm of technology philosophy, AI ethics, and digital policy, in order to answer the complexity of moral and existential challenges in modern life.

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