Whenever Spinoza provides reasons for the existence of politics, the key elements include security, cooperation in tasks, happiness, and freedom. The *TIE*’s project for the pursuit of happiness includes the formation of societies that allow men to share safely their supreme good (*TIE*, pp. 14–5); the *TPP* presents different justifications for political societies, such as security, the need for cooperative tasks, and freedom, which are exactly the same as those developed throughout the *Ethics*; and the *TP*’s political project predicts mutual assistance to support life and to cultivate the mind (*TP* II/15), whilst guaranteeing peace and security (*TP* V/2). In any case, these different reasons for the existence of politics are merely different versions for the political treatment of a wide-ranging concept of freedom that traverses Spinoza’s entire philosophical system. In this sense, natural law’s itinerary for individual empowerment is mostly a path for the pursuit of freedom.

Insofar as this itinerary comprises political societies, the background for Spinoza’s natural law theory is also political freedom. But freedom in the modern context of politics can be endowed with different aims and dimensions. From the viewpoint of the individual citizen in a modern State, he is politically free when he acts in accordance with his own reasoning albeit under the rule of law – that is, when he obeys objective institutional laws to whose making he somehow contributed (instead of arbitrary human powers). From the viewpoint of the modern State’s relations with its citizens, freedom can be either that which the State must continually promote in order to justify its own existence, or simply the set of conditions that it must ensure in order to allow its citizens to prosper. Accordingly the State is either merely the political terrain from which individual freedom can emerge (political institutions ensure minimum conditions for the making of freedom),
or the very pedagogical vehicle by which virtue and freedom can be fostered among citizens (political institutions make individual freedom by themselves). In early modern political theory, freedom is usually regarded from the viewpoint of the individual citizen; and, when regarded from the viewpoint of the State, the minimum liberal version overrules any pedagogical capacities attributed to politicians. Spinoza, in this setting, is truly modern.

But even in his modernity, Spinoza still manages to reconstruct anew the concept of political freedom. The purpose of this chapter is to explain how this reconstruction occurs, firstly from the viewpoint of individual citizens, and secondly from the viewpoint of States.

A right of one’s own

From the viewpoint of political individuality, natural law becomes a language of freedom within the confines of singularity, namely within the conceptual backbone of natural rights. Freedom appears in this context from the moment that a right’s self-reference and the reference to another right represent a rupture between, respectively, a sphere of personal liberty and a space beyond that sphere. In Spinoza, that moment appears mostly in the *TP*, when the pair *sui juris/alterius juris* is used to describe both consensual and conflictive relations between individuals. Like many other concepts proliferating in modern political theory, this pair is derived from Roman private law and imported into the public realm in order to give it a modern political dimension. Etymologically, it makes the difference respectively between validating individual natural rights simply by one’s liberty to act without external constraints, and the oppression of individual natural rights by one’s subjection to another’s will – that is why for moderns such as Hobbes and Kant, *sui juris* is mostly used as being synonymous with independence and autonomy, whereas *alterius juris* is synonymous with dependence and heteronomy. Politically, they establish the difference between acting as one wills and being subject to the power of another, between being a citizen and a slave.¹

Spinoza scholarship interprets his usages of this pair in the same sense that it does for other modern political theorists. *Sui juris* in the *TP*, then, would be synonymous with individual rights insofar as individual powers could unfold without requiring a direct external cause for acting – an individual would be *sui juris* if he were legally independent² – that is, a natural right-holder whose sphere of action could be interpreted under the Greek conceptions of *autonomos* or *autarkeia*. *Alterius juris*,