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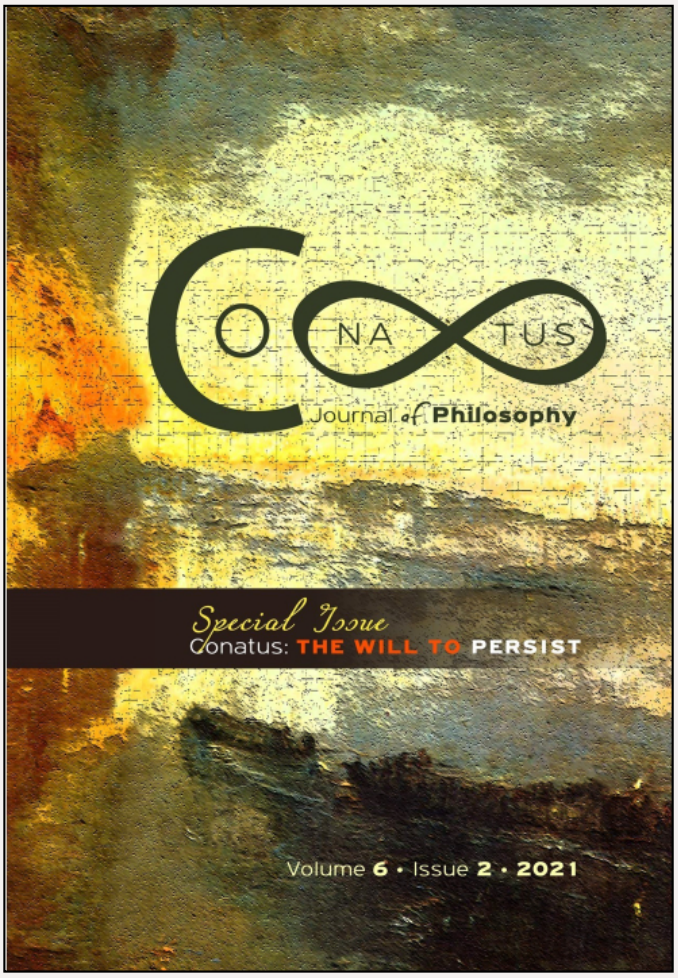

Spinoza's Conatus: A Teleological Reading of Its Ethical Dimension

Aksoy Neşe — Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University

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Spinoza's Conatus: A Teleological Reading of Its Ethical Dimension

Neşe Aksoy
Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Turkey
E-mail address: aksoynesee@gmail.com
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3815-4350

Abstract

In this article I examine how the teleological reading of Spinoza's conatus shapes the ethical trajectory of his philosophy. I first introduce the Spinozistic criticism of teleology and argue contra many critics that Spinoza has a mild approach to human teleology. On the basis of this idea, I develop the claim that conatus is a teleological element pertaining to human nature. From the teleological reading of conatus, I draw the conclusion that Spinozistic ethics is inclusive of objective, humanistic, and essentialist elements. In this sense, this paper emerges to be a challenge against the anti-teleological reading of conatus that is predominantly related to the subjectivistic, anti-humanistic, and non-essentialist interpretation of Spinoza's ethics. It mainly situates Spinoza in a traditionally teleological context where the human conatus is seen as an act of pursuing objective and essential moral ends that is distinctive to human nature.

Keywords: *conatus; humanistic; Spinoza; essentialist; teleology; ethicality; objectivistic*

I. Introduction

Spinoza's severe criticism of teleology is notoriously known to eradicate any form of teleological attitude. It is generally acclaimed that Spinoza's anti-teleological attitude in ontology leads to a subjectivistic, anti-humanistic, and non-essentialist reading of his ethics. This paper challenges this widely accepted view by suggesting that Spinoza's conception of *conatus* is teleological in character which ultimately leads to interpret the Spinozistic ethics as inclusive of objective, humanistic, and essentialist elements.

The paper divides into three main sections. In the first section, I dwell upon the Spinozistic criticism of teleology. Here, I argue that Spinoza, as a follower of Maimonides and the seventeenth century natural philosophers, is a harsh critic of teleology. I further argue that even though Spinoza is a severe critic of teleology, there are some scholars such as Garrett, Curley and Lin who hold the view that Spinoza has a milder approach to human teleology,[1] namely the fact that the human beings are teleological (or purposive) agents that strive towards the final cause. The claim that Spinoza countenances human teleology will be the key to our further discussion.

In the second section, I embark on the teleological character of *conatus*. After I posit the non-teleological arguments of Bennett, Carriero, and Hübner who basically hold that the conatus is 1) a mechanical tendency to persist in existence; 2) a maximization of one's power or activity; or 3) an act of causing effects, I side with Viljanen, Garrett, and Lin in considering that Spinoza's *conatus* is not merely a mechanical act of creating certain effects, but it is an act of inclination/orientation towards certain goals and ends.

In the third section, I proceed to draw conclusions with regard to the ethics of Spinoza on the basis of the teleological reading of *conatus*. An anti-teleological reading of *conatus* usually leads to interpret the Spinozistic ethics as inclusive of subjective, anti-humanistic, and non-essentialist elements. For example, Gilles Deleuze holds the view that the Spinozian ethical concepts, namely good and bad, are determined subjectively by the individual *conatus*es. I, however, argue that there is a certain objective ideal *(exemplar humanae naturae)* that the *conatus* of individuals aspires towards. Moreover, I contrast with the anti-humanistic and non-essentialist reading of Spinoza's ethics. Holding that the *conatus* of human agents is oriented towards the essential ethical values that distinguish them from other natural entities, I propose that the Spinozian ethics has essentialist and humanistic elements.

All in all, the current paper aims to give a comprehensive overview of the Spinozian ethics as an objectivistic, humanistic, and essentialist paradigm that is grounded on the teleological reading of human *conatus*. The innovation of the paper, I believe, is to offer a multidimensional analysis of the Spinozistic ethics on the basis of the teleological approach to *conatus*.

[1] As is well known, teleology, in its general use, is a very broad term. It is mainly a doctrine that explains natural phenomena by final causes. However, in this study we will gradually narrow down our scope to studying human teleology, namely the study of human beings as entities that strive towards the final cause as an end. In this sense, in the aftermath of the study, we will embark on the teleological nature of human beings as they are oriented towards the final cause of universe.

II. Spinoza's criticism of teleology

An inquiry into the ultimate telos of creation has been a common concern for the medieval Jewish philosophy.[2] Most medieval thinkers endorsed that the Aristotelian fourth cause (aitia),[3] namely final cause, is the most plausible formula for the explanation of the creation. One of the most renown Jewish philosophers Moses Maimonides, however, emerges as an exception to that. Although Maimonides does not always have reservations about the final cause,[4] he begins his discussion in the *Guide for the Perplexed* with the observation that the minds of the "excellent individuals" have been "perplexed" with the question of the "final end of the world's existence."[5] He bluntly argues that this question is inapplicable since the world has no final end.

Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* has had a profound impact on Spinoza's *Ethics*, Part I, Appendix. Akin to Maimonides, Spinoza maintains in the *Ethics*, Part I, Appendix that the teleological account of creation is baseless as it has simply arisen from the "ignorance" of the people about the "causal order of nature."[6] As Spinoza puts it, the majority of people think of themselves as free because they act on their volitions and appetites but ignore the causes behind their volitions and appetites. It follows that they "act always on account of an end, viz. on account of their advantage, which

[2] Medieval and early modern Jewish philosophers developed their thinking with the influence of ancient Greek – primarily Aristotle – and Arabic sources. Toward the late Middle Ages, Jewish philosophers also established a dialogue with Christian scholastics. In addition to that, Jewish philosophers were extensively influenced by the rabbinic sources and the Hebrew Bible; Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "Teleology in Jewish Philosophy," in *Teleology: A History*, ed. J. K. McDonough (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 123. These sources had a huge impact on the philosophical pursuits of the medieval Jewish philosophers. The medieval Jewish philosophers basically questioned about the ultimate purpose of creation. For example, Judah Halevi in the Kuzari argued that "it is clear that domestic animals were created for the benefit of man" and that "the world was but completed with the creation of man who forms the heart of all that was created before him;" Melamed, "Teleology in Jewish Philosophy," 128.

[3] In *Metaphysics* Book I Aristotle identifies four original causes for explaining nature: material cause, formal cause, efficient cause, and final cause; see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London, New York: Penguin Classics, 1998), 12.

[4] In his early *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Maimonides expresses extreme teleological and anthropocentric views; Warren Zev Harvey, "Spinoza and Maimonides on Teleology and Anthropocentrism," in *Spinoza's Ethics: A Critical Guide*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 43.

[5] See Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedlander (Skokie, IL: Varda Books, 2016), 272.

[6] See Benedictus Spinoza, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, (First Part, Appendix), vol. 1, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 440.

they want."[7] Addressing the dichotomy between the causal explanation and teleology, Spinoza obviously favours the former. Hence, he regards the teleological explanation as an unreliable way of seeing things.

Spinoza's anti-teleological outlook is, moreover, influenced by the advancement in the mechanical sciences in the 17th century. The 17th century science and philosophy in relation to teleology can be seen as a clear break with the medieval tradition. In parallel to the scientific advancements in the century, philosophers such as Bacon, Boyle, Hyugens, and Descartes view nature as a mechanical structure that operates on a causal basis. They come to reject any form of purposiveness in nature as the sciences show that nature can be explained simply through the mechanical principles. For instance, Descartes bluntly suggests that the teleological premises have no place within the domain of natural sciences and philosophy.[8] He utterly banishes the teleological premises from the domain of natural sciences and philosophy especially because he thinks that the finite intellect of the human being cannot grasp the infinite purposes of the God. Similarly, Francis Bacon removes teleology from the domain of natural sciences because he thinks that the study of the final causes gives rise to no practical art.[9] Like Descartes and Bacon, Spinoza known as a stern advocate of the mechanistic efficient causation, attacks teleology severely. However, his criticism extends beyond the anti-teleology of Descartes or Bacon as he does not only remove teleology from the study of metaphysics, but he also bluntly claims that God has no end/purpose. So, we should ask, how could Spinoza's brutal attack on teleology be explicated so that we can get a firmer grasp of it?

It is the Appendix to the First Part of *Ethics* that provides a clear indication of Spinoza's assault on the traditional understanding of teleology. In this text, Spinoza argues that the teleological explanations have simply arisen from a lack of understanding about nature or God (*Deus sive Natura*).[10] In other words, on Spinoza's view, the misapprehension of people about the true causes of the universe is what leads them to imagine that there are purposes/telos in nature to pursue.[11] Spinoza's anti-teleological account instead maintains that the universe/nature has no purposes. He mainly describes

[7] Ibid.

[8] See Rene Descartes, *The Principles of Philosophy*, trans. John Veitch (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2010), 15. Also see Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 40.

[9] Martin Lin, *Being and Reason: An Essay on Spinoza's Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 150.

[10] Spinoza identifies God and nature with each other and holds that they are the one and only substance (*Deus sive Natura*).

[11] See Spinoza, *The Collected Works*, (First Part, Appendix), 440.

nature as a causal unit necessitated and determined by God to be the way it is. In such a universe, there is no contingent or accidental being or fact existing. In the *Ethics* Spinoza explains this as follows:

> God acts from the laws of his nature alone and is compelled by no one.[12]
>
> A thing which has been determined to produce an effect has necessarily been determined in this way by God; and one which has not been determined by God cannot determine itself to produce an effect.[13]
>
> In nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.[14]

From the above excerpts, we can readily see that in Spinoza's causally determined universe natural beings or facts follow from the absolute necessity of God. In such a scheme, nature acts and preserves itself out of brute necessity. So, causation involves necessity, and nothing is outside of it. As is well known, there is room in Spinoza's system only for one substance, namely the necessarily existing nature or God without which nothing can exist or be understood.[15] The finite beings, however, are the modifications or affections which are produced by the monistic substance God in a causal and determinate manner.[16] In such a system of Spinoza, it is widely acclaimed that God and finite beings interact in an anti-teleological manner. This is mainly supported by Spinoza's anti-teleological attitude in the Appendix of the first part of the *Ethics*. In his discussion in the *Ethics*, I, Appendix, Spinoza explicitly argues that God or Nature knows no final ends since God per se is the cause of all things and it acts from absolute necessity:

> With these [demonstrations] I have explained God's nature and properties: that he exists necessarily; that he is unique; that he is and acts from the necessity alone of his nature; that (and how) he is the free cause of all things; that all things are in God and so depend on him that without him they can neither be nor be conceived; and finally, that all things have been predetermined

[12] Ibid., (First Part, P 17), 425.

[13] Ibid., (First Part, P 26), 431.

[14] Ibid., (First Part, P 29), 433.

[15] Ibid., (First Part, P 14), 420.

[16] Ibid., (First Part, P 26-27), 431-432.

> by God, not from freedom of the will or absolute good pleasure, but from God's absolute nature, or infinite power.[17]

In here Spinoza expresses that God's actions are necessitated by its nature (or essence) and that for this reason it would be wrong to view God's actions as goal oriented. Yitzhak Y. Melamed says that the necessitation of God's actions by his nature makes the teleological explanation redundant.[18] For him, insofar as the God's nature/essence is the sufficient cause of God's actions, teleological explanations appear misleading.[19] To put it in terms of Aristotelian philosophy, there are no final causes and everything is brought about merely through the operation of efficient causation.[20] All talk of God's intentions, aims etc. appears just to be an antropomorhizing story.[21]

In relation to his anti-teleological standpoint, Spinoza goes on to criticize the teleological explanation in the Appendix to Part I in two steps:

> a) *By treating the final causes as the first causes, teleology turns the causality of nature upside down (naturam omnino evertere).*
> b) *Upon depicting God as an agent who aims at something, teleology attributes a lack of self-sufficiency to God.*

How should the preceding arguments be explicated? One useful way to study this part is to analyse it in relation to Spinoza's doctrine of causal determinism. In the first statement above, we read that the teleological approach, on Spinoza's view, is not acceptable as it dismantles the causal order of nature. Spinoza basically holds that the teleological account explains things by appealing to their conclusion. For instance, he imagines a scenario where the stone falls from the roof and kills the man. In this very situation, Spinoza thinks, it is the fall of the stone that caused man to die. He literally gives a causal explanation to the situation. However, the teleological account, Spinoza thinks, would explain the situation in an opposite way: the stone falls from the roof so as to kill the man. Spinoza finds this explanation absurd because he thinks that by taking the effects as the causes, the teleological account turns the law of causality upside down.[22]

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[17] Ibid., 439.

[18] See Melamed, "Teleology in Jewish Philosophy," 141.

[19] Ibid.

[20] See Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 114-115.

[21] Ibid., 115.

[22] See Spinoza, *The Collected Works*, (First Part, Appendix), 443.

As to the second statement (b), Spinoza asserts that the teleological explanation is erroneous because, upon depicting God as an agent who aims at something, it disregards the self-sufficiency of God. For him, however, God is a self-sufficient agent that would have no aims because he does not lack anything.

The two seminal reasons Spinoza offers to defend his anti-teleological approach, I believe, are consistent within the context of his causal determinism. Arguing that God is the efficient cause of unthoughtful (unliving) things, and that he is a self-sufficient agent, Spinoza obviously leaves no room for divine teleology and unthoughtful teleology.[23] However, I am not so sure, if Spinoza, offering that the teleology is unacceptable due to the afore-mentioned reasons, does abruptly conclude that the teleology is erroneous altogether. Or is it possible to claim that he is sympathetic to some form of teleology in his metaphysics?

Some commentators of Spinoza like Bennett, Carriero, and Melamed maintain that these two reasons formulated in the First Part of *Ethics* suffice to say that Spinoza rejects teleology altogether.[24] For instance, Melamed in "Teleology in Jewish Philosophy," pointing to the connection between freedom of will and teleology, argues that Spinoza dispenses with any form of teleology (divine, human, or unthoughtful teleology) as he has already eliminated the freedom of will.[25] The human agents in Spinoza, according to Melamed, behave in a causal and determinate manner as is conditioned by God. But they cannot be considered as free agents who have purposes, intentions or preferences of their own.

In recent years, however, a number of scholars such as Curley, Garrett, Manning, and Lin have argued fairly persuasively that Spinoza does not wish

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[23] By the term "unthoughtful teleology," I mean the teleology of the non-living or inanimate things in nature.

[24] Jonathan Bennett in his article "Teleology and Spinoza's *Conatus*" mainly argues that Spinoza rejects all final causes, including the teleological explanations of the human action. However, Bennett affirms that Spinoza has an inconsistency in his system as he presents *conatus* as a teleological concept; see Jonathan Bennett, "Teleology and Spinoza's *Conatus*," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 8 (1983): 143-160. Likewise, John Carriero in "Spinoza on Final Causality" and elsewhere, argues that Spinoza is against the human teleology. Carriero basically argues that Spinoza sees the final ends as the appetites of the human beings. In this way, he suggests that the human ends or purposes are nothing but the motive tendencies. To illustrate his point, Carriero holds that when we build a house, we generally assume that we have an end: to build a house. However, he then puts that when we think of the issue more deeply, we will realize that we actually have no end other than being part of a causal chain of the construction of a house. According to Carriero, in Spinoza's trajectory, building a house is nothing more than a mechanical process; John Carriero, "Spinoza on Final Causality," in *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy: Volume 2*, eds. Daniel Garber, and Steven Nadler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 140-142.

[25] Melamed, "Teleology in Jewish Philosophy," 141-145.

to eliminate teleological explanations altogether.[26] These scholars mainly hold that even though Spinoza is against divine teleology, he countenances the teleological explanations of human affairs. That is to say, the second group of scholars point out that, in rejecting teleology for the above reasons, Spinoza does obviously deny the teleology of God or unthoughtful things, but he does not necessarily object to the fact that there might be certain teleological elements in human nature which they call "human teleology." Garrett, Curley, Manning and Lin each have their own reasons to support the idea that Spinoza has a milder approach to human teleology. For example, Curley attacking the non-teleological reading of Bennett, argues that the human teleology is very central to the Appendix of the part of the *Ethics*. He cites some passages from the *Ethics* which he thinks are supportive of his teleological reading of the human nature: "Not many words will be required now to show that Nature has no end set before it, and that all final causes are nothing but human fictions."[27] Curley thinks that this passage from the Appendix, which is widely held to be a rejection of human teleology, is merely a rejection of the divine teleology. By rephrasing the statement as "all final causes we are apt to ascribe to Nature (or God) are nothing but human fictions,"[28] Curley claims that by this statement Spinoza does merely attack the divine teleology. I tend to stand closer to this approach and my attempt in this study to prove that *conatus* might be considered as a teleological concept will rely on the basic assumption that Spinoza has a mild approach to human teleology.

III. A teleological reading of *conatus*

One of the central aims of the Spinoza's philosophy, I believe, is to discuss and, if possible, define the human nature. Articulated in the First Part of

[26] Garrett, Manning, and Lin all propose their own reasons for the idea that Spinoza is friendly with human teleology. Garrett, for example, has defined four textual reasons that are supportive of the human teleology. One of the reasons that Garrett holds is that Spinoza in *Treatise on the Emendation of Intellect* explains much of the human activity as performed for attaining certain ends. For Garrett, the fact that the human beings by their very essence are envisaged to pursue the absolute good as an ultimate end is a clear proof for human teleology; see Don Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza and Early Modern Rationalism," in *New essays on the rationalists*, eds. Rocco J. Gennaro, and Charles Huenemann (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 312. Also see Richard N. Manning, "Spinoza, Thoughtful Teleology and the Causal Significance of Content," in *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes,* eds. Olli Koistinen, and John Biro (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 183. See Martin Lin, "Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza," *The Philosophical Review* 115, no. 3 (2006): 320.

[27] Spinoza, *The Collected Works*, (First Part, Appendix), 442.

[28] See Edwin Curley, and P. F. Moreau, eds., *Spinoza: Issues and Directions: Proceedings of the Chicago Spinoza Conference* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1990), 40.

the *Ethics* as "the mode of the infinite substance"[29] and "an extended and thinking being,"[30] the human nature has been discussed by Spinoza in a limitedly metaphysical manner. Hence, the First Part of the *Ethics* leaves us with a certain expectation that Spinoza will be addressing the issue in the later chapters of his work from a more practical perspective. The concept of *conatus*, which is first incorporated in the *Ethics* in its third Part, steps into the scene at this stage. It helps us conceive of the human being as a less enigmatic and more solid figure in the metaphysics of Spinoza.[31] So what is *conatus*, and in what sense is it definitive and constitutive of the human nature?

Conatus originally comes from the Latin verb *conatur* which literally means "to try or strive."[32] It is used by early modern philosophers, including Thomas Hobbes, to express the notion of striving for what is advantageous.[33] Spinoza incorporates it into his metaphysics in a distinctive manner. In the *Ethics*, he first uses it when he says: "Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being."[34] Then he adds: "The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing."[35] Ontologically speaking, Spinoza's *conatus* argument holds that the human being, just like any other finite thing,[36] is an agent who strives to preserve its existence as its essential feature. So, Spinoza proposes that *conatus* – striving for self-preservation – is the essence of things "which makes each particular thing

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[29] Spinoza defines the mode in the *Ethics* as follows: "By mode I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived;" Spinoza, *The Collected Works of Spinoza* (First Part, D 5), 409. So, he offers that the human being, as one of the affections of God, is not a substance on its own right but it is a mode of the substance.

[30] Ibid., (First Part, P 14, Cor. 2), 420.

[31] Don Garrett, for instance, in his article "Spinoza's *Conatus* Argument" says that the *conatus* argument reveals the behavioural nature of human being as opposed to its being depicted merely as a metaphysical figure in the first part of the *Ethics*; Don Garrett, "Spinoza's Conatus Argument," in *Nature and Necessity in Spinoza's Philosophy*, ed. Don Garrett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 378. Likewise, Steven Nadler argues that *conatus* is the finite or solid manifestation of the infinite quantum of power of Nature or God. Nadler also proposes that *conatus* involves the things' individuation. This being so, the finite things are distinguished from each other "insofar as their parcels of power are distinct from each other;" Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics*, 195.

[32] Edwin Curley's translation for the Latin word *conatur* is "to strive, try or endeavour." See Beth Lord, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 88-89.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Spinoza, *The Collected Works*, (Third Part, P 6), 498.

[35] Ibid., (Third Part, P7), 499.

[36] Thomas Cook holds the view that it is not only the human beings but also each finite thing that strive to exist in Spinoza. In that sense, Cook points to the universality of *conatus*. See Thomas Cook, "*Conatus*: A Pivotal Doctrine at the Center of the Ethics," in *Spinoza's Ethics,* eds. Michael Hampe, Ursula Renz, and Robert Schnepf (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 153.

what it is."[37] *Conatus* as the act of self-preservation shows that the human beings are essentially active in maintaining their essence. Things are determined to act by their *conatus* in ways that will ensure their survival and promote their well-being.[38] As is well known, the traditional theology appeals to God as the ground for the maintenance of finite things.[39] Spinoza's *conatus* theory, in that sense, radically attacks the traditional metaphysics by attributing a great power to the finite beings in terms of their self-maintenance. In that sense, although Spinoza's system is deterministic where God determines everything as they are, Spinoza leaves room for self-determination to the finite things through *conatus*. In this way, things are regarded to be what they are in terms of their *conative* power.

Conatus has a central role in Spinoza's ethics as well. Spinoza utters in the *Ethics* that *conatus* is the most essential virtue as no other virtue can be conceived prior to it:

> The striving to preserve itself is the very essence of a thing (by IIIP7). Therefore, if some virtue could be conceived prior to this [virtue], viz. to this striving, the very essence of the thing would be conceived prior to itself (by D8), which is absurd (as is known through itself).[40]

As is clear from this excerpt, Spinoza believes that *conatus* is a foundation for ethics which suggests that we cannot conceive of any other virtue without one's *conative* activity. By holding that *conatus* is the most primary virtue, Spinoza centralizes the notion of self-preservation in his ethical theory which ultimately leads to the fact that the ethical concepts, mainly good and bad, are defined through *conatus*. Spinoza radically opposes the traditional ethical theory by holding that we judge good or bad not because they are good or bad in themselves. But we judge them good or bad because we desire (or strive for) them or not. This paradigmatic shift in the Spinoza's ethical theory suggests that there is no good or bad in themselves independent of the subject. Rather, good and bad are defined by the subject's *conative* act.

Now that we have touched upon *conatus* as an ontological and ethical subject, we shall turn to expounding on our teleological view of *conatus*.

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[37] Lord, *Spinoza's Ethics*, 90.

[38] Ibid., 89.

[39] For example, Judeo-Christian religions assume that God is the cause of the essence and existence of creatures. Therefore, the creatures are seen to be totally dependent on God. Although Spinoza similarly claims that God is the cause of the essence and existence of finite beings, he attributes an active power through *conatus* to the finite beings to determine their existence.

[40] Spinoza, *The Collected Works*, (Fourth Part, P22), 558.

When we take a closer look into the Spinoza literature, we can readily see that there is a dominant tradition of viewing Spinoza's system as thoroughly non-teleological in character. Our method in this section will be to give a critical assessment of the non-teleological arguments about *conatus* from a teleological standpoint. None of the arguments can be taken lightly as they represent a large body of scholarly opinion. So, our modest attempt will be only to remain consistent and articulate in our teleological attitude. Let me begin with reciting the anti-teleological arguments on *conatus*.

1. *Conatus* is a mechanical tendency to persist in existence.
2. *Conatus* is a maximization of one's power or activity.
3. *Conatus* is an act of causing effects.

As far as I hold sway over the Spinoza literature, the first argument (1), I have proposed above, has been defended by scholars such as Bennett and Carriero. In *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, Bennett has offered a non-teleological reading of the appetite for survival. In this study, although Bennett believes that the appetite for survival is not a "blind" impulse because we are aware of where they are taking us, he still argues that it might be seen "blind" in the sense that we are not aware of where we are taken into.[41] Hence, Bennett implies that appetite for survival is not a conscious act towards the attainment of a certain end, but it is an unconscious impulse. Similar to that, Carriero discusses that *conatus* is nothing more than a motion for survival without any goal in itself.[42] Carriero approaches Spinoza as a proponent of the mechanical philosophy. Observing a close relation between Spinoza's *conatus* argument and the statements of the 17th century conservation of motion, he proposes that Spinoza's *conatus* is nothing more than a motive tendency for survival.[43]

As opposed to Bennett and Carriero, there is a teleological reading of Spinoza's *conatus* which is much closer to our stance. For instance, in response to Bennett's non-teleological argument, Curley argues that *conatus* cannot be simply seen as a blind impulse. Curley holds that *conatus* has two meanings.[44] In traditional sense it means "striving for something." For Curley, *conatus* in this sense implies that one strives for a certain end. However, Curley argues that *conatus* has another meaning in Cartesian philosophy, namely "the tendency

[41] Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1984), 223.

[42] John Carriero, "Conatus and Perfection in Spinoza," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* XXXV (2011): 86.

[43] Ibid., 85.

[44] See Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 107.

bodies have to persist in a state either of rest or of uniform motion in a straight line."[45] Curley states that this technical meaning of *conatus* has no implication for a goal the thing literally wants to achieve. According to Curley, Spinozistic usage of *conatus* has been deeply influenced by this Cartesian usage of the term. However, for Curley, unlike the *conatus* of the inanimate things, Spinoza's human *conatus* might not be limited to this technical interpretation of the term. Rather, he supposes that the human *conatus* has an inner representation of future which clearly implies a conscious act towards a future end.

As to the non-teleological argument of Carriero, I would like to posit Viljanen's counter-argument. Viljanen calls Carriero's *conatus* argument as "inertial reading."[46] Viljanen first argues that Carriero's argument is fallacious because the human *conatus* does not act purposelessly (through motive tendency) in that it is not inert, but it aims to have good ideas rather than bad ideas in order to preserve its well-being.[47] Secondly Viljanen argues that Carriero's "inertial reading" ignores the fact that the *conatus* is not self-destructive. According to Viljanen, because we, the human beings, are *conative*ly not self-destructive, we cannot be moving inertly and merely through our motive tendencies.[48] Rather, we should have some conscious act in preserving ourselves which manifests itself in our attempt to avoid anything self-destructive to us.

The second non-teleological argument (2) we mention has been defended, for example, by Carriero who in his article "*Conatus*" utters that there is a theoretical upper limit to the reality to which the individuals with their *conative* power can reach.[49] However, he argues that this upper limit does not refer to any end. For Carriero, the natural things do not exist for the sake of this upper limit, that is, it does not mean that the things are deprived of their existence if they cannot reach this limit. Rather, they are just existing at each moment to maximize their activity and power. This argument brings us again to the "inertial reading" as Viljanen calls it. According to this argument, the *conative* agents are assumed to retain their power and activity without any further end to that. They simply exist for the sake of existing. However, some passages from Spinoza's *Ethics* indicate that *conatus* or the act of self-preservation might be interpreted to have certain goals to achieve. We can read the following remarks in this vein:

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[45] Ibid.

[46] See Valtteri Viljanen, "The Meaning of the Conatus Doctrine," in *Spinoza's Geometry of Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 105-112.

[47] Ibid., 110.

[48] Ibid., 111.

[49] John Carriero, "*Conatus*," in *Spinoza's Ethics: A Critical Guide*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 150-151.

> We strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to Joy, and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it, or will lead to sadness.[50]
>
> When we love a thing like ourselves, we strive, as far as we can, to bring it about that it loves us in return.[51]
>
> A free man who lives among the ignorant strives, as far as he can, to avoid their favors.[52]

In these remarks, Spinoza clearly suggests that the human beings strive towards certain ends such as to maximize joy and to minimize despair, to be loved back by our lovers or to avoid the favour of the ignorant people etc. So, we can see that we, the humans, are not existing only for the sake of existing, as was claimed by Carriero, but we aim to maximize our power and activity towards certain ends such as joy, love, and wisdom.

The last non-teleological argument (3) I have been going through in the Spinoza scholarship has been defended by scholars such as Hübner. In her article "Spinoza's Unorthodox Metaphysics of the Will," Hübner basically states that *conatus* in Spinoza is identified with the essence and that the essence is identified with activity and power.[53] Therefore, for Hübner, the Spinozistic conception of human being is not an inert substance in its essence but an active agent. This active agency, namely *conatus*, is simply an act of causing/bringing about some effects in relation to one's essence. For this reason, Hübner's anti-teleological reading of *conatus* suggests that *conatus* is an efficiently causal productive essence[54] without having any end to realize. We would argue against Hübner that *conatus* is more of a self-realization (preservation of one's essence) than an act of bringing about certain effects. Our counterargument might sound highly Aristotelian or scholastic Aristotelian. As is well known, Aristotle defines self-actualisation as a change from potency to the actuality. Although Aristotle's theory of potentiality and actuality is highly criticized in the later centuries, the Scholastic Aristotelian thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas and Avicenna reformulated it in their own way. They mainly argued that things have a certain level of perfection and reality which is to be actualized.[55] Do we see a similar picture in Spinoza's

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[50] Spinoza, *The Collected Works*, (Third Part, P28), 509.

[51] Ibid., (Third Part, P33), 513.

[52] Ibid., (Fourth Part, P70), 585.

[53] Karolina Hübner, "Spinoza's Unorthodox Metaphysics of the Will," in *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Michael Della Rocca (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 352.

[54] Ibid., 353.

[55] See Carriero, "Spinoza on Final Causality," 107-108.

ethical theory? One might answer that question by saying yes and no. First of all, I should definitely note that Spinoza's theory of self-preservation is highly original. This being so, Spinoza never formulates self-preservation as a clear-cut transition from potentiality to actuality in one's state, as is held by Aristotle and scholastic Aristotelians, but as a transition in the degree of the conative power of the agent. Accordingly, Viljanen utters that although Spinoza discards the Aristotelian notion of potentiality and actualisation, he offers an essentialist view of human nature in the sense that the human beings produce effects and determine each other's manner of acting on the basis of their finite essences that are determined by the divine essence.[56] And likewise, Viljanen holds that the Spinozistic concept of *conatus* is end-directed because it is an act of preserving some essential features of the human being such as freedom, virtuousness etc.[57] So, Viljanen's view shows that despite the fact that Spinoza defines the essence of man as *conative* agent[58] that is active and mobile in character, he affirms the essential features that are stable and unchanging in human nature, for he offers that the finite essences are pre-determined by God.[59]

Our attempt to refute the possible non-teleological arguments of Spinoza's *conatus* sheds some light on our path to a teleological reading of *conatus*. Based on the teleological arguments we have suggested above, we can safely draw the conclusions that a) *conatus* is more than a blind (mechanical) impulse as it has a projection towards a future end; b) *conatus* is not merely a maximization of power but it is a maximization of power towards certain ends like joy, love and wisdom; and c) *conatus* is not merely an act of producing certain effects but it is a preservation of essence as the human beings have certain essential features embedded in them. The upshot of these conclusions is that Spinoza's human *conatus* might be seen as a much broader concept than it is suggested by the proponents of the mechanical philosophy. This being so, we can argue that the human *conatus* is not merely a blind mechanism acting purposelessly but it is an act of maintaining one's existence through certain ends and ideals. This approach definitely makes us swim against the dangerous tides of the anti-teleological reading that dominates Spinoza scholarship. However, we feel safe to say that Spinoza's *conatus* argument implies that the human beings are more than mechanical entities as they have certain ends, inclinations and purposes on their own.

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[56] Valtteri Viljanen, "Spinoza's Essentialist Model of Causation," *Inquiry* 51, no. 4 (2008): 427-428.

[57] Valtteri Viljanen, *Spinoza's Geometry of Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 127.

[58] See Spinoza, *The Collected Works*, (Third Part, P7), 499.

[59] See ibid., (Second Part, P26), 431, and (Second Part, P29), 433.

IV. What does the teleology of *conatus* imply in ethical sense?

Spinoza's *Ethics* and other works are largely imbued with an ethical consciousness rather than enunciating moral principles.[60] So, we never see Spinoza formulating moral principles to be followed. Instead, he aims to endow the reader with a certain ethical awareness. Gilles Deleuze in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* draws a distinction between the Spinozian version of ethics and traditional morality.[61] He stresses that despite rejecting the moral norms and values, Spinoza is deeply concerned with elucidating a non-moralistic ethics. This is primarily championed by the Spinozian conception of *conatus*. Accordingly, Spinoza holds that ethicality is not gained through conformity to the moral values and norms but rather through one's *conative* act, namely striving towards what is useful and avoiding what is not.[62] Spinoza is commonly held to offer a subjectivistic, anti-humanistic, and non-essentialist ethical theory mainly because of his conception of *conatus* that is regarded to be egoistic (seeking what is useful and avoiding what is not) and non-teleological. However, our teleological reading of *conatus* in the previous chapter has crucial implications for Spinoza's ethics. In this respect, we will mainly claim that the afore-mentioned teleological arguments of the human *conatus* in Spinoza usher us to interpret the Spinozian ethics as inclusive of objective, humanistic, and essentialist elements.

I. *Ethical Objectivism*. Spinoza's reformulation of ethicality, namely his attempt to ground ethicality on the *conative* act of the ethical agent instead of morality, exposes a sharp contrast with the traditional moral theories. As is well known, the traditional moral theories, from the Platonic and Aristotelian ethics to scholastic Aristotelianism and Cartesian theory, embrace the following dictum: there are certain objective moral values and norms out there which ought to be pursued by the human being. Spinoza, however, considers that the ethical conceptions of good and bad are subjectively determined by the *conatus* of human beings, namely their striving towards what is useful and avoiding what is not.

This might trigger us to think that the ethical agents are egoistic and subjectivistic in terms of their ethical choices and decisions. For instance, Deleuze in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* holds that Spinoza disregards the notion of moral values that are objectively graspable. Rather, to Deleuze,

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[60] Genevieve Lloyd, *Part of Nature: Self-knowledge in Spinoza's Ethics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 133.

[61] Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 17-30.

[62] See Spinoza, *The Collected Works*, (Fourth Part, D1, D2), 546.

Spinoza is subjectivistic in terms of ethical concepts as he propounds that they are determined in accordance with the fact that they are useful to us or not.[63] For Deleuze, the fact that we are ethically driven towards something or avoid it just because it "agrees with our nature or disagrees with our nature" implies a subjective and modal conception of ethicality.[64] This kind of Deleuzian interpretation might lead us to think that the Spinozian ethics is relativistic and egoistic. For example, Melamed clearly proposes that the Spinozian ethics is egoistic. By calling it "Egoism without Ego," Melamed says that every being in Spinoza seeks to promote his own true good.[65] According to Melamed, Spinoza indicates his egoism in ethics especially via his concept of *conatus*.[66] Because the human beings are regarded to be virtuous depending on their individual conative power, Melamed concludes that Spinozian ethicality is subjectively determined.

However, our teleological view of *conatus* is not supportive of such an interpretation. If we recall our first argument that *conatus* is a conscious act towards certain ends rather than merely being a mechanical tendency (a),[67] we shall readily argue that our *conative* act in ethical sense is not simply shaped by our appetites (what is useful to us or not) but it is teleologically oriented towards some ethical good. As Curley argues, the ethical good in Spinoza cannot be regarded as a subjective concept because it is deeply connected to the "ideal of human nature" (*exemplar humanae naturae).* Curley holds that the human beings strive towards the ethical good which conforms to the idea of ideal human nature.[68] In other words, we, the human beings, have a conception of ideal human nature according to which we define the good and bad. Accordingly, we call something good because it approximates to the ideal of human nature, and we call bad what does not approximate to the ideal. Hence, Curley suggests that the Spinozian ethical agent has an objective criterion to determine what is good or bad. However, note that the good and bad in Spinoza are in no way transcendent values but they are defined by the human beings.[69] Moreover, scholars such as Andrew Youpa argue that Spinoza is more a moral realist than an anti-realist. Arguing that the instances of goodness and badness do not depend on one's desires, emotions

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[63] See Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 22-23.

[64] Ibid., 22.

[65] See Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "Spinoza's Anti-Humanism: An Outline," in *The Rationalists: Between Tradition and Innovation*, eds. Carlos Fraenkel, Dario Perinetti, and Justin Smith (Dordrecht: Springer/Synthese, 2011), 159.

[66] Ibid.

[67] See page 108.

[68] See Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 123.

[69] Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 23.

or appetites, Youpa suggests that Spinoza is a moral realist. For Youpa, the fact that Spinoza proposes an ideal human nature that the individual human beings set for themselves shows that the goodness and badness are not determined on the basis of one's emotions, desires or beliefs, but on their objective notion of ideal and perfect human nature.[70]

If we turn to our teleological view of *conatus*, we shall claim that Curley and Youpa's interpretation of the Spinozian ethics fits in to our paradigm nicely. To put it simply, we shall point out that the Spinozian ethical agent strives towards the good as an end because of its conformity to the ideal human nature and vice versa. Hence, our teleological view of *conatus* implies that Spinoza's ethical agent is not egoistic (pursuing only what is useful or avoiding what is not) but rather it is oriented towards the objective ethical good as an end that is immanent in human nature. In this sense, we can call Spinoza's ethical objectivism as "conative objectivism" as it mainly relies upon the idea that the *conative* act of individuals is oriented towards the ethical good or bad depending on the power they gain through them. Put it another way, we can claim that Spinoza is neither offering a transcendentally objectivistic ethical theory nor a pure subjectivism but a *conatively* constructed objectivism.

II. *Humanism.* Spinoza is widely acclaimed to offer that the human nature has nothing distinctive than other natural beings.[71] This very notion that dominates the literature is mainly grounded on the idea that Spinoza regards all finite beings as the modes of one substance, God. For example, Melamed has argued that Spinozian rationalism "rejects the existence of any "islands" within nature which are governed by "special" laws."[72] In this way, offering an anti-humanist reading, Melamed holds that the humanity in Spinoza is in no way secured a distinguished or elevated place in nature. According to Melamed, the fact that the animals, and even rocks, have self-consciousness or a second-order idea of body, shows that they are not radically different from the human being who is primarily composed "of a body" and "an idea of his body."[73] On this ground, Melamed claims that the human beings and other entities of nature, namely animals and inanimate things, have only a degree of difference but they are fundamentally equal. However, our second teleological argument we have proposed in the previous section tells a different story.

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[70] See Andrew Youpa, *The Ethics of Joy: Spinoza on the Empowered Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 46-54.

[71] As is clear, by humanism, I mean a view that assigns human being a distinctive place among other natural things.

[72] Melamed, "Spinoza's Anti-Humanism: An Outline," 151.

[73] Ibid., 151-152.

As you shall recall, we have formulated our second argument (b) as follows: *Conatus* is not merely a maximization of power/activity, but it is maximization of our wisdom, joy, and love.[74] This teleological view of *conatus* has a highly significant implication in the Spinozian ethics. As is well known, Spinoza is surely against the idea that the human beings can be conceived as "a dominion within a dominion in nature."[75] In the Preface to the Third Part of the *Ethics* Spinoza discusses about this issue at length where he suggests that because nature is same everywhere and for every sort of being, no being can be conceived of differently than the others.[76] Spinoza's claim in here mainly addresses the issue of free will (of the human being). As is well known, the traditional metaphysics (from Plato to the Cartesian philosophy) has a very strong notion of free will (of the human being). For example, Descartes argued that because the human will is absolutely free, the human being is distinctive in its nature for having an autonomy of power compared to the other beings which are simply part of the mechanical nature. Spinoza's metaphysics, however, offers a severe critique to this traditional view. Instead, Spinoza holds that no natural being, that is to say, neither human being nor God, has free will as they are all determined by the causal laws of Nature or God. On a casual reading, this picture might suggest that the human *conatus* and (let's say) animal *conatus* are equivalent on the ground that they are both subjected to the causal laws of nature or God. As we have seen, Melamed has defended this view. However, our teleological reading of human *conatus* shows that the human *conatus* has a distinguished place in nature as an ethical subject. We can elucidate this claim via Spinoza's theory of knowledge.

In the *Ethics* and elsewhere, Spinoza distinguishes three kinds of knowledge: opinion or imagination [*opinio vel imaginatio*], reason [*ratio*], and intuitive knowledge [*scientia intuitiva*].[77] Observing a hierarchical difference between the three types of knowledge, Spinoza argues that the second and third kinds of knowledge are the highest forms of knowledge the acquisition of which is peculiar only to the human being. Apparently, the hierarchical difference between the first kind of knowledge and the second and third kinds of knowledge is mainly due to ethical reasons because the second and third kinds of knowledge are regarded to be the forms of knowledge that "teach us to distinguish the true from the false."[78] The first kind of knowledge, on the other hand, has nothing to do with truth and therefore ethicality. In that sense,

[74] See page 10.

[75] See Spinoza, *The Collected Works,* (Third Part, Preface), 491.

[76] Ibid., (Third Part, Preface), 491-492.

[77] In the *Emendation*, however, Spinoza identifies four types of knowledge*: report alone, experience, belief and clear knowledge* (ibid., 12-13).

[78] See ibid., (Second Part, P42), 478.

it should not be a mistake to say that the second-order idea of body of the animals and rocks can be seen as a form of the first form of knowledge.[79] The human *conatus*, on the other hand, is driven towards the adequate ideas (first and second kinds of knowledge) which are per se ethical for being grounded on the knowledge of God. In my opinion, this sharp difference between the human cogatio (second and third kind of knowledge) and animal or rock's second-order idea of body (self-consciousness) is a clear indication for the fact that Spinoza is not a friend but a foe of the idea that humanity has no distinguished place in the realm of ethicality. For example, Yirmiyahu Yovel in "Spinoza and Other Heretics" proposes that Spinoza's theory of ethical emancipation through self-knowledge is a sign of his humanistic stance.[80] Yovel puts that the humans are exceptional and rare beings in terms of their level of self-knowledge.[81] This way of putting things shows that the Spinozian human *conatus*, which is teleologically driven towards the adequate ideas that brings his emancipation, has originally an ethical orientation towards the truth (or the good) which sets him apart from the other beings that are part of the causal mechanism of nature. However, this can be called "moderate humanism" for Spinoza is highly egalitarian in seeing all things as equally determined by the causal laws of nature/God.

III. *Essentialism*. The concept of essence has had a hard time in the analytic-continental philosophy as essentialism is a loaded word. Essentialism is mainly associated with the Platonic philosophy which holds that we have universals that are stable, necessary and unchanging (Ideas, Forms) on the one hand and we have the particulars that are mutable and variant on the other.[82] It mainly entails the idea that the human essence has universal Forms or Ideas. Undoubtedly, Spinoza offers a highly different ethical paradigm than the Platonic essentialism. But we still tend to claim that Spinoza is an essentialist in his own sense. How is that so?

As is known, having defined the essence of human being as *conatus* (self-preservation),[83] Spinoza proposed that the human essence is mobile and active. Hence, the human essence is basically envisaged to strive to gain power to preserve itself. Spinoza puts forward that the more one has *conative*

[79] Because Spinoza in the *Ethics* utters that any form of knowledge that is not adequate falls into the category of first kind of knowledge [Ibid., (Second Part, P41), 478].

[80] Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and other heretics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 164-165.

[81] Ibid., 164.

[82] Constantin V. Boundas, *Deleuze and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 31.

[83] See Spinoza, *The Collected Works*, (Third Part, P7), 499.

power, the more real he is. In ethical sense, this means that agents with high level of *conative* power are more virtuous than the ones with less *conative* power. Denying that the good, bad, imperfection and perfection etc. are real properties of things, Spinoza asserts that we define good and bad etc. in terms of how things affect one's essence or power of acting. Things are good insofar as they increase one's *conative* power or help one realize one's power and are bad insofar as they diminish one's *conative* power or prevent one from realizing one's power. This also fits with the afore-mentioned theory of "model of human nature" (*exemplar humanae naturae*) which has been taken as an objective criterion according to which the good and bad etc. are defined. Accordingly, as Justin Steinberg puts it nicely in "Striving, Happiness, and the Good: Spinoza as Follower and Critic of Hobbes," the model of human nature emerges to be "a paradigm of human power or reality, that is a model of a fully realized human essence."[84] So, it seems clear that Spinoza denounces the Platonic notion of essence but offers that the essence of the human being depends upon power. We can therefore call the Spinozian essentialism as "*conative* essentialism," for Spinoza considers human essence as an act of *conative* power. However, at this point, we shall also examine if the *conative* power of the human agent is oriented towards something stable and unchanging, namely something essential. Spinoza defines essence in the *Ethics* as follows:

> I say that to the essence of anything belongs that which, being given, the thing is [NS: also] necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily [NS: also] taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which 20 can neither be nor be conceived without the thing.[85]

Thus, for Spinoza, essence is fundamentally associated with necessity. That is to say, the essence of the things is what necessarily makes the thing itself. If we casually think that *conatus* is simply an increase and decrease in power without any purpose, we shall find ourselves defending the idea that every *conatus* is free to act or decide on its own without taking into account anything necessary about its nature. However, recalling our third teleological argument (c),[86] we might say that the human beings are not free from the necessary determination that is embedded in them. Accordingly,

[84] Justin Steinberg, "Striving, Happiness and the Good: Spinoza as Follower and Critic of Hobbes," in *A Companion to Hobbes,* ed. Marcus P. Adams (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2022), 441.

[85] Spinoza, *The Collected Works*, (Second Part, Def. 2), 447.

[86] See page 108.

we should remember that Spinoza is very clear when he says: "Whatever has been determined to exist and produce an effect has been so determined by God."[87] This shows that the Spinozian human being is not free to produce any effects without the necessary determination of God. In ethical sense, this means that *conatus* is not free and non-oriented towards any purpose but instead it is oriented towards some ethical concepts which are necessary and unchanging. As we have discussed before, it is certainly the adequate ideas (second and third kind of knowledge) that the *conative* act of the human beings is oriented. Hence, this shows that the ethicality in Spinoza is not a so-called libertarian phenomenon of discovering the good and bad etc. in one's specific experience.[88] But, on the contrary, the ethical good and bad etc. are pre-determined by God which are therefore merely to be uncovered by the *conative* act of human beings. In this way, we can conclude our words by saying that the human beings do not create the ethical values such as good and bad etc. themselves but realize them through their *conative* act as they are imprinted in their essences.

V. Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have argued that Spinoza's conception of *conatus* turns out to be considerably closer to a traditional idea of the teleology than to a mechanistically conceived notion of anti-teleology. I have basically relied this notion on the assumption that even though Spinoza severely criticizes divine teleology, he has a milder approach to human teleology. So, I think that even though Spinoza is radically against the traditional metaphysics, he still cannot completely overcome the teleological agenda of the Aristotelian and Aquinian human ontology.

Situating Spinoza in a more traditional context of teleology has certain implications in terms of his ethics. As opposed to the dominant view in Spinoza scholarship that Spinoza's ethics is subjectivistic, anti-humanistic and non-essentialist based on the anti-teleological reading of his ontology, I have proposed that his ethics is more of an objectivistic, humanistic, and essentialist one. However, I have indicated that Spinoza's ethics is not objectivistic, humanistic, and essentialist completely in traditional sense, but in a highly original sense. This being so, I have shown that the teleological character of *conatus* plays a critical role on the reformulation of the objectivism, humanism, and essentialism of Spinoza's ethics. In this sense, I

[87] Spinoza, *The Collected Works*, (First Part, P28, Dem.), 432.

[88] For example, as a representative of the post-modern libertarian view, Jean-Paul Sartre holds the view that the ethical concepts of good and bad etc. are definable by the individual human agents depending on their subjective experience.

have argued that Spinoza's ethical objectivism, humanism, and essentialism is grounded on the fact that the teleological human *conatus* peculiarly defines the objective and essential values itself as a distinguishing feature for human beings.

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