

## CAUSAL EFFICACY OF REPRESENTATIONAL CONTENT IN SPINOZA

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### INTRODUCTION

**E**specially in the appendix to the opening part of his *Ethics*, Benedict de Spinoza discusses teleology in a manner that has earned him the status of a staunch critic of final causes. Much of the recent lively discussion concerning this complex and difficult issue has revolved around the writings of Jonathan Bennett who maintains that Spinoza does, in fact, reject all teleology. Especially important has been the argument claiming that because of his basic ontology, Spinoza cannot but reject *thoughtful* teleology, that is, teleology involved in the actions of conscious cognitive beings who have thoughts of future states of affairs. For Spinoza, a particular idea is a modification of the thinking substance the object of which is a certain modification of the extended substance, and Bennett's central argumentative move is to claim that there is no room in Spinoza's system for a key ingredient in thoughtful teleology, the tenet that representative content of ideas is causally efficacious. It should be noted that typically in the scholarship, by "teleology" a particular style of explanation is meant; to take one formulation, "[t]eleology is the phenomenon of states of affairs having etiologies that implicate, in an explanatory way, likely or presumptive consequences of those states of affairs."<sup>1</sup>

In what follows, I begin by presenting Bennett's argument. As his position has received much criticism, I then take up the ways in which it has been discussed and found wanting. I think that Bennett's position really is something that should not be endorsed; however, and despite the lively discussion, it also seems to me that there is more to be said about what is at stake here. Thus, I aim at offering an analysis of the nature of Bennett's argument and the ensuing discussion with the aim of discerning the philosophical source from which Bennett's interpretation draws its force.

Having an adequate understanding of these matters is important given that they are central not only for Spinoza's thought but more generally for constructing a workable theory of human action after the breakthrough of the new mechanical science in the beginning of the modern era. If Bennett were right, Spinoza would not only be a thoroughgoing antiteleologist but a proponent of an extremely radical view of human action, a view according to which, for example, when I feel thirsty and go to drink a glass of water that I see in front of me, instead of eating salt from the bowl lying next to it, the content of the mental items involved are causally irrelevant. In other words, the act of quenching my thirst with water would take place under the attribute of thought in virtue of an idea and of a feeling I have, but *not* because I have a feeling of *thirst* and an idea of *a glass of water*.

### BENNETT'S INTERPRETATION

As already indicated, Bennett insists that Spinoza rejected—or at least wanted to reject—all final causes and purposes; what is left for us to find out are Spinoza's reasons for this rejection. Bennett presents his views in the extremely influential 1984 work *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, but he had put forth essentially the same view in a slightly earlier article, "Teleology and Spinoza's Conatus" (1983). He returned to this topic later, in "Spinoza and Teleology: A Reply to Curley" (1990) and in *Learning from Six Philosophers, Volume 1* (2001).

In the *Study*, Bennett starts by citing Spinoza's general claim that "this doctrine concerning the end turns nature completely upside down. For what is really a cause, it considers as an effect, and conversely [NS: what is an effect it considers as a cause]. What is by nature prior, it makes posterior" (E1app).<sup>2</sup> Bennett claims the idea to be that "one cannot explain an event by reference to a later event, because one cannot explain an item by reference to something which it causes."<sup>3</sup> This is so, according to Bennett, because the causal flow runs from causes to effects; hence, the latter can be explained by the former but not vice versa.<sup>4</sup> However, he claims this way of putting things to contain a "trap":

[I]n a teleological explanation the event is usually explained by reference not directly to an effect of it but rather to an antecedent thought about an effect of it. In saying "He raised his hand so as to deflect the stone" we are saying that Raise happened because he thought it would cause the stone's being deflected. What is there in that for Spinoza to object to? Why can he not just accept it, saying that the subsequent event enters the story only as something represented in an antecedent thought, so that "the [thought] of the 'final cause' functions as 'efficient cause'"? (*Study*, 217)

The just-depicted position outlines what has become to be called “thoughtful teleology,” according to which thoughts of the effects of actions precede those actions themselves and, hence, those thoughts can act as causes of actions. “We need not postulate any obscure pull on the part of the future,” as one recent defender of this position puts it.<sup>5</sup> However, Bennett (*Study*, 217) is convinced that there are reasons embedded deep in Spinoza’s system for rejecting “a representation of . . . something subsequent to x help to explain x”—and to the extent Spinoza resorts to explanations of the just-mentioned kind, he is, according to Bennett, being simply inconsistent.

What is Bennett’s reasoning here? First, we should note a vital distinction at play: that between causally relevant (that is, efficacious or potent) and causally irrelevant (that is, inert, impotent, or inefficacious) features of events or states. Michael Della Rocca outlines this distinction as well as anyone could wish, with an example derived from Ernest Sosa:

Assume that Bill kills Fred by shooting him with a gun. Let us call the firing of the gun “A” and Fred’s death “B.” A causes B. A has, of course, the property of being a gun-firing. Further, suppose that A also has the property of being loud. These two properties of the same event seem to play different roles in the causation of B. Consider these claims:

- (1) It is because A was loud that A caused B.
- (2) It is because A was a gun-firing that A caused B.

Intuitively (1) seems false and (2) true. The loudness of A seems to have nothing to do with its causing B, but A’s being the firing of a gun does seem to have quite a lot to do with A’s causing B. We can mark this difference between the two properties by saying that the loudness is a causally irrelevant feature while being a gun-firing is causally relevant.<sup>6</sup>

Bennett begins by noting that Spinoza does not deny thoughtful teleology because of his dualism, that is, because there cannot be any causal flow between the attribute of thought and the attribute of extension. Of course, Spinoza cannot allow that any idea (such as an idea of deflection, to use Bennett’s example) would bring about something physical (for example, raising one’s hand). But this does not mean that the *object* of an idea, or the physical counterpart a thought has on grounds of parallelism, could not cause raising one’s hand; the counterpart is most likely a certain brain-state, and Bennett refers to it as “O(Thought of deflection)” and to its effect as “Raise.” Bennett, however, argues,

Raise is caused by a certain physical event  $x$ , and  $x$  is indeed  $O$  (Thought of deflection), but that fact about it is not causally potent—none of  $x$ 's causal powers depend on its being the counterpart of a thought with such and such a content, i.e., the counterpart of something which is an idea indirectly of a so-and-so. The physical theory inserted between 2p13 and 14 firmly assumes that physical events are to be explained purely in terms of the shapes, sizes, positions, velocities etc. of particles of matter. There is no work to be done by representative features. (*Study*, 219)<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the claim is that, as also testified by the so-called physical digression in the second part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza is an adherent of the mechanistic physics; and since in that physics only such (intrinsic and nonrepresentational) properties as sizes, shapes, etc., are causally efficacious, representative features must be causally impotent. Bennett presents the following analogy to illustrate his stand: “[T]he causal powers of a page with ink marks on it may depend on size, shape, chemical composition etc., but will never depend upon whether it is a map of Sussex” (*Study*, 219). But this raises a question: even if the representative features really were causally irrelevant *under the attribute of extension*, why could there not be work to be done by them *under the attribute of thought*? Bennett’s answer to this can be found in the following passage:

[Spinoza] ought to hold that when I have the thought that  $P$ , this thought is a psychological particular with various features contributing to its causal powers, but its representative feature—its having the content *that P*—must be causally inert. The parallelism of causal chains forces this onto Spinoza. If a physical item’s causal powers depend solely on facts about positions, velocities etc. of particles, then the causal powers of mental items must depend upon features which are systematically correlated with *those* features. And that implies that the causal powers of mental items do not depend on their representative features, what they are indirectly “of” or “about” or “that” (*ibid.*, 220).

Obviously, the idea is that, given Spinoza’s famous doctrine of parallelism (see especially E2p7), thought and extension must be isomorphic, which means that causally relevant features of extension must completely and systematically map onto causally relevant features of thought—and so, as we know that representative features are causally inert under the attribute of extension, they must be that under the attribute of thought as well.

Later, when responding to Edwin Curley’s criticism, Bennett endeavored to strengthen his position by arguing that it is no wonder that the

representational features of our ideas cannot be systematically mapped onto those states of mind that are isomorphic with brain states because the former (that is, representational features) are *relational*, the latter *intrinsic* in character.<sup>8</sup>

At this point, it should be noted that in the literature there have been at least two reconstructions of Bennett's argument. Don Garrett's is as follows:

(1) The causally efficacious properties of things under the attribute of extension are all intrinsic geometrical and dynamic properties, such as shape and velocity (inference from Spinoza's so-called "Physical Excursus," the set of axioms and lemmas following E 2P13).

(2) Whether an entity with a certain complete set of intrinsic properties counts as having this or that *content* or *representative* property depends on when its bearer got it, in what circumstances, in association with what other items, and so on (inference from E 2P16, 2P16C1, 2P16C2, 2P40S1).

(3) No intrinsic property can be mapped onto any representative property [inference from (2)].

(4) Any properties of things under the attribute of extension that can be mapped onto representative properties lack causal efficacy [inference from (1) and (3)].

(5) The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things (Causal Parallelism, as stated in E 2P7).

(6) Any properties of things under the attribute of thought that can be mapped onto representative properties lack causal efficacy [inference from (4) and (5)]. (Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza," 319)<sup>9</sup>

More recently, Martin Lin summarizes Bennett's position as follows:

1. The causal powers of bodies depend on intrinsic properties such as size, shape, and motion.
2. There is a parallelism between bodies and their properties and relations on the one hand and ideas and their properties and relations on the other. (2p7)
3. The causal powers of ideas depend on intrinsic properties. (1 and 2)
4. The representational properties of ideas depend upon their causal history. (2p16d and c1)
5. Causal history is an extrinsic property.

6. Therefore, the causal powers of ideas do not depend upon their representational properties. (3, 4, and 5) (Lin, "Teleology and Human Action," 330)

Lin's account is especially compact: according to it, Bennett's interpretation would turn on the fact that only *intrinsic* properties are causally efficacious under the attribute of extension; and so, given the parallelism thesis and the fact that representational properties of ideas depend upon *extrinsic* properties, representational content of ideas cannot be causally efficacious.

However, it should be noted that in his writings of 1980s, Bennett presents his case without explicit reference to the relationality or extrinsicity pertaining to representational features. To put things in terms he himself uses at that point (that is, in "Teleology and Spinoza's Conatus" and *Study*), the argument seems simply to be this:

- (1) Under the attribute of extension, only such (intrinsic) mechanical properties as size and shape are causally efficacious. (From the so-called physical digression located between E2p13 and p14)
- (2) Mechanical properties are not representational.
- (3) Under the attribute of extension, representational features are causally inefficacious. (From 1 and 2)
- (4) Attributes are isomorphic with regard to their causally efficacious features. (From E2p7)
- (5) Under the attribute of thought, representational features are causally inefficacious. (From 3 and 4)

As noted, Bennett adds only in later texts that there is no mapping of representational features onto intrinsic properties because the former depend on relational properties. (Being at this point as precise as possible on the role of all the ingredients involved in Bennett's line of thought helps later in evaluating it.)

In any case, the upshot is, as Bennett later writes in *Learning*, that "something is being caused by a thought about the future, but the thought's being about the future—and indeed its entire content, its whole representative nature—is irrelevant to its causal powers" (213). And since thoughtful teleology requires representational contents of our ideas to be causally efficacious, from the causal impotence of representational features follows the impossibility of thoughtful teleology.

## BENNETT CRITICIZED

Bennett's position has received a considerable amount of criticism, mostly from scholars adhering to a teleological interpretation of Spinoza. For instance, Edwin Curley, to whom Bennett's reply of 1990 is addressed, thinks that Bennett's interpretation is thin on textual evidence and finds the idea of the impotence of content hard to reconcile with certain key tenets of Spinoza's philosophical psychology.<sup>10</sup> As we will see, I am inclined to think that Curley's first critical point holds good; but even though the second point would give us *prima facie* reasons to be skeptical about Bennett's argument, it may still turn out that there is some way to translate Spinoza's psychological claims into language that is in consonance with mechanistic physics, or it might just be that Spinoza is less consistent a thinker than we would like to believe.<sup>11</sup>

Garrett offers a critical discussion of Bennett's argument, and at least the following two points merit attention: first, the argument from the impotence of content does not exclude the possibility that Spinoza might accept teleology that does not turn upon representations at all; second, Spinoza might find appealing the idea that at least some representative content can be determined by the intrinsic (and thus nonrelational) properties of the representer, and if Spinoza did not see all representative content as relational in character, there would be room for thoughtful teleology even if his mechanistic physics coupled with parallelism were to entail the causal impotence of relationally generated content ("Teleology in Spinoza," 320–22). However, there are, I think, ways for Bennett to counter these criticisms. About the first one, he could say that, when arguing for the impotence of content, his target is not all kinds of teleology but thoughtful teleology (that does involve representations) only, because Spinoza rejects the two other branches of teleology, unthoughtful and divine, on different grounds, mostly because they "reverse the order of nature." So, in the Spinozistic scheme of things, the strongest case can be made for thoughtful teleology, and if there are reasons in Spinoza's system to reject it too, nothing else can be concluded than that all teleology at least should be expunged from his system. The problem in Garrett's second point is that he suggests intrinsically determined content to represent objects by resembling features of objects (*ibid.*, 321); but as Lin has pointed out in "Teleology and Human Action" (333), properties "things have in virtue of resembling something else are extrinsic properties," and thus they cannot be causally efficacious, if causal powers are determined by intrinsic properties alone.

Later commentators have brought forth still more criticism against Bennett. Richard Manning begins by observing that, for Spinoza, the



actual state (of motion and rest) of any extended mode involves the nature of the external causes affecting it; and this, according to Manning,

provides a means of suggesting how the properties of the idea of the [extended] effect might mirror not just those of the effect but also of its cause, and hence represent that cause. . . . [T]he bodily mode corresponding to the idea is . . . determined to be as it intrinsically is—in terms of the rest and motion of its parts—in part by the nature of its bodily cause, and again in a way that reflects that cause's distinctive nature. Both the effect and the idea of the effect reflect, in their respective attributes, the rest and motion of the parts of the (external) cause of the effect. ("Spinoza, Thoughtful Teleology," 197–98)

And as Manning claims that, for Spinoza, "representation is always a matter of an idea's intrinsic features reflecting the distinctive nature of its object or content" (ibid., 198), Manning's point is obviously that, just as some of our ideas reflect (that is, represent) external causes that affect our minds, some of our bodily states reflect the external causes that affect our bodies. And since under the attribute of extension this reflecting takes place by alteration in the mechanical features—presumably in motion and rest—of our bodies, there is no reason, Manning holds, for us to think that the intrinsic properties of things could not reflect or represent things external to us. If this is right, then representations—whether of the mental or of the bodily kind—have an effect on our intrinsic properties and, hence, through them can be causally efficacious.

There is much good in Manning's account, and this can also be seen in the way he clearly outlines some central features of the Spinozistic position on how our representations of outer objects are brought forth:

In insisting that one cannot have an idea of an external object without having an idea of one's own body, Spinoza seems to be emphasizing that one has ideas of external bodies *in having* ideas of one's own, as modified. And in saying that such ideas involve the *nature* of those bodies, Spinoza seems to be suggesting not merely that modifications caused by external bodies reflect some of the features of those bodies, nor that they simply depend on the nature of those bodies in the sense of being caused to be as they are by those natures; rather, Spinoza seems to be saying that such modifications involve something distinctive of their causes. This, on my view, is Spinoza's answer to the question why our idea of such modes are perceptions of the nature of *those* external bodies rather than others. ("Spinoza, Thoughtful Teleology," 199)

Now I am not sure whether Bennett would object to anything above; he would probably just add that if "involving something distinctive of



external things or causes” refers to having representational content of outer objects, this kind of involvement is causally inert. Here much seems to depend on how the relationship between intrinsicity and representationality is understood. As we saw, Manning thinks there is no problem in claiming that intrinsic features represent or reflect external things, but precisely this is problematic from Bennett’s point of view. According to it, representative features are such that they necessarily involve something else than the representer—namely, the object of representation—and hence seem inevitably always to be relational. And as already noted, as the mechanical properties are intrinsic, it is hard to see how any relational property could ever be truly “mapped onto” them.<sup>12</sup> To this, Manning would most likely retort that Spinoza may have thought representational content to supervene on the intrinsic properties of ideas (and their extended correlates).<sup>13</sup> It is, however, difficult to see how this could convince Bennett: given the idea that, as he writes in *Study* (219; emphasis added), “physical events are to be explained *purely* in terms of the shapes, sizes, positions, velocities etc. of particles of matter,” there does not seem to be left any causal work to be done for the supervenient features, should there be any.<sup>14</sup>

What we have here is, to a large extent, a disagreement over the fundamentals of Spinoza’s thought: Bennett takes Spinoza to start off from the mechanistic view and its way of explaining things, whereas Manning regards Spinoza as *prima facie* committed to causal efficacy of content, sees his interpretation as giving us a plausible account of the relation between representational content and intrinsic properties, and hence submits that we have weighty enough reasons to attribute this view to Spinoza. But also because of these basic differences, it is unlikely that Bennett would be willing to accept Manning’s account. Moreover, the conjecturality involved in both of these approaches should be noted: Manning refrains from claiming to have “shown definitely that Spinoza held that representational content supervenes on the intrinsic features of ideas” (“Spinoza, Thoughtful Teleology,” 200), and Bennett “conjecturally attributes” (*Study*, 219) the impotence of content thesis to Spinoza.<sup>15</sup> So it would appear that an interpretation of the issues at hand that rests on a firmer Spinozistic ground remains to be given.

Arguably the most effective case to date against Bennett’s argument is along the lines presented by Lin. His strategy is to try to disprove the contention that, for Spinoza, the causal powers of ideas depend solely on intrinsic properties. He aims at doing this by showing that at least one sort of ideas important for human motivation, the so-called passive affects (that is, mental correlates of the passively produced increases and decreases in our bodies’ power of acting), are individuated—along with their causal powers—partially by extrinsic properties. As Lin points out,

Spinoza quite explicitly claims this to be the case with regard to the passive affects themselves: “The nature, *or* essence, of the affects cannot be explained through our essence, *or* nature, alone (by 3d1 and d2), but must be defined by the power, i.e. (by 3p7), by the nature of external causes compared with our own” (E4p33d). Now, Spinoza endorses a particular model of causation according to which things ceaselessly cause effects in virtue of their essences—consider especially E1p36, “[n]othing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow”<sup>16</sup>—as their essences determine; hence, if something (or its essence) is partly individuated by external causes, so are its causal powers. As a consequence, it is well grounded to claim, as Lin does, “if two affects result from being affected by two different external causes with different natures, then the causal powers of the affects must differ since they express the natures of their different external causes” (“Teleology and Human Action,” 339–40).<sup>17</sup> Simply from this it follows that Bennett cannot be right in holding that causal powers of all ideas depend on, for Spinoza, intrinsic properties alone: there are ideas with extrinsically determined causal powers. As a consequence, the claim that representational content cannot be causally efficacious because of being extrinsic in character cannot hold true.

Given that there appears to be no flaws in Lin’s reasoning, what conclusions should we draw from it? Does Spinoza hold, on one hand, that under the attribute of extension only intrinsic properties are causally relevant and, on the other hand, that under the attribute of thought both intrinsic *and* extrinsic properties are causally relevant? Now, given Spinoza’s parallelism and the tenet that we have mental states whose powers are partly individuated by external causes, he is forced to admit that we have bodily states whose powers are likewise individuated. But how can he do that? Bennett’s argument is, after all, built on the contention that, from the mechanical philosophy, it follows that only intrinsic properties such as size and shape are causally potent. Lin, however, suggests that “the real key commitment of the mechanical philosophy” (“Teleology and Human Action,” 348) is the denial of the Aristotelian doctrine of action at a distance, and it does not, of course, go against this commitment to claim that the causal powers of a body depend, in part, upon external causes of the body’s states. In other words, the claim is that Spinoza can consistently adhere to what is essential in mechanistic thought without seeing only intrinsic properties as causally efficacious.<sup>18</sup>

However, this shows only that Spinoza is not guilty of being blatantly inconsistent with the (alleged) core of the mechanistic philosophy; it does not tell us much about his grounds for holding a view on causal efficacy of properties that is at least *prima facie* less well in accordance with the science of mechanics than the one assigning causal powers to

intrinsic properties alone. Bennett could surely still ask, given that the science of mechanics acknowledges only such properties as size, shape, and motion, how Spinoza could deny that only intrinsic properties are causally efficacious. Lin's answer seems to be that this is so because of Spinoza's monism: any finite thing is a modification of God whose states and causal powers of those states are not determined by the thing's essence alone but also by other modifications of God: "The causal power of the affection is therefore the power of God insofar as he is affected by both the affected and the affecting mode" ("Teleology and Human Action," 349). This is surely true, but at the same time still so close to Spinoza's way of putting things that further interpretive elucidation is desirable. This is what I aim at offering next.

### SPINOZA ON INTRINSICALITY AND EXTRINSICALITY

As noted above, in his earlier works ("Teleology and Spinoza's Conatus" and *Study*), Bennett does not build his argument on the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic properties, but his later writings ("Spinoza and Teleology" and *Learning*) make clear that he views mechanical properties as intrinsic, representational features as dependent on extrinsic properties. I take it that, if asked to justify premise (2) of the argument presented earlier (see p. 22; the last of the three reconstructions offered), Bennett would base his answer on the idea that mechanical properties are not (unlike representative features) relational, that is, extrinsic, in character.<sup>19</sup> Now, the true—and to my knowledge, thus far unacknowledged—source of trouble in the whole discussion revolving around Bennett's claims is, I think, that *Spinoza does not draw the intrinsic-extrinsic distinction quite the way we are used to*.

To see this, we can first take a look at David Lewis's influential way of introducing the distinction, contemporaneous to Bennett's *Study*:

A sentence or statement or proposition that ascribes intrinsic properties to something is entirely about that thing; whereas an ascription of extrinsic properties to something is not entirely about that thing, though it may well be about some larger whole which includes that thing as part. A thing has its intrinsic properties in virtue of the way that thing itself, and nothing else, is. Not so for extrinsic properties

...<sup>20</sup>

Lewis mentions shape as an example of an intrinsic property, and it seems evident that he would regard, as Bennett does, all mechanical properties as intrinsic. But it seems to me that Spinoza would have objections to the quote above, stemming from his model of causation and other commitments. According to his essentialist view, intrinsic features or properties of a thing are those that are brought about by that thing's

essence alone or those that can be said to belong to the thing's (full or autonomous) subjecthood.<sup>21</sup> To use Garrett's idiom, only this kind of features or properties are truly *in* the thing.<sup>22</sup> And to the extent a property depends on, or is brought about by, external causes or things, it is extrinsic and not *in* the thing in question. Moreover, since "[t]he knowledge [*cognitio*] of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause" (E1a4), we cannot describe or have an idea of properties without understanding (if only inadequately) their causes;<sup>23</sup> so to the extent a thing's properties are caused externally, their ascriptions cannot refer only to their bearer. Garrett sums up this line of thought with regard to passions, or (as he calls them) accidental qualities, as follows:

[T]he *accidental* qualities of a thing are only *partially* or *to some extent* in the things of which they are predicated. That is, because each accidental quality is only partly the result of the nature of the thing and partly the result of external causes, it is to some extent or degree *not* conceived through the subject of which it is typically predicated, and so it is to some extent or degree *not in* that subject. ("Spinoza's *Conatus* Argument," 140)

Now, Spinoza's views on causation and conceiving may appear strange to a modern eye, or at least they do not belong to our shared philosophical assumptions. We tend to take it for granted that when describing such properties as size, shape, and velocity, no reference to any object distinct from their bearer is needed and hence that they are intrinsic—in other words, it is nowadays customary to think that bodies have such properties always, as we have seen Lewis expressing it, "in virtue of the way that thing itself, and nothing else, is" and that ascriptions of such properties are "entirely about that thing." However, if I am right, Spinoza would here object that if a certain mechanical property, for instance, a ball's velocity to roll 10 m/s northward, is caused in part by a kick given to it, the velocity is not completely *in*, or conceived through, the thing, and thus cannot be classified as an intrinsic property.

Provided that the aforesaid is correct, the greatest problem in Bennett's interpretation is that already its most fundamental premise, that mechanical properties are always intrinsic, would not be accepted by Spinoza. My analysis provides support for Lin's interpretation: in this kind of framework, causal history is, as Lin argues, of utmost importance for individuating all kinds of properties and their causal powers. And from my perspective, it makes sense to claim, as Manning does, that bodies reflect external causes with their mechanical properties—provided that we keep in mind that thereby-generated properties are not, for Spinoza, intrinsic and that this reflecting is very different in character under the attribute of thought.<sup>24</sup> Further, as Lin contends,

there is nothing in Spinoza's views that would be in contradiction with the science of mechanics. To my mind, this holds because the latter is a physical theory that contains certain basic contentions concerning what the natural world consists of (material bodies with size, shape, and motion) and how it operates (by impacts through which motion is transferred from one body to another), whereas Spinoza develops a metaphysical theory of the individuation of things, properties, and their powers that applies to mental as well as to physical phenomena.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Given the analysis above, we should conclude that Bennett's interpretation should not be accepted and that the thesis that representational content is causally inert is not forced onto Spinoza. This leaves open precisely what kind of theory of action Spinoza's is, and even whether it is teleological in character. I will not attempt to answer these questions here.

There are, however, reasons not yet mentioned for rejecting the impotence-of-content thesis, and we can conclude by taking a look at them. First, according to E1p36, there is nothing that has no effects, so it would indeed seem strange if, for Spinoza, the representative features of our ideas were to lack all causal efficacy altogether.<sup>25</sup>

Second, Bennett presents some textual evidence for his argument, most notably E2p16 and 2p40s1, but even he does not claim these passages to imply more than that there is *room* in Spinoza's system for the kind of position he proposes.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the claim concerning the thinness of textual evidence seems to be largely justified, and Bennett's eagerness to assign the sort of position he does to Spinoza seems to stem, at least partly, from the conviction that "[a]ny philosopher who thought seriously about how the representative content of thoughts relates to intrinsic brain states would be almost certain to conclude that there is no simple mapping between them: once the question is raised, the answer is pretty obvious" (*Study*, 220). In other words, there is a philosophical stand concerning the mind-body relationship—that of the so-called type-identity theories<sup>27</sup>—so obviously wrong, at least according to Bennett, that Spinoza could not have accepted anything like it. I do not, however, find this convincing: however problematic they may eventually turn out to be, type-identity theories are hardly so evidently flawed that anyone who ever thought about the relationship between representationality and physical states could not end up endorsing some variant of them.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, it seems to me right to hold, as Della Rocca does, that "there is no sign that Spinoza appreciates the point that two states could be alike intrinsically, but unlike representationally" ("Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology," 256).

Finally, it is not clear to me that it is right to call Spinoza a type-identity theorist in the first place, so hostile he is toward universals. In E2p40s1, he claims “[t]hose notions they call *Universal*, like Man, Horse, Dog, etc.” arise from illegitimately conflating ideas we have of different individuals, when each one of them is, in fact, strictly speaking different from anything else. This conviction, I believe, rests on his adherence to unique individual essences.<sup>29</sup> As a consequence, given Spinoza’s views on universality, it seems that he would be very skeptical about categorizing things, physical states, or representational contents into types in the first place—which makes it with all likelihood inappropriate to regard him as a type-identity theorist in any relevant sense.<sup>30</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Don Garrett, “Teleology in Spinoza and Early Modern Rationalism,” in *New Essays on the Rationalists*, ed. R. J. Gennaro and C. Huenemann, 310–35 (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 310. Further references to this work will be cited in the text as “Teleology in Spinoza.”

2. Benedictus de Spinoza, *The Ethics (Ethica Ordine Geometrico demonstrata)*, in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. E. Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985) = E. I have used the following method in referring to E: a = axiom, app = appendix, c = corollary, d = definition (when not after a proposition number), d = demonstration (when after a proposition number), p = proposition, s = scholium. For instance, E1p8s2 refers to the second scholium of the eighth proposition in the first part of the *Ethics*.

3. Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 216. Further references to this work will be cited in the text as *Study*.

4. *Ibid.*, 217. Although Spinoza would, Bennett holds, accept the temporal point that “causes cannot postdate their effects,” he still argues that “to state his [Spinoza’s] entire case against teleology in that temporal way is to lose generality and to mislocate the center of gravity of his thought” (Jonathan Bennett, “Teleology and Spinoza’s Conatus,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 8 [1983]: 143–60, at 144). Further references to this work will be cited in the text by its title.

5. Martin Lin, “Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza,” *Philosophical Review* 115 (2006): 317–54, at 327. Further references to this work will be cited in the text as “Teleology and Human Action.”



6. Michael Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. D. Garrett, 192–266 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 253. Further references to this work will be cited in the text by its title.

7. Since this idea is absolutely crucial for Bennett's case, it should be compared with the way in which he puts it in "Teleology and Spinoza's Conatus" (146):

Spinoza allows that a state of one's body may be "of" something else: He calls such physical states "images." . . . What matters here is that Spinoza seems to have assumed, firmly and deeply, that the causal powers of a physical item depend wholly upon its intrinsic properties, such as the shapes, sizes, positions, and velocities of particles, and never on any representative or "of"-ish feature it might have.

8. Jonathan Bennett, "Spinoza and Teleology: A Reply to Curley," in *Spinoza: Issues and Directions. The Proceedings of the Chicago Spinoza Conference*, ed. E. Curley and P.-F. Moreau, 53–57 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), 55. "[T]he representative content of a person's state of mind . . . depends upon *relational* features of that state, e.g. on the person's past history of being in that state, what else was going on at the time, and so on" (ibid.). Further references to this work will be cited in the text as "Spinoza and Teleology." See also Jonathan Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers: Volume 1, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 213. Further references to this work will be cited in the text as *Learning*.

9. Note that the reconstruction continues to arrive at the denial of teleology:

(7) All teleology requires that some causally efficacious properties map onto representative properties.

(8) There is no teleology [inference from (4), (6), and (7)].

10. Edwin Curley, "On Bennett's Spinoza: The Issue of Teleology," in *Spinoza: Issues and Directions*, 39–52, at 46, 52. Richard Manning argues that the interpretive costs of regarding representational content as causally inert are high: it would be in direct conflict with Spinoza's associationist psychology, explanatory rationalism, and the geometrical method. (See Manning, "Spinoza, Thoughtful Teleology, and the Causal Significance of Content," in *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, ed. O. Koistinen and J. Biro, 182–209 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], at 192–93. Further references to this work will be cited in the text as "Spinoza, Thoughtful Teleology.") For Bennett on the lastly mentioned and causal impotence of content, see *Learning*, 212–13. Further, Manning (193–94) worries, not unreasonably, that the impotence of content doctrine might well have, at least in Spinoza's case, serious skeptical consequences. It should be noted that Lee Rice holds, to my mind plausibly, that adequate ideas have only intrinsic features but nevertheless still represent other ideas by implying them (Lee C. Rice, "Spinoza, Bennett, and Teleology," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 23



[1985]: 241–53, at 243). However, as our overt actions seem to depend always, for Spinoza, on inadequate ideas, this is not enough to alleviate the problem.

11. In “On Bennett’s Spinoza” (47), Curley also insists that—despite parallelism—the causal efficacy of representational content is not in conflict with the mechanistic account of extended universe. Here he relies on E3p2s and its claim that many complex things follow from the nature of the body alone that we never would have believed possible. I am, however, unsure of how this backs up Curley’s interpretative claim that “my brain’s being in a certain state . . . just *is* its being the object of an idea indirectly of a certain future state of my body” (47).

12. Compare Bennett’s following elaboration of his position: “[B]ecause they are mostly relational, the representational features are not mirrored in a sufficiently full, disciplined and interpersonal way for them to play a part in a causal chain that maps on to the strictly particle-impact physical explanation of what goes on in a person’s body” (*Learning*, 216).

13. Manning writes,

Moreover, 2p17cd, in which Spinoza discusses the result of interactions between external bodies, soft parts of the human body, and hard parts of the human body, comes very near to positively asserting supervenience. This highly convoluted and abstract discussion is clear on one point. When the parts of the body are affected in the same way as they were initially by an interaction with an external body, “they will affect the human body with the same mode, concerning which the mind will think again, i.e., the mind will again regard the external body as present.” The supervenience suggested here is of the content of an idea on the structural properties of the extended correlate of that idea, but given the parallelism, this trivially implies for Spinoza a supervenience of content on the parallel properties of the idea itself. (“Spinoza, Thoughtful Teleology,” 199; see also 200–1.)

Also, Garrett (“Teleology in Spinoza,” 321) at least hints at this direction.

14. And indeed, Bennett (*Study*, 224) thinks there are. While analyzing Spinoza’s theory of desire, he remarks, “[T]he representational features of thoughts are supervenient on their intrinsic features.” So it seems that no theory of supervenience can be used to criticize Bennett, for although Bennett regards supervenience as the answer to the question of the relation between intrinsic and representational features, the crucial point is that “[t]he basic story is always intrinsic, not representational” (*ibid.*, 224). See also Bennett, *Learning*, 216.

15. Moreover, as we have seen, Bennett’s account has been accused of being based on thin textual evidence.

16. For a paper explicating this kind of view, see Valtteri Viljanen, “Spinoza’s Essentialist Model of Causation,” *Inquiry* 51 (2008): 412–37.

17. Lin takes a slightly different route from the one presented here to reach this conclusion: he brings forward what Spinoza thinks about desire, individu-

ation of the power of passions, and expression. As Lin argues, the underlying causal architecture is that of causation through essences.

18. See Lin, "Teleology and Human Action," 347–48.

19. However, representational features of ideas may be claimed to supervene on the mechanical properties; see note 14.

20. David Lewis, "Extrinsic Properties," in *Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology*, 111–15 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 [1983], at 111.

21. For more on this, see Valtteri Viljanen, "On the Derivation and Meaning of Spinoza's *Conatus* Doctrine," in *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy*, vol. 4, ed. D. Garber and S. Nadler, 89–112 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), especially 97.

22. This idiom appears in Don Garrett, "Spinoza's *Conatus* Argument," in *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, 127–58; and idem, "Representation and Consciousness in Spinoza's Naturalistic Theory of the Imagination," in *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays*, ed. C. Huenemann, 4–25 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

23. See Margaret D. Wilson, "Spinoza's Causal Axiom (*Ethics* I, Axiom 4)," in *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics*, ed. Y. Yovel, 133–60 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991); and Lin, "Teleology and Human Action," 336–37.

24. That is, we can speak properly of representativeness only under the attribute of thought. For a related point, see Lin, "Teleology and Human Action," 342.

25. I owe this point to Olli Koistinen. For related discussion, see Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology," 252–57; Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza," 320; Manning, "Spinoza, Thoughtful Teleology," 207; and Lin, "Teleology and Human Action," 330–31. Koistinen has also pointed out to me that even if representational features of ideas were incapable of having effects, they would obviously *be* effects, which amounts to a rather puzzling picture: causal chains ending up in causally inert entities.

26. "So there was some place in Spinoza's mind for the view that even in thoughtful teleology the notion of the future is causally idle . . ." (Bennett, "Spinoza and Teleology," 55).

27. According to these, there is one-to-one correspondence between types of mental events and types of physical events.

28. Indeed, quite recently Christopher Hill defends one form of type-identity theory, type materialism, and laments, "Alas, for reasons that are not entirely clear to me, type materialism . . . is one of the least popular theories in philosophy of mind, if not all of philosophy. However, in my judgment, it deserves to be taken seriously, and it may well represent the correct answer to the mind–body problem" (*Sensations: A Defense of Type Materialism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 12).

29. This is related to Spinoza's critical attitude toward certain elements in the Aristotelian framework; as John Carriero succinctly puts it, "He proposes that we drop the reference to genera and species and simply consider things as beings" ("Spinoza on Final Causality," *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy*, vol. 2, ed. D. Garber and S. Nadler, 105–47 [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005], 129).

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