

# SPINOZA'S REJECTION OF TELEOLOGY

EDWARD ANDREW GREETIS \*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Teleology is a highly contested topic in Spinoza scholarship. Spinoza's discussion of teleology, which comes in Appendix 1 of the ETHICS, appears to be a brutal assault on the concept. At one point, he even states that "all final causes are nothing but human inventions."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, many commentators, such as Martin Lin, argue that Spinoza is committed to and employs teleological explanations of human action—the discussion in Appendix 1 is merely an assault on divine teleology, i.e., the notion that God had objectives in mind when creating the universe. On the other hand, Jonathan Bennett argues that Appendix 1 is an argument against all final causation; moreover, the metaphysics and philosophy of mind in the ETHICS show that Spinoza is committed to a rejection of all teleological explanations. Bennett concedes, however, that this exposes an inconsistency in the ETHICS: Spinoza argues against, and is committed to, a rejection of all teleological explanations, but his concept of *conatus*, or endeavoring, which is the basis of his moral philosophy and psychology, is used to explain human action teleologically.

Contrary to Bennett's arguments, Lin holds that not only is Spinoza not committed to a rejection of teleological explanations of human action, his account of mental content actually commits him to such explanations. In what follows, I argue, contra Lin, that Spinoza is committed to a rejection of teleology, and contra

Bennett, that Spinoza is consistent in his rejection of teleology. My argument will consist of two main parts. First, I argue that Lin misinterprets Spinoza by showing that his argument against Bennett is mistaken. Second, I aim to show that Bennett is incorrect in claiming that Spinoza is caught in an inconsistency; I argue that Spinoza not only rejects all teleology but consistently does so, i.e., I argue for a nonteleological reading of *conatus*.

## 2. WHY SPINOZA REJECTS TELEOLOGY: BENNETT'S ARGUMENT

One of Spinoza's objections against final causation in Appendix 1 is that it "completely overturns nature," that is, "that which is prior in nature it makes posterior." To borrow Bennett's analogy, teleology explains causes in terms of "pulls" (something subsequent in time explaining something prior) instead of "pushes," i.e., efficient cause determinism where, if A efficiently causes B, then B follows from A. Spinoza is arguing here that teleology is incompatible with the efficient cause determinism, which he prescribes.

Some teleological explanations, however, seem to be tenable in a world of only efficient causes. Consider the following: an idea representing a future goal, or (i) causes an action (a). This is an efficiently caused event, which can be explained teleologically. Although Spinoza would find this event untenable because his system does not allow thought and extension—two, of the infinitely many, distinct attributes of substance, or God—to interact, we can modify the explanation to work. Spinoza's parallelism doctrine holds that the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and

\* I am currently affiliated with San Diego State University where I work on Spinoza, philosophy of science, and epistemology. My current projects involve Spinoza's theory of causation, especially his views on teleology.

<sup>1</sup> I use G. H. R. Parkinson's translation of the ETHICS, unless otherwise noted.

connection of things (E2P7).<sup>2</sup> Thus, for every mode of thought, there is a parallel mode of extension—there is only one substance for Spinoza, so thought and extension are merely ways of considering the same substance. So (i) could not cause (a), but (i) could cause the idea parallel to (a), and, since the order and connection is the same for ideas and matter, (a) would be caused by the physical parallel of (i). Spinoza's parallelism therefore does not rule out this kind of teleological explanation.

Bennett, nevertheless, contends that Spinoza also rejects this kind of teleological explanation. Spinoza's formulation of "appetite" and much of Part 3 of the ETHICS is explicable only if he is attempting to avoid letting anything subsequent to x explain x (Bennett, 1984: 217). For example, Spinoza's formulations of appetite and desire are nonteleological, and Bennett claims, and I agree, that it is an attempt to replace the standard Scholastic teleological conceptions of, among other things, will, appetite, and desire. Spinoza writes in E4Def7: "by the end for the sake of which we do something I understand appetite," and in E3P2S: "the decrees of the mind are simply appetites themselves." And desire is simply "appetite together with a consciousness of the appetite" (E3P9S). Appetite and desire are further identified with the actual essence of a thing (E3P7 and E3P9S). Moreover, some of Spinoza's tenets require a rejection of the kind of teleological explanation in question.

In the 'short physical treatise'<sup>3</sup> in Part 2 of the ETHICS, it is evident that the causal powers of bodies rely only on size, shape, motion and rest, etc., or intrinsic properties.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the causal powers of ideas rely only on intrinsic properties—recall that thought and extension are

<sup>2</sup> By "order and connection," Spinoza means that every cause and effect is numerically identical in both thought and extension (Spinoza adheres to a rationalist causal theory so causation is logical deduction: if A causes B, then B follows logically from A). That is, if body A causes B, then the idea parallel to A causes the idea parallel to B.

<sup>3</sup> This treatise is found between E2P13 and P14.

<sup>4</sup> Bennett translates Spinoza's term "*formaliter*" as "intrinsic" and claims that it is the inherent features of a thing. As we will see shortly, he compares intrinsic with extrinsic, or representative features of an idea, i.e., the content or meaning of an idea. I will explain "intrinsic" and "representative" shortly. Here, his point is that representative features are not causally relevant in Spinoza's discussion in the short physical treatise.

parallel. Thus, the causal powers of ideas cannot depend on the representational content of ideas—which represent the future goals or external objects involved in the teleological explanations in question—because representational content is an extrinsic property of ideas. Bennett clarifies the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic properties of ideas by comparing them to a page with ink on it. The page represents a map of Sussex. However, what the page and the person examining the page are intrinsically like conjures the thought "this is a map of Sussex," not what the map indirectly represents<sup>5</sup>—if the intrinsic properties did not change, the thought "this is a map of Sussex" would be the same even if Sussex never existed (Bennett, 1984: 219). Lin further elucidates why representational content is an extrinsic property of ideas by likening extrinsic properties with causal histories.<sup>6</sup> He asks us to imagine a thing and its perfect duplicate; they both have a scratch on them (what they share is intrinsic to them), but the original was scratched by an external object last July, so they each have different causal histories, which is extrinsic to them. In short, intrinsic properties are those properties a thing has regardless of its relations to other things, while extrinsic properties are relational properties—properties a thing has solely in virtue of its relation to other things.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Bennett uses "indirect representation" to indicate that it is the content of the idea that represents objects external to us. The reason he adds "indirect" is because trivially, ideas represent body states due to Spinoza's parallelism. This "representation," however, simply means that the idea is parallel to a body state. The idea parallel to a body state will include properties other than representations of external objects (including, among other things, passions; the mind's ideas retain a certain ratio of motion and rest identical to the body's ratio, which explains why the mind is a composite, individual idea of the body; and each individual idea will be a parallel of an affection of the body, meaning that the motion and rest, position, etc., of a body must have an idea parallel to it). These are the intrinsic properties of an idea. Although ideas represent, or parallel, bodies, ideas also contain representations of external objects and intrinsic properties. I will use the term "represent" as synonymous with the content of an idea.

<sup>6</sup> Bennett compares representative features with causal history as well, but I will provide Lin's elucidation.

<sup>7</sup> It may be objected that on this account of "intrinsic," motion and rest, direction, etc., are not intrinsic.

However, we can see why motion and rest, direction, etc., are intrinsic properties by imagining an x, **(TO BE CONTINUED)**

Lin summarizes Bennett's argument 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 on the other. (E2P7)
3. The causal powers of ideas depend on intrinsic properties. (1 and 2)
4. The representational properties of ideas depend upon their causal history. (E2P16Dem 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) (2006: 330)

If the argument is correct, representational properties are irrelevant to the causal powers of ideas, which rules out teleological explanations of human action of the kind in question.

### **3. MENTAL CONTENT AND PASSIVE EMOTIONS: LIN'S ARGUMENT**

Let us now turn to Lin's argument. Lin argues that Spinoza does not hold premise (3) of Bennett's argument and is therefore not committed to a rejection of teleology. He then argues that Spinoza's account of mental content commits him to teleological explanations of human action.

First, to support the claim that Spinoza does not hold premise three of Bennett's argument, Lin argues that passive emotions (*affectus*) are ideas with wide causal powers, i.e., the causal powers of passions gain some of their causal power from, and are at least partially individuated by, extrinsic properties of those emotions (2006: 337 and 339). He first shows

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**(CONTINUATION OF NOTE 6)** which when moved by an external object  $y$  at time  $t$  is traveling at a certain velocity, and  $x$ 's perfect duplicate  $x^1$ . Both  $x$  and  $x^1$  will have the same velocity, but different causal histories ( $x$ 's velocity was due to its being moved by  $y$  at  $t$ ). Thus, the causal history (including the external object that moved  $x$  and when) is extrinsic to the velocity of  $x$  and so velocity is an intrinsic property.

that passions themselves are widely individuated by citing E4P33, where Spinoza claims that there are "as many species of each emotion as there are species of objects by which we are affected." In other words, Lin claims, passions are individuated by their external causes. Spinoza seems to provide further support for this claim in E3P56Dem. In the demonstration, he argues that we are only acted on—passively affected—insofar as we imagine (including, among other things, sense perception, memory, and induction), that is, insofar as we are affected with an emotion that "involves both our nature and the nature of an external body." Thus, the nature of each passion must "be so explained that the nature of the object by which we are affected is expressed" (E3P56Dem). Consequently, if passions express different natures, they are different passions. Spinoza concludes from this that there are as many kinds of passions as there are external objects.

Moreover, the causal powers of passions are individuated widely. Lin cites E3P56Dem and E4P5Dem as evidence. In E3P56Dem Spinoza writes:

But desire is the very essence of, or nature, of each man insofar as it is conceived to be determined, by whatever constitution he has, to do something (see p9s). Therefore, as each man is affected by external causes with this or that species of joy, sadness, love, hate, etc.—i.e. as his nature is constituted in one way or the other, so his desires vary and the nature of one desire must differ from the nature of the other as much as the affects from which each arises from one another. Therefore, there are as many species of desire as there are species of joy, sadness, love, etc. and consequently ... as there are species of objects by which we are affected. [*Lin's translation*]

And in E4P5Dem Spinoza writes:

The essence of a passion cannot be explained through our essence alone (by Defs. 1 and 2, Part 3), that is (by Prop. 7, Part 3), the power of a passion cannot be defined by the power by which we endeavour to persevere in our being, but (as was shown in Prop. 16, Part 2) it must necessarily be defined by the power of an external cause *paired (comparata)* with our own. [*Lin's translation, emphasis added*]

To understand these passages, we must briefly examine Spinoza's theory of desire, which is roughly his theory of *conatus* (I will have more to say on desire and *conatus* in the following two sections). *Conatus* is a thing's endeavor to persevere in its being (E3P6), which is "nothing other than the actual essence of the thing" (E3P7). In other words, *conatus* is the source of the causal power of a thing. And, in the passages in question, Spinoza claims that the power of a passion is our power paired with an external cause's power. Therefore, Lin concludes, "if something expresses something else's nature, then the source of its causal powers are its own nature and the nature of the other thing that it expresses" (2006: 339). Furthermore, since passions express the natures of their external causes, and the nature of a passion is its causal powers, passions have different causal powers just in case they have different kinds of external causes. Thus, passive emotions have wide causal powers, which entails that the causal powers of ideas do not depend solely on intrinsic properties of those ideas. Thus, Spinoza is not committed to a rejection of teleology: premise three of Bennett's argument is false.<sup>8</sup>

Next, Lin builds upon his previous points to argue that Spinoza is committed to teleological explanations by first arguing that all representational content involving goals, and hence teleology, would be considered inadequate ideas in Spinoza's system. Goals involve external objects or future events, which are both considered inadequate ideas by Spinoza. Ideas of external objects are inadequate because "The human mind perceives no external body as actually existing, except through the ideas of the affections of its body" (E2P26). That is, sensory experience lacks the knowledge of the external object affecting the body (E2P25) and the causal processes involved. What is more, God has the ideas of the external objects affecting our bodies and the processes involved—we do not. Lin claims that since an

adequate idea does not differ from God's idea (E2P25Dem), our ideas of external objects are inadequate. Furthermore, all temporal ideas are considered inadequate because adequate ideas must be conceived *sub specie aeternitatis*, or under a certain species of eternity (E2P44C2).

Lin then notes that passions depend on inadequate ideas, whereas actions<sup>9</sup> depend on adequate ideas (E3P3). That is not to say that nothing follows from passions; in fact, much of Part 3 of the ETHICS is devoted to explaining how our behavior is caused by passions. Thus, if behavior is motivated by ideas of future events or external objects—i.e., inadequate ideas—then that behavior is motivated by passions, or ideas with wide causal powers (Lin, 2006: 341).

Lin argues next that the content of our ideas has the same source as the causal powers of our ideas: the expressive relation they bear to the nature of their external causes (2006: 341). The content of the mind's ideas finds its source in the perception of the external causes that affect the body (the mind is the idea of the body [E2P13]). Lin argues that "the mind perceives the external causes that affect it because its ideas express the nature of those external causes" (2006: 341). To argue for this point, Lin cites E2P16 and C1. In E2P16, Spinoza argues as follows:

1. The modes by which a body is affected follow from the nature of the body affected and the nature of the affecting body. (By Ax. 1 after Cor., Lem. 3)
2. Thus, the idea of any mode by which the body is affected by an external object involves the nature of the human body and its external causes. (By Ax. 4 Part 1)
3. It follows (in E2P16C1) that we perceive the nature of very many bodies together with the nature of our body.

It is unclear what Spinoza means by the predicate "involves" in the preceding argument, but Lin claims that for the argument to be valid, it seems that "involves" denotes a relation such that "if y involves x, then if some idea represents y, then it represents x as well" (2006: 334). The content of ideas therefore has the same source as the causal powers of ideas: they are both expressions of the external objects that affect the body.

<sup>9</sup> A thing is active to the extent that it is an adequate cause of an effect and passive to the extent that it is not.

<sup>8</sup> Premise (3) of Bennett's argument follows from (1) and (2), so Lin must, and does, provide a further argument that Spinoza need not hold premise (1) of Bennett's argument. Examining this argument, however, is beyond the scope of this paper, since I will argue that Spinoza does hold premise (3) of Bennett's argument and therefore Lin's first argument is mistaken.

However, Spinoza's commitment to teleology is not yet established—content and causal powers have the same source, but they could simply be effects of a common cause. To conclude that Spinoza is committed to teleological explanations, Lin includes and provides evidence for the following conjecture: for Spinoza, the expression constitutes the perception. As explained above, the expression relation partially determines the causal powers of passions. Therefore, if the expression relation is perception, the content of an idea partially determines its causal powers, which commits Spinoza to teleological explanations of human action.

Lin's evidence for his conjecture is that it unifies and explains the following claims of Spinoza:

- a. The idea of an effect expresses the nature of the effect's cause (E3P56Dem).
- b. The perception of an effect involves perception of its cause (E2P16C1).
- c. An attribute expresses the essence of a substance (E1Def6).
- d. An attribute is what an intellect perceives of the essence of a substance, that is, the intellect perceives the essence of a substance by having an idea of an attribute (E1Def4).
- e. An idea *i* expresses the nature of some *x* just in case *i* is a cognition of *x*.<sup>10</sup>

If Lin's conjecture were correct, (a) would entail (b) and (c) would entail (d). Furthermore, the conjecture explains claim (e): Spinoza treats "cognition of" and "expresses" as synonymous because expression is perception, which is a form of cognition. With this final premise, Lin concludes that Spinoza is committed to teleological explanations of human action.

#### 4. INTRINSIC CAUSATION AND PASSIVE EMOTIONS

Lin's argument is valid, so we must look to the premises to determine if it is fair to interpret Spinoza as being committed to teleological explanations of human action. In this

<sup>10</sup> In E2P29Dem, Spinoza says, "An idea of a state of the human body does not involve adequate cognition of that body, in other words, does not adequately express its nature." (Lin's translation) Lin claims that in this passage, Spinoza treats "cognition of" and "expresses" as synonymous.

section, I will question the first premise of Lin's argument as to whether it has a basis in Spinoza's ETHICS, and I conclude it does not. (Note that premise one is a crucial premise for both the claim that Bennett's argument is false and the claim that Spinoza is committed to teleology.)

From Part 3 of the ETHICS, it seems that, at time  $t$ <sup>11</sup>, passions are individuated widely, but what about their causal powers? Lin's evidence for his claim that the causal powers of passions are individuated widely occurs in E4P5Dem and E3P56Dem. As we saw in his translation of E4P5Dem, Lin translates *comparata* as "paired." Using this translation, he determines that causal powers of a passion derive from both the person's nature and an external object's nature, i.e., the power of a passion is our power *paired* with an external object's power. Lin's translation is adequate, however, "*comparata*" is most commonly translated as "compared."<sup>12</sup> Translating "*comparata*" as "compared" seems to change the meaning of the passage—from Lin's interpretation—to the following: the power of a passion is our power *compared* with an external object's power, in other words, a passion is defined as the person's essence, or power, *as it is affected by or in relation to* an external object. The translation of "*comparata*" therefore drastically changes the meaning of the passages in question. In order to determine the proper translation of "*comparata*" and the meaning of E4P5Dem and E3P56Dem, a brief examination of Spinoza's theory of passive emotions must be undertaken.

For Spinoza, emotions are affections of the body, which help or hinder the body's power of acting (which is simultaneous in nature with mind's power of thinking [E3P28Dem]), and—given Spinoza's parallelism—the ideas of these

<sup>11</sup> I say "at time  $t$ ," because the numerically same external object can affect the numerically same person differently at different times (E3P51). Thus, diachronically, affects are not individuated widely.

<sup>12</sup> See for example, G. H. R. Parkinson, R. H. M. Elwes, and Samuel Shirley. See also, the translations of the root word "*comparare*" as it is often translated "compare," depending on the context (for example, if the context calls for it, Shirley sometimes uses "constituted," e.g., in E3P32S he translates "*Videmus itaque, cum hominum natura plerumque ita comparatum [...]*" as "We therefore see that human nature is in general so constituted [...]").

affections as well (E3Def3). Passive emotions then, are simply emotions of which we are not the adequate cause (i.e., a “cause whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through itself” [E3Def1]) (E3Def3). According to Spinoza, there are three basic passive emotions<sup>13</sup>—that is, there are only three passive emotions; other emotions are species of, and can be reduced to, the three basic emotions—namely desire, pleasure, and pain.<sup>14</sup> Desire is simply a thing’s *conatus* as it relates to the mind and body, or appetite, “together with the consciousness of the appetite” (E3P9S). And pleasure and pain, we are told, are passions by which the mind passes to a greater or lesser perfection,<sup>15</sup> respectively (3P11S). Spinoza therefore defines pleasure and pain in terms of *conatus*: if our endeavor to persevere in our being is hindered, we feel pain; if our endeavor is increased, we feel pleasure. So although Spinoza claims that there are three fundamental passions, it is clear from his definitions of emotions that *conatus* is fundamental—which, as G. H. R. Parkinson remarks, “one would expect from what Spinoza has said about *conatus* and essence” (2000: 41). The fundamental nature of *conatus* becomes more evident in E3P57Dem, which reads:

pleasure and pain *are desire*, i.e., appetite, in so far as it is increased or diminished, helped or hindered, by external causes, that is (by Prop. 9, Schol., Part 3), it is the very nature of each individual. [Emphasis added]

From this passage, we learn that pleasure and pain are clearly defined in terms of desire, hence, a thing’s *conatus* is most fundamental in descriptions of passions. How does this understanding of passive emotions determine what the causal powers of passions are, i.e., how should we interpret E4P5Dem, E3P56Dem, and *comparata*?

First, the theory of passions explains what “involve” and “expressed” must mean in E3P56Dem. Recall that in this passage Spinoza claims that

<sup>13</sup> Pleasure and desire are both passive and active emotions (E3P59).

<sup>14</sup> See E3P11S, P2S, P59S, AD4DE, and AD48DE.

<sup>15</sup> Perfection is reality (E2Def6), that is, the essence of each thing in so far as it exists and operates in a certain way, without attending to its duration because essence does not involve duration (E4Pref).

passions *involve* both the nature of the external body and our body and the nature of each passion must be explained such that the nature of the object affecting us is *expressed*. From the theory of passions, we find that the passage only claims that to *explain* the nature of a passion, we must include the nature of the object by which we are affected. The passage is simply a reiteration of Spinoza’s point in E4P5Dem, which maintains that passions are not simply our essence (i.e., our essence unaffected) or cannot be explained by our essence alone. Instead, passions are our essence *as it is affected* by an external object, i.e., our nature in relation to an external object’s nature (I will further explicate this point presently).

Second, since passions are simply desire, i.e., *conatus*, i.e., essence, they must be defined by *comparing*—not *pairing*—the power of our essence with that of an external object’s power—i.e., Spinoza’s theory of passions suggests that “*comparata*” should be translated, “compared” (I explore what it means to define passions by comparing the powers of things in the subsequent section).

In other words, we cannot construe Lin’s view to accord with Spinoza’s reduction of emotions to desire. A passion is *not*—as Lin argues—something separate from the nature of a person, which receives *its* causal powers from the nature of both an external object and the person. Desire is a person’s essence and therefore cannot gain some of its causal powers from—or have its causal powers *paired* with—an external object’s powers; a thing’s causal power simply *is* its desire or essence. According to Spinoza’s definition of essence, an essence is that which, when given, the thing is necessarily posited, and when taken away, the thing is necessarily negated or that which is essential to a thing (E2Def2). From his definition we learn that if something’s causal powers, i.e., essence, change when passively affected, it would necessarily cease to exist.<sup>16</sup> However, according to Spinoza, a thing can be affected in many ways without changing its essence, i.e., without ceasing to exist, and in most cases passive emotions are one

<sup>16</sup> Note that it cannot be something’s essence to be changed; it would not be an *essential* property if the essence changed while the bearer of the essence remained the numerically same thing.

of the ways a thing can be affected without changing its essence (finite modes do change essence, or get destroyed, but they are often affected without doing so). In fact, Spinoza adds the short physical treatise in Part 2 of the ETHICS to show how things are affected while remaining the numerically same thing, which provides a basis for his theory of passions and perception in Parts 3 and 4 of the ETHICS (many propositions in Part 3 and 4 are deduced from the physical treatise). Thus, it seems that we must read Spinoza as holding that a thing does not receive any of its causal powers externally, as it would undermine the most important parts of Part 3 and 4 of the ETHICS—if persons cannot be affected without ceasing to exist, most of Spinoza's explanations of ethics and psychology are null.

Furthermore, since desire or causal power is a thing's essence, causal power cannot be individuated by external objects, as the thing's essence would change each time it was affected, which as previously argued would undermine Parts 3 and 4 of the ETHICS. This is enough to show that the first premise of Lin's argument is mistaken: passions do not have wide causal powers—Bennett is correct in thinking that Spinoza rejected all teleological explanations because causal powers rely on intrinsic properties, i.e., causal powers are a thing's essence.

#### **4.1 INTRINSIC CAUSATION AND THE REDUCTION OF PASSIVE AFFECTS TO DESIRE**

From what has been said thus far, it seems clear that causal powers depend on intrinsic properties alone, however, to clarify further my interpretation, I should explain how passions are widely individuated—which Spinoza seems to hold—despite the fact that their causal powers are not widely individuated (all causation is intrinsic) and passive emotions can be reduced to desire. Furthermore, I should elucidate the manner in which passions are defined by *comparing* an external cause with a thing's essence.

To be able to reduce all passions to desire, we must conceive of each species of passion as helping or hindering the person's power, i.e., causing pleasure or pain, a certain quantity. Indeed, Spinoza seems to suggest this in E3Pref when he claims to study the emotions as one

studies geometry<sup>17</sup> and in E4P7 when he claims that an emotion, x, can only be restrained by an emotion which is contrary to and more powerful than x. For example, love for a sibling helps one's endeavor to persevere in one's being by a certain quantity different than, say, love for a friend, but these passions are both reducible to pleasure (they are just certain levels of pleasure), which can be expressed as desire. (Note that a thing and its exact duplicate will have the same level of power regardless of what objects help or hinder its power, so causal history does not affect causal powers. For example, if the original is hindered a certain quantity by, say, being hit by a truck, its duplicate will have a different causal history, i.e., it was not hit by a truck, though they are intrinsically the same, i.e., the quantity the two are hindered is the same.) With this, we see that *comparing* a thing's power with an external object's power will explain what passive emotion will arise—that is, it will explain the quantity the thing's power is helped or hindered.

Passions may also be distinguished solely by their external causes. Spinoza writes:

all the emotions spring from desire, pleasure, or pain; or rather, that there are no emotions apart from these three, which are customarily called by various names on account of their relations and extrinsic denominations.<sup>18</sup> [AD48DE]

In other words, two distinct objects may cause, say, pleasure, and the two pleasures may be the same quantity of pleasure, but they are denoted by distinct terms because they each relate to distinct kinds of external objects. Spinoza tells us that every different object that affects us will give rise to a different passion (at time t), so even though the pain caused by being struck by a bus or car—or even getting a broken heart—may cause the same quantity of pain, we could refer to the pains by different names. Therefore, although the causal powers of passions, as we learned above, rely on intrinsic natures, i.e., the essence or desire of the thing affected and how much its *conatus* is helped or

<sup>17</sup> Spinoza's theory of identity in the short physical treatise also employs mathematical concepts, or quantity. He claims that the identity of composite bodies consists in a certain *ratio* of motion and rest.

<sup>18</sup> An extrinsic denomination is a Scholastic term referring to a relational characteristic (Parkinson, 2000: 330).

hindered, the passions themselves are widely individuated. That is, the causal powers of passions are simply desire, but to provide a complete explanation of passions, they can be termed according to their external causes.

## 5. CONATUS AND TELEOLOGY

Thus far I have shown that Lin's argument is mistaken—Spinoza is not committed to teleological explanations of human action; moreover, since all causation is intrinsic, Bennett's argument is correct and therefore Spinoza is committed to a rejection of teleology. In the ensuing section, I argue, contra Bennett, that Spinoza is not only committed to rejecting teleological explanations, he consistently does so. That is to say, I aim to show that Spinoza's employment of *conatus* is non-teleological; *conatus* follows the comprehensive efficient cause determinism of the ETHICS, which Spinoza believes to be incompatible with final causation.

According to both Lin and Bennett, the nonteleological interpretation of Spinoza presented thus far seems to commit him to a gross inconsistency: his metaphysics and philosophy of mind, which include a rejection of teleology, are inconsistent with his moral philosophy because it employs teleology. Lin remarks that to a philosopher who strived for a systematic philosophy in which metaphysical and psychological considerations are the basis of ethical conclusions, this inconsistency amounts to a profound failure (2006: 318).

Bennett claims to provide proof of this inconsistency by citing several passages, which seem to show that Spinoza's employment of the concept of *conatus* (which is the basis of his moral philosophy and psychology) is teleological—though it is formulated nonteleologically because it is identified with desire and appetite. As Bennett puts it, Spinoza's concept of *conatus* goes from appetite in E3P6, which Bennett states as a conditional: (a) “if he does it, it helps him,” to its converse: (b) “if it would help him, he does it,” which is clearly teleological.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Bennett's claims seem to be stronger than what Spinoza means in E3P6. Spinoza would not hold (a) because he recognized that people do self-destructive things. These self-destructive things, however, are due to external causes (causes external to a thing's essence) **(TO BE CONTINUED)**

Bennett's argument comes in three parts. He begins by claiming that the word “*conatur*”—which I have translated as “endeavor” and Bennett translates as “try”—is *prima facie* evidence that Spinoza employs the concept of *conatus* teleologically. Bennett then points to the fact that in E3P6Dem, Spinoza includes the phrase, “*as far as it can,*” which makes sense only if it is added to conditional (b) (not [a]); the proposition would read, “if it would help him, he will do it as far as he can.” Finally, Bennett notes that eleven propositions in Part 3 (starting with P12; the remaining propositions are derived from either P12 or P13) say “If [...], we try [...]” rather than “Only if [...], we try,” and “We try to do whatever [...]” rather than “We try to do only what [...]” (1984: 245). Each of these phrases infers facts about behavior from facts regarding the results of behavior, i.e., they all have the form of (b). I find these arguments unconvincing and will respond to them in turn.

Bennett purports that the word “*conatur*” or “try” is a teleological word. However, *conatus* is identified with appetite, which as stated in section (2), is nonteleological. Moreover, once Spinoza's argument for *conatus* is closely examined, it becomes evident that the only way it is remotely close to validity is if “*conatur*” is nonteleological. In fact, Bennett derives conditional (a)—as a possible meaning of *conatus*—from Spinoza's argument for *conatus*. The argument proceeds as follows: “nothing can be destroyed except by an external cause” (E3P4); things cannot be in the same subject if they can destroy each other; thus, each thing endeavors to persevere in its being (E3P6). If the conclusion means something like conditional (a), or if x does f, f tends towards x's preservation, the argument is much closer to validity than if the conclusion is (b), which makes the argument blatantly invalid. Likewise, Michael Della Rocca's interpretation, which renders Spinoza's

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**(CONTINUATION OF NOTE 19)** (See E3P4 and Steven Barbone and Lee Rice, Spinoza and the Problem of Suicide, *International Philosophical Quarterly* v. 34, n. 2, p. 229-241, June 1994.). Likewise, (b) is too strong. There are many examples of people not doing what would help them. Later in this section I will point out that Michael Della Rocca has a better interpretation of E3P6, which better captures Spinoza's meaning.



argument valid, is nonteleological. He claims E3P6 means something like the following: “For each thing x, x’s state is such that, unless prevented by external causes, x will persevere in its being” (1996: 200). This principle, which is reminiscent of Newton’s first law of motion, gains support from Spinoza’s claim in E2Lem3 that “a body in motion moves until determined to rest by another body, and a body at rest remains at rest until it is determined by another to motion.”

Spinoza is a scrupulous writer who placed the utmost value on deduction, so I think in order to provide a charitable reading, we ought to take this nonteleological reading of *conatus* as far as it can go. I therefore consider the above points as *prima facie* evidence for a nonteleological account of *conatus*. What about Bennett’s claim that “as far as it can” is clearly teleological because it can only be plausibly added to (b), not (a)?

Bennett’s argument is misleading, as it seems to focus on grammar rather than meaning. He is correct in that adding “as far as it can” to (a) renders the proposition grammatically incorrect, while adding the phrase to (b) is obviously correct. However, if we do not focus on the grammar of *Bennett’s substitute* for E3P6, it seems that we can easily make sense of “as far as it can” in the proposition. For E3P6 to be both nonteleological and follow from E3P4 and E3P5,<sup>20</sup> it must mean something like (a) or Della Rocca’s interpretation. The following proposition keeps the meaning of (a) intact, while adding the phrase “as far as it can”: x does<sup>21</sup>—*as far as it can*—only beneficial, or self-preserving, things.<sup>22</sup> The essence/existence dichotomy for finite modes in the ETHICS leads me to think that “as far as it can” is meant in a nonteleological way.

Spinoza holds that essence and existence are separate for all finite modes (E1Def1, E1P24, and TP2.2)—only God’s essence and existence are the same (E1P20). For finite modes, their power to exist is infinitely surpassed by greater

<sup>20</sup> As Bennett notes, *conatus* seems to follow from E3P4; E3P5 does not seem to add to the argument.

<sup>21</sup> This assumes a premise of Spinoza’s that effects follow from the nature of existing things (E1P36).

<sup>22</sup> I wrote this sentence to accord with Bennett’s conditional (a). However, I think Della Rocca better captures the meaning of E3P6 because he takes into account the phrase “in so far as it is in itself.” It will become clear in the next paragraph why this is important.

finite modes, i.e., for any finite mode x, there is another finite mode y, which can destroy it (E4Ax, E4P3, E2Ax1, and E4P4). The need for the addition of “as far as it can” to the concept of *conatus* is now clear: a thing strives to exist but will be infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes.<sup>23</sup> While in existence, a thing will endeavor to persevere in its being but will eventually succumb to more powerful external forces and cease to exist. That is, the thing’s endeavor will be hindered and eventually overcome; hence, it will “endeavor, *as far as it can*.” We now see why Della Rocca interprets E3P6 as x’s state is such that, unless prevented by external forces, x will persevere in its being. If x were unaffected, it would persevere in its being (nothing in x’s state can cause its destruction),<sup>24</sup> but external causes can prevent it from persevering in its being. Thus, the phrase points to our lack of power and finite existence—it is not a teleological claim.

Finally, Spinoza claims “If [...], we try...” rather than “only if [...], we try [...]” and, “We try to do whatever [...],” rather than “We try to do only what,” which clearly seems teleological. Here, however, we should note that Spinoza adds the word “imagine”—e.g., “we shall endeavor to do whatever we *imagine* men to view with pleasure” (E3P29Dem<sup>25</sup>)—to each of the propositions Bennett cites. Imagination is a passive affect. When an external object affects the body, it leaves an imprint of an image (this image need not completely resemble the external cause E2P17S), and since the mind is the idea of the body (the mind and body are parallel), an idea correlate is created as well. Further note that Spinoza wanted to treat persons as all other natural phenomena and not, as it were, a “kingdom within a kingdom,”<sup>26</sup> thus, his descriptions of natural events, which follow

<sup>23</sup> Much of Parts 3 and 4, and the discussion of suicide in the ETHICS show how our power to exist can be surpassed.

<sup>24</sup> Della Rocca thinks this claim is open to counter examples, i.e., many things self-destruct. For possible counter examples concerning apparent self-destruction and arguments against these apparent counter examples see Steven Barbone and Lee Rice, *Spinoza and the Problem of Suicide*; Michael Della Rocca, p. 200-202; and Wallace Matson, *Death and Destruction in Spinoza’s Ethics*, **Inquiry**, v. 20, n. 4, p. 403-417, Winter 1977.

<sup>25</sup> My translation.

<sup>26</sup> E3Preface, TP2.3, TP2.5, and TP2.6.

efficient cause determinism, will be the same as his descriptions of events involving people. Since imagination is included in the propositions that Bennett cites, we can see that the person is passively affected, which in turn causes the person to act or behave in a certain way. For example, we find that when people are affected by an imagination (in the case of E3P29Dem, an image of what others view with pleasure), they will endeavor to do what the imagination, and their essence, entails. Thus, this is an efficiently caused event that involves the natures of a person and an external object and the results of such an interaction. This same kind of explanation is found in Spinoza's short physical treatise—e.g., “When a body in motion impinges upon another which is at rest, which it is unable to move, it is reflected” (E2Lemma3Ax2). Spinoza therefore gives a nonteleological explanation, which accords with the new science (science that works according to efficient causes) by using his understanding of the essences involved. Even if the imagination represents a future pleasure or pain, it is the intrinsic properties of the idea (not what the idea represents) that proximately cause pleasure or pain, which moves the person to behave a certain way according to both the essence of the person and the object affecting the person.<sup>27</sup>

I conclude that Spinoza's employment of *conatus* is nonteleological (as Bennett provides the strongest reasons that I am aware of, to believe that Spinoza is inconsistent). I do not purport that Spinoza is everywhere consistent with his wording regarding *conatus* but that he is not caught in any kind of profound inconsistency, that is, there is no fundamental concept or proposition in the

<sup>27</sup> Della Rocca makes a similar point. He claims that there is no future-directed endeavoring for Spinoza because the immediate idea, even if the idea is of a future pain (or pleasure), is itself painful (or pleasurable). Spinoza says as much in E3P18: “A man is affected by the image of a past or future thing with same emotion of pleasure and pain as he is by the image of a present thing.” Further, in E3P37Dem Spinoza writes that “all a man affected with pain endeavors to do is to remove that pain” (my translation). Thus, a thing's endeavor is not future-directed, i.e., teleological. I claim that if an imagination is of a future event, the part of the imagination that is “of a future event” is a representational property of the idea and therefore cannot cause behavior. However, the imagination itself, i.e., its intrinsic properties, may be the proximate cause of pleasure or pain, which will cause behavior.

ETHICS where Spinoza explicitly uses teleological explanations. Rather, throughout the ETHICS it seems that Spinoza is consistent in his attempt to reject teleology and replace the traditional Scholastic concepts with nonteleological concepts that fit with the science of his time.

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Spinoza not only rejected divine teleology but the concept of teleology in general. Much of Part 3 and 4 of the ETHICS is a remarkable attempt to replace the teleological explanations of human behavior with nonteleological, efficient cause explanations. I have argued, contra Lin, that Bennett is right in his conclusion that Spinoza is committed to a rejection of all teleology because the causal powers of things depend upon intrinsic properties only. I demonstrated that the causal powers of passions are simply a thing's essence in relation to external causes, which shows that Lin is mistaken in thinking that passions have wide causal powers. I argued further, contra Bennett, that not only is Spinoza committed to a rejection of all teleology, but he consistently rejects the concept throughout the ETHICS. I did this by trying to show that Spinoza's use of the concept *conatus* is nonteleological. And, since his formulation of *conatus* (desire, will, and appetite) is nonteleological, we ought to interpret *conatus* as an attempted replacement of the Scholastic teleological concepts. If my interpretation is correct, this is a radical and interesting rejection of teleology, which was a prevalent concept in Spinoza's time. It shows another departure in Spinoza's thought from the Scholastic Aristotelians—thought that is much closer to Thomas Hobbes and in tune with the new science. This rejection of teleology therefore has an important place in the history of philosophy and may apply to the continuing debates over teleology and efficient causation.<sup>28</sup>



<sup>28</sup> I am grateful to Steven Barbone and Liana Hill for many helpful comments.

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