

The Issue Of Teleology In Spinoza: A Defence Of The Standard  
Interpretation

João Carvalho

A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Philosophy  
University of Otago  
Dunedin, New Zealand

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## Abstract

Current scholarship offers two competing accounts of Spinoza's views on the issue of teleology, which I label Standard Interpretation and Modest Interpretation respectively. Several texts, including *Ethics* 1 Appendix, support the Standard Interpretation: they make the point that Spinoza rejects all forms of teleology and teleological explanations. A second group of remarks, most of which occur in Part 3 of the *Ethics*, suggests that the chief claim of the Modest Interpretation is correct: Spinoza seems to accept some meaningful forms of teleology and teleological explanations. In this thesis, I build a new case for the Standard Interpretation. I assess divine causality and human causality in Spinoza and show that, given other Spinozistic assumptions, one and the same activity underlies all of causation. In particular, two metaphysical commitments preclude Spinoza's endorsement of divine teleology: causal determinism and necessitarianism. These commitments amount to a failure to meet two conditions that Spinoza places on final causation: (i) that an agent has the ability to choose freely, and (ii) that an agent chooses among a range of possible states. I show that Spinoza's reasons for rejecting teleology in God also apply *mutatis mutandis* to the activity of singular things. By providing such an account I hope to debunk one of the main assumptions of the Modest Interpretation: namely, that Spinoza's fundamental distinction between substance and mode gives him the flexibility to deny teleological activity to God but to attribute it to finite beings.

## **Preface**

I wish to thank my supervisor, Michael LeBuffe, from whom I have learned a lot over the past two years. I am particularly grateful for his constant encouragement, expertise and outstanding feedback. Thank you also, Mike, for prompting me to think carefully and rigorously about Spinoza.

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## A Note On Citations

Spinoza: Unless otherwise noted, I follow Edwin Curley's translations of Spinoza's works (*The Collected Works of Spinoza*). In citations of the *Ethics*, I use the following abbreviations:

A: axiom;  
D: definition;  
p: proposition;  
d: demonstration;  
c: corollary;  
s: scholium;  
DOA: Definitions of the Affects.

For instance: '1p16d' means *Ethics*, Part 1, proposition 16, demonstration. Citations of a preface, appendix or scholium from the *Ethics* will often also be done by reference to Carl Gebhardt's edition (*Opera*) quoted as "G" followed by Roman numeral for the volume and Arabic numeral for the page.

Descartes: Citations of Descartes are done by reference to the Adam and Tannery volumes (*Oeuvres De Descartes*), abbreviated as "AT," followed by volume and page number. This is followed by a reference to the standard English translation of Descartes's works by Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdoch, and Kenny (vol. 3) (*The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*), abbreviated as "CSM(K)," followed by volume and page number.

Aristotle: References to Aristotle's works are done by the standard Bekker page, column and line numbers.

Thomas Aquinas: In citations from the *Summa Theologiae*, roman numerals stand for parts; "Q" means question; "A" means article. Citations from the *Summa Contra Gentiles* are doubly cited. The first citation uses the format: book, part, chapter. It is followed by a page reference to the English translation by Vernon J. Bourke.

## Introduction

Here are three central features of Spinoza's philosophy:

***The Rejection Of All Teleology:*** Spinoza famously rejects the use of teleological concepts, seemingly explaining away all final causes by offering alternative accounts of the corporeal order that rely solely on the explanatory power of efficient causes. Where Spinoza offers a positive characterization of final causes, he describes them as psychological illusions:

*Ethics* 1 Appendix (G II. 80): Nature has no ends set before it, and (...) all final causes are nothing but human fictions. For I believe I have already sufficiently established it (...) by P16, P32C1, and C2, and all those [propositions] by which I have shown that all things proceed by a certain eternal necessity of Nature.

***Apparent Teleology In Human Action:*** Spinoza seemingly accepts that human activity is goal-directed. In *Ethics* 3, Spinoza offers an account of human motivation – the conatus doctrine – which is the principal basis for many teleological-sounding descriptions of human behavior and psychological principles that he provides later in the same part:

3p6: Each thing, insofar as it is in itself [*quantum in se est*], strives [*conatur*] to persevere in its being.<sup>1</sup>

3p28: We strive [*conamur*] to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to joy, and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it, or will lead to sadness.

Dem.: We strive to imagine, as far as we can [*quantum possumus imaginari conamur*], what we imagine will lead to joy (by 3p12), that is (by 2p17), we strive, as far as we can [*quantum possumus conabimur*], to regard it as present, or as actually existing [...].

4D7: By the end [*Per finem*] for the sake of which we do something I understand appetite.

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<sup>1</sup> “Insofar as it is in itself” is my translation of Spinoza's trope *quantum in se est*. Curley renders the expression “as far as it can by its own power.” Note that Spinoza uses *in se est* to characterize substance at 1D3 as something that is “in itself.”

***Apparent Teleology In Moral Theory:*** Spinoza often makes use of teleological-sounding concepts in his moral theory. These include the dictates of reason, his account of the highest good, and the model of human nature. Accordingly, Spinoza gives accounts of what has value in many propositions of *Ethics* 4 and 5 that seemingly require agents to pursue the ends described.

*Ethics* 4 Preface (G II. 208): [W]e desire to form an idea of man, as a model of human nature which we may look to (...). In what follows, therefore, I shall understand by good what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature we set before ourselves.

4p65: From the guidance of reason, we shall follow the greater of two goods or the lesser of two evils.

*Ethics* 4 Appendix 4: [T]he ultimate end [*finis ultimus*] of the man who is led by reason, that is, his highest desire, by which he strives to moderate all others, is that by which he is led to conceive adequately both himself and all things which can fall under his understanding.

5p10s: The best thing, then, that we can do so long as we do not have perfect knowledge of our affects, is to conceive a correct principle of living, *or* sure maxims of life [...]. For example, if someone sees that he pursues esteem too much, he should think of its correct use, the end [*finem*] which it ought be pursued.

Take the first feature – *The Rejection Of All Teleology* - and any other feature and there is a tension. At first glance, there seems to be textual evidence for a perfectly general non-teleological reading of Spinoza's metaphysics - on which Spinoza means to reject, and is committed to rejecting *all* forms of teleology and teleological explanations. But there also appears to be textual evidence for what we could call a teleological interpretation - on which Spinoza accepts and is committed to accepting *some* meaningful forms of teleology and teleological explanations.

At its core, then, this thesis is an attempt to provide an answer to the following question. Does Spinoza accept the legitimacy of any form of teleology? Or to put it in what are arguably equivalent concepts in his framework: does Spinoza maintain that ends, goals, or purposes – that is, final causes – can account for the existence and activity of at least some things?

To break this question into a little more detail: does Spinoza contend, as the first feature may suggest, that in true metaphysical rigor there are no such things as ends or final causes and thus that the language of teleology is ill-suited to characterize the causal activity of *any* thing, including human beings? Or does he hold – in a way perhaps suggested by the latter two features – that purposive action is characteristic of at least *some* domains of causality, such that human beings and presumably other ordinary things on the account of the *Ethics* are goal-directed agents? And if so, is a commitment to some forms of teleology reconcilable with Spinoza’s other causal commitments, including his claim that God’s creative activity is not goal-directed (1 Appendix G II. 80; 4 Preface G II. 206-7) and that all things - including human beings - are “in” God (1p15) and are God’s affections (1p25c)?

These are fundamental questions, for the concept of ‘teleology’ occupies a central place not only in Spinoza’s metaphysics but also within his philosophy more generally. A quick look at Part 1 of the *Ethics* is sufficient to highlight the importance of the notion. There, Spinoza devotes an entire appendix to arguing that the common understanding of God, which makes him a person who acts with an end in view, is both false and misleading. It prevents human beings, Spinoza argues there, from understanding the nature of value and from achieving true knowledge of God – precisely the type of knowledge that, on the account of the *Ethics*, constitutes the mind’s highest good (4p28; *Ethics* 4 Appendix 4).

Despite the obvious importance that teleology has in Spinoza’s system, there is simply no scholarly consensus about Spinoza’s answers to the above questions. Current scholarship offers two main interpretative outlooks, which I will label Standard Interpretation and Modest Interpretation, respectively. Very roughly, on the Standard Interpretation, Spinoza endorses *The Rejection Of All Teleology* and so he rejects the other two features altogether. Proponents of the Modest Interpretation, on the other hand, accept *The Rejection Of All Teleology* in some form but also permit some version of *The Apparent Teleology In Human Action* and some version of *The Apparent Teleology In Moral Theory*. As these latter two features indicate, this disagreement holds great importance: the kind of view that one attributes to Spinoza on the issue of teleology largely determines the types of interpretation of his psychological and moral doctrines that one is willing to accept. For example, should one be inclined to read



Spinoza as an opponent of all teleology, interpretations of his theory of desire that appeal to ends in human action would appear to be inadequate. So clarifying Spinoza's stance on the problem of teleology, which is my project here, will provide a basis for the interpretation of the *Ethics* as a systematic work.

In this thesis I build a case for the claim that Spinoza endorses *The Rejection Of All Teleology* and that any apparent teleology in the *Ethics* is merely apparent. My principal claim is that Spinoza bans teleology altogether from his metaphysics. This interpretation is the one that best squares both with the textual evidence of the *Ethics* and with Spinoza's other principal commitments. I am, of course, far from being the first one to propose such a reading, and what follows is indebted to earlier accounts of the Standard Interpretation. The argument here, however, builds upon them in different ways. First, I provide new arguments for the Standard Interpretation by responding to recent defences of the Modest Interpretation. Second, I assess divine causality and human causality in Spinoza and show that, given other Spinozistic assumptions, *one and the same* activity underlies all of causation. Although previous readings of Spinoza's monism have associated God's causation with that of finite things, there is not yet, to my knowledge, a full treatment of that theme in the context of the issue of teleology. By providing such an account I hope to debunk one of the main assumptions of the Modest Interpretation: namely, that Spinoza's fundamental distinction between substance and mode gives him the flexibility to deny teleological activity to God but to attribute it to human beings. Third, and relatedly, I reassess some of the main arguments already given for the Modest Interpretation and show how they can, and in fact ought to be read as supporting the Standard Interpretation.

The argument will proceed in the following way. §1 introduces material that will be useful in the detailed argument of the thesis. I describe those of Spinoza's central concepts and ideas that form important premises to and constraints on his views about teleology.

In §2 I use these concepts to provide an initial account of the metaphysical picture that I defend throughout this thesis. Here, in a sketch, is a characterization of that account. Spinoza claims at 1D6 that God is everything, and he argues at 1p25c that everything other than God is an affection, or mode, *of God*. If there is a being that is everything, then that being must also be, at the deepest level, the only genuine cause: it

must be all of causation and all of explanation. Although such an account does not obviously preclude teleology in God or in God's affections, it does indicate that God's causal structure pertains to the causal activity of all things, whether finite or infinite. Spinoza does, moreover, contend that God is an efficient cause at 1p16c1, and he rejects as an illusion the view that God acts with an end in view at *Ethics* 1 Appendix. There, the argument depends mainly upon Spinoza's account of necessity. The causal nature of human beings – as one should expect from 1D6 – is an expression of God (3p6d) and God's causal necessity *is* their causal necessity. In a finite way, our activity *is* God's activity. The upshot is that, because there is no causation that is not divine causation, no causation is teleological causation either.

The argument following this section proceeds in a series of objections and replies. In §3, I take up, as a starting point, the objection from a familiar Leibnizian perspective. On that objection, Spinoza's deterministic and necessitarian commitments do not preclude an account on which God also acts for the sake of ends. Perhaps, at least in some instances, Spinoza permits something like Leibniz's pre-established harmony on which God is both a final and an efficient cause at once.

In §4 I offer a new interpretation of Spinoza's account of divine action. I argue, in response to the objection of §3, that a commitment to anything like Leibniz's pre-established harmony would require a conception of God on which his action is teleological because it is the result of a choice to perform one of several possible actions. To be a bit more specific: Spinoza seems to assume that an agent can act teleologically only if (i) that agent has the ability to choose and only if (ii) there is a range of possible states that the agent chooses among. Spinoza's determinism, however, paired with other commitments of the *Ethics*, entails that God cannot choose freely with an end in view.

In §5 I argue that Spinoza's commitment to necessitarianism amounts to a failure to meet the second condition that he places on teleology. Spinoza is a necessitarian, for whom everything that is possible is also actual. All of God's power is completely exercised in bringing about everything that he can conceive. The result is a view on which all of God's volitions are necessary. God cannot act teleologically, for Spinoza, because he cannot select, nor be determined to select, among states of affairs on the basis of their consequences.

A notable theme of §5, worth mentioning here, is this. What might appear to be a weak link in the *Ethics* between causal determinism and the denial of final causation is not, after all, so weak. Spinoza's commitment to determinism, I hold, provides the ground for a robust account of necessity which he takes to be incompatible with final causation. In finding a basis for necessitarianism in his demand for causes, Spinoza, then, has an account on which efficient-cause determinism, rightly understood, is incompatible with action for an end.

In §§6-7, I put my interpretation of divine causation to use in responding to the objection that, despite rejecting final causation in God, Spinoza endorses some kind of finite teleology. In §6, I emphasise Spinoza's distinction between substance and mode in order to articulate reasons for finding the Modest Interpretation a plausible reading of Spinoza. The distinction is central because, given Spinoza's commitment to the view that everything is an aspect of God, the plausibility of the Modest Interpretation depends on its ability to explain how God and finite things can act in fundamentally different ways. In §7, I build upon my analysis of God's causal activity in §§4-5 to provide new arguments for the Standard Interpretation. Any account of the kind of motive tendencies that characterize finite things will have to be consistent with Spinoza's own reasons for rejecting the attribution of ends to God. These reasons suggest, however, that Spinoza cannot endorse even more modest forms of teleology.

## §1. Central Concepts

The basic concepts that Spinoza uses to present his metaphysics may constitute an initial obstacle to the understanding of his views. Most of the defining concepts of the *Ethics* – such as those of ‘substance’ and ‘mode’ – have a long history before (and after) Spinoza, and do not have unequivocal meanings in the history of philosophy. Moreover, even readers familiar with how other early modern philosophers define and use many principal terms are often struck with the way Spinoza reconstrues them, by either giving them new meanings or by drawing bold, new conclusions from a seemingly traditional understanding of those concepts. Because Spinoza’s use of the terms also often gives rise to positions which he uses later in arguing for many controversial views, it will be useful here to delineate the meaning of those concepts that will be especially relevant to the account I develop in the following sections.

In this preliminary section I focus on those central concepts that will be used throughout this dissertation, including both specific Spinozistic premises and special terminology. In what follows I provide a characterization of (1.1) Spinoza’s account and use of the terms ‘substance’ and ‘mode;’ (1.2) Spinoza’s causal axiom; (1.3) a general account of causal determinism in Spinoza; and (1.4) a general account of necessity and necessitarianism in Spinoza. Finally (1.5), I introduce a framework in which I situate Spinoza’s treatment of teleology. Many of the views described here receive more detailed discussion where they arise in later sections.

### 1.1. Substance And Mode

In the opening of the *Ethics*, Spinoza defines ‘substance’ and ‘mode’ as follows:

1D3: By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself [*in se est et per se concipitur*], that is, that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed.

1D5: By mode I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived [*in alio est, per quod etiam concipitur*].

In distinguishing between substance and mode Spinoza emphasizes their differences with respect to *inherence* and *conceivability*. According to 1D3, a substance is said to be “in itself” and to be conceived “through itself.” This characterization suggests that Spinoza takes substances to be the kinds of things that are, by definition, ontologically and conceptually independent. Conceptual independence is perhaps the clearest of these two defining features of Spinozistic substances: some thing is conceptually independent if and only if the concept of that thing does not require the concept of anything else. This point is clearer if we consider, by contrast, an example of conceptual dependence. At 1D5 Spinoza says that modes are conceptually dependent, by which he presumably means that, in order to form the concept of a mode *m*, one needs the concept of something else other than *m*. For instance, if one has the concept of Socrates’ smile, one must also have the concept of Socrates himself.<sup>2</sup> So, a mode is *not* conceptually independent because it must be conceived in relation to that upon which it depends. A substance, on the other hand, is conceptually independent in that it is conceived in relation to nothing other than itself.

The other feature of Spinozistic substances – self-inherence – appears to be close to a view about ontological independence. Descartes’s definition of substance is not identical to Spinoza’s but a precedent in Descartes suggests that ontological independence signals some notable feature of the meaning of self-inherence in Spinoza’s definition of the concept. Here is part of Descartes’s own definition of substance at *Principles* §51:

By *substance* we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence. And there is only one substance which can be understood to depend on no other thing whatsoever, namely God.

In this passage, Descartes suggests that substances are characterized by their independence. But what might Descartes mean by this feature? On the one hand, it might be understood as ontological independence. We may say that some thing is ontologically independent if and only if that thing is not a state of anything else. By contrast, some thing is ontologically dependent in the sense that it is a state of some

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<sup>2</sup> I borrow this example, with some minor changes, from Morrison, “The Relation,” 2.

other thing. Redness is a state in which the cherry exists: redness *is in* in the cherry, or inheres in it. On the other hand, Descartes might also be understood as stating that substances are causally independent entities, inasmuch as they are not caused to exist by anything else.<sup>3</sup> At 1D3 Spinoza should be understood as claiming that a substance is an ontologically independent being: a substance is “in itself,” whereas a mode is “in another” (1D5). The characterization suggests that a mode is a state of a substance, whereas a substance is not a state of anything else.<sup>4</sup>

While Spinoza does not define substance in causal terms at 1D3, he does, however, prove the causal independence of substance at 1p6c1. The argument there relies only upon 1D3 and 1A4 (which I discuss in detail at 1.2 below). That axiom associates conception with causation: for Spinoza, conceiving a thing requires conceiving it according to its causes. Because substances are the kinds of things that by definition are not conceived through anything else, they cannot - given the fundamental Spinozistic assumption that conception involves causation - be caused to exist by anything else. Thus, for Spinoza, every *conceptually* independent being must also be *causally* self-sufficient. Although this characterization does not yet establish that a substance exists, it suggests that if any substance does exist it will either be (i) uncaused or (ii) self-caused.

Spinoza favours the second option, contending in the very next proposition that substance is “the cause of itself” (1p7d). The argument there relies only upon the premise that substances are causally independent entities (1p6c1) and on the assumption that everything must have a cause. If substances cannot be caused by anything else, they will either be uncaused or self-caused. They cannot be uncaused, on Spinoza’s view, because of his commitment to the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR): “for each thing there must be assigned a cause, *or* reason, both for its existence and for its nonexistence” (1p11d2).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that Descartes distinguishes between two senses of substance at *Principles* §51. God is the only *causally* independent substance; created substances, on the other hand, while they are substances for Descartes, require “God’s ordinary concurrence” - i.e. they depend upon God as the cause for their existence. For an instructive discussion of these topics in the context of Spinoza’s own definition of substance see Melamed, “The Building Blocks of Spinoza’s Metaphysics,” 87–90.

<sup>4</sup> For discussion see Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 59.

<sup>5</sup> For an excellent summary of Spinoza’s usage of the PSR in his argument for the existence of God see Viljanen, “Spinoza’s Ontology,” 73–74. It should be noted that the importance of the PSR to

Spinoza defines God in 1D6 as follows:

By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence.

At 1p11, Spinoza claims that the kind of being described at 1D6 must necessarily exist:

God, or a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists.

The argument at 1p11 contains several different demonstrations. One of these demonstrations has received particular attention because of the emphasis that Spinoza places there on the PSR. In that demonstration - 1p11d2 - Spinoza appeals directly only to the PSR together with the view that he defends at 1p7, according to which any existing substance must be a cause of its own existence. The argument can thus be spelled out as follows. There must be a cause for the existence or non-existence of some thing (PSR). Thus, there must a cause for the existence or non-existence of a substance. But a cause of a substance can only be internal to that substance because substances are causally isolated beings (1p7). So only a substance's essence can provide a cause for its existence or nonexistence. Now, if a substance did not exist, then its essence would have to involve a contradictory notion (like that of square circle). But there is no reason to think that a substance's essence involves a contradiction. Thus, there is no cause for the non-existence of a substance. Hence, a substance must exist and its essence must provide the cause of its own existence. (Otherwise its nonexistence would be a brute or unexplained fact, which violates the PSR.) We arrive then at the same conclusion that Spinoza arrives at 1p11, namely, that the kind of being defined as a substance in 1D6 necessarily exists.<sup>6</sup>

Let us pause and take stock. Spinoza's definition of substance in ontological and conceptual terms – as something which inheres only in itself and is conceived through

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Spinoza has been at the centre of one the most productive debates in recent scholarship. Della Rocca (*Spinoza*) influences many discussions.

<sup>6</sup> A useful, influential account of Spinoza's arguments for the existence of God at 1p11 is Garrett, "Spinoza's 'Ontological' Argument."

itself – forms a premise in his argument for the claim that substances are causally independent entities (1p6c1) and in the argument for the view that if a substance exists its essence will provide the cause of its own existence (1p7d). Granted certain additional premises that include a conception of the PSR, Spinoza can draw an important conclusion at 1p11 from mere causal - ultimately, conceptual - considerations about the nature of substance: at least one substance, God, necessarily exists.

These commitments also contribute to Spinoza’s argument for substance monism. In fact, shortly after proving God’s existence at 1p11, Spinoza argues that God is the only substance:

1p14: Except God, no substance can be or be conceived.

Substance monism, as I will use the concept here, is the view that there is only one thing – God – that is in itself and that can be conceived entirely through itself. The argument for this claim depends on the thesis that no two substances could share the same attribute (1p5), and on the view that God, a being who possesses all possible attributes (this is how Spinoza understands “infinite attributes” at 1D6), necessarily exists.

Because there is only one thing that inheres in itself and is conceived through itself - God - it follows that all other existing things must, on the account of the *Ethics*, inhere in something other than themselves in relation to which they must also be conceived. That is, they must be “modes,” rather than substances. Recall that Spinoza defines “mode” as something which is in a substance:

1D5: By mode I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived [*in alio est, per quod etiam concipitur*].

Because all things other than God inhere in and are conceived through a substance, the conclusion that everything other than God is a mode must hold true of all things: ants, trees, staplers, and also human beings. Spinoza advances this view at 1p15 and, most clearly, at 1p25c. At 2p10, he explicitly asserts that human beings are not substances:

1p15: Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God.



1p25c: Particular things are nothing but affections of God's attributes, or modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way.

2p10: The being of substance does not pertain to the essence of man, or substance does not constitute the form of man.

For our purposes, Spinoza's characterization of ordinary things as modes of God suggests that Spinoza endorses a distinctive, particularly strong version of the view that human beings depend upon God. Descartes's account of substance suggests that he takes human beings to be causally dependent on God. It also suggests, however, that because they are substances, in a different sense, human beings exist outside of God and are, to an extent, independent of God. Arguably, Spinoza's substance monism forces upon him a stricter account of this relation. Ordinary things inhere in God, according to Spinoza, in that they causally depend upon God for their existence,<sup>7</sup> and also in the sense that they are not really distinct from God. Particular things *are* God, insofar as they are a finite modification of the only existing substance.<sup>8</sup> These points suggest that, because God is all of being and everything is in God, God's laws will have to characterize each human being and everything alike.

### 1.2. Spinoza's Causal Axiom

Axiom 4 of Part 1 - known as "Spinoza's causal axiom" - associates conception with causation:

The knowledge [*cognitio*] of an effect depends on, and involves [*involvit*], the knowledge of its cause.

I have noted above that 1A4 plays a central role in Spinoza's argument for the view that substances are causally independent entities at 1p6, which is in turn a fundamental premise for the claim that at least one substance necessarily exists (1p11 via 1p7).

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<sup>7</sup> See 1p16c1: "From this [1p16] it follows that God is the efficient cause of all things which can fall under an infinite intellect."

<sup>8</sup> They are not, however, *parts* of God because, strictly speaking, substances are indivisible and thus have no parts. Melamed ("The Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics," 105) draws my attention to this aspect of Spinoza's account of substance.

Spinoza makes direct use of the causal axiom to prove other crucial metaphysical views. Among these are the doctrines that two things that do not have an attribute in common cannot causally interact (1p6 via 1p3); that the order and connection of things is identical to the order and connection of ideas (2p7); and that the human mind has perceptions of the nature of external bodies (2p16). The axiom also figures indirectly in the demonstration of substance monism (1p14 via 1p11) and in one of Spinoza's proofs of necessitarianism (1p29 via 1p25 and 1p26).

In recent years a lot of scholarly attention has been devoted to the meaning of 1A4, and on whether the axiom can be given a univocal interpretation that allows it to play all the different roles that Spinoza assigns to it.<sup>9</sup> Spinoza's usage of 1A4 makes it clear that, at minimum, the axiom entails the doctrine that conception implies causation.<sup>10</sup> That doctrine can, very briefly, be stated as follows:

(1) if **A** is conceived through **B**, then **A** is caused by **B**.

There are also good reasons to think that, as Michael Della Rocca has argued, Spinoza understands conception in terms of explanation, and that one should thus read the relation of conception stated in 'A is conceived through B' as equivalent to an explanatory relation of the form 'A is explained by B.'<sup>11</sup> Spinoza's understanding of the 'conceived-through' relation in the argument for parallelism at 2p7s may appear to show that this is Spinoza's view:

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<sup>9</sup> At the centre of this debate are Bennett, *A Study*, 29–30, 127–31; and Wilson, "Spinoza's Causal Axiom."

<sup>10</sup> Here, the relevant textual evidence is 1p25, whose demonstration relies on the "conception implies causation doctrine." I first became acquainted with this argument by reading Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 90. Don Garrett was, to my knowledge, the first to name this view the "conception implies causation doctrine." See Garrett, "Spinoza's Conatus Argument." Note also that there is significant scholarly consensus that this view forms part of Spinoza's account of 1A4. However, for a different view see Morrison, "The Relation."

<sup>11</sup> Lin, in his treatment of the 'conceived-through' relation in Spinoza, helpfully refers to Della Rocca's own discussion of the topic, and my own treatment here is indebted to both of their accounts. Wilson also makes a similar point in her discussion of 1A4, 1A5 and 1p3. See Lin, "Substance, Attribute, and Mode in Spinoza," 145–46; Della Rocca, *Representation*, 3–4; and Wilson, "Spinoza's Causal Axiom," 146.

When I said [NS: before] that God is the cause of the idea, say of a circle, only insofar as he is a thinking thing, and [the cause] of the circle, only insofar as he is an extended thing, this was for no other reason than because the formal being of the idea of the circle can be perceived [*percipi*] only through another mode of thinking, as its proximate cause, and that mode again through another, and so on, to infinity. Hence, so long as things are considered as modes of thinking, we must explain the order of the whole of Nature, or the connection of causes, through the attribute of thought alone (G II. 90).

Here, Spinoza says that when one perceives (*percipi*) effects through their causes, one is thereby *explaining* the order of nature. The fact that Spinoza, as Della Rocca also points out, often uses “perceives” and “conceives” interchangeably (e.g., 2p38d), suggests that Spinoza takes claims about conception to be equivalent to claims about explanation.

A different axiom of Part 1, which treats the notions of conception and understanding as equivalent, appears to give further support to Della Rocca’s interpretation of the meaning of the causal axiom:

1A5: Things that have nothing in common with one another also cannot be understood through one another, *or* [*sive*] the concept of the one does not involve the concept of the other.

If we assume the premise that explanation is what generates understanding, then it seems to follow that claims about how things are conceived just are claims about how things may be explained, according to Spinoza.

Della Rocca’s interpretation suggests a relevant doctrinal connection for our purposes here. If the ‘conceived-through’ relation in Spinoza is to be understood as a matter of explanation, then replacing the equivalents in the first formulation above of the “conception implies causation doctrine” entails the view that

(2) if **A** is explained through **B**, then **A** is caused by **B**.

That is, if Della Rocca is right in associating conception and explanation in Spinoza, then, via the substitution of equivalents in (1) we arrive at the controversial conclusion that all explanation is causation, according to Spinoza.

One might (and perhaps in a sense I think one ought to) be suspicious of this conclusion, and understand it as a highly generalized principle that captures only

particular instances of explanation. As Benson Mates hints in his discussion of Leibniz's use of the PSR, a proper analysis of the relation between explanation – whose domain is that of *reasons*, not *causes* – and causation may reveal that it is a mistake to assimilate causal relations and propositional relations. Causal relations are relations that obtain between cause and effect, while propositional relations obtain between explanans and explanandum. So, for instance, one might explain why '2+3 is a prime number' by relating it to the proposition '2+3=5,' which is the reason doing the explanation; arguably, however, it seems that this reason *cannot* count as cause. So there appear to be at least some instances in which explanation need not involve causation.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps a more restrictive (and plausible) account of 1A4 could avoid these counterexamples. But no such account can be found in Spinoza's usage of the causal axiom.<sup>13</sup> On the contrary, what one finds in Spinoza is a perfectly general metaphysical thesis, according to which there is a causal condition of some sort on explanation. If that is right, then one's ability to explain some thing will involve, according to Spinoza, one's ability to understand its causes.

The same passage in which Della Rocca finds an equivalence between conception and explanation, also appears to link explanation and causation (2p7s, G II. 90):

Hence, so long as things are considered as modes of thinking, *we must explain the order of the whole of Nature, or the connection of causes*, through the attribute of thought alone.<sup>14</sup>

Here, Spinoza appears to say that explaining the order of nature is the same as understanding causal relations. It seems to suggest that the content of an explanation will have to include an account that identifies the causes of the event to be explained. The expression "reason or cause" (*causa sive ratio*) at 1p11d2 is further evidence that Spinoza links these concepts.

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<sup>12</sup> See Mates, *The Philosophy of Leibniz*, 158–61.

<sup>13</sup> Relatedly, Bennett (*A Study*, §8.3, 29-30) writes that Spinoza does not distinguish causal from logical necessity and that he "thinks that a cause relates to its effect as a premise does to a conclusion which follows from it," even though this "does not bring into mathematics anything we would call 'causal.'" I return to this problem in §7.

<sup>14</sup> Emphasis added.

The notion that explanation is conceptually linked to causation has a long history, and this precedent might constitute another reason to attribute the view to Spinoza. Aristotle is arguably the earliest systematic thinker that explicitly endorses this account. His position is perhaps clearest at *Physics* II. 3:

[W]e think we have knowledge of a thing only when we can answer the question about it ‘On account of what?’ and that is to grasp the primary cause.<sup>15</sup>

So, Spinoza has an understanding of the relation between explanation and causation that is similar to that of Aristotle. This is not entirely surprising. Despite the general critical attitude that many philosophers of the early modern period displayed towards Aristotle and the Aristotelian tradition, the doctrine that explanation involves causation remained largely unchallenged throughout the early modern period.<sup>16</sup>

Critical debate about the precise way in which explanation and causal dependence relate to one another in Spinoza is ongoing. Certainly, Spinoza associates them closely in some way. The causal axiom appears to suggest, then, that whatever Spinoza’s stance towards teleology might be, that stance will concern primarily the question of whether a certain kind of explanation can adequately account for the relation between a thing’s activity and the *cause* of that activity. Accordingly, whether Spinoza can accept the legitimacy of a certain kind of teleological explanation will depend upon whether he accepts that some kind of activity can be genuinely guided by some end, purpose or goal. Therefore, throughout this dissertation I will understand by the notion of ‘teleology’ any scheme of explanation that describes the existence and the activity of some thing by reference to its ends, goals or purposes – that is, to the *final causes* that explain why the thing is the way it is and behaves the way it does.<sup>17</sup>

### 1.3. Causal Determinism In Spinoza

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<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, II.3, 194b17-19.

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed defence of this claim see Nadler, “Doctrines of Explanation.”

<sup>17</sup> For a similar definition of ‘teleology’ see also Hübner, “Unorthodox,” 365.

In this and in the following sub-section, I outline the meaning of two Spinozistic doctrines which will be a focus of §§4-5: causal determinism and necessitarianism. In those sections I argue that these doctrines drive Spinoza's rejection of divine teleology.

On its common characterization, efficient-cause determinism is the view according to which every event is causally determined by antecedent conditions together with the laws of nature.<sup>18</sup> It is widely agreed that Spinoza endorses a version of causal determinism, and 1A4 is a source of this view in the *Ethics*. Spinoza uses the causal axiom in the demonstration of 1p25, contending there that everything must have an efficient cause because everything is conceived through God. The clearest statement of determinism in the *Ethics*, however, occurs at 1p28, a proposition that will be of particular interest to me where I discuss Spinoza's reasons for rejecting the common account of divine providence in §4:

1p28: Every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity.

Spinoza makes it clear at 2D7 that by "singular thing" he has in mind every finite thing. Thus, 1p28 paired with 2D7 entails the view that all finite things – ants, trees, staplers and human beings alike – causally depend upon other singular things for their existence.

While there is no direct reference in 1p28 to the laws of nature, Spinoza elsewhere claims that the laws govern each link in the causal nexus. An early text, the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect (TdIE)*, is perhaps the most straightforward textual source for this view:<sup>19</sup>

[E]verything that happens happens according (...) to certain laws of Nature.

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<sup>18</sup> This characterization is Garrett's. See Garrett, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism," 191–92.

<sup>19</sup> *TdIE* §12, G II. 8.

According to standard accounts of causal determinism, however, the laws of nature do not fully determine the ways in which change takes place. Rather, they set the constraints on how events follow from their given antecedent causes. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza appears to lay down this aspect of his causal determinism at 3p2s (G II. 142):

[N]o one has yet determined what the body can do (...) from the laws of Nature *alone*, insofar as Nature is only considered to be corporeal (...).<sup>20</sup>

On a plausible reading of this text, Spinoza contends that the laws of nature cannot fully (i.e., “alone”) determine the changes by themselves. Antecedent events, as 1p28 makes clear, are also needed to account for the changes in the world. Thus, for Spinoza, an explanation of any particular thing will demand both knowledge of the laws of nature and an understanding of its antecedent causes.

In addition to placing requirements on explanation, Spinoza’s causal determinism is also relevant for his account of agency. His rejection of free will, for example, relies on causal determinism as a premise (1p32). Spinoza also emphasizes the point that determinism is a universal doctrine and as such applies equally to God’s actions and volitions. In §4 we will see that Spinoza’s rejection of divine teleology has a basis in his causal determinism. In particular, determinism implies that God has no free will, and rules out an ordinary account on which God acts teleologically by choosing freely among alternatives. Furthermore, as we shall see in §5, Spinoza’s commitment to causal determinism in the *Ethics* also provides the ground for his robust account of necessity.

#### 1.4. Necessitarianism In Spinoza

While Spinoza’s determinism is a premise in his argument to necessitarianism, the doctrines are nevertheless different. Necessitarianism, on a standard characterization, is the view according to which every event is logically or metaphysically necessary, and could not have been otherwise.<sup>21</sup> One can in principle allow for a deterministic world

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<sup>20</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup> This characterization of necessitarianism may be found in Garrett, “Spinoza’s Necessitarianism,” 191–92. It is not clear to me whether Spinoza’s system has the conceptual resources to distinguish between these different types of modality. Following Garret’s characterization, I understand

whose existence is not necessary, if one believes that there could have existed at least one other world containing a different set of events (even if these events were thoroughly determined by antecedent conditions together with the laws of nature). So one can in principle be a determinist without adhering to necessitarianism. Likewise, one can also be a necessitarian without being a determinist, if one thinks that there is only one possible world and that, in that world, there is at least one event that does not follow from previous antecedent events together with the laws of nature.

We have already seen that the existence of God, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, is necessary, according to Spinoza. So the actual substance and its attributes could not have failed to exist and could not have been any different than they are. Spinoza's generalization of this commitment to include every mode, finite and infinite, occurs most explicitly at 1p33:<sup>22</sup>

1p33: Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced.

In the scholium to this proposition Spinoza also makes clear that contingency is not a feature of the world, but an epistemological notion: it signals our own uncertainty about what is the case.

Spinoza's endorsement of necessitarianism has striking consequences for his conception of agency, and throughout this dissertation I argue that necessitarianism is the principal motivation behind Spinoza's general rejection of teleology. At minimum, acceptance of necessitarianism should lead us to reject folk explanations of agency on which human beings - and perhaps God as well - act by selecting among different possible courses of action. In fact, necessitarianism should lead us to reject the idea that there are possible alternatives altogether. If the world must be exactly the way it is, then all possibilities, including all actions, must be necessarily actualized in this world.

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necessitarianism in Spinoza to involve both the necessity of all true logical propositions and of all metaphysical facts.

<sup>22</sup> It should be noted from the outset that there is considerable scholarly disagreement about Spinoza's views on modality. The main interpretative question revolves around the issue of whether Spinoza endorses strict necessitarianism, the view on which there is only one possible world. I address this issue and defend a necessitarian reading of Spinoza in §5.



### 1.5. Teleology In Spinoza

In this final sub-section, I outline a framework that will allow me to situate the different passages concerning teleology in Spinoza's system. Before proceeding, it is worth noting that it has become conventional in Spinoza scholarship to refer to teleology of three different kinds: divine, thoughtful, and unthoughtful. 'Divine teleology' is the attribution of goal-directed behaviour to God's causal activity, and it is also usually understood as involving thought. 'Thoughtful teleology' involves cognitive beings (most notably, human beings) that are capable of representing and acting on the basis of future states of affairs. 'Unthoughtful teleology' refers to the activity of non-cognitive beings (e.g., trees and staplers), and it is usually understood as being independent of thought. It is a neat heuristic framework because it allows us to categorise views about Spinoza's conception of teleology: for example, one might say that Spinoza rejects divine teleology but that he endorses thoughtful (i.e., human) teleology.<sup>23</sup>

This framework comes, however, with some unattractive conceptual implications. There are reasons, for instance, to be suspicious that Spinoza would allow for any meaningful distinction between human activity and the activity of non-cognitive beings. His endorsement of naturalism, the thesis that everything is alike in important respects, is an obvious quick route to this conclusion.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, there are also reasons to think that Spinoza would deny that thought is a distinctive mark of some kinds of activity. At least two doctrines of the *Ethics* seem to support this conclusion. One is Spinoza's parallelism, which implies that for every mode of extension there will be a corresponding idea of everything that happens to its body (2p7s; 2p12). The other is Spinoza's panpsychism, the view on which everything has a mind and is animated to some degree (2p13s). These views suggest that whatever types of causal activity there might be in nonmental finite things (efficient, final, formal, etc.), those types of activity will be the same in mental things.

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<sup>23</sup> Notable works that make use of these labels include Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza"; Lin, "Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza," 318–19; Viljanen, *Spinoza's Geometry of Power*, chap. 5; and Sangiacomo, "The Polemical Target."

<sup>24</sup> Spinoza's clearest statement of naturalism occurs in the Preface to Part 3 of the *Ethics* (G II. 137–8). For a more detailed characterization of this view see LeBuffe, *From Bondage to Freedom*, 40.

I think that we can get a better grasp of Spinoza's stance on the issue of teleology if we recover from the outset a distinction between external end-directedness and internal end-directedness that forms part of the traditional discussion of the topic in ancient Greek thought.<sup>25</sup> Externally oriented forms of teleology are models of explanation in which the end, goal, or purpose of a being is extrinsic to the being itself, which thus has an external, end-directed principle of change, found in the mind or will of an external agent. The example of a craftsman who builds an artefact that fulfils the craftsman's purpose is a typical example of external end-directedness. Whether, in Spinoza's system, God orients the totality of nature towards a certain purpose and whether particular things have end-structured essences given to them by God are questions that pertain to this model of teleological explanation. On the other hand, internally oriented forms of teleology are models of explanation in which the goal, end or purpose of a being is intrinsic to the being itself, which thus has an internal, end-directed principle of change. A plant naturally pursuing its own nutrition might be an example of a singular thing aiming at a definite result without being compelled to do so by the action of another.<sup>26</sup>

Here, I will quickly dismiss any view on which Spinoza takes human activity to be a case of external end-directedness. The reasons for this are both heuristic and philosophical, and I shall emphasise them when I reply to the objection that Spinoza allows for human teleology in §7. Here, what requires emphasis is the point that claims about the causal activity of human beings for Spinoza just *are* claims concerning the causal activity of finite modes. Human beings, trees, ants and all other ordinary things on the account of the *Ethics* are, fundamentally, modes. And so characterizations of any one of these entities will have to apply to the others also. Because Spinoza does not distinguish in any metaphysically significant way between human beings and other

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<sup>25</sup> Karen Detlefsen offers a very helpful sketch of these two strains, and her application of them to Descartes influences my own approach to Spinoza here. See Detlefsen, "Teleology and Natures in Descartes' Sixth Meditation," 157–59.

<sup>26</sup> There are other considerations here that I set aside. Some forms of teleology can integrate aspects of both external and internal end-directedness. Aquinas arguably offers such an account. He holds that God, an external agent, has conveyed a teleological structure onto natural things. See, e.g., Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, book 3, part 1, chapter 1, 31–32. Because I take Spinoza to reject both external and internal end-directedness, I also take him to reject the elements upon which other hybrid accounts depend.

individual things, it is best to understand both his claims about the activity of human beings and other modes under the same strain of causation.

## §2. An Initial Account

A time-honored accounting of Spinoza's attitude towards teleology casts him as a radical opponent of any form of goal-directed activity. On this view, Spinoza denies that anything - including God and human beings - acts on account of an end. Already Leibniz - Spinoza's contemporary, correspondent and critic - captures this aspect of Spinoza's thought when he writes that the "Spinozist view (...) dismisses the search for final causes and explains *everything* through brute necessity."<sup>27</sup> Call this view the Standard Interpretation. There appears to be straightforward textual evidence that Spinoza intends to ban teleology entirely from his metaphysics, and that for him teleological explanations signal our own uncertainty about what is the case. This is perhaps clearest in *Ethics* 1 Appendix, where Spinoza maintains that "Nature has no ends set before it" and that "all final causes are nothing but human fictions" (G II. 80). In line with remarks like these, proponents of the Standard Interpretation cast Spinoza as a radical opponent of any form of external and any form of internal end-directed teleology.

It is a clear-cut picture, even if it raises difficult issues. However, readers who try to understand other aspects of Spinoza's system, and particularly readers who focus on his moral psychology and ethical theory, frequently lose the impression that Spinoza's critique of teleology is universal in scope, and in particular the impression that Spinoza denies that human beings frequently act for the sake of ends.<sup>28</sup> For instance, as the *Apparent Teleology In Human Action* suggests, Spinoza's main psychological claims appear to describe human activity in terms of the ends that we seek when we act. Thus, for example, Spinoza suggests that we strive to attain those things that we associate with joy and to avoid those that we associate with sadness (3p28). Remarks like this, it is claimed, would make no sense if human action were not goal directed.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, in an influential paper, Don Garrett has challenged the Standard Interpretation contending that, despite appearances to the contrary, there is a strong textual case for the conclusion

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<sup>27</sup> Leibniz, *New Essays*, I, 73. Emphasis added.

<sup>28</sup> Recent influential studies on Spinoza's moral theory that retain some version of human teleology include LeBuffe, *From Bondage to Freedom*, 37; and Kisner, *Spinoza on Human Freedom*, 88, n.2.

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., Lin, "Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza," 320.

that Spinoza allows for *some* teleological explanations. Moreover, on Garrett's account, this position is consistent with Spinoza's metaphysics because, together with other doctrines, Spinoza's distinction between substance and mode gives him the flexibility to deny ends to God while attributing them to human beings in particular, and to finite things in general.<sup>30</sup> On this account, Spinoza rejects, and is committed to rejecting, external-end directedness but endorses internal end-directed teleology. Call this view the Modest Interpretation.

I think that the chief claim of the Standard Interpretation is correct and that although Garrett raises difficult challenges for a systematic reading of Spinoza, the Modest Interpretation creates additional textual problems and does not square with Spinoza's basic metaphysical commitments. An initial sketch of the reasons that preclude divine teleology in *Ethics* 1 Appendix will provide a framework for the interpretation of Spinoza's views on the causal structure of finite modes: any account of the kind of motive tendencies that characterizes modal activity will have to be consistent with Spinoza's own reasons for rejecting the attribution of ends to substance. Attention to these reasons, I argue, shows that Spinoza cannot endorse even more modest forms of teleology.

Here, I emphasize Spinoza's commitment to necessitarianism and argue that, given other Spinozistic claims, necessitarianism precludes any kind of teleological causation. While there has been considerable debate on Spinoza's views on necessity in recent scholarship, there is not yet, to my knowledge, a comprehensive treatment of the relation between necessity and teleology in Spinoza. In this section I offer an initial statement of my view and argue that necessitarianism is the principal reason motivating Spinoza's critique of both external and internal end-directed teleology. A notable theme of the section is that Spinoza endorses a version of the view that human beings are like God. Unlike other traditional versions of that doctrine, Spinoza includes the bold, counterintuitive view that all things, including human beings, are like God in that they necessarily do everything that they can do: there is no possibility, finite or infinite, that is not always completely exercised.

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<sup>30</sup> Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza," 316–17.

In the course of the argument – both here and in the sections that follow - it will be useful to refer back to the intellectual milieu that forms part of Spinoza’s attack on teleology. As it is often noted, teleology played a critical role in the pre-modern understanding of natural events. Aristotle’s account of causation in the *Physics* makes him a foundational figure in this influential tradition. Very briefly, his fundamental claim there is that the effects that things produce as efficient causes are what those things aim at. Aristotle’s account of final causation is closely related to his account of change as movement from potency to act. For an Aristotelian, things could not *systematically* move from a condition of potentiality to one of actuality without final causation, that is, without aiming at a specific result. In *Physics* II. 8 Aristotle holds that, for the most part, the regular outcomes of natural processes cannot be merely accidental, and that these regular outcomes cannot be made intelligible through the operation of efficient causes alone, blindly following their course. They must result from a real teleological feature – the final cause - taking place at the centre of those natural processes:

[A]ll things which are due to nature, come to be as they do always or for the most part, and nothing which is the outcome of luck or an automatic outcome does that. (...) *The ‘for something’, then, is present in things which are and come to be due to nature.*<sup>31</sup>

Hence, for this tradition, the consequences of events must be causally efficacious because they determine how efficient causes are organized: namely, around the attainment of a certain end.

Aristotle’s account of causation thus commits him to the view that final causes are distinct and real features of all natural events. Because, as we have seen in §1, Aristotle accepts, as Spinoza does at 1A4, that there is a causal condition of some sort on explanation, it follows that, for Aristotle, final causes have to figure into the *only* complete or sufficient explanation of a natural event. To anticipate what is a central topic in the debate over Spinoza, one might think that, in rejecting final causes, Spinoza is rejecting Aristotle’s view by maintaining the thesis that there are some independently sufficient explanations of events that do not include final causation. While this

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<sup>31</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, II. 8, 198b35-199a10. Emphasis added.

interpretation of Spinoza is correct, it is also incomplete. Spinoza also rejects the hypothesis that there may be other equally valid independent explanations in teleological terms. In other words: Spinoza contends that final causes are not part of *any* explanation of natural events.

The detailed case for the attribution of these views to Spinoza should start, then, with his case against divine teleology in *Ethics* 1 Appendix. Spinoza sets out his view in the following passage (G II. 80):

Nature has no ends set before it, and (...) all final causes are nothing but human fictions. For I believe I have already sufficiently established it (...) by P16, P32C1, and C2, and all those [propositions] by which I have shown that all things proceed by a certain eternal necessity of Nature.

This passage seems to establish a clear connection between the rejection of final causation and necessitarianism. First, the phrase “a certain eternal necessity of Nature” may plausibly be read as a reference to the view that things could not have been otherwise. Second, the propositions that Spinoza cites in support of his claim that “Nature has no ends set before it” are related to the view that everything is necessary. Because those propositions will be a central focus throughout this thesis, it is worthwhile quoting them at length here (with textual references to necessitarianism marked in italics):

1p16: From *the necessity of the divine nature* there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect).

1p32c1: From this [1p32] it follows, first, that God does not produce any effect from freedom of the will.

1p32c2: It follows, second, that *will and intellect are related to God's nature as motion and rest are, and as are absolutely all natural things, which (by P29) must be determined by God to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.* For the will, like all other things, requires a cause by which it is determined to exist and produce an effect in a certain way. And although from a given will, *or* intellect, infinitely many things may follow, God still cannot be said, on that account, to act from freedom of the will, any more that he can be said to act from freedom of motion and rest on account of those things that follow from motion and rest (for infinitely many things also follow from motion and rest). *So will does not pertain to God's nature any more than do the other natural things, but it is related to him in the same way as motion and rest, and all the*

*other things which, as we have shown, follow from the necessity of the divine nature and are determined by it to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.*

The remarks that I consider here to constitute a reference to necessitarianism, which will also be a focus of §§4-5, include 1p16 and 1p32c2.<sup>32</sup> The central claim of 1p16 is that every mode follows from God's essence, and at 1p32c2 Spinoza contends that all of God's volitions are necessary because they follow from God's nature.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the only proposition that Spinoza cites at 1p32c2 is 1p29, whose derivation relies directly upon 1p16. Proposition 29 of Part 1 is also one of the clearest statements of necessitarianism in the *Ethics*.<sup>34</sup> It reads:

In nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.

Thus, although Spinoza does not explicate the nature of these connections, the principal passage of *Ethics* 1 Appendix makes clear that there is a relation of some kind between (i) the rejection of at least some form of teleology, (ii) necessitarianism, and (iii) the way things follow from God's essence. The question for us, then, is this. How does Spinoza understand the nature of these relations?

I believe that we ought to read 1p32c2 as articulating these three different themes of Spinoza's metaphysics. The deductive chain of 1p32c2 is helpful in understanding the relation between (ii)-(iii). Very briefly, we can reconstruct Spinoza's reasoning there as follows. God and God's modes are all that exists (1p15). God exists necessarily (1p11). We know from 1p16 that all modes follow necessarily from God and are determined by God to produce effects in a certain way. Let us assume that whatever follows from something necessary is itself necessary. If God's existence is necessary, then the existence of all modes and all their causal relations must be necessary in virtue of 1p16.

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<sup>32</sup> I return to Spinoza's own motivation for accepting 1p32c1 in §4.

<sup>33</sup> Although I will not engage with this claim here, it should be noted that in principle 1p16 is consistent with there being entities that do not follow from God's nature. This is because it is not entirely clear whether at 1p16 Spinoza uses *modus* in a technical sense (i.e., as entities that pertain to the modal category of being) or in an ordinary sense (i.e., roughly equivalent to the English noun 'ways').

<sup>34</sup> This view of 1p29 is controversial. I defend it in §5.



Given that nothing exists apart from God and God's modes, it follows that the existence of everything in nature is necessary. In other words, there is nothing whose existence and action is contingent (1p29). By 1p31, all divine volitions are infinite *modes*, and thus they must fall under the scope of 1p29. In turn this allows Spinoza to conclude that everything that God creates by means of his volitions (as well as its corresponding states of affairs in the attribute of extension) must exist necessarily (1p32c2).<sup>35</sup> To return, then, to the relation between necessity and the way things follow from the divine nature, we see that a commitment to 1p16 – a commitment to a kind of dependence of every mode on a necessary being – leads Spinoza to endorse a version of necessitarianism.<sup>36</sup>

So, 1p16, 1p29 and 1p32c2 show that Spinoza endorses a version of the view that things could not have been otherwise, and we have seen that in *Ethics* 1 Appendix Spinoza quotes 1p16 and 1p32c2 explicitly in his case against teleology. The most relevant consequences of necessitarianism for Spinoza's account of divine causation are negative: the modes that follow from the divine nature cannot be the result of God's voluntary choice directed at an end. In fact, necessitarianism leaves no room for an account of divine causation understood in terms of a choice to actualize one of several possible actions. This conclusion is clearest at 1p32c2, where Spinoza claims that "will and intellect are related to God's nature as motion and rest are," and that "*like all other natural things*, God's will (by P29) must be determined by God to exist and produce an effect in a certain way."<sup>37</sup> The salient point in this passage is that all divine volitions follow necessarily from the essence of God and are determined by it to produce effects that are themselves necessary. So God's production of his effects cannot be a consequence of a free, intentional choice directed at some end. Of course, this point is

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<sup>35</sup> Given that Spinoza thinks that there is a causal and explanatory barrier between the attributes it follows that, strictly speaking, volitions (and mental items more generally) cannot cause physical events. Rather, they cause the *mental correlates* of their corresponding states of affairs in the attribute of extension. For Spinoza's commitment to the causal barrier between the attributes see 2p6; for Spinoza's parallelism, the view on which the order and connection of things is identical under every attribute, see 2p7s.

<sup>36</sup> For similar assessments of 1p16 see Bennett, *A Study*, §29.5, 122; Garrett, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism," 205–9; Koistinen, "Spinoza's Proof of Necessitarianism," 285–87; and Lin, *Being and Reason*, 170–71.

<sup>37</sup> Emphasis added.

also implied by 1p16, an implication that Spinoza notices and endorses in the relevant passage from *Ethics* 1 Appendix. Spinoza's affirmation of strict necessitarianism at 1p16 entails that there can be no feature of the natural world – and, to be sure, no state of affairs that God creates by means of his volitions – that is not completely necessitated by God's essence (which is itself necessary). So God cannot choose ends from a range of alternative possibilities because no divine volition can be free in a sense that would allow for end-directed activity; that is, in the sense of being self-necessitated.

Turning now to finite modes, I have suggested that at 1p16 Spinoza defends the view that God's causal activity results in the *necessary* production of an infinity of modifications, including both infinite things, such as divine volitions, and finite things, such as human beings. Moreover, in the crucial passage of 1p32c2, which affirms necessity of the will, Spinoza maintains that God's causal necessity, by which he is led to create everything, also belongs to the things he creates. The crucial formulation of 1p32c2 reads: “[all things] follow from the necessity of the divine nature and are determined by it to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.” Together, the claims suggests that, in a sense, there is only one causal power, and only one way in which that power is exercised. The language of 1p32c2 gives further support to this conclusion in suggesting that from the adequate, monistic viewpoint God is, at the deepest level, the only causal agent: all things, as Spinoza writes there, “are determined *by it [God's nature]* to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.”<sup>38</sup> So 1p32c2 strongly suggests that God is all of causation and thus that one and the same mode of activity underlies all causality. The main argument in *Ethics* 1 Appendix appears, then, to be directed against all finality because the same necessity that characterizes God's activity also pertains to the activity of finite beings.

In fact, Spinoza explicitly associates the causal nature of finite things with God's causal nature in a series of difficult propositions about the activity of singular things:

3p6: Each thing, insofar as it is in itself, strives to persevere in its being.

Dem.: For singular things are modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way (by 1p25c), that is (by 1p34), things that express in a certain and determinate way, God's power by which God is and acts (...).

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<sup>38</sup> Emphasis added.

3p7: The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing.

Dem.: From the given essence of each thing some things necessarily follow (by 1p36), and things are able [to produce] nothing but what follows necessarily from their determinate nature (by 1p29). So the power of each thing, *or* the striving by which it (either alone or with others) does anything, *or* strives to do anything – that is (by 3p6), the power, *or* striving, by which it strives to persevere in its being, is nothing but the given, *or* actual, essence of the thing itself.

For singular things, including human beings, 3p6 suggests that the activity of modes is a striving to persevere in being. At 3p7, Spinoza goes on to argue that the striving that characterizes our causal activity just is our actual essence; in the demonstration, he cites 1p29, suggesting that the causal necessity that characterises God’s production of his modes is equally appropriate to account for the way in which effects follow from the essences of singular things. The language of 3p7 strikingly resembles that of 1p32c2, where, as I have interpreted him, Spinoza asserts that necessity in finite beings has the same character as necessity in God. So what he has made clear at 3p7 is that finite things act to bring about all the effects that can be understood through their nature in fundamentally the same way that God does: their actions are just as *blind and necessary* as God’s actions.

Ordinary explanations of human action are teleological because they appeal to intentions and desires, and Spinoza clearly accepts that desires cause and explain actions.<sup>39</sup> I can either go to the dairy in order to get an ice cream or I can go home in order to go for a bike ride. Whether my action is motivated or not, the fact that it is within my power to either go to the dairy or to go for a bike ride might also suggest that the intention of my action may figure centrally in its explanation: it is the object of my desire, ice-cream, that (at least partially) explains why I went to the dairy. For human beings, 3p6 and 3p7 themselves suggest, however, that it is improper to speak of agents having power to accept or to reject ends, and thus that the language of folk teleological

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<sup>39</sup> This is clearest, perhaps, at 3 DOA 1 where Spinoza defines desire as the essence of man. Given that, for Spinoza, our essence just is our conatus (3p7), and that our conatus is always (at least partially) a cause of our actions (3p9), it follows that our desires are always a cause of our actions. See also 3p9s, where Spinoza identifies desire, after a fashion, with striving.

explanations can be misleading. Strictly speaking, I could not have gone for a bike ride; if I went to the dairy instead that was because the relevant internal and external forces *necessitated* the action in those circumstances. In different circumstances, of course, I do for go bike rides, but then that action is also necessitated. Desires, with their imbedded intentions, have explanatory power, on this account, only insofar as they are understood as part of the complete chain of efficient causes that necessitates the action.

Although these points concern the actions of beings with robust mental lives, capable of complex thoughts and desires about the future, their conclusions are generalizable. If I am correct about human beings, then it is also correct to say about finite things in general that their actions are necessitated by the exercise of their own causal power together with the power of external objects. The accounts of 3p6 and 3p7 are characterizations of the causal nature of any singular thing, and thus they may be applied to account for the actions of every thing that belongs to the same relevant metaphysical class: that is, to every finite mode.

This section has been an initial statement of my reasons for taking Spinoza to reject all teleology: everything that follows from God's essence, including everything that God creates by means of his volitions, is necessitated from without and cannot be the result of a self-determining choice. In the sections that follow, it is my project to refine the view. In the following section I raise an initial objection to it. On that objection, causal determinism and a kind of necessitarianism may be compatible with teleological action. The objection will allow me to clarify my actual position in two ways. First, we will see that, in invoking determinism and necessitarianism in *Ethics* 1 Appendix, Spinoza ought to be understood as refuting two conditions that he places on teleology: (i) that an agent can choose ends freely, and (ii) that there is a range of possible states that the agent chooses among. This will be the topic of §§4-5. Second, the very same reasons that preclude teleology in God also apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the actions of all singular things. Attention to these reasons shows (§7) that Spinoza cannot endorse even more modest forms of teleology.

### **§3. Compatibility: An Objection From The Leibnizian Perspective**

On the view that I have just presented, causation is for Spinoza a single kind of event: there is, at bottom, one causal power and only way in which that power is exercised. In fact, Spinoza is quite explicit that God is not only the cause of himself but also the cause of all things (1p18; 1p25c). It is natural, and I think correct, to take Spinoza to assert by this that the causal activity of all things just *is* God's causality. Such a view does suggest that all kinds of activity will be determinations of one fundamental efficient cause – God – but it does not immediately indicate that the activity of all things, and their causal relations, will resemble God's. That emerges more clearly in *Ethics* 1 Appendix, where Spinoza appeals to his necessitarianism and argues, as I have interpreted him, that the same causal necessity that precludes teleology in God also correctly characterizes the causal relations that obtain between finite modes.

In this section, I outline an objection to my account. The objection arises from the Leibnizian perspective. Leibniz was Spinoza's correspondent and critic, and their concerns are the same in many respects. Leibniz is a compatibilist about causal determinism and universal teleology, and his system exhibits the sort of conceptual principles that are required for a teleological account of causation in the context of the new science, whose main tenets Spinoza also endorses. In particular, Leibniz upholds the view that both God and rational creatures act for the sake of ends that they perceive as good. Moreover, Leibniz also insists that this sort of teleological action is consistent with a weak, narrow kind of necessity. For present purposes, I will focus only on external-end directed teleology, which may be understood to involve two distinct questions, corresponding to two different aspects of causation: whether God's activity as a whole is directed to some intended purpose and whether particular beings in nature are directed by God towards ends.

Before proceeding, it should be noted from the outset that no scholar has, to my knowledge, attributed any kind of external-end directed activity to Spinoza. This is understandable, given that *Ethics* 1 Appendix is a polemic against the common view on which God has designed the world for the sake of human beings. In that text, Spinoza includes a very straightforward account of his programme. Immediately after declaring that people "maintain as certain that God himself directs all things to some certain end,

for they say that God has made all things for man,” Spinoza promises to “show [the] falsity” of this assumption (G II. 78). In the same text, Spinoza also emphasises a particular influential prejudice that he takes to arise from the belief in divine providence: namely, that God has created human beings for the purpose of worshiping God (G II. 82-3). So it is clear that by “all things” in the passage above Spinoza means both ordinary things and human beings. Moreover, the range of examples that Spinoza offers in this text – encompassing both natural disasters and the arrangements of living things – suggests to me that that it is best to interpret the passages as a statement against the attribution of any final causes to God, but it suggests even more explicitly that it is a mistake to find external end-directed teleology in finite things.<sup>40</sup>

Yet, I believe that a comprehensive treatment of external end-directedness is justified. First, it might be unclear whether Spinoza’s commitment to necessitarianism can deliver on his statement at *Ethics* 1 Appendix. One might wonder whether there is in fact any positive basis in Spinoza’s metaphysics for the rejection of external end-directedness. To be sure, the objection that I outline here accepts the textual evidence from the appendix on face value: Spinoza rejects some version of external end-directed teleology. It finds, however, the basis for such a view lacking in Spinoza because it is not obvious that a commitment to the thesis that things necessarily follow from a given essence can lead to the conclusion that there is no teleological causation in God’s production of his effects. One might even think that things behave teleologically precisely in virtue of their essences, which also necessitates them. On such a view, natural things tend towards the specific realization of their own essence, and it is their essence that necessarily determines the kinds of activity that they engage in. These points cast at least some initial doubt on the validity of Spinoza’s argument in the appendix. Second, and perhaps more relevant for current debates on Spinoza, I believe that the already quoted critical passage of the appendix is directed against *all* finality, and not only against divine providence.<sup>41</sup> So a clearer understanding of *how* the

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<sup>40</sup> See, notably, G II. 80-84. Among the living things he discusses, Spinoza offers an interesting, although brief, set of remarks about the structure of the human body at G II. 81. Incidentally, these remarks contrast sharply with Leibniz’s own discussion of the structure of living things in the *Discourse*, in a passage which I quote below.

<sup>41</sup> For a similar assessment see Viljanen, *Spinoza’s Geometry of Power*, 121–22; Bennett, *A Study*, §51.3, 216; Carriero, “Historical Perspective,” 57–58; Carriero, “Conatus and Perfection in Spinoza,” 84–85; and Melamed, “Teleology in Jewish Philosophy.” For a different view, on which

propositions of *Ethics* 1 yield the conclusion that there is no external end-directed teleology will also indicate why we should take those same propositions to show that Spinoza rejects all teleology.

Here, then, is the objection from the Leibnizian perspective. From the fact that everything has a cause that necessitates a given effect it does not follow that the relation between the cause and the effect is non-teleological. Now, Spinoza clearly holds that God's essence is the centre of God's causal activity. This point, although already implied by 1p16, is clearest at 1p34 and 1p36:

1p34: God's power is his essence itself.

1p36: Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow.

Note that Spinoza often uses the terms "nature" and "essence" interchangeably. In the opening of the *Ethics*, for example, he defines something as self-caused (*causa sui*) as that "whose essence involves existence, or [*sive*] that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing."<sup>42</sup> So, granted the equivalence between "nature" and "essence" here, 1p36 amounts to the claim that the effects of God's creative activity must be ultimately derivable from God's essence. Spinoza argues that God's essence is the efficient cause of all things at 1p16c1. So it is clear that he holds that all things necessarily follow from the essence of God as their efficient causes. The fact, however, is that they may very well be *necessitated* to follow teleologically in that way. Indeed, claims of the form 'God is the efficient cause of x' and claims of the form 'God acts for the sake of x' are neither logically nor metaphysically inconsistent. So, on this objection, the fact that everything has an efficient cause located in God's essence does not altogether rule out the possibility that everything might also, in a sense, follow necessarily from it with a purpose or end in view.

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the arguments of the appendix aim at divine teleology alone see Lin, "Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza," 322–27; Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza," 315–17; Curley, "On Bennet's Spinoza," 40–41; McDonough, "The Heyday," 189, 193; and Sangiacomo, "The Polemical Target," 410–11.

<sup>42</sup> Here, the Latin word *sive* is important because Spinoza often uses it to establish an equivalence. Other notable passages where Spinoza identifies "essence" with "nature" include 1p7, 1p11s, 1p16, 1p16d, 1p17s, 1p36d, 2p10c. Lin (*Being and Reason*, 140, n. 13) draws my attention to these passages.

Let us illustrate this point with an example: suppose that an idea of the good in God's intellect had determined God to create and arrange some or all states of the world in the way they are. On this scenario, even though God's creative activity had been determined (and one might say necessitated) by an infinite mode – namely, an idea in God's intellect<sup>43</sup> - the good is nonetheless the final cause of God's creation and thus his creative activity qualifies as teleological. So, perhaps every feature of the world is doubly determined in that it is caused mechanistically (by the arrangement and distribution of previous states of affairs) and teleologically (by the arrangement and distribution of posterior states of affairs). Perhaps either efficient or final causes are, on their own, sufficient to explain why every event occurs in the way it does. There is nothing in Spinoza's system, so goes the objection, that excludes compatibilism between determinism by efficient causes and determinism by final causes.

Leibniz holds something close to this account. Although he emphatically rejects Spinoza's view that things follow with *absolute* necessity from God – and, instead, ascribes to God's action a distinct kind of *hypothetical* necessity<sup>44</sup> – Leibniz nonetheless emphasises a sort of compatibility between two types of determinism: determinism by final causes and determinism by efficient causes. The following passages from the *Monadology* show that this is Leibniz's position:

§53: Now, since there is an infinity of possible universes in God's ideas, and since only one of them can exist, there must be a sufficient reason for God's choice, a reason which determines [*détermine*] him towards one thing rather than another.

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<sup>43</sup> Spinoza argues at 1p17s2 that God's intellect cannot pertain to the essence of God, by which he means that intellect cannot be an attribute of God (note that Spinoza defines attribute at 1D4 as "what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence"). At 1p31 he makes this point clearer by arguing that the divine intellect and its ideas belong to *Natura naturata*, a term by which Spinoza understands all the modes that follow from God's essence (1p29s). So it is clear from these texts that all ideas, including every divine idea, are modes of the attribute of thought. See also 1p21d, where Spinoza offers "God's idea in thought" as a specific example of an infinite mode.

<sup>44</sup> Hypothetical (or moral) necessity is a term that Leibniz uses to characterize God's choice of the actual world. It marks a distinction with "blind" necessity because, according to Leibniz, there are multiple possible worlds that God could have chosen to create but that he did not create because God's action is motivated by considerations about the good. See, especially, Leibniz, *Theodicy*, "Reflections on Hobbes," §3, 393.



§55: And this is the cause of the existence of the best, which wisdom makes known to God, which his goodness makes him choose, and which his power makes him produce.

The first claim of §53 states the familiar Leibnizian view that God has ideas of a virtually unlimited number of possible worlds. The second claim of §53 is the claim that there is a reason that is known to God and that determines his choice. This reason, §55 makes clear, is an idea of the good. Arguably, then, Leibniz contends that God's choice, which one might interpret as efficiently determined by his understanding, is teleologically directed by the good as the content of a divine idea. So Leibniz's account of the doctrine of divine creation, paired with his commitment to the existence of a plurality of possible worlds, allows him to affirm that the world is ordered with an end in view in virtue of God's choice of the best.

In §79 of the *Monadology*, Leibniz builds upon his account of divine creation to argue that either final or efficient causes can be used to explain natural events. There, the argument depends upon Leibniz's pre-established harmony: God has pre-determined the actions of bodies (which act by means of efficient causes) and the actions of souls (which act by means of final causes) such that there is a non-causal harmony between the two:

§79: Souls act according to the laws of final causes, through appetitions, ends, and means. Bodies act according to the laws of efficient causes or of motions. And these two kingdoms, that of efficient causes and that of final causes, are in harmony with each other.

Indeed, it is not only that God's activity as a whole is directed to some intended goal. Leibniz clearly maintains that particular things in the world have purposes given to them by God. Consider also the following passage from the early *Discourse on Metaphysics* (1686) that emphasises animal behaviour, but that emerges in the more general context of Leibniz's defence of teleology:<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Leibniz, *Discourse*, §19, 52-53. Note that the harmony between efficient and final causes in the *Monadology* appears most clearly at §§78-81. There, however, the topic arises in the context of Leibniz's discussion of the mind-body problem. A clearer and more fully developed account of Leibniz's defence of external end-directedness in the natural world appears in his "Tentamen

Anyone who sees the admirable structure of animals will find himself forced to recognize the wisdom of the author of things. (...) Moreover, it is unreasonable to introduce a supreme intelligence as orderer of things and then, instead of using his wisdom, use only the properties of matter to explain the phenomena.

It is better when trying to understand the biological functionings of natural beings to try to understand them as a product of God's providential plan, Leibniz writes here. So he clearly endorses a version of the view that particular things in nature have teleological functions given to them by God and therefore that there is external end-directed teleology in the natural world. We must admit, then, that God's strict determination of the world by means of efficient causes does not preclude teleological causation. In fact, God can have volitions that are compatible with efficient-cause determinism – and that, in a sense, necessitate God's causal activity – and that are nonetheless also the product of a final cause.

Emphasising not Spinoza's necessitarianism but his commitment to causal determinism, Jonathan Bennett reaches a similar evaluation of Spinoza's argument against teleology. Bennett interprets the crucial passage of *Ethics* 1 Appendix as a reference to universal efficient-cause determinism, the view on which everything has an efficient cause. Although I have interpreted the passage thus far as a reference to necessitarianism, I believe that Bennett's assessment also captures an important view: 1p16 and 1p32c1 can be read, correctly, as a direct reference to efficient-cause determinism. Very briefly, 1p16 commits Spinoza, via its first corollary, to the view that everything has an efficient cause, and universal determinism is a premise in Spinoza's rejection at 1p32c1 that God has a kind of free will.<sup>46</sup> According to Bennett, then, Spinoza is simply, and mistakenly, putting forward the claim that nothing can have a final cause because everything has an efficient cause. Were Bennett right in interpreting

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Anagogicum." For an illuminating discussion of external end-directed teleology in Leibniz see McDonough, "Leibniz's Two Realms Revisited."

<sup>46</sup> To be a bit more specific, 1p16c1 is the view that "God is the efficient cause of all things which can fall under an infinite intellect," thus implying that every thing "which fall[s] under an infinite intellect" has an efficient cause. On Spinoza's account, God is everything, including the thought of all of being (1D6). Thus, God will understand infinitely many things – everything – that follow from his nature (2p3). So it is clear that God has an idea of every possible thing and thus, by 1p16c1, that every thing must have an efficient cause.

Spinoza's reference to determinism in this way, it would be justified to hold, as Bennett does, that Spinoza's argument is flawed because "there is no reason why something which is done with a purpose or end in view should not be fully efficiently caused."<sup>47</sup>

Now, Bennett also writes that it does not really matter *for purposes of interpretation* whether Spinoza's argument is any good. In a qualified sense, that is true. Bennett suggests, and I agree, that on Spinoza's view there is an incompatibility of some sort between a commitment to causal determinism and teleology. Because determinism (and we could also add necessitarianism) applies equally to the actions of God and to the actions of finite beings, according to Bennett, one should read Spinoza's general remarks about final causes as directed against *all* types of finality. On this reading, it is the intended scope of Spinoza's premises, more than the soundness of the argument, that offers evidence for a perfectly general interpretation of his rejection of teleology.

It is not clear from the main body of Part 1, however, what exactly those premises might be, and the problems stemming from the compatibilist objection might lead to questions that are of independent interest and which do matter *for the assessment of* Spinoza's view. To be more specific, what might move Spinoza to endorse the bold claim that all causation is necessitated by the essence of God? And, more strikingly, why should we suppose that on Spinoza's view teleology must assume causal indeterminism, or the possibility of contingent causation? Of course, it is always possible that Spinoza offers no plausible arguments for the conclusion he provides in the appendix and that he was oblivious to the compatibilist objection. But already Aristotle, as we have seen, endorses an account on which efficient-cause determinism is compatible with, and one might say required, for teleology. And, of course, Spinoza ought to be understood as arguing in part against this influential tradition. So this precedent suggests that for the claim that teleology does not characterize God's activity to be at all plausible, Spinoza has to show exactly how the account of Part 1, rightly understood, precludes final causation. Understanding precisely *how* Spinoza does so will move us closer to an adequate assessment of his argument in the appendix and of its intended scope.

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<sup>47</sup> Bennett, *A Study*, §51.2, 216.

In addition, there may also be other interpretative questions that, *pace* Bennett, do arise, and which also depend on the correct assessment of Spinoza's argument. Notably, I have suggested in the introduction here that there is a very strong textual case for the conclusion that Spinoza endorses teleology in some domains of activity. Moreover, and in accordance with this line of interpretation, a different set of remarks at the appendix appear to offer human teleology as the very root of our erroneous belief in divine providence. Spinoza writes, for example, that "men commonly suppose that all natural things act, *as men do*, on account of an end" (G II. 78).<sup>48</sup> Textual remarks like these, plus the apparent weak inference from causal determinism (and perhaps also from necessitarianism) to the rejection of all teleology, may suggest that Spinoza is concerned with a more specific objection against divine ends, or perhaps against a particular type of divine purpose.<sup>49</sup> So, the question for us now is this. Is there any room in Spinoza's *system* for any type of external end-directed teleology?

Again, the principal argument from *Ethics* 1 Appendix, read in isolation and against the Leibnizian perspective, may suggest that there is. The defender of teleology may object against Spinoza's claim by saying that determination and necessitation of the will do not altogether preclude teleological activity because teleology need not involve causal indeterminism. Perhaps it could have been the case that, in the chain of divine volitions, there was a point at which God could have been determined by some other cause to will **B** instead of **A**. In this case, there could have existed some other possible series of states of affairs (corresponding to God's volitions under the attribute of extension), one equally compatible both with the constraints of efficient-cause determinism and with a kind of necessitarianism, on which things necessarily follow from their given efficient causes.

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<sup>48</sup> Emphasis added. Proponents of this reading include Lin, "Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza," 320; Curley, "On Bennet's Spinoza," 41; Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza," 312–13; Sangiacomo, "The Polemical Target," 408; and McDonough, "The Heyday," 189. Note that it is also possible to read Spinoza's remarks about human teleology here as part of the assumptions that Spinoza criticizes in *Ethics* 1 Appendix. Proponents of this latter reading include Melamed, "Teleology in Jewish Philosophy"; and Hübner, "Unorthodox," n. 13.

<sup>49</sup> This is a particularly relevant point for proponents of the teleological reading that deemphasize the apparent general scope of Spinoza's arguments in the appendix. See Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza," 316; and Lin, "Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza," 322–25.

I think that this is a strong objection. Spinoza does not explicitly discuss final causality in the main text of Part 1. And where he does so at length in *Ethics* 1 Appendix it is unclear whether his arguments can address sophisticated objections from the compatibilist perspective. Nevertheless, as I have mentioned, I do believe that Spinoza's arguments in the appendix are powerful and worth taking seriously because they are intertwined with central metaphysical commitments. Seeing precisely how, rightly understood, those arguments are effective, will yield a better understanding of Spinoza's intended critique.

#### §4. God's Action Is Not The Result Of A Choice Directed At An End

The objection from the compatibilist perspective is powerful against generic forms of determinism and necessitarianism. Spinoza's views, however, do not have this form. Ordinary accounts of divine teleology, as Spinoza understands them, place two conditions on God's action as a final cause. First, God must be able to choose. Second, what God causes must be one among a range of possibilities. The specific versions of determinism and necessitarianism that appear in the *Ethics* suggest that these doctrines amount to a failure to meet both of these conditions. In this section, I argue that causal determinism motivates Spinoza's rejection of a common view on which God creates the world freely by an act of will, and so it amounts to a failure to meet the first condition.

In what follows I outline an auxiliary argument that Spinoza puts forth in *Ethics* 1 Appendix, which targets views on which God selects the best among given options. It is an important argument to Spinoza because many of his opponents would have held the view that it purports to overcome. Nevertheless, I show that the auxiliary argument does not completely refute the compatibilist objection. Next, I start arguing for the view that Spinoza's rejection of teleology is not vulnerable to standard forms of that objection: determinism is a premise in Spinoza's claim that God cannot create things teleologically because God cannot choose in any meaningful sense.

The auxiliary argument offers some textual evidence that Spinoza takes causal determinism to be incompatible with action for an end. Here is the relevant passage (G II. 80):

[T]his doctrine concerning the ends 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.

The first phrase has vexed commentators.<sup>50</sup> There, however, it is clear that Spinoza invokes some aspect of his causal determinism. That can be seen from the specific

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<sup>50</sup> The main scholarly debate concerns the aim of Spinoza's remarks. Most scholars think, and I agree, that this passage is specifically about external end-directness. See Carriero, "Conatus and Perfection in Spinoza," 89; Viljanen, *Spinoza's Geometry of Power*, 124; Melamed, "Spinoza's Anti-Humanism," 157; Curley, "On Bennet's Spinoza," 41; McDonough, "The Heyday," 193; and Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza," 317–18. I am most sympathetic towards Carriero and Viljanen's

causal language that Spinoza uses to explicate that expression in the phrase that follows it: “what is really a cause it [teleology] considers an effect.” Now, some scholars have interpreted this passage broadly, as the general claim that one cannot explain an event by reference to something which it causes. Notably, Bennett interprets the passage in that way and judges – correctly, based on that assumption – the argument itself to be weak on the grounds that one need not postulate any mysterious pull from the part of the future in order to have a clear instance of teleological causation.<sup>51</sup> I believe, however, that Spinoza’s point there is more focused and that the passage invokes a narrower aspect of his deterministic framework.

If Spinoza is not completely explicit here it is because he takes it to be evident from earlier discussions in Part 1 that everything that exists, including every divine idea and volition, is an effect of God’s causal power. Spinoza’s target is a version of the traditional view of divine creation on which all things are directed at an end because God’s creative act is motivated by an idea of the good in the divine mind. That was, of course, a very common view in Spinoza’s intellectual milieu, where God was thought to create the best among possible alternatives.<sup>52</sup> But what might move Spinoza to claim that this view “turns Nature completely upside down”? Recall from §1 that Spinoza takes God to be self-caused (1p7d). Modes, however, are not: they must be conceived and caused through another and, ultimately, through God as their efficient cause (1D5, 1p15, 1p16c1). So, the direction of the causal relation runs from God to God’s modes. This point is perhaps clearer at 1p17s1, where Spinoza builds upon 1p16 and his understanding of God’s causal power to argue that all modes are an effect of God’s productive essence:<sup>53</sup> “I have shown clearly enough (see P16) that from God’s supreme

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interpretations, which emphasise a crucial aspect: although Spinoza’s argument is directed against divine finality his point is highly general and captures other instances of teleology. For more on this see note 55. For a different view, on which this passage is intended broadly against all types of final causality see Bennett, *A Study*, §51.3-4, pp. 216–7; and Hübner, “Unorthodox,” 348–49, n. 19.

<sup>51</sup> Bennett, *A Study*, §51.3-4, 216–7. This view is also presented in Garrett, “Teleology in Spinoza,” 318–8; and Curley, “On Bennet’s Spinoza,” 41.

<sup>52</sup> See notes 76 and 78. I return to the issue later in this section, in the context of Spinoza’s rejection of divine free will.

<sup>53</sup> For Spinoza’s identification of essence with power (*potentia*) see 1p34: “God’s power (*potentia*) is his essence (*essentia*) itself.”

power, *or* infinite nature, infinitely many things *in infinitely many modes*, that is, all things, have necessarily flowed.”<sup>54</sup>

This general point about modes is relevant here because it applies equally to God’s volitions and ideas. In fact, Spinoza argues not only that particular acts of will and intellect must be modes of God (1p31). He also argues against an alternative account of the ontological status of those modes, devoting a long scholium to rejecting the hypothesis that they may be God’s attributes (1p17s2). Now, it is also uncontroversial that for Spinoza God’s causal activity is a product of his essence (1p16). So if God’s activity could be determined, as the compatibilist might propose, by an individual idea or volition of God, then God’s essence would not cause, but rather be caused, by a mode. The causal relation would run from a specific infinite mode to God’s nature. But that is absurd because modes are determined to exist by God, which depends upon nothing else in order to exist. So God cannot act teleologically because if one of God’s modes could cause God to act, then God’s essence would have to be caused by a mode.<sup>55</sup>

Unfortunately for the Spinozist, although it does address a prominent opposing view, this auxiliary argument does not completely overcome the objection. Our compatibilist may retort by saying that God might first create all of his ideas and then create everything else by selecting among them by means of his volitions. On this objection, God first creates all modes and then selects among them by means of other modes. Since all modes would first follow from God’s essence, on this view, the causal dependence that modes bear upon God would be strictly maintained.

Conceptions of God’s activity in Descartes might accommodate a reading similar to this, and one might think that Descartes’s voluntarist account of divine creation supplies an immediate precedent for the occurrence of such a view in the *Ethics*. On Descartes’s account God is the greatest possible being, and so there is nothing that might exist

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<sup>54</sup> G II. 62. Emphasis added.

<sup>55</sup> Note that at 1p23 Spinoza explicitly asserts that, ultimately, God’s essence is what causally explains the existence of the infinite modes. I think that Spinoza’s reasons for holding this view are clearer from 1p16d, where he treats all modes as properties that follow from God’s nature. Note that this conclusion is highly general because, as in God’s case, the essences of finite things (such as human beings) are what causally explains their properties (see, e.g., 3p9s). I am most sympathetic towards Viljanen’s interpretation (*Spinoza’s Geometry of Power*, 124), which also emphasises the role of essences in Spinoza’s critique of teleology.



which does not depend on God: “If anyone attends to the immeasurable greatness of God he will find it manifestly clear that there can be nothing whatsoever which does not depend on him.”<sup>56</sup> This strong view about universal dependence allows Descartes to endorse the claim that all possibilities, including every possible truth, are a consequence of God’s understanding, who creates them by selecting them at will.<sup>57</sup> One may be inclined to attribute a similar view to Spinoza, on the grounds that he explicitly writes that for a large of class of things God acts by means of his modes. For example, at 1p28 Spinoza claims that God is the cause of singular things insofar as God is “modified by a modification which is finite and has a determinate existence.” One might interpret this text as suggesting that God causes singular things by acting through other singular things.<sup>58</sup> Consider also 1p36, the claim that everything is endowed with some causal power to produce effects. That proposition commits Spinoza to the view that God’s intellect must be causally efficacious. Thus, we must admit that there are many things (considered under the attribute of thought) that Spinoza’s God will create in virtue of possessing individual ideas.

Spinoza’s account of God’s will thus appears to bear some similarities to an account that, like Descartes’s, is friendly to the compatibilist perspective. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude from that apparent similarity that Spinoza takes God to choose ends in any meaningful sense. Spinoza has a better argument stemming from his causal determinism against external end-directedness. In the ontological framework of *Ethics* 1, efficient-cause determinism leads Spinoza to consider anew the relation between God and the exercise of God’s causal power. In particular, a certain conception of efficient causality, I argue, underlies Spinoza’s rejection of the view that God has the ability to create teleologically by choosing freely among several possible ends. Causal determinism also motivates an argument for strict necessitarianism, according to which all of God’s power is completely exercised in creating all the things that he can understand.

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<sup>56</sup> Descartes, *Replies to Sixth Objections*, AT VII: 435; CSM II: 293.

<sup>57</sup> See, especially, Descartes, *Letter to Mersenne (15 April 1630)*, AT I: 145; CSMK III: 23; and Descartes, *Letter to Mersenne (6 May 1630)*, AT I: 149; CSMK III: 24. As with the above passage, Bennett (“Descartes’s Theory of Modality,” 642–43) draws my attention to these texts.

<sup>58</sup> See also 2p9d, where Spinoza, quoting 1p28, explicitly writes that God is the cause of a mode insofar as God is affected by some other mode.

Two propositions that Spinoza quotes in the relevant passage from the appendix are especially relevant. Those propositions are 1p16 and 1p32c1. The first passage, 1p16, includes a broad account of the relation between God's essence and the things he creates. Understood more narrowly, that account provides the metaphysical underpinnings of Spinoza's commitment to causal determinism in the *Ethics*. Recall 1p16:

From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect).

There is a great deal of scholarly debate about what kind of relation Spinoza has in mind when he argues here that modes "follow" from God's nature.<sup>59</sup> Certainly Spinoza is clear that at minimum the "following from" relationship involves efficient causation.<sup>60</sup> That can be seen from the immediate corollary that Spinoza derives from 1p16: "From this [1p16] it follows that God is the efficient cause of all things which can fall under an infinite intellect" (1p16c1). Remarkably, 1p16 also figures (via 1p26) in Spinoza's most general formulation of causal determinism in the *Ethics* at 1p28. That is understandable, given that Spinoza is *already* committed at 1p16 to a series of theses that entail strict causal determinism. These are:

- (1) There is nothing apart from substance and its modes.
- (2) All modes "fall under an infinite intellect."

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<sup>59</sup> At times Spinoza makes use of 1p16 in a way that suggests that he treats the causal flow of all things as a type of logical inference (see, e.g. 1p17s1, 1p33d). Accordingly, Bennett (*A Study*, §8.3, §29.5, pp. 29–30, 122) makes a strong case for the view that Spinoza identifies causal relations with logical relations. For a different view, on which the primary model of Spinozistic substantial causation is that of formal causality see Viljanen, *Spinoza's Geometry of Power*, 41–53. For the view that Spinoza has in mind primarily efficient causation at 1p16 see Carriero, "Historical Perspective," 61–65. For a comprehensive, critical survey of the literature on this issue see also Hübner, "On the Significance," 198–205.

<sup>60</sup> The qualification in the main text is added in order to accommodate other types of relations that Spinoza might have in mind at 1p16. It seems to me that he also takes everything that happens as a logical consequence of the divine essence. This is suggested more clearly by Spinoza's modelling of substantial causation in geometrical relations, as when he asserts that things depend on God in the same way that the properties of the triangle depend on its definition (1p7s1). I return to this issue below, in the context of my discussion of Spinoza's necessitarianism.

- (3) All modes that “fall under an infinite intellect” must have an efficient cause.
- (4) Substance is its own efficient cause.

(1) is just a paraphrase of 1p6c, although in that corollary Spinoza uses the term “affections,” and not “modes.” Elsewhere in the *Ethics*, however, Spinoza makes it clear that by God’s affections he just understands God’s modes.<sup>61</sup> Spinoza’s commitment to (1) also follows directly from 1p15, the claim that “[w]hatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God.” God is the only substance (1p14). A mode is, by definition, something that is ontologically and conceptually dependent on a substance (1D5). So, if everything that exists is in God, then everything that exists, apart from God himself, must be a mode, which is equivalent to (1).

Evidence that Spinoza endorses (2) comes from 1p16 itself. In the parenthetical claim that follows and explicates the main clause, Spinoza makes it explicit that by the term “infinite” in the phrase “infinitely many things in infinitely many modes” Spinoza just means all things, that is, everything. That proposition, then, amounts to the claim that there is in God’s understanding an idea of everything.<sup>62</sup> This is equivalent to (2) given that, by definition, “everything” must include all possible modes.

The combination of 1p15 and 1A4 yields a commitment to (3). At 1p15 Spinoza argues that God must be conceptually prior to all modes, on the grounds that God is the only substance and that modes are the kinds of entities that, by definition, must be conceived through a substance (1p14; 1D5). Call this the doctrine of “universal conceptual dependence.” We have seen in §1 that Spinoza is also committed via 1A4 to the “conception implies causation” doctrine, which states that if **A** is conceived through **B** then **A** is caused by **B**.<sup>63</sup> But if modes must be conceived through God then modes

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<sup>61</sup> This is clearest at 1p25c: “Particular things are nothing but affections of God’s attributes, *or* [*sive*] modes by which God’s attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way.” Here, Spinoza says that particular things are God’s affections, and the use of the term *sive* suggests that he identifies particular things with modes. But if A is equal to B and A is equal to C, then B is also equal to C. Hence, 1p25c implies that God’s affections are modes.

<sup>62</sup> Spinoza defends this view explicitly at 2p3: “In God there is necessarily an idea, both of his essence and of everything which necessarily follows from his essence.” Notably, the demonstration of 2p3 quotes 1p16.

<sup>63</sup> How to understand relations among conception and causation in Spinoza is a topic of on-going debate. Notable contributions include Bennett, *A Study*, 29–30, 127–31; Wilson, “Spinoza’s Causal Axiom”; Della Rocca, *Representation*, 3–4, 10–11; Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 43–45; Garrett,

must be caused by God. So the doctrine of “universal conceptual dependence” of 1p15, paired with Spinoza’s commitment to the “conception implies causation” doctrine of 1A4, entails the further commitment that modes must have an antecedent cause found in some aspect of God.<sup>64</sup> In other words: just as God is conceptually prior to its modes, God is also, by 1p15 and 1A4, causally prior to them.

Finally, Spinoza’s commitment to (4) stems from 1p7d and from 1p11d2. At 1p7d Spinoza maintains that a substance must be self-caused on the grounds that substances cannot be caused by anything else. By definition there is nothing external to a substance. Thus, substances cannot have external causes (1p6c). Apart from substances there are only modes. But substances cannot be caused by modes because if a mode caused a substance, then a substance would have to be conceived through a mode (1A4). That is absurd because, by definition, modes must be conceived through a substance (1D5). Since everything has a cause and a substance cannot be caused by anything else, any existing substance, Spinoza concludes at 1p7d, must be self-caused.

However, and we have already come across this issue in §1, from the fact that a substance is neither externally caused nor caused by its modes it does not follow that a substance must be the cause of itself. It may equally be that, at least in principle, a substance does not have a cause at all.<sup>65</sup> So it would seem that a third option is still open. But Spinoza is not guilty here of reasoning by false dichotomy. In the second demonstration to 1p11 he makes explicit an assumption already at work at 1p7. That assumption is the PSR. By Spinoza’s PSR, there must be a reason (*causa sive ratio*) both for the existence and non-existence of a thing. It is clear from the usage of the expression *causa sive ratio* at 1p11d2 that Spinoza takes reasons and causes to be equivalent.<sup>66</sup> Because God must have a reason he must also have a cause. The

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“Spinoza’s Conatus Argument,” 134–41; Melamed, “Spinoza on Inherence”; Melamed, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, chap. 3; Morrison, “The Relation”; and Newlands, *Reconceiving Spinoza*, chap. 2.

<sup>64</sup> The combination of 1p16 with 1p16c1 clarifies that this aspect of God that is the cause of all modes is God’s *essence*. At 1p16c1 Spinoza’s claim is that “God is the efficient cause of all things.” The way in which that corollary relies on 1p16, a claim about what follows from the necessity of the “divine nature,” makes it clear that the term “God” at 1p16c1 is short for “God’s essence.”

<sup>65</sup> Avicenna (*Metaphysics*, 1.6, §3), who is an important influence for Spinoza, holds a similar view. Avicenna might also be a person to whom Spinoza’s account of God’s causation responds directly. LeBuffe (*Spinoza on Reason*, 23–27) defends an interpretation of Avicenna’s influence on aspects of Spinoza’s causal metaphysics.

<sup>66</sup> See §1.4 above for discussion on this issue.

possibility that God may be uncaused is thus ruled out by the PSR. Since everything has a cause and God cannot be caused by anything else, it follows that God must be the cause of himself.

Still, one may ask: why should the cause of God's existence be, specifically, an *efficient* cause? After all, the term *causa efficiens* does not appear in the *Ethics* until 1p16c1, where the discussion focus not on God's self-causation but on how God causes the modes. So why should we understand the term *causa* at 1p7d and 1p11d2 to mean *causa efficiens*? The answer to this question lies in the scholium to 1p25. In that text Spinoza writes that "God must be called the cause of all things in the same sense in which he is called the cause of himself." This text makes clear that God is self-caused in the same way that God causes modes. God causes modes by efficient causation (1p16c1; 1p25); so he causes himself by efficient causation.

From (2)-(3) we can infer:

(5) All modes must have an efficient cause.

And, finally, from (1), (4) and (5) it follows:

(6) Everything has an efficient cause.

Because to explain something, according to Spinoza, just is to understand its causes, it follows that (6) is equivalent to universal efficient-cause determinism.<sup>67</sup> Noticing this connection is helpful because it suggests that, in referring to 1p16 in his case against teleology, Spinoza might be invoking his deterministic framework.

But how does Spinoza intend this account to tell against divine final causation? The account implies that God's volitions are themselves determined because they are modes,

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<sup>67</sup> This interpretation of 1p16 accords particularly well with readings that emphasise Spinoza's unrestricted commitment to the PSR. As Della Rocca understands it, Spinoza's PSR commits him to the view that inherence and causation are the same type of dependence. If one accepts Della Rocca's view, then it is hardly surprising that one takes Spinoza to derive causal determinism at 1p16 because Spinoza explicitly argues at 1p15 that all modes inhere in God. For discussion on this topic Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 65–69.

and thus that God's creation of the world cannot result from an act of choosing freely directed at an end.

One of the propositions that I have mentioned earlier, which Spinoza quotes in *Ethics* 1 Appendix, is evidence of this view. That proposition is 1p32c1, the claim that "God does not produce any effect by freedom of the will." Notably, the derivation of 1p32c1 relies on causal determinism. At 1p31 Spinoza had proven that the divine will is an infinite mode of the attribute of thought. Furthermore, Spinoza devotes a long scholium to rejecting an alternative account on which will pertains to God's nature and is therefore an attribute of God.

Maimonides, who is an important influence for Spinoza, endorses this view of God's will precisely in the context of his own defence of external-end directedness. Here is a passage from Chapter 69 of *The Guide of the Perplexed*:

[F]or when a thing has an end you should seek the end of that end. You say, as it were, for instance that a throne has wood as its matter (...) and to be sat upon as its end. You should consequently ask: what is the end of sitting upon the throne? (...) This should be done with regard to every end occurring in time until one finally arrives at His mere will (...) so that ultimately the answer will be: God willed it so (...). [T]he order of all ends is ultimately due to His will and wisdom, as to which it has been made clear, according to our opinion, that they are identical with His essence: His will and His volition or His wisdom not being things extraneous to His essence. I mean to say that they are not something other than His essence. Consequently He, may He be exalted, is the ultimate end of everything.<sup>68</sup>

This passage is particularly useful for the interpretation of Spinoza's argument. Maimonides makes two claims here, both of which Spinoza ought to be seen as rejecting. First, Maimonides asserts that the cause of all ends is God's will. That claim contrasts sharply with a different set of remarks that Spinoza offers in *Ethics* 1 Appendix where he criticizes the kind of explanatory regress that Maimonides endorses because that regress appeals at root to an arbitrary divine act:

[T]hey will press on – for there is no end to the questions which can be asked: but why was the sea tossing? [W]hy was the man invited at just that time? And so

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<sup>68</sup> Maimonides, *Guide*, I:69, 169–70.

they will not stop asking for the causes of causes until you take refuge in the will of God, that is, the sanctuary of ignorance.<sup>69</sup>

Second – and this is what matters most for the interpretation of 1p32c1 – Maimonides takes God’s will to be *identical* with the divine essence, and maintains that this identity explains why God is the “end of the ends.” Spinoza’s view is different. He denies at 1p17s2 that “will and intellect do pertain to the eternal essence of God,” thereby ruling out an account on which will is an *attribute* of God.<sup>70</sup> At 1p31 Spinoza explicitly maintains that God’s will is a *mode* of the attribute of thought.

To return to the case at hand, then, Spinoza’s general point about modes applies equally to God’s volitions because they *are* modes. We have seen that it is a fundamental tenet of Spinoza’s determinism that everything - including both every finite and every infinite mode - is efficiently determined by its antecedent conditions together with the laws of nature. So God’s volitions too must be subject to universal causal determinism.<sup>71</sup>

Spinoza’s appeal to causal determinism in the argument for 1p32c1 suggests that this corollary ought to be understood as addressing the possibility that the will might be an *uncaused cause*. That possibility is at the root of the notion of freedom understood as absence of efficient cause. That was, to be sure, the standard accounting of the notion of free will in Spinoza’s intellectual milieu. Descartes’s conception of the will in the *Passions of the Soul* is an immediate precedent of the view that Spinoza should be taken to reject at 1p32 and 1p32c1. In that text, Descartes asserts that “the will is *by its nature* so free that it can never ever be constrained.”<sup>72</sup> Spinoza’s own conception of the will contrasts markedly with Descartes’s. For Spinoza, there is no faculty of will and any

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<sup>69</sup> G II. 81.

<sup>70</sup> Note that at 1D4 Spinoza defines “attribute” as “what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence.” Thus, if God’s will pertained to God’s essence, the divine will would have to be an attribute of God (by 1D4). The classical locus for the interpretation of 1p17s2 is Koyré, “The Dog That Is a Heavenly Constellation and the Dog That Is a Barking Animal.”

<sup>71</sup> Note also that in the demonstration to 1p32, the claim that the will cannot be free, Spinoza refers the reader back to 1p28 and to 1p23, which are, respectively, accounts of determinism for finite and for infinite modes.

<sup>72</sup> *Passions of the Soul*, §41. Emphasis added. For Descartes’s account of freedom of the will see also *Meditation IV* (AT VII: 56-7; CSM II: 39-40); *Second Set of Replies* (AT VII: 166; CSM II: 117); and *Principles of Philosophy*, I, §39 (AT VIIIa: 19-20; CSM I: 205-6).

instance of willing is a mode.<sup>73</sup> It is this basic ontological fact that explains why any instance of willing is subject to causal determinism. In other words: God's volitions, *by their nature*, must be compelled by their efficient causes to create things in a certain way.<sup>74</sup>

However, Spinoza's critique of the notion of free will does not stop with his rejection of the Cartesian notion of freedom. Proposition 32 equally entails that God's will cannot be free even in *Spinoza's own sense* of freedom, as he defines the concept at 1D7. According to 1D7, if *x* is free, *x* must be determined to act by *x*'s nature alone. Since the divine will is a mode, it cannot be determined to act solely by its own nature: it must also be determined by the nature of the efficient cause.<sup>75</sup> Note that causal determinism is a central premise for this conclusion because it allows Spinoza to argue that everything other than God - including every infinite mode such as one of God's volitions - must have an efficient cause found in something external to that mode's nature. Of course, this claim makes plausible the central plank of 1p32c1, according to which no divine volition is free in *any* sense that would allow for voluntary end-directed activity: that is, either in the sense of being undetermined or self-determined.<sup>76</sup>

In fact, the reference to 1p32c1 shows that, for Spinoza, the clearest cases of teleology would be those in which final causes appear to be the *only* available

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<sup>73</sup> Note that in *Ethics 2* Spinoza maintains that the will is not a faculty at all (2p48d): "The mind is a certain and determinate mode of thinking (by P11), and so (by IP17C2) cannot be a free cause of its own actions, *or* cannot have an absolute faculty of willing and not willing." This is also a relevant point to the assessment of finite teleology because - I will argue in §7 - Spinoza's reasons for rejecting teleology in God apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to finite individuals.

<sup>74</sup> Note that although the *Passions of the Soul* was originally written in French in 1649, a Latin translation of this work, published in 1650, was in wide circulation. It is unlikely that Spinoza had access to the French version. On the relation between Spinoza and the *Passions of the Soul* see Voss, "On the Authority of the *Passiones Animae*."

<sup>75</sup> Proposition 23, which Spinoza quotes in the demonstration to 1p32, makes this point explicit. There Spinoza writes that "every [infinite] mode (...) had to follow either *from the absolute nature* of some attribute of God, or from some attribute, modified by a modification which exists necessarily and is infinite" (emphasis added). So it is clear from this text that a particular infinite mode must be determined to exist by the specific *nature* of something other than that mode.

<sup>76</sup> Lin ("Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza," 323) notes that the idea that God creates things freely by an act of willing was prevalent among scholastic Aristotelians. That is of course a view that Descartes shares with the scholastics, even as their accounts of freedom of the will differ. Scotus, for example, contends that God's volitions are teleological and also the result of a self-determining - rather than undetermined - causal power. See *Ordinatio* IV, d. 29, d. 46 in Scotus, *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*. McDonough ("The Heyday," 187) draws my attention to Scotus's account.



explanation. That proposition concerns the problem of how God can create things (considered under the attribute of thought) by means of his volitions. The common explanation for this problem, Spinoza thinks, is teleological: God creates states of affairs freely from an act of willing with an end in view.<sup>77</sup> The denial of divine free will at 1p32c1 addresses this view directly.<sup>78</sup> There Spinoza claims that those states of affairs that God creates by means of his volitions (considered under the attribute of thought) are mediated by other infinite modes as their efficient causes and cannot be the result of a free act. This is just the opposite of what the common teleological view holds. On that view, God's action is teleological because God creates the world freely by an act of willing with a goal in mind. Note that Spinoza works to show that even where people ordinarily and pervasively think that there must be clear cases of teleology, there in fact are not. That he works to defeat the view that God's creative act is free suggests, of course, that he takes external end-directed teleology to be mistaken. It suggests more generally, however, that Spinoza takes any kind of teleological causation to be incompatible with a commitment to efficient-cause determinism.

To be sure, Spinoza never denies that God acts freely (1p17c2), neither does he reject the view that a particular finite mode can be free to a certain extent, inasmuch as the activity of that mode is a causal consequence of its own nature.<sup>79</sup> He does, however, emphatically reject the common account that the divine *will* can, in any sense, be a free cause and, thus, that God can *choose* freely.

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<sup>77</sup> Spinoza thinks that the belief in a teleological divine will is also the common view of ordinary people. He makes this point clear in *Ethics* 1 Appendix (G II. 80-81), contending there that the belief in God's providential will is rooted in the mistaken belief in our own free will.

<sup>78</sup> In a recent paper, Andrea Sangiacomo ("The Polemical Target") builds a case for the view that the target of Spinoza's critique of teleology is Adriaan Heereboord's *Meletemata Philosophica* and, more precisely, Heereboord's account that God acts on the basis of a freely deliberated providential plan. Sangiacomo's method consists in showing how Spinoza's arguments successfully target an account of final causes close to that presented by Heereboord. I grant that Spinoza takes issue with the idea that God has freely designed the world but I think we ought to keep in mind that this claim was a tenet of *many* philosophical systems of scholasticism. I am most convinced by Melamed's account. Melamed ("Teleology in Jewish Philosophy") presents a very strong textual ground for the claim that Spinoza's critique is, in part, a response to a precedent in Maimonides.

<sup>79</sup> I qualify the claim here because, although Spinoza clearly allows for a limited sense of freedom in the case of human beings, he is also clear that finite modes can only be free to an extent. God is the only being that never fails to act according to his nature (and thus that never fails to be free). See 1p17c2, 4p4, 4p4c. For a different view, on which human beings are in principle capable of absolute freedom, see Nadler, "On Spinoza's 'Free Man.'"

Chapter 3 of the *Theologico-Political Treatise (TTP)* provides further evidence for this interpretation. There, Spinoza offers an account of God's choice that is at odds with the traditional, teleological understanding of this theme. These passages come in the course of an argument against the idea that the Hebrews are chosen people (G III. 46):

By God's guidance I understand the fixed and immutable order of nature, or the connection of natural things.

[T]he universal laws of nature, according to which all things happen and are determined, are nothing but the eternal decrees of God, which always involve eternal truth and necessity.

From these considerations, it is easy to infer what must be understood by God's choice. For (...) no one does anything except according to the predetermined order of nature, i.e. according to God's eternal guidance and decree (...).

In this discussion, Spinoza makes God's choice identical with the guidance he establishes by means of divine decrees. Spinoza does, moreover, take God's eternal decrees to be equivalent to, or perhaps reducible to, the laws of nature, which Spinoza understands as involving "eternal truth and necessity."

One may suspect, initially, that these passages might offer some indication for a voluntarist interpretation of God's activity in the *TTP*. Notably, most of the elements Spinoza uses here to characterize God's choice would be familiar to a proponent of a voluntarist, teleological account of divine choice: for Spinoza, God chooses in the sense that he establishes decrees that bear some kind of dependence on him and that constitute a set of eternal truths. Despite framing his view in these terms, however, together the passages above suggest that the teleological understanding is not Spinoza's account of God's choice. These passages emphasize the fact that the divine decrees follow with "eternal truth and necessity" from God. Supposing that "necessity" here involves an absence of alternatives available to God – below I argue that this supposition is correct – Spinoza renders impossible the idea that God's choice results from an ability to perform one of several possible acts. Indeed, Spinoza even denies, as we shall see, that there is such a thing as a choice that God does not make or, similarly, a possible volition that he does not actualize. Here, these points lend the thesis that Spinoza takes efficient-cause determinism to be incompatible with teleology some additional plausibility: like the

account of 1p32c1, they emphasize the extent to which it is impossible for God to create things at will by choosing freely from a range of possible ends.

To take stock: Spinoza seems to assume that an agent can act teleologically only if that agent can intend an end. Ordinary accounts of causation that assign ends to God appear to require the possibility that God, being an agent with volitions, can intend an end in that he can freely choose to create a particular state of affairs from a range of other equally possible states of affairs. I have suggested that if our compatibilist is right, this intentional, teleological process does not preclude efficient causation (it may even require it) because things can be both fully efficiently caused and directed at an end. I have argued, against such compatibilist interpretations, that determinism does matter to Spinoza's rejection of teleology; but the auxiliary argument that final causation reverses the order of nature - by supposing that it makes certain infinite modes causally prior to God's essence - does not supply the principal sense in which it matters. As I have shown here, determinism matters principally because it provides the underpinnings for an argument according to which God's creation of the world cannot be the result of an act of willing freely directed at an end.

## §5. The Total Series Of Divine Volitions Is The Only Possible One

It was a theme of the previous section that Spinoza's causal determinism is not vulnerable to the compatibilist objection raised in §3. This is because, in the ontological framework of *Ethics* 1, determinism implies that God's volitions are themselves determined and thus that God cannot choose freely with an end in view.

But this is only part of Spinoza's case. After all, Spinoza's refined version of causal determinism appears not to be able to address an equally refined version of the original objection, one that is independent of any free choice on God's part. We can summarize the objection as follows. There is no reason to assume that teleology requires free, intentional action because God could have been determined and (in a qualified sense) necessitated to act on account of an end. Suppose that an idea **I** had *determined* God to create and arrange the actual particular order of modes **O**. On this scenario, God's creative act was not and could not be free in any of the senses described above because God's action was mediated, efficiently determined by **I**. Still, the content of **I** may provide the model for **O** such that God might have done **O** for the sake of **I**. In that case, **O** would be caused, and explained, by something that it brings about – the content of **I**. But, we have seen, a process in which something is caused and explained by something else that it brings about, is, by definition, teleological. Hence, it seems that Spinoza's account of causal determinism may not preclude teleology because God can have volitions that are compatible with universal efficient-cause determinism but are also the product of a final cause.

I have noted that, although he emphatically rejects the view that God is constrained in any meaningful sense, Leibniz's account of divine creation is similar to the account of the above paragraph. First, Leibniz contends that God, in his omniscience, understands all possibilities. Second, Leibniz maintains that, having understood an unlimited number of possible worlds, God is *determined* to create this world by specific considerations of the good represented by an idea in the divine mind.<sup>80</sup> God's infinite goodness motivates God to create the objectively best of all possible worlds. It may appear, therefore, that Spinoza's account of determinism and the rejection of freedom of

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<sup>80</sup> See Leibniz, *Theodicy*, §45, 151.: "The will is never prompted to action save by the representation of the good (...). This is admitted even in relation to God (...)."

choice that it entails go some way towards addressing what was, in the seventeenth century, a notable historical precedent. But at the same time this gives the impression that, as Leibniz's account points out, Spinoza's doctrines, considered on their own, appear not to be able to address sophisticated cases for compatibilism, on which God might be determined (and, in a sense, necessitated) to create things on account of an end.

I believe that this impression is misleading, for it fails to acknowledge that Spinoza presents another argument in the principal passage of the appendix that anticipates more sophisticated versions of compatibilism. The argument shows that Spinoza rejects the second condition on divine teleology that I presented in the previous section: namely, that there is a range of possible states that God chooses among. Spinoza's argument stems from his commitment to necessitarianism: no aspect of the world could have been created by God in any other way. Such a view rules out external end-directedness because when God creates particular things (conceived under the attribute of thought) he does not select, nor can he be determined to select, among those things on the basis of their consequences. In other words: because there are no possibilities available to him, God cannot determine finite things in such a way that they must tend towards a specific end-state rather than another.

At this stage, we should take a new look at the main argument of *Ethics* 1 Appendix and draw a distinction between two doctrines that Spinoza invokes there, doctrines that he clearly regards as effective against external end-directedness. That distinction will show that Spinoza ought to be understood as offering two independent arguments against external-end directedness - one based on his conception of causal determinism and one rooted in his necessitarianism.<sup>81</sup> Spinoza's argument from necessity, I hold, supplies the principal sense in which he is able to address this refined version of the original objection.

Recall that the only three propositions that Spinoza quotes in the principal argument of the appendix are 1p16, 1p32c1 and 1p32c2. Proposition 16, we have seen,

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<sup>81</sup> As we have seen in §1 contemporary philosophers distinguish sharply between these two metaphysical views, even if details in different accounts may vary. Della Rocca (*Spinoza*, 75), for example, suggests that necessitarianism is a view much stronger than causal determinism. Melamed ("The Causes of Our Belief," 123) takes these doctrines to be orthogonal, on the grounds that they may be true or false in any combination without contradiction.

is the claim that all things follow from God's nature; c1 is the claim that the will is bound by causal determinism and cannot be a free cause of its own actions; and c2 is the view that the will is bound by necessity. Here is part of 1p32c2:

[W]ill and intellect are related to God's nature as motion and rest are, and as are absolutely all natural things, which (by P29) must be determined by God to exist and produce an effect in a certain way. (...) [W]ill (...) is related to him [God] in the same way as motion and rest, and all the other things which, as we have shown, *follow from the necessity of the divine nature and are determined by it to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.*<sup>82</sup>

The text implies that God's nature determines God's volitions, a claim which we have already encountered in our analysis of 1p32c1. Why, then, should we take Spinoza to appeal here to his necessitarianism? As a first approach to the question, we may note that Spinoza invokes at 1p32c2 language that may be taken as a natural reference to some kind of necessitarianism. All natural things, Spinoza writes in that text, follow "from the *necessity* of the divine nature and are determined by it" to act in a certain way. It is natural – and I think correct – to take Spinoza to mean by this that all things necessarily depend on God for their existence. It is a major further step, however, to argue that all things that depend on God follow from him necessarily, and could not have been otherwise. Despite this initial challenge, and in a way that is consistent with the claim that God determines everything, Spinoza's argument for 1p32c2 shows that Spinoza takes all things that follow from God's essence to be themselves necessary. Of course, because God's volitions follow from and are determined by God's nature, the account of 1p32c2 amounts to the view that the actual total series of God's volitions is the only possible one.

Fundamental to my interpretation, then, is the deductive chain of 1p32c2. Note that the corollary depends only upon two familiar propositions. Proposition 32 is the principal claim from which c2 is supposed to follow, and 1p29 is the only proposition that Spinoza cites in the main text of the corollary. I believe that Spinoza is committed

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<sup>82</sup> Emphasis added.

to the necessity of all divine volitions (and to the necessary existence of all of their corresponding states of affairs)<sup>83</sup> by both propositions and the doctrines they entail.

To start, then, with 1p29, notice that this proposition offers some strong prima facie textual evidence that Spinoza is a necessitarian:

1p29: In nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.

It is natural, and I think correct, to understand by the sentence “in nature there is nothing contingent” the view that nothing could have been any different. But if nothing could have been otherwise, it follows that everything that exists, must exist necessarily.

Notice that this claim is distinct from mere causal determinism because, as we have seen in §1, causal determinism is compatible with the possibility of things being otherwise. For the determinist there is nothing in principle contradictory about the existence of a different series of states of affairs. Determinism does require that any action is caused by antecedent conditions, but those conditions need not themselves exist necessarily. In other words: for the mere determinist the actual total series of causes is contingent; so when Spinoza affirms at 1p29 that there is no contingency in nature, he is not merely restating his account of causal determinism (which he had previously presented and argued for at 1p28). Spinoza must be understood as advancing the much stronger view on which the total series of causes and effects is necessary. This makes plausible the assumption that 1p32c2 concerns the necessity of God’s will: if everything that exists, exists necessarily, then all of God’s volitions must be necessary. It also explains why Spinoza should think it is worth emphasising 1p29 in 1p32c2.

Proposition 29 is, at that point in the *Ethics*, the clearest statement of necessitarianism.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> In Part 2 of the *Ethics*, Spinoza claims that adequate ideas must be identical to the objects that they represent in the attribute of extension (2p7s). Moreover, Spinoza argues at 2p36d that in God all ideas are adequate. Since volitions in general just are ideas (2p49), and since all divine ideas are adequate, it follows that all divine volitions must have a corresponding state of affairs.

<sup>84</sup> The qualification in the main text is added because the clearest statement of necessitarianism in the *Ethics* occurs at 1p33. Below, I show how the demonstration to this proposition offers a different argument for necessitarianism.

Still one might think that, despite appearances to the contrary, 1p29 does not licence a necessitarian reading of Spinoza. This is because the expression “there is nothing contingent” may be construed as the claim that everything that exists is merely inevitable given the fact that its antecedent conditions obtain; those conditions, however, need not themselves be necessary.<sup>85</sup> An early axiom of Part 1 might offer some textual support for this conclusion because that axiom appears to show that Spinoza (at least at times) understands the language of necessity to denote mere inevitability given certain antecedent conditions. Here is 1A3:

From a given determinate cause the effect follows necessarily; and conversely, if there is no determinate cause, it is impossible for an effect to follow.

It is clear that in this context Spinoza understands by the expression “follows necessarily” a relation of *conditional* necessity of the following type: for any effect  $e$ ,  $e$  exists if and only if its cause  $c$  obtains. So Spinoza seems to invoke necessity here in a way that suggests only that causal links are absolutely necessary. The usage of the term does not suggest any stricter link between cause and effect other than the one already required by weaker accounts of conditional necessity: *in the supposition* that  $c$  obtains,  $e$  obtains necessarily. But, as Spinoza uses the term here, nothing suggests that  $c$  will or must obtain. Understood in this way, Spinoza’s notion of ‘necessity’ is harmless in the sense that it is consistent with mere causal determinism, and does not entail robust necessitarianism (the view that everything must happen necessarily). If our concern is whether Spinoza thinks at 1p29 that all things are strictly necessary, then Spinoza’s text may not commit him to that.

In §2 I have suggested, however, that the demonstration to 1p29 does commit Spinoza to a strict form of necessitarianism. Recall that the demonstration proceeds roughly in this way. God and God’s modes are all that exists (1p15). God exists necessarily (1p11). We know from 1p16 that all modes follow the necessity of God’s

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<sup>85</sup> Notably, Curley and Walski (“Necessitarianism Reconsidered”), in what is the strongest available case for the view that Spinoza is not a strict necessitarian, read 1p29 as affirming only *conditional necessity*, by which they mean inevitability given antecedent conditions. I believe that the standard reading of Spinoza as a strict necessitarian is correct. Notable accounts include Garrett, “Spinoza’s Necessitarianism”; Koistinen, “Spinoza’s Proof of Necessitarianism”; Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 69–78; and Lin, *Being and Reason*, 169–74.



nature, and at 1p26 Spinoza is clear in asserting that God determines the causal relations between the modes. Let us assume that whatever follows from something necessary is itself necessary.<sup>86</sup> If God's existence is necessary, then the existence of all modes and all their causal relations must be necessary in virtue of 1p16 and 1p26. But if nothing exists apart from God and God's modes, it follows that the existence of everything in nature - including every causal relation between the modes - is necessary. In other words, there is nothing whose existence and action is contingent (1p29). We see, then, that a commitment to 1p16 - a commitment to a causal dependence for every mode on a necessary being - leads Spinoza to endorse a strict kind of necessitarianism.

One may suspect that Spinoza's derivation of necessitarianism from 1p16 is incomplete, on the grounds that 1p16 only allows us to assert that whatever God creates is necessary and hence actual. But showing that whatever actually exists is necessary is not the same as showing that God has exhausted all possibilities in creating the actual world. Leibniz, for example, thinks that because God is morally good he would have not and will not create any world other than the actual world: that possibility is incompatible with the existence of the best. But there remain, according to Leibniz, other worlds that God will not actualize, but which are nonetheless possible. Now, similarly, suppose that we grant to Spinoza that the modes that compose the actual world are necessary in some sense and could not have been otherwise. It would still not follow from that claim that there is only one possible world because there may still be other modes, besides the (loosely speaking) necessary ones, that God did not actualize. So why should we take Spinoza, on the grounds of 1p16, to assert the strong necessitarian view on which the actual world is the only possible world?

To be a bit more specific: does 1p16 suggest that Spinoza intends to advance the claim that the world, as created by God, is the only possible world? And if so what motivates Spinoza to believe this? I think that the answer to the first question is yes, as

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<sup>86</sup> One might think that Spinoza would regard this as an unstated self-evident truth. Put in historical context, however, I believe that it is a controversial assumption. In the tradition God is a necessary being but his actions are contingent. Aquinas (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I. 81, pp. 257-29), for instance, maintains that God's creation of the best does not require any particular order of created things. I take it that Don Garrett ("Spinoza's Necessitarianism," 206) has convincingly shown that Spinoza is committed to this assumption because he understands the relation between God and its modes as a type of logical relation, modelled in the scholastic distinction between an essence and its properties. For a similar claim see Bennett, *A Study*, §29.5, 122; and Koistinen, "Spinoza's Proof of Necessitarianism," 285-86.

the immediate context to 1p16 makes clear. Here is part of 1p17s1: “I have shown clearly enough (*see P16*) that from God’s supreme power (...) all things, have necessarily flowed, or always follow (...). So God’s omnipotence has been actual from eternity and will remain in the same actuality to eternity.” In this scholium Spinoza’s target is a version of a traditional view of divine power on which God can always do more than he actually does, on pains of “exhaust[ing] his omnipotence.” Spinoza’s own view contrasts sharply with such an account. As the above quote makes clear, Spinoza takes it to be impossible that God could somehow choose not to exercise all of his power in creating everything that he can conceive. Indeed, Spinoza explicitly asserts that in God all power is actual, which obviously excludes the view that there is power that may remain merely potential or, similarly, possibilities that may remain unactualized. Moreover, the above quote indicates that Spinoza sees this view of divine power as a fitting consequence of 1p16 and its central claim that infinitely many things must follow from God’s essence. So we must admit that 1p16, when placed in its broader argumentative context, shows that Spinoza takes that proposition to involve a commitment to a strong kind of necessitarianism.

With respect to the second question, I think that Spinoza’s argument for the view that God has (and exercises) every possible power depends mainly on his commitment to the PSR together with his understanding of God’s infinity. It is clear that Spinoza endorses a version of the PSR: there is a cause or reason for everything (1p11d2). Now, for Spinoza, to be infinite is to be without limitation (1D6; 1p8s1). We can see that Spinoza’s proof of necessitarianism at 1p16 relies on the PSR and on his notion of infinity in the following way. At 1p16 Spinoza claims that God’s essence suffices to bring about an unlimited number of things and states of affairs. On this argument, the more reality something has, the more properties may follow from its nature. But God has infinite reality. So infinitely many things – that is, everything - may follow from God’s nature. Now, suppose that there remained some possibility that God would not create. By the PSR, there would have to be a reason for that fact. But there can be no such reason because God is an infinite being: there is nothing limiting God that may

prevent him from realizing all the infinitely many modes that follow from his essence. Thus God must create everything that is possible.<sup>87</sup>

So interpreted the argument explains why Spinoza is entitled, on the basis of 1p16, to claim that all of God's power is actual at 1p17s1. That claim is a consequence of Spinoza's endorsement of necessitarianism at 1p16: if there is only one possible way in which the world could be, then all genuinely possible states of affairs have been actualized in this world. Anything that God did not create is impossible. In other words: there are neither unactualized possibilities nor unrealized power in God. There is thus no discrepancy between Spinoza's necessitarianism and his views on divine power at 1p17s1: just as there can be no reason for the non-existence of a merely possible mode, there can be no reason for the existence of divine power that may remain merely potential.

We have now addressed the crucial question in the interpretation of 1p16 – namely, the question of whether Spinoza takes it to entail the view that this is the only possible world. But is Spinoza's argument plausible? It may be claimed that it rests on the unmotivated assumption that all sets of possible modes are compossible. The set of modes **A** is compossible with the set of modes **B** if and only if the union of all the elements of **A** and **B** can be actualized in one world. Let **A** contain as its mode Spinoza who is born in 1632; and let **B** contain as its mode Spinoza who is not born in 1632. The compossibility of **A** and **B** would require the truth of a contradictory statement. So, **A** and **B** are impossible. But if two sets of modes are impossible and, let us assume, if God chooses to actualize **A** instead of **B**, it is not at all clear whether Spinoza's PSR could rule out the view that **B** is an unactualized possibility. In fact, assuming that there are impossible sets, there seems to be an obvious reason for **B** being merely possible and for it being non-actual: namely that God actualized **A** (for some independent reason) and that the union of **A** and **B** forms an impossible world. Thus, the plausibility of the argument for necessitarianism at 1p16 seems to rely on the plausibility of the assumption that everything that is possible must be compossible. Unfortunately, Spinoza does not offer an independent argument for this conclusion and there is no

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<sup>87</sup> For what is essentially the same argument see Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 77–78; and Lin, "Spinoza's Arguments for the Existence of God," 286–87. For a critique of this reading see Lin, *Being and Reason*, 172–73.

textual evidence suggesting that he was aware of the need to motivate it. On the contrary, the available evidence from 1p16 together with its immediate context suggests that, in his proof of necessitarianism, Spinoza introduces the assumption that all possibilities are compossible, but it also suggests that he does not derive it from more basic principles. Nevertheless the context of 1p16 makes clear – and this is what matters most for purposes of interpretation – that Spinoza regards that proposition as entailing the strong view that there can be no unactualized possibilities, and thus that everything that God is capable of creating necessarily exists.

We have seen that all things that may follow from God's essence - that is, all modes - must exist necessarily in virtue of 1p16. This allows Spinoza to conclude at 1p29 that there is no contingency in nature because strictly speaking there is nothing merely possible that may follow from God's essence. Of course, because all divine volitions are modes of God they must fall under the scope of 1p16 and 1p29. So the principal text of 1p32c2 should be interpreted accordingly, as the claim that all of God's volitions are necessary and that they cause states of affairs (conceived under the attribute of extension) that must themselves be necessary, and could not have been otherwise.

Spinoza's argument here is highly general. The causal effects of God's will are necessary *not* because the will receives any special status in the ontological framework of the *Ethics*. On the contrary, it is the fact that God's volitions are modes – and, as such, belong to the class of things that according to 1p16 follow from the necessity of the divine nature – that explains why they must exist and produce effects necessarily. The point suggests by implication that all other things which are modes and follow from God's nature - including all finite things - share with God the causal necessity that belongs to God's productive essence. So interpreted, Spinoza's argument accords particularly well with the end of 1p32c2, according to which God's will “is related to him [God] in the same way as motion and rest, *and all the other things which, as we have shown, follow from the necessity of the divine nature* and are determined by it to exist and produce an effect in a certain way.”<sup>88</sup> Notably, this passage is phrased in the language of 1p29. Read in light of that proposition, then, the passage signals an attempt to show that the actions of all things that “follow from the necessity of the divine

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<sup>88</sup> Emphasis added.

nature” exhibit the same kind of causal necessity that characterizes God’s activity. The passage also suggests that there is no significant difference between the exercise of God’s power and the power pertaining to the things that follow from his nature: all things - including all divine volitions but also all finite modes – are necessitated by God’s nature to exist and act in a certain way; and there is no room in this framework for any possibilities - finite or infinite - that do not become actualized.<sup>89</sup>

It might be objected that the foregoing interpretation ignores the fact that Spinoza is trying to derive 1p32c2 most directly from 1p32, the claim that the will cannot be a free cause because all volitions fall under the scope of causal determinism: their existence is mediated and depends upon their causal relations with other modes. However, determinism and necessitarianism are distinct views and certainly ordinary forms of determinism do *not* imply necessitarianism. In fact, one might argue that there are multiple possible worlds while maintaining that in those worlds every event must follow from its given antecedent conditions together with the laws of nature. The fact that Spinoza wants to derive 1p32c2 from 1p32, together with the lack of any clear connection between determinism and necessitarianism, may suggest that Spinoza’s account of God’s will at 1p32c2 is distinct from the one I have attributed to him, on which none of God’s volitions could have been otherwise. The specific language of determinism that Spinoza uses in that corollary is further evidence for this objection.

Although the particular use of 1p32 is difficult to understand, I think that the specific version of causal determinism that appears in the *Ethics* implies a commitment to necessitarianism, an implication that Spinoza notices and endorses. In fact, Spinoza’s reasoning from 1p28 to 1p33 shows that Spinoza has an argument for necessitarianism in which causal determinism figures as an important premise,<sup>90</sup> and thus we should take the derivation of 1p32c2 as a particular instance of this implication.<sup>91</sup> At 1p28 Spinoza contends that for any given thing there will be an efficient cause which determines that thing to exist and produce effects. But for that cause there must also be a cause in virtue

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<sup>89</sup> I return to the relation between necessity and power in finite modes in §7.

<sup>90</sup> An argument for this claim is gestured at, although not fully developed, in LeBuffe, *Spinoza on Reason*, 25.

<sup>91</sup> Another textual evidence that suggests a connection between these two doctrines is the demonstration to 1p29, which (as we have just seen) commits Spinoza to necessitarianism. In that text, Spinoza cites 1p28, the most general formulation of causal determinism in the *Ethics*.

of which it exists, and this demand will regress. The cause of any particular thing, then, will involve an infinite network of causes operating within nature. Ultimately, as Spinoza suggests in a scholium to 1p28, the cause of any particular thing will be the whole of nature within a given attribute.<sup>92</sup> Elsewhere, Spinoza makes a similar point contending that every thing other than God follows “from the order of the whole of corporeal Nature.”<sup>93</sup> Now, suppose that any element in this infinite chain of causes could have been different. In that case, the whole order of nature would have to be different because, in the complete analysis, the cause of any particular thing will be the entire nature considered under an attribute.

Moreover, Spinoza holds the view that the whole order of modes and the causal relations that obtain between them are properties of God which follow from God’s productive essence (1p16d; 1p26; 1p29d).<sup>94</sup> If any link in the actual efficient causal chain of modes were different, then, because all things are God’s properties, God’s essence too would have to be different (1p16; 1p16d; 1p33d). Of course, substance monism implies that it is impossible to conceive of two or more substances with different essences (1p14; 1p33d). A commitment to efficient-cause determinism for every mode, paired with certain tenets of his substance monism, thus leads Spinoza to endorse the strict view that no aspect of the world could have been created by God in any other way.

As our argument makes clear, then, the impression that 1p32c2 does not concern necessity – on the grounds that 1p32 is an account of determination of the will - is misleading. That is because it is based on a failure to acknowledge that in the particular monistic ontology that Spinoza develops in Part 1, there is a sense in which determinism

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<sup>92</sup> At 1p28s2 (G II. 70), Spinoza contends that God or the whole of nature within a given attribute is involved in all of causality: “God cannot properly be called the remote cause of singular things (...). [A]ll things that are, are in God, and so depend on God that they can neither be nor be conceived without him.”

<sup>93</sup> See also 2p7s where Spinoza identifies the whole of Nature (conceived under an attribute) with the chain of causes of particular things: “we must explain the order of the whole of Nature, *or* [*sive*] the connection of causes.”

<sup>94</sup> Note two things in support of this claim. First, Spinoza asserts in the demonstration to 1p16 that “infinitely many things” should be understood as *properties* of God. Second, the only proposition cited at 1p16d is 1D6, Spinoza’s *definition* of God. This suggests to me even more clearly that the necessary existence of “infinitely many things” (1p16d) is itself a property inferable from God’s definition.

involves a commitment to necessitarianism. If we don't take this aspect of Spinoza's system into account, we might be naturally led to assume that 1p32c2 concerns determinism, and not necessitarianism. But by reading Spinoza's claim that God's volitions follow "from the necessity of the divine nature and are determined by it to exist and produce an effect in a certain way" (1p32c2) in light both of 1p29 and of the aforementioned argument, we can see that the corollary advances an argument from necessitarianism. Contrary to what one may intuitively think it means, we should understand 1p32c2 as the claim that all divine volitions (and its corresponding states of affairs) are necessary insofar as they could not have been any different. Attention to this aspect yields the conclusion that when Spinoza invokes 1p32c1 and c2 in *Ethics* 1 Appendix he is invoking *two* distinct metaphysical doctrines that he clearly regards as telling against divine ends: causal determinism and necessitarianism.

Now, despite the fact that, to my knowledge, scholars agree that determinism and necessitarianism are indeed different metaphysical theses, some commentators have taken both corollaries to 1p32 as part of a single view: namely, that God cannot create things freely because the will is not a free cause. Behind this suggestion, I believe, is the assumption that, like determinism, necessitarianism is also incompatible with any kind of deliberate, free choice.<sup>95</sup> If all of God's volitions are absolutely necessary, then it is not possible that God could have freely chosen among different ends in any meaningful sense. Presumably following a similar line of thought, Lin contends that Spinoza cites

1p32c1 and c2 which say that God does not produce the modes freely. [W]hen Spinoza says that God acts out of out of natural necessity, he means that God's action is not deliberate.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Some philosophers have argued – correctly, I think - that necessitarianism is more of a threat to the idea of free will than determinism. Leibniz, for instance, maintains that determinism is compatible with divine freedom. He rejects, however, the view that God's actions are necessary precisely because he takes necessitarianism to be incompatible with freedom. Incidentally, Spinoza not only thinks that necessitarianism and freedom are compatible. He also maintains that necessity is a condition for freedom insofar as to be free is to exist and to act from the necessity of one's own nature (1D7). On Leibniz's compatibility between determinism and freedom see, especially, *Theodicy* §45, 151. For discussion on these themes see McDonough, "The Heyday," 195; and Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 76.

<sup>96</sup> Lin, "Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza," 323–24; Lin, *Being and Reason*, 152. For a similar view see Sangiacomo, "The Polemical Target," 410.

While this view is in a sense correct, it is also incomplete. To be sure, Spinoza's necessitarianism does rule out any kind of free *will*.<sup>97</sup> But already the derivation of 1p32 suggests that determinism is far more important than necessitarianism in Spinoza's rejection of freedom of the will. Recall that Spinoza's argument at 1p32 builds only upon specific accounts of efficient causation for finite and for infinite modes to argue that the will is determined from without. In fact, in order to justify his claim that God (and, for that matter, human beings) cannot choose freely Spinoza *never* appeals to the view that this is the only possible world.<sup>98</sup> Were Spinoza concerned only with the question of divine free will, and with the rejection of the ordinary view of divine creation that it entails, he would *not* need the further claim of 1p32c2. The inclusion of that corollary in the principal argument of the appendix suggests to me that one ought to read Spinoza as offering an argument from necessitarianism, but suggests even more explicitly that that argument ought to be understood independently of Spinoza's rejection of freedom of the will. For these reasons I find the suggestion that both corollaries are part of a single argument implausible.

Still, one may object that there is no obvious link between the endorsement of necessitarianism and the denial of final causation. In the tradition, things that act for an end may be understood to do so necessarily.<sup>99</sup>

One quick (and adequate) way of responding to this concern would be to emphasise Spinoza's scholastic intellectual background and to note that Spinoza's argument from necessity targets particular types of final causality that were predominant in that background. In the influential framework of late scholasticism, the operation of final causes was seen as an activity exclusive to cognitive agents. This view is perhaps stated most clearly in Suárez: "I say that first: in order for the end to cause, it is entirely necessary for it to first be cognized [ut praecognitus sit]."<sup>100</sup> Because only rational

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<sup>97</sup> Note that I emphasise the will here because necessitarianism is in fact compatible with Spinoza's definition of freedom at 1D7. Spinoza's point, as we have seen, is rather that the will must be necessitated either by the absolute nature of God or by the nature of some other infinite mode to exist and act in a certain way.

<sup>98</sup> This point is made in Della Rocca, Sleigh, and Chappell, "Determinism and Human Freedom," 1227.

<sup>99</sup> See, e.g., Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, Q. 1, A. 2.

<sup>100</sup> Suárez, *DM*, 23.7.2.



agents are capable of having cognitive states, it follows that (according to this tradition) only rational agents are capable of acting on account of an end. The cognition of the end is thus deemed necessary for teleology because that cognition motivates an agent to act in one way rather than another, such that an agent's causal powers were understood as organized around ends - the end providing the necessary conditions under which the other efficient causal powers were exercised.

One might argue that, for Spinoza, efficient causes do not require the operation of final causes because efficient causes alone completely *necessitate* their effects. In slogan form: efficient causes are blind. Axiom 3 of Part 1 offers some indication that Spinoza holds this view: "From a given determinate cause the effect follows necessarily; and, conversely, if there is no determinate cause, it is impossible for an effect to follow." We may gloss this axiom as the claim that efficient causes are both necessary and sufficient to account for the effects of any causal process.<sup>101</sup> If that is correct, then it is plausible to assume that natural beings are not externally end-directed by God for the reason that there is no need to posit the cognition of an end as the model of God's creation of the world. God's efficient-causal essence is both a necessary and sufficient condition to account for all the things that it brings about. The argument might be independently appealing, but it contrasts particularly sharply with the mainstream conception of agency predominant in the Aristotelian framework. In that framework agency is constitutively for something.<sup>102</sup> When Aquinas writes that "every agent, of necessity, acts for an end"<sup>103</sup> he is claiming that to be an agent is to intend an end. So when Spinoza implies at 1A3 that efficient causes alone necessitate their effects, he is rejecting the Aristotelian view on which efficient causes must be structured around final causes.

Nevertheless, I believe that Spinoza's necessitarianism provides him with a different argument against goal-directed activity. The argument is of independent interest because it tackles basic assumptions about the modality of final causation.

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<sup>101</sup> The way Spinoza uses 1A3 in the demonstration to 1p27, the claim that everything is determined by God to produce effects, suggests that the axiom ought to be understood as a claim about *efficient* causation because, according to 1p16c1, God is the efficient cause of all things.

<sup>102</sup> John Carriero has convincingly shown this to be the case in Carriero, "Spinoza on Final Causality," 107–20. For a different view see Hoffman, "Final Causation in Spinoza."

<sup>103</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, Q. 1, A. 2.

Those assumptions can be summarized as follows. Teleology appears to rely on the existence of multiple possibilities together with a criterion of selection. This is because teleology is the model of causation that assigns causal properties to subsequent events in a causal chain. To be sure, it is not enough that a specific consequence of a causal process obtains, or obtains regularly,<sup>104</sup> for that process to count as teleological. There must be a press of events in the direction of the end, such that the end causally explains why the earlier events in the process occurred. An effect, however, cannot directly produce its own cause; so the cause must be endowed with some power that directs the causal process to a particular end-state, and that explains why the process was directed to that specific end-state rather than to other possible end-states. Accounts of causation that assign ends to God thus appear to require the possibility that God can cause contingently in that he can actualize ends from a range of alternative possibilities.

When Spinoza quotes 1p32c2 - the view that every divine volition is actual - in his case against divine teleology in *Ethics* 1 Appendix he is targeting all of these assumptions: with respect to God and to God's will, necessitarianism entails the view that there can be neither unrealized possibilities nor potential power. The actual world is the only possible world. So God must create everything and anything that he does not create is impossible. It is this specific sense of necessity assigned to the divine nature and will that allows Spinoza to refute the view that God can create things from a range of possibilities on the basis of their consequences.

Here, we may return to Leibniz's case cited in the beginning of this section. God's activity qualifies as teleological (on that view) because God selects, or is determined to select, between ideas that are represented to him in the form of possible alternatives in the divine mind. For Leibniz, there are multiple possible worlds but God creates only the best of all possible worlds. Because, on that view, God selects (or is determined to select) among known possibilities it is also logically possible that he could have created

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<sup>104</sup> Recall from §2 that Aristotle defends final causation on the grounds that there are many things that happen regularly and that all things that happen regularly must happen for the sake of an end. Note, however, that the late scholastic Aristotelians became increasingly suspicious of this argument, admitting the possibility that the existence of order and regularity in nature could be explained solely by the operation of efficient causes. For discussion see Des Chene, *Physiologia*, 177–79. I think that 1A3, which I have just quoted, shows that Spinoza follows the late scholastics in endorsing this view. See also 2p7s and 2p29s, where Spinoza glosses the notion of “order of Nature” in terms of the network of *efficient* causes that operate within nature.

other states of affairs on the basis of their consequences. Spinoza's strict necessitarianism allows him to reject all of these assumptions. He explicitly rules out any view on which there is contingency in God's will at 1p32c2, the claim that all of God's volitions are necessary. And he rejects as absurd the attribution of potential intellect to God at 1p33s2. There is only one possible world which is the actual world. So God could not have conceived multiple possibilities and selected among them because everything that God conceives is also necessary and hence actual. Hence, for Spinoza, God's causal power could not be exercised in a way required for teleology because God cannot be determined to actualize some possibilities rather than others.

In short, because Spinoza relies on the assumption that explanation involves causation (1A4), his complaint about divine teleological models is that they do not adequately mirror the causal nexus at work. Spinoza explicitly cites three propositions in support of this claim: 1p16, from which stem both efficient-cause determinism and necessitarianism; 1p32c1, a claim that, relying on causal determinism as a premise, asserts that God has no free will; and 1p32c2, which contends that all of God's volitions are necessitated by their causes. Although there is, on the account of the *Ethics*, a sense in which God creates things (under the attribute of thought) by means of his volitions, it would be a mistake to think that God causes voluntarily with an end in view because God does not select freely among given ends (1p32c1). Similarly, although there is an account of God's choice in Spinoza, this account emphasizes the fact that God chooses and acts necessarily, and not contingently (1p32c2; *TTP* §3, G III. 46).

The objection from the compatibilist perspective in §3 was that, although everything has an efficient cause, God himself may direct all things towards an end, and particular beings in nature might be efficiently determined by God to act teleologically. Determinism is usually understood as the view that every event is determined by antecedent events together with the laws of nature. Spinoza's determinism is different because it is not limited to particular events that take place within the natural world: determinism applies equally to God's existence and to God's actions, including all instances of divine volitions.

In this and in the previous section, I have argued that the specific doctrine of determinism that appears in the *Ethics* is not vulnerable to standard forms of the compatibilist objection for two reasons. In the particular monistic ontology that Spinoza

develops in Part 1, determinism yields the conclusion that God cannot create states of affairs freely with a goal in mind for the reason that God cannot choose freely in any meaningful sense (§4). The second reason was that Spinoza's causal determinism motivates his commitment to necessitarianism (§5). Necessitarianism may be understood to contrast sharply with certain conceptions of agency predominant in Spinoza's intellectual milieu: for Spinoza, efficient causes are blind because they completely necessitate their effects. Notably, necessitarianism also supplies the principal sense for an independent argument at 1p32c2, according to which God cannot cause things from a range of possibilities on the basis of their consequences. There are no possibilities available to God because God necessarily creates everything that he can conceive. I will offer some more evidence in §7 that Spinoza's account of divine causality characterizes, *mutatis mutandis*, the causal nature of every finite thing. But even with this caveat in mind, Spinoza's critique of divine teleology lends some initial plausibility to his bold assertion that "*all* final causes are nothing but human fictions" (*Ethics* 1 Appendix; G II. 80).<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Emphasis added.

## §6. Finite Individuals: A Case For Teleology In Finite Things

On the present interpretation, Spinoza's account of necessity, which is rooted in his causal determinism, supplies the principal sense for his rejection of external end-directedness. This is because necessitarianism rules out any unactualized divine power: God, for Spinoza, creates everything that is possible and anything that he does not create is impossible. The actual total series of divine volitions is the only possible one. Thus, God cannot act on account of an end because he cannot select, nor can he be determined to select, among possible alternatives on the basis of their consequences.

Although the details of my interpretation are controversial, its main claim is not. Spinoza is widely regarded as a stark critic of the idea that God creates the world with an end in view, and no interpreter has, to my knowledge, attributed any kind of external end-directedness to Spinoza. The main locus of the scholarly debate concerning Spinoza's stance on the issue of teleology concerns rather whether Spinoza, despite his critical remarks in *Ethics* 1 Appendix, is willing to accept any form of internal end-directedness, and whether his system has the metaphysical resources to accommodate a commitment to that view.

Recent scholarship offers two broadly different answers to these problems, answers that seek to shed light on the more general issue of how to understand Spinoza's account of the activity of finite modes. Thus, a tradition inaugurated by Jonathan Bennett and recently developed by John Carriero, reads Spinoza as rejecting all kinds of finite teleology. Proponents of this view hold that Spinoza's critique of final causes is perfectly general in scope and attempt to explain away ostensible teleological elements of Spinoza's moral psychology and ethics by showing how they can be understood in harmless, non-teleological terms. Following the terminology set out in the introduction here, I shall refer to this reading as the Standard Interpretation.

Another stream in the scholarship takes a rather different approach. Very generally, on this reading, which I call the Modest Interpretation, Spinoza rejects any kind of divine providence, but his critique of divine ends does not yield the conclusion that Spinoza is committed to rejecting teleology in the case of finite things, such as human beings.

In this section, I build upon recent work on the Modest Interpretation and articulate reasons for finding this reading of Spinoza plausible. The Modest Interpretation draws its appeal mainly from Spinoza's account of finite action in the beginning of *Ethics* 3. There, Spinoza characterizes the activity of finite modes as a conatus or striving to persevere in being.

I proceed as follows. I start by motivating a reading of Spinoza's conatus doctrine on which self-preservation is an end for striving things. I do so by considering some psychological principles that Spinoza derives from it, and which appear to license teleological predictions of human behaviour. I show that a teleological rendering of the conatus doctrine fits nicely with many of Spinoza's informal discussions of human action. Because that doctrine applies equally to every singular thing, including both human beings – capable of complex desires and thoughts about the future – and all other ordinary things, the conatus seems to characterize the activity of every finite being as aiming at the goal of self-preservation. Finally, I consider how this interpretation might be reconcilable with Spinoza's reasons for rejecting teleology in God. This is a critical point because, given Spinoza's commitment to the view that everything is an aspect of God, the plausibility of the Modest Interpretation relies crucially on its ability to explain how internal end-directedness might be compatible with Spinoza's rejection of divine final causation. Together, this evidence for Spinoza's acceptance of teleology constitutes a strong case for the Modest Interpretation. Understanding exactly *how* the Modest Interpretation is an appealing reading of Spinoza will allow me to offer, in the next section, a new, stronger case for the Standard Interpretation, by responding to this, the strongest available evidence for the Modest Interpretation.

Arguably, the most important textual evidence for the Modest Interpretation consists of a group of remarks that Spinoza makes in Part 3 of the *Ethics*, where his project is to develop an account of human moral psychology. In the introduction here, I have cited some of these texts under the heading *Apparent Teleology In Human Action*.<sup>106</sup> Here, I focus on two propositions that, on a natural and appealing reading, seemingly show that Spinoza takes human action to be motivated by some end and thus to be genuinely goal-directed. Those propositions, we shall see, rely on Spinoza's

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<sup>106</sup> See, especially, *Ethics* 1 Appendix (G II. 78), 3p6, 3p12, 3p13, 3p27c3, 3p28, 3p33, Preface 4 (G II. 207), 4D7.

account of the striving of finite things. Because they favour a teleological conception of human psychology, they likewise appear to imply that Spinoza's account of the striving of finite things ought to be understood in terms of an end or goal that we aim at when we strive.

3p12: The mind as far as it can [*quantum potest*], strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the body's power of acting.

Demonstration: So long as the human body is affected with a mode that involves the nature of an external body, the human mind will regard the same body as present (by 2p17) and consequently (by 2p7) so long as the human mind regards some external body as present, that is (by 2p17s), imagines it, the human body is affected with a mode that involves the nature of that external body. Hence, so long as the mind imagines those things that increase or aid its power of acting (see Post. 1), and consequently (by 3p11) the mind's power of thinking is increased or aided. *Therefore (by 3p6 and 3p9)*, the mind, as far as it can, strives to imagine those things, Q.E.D. (emphasis added)

3p28: We strive to *further the occurrence of* whatever we imagine will lead to joy, and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it, or will lead to sadness.

Demonstration: We strive to imagine, as far as we can, what we imagine will lead to joy (by 3p12), that is (by 2p17), we strive, as far as we can, to regard it as present, *or* as actually existing. But the mind's striving, *or* power of thinking, is equal to and at one in nature with the body's striving, *or* power of acting (as clearly follows from 2p7c and 2p11c). Therefore, we strive absolutely, *or* (what, by 3p9s, is the same) want and *intend* that it should exist. This was the first point. Next (...). (emphasis added)

Proposition 12 is about what a mind does insofar as it can by its own power (*quantum potest*). The qualification here is relevant because Spinoza obviously uses it to restrict the scope of 3p12. A related trope that Spinoza employs earlier at 3p6 - a proposition that he quotes in the demonstration to 3p12 - *quantum in se est*, is helpful for understanding the meaning of 3p12. The trope translates literally "insofar as it is in itself." The question is: what does Spinoza mean by it, and does that expression suggest any specific understanding of Spinoza's account of human agency?

A precedent in Descartes seems to suggest that *quantum in se est* characterizes what a thing does as a result of its own powers, and marks a contrast with what a thing might

do when it encounters opposition or external causes.<sup>107</sup> Descartes uses the phrase in the context of his own inertial, non-teleological account of the striving of bodies. Here is part of Descartes's first law of motion from *Principles*, II, 37 (AT VIIIa: 62; CSM I: 240):

Each and every thing, insofar as it is in itself [*quantum in se est*], always continues in the same state.<sup>108</sup>

For Descartes, any given body tends to remain in the same state and, in particular, to continue in a straight line given that it is moving, *insofar as it is in itself*; that is, unless prevented by external bodies. Descartes employs this expression in the context of his account of non-living bodies, and particularly of material objects. But the account nonetheless promises to be an influence for Spinoza's moral psychology.

In particular, one might think that the Cartesian precedent gives us at least some *prima facie* reasons to interpret the account of 3p12 and related propositions in a way that reflects Descartes's usage of the phrase in the context of his own account of bodily tending - an account that is arguably deprived of any kind of final causation. But matters are not so clear cut, and one should be cautious not to infer from the usage of *quantum in se est* alone that Spinoza is trying to develop some kind of inertial account of the activity of the mind at 3p12. In Descartes and Spinoza alike the phrase appears to concern primarily not the debate between efficient and final causation, but rather the opposition between a thing's activity under its own power and what a thing does as it is influenced by external causes. Spinoza's usage of vocabulary concerning power in the related expression *quantum potest* seems to indicate further that the qualifier means to capture what a thing does by virtue of its own internal forces.

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<sup>107</sup> A more detailed case for this view may be found in Lin, *Being and Reason*, 138–39. Note, however, that some commentators have argued that this trope is better understood in terms of Spinoza's characterization of substance, as a thing that is in itself (1D3). On this interpretation, Spinoza uses the qualifier to narrow his claims about modes insofar as they are a substance. This is an admittedly counterintuitive but, I think, correct reading, and I defend a version of it in the next section. Notable proponents of such a reading include Garrett, "Spinoza's Conatus Argument"; and LeBuffe, *Spinoza on Reason*, 39–42.

<sup>108</sup> *Unaquaque res, quantum in se est, semper in eodem statu perseveret*. Here, I have changed Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch's translation of *quantum in se est*. Cottingham et. al. translate the trope "in so far as it can".



For Spinoza, to consider a thing's behaviour isolated from external causes just is to consider what that thing does when it is active. Here is Spinoza's definition of action at 3D2:

I say we act when something happens, in us or outside of us, of which we are the adequate cause, that is (by D1), when something in us or outside us follows from our nature, which can be clearly and distinctly understood through it alone.

This definition asserts that action equals adequate causation, which (by 3D1) is equivalent to being the *only* cause of some effect. In other words, if the effect of a thing's causal work results from that thing alone and is not determined by external causes, then that thing may be said to be active. But, as we know, regarding some thing isolated from external causes just is equivalent to conceiving that thing insofar as it is in itself. And so it seems that expressions like *quantum in se est* and *quantum potest* denote activity, according to Spinoza.

At 3p12 and 3p28 Spinoza appears to develop an account of human activity that links action with final causation. We may start by noting that these propositions play a very important role in licensing many teleological-sounding descriptions of human behaviour.<sup>109</sup> To see exactly what that role is, and to start fleshing its apparent teleological underpinnings, start by considering Spinoza's claim at 3p12 that as far as we can we will necessarily strive to increase our power of acting. There are two elements in this formulation of 3p12. The first concerns the phrase "as far as it can" which, as we have just seen, denotes a kind of activity. The second is Spinoza's complex notion of striving. For present purposes, all we need to note is that striving is not really distinct from Spinoza's notion of desire. In fact, Spinoza repeatedly couches his claims about desire in terms of our more fundamental striving to persevere in being. By replacing equivalents at 3p12, then, we arrive at the controversial conclusion that, for Spinoza, when we act we always desire to imagine those things that, if obtained, may result in an increase in our power of acting.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> For further discussion see Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza," 325; and Viljanen, *Spinoza's Geometry of Power*, 116.

<sup>110</sup> Bennett notes that there are eleven propositions in Part 3 of the *Ethics* that derive from 3p12, all of which seem to license teleological predictions of human behaviour. See Bennett, *A Study*, 245.

This understanding of 3p12 is arguably teleological because it indicates that the mind is necessarily proactive and forward looking. The future is not irrelevant to our preferences and our actions are responsive to considerations about our future existence. In fact, on the basis of 3p12, Spinoza derives the even more teleologically-sounding claim of 3p28, namely, that “we *strive to further the occurrence* of whatever we imagine will lead to joy.”<sup>111</sup> It is a common property of our actions, on a plausible reading of this proposition, that they *aim at something*, namely, at those things that we associate with joy. Thus, 3p28 appears to license teleological explanations of the following form: ‘if x thinks **A** will bring joy to x, x will do **A**.’<sup>112</sup> This type of explanation is teleological because the representation of something subsequent to the action causes and thus helps to explain why that action was selected from a range of other possible alternatives: it is the fact that I represent something as joyful that, on this reading of Spinoza, causes and explains **A**.

Another important word, intend (*intendimus*), may be found in the demonstration to 3p28. There, Spinoza explicitly writes that we *intend* those things that make us more powerful and which we associate with joy. To see how this notion is linked with teleology, consider why, under common descriptions of human behaviour, actions are typically regarded as teleological. Human actions are teleological because they appeal, among other things, to desires and intentions. We might say, to recall the example of §2, that my going to the dairy is a goal-directed activity precisely because my action is caused by the anticipation of the consequences of that action, getting ice-cream. It is thus the present representation of a future effect – an effect which I *intend* and desire – that acts as a final cause. Because it causes the action, my desires – and their representative contents - may also figure centrally in its explanation. To say that something is the intentional object of one’s desires, on a very common understanding of human action, just is to say that the agent acts *for the sake* of those things which she intends. Spinoza’s usage of expressions like “intend” and “further the occurrence” of,

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<sup>111</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>112</sup> Do not take this as a conclusive interpretation of 3p28. A different text – 3p9s – offers, I think, a corrective to this reading: on the account of 3p9s, it is because x does **A**, that x thinks **A** will bring joy to x. I defend a reading of 3p9 consistent with this interpretation in the next section.

both of which may be found at 3p28, thus favours a teleological understanding of that proposition.

Thus far we have seen that Part 3 of the *Ethics* contains propositions that appear to license teleological descriptions of human behaviour. But can Spinoza accept this general form of teleological explanation? To be somewhat more specific: does Spinoza's philosophy of action allow him to accept, in a way that is consistent with what appears to be the lesson of 3p12 and 3p28, that our motive tendencies are responsive to our representations of ends? Recent scholarship on this question has focused crucially on Spinoza's account of the causal character of the representational features of thought.<sup>113</sup> This is because teleology of the kind that might be inferred from 3p28 can only exist if the right properties of ideas – namely, their *representative* properties – are causally efficacious. A thing is causally efficacious if and only if that thing contributes to a causal occurrence, i.e. if that thing produces effects. Thus, whether teleological explanations of the form 'if x thinks **A** will bring joy to x, x will do **A**' are at work in the *Ethics* seems to depend, to a great extent, upon whether Spinoza has an account capable of accommodating a commitment to the view that the representational content of x's idea of **A** is endowed with genuine causal powers.<sup>114</sup>

In a series of influential studies, Jonathan Bennett has argued that Spinoza's account of mental representation makes it impossible for content to be causally potent. Bennett's argument turns crucially on Spinoza's commitment to the mechanical philosophy. Mechanism is usually understood as denying that the causal powers of bodies can depend on something other than their intrinsic (nonrepresentational) features,

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<sup>113</sup> Bennett's work is at the centre of this debate. See, especially, Bennett, *A Study*, §51, 215–221; and Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers*, 1:210–17. For the critical literature it has inspired see, especially, Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza," 318–21; and Lin, "Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza," 327–47. For a critical survey of that literature see also Viljanen, "Causal Efficacy of Representational Content in Spinoza."

<sup>114</sup> There may be other considerations here that for present purposes I set aside. A related issue concerns whether Spinoza takes human beings to be responsive to properties other than objects of mental representations, such as judgements about the good. The scholium to 3p9 is the central text for this intriguing question. Bennett (*A Study*, 221–24), Carriero ("Spinoza on Final Causality," 138), Della Rocca ("Steps toward Eleaticism," 21), Hübner ("Unorthodox," 358–62), and Viljanen (*Spinoza's Geometry of Power*, 124) defend readings on which 3p9s ought to be read as strong evidence for the Standard Interpretation. Garrett ("Teleology in Spinoza," 323–26), Lin (*Being and Reason*, 162–63), and McDonough ("The Heyday," 192) offer interpretations of the passage consistent with teleology.

such as shape, size, and motion. Representational features are not intrinsic properties of ideas, according to Bennett, because they depend upon things that are external to those ideas, such as their causal history. Furthermore, Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism implies that thought and extension are isomorphic, and so that all the relevant causal features will be the same under every attribute. It follows, according to Bennett, that representative features will be causally inert under the attribute of thought because they depend upon other properties - extrinsic ones - which are causally inert under the attribute of extension.

Proponents of the Modest Interpretation, on the other hand, tend to see in Spinoza room for the opposite thesis. Here, the work of Don Garrett and Martin Lin is particularly important. Garrett and Lin have both argued, *contra* Bennett, that Spinoza accepts that the representational features of thought are causally efficacious. On their view, Spinoza's philosophy has room for a conception of teleology on which a causally efficacious representational state about an anticipated outcome motivates an agent to a certain action.<sup>115</sup>

Whether there are in fact, for Spinoza, representative properties of ideas endowed with causal powers need not be settled here. For even if the proponents of the Modest Interpretation are right in assuming that mental content has efficiently-causal properties, it still does not follow from that commitment alone that there is teleological causation in Spinoza. It might also be, for instance, that the relations that obtain in the attribute of thought between ideas (and their representative properties) are simply the mental counterpart of blind efficient causes following their course in the attribute of extension. Just as bodies enter into relations through efficient causation alone, so do ideas. Spinoza's commitment to seventeenth century mechanism, and his doctrine of parallelism, supply some evidence for this conjecture. It is a tenet of mechanism, it might be argued, that interactions between bodies are the result of the operation of efficient-causes alone. And Spinoza's parallelism requires that every causal occurrence in extension must be mirrored in the attribute of thought (2p7s). Also on grounds of parallelism, there are good reasons to think that adding thought to a causal process does

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<sup>115</sup> See, especially, Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza," 318–21; and Lin, "Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza," 327–47.

not alter the basic structure of the motive tendencies governing that process.<sup>116</sup> So it is not implausible that the relations which obtain between our mental representational states are like the non-teleological relations that, one might suspect, obtain between bodies colliding in extension.<sup>117</sup> The Modest Interpretation should show, more generally, that our ideas, with their imbedded intentions, stand in the right kind of relation to our most basic motive tendency, which Spinoza describes as a striving to persevere in being (3p6). In other words, whether representational content can act as a final cause appears to depend on whether Spinoza has an account of the basic structure of human motivation that allows for some teleological descriptions of it.

Now, I think that it is quite clear that Spinoza accepts that our desires are responsible for causing, at least partially, some of our actions, a view that stems from his association of desire with conatus.<sup>118</sup> Spinoza, recall from §2, presents his conatus doctrine at 3p6:

3p6: Each thing, as far as it is in itself [*quantum in se est*], strives [*conatur*] to persevere in its being.

At 3p9s, Spinoza goes on to argue that desire (*cupiditas*) just is our conatus together with consciousness of it. So, by replacing equivalents, 3p6 amounts to the view that each thing desires to persevere in being. Moreover, Spinoza often writes as if the perception of our desires genuinely informs some of our activities. An important passage may be found in *Ethics* 4 Preface (G II. 207):

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<sup>116</sup> Proponents of the Standard Interpretation often emphasise these aspects of Spinoza's philosophy in order to attribute to him a kind of psychodynamic inertia. On this view, just like bodies have inertial motion, ideas have a kind of inertia to continue their prevailing state. See Carriero, "Spinoza on Final Causality," 134; and Rice, "Spinoza, Bennett, and Teleology," 249.

<sup>117</sup> Although he does not explicitly advance this thesis, I think that Carriero ("Spinoza on Final Causality," 141–44), commenting on a passage from *Ethics* Preface 4 that I discuss below, holds a similar view. Della Rocca's account ("The Power of an Idea," 219–20; and "Steps toward Eleaticism," 21–25) is also particularly noteworthy because Della Rocca, who is a proponent of the Standard Interpretation, holds an extreme view on which *all* the causal work in the mind is done by representational content. Thus, Della Rocca would agree with Garrett and Lin about the causal efficacy of representational properties but he would not take that position as conclusive evidence for the Modest Interpretation.

<sup>118</sup> Spinoza defines desire as *conatus* together with conscious of it, which he distinguishes from mere appetite (3p9s). The qualification in the main text is thus added to accommodate ordinary cases in which consciousness does not accompany action.

What is called a final cause is nothing but a human appetite [...]. For example, when we say that habitation was the final cause of this or that house, surely we understand nothing but that a man, because he imagined the conveniences of domestic life, had an appetite to build a house. So habitation, insofar as it is considered as a final cause, is nothing more than this singular appetite.

This passage seems to leave much room for teleology understood on the basis of the representational features of thought. It suggests that Spinoza is explaining an action by referencing the anticipated consequences of that action, together with the agent's desires for those consequences. Furthermore, Spinoza clearly says in this text that final causes just are appetites and he maintains elsewhere that there is no real difference between appetites and desires (DOA 1, G II. 190). By replacing equivalents once more we arrive at the controversial conclusion that our desires just are the final causes of our activities. And because our desires are determined by our striving to persevere in being, this reading also provides an obvious avenue for interpreting the conatus doctrine of 3p6 in a teleological way. On this reading, self-preservation is the aim of the conatus, the final cause that regulates our most basic conative tendency. Such reading, of course, has the advantage of being consistent with the above teleological rendering of 3p12 and related psychological principles that Spinoza derives from it. In fact, Spinoza couches 3p12 in terms of striving. In the demonstration, he quotes 3p6 directly.

Perhaps one might object to the Modest Interpretation that at 3p6 Spinoza defends the view that things act teleologically only in a very qualified way, a qualification which Spinoza marks by the phrase *quantum in se est*. On this objection, we strive to persevere in being only when we are active, that is, only when we are not under the influence of external causes. But, according to Spinoza, all finite things - including finite actions and human beings - always depend upon other external things for their existence. It is a theme of *Ethics* 4, after all, that human beings are always subject to passions because they necessarily depend upon something other than themselves, and must follow "the common order of Nature" (4p4c). Spinoza's detailed account of finite causation at 1p28 emphasises this dependence for every singular thing. Thus, if both claims are part of Spinoza's view, perhaps 3p6 is only meant to capture what individuals would do under merely *idealized* circumstances, in a way perhaps similar to Spinoza's descriptions of the behaviour of the ideal 'Free Man' at the end of *Ethics* 4. Because human beings, and

finite things in general, cannot avoid but being influenced by other external things, our actions too must be at least partially efficiently caused by those external determinations. We are, in this sense, only “spiritual automata” (*TdIE* §85) because our desires are always fully determined by antecedent conditions.

This, however, is a bad strategy. A wider acquaintance with Spinoza’s views in Part 3 of the *Ethics* reveals that the conatus characterizes not only what we do when we are active. It also describes everything that finite things do *under every circumstance*. In other words: all of our activity is, at the deepest metaphysical level and without exception, a striving to persevere in being. Two other propositions of Part 3 – 3p7 and 3p9 – help to clarify Spinoza’s actual position in two ways. First, 3p7 is the claim that the conatus is the actual essence of any singular thing. There are many effects that we necessarily produce simply in virtue of possessing an essence (1p36). So there are many things that we do which are the result of our striving to persevere in being. Second, at 3p9 Spinoza pushes this view further and claims that both insofar as it is active and insofar as it is passive the mind always strives to persevere in being. The demonstration quotes 3p7, suggesting that our conatus determines everything that we do, even under the influence of external forces. Although 3p9 concerns the activity of the human mind, its chief claim is highly general. Spinoza’s parallelism requires that it is also true of the human body that all of its motive tendencies are determined by the conatus. And by virtue of naturalism, the view on which everything plays by the same rules, what Spinoza has shown about human beings at a deep metaphysical level will also hold true of all other individual things. Hence, Spinoza’s conception of the universality of the conatus makes clear that a teleological understanding of that doctrine will imply a teleological characterization of the actions of any singular thing. Furthermore, because it is not a necessary condition on the conatus that it must be accompanied by veridical awareness,<sup>119</sup> its account must apply equally to beings without such awareness.

One last text that supports the goal-directedness of our activity appears in the Appendix to Part 1 and it is often cited as critical textual evidence for the Modest Interpretation:

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<sup>119</sup> See 3p9s; and 3 DOA 1 (G II 190). See also *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, Def 3.

All the prejudices I here undertake to expose depend on this one: that men commonly suppose that all natural things act, *as men do*, on account of an end. (G. II 78; emphasis added)

A few lines later, Spinoza adds:

I take as a foundation what everyone must acknowledge: that all men are born ignorant of the causes of things, and that *they all want to seek their own advantage* (G. II 7; emphasis added).

On a cursory reading of these passages, Spinoza maintains that human beings act for the sake of ends, a view that helps to explain why we believe (although mistakenly) that God too acts for the sake of ends. On this reading, we cast God in our own image and mistakenly believe that he shares this teleological structure with us.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, Spinoza claims that we are directly aware of the goal-directedness of our actions: we always want those things which we represent as advantageous to us. The text clearly anticipates Spinoza's formal account of the conatus at 3p6, and so it suggests that this latter doctrine really ought to be understood as a teleological doctrine.

To summarize the objection that I have raised on behalf of the Modest Interpretation: because Spinoza takes 3p6 to license the kind of pro-active and forward-looking behaviour that he describes at 3p12 and related propositions, we have strong motives to ascribe to him a teleological reading of the conatus. One of the textual strengths of the Modest Interpretation is its ability to make sense of many of Spinoza's informal discussions of human activity that occur in *Ethics* 1 Appendix and *Ethics* 4 Preface, where Spinoza appears to describe an agent's action by appealing to the agent's anticipated consequences of that action.

But is this reading consistent with Spinoza's rejection of divine ends? This is a fundamental question because Spinoza undeniably rejects the attribution of ends to God. The plausibility of the Modest Interpretation, then, depends on whether it is consistent with that commitment. In the rest of this section, I outline three overall strategies that, although ultimately unsuccessful, may promise to block the Modest Interpretation. This

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<sup>120</sup> Notable proponents of this interpretation include Lin, "Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza," 320; Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza," 316; McDonough, "The Heyday," 189; Curley, "On Bennet's Spinoza," 40–41; and Sangiacomo, "The Polemical Target," 409.



will allow me, in the next section, to develop a new argument for the Standard Interpretation and to show how that argument is a more plausible objection to the teleological reading.

First, an advocate of the Standard Interpretation could point out that Spinoza does not allow for any significant distinction between the causal structure of modes and God's causal structure because Spinoza takes the power of the modes to be part of God's power. He does so explicitly at 4p4d, writing that "man's power (...) is part of God *or* Nature's infinite power." In the *TTP* he makes a similar point, contending that "the universal power of Nature as a whole is nothing but the power of all individual things taken together."<sup>121</sup> These texts seem to indicate that the power of singular things is not really distinct from God's power, and thus that they are alike in some fundamental way. Because the way God exercises his power is deprived of any finality, it seems, then, that the same would hold true for singular things.

This conclusion, however, is unwarranted. An easy way out for the Modest Interpretation is to point out that the above inference is invalid and built on a misreading of Spinoza. At 1p13, Spinoza argues that a substance has no parts: "A substance which is absolutely infinite is indivisible." Thus, singular things and their power cannot, strictly speaking, be part of God. Moreover, even if one takes the above texts at face value and accepts that God can have parts in some sense, the argument is nonetheless invalid. Other things being equal, one cannot derive from the statement 'Nature (i.e. the whole) does not act for ends' the further statement 'singular things (i.e. a part of the whole) do not act for ends.' To do so would be to commit a fallacy of division, whereby from the claim 'A is part of B' and 'B has property P' one makes the invalid inference 'A has property P.'

Perhaps the proponent of the Standard Interpretation could refine the original objection – and this is the second concern I wish to highlight - by arguing that the link between God and singular things is stronger than that of a part-whole relation. On this view, it is not only the case that the power of finite things is part of God's power. It is also that their power – and thus also the way in which that power is exercised - is

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<sup>121</sup> *TTP*, 16.2. Viljanen ("Spinoza's Actualist Model Of Power," 217) draws my attention to these texts. Relatedly, see also 1p17s2 and 2p11c, where Spinoza specifically characterizes the human intellect and will as a part of God's intellect and will.

*identical* to God's. Spinoza certainly does commit to the view that the power of singular things is, in a sense, God's power because he thinks that modes are an expression of God. This is perhaps clearer in the proof to 3p6, where Spinoza contends that whatever power singular things might have is the power of God, a power that he expresses through singular things. Recall: "For singular things are modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way (by 1p25c), that is (by 1p34), things that express, in a certain and determinate way, God's power, by which God is and acts."<sup>122</sup> But if this claim on the identity of power is part of Spinoza's view, then we have no reason to suppose that singular things act in a way that is fundamentally different from the way in which God acts.

This is a good objection because it invites us to reconsider the nature of a finite thing and its similarities with God's nature.<sup>123</sup> I think this is ultimately a successful strategy, but not without further qualifications. For present purposes, we may simply note that God's power and the power of singular things are distinct in some respects. God is an infinite substance, and so he has infinite power. Singular things, however, are finite and limited by other finite things; and so their power is also finite and limited. Assuming the Indiscernibility of Identicals, however, we quickly arrive at the conclusion that God's power and the power of singular things cannot be identical because they do not share all the same properties.<sup>124</sup> Of course, this does not mean that finite things do not exercise their causal power in the same way that God does – and thus that *some* of their properties are identical – but it does mean that any identification tout court will be misplaced.

The final objection that I will raise here is this. Spinoza's naturalism, together with his rejection of divine providence, appears to imply that finite beings are not goal-directed agents.<sup>125</sup> Spinoza is a naturalist, for whom all things, including human beings, manifest universal laws. In the Preface to Part 3 he puts this point in dynamic and causal

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<sup>122</sup> The demonstration to 3p6, its validity and meaning remain a topic of critical debate. Here, I rely on Garrett's account. See Garrett, "Spinoza's Conatus Argument."

<sup>123</sup> Note that "power" and "nature" are identical for Spinoza (1p34).

<sup>124</sup> The Indiscernibility of Identicals is usually understood as the principle according to which two objects are identical if and only if they have all their properties in common.

<sup>125</sup> Carriero ("Spinoza on Final Causality"), and Hübner ("Unorthodox") are notable proponents of the Standard Interpretation who emphasise Spinoza's naturalistic metaphysics.

terms, contending there that activity is “always and everywhere the same.” Together with Spinoza’s insistence that a certain type of being – God – does not act teleologically, the doctrine of naturalism suggests that his rejection of goal-directedness will characterize *any* being alike.

But Spinoza’s naturalism is not so clear-cut. As we have just noted, God and finite things are by no means identical and Spinoza recognizes that there are many differences between them that stem from the fact that God and finite things belong to different ontological categories. God is a substance and finite things are modes. So any argument that is fitting to generalizing from Spinoza’s conception of God to his conception of finite beings will have to show that the generalization involves some respect in which finite things are like God. To anticipate what will be a central focus of the next section, the account of 3p6 is a guide in this respect. In light of Spinoza’s naturalism, either *all* finite things act teleologically or none does, and it is 3p6 that characterizes the activity of finite things. There, moreover, Spinoza explicitly links the activity of the modes with God’s own activity.

The aim of this section was to show how a proponent of the Modest Interpretation might account for internal-end directedness in Spinoza. I argued that the strongest available case for this reading occurs in the first half of *Ethics* 3, where Spinoza’s project is to develop a moral psychology that can serve as basis for his ethics. Many of the psychological principles that Spinoza develops there are naturally understood to license teleological predictions of human behaviour. Because these principles derive from and are ultimately couched in terms of Spinoza’s account of striving, they likewise encourage a teleological rendering of that doctrine. Furthermore, I have argued that this interpretation of the conatus squares nicely with Spinoza’s informal discussions of human action in *Ethics* 1 Appendix and *Ethics* 4 Preface.

Perhaps the most relevant point that emerges from the above discussion, however, is that there are metaphysical resources in Spinoza’s system that may give him the flexibility to deny ends to God, while attributing them to singular things. As I have also hinted above, however, I think that this strategy ultimately fails. Spinoza’s strong identification of God’s power with the power of finite things is a guide in this respect: it suggests that any account of the basic causal structure of God will have to be true of modes. This point is also suggested by Spinoza’s naturalistic metaphysics. Under either

characterization, the conclusion that God and finite things are alike is appealing. In the next section, it is my project to develop new arguments for this similarity.

## **§7. The Causal Structure Of God Is The Causal Structure Of Finite Things**

In §§4-5 I have argued that Spinoza's rejection of external-end directedness has a basis in his causal determinism together with his endorsement of necessitarianism. Spinoza's determinism tells against divine teleology because it implies that God's volitions are not free, and thus that God cannot cause freely with an end in view. Necessitarianism means that there are no alternative possible states from which God chooses among.

In §6, however, we have seen that one might object to this account by distinguishing sharply between the activity of finite things and the activity of God. Here, I argue in response to that objection that there is no relevant respect in which God's activity differs from the activity of singular things. Certainly Spinoza unambiguously holds that, like God, human beings have no free will (1p32; 2p48). The very same reasons that lead Spinoza to rejecting divine ends also force upon him a general rejection of finite teleology. In particular, I show that whether things are considered as divine or as finite actions, there are no unactualized possibilities. And so we cause everything that is possible for us to cause. Our actions are just as *blind and necessary* as God's actions. By showing that finite things resemble God in this way I also hope to show that God's activity resembles the activity of finite things in being a striving to persevere.<sup>126</sup> God, like singular things, has a causal power to exist and to produce effects that follow from his nature alone. Thus, substance and modes behave in essentially the same way, differing primarily with respect to degrees of activity rather than with respect to the structure of their conative tendencies.

We may start by recalling what, on ordinary accounts of human activity, makes a certain type of action teleological. Consider the following question:

What is it in virtue of which x did action **A** instead of action **B**?

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<sup>126</sup> This a controversial claim. For a recent, sophisticated defence of it see Hübner, "Unorthodox," 354–55.

A teleological answer to this question would be one that appeals to a process whereby an agent selects a given state of affairs on the basis of its consequences.<sup>127</sup> On the example that I have used before, my going to the dairy is a goal-directed activity inasmuch as it is caused by the anticipation of one particular effect of that action, getting ice-cream. Because it causes the action, my representation of its consequences also helps explaining why I selected that particular course of action among other equally possible alternatives. For human beings, the idea that desires (with their intentions) guide actions makes sense, and the fact that it is within my power to either go to the dairy or to go for a bike ride suggests that the intention of my action will figure centrally in its explanation: it is that intention that provides a reason for why I did go to the dairy, and for why I did not go for a bike ride.

Spinoza would reject this answer altogether because he also rejects one of its underlying assumptions: namely, that *x* could have done **B** instead of doing **A**. He would reject this assumption because it presupposes that there is a world in which *x* does **B**. For Spinoza, it would make no more sense to ask why a human being selected a certain course of action from a range of possibilities than to ask why God “chose” to actualize a certain world rather than another. Here, Spinoza’s necessitarianism is a guide: everything that is possible necessarily exists and there are no actions that may simply remain possible. Strictly speaking, I could not have gone for a bike ride. If I did go to the dairy that was because the relevant internal and external forces necessitated the action in those circumstances. When, in different circumstances, I do go for bike rides, my action is also necessitated. Spinoza thus denies the assumption that agents can be genuinely motivated by some goal to do certain actions rather than others. And so he rejects teleological causation altogether.

I think that the conatus doctrine and its demonstration show that this is Spinoza’s view. Recall:

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<sup>127</sup> A definition of teleological explanation along these lines may be found in Garrett, “Teleology in Spinoza,” 325. Garrett notes that teleology “requires what may be called a *teleological selection process* – that is, a process capable of selecting and producing states of affairs on the basis of their typical or presumptive consequences” (emphasis in the original). In the main text, the term ‘agent’ is mine, not Garrett’s. I use it loosely to characterize any thing capable of exercising some causal power (and so it should not be taken to capture only cases of *intentional agency*).

3p6: Each thing, insofar as it is itself [*quantum in se est*], strives to persevere in its being.

Dem.: For singular things are modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way (by 1p25c), that is (by 1p34), things that express in a certain and determinate way God's power by which God is and acts.

Spinoza contends here that the activity of finite things is a striving to persevere in being. The demonstration clarifies the proposition. This power by which "each thing" strives to exist is simply an aspect of God's causal power. It suggests that in our striving we resemble God because our activity is merely an aspect of God's activity. The proposition following 3p6 makes this striving the actual essence of singular things:

3p7: The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing.

Dem.: From the given essence of each thing some things necessarily follow (by 1p36), and things are able [to produce] nothing but what follows necessarily from their determinate nature (by 1p29). So the power of each thing, *or* the striving by which it (either alone or with others) does anything, *or* strives to do anything – that is (by 3p6), the power, *or* striving, by which it strives to persevere in its being, is nothing but the given, *or* actual, essence of the thing itself.

A first thing to note is that necessitarianism and the striving of finite things appear side by side in the above passage. In fact, 1p29, which Spinoza also invokes in his account of the necessity of God's will at 1p32c2, says that "[i]n nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way." The demonstration to 3p7 appeals to 1p29: things strive because they have been determined by God to act in a certain way. It suggests that the striving of finite things is a determination of God's power, a power which is never potential but always fully active, as necessitated by the laws of God's nature (1p17d). Spinoza invokes 1p29, then, as a means to emphasize the point that, because finite things are determined by God, the same causal necessity that characterizes God's production of his effects also accounts for the causal activity of the modes.

Second, because "essence" and "power" are identical for Spinoza, 3p7 amounts to the claim that finite things always act or do something just in virtue of having a

particular essence. According to Spinoza's own definition of the term, an essence is the set of necessary and sufficient conditions required for the existence of a thing:<sup>128</sup> "I say that to the essence of any singular thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily taken away" (2D2). (The implication, also present at 2D2, is that a thing will cease to exist if and only if its essence is destroyed.) But an essence is also identical to a causal power. Spinoza makes this point clear for the case of God at 1p34 and for the case of finite things at 3p7d. The characterization suggests, then, that things are always causally operative: without exercising some causal power a thing would simply cease to exist. Hence, insofar as a certain thing exists, that thing will also necessarily do something: it will, according to 3p7, strive to persevere in being.<sup>129</sup>

One might object to this line of reasoning that 3p6 and 3p7 defend the view only that singular things will always exercise *some* causal power, but not that the causal power of singular things is completely exhausted in every causal interaction. It is an admittedly counter-intuitive view to hold – that finite things always do everything that they can – and it is not easily reconcilable with other texts where Spinoza affirms that human beings are for the most part acted on and thus passive.<sup>130</sup> It is perhaps a more plausible interpretation – and one that appears to be consistent with 3p7 and its demonstration – that Spinoza takes finite things to be only partially causally operative. After all, with respect to different courses of action there are alternatives that appear to remain merely potential - even if I did to go to the dairy, it still does not follow (on this objection) that I did not have the power to go for a bike ride instead. And so that course of action remained potential to a degree.

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<sup>128</sup> For a similar gloss of the term "essence" in Spinoza see, e.g., Hübner, "Spinoza on Being Human," 126.

<sup>129</sup> Note that the identity of power and essence, while it is Spinoza's view, raises difficulties for a systematic interpretation of the *Ethics*. Spinoza's theory of the affects – what we would roughly call 'emotions' – is based on his understanding of an affect as a change in one's power of acting (*agendi potentia*), and thus also presumably as a modification of one's essence (3D3; 3p11). This view appears to conflict with other texts of the *Ethics* where Spinoza implies that a thing's power never changes (e.g., 3p8d). However, for recent accounts that address these issues see Hübner, "The Trouble with Feelings"; and Viljanen, *Spinoza's Geometry of Power*, 125–49.

<sup>130</sup> See, especially, 3D2, 4p4, 4p4c.



I think that this strategy, however appealing, is unsuccessful. Finite things, like God, always do everything that they can and so there are no possibilities, both at the level of the finite and at the level of the infinite, that may remain merely potential.<sup>131</sup> To reach this conclusion we need to take a closer look at 3p9, a proposition that we have encountered before and which Spinoza derives (via 3p7) from the conatus doctrine:

3p9: Both insofar as the mind has clear and distinct ideas, and insofar as it has confused ideas, it strives, for an indefinite duration, to persevere in its being and it is conscious of this striving it has.

This proposition concerns specifically the activity of the human mind. It suggests that in every causal interaction the mind always strives to persevere in being, even as its power is limited and conditioned by the power of external things.<sup>132</sup> The same point is reinforced by Spinoza's general definition of passivity at 3D2 (a definition, that unlike the account of 3p9, does not make any attribute-specific claim and so applies to minds as well as to bodies): "I say that we are acted on when something happens in us, or something follows from our nature, *of which we are only a partial cause*" (emphasis added). We are causally operative even when we are passive, Spinoza says here. So it *does* follow that, for Spinoza, things always and in every circumstance fully exercise their power, though that power may in some cases bring about effects as a total cause and, in others, only as a partial cause.

Effectively, what 3D2 and 3p9 make clear is this. In the causal interactions of finite things what alters is *not* the extent to which their power is exercised, but the way in which a thing's power is limited by other external things. There are no things external to God, and so all of God's actions must be caused by his nature alone (1p11d2; 1p16). Finite things, likewise, always strive to exist and to bring about effects from their

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<sup>131</sup> The account of this paragraph includes features that may be found in Viljanen, "Spinoza's Actualist Model Of Power," 220–25.

<sup>132</sup> Note that although there is no explicit reference to the notion of external cause at 3p9, that notion is implicit in Spinoza's reference to confused or inadequate ideas. Inadequate ideas have causes external to the nature of the mind because they express the way in which the body is affected by external bodies (2p11c; 2p29s). Effectively, at 3p9, in asserting that the mind strives from inadequate ideas, Spinoza is saying that the mind strives even when its object – the body – is under the influence of external causes.

essence (3p7; 3p9). In their case, however, this inclination is defeasible. Nonetheless, both in the case of God and in the case of finite beings, things always use all of their power and all possibilities are completely exercised as necessitated by their relevant causes.

Let us pause and take stock. What bearing does this account of power have on the issue of internal-end directness? First, it shows that Spinoza would render our initial question loose at best, misleading at worst. Spinoza would deny that *x* had the power to do **B** and so he would deny that *x* acted teleologically by selecting, or by being determined to select, **A** from a range of possibilities on the basis of **A**'s consequences. Given *x*'s current state, together with the state of its external causes, it would be *impossible* for *x* to do **B**. And so in doing **A**, *x* actualized all possibilities.

Second, this conclusion is just what one should expect given Spinoza's thesis that each (finite) action is just an aspect of God's activity. In reaching the result that God does not cause things teleologically in §§4-5, I focused at a crucial point on Spinoza's views on necessitarianism. Because Spinoza is a necessitarian, he denies that there is any potential power in God and so he also denies that God could have been determined by considerations about the good (for instance) to actualize this world rather than any other equally possible world. In light of his claim that all finite actions are God's actions, we should expect Spinoza's characterization of God's activity to apply equally to any action and so to hold true of ants, rocks, and human beings. My reading shows that this expectation is borne out in Part 3 of the *Ethics* – especially 3p6 to 3p9 – where Spinoza emphasises that striving characterizes all of the conative tendencies of any given singular thing. All of our power is, like God's, always completely exercised as necessitated by our essence. And so the same reasons that Spinoza takes to preclude external-end directedness also force upon Spinoza a general rejection of internal end-directedness.

When we act, then, what happens is *not* that we are determined to do something by some end, say, persevere in being. What the above propositions make clear is that our essence just is a causal power that has a certain character.<sup>133</sup> For as long as we have an

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<sup>133</sup> It seems intuitive to me that a power can have a certain character without being teleological. Descartes's account of bodily tending, on which bodies strive without their striving being for the sake of anything else, is perhaps an example of such power.

essence – that is, as long as we exist – we will always necessarily do certain things. Of course, Spinoza never denies that mental representations often accompany our striving and thus that we act with intentions (e.g., *Ethics* 4 Preface G II. 207). But he would certainly deny that the objects of our intentions cause our actions and therefore also that they can explain why we act or strive to act in the way we do.

I think that Spinoza sees this conclusion as a consequence of his necessitarian account of power. It is because finite things are fully causally operative that they regard certain things as good or worth pursuing. This point is implied already in the demonstration to 3p7, where Spinoza writes that “things are able [to produce] *nothing but what follows [sequitur] necessarily from their determinate nature*” (emphasis added). Our nature is a power to cause effects that can be understood through our essence alone. And so all the other properties of human beings, such as their judgements about the good, must be effects of this causal power - they must be caused and explained by our nature. In this respect too, we resemble God. To think otherwise would be to reverse the proper order of causation and explanation. The scholium to 3p9 explicitly asserts this view (and note that the demonstration to 3p9 quotes 3p7 directly):

We neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it.

Because willing, wanting and desiring are all kinds of striving for Spinoza, the passage indicates that certain representations of goals, such as judgements about the good, do not influence our most basic conative tendencies. On the contrary, Spinoza makes clear that these conative tendencies are causally prior to other properties that accompany our actions. Thus, he does not deny that we judge things to be good, or even that we ordinarily characterize certain aspects of our actions as ends (as he seems to indicate most clearly in *Ethics* 1 Appendix).<sup>134</sup> Yet, Spinoza seems to insist that insofar as those judgements or characterizations are causes they can only be *efficient* causes.

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<sup>134</sup> G II. 78. Melamed (“Teleology in Jewish Philosophy,” 143–48) offers a detailed account of Spinoza’s reasons for thinking that people mistakenly believe that they act on account of ends.

Attention to Spinoza's Latin in the house-building passage that I quoted in the previous section shows that that text, properly understood, provides a deflationary account of desire that is consistent with 3p9. Recall:

What is called [*dicitur*] a final cause is nothing but [*nihil est praeter*] a human appetite insofar as a principle, or primary cause [*causa primaria*] of some thing. For example, when we say that habitation was the final cause of this or that house, surely we understand [*intelligimus*] nothing but that a man, because he imagined the conveniences of domestic life, had an appetite to build a house. So habitation, insofar as it is considered as a final cause, is nothing more than this singular appetite. It is really [*revera*] an efficient cause, which is considered as a first cause, because men are commonly ignorant of the causes of their appetites.

As Spinoza indicates here, ordinary people misunderstand the nature of the causal relations at work because they are ignorant of the causes of their own desires. (Already in *Ethics* 1 Appendix Spinoza had given an account of why ordinary people have an inclination to think that their desires are uncaused.) In the course of experience we mistakenly take our appetites to be the final or primary causes (*causa finalis ... causa primaria*) of what we do because we are unaware of the causes of our actions. And so we believe the object towards which we strive to be the cause of our striving. But as Spinoza explicitly asserts, those same appetites, properly understood, are really (*revera*) efficient causes. Of course, the object of my striving may also be a feature of my desire. Still, that object will be a feature of an *efficient* cause which, like everything else, will also have *efficient* causes in virtue of which it exists and produces effects (1p28). Each desire, then, with its intention, is only a small part of the infinite chain of efficient-causes that completely *necessitates* our actions.

The above analysis has focused on aspects of activity that appear to be typical of human beings or of otherwise particularly complex individuals. But is this account capable of addressing potential cases of final causation that do not depend on robust psychological features like intentions and desires? It is a well-known tenet of Aristotelian natural philosophy that teleological action does not always require intentional deliberation: “[I]t is absurd to suppose that purpose is not present because we do not observe the agent deliberating.”<sup>135</sup> One might argue that Spinoza's conatus is

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<sup>135</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, II. 8, 199b27.

similar, in that it is goal-directed because it aims at self-preservation, and yet not guided by mentality.<sup>136</sup>

As a first round of response we might simply note that Spinoza believes that all things are animated to a degree, and so that there are reasons to think that whatever types of causal activity there might be, these types will also involve mentality. In fact, Spinoza's panpsychism arguably commits him to the view that every being will experience desire to a degree.<sup>137</sup> And his naturalism requires that general descriptions of human behaviour will be true also of other singular things. It is a point also favoured by the universal scope of the conatus doctrine: as Spinoza asserts in 3p6, it is "each thing" that strives. Moreover, desiring is just an attribute-specific manifestation of striving (3p9s). For the metaphysics of finite things generally, then, what matters most is that Spinoza's account of desire is meant to capture an aspect of our striving that we also share with other beings. Whether the universal doctrine of striving is conceived under the attribute of thought or under the attribute of extension (or under both attributes) its basic causal structure remains the same (3p9s; DOA 1).

Nevertheless, I think that we can push Spinoza's position further and argue also that his views on power would lead him to reject any kind of distinctively non-thoughtful teleological process. A tradition going back at least to Aristotle famously conceived final causation – and movement more generally – as the actualization of something that is merely potential.<sup>138</sup> For the Aristotelians, driving this change lies a substantial form, which is usually related to a particular species or kind: the acorn will become an oak tree partially because the form of the oak tree is impressed in the acorn and directs its change.<sup>139</sup> Spinoza would reject this kind of explanation entirely because he rejects the idea that things have capacities for change that may be merely potential. For, as we have

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<sup>136</sup> This is an important theme of Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza," 322, 327; and Lin, *Being and Reason*, chap. 6.

<sup>137</sup> For a detailed defence of this claim see LeBuffe, "Theories about Consciousness."

<sup>138</sup> See Aristotle, *Physics*, III. 1, 201b4 ff.: "[T]he actuality of the potential, qua potential, is change." Des Chene (*Physiologia*, chap. 2) offers a comprehensive discussion of the reception of this doctrine in late medieval Aristotelianism.

<sup>139</sup> The relation between a thing's form and its end is clearest perhaps at Aristotle, *Physics*, II. 3. Carriero ("Spinoza on Final Causality," 129) notes the importance of this doctrine to Spinoza's use of value terms.

seen, all power is always completely exercised as necessitated by the laws of one's nature.

I would like to conclude this section by addressing two potential worries that one might raise to the account of power and causation in Spinoza as I have defended it here. Addressing these worries will let me further clarify my account.

The first issue is an earlier concern and involves the scope of the causal activity thesis described in the conatus doctrine. That thesis, recall, is the view according to which anything that is a cause, always exercises all of its power in striving to persevere in being. A proponent of the Modest Interpretation could reasonably deny that this thesis applies equally to God or nature taken as a whole.<sup>140</sup> First, although at 3p6 Spinoza writes that "each thing" strives, he clarifies in the demonstration that the doctrine applies only to "singular things." At 2D2, Spinoza defines "singular things" as "finite things that have a determinate existence." Thus, it is clear that infinite things (like God and the infinite modes) do not fall under the scope of 3p6. Second, 3p4 and 3p5, which form an important basis for the conatus doctrine, strongly suggest that striving is something that finite things do *against* other finite things. For example, 3p4, which Spinoza quotes at 3p6d, is the claim that "no thing can be destroyed except through an external cause." There is nothing external to God. So the conatus doctrine cannot apply to him. Under any characterization, the salient point is this. Because God does not fall under the scope of 3p6, the claim that God and finite things share the same causal structure is defeasible. And so a teleological interpretation of that doctrine would not require the attribution of ends to the activity of God.

To clarify my position: I acknowledge that the account of 3p6-3p9 characterizes the activity of finite things specifically and suggests that infinite things are not within the scope of the conatus doctrine. Nevertheless the various components of the striving doctrine also characterize the divine case, and the causal activity thesis that Spinoza defends at 3p6 applies equally to God. Like singular things, God's causal power is a power to exist and to produce effects from his nature alone (1p11d2; 1p16; 1p34). And in both cases this power is always completely exercised as necessitated by the laws of one's essence (1p17d; 1p34; 3p7d).

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<sup>140</sup> This view is explicitly defended in McDonough, "The Heyday," 190. See also Lin, *Being and Reason*, 138.

We may also put this point by saying that things strive because they are an expression of God's striving. In fact, finite things strive to maintain their own existence and to cause everything that is possible for them to cause in virtue of the fact that their striving *is* God's striving. As Spinoza writes, "each thing, insofar as it is in itself [*quantum in se est*], strives to persevere in its being." Notably, the phrase *quantum in se est* resembles Spinoza's definition of substance. For Spinoza, a substance is *in se* (1D3). So at 3p6 Spinoza's claim is that finite modes strive insofar as they are a substance. An analysis of finite modes "insofar as" they are substances just is an analysis of finite modes that concerns itself with an aspect of finite modes that they share with substances. So what Spinoza makes clear at 3p6 is that finite things strive because they are an expression of a kind of God's striving to persevere.

A final concern may arise from a distinction that we have encountered earlier in §1 between explanation by ends and causation by ends. Someone could object to the above account that, although he does not allow for final *causation* anywhere in the world, Spinoza's system nonetheless has the resources to accommodate certain kinds of *explanation* that we would regard as teleological. Functional explanations, for example, are of this kind because they do not require final causation. When one says that the heart facilitates the purpose of circulating blood one is thereby putting forward a certain type of teleological explanation. But that explanation should be distinguished from teleology understood as a certain type of causation or motive tendency – as when one says, e.g., that the heart's activity is structured for the sake of circulating blood. Certainly, Spinoza is clear that a given thing does what it does *because* (at least partially) its activity is a striving to persevere in being. So we may perhaps explain a thing's behaviour by referencing something subsequent to it (perseverance in being), even if we deny that perseverance is a cause for the striving of the thing.<sup>141</sup>

While we may reasonably distinguish causation and explanation in this way, Spinoza would not. In our analysis of 1A4 in §1 we have already seen that Spinoza places a causal condition on explanation such that an explanation of an action or event requires knowledge of its causes. It is a thesis also favoured by his endorsement of

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<sup>141</sup> It should be noted that of those scholars who find teleology in Spinoza, Garrett explicitly offers a definition of the concept in specific explanatory terms. Garrett ("Teleology in Spinoza," 310) defines teleology "as the phenomenon of states of affairs having etiologies that implicate, in an explanatory way, likely or presumptive consequences of those states of affairs."

causal rationalism, the view that everything has a cause and can be explained *only* by reference to that cause.<sup>142</sup> As Spinoza explicitly asserts at 1p11d2, there is a cause or reason (*causa sive ratio*) for everything. The Latin word *sive* generally indicates identity. It suggests, then, that Spinoza takes explanatory and causal relations to be the same kind of relation. And so it also suggests that Spinoza would regard and dismiss as teleological any kind of explanation that appeals to the consequences of the action to be explained.

If the above account is correct, it raises difficulties for the interpretation of the psychology and moral theory of the *Ethics*. In particular, it seems unlikely that Spinoza would accept an understanding of the conatus doctrine that could be used to explain the activity of human beings by reference to their self-preserving tendencies. It also suggests that a cursory reading of 3p12, 3p28 and related propositions – all of which Spinoza derives from 3p6 – is mistaken: things do not do what they do *because* of the joyful outcomes of their activities.

The principal objection in the previous section was that, although Spinoza rejects divine teleology he is not thereby committed to rejecting finite teleology. Against this line of thought, I have argued here that from the adequate monistic viewpoint all there is is God's action. And so Spinoza's reasons for rejecting divine teleology characterize finite things just as well. Finite things, like God, always exercise all of their power in causing everything that is possible for them to cause. And so there are no possible states from which they choose among: their actions are just as necessary as God's actions. Hence, Spinoza's own reasons for rejecting external end-directedness also force upon him a general rejection of internal-end directedness. Moreover, Spinoza's commitment to causal rationalism in the *Ethics* strongly suggests that he does not distinguish in any meaningful way between explanation and causation. Because no causation is teleological causation, no explanation is teleological explanation either.

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<sup>142</sup> For discussion of this doctrine see Bennett, *A Study*, §8.3, 29-30.



## Final Remarks

In this thesis I have attempted to defend the Standard Interpretation by developing an account of Spinoza's metaphysics on which Spinoza is committed to rejecting all forms of teleology and teleological explanations. Proponents of the Modest Interpretation depict Spinoza otherwise. According to them, Spinoza allows for some kinds of teleology and teleological explanations. On their view, this commitment is consistent with the metaphysics of the *Ethics* because Spinoza's fundamental distinction between substance and mode gives him the flexibility to deny ends to God while attributing them to finite things.

After having introduced Spinoza's central concepts in §1, I have argued in §2 that, on the account of the *Ethics*, there is no relevant difference between God's causal structure and the causal structure of finite things. There is, at bottom, only one causal power and only one way in which that power is exercised. God's essence causally necessitates everything by efficient causation alone. Because no divine causation is teleological, no finite causation is teleological causation either.

In §3 I have raised an objection to my view. The objection was that God's strict determination of the world through efficient causes does not preclude an account on which God also acts for the sake of an end. §§4-5 showed that Spinoza's arguments against teleology are more powerful than they are usually understood to be because they are intertwined with two important metaphysical commitments: causal determinism and necessitarianism. In the ontological framework of the *Ethics*, these commitments yield striking results: God cannot act teleologically because God cannot cause freely, and there are no possible alternatives that God can select among.

In §6, I have raised a second objection to my view. On that objection, Spinoza can accept internal end-directedness because he distinguishes sharply between the activity of substance and the activity of modes. Spinoza's conatus doctrine, which characterizes the active of finite modes specifically, suggests (on this view) that finite things regularly act for the sake of persevering their being. In §7 I have argued that this suggestion is misleading: Spinoza endorses a view on which, like God, finite things always do everything that they can, and there are no possibilities – finite or infinite – that may

remain merely potential. The same reasons that lead Spinoza to reject ordinary accounts of divine teleology also lead him to reject finite teleology altogether.

The metaphysical picture I have defended here thus suggests that any apparent teleology in the *Ethics* is merely apparent. Nevertheless, some issues do remain pressing. In particular, we have seen in §6 that Spinoza draws many pro-active and forward-looking descriptions of human behaviour from his basic, non-teleological account of human action. Understanding Spinoza's motivations for these claims, which is a possible avenue for further research, may move us closer to a systematic understanding of the *Ethics*.

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