

the mother of all prejudices: teleology and normativity in spinoza

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Teleology is a major problem in Spinoza's thought for at least three reasons, two internal and one external to Spinozism as a historico-philosophical field. The first internal reason is that Spinoza himself considers the path toward truth to be seeded with obstacles and difficulties formed by theological and philosophical prejudices. He sees teleology as the first and most serious of these obstacles, so widespread that everyone aspiring to the acquisition of true knowledge encounters it. Teleology is, in a word, the mother of all prejudices. The second internal reason is that the question of Spinoza's teleology, and the normativism that derives from it, is one of the most divisive issues within Spinozist scholarship. Although Spinoza plainly and openly dismisses every and any form of teleology, this claim is unambiguously understood and fully accepted only in the continental tradition. In analytic scholarship, on the contrary, it has sparked a huge debate that has dismissed Spinoza's own words and neutralised the originality and strength of his thought vis-à-vis the main normative ethical and metaethical thinkers of the canon, Aristotle and Kant in particular.¹ The third reason goes beyond a mere enquiry in the history of philosophy and is thus external to Spinozism itself: I strongly believe that Spinoza's critique of teleology and normativity remains relevant, as teleology permeates our culture in forms and ways that are far more sophisticated than they were in Spinoza's time. We are in dire need of language that critiques it as the theological/philosophical superstition it is, and the internal and external reasons thus converge: we can ill-afford a strand of philosophy that so misreads this key

element in Spinoza's potentially liberatory work.

Although space constraints make it impossible to discuss the external reason, I will explore the question of teleology related to the internal reasons to show that Spinoza's philosophy is—in all its aspects, metaphysical and ethical, political and aesthetic—profoundly and consistently anti-teleological. I will start by showing that the historiographical debate has failed to understand the issue of teleology in Spinoza because it has used a definition of finalism that is more consistent with the language and meaning of 20th century metaethical and analytical debates than with the 17th century debates Spinoza refers to. Next, in section two, I will show how he rejects teleology, along with normativism, and grounds his philosophy on four theoretical pillars that I will analyse in the third and last section. These pillars are the redefinition of the notion of essence, the destruction of the concept of divine providence, the critique of functionalism, and, finally, the development of ontological nominalism.

SPINOZA AND THE ORDER OF NATURE

According to Spinoza, everything happens necessarily and in agreement with the universal and eternal disposition of nature that reveals itself in its constant and regular *ratio*. Spinoza consistently states this, perhaps most clearly in chapter VI of his *TTP* in which he says that Nature observes a fixed and immutable order (*ordo fixus et immutabilis*) and that if anything were to happen contrary to Nature's universal laws (*leges universales*), it would necessarily also be contrary to God's intellect (*TTP VI, 7-9; CSW II, 154*). Nature's *ratio* does not make exceptions and does not depend on any divine and arbitrary will.

The term *ratio* refers to hermeneutic rules (*TTP VI, 34*), Hebrew grammar rules (*TTP IX, 29*), legal rules and laws (*TTP VII, passim*) and, most interestingly for the issue at stake here, the *regula naturae*, which Spinoza used in his striking definition of the *jus sive potentia* in *TTP XVI, 2*: “Per jus et institutum naturae nihili aliud intelligo quam regulas naturae uniuscujusque individui, secundum quas unumquodque naturaliter determinatum concipimus ad certo modo existendum et operandum.” The following are the most important English translations:

Wernham: “By the right and law of nature I simply mean the rules of each individual thing's nature, the rules whereby we conceive it as naturally determined to exist and act in a definite way.”

Shirley: “By the right and established order of Nature I mean simply the rules governing the nature of every individual thing, according to which we conceive it as naturally determined to exist and to act in a definite way.”

Silverthorne/Israel: “By the right and order of nature I merely mean the rules determining the nature of each individual thing by which we conceive it as determined naturally to exist and to behave in a certain way.”

Curley: “By the right and established practice of nature I mean nothing but the rules of the nature of each individual, according to which we conceive each thing to be naturally determined to existing and having effects in a certain way.”

Shirley and Israel both introduce the idea of rules that, from above, actively “govern” and “determine” natural things, which are somehow passive. Wernham, followed by Curley, is more respectful of the text, implicitly suggesting the immanence of these rules to natural things. Nature’s *ratio* is immanent and Spinoza suggests, I believe, precisely the contrary of an “order” (Israel) or an “established order” (Shirley) that governs or determines nature. Wernham is closer, with the idea of law, which is also suggested by Giacotti’s *Lexicon*, which unequivocally points to the meaning of *lex naturalis*.²

The laws of nature do not express God’s will, but God’s intellect, and thus unfold according to its *integrally absolute* necessity, beyond and against every end. The concept is strategically explained in *E I*, Ap.: “the laws of [God’s] nature [are] so ample that they sufficed for producing all things which can be conceived by an infinite intellect,” (*E I*, Ap.; CSW II, 446) which repeats *E I*, P16: “omnia quae sub intellectum infinitum cadere possunt.” It is in this astonishing text, the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics*, that Spinoza powerfully presents his fight against teleology: “Nature has no end set before it [*naturam finem nullum sibi praefixum habere*] and ... all final causes are nothing but human fictions [*omnes causas finales nihil, nisi humana esse figmenta*]” (*E I*, Ap.; CSW II, 442).

TELEOLOGY: THE PROBLEM OF A DEFINITION

Now, if the statement is as unambiguous as I claim, how is it that so many scholars are able to reintroduce teleology into Spinoza’s thought? Again, this happens

mainly in the anglophone debate, largely but not exclusively influenced by the analytical approach and completely ignoring, consciously I assume, the continental scholars who take Spinoza's anti-teleological statement seriously. The dispute in anglophone scholarship is polarised around two main positions that recognise either a partial or a full teleological dimension in Spinoza's thought. Both are attempts to respond to a number of recurring questions: does Spinoza accept any form of teleology and, if so, in which domain of his system, i.e. moral psychology, the natural world, or even the substance/God itself? How does his metaphysics, apparently grounded on a strict necessitarianism, reconcile itself with an ethics? In other words and more broadly, is a non-normative and non-teleological ethics possible at all?

Edwin Curley has argued that the ethical aim of Spinozism cannot be disconnected from teleology. Spinoza's ethics is concerned with the future, with provision and prescription, with recommendations and injunctions, and thus, Curley contends, with something that somehow commands, from the end that lies in the future, the beginning and present of human actions. Moral imperatives for Spinoza are general and universal; as "hypothetical imperatives with necessary antecedents, and so, in effect, categorical," they remind us of Kant.³ Curley's intention is to transform Spinoza's natural laws, at least at the human level, into imperatives.⁴ Surprisingly, however, Curley ignores the clear distinction that Kant himself establishes between categorical and hypothetical. A hypothetical imperative, even with a necessary antecedent, does not become categorical. It is an assertorial and non-problematic imperative, but not a categorical one.⁵

Curley has refined his position in response to Jonathan Bennett's influential thesis. Spinoza claims to reject ends in both his metaphysics and his psychology (i.e. neither nature nor man functions teleologically). However, Bennett argues, because Spinoza's ethics is grounded on the idea of the individual effort in the *conatus* (which Bennett uncritically but superficially equates with "self-preservation"), his argumentation is fallacious, inconsistent, and masks its teleology, which, according to Bennett, is the necessary condition for every principle of self-interest.⁶ What is thus at stake for Curley and Bennett (and their respective followers) is the consistency of Spinoza's philosophy. Although they disagree on the formal consistency of Spinoza's argumentation, they agree on the substantive question, namely, that Spinoza, more or less explicitly and consciously, does not and cannot renounce teleology in the human realm, even if he is able to imagine nature at its highest level as free from it.

These readings have opened the door to even more radical conclusions like those of David Garrett. Less interested in the question of consistency, Garrett reintroduces Spinoza's philosophy into the early modern debate, comparing him with Descartes, Leibniz, and Aristotle. In an unorthodox position, Garrett claims that Spinoza accepts teleology, although differently, at every level of reality: human, subhuman, and divine. At the human level, Spinoza "fully and consistently accepts the legitimacy of many teleological explanations," in particular through his theory of *conatus*, which is intrinsically teleological. More strikingly, because of Spinoza's monism, "whatever teleological selection process exists must exist 'in God'." If there is not a teleology *of* God, there is certainly a teleology *in* God. Finally, at the subhuman level, since the *conatus* is in no way restricted to human beings, the mechanistic laws of motion and rest ultimately depend on and point to an intrinsic teleological activity. Spinoza's originality is thus annihilated, and he is reinserted into the diverse and yet consistently teleological nature of the philosophical canon.⁷

A third set of interpretations stands between the first two, serving as a kind of mediation between Spinoza's unambiguous condemnation of every form of teleology and the idea that a certain kind of normativity must exist, at least as a regulatory framework, in every ethically oriented system. Michael A. Rosenthal argues, for example, that Spinoza is committed to a full relativism of moral positions and values, and that these values never work as higher principles that transcend the actual relationship between modes.⁸ However, by metaphorically extending the process of value creation from the political to the individual domain, Rosenthal claims that the Good has a *constitutive* function for humans in the same way a political *constitution* does for the body politics. Developing Miller's reflection on the real presence of an axiology in Spinoza,⁹ Rosenthal argues that objective standards exist, notwithstanding and beyond relativistic anthropology, in Spinoza's thought, and that they have a normative function in the same way that political values are normative at the collective level. The question of Spinoza's consistency reappears also within this third kind of mediating interpretations, for example, Yakira's.¹⁰ Yakira argues that the "final moment" of the *Ethics* is normatively grounded on a positive and objective concept of values that is developed beyond and against the earlier natural necessitarianism and ethical eudemonism of Stoic inspiration. In Yakira's view, Spinoza's strictly deterministic approach fails to respond to Blyenbergh's objections on the nature of evil, until, that is, part V of the *Ethics*, when Spinoza responds by abandoning his determinism for a normatively oriented ethics. The problem is that Yakira seems to proceed here as if part V were

the ultimate and real expression of Spinozism, superseding the rest of Spinoza's production.

In the anglophone literature, only Lee Rice has taken Spinoza's rejection of any teleology seriously. Spinoza is not inconsistent, Rice claims, because his *conatus* is not a conscious effort *even* for humans; rather it must be connected to a physical idea of a "law of psychodynamic inertia," of internal and essential force.¹¹ Rice's only non-English source is Sylvain Zac's book on *L'idée de vie dans la philosophie de Spinoza*, but he develops a reading of both the *conatus* as an inherent and efficient cause of motion and of teleology as a merely human fiction that was already *not* problematic in the continental literature since at least the works of Gueroult (1969), Deleuze (1968), Matheron (1969), and Macherey (1979). However, before the analytic turn—and one can hardly underestimate Bennett's influential reading here, regardless of whether it has been accepted or criticised—the vast majority of interpretations of Spinozism have seen him—the enemy of teleology—as guilty of the mortal sin of ruling out every and any form of normativism in early modernity.¹²

The analytic approach, however, is not the main problem here. Garrett, for example, goes far beyond a purely analytical perspective, making a real effort to take the historical dimension of Spinoza's philosophy seriously. The problem, I believe, is in what all these authors intend by teleology and how they define it. No scholar has the monopoly on a definition, but if one does not work with the same concept Spinoza does, then 'Spinoza' becomes an empty word, much like, following Spinoza's metaphor in *E I*, P17S, the word 'dog' means both the barking animal and the heavenly constellation.

People form opinions about the future using their imagination, evaluate the possible consequences of their actions using their reason, *desire* what they do not possess yet, *fear* what they perceive as a threat, etc. In a word, humans think about and are thus affected by the idea of the future: for many scholars, this is already teleology. It is by no means a technical or specific definition of teleology, drawn from a philosophical tradition, but it is enough to say that because Spinoza conceived human minds as engaging in all these activities, he admits teleology and normativity in his thought, notwithstanding his open condemnation.¹³

Thinking the future, or even thinking *about* the future, is an idea that extends beyond any workable definition of normative teleology. Because this idea is so

broad, encompassing any viable definition of a human mind having any kind of idea beyond the immediate and punctual perception of itself, these scholars are not saying that Spinoza more or less consciously or consistently opts for teleology. Instead, they are saying that no human mind *qua* human can be conceived outside a teleological framework. If teleology is any psychological consideration of the future, then nothing but teleological psychology can possibly be conceived. But this would mean no alternative interpretation of Spinoza—or, indeed, debates about teleology at all—would be possible.

A similar outcome follows from Garrett's definition:

Roughly speaking, a *teleological explanation* explains why something is so by indicating what its being so is *for*. Somewhat more precisely, a teleological explanation is one that explains a state of affairs by indicating a likely or presumptive consequence (causal, logical, or conventional) of it that is implicated in the state's origin of etiology. Such consequences often, if not always, take the form of ends, goals, or goods. ... *Teleology* is the phenomenon of states of affairs having etiologies that implicate, in an explanatory way, likely or presumptive consequences of those states of affairs.¹⁴

It is not clear where Garrett takes this definition from. Nor is it clear why he decides to “make no attempt to define the concept of ‘an explanatory way’,”¹⁵ since the teleological *explanation* of phenomena is precisely what is at stake in this debate and what is denounced by Spinoza as a human fiction.

In the Appendix, Spinoza states clearly that part I of the *Ethics* is first and foremost an *explanation* of the concatenation of things. He also says that “misconception” developed into superstition precisely when “every man strove most earnestly to understand and to *explain* [*explicare*] the final causes of all things,” and that the abstract notions such as Good, Bad, Order, Confusion and the like are precisely formed “to explain” what happens in nature. Finally, Spinoza states, “we see ... that all notions whereby the common people are wont to explain Nature are merely modes of imagining” or *entia imaginationis*.¹⁶

It is thus a pity that Garrett's hypothesis avoids precisely what Spinoza considers the ground of the main prejudice, namely the supposedly explanatory function of teleology,¹⁷ the widespread belief among humans that all things in Nature are like themselves in acting with an end in view.¹⁸ Turning upside down Spinoza's un-

ambiguous statement, Garrett first establishes the truth of the teleological prejudices and then builds on it the ground for every other prejudice.

SPINOZA'S CONCEPT OF TELEOLOGY

Spinoza clarifies that the chronological anticipation of the future is only part of the problem, which has to do with the nature and characteristics of human imagination. Imagination is a power and feature that has the inconvenience of drifting toward the finalist illusion.¹⁹ There is nothing wrong in imagining the future in itself. The more or less adequate knowledge of it does not differ, in this sense, from the knowledge of the present or the past. The future is involved in our knowledge and action as much as the memory of the past is. When I cry or laugh because I remember a sad or cheerful event that happened in the past, it is not the past event itself that causes my sadness or joy, but rather my current mind-body state, which is determined by my memory, knowledge and representation of the past. They are at work in the representation, but never as a final cause. One could think of the image of a mechanical watermill. It is not the water that has already passed nor that is yet to come that actually moves the wheel. But there is a continuity in the movement, and although the wheel is only in contact with the water that is presently pushing it, the whole flow includes the water that was here in the past and will be here in the future.

The problem, Spinoza argues, is thus not imagination itself, but rather the belief in the actual existence of a final cause, a *causa finalis* that explains the antecedent by the subsequent, not so much in chronological terms, but by claiming ontological priority and superiority over the efficient cause.²⁰

Bennett claims that the representation of the future is incompatible with the materialist physics of the *Ethics*,²¹ and Spinoza “simply failed to notice that he had no decent case against this kind of teleological explanation.”²² To this, one can respond with Curley that human action is not caused by the future itself, but by the anticipation of its consequences, which produces desire and informs the action.²³ One can also respond to Curley, however, by saying that this is not “making talk of final causes acceptable.”²⁴ In fact it is simply *not* finalism at all.

Bennett makes his point by saying that “Spinoza [rejects] ‘final causes,’ teleological explanations, anything in the nature of a pull rather than a push,”²⁵ and concludes that Spinoza is wrong. I think this is a poor metaphor, however, and that

the language is imprecise. For a mechanist like Spinoza, *push* and *pull* belong to the same kind of phenomena, material and mechanical. The cause that pushes and the one that pulls are both efficient causes and thus not different with respect to their mechanical (and non-teleological) nature. What Bennett's language misses is that Spinoza's denunciation is not pointed at the direction to or from which a cause pushes or pulls, but rather the ontological priority of the effect over the cause. It is this, for Spinoza, that turns Nature upside down.

Once the final cause has been restored to its central position, the question becomes what its relationship with the efficient cause is and if there are domains in which its existence can be granted. It is here that Spinoza's radical originality can be seen. Mechanicism, and the 17th century more generally, is traditionally seen as the adversary of finalism. Yet the truth is not so simple. Neither Bacon nor Descartes deny the existence of final causes. They only exclude them in physics and biology. Throughout the 17th century, Descartes' followers take a much softer position, and sometimes work precisely to restore final causes to scientific discourse.²⁶ In order to counter anti-Cartesian arguments, they must reconcile efficient and final causes in nature. The mechanical structure of animal bodies, so unambiguously maintained by Descartes, becomes the proof of the machine-maker's higher intelligence, its operation above and beyond nature itself.²⁷ The outcome of this process will be Leibniz's idea that finalism contains mechanicism,²⁸ followed by Boyle's and Newton's teleological science.²⁹

It is at this moment that Spinoza's originality becomes evident. The demolition of the ontological consistency of final causes had already started in the middle ages with Scotus³⁰ and Ockham,³¹ who declare that the end can be a cause only in a metaphorical sense. Stoics had already criticised the multiplication of causes in Aristotle and Plato and reduced all of them to the efficient cause, as seen in Seneca, *Ep.* 65, in which, however, the efficient cause is the providential reason of a god that, like a sovereign and the soul, gives shape and order to the world. I think Spinoza goes much further. Like Lucretius and the Epicureans,³² Spinoza does not just reduce final causes to efficient ones or merely think that ends are causes in a metaphorical sense.³³ Instead, he utterly denies any consistency to final cause. He does this by flattening the ontology of causality onto a single plan of immanence and denouncing the fictions of beauty, order, and providence in nature.³⁴ The Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics* is thus a refutation not only of Aristotelian and Scholastic teleology, but also of Cartesian conciliation.³⁵

THE FOUR PILLARS OF SPINOZA'S ANTI-TELEOLOGY

Following a Lucretian pattern, Spinoza summarises his critique in the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics*, the manifesto of his anti-teleological philosophy. This critique aims to show that, because of the nature of the final cause, i.e. its ontological priority over the efficient cause, teleology is always accompanied by normativism. Spinoza is perfectly aware that the ontological priority of the final cause implied by teleology has always been conceptualised by building four types of hierarchies: 1) priority of the essence over the existence; 2) priority of the providence of the ends over the necessity of the means; 3) priority of the function over the organ; 4) priority of the universal over the individual. I will now show how Spinoza rejects these four claims of priority first in the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics* and then throughout his works, in order to build his anti-teleological and anti-normative philosophy.

i) Essence and Existence

Aristotle defined the priority of the essence over both the accident and the existence by opposing the true and stable nature of being to both its superficial modifications and the mere fact of being.³⁶ Everything in nature makes itself, or is made, through the actualisation of a certain power, namely in and through the passage from power (*δύναμις*) to act (*ἐντελέχεια*). Although the potential comes chronologically before the act, from the point of view of perfection, the act has priority, because it is the reason that what is less perfect tends toward something else, becoming in the process, if everything goes well, more perfect.³⁷ If everything goes well: nature is full of obstacles, and perfection is never fully realised. This is what gives nature its diverse appearance and beautiful harmony: if perfection were always accomplished, everything would resemble itself and nothing could be distinguished from anything else.³⁸

This is where Spinoza strikes first. The priority of the essence over the existence is at the heart of the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics*, in which he claims that “all things proceed by a certain eternal necessity of nature, and with the greatest perfection” (*E I, Ap.; CSW I, 442*). Nature as a whole, as well as each individual thing in it, is already thoroughly perfect. It is as perfect as it can possibly be, both in its being and in its becoming. Having stated this in part I, in part II of the *Ethics*, Spinoza makes the natural perfection of all things even clearer by redefining the concept of essence and its relationship with existence. *E II, D2* reads as follows:

I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is [NS: also] necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily [NS: also] taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing [*vice versa quod sine re nec esse, nec concipio potest*].

In the last line, Spinoza offers a definition of the essence that, as scholars have suggested, is stricter than Aristotle's or even Descartes'.³⁹ More than that, he reverses the core idea of the essence's ontological priority.⁴⁰ If it is true that the essence of God does not constitute the essence of individual things, it is also true that without individual things, essence cannot be or be conceived.

Spinoza explains that the correct order of philosophising is from God to individual things, descending and not ascending, moving from the cause to the effects (*E II, P10CS; CSWI, 454*). Humans, however, tend to invert the order of reasoning and start with the effects, which creates endless contradictions, as he explains in the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics*. The teleological illusion thus arises from an incorrect definition of the essence, an error Spinoza condemns in both the Scholastics and the Cartesians.⁴¹ Spinoza's essence does not have ontological priority over existence, it is not above and before the actual existing thing. As Macherey puts it, the essence is something of the thing, and in it.⁴² This is the ground for the radical immanence Spinoza suggests for the relationship between God and individual things.⁴³

This immanence is not just abstract, nor does it statically describe the relationship between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. Immanence characterises the mechanism of production of things themselves or, as Aristotle would put it, their passage from power to act. In Spinoza's idea of *potentia*, however, the δύναμις of Aristotle loses all its ontological subordination to the ἐντελέχεια. The reversibility of essence and existence implies that the production of things cannot be conceived as the actualisation of a possibility, according to a model of essential perfection.⁴⁴ This is especially clear in God: Spinoza's striking, bold and counter-intuitive suggestion is that God's power is always-already in act.⁴⁵

It follows that individual things' power is always-already in act, since that power is part of God's power and no different from it in nature.⁴⁶ These things, together and in themselves, necessarily cause all their effects, that is to say all the effects that result from their nature. The nature of things is the efficient cause, always-

already in act, of their effects (*E I*, P36), in the same way God is the efficient cause, always-already in act, of nature as a whole (*E I*, P16C1).

For Descartes and Aristotle, the cause has more perfection than the effect. God, as a cause, is eminently perfect vis-à-vis the creation. Spinoza, on the contrary, claims that the same perfection passes from cause to effect, immanently and equally.⁴⁷ He explains this by developing the famous theory of the equivalence between *realitas* and *perfectio* in *E IV*, pref. According to Spinoza, the concept of perfection has been perverted by comparing it to a model and giving it the meaning of an “ought,” of how things ought to be.⁴⁸ The preface of *E IV* explicitly refers to the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics*. in condemning the teleological illusion. Whereas teleology implies that perfection is intended as a model, nature expresses on the contrary an absolute necessity that manifests itself in the strict equivalence between reality and perfection. Reality is always perfect as it is, because it is always everything it can be.

The Preface of Part IV has sometimes been read against the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics* because Spinoza speaks there of the *exemplar naturae humanae* (usually translated as ‘model’), an example of human nature that men can approach to.⁴⁹ My suggestion, which is perhaps counter-intuitive, is to contrast the example and the model and play the former against the latter. It is not by chance that Spinoza speaks about the *exemplar* on the same page on which he condemns the fiction of perfection as a model and establishes the equivalence between reality and perfection. The example means nothing more (and nothing less) than what we can learn from both the correct and the wrong order of reasoning, i.e. the teleological illusion and its normative corollaries. The example is nothing more (and nothing less) than the essence conceived in and through its actual—and thus concrete and individual—existence.⁵⁰ Examples can be set, and behaviours adapted to them, without thus creating any normative content with objective values or standards.⁵¹

Spinoza expands on this concept in the Ep. XXI and the famous discussion with Blyenbergh on good and evil. A man is, or becomes, blind, and we say that he is deprived of sight because we compare him with a model, or a standard, or an essence. Yet privation “is, not the act of depriving, but only the pure and simple lack, which in itself is nothing. Indeed, it is only a Being of reason (*ens rationis*) or mode of thinking, which we form when we compare things with one another.”⁵² The constructs of the mind recall, of course, the *entia imaginationis* and the *humana figmenta* about which men rave when they fall prey to the teleological prejudice.

ii) Providence and Necessity

The second pillar upon which a teleological conception of nature rests is the belief in divine providence. The Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics* makes the connection between finalism and providentialism explicit anchoring it again in the human tendency to reason from effects backward to causes, that is to say, to rely on final causes. When people find outside of themselves means and things that help them reach their goals, they come to believe that someone else, above them, has made these means and things for them.⁵³

This is the second step of the teleological illusion: establishing a relationship of exchange with God, who has supposedly created the world and what is convenient in it freely for the sake of humans. Anthropocentrism and finalism thus go hand in hand.

It is interesting to note the political origin of the idea of an “exchange” with God, that is, the way the Jews use it as a trump card in their ongoing dispute with the gentile neighbors about whose God is stronger. The idea of miracles, Spinoza says, originated with the ancient Jews who wanted to convince themselves and others that “the whole of nature was directed only for their advantage, by the command of the God they worshipped,” and thus they made themselves “the final cause [*causa finalis*] on account of which God has created, and continually directs, all things” (*TTP* VI, 4; *CSW* II, 153). Anthropocentrism and teleology are here perfectly merged within the *figmentum* of the chosen people.

Spinoza contrasts the *ars divina vel supernaturalis* that supposedly creates things for men with the *ars mechanica* that produces things necessarily. Wolfson interestingly remarks that Spinoza’s choice corresponds to, and diverges from, Maimonides’ opposition between teleology and chance.⁵⁴ Maimonides’ opposition is traditional, and dates back to the very origin of teleology in Greek thought, in particular in Anaxagoras and Xenocrates.⁵⁵ Spinoza carefully chooses his terminology to overturn the traditional sense: whereas Maimonides and the earlier Greek philosophers defend teleology and providence to say that nothing happens by chance, Spinoza defends the mechanical art’s necessity to say that nothing happens teleologically and providentially.

What kind of necessity, however, is Spinoza talking about? A steady stream of scholarship has recognised Stoic elements in Spinoza’s philosophy.⁵⁶ Kristeller ar-

gues that Spinoza's radical determinism is clearly Stoic, while De Brabander sees the *natura naturans* and the *natura naturata* as corresponding to the active and passive Stoic principles. What this scholarship overlooks, however, is Spinoza's opposition to divine providence, a foundational feature of Stoic necessitarianism.⁵⁷ As Matheron has shown, even Spinoza's *Ethics* IV app. 32, his most Stoic text, goes against the providential character of the πνεῦμα's action and intervention of the divine fire in the world.⁵⁸ For the Stoics, God's causality in the world is necessary and nonetheless providential, while Spinoza precisely rules out every notion of providential teleology.⁵⁹

Spinoza's necessity is thus of a different kind. Following Spinoza's own suggestion (*Ep.* LVI to Boxel) and his explicit polemical statement against the authority of Plato, Aristotle and Socrates in favour of Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius, the necessity here is nothing else than the ἀνάγκη/*necessitas* of the Atomists, namely the causal explanatory principle traditionally opposed to teleology that establishes the mechanical and efficient explanation as the only causal principle.

iii) The function and the organ

The third pillar of teleological thinking is giving ontological priority to the function over the organ. This functionalist argument has been employed since finalism was first developed and was still vigorously used in Spinoza's time (and beyond) by partisans of the world's beauty and order. Nature's finalism, this time, takes the form of the perfect adaptation of individual beings to its complexity, reflected by the perfect disposition of the organs in a living organism. Spinoza is aware of this argument when he quotes in the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics* the classic examples of "eyes for seeing, teeth for chewing" and, more generally, the structure of the human body that men consider with astonishment, being ignorant of the causes of such work.⁶⁰ This is part of what Spinoza calls the *asylum ignorantiae*, and he is conscious that to escape from it, a changed paradigm is necessary, one with a different norm of truth. He finds this different norm in mathematics.

Truth, he writes in the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics*, could have remained hidden to eternity, "if Mathematics, which is concerned not with ends, but only with the essences and properties of figure, had not shown men another standard of truth [*alia norma veritatis*]." To the idea of mechanical and efficient logic as the only permissible principle of explanation in nature, Spinoza now adds that mathematical reasoning is alien to every teleological notion and thus the way toward

truth.⁶¹

Spinoza is aware of the difference between mathematical objects and physical realities. For example, it is the definition of the triangle (i.e. the polygon whose interior angles add up to 180 degrees) that establishes the science of the triangle itself. No definition of a living being can ground its science in the same way. The science of triangles is based on their common notions, strictly derived from their definition. Spinoza's striking suggestion is to extend the mathematical norm of truth to physics itself. This is only possible with the revolutionary definition of essence that we have seen above, a definition that obliterates every transcendence between essence and existence. Mathematical knowledge of physics means, first and foremost, understanding Nature without resorting to any teleology.

For this to happen, Spinoza argues, knowledge of essence and existence must go hand in hand. In other words, the knowledge of individual existing things must be held alongside the knowledge of their definition. This principle explains Spinoza's theory of the three kinds of knowledge. The first kind is imagination or opinion, which are the only causes of possible falsity (*E II*, P41; *CSW I*, 478). Reason is the second kind, the domain of common notions and adequate ideas. Lastly, Spinoza adds the third and highest kind, intuitive science, which he defines as the knowledge that "proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things" (*E II*, P40S2; *CSW I*, 477-78).

The highest kind of knowledge is the knowledge of singularity and individuality. For Spinoza, mathematics is not an end in itself. Rather, it is mainly concerned with abstract notions related to common properties of shapes. It thus relates to the second kind of knowledge. The whole theory of intuitive science is developed to offer an additional way to knowledge that Spinoza eventually exploits in the last and final part of the *Ethics*, in which he shows to the reader the pattern toward freedom and beatitude.⁶² It is not abstract notions, but the knowledge of concrete individuals that helps humans progress and move away from ignorance. This points to the fourth pillar of Spinoza's anti-teleology, namely his nominalism.

iv) Spinoza's nominalism

The universal and abstract categories that people use to describe nature—as if they existed outside the human mind—are only "entities of imagination (*entia*

imaginationis).” Good, Bad, Order, Confusion, etc., speak only about the relativity of human judgements, not the supposed objectivity of Nature itself.⁶³ The question of judgement resurfaces in Spinoza’s epistolary exchange of 1665 with one of the most learned men in Europe, Henry Oldenburg, offering yet another opportunity for Spinoza to attack finalism and teleology.

War is threatening Europe, and Oldenburg seeks common ground with his erudite correspondent Spinoza by declaring the behaviour of the vulgar as of a “bestial kind, not human.”⁶⁴ Spinoza responds in philosophical terms to this moral consideration, repeating his famous motto: *nec ridere, nec lugere, sed intelligere*. He makes the argument on his favoured ground, saying that man is only a portion of nature, whose parts agree and cohere with each other (*convenire* and *cohæerere*) in ways that we ignore.⁶⁵

Oldenburg is clearly interested in this statement, which is more a refusal to use moral categories than a declaration of ignorance. Spinoza could have remained on a general and abstract level, since Oldenburg’s question is general and simply asks for further explanations (ironically, the discussion happens with the blessing of Robert Boyle, one of the strongest partisans of the teleological revival of the late 17th and 18th centuries).⁶⁶ But instead, Spinoza pushes the argument much further, directly attacking teleology and normativism by saying that not only does he not know how each part agrees and convenes with the others, but he does know full well that abstract and normative categories are nothing more than *entia imaginationis*.⁶⁷

This passage is followed by the famous example of the tiny worm living in the blood, ignorant of what happens beyond its limited world and incapable of seeing the difference between the whole and the part, of understanding the laws of agreement and convenience, etc. The worm’s knowledge is limited by the environment and the context within which its nature confines it. This is not an extreme case, Spinoza suggests. It is rather a metaphor for the common dimension within which all men live until and unless they have the intuition that another norm of truth is available. Spinoza has achieved his objective: Oldenburg becomes nervous and plainly declares (we can almost hear Boyle in the background) that he does not see “how we can ruin⁶⁸ [*profligare*] the order and simmetry from nature, as you seem to do.”⁶⁹

Although Spinoza’s answer is lost, I think we have everything we need to see the

gap between the two authors: Oldenburg on the one hand, scientifically inspired by the belief in the regularity of nature's order, yet teleologically oriented, and Spinoza on the other, recognising the bias of order and harmony that still haunts the most enlightened mind of his century, because of the teleological prejudice that he intends to destroy.

In the *TTP*, Spinoza exploits the theologico-political dimension of this kind of ignorance, which he calls superstition. Superstition is the ground of men's belief in miracles and the "term 'miracle' cannot be understood except in relation to men's opinions and means nothing but a work whose natural cause we cannot explain by the example of another familiar thing [*cujus causam naturalem exemplo alterius rei solitae explicare non possumus*]" (*TTP* VI, 13; *CSW* II, 155).⁷⁰

Just like the worm's, our pool of available knowledge is not wide enough to be used as a source of comparison with unknown things or events. People thus consider miracles "whatever they could not explain in the way in which the common people are accustomed to explain natural phenomena, that is, by resorting to memory so as to call to mind a similar happening which is ordinarily regarded without wonder."⁷¹ The ignorance rising from the incapacity to connect the unknown to the familiar is part of the Skeptic rhetorical arsenal.⁷² I believe, however, that Spinoza is pushing the argument further, by opposing the concept of *res solita* to the *res singularis*, and pointing to the possibility of changing perspective in order to move away from ignorance. *E* II, P40S1 explains that:

when the images in the body are completely confused, the Mind also will imagine all the bodies confusedly, without any distinction, and comprehend them as if under one attribute, viz. under the attribute of Being, Thing, etc. ... Those notions they call *Universal*, like Man, Horse, Dog, etc. ... the Mind can imagine neither slight differences [*singulorum parvae differentiae*] of the singular [individuals] such as the color and size of each one, etc.) nor their determinate number, and imagines distinctly only what they all agree in, insofar as they affect the body (*E* II, P40S1; *CSW* I, 477).⁷³

The following S2 introduces the third and highest kind of knowledge as knowledge of individual essences. Spinoza is suggesting the need to move away from the illusion of universal categories and toward the knowledge of individuality. *E* III, P52 and P52S bring forth once again the deceptive nature of a knowledge isolated from context. Wonder (*admiratio*) arises from the singular, which appears to us

uncommon or special. Spinoza uses the same term, *res singularis*, for both individual and uncommon things: “This affection of the Mind, or this *imagination of a singular thing* [*rei singularis imaginatio*], insofar as it is alone in the Mind, is called *Wonder*” (E III, P52S; CSW I, 523). The thing’s solitude, which derives from its singularity, drags the mind into the solitude of ignorance.⁷⁴ It is because the mind is stuck in loneliness that it falls prey to ignorance. The task, as Spinoza sees it, is thus to recognise this seeming singularity and bring it back to the whole of nature to which it belongs.⁷⁵

What is crucial is to know and understand the singular, both in terms of the individual and what seems to be special. Spinoza’s strategy is to reduce the power of singularity in the sense of that which evokes wonder by increasing the knowledge of singularity in the sense of that which is individual. “The more this knowledge that things are necessary is concerned with singular things [*res singulares*], which we imagine more distinctly and vividly, the greater is this power of the Mind over the affects” (E V, P6S; CSW I, 599). Also: “The more we understand singular things [*res singulares*], the more we understand God” (E V, P24; CSW I, 608).⁷⁶

Spinoza’s nominalism is already sketched in his *Short Treatise*, the aim of which is to reject both Plato’s idealism and Aristotle’s finalism by his critique of the archetype and the model.⁷⁷ It is only through intuitive science, however, and the whole theory of the three kinds of knowledge that Spinoza accomplishes the task and makes nominalism not only the ground of his ontology, but a powerful philosophical tool with a strong impact on the political dimension and people’s concrete lives.



I believe that the rejection of teleology and the normativism that derives from it is one of the major tasks Spinoza wishes to accomplish in his philosophy. Indeed, he may see it as the most important, for at least two reasons. The first is his conviction that finalism is the origin of every other form of superstition and ignorance. Demolishing the source is the surest and most effective way of destroying everything that derives from it. The second reason is that, contrary to Descartes and his followers, Spinoza knows all too well that not only has the battle for mechanism not yet been won, but in fact, the most advanced intellectuals and scientists of his time, including Oldenburg, Boyle, and Leibniz, have been winning the battle only by compromising on teleology. Their Christian mechanism is indeed provi-

dentialist, while Spinoza's revolutionary modernity, with its roots in the ancient Atomism of Epicurus and Lucretius, cannot compromise on this principle.

A final word on analytical interpretations that insist on a teleological reading of Spinoza: the connection between the ontological and the political is explicit in Spinoza's thought especially in the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics*: astonishment [*stupor*] is the one and only support for safeguarding the authority [*auctoritas*] of ignorance. If we needed another reason to assess Spinoza's anti-teleological statements, we would find it in his political thought and its history. The negation of teleology is the condition for overcoming ignorance, which is the aim of a free life in a free Republic. But of course, for analytical philosophers, the history of political thought is not philosophy, and thus for them the connection does not have any demonstrative value. And with this, we see that the dialogue lacks a common ground, much like that earlier one between Oldenburg and Spinoza.

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NOTES

1. On the specific relation of Spinoza to these authors see, recently, F. Manzini, *Spinoza: Une lecture d'Aristote*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009 and O. Boehm, *Kant's Critique of Spinoza*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. More generally, and with a different perspective, V. Morfino, *Genealogia di un pregiudizio. L'immagine di Spinoza in Germania da Leibniz a Marx*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2016.
2. See E. Giancotti Boscherini, *Lexicon Spinozanum*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970.
3. E. M. Curley, "Spinoza's Moral Philosophy." *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. M. Grene. Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1973, 371.
4. See also M. Lin, "Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza." *The Philosophical Review* 115 (2006, 318): "There is nothing in [Spinoza's] metaphysics or philosophy of mind that forbids teleological explanations of human actions. In fact, there is good reason to think that his account of mental content commits him to them."
5. See I. Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten. Kant's gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. Königlich-Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Berlin: G. Reimer (later Berlin-New York: W. de Gruyter, 1910-83) IV, 414-5: "Der hypothetische Imperativ sagt also nur, daß die Handlung zu irgend einer möglichen oder wirklichen Absicht gut sei. Im erstern Falle ist er ein problematisch-, im zweiten ein assertorisch-praktisches Prinzip. Der kategorische Imperativ, der die Handlung ohne Beziehung auf irgend eine Absicht, d. h. auch ohne irgend einen andern Zweck, für sich als objektiv nothwendig erklärt, gilt als ein apodiktisch-praktisches Prinzip." See also S. Landucci, "L'etica e la metaetica di Spinoza." *Rivista di Filosofia* 92 (2001, 400 n. 55).
6. J. Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, ch. 9, "Goals" and ch. 10, "Self-Preservation."
7. D. Garrett, "Teleology in Spinoza and Early Modern Rationalism." *New Essays on the Rationalists*. Eds R. J. Gennaro and C. Huenemann. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 332-3: "... close examination shows that it is not Leibniz but Spinoza ... who holds the position on teleology and teleological explanation nearest to that of Aristotle ... Unlike Leibniz, Spinoza accepts unthoughtful teleology. Unlike Leibniz, he denies teleology through divine will. Spinoza allows teleological selection even more pervasively within the subhuman realm than does Leibniz, recognizing even inorganic teleological selection. Finally, far more thoroughly than Leibniz, Spinoza makes teleological explanation of particular events and features of nature part of the methodology of natural philosophy." See also A. Dominguez, "Die Ethik Spinozas—zwischen Aristoteles und Kant." *Zur Aktualität der Ethik Spinozas. Medizin/Psychiatrie—Ökonomie—Recht—Religion—Spinoza in der Geschichte der philosophischen Ethik*. Eds K. Hammacher, I. Reimers-Tovote, M. Walther. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000, 453-478 and, on Leibniz and Spinoza, the excellent work of M. Laerke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza: La genèse d'une opposition complexe*. Paris: H. Champion, 2008. On the teleological interpretation of the conatus, see also M. Lenz, "Ideas as Thick Beliefs: Spinoza on the Normativity of Idea." *Contemporary Perspectives on Early Modern Philosophy: Nature and Norms in Thought*. Eds M. Lenz and A. Waldow. Dordrecht : Springer, 2013, 40: "On my reading, it is the conatus-doctrine, we've just referred to in passing, that lies at the heart of Spinoza's philosophy and of his account of normativity in particular. The term 'conatus' denotes the essence of every individual thing; and this essence lies in the thing's striving for self-preservation and for the increase of its power. Thus, I take it that, for Spinoza, everything's essence has basically a teleological structure." *Contra*, see L. Bove, *La stratégie du conatus. Affirmation et résistance chez Spinoza*. Paris:

Libraire philosophique J. Vrin, 1996, 21 and *passim*.

8. M. Rosenthal, "Politics and Ethics in Spinoza: The Problem of Normativity." *Essays on Spinoza's Ethical Theory*. Eds. M. Kisner and A. Youpa. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 85-101.

9. J. Miller, "Spinoza's Axiology." *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy* 2 (2005, 149-72).

10. E. Yakira, *Spinoza and the Case for Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

11. L. Rice, "Spinoza, Bennett, and Teleology." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 23 (1985, 249).

12. This includes the classic works of P. Janet, *Les causes finales*. Paris: G. Baillière, 1876 and H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934. The accusation is, however, much older and accompanies the whole history of Spinozism. See P. Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française avant la Révolution*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

13. Some example of this kind of conclusion: Curley, *Spinoza's Moral Philosophy*, 370: "... Is it legitimate to interpret [Spinoza's] talk about what reason demands in terms of talk about obligation? Now it cannot be denied that Spinoza uses a great deal of language which sounds prescriptive. In the Scholium to E., IV, xviii alone, he speaks of the precepts of reason, of what reason prescribes, of the dictates of reason, of what reason demands and so on." J. Bennett, "Teleology and Spinoza's *Conatus*." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 8 (1983, 150): "Spinoza says that teleological explanations are always improper; yet he attributes to organisms a drive—he calls it *conatus*—that in his hands becomes a principle of self-interest. But to be self-interested is to have a certain kind of goal or purpose, which is the whole essence of teleology or 'final causes' [sic!]. What on earth is going on here?" E. M. Curley, "On Bennett's Spinoza: The Issue of Teleology." *Spinoza: Issues and Directions: The Proceedings of the Chicago Spinoza Conference*. Eds E. M. Curley and P.-F. Moreau. Leiden: Brill, 1990, 40-1): "I am not persuaded that it is Spinoza's intention to offer a non-teleological theory of human motivation. ... I would have thought that the passage just quoted [viz. E I, App] makes it quite clear that Spinoza does not deny purposive action to man: the prejudice Spinoza is exploring in this preface is precisely the attribution to natural things of a *form of activity characteristic of men*, viz. action for the sake of an end."

14. Garrett, "Teleology," 310.

15. Garrett, "Teleology," 310.

16. Partisans of teleology also stress that finalism has a philosophical value only insofar as it has a proper *explanatory* function. See, for example, G. W. Leibniz, *Tentamen Anagogicum*. In *Die philosophische Schriften*. Ed. C. J. Gerhardt. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1875-99 VII, 273, 6: "il y a, pour parler ainsi, deux Règnes dans la nature corporelle même qui se pénètrent sans se confondre et sans s'empêcher: le règne de la puissance, suivant lequel tout se peut *expliquer* mécaniquement par les causes efficaces, lorsque nous en pénétrons assez l'intérieur; et aussi le Règne de la sagesse suivant lequel tout se peut *expliquer* architectoniquement, pour ainsi dire, par les causes finales, lorsque nous en connaissons assez les usages."

17. E I, Ap.: "omnia ... praejudicia pendent ab hoc uno."

18. E I, Ap.: "omnes res naturales, ut ipsos, propter finem agere." See also M. Gueroult, *Spinoza. I—Dieu*. Paris: Aubier, 1968, 393: "Ce préjugé est la source de tous les autres. En conséquence, à l'exemple de Descartes, qui estimait inutile d'examiner en particulier toutes les opinions fausses pourvu qu'on en ruinât le principe, il suffira de le détruire pour détruire du même coup tous les autres."

19. See A. Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1969 and P. Macherey, *Introduction à l'Éthique de Spinoza. La première partie, la nature des choses*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998.

20. E I, Ap.: CSW I, 442: "this doctrine concerning the end turns nature completely upside down

[*evertere*]. 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 [*prius*], it makes posterior [*posterum*]. And finally, what is supreme and most perfect [*perfectissimum*], it makes imperfect.”

21. Bennett, “Teleology,” 146: “the causal powers of a physical item depend wholly upon intrinsic properties, such as the shapes, sizes, positions, and velocities of particles, and never on any representative or ‘of’-ish feature it might have.”

22. Bennett, *A Study*, 217-8.

23. Curley, “On Bennett’s Spinoza,” 48.

24. Curley, “On Bennett’s Spinoza,” 48.

25. Bennett, *A Study*, 213.

26. B. Tocanne, *L’idée de nature en France dans la seconde moitié du XVIIe siècle: Contribution à l’histoire de la pensée classique*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1978, 70: “A l’antifinalisme métaphysique et scientifique rigoureux de Descartes, ses successeurs, ses disciples ou ses critiques opposent une attitude souvent beaucoup plus souple et nuancée, quand ils ne redonnent pas à la finalité une place essentielle.”

27. Tocanne, *L’idée de nature en France*, 72-3: “Les partisans des animaux-machines dépouillaient les bêtes de tout comportement intelligent pour mieux montrer l’intelligence de l’artisan infiniment sage qui a construit des automates aussi parfaits.”

28. See “Leibniz an Ramond,” 10/1/1714. *Philosophische Schriften*, III, 605-8 and “Leibniz an Philipp,” January 1680. *Philosophische Schriften*, IV, 283-87. See also Janet, *Les causes finales*, 167: “les savants sont trop portés en général à confondre la doctrine de la cause finale avec l’hypothèse d’une force occulte agissant sans moyens physiques, comme un *Deus ex machina*. Ces deux hypothèses, loin de se réduire l’une à l’autre, se contredisent formellement: car qui dit *but* dit en même temps *moyens*, c’est-à-dire cause apte à produire tel effet. Découvrir cette cause, ce n’est nullement détruire l’idée du but: c’est au contraire mettre au jour la condition *sine qua non* de la production du but.”

29. G. W. F. Hegel, “Teleologie.” *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*. (1827), *Gesammelte Werke*. Ed. Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, XIX, 161 ff. esp. par. 209. See also Janet, *Les causes finales*, ch. VI.

30. M. Fernandez-Garcia, *Lexicon scholasticum philosophico-theologicum* (Ad Clara Aquas: Ex. Typ. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1910), 786: “Causa finalis cuiuscumque est, eius est causa efficiens.—Oxon. I. d. 8. q. 5. n. 6.—Nullus est causa finalis aliqua, nisi respectu cuius est causa efficiens, quia causalitas causae finalis est movere efficiens ad agendum.—Ib. d. 1. q. 5. n. 6.—Quia causa finalis non causat, nisi quia metaphorice movet ipsum efficiens ad efficiendum [a final cause is no more than a metaphorical cause, moving the efficient to act].—Ib. d. 2. q. 2. n. 16.—Vid. Finis est causa causarum = Finis movet efficientem.” See D. Demange, *Jean Duns Scot, la théorie du savoir*. Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 2007, 159: “ce n’est que de façon métaphorique que l’on peut dire que la fin est motrice, en tant que la cause efficiente tend vers cette fin. Thomas d’Aquin expliquait le hasard dans la nature par l’absence de cause finale: un accident se produit lorsque se rencontrent des causes non ordonnées à la même finalité; Duns Scot explique les accidents de la nature par l’addition et la soustraction des causes efficientes concourantes, selon un modèle qui deviendra tout puissant dans la physique classique.”

31. See Ockham, W. of, “Utrum ex hoc aliquid moveat ut finis sequatur ipsum habere aliquod esse reale extra animam (Q. disp.)” *Opera philosophica et theologica. Ad fidem codico manuscriptorum edita*. Cura Instituti Franciscani, Universitatis S. Bonaventurae. Ediderunt P. Boehner et alii. St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1967-, VIII, *Quaestiones variae*, q. 4, and *Quodl.*, IV, q.

- 1, in *Opera philosophica et theologica*, IX, 293-300 (= *Quodlibetal Questions*. Translated by A. J. Fredoso and F. A. Kelley. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 245-50).
32. See, for example, Lucretius *De rerum natura: libri sex*. Ed. with prolegomena, critical apparatus, translation and commentary by C. Bailey. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947, IV, 832. See also Macherey, *Introduction à l'Éthique de Spinoza. La première partie*, 238. Significantly, the Lucretian and Epicurean philosophy that is Spinoza's source completely disappears from the scholarship supporting a teleological reading of Spinoza.
33. This is Wolfson's reading of *E I*, 36, see p. 423: "The method by which he now tries in Proposition XXXVI to reject final causes altogether is by reducing every final cause to an efficient cause."
34. See Janet, *Les causes finales*, 249 who reacts to this reading of immanence: "La finalité de plan que nous remarquons dans toute la nature, nous conduit à la *finalité esthétique*, qui en est une forme. [Le beau] implique un certain accord entre les parties et le tout: *unitas in varietate*. Ne faut-il donc pas, pour que la nature soit belle, quelque principe qui ramène la diversité à l'unité? Il ne suffirait pas, pour répondre à la difficulté, de faire tout dériver, comme Spinoza [sic], d'une seule substance: car il ne s'agit point d'une unité d'origine, mais d'une unité d'accord, de proportion, d'harmonie. Il ne s'agit point d'une identité abstraite et vide, mais de l'unité morale et intelligible qui résulte de la diversité même."
35. See Gueroult, *Spinoza. I*, 399: "... malgré [les] affinités, les deux conceptions restent très opposées, et la réfutation spinoziste vise Descartes autant que l'École. ... l'Appendice final du Livre I de l'Éthique apparaît bien comme une réfutation directe du cartésianisme." See *E I*, Ap.; CSW I, 444 and *Ep.* LIV to Boxel; CSW II, 414-5.
36. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. Trans. H. Tredennick. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935, Z, chap. 3.
37. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V, 7, 1017 a 35 ff. and IX, 1-9. Only God is the pure act as form fully accomplished and thus deprived of every potentiality. See *Metaphysics* XII, 6-10.
38. See P. Aubenque, *Le problème de l'être chez Aristote*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962, 388-90: "Un monde sans échecs serait un monde où l'être serait tout ce qu'il peut être, où il n'y aurait ni matière, ni puissance, ni mouvement, ni multiplicité; un tel monde se confondrait avec son principe: acte pur, immatériel, immobile et unique comme lui, il serait, finalement, indiscernable de lui."
39. See M. Gueroult *Spinoza. II—L'Âme*. Paris: Aubier, 20, Curley in Spinoza, *Works I* (1985), 447 n. 1 and Giancotti in B. Spinoza, *Etica dimostrata col metodo geometrico*. Ed. E. Giancotti. Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1988, 364, n. 1.
40. Curiously, A. Lalande, *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1956⁷, 302, does not see any originality in Spinoza's definition, correlating it with Aristotle's (*Metaphysics* VII, 4, 1030 a and 7, 1032 b) and Kant's *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft. Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, IV, "Vorrede." Wolfson in *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, II, 40 also fails to remark on the importance of Spinoza's addendum.
41. See Gueroult, *Spinoza. II*, 114-15 and P. Macherey, *Introduction à l'Éthique de Spinoza. La seconde partie, la réalité mentale*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997, 100 ff.
42. Macherey, *Introduction à l'Éthique de Spinoza. La seconde partie*, 22 ff.
43. See G. Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1968, 38-9.
44. See Deleuze, *Spinoza*, 194.
45. *E I*, P17S; CSW I, 426: "from God's supreme power [*summa Dei potentia*], or infinite nature, infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, i.e., all things, have necessarily flowed, or always follow, by the same necessity and in the same way as from the nature of a triangle follows, from

eternity and to eternity, that its three angles are equal to two right angles. So God's omnipotence has been actual from eternity and will remain in the same actuality to eternity. And in this way, at least in my opinion, God's omnipotence is maintained far more perfectly."

46. Spinoza builds his original and unconventional theory of power across the *Ethics*, but it is in the *TTP* that he states it in its most compelling form. See e.g. *TTP* XVI, 4; CSW II, 282: "the universal power of the whole of nature is nothing but the power of all individuals together [*universalis potentia totius naturae nihil est praeter potentiam omnium individuorum simul*]."

47. Deleuze, *Spinoza*, 152.

48. *ST* I, 6-7. See Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, 438, Gueroult, *Spinoza*, I, 398, Matheron, *Individu et communauté*, 122-23.

49. Curley, *Spinoza's Moral Philosophy*, 364, for example, speaks about the *exemplum* as an objective standard that we can follow. But with this standard, Spinoza would reconstruct the Platonic-Aristotelian categories he has just destroyed, giving them an objective foundation. Moreover, this model would only be available to the philosopher, while the ordinary man would be condemned to ignorance. Against the elitist idea of the pattern of truth open to the wise but precluded for the ordinary man, see F. Del Lucchese, *Conflict, Power, and Multitude in Machiavelli and Spinoza. Tumult and Indignation*. London: Continuum, 2009.

50. See J.-M. Beyssade, "Norme et essence chez Spinoza." *Spinoza et la norme*. Ed. J. Lagrée. Besançon: Presses Universitaires Franc-Comtoises, 2002, 13-21.

51. Rosenthal, "Politics and Ethics," 98 speaks about the the *exemplar* as a *juridical* constitution. The analogy is suitable, however, only insofar as it is intended according to Spinoza's equation between *jus* and *potentia*. Rosenthal, on the contrary, thinks about the more traditional natural law theory according to which "... laws of nature [guide, through a model constitution] the foundational deliberation of a state" and, with J. Miller, "Spinoza's Axiology," he suggests the existence of an "objective standard" (98-100).

52. *Ep.* XXI; CSW, I, 377.

53. E I, Ap.; CSW I, 440-41: "knowing that they had found these means, not provided them for themselves, they had reason to believe [but had they? Shirley, 239: "they come to believe"] that there was someone else who had prepared those means for their use. For after they considered things as means, they could not believe that the things had made themselves [*credere non potueront, easdem se ipsas fecisse*]; but from the means they were accustomed to prepare for themselves, they had to infer that there was a ruler, or a number of rulers of nature, endowed with human freedom, who had taken care of all things for them, and made all things for their use."

54. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, 435: "In Maimonides the oppositional term is 'chance,' i.e., without a cause; in Spinoza it is 'mechanical art,' i.e. necessary efficient causation."

55. W. Theiler, *Zur Geschichte der teleologischen Naturbetrachtung bis auf Aristoteles*. Zürich: K. Hoenn, 1924.

56. See, for example, P. O. Kristeller, "Stoic and Neoplatonic Sources of Spinoza's 'Ethics'." *History of European Ideas* 5 (1984, 1-16), S. James, "Spinoza the Stoic." *The Rise of Modern Philosophy: The Tension between the New and Traditional Philosophies from Machiavelli to Leibniz*. Ed. T. Sorell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, 289-316), F. De Brabander, *Spinoza and the Stoics*. London: Continuum, 2007, and Miller, *Spinoza and the Stoics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

57. James, "Spinoza the Stoic," 306 and De Brabander, *Spinoza and the Stoics*, 11-2. See *contra* A. A. Long, "Stoicism in the Philosophical Tradition: Spinoza, Lipsius, Butler." *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*. Ed. B. Inwood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 377 and 396.

58. See A. Matheron, "Le moment stoïcien de l'Éthique de Spinoza." *Le stoïcisme au XVIIe et au*

XVIIe siècle. Eds P.-F. Moreau and A. Michel. Paris: A. Michel, 1994, 302-16 and *supra*.

59. See, *contra*, Yakira, *Spinoza*, who reads Spinoza's Stoicism as a form of necessitarianism, without addressing the question of teleology.

60. The endurance of this idea is astonishing, and the teleological scholarship has clearly identified Spinoza and his Atomist source as the main targets. See Janet, *Les causes finales*, 69-73: "the embryo develops as if it had a model in front of it. It is indeed the $\tau\mu$ of the Stoics, this secret and active reason of the universe which, conscious or unconscious, is the spring of life in the universe. [The] marvelous reciprocal adaptation [of sexual organs] cannot be considered as the simple result of the use and encounter; as if one said, for example, that the form of the bones' articulation, which is so appropriate, came from the reciprocal actions of organs: the use and the encounter do not explain, but rather require, the organs' formation; for the encounter, adaptation and convenience are required in advance; and one cannot say that the adaptation has been made with time, because the species would have been extinguished without it, before it to be even formed. ... Thus, at every phenomenal level, we see the determination of the present by the future. ... The order of causes is manifestly reversed, and no matter what Lucretius and Spinoza [sic] say, the effects are the causes" [translation mine]. Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* was published 17 years before this text, which is a late attempt to preserve 'evidence' of the ontological priority of the function to the organ, to support teleology in nature.

61. See Gueroult, *Spinoza*. I, 394 ff., Macherey, *Introduction à l'Ethique de Spinoza. La première partie*, 234, and Beyssade, "Norme et essence."

62. See Macherey, *Introduction à l'Ethique de Spinoza. La première partie*, 234. It is thus wrong, I believe, to see the "final moment" of the *Ethics* as detached from its early foundation in the critique of teleology, as suggested by Yakira, *Spinoza*.

63. *E I*, Ap.: "So many heads, so many opinions."

64. *Ep. XXIX*; CSW II, 35-6.

65. *Ep. XXX*; CSW II, 14. Shirley, 844 translates 'harmonises' and 'coheres.' Once again, the concept of harmony is alien to Spinoza's attitude. Curley's 'agree' and 'cohere' is preferable. Because of this lack of understanding, Spinoza adds, things appeared to him, in the past, vain, disordered and absurd (*vana, inordinata, absurda*), language that is repeated in *E III* pref. (*vana, absurda, horrenda*) and *TTP XVI* [G 191] (*absurdum, ridiculum, malum*).

66. *Ep. XXXI*; CSW II, 15-7.

67. *Ep. XXXII*; CSW II, 18: "I attribute to Nature neither beauty, nor ugliness, neither order nor confusion. For only in relation to our imagination can things be called beautiful or ugly, orderly or confused. ... Concerning whole and parts, I consider things as parts of some whole to the extent that they agree with one another as far as possible. But insofar as they disagree with one another, to that extent each forms in our Mind an idea distinct from the others, and therefore it is considered as a whole and not as a part."

68. Curley, CSW II, 22 translates with 'eliminate,' and Shirley, 851 opts for 'banish,' but Oldenburg's *profligare* is much stronger—closer to the idea of ruin, destruction and annihilation.

69. CSW II, 22: "This seems to be the formal ground itself of a true order" (Shirley: "good grounds of order"). Curley is thus closer to the *ratio formalis* that has a technical and Scholastic sense of formal reason. Barbaras in Lagrée (2002) argues that, with the example of the tiny worm, Spinoza targets first and foremost Aristotle's normativism.

70. Shirley, 446, reads it as "by comparison with any other normal event." It is however essential to keep the reference to the *res solita*.

71. *Ivi*.

72. See, for example, M. de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*. Trans. and ed. with an Introduction and Notes by M. A. Screech. London: Penguin, 1993. See also R. Popkin, *History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*. Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979.

73. The *singulorum parvae differentiae*: the differences are slight (Curley) or small, but certainly not unimportant, as Shirley, 267, reads them.

74. *E* III, P52D; *CSW* I, 523: “when we suppose that we imagine in an object something singular, which we have never seen before, we are only saying that when the Mind considers that object, it has nothing in itself which it is led to consider from considering that. And so it is determined to consider only that.”

75. See also S. Laveran, *Le concours des parties: Critique de l'atomisme et redéfinition du singulier chez Spinoza*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014.

76. Shirley is once again misleading with “particular things.”

77. *ST* I, 6; *CSW* I, 86-7: “it cannot rightly be said that there is confusion in Nature, since no one knows all the causes of things, and so no one can judge them. But this objection arises from ignorance, from the fact that men have formed universal Ideas, with which they think the particulars must agree in order to be perfect. They maintain, then, that these Ideas are in God’s intellect, as many of Plato’s followers have said, viz. that these universal ideas (such as *rational animal*, etc.) have been created by God. And though Aristotle’s followers say, of course, that these things are not actual, but only beings of reason, nevertheless they very often regard them as things. For they have said clearly that [God’s] providence does not extend to particulars, but only to kinds. ... They say also that God has no knowledge of particular and corruptible things, but only of universals, which in their opinion are incorruptible. But we have rightly regarded this as indicating their ignorance; for all and only the particulars have a cause, not the universals, because they are nothing.” See Mathéron, *Individu et communauté*, 123.