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Spinoza's critique of final causes[1]

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Abstract: The spinosan reformulation of the Aristotelian doctrine of causality proclaims the predominance of the efficient cause and demands the abandonment of the doctrine of final cause. Considered the source of all prejudices, this doctrine is the object of fierce criticism in the appendix of the first part of Spinoza's *Ethics*. This article intends to expose this criticism and show how the resumption of this issue in the preface of part IV of the same work does not imply any revision of the previous position.

Keywords: Spinoza; final cause; efficient cause; teleology; superstition.

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1. Introduction

In a relatively recent work[2] we seek to reconstruct the demonstrative chain in book I of Spinoza's *Ethics* from the point of view of his conception of causality. Present since the first definition of the work (the *causa sui*), the notion of cause will determine Spinoza's entire ontology, leading to the complete denial of contingency and, consequently, to the affirmation of reality as absolutely necessary. Such a conception of causality involves, as we showed there, the predominance of the efficient cause, which absorbs the formal cause and reneges on the notion of final cause. In that article, we focused on the constructive aspect of this conception, passing only briefly through the critical part. Now we intend to take a closer look at this critique of the final cause, which will involve a detailed analysis of the famous appendix of part I of the *Ethics*.

Causality is for Spinoza the fundamental element for understanding reality in all its manifestations. Adept of the Aristotelian adage "to know is to know by cause", the philosopher, however, makes a considerable reform in the Aristotelian notion of causality, in which stands out, above all, the criticism of the final cause. As we mentioned in the aforementioned article, Aristotle, when elaborating the theory of the four causes (formal, efficient, material and final), proposed the finality as the preponderant element of causality insofar as, from the end, the whole causal process was understood. From a certain point of view, the Aristotelian final cause is confused with the formal one, because the end is nothing more than the full actualization of the form or essence that defines the nature of the thing[3]. It is as a purpose that the form will be applied to matter, appropriating it according to the ideal pursued[4], and it is also through the end that the appropriate instruments are determined[5], so that the agent is efficient cause only insofar as it possesses the form or model as end. Such an imbrication of the types of cause under the command of the final cause will make a radical critique of finality entail a revision of the conception of cause in general.

Even before Spinoza, however, moderns began to challenge this framework. Bacon valued formal causation above all: the material and efficient causes were only vehicles for the forms. The final cause had no place in his project of science. It could be in religion or ethics, but in science it was perverse, since it hid the true physical causes. Saying that there are leaves on the trees "to protect the fruit", or clouds "to water the earth" said nothing about the true causal process desired by Baconian science. Also, Descartes, although he defended that science should keep to the record of efficient cause, doesn't fail to mention "the impenetrable ends of God", therefore he doesn't deny them[6]. Finalism, however, had not yet met its cruelest opponent: Spinoza.

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[2] Oliva, 2015.

[3] See, for example, the finalist features of the following presentation of the form: "For the naturated, while it is being naturated, goes from one term to another. Toward what? It is not toward the starting point; it is toward that to which it tends, that is, the form; therefore, it is the form that is nature" (Aristotle, 1961, 193b, p. 62). And even a more explicit identification: "Moreover, nature being double, matter on one side, form on the other, and this being the end and the others in view of this end, this one will be a cause, the final cause" (Ibid., 199a, p. 78).

[4] "Why is the saw like this? For this and in view of this; now, this end cannot be produced if the saw is not of iron, therefore necessarily it is of iron if there is to be a saw and its operation" (Ibid., 200a, p. 79).

[5] "Well understood, there also belongs to this same [final] causality everything which, moved by something other than itself, is intermediate between that motor and the end, e.g., for health, slimming, purging, remedies, instruments; for all these things are in view of the end, and only differ among themselves as actions and instruments" (Ibid., 194b, p. 65).

[6] "For, knowing already that my nature is extremely weak and limited, and, on the contrary, that God's is immense, incomprehensible, and infinite, I have no more difficulty in recognizing that there is an infinity of things in his potency whose causes are beyond the reach of my spirit. And this one reason alone is sufficient to persuade me that all that kind of causes which is usually taken from the end is of no use in physical or natural things; for it does not seem to me that I can without temerity seek and attempt to discover the impenetrable ends of God" (DESCARTES, 1988, p. 49).

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2. The appendix

The famous appendix of *Ethics* I, where the critique of final causes is made, closes the *De Deo*, which, on a superficial reading, would close Spinoza's ontology, which in turn would be followed by epistemology in part II and by ethics proper in the other parts. This division is questionable, since the rest of the *Ethics* is just as ontological as part I. However, thinking about this division, many say that the appendix should come later, in the middle of part II, considering that it is only in EIIP17 that Spinoza presents imagination, the proper ground of prejudices in general and of the finalist prejudice in particular. Now, if this were so, the philosopher would not have been able to elaborate almost any of the scholia of part I, since they dialogue with the imagination. This is also what Spinoza will do in the appendix: dialogue with the imagination, rather than presenting the genesis of imagination in itself, which will only be possible in part II. This dialogue will lead the reader to understand how prejudice in general arises from the finalist prejudice. However, this will not be a genesis in the strict sense implied by intuitive knowledge, but from the reader's own experiences. The presuppositions of the demonstration will not be definitions and axioms, but universally accepted experiences.

The beginning of the text picks up on the achievements made demonstratively in part I, which we will not be able to reconstruct in detail here:

> By this I have explained the nature of God and his properties, such as: that he exists necessarily; that he is one; that he is and acts by the necessity of his nature alone; that he is the free cause of all things and how he is; that everything is in God and depends on him in such a way that without him nothing can be or be conceived; and, finally, that everything has been predetermined by God, certainly not by the freedom of the will, that is, by absolute benevolence, but by the absolute nature of God, that is, by his infinite power. Moreover, wherever there was occasion, I took care to remove prejudices that might prevent my demonstrations from being perceived; but since there still remain not a few prejudices that also, and even to the utmost, could, and can, prevent men from being able to embrace the concatenation of things in the way I have explained it, I was led to think it worthwhile here to summon them to the examination of reason (ESPINOSA, 2015, p. 109, GII/77).

The examination of reason does not invalidate the partial refutations of the prejudices made in the previous scholia. What is intended is to call to examination those that still survive. These prejudices that are resistant to the demonstrations made and the refutations of the polls are not resistant by chance. They have common properties that guarantee their strength, hence the examination, although it starts from experience, must come from reason, which, as will be seen in part II, knows the common properties of things.

Such properties are common because they stem from a common basis for all, a first prejudice, which will be the subject of the continuation of the appendix:

> In fact, all the prejudices which I am here charged to denounce depend on one only, namely, that men commonly suppose that natural things act, as they do themselves, with a view to an end; still more, they take it for granted that God himself directs all things to some certain end: they say, in effect, that God made everything with a view to man, and man, in his turn, in order that he might worship him. This one prejudice, therefore, I shall consider first of all, seeking first the cause why the majority give acquiescence to it, and why all are by nature so inclined to embrace it. I shall then show its falsity, and finally how from it arise the prejudices about good and evil, merit and sin, praise and vituperation, order and confusion, beauty and ugliness, and the like (IDEM, p. 111, GII/78).

The general plan of the appendix is given: the object is the belief that all things (and not only men, but also natural things and God Himself) conduct themselves towards ends. The end of God would be the good of man, and the end of man would be the worship of God. All of nature is articulated, so to speak, backwards, from ends to means, from ends, as ends, to other means, etc. The first step will be to investigate why everyone accepts such prejudice. The second will be to show that such prejudice is false. The third will be to verify its derivations (good, evil, merit, sin, etc.).

Let's start with the first stage, the cause of this prejudice:

> In truth, this is not the place to deduce this from the nature of the human mind. Here, it will suffice that I take for foundation what must be admitted by all, namely, that all men are born ignorant of the causes of things, and that all have the appetite to seek what is useful to them, being conscious of this (IDEM, GII/78).

The rigorous deduction of the finalist prejudice could only be made from the essence of the human mind, which will be the object of part II, but, as I have already said, it is sufficient for the purpose of the appendix to deduce such prejudice from experiences common to all, namely: A) men are born ignorant of the causes of things. Even those who think they know the causes of things must recognize that at some time, or at least in childhood, they were ignorant of them. B) everyone has an appetite to seek the useful and knows it. This is a universal feeling, shared even by those who condemn this appetite, considering the useful as a private good, unsuitable for founding ethics, and therefore try to repress this appetite. Condemnable or not, realized or not, everyone recognizes, however, that this appetite exists.

From this original ignorance, added to the knowledge of appetite, Spinoza deduces:

> From this it follows, first, that men think they are free because they are conscious of their volitions and their appetites, and they do not even dream of considering the causes that dispose them to desire and want, since they are ignorant of them. It follows, secondly, that in everything men act in view of an end, that is, in view of the usefulness they desire, hence they are always anxious to know only the final causes of things done, and are quiet as soon as they have heard them; no wonder, since they have no cause to doubt further (IDEM, GII/78).

Aware of their appetites, but ignorant of the causes that determined them, men think they are free. They take themselves as free in the sense of indeterminate, since the causes of determination are hidden. In Part II, after having deduced the nature of the human mind, the folio from EIIP35 will use the same phenomenon as an example of the deprivation of knowledge implied in falsity: "Men are mistaken in regarding themselves as free, an opinion which consists only in being conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined. Therefore, their idea of freedom is this: they know no cause of their actions." (IDEM, p. 191, GII/117). In the appendix, however, we already had the linking of the image of freedom to ignorance of causes. Ignorance that leads to the illusion of autonomy of men conscious of that appetite. Tosel measures well the depth of this misunderstanding:

> This consciousness sees itself right from the start with immediate evidence as self-sufficient: and it attributes to itself a power that comes from its ignorance. It perceives itself as free in the face of the circumstances that provoke it: the consciousness detaches itself from the causal chain that produces it, it abstracts itself from such chain; it is an effect that spontaneously annuls or denies itself as an effect. It perceives itself without a cause (TOSEL, 1984, p. 32)[7]

But the illusion of freedom does not come alone. As Tosel develops:

> The genesis of the imaginary subject and object is simultaneous: in this primary situation of impotent affirmation, consciousness, the imaginary principle, is induced to construct an imaginary object. The objects that are useful are not known in themselves, in their internal structure and law of production; they are determined solely as having by nature to be useful to us. The relation of objects to our desire is repeated and redoubled: if everything has a relation to our use, things themselves can only be understood by their use (IDEM, p. 32-33).

In other words, because they are ignorant of the causes of appetite, men take the useful thing they crave as their end and make it the explanatory model for all things. This is why only the final cause satisfies human curiosity. We know that Spinoza is an advocate of efficient causation, but satiating curiosity by this route would presuppose the suppression of ignorance of those causes of determination. In the impossibility of doing so, the end presents itself as the true causality, at least as long as other experiences do not disown it.

[7] The translations and griffon are our own.

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If the final cause becomes the model of causality and the only one capable of quieting human curiosity, what happens when the sequence of ends does not present itself to experience? "But if they cannot hear them from another, nothing remains for them but to turn to themselves and reflect on the ends by which they are usually determined in similar cases, and thus necessarily judge by their own the ingenuity of others" (ESPINOSA, 2015, p. 111, GII/110). It is remarkable how the movement of anthropomorphization is widening at every step. The purpose, all along, is an anthropomorphization. It is because he sees in himself the desire for something useful, without knowing its causes, that man applies the model to all of nature, as if its functioning had to be regulated by his own. But anthropomorphization encounters obstacles when the purpose is not immediately revealed. According to the *Treatise on the Amendment of the Intellect*[8], the most precarious way of knowing (although as necessary as full intellection) is by hearsay. By this I know my birthday, who my parents are, etc. And I have never doubted it, which is very good, because it would not be possible to investigate the causes of everything. Within the realm of final causes, hearsay would be enough to calm our search for causes, but sometimes, as the appendix says, "one cannot hear them from others." What do men do then? They turn more inward and check what are the ends they imagine for themselves in similar cases, that is, they judge by their own the ingenuity of others, they apply to other men the ends they desire for themselves. Thus, they not only generalize the final causality, but the content of their particular ends.

But the movement is not limited to human or rational beings. The projection of my inner illusions into externality goes further:

> Moreover, since they find in themselves and outside of themselves no small number of means, which are very useful to them, such as, for example, eyes for seeing, teeth for chewing, herbs and animals for food, sun for light, sea for fish, it follows that they consider all natural things as means to that which is useful to them. And since they know that these means were found and not provided by them, they had cause to believe in some being who provided those means for their use. Indeed, after they considered things as means, they could not believe that they made themselves, but from the means they usually provide for themselves they had to conclude that there is someone or some leaders of nature, endowed with human freedom, who took care of everything for them and made everything for their use (ESPINOSA, 2015, p. 111-113, GII/78-79).

Not only in themselves they found means to the desired ends (eyes to see, teeth to chew), but they also saw in external nature such means, not only articulated with human desire, but also articulated among themselves: the sea exists as a means to the end of nourishing the fish, and the fish as a means to the end of nourishing man. Now, it was not we men who made the sea nourishing, nor the fish that feed us. Then it must have been some other superior being who put these means at our disposal. As Tosel explains, "Knowing of things only their relation to our immediate needs, men can only interpret the irreducibility of these things (insofar as they are not produced, but found) as due to another consciousness, an alter ego, a super-self that created the objects as means for men's use." (TOSEL, 1984, p. 34). This being, following anthropomorphizing logic, will have a nature analogous to ours, although transcendent, so it will have to have the freedom that we attribute to ourselves due to ignorance of causes.

But why, or rather for what, did such free gods do everything for our benefit? Again, the hearsay fails us and leads to a new anthropomorphic projection of our appetites: we men have a desire for honor, so the gods must have it too. The ultimate cause of their having created things to be useful to men was that

[8] As they will be important later on, the presentation of the modes of perceiving in TIE should be quoted: "I. There is a Perception that we have from hearing or from some sign, as they say, arbitrary. II. There is a Perception which we obtain from wandering experience, that is, from experience which is not determined by the intellect, but which is so called because it thus occurs by chance and we have no other experience to oppose it, so that it remains as unconcussed with us. III. There is a perception in which the essence of the thing is concluded from another thing, but not properly; which is done when we gather the cause from some effect, or when it is concluded from some universal which is always accompanied by some property. IV. Finally, there is a Perception in which the thing is perceived through its essence alone, or through the knowledge of its proximate cause" (ESPINOSA, 2015b, p. 37, GII/10).

these men would honor them. And how would this honor and worship be? New projection: each one, according to his individual preferences, invented a way to worship God, so that he would be esteemed above the others, having, among men, a privileged position. The entire nature would then be subjected to his idiosyncrasy, closing the cycle. More than anthropomorphization, we have a multiple movement of idiosyncratizations of the universe, each one making itself a universal law. What they all have in common is the finalistic structure of their thought. The ends are not atomized and independent of each other, but constitute highly sophisticated systems, articulating one to the other, governed by the most individual of measures, which, nevertheless, is set as universal: "what is useful for me". This structure, more than prejudice, has become superstition and has become so ingrained in minds that all causal investigation has become a search for the ends of things.

The result of this is universal delirium:

> But while they sought to show that nature never acts in vain (that is, that it is not for the use of man), they seem to have shown nothing else but that nature and the gods, like men, are delirious. See, I beg you, how far things have come! In the midst of the many comfortable things of nature, they had to encounter not a few uncomfortable things: storms, earthquakes, disease, etc., and they then maintained that these came about because the Gods were angered by the insults done to them by men, that is, by the sins committed in their worship. And although experience daily protested and showed with infinite examples that annoyance and inconvenience come equally and indistinctly to the godly and to the ungodly, they did not let go of their deep-rooted prejudice: indeed, it was easier for them to put these events among the other unknowable things, the use of which they did not know, and thus to maintain their present and innate state of ignorance, instead of destroying this whole structure and excogitating a new one. Hence, they took it for granted that the judgments of the Gods are far beyond human comprehension, which, of course, would be the only cause for the truth to escape the human race forever, were it not that Mathematics, which is not concerned with ends, but only with essences and properties of figures, has shown men another standard of truth; And besides Mathematics, other causes may also be pointed out (which it is superfluous here to enumerate), which have been able to make men open their eyes to these common prejudices and turn to the true knowledge of things" (ESPINOSA, 2015, p. 113, GII/79).

In *TIE*, after hearsay, the next mode of perception that presents itself is vague experience, that is, that which is established until a new experience contradicts it. It likewise ignores causes and likewise is doubtful, although necessary for life. For example, through vague experience I know that oil feeds the flame and water extinguishes it. Now, the finalistic structure of the universe, originally known by hearsay, is established by vague experience. Up to this point we have preconceptions, but we are not yet in the delusion, that is, we are not yet in the realm of superstition. These are established when the finalistic prejudice goes beyond the proper functioning of vague experience and resists being abolished even when new experience contradicts it. Superstition is the entrenchment of the prejudice when it becomes a belief system that can no longer be overthrown by the very vague experience that established it[9].So, the experience of the evils of the world does not dissolve the belief that the world is there to serve us, even if the service is painful to us. The belief system, again through hearsay, teaches us that the evils have come to punish the sins committed in the worship of God. As Tosel explains, Spinoza thus reconstructs all the key concepts of Judeo-Christian theology:

> When men are faced with the unfavorable circumstances of nature, they then constitute themselves as guilty or sinners before God. If things do not turn out as we wish, it is because we have committed faults before God, which the gods punish by failure. (...) The transformation of the superstitious self into the guilty self is reciprocated by the

[9] Homero Santiago is skilled in showing how the frustrations of experience can also lead to the search for the "new way of life," as described in the preface of TIE. However, this is not what happens in the appendix: "Disappointment, however, can also lead us in another direction: distrust of the code, of the values that had been given to us; in the limit, it can lead to the destruction of this finalist way of life and - why not? - to try to forge a new way of life, even searching for a true good that is different from the one that proved to be a lure. This path is not taken in the appendix, but it unquestionably appears as a possibility" (SANTIAGO, 2007, p. 138). This more "optimistic" alternative to the picture painted in the appendix, however, depends on the radically melancholic situation shown in the Treatise, which, at the risk of the loss of life, leads to an equally radical leap into philosophizing. It is not the universal experience portrayed in the appendix.

> transformation of the creator God into a redeemer God or a judge God. God is the one who gives an unjustifiable existence in order to forgive [the creature] for existing (TOSEL, 1984, p. 40).

But the dynamics of the vague experience do not tire and again challenges superstition. After all, why do misfortunes also affect the pious? The reasons for this are beyond human finitude. But they must exist, so the maintenance of this focus of ignorance (the "impenetrable ends of God," as Descartes would say) is tolerated. It is necessary to maintain the entire finalistic belief system. Were it not for Mathematics, which does not deal with ends, having awakened us from this "dogmatic sleep" (to steal Kant's expression), we would be stuck in it forever, since the strength of the mental rootedness of superstition overcomes our merely imaginative ability to revise partial experiences by means of new experiences. This ends the first task of the appendix (to show the cause of the finalist prejudice).

Let us now move on to the second task: to show the falsity of this prejudice. That natural ends are fictions is something manifest from the very presentation of the imaginative genesis of this prejudice at the beginning of the appendix. Moreover, Spinoza recalls proposition 16, which shows that from the necessity *of the divine nature must follow infinite things in infinite ways*. This means - as, incidentally, is made explicit by the corollary of this same proposition - that God is efficient cause of everything. If this is so, natural things cannot be effects of a fictitious natural finality thought in Aristotelian terms. They are, rather, effects of their efficient causes, especially of their first efficient cause, the necessity of the divine nature. This necessity, in turn, must be understood rigorously, and not as another name for the divine freedom to create, which is a fictitious projection from the also fictitious human free will. Hence Spinoza's mention of the corollaries of proposition 32, which say that God does not operate by freedom of the will. This demonstrative path from proposition 16 to 32 disanthropomorphizes God and nature in light of the idea of efficient cause, a process that now becomes explicit. But this Spinoza has already done in the course of book I. The demonstration in the appendix will be of a different kind, pointing out how the doctrine of finality inverts nature.

But what is the inversion? Spinoza says:

> What is really cause, it considers as effect, and vice versa. What is first by nature, makes later. And finally, what is supreme and perfect, makes imperfect. For (omitting the first two points, because they are manifest by themselves), as is established by Propositions 21, 22 and 23, that effect which is produced immediately by God is most perfect, and the more something needs many intermediate causes to be produced, the more imperfect it is. Now, if the things immediately produced by God had been made for God to pursue his end, then necessarily the latter, for which the former would have been made, would be the most excellent of all (ESPINOSA, 2015, p. 115, GII/80).

Whereas the cause-effect inversion is obvious when proposing the final cause, Spinoza will focus on the inversion between perfect and imperfect. The aforementioned propositions 21 to 23 had brought about the deduction of the infinite immediate and mediate modes. These are more perfect than the other modes, which are finite, so that the decrease in perfection is proportional to the degree of mediation between the thing and its cause in God. Now, if the infinite modes had been made for God to pursue his end, namely, to benefit men so that they would worship him, the latter would have to be more excellent than the immediate modes, i.e., the finite and remote would be more perfect than the infinite and immediate, which is absurd. But that's not all:

> Moreover, such a doctrine suppresses the perfection of God, for if God acts in view of an end, he necessarily desires something that he lacks. And though Theologians and Metaphysicians distinguish between the end of indigence and the end of assimilation, they nevertheless admit that God made everything in view of himself and not in view of the things to be created, because, before creation, they can point to nothing apart from God in view of which God acted; hence they are necessarily coerced to admit that God lacked those [things] in view of which he wished to provide the means, and desired them, as is clear in itself (IDEM, GII/80).

More than the reversal of the order of perfection of creatures, what finalism brings is the very suppression of God's absolute perfection, an argument which will have particular effect on the reader targeted by the appendix, a reader whose prejudices resist demonstration, but will not resist the evidence that his prejudice has a heretical consequence. If God aims at an end, he lacks something that he desires. Now, if he lacks something, God is not absolutely perfect. Therefore, God cannot act in view of ends. First of all, Spinoza denies that this problem can be solved with the scholastic distinction between the end of indigence and the end of assimilation[10]. This solution would preserve the idea that God is guided by ends, since these would not be His own good, but the good of created things. God's end, therefore, would be the good of man. For Spinoza, this distinction is useless, since, at least before creation, theologians themselves recognize that they cannot say that God sought the good of things outside of Himself. It is in view of himself (not least because there was nothing outside) that he decides to create everything. God desired these things, so he lacked them, which is incompatible with his absolute perfection. Finalism, as an explanatory structure of the universe, is therefore a threat to the divine nature itself.

One could say, however, like Descartes, that God's purposes are unfathomable. We ignore them, but they are at work. Once again, we have the appeal to ignorance to support a hypothesis that would collapse from the denials of reason and from vague experience itself. Now, however, this appeal to ignorance takes on the appearance of method:

> Nor should it be silent here that the followers of this doctrine, who wanted to show their ingenuity by pointing out ends to things in order to prove it, have also introduced a new way of arguing, namely, not reduction to the impossible, but to ignorance, which shows that for this doctrine there was no other way of arguing. In fact, for example, if a stone falls from a roof on someone's head and kills him, you will demonstrate in the following way that the stone fell to kill that man: in fact, if it did not fall for this purpose and by God's will, how could so many circumstances (for many often concur simultaneously) have coincided by chance? You will perhaps answer that it happened because a wind blew and the man was on his way there. But you will insist: why did the wind blow at that moment? Why was the man walking that way at that very moment? If, once again, you answer that the wind rose on that occasion because the day before, when the weather was still calm, the sea had begun to blow and because the man had been invited by a friend, they will insist again, because the question never ends: Why did the sea blow? Why was the man invited on that occasion? And so, more and more, they will not stop asking about the causes of causes, until you take refuge in the will of God, that is, in the asylum of ignorance. In the same way, they are astonished when they see the structure of the human body, and because they do not know the causes of such great art, they conclude that it is not made by mechanical art, but by divine or supernatural art, and that it is constituted in such a way that one part does not injure another. And from this it follows that he who inquiries into the true causes of miracles, and endeavors to understand natural things as the learned, and not to admire them as the foolish, is everywhere regarded as heretical and impious, and [thus] proclaimed by those whom the vulgar worship as interpreters of nature and the Gods. For they know that once ignorance is suppressed, stupor is suppressed, that is, the only means they have for arguing and maintaining their authority (IDEM, p. 115-117, GII/80-81).

The mode of argument of the defenders of finalism is to exhaust the search for efficient causes, until the listener, unable to continue, appeals to the will of God, the asylum of ignorance. The will of God, in this case, is equivalent to the "because yes" that any tired father gives to his son who never stops asking. The difference is that to appeal to God's will is already to give in to finalism, for this will that requires no other efficient causes is supposedly guided by ends, even if unknown. To say that something occurred "because God willed it" interrupts the infinite sequence of finite efficient causes (as described in EIP28) that cannot be fully traversed. Instead of recognizing ignorance, however, one prefers to refer causality to an end external to the series of efficient causes, an end that God would have aimed at in producing the entire series. Hence, the investigation of the series itself becomes unnecessary, because we have been presented with the reason (in the mathematical sense of the reason of a progression) that gave rise to the

[10] I reproduce Joaquim de Carvalho's note on this: "A distinction in use in contemporary Spinoza scholasticism. From the texts collected by Freudenthal (cit. Sp.u.d.Scholastik, p.133), the following passage from Heereboord's Meletemata. Philos. by Heereboord: 'God made all things because of an end, not of indigence (lack) but of assimilation, an end which is that for which one acts, not to seek one's own good, but to do good to other things outside oneself" (ESPINOSA, 1973, note 189, p. 125).

entire series. Only we don't know what it is. If we knew, we could ask again why God wanted such an end. In the case described, however, ignorance is presented as knowledge. To tell the truth, a knowledge of not knowing, but which implies a conformism in the face of ignorance itself. Remaining stupefied before a complexity that surpasses him, man does not question the finalist explanation and attributes everything he does not understand to divine art, which cannot even be understood. This is why coming out of the stupor by resuming the examination of efficient causes is a threat, not only to the finalist doctrine as such, but also to the power structure that is created around it. For the "managers" of the asylum of ignorance, it is useful that man remains stupefied in the face of supposed miracles.

With this we can pass to the third and last stage of the appendix: to examine the prejudices derived from that original prejudice. Indeed, after men came to see themselves as the end of Nature, and to judge things by what they have of use to each one, from this arose the notions of good, evil, order, confusion, hot, cold, beauty and ugliness: "Indeed, they called Good everything that leads to good health and the worship of God, and Evil, on the other hand, what is contrary to this" (IDEM, 2015, p. 117, GII/81). Health is seen as the end of nature and the worship of God is seen as the end of health, so everything that benefits one end or the other is called good. In part IV, the term *Good* will be recovered as that which we know for certain to be useful to us. Here, however, it is enough that we imagine that something is useful to us to call it *Good*. Of course, this implies a relativity of goods: what is good for one may not be good for another.

And what about order?

> And since those who do not understand the nature of things say nothing about them, but only imagine them, and take the imagination for the intellect, therefore they firmly believe, ignorant as they are of the nature of things and of their own, that there is order in things. For when they are so arranged that, when they are represented to us by the senses, we can easily imagine them, and therefore easily remember them, we say that they are well-ordered; if the opposite is the case, we say that they are ill-ordered, that is, confused. And since the things that we can easily imagine are more agreeable to us than others, therefore men prefer order to confusion, as if order were something in nature beyond the relation to our imagination; and they say that God created everything with order, and in this way, without knowing it, they attribute imagination to God (IDEM, p. 117-119, GII/81-82).

The renunciation of the intellection of nature, typical of those who take refuge in the asylum of ignorance, implies taking the imagination for the intellect, still within that model of anthropomorphic projection of what goes on in me. In effect, imagination is the purely individual and idiosyncratic, although projection seeks to universalize them. Those who indulge in imagination believe that there is order in things. We are not dealing here with order as a causal series, which is the basis of true knowledge and which will be dealt with as of part II, but rather order as the imaginative basis of the evaluative appreciation of things. Not taken individually (for that would be enough the notion of good), but in the articulated totality of things, the universe. After all, what makes us say that things are well ordered? The fact that it is easy to imagine them, that they fit what we expect and are used to seeing, integrating perfectly into our belief system. What is not easy to imagine, this is said to be messy and disordered. Since this ease of imagining is felt to be pleasant, men prefer order to confusion and attribute it to things themselves, forgetting that such pleasantness is dependent on their relation to our imagination. Order, like goodness, ceases to be seen as a way of being of reality and now constitutes reality itself. And delirium, within the same logic of anthropomorphic projection of what goes on in us, leads to attributing order to the creative act, which implies that God himself was guided by imagination, or rather, our imagination. And what about the things that are not imaginable or that escape our imaginative comfort? As we saw before, there is no problem: it is enough to appeal to the idea of punishment or, directly, to the asylum of ignorance (the divine will whose ends are unfathomable).

Like good and order, beauty and ugliness are also modes of imagining. Beauty is tributary to good, that is, to that which leads to good health and the worship of God, that is, to me and the anthropomorphic

projection of harmony. Purely linked to what pleases my senses, it has been attributed to the heavenly bodies themselves, and even to the ends of God, as if God, besides imagination (which would be serious enough...), could also have senses that perceive a harmony. Finally, as the imagination composes doctrines from the notions of good, order and beauty, it is understandable that this has resulted in controversies, or even skepticism. After all, if from the discrepant among men, what is pleasant or unpleasant to each one's imagination and senses, one tries to make universal doctrines and even theologies, it is clear that there will be no agreement. As Spinoza says:

> Although human bodies agree in many things, they differ in several, and therefore what seems good to one seems bad to another; what seems orderly to one seems to another confused; what is pleasant to one is to another unpleasant; and so on to the rest, from which I will here refrain, both because this is not the place to treat it thoroughly and because everyone has already experienced it. (IDEM, p. 121, GII/83).

Such notions, which Spinoza calls entities of imagination, because they are modes of imagining, to which reality outside the mind is attributed, are at the basis of the arguments against the demonstrations made in *Ethics* I:

> Indeed, this is how they usually argue: if everything follows from the necessity of the most perfect nature of God, from where do so many imperfections in nature arise? Namely, the corruption of things to the point of stench, the ugliness that causes nausea, confusion, evil, sin, etc.? Yet, as I said earlier, they are easily refuted. For the perfection of things is to be estimated by their nature and power alone, and therefore things are neither more nor less perfect in view of whether they delight or offend men's senses, whether they contribute to or repulse human nature (IDEM, GII/83).

The opponents say that God, being perfect, cannot produce evil except by punishment, but this is only acceptable because things are not necessary. If everything arises from the necessity of the divine nature, as proposition 16 says, everything should be perfect like God, and not full of imperfections as experience shows. What Espinosa retorts is that precisely this is not an experimental counter-argument. Experience does not show ugliness, evil, and sin, because these are actually creations of our imagination, from our particular impressions, and not realities outside the mind. Things are more or less perfect according to their own potency, not according to how we like them.

3. The preface to *Ethics* IV

The conclusion of the appendix was dedicated to showing that all the main elements of vulgar ethics derive from the finalist prejudice. Being derivations of an "inversion of nature", it will be up to the new ethics proposed by Spinoza to subvert them, otherwise it will never have the affective power to prevail over superstition. This is why it is difficult to accept the interpretations that the Spinoza critique of final causality would focus only on God (who is immune to any teleology), but would not affect the effective (and not merely imaginary) presence of the final cause in human actions. The consequence of such interpretations would be to deny that Spinoza has made an effective transformation in the traditional conception of causality, since the structure remains in general, although the final cause cannot be applied to God. Moreover, by maintaining the validity of the teleological explanation of human conduct, such interpretations take away the ethical scope of the critique of finalism in the appendix, making it an exclusively theological discussion.

Most surprisingly, such interpretations invoke the preface to *Ethics* IV, where Spinoza explicitly reduces finality to efficient causality, to support the maintenance of teleology in Spinosianism. In this vein, Gleizer says:

> The entire analysis proposed in this preface concerning the genesis and nature of the notions of 'perfection' and 'imperfection', 'good' and 'evil', takes as its foundation the recognition that men act towards ends when they intentionally produce certain works. (...) The critique of the objective validity of imaginative models and the exclusion of the legitimacy of the anthropomorphic projection of our teleological behavior onto God or Nature

> does not lead Espinosa to deny the teleological character of our behavior, nor to refuse the validity of any model that can guide and evaluate our conduct (GLEIZER, 2006, p. 167).

As we already dedicated another paper[11] to this preface, and especially to the controversial notion of a model of human nature raised therein, we will not make a detailed analysis of the whole argumentative movement of the text, limiting ourselves to the passage that dialogs most closely with the appendix of part I:

> Now, the cause which is said to be final is nothing other than the human appetite itself, while considered as the principle or first cause of a thing. For example, when we say that dwelling was the final cause of this or that house, we certainly mean nothing other than that a man, because he imagined the comforts of domestic life, had the appetite to build a house. Therefore, the dwelling, while considered as the final cause, is nothing other than this singular appetite, which in reality is the efficient cause, considered as the first because men commonly ignore the causes of their appetites. For they are, as I have often said, certainly conscious of their actions and their appetites, but ignorant of the causes by which they are determined to appetite something (ESPINOSA, 2015, p. 375, GII/207).

About this passage, Curley (on whom Gleizer relies) claims not only that it attests to the validity of final cause for man, since Spinoza clearly explains human action "by appealing to a person's mental anticipation of the consequences he expects from the action, the desire for these consequences, and the resulting desire to perform the action" (CURLEY, 1990, p. 179), as well as avoiding the charge of "inversion" proper to final causation, as had been presented in the appendix: "That is, the attribution of beliefs and desires to the agent allows one to escape the argument of the inversion of the order of Nature, since it is not a matter of explaining the action from its future effects, but from mental states that, preceding the action, intentionally refer to its possible future effects. The end, therefore, is an intentional object that internally modifies and determines desire." (GLEIZER, 2006, p. 179).

The description of human action by the two interpreters is correct in general terms, although the end is not exactly the intentional object (this would be the affection that determines desire; in this case, the imagination of the comforts of domestic life), but desire itself, now as an efficient cause. They missed, however, the subversion that such a description implies in the traditional conception of causality, no longer allowing to speak of a final cause. More attentive to the depth of this change was Matheron, mistakenly pointed out by Gleizer as a partisan of his teleological conception of human action:

> The dwelling appears to me as the final cause of my house, whereas, in fact, it is I-as-desire-to-inhabit who am its efficient cause. The difference, to tell the truth, may seem insignificant, for it is certain that I build my house **with a view** to inhabiting it: the efficient cause, here, is a conscious agent who imagines beforehand the result of his undertaking; if I christen 'end' the anticipated image of this result, the harm does not seem very great, and, if I do not do so, nevertheless I will not have advanced any further in the knowledge of the determinism that governs me. And yet, it is not just a matter of words. It is not the same to integrate the end with the efficient cause or to separate it from it in order to make it act upon it from outside: in the first case, we recognize the principle of our belonging to the universal necessity, even if it remains for us lacunae; in the second, we break the chain and, illusorily filling the gap, we invert things." (MATHERON, 1969, p. 105, emphasis added).

The inversion denounced in the preface to part IV is no less than that in the appendix to part I. Both texts are complementary and are concerned with the prejudices of the vulgar taken for science. As Chaui explains, thus departing from Gleizer's position:

> The difference between the two texts arises from the place where the geometrical deduction inserts them. In the case of the Appendix, the critique of the finalist prejudice is made by reference to the essence and potency of God, while in the Preface of part IV it is made starting from human nature, whose knowledge was obtained in the previous parts. However, since the finalist prejudice equates the image of human action with that of natural and divine action, in both the Preface and the Appendix, the center of the argument is given by proposition 16 of Part I (From the necessity of the divine nature must follow infinite things in infinite ways) (CHAUI, 2016, p. 390).

[11] OLIVA, 2017, pp. 39-55.

This proposition highlighted the active or acting character of the divine essence, which will be fully demonstrated in EIP34 (*God's potency is his own essence)*. In God, his being is his own acting, so that it makes no sense to place in the exteriority of the ends the cause of his actions. The point is that, in a certain sense, it is also so for man. Indeed, we know from EIIIP7 that *the effort by which each thing strives* to *persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing itself,* so here too we have that the essence is potency, even if it is a limited degree of potency. Therefore, the transcendence of cause to effect, typical of traditional finalism, is absurd, which, by the way, Matheron already pointed out, when he said that it was not a triviality to integrate the end to the efficient cause, instead of separating it from it and making it act on it from outside. Such transcendence is absurd only if we understand it in relation to man as the imaginative reading of his own ignorance about causes. In short, from nature, the finalist prejudice is thrown back into the human imagination. But even there the ends do not exist.

As explains Chaui:

> The **image** of the appetite leads to the supposition that it is determined by a final cause because it is supposed to be the first cause of an operation, when, as shown in part III, it (or desire) is determined to do something by an affection which thus determines it to conceive or do something. In contrast, his **idea** states that it is an efficient cause determined by other causes and which has in itself its own end (IDEM, p. 391).

The so-called final cause is the human appetite itself, which only appears as a first and isolated cause from other determinations because man is often ignorant of the causes of his appetites. No wonder the passage quoted before from the preface, about the fiction of dwelling as a final cause, ends by citing the same foundations of the finalist prejudice presented at the beginning of the appendix and universally experienced (the ignorance of causes and the consciousness of appetites).

In short, the criticism of the final cause in the appendix and in the preface of part IV go in the same direction. It is not by talking about desires and desired objects that Spinoza would be keeping in the human sphere the teleology abolished in the divine sphere. What the philosopher refuses, in both spheres, is to hypostatize an imaginary scope whose potency would be the agent's true motive, although external to him. For God or for man, the function of the critique of finalism is to put things back in their proper places: ends only make ontological sense if they are no longer seen as a particular type of causal action and are integrated into the efficient causal chain. Without this structural change in the conception of causality, superstition is insurmountable.

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