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Teleology and Agreement in Nature, *Andrea Sangiacomo*

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My idea is that every specific body strives to become master over all space and to extend its force (– its will to power:) and to thrust back all that resists its extension. But it continually encounters similar efforts on the part of other bodies and ends by coming to an arrangement ('union') with those of them that are sufficiently related to it: thus they then conspire together for power. And the process goes on.

—F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, s.636

Is Spinoza's Notion of Conatus Teleological?

From Aristotle to Suarez, philosophers have conceived of final causes in a variety of different and often irreconcilable ways. Despite these differences, final causes remain more or less constantly defined as that which determines a specific orientation in the causal process. While the same efficient cause can bring about different effects that are equally compatible with the expression of its causal efficacy, a final cause determines the causal process in such a way that it must tend toward a specific state rather than others. Accordingly, final causes are often presented as the 'guide'

[1] This chapter is part of the research project 'Naturalism and Teleology in Spinoza's Philosophy', funded by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung and led by Martin Lenz at the University of Groningen. I would like to thank Keith Green, John Grey, Martin Lenz, Eugene Marshall, and Valtteri Viljanen for very helpful comments on previous versions of this chapter.

of efficient causes, and efficient causes taken alone are depicted as 'blind'.

In the *Appendix* to the first part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza famously claims that 'all final causes are nothing but human fictions' (EI App). This would entail that, in Spinoza's ontology, things do not act in order to bring about a certain state rather than others, and efficient causes do not need any 'guidance'. In fact, it is because everything in nature happens necessarily that final causes are superfluous and efficient causes suffice to account for the causal interactions among natural things.

Don Garrett challenged this anti-teleological reading by arguing that Spinoza's position remains instead close to Aristotle's original account of 'unthoughtful' teleology (i.e. teleology of natural things moved by an internal principle of change but deprived of any conscious intentionality). Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine (EIIIP6–7) figures among the main pieces of textual evidence in favour of Garrett's claim (Garrett 1999, 313). The teleological nature of the *conatus* would consist in the fact that each thing's causal efficacy would be directed to the thing's own self-preservation.²

However, Garrett's reading has been the object of extensive criticism. For instance, John Carriero contended that 'reflecting on the basic nature of motive tendencies as found within the corporeal order envisioned by the new science, Spinoza is ultimately led to present an account of the universe that is free from anything that an Aristotelian would have recognized as final causality' (Carriero 2005, 145). After all, Spinoza's introduction of the notion of *conatus* does not seem to provide enough evidence to conclude that such a notion must be understood in a teleological way.

In this chapter, I argue that the notion of *conatus* is not necessarily teleological in itself, but it must work in a teleological way given the broader ontological framework in which Spinoza inscribes it.

[2] For an introduction to Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine, see Valtteri Viljanen's contribution to this volume. Lin (2006) extended Garrett's teleological reading to human actions, a topic I will not touch in this chapter due to space restrictions.

In order to support this claim, I first outline (§2) two readings of the notion of *conatus* that weigh against its intrinsic teleological nature. Then (§3), I argue that a thing's *conatus* must work in a teleological way once we consider that Spinoza's account of causal interactions is based on the notion of 'agreement in nature' among finite modes. Finally (§4), I outline how this teleological account can be applied consistently across a spectrum that ranges from the simplest bodies to that of the most complex individuals.

Two Ways of Dissolving Teleology

The first way to dismiss a teleological orientation in Spinoza's notion of *conatus* (EIIIP6–7) consists in considering the thing's *conatus* as expressing the thing's determination to merely preserve the state induced by the complex causal network of external causes in which the thing exists and operates (EIP28). In this 'inertial reading',³ the thing's *conatus* would instantiate the principle of 'inertia' allegedly endorsed in seventeenth-century natural philosophy.⁴

Some textual evidence suggests that Spinoza might have partially agreed with the fundamental intuition at the core of this 'inertial reading', at least insofar as we consider what he calls the 'simplest bodies' (*corpora simplicissima*). In EIIP13 Sch Lem3, Spinoza claims that the state of motion or rest of any given simplest body will be maintained until external causes determine it to change. If a body could equally persevere in motion or rest, and the change from one state to the other would depend only on the determination it receives from external causes, then the body's striving to remain

[3] I use the labelling introduced by Viljanen (2011), 105, to present the scholarly debate on this point. Carriero (2011), 70, suggests a slightly different label: 'the inertial picture of conatus'.

[4] However, from a historical point of view, McDonough (2011), 191, rightly recalls that 'the concept of conatus as used by seventeenth-century mechanist was, in fact, by no means essentially nonteleological'. Concerning how the use of the notion of *conatus* in seventeenth-century physics might have influenced Spinoza, see Sangiacomo (2013), 151–187.

in motion when it is in motion (or at rest, when it is at rest) would not count as 'teleological', because the body itself would not be intrinsically oriented toward one of these states or the other.

If we generalize this point, we could conclude that the thing's *conatus* consists in persevering in a state that the thing itself acquired through causal interactions. However, insofar as different states do not amount to a complete destruction of the thing itself, the thing does not have any 'preference' for one state rather than the other and it will simply strive to preserve the state to which it is determined by external causes, until stronger external causes change it. This reading is in fact a way to dissolve the teleological nature of the notion of *conatus* because it dismisses the idea of 'orientation' that seems to be at the core of any teleological account.⁵

However, a supporter of the teleological reading can build a better case by pointing to the way in which more complex bodies (individuals) tend to preserve their own being. In fact, complex individuals strive to persevere in their being in the sense that they strive to realize the fundamental properties or causal powers entailed by their own (eternal and singular) *essence*, which would thus orient every causal operation that the individual brings about.

Yet, accepting this general essentialist assumption does not commit one to subscribing to a teleological reading of Spinoza's notion of *conatus*. Valtteri Viljanen illustrated a notable instance of this point by defending the claim that essences are best interpreted in terms of causal powers:

[T]hings are endowed with *conatus*, that is, striving to drive themselves through opposition to produce effects determined by their definable essence alone. The fact that things are endowed with power (and are so because they express God's power) grounds the thesis that they genuinely resist any opposition, not just (indifferently) maintain whatever prevailing state they may have as long as they are not interfered with. (Viljanen 2011, 126)

[5] Klever (1988) and (1993) presented the strongest defence of this reading.

According to Viljanen, this reading would not be ‘teleological in any Aristotelian sense’ (Viljanen 2011, 128). The reason seems to be that things do not strive to achieve a specific ‘end-state’, but they simply strive to enhance their own perfection or power without limit.

The merit of the inertial reading consists in showing that a thing’s mere effort to persevere in a given state does not entail a teleological orientation. Viljanen’s essentialist reading is a second, more sophisticated way to show that the thing’s striving to bring about its own effects and resist external causes does not entail teleology either. Essentialism would not introduce an ‘internal’ orientation because the effects that a thing can bring about necessarily ‘follow’ from its own essence in the same way that from the definition of a triangle it ‘follows’ that its internal angles are equal to two right angles.⁶ Each singular thing can do nothing but strive to bring about its own effects, not because it tends to reach a certain state rather than another, but simply because it cannot operate differently.

Viljanen’s essentialist reading successfully shows that a strict inertial reading is unable to account for the fact that in Spinoza’s ontology a thing not only strives to preserve its own being or state, but it positively strives to *enhance* its own power of acting. Despite its merits, however, Viljanen’s account is based on the assumption that external causes play only a ‘negative’ role in Spinoza’s ontology. In fact, Viljanen defines the state of ‘perfect essence realization’ as

[6] Viljanen (2011), 122, stresses that a ‘geometrical’ understanding of the ‘following’ of properties from the thing’s essence rules out teleology. This claim can be traced back to Spinoza’s own appeal to ‘mathematics’ as able to reveal a different standard of truth, arguably not interested in investigating final causes (*EI App*). This in turn echoes Aristotle’s own claim (*Physics II.2*), according to which geometry and mathematics, by dealing with ‘abstract’ entities, are not concerned with final causes, which are instead essential to understand real natural things. However, Spinoza explicitly agrees with Aristotle that numbers and measurements at the centre of mathematics and geometry are only imaginative tools based on abstraction, and they cannot produce an adequate understanding of the nature of things (*Ep 12*).

the condition that the thing would reach if it were *not* acted upon (and prevented) by external causes. Accordingly, the best that external causes could do is simply not ‘disturb’ the thing’s *conatus* (Viljanen 2011, 128–129).⁷

This assumption seems at odds with one of the fundamental tenets of Spinoza’s ontology, according to which we cannot conceive of a thing existing in act and operating in nature *without* taking into account the causal network that necessarily and always determines it (EIP28). For this reason, I propose a different reading in the next section. I argue that the way in which Spinoza’s ontology accounts for interactions among things entails that the thing’s *conatus* is always oriented to achieve a state that maximizes agreement (and minimizes disagreement) in nature with external causes.

Agreement in Nature

According to Spinoza, singular things can ‘agree or disagree in nature’ to different degrees. As he best explained in a famous letter dated 1665:

I consider things as parts of a whole to the extent that their natures adapt themselves to one another so that they are in the closest possible agreement. Insofar as they are different from one another, to that extent each one forms in our mind a separate idea and is therefore considered as a whole, not a part. (*Ep* 32)

Two variables determine the degree of agreement or disagreement in nature. The first is the thing’s own essence, which defines the fixed set of essential properties that establishes what a thing can or cannot do. According to Spinoza, things can share a greater or smaller number of ‘common properties’ (EIIIP38–39; Gueroult 1974, 345–347), and thus they can bring about effects that are more or less compatible with each other. Different singular things

[7] I took issue more at length with this view in Sangiacomo (2013b).

always agree in nature to some extent, at least insofar as they share the same attribute (*EIVP29* Dem).⁸ Accordingly, the same thing can agree in nature more with certain external causes and less with others, depending on how many common properties they share.

The second variable is the way in which a thing is determined to interact with other things. The same thing can agree more in nature with the same external causes depending on whether, and to what extent, it is able to ‘adapt’ its effects to those of the external causes. In the case of human beings, for instance, Spinoza argues (*EIVP59* Sch) that the same physical action of beating can be brought about either because the body is determined by certain passions or because it is determined by reason. In the first case, the act of beating is produced, e.g., as an effect of hate, which is based on disagreement in nature with external causes. In the second case, the same act is determined by reason, i.e. by those properties that are shared by the body and the external causes, and thus that act expresses a higher degree of agreement in nature between them and the body.⁹

Although different things can agree to some extent, they always remain *essentially* different since they are defined by different singular essences.¹⁰ As Spinoza states in the quote above, ‘insofar as [finite things] are different from one another, to that extent each one forms in our mind a separate idea and is therefore considered as a whole’, that is, they do *not* ‘adapt themselves to one another’.

[8] Only things that have absolutely nothing in common can have no impact on their reciprocal powers of acting (*EIVP29*), but this can happen only among things conceived under different attributes, i.e. among things that cannot have any causal interaction, for *EIIIP2*. Regarding Spinoza’s account of ‘parts’ and ‘wholes’ and the way in which his mereology influences the development of the *conatus* doctrine, see Sangiacomo (2013), 37–187.

[9] For a detailed account of how power of acting, affects, and consciousness are related in Spinoza’s epistemology and psychology, see Eugene Marshall’s contribution to this volume and Marshall (2013).

[10] Conversely, it is impossible to derive the essence of singular things from common properties (*EIIIP37*).

The thing's essence *alone* defines the thing as a *whole* (i.e. as entirely different from other external causes) without taking into consideration whether and how the thing's nature could adapt itself to that of the external causes (because the thing's essence does not entail the essence of external causes, and thus it cannot entail whether, and to what extent, the thing could agree with them in nature). Should the thing's *conatus* strive to bring about its effects as they are defined by the essence *alone*, it would strive to simply persevere in what makes that thing *different* from all the other external causes, and thus it would foster its disagreement with them in nature, without 'adapting' to the nature of external causes. However, the more the thing acts on the basis of its disagreement in nature with external causes, the more its power of acting will be opposed. Hence, the more the thing strives to bring about its own effects on the basis of its essence alone, the more it will foster disagreement in nature with external causes, which will turn out to be detrimental to the thing's own *conatus*.¹¹

Although the thing's essence defines a fixed set of effects that the thing can (and will necessarily) bring about, these effects can be produced in different ways, depending on how the thing's causal power is determined. Since the thing's *conatus cannot* be determined to bring about the thing's effects as they are defined by the thing's essence *alone*, the only way the thing can persevere in its own being consists in being determined to 'adapt' its causal activity to the nature of external causes by enhancing their degree of agreement in nature (because the more the disagreement in nature prevails, the more the thing's existence will be opposed).

It should be stressed that if the thing's *conatus* can strive to preserve its own being only by increasing its agreement in nature with external causes, but the more the thing agrees in nature with

[11] In the case of human beings, this situation is produced by 'ambition', which is a passion based on imagination and imitation of affects (*EIIP27* and *29*), see *EIIP31* Sch: 'each of us, by his nature, wants the others to live according to his temperament; when all alike want this, they are alike an obstacle to one another'. Cf. *EIVP37* Sch1.

external causes the more they will *enhance* its power of acting (by supporting, rather than opposing, its causal efficacy, EIVP18 Sch), then it follows that the thing's *conatus* to persevere in its own being (i.e. to enhance its agreement in nature with external causes) necessarily leads the thing to strive to improve its own power of acting. This striving to *enhance* the thing's power of acting does not depend on the notion of *conatus* itself. Rather this is a consequence of the way in which that notion works within the ontological framework that Spinoza provides, which is based on the concept of 'agreement in nature' as the fundamental criterion to determine whether, and to what extent, different things can interact without destroying each other.

In this sense, the thing's *conatus* is not only ruled by efficient causality, but also by a kind of 'teleology' that orients the thing's causal efficacy towards a specific state compatible with the preservation *and* enhancement of the thing's power of acting. In fact, mere efficient causality is compatible with (and is not undermined by) states in which a thing is passively determined by external causes that exploit its causal efficacy in such a way that the thing's own power of acting is decreased (e.g. as cases of slavery or bondage produce affects based on sadness). Even when determined by passions, the thing still necessarily produces its own effects and, insofar as external causes do not destroy it, the thing still perseveres in its own being (as in the case of beating determined by hate). However, such a condition compromises the efficacy with which the thing is able to *enhance* its own power of acting by achieving higher degrees of agreement in nature with external causes. Since this striving to *enhance* the thing's power of acting is a fundamental aspect of how the thing's *conatus* works within the framework provided by Spinoza's ontology of 'agreement in nature', but this aspect cannot be captured by reducing the kind of causal efficacy expressed by the thing's *conatus* through reference to mere 'efficient' causality, it is better underlined by conceiving of it as a 'teleological' orientation of the thing's *conatus*.

It must also be observed that both absolute agreement and absolute disagreement in nature are impossible in Spinoza's ontology. This entails that the thing's striving to adapt its own effects to those of the external causes will always find a limit and the thing's power of acting cannot grow indefinitely (EIVP3–4). In fact, since finite things are *essentially* different from each other, some degree of disagreement in nature will always be unavoidable. This means that the thing's *conatus* is oriented to achieve the maximum degree of agreement *possible*, as well as the minimum degree of disagreement with external causes.¹² I propose to call 'equilibrium'¹³ this state in which the thing is able to bring about its own effects in such a way as to maximize agreement and minimize disagreement in nature with external causes, by operating as much as possible as a *part* among them, rather than as an independent whole. This state of equilibrium represents the 'optimal' condition for the enhancement of the thing's power of acting, although it cannot be defined by the essence of the thing *alone*.

Although the actual state of equilibrium in a given causal network cannot be predicted on the basis of the thing's essence alone, the *fact* that the thing must strive to reach equilibrium with external causes follows from the thing's *conatus* since reaching equilibrium is the only way in which the thing can preserve and enhance its existence. This view is consistent with Spinoza's definition of

[12] Viljanen (2011), 135–142, suggests a similar conclusion by presenting it in terms of 'path of least resistance'.

[13] I introduce the term 'equilibrium' as a compendious expression for Spinoza's own account of 'coherence of parts', defined as the fact that 'the laws or nature of the one part so adapt themselves to the laws or nature of the other part that they are opposed to each other as little as possible' (*Ep* 32). I do not think that Spinoza's notion of 'equilibrium' should be understood in terms of 'homeostasis' (*pace* Damasio 2003) for two reasons: 1) Spinoza's notion is not restricted to organisms; and 2) Spinoza's notion entails a constant enhancement of the thing's power of acting, while homeostasis focuses on certain internal conditions that should be conserved. However, this does not mean that homeostasis cannot be a specific means to support equilibrium within certain kinds of organisms.

activity, according to which we are active ‘when something in us or outside us follows from our nature, which can be clearly and distinctly understood through it alone’ (EIII D2). In fact, it follows from the thing’s essence ‘alone’ that it will have to strive toward equilibrium with external causes, although it does *not* follow from that essence alone how the actual state of equilibrium will be determined in a given causal network and in a given moment of time. From this point of view, Spinoza’s notion of activity should be qualified as ‘relational’ (that is, as something that cannot be fully determined without taking into account the causal network in which the thing operates).¹⁴

Insofar as equilibrium consists in the maximum agreement possible, this state entails that the greatest part of the thing’s causal activity is determined by those properties of its essence that the thing has in common with the nature of the external causes acting upon it. It follows that the mind of such a thing will understand its own actions and its effects on the basis of common notions (which are the mental counterparts of common properties, EIIP37–39), that is, on the basis of reason, which is an expression of the mind’s power of thinking (i.e. of the thing’s *conatus* as it is expressed under the attribute of thought). As a result, insofar as the thing strives to reach equilibrium with external causes, it strives to operate ‘under the guidance of reason’, which Spinoza explicitly identifies with the paradigmatic example of activity (E3p1) on the basis of agreement in nature (E4p32).¹⁵

[14] I guess that this ‘relational’ qualification is important to complete the otherwise remarkable account of Spinoza’s *conatus* doctrine proposed by Garrett (2002).

[15] Regarding Spinoza’s account of reason see John Grey’s chapter in this volume.

Becoming Parts of Larger Wholes

Using Spinoza's terminology introduced in *Ep* 32, the above discussion might be summarized by stating that the thing's *conatus* is oriented to make the thing a *part* of the causal system in which it operates, rather than to keep it as a distinct *whole*. In this section, I will argue that such a reading suggests that not only do the simplest bodies operate in a teleological way (*pace* the inertial reading discussed in section two), but that this teleological orientation creates a tendency to form individuals of a growing degree of complexity.

In *EIIP12* Sch Lem1, Spinoza states that the simplest bodies 'are distinguished from one another by reason of motion or rest, speed and slowness'. In *EIIP12* Sch Lem2, he adds, 'all bodies agree in certain things. For all bodies agree in that they involve the concept of one and the same attribute (by D1), and in that they can move now more slowly, now more quickly, and absolutely, that now they move, now they are at rest'. Although the simplest bodies are 'simplest' because they do not have a specific inner structure, they can have different degrees of agreement or disagreement in nature, depending on the extent to which they can move for instance at the same speed in the same direction. This idea is reinforced by a further stipulation that Spinoza introduces as an axiom:

[A]ll modes by which a body is affected by another body follow both from the nature of the body affected and at the same time from the nature of the affecting body, so that one and the same body may be moved differently according to differences in the nature of the bodies moving it. (*EIIP13* Sch Ax1)

According to this principle, even interactions among the simplest bodies are ruled by the principle of agreement or disagreement in nature. It follows that even the simplest bodies must strive to reach the best equilibrium with external bodies able to maximize the degree of agreement and minimize the degree of disagreement.

Each simplest body is arguably defined by a certain size and a certain speed, which together define its quantity of motion (size times speed).¹⁶ If the simplest body loses both its size and its speed in the interaction with the external causes, it seems safe to say that the interaction will destroy it. However, Spinoza's Lem3 (already mentioned in section two) does not necessarily entail that any determination of external causes will always destroy the simplest body.¹⁷ To understand how this might be possible, we must assume that Spinoza endorses Descartes' relational notion of motion, according to which motion is always defined with reference to surrounding bodies taken at rest (*PPC* II D8).¹⁸ Following Descartes, Spinoza should also accept that the actual part of extension that defines the size of a simplest body depends on how that body moves with respect to others (*PPC* II P9–11). This means that a simplest body is defined by its own quantity of motion, but that both the size and the speed that define this quantity of motion depend on the body's relationship with the surrounding bodies, that is, with the quantities of motion that define each of these other bodies. This entails that the simplest bodies are intrinsically relational in nature and are defined by the proportion between

[16] I subscribe to Gueroult's claim (1974), 161–163, that Spinoza does not mention 'size' and 'figure' of the simplest bodies not because they do not have any but rather because these features depend on kinetic properties. Moreover, Spinoza seems to uphold a Cartesian account of 'quantity of motion', which cannot be defined without assuming that a body has a certain size. For a detailed discussion on how, and to what extent, Spinoza's 'physical interlude' relies on Cartesian physics, see Messeri (1990); Sangiacomo (2013), 241–268.

[17] I do not subscribe to the view firstly proposed by Rivaud (1924) and then often repeated until present (e.g. Marshall 2013, 66) according to which simplest bodies are defined by their quantity of motion or speed *only*, and thus every change in their speed will amount to destruction. For extensive discussion of this point, see Messeri (1984) and (1990), 79–111.

[18] This assumption is supported by the fact that Spinoza explicitly accepted almost all of Descartes' rules of impact (except for the sixth), which presupposes Descartes' relational notion of motion. Cf. *Ep* 30. On Spinoza's exception to the sixth rule, see Sangiacomo (2013), 268–275.

their own quantity of motion and that of the surrounding bodies. It follows that, insofar as the communication of motion during the impact is able to conserve the same proportion between the body's quantity of motion and that of the surrounding bodies before and after the impact, external causes can change the kinetic state of the simplest body without destroying it.

When external causes determine a body in motion to rest or a body at rest to move, that body has a specific *conatus* to orient this causal interaction in such a way that it will not destroy its own nature. This can happen through the striving to communicate motion in such a way to keep a fixed proportion between the quantity of motion of the body and that of the surrounding bodies. This state defines the equilibrium at which the body is able to maximize its agreement and minimize its disagreement in nature with the external causes. Moreover, this state does not depend on the body as such but on its relationship with the surrounding bodies. Accordingly, the body cannot strive to keep this equilibrium on the basis of its own nature alone, but only on the basis of how its nature can interact with that of the specific external causes that form its causal network.

The idea of a common proportion in the communication of motion is central to Spinoza's definition of complex bodies, that is, individuals:

[W]hen a number of bodies, whether of the same or of different size, are so constrained by other bodies that they lie upon one another, or if they so move, whether with the same degree or different degrees of speed, that they communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner, we shall say that those bodies are united with one another and that they all together compose one body or individual, which is distinguished from the others by this union of bodies. (EIIP13 Sch D)

The fact that the bodies constituting the individual might be constrained to form it is consistent with Lem3, according to which

bodies are always determined by external causes. Once again, the possibility of forming an individual depends on the bodies' power to interact among each other in such a way that they can find equilibrium between maximum agreement and minimum disagreement in nature. Spinoza stipulates that this happens when they 'communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner [*certa quadam ratione*]', which means that the result of impacts among these bodies will preserve the same proportion [*ratio*] among their quantities of motion.¹⁹

The convergence of simpler bodies into a more complex individual is the result of a bottom-up *conatus* that maximizes the equilibrium within a certain system of singular things. The individual form is the result of this equilibrium that allows the whole of its parts to maximize their power of acting and minimize their disagreement in nature. From this point of view, individuals are produced by the strivings of their own parts, and this explains why Spinoza admits an unlimited progression in nature toward individuals of greater complexity (EIIIP13 Sch).²⁰

Depending on how the network of external causes changes, the actual point of equilibrium changes as well. Singular things do not 'know' what the actual state of equilibrium would be, but this will be established through a combined striving to maximize agreement and minimize disagreement in nature among all the interacting bodies striving to become *parts* of a larger whole. This makes room for a feedback loop of reciprocal adjustments among the *conatus* of different things constituting a relatively isolated causal system, which results in the instantiation of specific individual forms of cooperation among the interacting bodies. Moreover, insofar as each causal system is only 'relatively' isolated, it is always open to

[19] I suggest reading the term 'ratio' used by Spinoza as a technical term derived from the theory of proportions, which can be used to restrict the ways in which bodies can communicate their motion during impacts. See Sangiacomo (2013), 289–306.

[20] For an extensive discussion of this point, see Sangiacomo (2013), 152–177.

receive further causal affections from other external causes acting upon it.²¹ For instance, while we can regard an individual body as a relatively isolated causal system insofar as it is able to maintain its own form, this same individual is never really isolated and in fact must constantly interact with external causes in order to maintain its own form. This is the reason why each individual's *conatus* always strives to interact with other external causes in such a way to generate other individuals of a greater degree of complexity in order to better reach a state of causal equilibrium.

To conclude, the thing's *conatus* consists in the fact that each thing strives to persevere in its own being. The efficacy of this striving depends on the degree of its agreement in nature with external causes. Yet, by striving to improve its agreement in nature with external causes, the thing necessarily strives to enhance its own power of acting. This striving orients *how* the thing will bring about its own essential effects, and it is teleological because it sets specific restraints on how the thing can make use of its own power of acting, by directing it to reach a state of equilibrium between maximum agreement and minimum disagreement in nature with the external causes. Once equilibrium is reached, a new individual form of organization is produced. In this sense, teleology is the key to understanding how complex forms of organization must necessarily emerge in an infinite nature.

[21] See Spinoza's discussion of this view in *Ep* 32.