

Spinoza on Agency without Final Causes

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- (1) “Each thing, insofar as it is in itself, strives to persevere in its being.” (3p6, translation modified)
- (2) “The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing.” (3p7)
- (3) *Each and every singular thing is a powerful entity which, when it encounters opposition, strives to exist and to bring about things derivable from its own definition alone.*
- (4) Appetite is one term with which Spinoza refers to human striving, namely “when it is related to the mind and body together” (3p9s); desire is conscious appetite, but apart from that layer of consciousness “there is no difference” between them (3p9s); thus, an appetite is “nothing but the very essence of man” (3p9s).
- (5) “By virtue and power I understand the same thing, i.e. (by 3p7), virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is the very essence, or nature, of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone.” (4d8)
- (6) “[A]s each [man] is affected by external causes with this or that species of joy, sadness, love, hate, etc., [...] so his desires vary” because desire is our essence as determined “by whatever constitution” we have “to do something” (3p56d).
- (7) *If A is likely to promote self-preservation better than any other action within x’s power, x endeavours to do A.*
- (8) “The mind, as far as it can, strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the body’s power of acting.” (3p12)
- (9) “When the mind imagines those things that diminish or restrain the body’s power of acting, it strives, as far as it can, to recollect things that exclude their existence.” (3p13)
- (10) “We strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to joy, and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it, or will lead to sadness.” (3p28)
- (11) “Sadness diminishes or restrains a man’s power of acting (by p11s), i.e. (by p7), diminishes or restrains the striving by which a man strives to persevere in his being; so it is contrary to this striving (by p5), and all a man affected by sadness strives for is to remove Sadness. [...] [S]ince joy (by the same p11s) increases or aids man’s power of acting, it is easily demonstrated in the same way that the man affected with joy desires nothing but to preserve it, and does so with the greater desire, as the joy is greater.” (3p37d)
- (12) “[W]hen we say that habitation was the final cause of this or that house, surely we understand nothing but that a man, because he imagined the conveniences of domestic life, had an appetite to build a house. So habitation, insofar as it is considered as a final cause, is nothing more than this singular appetite.” (4pr)
- (13) *If x is prevented from bringing about something that would follow from its essence alone, say A, x strives to do A.*
- (14) *If, of the options available to x, A least resists x, x strives to do or maintain A.*
- (15) *If, of the ideas present to x, I_A is most joyful to x, x strives to do or maintain A.*
- (16) If we know
 - (1) x’s essence and what follows from it alone,
 - (2) that x strives against any opposition to perfectly realize its essence,
 - (3) that x directs its power to where it is least resisted (or least sorrow is felt),
 - (4) what is x’s prevailing state, and
 - (5) in what circumstances x must operate,
 we are in a position to provide adequate explanations and predictions of x’s actions.
- (17) “For what is really a cause, it [the doctrine concerning the end] considers as an effect, and conversely [NS: what is an effect it considers as a cause]. What is by nature prior, it makes posterior. And finally, what is supreme and most perfect, it makes imperfect.” (1app)
- (18) God’s nature is “prior both in knowledge and in nature.” (2p10cs)
- (19) “[A]ll final causes are nothing but human fictions[.]” (1app)

I am using Edwin Curley’s translation in *The Collected Works of Spinoza, Volume I*. Princeton, 1985.