Spinoza on Freedom, Feeling Free, and Acting for the Good

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Abstract

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza famously rejects freedom of the will. He also offers an *error theory* for why many believe, falsely, that the will is free. Standard accounts of his arguments for these claims focus on their efficacy against *incompatibilist* views of free will. For Spinoza, the will cannot be free since it is determined by an infinite chain of external causes. And the pervasive belief in free will arises from a structural limitation of our self-knowledge: because we are aware of our actions but unaware of their causes, we suppose that we alone must be responsible for them. Yet I argue that the standard accounts miss a further element of Spinoza's arguments that also targets *compatibilist* views on which free will is consistent with a specific kind of determination—namely, self-determination in accordance with our *value judgments*. For Spinoza, we are misled not only in supposing that our actions lack external determination but also in thinking that they are determined by our representations of value. In fact, our actions are determined by our appetites, which are blind to our value judgments. And the pervasive belief that our actions are determined by such judgments arises from the *projection* of value onto the objects we seek. As he denies us free will, then, Spinoza also denies us a capacity central to agency—the capacity to determine our actions in accordance with our ideas of the good. This makes his arguments against free will more consequential, and more radical, than commonly assumed.

Keywords: Spinoza, Free will, Projectivism, Error theory, Agency.

1. Introduction

At first glance, Spinoza's rejection of free will appears to be among the most straightforward doctrines of the *Ethics*. Spinoza states flatly that "[i]n the Mind there is no absolute, *or* free, will, but the Mind is determined to will this or that by a cause which is also determined by another, and this again by another, and so on to infinity" (2p48 | G II/129: 483).[1] The will is not free for Spinoza because

[1] All translations of Spinoza's works are drawn from Spinoza 2016 and include citations of Spinoza 1925. Unless otherwise noted, all references are to Spinoza's *Ethics*, for which

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acts of willing are in every case determined by an infinite chain of causes. The question of human freedom is thus quickly settled—we have no free will.

Yet a second look at this rejection reveals two further issues of considerable interest. First, Spinoza does not simply deny us free will; he expresses interest in why many *believe*, falsely, that their wills are free. He attributes the pervasiveness of this false belief to a deeply rooted but illusory *experience* of our actions as free. I will call this the *feeling of freedom*.[2] Because many take this feeling as evidence that their actions are freely willed, Spinoza provides an *error theory* to strengthen his case against free will: "[M]en are deceived in that they think themselves free [NS: i.e., they think that, of their own free will, they can either do a thing or forbear doing it], an opinion which consists only in this, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined. This, then, is their idea of freedom—that they do not know any cause of their actions" (2p35s | G II/117: 473). The feeling of freedom arises from a structural limitation of our self-knowledge. We are aware of our actions but unaware of the causes that determine them. Since we lack this knowledge, it seems to us that our actions follow from our wills alone, and thus that our wills are free.[3]

The second issue concerns the *kind* of free will Spinoza denies us. 2p48 most clearly targets *incompatibilist* conceptions of freedom that analyze it as an absolute faculty of choice—that is, an undetermined, two-way power to do or not do something. For incompatibilists, the will is free just in case, holding all conditions fixed, it can order or forbear from ordering an action. Incompatibilist accounts of free will were defended most prominently by late scholastics like Suárez and Molina, and by Bishop Bramhall in a famous dispute with Hobbes. Descartes also defended incompatibilist freedom, albeit in a qualified form.[4]

But *compatibilist* accounts that make free will consistent with determination were also prominent in the early modern period. Consider Leibniz's view of freedom as stated in the *Theodicy*, on which the will is free because it is *self*-determining in accordance with our representations of value:

I use the following conventional abbreviations: First number=Part, 'pref'=preface, 'app'=appendix, 'D'=definition, 'p'=proposition, 'd'=demonstration, 'c'=corollary, and 's'=scholium. So, for example, '2p48' refers to '*Ethics* Part 2, proposition 48'. For Spinoza's other works, I use the following standard abbreviations: 'KV'=*Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being*, 'Ep'=Letter.

[2] I take this useful phrase from Barry 2016. It is critical to underscore the difference between the *feeling* of freedom and the *belief* that we have free will. As I use the terms, a 'belief' indicates a higher level of cognition than a 'feeling', and what we feel is not always responsive to what we believe. For instance, we can imagine that Spinoza himself felt that his actions were free in the sense at issue here, even if he rejected free will. See Barry 2016: 632-33 for more.

[3] See also 3p2s, 4pref, 5p5d. For accounts of this argument, see Barry 2016 and Melamed 2017. Spinoza's interest in the feeling of freedom is also noticed by Bennett (1984: 170), Deleuze (1988: 20), Klein (2003: 154), Nadler (2006: 186), and Sharp (2007: 740).

[4] For Molina's views on free action, see *Concordia* IV and the introduction to Molina 1988. For Suárez's views, see *Disputationes Metaphysicae* XVII-XXII and Penner 2013. For Descartes' view of free will, see the Fourth Meditation (CSM II 40), the Second Set of Replies (CSM II 116), and the *Passions of the Soul*, I.41 (CSM I 343). For commentary that compares Descartes' view with Molina's and Suárez's views, as well as with Leibniz's, see Wee 2006. Finally, for a very helpful overview of the various positions on free will defended by key figures in seventeenth century Europe, see Ragland 2017.

> [Freedom] consists in *intelligence*, which involves a clear knowledge of the object of deliberation, in *spontaneity*, whereby we determine, and in *contingency*, that is, in the exclusion of logical or metaphysical necessity. Intelligence is, as it were, the soul of freedom, and the rest is as its body and foundation. The free substance is self-determining and that according to the motive of good perceived by the understanding, which inclines it without compelling it: and all the conditions of freedom are comprised in these few words (*Theodicy* §288: 306, emphases mine).

For Leibniz, an action is free just in case it is *spontaneous*, *contingent*, and *intelligent*—that is, just in case it is self-determined according to a representation of value, and it is not metaphysically necessary. On this account, freedom is not only consistent with but *requires* a particular kind of determination. Indeed, Leibniz calls intelligence the "soul of freedom". For him, free will involves a paradigmatic exercise of practical reason: the selection of an object or course of action based on some normative demand, like the object's goodness or rightness. Our capacity to order our actions in accordance with such demands is makes our will free on compatibilist views, even if determined.

These issues raise two related questions about Spinoza's engagement with the problem of free will. First, does Spinoza's rejection of free will only target incompatibilist views like Descartes', or does it also target compatibilist views like Leibniz's? Second, if the rejection does extend to compatibilist views, does Spinoza's error theory—his account of the *feeling* of freedom—also extend to the belief that our actions are determined by representations of value, which compatibilist views identify as the key condition of freedom?

In this paper, I argue that both Spinoza's rejection of free will and his account of the feeling of freedom *do* extend to compatibilist views like Leibniz's.[5] In the first instance, this is because Spinoza denies that we satisfy Leibniz's contingency condition. Spinoza agrees with Leibniz that freedom is consistent with self-determination. A thing is free just in case it exists and acts by its nature alone (1D7).[6] Yet for Spinoza, this implies that everything exists and acts according to strict metaphysical necessity. Indeed, Galen Barry has persuasively argued that Spinoza's error theory includes an explanation of the *feeling of contingency*—a deeply rooted but misleading experience that our actions are not metaphysically necessary, that we could have done otherwise.

But I will argue that Spinoza's rejection of free will and his account of the feeling of freedom both go further than this. For Spinoza also denies that we satisfy Leibniz's intelligence condition, and his error theory includes an account of

[5] To be clear, I do not argue that Spinoza's arguments *succeed* against compatibilist views like Leibniz's. I only aim to show that Spinoza would also have rejected conceptions of free will that locate freedom not in the absence of determination but in the capacity to be determined by representations of value.

[6] It follows for Spinoza that only God is free, for only God acts by the necessity of his nature alone (1p17c2). In other words, Spinoza denies that we satisfy Leibniz's spontaneity condition. This point highlights that there are really *two levels* of contrast between Spinoza and Leibniz here. The first level is *conceptual*: What does free will consist in? The second level is *extensional*: Do human beings have free will? Spinoza and Leibniz both hold that freedom requires spontaneity. Leibniz adds to this that freedom also requires contingency and intelligence, and that human beings have free will in this full sense. Spinoza insists that while these conditions capture the ordinary conception of free will, it is neither the case that we enjoy this kind of freedom nor that this is what freedom, properly understood, consists in.

the *feeling of intelligence*—a deeply rooted but false experience of our actions as determined by representations of value. This is significant for several reasons. In the first place, Spinoza's denial of the intelligence condition and the account of the feeling of intelligence complete his rejection of free will. But these claims also have major implications for his conception of human agency. By denying us the "soul of freedom," Spinoza strikingly eliminates a key feature of many standard accounts of agency: the capacity to determine our actions in accordance with our view of the good. For Spinoza, our self-conception as beings sensitive to practical reasons is a defining but ultimately mistaken feature of human experience.

2. Freedom and the *Feeling* of Freedom

Freedom is one of the first notions Spinoza defines in the *Ethics*. For Spinoza, a thing is free just in case it is entirely self-determined: "That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone. But a thing is called necessary, or rather compelled, which is determined by another to exist and to produce an effect in a certain and determinate manner" (1D7 | G II/46: 409). Immediately clear in this definition is Spinoza's denial of an incompatibilist conception of freedom as an undetermined power of choice. For Spinoza, freedom is opposed not to mere determination but to *compulsion*—that is, to determination by external causes. To be free is to be determined by one's nature alone.

Working with this conception of freedom, Spinoza swiftly puts to rest the question of human free will. Freedom can be ascribed only to God, "[f]or God alone exists only from the necessity of his nature (by 1p11 and 1p14c1), and acts from the necessity of his nature" (1p17c2 | G II/61: 425).[7] Only God, the one infinite and eternal substance, is self-determining. Human beings are part of an infinite chain of causes that determine one another to exist and produce effects: "Every singular thing, *or* any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence" (1p28 | G II/69: 432). Since the mind is determinate—since its existence and actions are both determined by things external to it—it is not free: "The Mind is a certain and determinate mode of thinking (by 2p11), and so (by 1p17c2) cannot be a free cause of its own actions" (2p48d | G II/129: 483).

For Spinoza, then, there is no doubt that our wills are not free. Even so, he frequently remarks on the pervasiveness of the *belief* in freedom, a belief arising from what he considers a deep-seated but misleading experience of our actions as freely willed. No matter what abstract argument against free will we accept, Spinoza thinks, we cannot help but feel that our actions are free. This *feeling of freedom* is a distinctive phenomenon that Spinoza takes it upon himself to explain, and for good reason. Since many take it as evidence for the claim that we *are* free,

[7] In the last two Parts of the *Ethics*, however, it seems that Spinoza *does* allow that human beings can achieve a kind of freedom that represents an ethical ideal. This freedom has to do with what Spinoza calls 'Strength of Character' (3p59s, 4p73s), which denotes actions that we undertake insofar as our mind understands or 'acts' in a technical sense (3p1, 3p3)—that is, insofar as it is self-determined (3D1, 3D2). This kind of freedom is exemplified by the figure of the 'free man' (4p67-73) and is the subject of *Ethics* 5, titled 'on Human Freedom'. For recent commentary on the relation between this ethical sense of freedom and the strict sense defined in *Ethics* 1, see Kisner 2019.

Spinoza's argument against free will will be all the more convincing if he can explain the feeling away. If we have no free will, then why does it seem to us that we do?

Spinoza's clearest answer to this question posits a structural limitation of our self-knowledge—our *ignorance* of the causal origin of our actions: "[M]en are deceived in that they think themselves free [NS: i.e., they think that, of their own free will, they can either do a thing or forbear doing it], an opinion which consists only in this, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined" (2p35s | G II/117: 473). Since we are aware of our actions but have no idea of the external causes that determine them, it seems to us that they *lack* external causes, and are thus free. Using Leibniz's language, we might call this the *feeling of spontaneity*.[8]

Most scholars assume this is all Spinoza has to say about the feeling of freedom. But this is not so. For Spinoza recognizes that the *sense* of freedom that many people ascribe to themselves and to God includes more than lack of external determination. Indeed, he acknowledges that many will balk at his own account of divine freedom as complete self-determination "because they have been accustomed to attribute another freedom to God, far different from that we have taught (1D7), viz. an absolute will" (1p33s2 | G II/74: 437). An absolute will does not merely lack determination by external causes—it is also *contingent*: "By God's power ordinary people understand God's free will and his right over all things which are, things which on that account are commonly considered to be contingent" (2p3s | G II/87: 449). For ordinary people, in other words, God's freedom implies that his actions are not metaphysically necessary.

Of course, Spinoza believes ordinary people are mistaken. God could not have acted otherwise. While God alone is free in the sense of self-determination, God does not have *free will*: "God does not produce any effect from freedom of the will" (1p32c1 | G II/73: 435).[9] But the error of ordinary people is nonetheless indicative of something important about the feeling of freedom. When people think themselves and God as free, they have in mind the idea that they could have done otherwise. For instance, many feel that they have a capacity to suspend judgment: "experience seems to teach nothing more clearly than that we can suspend our judgment so as not to assent to things we perceive […] that the will, *or* faculty of assenting, is free" (2p49s | G II/132-33: 487).[10] From their own

[8] With the caveat that Spinoza does not specify here whether the feeling at issue is that our actions are *undetermined* or that they are *self*-determined. Spontaneity as Leibniz thinks of it consists in self-determination.

[9] This explains why it is not contradictory for Spinoza to say both (i) that God alone is free and (ii) that God has no free will. These two claims employ two different conceptions of freedom. Indeed, Spinoza seems to use the phrase 'free will' to indicate a richer conception of freedom that includes contingency in addition to self-determination (and, as I will later argue, intelligence). Thus, God is free because he is self-determined, but he has no free will because his actions are not contingent.

[10] Spinoza likely has Descartes in mind here, who equates free will with the power to grant or withhold assent to a proposition or to a proposed course of action. See *Principles of Philosophy* I.39: "That there is freedom in our will, and that we have power in many cases to give or withhold our assent at will, is so evident that it must be numbered among the first and most common notions that are innate in us" (CSM I: 205-206). The cases in which we do *not* have absolute power to give or withhold assent, Descartes makes clear in a May

experience, many hold that it is possible to withhold assent from a particular idea or course of action, which implies that their actions are not metaphysically necessary. In other words, they believe their actions are free because of their *feeling of contingency*.

When Spinoza rejects human free will, then, he is also denying that our actions are contingent. Note that this point complicates the standard reading of Spinoza's account of the feeling of freedom. Can the account of the feeling of freedom in 2p35s, taken on its own, *also* explain the feeling of contingency? Galen Barry (2016: 163-69) argues that it cannot. For Barry, Spinoza takes the feeling of contingency to arise from a distinctive kind of cognitive limitation tied to the mental phenomena of *association* and *vacillation*. Association is a psychological process by which the mind moves between two representational contents that are not logically connected. For Spinoza, this occurs when the body has been affected concurrently by different external stimuli—like the sound of a word and the sight of an object. To use Spinoza's example, the mind of a Roman citizen associates the auditory representation '*pomum*' with the visual representation of an apple (2p18s), moving seamlessly between the two.

Yet the mind often associates ideas with incompatible representational contents (2p44s). For instance, because I sometimes have breakfast at home and other times have breakfast out, my mind associates mornings both with cereal at home and with a cornetto and cappuccino *al bar*. Since the content of these ideas is logically incompatible, my mind cannot consider both at the same time. As a result, it switches rapidly or 'vacillates' between them, representing now the one and now the other. Crucially, since for Spinoza the mind is apt to confuse the properties of objects with the way those objects affect us (2p17s), the mind confuses its own vacillation between two representational contents with a property of the represented objects. That is, the mind *projects* its own vacillation between two objects onto the objects themselves, which it thus represents as contingent.[11] Finally, since our actions are often accompanied by representations of other, logically incompatible courses of action, we represent our own actions as contingent. We feel that we could have acted otherwise.

Barry offers a convincing explanation of how Spinoza accounts for the feeling of contingency. And of course, Spinoza denies contingency in nature. Since all things follow from the necessity of God's nature, all things occur with strict metaphysical necessity (1p16, 1p33). So, Spinoza denies that we satisfy Leibniz's second condition for freedom, and he explains why many nevertheless believe falsely that our actions are in fact contingent.

Yet Spinoza's rejection of free will goes further than this. For the ordinary conception of free will holds not only that we could have done otherwise but also that we act on the basis of *reasons*. This is why Leibniz's account of freedom centers the idea that our actions are determined by our representations of value—that

1644 letter to Mesland, are those in which the object of the will is clearly and distinctly perceived: "[I]f we see very clearly that a thing is good for us, it is very difficult—and on my view, impossible, as long as one continues in the same thought—to stop the course of our desire [to pursue]" (CSMK III: 233-34). According to Wee (2006: 395-98), Descartes holds that, in such cases, it is still possible for the agent to do otherwise by shifting her attention away from the clear and distinct perception.

[11] I say more about the phenomenon of projection in Section 3, where I argue that for Spinoza good and evil are also projected properties, and that this partly explains why we feel that our actions are intelligent.

they are *intelligent*. This, for Leibniz, is the "soul of freedom". A free action results from an exercise of practical reason, which involves selecting an option or a course of action due to some normative demand associated with it, like its goodness or rightness. But I argue that Spinoza denies that we satisfy this intelligence condition, and I also argue that he offers an error theoretic account of the *feeling of intelligence*—the deeply rooted but misleading sense that our actions are determined by representations of value.[12]

3. Spinoza on the Feeling of Intelligence

Spinoza's interest in the feeling of intelligence emerges in his account of what he calls 'decisions of the mind'—roughly, our choices to pursue one course of action over another. Spinoza introduces this notion at the beginning of *Ethics* 3, where he rejects Descartes' view that the mind determines the body to move via free acts of will. The feeling that our words and actions always follow from our decisions, Spinoza notes, is often cited as a point of support for the Cartesian view. Though they know not *how* the mind moves the body, many people claim that "they know by experience, that it is in the Mind's power alone both to speak and to be silent, and to do many other things which they therefore believe depend on the Mind's decision" (3p2s | G II/142: 495).

For Spinoza, the experience of our actions as dependent on our decisions is closely related to the feeling of intelligence. In an early work, the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, he identifies the mind's decisions with value judgments: "[B]efore our Desire extends externally to something, a decision has already taken place in us that such a thing is good. This affirmation, then, or taken generally, the power of affirming and denying, is called the Will" (KV II.16 | G I/80: 121). Spinoza claims here that a decision is an affirmation that some object is good or evil—that is, a value judgment.[13] Decisions lie at the foundation of all our actions. We judge something to be valuable and so desire and pursue it. To experience our actions as dependent on our decisions, then, is to experience them as determined by a value judgment.

Now, as we will see momentarily, the mature moral psychology Spinoza defends in the *Ethics* differs from this picture in fundamental ways. Most importantly, Spinoza argues in the later work that our actions are *not* in fact determined by value judgments—that they are not intelligent. Even so, Spinoza retains the idea that we *feel* that our actions are intelligent in that we experience them as depending on our representations of value. And as we will see in Sections 3 and 4, this feeling arises

[12] What Barry has to say about Spinoza's engagement with the intelligence claim is unsatisfying: "All mental activity, including decisions, is the result of reasons; and when we are conscious of those reasons, an action is felt as intelligent" (Barry 2016: 640). This brief explanation does not respect the difference between *normative* reasons—those consisting in a normative demand for action—and *explanatory* reasons—those that specify the causes of events. The feeling of intelligence is the feeling that our actions are determined by normative reasons. But it is unclear how this feeling might arise simply from consciousness of the reasons that explain our mental activity, since these are explanatory reasons.

[13] Earlier, I articulated the intelligence condition in terms of *representations* of value, not affirmations or judgments. But for Spinoza, these all amount to the same. In the *Ethics*, he identifies the will and the intellect (2p48-49). So, for Spinoza, to represent something is the same as to affirm something of it as true—that is, to make a judgment about it.

from the fact that the mind projects onto objects of desire the value properties which it then falsely takes to determine our actions.

We can begin by taking note of something beyond dispute. Spinoza claims in the *Ethics* that many believe that their actions depend on freely made decisions of the mind, and that this belief is *false*: "[T]he drunk believes it is from a free decision of the Mind that he speaks the things he later, when sober, wishes he had not said. So the madman, the chatterbox, the child, and a great many people of this kind believe they speak from a free decision of the Mind, when really they cannot contain their impulse to speak" (3p2s | G II/143: 496).[14] The reason this belief is mistaken is that the mind's decisions are in fact reducible to its *appetites*: "[E]xperience itself, no less clearly than reason, teaches that men believe themselves free because they are conscious of their own actions, and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined, *that the decisions of the Mind are nothing but the appetites themselves*, which therefore vary as the disposition of the Body varies. For each one governs everything from his affect" (3p2s | G II/143: 496-97, emphasis mine).

Spinoza thus claims that our mind's decisions are not free because they are nothing more than our appetites, which alone determine all our actions.[15] To understand why this analysis of decision might be plausible, we must consult the fundamental principle of Spinoza's moral psychology, the *conatus* doctrine: "Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being" (3p6 | G II/146: 498), and this striving "is nothing but the actual essence of the thing" (3p7 | G II/146: 499). The actual essence of each thing consists in a power to persevere in existence, and our decisions and appetites must both be understood in terms of it: "When this striving is related only to the Mind, it is called Will; but when it is related to the Mind and Body together, it is called Appetite. This Appetite, therefore, is nothing but the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation. And so man is determined to do those things" (3p9s | G II/147: 500).[16] So, for Spinoza, our decisions are identical to our appetites simply because both are different ways of considering the same, fundamental striving to persevere in being, which alone determines all our behavior.[17]

[14] See also the well-known letter to Schuller: "This is that famous human freedom everyone brags of having, which consists only in this: that men are conscious of their appetite and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined. So the infant believes that he freely wants the milk; the angry boy that he wants vengeance; and the timid, flight. Again, the drunk believes it is from a free decision of the mind that he says those things which afterward, when sober, he wishes he had not said. Similarly, the madman, the chatterbox, and a great many people of this kind believe that they act from a free decision of the mind, and not that they are set in motion by an impulse" (Ep. 58 | G IV/266: 428).

[15] 3p2s says that our *affects* determine our actions, but Spinoza later clarifies that appetites and affects are the same thing (3p9s). See Rutherford 2019 for an account of the relation between decisions of the mind and the affects.

[16] What Spinoza refers to as 'Will' here is identical to our decisions: "[T]he decision of the Mind and the appetite and the determination of the Body by nature exist together—or rather are one and the same thing" (3p2s | G II/144: 497).

[17] Of course, we are *also* always determined by external causes. But this external determination itself runs through our essential striving. Thus, for Spinoza, our actions are determined both by our essential striving alone and by the causal influence on this striving of external things (see e.g., 3D1-2 and 4p4).

How does this help us understand Spinoza's claim that we are mistaken in regarding our mind's decisions as free? On the one hand, it is clear that our decisions cannot be *freely made* in the sense that they cannot be spontaneous. For they are nothing but our affects which, as Spinoza claims, "vary as the disposition of the body varies". Our decisions, like the affections of our body, are always determined by external causes. We have no undetermined power of choice.

Yet later in *Ethics* 3, Spinoza points to a second, more fundamental way we are deceived about the decisions of the mind. As we saw, Spinoza associates decisions with judgments of value in the *Short Treatise*, claiming that these judgments determine our desires. Yet in the *Ethics*, he strikingly inverts this order of explanation. He claims that it is not our judgments of value that give rise to our desires but rather our desires that give rise to our judgments of value: "From all this, then, it is clear that we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it" (3p9s | G II/148: 500).[18] For Spinoza, all our actions are determined by our appetites, which are expressions of our essential striving to persevere in being. This striving, he now tells us, is not determined by but instead determines our judgments of value. It follows that our actions are not determined by judgments of value. Holding something to be good is the *result* of our appetite for it, not an input that determines this appetite.

This point is critical to grasping Spinoza's rejection of the intelligence condition. An action is intelligent, recall, if it is determined by a representation of value. But for Spinoza, what we hold to be valuable is fixed by our strivings, appetites, or affects, and it is these alone that determine all we do.[19] By reducing the mind's decisions to appetites, then, Spinoza reveals something crucial about how these decisions are related to our actions. We may feel that our decisions lead us to act because they consist in value judgments. But Spinoza denies that our actions depend on our value judgments—our actions are determined entirely by our affects or appetites, which are expressions of an essential striving to persevere in being that is insensitive to representations of value. Thus, the feeling of intelligence is illusory. Our actions are never determined by our representations of value; instead, both are determined by our affects or appetites.

4. Spinoza's Value Projectivism

For Spinoza, I've argued, our actions are not determined by our value judgments but rather by our appetites, which alone govern all our behavior. But this point alone does not explain why we *feel* that our actions are determined by our value judgments—that is, that they are intelligent. Spinoza explains the feelings of spontaneity and contingency by appeal to necessary limits of our cognition. How might he explain the feeling of intelligence?

[18] For Spinoza, desire and appetite are the same thing (cf. 3p9s, 3DA).

[19] Spinoza later provides a helpful illustration of this claim "So each one, from his own affect, judges, *or* evaluates, what is good and what is bad, what is better and what is worse, and finally, what is best and what is worst. So the Greedy man judges an abundance of money best, and poverty worst. The Ambitious man desires nothing so much as Esteem and dreads nothing so much as Shame" (3p39s | G II/170: 516-17). The greedy man is one whose dominant appetites are for wealth (3DA XLVII). These appetites determine him to seek wealth *and* to judge that wealth is good. So, the value judgment is codetermined with his actions—it does not give rise to them.

I believe Spinoza offers an account of the feeling of intelligence on which the phenomenon of projection plays a key role.[20] As we've seen, Barry argues that, for Spinoza, we feel that our actions are contingent because the mind mistakes its vacillation between different ideas for a property that the objects represented by the ideas have in themselves—namely, their contingency. Similarly, I propose, Spinoza holds that we experience our actions as determined by value judgments because the mind mistakes its own appetites for properties things have in themselves—namely, being good or evil. In short, the mind ascribes the properties of good and evil to things based on its appetites, even if those things do not really have these properties. And this projection accounts at least partly for the misleading feeling that our actions are determined by our judgments of value.

Though mostly associated with Hume, appeals to the phenomenon of projection were by no means uncommon in the seventeenth century.[21] As theorists of the time understood it, projection is a psychological process by which the mind mistakenly represents objects as having properties that, in fact, merely indicate how those objects affect us. As I will understand it here, a projectivist account of some property has two main features: (i) the false ascription of properties to some object (ii) based on some constitution or affection of our bodies. Examples of projection for seventeenth century theorists paradigmatically included sensory properties such as color, sound, odor, and heat. On projectivist accounts of color, we represent color properties as belonging to objects by virtue of how those objects causally impact the optic nerve. This occurs because we mistake an affection of the body for a property of the object that affects the body.[22]

Spinoza integrates the phenomenon of projection into his account of the mind by making it a constitutive feature of the *imagination*. For Spinoza, the imagination is the first and most common kind of cognition (2p40s2). It is the mind's ability to represent external bodies by representing the way those bodies affect our own bodies: "the affections of the human Body whose ideas present external bodies as present to us, we shall call images of things, even if they do not reproduce the [NS: external] figures of things" (2p17s | G II/106: 465). Thus, for Spinoza, the visual image I form of a tree consists in a mental representation of a state of my body insofar as some part of it is affected by light that has bounced off the tree itself. When I imagine the tree, I represent it *indirectly* in virtue of *directly* representing the changes in my body that the tree has caused.

For Spinoza, the indirect representational structure of the imagination is what makes projection possible. This is because the bodily affections directly represented by ideas of the imagination involve both the nature of external things

[20] LeBuffe (2010: 154-59) argues that Spinoza offers a projectivist theory of value, though he does not fully explain how projection occurs, nor does he draw any connection to the feeling of intelligence at issue here. Spinoza might not be the first to offer a projectivist theory of value. Arguably, Hobbes does so in *Leviathan* (see Darwall 2000). Scribano (2012) makes the case that Spinoza must have read *Leviathan*, and that his engagement with this work accounts for the important shifts in his moral psychology between the *Short Treatise* (completed around 1661) and the *Ethics* (completed around 1675). See Sacksteder 1980 for an account of how much of Hobbes Spinoza might have read.

[21] Hobbes offers a projectivist account of sense properties in the opening passages of *Leviathan* (1651/1668). He was very likely influenced by Galileo's account of heat and of other sense properties in *The Assayer* [*Il Saggiatore*] (1623).

[22] I offer a fuller account of the phenomenon of projection and its place in Spinoza's moral psychology in Moauro unpublished.

and the nature of our own bodies (2p16). Indeed, for Spinoza, the content of these ideas indicates the latter *more* than the former: "the ideas which we have of external bodies indicate the condition of our own body more than the nature of the external bodies. I have explained this by many examples in the Appendix of Part 1" (2p16c2 | G II/104: 463). The images we form of external objects include many properties that are causally explained by features of our bodies. Yet the mind mistakenly represents these properties *as if* they belonged to the external bodies themselves. It projects properties onto external objects based on how those objects causally affect us.

For examples of the phenomenon of projection, Spinoza points us to the Appendix to *Ethics* 1, where he famously offers a sustained criticism of the 'prejudice of divine ends.' This is the belief that God created the world for the sake of human beings, and human beings themselves to worship and glorify him.[23] Spinoza claims that, in the grips of this prejudice, ordinary people form a false conception of God and nature based on their imagination: "[A]ll the notions by which ordinary people are accustomed to explain nature are only modes of imagining, and do not indicate the nature of anything, only the constitution of the imagination. And because they have names, as if they were [notions] of beings existing outside the imagination, I call them beings, not of reason, but of the imagination" (1app | G II/83: 445-46). 'Beings of the imagination' exemplify the two features of projected properties I outlined above. Though they are represented as indicating the natures of things, they in fact indicate "the constitution of the imagination".[24] In other words, they are properties the mind mistakenly attributes to objects based on the condition of our bodies.

Among these beings of the imagination, Spinoza strikingly lists the notions of good and evil: "After men persuaded themselves that everything that happens, happens on their account […] they had to form these notions, by which they explained natural things: *good*, *evil*, *order*, *confusion*, *warm*, *cold*, *beauty*, *ugliness*" (1app | G II/81, 444). Ordinary people "call the nature of a thing good or evil, sound or rotten and corrupt, as they are affected by it. For example, if the motion the nerves receive

[23] "All prejudices I here undertake to expose depend on this one: that men commonly suppose that all natural things act, as men do, on account of an end; indeed, they maintain as certain that God himself directs all things to some certain end, for they say that God has made all things for man, and man that he might worship God" (1app | G II/78, 439-40). Some take this remark as proof that our actions in fact *are* determined by value judgments for Spinoza, since he seems to admit that we act for the sake of ends (see Garrett 1999: 312-14). Indeed, Spinoza later claims that "men act always on account of an end, viz. on account of their advantage, which they want" (1app | G II/78: 440).
I am not persuaded by this reading. Spinoza is likely referring to a *presumption* that human beings act for the sake of ends. We believe (falsely) that we act based on representations of value and assume that all things in nature have similarly been arranged (by God) based on such representations. In fact, it is our appetites that determine all our actions (3p2s). Indeed, Spinoza later provides an account of human ends in terms of appetite: "By the end for the sake of which we do something I understand appetite" (4D7 | G II/210: 547). And appetites, as we've already seen, do not arise from but rather give rise to value judgments (3p9s). So, though Spinoza holds that we necessarily want what has proven to be advantageous or 'useful' to us (cf. 3p12), this is not because we judge it to be good.

[24] Note that the prejudice that God directs all things to ends is not responsible for the phenomenon of projection itself. Regardless of what we think of God, we still perceive objects as if they were colored, warm, etc. What the prejudice *is* responsible for is promoting the belief that these projected properties characterize the natures of the objects.

from objects presented through the eyes is conducive to health, the objects by which it is caused are called beautiful" (1app | G II/82: 445). The example of beauty offers a paradigm instance of projection. We attribute the property of beauty to things based on an affection of our bodies—a motion of the nerves that is "conducive to health." This occurs because the image the mind forms of the beautiful object confuses the constitution of our body with the nature of the object itself. In fact, objects are neither beautiful nor ugly. The notion of beauty indicates not the nature of the object but rather the nature of our own bodies.

In the same way, Spinoza considers goodness a property the mind projects onto things based on how those things affect us. Though we call objects themselves good and evil, these notions in fact indicate something about our own nature. More specifically, they indicate affections of our bodies that determine us to strive for, desire, or have an appetite for an object. This is why Spinoza holds that our value judgments arise from our desires (3p9s). Spinoza's claims about the way we use value terms fit perfectly within a projectivist account. We call objects good or evil because the mind forms an image of them in which the way they affect us—that is, the desire or appetite they bring about—is confused for a property they have in themselves. So, the mind mistakenly attributes value properties to things based on a particular condition of our bodies.[25] For Spinoza, we project value properties onto things based on our appetite for them (3p9s).

5. Diagnosing the Feeling of Intelligence

With this projectivist account of good and evil, Spinoza can explain the feeling of intelligence.[26] For Spinoza, the feeling occurs because projection leads us to invert the order of determination between our desires and our value judgments. I've argued that, for Spinoza, value judgments arise from ideas in which the mind confuses affections of the body with properties of objects themselves. Part of this confusion, I now propose, involves the *causal origin* of our desires. The imagination leads us to experience value properties as the causal determinants of our desires. Since we also experience our desires as determining our actions, we feel that our actions are determined by our judgments of value. This is the feeling of

[25] Thus, Spinoza remarks in the Preface to *Ethics* 4 that the same thing can be called good or bad depending on the affective state of the speaker: "[Good and evil] indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are they anything other than modes of thinking, *or* notions we form because we compare things to one another. For one and the same thing can, at the same time, be good, and bad, and also indifferent. For example, Music is good for one who is Melancholy, bad for one who is mourning, and neither good nor bad to one who is deaf (4pref | G II/208: 545)." A person who is melancholy desires music, so she will call music good. A person in mourning, who is averse to music, will call it evil. Finally, a deaf person, who is not affected by music at all, will call it neither good nor evil.

[26] Some may object to the claim that Spinoza offers a projectivist account of value properties by noting that he provides definitions of good and evil in *Ethics* 4: "By good I shall understand what we certainly know to be useful to us" (4D1 | G II/209: 546). This seems to suggest that Spinoza posits some value properties that are *not* beings of the imagination. Yet the epistemic status of Spinoza's definitions is not always straightforward. Some definitions take as *definienda* imaginative notions, such as the definition of 'contingent': "I call singular things contingent insofar as we find nothing, while we attend only to their essence, which necessarily posits their existence or which necessarily excludes it" (4D3 | G II/209: 546). So, Spinoza's definitions do not show that good and evil are not imaginative notions.

intelligence. So, the phenomenon of projection explains both why we attribute value properties to things and why we take our actions to be motivated by a representation of these properties—and this despite the facts that good and evil are not real properties of things, and that our actions are not determined by our judgments of value.

This explanation of the feeling of intelligence arises within Spinoza's account of *final causes*, which is closely related to his projectivist account of value. For Spinoza, the notion of a final cause indicates an end for the sake of which something occurs. This means that there is a close connection between final causes and intelligent actions. Intelligent actions are determined by judgments of value—judgments that something provides us with a practical reason to pursue it. So, intelligent actions are done for the sake of achieving an end. But Spinoza rejects final causes as a legitimate source of explanation in nature: "[a]ll final causes are nothing but human fictions" because "all things proceed by a certain eternal necessity of nature" (1app | G II/80: 442). For Spinoza, nothing is determined by final causes, and nothing happens for the sake of any end. Consequently, our own actions cannot be determined by final causes.[27]

Despite this, Spinoza recognizes that we frequently appeal to final causes in our explanations of nature and of our own actions. And in the Preface to *Ethics* 4, he offers an account of why this so. He claims that our talk of final causes indicates our appetites, and that we appeal to final causes only because we lack knowledge of what really determines our desires and actions:

> What is called a final cause is nothing but a human appetite insofar as it is considered as a principle, *or* primary cause, of some thing. For example, when we say that habitation was the final cause of this or that house, surely we understand nothing but that a man, because he imagined the conveniences of domestic life, had an appetite to build a house. So habitation, insofar as it is considered as a final cause, is nothing more than this singular appetite. It is really an efficient cause, which is considered as a first cause, because men are commonly ignorant of the causes of their appetites. For as I have often said before, they are conscious of their actions and appetites, but not aware of the causes by which they are determined to want something (4pref | G II/207: 544-45).

Spinoza's account of final causes parallels his projectivist account of value. What we refer to as a 'final cause' is, in fact, an appetite considered a "primary" or first cause of something. When we say that habitation was the final cause of a house, what we mean is that someone built the house *for the sake of* habitation—that is, that the builder's actions were determined by a representation of the value of habitation. By calling habitation a final cause, we imply that the builder's actions were intelligent. But for Spinoza, it is wrong to say that habitation is a final cause, for all final causes are simply human fictions. What calling habitation a

[27] Some scholars, including Sangiacomo (2016), argue that Spinoza's critique of final causes in 1app and 4pref is limited to a particular conception of them prevalent in the Late Scholasticism Spinoza would have encountered in the writings of Franco Burgersdijk and Adriaan Heerebord. See also Garrett 1999. Though there is considerable merit to the claim that the Late Scholastic model of final causation is the one Spinoza targets most directly, I take his arguments to generalize to *all* kinds of final causation. See Viljanen 2011: 123, and Rumbold 2021: 296-97 for more on this point.

final cause in fact indicates is the builder's appetite for housebuilding.[28] Indeed, Spinoza later provides a definition of ends (or final causes) in terms of appetite: "By the end for the sake of which we do something I understand appetite" (4D7 | G II/210: 547).[29] We consider things final causes because we project value onto them based on our appetites. What makes this possible is ignorance about the true causes of our appetites. We can call an object a final cause only if we consider our appetite for it a first cause. But this assumption is false. The builder's appetite is not a first cause of the existence of the house, for like all appetites, it is determined by further causes of which he cannot be aware.

While he eliminates final causes from nature, then, Spinoza provides an explanation of why we nevertheless refer to some things as final causes. This explanation works with his projectivist theory of good and evil to provide an error theoretic account of the feeling of intelligence. The builder treats habitation as a final cause because he is ignorant of the true causes of his appetites. His ignorance of these causes, together with his projection of goodness onto the conveniences of domestic living, leads him to feel that his actions are determined by a judgment that building the house is good. And this feeling contributes to his belief that his actions are freely willed. In fact, the builder's actions are determined by myriad external causes alongside his essential striving to preserve his being, which is insensitive to any judgments of value. His actions are not intelligent, though he inevitably feels that they are.

6. Concluding Remarks

My argument in this paper allows us to fully grasp Spinoza's rejection of free will and his account of the feeling of freedom. His rejection targets more than an incompatibilist conception of free will as an undetermined power of choice. For Spinoza, our actions are neither spontaneous, contingent, nor intelligent. Instead, they are determined by external causes, metaphysically necessary, and not sensitive to any representations of value. Yet due to our necessary ignorance of our action's true causes and to structural features of the imagination, we *feel* that our actions are spontaneous, contingent, and intelligent. Others explain how Spinoza accounts for the feelings of spontaneity and of contingency. Here, I have explained how he accounts for the feeling of intelligence.

[28] The builder develops this appetite "because he imagined the conveniences of domestic life". It might seem from this that the builder *does* act for the sake of an end after all, namely for the convenience of domestic living. Yet the image of convenience can play a role in determining the builder's actions even if it does not involve a value judgment. Indeed, Spinoza claims that the image determines the builder's appetite for house building. But as we saw, Spinoza also claims that our appetites are not determined by value judgments but rather determine them (3p9s). Thus, the while the builder acts with an image of a house in mind, this image does not determine his actions by providing them with a final cause. While the builder acts with an idea of domestic life in mind, he does not act *for the sake of* domestic life—though it inevitably *seems* to him that he does. I thank an anonymous reviewer for prompting me to say more on this point. For more on the role of mental content in Spinoza's theory of action, see Curley 1990, Bennett 1990, Manning 2002, Lin 2006, and Viljanen 2010.

[29] This is another example of a definition that takes as a *definiendum* a notion of the imagination (see note 26). An end for the sake of which we do something is a final cause (as implied by the passage from 4 Preface examined above), and as we've seen, Spinoza considers all final causes human fictions—products of the imagination.

The denial that we satisfy the intelligence condition, along with his error theoretic account of the feeling of intelligence, is crucial to Spinoza's rejection of free will. Leibniz was not wrong to call intelligence the "soul of freedom". The feeling that we act based on our understanding of the good is central to our self-conception as agents—as beings whose behavior is explained in terms of practical reasons and are thus appropriately held responsible for their actions. It is a bold and consequential view of Spinoza's that this self-conception is fundamentally mistaken. We are not endowed with the soul of freedom—with a capacity reasonably taken as central to agency—even if we inevitably feel that we must be.[30]

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