

NOTE FOR WORD *CAUSE*

The importance of the word *cause* for the philosopher should be obvious for his end is to know the causes of things and, at last, their first cause.

The distinction of matter, form, mover and end is both a distinction of the kinds of cause found in things and a distinction of the senses or meanings of the word *cause*.

In the first part of Book One *after* the proemium, Aristotle enumerates the opinions of his predecessors about causes and the reasons for those opinions. And he states two reasons for this enumeration. One is to prepare for the consideration of the sufficiency of what they have said in the second part of book One *after* the proemium. And the other reason is to see if they have touched upon any kind of cause in addition to the four kinds distinguished in natural philosophy. They have not and have not even understood these four kinds well. Hence, we get a confirmation that there are indeed only four kinds of cause.

But *cause* is not said with the same exact meaning of these four. What is a cause in general? We could say with Thomas:

causae autem dicuntur ex quibus aliqua dependent secundum suum esse vel fieri...Principium vero importat quendam ordinem alicuius processus¹

Or we could look at the Greek word for cause (*aitia*) which has the sense of *responsible*. A cause is what is responsible for the being or becoming of another. But each cause is responsible in a different way. The carpenter and wood are responsible for the becoming of a wooden chair in quite different ways. Further, one kind of cause is a cause of the causality of another for the maker by transforming the wood makes the wood to be the wood of a table and for a new form to be in that wood. But the carpenter acts in making a chair for the sake of sitting. And thus cause is said neither in the same way nor equally of the four kinds unlike a genus which is said equally and in the same way of its species.

¹ In I Physicorum, Lectio I, n. 5

It is interesting to note then that the distinction of the kinds of causes found in things corresponds exactly to the distinction of the basic senses of the word *cause*. But when a genus is divided into species, the different kinds of it are not different meanings of the word naming the genus. When Euclid divides quadrilateral into square and oblong and rhombus and rhomboid and trapezium, he is dividing quadrilateral into the different kinds of quadrilateral. But these different kinds of quadrilateral are not different senses of the word quadrilateral. For each of the five is a quadrilateral in exactly the same sense – a rectilineal plane figure contained by four straight lines. But the distinction of the kinds of cause is also a distinction of the senses or meanings of cause.

The word *cause* is equivocal by reason of other ratios to the same. For wood, shape, carpenter and sitting are to wooden chair all in different ways.

Perhaps the fundamental reason for considering the four causes in this order is that it is the best one to force reason by truth itself to admit that there are indeed four kinds of cause. This can be best seen in some homely examples. But before taking one of these homely examples, we should also consider that in harmony with forcing reason to admit that there are four kinds of cause, this order also seems to be from what is more known to us to what is the less known to us in causality. We begin with matter and the first philosophers seemed to look only for this kind of cause. And Hesiod before the philosophers had spoken of mother earth. *Materia* in Latin comes from *mater*. And the native English word for cause which is *ground* would also seem to be connected with mother earth. That matter is also most known is clear from the questions and dialectic of Book Three of the *Metaphysics*, especially the first two questions there about the separated (in the third *Lectio*): Is there any cause besides matter? And if so, is this other cause separated from matter or only in matter? The dialectic assumes that matter is a cause and disputes about whether there is any cause besides matter. And Thomas explains why Aristotle pauses alone on the fourth cause, the end, to manifest that it is also a cause: this kind of cause is least known.

Let us take here just one homely example to illustrate how this order is the best to force reason by truth itself to admit that there are four kinds

of cause. Consider the written word *cat*. The most obvious dependence here is upon the letters c, a, and t. If I erased these three letters, nothing would remain. This dependence is upon the first kind of cause, matter. But since the word *act* has the same letters, but is not the same word, one is forced to see the dependence of the word *cat* upon the order of its letters. This is a dependence upon the second kind of cause, form. But if the same letters can be in different orders, what is the cause of these diverse orders? It cannot be the letters since they are the same. Hence, we are brought to recognize the need for a mover or maker. But is the ability of the writer limited to one order? Of course not. Hence, there is the need of an end to explain why he put them in this order. What did he intend to signify?

In trying to understand a division or distinction into more than two or three parts and the completeness of that division or distinction, it is usually necessary to follow the rule of two or three. Thomas divides the four causes into two (one and three) in this text to show the necessity of the four:

Necesse est autem quatuor esse causas.

Quia cum causa sit ad quam sequitur esse alterius, esse eius quod habet causam, potest considerari dupliciter:

uno modo absolute, et sic causa essendi est forma per quam aliquid est in actu;

alio modo secundum quod de potentia ente fit actu ens.

Et quia omne quod est in potentia, reducitur ad actum per id quod est actu ens; ex hoc necesse est esse duas alias causas, scilicet materiam, et agentem, qui reducit materiam de potentia in actum.

Actio autem agentis ad aliquid determinatum tendit, sicut ab aliquo determinato principio procedit: nam omne agens agit quod est sibi conveniens; id autem ad quod tendit actio agentis, dicitur causa finalis.

Sic igitur necesse est esse causas quatuor.

Sed quia forma est causa essendi absolute, aliae vero tres sunt causae essendi secundum quod aliquid accipit esse; inde est quod in immobilibus non considerantur aliae tres causae, sed solum causa formalis.²

But one could also divide the causes into two and two. One way of doing this is to divide the inside causes, matter and form, against the outside causes, mover and end. Then it is not too difficult to see that matter and form exhaust the kinds of inside causes for either one part is as ability and the other as act (as man is body and soul) where the ability is matter and the act is form or all the parts are to the whole as ability to act where parts are like matter and the whole as form. Likewise, it is not difficult to see that mover or maker and end exhaust the outside causes which are either bringing the effect to be or that for the sake of which it comes to be.

Thomas, in explaining the four kinds of cause, often gives a subdivision of the third kind from Avicenna. But in the following text, he gives another somewhat different way of dividing the efficient cause into four kinds:

...causa efficiens dupliciter potest dividi.

Uno modo ex parte effectus; scilicet in disponentem quae causat dispositionem ad formam ultimam, et perficientem quae inducit ultimam perfectionem.

Alio modo ex parte ipsius causae in agens principale, et instrumentale. Agens enim principale est primum movens, agens autem instrumentale est movens motum.

Instrumento autem competit duplex actio: una quam habet ex propria natura, alia quam habet prout motum ab primo agente: sicut calor ignis qui est instrumentum virtutis

² In II Physicorum, Lectio X, n. 240

nutritivae, ut dicitur in II de Anima (4165b 25) ex natura propria habet dissolvere et consumere et hujusmodi effectus; sed inquantum est instrumentum animae vegetabilis, generat carnem.

Sed sciendum quod actio instrumenti quandoque pertingit ad ultimam perfectionem quam principale agens inducit, aliquando autem non; semper tamen pertingit ad aliquid ultra id quod competit sibi secundum suam naturam, sive illud sit ultima forma, sive dispositio; alias non ageret ut instrumentum. Sic qualitates activae et passivae elementorum pertingunt instrumentaliter ad formas materiales educendas de materia, non autem ad productionem animae humanae quae est ab extrinseco...omne instrumentum agendo actionem naturalem quae competiit sibi inquantum est res quaedam pertingit ad effectum qui competit sibi inquantum instrumentum: sicut dolabrum dividendo suo acumine pertingit instrumentaliter ad formam scamni...

Ad secundum dicendum quod reducuntur ad genus causae efficientis, non principalis, sed instrumentalis. Deus autem solus est causa gratiae quasi principale agens, sed sacramenta quasi instrumentaliter et dispositive, ut dictum est, agentia sunt.³

In the following text, Thomas gives four ways of cooperating with the agent:

...cooperari alicui agenti dicitur quatuor modis.

Uno modo sicut adjuvans ei cui auxilium praebet, cooperatur.

Alio modo sicut consilium praebens.

Tertio modo sicut quo mediante agens primum suum

³ Scriptum Super Lib. IV Sententiarum, Distinctio I, Quaest I, Art. IV. Quaestiuncula I, Responsio & Ad 2

effectum inducit, sicut cooperantur instrumenta principali agenti.

Quarto modo sicut disponens materiam ad effectum agentis principalis suscipiendum.

Primis ergo duobus modis in nulla actione aliquid Deo cooperatur propter perfectam ejus potentiam quae auxilio non indiget, et propter perfectam sapientiam quae non indiget consilio...

Sed tertio modo cooperatur aliqua creatura Deo in aliqua actione, non tamen in omnibus. Cum Deus sit primum agens omnium naturalium actionum, quidquid natura agit, hoc efficit quasi instrumentale agens cooperans primo agenti, quod est Deus.

Sed quaedam sunt quae sibi Deus retinuit, immediate ea operans. Et in his creatura Deo non cooperatur hoc tertio modo, sed quarto modo potest ei cooperari: sicut patet in creatione animae rationalis quam immediate Deus producit, sed tamen natura disponit materiam ad animae rationalis receptionem.⁴

It should be noted that this distinction of four takes two from the distinction given by Thomas from Avicenna and two from the previous distinction.

In the following text, Thomas elaborates a bit on the distinction between the principal or chief cause and the instrumental cause or tool:

Causa autem est duplex, scilicet instrumentalis et principalis.

In principali quidem causa est aliquid secundum similitudinem formae, vel eiusdem speciei, si sit causa univoca; puta, cum

⁴ Scriptum Super Lib. IV Sententiarum, Distinctio V, Quaest I, Art. II, Responsio

homo generat hominem, vel ignis ignem; vel secundum aliquam excellentiorem formam, si sit agens non univocum; sicut sol generat hominem.

In causa autem instrumentali est aliquis effectus secundum virtutem quam recipit instrumentum a causa principali, in quantum movetur ab ea:

aliter enim est forma domus in lapidibus et lignis, tamquam in proprio subiecto; et aliter in anima artificis, tamquam in causa principali; et aliter in serra et securi tamquam in causa instrumentali.⁵

The famous statement that an agent acts insofar as it is in act involves a distinction when applied to the chief cause and the instrument:

...aliquod agens est in actu multipliciter.

Uno modo secundum propriam formam quae vel continet formam effectus secundum similitudinem speciei, sicut ignis generat ignem; vel secundum virtutem tantum, sicut sol generat ignem.

Alio modo, secundum motum ab alio; et hoc modo instrumentum agit ut ens actu: et sic etiam semen est actu, in quantum est in eo motus et intentio animae generantis, secundum Philosophum in lib. de gener. Animalium [II, cap. vii]; et ex hoc habet virtutem causandi et humanam naturam et originale peccatum.⁶

Hence, the power of acting is also different in the principal or chief cause and the instrument or tool:

...virtus agendi proportionatur agenti. Unde alio modo oportet ponere virtutem agendi in agente principali; alio modo in agente instrumentali.

⁵ Quaestiones Disputatae de Malo, Q. 4, Art. 1, Ad 16

⁶ Quaestiones Disputatae de Malo, Q. 4, Art. 3, corpus

Agens enim principale agit secundum exigentiam suae formae. Et ideo virtus activa in ipso est aliqua forma vel qualitas habens completum esse in natura.

Instrumentum autem agit ut motum ab alio. Et ideo competit sibi virtus proportionata motui; motus autem non est ens completum sed est via in ens quasi medium quid inter potentiam puram et actum purum, ut dicitur in III Physicorum.

Et ideo virtus instrumenti inquantum huiusmodi, secundum quod agit ad effectum ultra id quod competit sibi secundum suam naturam, non est ens completum habens esse fixum in naturam, sed quoddam ens incompletum: sicut est virtus immutandi visum in aere, inquantum est instrumentum motum ab exteriori visibili.

Et huiusmodi entia consueverunt *intentiones* nominari et habent aliquid simile cum ente quod est in anima quod est ens diminutum, ut dicitur in VI Meta...

Ad primum ergo dicendum quod ens incompletum quod est in anima, dividitur contra ens distinctum per decem genera, ut patet in VI Metaphysicorum (1026a 35). Et ideo talia entia incompleta, per se loquendo, non sunt in aliquo genere nisi per reductionem: sicut motus quantum ad suam substantiam reducitur ad illud genus in quo sunt termini motus, sicut imperfectum ad perfectum, quamvis ponatur in praedicamento passionis secundum quod importat ordinationem moventis ad motum, ut dicit Commentator in III Physicorum.⁷

Likewise, this involves a distinction in regard to the statement that the agent makes what is like itself:

...agens per se et agens instrumentale in hoc differunt quod agens instrumentale non inducit in effectum similitudinem suam, sed similitudinem principalis agentis. Principale autem

⁷ Scriptum Super Lib. IV Sententiarum, Distinctio I, Quaest I, Art. IV. Quaestiuncula II, Responsio & Ad 1

agens inducit similitudinem suam.

Et ideo ex hoc aliquid constituitur principale agens quod habet aliquam formam quam in alterum transfundere potest. Non autem ex hoc constituitur agens instrumentale, sed ex hoc quod est applicatum a principali agente ad effectum aliquem inducendum.

Ad primum ergo dicendum quod sicut inter instrumentum et effectum non exigitur similitudo secundum convenientiam in forma, sed secundum proportionem instrumenti ad effectum; ita etiam nec inter instrumentum et principale agens....⁸

The distinction of a univocal cause and a non-univocal or equivocal cause is primarily a distinction of the chief or principal cause:

Ad quartum dicendum quod causa univoca vel non univoca, proprie loquendo et simpliciter sunt divisiones illius causae cujus est similitudinem habere cum effectum; hoc autem est principalis agentis et non instrumentalis, ut dicit Alexander, secundum quod narrat Commentator in XI [II] Meta.

Et ideo proprie loquendo, neque instrumentum est causa univoca, neque aequivoca. Posset tamen reduci ad utrumlibet, secundum quod principale agens, in cujus virtute instrumentum agit, est causa univoca vel non univoca.⁹

The instrumental cause is sometimes divided into the animate and inanimate:

...duplex est instrumentum, scilicet animatum, ut servus, et inanimatum ut securis, ut dicitur in VIII Eth. (1161b 4; lectio II, n. 1699)

⁸ Scriptum Super Lib. IV Sententiarum, Distinctio XIX, Quaest I, Art. II, Ad primam quaestionem & Ad 1

⁹ Scriptum Super Lib. IV Sententiarum, Distinctio I, Quaest I, Art. IV. Quaestiuncula I, Ad 4

In instrumento igitur inanimato non requiritur intentio propria, quia ipsa inclinatio instrumenti ad effectum per motum principalis agentis, locum intentionis supplet.

Sed in instrumento animato quod non tantum agitur, sed aliquo modo agit, utpote per imperium agens et non per impulsum motus, requiritur intentio exequendi ministerium ad quod applicatum est.¹⁰

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¹⁰ Scriptum Super Lib. IV Sententiarum, Distinctio VI, Quaest I, Art. II, Quaestiuncula I, Ad 1