

Four Causes in Aristotle

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Material Causality

To begin with the nature of material causes and the nature of formal causes, as our point of departure, to understand the causes of being as these causes would apply to the being or the existence of all things which exist within our world, let us begin with two metaphysical principles that are paired with each other. One is potency; the other, form. First, with respect to the being of potency and how we can understand what this is and where it sits within the context of Aristotle's thought, from the givens of sense which exist as an experience of sensibility (sensibility as that kind of being which can be sensed and which is known by us by how it is related or how it is revealed to us through our different acts of human sensing, existing as the term of our different acts of human sensing), within the order of reflection and the kind of reflection which exists within the *Physics* of Aristotle and also within his *Metaphysics*, from that which is given to us as sensibility, from that which exists as sensibility, we can understand potency as a particular species or type of being. In another way of speaking, matter as *hule* and potency as *dunamis* refer to the same thing.¹ That which is sensed exists as matter and, at the same time too, this matter (in its formlessness or indeterminacy) exists as potency. A commonly used simple example says that the clay of the earth points to how it exists as potency. It is bereft of any form or shape (relatively speaking, since clay is clay and not stone; hence, it does not exist as an instance of pure potency, as an unrestricted or as an ultimate, infinite kind of potency).

Hence, as something that is simply or merely given to us in our experience of it and as something that can be then used or taken up by us in a way that can confer on it a noticeable form or shape, for this reason, through an analogical form of reasoning that is given in this aforementioned cited example, it is argued or it can argued that, in its distinctiveness, matter or potency exists essentially as a passivity, as a species of passivity, or as a passive principle. It is that which can receive. It can become this or it can become that and, at the same time, it is not able to become this or it is unable to become that. In becoming this or in becoming that, it exists as the presupposition or the precondition for the being of any kind of becoming or change where this becoming or change exists as a reasonable, intelligible kind of thing. Hence, within the context of Aristotle's analysis and in his conceptuality, matter or potency technically exists, in Greek, as *hupokeimenon* (literally: as “that which is presupposed by” any kind of change or becoming which would refer to the reception of a specific determination where, typically, a previously existing determination is replaced by a newly existing, new determination).² In change, a potency moves into a condition of act or, more accurately, it is put or placed into a condition of act. The potency disappears or it ceases to be (in terms of how it has existed) whenever we speak about its realization or its actualization: the actualization of a potency in change (or, alternatively here, the “actualization of a potential” whenever changes occur of one kind or another in a way that is suited to the meaning or the identity of a given potency although, within our currently existing world, no potency exists without a degree of determination that, in some way, already belongs to it).³ In our

¹Aristotle, *Physics*, A.6-7, 193b1, as cited by Byrne, “*Insight and the Retrieval of Nature*,” p. 11.

²Aristotle, *Physics*, A.6-7, 191a9, 193a2-193b22, as cited by Byrne, “*Insight and the Retrieval of Nature*,” p. 10.

³Edward Feser, *Five Proofs on the Existence of God*, p. 18.

world, unrestricted potency does not exist. Prime matter or prime potency exists only, for us, as an explanatory principle where, through our knowledge of it, partial or relative potencies can be more clearly and exactly known.

To employ a trite but exact example which points to a temporal order of things within an order of spatial determinations and the relevance of a real distinction: the making of a chair as an act is preceded by potencies (be they materials, tools, or possible actions) and, as soon as a chair exists, nothing more needs to become, move, or change. The becoming ends where, here, a real distinction exists between act and term: the becoming and the being, the becoming of a chair versus the being of a chair. The term, the result, is not itself the act.

Hence, as potency and not as act, in its condition of potency (or as materiality), a potency cannot realize itself to become some other kind of thing. For purposes of illustration, we can distinguish between the being of a lump of clay and the being of an earthen clay pot. Notice, grasp the difference between them and we should understand why, to potency or matter, a condition of passivity is to be alluded to. All matter, all potencies exist with a passivity that is proper to potency in terms of the kind of being which belongs to potency. As a species of material cause, clay can be made into a clay pot or into a clay dish. The being of clay, as potency, can be converted or it can be turned into a realization which would exist as either a clay pot or perhaps a clay plate (among other possible realizations that can brought into being from a material substrate which would exist for us here as clay). From clay, we can have china. Nothing of clay, however, can receive a realization or be converted into a form or a shape which would refer to the kind of realization which exists if we should refer to the being of a bronze kettle, the being of a bronze pot, or the being of a bronze plate. In matter or potency, relative to form or the actuality and being of form, matter/potency exists as becoming or as the principle of becoming for the being of all things. It exists as that which can become or change into something else.

If, for instance, a material component exists within the being of any given thing, because this component can be moved or because it can be altered in some way, a given thing which has a material component is a kind of being which can be changed or altered in a way which is suited or which belongs to the kind of potency which exists if our point of departure here is the givenness of a certain type of material determination.⁴ Conversely too, if a material component is absent or if it is found to be wanting in some kind of way, then the absence of materiality points to the absence of any kind of change or alteration which could exist as a material kind of change. If change were to exist, it would exist as some other kind of change. Conversely again, if something were to exist in a way that is fully actual (if no potency exists in it), its condition of realization would have to be described in a way which points to its completeness or fullness and so, from this completeness or fullness, its perfection.

Formal Causality

If we should now move toward an understanding of formal causes (the nature of formal causes): to account for change thus, to explain transitions where something is moved from a condition of potency to a lessening or an absence of potency (to explain why something receives a determination which makes it into a particular kind or type of existing thing since no potency, as potency, is able to bring itself into a condition of act), an active or agent principle needs to be determined and known and if we are to give this kind of principle a name that we can use to talk about it, on the basis of an analogy

⁴Roger Collingwood, *Idea of Nature*, p. 91.

which refers to the being of a sensible form or shape and the reception of this sensible form or shape (how, in sensation, a form is received apart from its originating source and apart from the matter of this same source),⁵ we can take this principle and then, by generalizing it or, in other words, by immaterializing it or by abstracting it, a principle or form is derived which exists simply as form (form as it exists apart from matter, having a kind of reality which differs from the kind of reality which belongs to matter). Form or formal cause as act or realization differs from matter or material cause as potency (it is not to be confused with the givenness of matter or potency) or, in other words, when matter is generalized in a manner which leads us toward a meaning for potency (as an apprehension of potency), form differs from potency (a formal cause from a material cause) since, if any given potency receives a determination which diminishes its potency or which lessens the potency which formerly it had possessed, the explanation for this is the entry or the ingress of something which exists as a specification or as a determination (a determination as opposed to the absence of a determination), a determination which exists as a structure or form (form as opposed to potency).

In other words, “matter exists in a potential state...because it may come to its form: and when it exists *actually*, then it is in its form.”⁶ Hence, in Aristotle's own words, through a negative species of predication: “by matter I mean that which in itself has neither quality or quantity nor any of the other attributes by which being is determined.”⁷ However, the being of things in our world, on the other hand, is explained by the entry and the reception of something which exists essentially as an order, structure, or form (albeit, form entering into a set of material conditions in a manner which points to the being and the reality of an essence if here form is considered in terms of how it is united to a given set of material conditions).⁸ An essence is more than just a form.

Instead of referring thus to the being of some other kind of principle in metaphysics which can explain why things exist in the way that they do and how or why they become and change in the way that they do, to the principle of form and the being of form a primacy exists and a centrality which explains why it has been said about the metaphysics of Aristotle that it is to be regarded as essentially a metaphysics of form. In Aristotle, *energeia* (“act”) and *entelecheia* (“perfection”) are used in order to refer to form (to the being of form or the act of form; form as primarily *actuality* if we should think about it in terms

⁵Collingwood, *Idea of Nature*, pp. 85-86. The rhythmic vibration of a sounding bell is received by a like rhythm which emerges and which exists within the hearing of a human hearer, a human listener.

⁶Joseph Owens, *A History of Ancient Western Philosophy* (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1959), pp. 326f, as cited by Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, *Being and Knowing: Reflections of a Thomist* (Albany, New York: Preserving Christian Publications, Inc., 1995), p. 103, n. 18.

⁷Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1029a20, as quoted by Collingwood, *Idea of Nature*, p. 92.

⁸To avoid confusion, please distinguish here between material conditions which exist as particular matter and material conditions which exist as common matter. Essences exist when form, as a universal, is joined to a universalized apprehension of matter which exists as common matter. The essence of a maple tree refers, for instance, to the unity which exists between, on the one hand, the nature or the intelligibility of a maple tree that is shared by all maple trees (participated in by all maple trees) and, on the other hand, a common materiality which belongs to the shared matter or the corporality which is common to the being of all maple trees. The intelligibility and the materiality both exist as abstractions that are known by us through as our acts of understanding as we individually move from our acts of human sensing toward our later acts of human understanding.

of its function and effect).⁹ In comparison to the actuality of form as a principle of movement or change, potency lacks status or, if you will, it exists at a lower, lesser level (existing as becoming or more specifically, as the potentiality of becoming). Its indeterminacy more closely connects it with the principle or the privation of nothingness than with the being of something which is to be contrasted with the condition and the negation of nothingness. Potency is that which is somehow without this or that quality or characteristic. That which truly exists and which makes things happen is that which exists as form, as the act of form which, within matter or as informing matter, exists as the act of matter (act within matter).

From a knowledge of forms we move toward a knowledge of potencies. Forms specify potencies in a relation which explains why, within the order of being, the order of existing things, form precedes potency.¹⁰ Simply put: first form, then potency (or, cognitively, within the order of our human cognition, we begin with a prior understanding of things, we begin with intelligible determinations of some kind or other, something which we already understand and know; and then, from there, we can move toward that which we have yet to experience as a determination as this can be given to us within a new act of understanding that could be possibly given to us). A form explains what something is or why it exists in the way that it does and also or, simultaneously in Aristotle's understanding of things, the being or the existence of a given thing.¹¹ It also explains why a given thing can function in a certain way with respect to what it can do and achieve and what it can also receive and experience in a way which can bring into being new points of departure that can lead to the possible emergence of new realizations.

Since the being of existing things is explained by form, in a shorthand form of expression, with Aristotle, we would say or we simply reiterate that, ultimately, being is form and form, being. The being of a thing, its reality, its actuality is its form. The determinacy or the specificity of a form points to its stability or to its unchangeableness (hence, its transcendence or, in other words, its eternity), a form of existence that is not subject to any kind of change, any kind of impermanence, or any kind of variation since from any absence of being or from any kind of non-being, we cannot get being (since an absolute disjunction exists between being and non-being: in accordance with an insight that comes to us from Parmenides, from non-being, we cannot get being).¹² Hence, from the absence of indeterminacy or, more strongly, from the exclusion of any kind of changeableness, indeterminacy, or potency, in form we have a species of existence which always points to the eternal existence of forms (forms which exist apart and which are not conditioned by any conjugates or properties which would refer to any spatial temporal categories in determinations of space and time). As noted, that which changes and that which never changes necessarily exclude each other (in an absolute and total way) even as we should also realize and know that, within the world that we experience about us, nothing exists apart from a combination which exists between that which exists in a condition of potency and that which exists in a condition of form (the indeterminate being of potency being united or joined to the determinate kind of being which exists as form). A potency is informed by a form; a material cause, by a formal cause. No potency would exist in our world as if this potency were to exist as an

⁹Joseph Owens, *History of Ancient Western Philosophy*, pp. 326f, as cited by Wilhelmssen, *Being and Knowing*, p. 103, n. 18; Wilhelmssen, *Paradoxical Structure of Existence*, p. 15.

¹⁰Hill, *After the Natural Law*, p. 42.

¹¹James Lehrberger, O. Cist., "Introduction to the Transaction Edition," *The Paradoxical Structure of Existence* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. xvi.

¹²Lehrberger, O. Cist., "Introduction," *Paradoxical Structure of Existence*, p. xvi.

unrestricted or as an unlimited kind of potency.

Efficient Causality

With respect now to the being of efficient or instrumental causes (given earlier discussions about the meaning of material and formal causes in Aristotle), an efficient or an instrumental cause refers to that by which something else is made. Hence, an efficient cause refers to some kind of instrument or means that is used in a given context. One does this in order to do that. This leads to that. A frequently employed example refers to an artist who carves a statue from a mass of stone. The hammer and chisel that he uses function as efficient or as instrumental causes. By their use, through an external kind of application and use, something else is brought into being which had not existed before.¹³ An efficient cause accordingly exists as a catalyst: as an agent cause, as a moving cause, as an agent object, or as a moving substance. It moves matter or something other which exists as an other from a condition of non-being toward a condition of being.¹⁴ In a definition which comes to us from Aristotle, it is “that from which change or rest first begins.”¹⁵ A parent, as a substance (*ousia*), through the form of the parent's humanity, takes something other which is not yet human and, by working with it, changes it into something which is now human.¹⁶ More precisely in wording which can be used to define the nature of an efficient cause, it is that “*by which* something [other] is made.”¹⁷

To understand the nature of an efficient cause, we begin by understanding how we can move from the nature of a formal cause to the nature of an efficient cause, an understanding of formal causes leading us toward an understanding of efficient causes. On formal causes: when a form exists within a given thing, as a formal cause, it accordingly exists as a distinct predicate, having its own effect. It indicates what a given thing is: why it exists in the way that it does, what this same thing is able to receive without destroying or violating its being and identity, and what this same thing is able to do as an extension or as a communication of its being and identity if, with respect to the being of a given thing, it exists with a measure of self-motion and self-movement which points to its animate, living nature. Living things or animate substances are characterized by varying degrees of self-motion; dead inanimate things, by a lack of self-motion. When the intelligibility of a formal cause accordingly indicates what a given thing is able to receive (when its passivity is indicated and understood), we can then understand what kinds of action can come to it from without (from external sources and causes): actions which can bring a given thing into a condition of being or actions which can bring a given thing into a specification of being which refers to the kind of fuller being which exists in context of its flourishing. It is one thing to simply be or exist. It is another thing to fully live and be. Then too however, by also understanding what a given thing is able to do, we can also understand how a given thing can also exist and function as if it is itself a species of efficient cause. By its own actions, it can bring something else into being: either a being which is totally other than the being who is the doer or the subject of efficient causality or something which exists within the life of the subject who is the

13Michael Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, p. 98.

14Joseph Owens, *Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, p. 76 & n. 19 citing Aquinas, *De Ente*, 4. See also Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, p. 8; and Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, p. 41.

15Aristotle, *Physics*, 194b30, as quoted by Patrick H. Byrne, “Teleology, Modern Science and Verification,” *Lonergan Workshop*, vol. 10, ed. Fred Lawrence (Boston: Boston College, 1994), p. 4.

16Patrick Byrne, “*Insight and the Retrieval of Nature*,” *Lonergan Workshop*, p. 15.

17Mortimer Alder, *Aristotle for Everybody*, p. 42.

agent or the doer of efficient causality. We can read a book in order to grow in our own understanding and knowledge of things or we can read a book in order to engage in actions which construct external objects. We might want to build a house, a computer, or some other external object. While substances (or things) exist with formal determinations which point to their distinctiveness (who and what they are), through their efficient causality, these same substances or things can pass on or they can communicate their whatness (their formal determinations) to things which would exist as new others (acting upon these others in a way which effects the being of something which, before, had not existed). In a point of difference or contrast with the formality or the immateriality of formal causes, efficient causes work with material means of one kind or another to effect the emergence or the being of other things even if, admittedly, in some circumstances, these other things or these other objects exist in an immaterial way (they have no spatial or temporal conjugates).¹⁸

Paraphrasing the kind of argumentation which we can find in the teaching of Aquinas: since contingent being cannot cause itself (since, in Aquinas, the form or the nature of a contingent being is not to be equated with the act of being or the act of existence which belongs to an actually existing contingent thing), the beingness or the existence of an actually existing contingent thing can only be explained if we should refer to an act or a cause of being or existence which comes from something other (externally), this other referring to the reality or the activity of an efficient cause. In a shift which moves toward the kind of truth which is expressed by a proposition which exists for us as an analytic principle (its truth is such that the form or the predicate of a thing exists within the meaning or the being of a given thing; a thing exists as a substance or it exists as a subject), a difference in internal relations distinguishes the causality and the reality of a formal cause from the causality and the reality of an efficient cause. In a formal cause, a form exists within a set of material conditions and, in the consequent internal relation which exists between form and matter as these exist together, as noted, in and by itself, a formal cause does not bring something other into a condition of being from a prior condition of non-being. The causality of a formal cause is limited to specifying why something exists in the way that it happens to be and exist. However, with respect to the being of efficient or instrumental causes: if, in another predicate of relation, an internal relation is constitutive of the being of another thing, if an internal relation brings a being into a condition of existence which before it had not enjoyed (moving from a condition of non-being to a condition of being), then, in this sense, we can refer to how this type of internal relation can be regarded as an efficient cause and not as a formal cause. The internal relation which exists within the being of an efficient cause points to a variable or a factor which explains how or why a given something which is other has been

¹⁸As Hill notes in *After the Natural Law*, p. 43, the materiality of material and efficient causes is to be distinguished from the formality or the immateriality of formal and final causes and, in differing ways also, each set respectively refers to the being of internal and external aspects with respect to the being and the becoming of things. Matter exists as an internal component when we refer to the being of existing things. Form also exists as an internal component (matter and form go together) and so, with respect to material and formal causes, both exist as internal components with respect to the reality of existing things (things which exist as substances). However, as external causes, an efficient cause brings something which is other into being and, in an external way too, according to Aristotle's understanding of final causes, these act from without or externally to bring something which is other into a condition of fuller, more perfect being.

brought into a condition of being from a prior condition of non-being. On this basis then, if human beings can understand how they themselves can function as efficient causes, if they can understand how, in their efficient causality, they can effect or bring into being the being of other things (these things can refer also to the being or the existence of other human beings), then, they can begin to understand how efficient causes have functioned to effect the being of their personal existence. To some extent, they can understand and know these external causes, determining them and also possibly the order which can join these efficient causes with each other in a manner which is more effective than the being of some other kind of order.

Final Causality

With respect to the being of final causes, for Aristotle (in the context of his teleological biology, his teleological ethics, and his teleological physics): "nature does not act without a goal."¹⁹ In asking why something exists or why it functions in the way that it happens to exist or function, implicitly, in the posing of this question, we would be asking about the existence of some kind of end or purpose, a realization of some kind: a "that for the sake of which,"²⁰ a "form which finally results when the motion continues on to completion,"²¹ where here, in Greek, *telos* refers to the term of a realization or the term of a development which would exist as some kind of "end," "goal," "purpose," or "fulfillment."²² In general terms thus: an "x" exists in the way that it does because of a "y." Hence, with respect to that which exists as "y," as an explanation, it imparts or it points to a possible direction or to an orientation which can exist with respect to that which exists as "x," informing the being or the nature of "x," belonging in a way to the fuller existence of that which exists as "x." The "x" in question does not exist in some kind of isolation by itself (in a self-enclosed kind of way) but in a manner which points to a measure of self-transcendence which properly belongs to it. The self-transcendence exists initially as a species of passive potency although, in the case of living things, another species of self-transcendence can be identified if we should refer to the possible activation or the eliciting of active potencies which can be brought into a condition of act if we admit that, as a final cause, a given "y" exerts an enhancing, perfecting influence. Its causality is such that it functions as an immaterial kind of efficient cause through the attractiveness which it exerts on things which are other than itself,²³ at times drawing a lower order of being toward a realization of some kind which cannot be effected in any other kind of way (since, as we have previously noted, as a general principle, nothing which exists in a condition of potency is able to realize itself through a change which could be described as a species of self-actuation, a self-actuation of something which, in its potency, is bereft of that which exists in a condition of act). Realizations of potency come from acts and not from something which exists only as a "could be" or as a possibility (hence, as a potency). If, in the life of a given thing, stages of development can be noticed or if, say, the emergence of "x" makes for the possible emergence of something which exists as "z," then, in order to understand the nature or the being of a living thing or in order to understand a possible relation which can exist among a number of different living things, then the necessary conclusion is the value of pointing to a final cause of some kind which needs to be understood (an order of finality or entelechy) that is able to link these different stages and conditions

¹⁹Osborne, *Philosophy for Beginners*, p. 19.

²⁰Byrne, "Insight and the Retrieval of Nature," *Lonergan Workshop*, p. 15.

²¹Byrne, "Insight and the Retrieval of Nature," *Lonergan Workshop*, p. 15.

²²Hill, *After the Natural Law*, p. 34; Collingwood, *Idea of Nature*, p. 83.

²³Collingwood, *Idea of Nature*, p. 84.

with each other in a way which suggests that formal causes exist for the sake of an order of final causes (for the sake of realizations and perfections which have yet to be, exist, and emerge within the order of our world and universe).²⁴

On a critical note: to avoid any confusions here and to determine the kind of final cause which is to be identified with Aristotle's notion of final cause, please note thus that this final cause is not to be identified with the possible being of some kind of inner tendency, a *nisus*, a conation, a desire, or an effort which somehow exists within things as a governing "inner impulse" that impels growth or which directs the life and growth of a given thing,²⁵ although, on the other hand, it is to be admitted that this type of understanding has been attributed to Aristotle or it has been postulated as a better understanding about how, in nature, teleological causes function and operate in our world. In the first case, R. G. Collingwood speaks about final causality as an inner tendency which exists within things, a finality which does not have to be conscious in the manner of its operation in order for it to exist and function as an operative cause,²⁶ and, without qualification, this understanding is attributed or it has been attributed to the kind of understanding that comes to us from Aristotle. Similarly, in the thought of Bernard Lonergan, a like understanding of finality is given which suggests that, perhaps, Collingwood was its probable source or he exists as an accompanying, kindred source although, on the other hand, if this understanding is to be attributed to Aristotle, it points to the necessity of a qualification since the finality which comes to us from Collingwood and Lonergan does not come to us from Aristotle in terms which refer to a *telos* or in terms which would refer to a final cause as an *archê hothen hê kinêsis* [as the source of movement].²⁷ Instead, the parallel in Aristotle exists in terms of how, in the *Physics*, Aristotle understands motion or movement as a species of inner principle or inner cause which exists within the being of things. If, in Aristotle, final causes resemble efficient causes in terms of an external causality which belongs to them (the externality of their operation), in Lonergan, the reverse applies: final causes resemble formal causes in terms of a form of internal causality (in their own way, they operate within the being of existing things). A formal cause indicates what a given thing is; a final cause, what the same thing can become given what it already happens to be. Citing Lonergan's own words on the identity of final causes as these indicate both an absence of Aristotelian origins and also a derivation from Aristotelian origins: "finality is not *principium motus in alio in quantum aliud* [a principle of movement in another thing insofar as it is other]; it is not *id cuius gratia* [that for the sake of which]; [instead] it is *principium motus in eo in quo est* [a principle of movement within the thing itself (in that in which the principle too has being)]."²⁸ In its dynamism and also its incompleteness, for both Aristotle and Lonergan, this inner tendency or this active potency is something which exists as a motion, movement, or change, and so it exists as a kind of in between. It exists as a departing or as a shifting from a prior condition of potency toward a later condition of act; or, perhaps more accurately and precisely, it exists as a departing or as a moving from a lesser condition of act toward a later, fuller condition of act.

To understand, however, how or why final causes differ from efficient causes and how they also differ

²⁴Patrick H. Byrne, *Analysis and Science in Aristotle* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 197.

²⁵Hill, *After the Natural Law*, p. 34; Collingwood, *Idea of Nature*, p. 83.

²⁶Collingwood, *Idea of Nature*, p. 83.

²⁷Aristotle, *Physics*, 2, 1, 192b21-22, as cited by Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, p. 476.

²⁸Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, p. 476.

from formal causes, in its simplicity, a useful point of departure refers to the example of a sculptor who works with stone, hammer, and chisel to carve a statue. In his thinking and understanding, the sculptor has a plan, an image, which exists within his mind. Within the mass of the stone that he is working with, he sees an image that he wishes to reveal and so he removes the obstructing stone to reveal the being of this image. The image, relative to the materiality of the stone, exists as a species of formal cause. It identifies the form of a statue. A statue is a statue because of the form which it has. However, in the work which is being done, material, efficient, and formal causes are being combined with each other in many and various ways and the intelligibility which specifies this combination of differing acts and potencies is itself a predicate (a species of predicate) which transcends the being of all the other causes or predicates which together are needed if we are to explain the being of existing things. The sculptor, in his own right, is a human being and the formal causality of his humanity is being combined with the being of other causes in a way which refers to the being and the finality of a larger, more general scheme of things. In finality, this exists for the sake of that, and in the correlation and interrelation of many different variables, in the context of a general order which exists among many different things, a given end or purpose or, in other words, a condition of perfection or a condition of realization which exists at one level of being is explained by the being of other ends or purposes (other, possible conditions of realization) through a chain of causes which moves through differing levels of being or reality toward higher orders of being or reality. If, for instance, we should look at the organic world of living things which surrounds us, we notice that without water and a cycle of events which make for a regular supply of water, no plant life can ever exist. But then, without the existence of certain kinds of vegetative life, certain other kinds of life form would not exist within the animal kingdom and then too, without the existence of life forms which exist among lower animals, higher animals would not be able to exist. Generically speaking: one type of being creates conditions of possibility for the emergence of other types of being. Hence, in Aristotle, the primacy of final causes is such that it points to why final causes are to be understood in a way which regards them as “the cause of causes” (*causa causarum*).²⁹ To repeat and reiterate what we have said and to try and give a fuller explanation about how, in our world, a finality exists with respect to the being of existing things:

In the world of our experience, a final causality imparts a unity or it creates a comprehensiveness that is able to integrate the being of all lesser final causes and, at the same time too, all other primary causes (material, formal, and efficient). All other causes can be understood in terms of how they all relate to each other if we can point to an internal orientation or a vector which exists within the world of our ordinary experience, a world which cannot be or exist in the way that it does if certain levels of being or if certain kinds of being are not to be known in a way which recognizes the fact that certain things exist as points of departure for the possible existence of other things: higher things or higher levels of being even if the being of lower or prior things is without any kind of awareness which would know about the existence of this kind of order or this kind of ordination. As noted, a higher level of being or a higher kind of being can only exist if certain lower levels of being exist in some kind of preliminary way or if, similarly, lower kinds of being exist. Apart from our subjective considerations or apart from our subjective desires as these exist within the human order

²⁹Hill, *After the Natural Law*, p. 43, quoting D. Q. McNerny, *Metaphysics* (Elmhurst, PA: Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, 2004), 266; Charles A. Hart, *Thomistic Metaphysics An Inquiry into the Act of Existing* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1959), p. 299.

of things when we ask about the kind of order which exists among our many human actions and how our actions are orientated toward goals and objectives which are proper to them, within the external world of physical, chemical, biological nature (as this exists) an objective species of order is discoverable, a teleological order of some kind or other even if we would have to admit that the existence of this order is not so easily understood within a context of mind and a way of thinking which prefers to think that a teleological order of things is to be associated only with the human order of existing things and not with an order of things which exists apart from any kind of human intervention that would take up this world in a way that is suited to our refashioning of it ways that would seem to suit our human interests and desires.

By attending thus to the form of a thing (the form of a substance), from the principle of form and by understanding how it relates to the principle of matter as this exists in potency, the result should be an apprehension which knows about an order of being within our world and how finality exists within the being of our world. Consciously or unconsciously, a goal-oriented system strives for its own form of self-realization and for whatever perfection is possible within a context of limitations as these are allowed and permitted by the essence of a particular thing (perhaps according to how this essence is known by us initially through an understanding that knows about the being of its relevant form).³⁰ If, from the form of a thing, we understand the essence of a thing, from the same form (or, in other words, from the same principle), we should also understand how a thing best exists when it is realized a manner which points to the fullness of its being (the fullness of its reality).³¹ For an example here that is often used: metaphysically speaking, an acorn is an actuality which exists as the potentiality for the later being (the later emergence) of a mature oak tree since its matter contains the potentiality for becoming a mature oak tree which is the acorn's eventual actuality in the course of time although, in metaphysical terms, we would say that an oak tree's being or that the oak's tree's existence is the actuality of an acorn: an actuality which would exist as the realization or as the kind of terminus which belongs to the life and being of an acorn. Throughout, a form exists as an operative, operating cause and the form of an acorn is such thus that its realization or its end is the reality of a fully existing tree.

An adequate understanding about the nature of a formal cause should always thus indicate the being and the operation of a final cause and the possible understanding that can be had if we should attend to the possible being and meaning of a final cause. This proceeding of an understanding of finality from a apprehension which first understands and knows about the intelligibility of a formal cause accordingly explains why these two causes exist together as respectively denoting internal and external aspects which belong to the intelligibility of things, an intelligibility however which refers to the "formal nature of things."³² The form of a thing exists internally as one of its two components (the other component is matter) but, as an internally existing thing, the form or the intelligibility of a thing points to a species of external cause which is the term or the terminus of a formal cause with respect to its possible later realization within conditions that belong to the being of our world in terms of its spatial and temporal conjugates. Hence, the intelligibility of a final cause is other than the being of a formal cause although, from an understanding of formal causes, we move toward an understanding of final causes. Relative to the being of formal causes, final causes exist in an external manner as a higher principle of order. *Qua* externality, final causes resemble efficient causes (both exist in an external

³⁰Palmer, *Looking at Philosophy*, p. 79.

³¹Hill, *After the Natural Law*, p. 41.

³²Hill, *After the Natural Law*, p. 43, n. 12.

way) although the resemblance ends as soon as we advert to how they refer to different aspects or different parts that are constitutive of how change occurs within the world of our ordinary experience, or to a different kind of relation which can exist between act and potency, or to a different kind of relation which can exist between form and matter. Act stands to form as potency to matter. If, in Aristotle, every kind of change is a process of being moved or affected by something else which is other than itself in some way (whether changes occur within our souls or within the being of inanimate nature),³³ to explain every kind of movement or change which occurs, it is accordingly noted and argued that every kind of moving or changing involves a potential (a material cause) which receives a form (a formal cause) from an agent (an efficient cause) in a context which creates conditions that lead to the possible reception of new changes in a growth, a development, or a perfection of some kind which occurs within the being of that which had been potential (a final cause).³⁴

To conclude with an example which attempts to explain how these four necessary causes exist together, we can distinguish between the plan of an architect to construct a building and the realization of this same building once it has been constructed. Very many events or causes need to occur before we can have the finished product, a completed building. Now, as an analytic principle (as a truth that cannot be doubted since the predicate exists within the subject), it can be said that, prior to the completion of a given building, the building in question, in fact, does not exist. Its lack of being or its lack of reality explains why it cannot be or act within a currently existing context in order to effect or to bring about a given act or an activity which would contribute to the construction of the building in question. As we have noted, nothing which exists in a condition of potency is able to realize itself. However, if we should want to talk about how we are to advert to a possible application of different causes that can effect the construction of a given building, we can refer here to efficient forms of causality. An architect and subsequent builders work from a realized conception or a thought out plan which exists as a species of formal cause. This thought out plan is to be concretely realized in a manner which works from a set of architectural drawings, these drawings existing as a species of first principle for the generation of a series of efficient, instrumental causes. However, if, within this context, we should move to another point of view and if we should advert to an intelligible order which exists within a series or a succession of acts or causes that ultimately leads toward the realization of a building's construction, we will encounter an intelligibility which differs from the intelligibility or the form of efficient causality: an order of intelligibility which is denoted if we should refer to that which exists as the final causality of a realized intelligibility and why, from the standpoint of a realized accomplished intelligibility, we can go back and find an order which is to be distinguished from other kinds of intelligible order which exist because, here, its point of reference is the maturity of a completed form. Final causes differ from efficient causes because, in each case, a different base or a different point of departure is to be employed as a species of first principle for the determination of a given relation which exists as we move from the formality of one kind of cause to the formality of another kind of cause where, in the being of each cause, act and potency are related in a different way.

³³Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 11, 7, 1072b3, as cited by Hill, *After the Natural Law*, p. 44, n. 15.

³⁴Byrne, *Analysis and Science in Aristotle*, p. 166.