

# Scotus, Ockham, and Biel on *Sine qua non* Causes

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1. Otherwise if this can be said about the will, then we can equally easily and rationally deny all active powers as distinct from passive ones, and say that every single being brings itself from potentiality to act. . . . Who will then show that a piece of wood or a body becomes hot by the fire? Rather, they will say that it makes itself hot when the fire is present as a *sine qua non* cause.
2. In the whole world one cannot find such a *sine qua non* cause, as that is called a *sine qua non* cause which when not acting, the other does not act, and yet which has no causality on it or on its act.
3. This division of causes into proper and *sine qua non* causes, does not seem to hold. . . . This argument seems to me strong and quite probably concluding that, if God determined himself that from this day, to the utterance of some words that are uttered by anyone, he would will to give rain, then those words just uttered would be the proper causes of rain, which God produced to their utterance, just the same way as heat is the cause of heat.
4. Therefore, to the question I first propose a distinction, following the sayings of the saints and authorities. Because ‘cause,’ if it is that the being of which is followed by another, can be taken two ways. One way, when from the nature of the thing the presence and being of one is naturally followed by the being of another. The other way, when the being of one is followed by the being of another merely by the will of another. And in this way we say that the meritorious act is said to be a cause with respect to the reward merely by the divine will. And a *sine qua non* cause is a cause in the second way.
5. Anything if it is posited, another one is also posited, is its proper cause; now by reason of a proper cause it is not true that the effect would necessarily follow or that the effect cannot be posited without the cause, because the fire is a proper cause of heat and nevertheless heat follows the fire not necessarily but merely contingently, as it is clear from the fire of the three young men in the furnace. And heat can also be produced while the fire is present so that the fire causes nothing, as it is clear from the case when God by himself produced heat while suspending the action of the fire. Thus, for something to be a proper cause of another, it is enough that if the former is posited the latter is posited, and if it is not posited, then the latter is not posited either. But this is the case with the sacraments with respect to grace, etc.

Godfrey of Fontaines, *Quodl.* VI, 7 (Lottin ed., 158): Alioquin si sic dici potest de voluntate, aequè faciliter et rationabiliter poterit negari omnis potentia activa distincta a passivo, et dicetur quod unumquodque ens producit se ipsum de potentia ad actum [...] Quis etiam probabit lignum vel corpus aliquod califieri ab igne? Immo dicetur quod seipsum calefacit, praesente igne ut causa sine qua non.

Alnwick, *Additiones magnae* (Balić ed., 278): In toto universo non invenitur talis causa sine qua non, ut illud dicatur causa sine qua non, quo non agente, aliud non agit, quod non habet causalitatem super illud, nec super actum eius.

Biel, *Collectorium* IV, d. 1, p. 1, q. 1, a. 1 (Werbeck ed., 17): Et ideo illa distinctio causae in causam proprie et causam sine qua non non videtur subsistere. . . . Illa ratio videtur mihi fortis et satis probabiliter concludere quod, si Deus determinaret se, quod ab hac die ad prolationem alicuius verbi a quocumque prolati velit dare pluviam, verbum illud iam prolatum proprie esset causa pluviae ad eius prolationem a Deo causatae sicut calor est causa caloris.

Ockham, *Reportatio* IV, q. 1 (OTh VII, 12): Ideo ad quaestionem primo praemittam unam distinctionem propter dicta Sanctorum et auctorum. Quia causa, cum sit illud ad cuius esse sequitur aliud, dupliciter potest accipi. Uno modo quando ex natura rei ad praesentiam et esse unius sequitur naturaliter esse alterius. Alio modo quando ad esse unius sequitur esse alterius ex sola voluntate alterius. Et isto modo dicimus quod actus meritorius dicitur causa respectu praemii ex sola voluntate divina. Et causa sine qua non dicitur secundo modo causa.

Pierre d’Ailly, *In Sent.* IV, q. 1, a. 1 (Strasbourg ed., fol. 32ra): Quia videtur quod omne illud quo posito ponitur aliud sit proprie causa illius; nam de ratione cause proprie dicte non est quod ad ipsam necessario sequatur effectus aut quod non possit poni sine ipsa, quia ignis est proprie causa caloris et tamen non necessario sed mere contingenter ad ignem sequitur calor, sicut patuit de igne trium puerorum in fornace. Similiter calor etiam igne presente potest produci igne nihil causante, sicut patet si Deus se solo produceret calorem suspendendo actionem ignis presentis. Igitur ad hoc quod aliquid sit proprie causa alterius sufficit quod ipso posito ponatur illud et ipso non posito non ponatur. Sed sic est de sacramentis respectu gratiae, etc., igitur etc.

6. The fourth proposition is that no secondary cause is a proper cause of some effect, nor is some effect follows from some secondary cause by the nature of the thing in such a way that from the cause the effect necessarily follows or that the effect necessarily presupposes that cause; rather, the effect follows from the secondary cause merely contingently and the secondary cause precedes its effect merely contingently. The fifth proposition: that notwithstanding the aforesaid, some secondary efficient cause is proper cause in such a way that it produces the effect by its proper power. . . . that is by the power which is in it.
7. We also should not imagine that there is some medium between the immediate cause and the effect, in virtue of which it is said to cause, or that this cause transfers something from itself to the effect or something similar. But to cause is this: that to the mere presence of a thing another thing starts to exist or be.
8. The power to cause some effect is in the first cause fully and sufficiently, and is in no created thing fully and sufficiently, unless inasmuch as the first cause. . . freely and contingently willed and determined himself that to the presence of this thing he will produce that effect. For instance: that fire or heat is the cause of heat, is for this reason, that God determined himself so that to the presence of the heat he wills to produce the heat in the other subject. Thus, the heat is not a cause of heat by any other power existing in it. . . . And if God did not determine it this way, then the same heat. . . . would be heat and would not be the cause of heat. Whence God produces nothing by the secondary cause that he does not produce principally in the same way and not less as if only he produced it.
9. It seems that even now in fact a fire produces heat without a subject, and, consequently, creates. The antecedent is clear from the sacrament of the altar. If fire is applied to the consecrated chalice, it produces heat, as it appears to the senses, and this heat is not in a subject. . . . To the senses it appears that to the presence of the fire heat follows. And we do not deny this. But whether that heat follows by the action of the fire or by that of God alone, does not appear to the senses. And because of this, the one who denies the action of the fire, does not deny anything that appears to the senses.

Pierre d'Ailly, *ibid.* (Strasbourg ed., fol. 32ra):  
 Quarta propositio est quod nulla causa secunda sic est proprie causa alicuius effectus nec aliquis effectus sic ex natura rei sequitur ex aliqua causa secunda quod causa necessario inferatur effectum vel quod effectus necessario presupponat illam causam; immo effectus pure contingenter sequitur ex secunda et secunda causa pure contingenter antecedit effectum suum. Quinta propositio: quod non obstantibus predictis aliqua causa efficiens secunda sic est proprie causa quod ipsa agit effectum virtute propria. . . id est virtute que est in ipsa.

Biel, *Coll.* IV, d. 1, p. 1, q. 1, a. 1 (Werbeck ed., 15): Nec est imaginandum quod inter causam immediatam et effectum sit aliquod medium, ratione cuius diceretur causare, aut quod ipsa causa aliquid ex se transfundat in effectum aut huiusmodi. Sed causare est ad nudam praesentiam rei aliam rem incipere vel esse.

Biel, *ibid.*, notabile 3 (Werbeck ed., 16–17):  
 Virtus causandi effectum quemcumque est plene et sufficienter in prima causa et in nulla re creata sufficienter et plene, nisi quatenus ipsa causa prima. . . libere et contingenter voluit et se determinavit, quod ad praesentiam talis rei vult producere talem effectum. Gratia exempli: Quod ignis sive calor est causa caloris, ex eo est, quia determinavit se Deus, quod ad praesentiam caloris vult producere calorem in alio subiecto. Nec sic calor habet esse causam caloris per aliquam aliam virtutem sibi in-existentem. . . . Et si non sic determinasset Deus, calor idem. . . esset calor et non esset causa caloris. Unde Deus nihil facit per causam secundam, quin illud faciat per seipsum aequae principaliter et non minus quam si solus faceret.

Biel, *ibid.*, a. 3 (Werbeck ed., 30–31): Vide-tur quod etiam nunc de facto ignis producit calorem sine subiecto, et per consequens creat. Antecedens patet in sacramento altaris. Nam si ignis applicatur calici consecrato, producit calorem, ut patet ad sensum, et iste calor non est in subiecto. . . . Ad sensum apparet quod ad praesentiam ignis incipit esse calor. Et hoc non negatur. Sed an ille calor incipiat per actionem ignis vel solius Dei, non apparet ad sensum. Et per hoc negans actionem ignis nihil negat apparens ad sensum.