

Do Causal Powers Need Final Causes?

Zita V. Tóth, KU Leuven (zita.toth@kuleuven.be)

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1. “It seems to me that everyone, by a natural impulse and by nature, accepts that the end is a cause of our operations. Thus, if you ask an old woman for what reason she goes to the church or to the market, she will tell you that in order to hear mass or to buy a tunic. . . . The difficulty is only to see how that which is nothing can be a cause of those things that exist.”

Buridan, *In Phys.* II, q. 7 (ed. Steijger et al., 295–296): Videtur mihi quod omnes instinctu naturali tamquam a natura determinati concedunt finem esse causam nostrarum operationum. Ut si petas a vetula propter quam causam vadit ad ecclesiam vel ad forum, dicit tibi quod propter audire missam vel propter emere tunicam. . . . Non restat difficultas nisi videre quomodo illud quod nihil est sit causa eorum quae sunt.
2. “Why should it be the case that paper’s power is to be burned by fire, rather than to turn into a chicken when touched by fire, or to produce the sound of C#, or to pass along the flame to the next nearest object, or whatever you like? Powers come at least in pairs. Once we add in what we used to think of as background conditions. . . we find that the situation becomes all the more puzzling. For it is not just two powers that have to co-occur; now there’s an indefinitely large number of powers in play, all perfectly—and perfectly mysteriously—suited to their roles. Oxygen has the power to be consumed by flame and to enable it to do its work. It does not have the power, upon encountering the flame, to glow iridescent pink. And on and on. . . . It is no good insisting that the powers obviously do fit. The question is, in virtue of what?” (Walter Ott, “The Case against Powers,” in *Reconsidering Causal Powers: Historical and Conceptual Perspectives*, ed. Benjamin Hill, Henrik Lagerlund, and Stathis Psillos (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 149–167, at 156.)
3. “Imagine a heavy rock with the power to smash a particular martini glass. The powers of the rock (r) are such that when it impacts on the martini glass (m) with a certain high velocity (v) it will result in a state of affairs that is or includes m ’s being smashed. However, m ’s powers are such that if struck by r at v , m emits a loud ‘ping’ but does not break. Now imagine that we strike m with r at v . What happens? Does m shatter—as was r ’s power, does m remain intact, and emit a loud ping sound—as was m ’s power, or does nothing occur, because the two powers do not fit? The answer: none of the above” (Neil E Williams, “Puzzling Powers: The Problem of Fit,” in *The Metaphysics of Powers: Their Grounding and Their Manifestations*, ed. Anna Marmodoro (London: Routledge, 2010), 84–105, at 91).
4. “If the agent were not determined to some effect, then it would not act towards that rather than towards another: therefore, in order that it would produce a determinate effect, it is necessary that it be determined to a specific something, which has the nature [ratio] of an end. This determination in the rational nature is by the rational appetite, which is called will, and so too in others is by natural inclination, which is called natural appetite.”

Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II.1.2.co: Si enim agens non esset determinatum ad aliquem effectum, non magis ageret hoc quam illud: ad hoc ergo quod determinatum effectum producat, necesse est quod determinetur ad aliquid certum, quod habet rationem finis. Haec autem determinatio, sicut in rationali natura fit per rationalem appetitum, qui dicitur voluntas; ita in aliis fit per inclinationem naturalem, quae dicitur appetitus naturalis.
5. “For teeth and all other natural things either invariably or for the most part come about in a given way; but of not one of the results of chance or spontaneity is this true. We do not ascribe to chance or mere coincidence the frequency of rain in winter, but frequent rain in summer we do; nor heat in summer but only if we have it in winter. If then, it is agreed that things are either the result of coincidence or for the sake of something.”

Arist., *Phys.* II.8, 198b34–199a5 (tr. Hardie and Gaye).

6. “There is a proportion between matter and form because there is an order such that matter is perfected by form, and it is according to a proportionality. For just as form is able to give being, so too matter is able to receive that same being. In this way also the mover and the moved have a proportionality, and also the agent and the patient, so that just as an agent is able to impress some effect, so is the patient able to receive the same.”
7. “Those things, however, that do not have cognition, do not tend towards an end unless directed by another, knowing and intelligent; just as the arrow [is directed] by the archer. Therefore, there is something intelligent, by which all natural things are ordained to the end; and we call this God.”
8. “For it is necessary that everything that naturally tends towards something else had this direction from something else directing it to the end; otherwise it would tend towards it by chance. Now in natural things we find a natural appetite by which each thing tends towards its own end – and from this it follows that we have to posit, above all natural things, some intellect, which ordained natural things to their ends, and endowed them with their natural inclination.”

Aquinas, *In Sent.* III.1.1.1.ad3: Sicut dicimus esse proportionem inter materiam et formam, quia materia se habet in ordine ut perficiatur per formam, et hoc secundum proportionalitatem quamdam. Quia sicut forma potest dare esse, ita materia potest recipere idem esse. Et hoc modo etiam movens et motum debent esse proportionalia, et agens et patiens, ut scilicet sicut agens potest imprimere aliquem effectum, ita patiens possit recipere eundem. (Cf. , 38.)

Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I.2.3.co: Ea autem quae non habent cognitionem, non tendunt in finem nisi directa ab aliquo cognoscente et intelligente, sicut sagitta a sagittante. Ergo est aliquid intelligens, a quo omnes res naturales ordinantur ad finem: et hoc dicimus Deum.

Aquinas, *De veritate*, 2.3: [O]mne enim quod naturaliter in alterum tendit, oportet quod hoc habeat ex aliquo dirigente ipsum in finem, alias casu in illud tenderet; in rebus autem naturalibus invenimus naturalem appetitum quo unaquaeque res in finem suum tendit, unde oportet supra omnes res naturales ponere aliquem intellectum, qui res naturales ad suos fines ordinaverit, et eis naturalem inclinationem sive appetitum indiderit; sed res non potest ordinari ad finem aliquem, nisi res ipsa cognoscatur simul cum fine ad quem ordinanda est. . .