



From Aristotle's Four Causes to Aquinas' Ultimate Causes of Being: Modern Interpretations

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In the concluding chapter of his *The Metaphysics of Being of St. Thomas Aquinas in a Historical Perspective*, Leo Elders deals with Aristotle's four causes and determines that the study of material causality has no place at all in Thomistic metaphysics.¹ He allows, though, that in metaphysics there are forms of causality that are analogous to material causality: the potentiality of substance with regard to its accidents, of a faculty with regard to its action, and of essence with regard to being.²

This insight, in my opinion, needs to be pursued further, and there is a need to distinguish more precisely physical causality and metaphysical causality in both Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. The analogical nature of the four causes and Aristotle's distinction between causality in the *Physics* and causality in the *Metaphysics* has been studied extensively by Enrico Berti in *Aristotele: Dalla dialettica alla filosofia prima* (1977)³. After summarizing some of Berti's conclusions, we can proceed to Aquinas' metaphysical thought on causality,

¹ See L. ELDERS, *The Metaphysics of Being of St. Thomas Aquinas in a Historical Perspective*, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1993, 293.

² Ibid.

³ It is one of the few treatises that attempts a global consideration of Aristotelian causality.

aided initially by some insights in Jan A. Aertsen's *Nature and Creature* (1988).

1. Aristotelian Causality according to Enrico Berti

Wisdom, Aristotle determines, is knowledge of the first principles and causes. The principles that are sought by a philosopher must be contraries. The first contrary principles cannot stem from something else, nor can they derive from one another; furthermore, the contraries that explain movement must be opposites within the same genus and oppose one another according to privation (determinate opposition). The passage from one contrary to another, in a movement, is proper to a third principle, the subject or substrate (*hypokeimenon*).⁴

Particular determinations of the two contrary principles and their substrate occurs in works like *On Generation and Corruption*, where Aristotle argues that the four elements are the result of combination of contraries (fire: hot-dry; air: hot-wet; water: cold-wet; earth: cold-dry) that inhere in a common, originary substrate, known as "prime matter". The *Physics* takes a broader view and seeks to explain what it means to be a principle and what renders "change" intelligible.⁵ Whether we are dealing with a change of a substance according to quality, quantity or place, or with a substantial change, we are able to identify a substrate (matter) and two contraries (form and privation). These three principles are the *necessary* principles of change, but do not *sufficiently* explain what effects the change (agent cause) and the "why" of the change (final cause).⁶ By adding these two extrinsic causes – agent and final – Aristotle determines that there are four causes sought by the philosopher:

- [1] Matter: that out of which something is generated;
- [2] Form or model: the *logos* (definition) of the essence;
- [3] Moving cause: the first principle of movement or rest;
- [4] End: that for the sake of which the movement occurs.⁷

⁴ See E. BERTI, *Aristotele: Dalla dialettica alla filosofia prima con saggi intergrativi*, Bompiani, Milan 2004, 368-70.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 370-71.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 378-79.

⁷ See ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, II, 3, 194 b 23-25; *Metaphysics*, V, 2, 1013 a 24-35.

1.1 Aristotle's First Causes of Movement

The analogical and instrumental aspects of Aristotle's doctrine of four causes allows for a multiplicity of particular sciences. Having "science" of something means knowing its first causes – determining the causes by which it is what it is, articulating the why of its being or becoming, and delineating its properties. Berti points out that in its study of mobile being, the *Physics* refers to material being, and thus the study of *immaterial* separate forms belongs to another science, called "first philosophy" (*Physics*, II, 194 b 13-15). The immateriality of immobile substance leads to a threefold distinction between: *terrestrial physics* that studies mobile, corruptible, terrestrial substance; *celestial physics* that studies mobile, incorruptible, celestial substance; and *first philosophy* that studies immobile, incorruptible substance.

The last two books of the *Physics* move from a general consideration of movement to the determination of its causes and, in particular, to its foundation in the first moving cause. The argument of Book Seven for the first moving cause contains three propositions: 1) everything that is moved is moved by another; 2) one cannot go to infinity in the series of movers moved by another; and 3) there should be a first mover that is immobile. The first proposition is argued for by showing that even in those beings that move themselves – living beings, for example – there is still a part that is moved and a part that moves. The second proposition is demonstrated by the impossibility of an infinite series of moved movers or an infinite, simultaneous movement in a finite time. The argument of Book Seven, Berti opines, proves to be unsatisfactory due to the heterogeneousness of the different types of movement. That is why Book Eight takes a different approach and starts from a global consideration of movement in the cosmos, inquiring whether this can depend on a moved mover or whether it demands an immobile mover. This global consideration finds expression in the doctrine of the eternity of movement.⁸ The first immobile mover, Aristotle argues, is the direct cause of a unique circular eternal movement, that of the first heaven, and the indirect cause of a multiplicity of other movements. The eternal movements of the

⁸ See E. BERTI, *Aristotele*, 422.

sun and planets are the result of a multiplicity of circular motions that are effected by spheres that have the same center but diverse axes.⁹

With regard to material causality, the simple elements are associated with their natural movements: earth and water naturally move downwards; those of fire and air naturally move upwards. A fifth element, ether, is introduced to explain the circular movement of the heavens. Unlike the heavens, the four terrestrial elements are subject to all forms of movement, including generation and corruption. This leads Aristotle to posit a first or prime matter (substrate: *hypo-keimonon*), common to the four terrestrial elements.¹⁰

The first final cause of the heavens consists in fulfilling that movement that is proper to them according to the different degrees of perfection that they possess. The ultimate end of the terrestrial bodies, according to local motion, is their natural place: the center of the universe for earth, etc... According to the other types of movements, the ultimate end is found in the realization of the conditions that the element should have to be that which it effectively is, or, in other words, the realization of its being, of its form¹¹. In this case, there is an end that is diverse for each element, and identical only in an analogous sense. Their end is always constituted by their form and species (*eidos*), which is expressed in the definition of each.

Aristotelian Physical Causality		
	Terrestrial	Celestial
First material cause	Four elements / prime matter	Ether / prime matter
First moving cause	Generation and corruption effected by celestial movement	First immobile mover causes circular move- ment of heavens
First formal and final cause ¹²	Local movement: natural place Other movements: realization of its form	Circular local movement

⁹ Ibid., 431.

¹⁰ Ibid., 441.

¹¹ Ibid., 444.

¹² On the coincidence of formal and final causality (*Physics*, II, 198 a 23-26), Aquinas writes: "This must be understood to apply to the final cause of generation, not, however, to the final cause of the thing generated. For the end of generation of man is the human form, but

1.2 Aristotle's First Causes of Being

Two types of substances go beyond the domain of *Physics*: the immobile mover of the heavens and the active intellect.¹³ Their existence means that physics is not the supreme science and that, after its study of mobile being, it gives way to a higher, universal science that has being as being as its subject-matter. The various meanings of being are ordered to that of substance (*ousia*) and, consequently, Aristotle's first philosophy seeks the first causes of substance.¹⁴ Books VII and VIII of the *Metaphysics* deal with sensible substance and Books XII-XIV deal with supersensible substance as cause of sensible substance.¹⁵ First philosophy deals with sensible mobile substance, not insofar as it is mobile, but insofar as it is substance. In the determination of what substance is, Book VII offers three possible candidates: substance is either essence (*to ti en einai*), the universal or genus, or the substrate.¹⁶ After settling on the first candidate, Book VIII examines the first causes of substance according to the four types of causes.

Berti argues that, for Aristotle, the material cause of substance is its proximate matter, while the formal cause is its ultimate differentiation. The matter and form of a substance are the substance itself considered respectively in potency and in act. The final cause coincides with the formal cause; the moving cause makes the substance pass from potency to act. According to Berti, the introduction of a treatise on potency and act in Book Nine facilitates the passage from a static consideration of substance (material cause and formal cause) to a dynamic consideration of substance.¹⁷ Here Aristotle intends potency not in relation to operation and change, but as "being in potency": potency as a fundamental meaning of being, present in all the categories.

The three genera of substance are ordered in such a way that the moving cause of one substance is immutable with respect to the type of change it produces. The cause of generation and corruption can be

this form is not the end of man. Rather through this form man acts for his end" (*In II Phys.*, lect. 11, n. 242).

¹³ See E. BERTI, *Aristotele*, 457.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 463. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, IV, 2 1003 b 16-19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 474.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 476. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, VII, 3 1028 b 33-36.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 485-486.

subject to other movements, to local movement, but is immutable with respect to generation and corruption.¹⁸ This implies that the cause of eternal, local movement must be immutable with respect to this same movement: in fact, it is immune from any form of movement and is pure act.¹⁹ Hence, the doctrine of potency and act allows the philosopher to reach the heights of the Aristotelian science of being and to determine that there is a substance totally in act and totally immobile, and this is the first cause of substance. Since the transmission of movement to the first heaven cannot be accomplished through contact with the substance of the first heaven, Aristotle proposes a efficient causality for the first immobile mover similar to that exercised by an object of intelligence or desire.²⁰ Here, Berti emphasizes that the first heavenly sphere does not have the first immobile mover has its end, both rather both are ends in themselves: the first heaven is said to achieve its well-being by means of its circular movement.²¹

Aristotelian Metaphysical Causality		
First causes of substance	<i>To ti en einai</i> (essence)	Proximate matter (potency) Form as ultimate differentiation (act)
Immobile substance as first cause of eternal and corruptible substances	Moving-efficient cause that moves the first heaven	Substance that is totally in act

In effect, Aristotelian physical causality and Aristotelian metaphysical causality do not reach beyond the conclusions of Aquinas' First Way (cause of movement) and Third Way (cause of movement

¹⁸ Ibid., 489.

¹⁹ Ibid., 490.

²⁰ Ibid., 499. For discussion on the causality of the First Unmoved Mover, see E. BERTI, "Da chi è amato il Motore immobile? Su Aristotele, *Metaph.* XII 6-7", *Méthexis* 10 (1997), 59-82; Ibid., "The Finality of Aristotle's Unmoved Mover in the Metaphysics Book 12, Chapters 7 and 10", *Nova et Vetera*, Eng. Ed., 10 (2012), 863-876; K. FLANNERY, "On Professor Berti's Interpretation of the Causality of the First Unmoved Mover", *Nova et Vetera*, Eng. Ed., 10 (2012), 833-861.

²¹ E. BERTI, "La causalità del Motore immobile secondo Aristotele", in *Nuovi studi aristotelici. II. Fisica, antropologia e metafisica*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2005, 461-463.

of celestial substance and cause of the generation and corruption of terrestrial substance)²². Aristotle's principles need to be "intensified" in such a way that form falls to potency with respect to the being (*esse*) of a finite substance. This intensification opens up to true metaphysical causality and to the doctrine of creation and divine governance.

2. Aquinas' Ultimate Causes of Being as Being

The distinction between physical causality and metaphysical causality in Aquinas presented very clearly in Jan A. Aertsen's *Nature and Creature*. He points to a fundamental distinction in Aquinas between the mode of becoming *per viam naturae* and "another mode of causing" *per viam creationis*.²³ Aertsen refers especially to the arguments advanced in *De substantiis separatis* regarding the cause of spiritual substances that have no matter: for it seems that only that which is composed of matter and form can come to be.²⁴ A new perspective is opened when Aquinas writes that the intellect needs to go beyond to the mode of causality suited to material things and find "another mode of causing" that does not presuppose a pre-existing subject: "Over and above the mode of becoming whereby something comes to be through change, there must be a mode of becoming or origin of things without any mutation or motion through the influx of being."²⁵ This influx of being requires a universal cause; the production of being must be determined by or contracted by the categories.

De substantiis separatis, ch. 9 presents this achievement of metaphysical thought as a passage from the problem of accidental change (and the distinction between substance and accident) to the reduction of sensible substance to matter and form, and from this to "a common resolution" of all that participates in *esse* into that which is (*quod est*) and being (*esse*). Once this resolution is accomplished, the metaphysician can approach the relationship between: 1) *esse* as actuating act; 2) *es-*

²² J. MITCHELL, "The Method of *resolutio* and the Structure of the Five Ways", *Alpha Omega* 15 (2012), 339-380.

²³ J. A. AERTSEN, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas's Way of Thought*, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1988, 92-93.

²⁴ J. AERTSEN, *Nature and Creature*, 112.

²⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *De substantiis separatis*, ch. 9, n. 95.

sence as that which specifies the act of being and intrinsically orders the created substance to a proper operation; and 3) ordered operation, which brings the created substance to its ultimate perfection. The reduction to intrinsic causes is called “*resolutio secundum rationem*”; while the reduction to extrinsic causes is called “*resolutio secundum rem*.”²⁶ The method of resolution is first applied to movement and then to being: “it is in physics that the movable is reduced to the immobile. Subsequently, the analysis must be carried on into ‘the metaphysical,’ into the consideration of being, into the unitary view of the intellect.”²⁷ The metaphysical resolution to *esse* and essence, in my opinion, needs to be extended so as to understand the operation of finite *ens*:

<i>Resolutio secundum rationem</i>				
I		II	III	
Subject	Potency	Matter	Essence	Supposit
Accident	Act	Form	Act of being	Operation

Intelligibility of the participation of finite substance in *esse* is achieved by reducing it, through extrinsic causality, to the first being: “All things which are diversified by the diverse participation of being, [...] are caused by one first Being, who is most perfectly.”²⁸ Consequently the metaphysician understands that the cause of *esse* is twofold: it is intrinsically measured by the creature’s form and extrinsically produced by God²⁹.

2.1 *Actus essendi* as actuating act and essence as specifying measure

For Jan A. Aertsen and Rudi te Velde, the structural principles of *ens* are threefold: *subiectum – essentiam – esse*.³⁰ Aertsen proposes, in

²⁶ THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Boethii De Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 1.

²⁷ J. AERTSEN, *Nature and Creature*, 255.

²⁸ J. AERTSEN, *Nature and Creature*, 118. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 44, a. 1.

²⁹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Librum de causis*, lect. 26: “Duplex est causa essendi, scilicet forma, per quam aliquid actu est et agens quod facit actu esse”.

³⁰ J. AERTSEN, *Nature and Creature*, 138. “In composed creatures is found a twofold difference (duplex differentia). For the individual subject is neither the nature of the species

accord with L.-B. Geiger's division of participation (by composition and by similitude),³¹ a twofold reduction of the subject's *esse* to the divine nature and of the subject's essence to the divine ideas: "The first is reducible to an efficient causality, the second to an exemplary causality. In the first there is an equality in the datum of being (*per participationem*), in the second a hierarchical order of grades and modes."³² Aertsen's proposal underscores two very different Thomistic conceptions of *ens* and highlights the difficulty many Thomists have faced in conceiving the essence as something that "receives being."³³ L.-B. Geiger, for example, sees *ens* as a "realized essence"³⁴ and a composition of two perfections limited by two participations: the formal perfection of essence limited by means of a participation of similitude and the existential perfection of being limited according to a participation by composition. Tomas Tyn adds to Geiger's theory that the essence is terminated and made ready for the act of being by means of the addition of subsistence to the essence³⁵.

In contrast to Geiger's proposal of a double participation and Tyn's and Aertsen's threefold ontological structuring of *ens* according to *subiectum – essentia – esse*, Cornelio Fabro holds that *ens* is a transcendental plexus of *actus essendi* as intensive emergent act and *essentia* as its specifying measure. To this A. Contat adds the aspect of the *ordo ad operationem* and the relation to final cause, consequent upon the real composition: in fact, every (finite) substance is on account of its operation.³⁶ In Fabro's conception, the formal actuality of

nor its being. *Homo enim nec est humanitas nec esse suum*. In simple substances there is only one difference, namely, that of essence and being. In God there is no distinction at all. He is his nature and his being" (p. 137). R. TE VELDE, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1995, 201: "Being, therefore, must be understood according to a threefold structure of 'subsistence-essence-act'".

³¹ L.-B. GEIGER, *La participation dans la philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin*, J. Vrin, Paris 1953, 27-29.

³² J. A. AERTSEN, *Nature and Creature*, 185.

³³ R. TE VELDE, *Participation and Substantiality*, 148-154. "A thing distinct from God cannot be conceived as a being unless the *esse* is received in something and thereby contracted. This 'received' should be understood in a strictly formal sense. There can be no question of a quasi-subject which in a certain sense already 'is' before it has received *esse*".

³⁴ H. JOHN, *The Thomist Spectrum*, Fordham University Press, New York 1966, 108-122.

³⁵ T. TYN, *Metafisica della sostanza. Partecipazione e analogia entis*, Fede e cultura, Verona 2009.

³⁶ See A. CONTAT, "Esse, essentia, ordo. Verso una metafisica della partecipazione operativa", *Espiritu* 61 (2012), 24. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, ch. 45.

the essence stems from the founding actuality of *esse*, and by means of the substance, *esse* actuates the accidental forms and activity of the *suppositum*.³⁷

One of the true dividing lines, then, in Twentieth-century Thomism is not just the epistemological problem of how and when is the real distinction demonstrated, but rather how the relationship between essence and *actus essendi* is understood and articulated, what role is given to each principle, and what complements the real composition (*subiectum*, *subsistentia*, *ordo*, etc.). From the answers to these structural problems stem the different Thomistic theories concerning causality, creation and participation. Geiger's theory, for example, tends to relate the creature to God through the potency-principle and a relation of exemplarity; Fabro's theory, on the other hand, relates the creature to God through the act-principle and integrates exemplarity into structural and dynamic transcendental participation.³⁸

Accepting Fabro's line of interpretation ultimately means: accepting the distinction between *esse ut actus* (that by which the substance is) and *esse in actu* (result of the composition of essence and *actus essendi*); understanding *inesse* and *subsistentia* as instances of *esse in actu*, as the accidental and substantial modes of being;³⁹ accounting for the limitation of the created essence by holding that it is limited in itself (not by itself) and that it pertains to a genus according to predicamental participation;⁴⁰ and seeing *actus essendi* as *fixum et quietum* in *ens*, yet also as *virtus essendi*, the actuating capacity of *esse* itself.⁴¹

Expounding the notion of *virtus essendi* in Aquinas, Fran O'Rourke notes that Fabro's theory of intensive, emergent *esse*, could have benefited from the notion of *quantitas virtualis*.⁴² For Aquinas, *virtus* expresses the perfection of a power in relation to its end (*in or-*

³⁷ See A. CONTAT, "Esse, essentia, ordo...", 36.

³⁸ See C. FABRO, *Partecipazione e causalità*, EDIVI, Segni 2010, 639-646.

³⁹ See A. CONTAT, "Le figure della differenza ontologica nel tomismo del Novecento (seconda parte)", *Alpha Omega* 11 (2008), 241-246.

⁴⁰ See C. FABRO, "La determinazione dell'atto nella metafisica tomistica", in *Esegesi Tomistica*, PUL, Rome 1969, 336-338.

⁴¹ A. CONTAT, "Esse, essentia, ordo...", 46.

⁴² F. O'ROURKE, "Virtus essendi: Intensive Being in Pseudo-Dionysius and Aquinas", *Dionysius* 15 (1991), 43: "Cornelio Fabro does not seem to have exploited the wide wealth of texts by Aquinas on virtual quantity and the connection between *virtus* and intensity".

dine ad suum finem).⁴³ *Virtus* is thus the utmost to which a power can attain. *Virtus essendi*, O'Rourke concludes, is applicable to a being's act of being, its essence, and its operation. In this conception, the essence, as a mode of being, determines the nature of *ens* and measures and specifies the virtual quantity of being.⁴⁴ The act of being, as actuating act, is the wellspring which continually nurtures *ens* in all its activity.⁴⁵ Through the mediation of the substantial form, faculties, habits and accidents, *virtus essendi* becomes *virtus operandi*.

In conclusion, Aristotelian intrinsic causality, at a truly metaphysical level, is transformed such that the actuating act of created substance is no longer the form-in-act, but rather participated *actus essendi*; second, the essence falls to a potency principle that limits and specifies *actus essendi*; third, this real composition instills a teleology within *ens* and orders and directs it from within to its proper operation and ultimate end.⁴⁶

2.2 Triadic Structure of Divine Causality

The Five Ways of Thomas Aquinas lead to God as the ultimate cause of the motion of the creature (First Way), of the form of the creature (Third Way), of the participated being and perfection of the creature (Fourth Way) and of the ordering and governing of the creature to its end (Fifth Way). So, while physics arrives to the ultimate efficient cause of the motion of material being, metaphysics sees, in a superior fashion, that every finite *ens*, including spiritual beings, is mobile in an analogous way and ultimately moved by the first unmoved mover, whose substance is identical to its act. Furthermore, unlike the philosophy of nature, which does not consider the production of prime matter, metaphysics applies the following principle to prime matter: "from the fact that something has being by participation, it follows that it is caused by another"⁴⁷. Thus, prime matter, insofar as it

⁴³ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 55, a. 1.

⁴⁴ F. O'ROURKE, "*Virtus Essendi...*", 38-39.

⁴⁵ F. O'ROURKE, "*Virtus Essendi...*", 70-71.

⁴⁶ A. CONTAT, "*Esse, essentia, ordo...*", 60.

⁴⁷ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 44, a. 1 ad 1.

participates in the being of the substantial form, is caused by that which is *Esse per essentiam*⁴⁸.

The nature of the first cause can in no way be composed, imperfect, finite, mobile or divided. These are the conclusions of the *via remotionis*⁴⁹. At the same time, according to the *via eminentiae*, God is his being and his essence, is maximally one, is diverse from all other beings, is the *Prima veritas*, and is the *Summum bonum*. God's intellectual and voluntary action – due to his simplicity, perfection and immobility – is really identical to his being and substance and in no way is in potency. God knows all things other than himself by knowing himself and loves all things other than himself by loving himself. Lastly, God's active power is identical to himself and extends to all things that are not impossible in themselves⁵⁰.

R. te Velde, in *Aquinas on God*, rightly insists on Aquinas' triadic structure of divine causality: "The aspect of *production* is unmistakably associated with the efficient cause (*causa efficiens*); the *distinction* refers to the extrinsic formal cause (*causa exemplaris*), and the couple *preservation/government* is related to the final cause (*causa finalis*)."⁵¹

Aristotle described efficient causality in terms of movement. Aquinas goes beyond this and proposes an efficient causality as *productio ex nihilo*. This corresponds to a third "degree" of causality, above univocal and equivocal causality: "The univocal agent is cause merely of becoming, the celestial body also of being, since it is cause of the form as such. Now that the analysis has been brought to a more universal level, it must be said that only the first cause is really 'cause of being'"⁵². From the beginning of his career, Aquinas emphasized the intertwining of efficient and exemplar causality in the production of created being: "For efficient exemplar causality extends only to those things that actually participate in the form of their exemplar cau-

⁴⁸ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 44, a. 2.

⁴⁹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, ch. 14.

⁵⁰ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 25, a. 1: "In Deo maxime sit potentia activa".

⁵¹ R. TE VELDE, *Aquinas on God*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2006, 125-126. Francisco Suárez takes a notably different approach and deals with creation, conservation and divine concurrence as instances of efficient causality and then proceeds to final and exemplar causality.

⁵² J. AERTSEN, *Nature and Creature*, 313.

se”⁵³. God is the efficient cause, “inasmuch as an effect is produced in us by his operative power: and he is their exemplary cause, inasmuch as what we receive from him, reflects him in some way”⁵⁴.

God simultaneously gives and produces *esse* and that which receives *esse*.⁵⁵ Consequently, *esse* and *essentia* are not produced separately, but rather are concreated. God is the efficient composing-cause of this composite of being and essence.⁵⁶ Having been produced by God, the creature is constituted in a real relation of dependence on God. For Aquinas, this is a predicamental relation, that according to its *ratio* precedes the creature and that according to its *esse* is posterior to the creature.

In his *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* (2008), Gregory Doolan makes an important distinction between divine exemplarity according to the divine nature and divine exemplarity according to the divine ideas. This twofold exemplarity ultimately allows the metaphysician to establish the ultimate foundation for the real composition of essence and *esse* in beings by participation⁵⁷.

An exemplar idea is not entirely reducible to the species of formal causality: it is a productive idea and its causality entails both efficient causality – because the exemplar’s causality is caused by the efficient cause – and final causality – because the exemplar must first motivate the intention of the agent for him to produce his work.⁵⁸ The divine idea is the divine essence as terminus of divine knowledge inasmuch as God knows his essence according to its imitability: “Insofar as creatures imitate the divine essence, they must resemble in some respect the infinite act of being (*esse*)”⁵⁹. As exemplary cause, God’s

⁵³ THOMAS AQUINAS, *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 3 ad 2.

⁵⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra Gentiles*, IV, ch. 21: “In causam quidem efficientem, in quantum virtute operativa divina aliquid in nobis efficitur. In causam quidem exemplarem, secundum quod id quod in nobis a Deo est, aliquo modo Deum imitatur”.

⁵⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Potentia*, q. 3, a. 1 ad 17: “Deus simul dans esse, producit id quod esse recipit: et sic non oportet quod agat ex aliquo praeexistenti”.

⁵⁶ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, ch. 18: “Componens autem est causa efficiens compositi”.

⁵⁷ G. DOOLAN, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, CUA Press, Washington DC 2008, 222.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

divine exemplar ideas measure and diversify the nature of the creature, which, in turn, limits and specifies created *esse*⁶⁰.

As final cause, God creates in order to communicate his goodness and to manifest his glory. All creatures are ordered to God and return to God in different ways: God moves and governs the creature to their ultimate end in accordance with their natures. Irrational creatures tend to God by participating in his goodness and by way of assimilation. Only spiritual creatures are able to return perfectly to God since they are able to be united to God through knowledge and love. They reach God, participating in his beatitude and according to operation⁶¹.

Conclusion

Rather than try to make metaphysics conform to the precise structure of the four Aristotelian causes, material and formal causality should be seen by the metaphysician along the path of *resolutio secundum rationem*. The resolutions of accidental change and substantial change and their consequent distinctions, all proper to the philosophy of nature and the consideration of *ens mobile*, are surpassed at a metaphysical level. The result of this leads to the determination of the real distinction between essence and *actus essendi* and to the metaphysical consideration of the ordered operation of the finite substance. The essence, as *potentia essendi*, said to receive the act of being and, in this way, is similar, to a material cause; yet, at the same time, it determines the act-principle it receives and, consequently, exercises a formal causality. The act of being is the actuating act of the finite being and is the source of its perfection and second act (operation).

With regard to extrinsic causes the efficient cause is not only that which moves an existing potency to act (Aristotle), but also that which produces *ex nihilo* the act (*actus essendi*) and that which receives the act (*potentia essendi*), ordering finite *ens* to its ultimate end. Exemplar causality explains both the imitation of the divine nature by the created *ens* and the measuring influence of the divine exemplar ideas on the individual creature's essence and separable accidents. Final causa-

⁶⁰ THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Potentia*, q. 3, a. 16 ad 4: "Oportet autem illud quod est causa entis in quantum est ens, esse causam omnium differentiarum entis, et per consequens totius multitudinis entium." See also *In Librum de causis*, lect. 24.

⁶¹ See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Compendium theologiae*, I, ch. 103 - 107.

lity, at the metaphysical level, is seen against the backdrop of God's free decision to create and in the context of the realization of God's providential plan (*ratio ordinis rerum in finem*). The creature is ordered to God as final end and moved and governed by God in accord with its nature.

These distinctions and the different interpretations of the relationship between the causes of being as being allow us to see how Thomistic metaphysical causality surpasses that of Aristotle. In summary, this causality is as follows.

Thomistic Metaphysical Causality	
Intrinsic actuating act	Creature's participated act of being: the act-principle that actuates the entire substance, its accidental forms, and operation
Intrinsic specifying measure	Creature's substantial essence: the potency-principle that determines and specifies the act of being
Order to operation	Natural creatures are ordered to their proper operation and to man as the terminus of all generation (<i>Summa contra Gentiles</i> , III, ch. 22) Spiritual creatures are <i>naturally</i> ordered to their proper operation and to the beatific vision of the divine essence; they are <i>sufficiently</i> ordered to this vision by grace
Efficient cause	Divine power insofar as it produces <i>ex nihilo</i> the act of being and that which receives the act of being Divine power insofar as it moves the creature, reducing it from potency to act
Exemplar cause	Divine nature insofar as it is imitated by the creature insofar as the creature is in act Divine exemplar idea that measures the creature's essence and separable accidents
Final cause	Divine governance: effective realization of the plan of divine providence; spiritual creatures participate in this knowledge and governance End of creation: the communication of divine goodness and the manifestation of divine glory

Summary: Over time, Aristotle's theory of four causes lost some of their original flexibility as an instrument to be applied analogically in diverse sciences. Enrico Berti's distinction between physical and metaphysical causality in Aristotle provides insight into overcoming this crystallization. More importantly, the novelty of Aquinas' metaphysics of *actus essendi* calls for a revision of the four causes: first, *actus essendi* is presented as actuating act and the source of the finite being's ordered operation; the substantial essence falls to potency and specifies the act of being; the efficient cause is the power of God insofar as he produces and moves the creature; divine exemplar causality is twofold (divine ideas as extrinsic measuring causes and divine nature as imitated); the final causality concerns both the order and the governance of the world. In this paper, then, I outline this analogical passage from Aristotle's physical causality to Aquinas' metaphysical causality in reference to their modern interpreters, like Enrico Berti and Jan A. Aertsen.

Sommario: Col tempo, la teoria di Aristotele delle quattro cause ha perso un po' della sua flessibilità originaria come uno strumento da essere applicato in modo analogico in diverse scienze. La distinzione fra una causalità fisica e una causalità metafisica in Aristotele fatta da Enrico Berti ci offre una via per superare questa cristallizzazione. Anzi, la novità della metafisica dell'Aquinate di *actus essendi* esige una rivisitazione delle quattro cause: in primo luogo, l'*actus essendi* si presenta come atto attuante e come la fonte dell'operazione ordinata dell'ente finito; l'essenza sostanziale cade a potenza e specifica l'atto di essere; la causa efficiente è la potenza divina in quanto produce e muove la creatura; la causalità divina esemplare è doppia (le idee divine come cause misuranti estrinseci e la natura divina come imitata); la causalità finale verte sull'ordine e sul governo del mondo. In questo articolo, quindi, presento una bozza di questo passaggio analogico dalla causalità fisica aristotelica e la causalità metafisica tomistica, facendo riferimento agli interpreti moderni, come Enrico Berti e Jan A. Aertsen.

Key words: cause, movement, substance, act of being, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, physics, metaphysics

Parole chiave: causa, movimento, sostanza, atto di essere, Aristotele, Tommaso d'Aquino, fisica, metafisica.