

# Formal Causality

The Causality of Forms Formally Causing



# Substantial Forms

- Form is a certain simple and incomplete substance which, as the actuality of matter, constitutes with it the essence of a composite substance.
  - *forma est substantia quaedam simplex et incompleta, quae ut actus materiae cum ea constituit essentiam substantiae compositae (MD XV. 5.1)*
- $x$  is a substantial form =<sub>df</sub>  $x$  is a definite, simple, and incomplete substance, which, as the actuality of matter, constitutes with it the essence of composite substance



# Three Pertinent Issues

- The formal cause, considered as a first actuality
- The requisites of formal causation
- The formal cause, considered as a second actuality



# First and Second Actuality

- First, a distinction between first and second actuality:
  - Matter is potentiality, while form is actuality (*entelecheia*); and actuality is spoken of in two ways, first as knowledge is, and second as contemplating is. (Aristotle, *De Anima* ii 1, 412a10-11)
  - Actuality (*entelecheia*) is spoken of in two ways, first as knowledge is, and second as contemplating is. Evidently, then, the soul is actuality as knowledge is. For both sleeping and waking depend upon the soul's being present; and as waking is analogous to contemplating, sleeping is analogous to having knowledge without exercising it. (Aristotle, *De Anima* ii 1 412a21-26 ; cf. 417a22-30)



# Judging by the Examples

- $x$  is potentially<sup>1</sup>  $\phi$  iff (i)  $x$  is actually- $\psi$ ; and (ii)  $x$ 's being- $\psi$  categorially grounds  $x$ 's being- $\phi$ ; and (iii) the transition from  $x$ 's not being- $\phi$  to  $x$ 's being- $\phi$  involves an instance of canonical alteration.
  - Let us say an alteration is canonical only if it involves one positive quality's being supplanted by a contrary positive quality residing along some continuous quality space.
- $x$  is actually<sup>1</sup>  $\phi$  [= being potentially<sup>2</sup>  $\phi$ ] iff (i)  $x$  is  $\phi$ ; (ii) possibly,  $x$  is not *expressing*  $\phi$ ; and (iii) when  $x$  expresses  $\phi$ , the transition from  $x$ 's not expressing  $\phi$  to  $x$ 's expressing  $\phi$  is a non-canonical alteration.
- $x$  is actually<sup>2</sup>  $\phi$  iff (i)  $x$  is actually<sup>1</sup>  $\phi$ ; and (ii)  $x$  is expressing  $\phi$  [N.b. this is not pleonastic.]
  - So:
    - a girl who has not learnt to swim is potentially<sup>1</sup> a swimmer (here she is unlike rock);
    - a girl who has learnt to swim, but is at present playing her cello is actually<sup>1</sup> a swimmer [= being potentially<sup>2</sup> a swimmer];
    - a girl who has put down her cello on the beach and has entered the sea is actually<sup>2</sup> a swimmer.



# Considered as First Actuality

- With respect to the first matter, it should be said that the principle of causing is nothing other than the nature of the form itself, which causes through itself and through its own entity, by tendering (as I might say) itself completely to the matter or the composite.
- *Quoad primum dicendum est principium causandi non esse aliud quam entitatem et naturam ipsius formae, quae per seipsam et entitatem suam causat, exhibendo (ut ita dicam) sese totam materiae seu composito. (MD XV 6.2)*



# The Requisites of Causation

- These are three:
  - With respect to the second matter, concerning the conditions necessary for the exercise of this causality, three conditions seem to be able to be assigned.
  - *Quoad secundum, de conditionibus necessariis ad haec causalitatem exercendam, tres videntur posse conditiones assignari. (MD XV 6.3)*
- The three:
  - Actual Existence
  - Intimate Presence
  - Suitability of the Matter



# Actual Existence of the Form

- The first is the actual existence of the form — concerning which it is necessary to hold the view in several different ways, following upon different views about the existence of creatures and their distinction from their essence.
- *Prima est actualis existentia ipsius formae, de qua diversimode sentiendum est iuxta diversas sententias de existentia creaturae et distinctione eius ab essentia. (MD XV 6.3)*



# Intimate Presence

- Another necessary condition can be assigned: the presence or intimate affinity of the entity of the form with the entity of the matter.
- *Altera conditio necessaria assignari potest: praesentia seu intima propinquitas entitatis formae cum entitate materiae.*  
(*MD XV 6.4*)



# Suitability of Matter

- A third condition can be assigned: an appropriate disposition on the part of the matter, which form requires of necessity in order for it be able to impart its formal effect.
- *Tertia conditio assignari potest dispositio accommodata ex parte materiae, quam necessario forma requirit ut suum effectum formalem conferre possit. (MD XV6.5)*



# Considered as Second Actuality

- With respect to the third matter, concerning the actual causality of the form itself, whatever it might be, it is not easy to explain. . .
- *Quoad tertium de causalitate actuali ipsius formae, quidnam sit, non est facile ad explicandum . . . (MD XV 6.6)*



# Still, one can say. . .

- It seems especially clear that causality of this sort is in the nature of things something distinct by nature from the entity of the form.
- *Et imprimis certum videtur huiusmodi causalitatem aliquid esse in rerum natura distinctum ex natura rei ab entitate formae. (MD XV 6.6)*
- From which it should be said that this causality can be nothing beyond the actual union of the form to the matter.
- *Deinde dicendum est hanc causalitatem nihil aliud esse posse praeter actualem unionem formae ad materiam. (MD XV.6.7)*



# . . .and also

- . . . for it is an intrinsic cause, causing through itself. In this sense, it could even be said that the causality of the form encompasses the entity of the form in itself, or that this causality is the form itself—not taken absolutely, but as united. But in this manner of speaking we find conflated the cause with the causality, and the ratio of the causing as if in the case of a first actuality with the causing, which is as if in the case of a second actuality; and it is therefore formally and more precisely said that this causality consists in the union itself.
- *. . .est enim causa intrinseca per seipsam causans. Quo sensu dici etiam posset causalitatem formae complecti in se entitatem formae, seu hanc causalitatem esse ipsam formam, non absolute sumptam, sed unitam. Sed in hoc loquendi modo confunditur causa cum causalitate et ratio causandi quasi in actu primo cum causatione, quae est quasi actus secundus, et ideo formalius et magis praecise dicitur haec causalitas in ipsa unione consistere. (MD XV 6.7)*