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*Aristotelian Explanation*

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The Four Causes

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# A Simple Claim

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‘Every human being, by nature, desires to know.’

—Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 998a

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## . . .with a Complex Pedigree

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- ❖ Every human being has a definite and identifiable nature.
- ❖ That nature is to be knowledge-seeking.
- ❖ Humans seek knowledge by seeking explanations.
- ❖ Some explanations satisfy without being good; explanations divide into the good and the bad, as well as the subjective and the objective.
- ❖ Good explanations cite causes.

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# Explanations Good and Bad

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- ❖ Two notions of explanation:
  - ❖ Subjective: satisfies a curiosity
  - ❖ Objective: provides an interest-independent account

	Good	Bad
Subjective	√	?
Objective	√	√

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# Objectively Good Explanations

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- ❖ E is an objectively good explanation of phenomenon **P** if, and only if, E captures and displays the cause(s) of **P**
- ❖ When do we know the cause of some phenomenon?
  - ❖ What *is* a cause?

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# The Kinds of Causes: Four

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**Material:** what  $x$  is made of or comes from, for example, the *bronze* in a bronze statue of Hermes.

**Formal:** the *shape* or *structure* of  $x$ , what  $x$  is essentially, for example, the *Hermes-shape* of a bronze statue of Hermes.

**Efficient:** what puts the form into the matter, for example, the *sculpting* of the sculptor Praxiteles as he enforms the bronze with a Hermes-shape.

**Final:** the purpose or end of  $x$ , for example, the bronze statue of Hermes is *for honouring Hermes*.

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# Two Claims about the Four Causes

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- ❖ Citing all four causes is necessary for a complete explanation (w/ some exceptions, including, e.g. coincidence).
- ❖ Citing all four causes is sufficient for a complete explanation.

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# On Behalf of Matter and Form

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1. There is change in the universe.
2. A necessary condition of there being change is the existence of matter and form.
3. So, there are matter and form.



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## Matter and Form: First Characterization

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- ❖  $x$  is matter  $=_{df}$   $x$  underlies change in the acquisition or loss of a form.
- ❖  $x$  is form  $=_{df}$   $x$  is a positive attribute gained or lost by matter in the process of change.

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# Soul and Body

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soul : body :: form : matter

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# The Breadth of Life

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- ❖ Crucially, the application of the form / matter distinction to the relation of soul to body is quite general: *all* living things have souls.
- ❖ This provides a kind of hierarchy:
  - ❖ Nutritive souls belong to all living things (so, e.g., my floribunda rosebush as a soul)
  - ❖ Perceptual souls belong to all animals, human and non-human alike (so, e.g., my dog Wotan has a soul)
  - ❖ Rational souls belong to human animals alone
    - ❖ Humans alone have the power to know and explain, systemically and scientifically

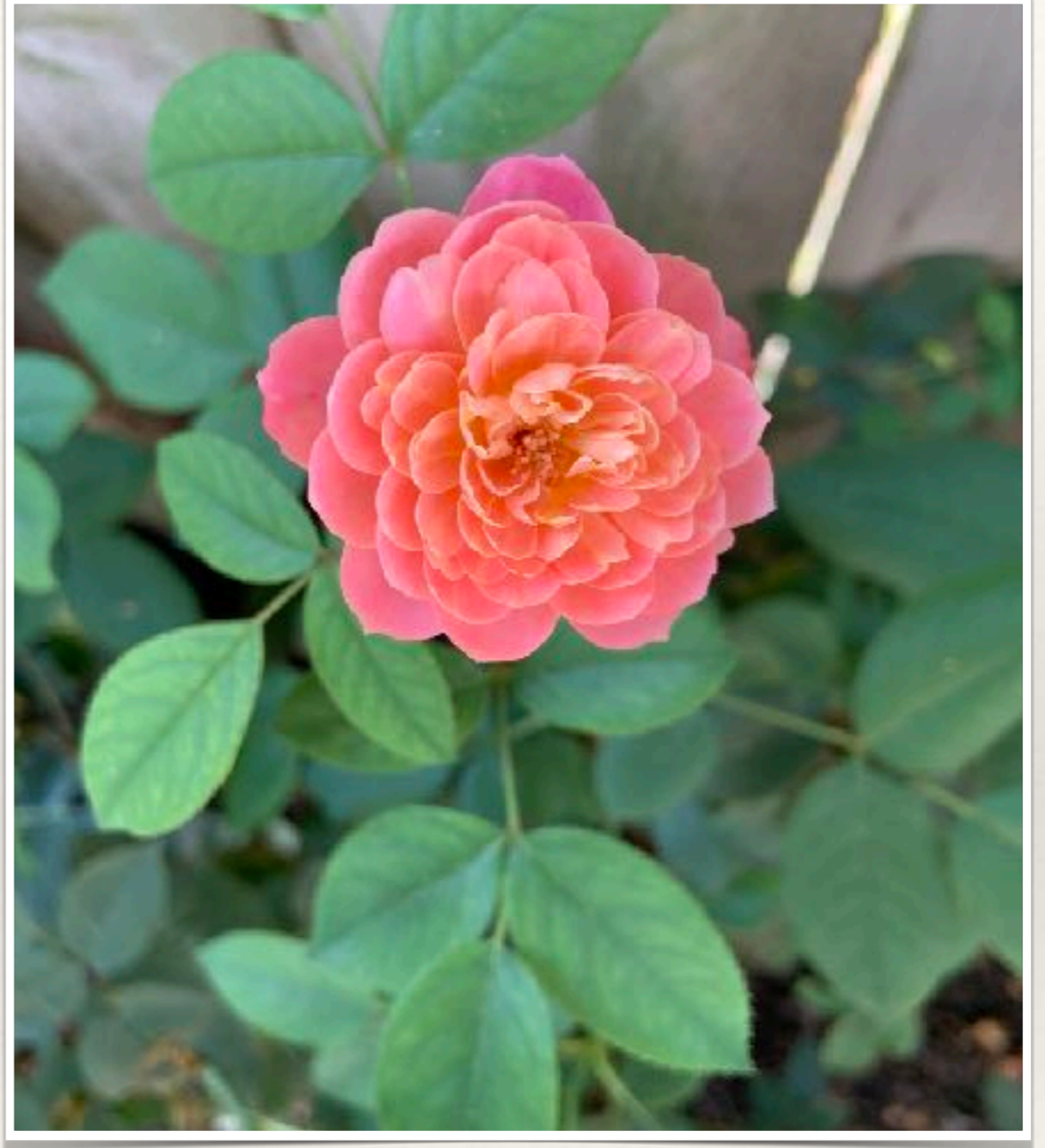
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# Nutritive Souls

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## The Four Causes:

- ❖ Material: Plant stuff
- ❖ Formal: *Rosaceae*
- ❖ Efficient: Nursery worker  
germinating seed
- ❖ Final: Flourishing in the nutritive way



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# Perceptual Souls

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The Four Causes:

- ❖ Material: Flesh and bone
- ❖ Formal: *Canis familiaris*
- ❖ Efficient: Mom and Dad dogs
- ❖ Final: Flourishing in the nutritive and perceptual way



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# Rational Souls

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## The Four Causes:

- ❖ Material: Flesh and Bone
- ❖ Formal: *Homo sapiens*
- ❖ Efficient: Mom and Dad
- ❖ Final: Flourishing in the nutritive, perceptual, and rational way

