

Metaphysics II

Acting and Activity

To effect is to cause, and to cause is
to act (*just to confuse you*)



Preliminary Ideas – activity as accidental

- We've looked at material and formal causality– exercise their causality in the very constitution of the substance
- Efficient causality was different– it was extrinsic to the effect
- But how does the agent act?
 - Efficient causality is done by an agent substance which acts.
 - The causal influence arises from the actions
 - These actions are accidents of the agent substance – they come from its potencies (*e.g. you are not always talking. You are not this action.*)
- These actions are what we call the activity of the substance

Preliminary idea: Every substance is capable of activity

- Through their activity, substances: reveal their inner perfections and thus reflect God's perfections more fully
- perfect other beings
- attain their end
- acquire relationships with one another
- [Dog playing Jenga](#)

Side note: God also exercises activity, though in his case his action is identical with his Being (because He has no accidents).



Nature of activity: actions and operations

To act = make something actual in some way (think verb, not noun)

Examples: to construct a house, write an email, come up with an idea for a song, climb a mountain

Transient Actions - *To make*

- agent affects some external object
- transitive means from the agent to the effect in something else
- perfective of others
- most part they do not perfect the agent as such

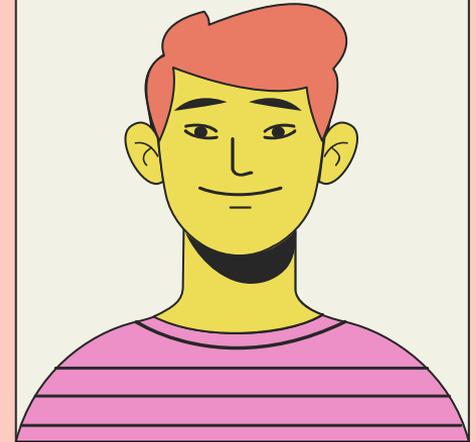
Immanent Operations - *To do*

- agent affects himself- effect remains within
- e.g understanding, watching a video, praying before the Blessed Sacrament
- activity characteristic of sensorial and intellectual life is an immanent operation
- not a proper example of efficient causality for this this reason. Better to call it a process

Transient actions often are the result of immanent operations, hence their importance.

Esse as the basis for activity

- *We have to be before we can act*
- *operari sequitur esse – acting follows on from the act of being*
 - esse is the source of the actuality of any act of the substance
 - action, means imparting one's own actuality, since any agent acts to the extent that it is actual
- Greater one's participation in esse, the more universal and more effective activity it can carry out (*e.g. holiness is power*)



Nature /Essence = principle of operations

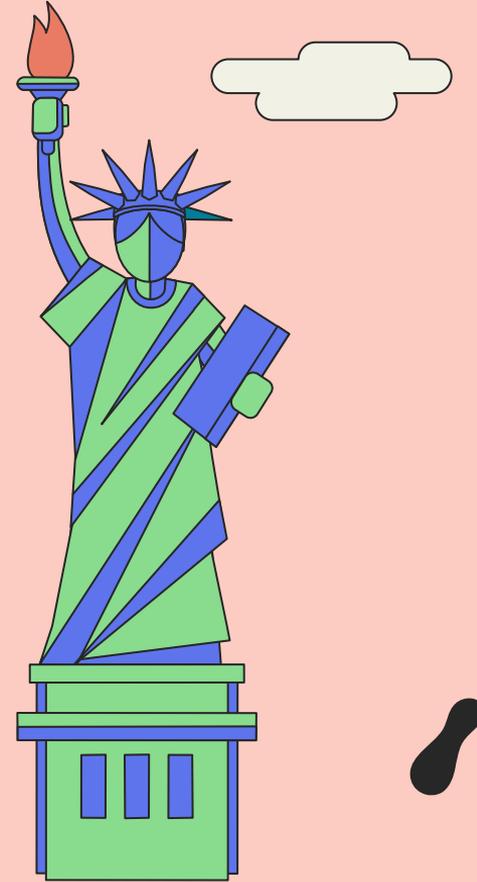
- Remember: form is the specifying principle of the substance (*thus it specifies/limits the kind of possible accidents (including actions) of the substance*)
- **The substantial form is also the specifying principle of actions and operations**
- Substances are revealed (made known to us) through their activity
 - E.g. mother walking into a rumpus room
- Nevertheless, it is the subject that acts. Neither the esse nor the essence act; rather, it is the being, the whole, composed of esse and essence, which acts. Action comes from the subsistent, not its faculties

Operative powers = proximate principles of activity

- Why do we distinguish between operative powers and substantial act?
- The multiplicity of actions in the activity of a subject cannot come from its substance directly
 - Remember first and second act?
 - **First act** = proper act of the substantial form; to actualise prime matter and makes a substance subsist. The substance, strictly speaking, is not the source (principle) of the many actions of the subject.
 - **Second act** = accidents of the substance, including the active potencies/capabilities

Activity requires Substance but they are not synonymous

- Sometimes we are in action, and sometimes not. (e.g. I am not always singing, reasoning etc.) But we recognise that the substantial form is always present, always in act. Hence the “activity” of our substantial form and the activity of our active potencies are quite different.
- We recognise that the great number and variety of actions, all very different from one another, and all with different objects and purposes, would imply that they cannot all arise in an immediate manner from one principle, but from many principles (i.e. the many operative powers we have).



**The subject acts through
its active powers which
need to be *actualised*
each time the subject
acts**

*Each time I run, sing, write, talk with
someone etc*



Therefore, operative powers = immediate (or proximate) sources of our actions

- Faculties (or operative powers) stem naturally from the substantial form; they flow from the essence
- They are accidents that always accompany a specific essence
- They draw their own capacity to act however from the actuality of the substantial form

IMPORTANT: Active powers and their corresponding actions are accidents
accident doesn't mean unimportant though!



No creature is its own activity, no matter how intimately conceived its action was.

There is a distinction between being and acting.

Distinction between Being and Acting

❑ Static Being

- ❑ Being is one
- ❑ Being is permanent and stable
- ❑ **Essence and Esse** - defining Potency/Act level

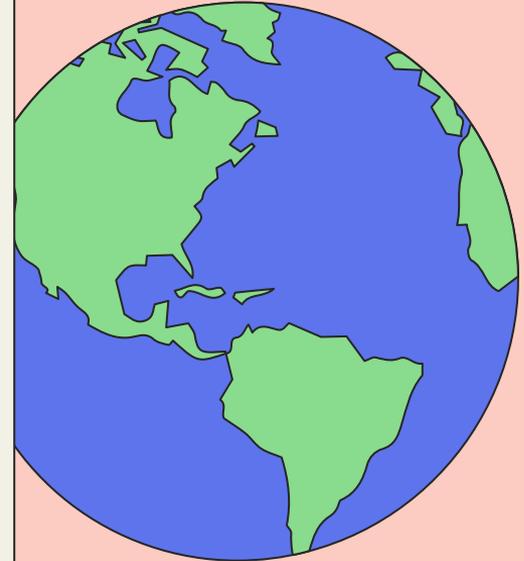
❑ Dynamic Being

- ❑ Operations are manifold
- ❑ Actions are passing
- ❑ **Substance + Accident** - defining Potency/Act level

God is the exception...Isn't he always?

Only God's operations are identical with his divine act of being

- All that God did in creation, in his dealings with men and women in the history of salvation, and all that he will do at the end of the world, he did with one giant act which is identical to His Being. All that in one act!
- God has all the perfections of Pure Act, which is not potential with respect its actions (as is the case of creatures). Creatures have to be perfected through their activity; God doesn't. He doesn't attain his end- He IS his end.



Some modern errors...

- Making ESSE identical with the operations/activity of the substance- activity is thus what is most real in them, and the true source of their perfection
- We are “self-produced” creatures: it’s not what we receive from God but what we make ourselves through our own actions. Essentially, we make ourselves God.
- Acknowledging that activity stems from the act of being, which is given to us, makes us aware that our operations must conform to a transcendent norm – a *perfected human nature*