The Nature of Causality

Overview of Today

Definition of a cause and its relationship to Esse

The difference between cause, principle, condition and occasion

Per se versus *per accidens* causality

1

2

3

4

5

Distinction between cause and effect

An introduction to the four main causes

1. Defining 'cause'

- Textbook: "that which really and positively influences a thing, making this thing dependent upon it in some way."
- "The word 'cause' implies influence on the being (esse) of the thing caused" (STA)
  - In causation, a new effect (act) comes into being. It was not....now it is. (Could be a new substance, a new accident)
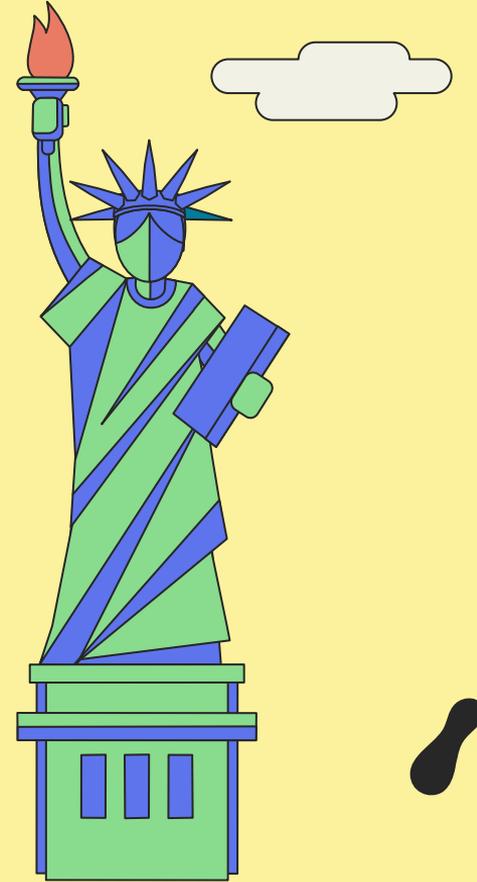
2. Cause and Effect – their distinction and interdependence

Causation is, metaphysically speaking, the conferral of being of one thing upon another, from cause to effect. *(Strictly speaking, this is for efficient causality but it also applies analogously to other causes)*

Cause → ## Effect

Cause and the effect have to be **really distinct**: otherwise a dependence would not make sense
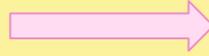
Cause
- A cause is such precisely to the extent that the effect cannot come to be or exist without it
- It is the actuality of the cause which is needed to produce the effect
- Has primacy over the effect because of priority and superiority

Effect
- The being of the effect depends on the action of the cause
- Whatever is in potency (with respect to a particular effect) must receive an act from something other than itself (from the cause).

2. Cause and Effect – their distinction and interdependence

- There is a real i**nterdependence** on the cause and effect which occur in a **correlative and simultaneous act** – the cause is a cause when it produces the effect, and the effect is an effect when it is being caused.
- E.g. A man only becomes a father when he has a child, even though he is the cause of his child. This real dependence implies that their beings are really distinct from one another.
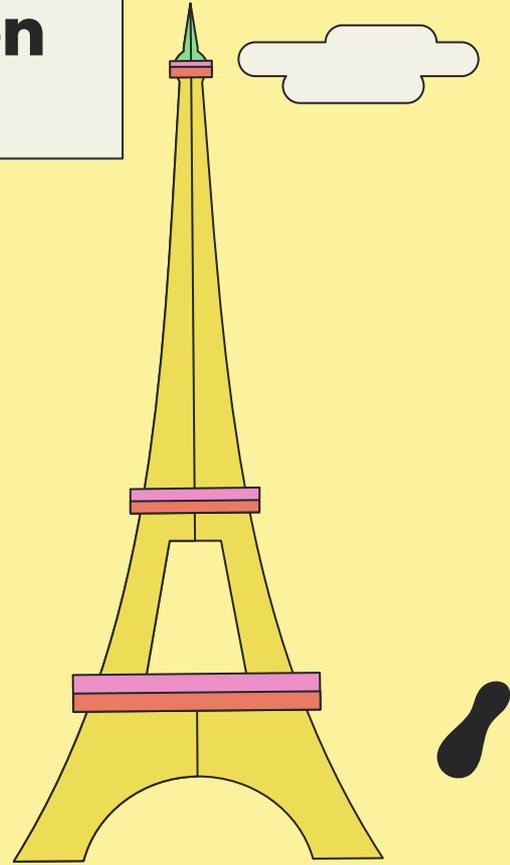
3. A CAUSE... different to a principle, condition and occasion

- Causes properly speaking have a direct influence on the being of the effect

- This distinguishes them from other realities that are connected with causality and form part of it but which are not, properly speaking, causes.
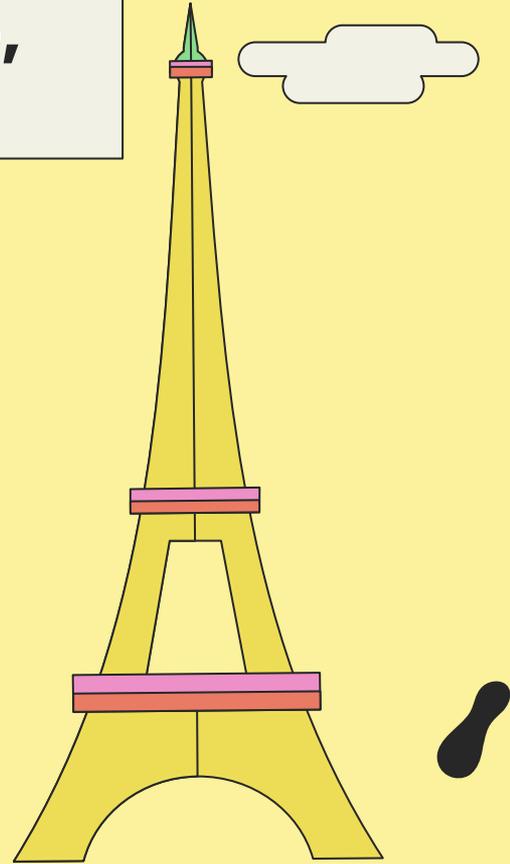
Principle – "that from which some other thing arises in any way whatsoever"

- starting point, the beginning of something (e.g. first point in a line)
- a principle does not, in virtue of being a principle, cause what follows it

Thus, **all causes are principles, but not all principles are causes**

E.g. The 3 Persons in the Trinity are *principles* of the other persons but do not cause the other persons

Condition: a pre-requisite or disposition in order to make causality take place

- either impedes or facilitates the action of the cause

- required for the effect to happen, but it does not exert a causal influence

- A *necessary* condition (i.e. essential for X to be) is called a *sine qua non*

- E.g. for gravity of earth to impart kinetic energy to an object, it must be able to free-fall

Occasion
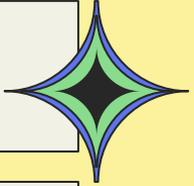
- Something whose presence favours the action of cause

- Less than a necessary condition

- E.g. Man who wants to propose wants the right time and place, a propitious occasion – an anniversary, an eclipse, a knee replacement
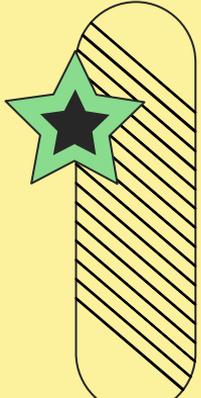
4. The Main Kinds of Causes

Intrinsic Constituent Principles:

Formal Cause

Architectural Plans

Material Cause

Wood, cement, glass etc.

Extrinsic Principles:

Efficient Cause

Construction crew, foreman etc.

Final Cause

Formation of Souls

All other causes can be reduced to one of these four.

5. Causes: Per se and Per Accidens

So far we have been considering what you might call "<u>per se</u>" proper causality:

- "Per se" causes directly (and necessarily) produce certain effects by their very nature. E.g. *action of digging is a per se cause of the effect of the hole in the ground*

(Proper means pertaining to the nature of cause (as properties flow from the essence).

However, there is also *'Improper'* per accidens causality -effects that are produced by causes in an indirect or 'accidental' way. *E.g. a treasure is found by the guy digging the hole. That action is now a per accidens cause of that effect.*