

Metaphysics II

Material and Formal Causality



Recap and Overview

Last 2 Lessons:

- **Experience of causality:** various formulations of the principle of causality, its scope
- **Nature of Causality:** definition of a cause, the distinction and interdependence between cause and effect, an intro to types of causes

Today:

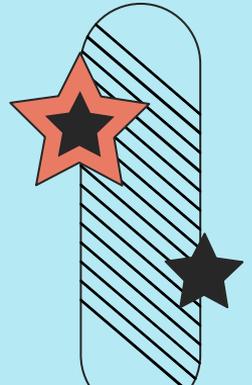
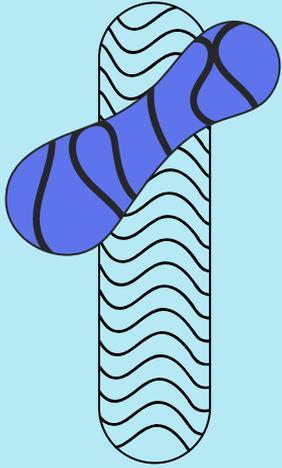
Material and formal causality

- Definition and characteristics of material causality
- Types of material causality – primary and secondary
- Explanation of formal causality
- Exemplary causes
- Relationship between material and formal causes



One axiom to remember for the lesson...

**Prime matter and
substantial form are
true causes, not just
principles**



What is a material cause?

anything *out of which* and *of/in which* something is made (ex qua et in qua aliquid fit)

- E.g. chair of wood, a statue of bronze, constituent chemicals of a molecule, prime matter
- Effect = the coming into being of the thing which is made



Characteristics of Material Causes

1

Passive potential principle: a passive potency for some kind of act

Perhaps this is different than what we said before about causality being the conferral of act from cause to effect. But we could argue that this potential to materially cause an effect is *in act* as a potential. The shape of a beautiful statue is, in some ways, contained in the shapeless block of marble.

2

Principle that remains within the effect, that is, as a constituent part of the thing coming into being

3

Indeterminate: unlike other causes it does not determine the type of effect but rather, it is determined by the formal cause

E.g. A block of stone can be any number of different final shapes. The passive potential principle is indeterminate with regard to all these possible shapes

Types of Material Causality

- Remember that causality (like Being) is **analogical** – exists at different levels
- So, what can be called a type of material cause?

Any subject or recipient (matter) of an act (form) to which it is in potency can be called a material cause

These recipients can be divided into Prime Matter and Secondary Matter

Prime Matter as Material Cause

- Remember, Prime Matter is the ultimate potential substratum = pure potency
- Fulfills the above characteristics of material causality in the fullest sense:
 1. remains in the effect
 2. eminently imperfect – can be anything
 3. what it becomes depends on form it receives.
 4. true cause because it is a principle of every corporeal being- it is something needed by the being in order to subsist.
 5. the causal character of prime matter can be clearly seen in that, in order to produce material effects, we have to start with some material thing. We act upon some material in which that effect in some manner “pre-exists”, at least potentially.

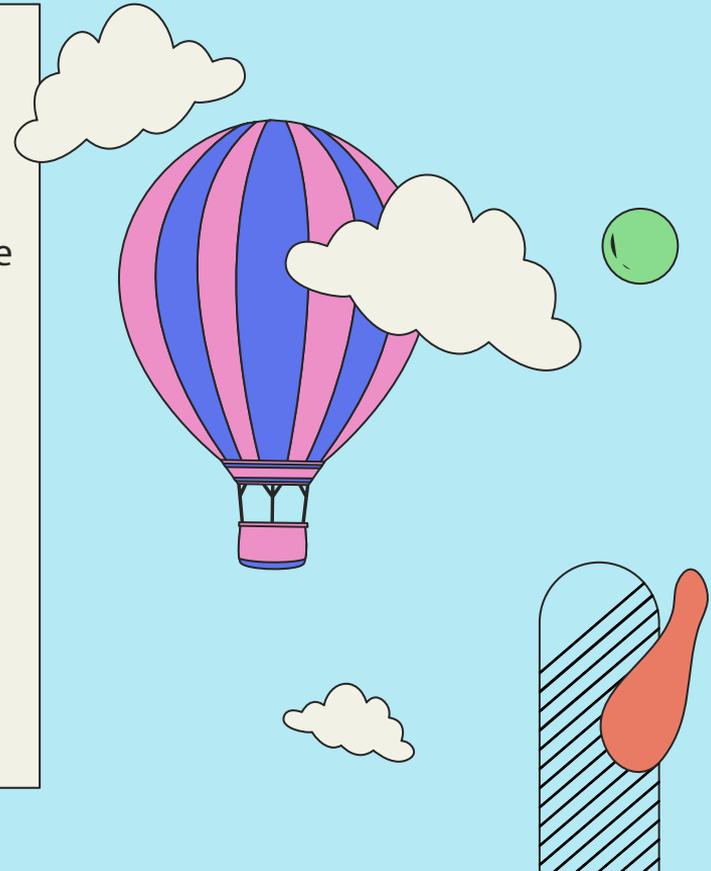
Secondary Matter as Material Cause

- Secondary Matter considered as SUBSTANCE – not pure potency but possessing an ACT
 1. The substance can be considered the material cause of the accidents which inhere in it
 2. I.e. the accidents can be considered to be forms (accidental forms) which the substance receives
 3. Substance is called secondary matter since it already has prime matter in its composition

What is a formal cause?

“an intrinsic act of perfection by which a thing is whatever it is, either in the realm of substance or of accidents”

- I. Whatever makes a subject to be in some determinate manner: a human being (the soul), a certain set of colours, heavy, etc.
- II. The form always has to inform some kind of matter
- III. Hence, there are either substantial forms or accidental forms
- IV. Substantial form is the act of prime matter (It's proper act to which it is in potency)
- V. Accidental forms are the act of secondary matter



Exemplary causality

- Exemplar causality is a special kind of formal causality
- It is the plan, model or pattern which guides an agent in the execution of his work.
- It entails:
 1. an agent which accomplishes some task
 2. the model or 'exemplar' which is used to guide his work
 3. some material cause on which to work

Disclaimer: an exemplar cause is similar to the intrinsic forms of things but the exemplary cause is different in that it is not an intrinsic principle of the substance or accident. It is in the mind of the agent.

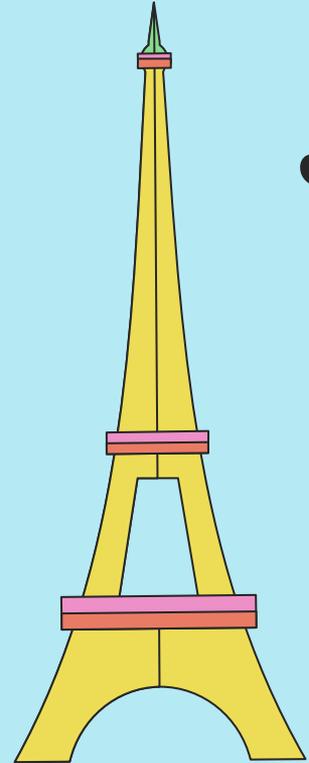
An Exemplar of Exemplary Causality

- Remember the House?
- The architectural plans/design (including the preconceived sequence of events required to implement them) = the exemplar cause



All causality includes exemplary causality

- We can see that, since everything acts according to some plan or model, exemplary causality is a part of all causal processes. Even unintelligent beings act with purpose and not completely randomly- they are just not aware of the exemplar.
- Exemplary ideas or patterns of all created things are found in the Divine Intelligence as his Ideas
- *Not quite sure why this is in God's mind?*



Relationship between material and formal causality

1. Matter and form are genuine causes of the entire substance of the corporeal being

a corporeal being depends on its prime matter and on its substantial form for its act of being (e.g. an animal cannot subsist without its body and it ceases to be when it loses its substantial form). Same with secondary matter (substances and their accidents)

Relationship between material and formal causality

2. Matter and form are mutual causes

- Since neither can exist separately, we say that they mutually cause each other:
 - “Matter is said to be the cause of the form insofar as the form is not, except in matter. Similarly form is the cause of matter insofar as matter does not have any actuality except through the form” (St Thomas).
- their respective causal roles are different
 - Form gives matter a specific organization and confers being upon it (forma dat esse).
 - Matter does not give being to form, but simply receives it. The form cannot receive the act of being until it is received by some matter.
- **matter is for the sake of the form and not form for the sake of the matter. This is why there are forms that can exist without matter (have esse), but not matter without form**