

What's the Problem?

Suárez has no doubt that things and processes have final causes, which account for their existence or occurrence.

"It has to be determined as a certain conclusion that an end is a true, proper and real cause."
(Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, 23.1.7 [25: 845a])

At the same time, Suárez holds (repeatedly) that the feature by which ends or purposes qualify as genuine final *causes* – Suárez calls it the 'causality of the end' – is *obscure*.

"[The question as to] what the causality of [the end] consists in is the most obscure question of all."
(Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, 23.1.9 [25: 845b])

0. Introduction 1

"Nihilominus statuenda est conclusio certa finem esse veram, propriam ac realem causam." (DM 23.1.7)

"Item quae sit necessaria conditio, quis effectus; in quo denique consistat eius causalitas, quod hic est omnium obscurissimum." (DM 23.1.9)

All Latin quotations from Suárez are retrieved from the very helpful online edition of Suárez's *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, edited by Salvador Castellote and Michael Renemann. Their Latin text is taken (largely) from S. Rábade et al. (Biblioteca Hispanica de Filosofía, Madrid 1960–1966), which follows the Vivès edition in the numeration of Suárez's texts. However, the editors have also double-checked the Latin text with the Salamanca edition (1597) and corrected the text if necessary.

The texts can be found here: <https://homepage.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/michael.renemann/suarez/index.html>

A Problem According to Interpreters

While Suárez offers a solution to this problem of the obscurity of final causality (by devising an account of final causality), recent interpreters argued that Suárez ultimately denies the reality of final causes by giving a *reductive* or even *eliminative* account of final causality in terms of efficient causality.

“[L]’exercice de la cause finale en tant qu’exercice *effectif* si l’on peut dire, se réduit à l’efficience.” (Carraud 2002, 159)

For Suárez, “final causality in case (b) [of intellectual created agents] involves not genuine action but only “metaphysical motion,” [sic!] and [...] when case (c) [of natural agents] is considered in abstraction from God’s causal contribution, there is no genuine final causality at all.” (Schmaltz 2008, 34)

The Problem of Final Causality in Suárez

“Although the final cause is in a certain way the principal of all ‘kinds of causes’, and even prior to the others, its nature of causing is, nevertheless, more obscure.”

(Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, 23.0 [25: 843b])

- Why does Suárez take final causality – the qualifying feature of final causes – to be obscure?
- How does Suárez account for final causality?
- Is his account of final causality consistent with his claim that final causes are prior to the other causes?
- To what extent did Suárez account of final causality have an impact on thought about (final) causes after him?

“Quamvis finalis causa praecipua quodammodo omnium sit atque etiam prior, obscurior tamen est eius causandi ratio, et ideo veteribus philosophis paene incognita fuit, ob quam ignorationem in alios errores circa rerum naturalium cognitionem inciderunt, ut Aristot., tract. II Phys., c. 8, et I Metaph., et I de Partibus animal., in principio.” (DM 23.0)

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1. The Sources of Suárez's Problem of Final Causality
2. Suárez's Account of Final Causality
3. The Ontology of Final Causality
4. Wrapping-up and Peeking Beyond

What are (Aristotelian) Causes?

Suárez's extensive treatment of Aristotelian causes in his *Meta-physical Disputations* is guided by the idea that there is a generic notion of a cause which applies to all kinds of causes.

How then should determine such a generic notion of a cause?

Defining a cause as a mere explanatory factor won't do according to Suárez since such a definition is ...

non-informative as it does not specify in virtue of what a cause is able to fulfil its specific explanatory task.

too broad or **inadequate** as there are explanatory principles of natural changes that are not counted as causes (e.g. privation).

How to define the notion of a cause adequately?

Suárez's *influxus*-Theory of Causality

"A cause is a principle that essentially infuses being into another thing. [...] By the term 'essentially infusing' privation and all accidental causes, which do not transfer or infuse being into something else per se, are excluded. The word 'infusing', however, is not to be understood strictly, in its customary sense as it is particularly attributed to the efficient cause, but in more general sense, so that it is synonymous with "giving or communicating being to another thing"

(Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae* 12.2.4 [25, 384b])

The Challenge: How are we to understand the distinctive influx of non-efficient causes? In particular: the influx of final causes?

1. The Sources of Suárez's Problem of Final Causality

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"Causa est principium per se influens esse in aliud, nam loco generis existimo convenientius poni illud nomen commune quod propinquius et immediatius convenit definito; hoc autem modo comparatur principium ad causam; nam ens et illud relativum id, quod absolute positum illi aequivalet, remotissimum est. Per illam autem particulam, per se influens, excluditur privatio, et omnis causa per accidens, quae per se non conferunt aut influunt esse in aliud. Sumendum est autem verbum illud influere non stricte, ut attribui specialiter solet causae efficienti, sed generalius prout aequivalet verbo dandi vel communicandi esse alteri." (DM 12.2.4)

Suárez's Divide and Conquer Strategy

"[T]he causality of the end, although it has a place in its own way in the actions of all these agents [that is in God, in created intellectual and in natural agents], is, nevertheless, better known to us in **created intellectual agents**, and it has more of a certain quality and special mode in them. For this reason, we will explain this causality of the end especially in their case and resolve the difficulties that arise concerning this causality. But afterwards we will talk about the other agents." (Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae* 23.1.8 [25: 845b])

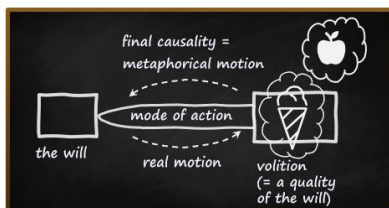
"Sed in hac re non tam oportet rationes multiplicare quam rem exponere, ut difficultates solvantur et finis causalitas, quae obscura est, declaretur; huc enim tendunt difficultates in principio positae, non ut res certa indubium revocetur. Ut autem hoc distinctius fiat, distinguamus tria agentia propter finem. Primum et supremum est intellectuale agens increatum, quod est solus Deus. In secundo ac medio ordine sunt agentia intellectualia creata, inter quae nobis notiores sunt homines, et ideo de illis semper loquimur, quamvis eadem ratio sit de intelligentiis creatis. In tertio et infimo ordine sunt agentia naturalia seu intellectu carentia, quamvis inter ea nonnulla sit differentia eorum quae sensum et appetitum habent et reliquorum, quam etiam suo loco indicabimus. Causalitas ergo finis, licet suo modo locum habeat in actionibus horum omnium agentium, tamen in creatis agentibus intellectualibus nobis notior est, et maiorem quamdam proprietatem et specialem modum habet, et ideo in illis peculiariter declarabimus hanc causalitatem finis et expediemus difficultates circa eam insurgentes; postea vero de aliis agentibus dicemus." (DM 23.1.8)

'Metaphorical Motion'

"[T]he causality of the end consists in a metaphorical motion. However, [...] such a motion is not actual, unless the will is actually moving, and when it is put in reality, **it is nothing different from the act of will itself**. But [...] one and the same act of will is caused by the end and by the will itself. And insofar it arises [a] from the will, it is efficient causality, and insofar it arises [b] from the end, it is final causality. And in the first way [a] it is a real and proper motion, because such an action stems from a power as a proper physical principle. In the second way [b], however, it is a metaphorical motion, **since it stems from an object which allures the will and attracts it.**" (Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae* 23.4.8 [25: 861])

"Est ergo tertia sententia, quae constituit etiam hanc finis causalitatem in motione metaphorica. Addit vero huiusmodi motionem non poni in actu secundo nisi quando voluntas in actu secundo movetur, et quando sic ponitur in re, non esse aliquid distinctum ab ipsomet actu voluntatis. Sed sicut supra dicebamus unam et eandem actionem, prout fluit ab agente, esse causalitatem eius, ut vero inest materiae, esse etiam causalitatem eius circa formam, ita aiunt unam et eandem actionem voluntatis causari a fine et a voluntate ipsa, et [a] prout est a voluntate esse causalitatem effectivam, [b] prout vero est a fine esse causalitatem finalem, et priori ratione [a] esse motionem realem ac propriam, quia talis actio manat a potentia ut a proprio principio physico, posteriori autem ratione [b] esse motionem metaphoricam, quia manat ab objecto alliciente et trahente ad se voluntatem." (DM 23.4.8)

Accounting for Final Causality



The distinctive influx of an end (by which it qualifies as a final cause) consists in the *attraction* it exerts on the will that chooses it; it is realized in the mode of bringing about the relevant volition.

2. Suárez's Account of Final Causality

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The Reality of Final Causality?

Is there really final causality for Suárez?

Eliminativism (Schmaltz): No, because final causality for Suárez consists only in a *metaphorical* motion, which is explicitly distinguished from the real (or efficient) motion that arises from the will as an efficient cause.

A final cause's "motion is called metaphorical, not because it is not real, but because it does not happen through an effective influx nor through physical motion but through an intentional and spiritual motion. And therefore, nothing prevents it from being the case that its causality is true and proper."

(Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae* 23.1.14 [25: 847a])

2. Suárez's Account of Final Causality

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"Eius autem motio dicitur metaphorica, non quia non sit realis, sed quia non fit per influxum effectivum, nec per motionem physicam, sed per motionem intentionalem et animale: et ideo nihil obstat, quominus vera ac propria sit eius causalitas." (DM 23.1.14)

Note that the Vivès edition fatally omits the underlined words, which can be found in the original Salamanca edition (1597), vol. 1: 615a. (The digital edition by Castellote & Renemann follows the Salamanca edition here).

The Reality of Final Causality?

Is there really final causality for Suárez?

Reductionism (Carraud): No, because final causality for Suárez is nothing but the efficient causality exerted by the will and so final causality is reduced to efficient causality.

“[O]ne and the same act of will is caused by the end and by the will itself. And insofar it arises [a] from the will, it is efficient causality, and insofar it arises [b] from the end, it is final causality.” (Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae* 23.4.8 [25: 861])

Identity is symmetrical, reduction is not: An identity statement amounts to a statement of reduction only if it is accompanied by a statement of metaphysical priority or grounding.

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The Question of Priority

For Suárez, the causality of an end is realized in the same mode as the efficient causality of the choosing will is realized in. Is Suárez thereby *reducing* final causality to efficient causality?

This depends on whether Suárez takes efficient causality to be prior to final causality.

Schmaltz (2008, 29) and Carraud (2002, 145-163) argue that Suárez does in fact take efficient causality as prior to all other kinds of causality since his *influxus*-theory privileges efficient causality – as admitted by Suárez himself:

“[T]he whole definition of cause is most properly suited to the efficient cause”
(Suárez, *DM* 12.3.3 [25: 389a])

Conceptual vs. Metaphysical Priority

In light of the fact that Suárez's *influxus*-theory captures efficient causality best and makes questions about the 'effects' of non-efficient causes and the way in which these effects arise even meaningful, it is obvious that Suárez conceives of all kinds of causes on the model of efficient causes.

I agree that **efficient causality is conceptually prior** to all other kinds of causality for Suárez.

But if final causality is to be *reduced* to efficient causality, then efficient causality is to be **metaphysically prior** to final causality such that instances of final causality are *grounded in* or (*metaphysically*) *explained by* instances of efficient causality.

“De efficienti etiam patet, quia sua actione efficit ut res habeat esse quod antea non habebat; et ad hoc per se ac directe tendit actio eius; ergo efficiens est quasi fons et principium per se influens esse in effectum; quod esse effectus distinctum est ab esse efficientis; ergo **tota definitio causae propriissime convenit efficienti.**” (DM 12.3.3)

The Metaphysical Priority of Efficient Causality?

Clearly, efficient causality is metaphysically prior to final causality since there are many instances of efficient causality (viz. all operations but the will's) that are *not* instances of final causality. Instances of final causality, by contrast, are always realized in certain instances of efficient causality. So, final causality is ontologically dependent on efficient causality, while the reverse does not hold.

Response: We haven't seen Suárez's whole account of final causality, but only the one for created intellectual agents.

Ultimately, *all* instances of efficient causality involve final causality for Suárez, such that they are actually interdependent.

The Priority of Final Causes

"Although the final cause is in a certain way the principal of all «kinds of causes», and even prior to the others, its nature of causing is, nevertheless, more obscure." (DM 23.0 [25: 843b])

"Suárez's language certainly suggests that he sees an important asymmetry between final causes and efficient causes. Final causes are 'the first of the causes'. It is not obvious, however, that such a priority is licensed by Suárez's account of the relationship between efficient and final causation. [...] The efficient cause cannot act without the concurrence of the final cause and the final cause cannot cause anything to come to be without the concurrence of the efficient cause"

(Penner 2015: 145)

"Quamvis finalis causa praecipua quodammodo omnium sit atque etiam prior, obscurior tamen est eius causandi ratio, et ideo veteribus philosophis paene incognita fuit, ob quam ignoratorem in alios errores circa rerum naturalium cognitionem inciderunt, ut Aristot., tract. II Phys., c. 8, et I Metaph., et I de Partibus animal., in principio." (DM 23.0)

Metaphysical Priority (Instead of Ontological Dependence)

Unlike Penner, we should construe Suárez's claim about the priority of final causes in terms of metaphysical priority (viz. in terms of grounding or metaphysical explanation) rather than in terms of ontological dependence.

Compare the famous Eutypbro-question: "Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?" – Given that gods love what is pious necessarily, facts of the form 'X is pious' and 'X is loved by the gods' are ontologically interdependent. Yet, it makes sense to ask as to what grounds what.

To what extent is final causality *metaphysically prior* to efficient causality for Suárez (in the sense that efficient causality is *grounded* in final causality)?

Metaphysical Priority of Final Causality

To what extent is final causality *metaphysically prior* to efficient causality for Suárez (in the sense that efficient causality is *grounded* in final causality)?

"But an end exceeds an efficient cause first in the fact that it is like the ultimate *terminus* to which every action of an efficient cause is directed – in such a way that (if it is right to talk that way) we can say that the efficient cause devotedly serves an end [...]."

(Suárez, *DM* 27.1.8 [25: 951b])

Due to its distinctive influence, a final cause endows an efficient cause's action or efficient causality with its success condition and thereby determines its identity.

"Finis autem excedit primum in hoc, quod est veluti ultimus terminus in quem omnis actio efficientis dirigitur, ita ut, si ita fas est loqui, dicere possimus efficiens fini *deservire*, et Deum ipsum sibi quodammodo ministrare, dum quidquid agit propter se operatur." (DM 27.1.8)

Metaphysical Priority of Final Causality

To what extent is final causality *metaphysically prior* to efficient causality for Suárez (in the sense that efficient causality is *grounded* in final causality)?

“An end also seems to particularly exceed in the fact that it itself is the first beginning and principle of every action, since it excites and attracts the efficient cause to effecting.”

(Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae* 27.1.8 [25: 951b])

Final causes are explanatorily self-sufficient explainers: The occurrence of efficient causality (or action) can be *ultimately* explained in terms of the goal or end for the sake of which it occurs.

“Deinde ac praecipue videtur superare finis in hoc, quod ipse est primum initium et principium omnis actionis; quia ipsummet efficiens excitat et allicit ad efficiendum; quod, quamvis in primo efficienti inveniatur absque causalitate finis in ipsum efficiens, sed tantum in externam actionem eius, nihilominus secundum eam rationem intelligimus primum motorem vel (ut ita dicam) primum procuratorem omnis causalitatis esse finem.” (DM 27.1.8)

The Reality of Suárezian Final Causality

Being realized in the very same mode of action, final and efficient causality are ontologically interdependent for Suárez.

Yet, far from reducing final causality to efficient causality, Suárez argues that final causality is metaphysically prior to efficient causality insofar as ...

... instances of efficient causality are processes that are individuated in terms of the ends they are directed at.

... each occurrence of efficient causality is ultimately explained in terms of an end or a final cause.

So, final causality is real for Suárez (albeit intimately linked to rational and free agency).

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The Problem of Final Causality in Suárez

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(Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, 23.0 [25: 843b])

- Why does Suárez take final causality – the qualifying feature of final causes – to be obscure?
- How does Suárez account for final causality?
- Is his account of final causality consistent with his claim that final causes are prior to the other causes?
- To what extent did Suárez's account of final causality have an impact on thought about (final) causes after him?

4. Wrapping-up and Peeking Beyond

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"Quamvis finalis causa praecipua quodammodo omnium sit atque etiam prior, obscurior tamen est eius causandi ratio, et ideo veteribus philosophis paene incognita fuit, ob quam ignorationem in alios errores circa rerum naturalium cognitionem inciderunt, ut Aristot., tract. II Phys., c. 8, et I Metaph., et I de Partibus animal., in principio." (DM 23.0)

The Problem of Final Causality in Suárez

- Why does Suárez take final causality – the qualifying feature of final causes – to be obscure?

Because for Suárez causes are essentially characterized by an influx by which they give rise to their distinctive effects; and it is hard to see how ends could exert any influx, as they often do not even exist at the time when the processes occur that they are supposed to explain.

- How does Suárez account for final causality?

In terms of its motivating or attractive influence on rational agents who choose to pursue this end and thus act for the sake of it.

The Problem of Final Causality in Suárez

- Is his account of final causality consistent with his claim that final causes are prior to the other causes?

Yes: While Suárez's *influxus*-theory of causality makes efficient causality **conceptually prior** to all other types of causality, he can still defend the **metaphysical priority** of final causality with respect to all other types of causality.

- To what extent did Suárez's account of final causality have an impact on thought about (final) causes after him?

Let me note two points of impact (with the example of Spinoza), corresponding to the fact (i) that efficient causation is conceptually privileged for Suárez and (ii) that final causality is tied to free agency.

Spinoza's Restriction to Efficient Causality

Spinoza emphatically rejects the Aristotelian doctrine according to which the order of being is inverse to the order of knowing:

Many philosophers "did not observe the [proper] order of philosophizing. For they believed that the divine nature, which they should have contemplated before all else (because it is prior both in knowledge and in nature) is last in the order of knowledge, and that the things that are called objects of the senses are prior to all. [...] So it is no wonder that they have generally contradicted themselves."

(Spinoza, *Ethics* 2p10s2 [C I: 455])

It is also no wonder that Spinoza takes Suárez's conceptually privileged type of cause (the efficient cause) to be the only true cause.

Spinoza's Critique of Final Causes

"Not many words will be required now to show that [...] all final causes are nothing but human fictions. For I believe I have already sufficiently established it, [...] by [...] [having] shown that all things proceed by a certain eternal necessity of nature, and with the greatest perfection." (Spinoza, *Ethics* Appendix I [C I: 442])

"If final causes are rivals of efficient one, then teleology involves radical freedom, i.e. the falsity of (efficient cause) determinism. Spinoza links these two in some of his discussions of common beliefs, contending in 1 Appendix that the belief in divine purpose is connected somehow with men's belief in their own human freedom (78/18); I don't fully understand that passage, and suspect it of muddle." (Bennett 1984: 216)

"" (Cogitata Metaphysica, Curley I:334)

Not many words will be required now to show that Nature has no end set before it, and that all final causes are nothing but human fictions. For I believe I have already sufficiently established it, both by the foundations and causes from which I have shown this prejudice to have had its origin, and also by P16, P32C1 and C2, and all those [propositions] by which I have shown that all things proceed by a certain eternal necessity of nature, and with the greatest perfection. C I: 442

Thank you for your attention!

Spinoza's Critique of Final Causes

Unravelling Bennett's Muddle

Spinoza links his conception of final causality to radical (or libertarian) freedom because this is what Suárez does in his influential account of final causality:

According to Suárez, the primary locus of final causality is (libertarian) free choice: rational agents are subject to final causality insofar as they choose what they take to be good.

Suárez's theory of final causality is not only fascinating in itself, but also helps making sense of what philosophers after him thought about final and other causes.

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Extending the Account

On Suárez's account, final causation takes place in the will – when we choose a certain option such that we can be described as being 'allured' or 'attracted' by this option.

How then can other things than volitions be subject to final causality and thereby be for the sake of certain ends?

"In this matter one has to state first that the external effects which are produced through these [i.e. transeunt] actions can only be effects of the final cause insofar as the actions through which they come about are caused in some way in its genus by a final cause and depend on it"

(Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, 23.4.15 [25: 863])

"In hac re imprimis statuendum est effectus exteriores qui per has actiones producuntur in tantum esse posse effectus causae finalis in quantum actiones per quas fiunt causantur aliquo modo in suo genere a causa finali et ab ea pendent; quia, ut supra cum Aristotele dicebamus, causa finalis non causat actu nisi quando agens agit aliquid propter finem." (DM 23.4.15)

Final Causality in Nature

A theistic response:

"Nonetheless, [...] the actions of these natural agents are for the sake of an end and an effect of a final cause. Yet not, insofar as they precisely arise from the natural agents themselves, but insofar as they simultaneously stem from the first agent who operates in and through everything. Or conversely (and this roughly amounts to the same), insofar as the proximate agents themselves are subordinate to the direction and intention of the superior agent."

(Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, 23.10.5 [25, 887a])

God endows natural processes with final causality to the extent that he *concurs* with them with their ends in view.

"Nihilominus, proprius modus loquendi in hac materia est actiones horum agentium naturalium esse propter finem et esse effecta causae finalis. Non tamen ut praecise egrediuntur ab ipsis naturalibus agentibus, sed ut simul sunt a primo agente, quod in omnibus et per omnia operatur. Vel e converso (et fere in idem redit), prout ipsa proxima agentia substant directioni et intentioni superioris agentis." (DM 23.10.5)

Final Causality in Nature

“And so there is no proper final causality in these [natural] actions, insofar as they arise from natural agents, but only a disposition towards a certain *terminus*; insofar as they arise from God, however, there is final causality in them as there is in the other external and transeunt actions of God.”

(Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, 23.10.6 [25, 887b])



“Atque ita fit ut in his actionibus, ut sunt a naturalibus agentibus, non sit propria causalitas finalis, sed solum habitudo ad certum terminum; ut vero sunt a Deo, ita sit in illis causalitas finalis sicut in aliis externis et transeuntibus actionibus Dei.” (DM 23.10.6)

Final Causation in God?

“[A]n end cannot have its causality in the will of God, nor, consequently, in the external effects or actions, which proceed from that will.” (Suárez, *DM* 23.9.1 [25, 882a])

Suárez's Trilemma

- (1) Final causality in the operations of natural agents is supposed to derive from the final causality involved in God's external (or transeunt) actions (of concurring with these natural agents).
- (2) External actions inherit their final causality from internal (or immanent) acts of will, which are primarily subject to final causation insofar as they are influenced by ends.
- (3) As a perfect being, God is not subject to any kind of influence at all, and so there is no final causation in God.

“Ratio dubitandi sumitur ex hactenus dictis de agentibus intellectualibus creatis; nam in his non habet locum causalitas finis quoad actiones externas, nisi media causalitate in ipsam voluntatem causae agentis; sed finis non potest habere causalitatem suam in voluntatem Dei; ergo neque in effectus vel actiones externas quae ab illa voluntate procedunt.” (DM 23.9.1)