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Efficient Cause, is it Really? Exploring the Aristotelian Idea of Craft

In Aristotle's book, *Physics*, he proposes that there are four possible causes for any given action in the material world. These causes are as follows: material, formal, efficient, and final. Respectively, they are defined in Aristotelian terms: (1) the parts, or constituents is "cause as subject" (2) the whole, the composition, and the form is "cause as essence" (3) the seed, the doctor, the adviser, and , in general, the producer, are all "sources of the principle of change or stability" (4) one thing is a cause of other things by being "the end and the good" (195a 15-25). Another, possibly oversimplified interpretation would be that material pertains to form, formal to nature, efficient to source, and final to motive, respectively. One could argue that the efficient cause is the easiest to identify; however, Aristotle's introduction of craft provides a new layer to this explanation.When evaluating the efficient cause it appears that there are two components: the source, and the action being performed by the source.While this cause seems to be twofold, intuition would suggest that the person using the craft would be the efficient cause, since craft is abstract and the person themself is the vehicle for change. Despite intuition, Aristotle suggests that the efficient cause in some scenarios is a craft, not a person, contrary to what one would immediately assume. This paper serves to provide clarification on the issue.

To elaborate on the four Aristotelian causes, I will provide two different scenarios. Take for example the question, "Why does the rock roll down the hill?" The material cause is that the rock is composed of earth, since Aristotle believed that earth, out of all four elements, had the desire to move downward. The formal cause is the roundness of the rock. The efficient cause is that someone pushed it, and the Final cause was the intention to hit someone with the rock. Another

example would be answering the question, "Why did the house burn?" The material cause is that the house is made of wood, since Aristotle believed wood contained fire due to its potential to burn. The formal is the way the house was built allowing flames to grow, the efficient being someone set it on fire, and the final being that person's revenge. When discussing efficient causes specifically, Aristotle says, "the adviser is a cause <of the action>, and a father is a cause of his child; and in general the producer is a cause of the product, and the initiator of the change is a cause of what is changed" (194b 30-34).

Aristotle seems to suggest that efficient causes can be attributed to a person, seeing as, "the initiator of the change is a cause of what is changed." He continues to say more succinctly that, "The seed, the doctor, the adviser and, in general, the producer, are all sources of the principle of change or stability" (195a 21-23). Aristotle's technical definition of "source of the principle of change" is nebulous. Furthermore, a dilemma is introduced when Aristotle introduces the analogy of a sculptor. He claims that,

> Both the sculpting craft and the bronze, for instance, are causes of the statue, not insofar as it is something else, but insofar as it is a statue. But they are not causes in the same way: the bronze is a cause as matter, the sculpting craft as the source of the motion. (195a 5-10).

While the first cause is obviously material, the "sculpting craft" appears to fall under Aristotle's qualifications for an efficient cause. This seems to complicate the idea previously posed "that the initiator of the change is a cause of what is changed." Does this mean that the efficient cause of creating a sculpture is the man or the sculpting craft itself? It is now more apparent that the sculpting craft could be the efficient cause by guiding the sculptor.

"…we may say either that the housebuilder, or that the housebuilder actually building, is causing the house to be built" (195b 5-7). Here Aristotle highlights efficient cause in regards to

potentiality and actuality. The house builder themself, or the "source of the principle of change," is the potential cause, while the housebuilder building, or the "source of the motion," is the actual cause. This creates a dichotomy within the efficient cause. Potential causes seem to be attributed to a "source" of change. When a cause is actualized it is the "source of motion." Operating under the premise that this is true, the question arises of whether or not it is possible for the potential cause and the actual cause to coexist simultaneously.

> Here as elsewhere, we must always seek the most precise cause. A man, for example, is building because he is a builder, and he is a builder insofar as he has the building craft; his building craft, then, is a prior cause, and the same is true in all cases. (195b 23-25)

It appears that in the search of a precise cause, Aristotle undermines the notion that craft and person can be the same type of cause simultaneously. In this example, a builder- someone equipped with the craft of building- builds, but the building craft is what qualifies a person to be a builder. While the builder is a source of change, or the body that change comes from, it appears that the prior cause (the building craft) is the source of motion, and therefore, the source of the action that causes change. It is not the builder's existence, but the builder's actions through the building craft that bring about change. Therefore, the builder themself as a body is not necessarily the cause of the action. In this way the craft as efficient cause functions in a twofold manner: as an attribute that provides identity to a body that uses the craft, and as the source of the action or change itself.

A seemingly present versus absent nature of craft is then proposed as follows: "…if a thing's presence causes F, that thing is also, by its absence, taken to cause the contrary of F, so that, for instance, if a pilot's presence would have cause the safety of a ship, we take his absence to have caused the shipwreck" (195a 11-15). This same principle can be used in terms of craft. If

the presence of the sculpting craft resides within a man, making them a sculptor, then it causes a sculpture, assuming that the sculptor chooses to use the craft. However, the absence of the sculpting craft, leaving an ordinary non sculptor, causes the absence of a sculpture, since the craft is not present within the man and cannot be used to sculpt.

When Aristotle says, "…a sculptor, for instance, is the cause of a statue…" (195b 26-27), he is making sure the reader isn't confusing one's identify with the craft they have. He notes that they are coincidental. He solidifies this by saying, "Polycleitus and the sculptor, for instance, are causes of the statue in different ways, because being Polycleitus is coincidental to the sculptor" (195a 34-36) It would appear that it is a misnomer when identifying efficient cause to say that, "Polycleitus is the cause of the sculpture," because despite the coincident of Polycleitus has the sculpting craft, simply naming Polycleitus as the cause does not highlight the prior and most precise cause: the craft. It is by being a sculptor and not by being Polycleitus that he (and in a different sense his craft) causes the sculpture.

Aristotle's idea of craft as efficient cause is an astute observation on his behalf, but unfortunately, he did not flesh out this idea like he did many others. His theory on craft can become more robust upon entertaining more inquiries in order to better understand it. For the most part, this theory seems sound as it is, but further inquiry complicates the idea of craft as efficient cause. When observing artists such as Michelangelo, it is easy to assert that craft is the efficient cause of a piece of art. But what if I were to create a piece of art? Could Aristotle's efficient cause still hold true to both Michelangelo and myself? Most people would find it hard to believe that I have the identical sculpting craft of Michelangelo. This calls into question the nature of craft as efficient cause. Me and Michelangelo's craft of sculpting are barely

comparable, seeing as he surpasses me in skill and experience. It seems fair to assume that Michelangelo's craft is more actualized than mine. Instead of craft only being present versus absent or based on success versus failure in nature, it makes more sense to assume that craft is slowly actualized in increments. If I were to continue sculpting, I would further actualize my craft and it would improve in increments. Just as a runner trains to be faster, I believe that craft can undergo kinesis and be improved and slowly actualized. Furthermore, what if one who has never sculpted before begins to sculpt. Is the craft absent during the process, or is it acquired through the act of sculpting? Aristotle's theory of change would suggest that the craft becomes acquired through use, much like how craft is honed through use via kinesis.

Since it is now determined that craft is gradual in nature, further investigation is necessary in regards to the qualitative aspects of craft. Michelangelo and Van Gogh's craft of artistry have without doubt been actualized, but each of their style's are drastically different. Craft is not uniform, and it seems as if artists such as Van Gogh bring to the table a different flavor of craft. One doesn't say that Picasso's work is the same as Van Gogh's, nor does one say that Van Gogh's is the same as Michelangelo's. Each artist has different inspirations, different styles, different tools, and different perspectives, so the uniformity of craft must also be affected by the person through which it is acting.

It has been established that the Aristotelian theory for cause presents four different types of causes: material, formal, efficient, and final. The efficient cause seemed to be presented in a twofold manner: the source of an action as well as the action the source is performing. Aristotle, however, says that craft is the efficient cause that guides the source of the action to perform the action itself. After establishing the validity of Aristotle's claim, it was further analyzed through

specific scenarios in order to accommodate for differences in craft, specifically how craft

changes and becomes actualized, and how craft can have different flavors depending on the

source it is working through.