

Is Efficient Causation Intensional? Suárez on Per Se and Per Accidens Efficient Causation¹

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(Forthcoming in *Suárez's Metaphysical Disputations: A Critical Guide*)

In this chapter I argue that Francisco Suárez takes efficient causation to be *intensional*, rather than *extensional*. That is to say, he thinks that co-referring terms cannot be substituted *salva veritate* into statements about efficient causation.² According to Suárez, whether a statement about some particular instance of efficient causation turns out to be true depends upon more than just how the world is; it also depends upon *how that statement represents* particular things in the world.

I expect this thesis to be controversial, because it appears to threaten Suárez's professed realism about efficient causation. If efficient causation turns out to be intensional, then whether a particular causal connection obtains would appear to be at least partly a function of how we conceive or speak of the world. Many philosophers in Suárez's time, as well as today, would find this suggestion implausible. As the contemporary metaphysician Jonathan Schaffer puts the point, 'How could mere talk stem the tide of causation?'³ Indeed, because realism about causation is such an intuitive view, this is a challenge that must be confronted by any philosopher who

¹I have done my own translations, but have checked them against English translations where available, and have sometimes used their wording. I have relied especially on Francisco Suárez, *On Efficient Causality: Metaphysical Disputations 17, 18, and 19*, tr. Alfred Freddoso (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

²One well-known example of a philosopher who endorsed an intensional theory of causation is Elizabeth Anscombe. For example, see G.E.M. Anscombe, 'Causality and Extensionality,' *Journal of Philosophy* 6(1969): 152–159. For a somewhat broader discussion of intensional theories of causation and a brief overview of more recent literature, see Jonathan Schaffer, 'The Metaphysics of Causation,' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (2007). See also 'Substitutivity *salva veritate*,' in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert Audi, 2001.

³Jonathan Schaffer, 'Contrastive Causation,' *The Philosophical Review* 14(2005), 337.

endorses an intensional theory of causation. Accordingly, in addition to arguing that Suárez is committed to such a theory, I shall also suggest a tentative answer to this objection on his behalf.

The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first and shortest section, I offer a bit of background about how Suárez understands efficient causation. In the second section, I offer some preliminary reasons for thinking that Suárez is an eliminativist about *per accidens* efficient causation, and accordingly that he is committed to an intensional account of efficient causation. In the third section, I offer a more detailed interpretation of Suárez's account of *per se* and *per accidens* efficient causes, and I consider several alternative interpretations. In the fourth and final section, I respond to the objection that Suárez's intensional account is inconsistent with his realism about efficient causation.

1 Background

In order to best appreciate Suárez's notion of an efficient cause, it will be helpful to consider Aristotle's famous example of the production of a statue.⁴ Imagine that a sculptor, Polycletus, makes a statue out of a block of wood. On Monday morning he begins working on the block, and by the end of the day on Friday it has been transformed into a statue of the god Apollo. In keeping with the Aristotelian tradition, Suárez tries to explain such phenomena by appealing to four types of causes—what he and other Aristotelians call the formal, material, efficient, and final causes.⁵

Suárez's treatment of these causes in the *Metaphysical Disputations* is preceded by his account of a cause in general, which he provides in DM 12. Because his discussion of efficient causes presupposes this account, I shall briefly outline it here. In DM 12, Suárez defines a cause as 'a principle *per se* instilling (*influens*) being in

⁴*Physics* 2, Chapter 3, 195a4–8.

⁵Suárez argues for the existence of each of these causes in DM 12.3.2. For translations of many of the relevant passages in DM 12, see Jacob Tuttle, 'Suárez's Metaphysics of Efficient Causation' (PhD Diss., Purdue University, 2013), Appendix A. For one well-known discussion in Aristotle, see *Physics*, Book 2, Chapter 3, 194b24–195a3.

another.’⁶ He views the term ‘principle’ (*principium*) as something akin to a genus in the definition.⁷ Although Suárez acknowledges a colloquial sense of this term, according to which anything *A* will be a principle of *B* if it stands in some relationship of priority to *B*, in his definition of a cause he appeals to a more strict, philosophical sense of ‘principle.’ In this sense, a principle must stand in a specific type of relationship of priority—namely, priority in being (*esse*), coming-to-be (*fieri*), or understanding.⁸ Suárez’s view seems to be that only these types of priority are genuinely explanatory. By appealing to a principle in the strict sense, we give at least a partial explanation of something’s existence, coming-to-exist, or being understood.⁹

The phrase ‘*per se* instilling being in another,’ which occupies the difference-place in Suárez’s definition of a cause, is supposed to distinguish causal from non-causal principles. Leaving aside the ‘*per se*’ bit until the next section, this definition tells us that to be a cause of something is to be prior to it in being. This existential priority distinguishes causes from non-causal principles, such as privations in respect of generations, or premises in respect of demonstrations, which are prior only in coming-to-be or understanding.¹⁰ Causal principles account for a thing’s existence, whereas non-causal

⁶DM 12.2.4. In many passages I have adopted Gracia’s translation of ‘*influens*’ as ‘instilling.’ See Suárez *on Individuation: Metaphysical Disputation V: Individual Unity and its Principle*, Mediaeval Philosophical Texts in Translation, no. 23, au. Francisco Suárez, tr. Jorge Gracia (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press 1982), 186. For discussion of some of the issues involved in translating *influere* and its cognates, see Jacob Tuttle, ‘Suárez’s Non-Reductive Theory of Efficient Causation,’ *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy* 4(2016): 124–58, especially note 11.

⁷DM 12.1.13.

⁸DM 12.1.12.

⁹Tuttle, ‘Suárez’s Metaphysics of Efficient Causation,’ 4–6; Alfred Freddoso, ‘Introduction,’ in *Creation, Conservation, and Concurrence: Metaphysical Disputations 20-22*, au. Francisco Suárez, tr. Alfred Freddoso (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2002), pp. xv–xvi.

¹⁰Suárez thinks that this way of distinguishing causal from non-causal principles does not work in some theological cases, such as the relations of filiation and spiration in the Trinity. See DM 12.1.5 and 12.2.6–10. However, I think that these exceptions can be safely ignored here. For a brief discussion of these issues, see Freddoso, ‘Introduction,’ p. xvi and xxxiv.

principles do not.

As we might expect, Suárez analyzes the correlative notion of an effect in terms of posteriority in being. On his view, to be an effect of a thing is to be posterior to that thing in being. However, instead of expressing this point in terms of instilling being, Suárez typically says that an effect depends (*dependet*) on its cause for its being. Hence, he habitually describes the relationship between a cause and an effect in two ways. When he wants to emphasize the fact that a cause is prior to its effect in being, he describes this relationship in terms of the cause instilling being in its effect. On the other hand, when he wants to emphasize that an effect is posterior in being to its cause, he describes their relationship in terms of the effect depending on its cause for its being.¹¹

Unsurprisingly, Suárez claims that the four Aristotelian causes each has a distinctive type of existential priority or dependency. Indeed, he appeals to this consideration when arguing that there are four distinctive types of causes. He refers to each cause's distinctive relationship to its effect as its 'causality' (*causalitas*).¹² Suárez identifies the causality of an efficient cause with action (*actio*).¹³ This is reflected in his definition of an efficient cause as a '*per se* principle from which an action first exists.'¹⁴ Again, leaving aside for the moment the '*per se*' qualification, what he means by this is that something qualifies as an efficient cause in virtue of performing an action. Thus, in our example of the production of the statue, the sculptor efficiently causes the statue by acting on the block—let us say, by carving it.¹⁵

So far, my discussion of situations involving efficient causation

¹¹For example, see DM 18.10.6. See Tuttle, 'Suárez's Non-Reductive Theory of Efficient Causation,' 129.

¹²For Suárez's most general discussion of causality, see DM 12.2.13.

¹³DM 18.10.

¹⁴DM 17.1.5.

¹⁵For treatments of Suárez's views about causality in general, and the causality of efficient causes, see Tuttle, 'Suárez's Non-Reductive Theory of Efficient Causation,' especially 128–32, which I rely on here; and *Suárez on Aristotelian Causality* (Investigating Medieval Philosophy, vol. 9), ed. Jacob Leth Fink (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), especially 'Efficient Causality: The Metaphysics of Production,' by Stephan Schmidt.

has made reference to the agent or efficient cause itself, its product or effect, and the causality whereby they are related by existential priority or dependency. However, it is also worth mentioning one additional component that Suárez thinks must be present in every such situation—namely, an active power. Like other Aristotelians, Suárez posits active powers in order to explain how efficient causes perform the specific actions that they do perform. Thus, for example, he thinks that fire is able to heat because it is hot, humans are able to reason because they are intelligent, and so on. Likewise, in our example of the production of the statue, the sculptor is able to carve the block into a statue because he possesses the art of statuary.¹⁶

In summary, Suárez thinks that an efficient cause is a principle that is prior to its effect in being, and produces that effect in virtue of performing an action. In turn, the performance of this action is enabled by the efficient cause's possession of an active power. Spelling this out in terms of our example, in the production of a statue, the sculptor accounts for the existence of the statue in virtue of his action of carving, which he is able to perform because of his power for producing statues.

2 Eliminativism about Per Accidens Efficient Causes

My analysis in the previous section was drawn from Suárez's definition of an efficient cause as a '*per se* principle from which an action first exists.' However, so far I have not explored the role of the '*per se*' qualification in this definition. And in light of the analysis presented already, one might well wonder what is left for this qualification to add to the definition. Indeed, it might appear to be out of place there, since efficient causes seem already to have been adequately distinguished from their neighbors.

Suárez makes two remarks that help to clarify his reasons for adopting the *per se* qualification. One occurs in DM 17.1, where he arrives at his definition of an efficient cause by commenting on a

¹⁶For a detailed treatment, see Jacob Tuttle, 'Suárez's Metaphysics of Active Powers,' *Review of Metaphysics* 74(2020), 43–80.

definition he attributes to Aristotle.¹⁷ There, Suárez suggests approvingly that Aristotle may have meant to exclude *per accidens* efficient causes from his own definition.¹⁸ Another remark is in DM 12.2, from Suárez's discussion of his definition of a cause in general as a principle *per se* instilling being in another. In his explanation of this definition, he notes that he uses the phrase '*per se* instilling' in order to exclude *per accidens* causes from the definition.¹⁹

Although '*per se*' modifies a different term in Suárez's definition of an efficient cause ('principle' instead of 'instilling'), he intends the qualification to play roughly the same role as it does in the generic definition—namely, to exclude *per accidens* efficient causes. This makes sense, because one would expect that if causes in general are defined via the *per se* qualification, then this qualification should carry over to the definitions of the four types of Aristotelian causes.²⁰

However, it is surprising that Suárez should want to exclude *per accidens* efficient causes from his definition. As noted already, he appears to present the distinction between *per se* and *per accidens* efficient causes as a way of dividing efficient causes in general, and this is part and parcel of the Aristotelian tradition.²¹ If *per accidens* efficient causes are to be excluded from the definition of an efficient cause, how can they be a *type* of efficient causes?

We can get some insight into this by examining Suárez's initial characterization of the division in DM 17.2. He writes:

(Text 1) A cause *per se* is that on which an effect directly (*directe*) depends for the proper being that it has insofar as it is an effect—in which way (says Aristotle) a sculptor

¹⁷*Physics*, Book 2, Chapter 3, 194b30–32; and *Metaphysics*, Book 5, Chapter 2, 1013a29–33.

¹⁸DM 17.1.4.

¹⁹DM 12.2.4.

²⁰This result suggests that the *per se*–*per accidens* distinction applies to formal, material, and final causes as well. For a brief discussion of this in Aristotle, see Huisman, 'Accidental Causation,' 563 and 566–67. For discussion of the distinction in Suárez's account of final causes, see Kara Richardson, 'Suárez on the Influx of the Final Cause,' in this volume.

²¹For example, see *Physics* Book 2, Chapter 3, 195a32–35; and Aquinas, *In Phys* Book 2, Lectio 6, para. 190.

is a cause of a statue. And because only this is a cause properly and without qualification, almost the whole of the following disputation will be about it alone. On the other hand, a cause *per accidens*, since it is not a true cause, but is so-called through a certain relation (*habitudinem*) or similarity or conjunction with a cause, cannot be neatly defined by a single common description, but is said in various ways.²²

Text 1 raises a number of interpretive issues, some of which I shall return to later in the chapter. But for the moment, it is worth noting one striking aspect of the passage—namely, Suárez’s insistence that a *per accidens* efficient cause is not a ‘true cause’ (*vera causa*). Suárez appeals to the notion of a true cause in a variety of contexts, when he wants to contrast genuine efficient causes with candidates that he regards as spurious. When he uses this expression, he emphasizes that something is a true cause only if it actually performs an action, has a real influence (*influxus*) on an effect, produces an effect, or has an effect that depends on it for its being. Since these are all ways in which Suárez refers to efficient causation itself, his point is that something is a true cause only if a causal connection actually obtains between it and some effect.

One example in which Suárez appeals to this notion occurs immediately after his treatment of *per se* and *per accidens* efficient causes, in his discussion of what he calls ‘physical’ and ‘moral’ causes.²³ He defines a physical cause not as a cause that is physical or natural, but rather as any cause that has ‘a true and real instilling into an effect.’ On the other hand, he defines a moral cause as a cause that ‘*per se* does not truly effect [anything], but conducts itself morally so that an effect is imputed to it.’²⁴ In drawing this distinction, Suárez is appealing to the intuitive idea that someone may be morally responsible for an effect without actually bringing it about. He offers the example of an arsonist who burns a house by moving a torch

²²DM 17.2.2.

²³DM 17.2.6.

²⁴We might say that such a cause is *merely* moral, since presumably someone could be both causally and morally responsible for an effect.

adjacent to it. Although it is obvious that the arsonist is morally responsible for the house's destruction, Suárez thinks that in a strict physical or metaphysical sense, the arsonist is only causally responsible for moving the torch, since it is the fire that actually burns the house. Accordingly, in this case the arsonist is a moral but not a physical cause of the house's destruction.²⁵

Notably, Suárez emphasizes that the distinction between physical and moral efficient causes can be captured in terms of the division between *per se* and *per accidens* efficient causes. He writes:

(Text 2) 'Physical cause' is said of what truly effects, [whereas] 'moral [cause]' only of what [effects] by imputation. From which it follows that, considered physically or metaphysically, this division can be reduced to the prior one of a cause *per se* and *per accidens*. For 'cause truly effecting physically' is only said of a cause *per se*. Whereas a cause that only causes morally or by imputation, physically considered, is only a cause *per accidens*, since it does not instill *per se* and truly.²⁶

As we shall see in more detail later, Suárez thinks that there are other kinds of *per accidens* efficient causes besides moral causes. Indeed, as he emphasizes, there is no single account of what makes something a *per accidens* efficient cause. But what is important for our purposes here is that in Text 2, Suárez says explicitly that only *per se* efficient causes stand in a genuine causal relationship to an effect. This is the sense in which only they are true efficient causes. In contrast, *per accidens* efficient causes do not stand in such a relationship. They do not actually perform an action or produce an effect. Instead, as Suárez notes in Text 1, they are called causes only because of some 'relation or similarity or conjunction with a cause.'

²⁵He also notes that someone can be a moral cause by omission, when he ought to prevent some effect but fails to act. For brief discussions of moral causes in Suárez, see Suárez, *On Efficient Causality*, 17, note 11; Freddoso, 'Introduction,' p. xlvii, especially note 96; and Suárez, *Creation, Conservation, and Concurrence*, 55, note 2, and 178, note 16.

²⁶DM 17.2.6.

Tyler Huismann has argued that Aristotle is an eliminativist about accidental or *per accidens* efficient causes, in the sense that they are not causally efficacious.²⁷ That is to say, according to Aristotle, ‘relative to proper effects, accidental causes make or produce nothing at all.’²⁸ In light of what we have seen so far, I think it is *prima facie* plausible that Suárez is an eliminativist about *per accidens* efficient causes in this sense. This is the most straightforward reading of his insistence that *per accidens* efficient causes are not true causes. Moreover, an eliminativist interpretation of Suárez suggests a natural explanation of what otherwise would be puzzling—namely, that his definition of an efficient cause purposely excludes *per accidens* efficient causes. If the latter sort of efficient causes are not actually causes at all, but only spurious or ‘so-called’ causes, then it makes perfect sense to exclude them from the definition.

As Huismann correctly notes, his eliminative interpretation of Aristotle is controversial, since scholars have traditionally wanted to say that Aristotle’s accidental causes are efficacious.²⁹ Although there is considerably less scholarship on scholastic accounts of *per accidens* efficient causes, I expect my interpretation to be controversial among scholars of this tradition as well.³⁰ One important objection is that an eliminative interpretation appears to commit Suárez to an intensional theory of efficient causation. This can be appreciated by considering some of his other examples of *per se* and *per accidens* efficient causes. Following Aristotle, Suárez claims that the sculptor is a *per se* efficient cause of a statue, whereas Polycletus is a *per accidens* cause of it, even though ‘the sculptor’ and ‘Polycletus’ refer to the same person.³¹ In the same vein, Suárez

²⁷Tyler Huismann, ‘Aristotle on Accidental Causation,’ *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* (2016): 561–575.

²⁸Huismann, ‘Accidental Causation,’ 566.

²⁹Huismann, ‘Accidental Causation,’ 568–9.

³⁰Gloria Frost entertains and quickly rejects an eliminative interpretation of *per accidens* efficient causes in Aquinas. See *Aquinas on Efficient Causation and Causal Powers*, Cambridge University Press (2022), 49, note 6. To my knowledge, no one else has considered such an interpretation in the literature on scholastic theories of efficient causation.

³¹DM 17.2.2. See also *Physics*, Book 2, Chapter 3, 195a32–35; and *Metaphysics*, Book 5, Chapter 2, 1013b34–1014a16.

insists that a hot thing heats *per se*, whereas water heats only *per accidens*, even though ‘hot thing’ and ‘water’ refer to the same quantity of water.³² But if Suárez denies the efficacy of *per accidens* efficient causes, then it seems to follow that numerically the same thing will be an efficient cause under one description, but not under another.³³ As I noted in the introduction, this result appears inconsistent with Suárez’s professed realism about efficient causation. If causal connections are mind-independent features of the world, then they should obtain however we represent them. Indeed, this is reflected in our intuitions about individual instances of efficient causation. If ‘the sculptor’ and ‘Polycletus’ are co-referring, it seems downright strange to insist that the former really does cause a statue, but that the latter does not.³⁴

Because this objection is best answered by developing Suárez’s account more fully, let us turn to that now.

3 Analysis of Per Se and Per Accidens Efficient Causes

One initially promising way of understanding the fundamental differences between *per se* and *per accidens* efficient causes is via another distinction Suárez draws—namely, that between ‘immediate’ (*immediatus*) and ‘mediate’ (*mediatus*) efficient causes.³⁵ Alfred Fredoso appears to endorse this interpretation in some of his work, where he treats ‘*per se*’ and ‘*per accidens*’ as paraphrases of ‘immediate’ and ‘mediate’, respectively.³⁶ Commenting on his analysis of Suárez’s definition of an efficient cause, Freddoso writes:

This definition applies both to what Suárez calls the *per se* (or direct or immediate) efficient cause [...] and to that

³²DM 17.2.2–3.

³³Huismann presents this failure of extensionality as an argument for his eliminativist interpretation of Aristotle. See ‘Accidental Causation,’ 563–67.

³⁴I thank Sydney Penner for this observation.

³⁵Suárez frequently makes use of this distinction in his discussion of God’s efficient causality. See especially DM 22.

³⁶Gloria Frost endorses a similar interpretation of Aquinas. See Frost, *Aquinas on Efficient Causation*, 50.

type of efficient cause whose influence on a given effect is mediated by its direct influence on some other effect.³⁷

A causal series presents the most straightforward sort of illustration of this difference. Consider a causal series in which a hand moves a stick, which in turn moves a stone. Here, the hand is an immediate cause of the motion of the stick, and the stick is an immediate cause of the motion of the stone, because neither produces its effect in virtue of producing some intervening effect. However, the hand is only a mediate cause of the stone's motion, because it is only by producing the stick's motion that it produces the stone's motion.³⁸

The main advantage of Freddoso's interpretation is that it suggests a natural way of understanding what it means for an efficient cause to produce its effect directly—namely, by producing it without producing any intervening thing. Nevertheless, I think this reading cannot be sustained, for two reasons. First, although Suárez does sometimes refer to mediate causes as *per accidens*, to my knowledge he never explicitly analyzes the distinction between *per se* and *per accidens* efficient causes in terms of mediate and immediate causes. Although this negative evidence is not decisive, it would be surprising if Suárez had in mind such a straightforward analysis, yet failed to mention it anywhere. And in fact, his remark in Text 1 that a *per accidens* efficient cause 'cannot be neatly defined by a single common description, but is said in various ways,' seems to rule out such an analysis.³⁹

Second, and more importantly, some of Suárez's examples of *per accidens* efficient causes constitute counterexamples to this interpretation. One such example is that of water that heats. Although Suárez cites the water as a *per accidens* efficient cause of the heat produced, nothing about the way he describes this example suggests

³⁷Freddoso, 'Introduction,' p. l. See also p. xxvii. However, in some places Freddoso seems to acknowledge that Suárez's notion of a *per accidens* efficient cause cannot be completely captured by his notion of a mediate efficient cause, as on p. lvi.

³⁸For discussion of mediate and immediate causes in Suárez, see Freddoso, 'Introduction,' p. lvii–lviii.

³⁹Freddoso himself notes this in 'Introduction,' p. lvi.

that the water cannot be an immediate efficient cause of the heat.⁴⁰ If a pot of boiling water heats some potatoes that are submerged in the water, it is plain enough that the water does not produce heat in the potatoes in virtue of producing anything else. Instead, the water heats the potatoes immediately. Another example is that of a white thing that heats *per accidens*.⁴¹ Again, there is no reason to suppose that a white thing cannot heat immediately. Imagine the white cheese on a piping hot pizza. It does not need to produce anything else in order to burn your mouth. Rather, it can burn you immediately.

Accordingly, I think it is unlikely that what Suárez means by *per se* and *per accidens* efficient causes can be captured in terms of immediate and mediate efficient causes. To see what he does mean, we must examine in more detail his discussion of *per se* and *per accidens* efficient causes in DM 17.2. After drawing the distinction between these two types of efficient causes in Text 1, Suárez describes some of the ways in which something can be called a cause *per accidens*. Although he thinks these ways ‘can be multiplied to infinity according to the various ways of conceiving and speaking,’⁴² in each case something will be called a cause *per accidens* either ‘from the perspective of the cause’ (*ex parte causa*) or ‘from the perspective of the effect’ (*ex parte effectum*).⁴³ Characterizing the first sort of *per accidens* efficient causes, he writes:

(Text 3) That is said to cause *per accidens* from the perspective of the cause, which is *per accidens* conjoined to a *per se* principle of causing.⁴⁴

The context makes clear that what Suárez means here by a ‘principle of causing’ is the active power that is manifested in the production of an effect. For example, he thinks that in the production

⁴⁰DM 17.2.2.

⁴¹DM 17.2.2.

⁴²DM 17.2.2.

⁴³DM 17.2.2. I have adopted Carlos Steel’s translation of ‘*ex parte causa*’ and ‘*ex parte effectum*’. See Carlos Steel, ‘Does Evil Have a Cause? Augustine’s Perplexity and Thomas’s Answer,’ *The Review of Metaphysics* 48 (1994): 251–273.

⁴⁴DM 17.2.2.

of a statue, the *per se* principle of causing is the art of statuary, which is a habit of a human being. Likewise, in the production of heat, the *per se* principle of causing is the form of heat that exists in the agent. So on his view, something qualifies as a cause *per accidens* from the perspective of the cause when it is accidentally or coincidentally (*per accidens*) conjoined to the active power that is manifested in the production of the effect. One way Suárez thinks this can happen is if the form that is the *per se* principle of causing belongs to a subject accidentally. For example, he thinks that water heats only *per accidens* because the power for heating (a quality of heat) just so happens (*accidit*) to belong to water. Similarly, Polycletus is a *per accidens* cause of a statue because the art of statuary is accidental to human beings.⁴⁵

How are we to understand the accidental conjunction to which Suárez appeals here? Because accidental features are typically understood in contrast with essential features, one natural interpretation is that a subject *S* is accidentally conjoined to a power *P* if and only if *P* is a non-essential feature of *S*.⁴⁶ For example, on this interpretation the power to heat is accidentally conjoined to water because water is not essentially hot. Likewise, the art of statuary is accidentally conjoined to a human being (for example, Polycletus) because a human being does not possess that art essentially. If this is what Suárez means, then his view is that a subject can be called an efficient cause *per accidens* from the perspective of the cause when it exercises an active power that is not essential to it.

However, some of Suárez's examples of *per se* efficient causes appear to rule out this sort of analysis. For example, he claims that a hot thing is a *per se* efficient cause of heat, even though the subject referred to by the expression 'hot thing' may well turn out to be hot only contingently, as when water is hot.⁴⁷ Likewise, a sculptor is a *per se* efficient cause of a statue, even though the subject referred to

⁴⁵Another type of accidental conjunction he mentions occurs when the *per se* principle of causing and another form co-exist accidentally in the same subject, as when a musical thing writes or a white thing heats. See DM 17.2.2.

⁴⁶I thank Sydney Penner for suggesting this interpretation.

⁴⁷DM 17.2.3.

by ‘sculptor’ (some human being) is a sculptor only contingently.⁴⁸ Thus, when Suárez says that a *per accidens* efficient cause is accidentally conjoined to the power by which it acts, he does not mean that the cause possesses the power contingently. Instead, I take him to mean that the power in question is accidental to the cause with respect to the way in which that cause is *represented*. This appears to be what Suárez has in mind in the following passage:

(Text 4) [A]n action is *per se* from a *suppositum* insofar as it has been affected by such a form, but not necessarily in itself (*secundum se*). And thus a hot thing heats *per se*, but water [does] not. And I add furthermore that an action is attributed (*tribui*) *per accidens* to a *suppositum* when the power of acting is also in it *per accidens*, as in the example mentioned [i.e., the water heating], because then in the *suppositum* itself taken nakedly (*nude sumpto*) the power of acting is in no way included, and the action is conjoined to it altogether *per accidens*.⁴⁹

Suárez has in mind two ways in which we can represent an agent. On the one hand, we can represent it insofar as it is affected by some form—that is, as possessing some accident. For example, we can represent an agent as a hot thing or a white thing. On the other hand, we can also represent it ‘in itself’ or ‘nakedly’—that is, as belonging to some substance-kind. For example, we can represent an agent as water, or as a human being.

With this in mind, let us consider Suárez’s example of hot water that heats. His point appears to be that if we represent the agent as a hot thing, then it heats *per se*—that is, it qualifies as a *per se* efficient cause of the heat that it produces in, say, some potatoes. However, if we represent it as water, it qualifies only as a *per accidens* efficient cause of the heat. He goes on to explain that the reason why the agent represented as water does not count as a *per se* efficient cause of heat is that the relevant active power (the power to heat) belongs

⁴⁸DM 17.2.3.

⁴⁹DM 17.2.3. For a similar passage, see DM 18.6.2. In this context, what Suárez means by a *suppositum* is a complete substance. See DM 34.

to water only *per accidens*. In turn, he evidently wants to explain this by saying that when we represent the water as such, we do not represent it as possessing the power to heat. But when we represent the water as a hot thing, we obviously do represent it as possessing this power.

It is worth noting that in some cases, an agent will qualify as a *per se* efficient cause of a given effect even when it is represented via its substance-kind. For example, fire, conceived as such, is a *per se* efficient cause of heat, because (Suárez says) heat is included in the concept of fire. He writes that ‘fire, at its root (*radicaliter*) and in respect of its power includes the proper notion (*rationem*) of heating.’⁵⁰ Likewise, sometimes an agent qualifies only as a *per accidens* efficient cause of a given effect when it is represented via one of its accidents. For example, an agent conceived as a white thing is only a *per accidens* efficient cause of heat, because the power to heat is not included in the concept of a white thing.

The main point to be drawn from my analysis is that, in order to qualify as a *per se* efficient cause of a given effect, an agent must be represented as having the active power that it exercises in producing that effect. Otherwise, it will qualify only as a *per accidens* efficient cause of that effect. This observation can be expressed as the following condition on *per se* efficient causes:

Condition 1: If *C* is a *per se* efficient cause of an effect *E*,
then

- (i) *C* is represented as an *F*, and
- (ii) the active power whereby *C* produces *E* is included in the representation of an *F*.

Recall that in the previous section, I raised an objection to my eliminative interpretation, according to which it seems to follow that extensionality fails for contexts involving efficient causation. It is true that the sculptor produces a statue, but false that Polycletus does, even if ‘the sculptor’ and ‘Polycletus’ are co-referring. If my analysis in this section is correct, then Suárez is prepared to accept

⁵⁰DM 17.2.3.

this consequence of his eliminativist theory, and even appears to emphasize it in his own discussion. As we shall see in the next section, I think this failure of extensionality is in principle consistent with Suárez's realism about efficient causation. Even so, I expect that many readers will be dissatisfied with this interpretation, and will be motivated to find some way of preserving extensionality in Suárez's account.

One strategy would be show that Suárez denies that terms such as 'the sculptor' and 'Polycletus' really are co-referring. This objection could be framed as a demand for clarification about what sorts of entities can be efficient causes. So far I have been assuming that Suárez takes efficient causes to be *supposita*, which outside theological contexts, he takes to be primary substances.⁵¹ However, perhaps this assumption is incorrect. An alternative suggestion would be that, according to Suárez, it is not *supposita* that are efficient causes but rather their active powers.⁵² Aristotle appears to endorse this position in some texts. For example, in the *Physics* he identifies the art of the sculptor as the efficient cause of a statue.⁵³ And Suárez sometimes describes active powers as if they themselves perform actions or produce effects.⁵⁴

This interpretation suggests a principled reason for denying that the relevant terms are co-referring, because one could say that, although 'the sculptor' refers both to a human being and to the art of statuary, 'Polycletus' refers only to the human being. This matters because on the interpretation we are considering, only the former expression refers to the efficient cause of the statue, so the extensionality of efficient causation is preserved.

However, this interpretation does not fit with Suárez's account of the role of active powers in efficient causation. As we saw in the introduction, he characterizes an active power as what enables something to perform a particular type of action. According to this

⁵¹DM 34.1.9.

⁵²I thank Kendall Fisher for suggesting this interpretation.

⁵³*Physics*, Chapter 2, Book 3, 195a4–6.

⁵⁴One striking example is at DM 18.5.4, where he notes that in non-vital actions, accidents can come to be (*posse fieri*) from accidents. He appeals to the example of the accident of heat heating something.

account, it is by manifesting the art of statuary that the sculptor produces a statue. We might say that, on Suárez's view, an active power does not produce an effect but instead *explains how* its subject produces the effect. Suárez addresses this most explicitly in DM 17.2.7, where he distinguishes between what he calls a 'cause' or 'principle *quod*' and a 'cause' or 'principle *quo*'—literally, the cause or principle *which*, and the cause or principle *by which*.⁵⁵ To be sure, Suárez sometimes characterizes active powers as principles or causes of effects in this latter, improper sense. However, following what he regards as the standard view among scholastic philosophers and theologians, he emphasizes that only *supposita* are efficient causes in the former, strict sense.⁵⁶ He makes this point especially clearly in DM 34.7.10, where he writes:

(Text 5) An action is attributed properly and *per se* to a *suppositum* as to that which operates. In this proposition we declare that axiom: 'Actions belong to *supposita*,' which is commonly received from the theologians, as one may see in St. Thomas [...].⁵⁷

Another strategy for preserving extensionality would be to say that an efficient cause is not a *suppositum* as such, but rather the composite of a *suppositum* and the relevant active power—what Suárez and other scholastics call an 'accidental unity' (*unum per accidens*).⁵⁸ For example, on this view the man Polycletus does not make the statue, strictly speaking. In the strict sense, the efficient cause of the statue is Polycletus *as informed by the art of statuary*. Similarly, we might say that it is not Socrates who sings, but musical Socrates. This interpretation initially appears to have more evidence in its favor than the previous account that identifies agents with powers. As Text 4 makes clear, Suárez thinks that a *suppositum*'s being a *per se* efficient cause is somehow relative to its possessing the correct

⁵⁵See also DM 18.2.1 and 18.6.2.

⁵⁶See Tuttle, 'Suárez's Metaphysics of Active Powers,' 61–62. One exceptional case is the human soul, which Suárez takes to be subsistent but not a *suppositum*. See DM 34.7.11.

⁵⁷For example, see ST I, q. 39, a. 5, ad 1; and ST III, q. 19, a. 1, ad 3 and 4.

⁵⁸I thank Kendall Fisher for suggesting this interpretation.

kind of active power. Perhaps this relativity could be captured by appealing to accidental unities, while preserving the extensionality of efficient causation.

Although this is an ingenious idea, I think it is also an implausible reading of Suárez. To my knowledge, no scholastic figure ever explicitly attributes action or efficient causation to accidental unities. And because this would have been regarded as such a novel opinion, we should expect that if Suárez held it, he would have noted it explicitly. Moreover, his insistence on the standard view that actions are *per se* from *supposita* rules out this reading. Outside theological contexts Suárez takes *supposita* to be primary substances—that is to say, individuals such as Socrates or Polycle-tus. But accidental unities are compounds of primary substances and their accidents, and so they cannot be identified with *supposita* on Suárez's account.

Let us turn now to Suárez's discussion of the other way in which he thinks a cause can be *per accidens*—namely, from the perspective of the effect. Characterizing this type of *per accidens* efficient cause, he writes:

(Text 6) It is also customary that a cause sometimes be called (*assignari*) *per accidens* from the perspective of the effect—that is, in respect of that which is accidental (*accidit*) to a *per se* effect. And in this way the very same *per se* cause of a certain effect is a *per accidens* cause of that which is conjoined to the *per se* effect, as for example a motion is a cause of heat, or a hot thing is a cause of something black.⁵⁹

In order to explain what Suárez has in mind in this passage, I need to make a few additional remarks about active powers. According to Suárez, active powers are directed or aimed at the production of particular types of effects. For example, the power to heat is directed at the production of heat. Given what we have seen so far from our brief discussion, this should not be surprising. I've noted already that active powers are powers for particular types of

⁵⁹DM 17.2.4.

actions. However, because an action of a certain type just is the production of a certain type of effect, it follows that active powers of a certain type are directed at the production of the corresponding type of effect.

Now, although the exercise of an active power aims at the corresponding type of effect, we do not necessarily represent the effect as belonging to that type. Suárez's examples of a motion that causes heat, and a hot thing that causes something black, are not especially helpful for illuminating this point. However, his contemporary Pedro Fonseca offers a much better example in the course of his explanation of *per accidens* efficient causes from the perspective of the effect. He writes:

In the latter [way], a sculptor is a cause of something white, if it just so happens (*accidat*) that the statue, which he makes *per se*, is white.⁶⁰

Although this example is suggested by his contemporary, it illustrates Suárez's point nicely. If the statue is represented as the type of thing at which the art of statuary aims—that is, as a statue—then it qualifies as a *per se* effect of the sculptor. However, if it is represented in some other way, for example, as a white thing, then it is only accidentally related to the *per se* effect, and thus counts only as a *per accidens* effect of the sculptor.

Suárez's main point here is that in order to qualify as a *per se* efficient cause, an agent must be represented as producing the sort of effect at which the active power in question aims. This result constitutes a second condition on *per se* efficient causes, which we can formulate as follows:

- Condition 2:** If *C* is a *per se* efficient cause of an effect *E*,
then
- (i) *E* is represented as a *G*, and
 - (ii) the active power whereby *C* produces *E* is a power that is aimed at producing *G*s.

⁶⁰See Book 5, Chapter 2 of Pedro Fonseca, *Commentariorum in Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*, 2 vols., (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1964).

So far, we have examined the two most general senses in which a cause can be said to be *per accidens*. I have argued that each of these ways of understanding *per accidens* efficient causes should be taken as imposing a necessary condition on *per se* efficient causes. However, because Suárez thinks that every *per accidens* efficient cause is such either from the perspective of the cause, or from the perspective of the effect, it should be clear that Conditions 1 and 2 are not only necessary for a cause's being *per se*, but also jointly sufficient. That is to say, any efficient cause that satisfies Conditions 1 and 2 will qualify as *per se*. Thus, by combining Conditions 1 and 2, we can formulate the following definition of a proper or *per se* efficient cause:

Definition of a *per se* efficient cause: *C* is a *per se* efficient cause of an effect *E* iff:

- (i) *C* is represented as an *F*,
- (ii) *E* is represented as a *G*,
- (iii) the active power whereby *C* efficiently causes *E* is included in the representation of an *F*, and
- (iv) the active power whereby *C* efficiently causes *E* is a power aimed at producing *G*s.

In this section, I have offered what I take to be Suárez's most general analysis of *per se* efficient causes, as well as his derivative characterization of *per accidens* efficient causes. Limitations of space prevent me from giving a more detailed survey of how he employs the distinction between these causes. However, it should be clear that the distinction plays a prominent role in his metaphysics, since he explicitly appeals to it in a variety of contexts in the *Metaphysical Disputations*.⁶¹ Moreover, because Suárez regards only *per se* efficient causes as genuine, his analysis of these causes influences his theorizing about every context in which he thinks efficient causation really occurs. With this in mind, let now us return to the objection I raised in Section 2.

⁶¹One important example is his treatment of chance and fortune in DM 19.12. Another prominent case is DM 22.1.

4 Response to Objection

In this chapter I have argued that Suárez endorses an intensional theory of efficient causation. As we saw in Section 2, his examples show that numerically the same thing will be a *per se* cause under one description, but a *per accidens* cause under another. However, because Suárez thinks that only *per se* causes are efficacious, it follows that whether an instance of efficient causation actually obtains depends in part on how its circumstances are represented. Indeed, we saw in Section 3 that Suárez appears to emphasize this consequence of his eliminativism, since his analysis of *per se* efficient causes requires pairs of causes and effects to be represented in the right way.

This result is surprising, because it appears to inject an element of subjectivity or mind-dependence into the domain of causation. For many philosophers, this is counterintuitive in itself. Moreover, it appears to be out of step with the scholastic tradition. Medieval Aristotelians regarded facts about causation as paradigmatically mind-independent, and for this reason often cited them as evidence for the existence of real relations.⁶² Suárez leaves no doubt that he follows the medieval tradition on this point, insisting that action—which, as we have seen, he identifies with efficient causation—exists in extra-mental reality (*in rerum natura*).⁶³ However, this appears inconsistent with the intensional account of efficient causation that I have argued he endorses.

Suárez does not explicitly address anything like this objection, and for this reason we cannot be certain how he would have attempted to resolve it. However, one option available to him is to say that his theory of *per se* efficient causation is not a theory of effi-

⁶²For example, see Ockham's *Ordinatio* I, distinction 30, question 1, in William Ockham, *Opera theologica*, 7 vols., ed. P. Boehner *et alia* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1974–88), vol. iv, 316–317; and Scotus's *Ordinatio* II, distinction 1, question 5, numbers 223 and 226, in John Duns Scotus, *Joannis Duns Scoti doctoris subtilis, ordinis minorum opera omnia*, 26 vols., ed. L. Wadding (Paris: Vivès, 1891–1895). For discussion, see Jeffrey Brower, 'Medieval Theories of Relations,' in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Stanford University, 1997–, article published 2018), URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relations-medieval/>, Section 3.3.

⁶³DM 48, prologue, paragraph 2.

cient causation as such, but rather of the *explanations* in which efficient causes are cited. The idea is that in articulating his account of *per se* efficient causation, Suárez is really expressing his view about the conditions under which a causal explanation is correct or adequate. Following this line of thought, a causal explanation will be correct or adequate just in case (i) it correctly identifies the agent and its effect, and (ii) it does so in a way that advertises the active power exercised by that agent, and the kind of effect at which that power aims. As an illustration, consider the production of the statue of Apollo. On the view under consideration, a correct or adequate causal explanation of the statue's production will not only tell us that the sculptor makes the statue, but it will also *represent* the sculptor as someone who possesses the art of statuary, and the statue as a statue.⁶⁴

Of course, in order to assess how satisfying this sort of proposal could be, it would need to be developed in much more detail. Even so, the approach I have outlined looks promising initially. If Suárez's account of *per se* and *per accidens* efficient causation is really an account of the explanations in which efficient causes are cited, it should not be surprising that *per se* efficient causation has a subjective or intensional component. Indeed, because explanation is arguably an epistemic notion, this is exactly what we would expect. Moreover, this account does not obviously threaten Suárez's realism about efficient causation. For, even if explanations are in some sense mind-dependent, there is no reason to suppose that the phenomena to which they appeal must be.⁶⁵

⁶⁴For discussion and criticism of a similar account from the twentieth century, see Jaegwon Kim, 'Causes as Explanations: A Critique,' *Theory and Decision* 13(1981): 293–309.

⁶⁵I presented drafts of this chapter at the Midwest Seminar in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, Gonzaga University, the Cornell Summer Colloquium in Medieval Philosophy, and a Society for Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy session on Suárez. I am grateful to the audiences for their questions and comments. I also thank Michael Bergmann, Jeff Brower, Susan Brower-Toland, Jan Cover, Shane Duarte, Brian Embry, Kendall Fisher, John Kronen, Sydney Penner, and Giorgio Pini for their comments and conversation about the chapter in its various stages.