

Review of *Suárez on Aristotelian Causality*

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This volume is a welcome addition to the growing body of English-language scholarship on the scholastic philosopher and theologian Francisco Suárez (1548–1617). The volume addresses one of the central topics in Suárez's metaphysics—namely, his account of causation or causality (*causalitas*). As Fink notes in his introduction, this topic has already received some attention in the secondary literature. In particular, Suárez's views about the formal and efficient causes have been the subject of several scholarly studies. Fink aims to expand and improve upon the existing scholarship by offering what he calls “the first attempt at a comprehensive account of Suárez on Aristotelian causality in the *Metaphysical Disputations*.” The volume collects five papers (all from early-career scholars) on Suárez's treatment of causality, and is organized as follows: Chapter 1, on causality in general [Jacob Leth Fink]; Chapter 2, on material causality [Erik Åkerlund]; Chapter 3, on formal causality [Kara Richardson]; Chapter 4, on efficient causality [Stephan Schmid]; and Chapter 5, on final causality [Sydney Penner].

Fink's editorial approach serves as a valuable corrective to some of the prevailing trends in Suárez scholarship. For example, in the Anglophone world, much of the existing work on Suárez has been done by scholars seeking insight into early modern accounts of causation and laws of nature. Although some of this work is quite good, it generally casts Suárez in a supporting role, and as a result does not do justice to the sophistication and systematic power of his own views. The papers in this volume explore Suárez's account of causality for its own sake, not as a mere foil for some later thinker. Fink also seeks to distance his approach from what he calls the “European current” of Suárez scholarship, which he takes to be dominated by the work of Étienne Gilson and his historiographical descendants. Because of its preoccupation with essence, existence, and the transcendentals, scholarship in the tradition of Gilson has presented an incomplete—and in some cases, even distorted—picture of Suárez's metaphysics. As Fink observes, this approach to Suárez scholarship has tended to overlook the prominent role of causality in the *Metaphysical Disputations*. Although the volume occasionally takes cues from the Gilsonian tradition (especially in Fink's own chapter), readers who are less than sympathetic to this tradition will still find much to like.

The volume's papers are well-written, and their insights will be readily appreciated by specialists in late scholastic philosophy. Even so, it is worth registering a couple points of criticism. First, the audience for the volume is unnecessarily circumscribed. Suárez is not exactly a household name, so it is perhaps unfair to expect that a volume on his theory of causality be pitched to a general philosophical audience. Nevertheless, the editor overlooks several points of contact with ongoing debates in the history of philosophy and in contemporary metaphysics. For example, the chapters on material and formal causality largely ignore the sizable literature on medieval hylomorphism and human nature. Likewise, the chapters on efficient and final causality could have benefited from engagement with contemporary debates about the metaphysics of causal powers. Second, Fink's aim of offering a “comprehensive account of Suárez on Aristotelian causality” is only partially realized. To be sure, the volume is comprehensive in the sense that it treats each of the four Aristotelian causes. However, beyond its focus on causality, it lacks any overarching historical or metaphysical narrative. Part of the problem is that, in his own chapter on causality in general, Fink does not offer an illuminating definition of causality on Suárez's behalf. This lack of editorial direction results in a collection that is best read as a series of stand-alone papers, rather than as a unified work reflecting a systematic view of Suárez's theory of causality or its historical significance.

In spite of these criticisms, the authors' individual contributions reward careful scrutiny. In

the interest of space, I want to briefly discuss one of them here. In her chapter on formal causality, Richardson argues against the interpretive thesis—defended by Helen Hattab, Robert Pasnau, and others—that Suárez privileges the substantial form's role in efficient causation over its traditional role as a formal cause. (This thesis is often deployed in support of a suspiciously tidy historical narrative, according to which Suárez is a sort of philosophical chimera, half medieval and half early modern.) Defenders of the thesis often appeal to Suárez's arguments for the existence of the substantial form in Disputation 15 of the *Metaphysical Disputations*. There, Suárez argues that the existence of substantial forms is the best explanation for a variety of natural phenomena, such as hot water's tendency to become cool if removed from an external source of heat. Richardson argues persuasively that, although these (and other) texts do show that Suárez affords substantial forms an important role in efficient causation, this does not preclude him from endorsing a traditional Aristotelian view of its role as a formal cause. Indeed, she points out that in the same text, Suárez also argues for the existence of the substantial form by appealing to its traditional role as a formal cause, which he characterizes as “constitut[ing] and complet[ing] the essence of a natural being.” Suárez refers to this consideration as the “chief” (*praecipua*) argument for the existence of the substantial form.