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On Reducing Final Causes

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Overview

1. A natural process
2. Final causes
3. Derived final causes
4. Reduction

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A natural process


biting chips off a tree, felling a tree, building a dam, ...

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A natural process

A natural process is a process a certain form of which is typical for the thing that undergoes this process,
such that what is typical for the process emerges exclusively from an account of the nature of that thing.

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A natural process

A feature F is *typical* for a thing A if F belongs in an account of what type of thing A is.

(Not only if all or most instances of that type possess F.)

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Final Causes

The final cause of a process is the form that typical instance of its kind have.
(= the course such processes typically take)

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Derived Final Causes

A *remote* final cause of P is the typical form of a process Q undergone by the same thing, to which P typically contributes.

An *external* final cause of a process P is the typical form of a process Q to which P typically contributes, where P and Q are undergone by different kinds of things.

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Derived Final Causes

The internal final cause of a thing (its *ergon*) is the internal final cause of a process in which it is typically involved.

The external final cause (its function) is the external final cause of a process in which it is typically involved.

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Reduction

Allan Gotthelf:

the Aristotelian notion of a final cause "is reserved for the processes of complex entities which are not reducible to element-potentials."

(*Philosophical Issues in Aristotle's Biology*, ed. Gotthelf and Lennox, 1987, p. 214)

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Reduction

Processes with a complex final cause (=typical form) may be analyzed into processes with a simple final cause.

All causal processes are processes for which a certain course is typical; hence, they have a proximate and internal final cause.

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