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The Four Causes of Personality. A Thomistic Approach to Personality Theory

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Abstract: Among personality psychology theorists there is general agreement that personality is the result of multiple causes. Biological and environmental causes are especially mentioned. However, no coherent theory of causality is found among them to account for the multi-causality that affects personality. This article proposes that the Aristotelian-Thomistic theory of causality can provide personality theory with the necessary framework of understanding for a coherent and integrated view of this multi-causality. From this perspective, the term 'cause' is analogous, and has four main meanings: the material cause, the formal cause, the efficient cause and the final cause. These are not unconnected causes, but constitute a system in which each cause is reciprocally dependent on the other. Moreover, these four causes are genera, which contain other specific causes. In this article we propose to determine for each factor affecting personality one of these causes, showing the capacity of this causal theory to contribute to personality theory and to the philosophy of psychology from a Thomistic perspective. From the application of the Aristotelian-Thomistic causal theory to personality, it is proposed, finally, a complete definition of the concept of personality where each of the four causes is assigned, in comparison with other less complete definitions taken from authors relevant to the Personality Psychology.

Keywords: theory of causality, personality psychology, philosophy of psychology, thomistic psychology.

Introduction

One of the classic controversies in personality psychology is the degree of influence heredity and environment have on personality, commonly referred to as the nature-nurture debate (Allport 1961, 4; Bolton & Hill 2007; Ceci & Williams 1999; Filloux 1961; Kagan 2010; Kluckhohn & Murray 1965; Plomin 1990, 56). This type of approach assumes a priori that both factors are causes in the same sense and therefore that, as the influence of one increases, the influence of the other decreases. Underlying this could be a misunderstanding, namely one in which these and other factors, which concur in the multi-causality of personality, are considered as causes on the same level, that they are univocal, instead of analogous causes.

To fully understand personality, all the factors that affect its formation and its internal constitution need to be accounted so as not to confuse them. In the Aristotelian philosophical tradition, that which explains the production and internal constitution of a thing is referred to as "cause" (Viano et al. 2013). The notion of Aristotelian causality does not fully concur with our modern notion, since it includes not only the agent that produces the effect, but all the factors necessary to answer the question "why?". Some have therefore suggested that the Greek term "*aitia*" and its corresponding Latin "*causa*" should not be translated as "cause", but as "be-cause" (Killeen 2001, 136; Austin 2017, 65; Pérez Álvarez 2017, 7). From this perspective, things are explained through four classes of "becauses" —which some compare with the answers to the four "whys" of the ethologist and Nobel Prize winner Tinbergen (Hladký and Havlíček 2013; Tinbergen 1963)—: material cause, formal cause, efficient cause and final cause (Aristotle 2007, 89–125). Our proposal is that this Aristotelian causal perspective allows psychological research data to be integrated into a theory that can account for the multi-causality that intervenes in personality. We will interpret Aristotelianism along the lines of Aquinas, since the latter included in, among other places, Book V of his Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (Aquinas 1961, 349–55)

a number of subdivisions within the Aristotelian classes of causality that we consider very useful for a complete consideration of causes.

It is well known that Aristotle's theory of causes has been the subject of much criticism by modern philosophy from Bacon, Descartes and Hume to the present day. There has also been no shortage of well-argued defences of Aristotle's concept of cause (Austin 2017; Cooney 1991; Gilson 1971; Jaworski 2016; Smith 2015). It is not possible to develop an adequate defence of the Aristotelian theory of causality in this article as a specific study would be needed. The convincing application of this theory to the explanation of personality may serve as a consideration in its favour. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that we are not the first to revive the Aristotelian theory of the four causes in the context of contemporary psychological theory. This has been carried out from very different perspectives, including the methodology of psychological research (Howard 1990; Grice 2011), the psychology of emotions (Arnold 1971), the humanistic theory of personality (Rycklak 1990, 1994) and the psychology of behaviour (Rachlin 1992; Killeen 2001; Killeen 2003; Killeen & Nash 2003; Killeen, Tannoc and Sagvolden 2011; Pérez Álvarez 2003, 2009, 2017; Pérez Álvarez and García-Monte 2004).

In the Aristotelian conception, the four causes are so closely connected that they need each other to be fully understood in themselves. Matter and form are co-principles: matter is the subject of form; form gives shape to matter. The agent (efficient cause) works for an end. This end is, therefore, the cause of the agent's causality. However, it is the agent that, through its action, makes the end a reality. The agent, for its part, introduces form into matter. In this way, all causes are connected and turn out to have a causal reciprocity, which gave rise to the scholastic adage *causae sunt ad invicem causae* (causes are reciprocally causes). The four causes are an integrated, holistic explanation system of reality, not four independent points of view (Austin 2018, 66–68).

1. The material cause

1.1. *Materia ex qua:* the elements of personality

These four are, to be precise, genera of causes that are subdivided into different species. There are different types of material cause, formal cause, etc. Furthermore, when thinking about a "material" cause, one spontaneously associate this concept with the organic foundations of personality. However, that is not necessarily the meaning of "matter" in the Aristotelian tradition. Aquinas distinguishes three types of material cause: *materia in qua* ("matter in which", the subject or substrate), *materia ex qua* ("matter from which", the elements or components of something) and *materia circa quam* ("matter concerning which", the object of an activity) (Peirce 1974, 249).

We start from a classic example, taken from artificial things: bronze is the material of the statue of Zeus or Apollo. This concept implies two dimensions, which in this example go together but which do not always do so: a) matter is that on which the form rests, that which receives the form or is perfected by it, its subject or substrate; b) matter is what a thing is made of. Later, in scholasticism, these two concepts received the name of *materia in qua* and *materia ex qua*, respectively. *Materia in qua* is the subject of form, while *materia ex qua* is the set of components or elements that make up that thing. For example, a painting is made up of colours (*materia ex qua*) and its subject is a canvas or a wall (*materia in qua*).

We will first discuss the topic of the material cause *ex qua*. Personality is clearly a complex reality —*unitas multiplex* in Stern's words (1938, 73; Allport 1961, 376). Almost all definitions state that personality is made up of a set of elements —let's call them qualities, habits, traits, dispositions, psychophysical systems, etc. These elements are the material cause *ex qua*, that is, of which personality is composed. We prefer to use the word "disposition" because we believe, together with Allport (1961), that personality is a reality within the individual that disposes him/her to a certain way of thinking, feeling and behaving. Allport distinguished what he called "personal dispositions" from "common traits". The latter are a statistical construction aimed at predicting behaviours but not

a reality within the individual that is the cause of their way of thinking and behaving. Personal dispositions, on the other hand, are interior inclinations that motivate thought and behaviour and are, therefore, their explanatory principles. Interest in statistical traits is characteristic of the nomothetic approach to the study of personality, while interest in interior dispositions is characteristic of the idiographic approach (Allport 1961; Eysenck 1968). A similar distinction is found in Erich Fromm (1947), who distinguishes what he calls "behavioural traits" from "character traits". The former are those addressed by behaviourism, which gives the same name to externally similar behaviours. However, apparently identical behaviours could have a completely different deep motivation, whether conscious or unconscious. For example, an apparent act of bravery may hide very different motivations, such as patriotism, ambition or recklessness. Character traits, on the other hand, are deep dispositions that could eventually be expressed through different behavioural traits and which are hidden motivating factors. Both in Allport and Fromm, it is a matter of distinguishing externally measurable behavioural regularities from real internal dispositions. Clearly, when we speak of the material cause of personality, we are referring to Fromm's character traits or Allport's personal dispositions, and not mere terms or constructs that bring together phenomenal regularities.

The concept of "disposition" has Aristotelian roots. Aristotle considered that operational dispositions were qualities and were divided into two types: unstable and stable. When Aristotle studied character (*ethos*), he considered it as being composed of stable operational dispositions which he referred to as *hexis*, the Greek term for the Latin *habitus*. A *habitus* is a stable internal disposition to operation, be it of a cognitive, affective or behavioural order. This Aristotelian concept is not perfectly equivalent to the meaning of "habit" in ordinary language, nor in psychology, which is closer to the behaviour trait than to the internal disposition. It is not a habit, nor a set of habits, but a stable internal disposition that can account for many specific behaviours and habits (Austin, 2017). An individual may have a habit of reading the newspaper every morning, but that does not make it a habit in the Aristotelian sense. *Habitus* is also not a mere summation of various habits, as if one were

saying that pleasantness —which in addition to being a statistical factor may also be an interior disposition— consisted of the habits of smiling while looking into the eyes of our interlocutor, always greeting the neighbour, helping the neighbour etc. *Habitus* is an interior disposition that can be translated into action through very different behaviours and habits (Hulsey and Hampson 2014).

These stable internal dispositions are the elements (*materia ex qua*) of personality. They can be cognitive (intelligence, memory, or imagination dispositions, for example) or affective (such as emotional and will dispositions), as well as innate (such as cognitive talents and temperament) or acquired (such as acquired cognitive dispositions and character). Nevertheless, to understand personality, it is first and foremost necessary to understand that it is a set of stable operational dispositions.

It is clear, then, that here "material cause" does not mean the same as "organic cause". The material cause *ex qua* of personality is the inner dispositions of a person's mental powers. It has been amply demonstrated by research that some of these dispositions in turn have a very important biological causal component (Cloninger et al 1993; Kagan 2010). This biological component is the material cause of those personality dispositions, of the elements of personality, not of personality itself *qua* personality, in the way that bricks of a house are the material cause of the house but in turn have their own material cause, namely what they are made of. Stable operational dispositions are like bricks that make up personality. Just as looking for the cause of the bricks is not the same as looking for the cause of the house, the study of dispositions is not the same as the study of personality as a whole, as will be seen below.

1.2. *Materia in qua:* the subject of personality

The matter *in qua* of personality is the subject or substratum that is affected by the dispositions of personality. Personality is not an independent hypostasis, but a set of dispositions of someone, that "individual" in whose "interior" Allport (1961) placed personality. This subject is the human person. We prefer the expression "person" to others, such as the

one used by Allport — "individual"—, since individual is also a stone, a pine tree or a worm and, therefore, does not specifically designate the human individual. Nor do we use the word "organism" (Goldstein 1963; Murray 2008), which is a generic term that encompasses not only living animals and human bodies, but also any living being, such as plants, fungi, and bacteria. All of them have in common being organisms, that is, living bodies made up of organs naturally and functionally connected to each other. The human person is also an organism, but the word organism is not enough to designate it in its difference regarding other living bodies. Nor would it suffice to use the term "human being" here because it designates what is common to all individuals of this species. The expression "human person", however, designates the human subject in his/her individuality. It is human individuals who are the subject of personality and not the universal human essence. The term "person" is used by Arnold (1969) in her own definition of personality. Recently, other authors have claimed the use of the notion of person in psychology (e.g., Martin et al 2010; Sugarman 2017; Witherington 2017).

Being the subject of personality, the person does not fully identify with it. The person is not his/her personality, but its base of support. Personality is something of the person, but personality is not the person (Echavarría 2010). With the term "person" we mean the complete concrete human being and not one of his/her parts. By "person", we do not mean a system of complexes related to the functional relationship with the world (Jung 1953) nor do we identify it with an internal organizer, whatever name it is given (ego, self, etc.). It is not the homunculus that manages the human machinery, but the complete human being, with his/her organism and his/her mind.

The human person, however, has many dispositions, cognitive, affective and behavioural. Stones and fungi have no cognitive or affective dispositions. To possess them they need to have the powers and the organs that make them possible. To have a good long-term memory, for example, it is necessary first and foremost to have a memory and its organ; to have a disposition to worry, one must have the capacity to worry, along with its corresponding organs. These powers and organs could also be called "*materia in qua*" of personality. Good long-term memory is a good

disposition of that capacity while memory is the immediate subject of that disposition; the tendency to worry is a disposition of the emotional faculty. However, neither the capacities nor their organs are realities that exist separately from the person but are aspects of him/her. Therefore, it is the person him/herself who is the subject, the material cause *in qua*, although secondarily the faculties of the subject by means of which the dispositions affect the person may also be referred to thus.

1.3. *Materia circa quam*: the material object of personality

In addition to matter *in qua* and *ex qua*, we have another class of matter, the *materia circa quam*, better known in philosophical language as the "material object". This is the term given to the field of action of a power, or of a science. For example, physical bodies are the material object of the sense of touch; the human organism is the material object of medicine.

Personality is a two-faced reality. One of its faces looks towards the interior of the person, insofar as it is a set of interior determinations of his/hers. The other face looks at an object, insofar as dispositions are intentional dynamic realities since dispositions are inclinations towards action. Dispositions are realities that have a subjective side, through which they are supported by a subject, namely the person, and an objective side, through which they point to action in the world. Personality is both something that belongs to a person because it organizes his/her internal dispositions, and something that points towards the objective side, insofar as the personality inclines to action.

Each disposition of personality inclines to different types of action, each of which in turn has its own object. For example, being fearful is a disposition whose object is acts of fear, to which it inclines; in turn, the object of fear is dangerous situations. The matter "on which" (*circa quam*) personality operates is the action of the person: personality exists to prepare us to act in a certain way.

When some authors refer to the central character of the I-world relationship in the understanding of personality (Lewin 1935; Stern 1938, 88–91; Murray 2008, 39–41; Nuttin 1980; Lersch 1956), they are referring to this objective or intentional dimension because personality disposes

us to action; action in turn is directed at objects that, taken as a whole, shape the world of a person, that is, the set of meanings and values that appeal to his/her operation and in view of which his/her operation makes sense and is understandable.

2. The formal cause

2.1. The internal formal cause

The concept of form is not alien to contemporary psychology, since it was used by the representatives of *Gestaltpsychologie* to explain the principle according to which, in perception, the whole is more than the sum of its parts (Köhler 1962). This principle was explicitly formulated by Aristotle in his treatise *On Sense and the Sensible*, which describes perception and which also contains a critique of ancient associationism (Aristotle 2001). *Gestalt* theorists adopt the principle of form from Christian Von Ehrenfels, a philosopher and psychologist disciple of the famous Franz Brentano, a great connoisseur of Aristotle. Ehrenfels distinguished "content qualities" from "form qualities" in music. The same musical form can be played using different keys and different musical instruments. That the same form is recognizable despite the differences between the elemental sounds demonstrates that form and content are principles that are irreducible to each other (Ehrenfels 1890; Lorenz 1968, 157–158). It is clearly the Aristotelian distinction of form and matter (Fabro 1941).

A distinction analogous to that made by *Gestalt* theorists in perception can be made in personality. When Allport (1961, 7–8) insisted that the consideration of isolated traits is not as important in the study of personality as understanding the organic relationship that different personal dispositions have with each other, he was referring to the principle of form. Personality is not a mere summation of traits or dispositions, just as these are not the mere result of the accumulation of behaviours or habits, but a qualitatively different reality. The form of personality is the order of the dispositions. These are not a flat, homologous reality, but an organized one, which implies that personality

is a set of hierarchical relationships. There are dispositions that are more important than others; some are executive, others subordinate. As Allport said, two people can score the same in a trait in a personality inventory. However, it is not only necessary to see which interior disposition that trait corresponds to, but what place it occupies in the organization of that personality. Those places are given by the form of personality.

Insisting on the importance of the form of personality is still as important today as it was in Allport's time, and not taking it into account could lead to some reductionist interpretations of research data. For example, if a study is carried out with monozygotic twins only on the basis of isolated traits, it is quite possible that the result is a greater similarity in the twins' personality between each other, or with their biological family, than with the twins' adoptive families. However, it must be kept in mind that, beyond other observations that can be made of these types of studies, which in themselves are valuable (Rowe 1994), research exclusively based on the evaluation of traits loses sight of the form of personality, which is the part that most depends on environmental influences, while, individually considered, traits and dispositions are ordinarily more dependent on heredity (Wright 1997). These observations lead us to an important distinction in the concept of Aristotelian formal cause because not only do we have the form that organizes the dispositions inside the subject, but other types of formal cause in the personality.

2.2. The external formal cause

The intrinsic formal cause must be distinguished from the extrinsic formal cause, which in Aquinas is the exemplary cause. The intrinsic formal cause is an internal organization that complements matter and makes it the type of entity that it is. In our case, it is the hierarchical set of relationships that organizes personality. The extrinsic formal cause, on the other hand, is the model in imitation of which matter is organized according to a form. For example, the model that poses for the sculptor to sculpt the figure in stone. It is here where social factors (family, education, culture, law, economy, etc.) come into play. The form that organizes personality internally is inspired by the models that the biographical

experience places in front of each one. Firstly, the models experienced in the family. These affect personality in two ways: firstly, because parents and other family members are taken as models upon which to shape one's own personality; and, secondly, by means of family customs and the roles assigned within the family. It is not possible to go into details about how these processes occur, but it is clear that a precondition for the assumption of these early models is that the attachment process be carried out properly (Ainsworth et al 1978; Bowlby 1988). In addition to these family models, we have the influence of other models from the school, other families, the church, the media, social customs, socially shared stories and legends, the social imaginary, etc. (Pérez-Álvarez & García-Montes 2004). All of these models have in common the fact that they are concrete examples, not universal norms, and, therefore, are learned in that intuitive and associative way that characterizes what the theory of double processing calls System 1 or Type 1 processing (Evans 2017; Kahneman 2003; Sloman 2006).

Together with these is also the influence of universal norms, such as moral precepts and values, civil laws, world views, life philosophies, etc. These latter factors should not be underestimated, although their direct influence occurs later than that of the concrete models that penetrate non-conceptual layers of personality. We are referring to those that occur according to the Type 2 processing mode, namely conceptual, rational, reflexive and argumentative (Evans 2017, 99–115; Kahneman 2003; Sloman 2006). This has two reasons: firstly, because many of those concrete models are a particular embodiment of universal norms; secondly, because when cognitive development enables the most direct influence of universal norms, they have a profound effect on personality. It is on the basis of this influence, for example, that Spranger (1966) organized personality types according to the type of value predominant in personality structuring.

All these family, social and cultural influences are extremely important in understanding why the innate dispositions are channelled in the way they are to form the stable dispositions of the adult, and also in understanding the way in which these are organized internally. The extrinsic formal cause allows us to understand the intrinsic formal

cause. Conceiving these influences of the models on personality like the exemplary formal cause, on the other hand, allows us to understand how it is possible to reconcile the influence of heredity with that of the environment. Heredity influences, as an efficient cause, the initial orientation of many cognitive and affective dispositions, while the environment has an influence as an exemplary cause, by proposing concrete ways to channel and organize these innate dispositions. It is not about distributing percentages of influence. Both types of cause are an outright cause in their own order.

2.3. The formal object of personality

The intrinsic formal cause organizes the dispositions taking as an example the extrinsic formal cause. However, as has been said, personality has also an objective facet, that is, one that is directed to actions and their objects. As has been explained, in this second facet of personality, there is a material object, which are actions. Each disposition has as its material object different types of actions, such as, for example, actions of long-term memory in the cognitive field, or actions of emotions, such as joy, desire, sadness or anguish, in the affective field. Just as there is an objective matter, there is also an objective form or formal object. This formal object is the way or mode in which these actions are carried out, their pattern or mould. Let's take an example: one can have, by temperament, a tendency to impulsiveness or anxiety. But the way in which one has learned to manage this impulsiveness or this tendency to feel anxious constitutes a disposition of character that is also integrated into a total structure with the other emotional tendencies that also have their own mode. One may have a repressive way of dealing with one's tendencies to desire, another may have a permissive way, for example. These modes are also related to the external formal cause, insofar as it is from the same normative influences that inspiration for emotional management is taken. The organized set of all these modes gives rise to a general way of being that characterizes us.

3. The efficient cause

The efficient cause is the agent that generates the thing, introducing form into matter. For example, the sculptor is the efficient cause of the sculpture, the painter is the cause of the painting and the parent is the child's. What is the agent cause of personality? Two candidates come up in the usual discourse of personality psychology: biological factors (genetic and congenital) and environmental factors. Let's analyse these two candidates.

Dispositions certainly have a biological component, which would be like the material cause of the dispositions themselves. We are, therefore, talking along the lines of the material cause, and not of the efficient cause. However, this organic component of dispositions has in turn an efficient biological cause, which is the parents and their genetic conditions, as well as the bio-environmental causes that are involved in the activation and development of the inherited characteristics. These influences do indeed fall in line with the efficient cause of personality dispositions. However, are they the efficient cause of personality *qua* personality? If we pay attention to what we have previously said, personality is such through its form. Form determines the species to which a thing belongs. The intrinsic form of personality is the order of the dispositions, that is, a set of hierarchically organized relationships. Since personality is not merely the sum of dispositions, but rather what determines it as a personality is the order of those dispositions, the efficient cause of personality *qua* personality is not the cause of each disposition, but the cause of the way in which these dispositions are channelled and organized. The biological cause is an efficient subordinate cause (dispositive cause) of another cause, the cause of the organization that constitutes the personality as such. A comparison can be made to aid comprehension: A house can be made of bricks, but the house is not a mere set of bricks, but an organized set shaped like a house. Without the form of a house, these bricks do not make a house. The brick maker is in a way the cause of the house, insofar as s/he causes its components. But the cause of the house as a house is the builder, who organizes the bricks in the form of a house. Similarly,

although certain personality dispositions are the result of heredity, the order that organizes these dispositions is not hereditary. Dispositions are like the building blocks of personality; however, it is necessary to organize them to have personality as such.

Are any of the agents of social influence, such as family, school, or society, the efficient cause? We have already seen that these factors played a role as exemplary causes. Do they also do so as the efficient cause? Undoubtedly, in the people comprising these groups there is an educational intention and, therefore, an intention to produce in the person of the child a way of being, stable dispositions, something that is achieved through the proposal —spontaneous or reflexive— of these models that serve as an exemplary cause of personality. This proposal often has an obligatory character accompanied by rewards for behaviours that manifest the desired way of being and punishments for those who deviate from or oppose that model. This way of acting places them along the line of the efficient cause. But are they the main efficient cause? We doubt it. Environmental causes are the causes of the models and norms; they are also the causes of the means that are used to propose them and to convince, by way of association, of emotion or reason. However, they are not the immediate cause of internal dispositions nor, more importantly, of their internal organization.

Our proposal is that the immediate cause of that internal organization is the person him/herself, who is also the subject of that personality. Seeing personality as the mere result of the encounter between efficient biological causation and efficient environmental causation transforms the person into a passive subject of the action of external agents. Undoubtedly the human being is somewhat passive. This passivity is something that must be accounted for to understand personality. We are born with a specific nature, which we have not given ourselves, and into a family and social context, with their ways of life, which we have neither created nor chosen and which affect us before we have the capacity to reflect and choose. However, the human being, like all living beings, is not a mere passive recipient, but also has an active and, in a way, *autopoietic* aspect. Through our natural dispositions, and even before we have developed the capacity for conceptual thought by

which we evaluate our actions, we are already an active interlocutor of our surrounding world. Although the first responses to our environment are reflex and instinctive actions, they are responses of a living being, and not mere pieces of a mechanism. Very soon, the child begins to gain a holistic perception of stimuli and to respond to them in a way that is often unexpected or unpredictable. It is through his/her own cognitive abilities, albeit in a preconceptual way, that the child begins to evaluate environmental influences, to prepare behaviours that respond to them and to internally organize his/her way of thinking and feeling. The environmental influence is mediated through the cognitions and affective reactions of the person him/herself; it is not an immediate physical influence, but rather one of meanings (Bolton & Hill 2007). Growing up, the child becomes more independent and, therefore, more capable of internal self-organization and directing his/her external behaviours. With the acquisition of conceptual thinking and the ability to reason and reflect, the human being grows in his/her capacity for self-organization and freedom, being an agent responsible not only for his/her behaviours but also for the dispositions that his/her habitual way of thinking, feeling, and behaving produce in the same agent. It is by using what other causes (biological and social) have provided him/her, that is to say, natural dispositions and social models, that the person him/herself, at first pre-conceptually, intuitively, experimentally, and associatively, and later increasingly consciously and freely, organizes his/her operation and, consequently, his/her operative dispositions, as his/her own work of art (Adler 1968). Although with the emergence of conceptual thought there is not necessarily a perfect awareness and mastery of pre-rational dispositions, it is characteristic of the human person to be able to know them and direct them, within certain limits, to their rational and voluntary goals (Álvarez-Segura et al 2017; Cloninger et al 1993; Pérez-Álvarez and García-Montes 2004; Rycklack 1979). The person is, therefore, in different modes depending on the stage of the life cycle in which s/he finds him/herself, the main efficient cause of his/her own personality. This means that the development of personality also implies, correlatively, development in recognizing personal responsibility for oneself.

If we assume a theological perspective, we could add that, in addition to acquired dispositions, there are dispositions infused by grace (infused virtues). The study of the role of these infused dispositions in personality is beyond the scope of this article and requires the development of what we might call a theology of personality.

4. The final cause

According to the classic saying, the final cause is last to be achieved, but first in intention. As in the case of form, the final cause has been present in the way of understanding personality and behaviour of important authors of contemporary psychology such as Stern (1938), Adler (1968), Arnold (1971), Nuttin (1980), Rychlak (1990, 1994) and, more recently, teleological behaviourism (Killen 2001; Rachlin 1992), to name just a few. The final cause is, in Aristotelian terms, "that in view of which" something is done. This is a fundamental aspect in understanding actions (Long 2015; Smith 2015). Two identical behaviours in their execution can be profoundly different if one takes into account their intention, i.e. what they propose as an end. One can give money with the intention of helping others, or with the intention of appearing morally superior. In this case, it is not only a difference that changes the moral evaluation of the act, but also the understanding of the type of action in question. Does something like this happen in personality too? We believe so.

Personality is a set of dispositions that have an internal order. This inner order, in turn, corresponds to a goal that its organization is made to achieve, consciously or unconsciously. Let's take an example. A football team is an organized group of players. Each one fulfils a different function, but these different functions are related to each other in such a way that they all contribute to achieving the final objective: winning the game. Similarly, the end or goal is what accounts for the organization of personality and operations as an ordered thing. This is what in the language of Thomistic philosophy is called the ultimate end (*finis ultimus*) and what some in psychology call the meaning of life (Adler 1968; Frankl 2000) or the self-ideal (Arnold 1960; Allport 1961, 379). For some the goal

of life may be to have power, for others it is pleasure, for others it is to be valued by their peers, for others it is intellectual knowledge, or friendship with God, etc. Each of these goals will lead to a different configuration of personality, even if similar innate dispositions are assumed. This is also expressed in the theories of personality: some consider that personality has as its goal adaptation, others self-actualization. It is clear that personality is ordered to adapt, but is that its ultimate end, or an intermediate end, necessary for something more important, such as the full realization of one's potentialities?

To understand a personality, it is necessary to determine to what end the total organization of its dispositions is directed. According to Aquinas, what we want as the ultimate goal, we want without limit, while what we want as a means we want in a limited way, i.e. only to the extent that it leads to the ultimate goal (Aquinas 1947). If one wants unlimited wealth, it is a sign that one's real goal in life is precisely that, regardless of what one's verbalizations or rationalizations indicate. Allport (1961, 380–382) stated that the more clearly and with greater intensity one tends towards an ultimate end, the more cohesive the personality will be. This indicates a close relationship between the intrinsic form of the personality and the end. In contrast, a personality without a clear goal will be a less cohesive personality, with more dispositions in conflict with each other (Álvarez-Segura et al, 2017). This end may be sought consciously or unconsciously, as not everyone explicitly reflects on ultimate ends.

Along this last line of thought, and as a corollary to the psychopathology of personality, it should be noted that, from the point of view of the four Aristotelian genres of cause, personality can be altered from any of these causal areas: the problem can come from below, i.e. from the material cause —for example, from the biological bases of the dispositions. Other problems may depend on the intended end, such as, for example, considering life as a continuous exercise of pleasure without responsibility. Others, from the formal cause, for example, from family and social models or from life philosophies. It can also come from the efficient cause, such as voluntary choices or involuntary mechanisms. As causes are systemically connected, a personality disorder may correspond to several of them simultaneously, especially when causality is from

above: inappropriate models may point to an inappropriate end, leading to inappropriate personality organization and negative channelling of innate dispositions. When the problem instead comes from below, there may be a contradiction between the goal and the proposed models and the dispositions; or it may simply be that, due to problems related to the setting of a goal and of a model (for example, attachment disorders or complex trauma), the set of dispositions fails to achieve a single organization, remaining in a state of immaturity or with partial organizations coexisting that are not integrated into a single personality (Álvarez-Segura et al 2017).

5. The definition of personality by the four causes

According to Aristotelian tradition, the complete definition of a thing is made by the four causes. Definitions of personality often contain at least several of the Aristotelian causes. Let's look at some examples:

A) Fromm (1947, 59): "The totality of inherited and acquired psychic qualities which are characteristic of one individual and which make the individual unique". This definition contains the material cause *ex qua* ("psychic qualities") and the material cause *in qua* ("the individual"). Being a definition that only refers to material cause, it is extremely incomplete.

B) Allport (1961, 28): "The dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristic behaviour and thought." This definition contains the internal formal cause ("the… organization"), the material cause *ex qua* ("psychophysical systems"), the material cause *in qua* ("the individual"), the material object and the formal object ("characteristic behaviour and thought"). However, the efficient cause and the final cause are absent. These two omissions are important, because they give the impression that personality is something that just "happens" to someone, and not that there is an agent acting in order to achieve an end.

C) Millon & Everly (1985, 4): "A pattern of deeply embedded and broadly exhibited cognitive, affective, and overt behavioural traits that

emerge from a complex biological-environmental formative matrix. This pattern persists over extended periods of time and is relatively resistant to extinction". This definition contains the material cause *ex qua* ("cognitive, affective and overt behavioural traits"), the formal intrinsic cause ("a pattern"), the efficient cause ("a complex biological-environmental formative matrix"). However, the final cause is absent.

D) The most evident case of the presence of the four causes in a definition of personality is that of Magda B. Arnold, an author of Aristotelian-Thomistic inspiration (Cornelius 2006). Arnold's definition of personality is: "personality is the totality of human potentialities, activities, and habits organized by the person in the active pursuit of his self-ideal" (Arnold 1969, 196). Arnold's definition is the most complete of those mentioned, probably because it was explicitly thought of with the four causes in mind. The material cause *ex qua* is "the totality of human potentialities, activities and habits"; the material cause *in qua* is tacit, but it is clearly the person; the efficient cause is also the active person; the final cause is the self-ideal; the formal cause is organization. However, reference to the objective dimension (material and formal) of personality is missing.

We end, therefore, with our own complete proposed definition which refers to all four causes:

> Personality is the set of stable operative dispositions (material cause *ex qua*) of the mental powers of a human person (*materia in qua*) which incline him/her to his/her characteristic mode (*formal object*) of cognitive, affective or behavioural operation (*material object*) as organized (*intrinsic formal cause*) by the person him/herself (*efficient cause*) according to norms learned through experience of concrete models of his/her environment or perceived by his/her reason (*extrinsic formal cause*) in order to carry out what s/he pursues as the purpose of his/her life (*final cause*).

As can be seen, the proposed definition contains all the causes and is, in short, a proposal for an explanation of personality from the consideration of all the factors that affect its configuration.

Conclusion

In this article we have tried to show how Aristotelian-Thomistic causal theory provides psychology with the necessary principles to integrate into a coherent and unitary vision all the factors that affect the structure and formation of personality. Starting from the four classes of causes, we have proceeded to a subdivision that has led us to the following set of explanatory principles:

a. The subject of personality (material cause *in qua*): the person, with his/her mind powers and organs.
b. The components of personality (material cause *ex qua*): stable operative dispositions.
c. The internal configuration of personality (intrinsic formal cause): the order of these dispositions.
d. The object of these personality dispositions (material object): the actions or operations.
e. The aspect upon which this object of personality dispositions is focused (formal object): the way these actions are channelled.
f. The model of personality (extrinsic formal cause): The models and norms on the basis of which personality is internally organized.
g. The agent of personality (efficient cause): mainly the person him/herself; dispositively, heredity and social agents.
h. The teleology of personality (final cause): the meaning of life.

This vision has the virtue of making the multi-causality of the personality integrate, without putting the different factors that affect personality in conflict with each other, giving each one a place and avoiding reductionism and simplistic views.

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