

Aristotle on Efficient and Final Causes in Plato

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Daniel Vazquez

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Aristotle’s four causes –material, formal, efficient and final– are one of his most famous and influential contributions to philosophy.¹ The origin of the conceptual distinction, however, remains rather obscure. If we believe Aristotle’s account in *Metaphysics* A 3-10, previous philosophy supports his views on the number and nature of these causes but does so in an incomplete, unclear and often misguided manner. For example, Plato fails to properly explain the causal relation, considers only two types of causes (material and formal) and considers them in a problematic way. Even a passing look at Plato’s dialogues tells a different story. In various places Plato identifies and discusses the role of all the elements that constitute the basis for Aristotle’s fourfold typology. Thus, even when they disagree about the nature of the causes, it is difficult to understand why Aristotle would deny that Plato identifies the correct number of causes.

¹ I systematically translate αἰτίαι and its cognates with the term ‘cause.’ Beware, however, that the semantic field of αἰτίαι is broader than modern notions of cause and includes ‘responsibility,’ ‘guilt,’ ‘blame,’ ‘fault,’ ‘accusation,’ as well as ‘reason,’ ‘explanation,’ ‘mode of explanation,’ ‘causation,’ and ‘causal account.’ On this topic see Frede (1980), Vlastos (1969), Sedley (1998, pp. 114–127), and Natali (2013).

Modern scholars offer contrasting answers to this question.² After a detailed review of the relevant texts, Harold Cherniss (1957, pp. 450–467) accuses Aristotle of being an unfair, forgetful or careless reader of Plato, observing that his proposals make many of the mistakes he criticizes.³ Since then, scholars have defended Aristotle’s exegetical skills. In some cases the exoneration is only partial. Julia Annas (1982), for example, shows that Aristotle’s criticisms of Plato regarding efficient causes may not be based on the most charitable reading of the *Phaedo* but is not a misinterpretation. In turn, Thomas Johansen (2010) argues that despite first appearances Aristotle was justified in denying final causes in Plato’s *Timaeus*. In contrast, Stephen Menn (2012, pp. 208–214) tries to clear Aristotle from all accusations. He suggests Aristotle’s claim is not that Plato fails to recognize efficient and final causes in general, but rather that he does not use his first principles –the one, the great and the small– as final or efficient causes.⁴

Even though I agree we should resist Cherniss’ conclusions, Annas arguments in support of Aristotle are insufficient for explaining his criticisms to Plato in *Metaphysics* A 6 –as she recognizes at the beginning of her paper.⁵ In the case of Johansen and Menn, I find their arguments ultimately unconvincing. First, because it seems undeniable that Plato distinguishes what Aristotle calls final causes in *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*. Moreover, I will also supply compelling passages in *Symposium* and

² Monte Ransome Johnson (2005, p. 118) reminds us that the problem was already noticed in antiquity by Alexander (*In Meta.*, 59.28–60.2). Here I shall limit myself to the discussion occurring in modern scholarship.

³ For further criticisms of Aristotle’s interpretation of Plato also see Vlastos (1969, pp. 303–305). For a more charitable take, see Steel (2012).

⁴ See also Menn (forthcoming, sec. Ib1).

⁵ Annas (1982, p. 312) acknowledges how surprising and odd are Aristotle’s criticisms in *Metaph.* A 6 regarding efficient causes in Plato more generally, especially given passages in *Ti.*, *Phdr.* 245c-e, *Leg.* 891e and 896b, *Phlb.* 23c-31b, *Soph.* 265-6, and *Plt.* 270a-b, 273a-e.

Philebus where Plato uses intelligent agents as productive causes but also distinguishes the aim of their actions as a crucial feature of the causal account. Secondly, because Aristotle's interpretation of Plato in *Metaphysics A 6* applies to causes in general, otherwise his justification for the number and nature of causes collapses. Finally, some of the arguments defending Aristotle depend upon his disagreements with Plato regarding the nature of causes. But these cannot be the reason he denies efficient and final causes in Plato; if so, he would deny Plato all causes.

The aim of this paper is to explain why Aristotle ignores passages that seem clearly to contradict his assessment of Platonic causes in *Metaphysics A 6* –and doing so without having to throw Plato or Aristotle under the bus. After reviewing the evidence and previous attempts and arguments that might help to solve this problem, I propose a reinterpretation of the evidence and reflect upon Aristotle's exegetical and methodological assumptions. In a nutshell, when it comes to causation, Aristotle gives pre-eminence to arguments in the *Phaedo*, and his recognition of the number of causes demands not only identification at a conceptual level but also a consistent use of the causes.

The following presents how Aristotle describes the four causes and how *Metaphysics A 3-10* offers an argument to justify his typology (section 1). It then focuses on Aristotle's interpretation of Plato's causal theory (section 2). Section 3 presents some of the Platonic passages that appear to contradict what Aristotle says in *Metaphysics A*. The last section discusses previous arguments and strategies to explain *Metaphysics A 6* and offers my proposal to resist Cherniss' conclusions.

1. Aristotle's four causes

Aristotle describes the four causes in three main places. The original formulation appears in

Physics 2.3, 194b23-195a3 (cf. *Metaph.* Δ 2).⁶ He says a cause could be 1) ‘that out of which a thing comes to be and which persists’ [τὸ ἐξ οὗ γίγνεται τι ἐνυπάρχοντος], *i.e.* the material cause; 2) ‘the form or the archetype’ [τὸ εἶδος καὶ τὸ παράδειγμα], *i.e.* the formal cause; 3) ‘the primary source of the change or rest’ [ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς μεταβολῆς ἢ πρώτη ἢ τῆς ἡρεμίσεως], *i.e.* the efficient cause; and 4) the ‘end or that for the sake of which a thing is done’ [τὸ τέλος· τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶν τὸ οὗ ἕνεκα] *i.e.* the final cause.⁷ For Aristotle, these types of causes are four ways in which one can answer a ‘why?’ or ‘because of what?’ (διὰ τί) question that paves the way to acquiring knowledge (*Phys.* 2.3, 194b16-23). He also points out that a thing can result from several causes and some things can cause each other reciprocally, but only if taking into consideration a different sense (or type) of the cause or causes. In addition, the same thing could cause contrary results depending on its presence or absence (*Phys.* 2.3, 195a4-195a14). Aristotle’s examples revealing the four types of causes are very broad, encompass various kinds of things, and depict various levels of generality and accuracy.⁸ In *An. Post.* 2.11, 94a20-94a23, Aristotle offers an interesting variation of the material cause: ‘if certain things hold [then] it is necessary for this [*i.e.* another thing] to hold [too]’ [τὸ τίνων ὄντων ἀνάγκη τοῦτ’ εἶναι]. Jonathan Barnes (1975, 226-7) argues that the unorthodox formulation stands for a sophisticated and special case of the material cause. The problem with the standard formulation of the material cause seems to be that simply citing the matter of something is not always explanatory. Barnes argues it is only when certain matter necessitates the effect that we can talk about a material explanation.⁹

⁶ Cf. Natali (2013), who argues that *Metaph.* Δ.2 is a copy of *Physics* 2.3.

⁷ Transl. by R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye in Barnes (1991a).

⁸ See also *Gen. corr.* 2.9.

⁹ I still wonder, however, whether the material cause of *An. Post.* is just a special case of the material cause, as Barnes suggests, or a different, more nuanced formulation of the material cause altogether? For further details see Barnes (1975, pp.

Finally, Aristotle also specifies that, in a sense, the formal, final and efficient causes might often (but not always) coincide. For example, a man is the formal, final and efficient cause of another man in the sense that a man is the offspring of a man, and the end of the generation process is a man (fully developed) specified in terms of the form or archetype of a man (*Phys.* 2.7, 198a22-32).

In *Physics* Aristotle makes no effort to justify his fourfold distinction. However, in *Metaphysics* A 3 (983a33-983b5) he launches a survey into previous philosophy to verify and support the number and causes he has identified:¹⁰

We have studied these causes sufficiently in our work on nature, but yet let us call to our aid those who have attacked the investigation of being and philosophized about reality before us. For obviously they too speak of certain principles and causes; to go over their views, then, will be of profit to the present inquiry, for we shall either find another kind of cause, or be more convinced of the correctness of those which we now maintain.¹¹

The discussion of previous philosophers serves as a defeasible argument for Aristotle's classification. It shows how all previous proposals can be understood as incomplete and unclear ways to describe the types of causes found by Aristotle. Crucially, it shows that no one really introduces other

225–233).

¹⁰ Some have argued that Aristotle does not justify the distinction because he is just referring to the everyday common uses of 'cause.' See, for example, Charlton (1970, p. 99). This is difficult to believe because, as Carlo Natali (2013, pp. 51–57) has noted, Aristotle's causes leave out many common uses of the term *αἰτία*. Instead, Natali suggests that Plato's causal distinctions in *Timaeus* and subsequent discussion in the Academy could have paved the way for a discussion of many types of causes. Thus, he argues, by the time Aristotle proposes his list, he is not concerned with justifying the existence of many kinds of causes but with proving there are only the four he proposes.

¹¹ All translations of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* by W. D. Ross in Barnes (1991b).

kinds of causes.¹² In *Metaph.* A 7 (988b16-18), Aristotle concludes the survey he began in A 3: ‘All these thinkers, then, as they cannot pitch on another cause, seem to testify that we have determined rightly both how many [πόσα] and of what sort [ποῖα] the causes are.’ These last lines make clear that Aristotle’s concern in *Metaph.* A 3-10 is to offer a reinterpretation of previous proposals through the lenses of his own conceptual distinction rather than just reporting their views. Notice that for his argument to work Aristotle must state that previous philosophy already recognizes, albeit imperfectly or vaguely (see ἀμυδρῶς at A 7 988a23), causes that fit into his fourfold schema and no other. The threshold for recognising types of causes in previous philosophers is set very low. With this in mind, let me now have a closer look at what Aristotle says about Plato.

2. Aristotle on Platonic causes in *Metaphysics* A 6

Aristotle begins his discussion of Plato in *Metaphysics* A 6. The overall assessment is not especially heartening. The chapter downplays Plato’s originality and takes a ruthless approach towards the weaknesses of his proposals. Aristotle’s evaluation is brief and very general but also acute and sophisticated. Now, although one should be careful with Aristotle’s interpretations and criticisms of other philosophers, it is also true that he tends to be very careful when discussing and ascribing views to Plato. Besides, since he studied in the Academy for two decades and read many of the dialogues, people often credit him as an especially important and reliable witness. For these very reasons his assessment of Platonic causes seems so startling.

Aristotle argues that Plato’s philosophy develops from three main sources. The first is Cratylus

¹² This, of course, does not mean that justifying the four causes is the only aim of *Metaph.* A 3-6. See Menn (2012, p. 209).

For a different take on why Aristotle only proposes four causes see Hennig (2009).

and the Heraclitean doctrines. According to Aristotle, Plato agrees that all sensible things are in a perpetual state of flux and therefore there is no knowledge about them. But Plato also agrees with the teachings of Socrates who seeks the universal in ethical matters and tries to define them. As a result, since sensible things were always changing, the common definitions do not apply to them but do to entities of another kind, which he calls ‘ideas’. The Pythagoreans are Plato’s third source. Aristotle argues that Plato simply rebranded the Pythagorean notion of ‘imitation’ (μίμησις), originally used to explain the relation between things and numbers, into ‘participation’ (μέθεξις), claiming that sensible things exist by participation in ideas. He also agrees with the Pythagoreans that the one is a substance (οὐσία) and not a predicate of something else (and thus has an independent, separate existence).¹³

Aristotle objects to many aspects of Plato’s conception of causes, but I shall only mention two of them. First of all, Plato never really explains what he means by participation. According to Aristotle (and many contemporary scholars) forms are causes.¹⁴ Thus, not explaining participation amounts to not explaining the causal relationship at all. This leads to a two-world problem where we cannot find a causal connection between forms and their sensible participants.¹⁵ If the causal connection is missing, a

¹³ See also *Metaph.* B 1001a4-12, where Aristotle claims that Plato and the Pythagoreans identify the one and being. Plato discusses the relation between the one and being in the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (142b-155e). The passage establishes that if one is (ἐν εἰ ἔστιν), it must partake of being (οὐσία) (142b5-6), and from there the characters of the dialogue seems to derive the series of numbers and infinity. However, in the dialogues, Plato never identifies the one and being. On the contrary, in *Republic* 6 (509b8-10), Plato distinguishes them by claiming that ‘the good is not being, but superior to it in rank and power’ [οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ’ ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος.]. For detailed commentary on the first part of *Metaph.* A 6, see Steel (2012).

¹⁴ See, for example, Sedley (1998) and Bailey (2014).

¹⁵ As Johansen (2010) rightly notes, Aristotle is criticising Plato for similar reasons offered in the *Phaedo* against Anaxagoras.

serious epistemic problem also arises: knowledge of the forms becomes impossible given that it seems to require a causal relation between forms and souls.¹⁶

The second objection –the one that most interests me– accuses Plato of using only two out of the four types of causes: the formal and the material. The text reads as follows (*Metaph.* A 6, 988a7-17):

Plato, then, declared himself thus on the points in question; it is evident from what has been said that *he has used only two causes, that of the essence and the material cause* [δυοῖν αἰτίαιν μόνον κέχρηται, τῆ τε τοῦ τί ἐστι καὶ τῆ κατὰ τὴν ὕλην] (for the Forms are the cause of the essence of all other things, and the One is the cause of the essence of the Forms); and it is evident what the underlying matter is, of which the Forms are predicated in the case of sensible things, and the One in the case of Forms, viz. that this is a dyad, the great and the small. Further, he has assigned the cause of good and that of evil to the elements [τὴν τοῦ εὖ καὶ τοῦ κακῶς αἰτίαν τοῖς στοιχείοις ἀπέδωκεν], one to each of the two, as we say some of his predecessors sought to do, *e.g.* Empedocles and Anaxagoras.¹⁷

This passage concludes an argument that runs from *Metaph.* A 6, 987b19-988a7. Interpretation of the entire argument is difficult because a brief outline of Plato's metaphysics mixes with comparisons to the Pythagoreans (*Metaph.* A 6, 987b19-988a7). However, the main points of the passage are clear enough. According to Aristotle, Plato thinks that the one and the dyad (the great and the small) are elements of all things. On the one hand, the one is the cause of the essence of the forms, and the forms are the cause of the essence of everything else. On the other hand, the dyad is the underlying matter of

¹⁶ Plato himself discusses the epistemic problem in *Prm.* 133a11-135c4. Although he recognizes the gravity of the difficulty, some scholars think he offers a solution either in the second half of the *Parmenides* or in the *Sophist*. See, for example, Rickless (1988) and McPherran (1986).

¹⁷ See also *Phys.* 1.4, 187a13-20. Aristotle makes similar remarks in his treatise *On the Good* (see Alexander, in *Metaph.* 55.20-56.35, 59.28-60.2, 250.17-20; Alexander *apud* Simpl. In *Phys.* 151.6-11; also see 453.25-30).

the sensible things and the forms. Even if Plato assigns the one as the cause of good (εὖ) and the dyad as the cause of evil (κακός), Aristotle takes them as formal and material, respectively, not as final or efficient causes. Thus, Aristotle concludes, Plato only uses two types of causes.¹⁸

According to this picture, Plato becomes a perfect example of all that Aristotle finds problematic about previous discussions of causes. Even if he recognized two types of causes instead of only one, just like previous philosophers, Plato offers an incomplete and confused causal account. His successors in the Academy seem to have done, in Aristotle's view, nothing better. Thus, the narrative of *Metaphysics* A is clear: Aristotle seems justified in distinguishing four and only four types of causes. He is the first person to clearly distinguish them all and use the final cause. Philosophers are yet to discover causes that fail to fit into his fourfold typology. That, at least, is what Aristotle would like us to think.

3. Plato on efficient and final causes

Let me now briefly fact-check Aristotle. In various dialogues, Plato offers subtle and complex arguments discussing causation. The following points out some of the most relevant passages to contrast with Aristotle's assessment. This, I believe, will suggest that Aristotle's assessment is a bit hasty, unfair or inaccurate. Then, I shall come back to save Aristotle from those accusations. But for now, and if we agree to anachronistically apply conceptual distinctions to past philosophers as Aristotle does, then there is no reason to think Plato only recognizes two out of the four types of causes.

In various places, Plato discusses and distinguishes what Aristotle calls efficient causation: a cause that initiates movement and generates or destroys sensible particulars. Although in some places

¹⁸ Notice that Aristotle's argument is not about Plato's terminology but about his use (even in a vague or imprecise way) of the four causes (see κέχρηται at 988a9).

Plato seems to attribute this causal power to forms, in others he talks about intelligent, divine and human craftsmen that, provided they have all the prerequisite means for acting, produce most of what can be seen in the cosmos. In the *Phaedo*, for example, Plato distinguishes between the real causes of generation and destruction and the necessary means for something to be a cause (*Phaedo* 99a5-b4):

If someone said that without having such things –bones, sinews and whatever else I have– I wouldn't be able to do what I have decided, he'd be telling the truth. However, saying that it is on account of them that I do what I do, rather than because of my choice of what is best, despite the fact that I act because of intelligence –that would be a profoundly careless way to talk. Imagine not being able to make the distinction that the real cause is one thing, while that without which the cause could never be a cause is something else!¹⁹

Plato distinguishes between material prerequisites (bones and sinews), an intelligent agent (Socrates), and the agent's choice of what is best (refraining from running away, *i.e.* the goal of an action). You may object that the passage in the *Phaedo* happens before Socrates announces his famous 'second voyage' which we know Aristotle understands as restricting causes to forms only. But in *Timaeus* we also read that without the agency of some cause it is impossible to explain generation and destruction. The paradigmatic example of this type of cause in *Timaeus* are not forms but a divine intelligent craftsman (see *Ti.* 28a4-b1):

Now everything that comes to be must of necessity come to be by the agency of some cause, for it is impossible for anything to come to be without a cause. So whenever a craftsman looks at what is always changeless and, using a thing of that kind as his model, reproduces its form and character, then, of

¹⁹ Translations of *Phaedo* by Sedley & Long (2011).

necessity, all that he so completes is beautiful.²⁰

Later in *Timaeus* 46c7-e6 and 68e6-69a7 Plato speaks only of two types of causes –the divine and the necessary. Although the latter reminds us of the material cause (especially as formulated in *An. Post.*), the former refers not to forms but the productive agency of the divine, intelligent demiurge.²¹ This divine cause is closer to Aristotle’s efficient cause than to formal causation. Moreover, the intelligent agency of the demiurge aims and produces what is beautiful and good (καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν at 46e4).²² So even if the good, in the sense of that for the sake of which a thing is done, is not called a type of cause, Plato distinguishes it as a crucial element in the causal account. Thus, even if the twofold classification of causes in *Timaeus* expresses Plato’s final thoughts on the matter (which would be a highly contentious claim), it would still be problematic to say, as Aristotle does, that he fails to use and recognize the efficient and final cause, at least imperfectly.²³ But perhaps this evidence alone is

²⁰ All translations of *Timaeus* by Donald J. Zeyl (2000).

²¹ See also *Ti.* 46c7-e6 where Plato talks about ‘auxiliary causes’, and *Ti.* 47e-48a where he refers to ‘the Straying cause.’ As I understand it, these are the roles taken by necessity. When the primary cause, namely the soul or intellect, persuades necessity, it plays an auxiliary role. However, if deserted by intelligence, it produces ‘haphazard and disorderly effects’ which are called the straying cause. Apart from the two causes, the receptacle also seems to have the capacity to have causal interactions. In this case, however, the receptacle is only reactive to the activity introduced by the different powers present in it. Plato never calls it a cause, but it is a required element in a full causal account of the cosmos (see *Ti.* 49a-53b).

²² *Ti.* 75d5-e2 suggests that in this context, what is beautiful and good consists in accommodating what is necessary and what is best: ‘Our makers fitted the mouth out with teeth, a tongue and lips in their current arrangement, to accommodate both what is necessary and what is best.’ Theophrastus’ interpretation of Plato seems to follow this passage closely. See footnote 43.

²³ Remember that Aristotle’s criticism is not that Plato failed to properly label the four causes but that he only used two of them (see *δυσὶν αἰτίαισιν μόνον κέχρηται...* at 988a7, quoted in section 2).

insufficient to let Plato off the hook. You may complain that the demiurge in *Timaeus* is not meant literally, and thus cannot be counted as an efficient cause. But other passages make the same point.

One of the clearest pieces of evidence is *Philebus* 23c-27b.²⁴ There, Plato's Socrates argues that an efficient cause is clearly distinct from other basic ontological kinds. In the passage he distinguishes four kinds of things. The first two are the unlimited and the limited. The third one—a mixture of the first two—stands for generated things (*Phlb.* 16d, 23c). But Socrates also notices the need for a fourth kind (*Phlb.* 23c12-d8):

Socrates: Let us now take these as two of the kinds, while treating the one that results from the mixture of these two as our third kind. But I must look like quite a fool with my distinctions into kinds and enumerations!

Protarchus: What are you driving at?

Soc.: That we seem to be in need of yet a fourth kind.

Prot.: Tell us what it is.

Soc.: Look at the cause of this combination of those two together and posit it as my fourth kind in addition to those three.²⁵

A bit later (*Phlb.* 26e1-27b3), Socrates explains the fourth kind and how he distinguishes it from the other three:

Soc.: But now we have to look at the fourth kind we mentioned earlier, in addition to these three. Let this be our joint investigation. See now whether you think it necessary that everything that comes to be comes to be through some cause [ὄρα γὰρ εἴ σοι δοκεῖ ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι πάντα τὰ γινόμενα διὰ τινα αἰτίαν

²⁴ Also see among other examples, *Soph.* 265c, and *Resp.* 530a5-7.

²⁵ I use Dorothea Frede's translation as it appears in Cooper & Hutchinson (1997).

γίγνεσθαι].

Prot.: Certainly, as far as I can see. How could anything come to be without one? [πῶς γὰρ ἂν χωρὶς τούτου γίγνοιτο;]

Soc.: And is it not the case that there is no difference between the nature of what makes and the cause, except in name, so that the maker and the cause would rightly be called one [τὸ δὲ ποιῶν καὶ τὸ αἴτιον ὁρθῶς ἂν εἴη λεγόμενον ἓν]?

Prot.: Right.

Soc.: But what about what is made and what comes into being, will we not find the same situation, that they also do not differ except in name?

Prot.: Exactly.

Soc.: And isn't it the case that what makes is always preceding in the order of nature, while the thing made follows since it comes into being through it? [Ἄρ' οὖν ἡγεῖται μὲν τὸ ποιῶν ἀεὶ κατὰ φύσιν, τὸ δὲ ποιούμενον ἐπακολουθεῖ γινόμενον ἐκείνῳ;]

Prot.: Right.

Soc.: Therefore, the cause and what is subservient to the cause in a process of coming to be are also different and not the same?

Prot.: How should they be?

Soc.: It follows, then, that what comes to be [τὰ γινόμενα] and that from which it is produced [ἐξ ὧν γίγνεται] represent all three kinds?

Prot.: Very true.

Soc.: We therefore declare that the craftsman who produces all these must be the fourth kind, the cause, since it has been demonstrated sufficiently that it differs from the others? [Τὸ δὲ δὴ πάντα ταῦτα δημιουργοῦν λέγομεν τέταρτον, τὴν αἰτίαν, ὡς ἰκανῶς ἕτερον ἐκείνων δεδηλωμένον;]

Prot.: It certainly is different.²⁶

The fourth kind in the *Philebus* seems to pre-empt Aristotle's complaint that Plato only recognizes the formal and material cause. This kind of cause is the maker or craftsman (τὸ ποιοῦν at 26e7; δημιουργοῦν at 27b1), which always precedes its effect (27a5-6), it is necessary for anything that comes to be (26e2-4; see also *Ti.* 28c2-3, quoted below), and is distinct from what comes to be (τὰ γινόμενα) and that from which is produced (ἐξ ὧν γίγνεται; see 27a11-b2). The fact that the cause has to be a fourth kind makes clear that the agent behind the mixtures differs in nature from the other two original kinds and cannot be reduced to them.²⁷ Plato, after all, seems to distinguish efficient causes.

In various passages, Plato also distinguishes what Aristotle calls final causes. For example, consider *Phaedo* 97b8-d1 where Socrates distinguishes between an active ordering *nous* and its aim of producing what is best:

However, one day I heard somebody reading from what he said was a book by Anaxagoras and saying that it turns out to be intelligence that both orders things and is cause of everything [νοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ διακοσμῶν τε καὶ πάντων αἴτιος]. I was pleased with this cause, and it struck me that in a way it is good that intelligence should be cause of everything, and I supposed that, if this is the case, when intelligence is doing the ordering it orders everything and assigns each thing in whatever way is best [καὶ ἕκαστον

²⁶ See also *Phlb.* 30c, 28d7-8. Compare with Philolaus' fragment 3 (Stobaeus 1.21.7d = DK44B6), and notice that Philolaus does not rule out an agent that explains how harmony is imposed. Unfortunately, from the surviving evidence it is difficult to know what exactly were Philolaus' thoughts about efficient causes. In contrast, the *Philebus* leaves no doubt that Plato thinks that a productive cause is a basic ontological kind needed to explain generation.

²⁷ In addition, many other Platonic passages confirm that for Plato the soul possesses an efficient capacity. See, for instance, *Chrm.* 156e; *Leg.* 892a-b, 896c-d; *Grg.* 465 c-d; *Phdr.* 246b; *Phd.* 80a, 94 b-e and 105b-106d. However, see *Metaph.* L 6 1071b31-1072a3 where Aristotle complains that souls cannot account for the eternity of movement. This is based on a literal reading of the creation of soul in *Timaeus*. See also my footnote 43.

τιθέσαι ταύτη ὅπη ἂν βέλτιστα ἔχη]. So, I thought, should someone want to discover the cause of how each thing comes to be, perishes, or is, this is what he must find out about it: how it is best for it either to be, or to act or be acted upon in any other respect whatsoever [ὅπη βέλτιστον αὐτῷ ἐστὶν ἢ εἶναι ἢ ἄλλο ὅτιοῦν πάσχειν ἢ ποιεῖν].

Again, even if Plato does not call the best (βέλτιστον) a cause, it uses it in his causal account and distinguishes it from *nous*. These elements do not collapse into one nor one reduces into the other. On the contrary, both seem essential for the causal account. But perhaps Aristotle also discards this passage because it occurs before the second sailing. However, in the *Timaeus* the demiurge knows and acts according to an end. At 28c2-29b1, the text seems to offer undeniable evidence of final causes:

We maintain that, necessarily, that which comes to be must come to be by the agency of some cause. Now to find the maker [ὁ ποιητής] and father of this universe is hard enough, and, even if I succeeded, to declare him to everyone is impossible. And so we must go back and raise this question about the universe: Which of the two models [παραδείγματα] did the maker use when he fashioned it? Was it the one that does not change and stays the same or the one that has come to be? Well, if this world of ours is beautiful and its craftsman [δημιουργός] good then, clearly, he looked at the eternal model. But if what it's blasphemous to even say is the case, then he looked at one that has come to be. Now surely it's clear to all that it was the eternal model he looked at, for, of all the things that have come to be, our universe is the most beautiful, and of causes the craftsman is the most excellent. This, then, is how it has come to be: it is a work of craft, modelled after that which is changeless and is grasped by a rational account, that is, by wisdom.

The craftsman and its aim (*i.e.*, to create the most beautiful universe by looking at the eternal model) are two distinct things that cannot be reduced to each other. When Plato talks about intelligent agents he always does it in the context of a teleological activity. Craftsmen have a model, a plan and thus a goal in

mind. In fact, for Plato, intelligence always orders in whatever way is best. But the close connection between agents and their aims does not imply any confusion or conflation between these elements of the causal account.

If this is not enough for doubting Aristotle's assessment, there is even stronger evidence of final causes in Plato. In the *Symposium* (205e7-b3), for example, Diotima establishes the good as the motivating factor in human action:

[...] what everyone loves is really nothing other than the good [τὸ ἀγαθόν].

Do you disagree?"

"Zeus! Not I," I said.

"Now, then," she said. "Can we simply say that people love the good?"

"Yes," I said.

"But shouldn't we add that, in loving it, they want the good to be theirs?"

"We should."

"And not only that," she said. "They want the good to be theirs forever, don't they?" "We should add that too." "In a word, then, love is wanting to possess the good forever."

"That's very true," I said.

"This, then, is the object of love," she said. "Now, how do lovers pursue it? We'd rightly say that when they are in love they do something with eagerness and zeal."²⁸

Note how the good is set as the goal of the lovers' actions, and the source of the motivation does not require a reference to anything else. In *Philebus* 20d7-10, Socrates states the same point about the motivational power of the good: 'Now, this point, I take it, is most necessary to assert of the good: that everything that has any notion of it hunts for it and desires to get hold of it and secure it for its very own,

²⁸ Transl. by A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff in Cooper & Hutchinson (1997).

caring nothing for anything else except for what is connected with the acquisition of some good.’ Later, in *Philebus* 53d3-e7, Plato comes closer to the terminology Aristotle uses to explain the final cause:

Soc: Suppose there are two kinds of things, one kind sufficient to itself, the other in need of something else [τὸ μὲν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό, τὸ δ’ ἀεὶ ἐφιεμένον ἄλλου].

Pro: How and what sort of things do you mean?

Soc: The one kind by nature possesses supreme dignity; the other is inferior to it.

Pro: Express this more clearly, please.

Soc: We must have met handsome and noble youths, together with their courageous lovers.

Pro: Certainly.

Soc: Now, try to think of another set of two items that corresponds to this pair in all the relevant features that we just mentioned.

Pro: Do I have to repeat my request for the third time? Please express more clearly what it is you want to say, Socrates!

Soc: Nothing fanciful at all, Protarchus; this is just a playful manner of speaking. What is really meant is that all things are either for the sake of something else or they are that for whose sake the other kind comes to be in each case [τὸ μὲν ἕνεκά του τῶν ὄντων ἔστ’ ἀεὶ, τὸ δ’ οὐ χάριν ἐκάστοτε τὸ τινὸς ἕνεκα γιγνόμενον ἀεὶ γίγνεται].²⁹

Plato’s distinction between means and ends –things for the sake of something else and things for whose sake the first kind comes to be– splits things at the most general level. This passage is not a myth, the distinction is not abandoned, nor is there any evidence it collapses into another type of causation. The passages quoted suggest that Plato recognizes and makes use of what Aristotle calls efficient and final causes –even if Plato conceives the causal process and the nature of the causes in a different way.

²⁹ See also *Phlb.* 53e and 54c, *Leg.* 903b4-d3, *Grg.* 467d, and, although probably inauthentic, *Ep.* ii, 312e.

We then return to the original question: why would Aristotle insist that Plato only recognizes two out of the four causes? Why would he claim that Plato's failed to use two of the causes instead of simply saying he is wrong about the nature or the extension of the final and efficient causes? After all, Aristotle's justification of the number and nature of causes in *Metaphysics* A does not really require the denial of efficient and final causes in Plato. Even if he wanted to highlight his contribution and original take on the topic, Aristotle could have simply said no one before him put these distinctions together in a clear complementary system of causal explanation.

4. Assessing Aristotle's reading of Plato

These passages suggest Aristotle could have read Plato more charitably. But even in the worst case, if we recall how Aristotle explains his motives for criticising Plato and other members of the Academy, we can rule out wilful misinterpretation.³⁰ In this section, I shall explain why I am unsatisfied with previous strategies to explain Aristotle's assessment of Plato in *Metaph.* A 6. Although it might seem tempting at this point to agree with Cherniss and regard Aristotle as (unintentionally) unfair, careless or, in the best case, a forgetful reader of Plato, I shall resist this conclusion by rethinking how Aristotle reads Plato.

First, let me discuss a couple of passages people think can be of help here. In *Metaph.* A 7, 988b6-15, Aristotle qualifies his claims from A 6. He now admits that some philosophers consider the final cause but only accidentally.³¹

That for the sake of which actions and changes and movements take place, they assert to be a cause in a

³⁰ See *Eth. Nic.* 1 6 (1096a11-16); see also *Metaph.* α 1, 993b12-19.

³¹ In fact, later in *Metaph.* A 10, 993a14 Aristotle admits: "in a certain sense all [the causes] have been said before."

way, but not in this way, i.e. not in the way in which it is its nature to be a cause. For those who speak of reason [νοῦς] or friendship [φιλία] class these causes as goods; they do not speak, however, as if anything that exists either existed or came into being for the sake of these, but as if movements started from these. In the same way those who say the One [τὸ ἓν] or the existent [τὸ ὄν] is the good, say that it is the cause of substance [ἡ οὐσία], but not that substance either is or comes to be for the sake of this. Therefore, it turns out that in a sense they both say and do not say the good is a cause; for they do not call it a cause *qua* good but only incidentally.

For Aristotle, those who say the one is the good, fail to show an essential connection between oneness and goodness. If so, their claim that the one is the cause of substance would not be any better than the person who says that a musician is the cause of the house. Aristotle defends this claim in *Metaph.* N 4, where he objects to identifying the good with the one.³² He offers two main objections. First, if the self-sufficiency and self-maintenance of the good depends on it being one, then all units would become species of good and there would be a great profusion of goods. Secondly, the great and small would be the bad itself, and thus the bad would be just the potentially good.³³ Needless to say, Aristotle finds these two consequences unacceptable.

Aristotle does not explicitly say that Plato identified the one with the good, but this is certainly the impression he gives. Like in A 6, in A 7 Aristotle criticises two groups of philosophers, one is formed by Empedocles –who speaks of φιλία– and Anaxagoras –who speaks of νοῦς. In A 6, the members of the second group are Plato and the Pythagoreans, so it is tempting to assume that these are

³² See *Metaph.* N 1091b13-15, where Aristotle reports that some philosophers who maintain the existence of unchangeable substance say that ‘the one itself is the good itself’ (αὐτὸ τὸ ἓν τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτὸ εἶναι). See also *Eth. Eud.* I, 8, 1218a25-30.

³³ See *Metaph.* N.4, 1091b16-1092a8. See also *Metaph.* N.6 and *Eth. Nic.* 1.6.

also the people criticised in A 7 and by extension in N 4.³⁴ Moreover, according to the later tradition, Plato in his lectures “On the Good,” identified the good with the one.³⁵

Johansen (2010, pp. 186–191) takes the arguments in A 7 and N 4 as directed to Plato and refers to them to defend Aristotle’s refusal to recognize final causes in Plato’s *Timaeus*. According to him, Aristotle’s objection in A 7 (988b6-15, quoted above) presents the following general pattern:

X is a final cause of actions, changes, movements, etc., only if, a) *X* is the cause of *Y* (actions, changes, movements, etc.), and b) *X* is good, and c) *X qua* good is the cause of *Y*.

Nous, Friendship, the One or Being satisfies a) and b), but not c). Therefore, *Nous*, Friendship, the One, or Being is not a final cause.³⁶

Although the argument applies to the way Plato may have thought about the nature of the good, the passages from *Timaeus*, *Symposium*, and *Philebus* quoted in the last section would still contradict Aristotle’s claim that Plato *only* considers the final cause accidentally (all this assuming A 7 and N 4 do refer to Plato).³⁷ Looking back at the *Symposium* (205e7-b3), we find an instance where the good is the final cause of the agent’s actions *qua* good. No reference to the one is added or needed to understand the motivational force of the good. Moreover, *Timaeus* 46e4 and 28c2-29b1 show that producing a good, desirable and beautiful cosmos is the goal of the demiurge’s actions. Therefore, even if Aristotle’s criticism of the good and the one had some weight, this cannot justify his claims about the number of

³⁴ See Johansen (2010, p. 180).

³⁵ See Aristoxenus, *Harm. El.* II.30-1; Simplicius, *In Phys.* 453.25-455.14.

³⁶ Johansen (2010, p. 180).

³⁷ But this may not be the case. One could argue that in A 6 the claim is slightly different. There, the one is the cause of good not identical to it. The Platonic passages cited in the previous section and the fact that Aristotle never ascribes the identification of the one and the good directly to Plato could also mean that Aristotle is aware this is not exactly Plato’s view.

causes in Plato, especially since Aristotle sees no problem, at least in *Metaphysics* A,³⁸ in recognising formal causes in Plato, even when he thinks forms do not exist at all.³⁹

Let me now consider whether Stephen Menn's (2012, pp. 208–214) argument avoids these problems. He calls attention to the general aim of *Metaphysics* A: to obtain knowledge of the first principles or original causes. He subordinates and restricts his discussion of causes to the advancement of this aim.⁴⁰ Then, he argues, Aristotle's claim is not that Plato fails to recognize efficient and final causes in general, but only that he does not use his first principles –the one and the dyad– as final or efficient causes. Menn's reading sounds attractive but I find the textual evidence unconvincing.⁴¹

For starters, Aristotle never specifies that he *only* means original causes. On the contrary, as mentioned above, the historical survey of *Metaph.* A 3-6 also corroborates the general classification articulated in *Physics* II. This argument would collapse if Aristotle were exclusively discussing original causes. To be left without an argument to justify the number and nature of Aristotle's causes sounds like a very high price to pay. Even conceding that Aristotle is only talking about first principles in *Metaph.* A, the passages quoted from *Philebus* still contradict what Aristotle claims. The productive cause that Socrates introduces as a fourth kind is identified as a basic and irreducible ontological and cosmological element. In the *Symposium*, the distinction between things 'for the sake of something else' and 'that for whose sake the other kind comes to be in each case' is also proposed at the most general ontological

³⁸ In *Metaph.* L 10, 1075b27-8, for example, Aristotle doubts the causality of forms even if they were to exist.

³⁹ To be fair, Johansen focuses on Aristotle's criticisms of Plato in relation to the *Timaeus*, and his concluding remarks acknowledge that Plato's philosophy might offer enough elements for a comeback. But I believe this speaks in my favour. Johansen's argument cannot explain Aristotle's general claims in *Metaph.* A 6.

⁴⁰ See also Barney (2012, pp. 71–73).

⁴¹ Menn (forthcoming, sec. Ib1) recognizes this weakness but, I think, underestimates its importance.

level. Thus, Aristotle would still be subject to a charge of forgetfulness regarding these very relevant passages unless we can provide a better interpretation. Menn's proposal, however, does not really save Aristotle from these charges.

Now, consider more closely Aristotle's refusal to recognize efficient causes in Plato. In some passages, Aristotle shows he has no clear idea of where to place an efficient cause in Plato's metaphysics.⁴² In *Metaph.* A 6 (991a8-11), he discards that forms can play the role of efficient causes: 'Above all one might discuss the question what on earth the Forms contribute to sensible things, either to those that are eternal or to those that come into being and cease to be. For they cause neither movement nor any change in them.'⁴³ Later in A 9 (992b7-9) he also discards the great and the small: 'And regarding movement, if the great and the small are to be movement, evidently the Forms will be moved; but if they are not, whence did movement come? If we cannot answer this the whole study of nature has been annihilated.' Aristotle, in fact, finds it intolerable that, in his view, Plato posits forms as the cause of becoming. At first sight it seems odd that Aristotle claims both that Plato proposes forms as causes of becoming and that he fails to recognize efficient causes. Could the problem just be a different understanding of the nature of the efficient cause? The issue hangs upon Aristotle's interpretation of *Phaedo* 95e-107b, explicitly discussed in two places. In *Metaphysics* A 9 (991b3-991b8) he states:

In the *Phaedo* the case is stated in this way—that the Forms are causes both of being and of becoming; yet when the Forms exist, still the things that share in them do not come into being, unless there is some

⁴² Although in *Gen. Corr.* I, 2, 315a29-33 he comes close to admitting that Plato discusses the efficient causes of the elements.

⁴³ See also *De anima* I, 3, 407b5-12, where Aristotle claims that Plato leaves obscure the cause of the movements of the heavens. Compare Aristotle's interpretation with that of Theophrastus who sees a material and an efficient principle in Plato. See Theophrastus Fr. 230 = Simplicius, *In Phys.* 1.2 184b15; transl. Sedley (2002, p. 42).

efficient cause; and many other things come into being (*e.g.* a house or a ring), of which we say there are no Forms. Clearly, therefore, even the other things can both be and come into being owing to such causes as produce the things just mentioned.⁴⁴

The passage makes clear that Aristotle believes Plato's *Phaedo* posits forms as the only causes of being and becoming, and that he sees two problems with it. First, he argues, the existence of a form does not by itself guarantee the generation of things that share in that form. Unless one also posits an efficient cause, nothing explains why, at a certain moment and place, something that shares in a form comes to be. Second, he continues, some sensible things have come to be but have no corresponding form. Therefore, Plato makes two mistakes. Forms cannot be causes of becoming because they are not efficient causes and, even if they were, they cannot account for all the generated stuff we find in the world. In this argument Aristotle assumes Platonic forms are passive. But, then, in *Generation and Corruption* 2.9 (335b9-24), he puts things the other way around: even if Platonic forms were active they cannot work as efficient causes because they, remaining always the same, would perpetually and continuously cause the same effect. In the sensible world, the sensible particulars share in forms only intermittently. A flower's beauty, for example, will only last for a couple of days, not forever. Therefore, Platonic forms are useless to explain the flower's beauty.

Annas (1982) has convincingly argued that Aristotle bases his criticisms on a perfectly possible reading of the Greek text and, strictly speaking, cannot be taken as a misinterpretation of Plato—even if other more attractive interpretations are possible. She acknowledges, however, that Aristotle's ruthless criticisms hang on combining a literal reading of the text, a demand for great terminological precision and a strict reluctance to supply missing premises. As mentioned at the beginning, even if we agree with

⁴⁴ See also *Metaph.* A 6, 991a8-11.

Annas, her defence of Aristotle only applies to his reading of the *Phaedo*, and the claims in *Metaphysics* A 6 are not restricted to this dialogue. Thus, Aristotle's reading of the *Phaedo*, alone, does not justify his denial of efficient causes in Plato in general. A response to this could be that Aristotle combines this interpretation of the *Phaedo* with a reticence to take the demiurge as something better than an obscure metaphor. But, as I have insisted, the passages in *Philebus* and *Symposium* demonstrate this is not enough either.

On Aristotle's behalf, we could say that the main target in *Metaphysics* A is not Plato's dialogues but his so-called 'unwritten doctrines.' Aristotle is aware to some extent that these views differ from what he writes in his dialogues (v.g. *Phys.* 4.2 209b11-16). But this idea is not really helpful. There is no clear indication that Aristotle is referring to these doctrines;⁴⁵ even less that he refers to them exclusively. Moreover, we know Aristotle has read all of the dialogues quoted in the previous section. If these passages offer a better proposal about causation and first principles than the unwritten doctrines, then he should have directed his criticism against these texts. And even if these unwritten doctrines represent Plato's views more accurately, one would expect Aristotle to notice that the dialogues offer a closer point of comparison with his four causes. He could have qualified or restricted his criticisms, but he did not. Alternatively, he could have complemented the unwritten doctrines with compatible claims in the dialogues. How could we make better sense of Aristotle's claims in *Metaph.* A 6? What premises or assumptions could we provide to offer a charitable interpretation of Aristotle that considers Plato's passages on causation in *Philebus* and *Symposium*?⁴⁶

⁴⁵ The connection, however, is not impossible. As noted in footnote 17, the arguments in *Metaph.* A 6 seem to be similar to those offered in Aristotle's lost treatise *On the Good*, a response to Plato's seminars on the good. See Simplicius, in *Phys.* 151.6-11 and Philoponus, in *De an.* 75.34-76.1.

⁴⁶ Other arguments on Aristotle's behalf have been proposed but I also find them unconvincing. Monte R. Johnson (2005, pp.

Perhaps Aristotle assumes that the *Phaedo* takes pre-eminence over later dialogues when it comes to causation. If so, the conclusions in *Phaedo* play a more important role than the arguments found in any other dialogues. Perhaps he supposes the *Phaedo* contains Plato's final word about causation or offers his most important attempt to deal with the number and nature of causes. It is not unreasonable to think he would consider one dialogue as the exegetical key to read the rest of the Platonic corpus. Later Platonists did this with the *Timaeus*. Alternatively, Aristotle's unitarian reading of Plato might assume that the contribution of the late dialogues subordinates to the doctrines and arguments already defended in the middle dialogues, unless, of course, Plato argues otherwise. Such procedure could be construed as an attempt to read Plato charitably.

Imagine I am talking with my friend Susan and she goes on and on telling me how much she loves her partner Peter. A couple of weeks later, Susan shares with me an anecdote. At some point, she explains Peter's involvement in the story and tells me that she hates him. On the face of it, her previous claims about Peter stand in some tension with what she tells me now. However, given the tone and

118–127), for instance, discusses some of the passages in *Philebus* and *Laws* concerning final causes. Johnson argues that Plato employs the notion of 'for the sake of which', but not as a cause –i.e. 'not as a cause in complete explanations of specific things that yield what Aristotle considers scientific knowledge' (p. 127). However, this makes Aristotle's criteria for recognition of final causes more demanding than his criteria for accepting the other causes. Furthermore, Johnson's arguments only prove that Plato and Aristotle disagree about the nature of that 'for the sake of which', not that Plato fails to use it as a cause. David Sedley (2007, p. 114), in turn, thinks Aristotle is justified in claiming that 'none of his predecessors, Plato included, have anticipated his discovery of the final cause, i.e. made goals themselves causes.' But Sedley's argument only considers the *Timaeus*. He worries that accepting final causes in *Timaeus* compromises the dialogue's restriction to two causes –the divine and necessary causes. However, if that were the reason, Aristotle would have accepted that the demiurge was an efficient cause. In any case, even if Sedley were right about the *Timaeus*, the other Platonic passages would remain problematic.

context of both encounters, I immediately assume that she is not serious about hating Peter; even if she just said so and I cannot completely rule out the possibility she had a change of heart.

Similarly, Aristotle might have assumed the conclusions of the *Phaedo* are the most careful and serious analysis of causation. After all, Plato's discussion of causes in the *Phaedo* is lengthy and detailed; the dramatic stakes cannot be higher. If Aristotle assumes the arguments in *Phaedo* have pre-eminence over whatever is said elsewhere, it would explain why he denies efficient and final causes in Plato and why he does not even bother to exhaustively discuss all the passages that seem to contradict his claim.

Priority in time, extension, and dramatic context, however, may not be sufficient reason to prefer the *Phaedo*'s arguments. Why would Aristotle discard Plato's arguments elsewhere? If you look for Aristotle's uses and comments about the *Timaeus*, for example, he simply seems to ignore the role of the demiurge in most of them. However, in *Metaphysics A 9* (991a19-27), he contemplates the possibility of a producer (τὸ ἐργαζόμενον) that looks at ideas to explain generation and corruption:

But further, all other things cannot come from the Forms in any of the usual senses of 'from'. And to say that they are patterns [παράδειγματα] and the other things share [μετέχειν] them is to use empty words and poetical metaphors. For what is it that works, looking to the Ideas? [τί γὰρ ἐστὶ τὸ ἐργαζόμενον πρὸς τὰς ἰδέας ἀποβλέπον;] Anything can either be, or become, like another without being copied from it, so that whether Socrates exists or not a man might come to be like Socrates; and evidently this might be so even if Socrates were eternal.

Aristotle's language seems to refer to the divine demiurge introduced in *Timaeus* 28c-29b (quoted above). A maker (ὁ ποιητής) that looks at an eternal model (παράδειγμα) to create the cosmos and all the things inside of it. There, *Timaeus* appears to assume that all efficient causes are intelligent

makers.⁴⁷ Aristotle criticism is that Plato's resort to a divine demiurge that looks at the forms as models amounts to nothing more than a poetical metaphor. Many things, he argues, generate naturally without the need of any external creator. Thus, positing demiurges is uneconomical because the natural world can be explained without them, but worst, even accepting them turns out to be insufficient to account for all of the natural generations and destructions. If Plato's demiurge is not meant literally, then the *Timaeus* is compatible with Aristotle's interpretation of the *Phaedo*. But what about the *Philebus* and *Symposium*? In particular, the passages provided on final causation still appear difficult to accommodate.

At this point we need to supply Aristotle's comments on Plato with one final assumption. To admit that someone correctly recognized one of his four causes Aristotle seems to demand more than simply distinguishing the different causal elements. One possibility is he requires that the types of causes do not collapse into each other. If this is correct, even if Plato recognizes teleological motivation in *Philebus* and *Symposium*, Aristotle might still think that for Plato the final and efficient cause collapse into formal causation, given his interpretation of *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*. However, it is not entirely clear if Aristotle complies with this demand himself.

Fortunately, the explanation might be simpler. Aristotle could be well aware that Plato understands that a causal account requires an efficient and a final cause at a conceptual level, but then fails to reliably pin down the kind of entity that can really act as these different types of causes. Thus, even if Plato gets it right in some passages, his flagrant categorical mistakes in other places and the lack of explicit amendments to the *Phaedo*'s arguments could justify Aristotle's assessment regarding the number of causes in Plato. If so, Aristotle's criticism amounts to saying that Plato only employs two of

⁴⁷ As D. Frede (2012, p. 290) points out, Aristotle's language in A 6 also reminds us of *Cra.* 389a-b and *Resp.* 596a-597d. In the latter, see especially 597d7-8, where Plato claims that the divine craftsman is by nature the maker of everything.

the causes consistently. If this is what he means he is not completely wrong. It does not matter anymore that in the *Symposium*, *Philebus* and other dialogues Plato distinguishes the efficient and final elements of causation. He is not consistent in his employment of these types of causes, providing Aristotle sufficient ammunition to argue that he fails to properly recognize them.⁴⁸

There is, of course, no definitive evidence to prove that Aristotle reads Plato in this way. But I argue conversely. Given the evidence we have, it is better to suppose that Aristotle gives pre-eminence to the *Phaedo* and demands from Plato a reliable use of the causes, rather than agreeing with Cherniss and claiming he was forgetful or careless. Given this is an argument for the best explanation, it is, of course, defeasible. But I find no evidence to contradict my proposal. Its advantages over previous attempts at explaining Aristotle's rejection of efficient and final causes in Plato should also be clear. We can now reread Aristotle's criticisms to Plato as diligent attempts to make sense out of the Platonic corpus. At the same time, we can better appreciate that in Plato we already find all the basic elements

⁴⁸ Notice that this is not the complaint raised by Aristotle in the *Metaph.* A 7 passage. There the problem with the one (or being) is that although it is nominally identified with the good, and is said to be the cause of substance, it is not its cause qua good, and thus cannot count as a final cause. But this only means that the author of this theory is not talking about the final cause at all. It is not even an inconsistent use but just an incidental reference to the good and the formal cause of substance. If Plato is the author of this theory, he could simply reply that although he was not talking about final causes there, he did recognize them in other places. Thus, even if we were to suppose that the identification of the good and the one was held by Plato, and moreover, that it was the most important of his doctrines, we would still wonder why Aristotle forgot the passages I have quoted from *Symposium* and *Philebus*.

and distinctions that allow Aristotle to construe his causal theory. In a sense, we can even say that the four causes have clear Platonic antecedents, even if Aristotle is unwilling to admit Plato employs efficient and final causes.

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