

Vincent Carraud, *Causa sive Ratio. La Raison de la cause, de Suarez à Leibniz*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2002. Pp. 573.

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Elephants need no less than twenty-two months. But what are elephants in comparison with *reason*, whose incubation took more than twenty-three centuries, beginning with the dawn of western philosophy in the sixth century BCE and ending in Leibniz's formulation of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. Carraud's fascinating book tells the story of the very last stages of this Heideggerian plot,¹ which is also the story of the rise and fall of the efficient cause in early modern philosophy and of the rehabilitation of the final cause. The chronological frame of the book is roughly² the century between Suarez's *Disputationes metaphysicae* (1597) and Leibniz's *De rerum originatione radicali* and *Les 24 thèses métaphysiques* (1697).

The breadth and depth of the book is very impressive. Carraud navigates masterfully among hundreds of texts in order to tell his story. The style itself is quite interesting, insofar as it goes far beyond straightforward history of ideas and attempts to engage in real philosophical discussion of the old but crucial issue of causation and intelligibility, or more precisely, the degree and manner by which various kinds of causes may confer intelligibility on their effects. Philosophically, the book engages in dialogues with two recent figures: Heidegger (particularly Heidegger's 1955-6 lectures on the Principle of Sufficient Reason) and, Carraud's former dissertation advisor, Jean-Luc Marion (primarily, Marion's work on Descartes and Spinoza). I found Carraud's discussion far more nuanced, and hence far more interesting, than Heidegger's lectures.

The book is also well structured; one chapter leads smoothly to the other. The introduction - or rather "companion" (*vade mecum*) - provides a valuable history of the pre-modern (Greek and medieval) discussions and uses of the relevant terms and formulae. (For instance, I was quite surprised to find that the first formulation of "*Nihil sine causa sit*" comes from Jerome's (mis)translation of Job 5:6.³) Carraud's choice to begin his history of early modern philosophy with a chapter dedicated to Suarez is both helpful and refreshing. Indeed, as Carraud points out, Suarez's discussion of the Aristotelian causes provides "une carte de l'empire de la cause à l'aube du XVII^e siècle" (104). But Suarez's role in Carraud's study is not limited to aiding the cartographer of modern philosophy in drawing

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the boundaries and layout of the map, since, as Carraud convincingly shows, Suarez made a crucial contribution to the modern history of the concept of cause by granting clear *primacy* to the *efficient* cause, and making the three other Aristotelian causes subordinate to the efficient cause (145-8).

The second, and most substantive, chapter of the book deals with Descartes. In Descartes Carraud identifies two crucial moves in the development of the notions of cause and reason. The more visible and widely known move is the elimination of the other Aristotelian causes in favor of a full identification of causality with efficient causation (288), and insofar as the cause confers intelligibility on its effect, efficient causation becomes the sole source of reason. Hence, the phrase, *causa (efficiens) sive ratio*. Yet, this very identification seems to begin the process which will bring about the downfall of efficient causation. The efficient cause, being the *explicans* of all things, remains itself unintelligible - “la considérer comme *explicanda* reviendrait à annuler la fonction d’intelligibilité qu’elle autorise” (289).

The undermining of the authority of the efficient cause is also assisted by what Carraud considers to be Descartes’ second major innovation which “consists of subjecting God not to the axiom of the efficient cause, but to that [axiom] which demands a cause” (289). Said otherwise: it is not that Descartes is making God into an effect of any sort; rather, he is willing to apply the demand for a cause to God’s case as well. Since God is not caused, the demand remains unsatisfied and presses Descartes to *explain* - that is, to point out the *reason* - why God is not caused. The incomprehensibility of God’s *potentia* provides the required explanation (or so it is said to be), and in this way the equivalence of *causa sive ratio* turns out to be a disjunction: *causa (efficiens) aut ratio*, i.e., every thing must have a cause, and if not, there must be a reason why it does not have a cause. Carraud stresses, however, that Descartes could not affirm the strict and all embracing demand for intelligibility embodied in Leibniz’s principle of sufficient reason, since in such a case he would have to renounce the crucial doctrine of the incomprehensibility of divine power (293). Thus, the quick rise to power of the efficient cause in Descartes’ system ended in a major crisis. Carraud considers the systems of Descartes’ followers - Spinoza, Malebranche, and Leibniz - as three attempts to disentangle the Cartesian problem of causality, and it is to these three attempts that the last three chapters of the book are dedicated.

The chapter on the occasionalists traces the ways various occasionalist systems - those of Malebranche, La Forge, and Cordemoy - were attempting to address

the Cartesian crisis of causality. It is particularly illuminating in its discussion of the relation of divine will and wisdom in Malebranche. The final chapter which deals with Leibniz is the true end of the book towards which all the other chapters lead. In Leibniz Carraud finds not only the explicit formulation of the principle of sufficient reason, but also the resolution of the Cartesian problem which is achieved by “transforming the problem itself into a solution”(392). The Cartesian disjunction “*causa aut ratio*” turns into the Leibnizian parallelism between the kingdoms of nature and grace. In Leibniz efficient and final causes are assigned separate and independent domains - “Les âmes agissent selon les lois des causes finales par appétitions, fins, et moyens. Les corps agissent selon les lois des causes efficientes ou des mouvements. Et les deux règnes, celui des causes efficientes et des causes finales, sont harmoniques entre eux”.⁴ But for Leibniz the parallelism between the kingdom of nature and the kingdom of grace is also a parallelism between *causes* and *reasons* - “La *cause* dans les choses répond à la *raison* dans les vérités. C’est pourquoi la cause même est souvent appelée raison, et particulièrement la cause finale.”⁵ Hence, Carraud concludes that for Leibniz reason is primarily identified with the final cause (395). This completes a full circle in Carraud’s plot which began with the deposition of the final cause and ended in its rehabilitation.

The teleological structure of the book has its own appeal, but to my mind the identification of the author with the Leibnizian position seems to be far too strong to allow the other systems a fair appearance in the philosophical court. This bias is most visible in Carraud’s treatment of Spinoza.

Carraud begins his discussion of Spinoza by pointing out what he terms “Les silence leibnizien”. In 1678, shortly after Spinoza’s death and the publication of his *Opera posthuma*, Leibniz received a copy of the book. Leibniz read the text and made some interesting notes to himself. In the second proof of proposition 11 of part of the *Ethics* Spinoza states: “For each thing there must be assigned a cause, or reason, as much for its existence as for its nonexistence [*Cuiuscumque rei assignari debet causa seu ratio, tam cur existit, quam cur non existit*].”⁶ It is clear that Leibniz paid close attention to this statement.⁷ While it is true that Leibniz made some use of the principle “*quod nihil sit sine ratione*” almost a decade earlier - in his 1668/9 *Demonstrationes catholicae* - one is still surprised by Leibniz’s failure to acknowledge Spinoza’s anticipation of his “most noble principle” (300). Carraud’s explanation of this silence is quite bold. According to Carraud, “the obvious reason” why Leibniz did not take Spinoza to anticipate

him is because for Leibniz the principle of sufficient reason was supposed to deal with the issue of contingency whose very existence was denied by Spinoza (340). “If contingency ceases to constitute a problem, then the principle of sufficient reason - being the solution of that problem - is just useless” (301). Here I respectfully disagree. It is true that in Spinoza contingency is banned. But it is, I think, not less clear that for Spinoza the main pressure to reject contingency comes precisely from the principle of sufficient reason itself. Were any fact contingent, the principle of sufficient reason would demand a reason for this fact. But once this reason is given, the original fact would *necessarily* follow (since it is a *sufficient* reason). Obviously, one can challenge this argument, but this is beside the point, since it is definitely not Spinoza who would try to undermine the connection between the principle of sufficient reason and necessitarianism. While Spinoza and Leibniz may have different views as to whether the principle of sufficient reason leads to necessitarianism, this, in itself, cannot prove that they did not share the same principle.

Another route which Carraud pursues in order to avoid ascribing to Spinoza the authorship of the principle is by arguing that Spinoza’s notion of cause was so far removed from the modern understanding of cause that even his apparent statement of the principle of sufficient reason as well as Spinoza’s identification of reason and cause cannot have any relation to the modern deployment of the principle (302). Carraud presents his argument in two stages. First he argues that (1) for Spinoza the self-causing activity of God is a general paradigm of causality (313), and then that (2) Spinoza’s definition of *causa sui* - “By cause of itself I understand that whose essence involves existence or that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing [*Per causam sui intelligo id, cuius essentia involvit existentiam, sive id, cuius natura non potest concipi nisi existens.*]” - cannot be read in terms of *efficient* causation, but rather as an Aristotelian *formal* cause. From (1) and (2) one can conclude that (3) Spinoza’s notion of cause is primarily that of a formal cause. As far as I can see both (1) and (2) are claims which point out something true, but eventually neither one can be accepted. It is I believe true that for Spinoza all things *try to be like* God.⁸ They try to be causally self-sufficient and they strive to avoid annihilation. But the tragic element in this story is that we are all doomed to fail. Except God, no one and no thing is, or can be, a fully self-causing and eternal substance.

The second point is somewhat trickier. Carraud is right in pointing out the assimilation of causation and conceivability in Spinoza (Proposition 16 of part 1 is

a clear example of such an assimilation since it identifies the causal flow of modes from God's nature with the derivation of *propria* from God's essence). Carraud is also right in maintaining that Spinoza's claim in Letter 60 that an efficient cause can be either external or internal breaks with the traditional understanding of the efficient cause as an external cause (320-24).⁹ Yet, as far as I can tell there is little doubt that the cause Spinoza had in mind in his definition of '*causa sui*' is nothing but the efficient cause. Consider proposition 7 of part 1:

P7: It pertains to the nature of a substance to exist [*Ad naturam substantiae pertinet existere*].

Dem.: A substance cannot be *produced* by anything else (by P6C); therefore it will be the cause of itself, i.e., its essence necessarily involves existence, or it pertains to its nature to exist [*Substantia non potest produci ab alio (per coroll. prop. praeced.); erit itaque causa sui, id est (per defin. 1) ipsius essentia involvit necessario existentiam, sive ad eius naturam pertinet existere*].

"*Potest produci*" is clearly an expression of efficient causation (cf. prop. 6 of part 1), and the demonstration says that insofar as a substance is not produced (efficiently caused) by anything else, it must be a *causa sui*. If the argument is to have any validity, this *causa sui* must as well be read as an efficient cause.¹⁰

These occasional disagreements aside, I found Carraud's book thought-provoking, rich, rigorous and deep. It is a pleasure to read and study it and it is a pleasure to disagree with it. I hope and believe that it will become a standard work in the field.

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Notes

¹ "Demnach dauerte es zweitausenddreihundert Jahre, bis das abendländisch-europäische Denken dahin gelangte, den einfachen Satz vom Grund zu finden und aufzustellen. [...] Man möchte die lange Zeit, die er dazu brauchte, seine Incubationzeit nennen: zweitausenddreihundert Jahre für das Setzen dieses einfachen Satzes", Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1957), I 14-15 (quoted in Carraud, 14 n.6) / Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, tr. Reginald

Lilly (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1996), 117-8.

² In spite of this announced choice of a square century (p. 167), much of the material in the Leibniz chapter actually comes from Leibniz's very late period.

³ Though, obviously, the Vulgate's "*Nihil in terra sine causa sit*" was never meant to be anything like a principle of causation.

⁴ *Monadologie*, § 79.

⁵ *Nouveaux Essais* (A VI/6, 475)

⁶ The translation is by Curley - *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, edited and translated by Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

⁷ Leibniz rephrases: "*Debet ratio reddi posse non tantum cur res exitat, sed et cur non existat*" (Leibniz, *Textes inédits*, published and annotated by Gaston Grua (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), vol. I 278). Similarly, Leibniz rephrases axiom 3 of part of the *Ethics* - "From a given and determinate cause the effect follows necessarily; and conversely, if there is no determinate cause, it is impossible for an effect to follow [*Ex data causa determinata necessario sequitur effectus, et contra si nulla detur determinata causa, impossibile est ut effectus sequatur*] - simply as the general principle "*Nihil est sine causa*" (Grua, I 278).

⁸ This view of the modes as engaging in a certain practice of "*imitatio dei*" is developed in the work of Martial Gueroult, and more recently by Don Garret and Dan Garber.

⁹ Carraud apparently did not notice that the notion of an *internal efficient* cause appears also in the *Ethics*. In a footnote (312 n. 4) Carraud says that Spinoza's claim in the first corollary to proposition 16 of part 1 - "...God is the efficient cause of all things.." - is not put to use till the second part of the *Ethics*. This is not precise. Spinoza invokes the claim that God is the efficient cause of all things in order to explain the notion of an immanent cause in the demonstration to proposition 18 of part 1 of the *Ethics*. This demonstration implies quite clearly that an *immanent* cause is an *internal efficient* cause.

¹⁰ See further the demonstration of proposition 6 of part 1 where Spinoza identifies "being caused" and "being produced" by another.