Suárez’s theory of formal causality encompasses Aristotle’s claim that the form or the account of the essence is among the types of cause.¹ But it also includes elements not found in Aristotle. These largely emerge in two disputations: in DM 12, where he treats the formal cause in connection with his attempt to discover a common account of cause, and in DM 15, where he treats the substantial formal cause. These disputations yield an account of the substantial formal cause as a principle that partially constitutes the existence of a natural thing and which completes and perfects its essence (see Section 1 below).

To some extent, Suárez’s account of substantial formal causality has been eclipsed in recent scholarship, which finds him to privilege the efficient causality of the substantial form over its formal causality or even to construe the substantial form as a kind of efficient cause rather than as a formal cause.² This impression is mainly derived from Suárez’s defense of the existence of substantial forms in DM 15.1, which repeatedly invokes substantial forms as necessary to explain natural phenomena. I argue, however, that the impression is mistaken. First, Suárez’s arguments from natural explanation for the existence of the substantial form in DM 15 appeal both to its formal causality and to its efficient causality. Second, he considers formal causality as fundamental to and definitive of the substantial form and he accords it great importance (Section 2 below).

While Suárez does underline the efficient causality of the substantial form in DM 18, his arguments there do not show that he accords less importance to its formal causality. He vigorously defends the genuine efficient causality of the substantial form against Thomist and Peripatetic philosophers, but his arguments are consistent with his claim that formal causality is fundamental to and

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¹ Aristotle, Physics 2.3.194b26–27.
definitive of the substantial form. His arguments in *DM* 18 are significant not only because they defend the efficient causality of the substantial form, but also because they respond to contemporary debates about the causality of the substantial form by distinguishing its formal and efficient causality (Section 3).

1 What is Formal Causality?

A central task of *DM* 12 is to develop a common account of cause (communis ratio causae), that is, an account of cause that encompasses all four of Aristotle’s causes. As we saw in Chapter 1, Suárez settles on the following account: a cause is a principle that per se inflows being to another.\(^3\) Two parts of his argument for this account are especially instructive with respect to his theory of the formal cause: his reasons for employing the term ‘inflows being’ (influens esse) and his response to the objection that use of that term suits the efficient cause alone.

Suárez considers his account of cause an improved version of the following one, which he attributes to certain modern philosophers: a cause is that on which something depends per se.\(^4\) As discussed in Chapter 1, Suárez retains the idea that causation involves dependence. On the other hand, he considers the account of cause as ‘that on which something depends per se’ to be too broad. He therefore removes the term ‘depends’ from his account of cause and instead employs the term ‘inflows being’. He uses the example of privation to support this revision. Suárez emphasizes that an account of cause must exclude privation from the circle of causes. His concern has to do with the role of privation in Aristotle’s account of change. In *Physics* 1.7, Aristotle identifies three principles of change: (a) the underlying subject, which persists through the change, (b) form (that is, some feature φ, which the underlying subject gains as a result of the change) and (c) privation (that is, the lack of φ in the underlying subject prior to the change). On this account, privation is a condition for change: for example, in order for water to become warm, it must first be cool. It appears then that any change, and any effect of change, depends on privation. On the view that a cause is that on which something depends per se, it also seems that privations are causes. Intuitively, this is mistaken: a lack of warmth in the water is not a cause of its becoming warm. Suárez considers the example of privation to show that not everything on which change depends is a cause. He employs the term ‘inflows being’ rather than the term ‘depends’ in his own account.

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\(^3\) *DM* 12.2.3 (Vivès 12.2.4) [25,384]: “Causa est Principium per se influens esse in alium.”

\(^4\) *DM* 12.2.3 (Vivès 12.2.4) [25,384]: “Tertia definitio est, quam potissime afferunt aliqui moderni, *Causa est id a quo aliquid per se pendet.*”