Commentary on De Groot

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Professor De Groot has an intriguing argument concerning the most primitive occurrence of final cause where it does not function as a nature or potentiality, but precisely as the form present at the end of the process. The advantage of this argument is that final cause emerges from within Aristotle's discussion of motion in the *Physics* and not from a biological or artistic overlay that is at odds with physical process. I will begin with an overview summarizing the major points of her discussion of two chapters from the *Physics*, the analysis of *Physics* II.2, which provides the premise for the argument in *Physics* II.8 that final cause operates in nature. This premise is the connection between continuous motion and an end as an expected natural culmination of development. What is involved in formulating this premise is the problem that arises in arguing for final causality, where the operative cause appears after the process producing it has been completed. Arguing from the process, however, does not seem a proper way to demonstrate how a future, and therefore only possible, cause can be operative in the process from which it emerges. This seems to indicate, in turn, that final causality can only be explanatory and not a real cause at all. De Groot finds aspects of Aristotle's notion of continuous motion to maneuver around this difficulty.

Aristotle's approach in *Physics* II.2, as Professor De Groot analyzes it, establishes an initial connection between continuous motion and various ways in which the end of that motion can be described: the last point (ἐσχάτον), the end (τέλος), or that for-
the-sake-of-which (τὸ οὗ ἐνέκα). These three terms do not amount to the same thing. First, the endpoint of a natural continuous motion need not be a τέλος: death is an endpoint of human life, but not that for the sake of which one was born. Only that last stage which is best qualifies as an end; this end she specifies as the point culminating growth or development. Τὸ οὗ ἐνέκα, on the other hand, denotes the idea of purpose that Aristotle applies to both nature and art. Thus, Professor De Groot maintains that the end and that for-the-sake-of-which have different meanings that are significant in the present argument for final causality. Τέλος indicates a natural culmination of a developmental kind. This particular kind of end is only in a second step identified with the reason why the motion leading up to it takes place (p. 5). Second, the connection between continuous motions and such an end can be understood in two ways, that a class of continuous motions have a natural culmination, or that any continuous motion has a natural culmination. In the first way, if I follow De Groot’s reasoning, the passage only indicates Aristotle’s general interest in final causality, but cannot count as an argument for it. In the second way, however, the passage points to a causal relation in the continuity of the movement that is relevant for understanding why an end as a natural culmination is part of the demonstration of the final cause.

The second way of understanding continuous motions seems more probable to De Groot because of its connection with the reason she discerns in these passages for asserting that the end is the final cause. That is, the commonplace expectations, for example, that make the poet’s statement that a character’s death was “the end for the sake of which he was born” funny or ridiculous. This expectation has a subjective and an objective aspect. Subjectively, it is the ordinary judgment that a movement will have a significant culminative end. Objectively, and this seems essential for De Groot’s project of making final cause more than merely explanatory, it is the pattern of development that suggests such an end and this pattern is somehow connected with the continuity of movement. She appeals to the analyses of Simplicius and Philoponus to establish the idea that any