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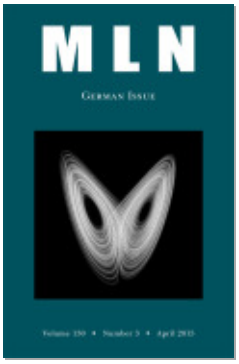

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Kleist's Four Causes: Narration and Etiology in *Das Erdbeben in Chili*[1]

Ellwood Wiggins

Kleist's *Das Erdbeben in Chili* (1807) both destroys and reconstitutes human society, revealing the core essence of the social order. It also shakes through several registers of storytelling, displaying the central principles of narrative possibility. These two seemingly incommensurable categories are shown to be related in the tale. A necessary web of narrative strategies is at work in the representation of society, and the elasticity or binding adhesiveness of the web is determined by varying notions of social causation inherent in the mode of storytelling assumed by the narrative voice. As chance, quite likely, would have it, the four successive registers of explanation invoked by the narrator can be read as a cogent commentary on Aristotle's parsing of causation and contingency.[2] This essay identifies four modes of Kleistian etiology that are polymorphously analogous to Aristotle's famous four causes. Far from simply tearing down the edifice of Western philosophical traditions, Kleist's story presents an involved exegesis

[1]I would like to thank Katrin Pahl and Gisela Berns for helpful suggestions in revising this essay, and Rüdiger Campe for encouraging me to write it.

[2]A strong caveat should be noted: this essay in no way argues that Kleist was directly influenced by Aristotle's *Physics*, or that he set out to comment on it with his story. Perhaps any worldview as complete and striking as the one presented in *Erdbeben* will resonate with Aristotle's cosmology, but this article claims that the specific parallels to and departures from Aristotle's four causes both enrich and complicate any reading of *Erdbeben* that engages with its narrative gestures toward philosophy.

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of etiological theories. It turns out that instead of merely replacing ancient (or Enlightenment) teleology with modern skepticism, as most scholars read the story, *Erdbeben* suggestively yokes ancient and idealist cosmologies together in a symbiotic complex.

As a story inspired by the catastrophic Lisbon earthquake of 1755 and the generation of theodical debates about the causes of evil that followed, *Erdbeben* has unsurprisingly provoked many reflections on contingency and causation.[3] Werner Hamacher noted how the structure of Kleist's story resembles an arch—the force of two chance catastrophes resting on each other to support a space for the possibility of narration, but which simultaneously weigh towards its destruction. He offers an unsettling and undermining critique not only of the story's own narrative form, but of the representational mode in general. "Darstellung ist—suspendierter—Sturz" (157). Helmut Schneider takes up Hamacher's stress of the trope of 'falling' in the story, but props up the figure of 'standing' over against it. Most 'stands' in the traditional sense of taking an intentional stance indeed prove to trip themselves up in Kleist. Schneider goes further, however, to locate in the novella an "aesthetic resolution" to the paradox posed between what he calls the "unrepresentable fall" and "representational (dignified) standing" ("Standing and Falling" 516). The reading of *Das Erdbeben in Chili* presented here stands (or wobbles) on the rubble mounds of both of these insightful glosses of the story's deconstructive work, but takes care to listen closely to the narrative voice in order to distinguish precisely *its* stance in relation to the characters and events it describes.[4] It turns out that the modulations in the registers of narration reveal much not only about the story's deconstructive suggestiveness, but also about its *con*structive power. In fact, falling and contingency make up just one fourth of the narrator's explanatory strategies. The tale can be read not only as a metaphor for the

[3]Two excellent studies of the relationship between Kleist's *Erdbeben* and causation are by Hans Peter Hermann and Bernd Fischer. Hermann's interpretation stresses the modernity of the story's situational worldview in a positive light (77–82). Fischer agrees that the story escapes traditional teleology as well as eighteenth-century rationalism and idealism, but contends that the inescapable irony of its narrative stance fails to offer anything beyond a discomfort with prevailing theories (esp. 426).

[4]This story has been a catalyst for a great number of compelling studies of narrative, as evidenced in the first word of Amanda Norton's recent title, "Another meditation on *Das Erdbeben in Chili*: Heinrich von Kleist and the Work of the Reader." Her excellent essay emphasizes how integral ambiguity and hermeneutical resistance are to Kleist's narrative technique.

precarious quaking of representation, but also as a thorough taxonomy of modern understandings of causation.

Aristotle's four causes are fundamental to his own philosophy and to the entire history of science. Their explication in book 2 of the *Physics* sets in motion the line of reasoning that leads all the way to the intricate cosmology that culminates much later in the *Metaphysics*. The influence of Aristotle's etiology, variously interpreted, has meanwhile held later scientists and philosophers in thrall, whether through reverential devotion or rebellious rejection. At root, however, the four causes are simply a catalogue of the ways humans can answer the question "why?" To account for any observed change, one must investigate: what the object's made of (material cause); its shape or governing ratio (formal cause); what brought it about (efficient or mechanical cause); and for what end or purpose (final cause).[5] Aristotle might offer the following account for the *zufällige Wölbung* that saves Jeronimo amidst the destruction of the prison: two buildings, constructed in order to incarcerate criminals for the safety of citizens (final cause), are shaken to collapse by an earthquake (efficient cause). The stone walls by nature are hard, inflexible, and heavy (material cause), and the angle formed by these colliding walls arrests their further fall in an arch (formal cause). For Aristotle, mechanical and material causes are sufficient to account for meteorological phenomena in the sublunary sphere (such as earthquakes);[6] formal and final causes come into play with the more perfect heavens, or in beings with souls. *Erdbeben*, as we will see, rearranges this hierarchy.

The narrative registers in Kleist's story map onto these four causes with surprising neatness. The narrator's voice in the story undergoes three transformations, allowing readers to learn of events through four successive modes of narration. These four registers all share the same distinctive 'Kleistian' style and belong to the same 'voice.'[7] The transitions do not imply radical divisions between the four sections; they all belong to the same third-person limited omniscient narrator. To speak with Genette, the voice of the story remains constant, but the mood, specifically the internal focalization through individual char-

[5]I use here the conventional terms for the four causes in English scholarship. For a convincing alternative to traditional terminology and for a helpful account of the four causes, see Sachs's translation and commentary in Aristotle (24, 53–58).

[6]For an excellent interpretation of Aristotle's *Meteorology*, see Wilson.

[7]Fischer also offers an outstanding analysis of the story's narrative technique, with which this essay is in broad agreement. The four narrative registers identified here are an elaboration of the "hintergründigen Erzähltechnik" Fischer describes (421, cf. 419–22).

acters, switches subtly (161–211). The four sections are distinguished further by the way in which—through conversational interjections and almost parenthetical asides—they account for the causes behind events or offer descriptive explanations for situations. It is the instances of causation that change over the course of the story; not the technique of storytelling, but rather the authority for explanatory remarks shifts during the tale. These switches in registers of causation occur naturally and logically as the focus of the story moves from character to character or from utopia to social reality. One might even say that they expand in successively greater spirals of inclusiveness: we start off limited to Jeronimo's view, and the narrative voice naturally shares (is contaminated by) his disjunctive understanding of (or bafflement at) the world's radical contingency. When he is joined by Josephe, the narrator begins to assume her religious mode of explaining events and motives by divine will and agency. Soon we see them in the bosom of a peaceful utopia, and the mode of description takes on the language of both idylls and epics, as echoed in the new occasional focalization through the heroic Don Fernando. Finally, as the old society is reconstituted and all of its ills thrown into vivid relief by the frenzied mob, it is the power of rhetoric along with its rootedness in the institution to which the narrator takes reluctant recourse. While the style and the narrator's sympathetic distance to characters remain constant throughout the transformations of causal authority, the comfort and identification of the narrator with the mode of explanation do not. The following pages examine each of the individual four sections closely to listen for smooth fits between narration and causology, and for the telling moments of chafing or pinching.

1. Register of Chance (*Zufall*)

The first part of the story opens with Jeronimo's remarkable salvation from suicide, backs up to recount the events leading up to the initial scenario, and then continues to narrate Jeronimo's experiences until his reunion with Josephe. The narration here is marked by four pervasive characteristics shared by Jeronimo, through whom the section is focalized: coincidence, passivity, cluelessness, and reversal. Nearly every occurrence in these pages is attributed to chance, and Hamacher has pointed out the repeated echo of *Zufall* in the narrator's diction. He finds this recurrence of *Fall* and *Zufall* to be representative of the entire story, yet while it is certainly true that the opening *Fall* casts its shadow over the rest of the novella, its actual predominance in the

narrative is limited to this first section (though it returns very significantly at the close of the final "rhetorical" part, which shares many important features with the opening). The repetitive invocations of coincidence begin with the very first sentence:

> In St. Jago . . . stand *gerade in dem Augenblicke* der großen Erderschütterung vom Jahre 1647, bei welcher viele tausend Menschen ihren Untergang fanden . . . (158)[8]

Anticipatory modifiers ("eben . . . als," "gerade . . . als," "kaum . . . als," etc.), which let readers understand that the current clause is only one of two that report actions occurring simultaneously, are famous hallmarks of a Kleistian sentence.[9] Here the clause is shortened to an adverbial phrase (though nouns in the phrase sport their own adjectival prepositional phrases and relative clauses) that modifies the first verb—"stand"—of the first sentence of the story. The very first action reported in the narration, therefore—standing—is already coupled with a coincidence that functions as so integral a part of the verb naming it, that we have to wait for several lines after the finite verb before we learn its subject and agent, Jeronimo.[10] Chance is thus built into the very grammar of the opening sentence, and it continues to be part of the structural make-up of the story, most emphatically in these initial pages.

Even the only means whereby Jeronimo can carry out the macabre decision to which he succumbs is provided by chance ("er beschloss, sich durch einen Strick, den ihm der *Zufall* gelassen hatte, den Tod zu geben" 159), and the narration follows this up directly with the opening *Zufall* of the quake that prevents his intended suicide once again: „Eben stand er [. . .], als plötzlich [the majority of the city sank and buried every living thing in its rubble]" (159). Chance continues to fall around his ears:

> Kaum befand er sich im Freien, als die ganze, schon erschütterte Straße auf eine zweite Bewegung der Erde völlig *zu*sammen*fiel*. (160)

Here is yet another ‚kaum . . . als' construction, with one more *Zufall* nicely tucked away under the rubble of the destroyed building: Jeron-

[8]All italics in the citations from Kleist are my doing.

[9]See especially the insightful essay by Wolfgang Wittkowski on "Formen des Als-ob in Kleists *Erdbeben*."

[10]Coincidentally, it is the *falling* of the city that occurs while Jeronimo is *standing* and prevents—or rather postpones—him *falling* to his death: a chance fall from an intentional stance that would support Schneider's thesis ("Standing") quite nicely.

imo has not only been saved by the improbable chance of the way the prison fell in on itself, but now even this fortunate unlikelihood collapses once he emerges from it—in the nick of time to provide a kind of exclamation point to the contingency of Jeronimo's escape.

Not only do improbable coincidences take place around Jeronimo, but all the events in his section seem to happen *to* him. He is the passive object of events rather than their active agent. The narrative emphasizes this by its consistent use of the passive voice wherever Jeronimo is concerned. In his dazed, stumbling trek through the destroyed city, moreover, collapsing buildings or burning flames, rather than any notions of his own, force him along a certain path. Here the active voice clearly displays the agency of other (mindless) objects in determining Jeronimo's actions: "jagte ihn . . . .trieb ihn . . . riß ihn . . . " (160). The narration also makes use of the passive flavor of the German reflexive to underline Jeronimo's unflinching passivity: "[. . .] weil er *sich* mit Donna Josephe . . . in einem zärtlichen Enverständnis *befunden hatte*" (158); "Kaum *befand er sich* im Freien, als die ganze, schon erschütterte Straße auf eine zweite Bewegung der Erde völlig zusammenfiel" (160). He is eternally *finding himself* in situations rather than bringing them about or even influencing them significantly once they have been thrust upon him.

The narrative's recourse to coincidence as an explanatory model and passivity as a mode of response in this section are partly explained by the remarkable cluelessness of Jeronimo, our focusing 'guide' during the first few pages. He is consistently surprised by events he cannot understand; they render him senseless or quite literally drive consciousness from him. Here a brief sampling of Jeronimo's incognizance: „Jeronimo Rugera war starr vor Entsetzen; und gleich als ob sein ganzes *Bewusstsein* zerschmettert worden wäre" (160). „Als Jeronimo das Tor erreicht . . . sank er *ohnmächtig* . . . Er mochte wohl eine Viertelstunde in der tiefsten *Bewusstlosigkeit* gelegen haben" (160). „*Besinnungslos* . . . eilte er . . . " (160) „Jeronimo . . . *wollte die Besinnung verlieren* . . . " (159). „Er *begriff nicht*, warum er dem Tod . . . entflohen sei" (161). Jeronimo is unable to place events into any kind of theoretical or etiological framework, and hence he—and the narrator along with him—is driven to ascribe everything to chance, the negation of cause (*aitia*), an anti-etiology. As we shall see, the uncertainty of Jeronimo's attitude even bleeds over to contaminate the inflection of the story's narration.

The examples cited so far are instances of contingency, passivity, and cluelessness. These three characteristics are shared by a whole

rash of protagonists from eighteenth-century novels, who are likable fellows enough, but seem to stumble from one chance adventure to another and hence willy-nilly into the role of hero despite themselves.[11] Kleist piles them on here with such concentration, however, that when joined with Jeronimo's otherwise remarkable lack of any really distinguishable character, they function almost like a thought experiment in the analysis of chemical elements, such as Lavoisier describes when he isolates individual molecules in compound materials and recombines them to discover if they are simple elements or synthetics. What happens if one takes the common features of the modern novel hero and applies them to an utterly conventional character for whom they will be the *only* defining characteristics? What happens when one assigns them to a non-entity like Jeronimo? The experiment shows that all three aspects combine to produce the fourth characteristic of this initial part of the story: repeated reversals. It reveals another literary trope: peripeteia. Devoid of any real individualizing traits to weigh his character and understanding with the assumptions and beliefs—mistaken or not—that anchor people in relatively solid ruts of habit, prejudice, or philosophy, nothing can offer any resistance to the turn-arounds triggered by outside circumstance. Peripeteia spins out of control. Time after time Jeronimo is forced to change directions, or he lets himself be turned around entirely. Throughout his circuitous exit from the city, as we have seen, sudden evidences of disaster herd him like a lab rat along new trajectories in the maze of destruction. Once he is safely outside the city gates and awakes from his shock-induced fainting spell, he undergoes a series of reversals both in his physical actions (starting out with his back turned to the city, then turning to see the destruction, then turning down to sink to earth, then turning back around away from the city to seek Josephe) and in his mental reactions (return from unconsciousness to consciousness; incomprehension at sight of refugees; return of memory at sight of city; thankfulness to God for survival and delight in life; return of Josephe's memory at sight of ring; regret of prayer and disgust at God). Words containing "kehr" occur no less than six times, and verbs deriving from "wenden" thrice more in the space of these two pages (161–162).

One sentence encapsulates succinctly all four aspects of the register of chance: "Jeronimo, der inzwischen auch in ein Gefängnis gesetzt

[11]Think, for instance, of Tom Jones, Agathon, or Wilhelm Meister.

worden war, wollte die Besinnung verlieren, als er diese ungeheuere Wendung der Dinge erfuhr" (159). Jeronimo, the subject of the passive relative clause, exhibits agency in the active verb of the main clause: he wants to lose consciousness in the face of a monstrous turn of events.[12] He desires, in other words, to be rendered senseless (to be the passive object of the main clause) by contingency, which figures as a turn, a reversal. And *Dinge*, things, are executing the reversal here. Jeronimo is most at home as a thing among things: acted upon, not acting himself.

This sentence also shows how Kleist's narrative itself at this point takes on the aspects of Jeronimo's character, which is a concentration of a certain kind of etiology—the kind that in its utter bafflement at events attributes them all to chance. The result is an endless series of reversals that ultimately can have no dramatic effect, since there can be no finality—or even any lasting pause—to any process (character or story) propelled only by outside events. To speak with Aristotle, that which has no motive power of its own will never come to rest or find its end. Jeronimo and the first section of *Das Erdbeben in Chili* demonstrate what happens when people and stories are subject to nothing but mechanical, efficient causes—which, from the point of view of the people as 'objects acted upon' and the narratives instilled with their 'objectivity,' will necessarily appear entirely contingent: propelled by a kind of Lucretian curve, they swirl into dizzying rings of peripeteia with no promise of catharsis.

Interestingly, Hamacher's study also turns on identifying a "permanent peripeteia" (157) in the story, but his does not refer to Jeronimo's endless pirouettes. Hamacher's phrase conjures up the permanent state of collapse in which the text itself is situated, a constant motion and instability that cannot come to rest in an unequivocal assertion of meaning. By associating this performative figure of reversal with the character of Jeronimo rather than with the text as a whole, this essay is not trying to contain or create a buttress against the destabilizing agency of Kleist's earthquake. Instead, the incarnation of peripeteia in the narrator's initial focalization through Jeronimo serves to show the psychological results of radical reliance on the mechanical cause

[12]The German modal verb, "wollen" here can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand is the straight literal rendering of "to want," but it is often used in such constructions as this one not necessarily to convey desire, but rather in the sense of "to be about to." This ambiguity is quite telling: it either limits Jeronimo's active agency to a desire for unconsciousness, or robs him of any active agency whatsoever.

of unfathomable chance. In Jeronimo, Kleist has engineered a perpetual motion machine such as would make Bessler envious. But whereas Bessler's contraption could only run on the fuel of blind trust,[13] Jeronimo's perpetual peripeteia will only be brought to a stop by the equal and opposite force of faith.

2. Register of Heaven (*Himmel*)

After all the turn-arounds Jeronimo undergoes due to the Santiago earthquake, the narrator drolly reports, " . . . er wollte sich schon wieder *wenden*, als er plötzlich . . . ein junges Weib erblickte" (161). The wry 'schon wieder' is hard to miss, but it is indeed the sight of his lover, Josephe, that prevents yet another about-face in Jeronimo's iterative whirligigs. Almost immediately, the narration's explanatory strategy changes from helpless confusion at the pilings-on of contingent chance to secure assurance in the will of providence. "O Mutter Gottes, du Heilige!" (162) cries Jeronimo as he recognizes Josephe, and the outburst functions as a presciently significant act of naming his lover: not only identifying her with the saintly mother of God, but also invoking the higher power to whom all reversals in fate will be attributed over the next few pages.

Josephe's character could not be more emphatically different from that of her lover. After the initial shock of the earthquake, " . . . die Besinnung kehrte ihr bald wieder, und sie wandte sich, um nach dem Kloster zu eilen, wo ihr kleiner, hülfloser Knabe zurückgeblieben war" (162). Jeronimo is clueless, and wants only to lose his 'Besinnung'; Josephe quickly regains her senses, and is remarkably cognizant of her actions and all that goes on around her. Jeronimo is driven passively and aimlessly through the burning city; Josephe directs her steps with knowing precision towards a certain goal. Jeronimo thinks of nothing but his own wretched life until he is safely out of the city, and even after he is safe he does not stop to assist any of the suffering people around him; Josephe not only rushes first of all to save her son in the midst of countless dangers, but also reaches out to assist the nuns in the convent. At the sight of the rubble remaining of the jail where Jeronimo had been imprisoned, Josephe, too, is tempted to sink into thoughtless despondence, but the collapse of a nearby building reminds her of the urgency in her purpose to save the child.

[13]See Simon Schaffer's fascinating study, "The Show that Never Ends: Perpetual Motion in the Early Eighteenth Century."

> Bei diesem Anblicke wankte sie, und wollte besinnungslos an einer Ecke niedersinken; doch in demselben Augenblick jagte sie der Sturz eines Gebäudes hinter ihr, das die Erschütterungen schon ganz aufgelöst hatten, durch das Entsetzen gestärkt, wieder auf. (163)

Here we have a situation parallel to that in which Jeronimo often found himself, but with several important differences: though the sentence construction "doch in demselben Augenblick" cries for a reference to *Zufall*, we do not get one; and instead of being driven blindly and passively on by the falling building, Josephe is 'strengthened' by her unsettlement (Ent-setzen), and acts thereafter with greater determination to rescue her child.

With Josephe indeed we get a very different 'type' of character from Jeronimo. If he was the prototypical affably passive hero of so many eighteenth-century novels, she is the fiercely determined saint and martyr who never wavers in her faith in divine goodness, despite all evidence to the contrary. The narrative voice echoes this change not by any stylistic trick of sudden baroque ornateness, but by casually yet relentlessly switching its mode of attributing causation for events. Whereas Jeronimo was the narration's insider genius to the first part of the story, Josephe provides the new focalization for this second section. As soon as she enters the horizon of narrated knowledge, the guiding principle of cluelessness and recourse to chance is abandoned, and the narrator begins to explain events in terms of divine intervention. Though many commentators make so much of the way this story is inaugurated by coincidence, which seems to be its (and, they usually add, Kleist's) poetological obsession, the word *Zufall* disappears for the majority of the text: from the shift to Josephe (162) until the closing page of the entire tale. Improbable events continue to be reported and repeated, of course, but with other explanatory inflections. In the very next sentence after Jeronimo's vocative outcry to the holy mother of God (who, like Josephe, conceived out of wedlock), Kleist writes, "Mit welcher Seligkeit umarmten sie sich, die Unglücklichen, die *ein Wunder des Himmels* gerettet hatte!" (162). The story's second exclamation point (the first was Jeronimo's invocation of Josephe as a saint) signals the *narrator's* outpouring of joy at the lovers' reunion; such fanfare accompanies the shift in narrative focus and causal attribution. Josephe is our new 'in' to the proceedings described, and she stands in stark contrast to her clueless betrothed, both in her sharply defined character and in her understanding of the workings of the world. We have gone from 'Wendung der Dinge' to 'Wunder des Himmels.' Whereas before we heard some echo of

Zufall whenever the story called for an explanatory nexus, we now get: "ein Wunder des *Himmels"* (162); "als ob alle Engel des *Himmels* sie umschirmten" (163); "den teuren Knaben, den ihr der *Himmel* wieder geschenkt hatte" (163); „Ein Gefühl, das sie nicht unterdrücken konnte, nannte den verflossnen Tag, soviel Elend er auch über die Welt gebracht hatte, eine Wohltat, wie der *Himmel* noch keine über sie verhängt hatte" (167).

Just as the narration in the first section points to the ultimate dissatisfaction inherent in the etiology of chance, however, it here too evinces some measure of discomfort with this brand of unshakable faith in a teleological account of causation. At first, readers cannot help but share a satisfying sense of accomplished justice as the narration, in its account of Josephe hurrying, babe pressed to her breast, past the ruined and smoking hulks of buildings, singles out the ruins of the places of religious and civil power responsible for her harsh judgment and sentencing. When 'rötliche Dämpfe' boil out from the rubble of her paternal house, readers may well feel some glee at this reminiscence of hell, surely the deserved reward of those responsible for such hypocritical injustice. Yet the last quoted sentence about Josephe's insuppressible feeling that the earthquake was a blessing is very telling. The fact that Josephe imagines that the feeling ought to be quelled—the mention of her inability to suppress it—suggests that even such feelings of just deserts may be guilty ones. The whole story, as mentioned, was largely inspired by the dreadful earthquake of Lisbon, which killed thousands of faithful worshippers in church on All Saints' Day, and set in motion countless debates over theodicy to account for evil in a world created by a being supposedly both benevolent and omnipotent.[14] Josephe is right to feel implicit shame at her joy in God's gift to her: the saving of one single family and vengeance on their tormenters by means of a natural disaster that kills thousands of innocent souls does seem a bit heavy-handed. How can Josephe's (and here the narration's) faith in a good God square with the image she beholds of the crushed nuns, the same women who had nurtured her son and pleaded for her life?

The narration's two etiological tendencies thus far correspond to two of Aristotle's four causes. Jeronimo's chance, in which everything is caused by the external actions of outside forces, maps onto the

[14]There is a rich fond of important research into Kleist's sources and inspiration for *Erdbeben*. See, most recently, Christoph Weber, "Santiagos Untergang—Lissabons Schrecken."

mechanical or efficient cause. Josephe's divine explanation, meanwhile, is a kind of final cause: an event's *telos* or end. In point of fact, however, the story does not end here, and we will be forced to reevaluate the narration's commentary on both of these modes of explanation in light of what follows. It turns out that Kleist's story reveals that *both* final and mechanical causes correspond to two senses of Aristotle's explanation of incidental causes: chance and fortune. After describing the four causes and their complex interplay in the *Physics*, Aristotle goes on to investigate chance and fortune (*automaton* and *tukhē*, 59–69). The upshot of his analysis is that chance is the general term for what comes about when two or more lines of causes cross with incidental or accidental results. Fortune, on the other hand, is merely a special case of chance when it befalls humans, and hence *seems* to have significance. But in fact, fortune is no different from chance at all other than in the human aspect from which it is viewed. Moreover, both of them can be classed with the efficient causes. In essence, Kleist has replaced Aristotle's distinction between efficient and final causes with Aristotle's own parsing of chance and fortune. Final causes are simply instances of mechanical chance happening to humans, which therefore seem to be for the sake of something we care about. Teleology is determinism from a human's hopeful perspective.

The strong belief in teleology displayed by Josephe in the end proves no more satisfying a theory of causation than Jeronimo's complete lack of any comprehensive theory. While his refuge in chance ultimately spins him reeling in circles out of control, her stubborn faith in divine will is a seed of guilt in paradise.[15] In these first two sections and with these first two characters, Kleist has mapped out a full spectrum of causal assignation. The couple comprises two poles of possibility in an individual's etiological stance: utter bewilderment and firm conviction. Interestingly, this distinction scans directly onto the dichotomy of narrative causal strategies that David Wellbery identifies in his reading of Kleist's *Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden*. All stories must navigate between the two extremes of radical contingency and ideology: in order to be both compelling and intelligible, they must have truck with both.[16] The first two sections of Kleist's *Erdbeben*

[15]Yet this kind of personal faith in the causal omnipotence of providence is still much more sympathetic to the narrator than the conventional God of organized religion and rhetoric, as we shall see.

[16]The one extreme Wellbery characterizes as "thoroughly random." There we have Jeronimo's *Zufall*. Josephine's *Himmel* verges on the opposite pole: "Every narrative that seeks to close off the domain of contingency [. . .] is ideological" (249).

clearly parse out Wellbery's astute analysis of Kleistian narratology, but the novella does not stop there. It pushes beyond Wellbery's vertical axis, so to say, of the individual's causality, to add a horizontal axis of social etiologies. As the story's following sections expand from limited internal focalizations through Jeronimo and Josephe to take on larger horizons of perspective, we move from the causal systems relied on by single persons to registers that require communities.

3. Register of Poetry (Dichtung)

The first two modes of narration are clearly focalized through individual characters, and their attributions of cause—divine will or random chance—are both ontological. In the third and fourth sections, the narration shifts to a more authorial perspective not limited to a single character,[17] and the explanations are fundamentally different in kind from the first two: they assume a social register. The medium in which society subsists is communication, and hence it is fitting that the narrative modes of the final two sections gesture toward forms of language: poetry and rhetoric. It may seem odd to consider these socio-linguistic modes as types of causation. For one thing, however, they take up the same narratological role that chance and heaven did in the first two sections. Instead of weaving coincidence and heaven into the narrative fabric, the story now alludes first to poetic tropes and then to rhetorical topoi. Additionally, they correspond with surprising suggestiveness to the two remaining causes in Aristotle's *Physics*: poetry to the formal cause; rhetoric to the material.

Just as the story comments on the relation of mechanistic and teleological explanations in ontology, it provides a framework for understanding poetry and rhetoric in language and society. Furthermore, the story ties together both ancient philosophical and contemporary historical accounts of the relation of literature to rhetoric. Like Plato, whose ironic disparagement of poets and sophists is constructed in rhetorically nuanced fictions, the story reveals the inner kinship between

[17]Although the narration still dips into focalization through characters at times in the second half, it never remains with one. Josephe and Jeronimo, interestingly, are no longer separable narrativistically: "In Jeronimos und Josephens Brust regten sich Gedanken von seltsamer Art" (166)—they even share a single (thinking) breast! Though the narration occasionally focalizes through Don Fernando, it never remains with him long, and there are even crucial passages where the narrator emphatically does not know what Don Fernando perceives. (E.g., when we are not privy to what Donna Elisabeth whispers in his ear (169)—this is the critical passage for Norton's reading of the story.)

the two. Like modern historical studies, moreover, the novella suggests a traceable shift in linguistic registers from rhetoric to literature (cf. Campe). Kleist's story, as will become clear, adds a twist to these accounts that unites them in a powerful taxonomy of human agency. To get there, one must first attend to the narration's gestures in the third section toward epics and idylls.

As the narration of Josephe's adventures since the moment of the earthquake draws to a close with the narrative present of her meeting with Jeronimo, we read that she "fand ihn hier, diesen Geliebten, im Tale, und Seligkeit, als ob es das Tal von Eden gewesen wäre" (164). Of course the Eden reference is part and parcel of the divine register that characterizes Josephe's entire section, but it also functions to introduce the idyllic section of the story that follows. We soon see that paradise is not limited to the small reunited family, but extends to include all of the survivors, who form a kind of peaceable kingdom where all men are brothers, regardless of their former places in the society that has fallen apart along with the structures that housed it. As a *literary* allusion to one of the most familiar and fundamental *stories* of Western culture, the reference to Eden points to the expanded register as the narrative voice moves beyond merely Josephe's perspective. The very next line in the text is even more indicative of this shift: "Dies alles *erzählte* sie jetzt voll Rührung dem Jeronimo" (164). This part of the story, which describes the gentle and utopian condition of the refugees in nature outside the city, is full of references to acts of storytelling and poeticizing. Furthermore, narration here is inflected as either epic—tales of heroes—or idyll—descriptions of idealized harmony.

The paragraph after Jeronimo and Josephe are taken in by Don Fernando's party consists of a single sentence: "*Man erzählte*, wie [. . .]; wie [. . .]; wie [. . .]; wie [. . .]; wie [. . .]" (166). Each "wie" is followed a different sensational story from the city's destruction. This 'man erzählte' is emblematic of the entire section—it is the act of narrating and the audience's sympathetic response that knit the utopian survivors together. Epic storytelling is the cause of the new idyllic society. Whereas the hypocritical and unjust pre-quake socialites traded trivial rumors over tea, the high and low are made equal by stories of heroic acts.

> Statt der nichtssagenden *Unterhaltungen*, zu welchen sonst die Welt an den Teetischen den Stoff hergegeben hatte, *erzählte man* jetzt Beispiele von ungeheueren Taten: . . . (167)

Note the contrast implicit here between *Unterhaltung* and *Erzählung*: the former is dilettantish 'conversation' for the sake of mere 'enter-

tainment,' and typifies the dissolved society with all its evils; the epic makes possible the idyllic utopia of people truly sympathizing with and helping each other.

If the catalyst of utopia is epic, its form is the idyll. The poetic pastoral runs through the social paradise from start to finish. "Indessen war die schönste Nacht herabgestiegen . . . *wie nur ein Dichter davon träumen mag*" (164). Jeronimo und Josephe then even slip "in ein *dichteres* Gebüsch, um durch das heimliche Gejauchz ihrer Seelen niemand zu betrüben. " (164) Of course this literally just means that they crawl into a *thicker* thicket, but the echo of 'Dichter' is hard to overhear, as was the couple's joy amidst the city's sufferings. The idyll here is the perfect example of Schiller's sentimental poetry: it positively drips with self-awareness as a literary representation.

The storytelling is inaugurated by Josephe and Jeronimo. "Denn *Unendliches hatten sie zu schwatzen* vom Klostergarten und den Gefängnissen, und was sie umeinander gelitten hatten; und waren sehr *gerührt*, wenn sie dachten, wie viel Elend über die Welt kommen musste, damit sie glücklich würden!" (164) The verb 'schwatzen' (to chat) might seem kin to the prating 'Unterhaltungen' above. Yet the description (stressed by the story's third exclamation point) alludes to the end of a seminal epic of Western culture, when Penelope and Odysseus spend a magically lengthened night in mutual storytelling of their travails (*Odyssey xxiii*).

Stories persuade people to act according to what some might call natural (as opposed to conventional) virtue. Donna Elisabeth is at first hesitant at Jeronimo and Josephe's arrival in their group, "doch der *Bericht*, der über irgendein neues gräßliches Unglück erstattet ward, riß ihre, der Gegenwart kaum entflohene Seele schon wieder" (166). Further, the crossing climaxes of others' stories move Donna Elvire to ask Josephe for hers: "da gerade die *Erzählungen* sich am lebhaftesten kreuzten . . . " (166). As Josephe begins to narrate, full of pathos, Elvire presses her hand to let her know that she needn't explain anymore; that she is accepted and loved. At every turn, epic narratives bring about the equalizing and forgiving force of natural right.

The stories are of normal folk performing heroic deeds: "Menschen, die man sonst in der Gesellschaft wenig geachtet hatte, hatten Römergröße gezeigt . . . " (166). In contrast to Jeronimo, who typifies the kind of protagonist to whom extraordinary things happen, normal people when faced with catastrophes often rise to meet the occasion and actually bring great deeds to pass. Tales are told of the feats of such men and women, rather than just the circumstances in which

they find themselves. In an age of poetry everyone can be a hero, and this 'idyllic' interlude in the story is simultaneously 'heroical' in that everyone can look back and retell recent deeds of heroism.

> Auf den Feldern, so weit das Auge reichte, sah man Menschen von allen Ständen . . . *einander bemitleiden*." (167)

What stands out in this description of the peaceable kingdom is how the stories people tell each other about their respective experiences in the catastrophe lead them to sympathize with each other despite the greatest gulfs between them in the pre-quake society. Sympathy, of course, was the foundational virtue for the generation of moral sense philosophers including Hume and Adam Smith. *Pitié* was the only positive interaction between people in the state of nature for Rousseau. *Mitleid* was Lessing's benchmark for all successful art (not just drama). He went so far as to interpret Aristotle's famous 'fear and pity' from the *Poetics* as a hendiadys with *Mitleid* as the basic term. These mid-eighteenth-century thinkers provided the blueprint for the more perfect society that emerged outside of Santiago's ruins: it consisted in sympathy. Lessing, moreover, suggested the recipe for bringing it about: storytelling is the most adept catalyst for idyllic fellow-feeling.

If the causal matrix of the narration of the first section was contingency, as personified by Jeronimo, a representative of the novel protagonist; and that of the second section was teleology, as represented by the saintly Josephe; then the guiding light of this third section of the story is the phenomenon of narration itself. 'Storytelling' is certainly not an etiological explanation in the same way that chance and divine providence are, but it lays bare the structure of all heuristic explorations into the causes of things: in trying to seek out chains of cause and effect to explain a situation, we are actually constructing its story. This section of *Erdbeben* intimates that when Aristotle claims in the famous first sentence of his *Metaphysics* that all humans by nature desire understanding (eidenai–to know through the causes), he is in fact pointing to an inborn longing to hear the tales behind things.

The poetic register of explanation in this section of *Erdbeben* corresponds to the 'formal cause' in Aristotle's *Physics*: "the form or pattern, the gathering in speech of what-it-is-for-it-to-be" (54). Storytelling entails form in two important ways here. First, any story imposes parts, ratio, magnitude, and shape onto a chain of events: events in fact only become visible as belonging together (and separate from the endless, amorphous happenings of life) when articulated into a narrative. Second, poetic genres comprise both the representation of the ideal

form of compassionate human nature (idyll) and the means by which it is achieved (storytelling). As Aristotle explains, "nature *is* the form" (51, emphasis added). Yet this state of nature is only realized in the pointedly unreal poetic mode of the idyll, and only produced by the emphatically exceptional mode of the epic.

The fact that the narrative drive here is associated with an idyllic scene that will have been only a temporary hiatus from the corrupt rule of society is further indicative of the role storytelling plays in human life. Jeronimo is so carried away by the newly evidenced power of pity in shared narrations that he immediately proposes to return to Santiago to let the telling of his story win the heart of the viceroy. Josephe, who, despite her faith, is more anchored in reality than her gullible husband, prefers not to test the limits of paradisiacal good will. Josephe finds it wiser "lieber nach La Conception zu gehen, und von dort aus *schriftlich das Versöhnungsgeschäft* mit dem Vizekönig zu betreiben" (167). She suggests *writing* the moving story down and sending it from a safe distance to see what effect it has. Would that they had heeded her pessimistic prudence! A hint of the necessary end to which every story must come is dropped already towards the beginning of the section, which, as we saw, likened the survivors' existence to the Garden of Eden. Shortly after this comparison is drawn, we read, "Sie fanden einen prachtvollen Granatapfelbaum, der seine Zweige, voll duftender Früchte, weit ausbreitete; und die Nachtigall flötete im Wipfel ihr wollüstiges Lied" (164). In every paradise there grows the tree of knowledge that will eventually reveal it all to be an ephemeral illusion, and Josephe's Garden of Eden is no exception.

The entire section plays, of course, with the Romantic borrowing of Rousseau's idea of the original virtue of man in the state of nature, before community and culture corrupted him to the crooked, deceitful beast of society. Kleist's repeated harping on the necessarily *narrated* aspects of this *story* emphasizes how indeed we can only speculate on human origins by means of invented narratives. In the final section of the novella, we will witness the tragic consequences of mistaking stories of origin for underlying reality.

In Plato's *Republic*, from which a playful Socrates bans poets for telling lies,[18] the selfsame Socrates introduces a lie in order to maintain social order. At the same time, he freely admits that even this society will eventually decay as the noble lie devolves into rhetorical dema-

[18]In fact, Socrates bans writers of the very kind of text of which *The Republic* is an example.

goguery. People, it seems, need some kind of myth to be able to relate to their state or society, even though the lie burnishes the imagined purity of the community and ushers in an insidious contamination that eventually leads to the society's inevitable downfall. Kleist's story makes a similar claim about the inseparability of 'telling stories'—lying—from his own imagined utopia. And in Kleist as for Plato, it is the unavoidable—and often unobservable—shift to persuasive rhetoric that ensures the idyll's end.

4. Register of Rhetoric

No sooner does Don Fernando's party reach the city and join the worship service but their optimism dissolves and they are made mortally uneasy. The culprit is the priest's fiery sermon, which whips the assembled crowd into flames of righteous frenzy. If the first quake destroyed society, a second one, instigated by the cleric's rhetorical prowess, reconstitutes it with a deft gesture of violence:

> [. . .] und als er das gestrige Erdbeben gleichwohl, auf einen Riß, den der Dom erhalten hatte, hinzeigend, einen bloßen Vorboten davon nannte, *lief ein Schauder über die ganze Versammlung.* (170)

This 'Schauder' is the effect of oratory, and gives the nod to the third transition in narrative strategy. The first two parts of the novella were narrated in the etiological modes of individuals; the third opened the vista of a larger, beatific community knit together by narrative discourse. The fourth and final section of the story takes place under the influence of rhetoric, and it reveals society at its ugliest.

Just as, with Jeronimo and Josephe's presence in the third section, traces of the contingent and the teleological registers remain in the idyllic valley of poetry, so too do all three modes coexist in the fourth section. Rhetoric molds itself to the assumptions and prejudices of its audience, and, as we shall see, it appropriates and corrupts all that went before narratologically. Like the scarecrow, the tin man, and the cowardly lion in Oz, Jeronimo, Josephe, and Fernando venture back into society and represent their respective modes of storytelling—the affable protagonist, the martyr saint, and the heroic knight—in the big bad world. They play their roles well: Jeronimo bumbles into death; Josephe sacrifices herself for her child; and Fernando heroically holds off the crowd with his sword. And like Dorothy and her companions in the Emerald City, the trio reveals the ugly material truth behind the pretty poetical curtain. Society cannot change suddenly: as soon

as it reconstitutes itself, it returns with a vengeance to its old habits and hypocrisies. The narrative voice was consistently sympathetic to the vehicles of its knowledge-horizon in the previous sections, and it maintains its allegiance to the three representative characters here in their life-and-death struggle against the constitutive element of the fourth narrative mode and its avatar: rhetoric and the crowd.

Jeronimo, true to form, does remarkably little during the entire episode. Fernando and Josephe are both more active throughout the crisis than he. True, Jeronimo does announce himself to the crowd in the church when they are about to tear apart Fernando, whom they mistake for Jeronimo, but even this single act is forced upon him by the rudiments of honor and has little effect. He remains silent for the rest of the story, and is killed so quickly, with so little narrative fanfare, that I, at least, had to reread the passage several times to make sure he was dead (173).[19]

Josephe, meanwhile, remains self-possessed and self-sacrificing to the very end. She tries to die a martyr's death while still in the church:

> So setzte Josephe den kleinen Philipp, den Jeronimo bisher getragen hatte, samt dem kleinen Juan, auf Don Fernando's Arm, und sprach: gehn Sie, Don Fernando, retten Sie Ihre beiden Kinder, und überlassen Sie uns unserm Schicksale! (172)

Fernando is not quite willing to give them up yet (we do not hear what Jeronimo has to say about the prospect of sacrificing their lives—he is not involved in the group's decision-making), and so she has to wait until after her lover's ignominious death to try again, this time successfully:

> Leben Sie wohl, Don Fernando mit den Kindern! rief Josephe—und: hier mordet mich, ihr blutdürstigen Tiger! und stürzte sich freiwillig unter sie, um dem Kampf ein Ende zu machen. (173)

She throws herself 'voluntarily' to the mob she dubs 'bloodthirsty tigers,' just as many of the martyred saints she must have read about in the nunnery died calmly under the teeth of the ravenous, exotic animals in the Roman coliseums. To the end she remains unwavering in her faith in a divine teleology.

Fernando, who was introduced into the story during the idyllic episode referred to as the register of *Dichtung*, first comes into his own

[19]Notice that even the sentence describing his death is a 'kaum . . . als' construction of coincidence: to the end he remains subject to chance.

as representative of storied narratives in this section where rhetoric is dominant.[20] The narrative voice is generous in its open partiality to him, as it repeatedly drapes him with epithets that recall the great heroes of the *Iliad*: 1) "mit *wahrer heldenmütiger Besonnenheit*" (172). This Odyssean epithet comes directly before Don Fernando hatches a ruse of which Odysseus would have been proud, and which would have saved them from the predicament had Don Alonzo shed his qualms about lying. 2) Don Fernando "*glühte vor Zorn*; er zog und schwang das Schwert" (173). Our sword-swinging Achillean hero glows from wrath, which word alone must remind us of the subject and first word of Western literature's oldest epic poem. 3) "Don Fernando, *dieser göttliche Held*, stand jetzt, den Rücken an die Kirche gelehnt; in der Linken hielt er die Kinder, in der Rechten das Schwert. Mit jedem Hiebe *wetterstrahlte* er einen zu Boden; *ein Löwe* wehrt sich nicht besser" (173). Zeus is the famous wielder of thunder and lightning to smite his opponents; more humanly, however, Fernando reminds us here of Ajax with his back to the wall, who, without the help of gods, defends single-handedly—like a 'lion'—the entire Greek camp after the other Greek heroes have all been wounded in Book XIII of the *Iliad*.

Don Fernando is a hero both complete and composite, as we see from these allusions to such varied Homeric heroes as Odysseus, Achilles, and Ajax. An astute reader could find many more, and by no means limited to Homer. The narrative voice is not merely full of praise for the protagonist, however. It also heaps abuse on the heads of the crowd. The narrator does not try to maintain an illusion of impartiality, but repeatedly reveals an attitude of disgust and dismay at the actions of the crowd, sometimes with dripping sarcasm, but largely through unsubtle pejoratives: "heiliger Ruchlosigkeit voll" (171); "Der wütende Haufen" (172); "aus dem rasendem Haufen" (173); "den fanatischen Mordknecht, der diese Greuel veranlasste" (173); "mit noch ungesättigter Mordlust" (173); "Sieben *Bluthunde* lagen tot vor ihm, der Fürst *der satanischen Rotte* selbst war verwundet" (174).

These epithets are examples of rhetorical devices in themselves and they simultaneously point beyond themselves to the Aristotelian category to which the rhetorical register corresponds: the material cause. For both Plato and Aristotle, rhetoric is inferior to philosophical discourse because it plays upon the material necessity of human situ-

[20]Hence it should be clear that there is no simple one-to-one correspondence between the narrator's causal register and the preferred mode of the focal character in the second half of the story. This tension in Don Fernando's sections between idyll and rhetoric will turn out to be important in the conclusion below.

atedness rather than stretching toward the potential of human form. If in *Erdbeben* the compassionate idyll is the *form* to which humanity should ideally strive, then this hateful vitriol is a sign of the *material* reality out of which humans are constituted. In Aristotle, material and form are not strict opposites, but together comprise a "necessary condition of change in general" (48). As the "look (*eidos*) disclosed in speech," form (*morphē*) is already in Aristotle inextricably tied to the unavoidable vagaries of material language (58). The contradictions involved in the impossible endeavor to marry form and material are a lifelong obsession of Kleist.[21] By yoking form and material together under the aegis of language and society, *Erdbeben* beautifully captures the ambivalence of Kleist's epistemology in the very structure of Aristotelian etiology.

It may seem odd to name rhetoric as the genius of this fourth section of the story when the narrative voice is so clearly hostile to the priest's sermon, its effects on the crowd, and to society in general (whose institutions of church and law provide a forum for the rhetorical arts), both before its destruction and after its restoration. But these devices by which the narrator instills in readers a righteous indignation[22] against the mob and its leaders are themselves all drawn from a bag of rhetorical tricks! The story performs marvelously in its narrative construction the same lesson that Plato's *Republic* stages for the attentive reader: there is ultimately no escape from the evils of men in groups or from the temptations of persuasion. Regardless of how genuinely a story aims at engendering sincere compassion, or how successful it is in fostering a sense of community, it is inevitably infected with rhetorical techniques from the moment of its first utterance. No matter how distasteful the admission might be, the true etiological source of society is rhetoric.[23]

The story allows a view of this Platonic shift between poetry and rhetoric over and against modern historical accounts. Rüdiger Campe's *Affekt und Ausdruck* (1990) uncovers the gradual shift in register from rhetoric to literature over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This trajectory maps neatly onto the dates when the story was set vs. the time it was written: 1647 and1807, respectively. On the surface it

[21]See Graham for one helpful study, among many.

[22]*Nemesis*, a passion described in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*—though the tricks by which Kleist's narrator triggers the emotion here are more akin to those of Gorgias or Protagoras.

[23]*Erdbeben* has often been read as a commentary on the course of the French Revolution (e.g., Schneider, "Zusammensturz" 127), and the implications of my reading for this connection are striking.

would seem that the order of the shift in Kleist is reversed: the story moves from literature to rhetoric. Yet the location of rhetoric at the novella's end in effect reveals its material presence all along, even through the poetic register preceding. Campe's study, similarly, is not simply the identification of a change in linguistic registers, but also an archeology of the baroque remains of affect in the new poetic gestures toward expression. If we understand *archeology* with its Greek root (and Foucauldian practice) as the study of ruling ideas as well as original traces (*arkhē* = first cause; AND source of power), then Kleist's tale can be read backwards as doing exactly the work of Campe's treatise: demonstrating the rhetorical material at work in literary forms.

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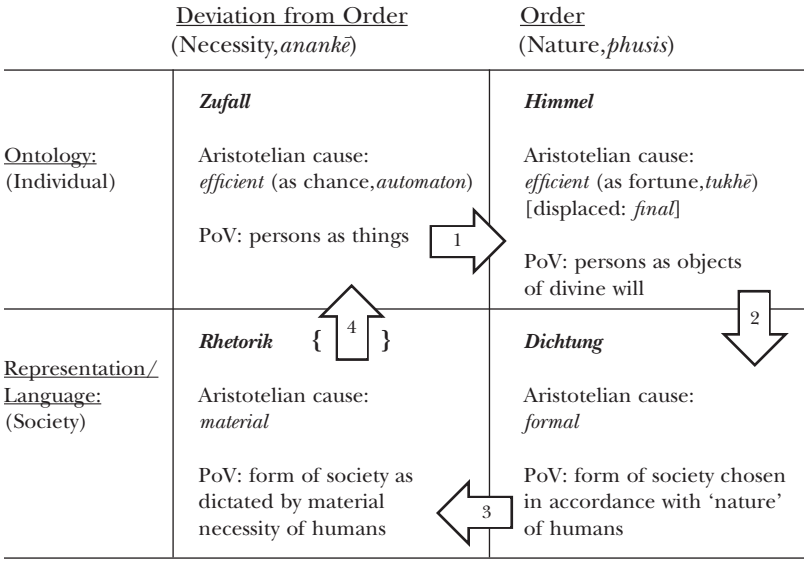
Das Erdbeben in Chili thus displays in its four registers the extremes of the spectrums possible both to an individual's search for the causes of things, and to society's myth of its own sources. In doing so, it dramatizes the shortcomings of each register of explanation, but at the same time it presents us with a complete matrix of causal possibilities. Kleist has replaced Aristotle's famous four causes from the *Physics* with his own analysis of the ways of asking the question why (which is Aristotle's general definition of cause). The first two registers, chance and providence, make up the individual's options for seeking causes; the second two, poetry and rhetoric, comprise the two poles of explanation for society. We may also see the former two as ontological modes of explication—an individual's tendency to understand the world's phenomena either in terms of chance or *telos*. Both latter registers, meanwhile, function at the level of language or representation. We can also criss-cross our view of the four registers, and regard providence and poetry as causes of order in the world, whereas chance and rhetoric are sources of deviation from order. [See chart.]

It is easy to assign a nearly one-to-one correspondence between the two systems: chance => efficient cause; rhetoric => material cause; poetry => formal cause; and providence => *telos* or final cause: that-for-the-sake-of-which something is done.[24] But this is where things

[24]It should be made clear at this point that the modern 'rewriting' of Aristotle's four causes enacted by Kleist's story applies not to the interpretation of those causes offered by Sachs, but rather—and significantly—to the conventional understanding of the terms in philosophical discourse since the medieval scholastics. Nonetheless, Kleist's commentary can buttress and support many of Sachs's claims as a critique of

Kleist's four causes:



get interesting. For the providential outcome, the *telos* of the second register, announced itself as the salvation of Josephe and Jeronimo and the punishment of the cruel societal engines that had condemned them. But that is precisely not where the story ends. The novella finds its completion with the reconstitution (by rhetoric, which relies on the material necessity of man) of this selfsame society in an even more vicious form with the violent deaths of Josephe, Jeronimo, and an innocent babe. What had *seemed* to be fate, providence, or the act of divine will rewrites itself as illusion.

As argued above, the first two causes (efficient and final) both turn out to be types of chance. Teleology had been under polemical attack since Bacon as valid mode of explanation in science, and so the story's complications with Josephe's worldview might be no great surprise. Yet stories cannot but be driven by a sense of final cause, an end, whether they are a *Bildungsroman*, a retelling of myth, or a

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the scholastic and contemporary reception of Aristotelian philosophy. The *reductio ad absurdum* by which the story demonstrates the untenability of the final and efficient causes applies to their received definitions among most historians of philosophy rather than to Sachs's interpretation of them.

light-hearted anecdote. Kleist's problematization of teleology, which is perhaps old hat in the scientific world, is revolutionary in poetics. The fact that the third and fourth types of cause in the novella are literary and rhetorical is no accident. The revolution the story enacts in ontology is carried over into language and representation. Kleist's story effectively re-charts Aristotle's four causes from his *Physics*, and does so by incorporating them with an understanding of the world informed by Aristotle's *Poetics*. It is almost as if Kleist took a direct cue from the *Poetics* in his tacit critique of the *Physics*. Recall the anecdote of Mitys from chapter 9, when Aristotle is laying down the best way to fashion a plot in terms of the likely and improbable:

> For in this way [when things have happened on account of one another in a paradoxical way] it is more a source of wonder than if they came from chance (automaton) or fortune (tukhē), since even among things that come from fortune, it is the ones that seem to have happened as if by design that are the most productive of wonder. An instance is the way the statue of Mitys in Argos laid out flat the person responsible for Mitys' death, when it fell on him as he contemplated it, for it seems that such things have not happened randomly; and so necessarily stories of this sort are more beautiful. (33; 1452a 5)[25]

This anecdote's resemblance to the plot of *Das Erdbeben in Chili* is unmistakable and remarkable. Here, too, all of the buildings of the institutions that engineered the demise of Josephe and Jeronimo come crashing down to destroy their would-be murderers and to allow the condemned to go free. This indeed is a case of seeming design: surely such things could not have happened randomly. But Kleist reverses this twist of fate again: it is as if the story of Mitys' revenge went on to reveal that the man killed by the toppling statue were not Mitys' killer after all, so that not only is Mitys' death still unavenged, but now he no longer even has a monument standing to his life. *Das Erdbeben in Chili* is the tragedy of this kind of 'seeming design,' the tragedy of teleology.

But neither does the alternative modern skepticism about cause and effect emerge unscathed in the story. Hume, for instance, knew the despair to which his denial of causal relations might lead. He determined to think no more about it in the everyday conduct of his life, but to continue to enjoy card games with his friends. Kleist's novella, however, posits a character a) who embodies the empiricist

[25]Translation modified to make the connection to the two terms for chance in the *Physics* clear.

denial of cause and effect so completely that for him every event is radically singular, and b) whom the world constantly prods into passive bewilderment at the endless (disconnected) chains of coincidence. Jeronimo may not be abed with the same 'dogmatic slumber' from which Kant was awakened by reading Hume, but he demonstrates the character of someone in the walking unconciousness that is the logical conclusion of taking Hume's uncertainty to heart.

Thus the story, while revising Aristotle's teleology, does not endorse eighteenth-century rationalist or empiricist etiologies for individual causation. In the same vein, Kleist's tale evinces discomfort with both ancient and modern social philosophies. Rousseau's diatribes against the sickness of culture and society, and his robust portrait of man's original state in nature carried away the hearts and imaginations of the generation that inaugurated the reign of terror. Kleist's story points out the inevitable seeds of society's sickness in the very language that paints man's mythically virtuous origins.

Now it may seem that this insatiable critique is just another aspect of Kleist's notorious deconstruction of the Western tradition, but in fact what is at stake here is more subtle. The story is not simply tearing down or revealing holes in a patchy metaphysical construct, but it builds on Aristotle's insights with a cogent system of its own. Just as Aristotle's four causes prove to be a powerful hermeneutical tool that can parse out the various and complex causes of events from multitudinous points of view, so too does Kleist's model offer itself up as a similarly useful explanatory device. It incorporates not merely the ontological or physical (in Aristotle's sense of 'natural') causes of change, but also the influence of language and representation on any system involving more than one human subject. The narrative stances of Kleist's story provide readers with an etiology as whole and complete for the modern world as Aristotle's *Physics* managed for the ancient.

The story's final sentences, however, strike a chord that seemingly turns the Kleistian etiology and its implicit critique of Aristotle on its head. *Zufall* makes its first appearance since Jeronimo's opening section when Don Fernando's wife is "*zufällig* von allem, was geschehen war, benachrichtigt" (174). By chance, then, Donna Elvire hears the *story* of her son's death. After a bout of crying, she *falls* around his neck and kisses him. Though Don Fernando had feared his wife's judgment, a contingent event of storytelling leads to her cathartic grief, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The puzzling last sentence tells how the couple adopt little Philip as their own: "und wenn Don Fernando Philippen mit Juan verglich, und wie er beide erworben hatte, so war es ihm

fast, als müßt er sich freuen" (174). There is an unmistakable note of teleology in Don Fernando's hesitant joy at the outcome: things (almost seem to have) turned out for the best after all. Thus in the space of its two last sentences, the narration has moved back through its three previous modes of explanation: chance, storytelling, and teleology. It would be tempting to write this off as another example of Kleistian equivocation, and revel in (or despair at, depending on one's taste) the radical evasion of interpretation.[26] Yet the structure of the final sentences aligns too neatly with what has preceded them for any easy throwing up of hands. In fact, together with the critique of Aristotle's four causes offered by the preceding story, it suggests a synthesis of ancient and idealist cosmology by means of the second part of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*.

The perhaps misnamed *Kantkrise* in 1801 was famously prompted by a misreading of the third critique that led Kleist to despair of ever being certain of anything in the world.[27] Yet the *Erdbeben* story, after providing an exhaustive and sufficient replacement for Aristotle's four causes, reneges on its initial promise by returning to the same teleological register it had seemingly debunked. In so doing, however, it dramatizes the inescapability of purposiveness. Though humans have no access to final causes, we cannot help but conceive of nature—and perhaps even history[28]—in teleological terms. This fact does not prove that any given purposive interpretation is false, but it disrupts our access to certainty while ensuring our demand for purposiveness. Don Fernando succumbs to the narratively castigated temptation of teleology only in order to prove its ultimate unverifiability and unavoidability. The story as narrated thus effects an invitation to philosophy as few philosophers, let alone storytellers, ever manage.

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[26]This is Norton's conclusion, for instance, to her clever insinuation of the possibility that Don Fernando is the father of both boys.

[27]See, for instance, James Phillips's *Equivocation of Reason*, which has surprisingly little to say about *Erdbeben*.

[28]As Kant argues in the *Conflict of the Faculties* (1798).

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