

## **Essay: Aristotle**

Q1a) Explain Aristotle's Theory of the Four causes. (33 marks)

Q1b) Aristotle's theory of the four causes is convincing. Discuss. (17 marks)

A1a) Aristotle was a Greek Philosopher who was a pupil of Plato. Aristotle rejected Platonic dualism. Aristotle was an empiricist; he believed that knowledge is only attainable through experience and the senses. He believed that the *Form* of something is physical, observable and not abstract. Aristotle identified four causes that he believed to completely explain what causes something to exist. The *material* cause answers the question what does it consist of? The *efficient* cause answers the question how does something happen? The *formal* cause answers the question what are its characteristics? The *final* cause answers the question why is it here? Or what is its purpose? Once all four causes have been established, it was Aristotle's belief that the complete explanation for the existence of an item has been found. The most important of these causes is the Final Cause This is concerned with the ultimate end or function of why something exists. Aristotle believed everything had a purpose (Final Cause). This belief is known now as the teleological explanation for the existence of God. The final cause of a natural object - a plant or an animal - is not a purpose, plan, or "intention. The four causes, especially the first two, are closely linked to Aristotle's important dichotomy between *matter* and *form*. This is the theory of *hylomorphism*; the theory that every physical object is composed of two principles, an unchanging *prime matter* and a *form* deprived of actuality with every substantial change of the object.

Aristotle opposes final causes in nature to chance or randomness. So the fact that there is regularity in nature - as Aristotle says, things in nature happen "always or for the most part" - suggests to him that biological individuals run true to *form*. So this end, which developing individuals regularly achieve, is what they are "aiming at." Thus, for a natural object, the final cause is typically identified with the *formal* cause. The final cause of a developing plant or animal is the *form* it will ultimately achieve, the *form* into which it grows and develops.

The basic idea is that matter takes on form. The form is contributed by the male parent (which actually does have the form), the matter by the female parent. This matter has the potentiality to be informed by precisely that form. The embryonic substance has the form potentially, and can be "called by the same name" as what produces it. Aristotle was concerned with the changes in nature. We could say that the 'substance' always strive toward achieving an innate potentiality. Every change in nature, according to Aristotle, is a transformation of substance from the 'potential' to the 'actual'.

Aristotle was also interested in tracing all things back to their first cause. In other words the chain of life itself can be traced back to a First or Prime Mover. Aristotle called this First Mover, God. Aristotle believed that God himself was a final cause, who causes things to be, not just through physical momentum but also through love. He believed that d was a 'common source' of all substance; in other words, something/someone that was responsible for the beginning of everything. Aristotle develops an argument to suggest that this 'common source' is an eternal source. This eternal source, Aristotle believed, had to not be a subject of death or decay. Aristotle's belief in the four causes also links to that of Aquinas and his view of the cosmological, First Cause argument for the existence of God.

Aristotle argues there is no Realm of Forms and says we know what objects are because we learnt it growing up. What makes an object an object is its characteristics. On the other hand, Plato argues that we know what an object is because we have seen its 'form' in the 'Realm of Forms'. Let me use a horse as an example. Plato believed this is a perfect representation of what it means to be a horse. You can find this form in the Realm of Forms. Whereas, Aristotle argues that the characteristics of a species is what makes an animal what it is. It doesn't exist in any place like the Realm of Forms. Aristotle believed that every time your saw a horse you are seeing a 'Form of a Horse'.

A1b) Aristotle's theory of the four causes is convincing because in everything he says we can relate to it. We can relate to it because he used his senses to come up with his theory. Aristotle spent a lot of time observing the world of natural living. He wanted to discover what the purpose of everything was. This is how he came up with his theory of the four causes. For example; what does the heart do? Why does the muscle contract? Scientifically we know now but why do we have to live like this anyway? Other living things such as reptiles survive in a completely different way. He came to a conclusion that nature in itself did not have a conscious mind. The purpose that the object is trying to achieve is somehow inside the object already without knowing.