

Explain what Aristotle meant by the final cause.

The 'final cause', the most important aspect of Aristotle's theory, is the theory that all objects have an ultimate reason for their existence, an ultimate purpose, ends, or goal. For example, the final cause for a statue is that the sculptor wants to create a beautiful object for decorative or memorial reasons. The final cause is the most important as the material, efficient and formal causes would be pointless under logical without a final cause. When we do something it is for a reason. Causes of all four sorts are necessary elements in any adequate account of the existence and nature of the thing, Aristotle believed, since the absence or modification of any one of them would result in the existence of a thing of some different sort.

No matter how intriguing the object is if it does not answer to the question what is it for? then your interest will fade. When the purpose is fully realised then perfection is reached

For Aristotle, the Form exists as part of the object. A Form is not a 'something'; it is the blueprint or the principle that lies behind a something. E.g. the Form of my CD collection is alphabetical order. Alphabetical order explains the way the collection is arranged. If you took away alphabetical order, the collection would 'die'. Aristotle's Forms are this worldly. We need the concept Form to make sense of things.

If you want to explain something completely you have to refer to its four causes which are;

- Material: substance, what is it made of? (For example, a table is made of wood)
- Efficient: how does it happen/come to be? (For example, a table happened because a person chose to manufacture it)
- Formal: the design of the object its characteristics, its "form". What are its characteristics (For example, a table has four legs and a flat surface on the top – it belongs to the "furniture" group)
- Final: the purpose of the object. What is it for? (For example, A table is a useful surface to put things on)

This theory argues that the Prime Mover (for Aristotle) or God (for Aquinas/Christians) is the final cause of the universe. Aristotle believed that all movement (by which he meant change) requires a mover (a 'changer'). If A changes (and everything in the world does change), then it must have been changed by B. Aristotle argued that this chain must eventually lead to something that causes change but is itself unchanged or unmoved. Aristotle did not just mean that something must have started the chain in time. He believed that there was a kind of change that was 'outside time' or eternal. This eternal change is the final source of all movement. This is what Aristotle calls the Prime Mover. The Prime Mover causes the movement of things, not as an efficient cause, but as the final cause. In other words, it does not start of movement by giving it a push, but is the purpose or goal or the teleology of the movement. It is as if everything (including man) has a desire for the Unmoved Mover, everything is drawn towards it. [It is easy to see how this thinking could be adapted by Christian thinkers like Aquinas.] Aristotle held that the UM exists necessarily – the UM/'God' does not depend on any finite/contingent being for its own explanation. The UM is non-material; it is purely spiritual and intellectual.

“Aristotle was wrong to imagine that everything has a purpose” Discuss.

Aristotle criticises Plato for basing his theory of knowledge on (eternal) Forms for which Aristotle says there is no concrete evidence. However Plato or we could say Aristotle has no concrete evidence for believing that this material world is the source of true knowledge.

It makes sense to say that man-made things have a final cause (purpose) e.g. the final cause of an axe is to chop. But how do we establish the final cause/purpose of natural (non-artificial) things (e.g. suns, trees, people)? And it's an untrue statement that we will lose interest if things don't have a purpose.

Why does there have to be a beginning to a connecting chain? Couldn't the existence of events be compatible with no beginning?

Some critics maintain that Aristotle's Unmoved/Prime Mover is incoherent. His argument seems to depend on the idea that nothing can cause itself but then contradicts itself by saying that 'God' does exactly what it just claimed was impossible.

On the other hand, most things in this universe do have a purpose, and it would be a fair statement saying such a thing. It is a believable theory that with scientific evidence could easily be an accepted statement. But in modern times, without sufficient evidence people are reluctant to believe in pretty much anything.