



Ancient Greek Philosophy: Aristotle



Aristotle was an empiricist. He thought the way to deepen his understanding was through experience. He thought the only knowledge we could have is of the empirical world (that which we can experience through our senses).

Aristotle disagreed with Plato about his idea of Forms. He did not believe there was a separate 'ideal' realm. He believed that a 'form' was distinctive to each object. Key question for Aristotle: **Why are things the way they are?** He realised there were different ways to answer this question...this led to his Theory of the Four Causes.

What caused this desk to be the way it is?



1. **Material cause.** What is the thing made from/ what does it consist of?

Example: the desk is made of wood. So the material cause of the desk is wood.

2. **Formal cause.** The shape, form or structure something takes to be a certain thing.

Example: the desk has flat surface and sturdy legs so it can hold a computer or someone can lean on it to write.

3. **Efficient cause.** What caused it to come about? Who made it or took action that caused it to come into existence?

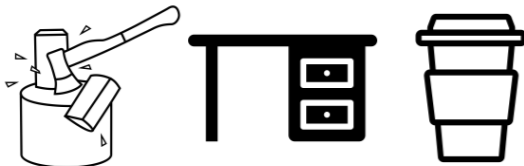
Example: the carpenter used the materials to make a desk.

4. **The final cause.** What is the goal or the purpose of this thing? The final cause is TELEOLOGICAL. (Telos= goal/ purpose)

Example: the purpose of the desk is to provide people with somewhere to do their work so they don't have to sit on the floors.

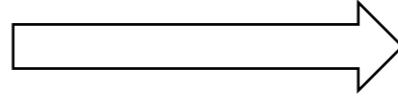
How does this link to goodness?

Aristotle linked the final cause to goodness. He did not think there was a concept of good- goodness is subjective- dependent on a situation. Something is 'good' if it achieves its telos/ purpose. *An axe is good if it cuts wood well. A desk is a good desk if it doesn't collapse. A cup is good if it hold your drink without leaking.*



Aristotle saw that the world around him was in a state of constant motion. To Aristotle motion means change. He was able to experience this change with his senses, making the evidence of change EMPIRICAL. Therefore, his statement that the world was in constant change was A POSTERIORI.

Things change because they exist in an 'actual' state and have the 'potential' to become another. These states are known as 'actuality' and 'potentiality'. The state something is in and the state it can change into.



Actuality- Cow

Potentiality- Beef Burger

Something has caused these things to CHANGE. They have caused the change to fulfil a purpose. *Eg. The cow was killed and filleted for beef to provide food.*

What caused the universe to go into motion?

Aristotle said you cannot have an infinite chain of cause and effect. There must be a starting point. The universe too is in constant motion and according to Aristotle the planets have been in motion eternally. Note that the thing causing the change (efficient cause) in all the examples we have seen are outside/ external to the thing itself. Therefore the universe must have a cause outside of itself, that put it into a state of constant motion or change, and this cause must be eternal.

The Prime Mover

Aristotle called the thing that caused the universe to go into constant state of motion the Prime Mover. For Aristotle the Prime Mover was God. The Prime Mover is in a state of pure actuality- it has no potential for change itself. As the Prime Mover has no potentiality, it cannot have put the universe in motion with a physical action, as this physical action would have caused change to the Prime Mover. Therefore, the Prime Mover is not the EFFICIENT cause of the universe, but the FINAL cause. The Prime Mover is perfect and all things want to imitate this perfection. This attraction to perfection provides a PURPOSE for change. The desire for God and perfection is the goal or purpose for changing. Therefore the Prime Mover is the FINAL cause.

The Beyoncé Effect

Beyoncé does not cause her fans to change their appearance though a physical action....she does not have time to do everyone's hair, but she inspires them and gives them a purpose to change...Just like the Prime Mover can the universe a purpose for change.



Characteristics of the Prime Mover:

Necessary: God is something which has always existed and always had to exist. God does not depend on anything or anyone to exist.

Eternal: God has no potential. God cannot change. If God cannot change then God cannot stop existing. If God cannot stop existing God must always have existed.

Perfectly good: Badness corresponds to a lack of something. God is pure actuality, so contains everything. Therefore, God must be perfect.

Immaterial: All physical matter has the potential to change. God cannot change, therefore is immaterial. God is immaterial so cannot perform any physical activity (remember God can be the final cause without physical activity. Consequently, God is spiritual and pure thought. God cannot think of anything that could cause a change therefore God must only think of his own pure state or perfection.

Evaluation

Strengths	Weaknesses
The four causes can readily be applied to things that exist in this world. Especially compared to Plato's Forms which cannot be observed.	Generally Aristotle's work was unclear due to the nature of the text he left behind. Lecture notes rather than books.
The view that everything has a purpose is supported by other philosophers- Aquinas supports this in his Fifth Way/ teleological argument.	Many theists would criticise the idea of a God that does not interact with the universe. A lot of religions believe in an IMMANENT God. Meaning God is present and active in the world.
Many characteristics of Aristotle's God are shared with the God of 'modern' religions such as Christianity. Eg. Eternal and perfect.	There is a lack of EVIDENCE for the Prime Mover....and isn't Aristotle an empiricist?
	To argue the universe must have a purpose is wrong. It just exists by chance. If it does have a purpose- what is it? Supported by philosophers. <u>Satre</u> - the universe is "Gratuitous". <u>Dawkins</u> - "The universe we observe has no design, no purpose..." <u>Russell</u> - "I should say the universe is just there, and that's all." <u>Hume</u> also made this point as part of his criticisms of the cosmological argument.
	Aristotle is guilty of the <u>Error/ Fallacy of Composition</u> . This is the mistake of assuming that because something is true of the parts it is true of the whole. Parts of the universe have a purpose so he assumes the universe as a whole must too.