

Explain what aristotle
meant by the final
cause. 25 marks

[Profession](#), [Philosophers](#)



Aristotle was an ancient Greek philosopher and empiricist, he believed in sense experience, as well as student to Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great. Aristotle understood that the world around us is transient, impermanent. He believed that everything can be explained with his four causes and in order for humanity to understand the world we needed to use them. The four causes are Aristotle's way of explaining the existence of an object, with the 'final cause' being the most important aspect of his theory as it gave the best explanation of an object.

The final cause is the theory that all objects have an ultimate purpose for their existence, an important part of what it is. The route to the final cause is as follows, the first cause is the material cause, it refers to the matter of an object, its substance and room for change, so the material cause of a chair would be plastic and metal. The next cause is the efficient cause, this is what caused it, the agent that brought it about, for a chair this would be the manufacturer.

Then there is the formal cause, the characteristics of an object, therefore the formal cause of a chair would be curved plastic seat with metal legs. Finally Aristotle stated the final cause, the purpose of something, its ultimate reasoning, and the chair's purpose would be to allow someone to sit on it. Aristotle suggested that humans had the greatest potential of all things as part of their telos is to understand the world, learning the form and purpose of everything in the world. In addition, Aristotle brings in the concept of actuality and potentiality into his argument.

Aristotle believed everything has potential and when it reached it's potential end becomes something different it reaches it's actuality. This then applies to the concept of the final cause, if everything has a purpose and, in the case of animate objects, realises it's purpose, it will inspire itself to reach it's potential and fulfill it's function. Therefore the final cause was not only meant as an explanation that everything had a purpose, but an aspiration to create the thought that everything needs to accomplish it's purpose and reach it's potential.

Where humans are concerned the final cause questions the telos of humanity. If humanity has not yet understood and realised it's true purpose then how is it going to reach it's full potential, according the Bible, humanity's purpose is to follow the teachings of God and reach goodness yetscienceteaches us our purpose is survival. With these conflicting views it shows that Aristotle's final cause can lead to many interpretations. The philosopher also said that when the purpose of an object is fully realised then full perfection is reached and it has achieved goodness, it has reached eudamonia.

This means that the final cause is the ultimate cause, the cause of causes. As he was a student of Plato his concepts tend to link well to Plato's, and in this case the idea that the purpose of an object is to reach perfection ties in with Plato's theory of Forms and the Form of the good, with both philosophers acknowledging that everything has potentiality. Plato's theory of Forms stated that there were two worlds, the world of appearances in

which we live, and the world of Forms, and it is in this world of Forms where the all perfect Forms and Form of the good resides.

Plato believed the Form of good is the perfect Form, it is eternal and all Forms in the world of appearances aim to achieve perfection and the Form of good. Aristotle acknowledged that all things in our universe are always trying to achieve perfection but he disagreed in the sense that these forms, that Plato said resided in another world, were what we see around us and substance and matter are what forms are made of.

This links to the meaning of the final Cause as both Aristotle and Plato believe and agree that everything in the physical world is striving to achieve perfection and this is it's purpose, an example of this is of how technology is constantly advancing, each product progressing to achieve it's purpose in new ways. Aristotle also understood that everything physical is transient, therefore if something was to move then another thing must have caused it to move.

With the final cause he tried to figure out for what purpose was the movement was caused, and what was the actual cause of movement, when does potential become actual. Because if everything has a purpose and function, then this purpose and function had to be thought out and caused by something else, and this is what led Aristotle to the theory of the Prime Mover, with it's purpose being the creator of the universe.

Therefore the final cause also means the existence of God, it was another concept Aristotle used to not only explain the key factors of an object, but the object's cause. If everything has a purpose then it must have a cause,

and with Aristotle creating the idea of a Prime Mover, disregarding the theory of infinite regression, the only logical explanation for the cause of the universe is a God. Aristotle claimed the Prime Mover is eternal, actual and perfect, and only God could fit these characteristics.

The final cause also 'proves' the existence of God as within the Bible it states that God has given humanity a purpose, and through the final cause we realise this purpose is true and therefore there must be a God or Prime Mover who caused this purpose. In conclusion there are many possible things that Aristotle meant by the final cause. It could be an explanation for each object and why it was created by 'God', but it could just as easily be an inspirational concept for humanity, by making sure we achieved our purpose by doing good and reaching our potential.

Although the world is currently dominated by science and it is seen as the only acceptable explanation and justification for everything's purpose, the final cause offers deeper insights into everything's purpose, especially humanity's. Therefore I believe what Aristotle mainly meant by the final cause was just simple the explanation that everything had a purpose and that if humanity realised it's true purpose and interpreted it as they would, then we would reach Eudamonia and full goodness.