

# Aristotle



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Aristotle The Concept of Cause Unlike Plato, Aristotle did not believe there are two separate realms. He believed the world we live in is the only place in which we can have true knowledge, because it is through our sense experience that we come to understand things. Aristotle believed that "form" was not an ideal, but found within the item itself. The form is its structure and characteristics and can be perceived using the senses. For example, the form of a table is that it has four legs and a flat surface. For Aristotle, the "substance" or "matter" of something was the material of which it was made. For example, the substance of a table is wood, nails and glue. Aristotle used the term "prime matter" for anything that lacks a well defined form, which means that it is not organised in any particular structure. It would have matter, but no form. For the reverse of "prime matter", which would be something with form but no matter, Aristotle would say that only God fulfils that. Only God has form without matter. Aristotle was very interested in change, and causation. Aristotle was always asking "why" something is, and for him, the suggestion (as put forward by Bertrand Russell) that some things are just "brute fact" (There is no reason for its existence) was unsatisfactory for Aristotle, and he sought to write about the "cause" of things. Aristotle's explanation of things can be seen in four different ways, at four different levels. 1. Material Cause ~ What is the object made of? The material cause of a table would be wood and nails, whereas the material cause of a statue would be gold or perhaps bronze. However, this is not enough to explain why the object is what it is. You can not understand a painting just by knowing the coloured paints and canvas used. 2. Efficient Cause ~ How did it happen? The efficient cause of something would be how it came about. For example, the efficient cause of a baby

would be sexual intercourse, and the efficient cause of sea glass would have been the weathering of the glass. 3. Formal Cause ~ What are its characteristics? The formal cause looks at the form of the object. As said earlier, the formal cause of a table would be the four legs and flat surface. If you look at a painting, its characteristics would be the subject of the painting itself, or the texture of the paint on the canvas. 4. Final Cause ~ Why is it here? The final cause is arguably the most important aspect of Aristotle's thinking. He described it as "the end (or telos), the for the sake of which a thing is done." This means that the final cause is the reason for something's existence, its aim or purpose. The final cause of a sailboat would be for sailing. Or the final cause of the painting may be for aesthetic pleasure, or perhaps to convey a message of importance. The Prime Mover For Aristotle, the world is "transient", which means that it is constantly changing. If nothing acted on A, then it would stay the same and not move. So if A is moving, then it must be being moved by B, which is being moved by C, and so on. Everything is contingent. Aristotle claimed that all movement (not just motion — change as well) must have a mover. However, for Aristotle, he didn't believe there could be an infinite chain of cause and effect. He believed that there must be a "mover" that does not move, but moves everything else. There can not be an efficient cause of this "mover" so Aristotle described it as the "unmoved mover", or the "prime mover". For Aristotle, the prime mover is God. God exists necessarily, independent of anything else for his existence. He never changes, and he doesn't have any potentiality. Completely unlike the Judaeo-Christian God, Aristotle's God thinks only about Himself, and is unaware of our existence and the physical world we live in. God doesn't physically intervene with something to change

it, it is more that everything is drawn towards God (or the "Prime Mover") like a magnet out of the desire to imitate His perfection. For Aristotle, this was the final cause of movement. It is also important to note that the Prime mover is immaterial — It has form but no matter or substance. Otherwise it could be acted upon and thus changed, which is impossible for Aristotle.

Strengths - Compatible with Science. Aristotle was a materialist and an empiricist, claiming that true knowledge depends upon observation and experience of the material world, which was supported by more modern empiricists such as Hume, Locke and Berkeley. - Allows open-mindedness and multiple possibilities. Aristotle's four causes show that there can be multiple explanations for something's existence, rather than simply saying "God", "Brute fact" or "It doesn't exist at all." - Very influential. Aristotle's ideas have been taken up and developed by both Christian and non-Christian disciplines. Christian thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas have used Aristotle's ideas in their work, but his theories have also been influential in the development of modern science.

Weaknesses - Too focused on observation and experience. Plato and Descartes would argue that the senses are unreliable and can deceive us, with the example of how in dreams we are often convinced that everything is real, only to discover we are wrong when we awaken. Instead, rationalists would argue for a more a priori approach to knowledge. - Some things appear to have no "final cause". Aristotle claims that everything has a telos, or purpose. However, some would say that there are some things with no obvious purpose, such as the human appendix. - Brute fact. Bertrand Russell would argue that the universe is just brute fact: "I would say that the universe is just there, and that's all.", whereas Aristotle argued that there is a purpose or goal behind the universe as a whole, which

was God or the Prime Mover. - Unmoved Mover. Many people contradict this theory, saying that the term " unmoved mover" is an impossibility. Christians in particular would argue that God can be affected by the power of human prayer.