

The prime mover essay



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The final cause of a natural object – a plant or an animal – is not a purpose, plan, or ‘intention.’ Rather, it is whatever lies at the end of the regular series of developmental changes that typical specimens of a given species undergo. The final cause need not be a purpose that someone has in mind. 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. Material and formal causes are preconditions for change, in that they allow for the distinction between matter and form in terms of change.

They are static, in that they tell us what the world is like at the moment. Efficient and final causes explain why things actually come to be what they are. They are dynamic, in that they explain why matter has come to be formed in the way that it has, and in doing so explain change. Final causes require further elaboration: 1) The final cause of something is its proper functioning, its essence 2) Final causes are not something anyone need be conscious of. The essence of something could also be stated as a formal cause (a particular configuration of DNA) or even as an efficient cause (explanation of their DNA and environment as formative in their character). The final cause might today be considered to be ‘ensuring its DNA persists’, but

Aristotle would definitely have said ‘ to perform its proper function in its community’.

Aristotle believed that all movement depends on there being a mover. For Aristotle, movement meant more than something travelling from A to B. Movement also included change, growth, melting, cooling, etc. He argued that behind every movement there must be a chain of events that brought about the movement that we observe taking place. He argued that this chain of events must lead back to something which moves but is itself unmoved. Also, in Aristotle’s view, change is eternal.

There cannot have been a first change, because something would have to have happened just before that change which set it off, and this itself would have been a change, and so on. Aristotle calls this source of all movement the Prime Mover. The Prime Mover to Aristotle is the first of all substances, the necessary first sources of movement which is itself unmoved. It is a being with everlasting life, and in metaphysics Aristotle also refers to this as ‘ God’. The Prime Mover causes the movement of other things, not as an efficient cause, but as a final cause.

In other words, it does not start off the movement by giving it some kind of push, but it is the purpose, or end of the movement. This is important for Aristotle, because he thought that an effective cause(giving a push), would be affected itself by the act of pushing. Aristotle believed the prime mover causes things to move by attraction in much the same way that a pretty flower attracts a bee. The flower attracts the bee but cannot be said to be

changed in the process. Aristotle said that the Prime Mover had to be immaterial.

It could not be made of any kind of stuff, because matter is capable of being acted upon, it has the potential to change. Since it is immaterial, it cannot perform any kind of physical action. Therefore, Aristotle thought, the activity of the Prime Mover, God, must be purely spiritual and intellectual and the activity of God is thought. He continues, ' God is a thought of a thought' . At the end of this line of argument, Aristotle comes to the conclusion that God knows only himself; so he does not know this physical world where we live and act.

He does not have a plan for we inhabitants, neither is he affected by our actions.