

# [Aristotle’s develop as they do because they](https://assignbuster.com/aristotles-develop-as-they-do-because-they/)

Aristotle’s Concept of TeleologyIn his Physics, Aristotle examines the theories and ideas regardingnature of his predecessors and then, based upon his own ideas, theories andexperiments, argues against what he believes are incorrect conclusions. Oneidea that Aristotle argues specifically is teleology. Teleology is the ideathat natural phenomena are determined not only by mechanical causes but by anoverall design or purpose in nature. In this essay, I will examine whatAristotle’s concept of teleology was and look at why he held this conception.

First, let’s talk about what we mean by teleology. Teleology is thestudy of ends, purposes, and goals. The word comes from the Greek word teloswhich means “ end” or “ purpose”. In cultures which have a teleological worldview, the ends of things are seen as providing the meaning for all that hashappened or that occurs. If you think about history as a timeline with abeginning and end, in a teleological view of the world and of history, themeaning and value of all historical events derives from thier ends or purposes. That is, all events in history are future-directed. Aristotle’s thought is consistently teleological: everything is alwayschanging and moving, and has some aim, goal or purpose. To borrow fromNewtonian physics, we might say that everything has potential which may beactualized.

An acorn is potentially and oak tree for example. The process ofchange and motion which the acorn undertakes is directed at realizing thispotential. Aristotle believed that things in nature occur because they serve apurpose. He maintains that organisms develop as they do because they have anatural goal or telos in Greek. Nature, writes Aristotle, is a principleof motion and change’ (Physics, 200b1), where motion or movement (or changeas we discussed in our classroom) describes the fulfillment of what existspotentially, in so far as it exists potentially(201a) in a thing.

But is there any reason for saying nature has a goal? Why cannot therain rain and the sun shine, not because the sky is cloudy or clear but just bychance? Empedocles argued for a theory of natural selection on the basis ofchance. The survival of the fittest means that those who happen to be more fitsurvive longer. The less fit perish. Aristotle rejects any theory of evolution. Things either occur by chance or they occur always or for the most part, which is the opposite of chance.

You must admit that things that occur alwaysor for the most part occur either by chance, or not by chance. If they occurnot by chance, then they occur for a purpose. Let’s take the example ofmonsters. Monsters occur by chance because they are not among those things thatare always or for the most part. Man, on the other hand, survives because he ismeant to survive. To argue that he is a result of chance is to argue that hedoes not exist always or for the most part, but only sometimes.

This, of course, is absurd. Because most things in nature seem to occur most of the timeand exhibit a pattern of change which can be broken up into the four causes, Aristotle argues that nature must have a purpose. Order and conformity to typeinfer purpose. Aristotle goes on in Book II to make his explanation of purpose innature more clear by relating natural purpose to artistic creation. In anyprocess of human creation, there is a definite end to be achieved. In order toachieve that end, the artist must complete a series of steps to bring this endabout. For example, if you want to build a house, there are certain steps youhave to go through in order to bring the house into being.

If those steps arenot followed, you may very well end up with something that resembles a house butis not a house. Natural processes imitate nature in the way art works come intobeing. If the art if for an end, nature must even more be for an end.

One hasonly to look at the work of swallows, ants or bees, who have no consciouspurpose, to realize that they are nevertheless acting according to a purpose. Mutations are simply nature’s failures, the miscarriage of purpose. If all hadgone well, the monster would have been a man and that which resembles a housebut is not a house would have been a house. When nature fulfills her purpose, man begets man and nothing else. The natural end of anything is to conform toits type, to become what it is designed to be.

In his zoological research Aristotle set forth his teleological view ofnature based upon his observations. To explain a phenomenon, Aristotle saidthat one must discover its goal, to understand that for the sake of which thephenomenon in question existed. A simple example of this kink of explanationsis the duck’s webbed feet. According to Aristotle’s reasoning, ducks havewebbed feet for the sake of swimming which is an activity that supports the goalof a duck’s existence. That goal is to find food in water so as to stay alivePhilosophy