

Four causes and the problem of change



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Once a buffalo entered a field and began to destroy it. Suddenly the owner of the field saw it, took the stick, and hit the buffalo. The buffalo ran away from the field. Here we see two actions taking place, firstly the owner hitting the buffalo, which we can call as the cause and the second action is the buffalo running away from the field, which we can call the effect. Therefore, there is a clear relationship between these two actions or events. The word cause gives us the clear meaning that “ anything responsible for change, motion, or action,”[1]as we saw in the above action. There are many philosophers who spoke about the cause especially Aristotle. He explains what cause is. Why there are causes? In order to make us understand He wrote about four important causes because, whatever he saw on the earth he began to question ‘ why’? Therefore, the outcome of this question is the theory of causality and the problem of change. In this assignment, I would like to go in depth into Aristotle’s theory of four causes and the problem of change. Because in this universe the Non- livings and the livings do not remain the same; rather they change in anything and everything.

Aristotle’s theory of four causes and the problem of change

As we know, Aristotle is one of the great Greek philosophers. He studied under Plato. He has written many books on many subjects. He is a father of many subjects like logic, political science, etc. Aristotle was convinced about his ideas and thoughts that is why he did not agree with some of the ideas of his guru and even with the other philosophers like Parmenides’ arguments. Plato believed in the world of ideas, for him the idea and the form were real. However, For Aristotle the individual things were real, he believed in the world of reality. Since he believed in the world of reality, he saw on this earth

many beings so he called them as substances. Aristotle says, " The substance is a unity of form and matter. Substances undergo two types of changes: accidental and radical." [2] Since he spoke about changes, there was a clash between Parmenides and Aristotle.

The Greek philosopher Parmenides said, " Reality is one and stable," [3] that means there cannot be any change. In other words, " In reality there is no change at all; all change is mere appearance; because reality is one, which is unchanging." [4] Because Parmenides believed that there are only two possibilities, they are ' being' and ' non-being'. According to Parmenides if there is something then only something comes out and if there is nothing how can you expect something? The problem was that later he said that from being no being comes because He has no idea of potentiality in being. However, Aristotle says, every being has potentiality therefore there is change in everything. Since Aristotle said about the change, he had to bring out the proper arguments. Therefore, He began to explain by giving theory of four causes and the problem of change.

Aristotle begins his arguments by saying that " If something comes to be it must be rooted in something. It cannot be rooted in nothing. But also it cannot be rooted in itself. So it must be rooted in a potentiality that something has for a range of (opposite, contrary) properties." [5] What he says is true because nothing can come from nothing rather. For example if you have an apple then only you can cut it and give it to others if we do not have how can we think of giving to others. Similarly, if we want something to come then there has to be something. A something that exists he calls them as substance. This substance under goes two types of changes as I

mentioned earlier. He calls them as accidental change. In this type, a sculptor goes to sculpt a statue from a marble; there he realizes that inside that marble the statue exists. From this incident, Aristotle discovers the concept of potency. The word potency means the ability or the power. For instance, the marble has the potency to become a statue. Finally, he concludes by saying every being has the potency to change.

He calls another change as the substantial change. In which an animal is dead and the other animal eats the dead animal here substance turns to something different which is not the same. Finally, with these incidents Aristotle comes to conclusion that the substance undergoes changes. These substances are functioned by four causes. Now let us see the theory of the four causes by Aristotle.

The material cause: material cause deals with 'whatness' of the substance. In other words, what an object or matter consists is a material cause. Every substance or object under goes a change, that receives a new form or a new look. We can take an example a carpenter makes a table out of wood. This we can call as an accidental change. We can take an another example a jack fruit is fallen down and a monkey begins to eat now the jack fruit is no more a jack fruit rather it is a part of that monkey. This kind of change we can call as a substantial change because the substance loses its original form and becomes something else; this is very common in this world because every day the animals, plants etc die, they become different forms. Therefore, this kind of change we can call as a material cause. I personally understand material cause as, in this universe whatever that exists has the matter and the form. The thing what it is I would call it as the material cause. Even when <https://assignbuster.com/four-causes-and-the-problem-of-change/>

a new thing comes out and that new thing has identified by what it is therefore I would agree with Aristotle.

The formal cause: In this cause, the word formal itself gives us the idea of a form. As we read in the beginning there is no matter without form and no form without matter. Any wood is a substance and it is made of matter and the form. For example a brick, when a man makes the brick by giving the proper shape to it then only it becomes as a brick and secondly he has the idea of the brick in his mind therefore he makes the brick. According to the formal cause, the word 'form' itself gives us the idea, that which exists should have the form. So similarly, a person has the idea of a brick in his mind and makes the brick. When the same bricks have arranged in proper order to build a house it has called as the formal cause. If a builder uses the bricks however he wants the wall will not rise and even if it rises it collapses. Similarly, if the librarian does not arrange the books in proper order then it will be something else but if the librarian arranges the books in the cupboard then it takes a better look and the shape. It has called as the formal cause. Finally, I want to say in simple words that the idea or the imagination that the maker has in his mind, the characteristics of the object that the maker or the designer gives to a thing can be called as the formal cause.

The Efficient cause: the efficient cause is the effort and the work of the designer or the agent, which changes the object. It means how the designer plans and what are the instruments he uses, how much hard he works counted in the efficient cause. So the efficient cause begins with the agent or the designer. In other words, " that from which the change or the freedom from change first begins, e. g. the adviser is a cause of the action, and the

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father a cause of the child.”[6]I would like to explain it through an example. I am going to a pond and collecting some clay and I prepare a beautiful statue. Here my effort and the force, which I used to make the statue, is the reason for the efficient cause. In this example, I have an idea of a statue and since I have an idea, I make the statue. It is because of my effort and hard work that a new statue comes to existence. I would say that it is an important cause because of this cause; a new thing comes to exist.

The final cause: the final cause is an important cause in which a new thing exists. Here a question arises why the agent or the designer made this thing for example the same story of mine making a pot out of clay. I make the pot because I wanted to keep it in my house in order to make use of cooking and to keep water in it. Similarly, a carpenter makes chair in order to sit on the chair. I walk everyday because it is necessary for my health so the final cause is the purpose for which the change takes place. Therefore, there is a clear connection between all these four causes.

These are the four causes of Aristotle. Later another great Christian philosopher Thomas Aquinas adds one more cause to these four causes. Which is called as an ‘exemplary’ cause. “Exemplary causality is the casual influence exercised by a model or an exemplar on the operation.”[7]If I take the same example of the clay and the statue here, first I have an idea in my mind therefore I make the statue. This idea in the mind we can call as the exemplary cause. However, it may have the same resemblance of the other causes but it deals with the idea. It guides the inner intellect.

Aristotle's causes were mainly on actuality but Aquinas's cause is on potentiality and actuality that means on idea and the actual factor. Since Aristotle also dealt about this, Aquinas gives more importance on idea, which he calls as essence. Since he added to the theory of Aristotle on existence and essence, Aristotle's theory took a better form and got more value than earlier.

Finally, Aristotle concludes his theory of four causes by saying there is cause and effect, everything under goes a change. As I mentioned in the beginning Aristotle saw everything that exists and asked why these are in this way. This made him to find out why everything changes in this world. Finally, when he finds out the reasons for change he concludes by saying that there must be somebody who is a supreme mover and the cause for a change. Because according to his theory if there is a watch there must be a designer or the Watchmaker, similarly when there is a change in everything there must be someone who is a cause maker. Aristotle calls him as a prime mover.

He also believes that the prime mover is the final cause and he is unchangeable, because he has no form. For Aristotle the prime mover is divine. After long arguments and disagreements with other philosophers Aristotle says, in the universe everything changes. The whole universe depends on the prime mover and he is cause for all the changes, which take place. He is the ultimate cause or the prime mover. Aristotle calls him as a supreme being or the supreme mover but the great Christian philosopher Thomas Aquinas calls him as a God. I too agree with Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle because both believe in the divinity. Since I believe that if I have <https://assignbuster.com/four-causes-and-the-problem-of-change/>

something then must be a creator of that so when I say this universe exists it is sure that the creator of the universe exists. I also agree that in this universe everything changes. God is the prime mover.

Conclusion

I would conclude by saying that the four causes of Aristotle and the other one cause by Thomas Aquinas are the main reasons, which affects an object. The five causes play an important role in everything that exists in the universe. All these causes linked to each other. Each and everything that exists on this universe has a purpose that is why all the causes explain to us the existence of the beings. These beings undergo a change. God is the ultimate change maker or the beginner of all the causes.