

Prof. Rex Li's Writings

Category: Philosophy

Sub-category:

Code: Phi 01-009

Title: Aristotle's Metaphysics and Present-day Review

Year Written: 2021

Summary/ Abstract: Aristotle starts metaphysics and the discipline continues up to today.

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Aristotle's Metaphysics and Present-day Review

(A) Based on Durant's Interpretation

(1) Everything has inner urge

(2) Form = shape,
matter = raw material

His metaphysics grew out of his biology. Everything in the world is moved by an inner urge to become something greater than it is. Everything is both the form or reality which has grown out of something which was its matter or raw material; and it may in its turn be the matter out of which still higher forms will grow. So the man is the form of which the child was the matter; the child is the form and its embryo the matter; the embryo the form, the ovum the matter; and so back till we reach in a vague way the conception of matter without form at all. But such a formless matter would be no-thing, for every thing has a form. Matter, in its widest sense, is the possibility of form; form is the actuality, the finished reality, of matter. Matter obstructs, form constructs. Form is not merely the shape but the shaping force, an inner necessity and impulse which moulds mere material to a specific figure and purpose; it is the realization of a potential capacity of matter; it is the sum of the powers residing in anything to do, to be, or to become. Nature is the conquest of matter by form, the constant progression and victory of life.³⁴

(p. 68)

(3) Man → child → embryo
ovum ... (ultimate matter)

(4) Everything has a form

(5) Form is actuality of
matter

(6) Form is a shaping force
= inner necessity
= impulse of a matter to
a purpose

(7) Nature is form conquers matter, progressing to life

(8) Final cause: fulfilment of things.

Everything in the world moves naturally to a specific fulfilment. Of the varied causes which determine an event, the final cause, which

(p. 68)

(9) Internal structure (Nature) determines direction of growth

mission of useful organs?); everything is guided in a certain direction from within, by its nature and structure and entelechy;³⁵ the egg of the hen is internally designed or destined to become not a duck but a chick; the acorn becomes not a willow but an oak. This does not mean

(p. 69)

(10) God as the "unmoved mover", the force, the final source of energy, moved by motive; the final cause, ... everything

of shapes? Surely motion has a source, says Aristotle; and if we are not to plunge drearily into an infinite regress, putting back our problem step by step endlessly, we must posit a prime mover unmoved (*primum mobile immotum*), a being incorporeal, indivisible, spaceless, sexless, passionless, changeless, perfect and eternal. God does not create, but he moves, the world; and he moves it not as a mechanical force but as the total motive of all operations in the world; "God moves the world as the beloved object moves the lover."³⁷ He is the final cause of nature, the drive and purpose of things, the form of the world; the principle of its life, the sum of its vital processes and powers, the inherent goal of its growth, the energizing entelechy of the whole. He is pure energy;³⁸ the Scholastic *Actus Purus*—activity *per se*; perhaps the mystic "Force" of modern physics and philosophy. He is not so much a person as a magnetic power.³⁹

(p. 69)

(11) God as self-conscious spirit, no desires, no will, no purpose, never acts, does nothing.

R: In this sense, Aristotle's God is "the king reigns, but he does not rule." He does nothing but contemplates, but he is the unmoved mover. Clearly it is very different from "the gentle and solicitous fatherhood of the Christian God." (p. 70)

(B) Contemporary Metaphysics: My first attempt

Below are my understanding and related ideas, with a few points based on Dewey's *Experience and Nature* (1926)

- (1) Chaotic Order
- (2) Big-bang theory
- (3) Teleology (everything has a cause) doesn't stand.
- (4) Cause, meaning, value as human construct.
- (5) Purposeless universe
- (6) Blind evolution (some structures, statistics, mutations, etc. determine growth)
- (7) Form (structure) → function → dictates life
- (8) Cognitive structure dictates thinking structure, which dictates and set limit of reasoning / science.
- (9) Science / technology tries to push this limit?

Apparently Aristotle started the whole thinking and debate by synthesizing Greek philosophy. Hopefully 20th century philosophers stand on his shoulders.