Aristotle’s Four Causes (Metaphysics Book 5)

"Cause" means: (a) in one sense, that as the result of whose presence something comes into being—e.g. the bronze of a statue and the silver of a cup, and the classes which contain these [i.e., the **material cause**]; (b) in another sense, the form or pattern; that is, the essential formula and the classes which contain it—e.g. the ratio 2:1 and number in general is the cause of the octave—and the parts of the formula [i.e., the **formal cause**]. (c) The source of the first beginning of change or rest; e.g. the man who plans is a cause, and the father is the cause of the child, and in general that which produces is the cause of that which is produced, and that which changes of that which is changed [i.e., the **efficient cause**]. (d) The same as "end"; i.e. the final cause; e.g., as the "end" of walking is health. For why does a man walk? "To be healthy," we say, and by saying this we consider that we have supplied the cause [the **final cause**]. (e) All those means towards the end which arise at the instigation of something else, as, e.g. fat-reducing, purging, drugs and instruments are causes of health; for they all have the end as their object, although they differ from each other as being some instruments, others actions [i.e., necessary conditions].

— *Metaphysics, Book 5, section 1013a, translated by Hugh Tredennick*

Notes:

1. *Aristotle specifically mentions certain objects or things in his work. You need to use his examples and then create your own to demonstrate your understanding (bronze statue and silver cup).*
2. *Notice that the four causes does not only apply to physical things – as described by the pattern of something. The formal cause is the ‘essence’ of the thing as we understand it.*
3. *‘Ratio 2:1’ is a reference to Pythagoras (6thCentury BCE) and his discovery of the octave in stringed instruments. He discovered that if you press half way down a string that you will find the octave of the string when plucked without any fret being used. This is evidence of pattern or form for Aristotle.*
4. *The efficient cause is the way in which the thing has come about (the father is the efficient cause of the child).*