

# Aristotle's *Metaphysics*

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## **The Origins of Knowledge**

- Sense-perception is the first requirement for knowledge, and it is found in animals.
- Memory with sense-perception allows for a single experience.
- Experience gives rise to science and craft.
- Craft arises through induction.
  - Many thoughts that arise from experience result in one universal judgment about similar things.
- Theoretical science, which studies the most universal causes and principles, is the most remote from sense-perception.

## **Wisdom**

- Experience concerns particulars, while craft gives a rational account, using universals.
- Craft is superior to mere experience because it knows the cause or reason why.
- Wisdom arises from wonder and removes wonder.
- There is a hierarchy from the least to the greatest wisdom:
  - The inexperienced person knows only what he has perceived,
  - The merely experienced person knows many particulars but not universals,
  - The manual craftsman employs universals out of habit, but without knowing the reason why,
  - The master craftsman produces his products through knowledge of the reason why,
  - The theoretical scientist produces nothing, but understands the reason why of a wide range of things.

### **Early Attempts at Theoretical Science**

- Most early philosophers thought the only causes of things are material.
- Finding a material cause, whether an element or atoms, does not explain *why* things happen.
- So, philosophers look for a source of motion to fill the gap.
- The best source of motion is mind, because it also explains why things turn out well.
- The early philosophers made no real use of their causes.
  - In this way they are like unskilled boxers who sometimes land good punches.

### **Plato's Account of Reality**

- Influenced by his predecessors, Plato claimed that there are two universal causes:
  - The Forms, which make a thing the kind of thing it is,
  - The matter which takes on qualities by its relation to the Forms.
- Things are said to “participate” or “share” in the Form which makes it the kind of thing it is.
- The Forms are the “one over many” which are supposed to explain what different things have in common.

### **Criticism of the Forms**

- Aristotle criticizes the theory of Forms in a number of ways, including the following.
- Redundancy: if there are already kinds of things in the world, it is redundant to introduce a separate set of forms corresponding to each kind.
- Inappropriateness: we can group things into kinds in many ways, and each one would have to have a Form, such as:
  - Negations (non-animal)
  - Relatives (taller than)
- Inefficacy: Forms are distinct from the world of perceptible things, and so cannot be causes of change in that world.
  - They are not mixed in with the perceptible things.
  - To say that they “share” in the perceptible things is an empty metaphor.
  - A source of motion is needed to account for change in the world.

## Substance

- In the *Categories*, Aristotle had identified primary substance as the fundamental being.
- Primary substance is defined negatively as a primary subject which is in nothing and which is said of nothing.
  - Socrates is a primary substance.
- Aristotle investigates a positive account of substance in Book VII of the *Metaphysics* (one of the hardest texts in all of philosophy).
- In one sense, a substance is a composite of matter and form.
  - Socrates is a material thing with the form of a man.
- In another sense, a substance is merely the form itself.
- But matter, although it is “primary” in the sense given above, is not substance.

## Substance and Essence

- The main topic of investigation in Book VII is the sense in which substance is form.
- Aristotle understands the form of a thing as its *essence*.
- The essence of a thing is what it is said to be in its own right.
  - Being a man is what makes Socrates Socrates.
  - Being a musician does not make Socrates Socrates.
- Since it is by virtue of the essence that a thing is what it is, the essence is a *cause*.
  - The essence of Socrates is the cause of Socrates being Socrates.
- We can say that the cause of a substance’s being what it is (hence its essence) is “the substance” of that substance.
  - Being a man (the essence of Socrates) is the substance of Socrates.

## Essence and Coincident

- Substances have attributes besides having an essence.
- Aristotle calls these non-essential attributes “coincident” (often known as “accidents”).
  - Being pale is a coincident of Socrates.
- A substance might or might not have any of its coincidents.

- Socrates might not be pale.
- But as substance would cease to be substance without its essence.
  - There is a corpse of flesh and bone, but no Socrates, when Socrates dies.

### **Essence and Form**

- Since substance (in one sense) is essence, and essence is form, form is fundamental to Aristotle's account of reality.
- The form of a substance is not a universal, as it is with Plato.
- As a result, the form is not separable from the substance, again contrary to Plato.
- The form for Aristotle is a cause.
- Aristotle's forms explain what Plato's forms explain:
  - Forms are what makes things the kinds of things they are,
- But they do so in a better way than do Plato's forms:
  - They are not distinct from the thing which they make to be the thing they are.
- A deep objection raised by modern philosophers is that a cause cannot be given by a definition, as the essence is.