

Aquinas' Metaphysics: Following Aristotle's rejection of Plato's Transcendental Forms, Aquinas holds that essences do not have an independent existence of actual beings, substances. Rather, the forms exist in things, not in a transcendental realm (for example, the essence of being exist in actually existing humans).

SUBSTANCE:

1. He was largely concerned with substances: their cause, nature, why they change, & what ends they serve.

2. What is a substance? A thing that can have an independent existence:
(e.g., a dog is a substance because it can exist by itself; in contrast to the color blue-for it can only exist in something else)

3. Substances are what God created & continues to create:

a. Corporeal substance, that is, the material world.

b. Incorporeal substance, that is, angels & human souls.

The idea of substantial forms dominates greek philosophy & medieval philosophy, but has fallen out of favor in modern philosophy. It was abandoned for a mechanical, or "bottom-up" organization.

What is substantial form? there are things called Forms (or Ideas), and they are what organizes matter and makes it intelligible. Substantial forms are the source of order, unity, and identity of objects. Substantial forms are what is delivered to us through sensation and thus are a solution to the problem of universals.

MATTER & FORM

1. He held that substances consist of matter & form, neither of which can exist by itself.

a. By itself, matter has no properties, although it has the potential to take on properties.

b. Properties have no existence except in matter; they are what make matter into an actual substance.

c. It is matter that individuates (to give individuality) substances-that makes it possible for there to be two of exactly the same kind of thing. For example, consider 2 copies of this chart. What makes them different charts, even though they are exactly alike in their properties, is their matter, not their properties, or form. If there were no matter, there could not be multiple instances of the chart, or of anything else.

d. Substances have have substantial forms & accidental forms:

(1) A substantial form is what makes a thing the kind of thing that it is, or without which it would not be that kind of thing (e.g., substantial forms of living things is a soul), for it is the soul that makes a living thing to be alive, enabling its activities: growth, nutrition, reproduction, perception, etc). Your substantial form is a rational intellect or soul; without that, neither Aristotle or Aquinas thinks you would be the kind of substance you are, a human being.

(2) An accidental form is a property that thing happens to have, but could exist without (e.g., your hair color is an accidental property; you can change hair color, but you would still be you).

POTENTIALITY & ACTUALITY:

1. Distinction between form & matter can be thought of as a distinction between potentiality & actuality:

a. Matter by itself has no form, thus it has potential to take on form.

b. The form it takes on is what enables it to undergo change, thereby becoming actual.

c. Form is what makes matter into substance, that makes it potentiality become actual.

d. Aquinas example of bronze statue: (1) Bronze out of which statue is made is like matter; (2) Shape it take on becoming status is like form. (3) The bronze out of which statue is made has potential to become a statue. (4) The form of the statue, it shape is what makes the bronze statue into an actual statue. Ex. is not perfect because bronze itself is a kind of substance, that is, it can exist by itself. Ultimately, the matter out of which all things are constituted is prime or first matter, which has no properties, but has the potential to take on any property.

CORPORAL & MATTER-LESS SUBSTANCES:

1. Aquinas agrees w/ Aristotle's analysis of substance as informed matter insofar as corporeal substances are concerned, that is, the material objects that populate the sensible world.

a. Because matter is basis of corporal substances, & because corporeal substances are extended, Aquinas thinks of matter as being extensive quantity.

2. Matterless Substances: There are substances with no matter at all; they are incorporeal (angels & human souls): simple substances, once created are immortal, & having no parts, they can't deteriorate.

a. They consist of form only, for they are not extended.

b. While matter can't exist by itself, uninformed (agrees with Aristotle), he believes some forms can exist by themselves, insofar as incorporeal substances are forms without matter.

c. Even though they have no matter, they still have potentiality

d. Since they have no matter, there can only be one incorporeal substance of any given kind (e.g., only one angel of any given kind).

e. Only God is pure actuality.

ESSENCE & EXISTENCE:

1. Aquinas seeks to distinguish between what a thing is, its essence, & that a thing is, its existence or being. (it is its definition). You can understand a thing's essence, what it is, without knowing whether it exists. For example, you can know what a unicorn is without knowing whether one exists, or indeed, even knowing that none exists.

2. In *Being and Essence*, Aquinas tells us *"...essence...designates that through which and in which a being has the act of existing."* He does not mean that to have an essence is to exist. Rather, an essence is what makes it possible for a substance to have existence as that kind of substance. For example, human being could not exist without a rational soul. However, this is not to say that a rational soul causes humans to exist. In a sense the explanation is the reverse: Existence causes essences. An essence is caused to have actual being by an act of existing. For example, your humanness is caused to exist by your act of existing.

3. The cause of the existence of an actual being is not self-caused, but created by God-whose essence is existence.