**PHI 301: Metaphysics**

## Nature of Metaphysics

Metaphysics can only be described since it is hard to define. It is one of the major branches of philosophy which investigates the fundamental nature of reality. The Ancient and Mediaeval Ages had a more unified central problems of metaphysics which could be today designated as the “Old” Metaphysics. *Metaphysics* was then divided into three parts, now regarded as the traditional branches of Western metaphysics, called (1) [ontology](http://philosophy.wikia.com/wiki/Ontology" \o "Ontology) which is the study of being, (2) [theology](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Theology&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "Theology (page does not exist)) which is the study of God, and (3) [universal science](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Universal_science&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "Universal science (page does not exist)) which is the study of the first principles. Whereas for Aristotle, the subject-matter of Metaphysics is “being qua being” (*ens qua ens*), for St. Thomas it is the “common being” (*ens commune*) which comprises specifically the neutrally immaterial entities like substance, being, act, potency and others as distinguished from the proper subject-matter of theology which is positively immaterial such as God and the angels. Though metaphysics studies God and the angels, according to Aquinas, only indirectly, not directly.

Since the [Age of Reason](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Age_of_Reason&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "Age of Reason (page does not exist)) or simply Enlightenment (1685-1815), the era of the “New” Metaphysics, some problems that were not originally considered metaphysical have been added to metaphysics. Other problems that were considered metaphysical problems for centuries are now typically relegated to their own separate subheadings in philosophy, such as [philosophy of religion](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Philosophy_of_religion&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "Philosophy of religion (page does not exist)), [philosophy of mind](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Philosophy_of_mind&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "Philosophy of mind (page does not exist)), [philosophy of perception](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Philosophy_of_perception&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "Philosophy of perception (page does not exist)), [philosophy of language](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Philosophy_of_language&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "Philosophy of language (page does not exist)), and [philosophy of science](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Philosophy_of_science&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "Philosophy of science (page does not exist)). In some cases subjects of metaphysical research have been found to be entirely physical and natural, thus making them part of [physics](http://philosophy.wikia.com/index.php?title=Physics&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "Physics (page does not exist)). For instance, problems such as free will, mind-body problem that do not relate to the first cause or unchanging entity and which Aristotle and the Mediaevals would have assigned to physics are today regarded as metaphysical problems. Today’s central questions in metaphysics include particulars and universals, change and permanence, being, necessity and possibility and others. Based on the evolution of the word metaphysics, in the 17th century the word *Ontology* was invented as the science of Being as such since Metaphysics has gained a loosed understanding. This loosed sense of metaphysics was justified by Christian Wolff (1679-1754) who argued that even though the subject-matter of metaphysics is being, being could be investigated in general or in particular, hence the distinction of metaphysics into general metaphysics which studies being as such and special metaphysics which deals with being of various objects such as the souls or material bodies. Even those philosophers who deny the existence of the first cause are regarded today as making metaphysical assertions, included are also those who deny that there is change such as Parmenides or those who argue that everything is in a state of flux like Heraclitus.

**The central questions of metaphysics are:**

Ontology (Being as such - old), First causes – old, Unchanging things – old, Substance – old, Categories of being and Universal – old, Identity and change, Space and time – new, Causality – new, Necessity and possibility

**The peripheral questions are:**

Cosmology and cosmogony, Mind and matter – new, Modality – new, Persistence and constitution – new, Determinism and free will -new, Natural and social kinds, Number, Applied metaphysics.

## Ontology

Etymologically ontology is from the Greek word *onto* meaning “being” or “what is” and *logia* meaning “science.” Ontology is a branch of philosophy (Metaphysics) that studies being, becoming, existence, and reality. Simply put, it is the science of being. Common fundamental ontological categories include substance, properties, relations, state of affairs and events. There is a question of ontological dependence of entities whereby it is investigated whether entities of a category exist on the fundamental level or not and how they are related to each other. Ontology from Aristotle’s perspective considers the question of “being qua being” (*Ens qua ens*) which is the question of what is found in all beings. One answer is that of the *Eleatic principle*[[1]](#footnote-0) which argues that it is causality that they have in common. But this Eleatic principle excludes abstract objects. Another answer is that of Berkeley’s *esse est percipi* (to be is to be perceived). Another is that of the categories of being such as substance, properties, relations, state of affairs or events to which each classification of entities belong to one category. However, there is lack of consensus on how categories are to be defined. The categories are characterized by fundamental ontological concepts such as universals and particulars, abstractness and concreteness, or possibility and necessity, ontological dependence, identity and modality which are sometimes treated as categories or used to explain categories.

### Possibility and Method of Ontology

The possibility of ontology depends on whether true universal propositions are possible for an unlimited field of objects, that is, the ones we have experienced and the ones not yet experienced; future events. In this sense, true universal propositions cannot be shown to be possible if they have to be arrived at inductively through experience. So, the method of ontology is that of synthetic judgement *a priori* which focuses on universals rather than on individuals. Ontological propositions cannot be merely analytical in order to liberate ontology from meaningless tautologies and the accessibility of the synthetic judgements *a priori* of ontology must be demonstrated by epistemology.

### **Ontological Categories**

#### Particulars and universals

Universals are usually contrasted with particulars or individuals. For instance, a yellow orange is a particular which has a universal *yellowness* that could be seen in other oranges or other fruits like mangoes. Socrates is a human refers to a particular which is Socrates and the universal which is human or *humanness* that Plato and other individual human beings possess. Particulars exists at a location at any given time while universals can be at various locations at a given time. During the mediaeval era, there emerged a controversy about the question of particular and universals. For instance, Boethius reacted to the philosophical question at this period which focused on the problem of whether the universals exist only in the mind or outside the mind. Boethius argued that they exist both in individual things and in the mind. Some scholars, like Odo of Tournai and Guillaume de Champeaux, followed the path of exaggerated realism which argued that universals are real things outside the mind. This exaggerated realism generated a criticism of another extreme position known as nominalism, and nominalists like Roscellinus argued that only individuals exist in nature and that universals do not refer to anything. Then, there was the position of moderate realism propagated by Peter Abelard who argued that universal was a word or concept that represented some realities, though they are not real things. Aquinas would later agree with Abelard but went further to argue that universals exist outside of things only as divine Ideas in the mind of God. Nominalists denied altogether the existence of universals. Ockham, for instance, rejected realism and settled down with nominalism.

#### Principles and Transcendentals

Understanding of synthetic *a priori* judgement lies on knowledge of being that makes our experience possible, which does not just result from experience, even though it is through experience that it becomes conscious knowledge. We know that we possess such knowledge of being through our knowledge of the transcendental “notes” of being. In the principle of non-contradiction (which includes the principle of the excluded middle and that of identity), we show our understanding of the truth that being excludes non-being. So, it is impossible for something not to be, insofar as it is. This proposition does not arise from experience since experience does not give absolute impossibility, so it is *a priori*. Because the judgement making *a priori* truths are starting point of further knowledge, so they are called principles. Then the “notes” which necessarily belong to being are called transcendentals.

The most important *a priori* judgement for our knowledge of being after the principle of non-contradiction is the *principle of causality* which states that everything that exists insofar as it has being contingently, not necessarily, has that being through a cause. Transcendentals are “notes” of being either in itself or in its necessary relationships. It is generally acceptable that unity is the characteristic of being in itself. Truth is characteristic of being in relation to knowledge, and goodness or worth in its relation to the will. Hence, in application it is argued, thus: each thing that is, insofar as it has being, is *one, true and good*. Other transcendentals all form a unity because they add nothing to real being but only expatiate it.

#### Finiteness, analogy, categories

Based on the positive non-limitation of being (one, true and good), being is ontologically distinguished from (finite) beings. Beings only participate in being because they do not have “part” of being. They possess being only analogously since their being is linked to non-being, and even by abstraction their being cannot be clearly distinguished from non-being. Hence, any attempt to classify these beings into a number of neatly classified categories always fails. The only more or less accepted distinction was that of Aristotle’s categories of substance and accident. Those Aristotle’s categories were met with rejections and reformations in the history of philosophy.

#### Criticism

Ontology deals more with the universals but human language used in discussing it centers on the particular. The singular cannot be exhausted by the universal concept. The more ontology focuses on the universal the more it will be easier for the human intellect to handle, but it will remain aloof from the special character of the individual and the concrete historical situation. The most pressing task today is for ontology to focus on the individual and the concrete without wavering.

## God

### God in the History of philosophy

Parmenides (b. 510 B.C.) used his principle of non-contradiction and argued that being is One, unchangeable and permanent. Plato in his theory of the Forms or Ideas posited Demiurge who uses receptacles to created beings, and at the same time spoke in his dialogue, *Parmenides*, about the One or the Father (the Good) who is above Demiurge as the source of all things. Aristotle in Metaphysics IX & XII described God as Unmoved Mover and Pure Actuality (*Actus purus*) who is eternal and unchanging. This Unmoved Mover, for Aristotle, cannot think about anything outside himself since he has no potentiality but only actuality. The Unmoved Mover is a Self-Thinking Thought who has no real relation with the world except relation of reason. This Unmoved Mover is only the final cause of the universe (formal, material, efficient and final causes). Aristotle argued that God, the Self-Thinking Thought did not create the world directly; rather He created the world through intermediaries such as Angels. Aristotle posited a lot of these intermediaries and scholars have argued that there is no definite number of intermediaries in Aristotle. For instance, it was pointed out that in his *Physics* 258b 11 and in many parts of *Metaphysics* he spoke about many intermediaries. The chapter eight of the Metaphysics has *fifty-five* unmoved movers.

### The Middle Platonism and the Neo-Platonism

The Platonic era was foreshadowed by the works of the Middle-Platonists, such as Albinus, of the 1st and 2nd century AD. The Middle Platonism made a synthesis of the Demiurge of Plato in *Timaeus* and the God of Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* in order to arrive at the idea of a personal God who is also the moving cause of the universe. The God of Aristotle has the feature of a moving cause but he does not generate the form or the essence of the universe as an artist with the exemplary idea of the form in his mind. So, this idea of a God who produces the world with exemplary idea in his mind is the God (Demiurge) of Plato. But the Demiurge was a producer of secondary importance because the Forms with which he uses to produce the visible things did not come from him. Based on this, the Middle Platonists contends that the personal God who lives in heaven is the God of Aristotle whose mind could be filled with the Forms of Plato so that he could produce the universe in his own image like an artist (Demiurge). So, by this merging of the God of Aristotle and the Demiurge of Plato, the Middle Platonists have arrived at a personal God who is the producer of the universe. But how precisely does he produce the universe? Such precision would be left for Plotinus to work it out in his doctrine of emanation. Plotinus (204/5 – 270 A.D.), in the *Ennead*, drew the idea of the One from Plato’s *Parmenides* where Plato discussed about the idea of the One who is static and impersonal. This One in Plato becomes the highest principle beyond the Aristotelian God having his ideas in his mind. The Aristotelian God became the second God of Plotinus which is the *Nous*. From here, Plotinus articulated with precision the basic idea of the Middle Platonists. That is, the supreme God, the One, the perfect, unlimited and infinite becomes the producer of the visible universe through the process of emanation. Though the universe is seen as an emanation from the One, the underlying rationality of the multiplicity in the universe is the *Nous* (eternal mind) which was the first emanation from the One. For Plotinus, evil is matter without form, hence it has no “positive” existence.

***Medieval thinkers***

St. Augustine (354 – 430 A.D.) argued that God exists and that the divine *Mind* contains the ideal exemplars as *rationes aeternae* according to which God created the multiplicity of things in the world by willing them to be. Augustine speaks of God bringing into being what was not there since he created *ex nihilo*. God created everything including matter, but not evil since evil is a privation.

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1100) in his ontological argument argued that God is the highest level of being under which there are, by degree, lesser and lesser beings: that than which nothing greater can be conceived. St. Anselm argues that God’s existence is self-evident.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225/7 – 1274 A.D.) accepted both reason and revelation as sources of the knowledge of God’s existence. Reason and revelation are in harmony because they have the same divine source and revelation is not unreasonable. God as the cause of the universe can be known through the world as effect. He rejected the *necessary* emanation of Plotinus and argued that creation was a free act of God who is pure act and who created *ex nihilo*, from nothing. But the fact that God created cannot be demonstrated. We know things by knowing their genus and species but we cannot know God this way. We know God through the negative way – *Via Negativa* – by removing limits. For instance, arguing that God is unmoved; God is unlimited by space. What we can know of God in a positive way is neither exact like our knowledge of temporal things (univocal) nor entirely different (equivocal), but only analogical. St. Thomas used his famous “Five Ways” (*Quinque viae*) to prove the existence of God who is the primordial source of all finite beings. The *Quinque viae* are: argument from Motion, Efficient cause, Necessary versus Possible Being, Degrees of Perfection, Order in the Universe.

After Aquinas, a radical view of God came from William of Ockham (1285-1347) who argued that omnipotent means that God could do literally anything. In this sense a person could perceive something by sheer act of divine will, without the object of perception being there at all. So, faith and reason could be contradictory – Ockham’s “razor.”

### Renaissance and Modern periods

The renaissance period moved God out of the center of knowledge, and human reason was no longer supervised by faith because of the rise of the modern science which uncovered mathematically describable physical regularities. This undermined the Aristotelian-Thomistic worldview’s emphasis on divine purpose. Deism rose as a philosophical form of theism that used reason as its source of knowledge of God.

Rene Descartes (1596-1650) regarded God not only as uncaused but also as the cause of himself whom we know through self-evidence like St. Anselm. But Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) argued that philosophy must begin with God, not with the self since God is first in the order of things. There is only one thing – God or Nature. David Hume (1711-1776) argued that the concept of God is rooted in emotion and the will, not in reason.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) rejected empirical knowledge as a way of knowing God and argued that God cannot be demonstrated. The idea of God has a regulative value for our thinking in that it acts heuristically and gives a sense of unity to our experience. Practically the idea grounds important moral beliefs. Whereas Kant regarded God as elusive to our rationality, Hegel (1770-1831) regarded Him as the essence of rationality.

#### German Idealism on substance

A German Idealist, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel all believe that God is the Absolute who could be identified with the universe. For Schelling, God and the universe are identical. According to Hegel, the Absolute is a Spirit and a self-thinking Thought. He is the Totality of realities and that this totality is a *process*. The Absolute is the universe which is in a teleological movement towards the actualization of itself.

### Process philosophers

A process philosopher, Bergson argued that reality is neither static (atom) nor mechanical; rather, reality is in the making, changing state. So, to understand reality one must think in *duration*. Whitehead followed Bergson and argued that God is in a process with the universe as *actual entities.* A famous Whiteheadian, Charles Hartshorne, would argue that God has *dipolar*: His real Being and his consequent nature. In his consequent nature, not His real being, he is ever-changing and ever-growing with the world in actuality. W. Norris Clarke argues that under the influence of Whitehead, a new notion of God in direct contrast to the notion of God in the traditional thoughts of Aristotle and Aquinas has emerged. God in his primordial nature is immutable and infinite, but in his intentional consciousness, the nature by which he is related to the temporal process of the world, he truly changes.

### Theories of God’s existence

#### Theism

This is the affirmation that God exists. The classical theists describe God as metaphysically ultimate transcendental being, in contrast with theistic personalism, open theism, and process theism.

#### Pantheism

This is the argument that God and the universe as the same thing. We see this in Baruch Spinoza, most of the German Idealists like Schelling, Hegel.

#### Deism and panentheism

This assert that God interwinds with the world and extends beyond the universe and does not intervene in the universe. Panentheism was invented by a German philosopher Karl Krause in 1828 to distinguish the pantheism of Spinoza from that of Schelling and Hegel. Deism discovers God with only bare reason; it rejects revelation. It flowered during the Age of Reason. *Pandeism* is the synthesis of Deism and Panentheism.

#### Atheism

It states that arguments and evidence both indicate that there is insufficient reason to believe in the existence of God.

##### Positive atheism

It asserts that no deities or gods exist.

##### Negative atheism

One does not believe in the existence of any deity but at the same does not explicitly assert that there is none.

#### Agnosticism

It states that the truth value of the claims of the existence of God is unknown and unknowable. Some claim to be theists and others atheists or neutral.

##### Strong agnosticism

It is impossible for humans to know whether God exists or not.

##### Weak agnosticism

It states that belief in God’s existence is unknown but not necessarily unknowable.

##### Agnostic theism

Believes in the existence of God but regards it as unknown or unknowable.

##### Agnostic atheism

It does not believe in the existence of God or deity and also holds that it is unknowable in principle.

#### Apatheism

One is not interested in accepting or denying the existence of God and lives one’s life as if there is no God and explain things without reference to God or any deities.

#### Ignosticism or Igtheism

Proponents conclude that questions about God’s existence or non-existence is not worth discussing because concepts such as God are always not well defined.

### **Divine Attributes**

##### God as personal

Many religions have thought that God is ‘personal’. Properties that essentially characterize a person include intellect and will. The intellect is characterized by rationality and knowledge, the will by morality, freedom and the ability to act. Some philosophers argue that to lack either intellect or will is to lack perfections. God then has perfect intellect and perfect will. Perfect intellect involves perfect wisdom, perfect rationality and perfect knowledge.

##### Omniscience

Perfect knowledge is usually taken to mean ‘omniscience’. The most obvious definition of omniscience is ‘knowing everything’ (Latin omni-, ‘all’; scient, ‘knowing’). Omniscience is not just a matter of what God knows, but also of how God knows. Aquinas argues that God knows everything that he knows ‘directly’, rather than through inference or through understanding a system of representation. But can God know in time?

##### Immutability

This is the argument that God does not change because he exists outside time and space which are the foundations of change. God’s relation with the universe is only a relation of reason, not a real relation.

##### Omnipotence

Power is the ability to do things. As perfect, God will have perfect power, or the most power possible. The most obvious definition of omnipotence is ‘the power to do anything’ (Latin omni-, ‘all’; potent, ‘powerful’). But does ‘anything’ include, for instance, the logically impossible? Could God make 2 + 2 = 5? Could God create a married bachelor? Aquinas argues that the correct understanding of God’s omnipotence is that God can do anything possible. What is impossible is a contradiction in terms.

##### Impassibility

This is the theory which says that nothing acts on God or causally affects him. While the universe is affected by God, God cannot be affected by the universe or by any finite existence.

##### Simplicity

This is the doctrine that God is Pure Act (*Actus purus*) without matter or accident. He is absolutely perfect.

##### Supreme goodness

There are two ways of understanding perfect, or supreme, goodness. The metaphysical sense in which God is perfectly perfect or or the most perfect possible being. Then the moral way in which God is perfectly good in accordance with moral values. Plato and Augustine connect the two understandings of perfect goodness by arguing that what is perfect includes what is morally good; evil is a type of ‘lack’.

##### Eternal and everlasting

Being perfect, God is self-sufficient, dependent on nothing else for existence. God’s existence has no beginning or end. There are two ways in which this can be expressed. If God exists in time, then God’s existence is everlasting – God exists throughout all time. If God exists outside time, then God’s existence is eternal – God is timeless.

##### Transcendence and immanence

These two interpretations of the relationship of God to time can be understood in a broader context of the relation of God to creation. The idea of transcendence marks the way God is very different from creation. God is ‘outside’ or ‘goes beyond’ the universe. However, emphasising God’s transcendence can make it seem that God is very remote from us. The claim that God is immanent marks the close connection between God’s existence and the existence of everything else. For example, it is said that God is omnipresent, i.e. that he exists everywhere. Immanence without transcendence – God as wholly immanent – would lead to ‘pantheism’, the view that God and the universe are the same thing. So transcendence is necessary for the traditional conception of God; immanence is necessary to prevent that God being impossibly remote from us

#### **Analogical Knowledge of God**

##### Univocal Predication of God

God infinitely exceeds the power of our intellect. Therefore, any truth or essence we conceive cannot completely represent the divine essence. Our concepts of God can be (must be) univocal, but they cannot be applied to God univocally, only analogically. Aquinas speaks here of analogous predication, not analogous concepts. E.g., we have a concept of good or wise. The concept is univocal (i.e., “good” and “wise” have the same meaning whether we apply them to God or humans), but the predication cannot be univocal, since God is infinitely wise while we are only finitely wise. In other words, creatures can have the same characteristics as God (e.g., patience), but not have them in the same way that God has them.

##### Equivocal Predication

If one and the same concept, for instance “wise,” has an entirely different meaning when predicated of humans and predicated of God. Equivocation can sometimes lead to skepticism. If we claim that God is unknowable, it means that we know something about him; namely, that he is unknowable. This is a self-defeating argument.

##### Analogical Predication

We use human language to express what God is. But such language will always be limited while God is unlimited. Analogy is based on causality, specifically, on efficient causality, that by which something comes to be. E.g., God as Being is the efficient cause of finite beings. The cause of being has to be Being, since a cause cannot produce reality that it does not possess (*Nemo dat quod non habet*). While the cause is Infinite Being, and the effect is finite being, the being of the effect is similar to the Being that caused it.

#### **Kinds of Analogy**

##### Extrinsic Analogy

There is no real similarity between two parties. Only one possesses the characteristic; the second lacks the characteristic but it is called that characteristic merely on account of its relation to the first.

###### Extrinsic Analogy Based on Efficient Causality

E.g., a body is called “healthy” in the sense of fully functional physiologically. Food is called healthy in that it causes healthy bodies.

###### Extrinsic Analogy Based on Similarity of Relation (Analogy of Improper Proportionality)

E.g., a frown is to a face as a thundercloud is to a landscape. The analogy is in the relationship, not in the similarity of the things being compared. A frown bears no real similarity to a thundercloud. In the above example there is a relationship between the two relationships, but no real relationship between the things being compared.

##### Intrinsic Analogy

Two things possess the same characteristic, each in accordance with its own being.

Analogy of Proper Proportionality

Infinite Good is to Infinite Being as finite good is to finite being. While this assertion is true, it tells us nothing about a real similarity between Infinite Good (Being) and finite good (being.)

Analogy of Intrinsic Attribution

Both parties possess the same attribute and the similarity is based on the causal connection between them. Being causes being to be. The cause communicates itself to the effect. Since God communicates his likeness to his “effects” (the creation), the creation must be like him; i.e., there must be a real similarity. All proper talk about God is based on the analogy of intrinsic attribution. A real similarity between Creator and creature exists because God has caused the creature. All language used of God is used analogically, as per the analogy of intrinsic attribution.

## Person

##### The notion of person

In the ancient Rome, the Latin term *persona* was used to refer to the mask (Latin *masca* – mask, spectre, nightmare) worn by actors performing different roles on the stage. A citizen in ancient Rome (3rd CE – 5th CE) could demonstrate his or her lineage by means of the death mask of his or her ancestor equivalent to family ancestors. By the end of the 2nd century CE, in the Roman society, *persona* gained a legal right referring to the Roman citizens as against slave who had no legal right (*non-persona*). *Persona* was then used to refer to someone with full Roman citizenship.

Human Person

The philosophies of Plato and Aristotle did not give the human person (as against human being) much philosophical importance. In Plato the human being came into existence as when the soul fell from the world of Forms and became imprisoned in the body. Aristotle developed the notion of the human being as a substance who is a rational animal that is composed of matter (body) and form (soul). Because the soul is not subsistent, it perishes with the death of the body. Though there an immortal element which remains when we die and which goes back to the Active Intellect where it belongs. It was the Stoics and the Neo-Platonists who started to accord the human person some ontological priority. Person was then seen, in essence, as made by God. But even during the time of Origen (185-254 EC), couple with the influence of Plotinus (204-269 EC), the concept of *person* did not gain much ontological import as such. It was in the 4th and 5th centuries AD, when the struggle to explain the Trinity emerged, that the concept of person took a decisive turn.

Within the realm of philosophy, St. Augustine (354 – 430 A.D.) describes the human person as *substantia quaedam rationis particeps, regendo corpori accomodata*, meaning “a substance that participates in reason, adapted to the governing body,” or more precisely “a rational soul using a mortal and earthly body.” He argued that the human soul possesses the power of sensation, reasoning and knowing, it apprehends indestructible truth through divine illumination. His analysis of the interior life of the human person could be seen in his *Confession* in which man consciously searches for God and for happiness. During this early Middle Ages, the definition of Boethius, that a person is *naturae rationalis individua substantia* (individual substance of a rational nature), came to limelight in the philosophical understanding of the human person. Also, Richard of St. Victor (1110 – 1173 A.D.) described the human person as *spiritualis naturae incommunicabilis existential*, that is, the proper incommunicable existence of spiritual nature. What is more interesting in Richard of St. Victor’s description is his emphasis on *existence*. This represents a shift from concentration on essence or substance to *existence* which Aquinas would later employ.

Subsequent thinkers, especially from the Arab and Jewish world, from 6th century, tried to interpret Aristotle’s thought. Prominent among them were Avicenna and Averroës. Avicenna (980 – 1037 A.D.) argued that God created nine Intelligences in that descending order and each one created the one below it. Then the ninth Intelligence created the tenth and final Intelligence which is called the Agent or active Intellect. Avicenna made a distinction between Agent intellect and possible intellect. Since, for him, every created thing has a possible being, then every created soul has a *possible* or *passive* *intellect*. The possible intellect is *tabula rasa* (like blank sheet) at birth but with the possibility of knowing. For him, the Agent Intellect, which is one for all human beings, performs the function of abstraction. At death, all human soul will go back to the one original source, the Agent Intellect. This invariably will lead to the annihilation of the individual immortality through the Agent Intellect.

Averroës (1126 – 1198 A.D.), the Commentator, like Aristotle regarded the soul is a material form. He contended that what unites people after death is the Agent Intellect. So, all human knowledge is located in the one universal Agent Intellect. This notion of one universal Agent Intellect led to the doctrine of universal *monopsychism*, that is, the doctrine that there is one universal *psyche* for all humanity. This was accepted and propagated by Siger of Brabant (1240 -1280 A.D.).

A prominent Jewish thinker, Moses Maimonides (1135 – 1204 A.D.), accepted Avicenna’s structure of human being regarding the *possible* intellect and the Agent or active Intellect. For him, at death the soul perishes with the body and what survives is the active intellectual ingredient which was acquired from the Agent Intellect and which returns to it.

What seemed to be lacking in the definition of the above thinkers was supplied by St. Thomas Aquinas (1225/7 – 1274 A.D.) especially the act of existence (*esse*) which appeared in Richard of St. Victor above. Aquinas described the human person as *distinctum subsistens in natura intellectuali*, a “distinct substance in an intellectual nature.” The human soul, for Aquinas, is not simply the *form* of the body as in Aristotle, instead, the soul is a spiritual *form* that possesses and confers substantiality. Man, for him, is composed of matter which is organized by the spiritual form, the soul, and the soul is a *subsistent form* which informs and organizes this matter. The human soul, for Thomas, is an *act*. But without the body, the soul cannot develop the *fullness* of its *actuality*. The body has neither *actuality* nor *subsistence* except the one it received from the soul. That is why the soul cannot perish with the death of the body. The *soul*, for Aquinas, is the source of human activities and it provides the capacity for knowledge. Aquinas followed Aristotle to argue that the human mind gains knowledge through its encounter with the concrete object. Each person has an active intellect whose function is to recognize the intelligible aspect of the sense object and to know the universal of an individual sense object. He maintains that there can be no knowledge without sense experience. Hence, he accepted the saying, *nihil in intellectu quod prius non fuerit in sensu* – “there is nothing in the intellect which was not first in the senses.” St. Thomas described the human person as *dominus sui* – a conscious, responsible, master or agent of one’s action. We recall the struggle between Aquinas’ intellectualism and William of Ockham’s voluntarism which was a debate on the source of legal authority. St. Thomas argument was that legal authority is founded on a higher moral law which is known by human reason, but Ockham and the Nominalists argued that legal authority is founded on the will of the sovereign which may be God, a king or the people. But against Ockham and the Nominalist tradition, human morality cannot be primarily a morality of obedience to the law imposed from without. Rather, human morality, as a responsible agent, should be rooted in a free self-governing person.

In the modern period, René Descartes argued that there are two different kinds of substances in the human person, namely: mind and body. Spinoza rejected the substance dualism of Descartes and argued that there is only one substance with two attributes: thought and extension. Locke rejected argued that the substance of the human person does not endure. What endures for him is the human consciousness. David Hume argued that the human person is a bundle of properties, not a substance. The attack on the notion of substance by the modern thinkers made many contemporary thinkers to argues that the essence of the human person is not substance but relation. Lowe’s approach is what he calls *non-Cartesian substance dualism*. Descartes has argued that a person has dual substances: mind and body. Lowe rejected this view and argue for a substance dualism that is non-Cartesian in which a person is a simple or *psychological substance* that coincides with his animal body (substance) but numerically distinct from it. Strawson (1919-2006), a British contemporary philosopher (though there is no evidence that they ever met in person), has proposed a solution in which he rejected Cartesian dualism arguing that the human person has two aspects instead of two substances and that the two aspects of the human person are the body and the mind. But for Lowe, the human person as a psychological substance possesses psychological modes, and while coinciding with his animal body (substance) he possesses material properties. Hence, they are dualism of psychological substance that coincides with the animal body whose qualities are ontologically dependent on the substance.

***human person as relational***

The contemporary thinkers on the human person who emphasized relation rather than substance as the essence of person. It shall be treated under the following:

* 1. Personalists
  2. Existential phenomenologists
  3. Psychologists and psychotherapists

**Personalists**

Personalists here refer to thinkers that focuses attention on the human subjectivity or self-consciousness such as Carol Wojtyla (St. John Paul II).

Wojtyla argued that self-determination through action is rooted in self-consciousness. Wojtyla criticized St. Thomas for not paying much attention on human consciousness. Self-determination, for him, is achieved through action. But this action is possible in human being endowed with *rationality* and *free will*. Hence, the roots of human action are consciousness and self-determination. Wojtyla is emphasizing the importance of an individual determining himself in relation with others which is achieved in action. That is, one may exist but will never attain self-determination by being alone unless he moves into action with others.

**Existential phenomenologists**

Existential phenomenology, inspired by the writings of Martin Heidegger who was influenced by the existentialism of Soren Kierkegaard and the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, tries to understand the place of man in the totality of existence. Here we are going to discuss the influence of some prominent thinkers in this area such as Martin Heidegger.

Heidegger developed his notion of *connectedness* of the human person understood as *Dasein* (meaning “To be there with”). For Heidegger, the essence of *Dasein* is existence. In existence, the basic condition of *Dasein* is *being-in-the-world* and the world is also a characteristic of *Dasein*. *Dasein* manifests his threefold structure of understanding, mood and discourse, in his relationship with others in everyday experience. Heidegger argues then that connectedness of *Dasein* in the everydayness is the hallmark of his being. In this sense, for him, relation or connectedness with the world is the defining factor of the human person or *Dasein*.

**Psychologists and psychotherapists**

This school of thought employs philosophical method of therapy on the belief that *inner conflict* of a person is as a result of one’s confrontation with givens of existence such as human freedom, responsibility, meaninglessness and death. Their understanding of the resolution of this inner conflict gives credence to *relation*. Prominent thinkers to be considered here are Viktor Frankl.

Frankl, during his World War II experience in the concentration camp at Auschwitz in Poland, developed the method of *logo-therapy* by which people are naturally moved to find meaning in life by searching for the *other* and this helps them to endure painful experiences. According to Frankl, in a condition of painful desolation a person can find meaning and fulfilment in life by contemplating the beloved. He believes that *relation* with the other is the hallmark of his logo-therapy.

###### **Ontological structure of person**

The root of this ontological structure stems from the understanding of the human person as a personal being that possesses intellectual or spiritual nature that is joined to a material body. Aristotle’s definition of the human person as a “rational animal” brings out these two aspects of the man: the rational or intellectual nature, and the material body. But Aquinas’ own definition added to that of Aristotle the notion of “embodied spirit.” So, while that of Aristotle leaves man at the material world, that of Aquinas moves him to the spiritual realm. To make this ontological structure of human nature clearer, we shall discuss it under the following: The soul as spirit and form, orientation of the will, dynamic *a priori* of the spirit, as a microcosm, as a frontier being.

The soul as a spirit and a form

St. Thomas argues that the soul is the unifying center of all activities in the body which must possess its own spiritual act of existence that transcends the body. The power of the soul, as spirit and a form, as an *a priori* transcendental condition of possibility of the intellect transcends the material world and move toward *Being* in totality.

Orientation of the will

Aquinas argued that the will, as the soul’s faculty of action which flows from its intellectual nature, is naturally oriented toward the Infinite Good. The will is free in this orientation because it can choose which path it wishes to follow; to move toward the apparent good or towards the Infinite one. Kretzmann, interpreting Aquinas, says that once the intellect presents to the will what it thinks is good for man, the will operates freely, like an efficient cause, orienting the whole faculties toward that good which the intellect has presented to it, even if the good is apparent or infinite. This soul’s journey, *homo viator,* toward the Infinite Good, God Himself, is described as an *a priori* transcendental condition of possibility of the dynamism of the human spirit as knower and lover.

Dynamic a priori of the spirit

The dynamic *a priori* of the spirit refers to the radical capacity of the human spirit by which it is naturally ordered to the whole of being. Just as the will is naturally oriented toward being as good, the dynamic *a priori* spirit is ordered toward being as intelligible. St. Augustine says that our hearts are restless until they rest in God. The discovery of this *a priori* dynamism could be traced to the Transcendental Thomism. The Transcendental Thomism retrieved the old Augustinian inner way to God, thereby filling an apparent lacuna in St. Thomas’ metaphysics. Aquinas could not develop in details these *a priori* transcendental conditions of possibility of the operation of the mind was because he devoted his effort in applying the spiritual dynamism to work out an *a posteriori* objective comprehension of the world by the intellect.

As a microcosm

The human person as an embodied spirit is a synthesis of the whole universe, hence, a microcosm, a unity of both the material and spiritual worlds in him. Democritus is said to be the first Greek thinker who referred to man as a microcosm of the universe. Plato in *Timaeus* referred to the world as a large human being. The modern philosophy from Descartes to Nietzsche wanted to split this unity in the human person by focusing on the subjective inner world of the human person and aligning it against the objective universe of nature.

As a frontier being

The idea of the human person as frontier being appeared first in Plato’s *Timaeus* where Plato referred to man as a middle being who is located between the upper world and the lower world. Frontier being means living on the edge, that is, between matter and form (spirit). Plato’s story of a charioteer riding two horses, one (reason) looking upward to the Forms, the other (appetite) looking downward to earthly beauty. On seeing an earthly beauty, the appetite (horse) loses control and plunges the reason (other horse) and the charioteer into the earth where the soul is imprisoned in the body. Plotinus and the Neoplatonic tradition described the soul as living on the edge between time and eternity, matter and spirit. The impression given by some ancient thinkers, like Plato, that the merging of the body and the soul was a mistake or an error was reversed by Christian thinkers, like Aquinas, who saw such merging as an intrinsic and natural union.

## **Substance and Accidents**

Aristotle developed a theory of ten categories which comprises of substance and nine accidents. The term category is derived from the Greek word “kategoriai” meaning “predicates.” It represents the way we talk about being. The nine accidents are: quality, quantity, relation, location, time, position, habit, action and passion. For Aristotle, these accidents are properties that are predicated of the substance. Substance literally mean that which stands under or that which remains under the appearances of a thing as the permanent and basic element sustaining accidents. Etymologically “substance” is from the Latin word “*substancia*” meaning that which stands under” (sub stare). The Latin *substancia* was used to translate the Greek term *ousia* which is an abstract noun for being. But Martin Heidegger did not agree that *substancia* translates *ousia*. He argues that such claim was the major cause of the oblivion or forgetfulness of being among metaphysicians.

Aristotle taught that there are three kinds of substances: perishable sensible substance, eternal sensible substance, and unmovable (non-sensible) substance. For him, the former two kinds of substance are the subject of physics; the third kind belongs to another science. The ones that belong to physics are subject to change, but the other one is not. Substance admits accidents as its properties and they are not substances in themselves. Aristotle has two types of substances and two types of properties. The two types of substances are the *primary* and *secondary* substances. The individual is a primary substance, while the universal is a secondary substance. For example, *Socrates* is a primary substance, while the universal, *man,* is a secondary substance. The two types of properties, in Aristotle, are the individual non-substance and the universal non-substance. For instance, this *white* is an individual non-substance, while *whiteness* is a universal non-substance. Hence, not every individual is a substance.

### **Said-Of and Present-In**

Cohen divided the Aristotle’s two fundamental ontological relations, “Said-of” meaning predicated of something and “Present-in” meaning being present in something, into fourfold terms in order to explain how substance differs from accidents and how accidents are regarded as the properties of substance. The fourfold divisions are: said-of, present-in, not said-of, and not present-in. Accidents are *said-of* something and are *present-in* something, but substance, especially primary substance, is *not said-of* anything and it is *not present-in* something.

For something to qualify as a primary substance it must possess both characteristics of *not said-of* and *not present-in*, but for something to qualify as a universal or as an accident it needs only to possess at least one of those characteristics. For instance, let us take Socrates as a primary substance. The statement thus: Socrates is a man. Here Socrates is not said-of man and not present-in man. So, Socrates is a primary substance. Wedin, for instance, in his discussion on the fourfold division, which he describes as the division of things that are (or simply a meta-ontology), explains the primary substance in Aristotle thus: “X is not in a subject & X is not said-of a subject, = X is a substance individual.” Wedin argues that these two asymmetric relations of ontological dependence, said-of and present-in, are used to indicate that the X is not ontologically either dependent on a subject or present in a subject. Hence only a primary substance has such characteristics. But the universal, *man*, is said-of Socrates but not present-in him. *Man* here is not an accident but a substance universal. How, then, did Aristotle explain accidents?

The term “accident” is derived from the Greek word “symbebekos” whose plural is “symbebekuta” (accidents) which means “going along with” or “occurring with” something else. An accident cannot exist independently like substance but must inhere in substance. Aristotle has two meanings of accident, that is:

1. That which attaches to a subject and exists not by virtue of the nature of the subject but by virtue of something else. This accident cannot be eternal.
2. That which attaches to something in virtue of itself but is not in the essence of that thing. This type of accident may be eternal, according to him.

Returning to the fourfold division, Cohen gives analysis of accident in Aristotle as that which is not said-of but is present-in something as a *particular* that is not substance, but accident. Contemporary metaphysicians call such entities *trope*, meaning that they are abstract particulars*.* For example, we take the statement: Socrates is white. The white here refers to a particular accident which is the white of Socrates. Another person, say Plato may be white, but his own white is particular to him just the same way the white of Socrates is particular to Socrates. This particular white that inheres in an individual substance is a non-substance particular.

### Essential and accidental predication

Cohen uses the two fundamental ontological relations, said-of and present-in, to distinguish between essential or proper predicate and contingent predicate. This is to shows clearly that something about a substance, which is not the substance itself, could be essential to it, and not just mere accident. For instance, tropes differ from the non-substance universal because *trope* could be traced to a particular substance but non-substance universal does not inhere in a particular substance. Example of non-substance universal is *whiteness* or white, not *this white*. So, this *white* (trope) is “present-in” Socrates, hence, this *white* is an accidental or contingent predication of Socrates. On the essential predication, *man* is “said-of” Socrates, hence, *man* is an essential predication of Socrates. The said-of and present-in correspond respectively to the notions of *essential* and *accidental* predications.

#### Summary of substance and accidents

The fourfold division of Aristotle’s ontology of the *Categories* could be summarized as seen below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| The Ontology of Aristotle’s Categories | |
| (a) Not said-of a subject  Not present-in a subject  “This man,”  “This horse”  *Individual substances* | (c) Not said-of a subject  Present -in a subject  “This knowledge of grammar,”  “This white”  *Individual non-substances* |
| (b) Said-of a subject  Not present- in a subject  “Man,” “horse,” “animal”  *Universal substances* | (d) Said-of a subject  Present-in a subject  “Knowledge,” “white”  *Universal non-substances* |

The above analysis explains the *Categories* of Aristotle with clear distinction between substance and accidents as belonging to different ontological categories.

Since, the material substance has parts, the question is whether the parts are substances themselves, or can substance exist if the parts are removed?

#### Bundle theory

The problem of bundle theory has root in the idea of ontological dependence of qualities on the substance. It is argued that without substance the qualities would not exist. But the question arose whether without qualities would substance exist? Without the body parts of Socrates, would there be Socrates? Or when the yellowness or circular shape of an orange is removed would there be an orange as a substance? Invariably, it seems that in this physical world, without the qualities, substance itself would not exist. But does this mean that substance is itself ontologically dependent on the qualities as well? The bundle theorists, such as David Hume, argue that substance is nothing other than the bundle or collection of properties. This problem seems to have been fanned by the conception of substance as a *substratum* or a *bare particular* upon which qualities ontologically depend for their existence.

#### **Substantial and accidental changes**

Aristotle has explained the process of change in finite beings in terms of substantial and accidental changes. He insists that there must be three basic ingredients in every case of change which are: an underlying subject, a form (i.e. a positive property) and a lack (or privation) of that form.Substantial change, for Aristotle, involves *generation* and *destruction* (corruption) of a substance, unlike accidental change which involves *alteration* of a substance. In accidental change the subject is substance, whereas in substantial change the subject is matter. The form is the form of substance. Examples of substantial change are: the bronze becomes a statue, a seed becomes a tiger, and an acorn becomes an oak tree. Aristotle posited four causes in order to explain the process of change. The four causes (αιτίες)are: Material cause: That from which a thing comes to be. Example, the bronze is the material cause of the statue. Formal cause: the form or the pattern of a thing, for instance, the shape of the statue. Efficient cause: The source of the primary principle of change or stability. Example: the man who moulds the statue. Final cause: The end (τέλος) of something. Example, the statue is for adoration.Matter and form are two of the four causes. Change consists in matter taking on (or losing) form. Efficient and final causes are used to explain why change occurs. For him, in accidental change, the essential self-identity of an individual human being is retained but in substantial change, the essential or substantial nature is lost.

Aristotle also used motion to explain the notion of change in beings. He identified three kinds of motions, thus: change in quality (alteration), change in quantity (growth or diminution), and change in place (local motion). Motion, for him, means the act of being in potency. So, motion was regarded as an imperfect actuality. St. Thomas later argued that if motion is an imperfect act, then, for every motion, there must be a cause sustaining it. This cause must be perfect in-itself. Aquinas used this argument to prove God’s existence.

1. *Eleatic principle* is from the Eleatic school of Pre-Socratic period founded by Parmenides in the 5th century B.C. at Elea, a Greek colony in southern Italy. Other important members of the school include Zeno of Elea, Melissus of Samos (born c. 470 B.C.) and (arguably) the earlier Xenophanes of Colophon (570 – 480 B.C.) [↑](#footnote-ref-0)