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ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE, TRANSCENDENTALISM AND PHENOMENALISM: ARISTOTLE'S ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS OF ONTOLOGY

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THE FIRST EXHAUSTIVELY SCIENTIFIC, speculative inquiry into the notion and nature of essence in the Western philosophical tradition is found in Aristotle's *Metaphysics.* In contrast to the earlier Greek philosophers and Plato, after considering the problem of being and change Aristotle reached the conclusion that the essential identity of material phenomena, or *ousia,* is an immanent and inseparable quality that forms the identity of each particular phenomenon. In Aristotle's concept, however, which constitutes the original form of phenomenal realism, *ousia* is not "it"-self some-*thing* or some *it.* For though its presence may certainly be speculatively implied, "it" is not. Following Aristotle, though, and for reasons extraneous to the theme of this present article, the speculative inquiry into the nature of essence and phenomenality deviated from the orientation that Aristotle initially imputed to that study, evolving in a philosophical milieu whose theoretical propensity was predominantly transcendental. This article, then, focuses on the problematic of essential identity in the Western transcendental tradition, and, more particularly, seeks to contrast and compare the essence of the transcendental philosophers against the *ousia* of Aristotle's metaphysic.

Ontology addresses the questions (1) of *Sein* as such, (2) of the presence of *Sein* in-the-world, or *Da-sein,* and (3) of the *Seinsart der Seienden,* the various ways in which *Sein* manifests itself in the world of process. This particular terminology, of course, is strictly Heidegger's.[1] But it is a type of language that is especially useful for the purposes of this present study, not only because of the exceptional visual acuity and linguistic rigor that it lends to the

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[1] Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik?* (Frankfurt: Klostermann Verlag, 1977).

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frequently recondite discourse of ontology, but also because it is a language that actually corresponds very closely to Aristotle's own peculiar metaphysical terminology.[2]

I

The Language of the Onto-metaphysical Discourse. It is indispensable to establish at the outset of any philosophical treatise, and then to sustain, a consistent linguistic environment. Heidegger's very precise, albeit poetic language concerning nothingness (*das Nichts*), the thing-that-is-there (*das Seiende*), what the thing-that-is-there is (*das Was-sein*), and the fact that the-thing-that-is-there is present in the world (*das Da-sein*), is ideally suited to that purpose.

In a poetically trenchant, but otherwise quite workable depiction of the relationship between nonbeing (potential being) and being (actual being) in his *Was ist Metaphysik?* Heidegger emphasizes the idea that objects are perceived to be there—that is, as *Da-seiende*—only because of the shadow that they throw against the emptiness of *Nichts.* It is only in contrast to *no*-thing (*Nichts*) that *some*-thing comes to light as [being] phenomenally present.[3] The type of language that Heidegger employs clearly stresses the idea that objects are defined as some-things, and not as no-things, in the process of epistemic recognition. Thus, it is only against the back-drop of *no*-thing-ness that *some*-thing is perceived to be some-*thing.*

Of course, Heidegger and Aristotle differ in their approach to the ontological discourse, and this difference is certainly significant, for while Heidegger strives to make the clearest possible theoretical distinction between *Sein* and *Nicht-sein,* Aristotle rarely touches upon the strictly theoretical concept of *Sein* as such, or if he does, the allusion generally remains peripheral and nonexplicit. As shall be seen, when Aristotle speaks of *ousia* or *ti,* he is referring uniquely to the particular and individual identity of each phenomenal entity. Although Heidegger's less restrictive philosophical use of the term should perhaps be considered typical, the strict rigor surrounding Aristotle's definition of *ousia* as the integral identity of each par-

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[2] The primary text for this article is Jaeger's edition of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957).

[3] Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik?,* 18–19.

ticular phenomenon would normally correspond quite nicely to the German linguistic concept of *Was-sein.* This is because when Aristotle defines *ousia* as *ti,* which is to say as some particular existing thing, he is not simply making a Heideggerian reference to the fact of presence in-the-world, that is, to *Da-sein,* or to the *some*-thing that is *there.* Rather, he is making a specific and much more significant reference to that which constitutes the identity of that which is there, that is, to *what* is there, or to the thing that is perceived to be some-*thing.* In Aristotle's metaphysical framework, then, ontological identity—*Was-sein* + *Da-sein*—is that quality that defines objects first as particular and very definite things, and only afterwards as things *qua* (some) objects of knowledge.

II

Transcendentalism versus Phenomenalism: The Problematic. In the *Metaphysics,* Aristotle argues that because knowledge is the epistemic recognition of a particular *Was-sein,* then the particular *Was-sein* must necessarily be present to apperception before knowledge is possible. Therefore, he concludes, it is as useless for the wise man to seek any knowledge outside of the phenomenal realm as it is impossible for the speculative philosopher to argue convincingly for transcendental knowledge. Now the substantiality of this thesis is really quite evident, and might be easily demonstrated by posing a rather simple, almost flippant rhetorical question: Is it possible to have knowledge of specific-things (this is the import of the Aristotelian *ti*) that are not apperceptually present? One possible answer to this question, of course, would be: It is possible to imagine a purple elephant with wings (supposing, of course, that one were to admit imagination as a form of knowledge). This type of sophistry, however, carries little weight when examined against Aristotle's impressively comprehensive thesis, because each of the component elements of the answer, namely, purple, elephant, and wings, has an actually-existing, in-the-world referent. Purple is a color, elephant is a common enough sight to the zoo visitor, and wings are the source of locomotion for birds and other flying things. This answer, then, does not demonstrate in any way that a truly

unknown quantity, in the sense of a non-existent or no-thing entity, has been introduced into the sphere of the phenomenally known.[4]

Transcendental thought, which continues to occupy an important place in Western philosophy, is problematic in the sense that it seeks to establish as one of its fundamental philosophical principles the idea that it is possible for certain types of transcendental "entities" ("a-things") to exist as essences (*Was-seiende*) without being defined by the structure of existence (*Da-sein*). This position continues to be maintained despite the fact that Aristotle very effectively and very convincingly disarmed the argument by showing that even if, on a strictly theoretical level, the existence of transcendental a-things should in fact be admitted, it would nonetheless be impossible ever to acquire certain knowledge concerning the identity or the what-nature of these transcendental "things."[5] For a thing (such as a transcendental essence) without identity (essence/*ousia*), which is to say a thing without the quality of being some particular thing, is no-thing; and no-things cannot become objects of knowledge in a world that is phenomenally determined. The crux of Aristotle's argument against transcendental essences or transcendental no-things is twofold: (1) All knowledge is the knowledge of some-*thing*, namely, *ousia*; and (2) the necessary nature of existing things is that they exist as some-thing,[6] and not as no-thing.

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle's first elaboration of the argument that phenomenality (*Da-sein*) is the *sine qua non* structure that allows *ousia* (*Was-sein*) to be defined in terms of the epistemic process

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[4] Kant's response to this type of argument was obviously to posit the existence of two types of knowledge: a priori knowledge and a posteriori knowledge. A priori knowledge, or the knowledge of transcendental "a-things" (for example, *Raum, Zeit*), roughly corresponds to Aristotle's speculative concept of *ousia*. But it must be remembered that unlike a priori *Wesen, ousia* is not *it*-self some thing or some what. So Aristotle's response to the Kantian notion of a priori knowledge, or knowledge of *things* transcendent, would be the same response that he gave regarding Plato's argument for the existence of transcendental Ideas: even if the Ideas should be said to exist, since they do not enter into the sphere of apperception it is ultimately impossible not only really to know whether or not they truly exist, but also to discover what they are like even if they should exist. Cf. *Metaphysics* 990b9–10.

[5] *Metaphysics* 990b9–10.

[6] Ibid., 991a14.

emerges from his exposition and criticism of Plato's doctrine of Ideas. In the analysis of the various arguments, however, it must be kept in mind that Aristotle's working hypothesis continues to be that *Da-sein* is apperceptible in the epistemic process only because it is an embodiment of some particular *Was-sein*.

As a preface to his criticism of Plato's doctrine of transcendental Ideas, Aristotle explains that Plato, in his earlier years, had been quite well versed in certain doctrines of Cratylus and Heraclitus. Those doctrines are as follows: All sensible things are incessantly in flow, and knowledge of things in flow is impossible.[7] While this statement may seem to be nothing more than an innocuous introduction to Plato's thought, Aristotle's intent is anything but innocent. For by presenting Plato's philosophical affinities as it were, Aristotle exposes what he considers to be the *faille* in Plato's transcendental edifice, and already begins bringing to bear the logical ram with which he will continue pounding away against the foundations of that speculative edifice. Although Plato himself never actually questions the real physical existence of sensible things in his writings, Aristotle astutely suggests that an important element of Plato's philosophical thinking is that he is on very familiar terms with, if not an actual partisan of, a school of thought whose major tenet is that, because they are nothing more than matter in motion, material phenomena cannot possibly be known.

The second and certainly clearer argument that Aristotle advances against Plato's transcendentalism takes form in his analysis of Plato's concept of numbers, and begins by pointing out a logical inconsistency in Plato's own theory. In this argument Aristotle points out that, according to Plato's theory, although there are Ideas for the numbers,[8] the intelligible (that is, noetic or transcendental) numbers do not have *ousiai*.[9] This clearly contradicts the transcendental hypothesis that Plato wishes to demonstrate, however, because it thus becomes impossible for him to deduce convincingly from his theory of transcending Ideas any type of existence for ideal or transcendental or noetic *ousiai*. In addition, should the Ideas, which Plato defines as things, that is, as possessing specific identity

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[7] *Metaphysics* 987a29–b1.
[8] Ibid., 990a32.
[9] Ibid.

or *ousia*, be posited as the causes of intelligible (noetic) numbers, then in spite of Plato's assertions to the contrary, intelligible numbers must necessarily have *ousiai* (actual presence as some-thing), and can therefore no longer be noetic (having only theoretical or transcendental existence).

In order to appreciate the full significance of this argument it must be remembered that Aristotle has already demonstrated, using Plato's own ideas and teachings, that the Ideas are *ousiai*,[10] and that the Ideas are the causes of the numbers.[11] Given these two premises, then, Aristotle points to what is obviously the logical flaw in Plato's transcendental theory: inherent within the notion of causality is the idea of essential (ousiatic) participation, or the unavoidable transmission of "something" of the *en auto* identity (*ousia*) of the cause (that is, the Ideas) from the cause to the caused (for example, the numbers) during the causal process.[12] Aristotle easily demonstrates the first contradiction in Plato's transcendental dialectic with this argument, because the intelligible numbers that are caused by essential Ideas must necessarily be essential, although this is a concept that Plato disallows. But then Aristotle also establishes a second contradiction, namely, that the Ideas cannot be essential, although this is a concept that Plato in fact affirms, and which is necessary to his theory. Aristotle's conclusion is thus demonstrated: If the Ideas of the numbers are not *ousiai*,[13] then Plato cannot hope either to demonstrate the existence of those Ideas, or to claim knowledge of them, because knowledge is the knowledge of some-*thing* or some *what* (*Was-sein*),[14] and not of a theoretical, transcendental no-thing.

The two most significant concepts of Aristotle's metaphysics are (1) that *ousia*, as the identity or *ti* quality of all *Da-seiende*, is the necessary structure of any possible phenomenal presence, and (2) that it is only conceivable to posit possible knowledge when the object of knowledge is *ousia*. Thus in the cadre of Aristotelian metaphysics it is both indefensible and absurd to argue that non-ousiatic (that is, transcendental) objects could possibly have existence. This is because an object is recognized as some-*thing* pre-

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[10] *Metaphysics* 990b28-34.
[11] Ibid., 987b9-10.
[12] Ibid., 987b9, 20-22, 990b30.
[13] Ibid., 990b28-34.
[14] Ibid., 991a14.

cisely because it has been formally defined in the framework that gives form and identity to phenomenal existence. In effect, then, the transcendental thesis constitutes a *contradictio in adjecto* in the cadre of Aristotelian metaphysics, because the principal argument of the transcendental thesis revolves around an appeal for an ultimately indefensible mode of existence (*Seinsart*).

Even though Aristotle, if only in the role of devil's advocate, is in fact prepared to argue hypothetically for the possibility of transcendental existence, it is impossible for him to find an argument sufficient to justify either a transcendental mode of existence, or the idea that such a mode of existence could be populated with ousiatic "things." Likewise, the theory of transcendental existence leads to an obvious contradiction with respect to knowledge and the object of knowledge because knowledge has as its sole object *ousia*, which is the quality of phenomenal integrity. So the transcendentalist, beyond entering into the simple conflict of having to defend reasonably the existence of a "thing" that is no-thing, also enters into an epistemic contradiction. This is because it is impossible either to have or to acquire knowledge of or concerning "things" that *are* not, and thus the transcendental argument becomes automatically *nul et non-avenu*. According to Aristotle, then, the most apparent contradiction in the transcendental thesis is in the configuration of the relationship between transcendental "a-entities," and the transcendental mode of "existence" that is said to define such entities. For how is it possible to argue reasonably, or even to *argue* at all, that a type of "thing" should "exist" that is at the same time *some*-thing (*ein Da-seiende*) and *no*-thing (*ein Nichts or ein Nicht-da-seiende*)?

There has been a long-standing controversy in philosophy concerning the relationship between existence and essence. For the record, of course, it must be said that the point is moot in the framework of Aristotelian phenomenalism, because the controversy obviously anticipates to some degree the overcoming of the transcendental hypothesis. The precise point of contention in the controversy has hinged upon the notion of sequence or chronology; for the crux of the matter invariably revolves around whether the fact of being-there precedes what is there, or vice-versa. In terms of that particular controversy, the position of this paper shall be the position defended by Aristotle. That position is that the phenomenal existence of an object must precede the possibility of the object being

given in knowledge, knowledge being understood as a recognition of *Was-sein*. This is because given the structure of phenomenal apperception, the fact that an object exists must precede the recognition of what that object is. Likewise, because knowledge can only be knowledge of essence, it necessarily follows that in order to be known, an object must be essential, which is to say that it must possess particular identity. In Aristotelian metaphysics only *Was-seiende* are knowable.

This brings us, then, to the question concerning the objective of the metaphysical endeavor. The principal focus of metaphysics as a speculative science is to isolate the identity or the what-nature of phenomena. In fact, the notion of what-ness or essence has been given many names in the historical unfolding of speculative thought: *ousia* (Aristotle), quiddity (Thomas Aquinas), *das Wesen* or *das Wasgehalt* (Kant), and *das Was-sein* (Heidegger). Despite the diversity in nomenclature, each one of the various designations for essence is in fact a useful linguistic vehicle that points its signifying finger to a single, in-fact type of quality that permeates the specific phenomenon, and which defines the boundaries of that phenomenon's presence in-the-world.

If Aristotle is to be believed, at the heart of metaphysical discourse lies a primal antinomy, an, as it were, onto-epistemic conundrum. It was this speculative conundrum that originally provoked, and which still continues to justify by its relevance, the philosophical inquiry into the nature of being, because it focuses upon the ambiguity surrounding the epistemic process.

Observation teaches us that phenomena are constantly changing "things," and yet the exact nature of that which is known in or about phenomena, which are themselves so obviously and profoundly in a state of constant transformation, is difficult to determine. Even the term "thing," for example, which linguistically corresponds to what is loosely considered a static ontological state, is an equivocal misnomer, or at the very least an ontologically inadequate description; for far from being ontologically static, the objects of knowledge are incessantly in-change, and are therefore no-things.[15] Given the

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[15] The language of this argument is critical, and so much the more because errors have a tendency to introduce themselves into arguments simply out of looseness of language. A. J. Ayer makes precisely this point in his consideration of certain ontological arguments. However, while his

irrefutable first premise of metaphysics, then, which is nothing more than an observation concerning the transitory nature of the material world, Aristotle's question concerning what is known in or about inconstant things is both reasonable and eminently pertinent.

The process of transformation that defines the world, a process that is nothing less than the exoskeleton of *Sein* and of which Time is the gauge, characterizes intimately and marks profoundly everything clothed in and defined by the framework of *Sein*. This process has many faces and many names: Maya, the veil of illusion, *das Werden*, flux, process, and change. Sensible things—a term that defines the set of all things belonging to the phenomenal order—are in a perpetual state of process, always changing, always becoming (other). Yet in spite of the interminable change that ravages their surface, sensible things never become (other) than what (*ti*) each particular thing fundamentally is.

What is it, then, exactly, that is known in the knowing of an object? Is it even possible to have knowledge of an object qua some*thing* if that thing is incessantly changing? Or is it, rather, that one knows a thing as it is in-change, continually renewing one's acquaintance with it? Could it be that the transcendentalists are correct after all when they say that one actually knows some-"thing" beyond or behind or transcending the thing that, precisely because

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point is well taken in this specific instance, Ayer is otherwise unconvincing in his empiricist critique of what he calls speculative philosophy, or transcendental metaphysics. His criticism reveals itself to be directed only toward the very specific transcendental metaphysical orientation of certain Western philosophers. The argument that is of particular ontological interest is Ayer's contention that metaphysicians, by which term he means transcendentalists, make the same type of linguistic mistake that is commonly made when one speaks of the idea of truth: "The traditional conception of truth as a 'real quality' or a 'real relation' is due, like most philosophical mistakes, to a failure to analyze sentences correctly. There are sentences . . . in which the word truth seems to stand for something real; and this leads the speculative philosopher to enquire what this something is. Naturally he fails to obtain a satisfactory answer, since his question is illegitimate. For our analysis has shown that the word truth does not stand for anything in the way which such a question requires"; A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1947), 89. The analogy is clear, and Ayer has demonstrated the point that precisely the same type of error is made by those who, in the pursuit of ontological questions, posit being as a thing, that is as the object of possible knowledge (*Language*, 42–3). Again, however, his criticism is directed primarily toward those philosophers who pursue "the wisdom concerning the origin of phenomena" transcendentally (*Metaphysics* 992a24–25).

it is constantly changing, *is* not, and which therefore cannot be known; that is, some-"thing" that is not itself empirically given in knowledge, and therefore not subject to constant change and transformation, but which, for this very same reason, is also not any thing? Yet even if this theory should in fact correspond to the truth of the matter, Aristotle very convincingly argues that transcendental "things" can never be or become epistemic objects. At best, the ultimate truth of the transcendental theory must forever remain unsubstantiated. At worst, there are other and certainly better theories that adequately explain the nature of the phenomena at hand, and which are not plagued with the foibles besetting the transcendental hypothesis.

Of course the fact that it is so difficult to obtain truly adequate responses to these particular types of speculative questions reveals the continued importance of the onto-metaphysical discourse in philosophy's search for speculative truth. For these types of speculative questions arise out of an immediately significant experience of life that Heidegger calls an *"in-die-Nähe-Kommen zum Wesentlichen aller Dinge."*[16] And the incongruity of many of the theories that have been tentatively proffered in response to these questions reveals the lacunae that continue to persist in even the most rudimentary domains of man's understanding of his world. In its own particular fashion, then, and within a very precise and definite framework, the onto-metaphysical discourse seeks to resolve speculatively at least part of the problem concerning what is known of objects that are in a state of constant transformation.

It is Aristotle's contention that the objective of speculative philosophy is to resolve precisely this conflict between practical observations concerning that which is the evident process of the world, and speculative inquiries concerning the nature of human knowledge. The most obvious practical observation, of course, is that the phenomenal world and all that is defined by materiality is in a state of constant flux. This observation naturally leads to speculative inquiries concerning *how* one can have knowledge of changing things, and, subsequently, concerning *what* one can know in a changing thing. For though it seems impossible to have knowledge of things

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[16] "A coming-into-the-proximity of that which is essential to all things"; *Was ist Metaphysik?*, 8.

that are constantly changing, it also certainly seems true that we do, in fact, have knowledge of or about or from those things.[17] Thus there is the metaphysical conundrum: if that which is constantly changing *is* not, and cannot therefore be known, what is it then that we are grasping in the knowledge of material objects? According to Aristotle, Plato's reply to this first metaphysical question, namely, the transcendental Ideas, shows itself to be speculatively inadequate both in the weakness of its logical necessity and in its transcendental approach to the problem.

In his criticism of Plato's doctrine of transcendental Ideas Aristotle not only demonstrates the inadequacy of Plato's dialectical method as a means of arguing for the existence of transcendental Ideas, but through a consistent application of that very same type of questioning procedure to Plato's entire theory,[18] he also reveals certain very damaging logical antagonisms within the network of arguments with which Plato substantiates his own theory.

Now the method of the dialectician is such that the conclusions of any given argument are ultimately won through an accumulation of definitions obtained by a refining process of questioning and defining. Aristotle contends that this method of "argument by definitions" was first employed by Socrates in his various dialogues; but he adds that Socrates was interested primarily in problems of an ethical order, and not so much in the types of problems associated with a philosophical or theoretical understanding of the natural order.[19] Even though Socrates lacks interest in the natural sciences, continues Aristotle, it is still obvious that in his consideration of ethical problems Socrates was trying to isolate a most universal or, as it were, most common element. Thus, Socrates was the first of the Greek philosophers actually to employ the method of reasoning through definitions.[20] This method was subsequently adopted by his pupil, Plato, but with the very significant difference that Plato did not apply the dialectic to ethical problems, but rather to speculative or metaphysical problems. Aristotle, therefore, will begin his critical analysis of Plato's theory by addressing precisely this

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[17] *Metaphysics* 987b6–7.
[18] Ibid., 987b31–33.
[19] Ibid., 987b1.
[20] Ibid., 987b3.

problem of methodology, because he maintains that problems of a speculative nature cannot be satisfactorily resolved through dialectical argument.

Aristotle's first major criticism of Plato's transcendental theory is that the choice of the dialectical methodology is inappropriate given the specific type of speculative problem Plato is attempting to resolve. Although the dialectical procedure may be convincingly used to demonstrate or to justify ethical arguments, as per Socrates' use of the dialectic, Plato's endeavors to argue dialectically for the "existence" of nonmaterial or transcendental things are both inappropriate and unsuccessful.[21] Of course the reason for this lack of success is that transcendental "things," precisely because they are *a*-phenomenal, are also and irremediably beyond the possibility of either dialectical demonstration or justification.

When he argues that Plato tackles the speculative quandary of knowledge in a world of transition already convinced that it is impossible to find the general definition of sensible things—that is, their *ousia* or *Was-sein*—in the sensible things themselves, Aristotle is obviously seeking to discredit Plato's transcendental hypothesis by attacking the speculative validity of Plato's dialectical method and transcendental orientation. This is because in contrast to the Aristotelian method of speculative argument, which concludes that the general definition (*ousia*) of sensible phenomena is actually an integral principle of the sensible phenomena, Plato thought it possible to discover dialectically the definition of material things in that which, because it is beyond the transient framework defined by *Sein*, is necessarily immaterial and therefore unchanging (namely, in the transcendental Ideas).

It is one of the premises of Plato's transcendental hypothesis that the object of knowledge in a world of process cannot be subject to the material vicissitudes that define that world of process. So, of course, the transcendentally oriented conclusions that necessarily follow from such a first premise are inevitable. For if it is true, as Plato assumes, that the object of knowledge cannot be a principle *of* the material things themselves, then the only conclusion possible is that the what-principle known in the knowing of material things must be grounded in something *beyond* the particular material thing,

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[21] *Metaphysics* 987b5.

in some-"thing" that is immaterial. Thus, by proceeding from definition to definition and from inference to inference, Plato finally happens upon the dialectically inferred transcendental what- or ideal-object of knowledge. This is an immaterial entity that is both exempt from the material conditions governing the phenomenal world, and yet somehow linked[22] to the specific material thing of which it is said to be the essence.[23]

Thus, Plato's response to the question of essence is that only the transcendental and transcending Ideas, which must of *dialectical* necessity be both eternal and immutable, can possibly function as both the adequate logical ground for knowledge and as explicative cause[24] of the material world. So where Plato concludes that transcendentally existent Ideas must be the objects of knowledge, Aristotle proffers what ultimately shall be the more convincing argument: *ousia*, or the essential structure of phenomenality itself, is the sole object of knowledge.

III

Ousia in Aristotelian Metaphysics. It was suggested earlier that the general language of Heidegger's ontological discourse reflects to some extent the type of language used by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*. While this similitude is indeed helpful in clearly laying out the parameters of the ontological discourse, there is nonetheless a significant and unmistakable conflict of emphasis between Heidegger's orientation and Aristotle's ontological orientation. This

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[22] The manner in which the Platonic Idea-causes are linked to their material effects shall later be the focus of what is perhaps Aristotle's most vehement and efficacious argument against transcendentalism.

[23] *Metaphysics* 987b5-8.

[24] Aristotle attacks the theory that the Ideas are the efficient causes of sensible things by pointing out that the Ideas are said to be immutable and unmoving (990a10), and therefore they cannot be the causes of movement in other things. Since Plato contends that the Ideas are immobile, Aristotle asks the most logical of all questions: What is it, then, that eventually unites the Ideas with the sensible things of which they are said to be the causes, thereby creating movement both in the Ideas and in the sensible things? According to Plato, in the Ideas themselves there is neither cause of movement nor cause of change. Cf. *Metaphysics* 988b1-7, 991a11-14.

conflict of emphasis becomes important when each thinker is finally considered within the framework of his own personal philosophical and linguistic context.

It has been seen that Heidegger makes a very useful distinction between the notions of *Sein* and *Da-sein* by highlighting *Sein* against the backdrop of *Nichts*. Heidegger's technique—a juxtaposing of the positive against the negative or the light against the dark—is actually borrowed from an idea that was originally expressed by Parmenides, and Heidegger uses the technique primarily to highlight visually the argument of *Sein*. Aristotle, on the other hand, seldom directly addresses the problematic of *Sein—that* something is there—but rather confines his analyses almost exclusively to delineating the notion of *ousia*, of *what* is there—a notion that embraces simultaneously *Was-sein* and *Da-sein*. Consequently, the more appropriate German rendering for Aristotle's concept of *ousia* is neither *Sein* nor *Da-sein*, but *Was-sein*. This is because as a reference to empirical presence or presence in-the-world, *ousia*, like the Heideggerian notion of *Was-sein*, points to the *identity* of things as they stand in-the-world, and not to the *fact* that they are in-the-world. Aristotle further enriches the significant content of the term *ousia*[25] by referring to it diversely as *ti estin*,[26] *to einai*,[27] *to ti en einai*,[28] and *ti estai to einai*.[29]

Ousia is Aristotle's response to the question, "What is it, exactly, that is knowable in a phenomenal object?" In order, however, to grasp the full import of what is encompassed in the notion of *ousia*, it is important to distinguish clearly the two principal postulates of Aristotle's argument. In his explanation of *ousia*, Aristotle first posits the very real existence of the object as phenomenal *thing*, and it is only afterwards that he emphasizes that the principle that makes each individual thing some *particular* thing, is the essential definition or *ousia* of each thing. This distinction is not without significance, because an inherent element of Aristotle's concept of *ousia* is the assumption of *Da-sein*; and any adequate resolution of

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[25] *Metaphysics* 987a20, 24, 988a11, 988b25, 998a16, 34, 998b4, 29, 991a1, 994a11, and 994b17, to cite only a few examples.

[26] Ibid., 987a20, 24, 988a9–16, 34, 988b4, 25, 991a1, 994a11, 994b17.

[27] Ibid., 987a26, 991b4, 993b27, 29, 994a27, 994b27.

[28] Ibid., 983a28, 987a34, 988b5.

[29] Ibid., 991a1.

the metaphysical conundrum must ultimately account not only for the phenomenality of the specific thing that is there (*da*), but also for the fact that it is some particular thing (*Was*). With *ousia*, then, Aristotle rebuts the transcendental proposition that it is necessary to posit an-other, transcending "entity" in order to answer the question concerning *what* is knowable in a phenomenal object.

Likewise, for a clear understanding of the concept of *ousia* it is important to make the appropriate distinction between Aristotle's notion of a specific thing (*to on, das Seiende*), and his notion of beingness or being (*to einai, Sein*).[30] For while the manner in which Aristotle employs the terms *to on* and *to einai* may seem at times to be synonymous linguistically with his use of *ousia*,[31] the meanings conveyed in the expressions *to on* and *to einai* are really quite distinct from the principle that Aristotle seeks to isolate with the term *ousia*. In contrast to *ousia*, then, *to on* and *to einai* seem to contain for Aristotle at least a linguistic, if not a conceptual appeal to the more concrete presence of phenomena as actual empirical objects, being expressions that focus more on the fact that an existing thing exists than on the nature or identity of the particular thing that exists. So while it is important to be aware of the distinction that exists between *to on* and *to einai*, the more important distinction, the distinction that is truly fundamental to Aristotle's metaphysics, is the one that he systematically makes between the *fact* that an existing thing is *there* (*to on/to einai, Da-sein*), and the *identity* of that existing thing (*ousia, Was-sein*). He draws a very categorical line of demarcation between *to einai* and *ousia*, especially when the distinction is of specific relevance to the idea that he is developing. *Ousia*, then, is actually much closer to the notion of *ti* than to either the notion of *to on* or *to einai;* for unlike either *to on* or *to einai, ti* refers principally to the *notion* of essential identity, and only indirectly to particularly determined *things*.

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[30] The Aristotelian *to einai* should not be confused with the more significant expression *to ti en* (*estai*) *einai*, for they speak to two entirely different concepts, both of which are crucial in Aristotle's ontology. Cf. *Metaphysics* 987a26, 991b4, 993b27 and 29, 994a27, b27.

[31] Although the terms are not exactly identical in meaning, the linguistic similarity between *to on* and *to einai* is amply substantiated in the first book of the *Metaphysics* 987a26, 991b4, 993b27, 29, 994a27, b27. The difference in the conceptual nuance that Aristotle associates with each notion individually, however, is considerable.

To reiterate the Aristotelian position, *to einai* points to the notion of particular existence, and addresses specifically the question of *ti* from the point of view of its existence, whereas *ousia* speaks to the question of the intrinsic identity of the particular thing that is present in-the-world, and is an interrogation into the what-nature or essential structure of empirically present things. Further evidence that clearly indicates that Aristotle at least implicitly assumes the validity of the distinction between *to on* or *to einai* and *ousia* is a rather curious argument that he brings to bear against those philosophers who advance the "it-self" (*en auto*) as a first principle.

In his critical exposition of the Presocratic philosophers and their speculative search for the first causes of the material world, Aristotle was able to show that, without exception, each of the earlier thinkers who posited at least two or more of the four principles—fire, water, air, and earth—failed to establish the "common element" of those principles. He drew the expected conclusion that any attempt to reason logically for the existence of "things of like composition" from such disparate principles as fire and water must inevitably fail. Likewise, he argues that any attempt to make the numbers proceed from the existence of the One (*ontos tou enos*), as opposed to making them proceed from the essence (*ousia*) of the One, must also fail. This is because if it is true that the numbers come from the existence of the One, that is, from the fact that the One exists, it would be impossible for those numbers to be *ousiai*, or to be possessed of specific identity, because—and here he demonstrates the contradiction of the argument—those who argue that the numbers are generated by the existence of the One, also argue that the numbers are *ousiai*.[32] While this argument is perhaps not without some obscurity, it is certainly more than sufficient to demonstrate that Aristotle acknowledges, both linguistically and notionally, a fundamental distinction between *to on* and *ousia*.

Aristotle first actually introduces his concept of *ousia* in the *Metaphysics* when he establishes his list of the first principles and causes.[33] In fact, the first of the four causes that he introduces is *ousia* or the *to ti en einai*. Aristotle justifies listing *ousia* as a cause, and indeed as the first and formal cause, by making the observation

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[32] *Metaphysics* 992a6-10.
[33] Ibid., 983a24-32.

that the concept of *ousia* is necessary to the logic that would take the *raison d'être* of a thing (that is, its *ratio* or *dia ti*), which is the reason "for which" a thing exists, to its ultimate or highest rationale (*eis ton logon eschaton*). Of course the most ultimate or first *raison d'être* must of necessity be a cause or principle. Aristotle has also gathered from his study that, among the earlier philosophers, only Plato seems to have hit upon, albeit vaguely, a causal notion of essence similar to Aristotle's *ousia*. For, says Aristotle, when Plato says that the Ideas *tou ti estin* are also causes of other things, he is really saying that *ousia* is a cause. It is clear, however, says Aristotle, that Plato had only a vague grasp of the notion of *ousia*.[34]

Among the Presocratic philosophers, then, only Plato seems to have grasped the notion of *ousia*, but his understanding of that notion seems to be more or less confined to an intuition, and was thus imprecise and inarticulate. Thus in his summary of the different causes advanced by the early thinkers, Aristotle states quite simply that not one of the natural philosophers, and not even Plato, advanced *ousia* as a first cause.[35] Although several causes were in fact advanced by these philosophers, no one advanced either *ousia* or any other cause sufficient to be a first cause. Among those, for example, who advance the Ideas as causes, Aristotle argues that the Ideas were posited neither as the matter of sensible things (and could not therefore be considered material causes), nor even as the source of the principle of movement (so the Ideas obviously could not be posited as efficient causes). Instead, the Ideas were said to cause the *ousia* of each particular *ti*—and here Aristotle is thinking specifically of Plato—and the One was said to produce the *ousia* in the Ideas.[36] As far as Aristotle is concerned, then, whatever might otherwise be the merits of Plato's intuition concerning the *ti en einai*, his philosophical "flair" was insufficient compensation for a misapplied dialectical procedure.

In a more general criticism of the causes the Presocratic philosophers advanced, Aristotle says that the earlier philosophers were primarily attempting to explain the causes of generation and corruption, and that they even advanced the cause of movement or the efficient cause. Furthermore, he says, they sought to provide an

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[34] *Metaphysics* 988a10.
[35] Ibid., 988a34-35.
[36] Ibid., 988b5-6.

explanation for other various and sundry aspects of natural philosophy. Yet they all failed, without exception, to grasp the notion of *ousia* as a cause.[37] Aristotle then makes a very specific reference to a metaphor that was used by Empedocles; and although he is clearly critical of the obscurity of Empedocles' imagery, he nonetheless concedes that the concept of *ousia* was at least notionally implicit in Empedocles' thinking, albeit in an extremely muddled fashion. As it turns out, this obscure Empedoclean metaphor, which Aristotle says belongs to philosophy's youth and lack of experience, will ultimately prove to be the key to the concept of *ousia*. For despite the charge of obscurity and simplicity, Aristotle maintains that when Empedocles makes the statement, "a bone exists analogically" (*ostoun tō logō einai*), he is, in reality, making an allusion to the essence of the thing, or to the *ti en einai* of the bone.[38] This seemingly unobtrusive passage, then, will ultimately be of tremendous significance when it comes time finally to define Aristotle's own concept of *ousia;* for the metaphor that Empedocles employs does not disclose the specific *ousia*-quality as a particular type of idea or object or "thing," but rather, it reveals general phenomenality in terms of essential analogy. The *ousia* that was but darkly seen by Empedocles is nothing less than the perception of phenomenal contextuality.

Another passage in which Aristotle directly addresses the causal aspect of *ousia* is in the addendum[39] to the first book of the *Metaphysics*. In this passage Aristotle refers again to the study he made of the earlier philosophers in which he managed to uncover, in the midst of the diversity in their opinions concerning the possible first causes, two generally agreed upon causes. Aristotle then analyzes these two causes in terms of causal priority, both because ultimate anteriority, that is, the quality of being an itself-uncaused cause, is a necessary quality of a first cause, and because he wishes to demonstrate that of all the causes advanced, only *ousia* can possibly satisfy the logical necessities of being a first cause. Unfortunately, however, he only develops this argument in a fragmentary fashion.[40]

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[37] *Metaphysics* 988b29.
[38] Ibid., 993a17-18.
[39] Ibid., 994a10-19.
[40] Cf. book 8 of the *Metaphysics* for the fuller argument.

He begins his demonstration of ultimate anteriority first by summarizing the ideas of the earlier philosophers, and then by showing that each one of the philosophers whom he has studied has advanced in one way or another, either implicitly or explicitly, the idea (1) that there is some kind of beginning (*archē tis*), and (2) that the causes of phenomena are not indefinite or unlimited (*ouk apeira*) either in their generation from an Idea (*kat' eidos*) or by continuing in a straight line.[41] Aristotle then justifies a further conclusion: in and of themselves, neither the material cause nor the efficient cause nor the final cause are of a sort to continue indefinitely. He justifies this conclusion by arguing that the Presocratic philosophers were the first-born thinkers of philosophy, and that if even they, in their vague understanding of the causes of phenomena, were able to understand that the causes they advanced are limited in nature, then it must be evident to anyone that those causes are in fact finite and limited. As for the formal cause, however, instead of arguing, as he does with the other causes, that *ousia* cannot continue indefinitely in a straight line, he reverses the direction of the argument, and by appealing to the common Presocratic assumption that there must have been some kind of beginning, he argues that *ousia* must be anterior to that which it causes. From this, of course, he concludes that the *ti en einai* is by definition a beginning, or a first cause.

At least part of the answer, then, to the question concerning what *ousia* is for Aristotle, must be that it is the first cause of empirical things. Likewise, *ousia* is by nature uncaused, which is to say that it is not "it"-self the object of any causal relationship. But, then, this is only logical, because *ousia* is not some-*thing* to be caused, but simply a description of the manner in which sensible things *are* in-the-world. Furthermore, Aristotle makes it quite clear in his criticism of Plato's theory of Ideas that speculative *ousia* is not merely ersatz for the transcendental Ideas. Because not only is *ousia* anterior to the Ideas in the causal chain, being the first cause, but the *ousiai* of the Ideas are in fact, according to Plato, caused by the One.

In the brief reference that Aristotle makes to Empedocles' image of the "bone being in analogy," he clearly acknowledges that there is also a certain analogon quality to the concept of *ousia*. But he

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[41] *Metaphysics* 994a1.

opposes the argument that the concept of ana-logical *ousia* is in any way similar to the dialectical thesis of those who taught that the Ideas, too, exist analogically. For though the *ti en einai* does, in fact, have an analogon quality, the manner in which Aristotle argues for *ousia* as analogon[42] must be sharply distinguished from the manner in which the other philosophers argue for the analogical existence of the Ideas. Apart from the notional differences, then, that obviously separate *ousia* from the transcendental Ideas, the principal dissimilarity between ana-logical *ousia* and ana-logical transcendental Ideas, is apparent from Aristotle's criticism that some of those who advance analogical Ideas are, in reality, deriving Ideal existence from a "third man" form of argument.[43] It is, therefore, primarily due to the form of the argument that Aristotle rejects any similarity between analogous Ideas and *ousia* as an analogical concept, because the *ousiai* of sensible phenomena cannot reasonably be said to exist outside of those things to which the *ousiai* give identity.[44]

In a more exhaustive assessment of the argument of analogous Ideas, Aristotle criticizes the analogon-Idea—and once again his argument is primarily directed against Plato—by defining what it means to be an analogy, or to be implicated in an ana-logical mode of existence. For it is Aristotle's contention that, by simple definition, those things that exist by analogy *are* in that they are in relationship (*pros ti*) with or to something else.[45] What this means is that an Idea *is* in that it is in-relationship, which is also to say that it *is not* if it is not *pros ti*. By way of illustration, let us say that there is an analogon-Idea "it-Self" (*to pros ti tou kat' auto*). If,

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[42] Theophrastus also bears witness to the importance of analogy in the tradition of speculative thought (see his *Metaphysics* 1.4, 11–13). For a full development of the concept and language (for example, analogous versus analogon) of analogy, especially in respect to the Aristotelian linguistic tradition, refer to Cardinal Cajetan's *The Analogy of Names and the Concept of Being* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1959).

[43] Cf. *Metaphysics* 991b1-3. Alexander, cited by David Ross, *Metaphysics* 1, pp. 194–5, explains the third man argument as follows: "since a particular man is like the ideal man in being a man, there must be a third man in which both share. . . ." Ross adds that, "[t]he 'third man' argument depends on the positing of the [I]dea as an individual substance outside the particular and imitated by them." Cf. *Metaphysics* 990b17.

[44] *Metaphysics* 990b20, 991b1-3.

[45] Ibid., 990b16.

as Plato has argued, Ideas *are qua* analogons, then the set of analogon-Ideas are analogous to the set of "them-Self" Ideas. Yet how can it be possible, even though the necessity is incontrovertible, that an analogous Idea should be anterior to the "it-Self" Idea, thereby making the analogue (which is by definition causally posterior) prior to the analogon (which is by definition causally anterior)?[46] For as the designation of an *auto*, if there is an analogon-Idea—as opposed to an analogous Idea—called "it-Self," then there must also necessarily exist another Idea that functions as the causal Idea for the "it-Self" Idea. In clearer terms, a shadow cannot be said to exist prior to that which casts the shadow; neither can it be said to be the cause of that thing of which it is the shadow. Yet such must indeed be the case if one contends that Ideas exist ana-logically.

Aristotle does not restrict his criticism of the Ideas simply to the concept of analogous Ideas, however, but harshly criticizes as well the teachings of those who argue that the Ideas are analogons or *ur*-paradigms. In this further criticism of transcendental Ideas, in order to illustrate the fatal logical defect of transcendentally nuanced types of argument, Aristotle once again postulates the hypothetical Idea "it-Self" (*en auto*), but this time he shall posit "it-Self" as the ousiatic paradigm for the set of things that resemble each other, or which are analogous. He advances this hypothetical Idea to show that it is at least logically absurd, if not outright impossible, that the *ousia* of a thing—because the Ideas are *ousiai* for Plato—should be distinct from that of which it is said to be the essential identity.[47]

While this last argument certainly serves to finish off the theory of ana-logical Ideas, it also serves to reveal yet another aspect of the Aristotelian concept of *ousia*. For with this argument Aristotle makes it clear that, although *ousia* does not always strictly describe the *ti* aspect of the phenomenal object (although this is also evident from the epistemological emphasis that he places upon the dilemma concerning knowledge and change), more often than not it does in fact refer to that which is immediately grasped, or epistemically recognized in knowledge, namely, the essential unity of "thing" *qua* specific thing.

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[46] *Metaphysics* 990b20-21.
[47] Ibid., 991b1-3.

Both Plato and Aristotle sought to isolate speculatively and define the "what" quantity that is known in constantly changing objects. But where Plato makes a dialectical departure from phenomena in an attempt to expose what he thinks must be the true object of knowledge or the most ultimate essential identity, the Ideas, Aristotle chooses the more terrestrial path by grounding himself in phenomenal existence, and by deducing from the phenomena themselves that which is known about the phenomena, namely, *ousia*. In contrast to the immaterial and other-worldly transcendental Ideas, Aristotle's *ousia* has neither location beyond material objects, nor is it transmitted through the vehicle of material *Da-sein*. *Ousia* is not a thing, but the description of the state of objects *qua* objects in-the-world; and precisely because it is not itself some-*thing*, it can never become a possible object of knowledge.

What, then, is *ousia* for Aristotle? Broadly speaking, one can define *ousia* in the Aristotelian metaphysic as essential integrity. *Ousia* is both the structural integrity that gives shape to sensible phenomena in-process, and that which somehow makes sensible objects sensible without "it"-self being or ever becoming sensible. *Ousia* is fundamental identity; it is the necessary structure of being. As such, it is automatically the *sine qua non* condition of the epistemic encounter.

At this point it is necessary to return to Empedocles' metaphor in order to discover exactly what Aristotle understands in the statement, "bone exists analogically," and precisely how he relates that statement to his concept of *ousia*. For the conclusion that Aristotle draws from that metaphor, namely, that Empedocles was referring to the "essence of the thing," is obviously going to be extremely significant to understanding Aristotle's ontology.

The first and most obvious idea suggested by the Empedoclean metaphor may be easily formulated in terms of a ratio: bone is to the body as *ousia* is to the empirical phenomenon. Now bones are that which, although unperceived, maintain the inherent structure or form of the surrounding body. Without this internal form-giving frame to impress its design onto the softer parts of the body, the body would no longer have the essential integrity of body as an organized whole; losing its structured-ness, the body would become amorphous. The metaphor also suggests a second idea, however, which is already implicit in the first idea: bones obviously accomplish their structure-giving work unperceived. This is to say, in keeping with the language of the Empedoclean metaphor, that in the same

way in which bones, without any apparent presence, give integrity to the overall structure of the organism, likewise *ousia* provides the structure for empirical phenomenality without in any way manifesting itself—for *ousia* has no "it"-self—other than through the structural integrity of specific things. *Ousia*, then, is the internal framework of *Sein*, and defines each given thing as a specific thing in-the-world.

The study of Empedocles' metaphor is extremely helpful in understanding the various nuances of Aristotle's concept of *ousia*, and particularly those concerning the manner in which *ousia* relates to material *Da-sein*. This is because both *ousia* and the Empedoclean bone participate in the same significant mode of existence-by-analogy. The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from the assertion that a thing exists in-relationship is that the thing in question (bone) exists as an integral element of a particularly defined structure. To exist analogically is to define existence within the confines of a determined and determining context. Yet to say that a bone exists in relation to the body is not to say that the bone ceases to exist physically when it is no longer within that defining context. A bone that serves as a sewing tool, for example, does not cease to be a bone simply because it no longer gives structure to an animal body. Rather, when it is no longer a part of its originally defining and therefore most significant context, the particular bone is still bone and a bone; but it has ceased to fulfill its intended purpose or *telos*. Thus bone *qua* needle, which stands in contrast to bone *qua* skeletal support, ceases to be the realization of its original contextual significance. Bone *qua* needle is no longer that which it was originally designed to be, namely, a supportive element in the body's internal framework.

The significance of Empedocles' metaphor is not only that it clarifies the distinction that Aristotle makes between the transcendental mode of existence (the Ideas) and the speculative mode of existence (*ousia*), but that it also introduces the idea of essential inseparability, which is to say the idea of existence that is significantly and inseparably bound to its immediately determining context. This is because like Empedocles' bone, Aristotle's *ousia* exists in-relationship to a specific, ontologically determined context. It exists within the concisely defined context of each specific *Da-seiende*, and it cannot be said to exist contextually, or according to its intended purpose, apart from that particular signifying context. In the language of the Empedoclean metaphor, then, *ousia* exists as

the form-giving frame or identifying structure of each particular phenomenon, but only in the sense that it is the unifying principle of each particular sensible thing.

Another quality of *ousia* is that just like the bone that can cease to be when it is removed from its natural context, *ousia* too can be lost or destroyed. *Ousia,* or original essential integrity, is a notion of speculative origin; and it is systematically the unforeseen and unperceived victim in the deconstructionist philosophy of the empirical sciences.[48] For though it is not "it"-self in any way subject to verification by means of the methodological tools of empirical analysis, it is nonetheless the inevitable victim of the process of analytical deconstruction. This is because at some point in the deconstruction process, the essential integrity of the original object (a chair) is lost, and a new object—with a new essential integrity—is created (pieces-of-a-chair).

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[48] The author is currently working on an article concerning the limitations of the empirical methodology, which, as an epistemic methodology, is only as valid as the weakest premises of its reductionist dogma. One of the arguments of the article is particularly relevant to Aristotle's concept of *ousia:* "A . . . limitation in the reductionist procedure is that, although the researcher has perhaps acquired relevant knowledge concerning the interior material relationships or composition of an object, such as a chair, through its material deconstruction, he has also at some point in his deconstruction lost or destroyed the object of his study. For in reducing the chair, or any other sensible object, to its component parts, there necessarily comes a point in the reducing process after which the chair can no longer be said to be the chair that was originally at hand, nor even chair as such, but rather pieces-of-a-chair. In material deconstruction, chair-ness as a particular identity inevitably vanishes, and a new particular identity, pieces-of-a-chair-ness, is created, thereby changing (or destroying) the original object of the inquiry. Yet at what point does a chair cease being this particular chair, or even chair altogether? After the removal of one leg? There are chairs with three legs. After the removal of all the legs? the arms? the back? the seat? So although it might not be possible to pinpoint precisely the exact instant when the original chair is lost, and when pieces-of-a-chair is created, the observer, or whoever might wish to sit in the chair, will certainly recognize the relevant difference between the two.

"The essential identity, or the what-this-thing-is quality of a chair is intimately and inseparably woven into the empirical *Da-sein* of each particular chair; but the reductionist method of empirical analysis is simply incapable of the speculative refinement necessary to grasp that identity. For the deconstructionist procedure is based upon a *parti pris* that sees in the actual physical phenomenon the adequate ground of knowledge. This means that any phenomenon is seen to be fully explicable in terms of its physicality. Yet if it is true that phenomena present themselves as objects

IV

Conclusion. Up to this point Aristotle has argued that the first or formal cause is *ousia*, which, like the Empedoclean bone-in-the-context-of-the-body, may be defined in terms of ratio and context. The final step, then, in isolating and defining Aristotle's concept of *ousia* is to determine the exact nature of the "thing," *ousia*. What is *ousia* itself?

Most of Aristotle's criticisms concerning the theories of Plato and the Presocratic philosophers have revolved around the question of sequential priority. This was, for example, the nature of the charge that Aristotle leveled against Plato's concept of analogical Ideas, where the shadow, or analogous Idea, was shown to be prior to the object that was casting the shadow, namely, the analogon-Idea. Aristotle applied this same criticism of illogical sequence to the theories of each one of the natural philosophers, because they all advance, each one in his own fashion, certain elements—fire, water, earth, and air—as primary elements or first causes. Likewise, each of these philosophers spoke of the generation of things, and they all maintained that each generation was a reciprocal generation from some other generation.[49] Therefore he concludes, and only logically so (because the crux of his argument is to determine the first cause in the causal sequence), that a critical step in the argument of reciprocal generation, or of any type of generation for that matter, must necessarily be to distinguish the posterior generation from the more anterior or earlier generation.

The natural philosophers were interested primarily in the question of the physical generation of bodies. So, argues Aristotle, if they are correct in advancing the types of causes they do (fire, water, earth, and air), then it ought to be demonstrable that there should exist one element, itself the most fundamental or primal of the

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of analysis only in terms of their material presence, and if it is also true that the material composition of objects is in fact insufficient in and of itself to disclose the full identity or essence of those objects, then it must be concluded that the reductionist procedure of strictly empirical analysis cannot reasonably be defended as a method capable of determining essential significance"; D. Wyatt Aiken, "Scientific Empiricism and the Philosophical Inquiry. A Case for the Speculative Methodology" (unpublished article).

[49] *Metaphysics* 988b30.

elements, from which all subsequent bodies or elements are generated.[50] Logic demands, of course, that this most fundamental of all elements must be not only of finer composition than the other elements, but indeed be of the finest composition, and must be the lightest of the elements. Yet, says Aristotle, none of the demonstrations by which the natural philosophers defend their hypothetical causes are logically consequent. After showing how the early philosophers failed to demonstrate the logically necessary existence of the most basic element as either principle or cause of the other elements, Aristotle argues there is yet another conflict among the theories of the earlier philosophers: the conflict as to which of the elements is to be posited as the most basic element. For no one among the earlier philosophers posits the earth as cause, and yet according to Hesiod, Gaia is the first of the elements.[51] The contradiction is of course obvious. The fundamental element must be of the smallest possible composition (*mikromerestaton*), and yet there can be no doubt that Gaia is a composition of large members (*megalomereian*).

Aristotle continues to refine the argument of the primal element by showing that anything that is generated from some other thing—and the natural philosophers say all things are generated from the primal element—must correspond in some way to the fundamental nature of the primal generating element. Aristotle has already effectively used this type of argument elsewhere to show that the Ideas, which are generated from the *ousia* of the One, must necessarily be *ousiai*, and that in the causal process they *necessarily* transmit their essential nature to the intelligible numbers, although Plato says that the numbers are without *ousiai*.[52] Applying this same unrelenting logic to the essential participation of generated natural elements, Aristotle rhetorically asks those who teach reciprocal generation to explain how it can be, if indeed the primal element is, as some have indicated, either fire or earth, that not all of

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[50] Although Nietzsche advances an impassioned criticism of this type of causal reasoning (Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke* [Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1964], Band VIII, *Götzen-Dämmerung*, Teil 4, 94), he makes no attempt to show either where this reasoning process is faulty or why the conclusions derived from this type of process must necessarily be inadmissible.

[51] *Metaphysics* 989a8-10.

[52] Ibid., 987b9-10, 20-22, 990b28.

the bodies that are subsequently generated from this element have a fire nature or an earth nature.

Now it is only really in the conclusion of his argument concerning causal anteriority (with its two parts: [1] the necessary communication of natures from the causing element to the thing caused, and [2] the argument from the *mikromerestaton*, or the subtlety of composition that necessarily characterizes a first element), that Aristotle finally states in very clear language what he means by *ousia*. Having concluded from his survey of the earlier philosophers that not one of them has truly grasped *to ti en einai* or *ousia* as the only principle that adequately resolves the speculative dilemma of knowledge and process,[53] Aristotle finally unambiguously states the following:

> . . . but here is what I say [concerning that essence]: that it is neither white nor black, nor gray nor any other color, but rather, and of necessity, without color; otherwise it would have had one of these colors. Likewise, and for the same reason, [*ousia*] is also without flavor, and without any other characteristic of this type. For it is impossible that it should, itself, be a certain sort of thing [*poion ti*], or a quantity [*poson*], or a particular thing [*ti*].[54]

In this final passage Aristotle affirms without equivocation that *ousia* is the defining what-quality inherent to empirical things. Yet this quality does not "it"-self exist independently as such, as some-*thing*, nor is it identifiable as a particular, potentially knowable *ti*.

In summary, then, Aristotle (1) defines *ousia* as the first or formal cause; he (2) attributes to *ousia* an analogical type of existence by putting it into a determined, contextual relationship with the phenomenal object to which it gives unifying structure; and (3) he makes very clear, in order to avoid any possible *malentendu*, that *ousia* "it"-self is not a thing of any kind, which, of course, automatically precludes the possibility that *ousia*, as such, should ever be the object of knowledge. In the framework of Aristotle's metaphysic, then, *ousia* is a reference to that quality of sensible phenomena that makes those phenomena *particular* things; and it is this structural integrity, or the essential unity of things in-process, that is for Aristotle the object of knowledge.

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[53] *Metaphysics* 989b17.
[54] Ibid., 989a8–12.