THE APORIA OF ESSENCE IN ARISTOTLE’S *METAPHYSICS*
THE APORTIA OF ESSENCE

IN

ARISTOTLE’S METAPHYSICS

By

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A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

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MASTER OF ARTS (2003)  McMaster University
(Philosophy)  Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE:  The *Aporia* of Essence in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*

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NUMBER OF PAGES:  v, 51
ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes a solution to the fourteenth puzzle stated in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Book 3, Chapter 6. For the most part I rely on *Metaphysics* Books 7 and 8 to find a solution and I treat the essences of natural beings in the context of a naturalized metaphysics. I conclude that essences are at once particular and universal. What is novel about my solution is that it allows Aristotle to maintain three important theses: (1) substance is particular, (2) knowledge is of universals, (3) the law of contradiction. I claim that Aristotle is able to maintain theses 1 and 2 without contradiction by giving matter a significant role to play in the solution. As a secondary task, I evaluate Aristotle's claim that essence is primary substance in the *Metaphysics*. I conclude that the right to the title of primary substance belongs to the following candidates in this order: sensible substances, essences, matter.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my thanks to Profs. Murray Miles and Martha Husain at Brock University, who got me on track and showed me some of the wonderful problems philosophy deals with. Special thanks to Prof. David Hitchcock for a careful reading of my work and Aristotle - his criticism was incisive and valuable. I learned much about scholarship under his supervision. Thanks also to Prof. Spiro Panagiotou for his helpful comments. I thank Alison Miculan, for friendship and encouragement, and Gülberk Koç, for cookery and laughter. And I thank Hans and Jane and the kids, who are always fun and morally supportive. This work is for my parents and brother, Charles, Kirsten and Neil.
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Introduction.

In *Metaphysics* 4.1 Aristotle says, "There is a science which investigates being as being and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of itself" (*Met. 4.1 1003a 22-23*). This science, however, will not be one of the special sciences, for these do not deal generally with being as being. We read in 4.2 that there are many ways in which a thing may be said to be, and all these senses relate to one central point (*pros hen*) (*Met. 4.2 1003a 33-34*). Aristotle provides examples: things are said to be in the sense that they are substances; or affections of substance; processes toward substance; destructions, privations, or qualities of substance; productive or generative of substance; relative to substance; and the negations of these. Thus, while affections, qualities and the like are kinds of being, they are beings only because they are related to substances. Substance, then, is the central and primary sense of being. Now, because science is chiefly the study of that which is primary (*Met. 4.2 1003b 16-17*), the science of being as being will be the study of being as substance. And, since wisdom was supposed to deal with first causes and principles of beings (*Met. 1.1 981b 26-27*), the science of being as being, known as first philosophy or wisdom to Aristotle and metaphysics to us, is a science that investigates the first causes and principles of substance.

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1 All quotations are from The Revised Oxford Translation (ed. J. Barnes, 1984), with occasional modifications, except where otherwise noted.
Metaphysics Book 3 lists a number of aporiai of principles and causes that the philosopher must resolve if he is to have clear understanding of the object of first philosophy. One of the aporiai, which I will call the aporia of essence (the naming of which I will explain shortly), is presented at 3.6. I will quote it here at length:

“...We must not only raise these questions about the principles, but also ask whether they are universal or what we call particulars. For if they are universal, they will not be substances; for everything that is common indicates not a this but a such, but substance is a this. - And if it is possible also to predicate separate existence of that which is predicated in common as a single this, Socrates will be many - himself and man, if each of these indicates a this and a one. -If, then, the principles are universals, these results follow; but if they are not universals but like particulars, they will not be knowable, for the knowledge of anything is universal. So that there will be other prior principles, predicated universally of the principles, if there is going to be knowledge of them” (Met. 3.6 1003a 6-17).”

The major claim of the argument is, “We must ask whether the principles are universal or particular”, and the reasons for embarking on this investigation are supported by three sub-arguments. The first and second sub-arguments warn against taking principles as universals, while the third sub-argument and its continuation warn against taking principles as particulars. These two groupings constitute the competing tendencies of the aporia.

Sub-argument 1, as it is given to us, can be standardized as follows:

1. Everything that is common indicates not a this, but a such.
2. Substance is a this.
3. If they (the principles) are universal, they will not be substances.

A premise needs to be assumed to derive the conclusion:
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1s. (x)(Cx -> ~Tx) (premise)
2s. (x)(Sx -> Tx) (premise)
3s. (x)(Ux -> Cx) (assumed premise: At Met. 7.13 1038b 10-11 Aristotle says, “the universal is common, since that is called universal which naturally belongs to more than one thing”.)

Cs. (x)(Px -> Ux) -> (x)(Px -> ~Sx)

With premise 3s, we know that if the principles are universal (the antecedent of the conclusion), then we know that they are common (3s), thus not thisses (1s), and thus they will not be substances (2s and the consequent of the conclusion).

The force of this argument rests on the meaning of the words ‘this’ and ‘such’. As I will argue, ‘this’ and ‘such’ are terms used to designate an ontological status of being in the Categories and metaphysical terms used to give a causal account of substance in the Metaphysics. Sub-argument 1, then, is an ontological-metaphysical argument, or, for short, a substantial argument, that the principles are not universal, if we assume that the principles are substances.

Sub-argument 2 reduces to absurdity the Platonist move of taking a universal as a this: the universals animal and man are correctly predicated of Socrates; but if these predicates are taken as thisses, then Socrates will be many since he will be himself and man. The effect of this argument is to serve as an addendum to sub-argument 1 in support of its first premise.

Sub-argument 3 is as follows:
1. The knowledge of anything is universal.
   C. If they (the principles) are like particulars, they will not be knowable.

Before symbolizing this argument, a few problems must be addressed. First, the lone premise easily translates to ‘(x)(Kx -> Ux)’, where ‘K’ stands for “knowledge”. The conveyed meaning of this premise is that knowledge is universal. Yet ‘K’ cannot be inferred in the conclusion, because there we are considering that which is knowable. Clearly, there is a difference between (1) knowledge being universal and (2) that which is knowable being universal: the first does not make reference to a correlate, while the second not only makes reference to it, but tells us something about it, i.e., that it is universal. The issue to be decided, then, is whether Aristotle suggests an epistemology whereby knowledge is characterized as universal independently of whether that which is known is universal, or whether he suggests an epistemology whereby knowledge is the knowledge of universal correlates.

The problem with the first proposal is that it forces an implausible reconstrual of the conclusion of the argument. Aristotle uses the word epistetai in the conclusion for ‘knowable’, and under the first proposal epistetai would be substituted by epistemai, or ‘science’. Thus the conclusion would be reconstrued according to the understanding that the principles of being are knowledge; clearly an odd thing to say. Under the second interpretation both epistetai and the meaning of the conclusion are retained - the principles are such that if they are particulars they will not be knowable. Thus what is
required is a reformulation of the premise such that ‘knowledge’ is understood as
‘knowable’. The *aporia* as stated at 11.2 provides an alternative reading of the premise:
“All knowledge is of the universal and of the such” (*Met.* 11.2 1060b 20-24). This can
be paraphrased “If anything is knowable, then it is universal”, which is also symbolized
‘(x)(Kx -> Ux)’, where ‘K’ is now defined as ‘knowable’.

The second problem to be addressed concerns the word “like” in the conclusion.
Now, if a principle is like a particular, it will be like it in some respect. But this will
give us only limited knowledge of a principle, limited with respect to the way it is
compared to a particular. It will remain to be asked what a principle is and how it can
be characterized independent of its similarity to other things. I prefer, then, not to
include “like” in the symbolization. Indeed, in another version of the *aporia*, Aristotle
does not use “like”, and begins his argument thus: “If they (the principles) are particular
and not universal...” (*Met.* 13.10 1086b 21). Sub-argument 3 can now be restated with
these two changes:

1a. If anything is knowable, then it is universal.

Ca. If the principles are particulars, they will not be knowable.

And the argument can now be standardized:

1s. (x)(Kx -> Ux)     (premise)
2s. (x)(Ax -> ~Ux)    (assumed premise: if something is particular (A), it is not
                      a universal: “I call universal that which by its nature
                      is predicated of several things, and particular that
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which is not" (De Int. 7.17a 38-39))²

Cs. (x)(Px -> Ax) -> (x)(Px -> ~Kx)

The last sentence of the quotation is a continuation of sub-argument 3, and says that if we do take principles to be particular, then, if we are to have knowledge of them, it will be through principles that are prior and universally predicated of them. To him who argues that principles are individual and knowable, Aristotle replies that these will be knowable only because there are prior principles universally predicated of them.

I take sub-argument 1 and sub-argument 3 to be the major players in the quotation above and to state best the contrary positions of the aporia of essence. Sub-argument 2 and the corollary of sub-argument 3 are additions to sub-arguments 1 and 3 and address the proposed remedies to the difficulties raised by the latter. The puzzle posed by the major arguments, then, is that while sub-argument 1 (hereafter referred to as the substantial argument) concludes that if principles are universal they will not be substances, sub-argument 3 (hereafter referred to as the epistemological argument) concludes that if the principles are like particulars, they will not be knowable: the substantial and epistemological arguments indicate with hypothetical statements

² Sykes argues that "on this basis we can construct a notion of 'being particular' which is the exact contradictory of 'being universal'" (1975, 312), and Code asserts they are interdefinable using negation (1984, 8). These statements are not strictly true, since for Aristotle a heap, while not a universal, is a particular lacking numerical oneness like that of Socrates. Yet interdefining 'particular' and 'universal' by negation proves to be useful and is adopted in this thesis.
conclusions that are contrary to one another with regard to the status of the principles. Put another way, first philosophy is a systematic knowing of being whose principles of knowing initially seem at odds with its principles of reality. This is a fairly serious problem for a science that purports to provide an accurate account of being.

The *aporia* is stated again at 11.2: “All knowledge is of universals and of the such, but substance is not among the universals, but is rather a this and separable, so that if there is knowledge about the principles, how are we to suppose the principle to be substance” (*Met.* 11.2 1060b 20-24). This formulation pits Premise 1 of the *epistemological argument* against Premise 2 of the *substantial argument*, and the question asked arises naturally from the opposing tendencies. However, I see no reason why the conditions in the question could not be reversed, so that it would ask instead, “if the principle is substance, then how are we to suppose the principles to be knowable?” This helps to point up the fact that the *aporia* is equally due to the conditions set by both sides of the debate.

Even though essence is not explicitly mentioned in the quotations above, I have entitled this problem the *aporia of essence* because the principle being sought in *Metaphysics* 7 and 8 turns out to be essence. For the *substantial argument*, a being’s highest principle is the cause of its being. One name Aristotle gives to this cause is ‘essence’. “And why are certain things, i.e. stones and bricks, a house? Plainly we are seeking the cause. And this is essence” (*Met.* 7.17 1041a 26-7). So, if essence is the
cause of substance and substance is particular, then if in some sense essence is a substance, essence is particular. For the epistemological argument, essence is that which a definition articulates: “A definition is a phrase signifying a thing’s essence” (Top. 1.5 101b 39). To know a thing is to know the definition of its essence. And since no particular is definable, essences are not particular. Hence, for knowledge to be possible, first principles and essences must be universals.

Essence is central to both sides of the aporia. But a satisfactory account of essence as substance requires that it be particular (with epistemology claiming otherwise) and a satisfactory account of essence in epistemology requires that it be universal (with substantial considerations claiming otherwise). Essence is stuck in the peculiar position that when it is doing the work for substance it is unknowable, and when it is doing the work for knowledge it is not a cause in the metaphysical sense of the word. One way around this problem is to claim that essence is neither a universal nor a particular. But this seems only to brush aside the serious claims that it is a universal or a particular by characterizing it as nothing at all.

In this thesis I will be treating the aporia within the context of a naturalized metaphysics. I will argue that Aristotle’s solution to the aporia is that essence is both particular and universal. This position gives equal consideration to the ontological and

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3 In Metaphysics 12, imperceptible immovable substances are recognized but are not considered in this thesis.
epistemological tendencies of the *aporia*. The plan of the thesis is as follows: Chapter 1: Criteria for being primary substance in the *Categories* and the *Metaphysics*. This chapter will establish a conceptual framework through which the *aporia* may be solved. Chapter 2: Essence is a *tode ti* and a *toionde*. Here I show how matter plays a central role in the argument that essence is simultaneously particular and universal. Matter also provides the reason why this conclusion is not a contradiction. Chapter 3: Are the essences of things primary substance? This chapter reflects on the criteria of being a primary substance in the *Metaphysics* and concludes that essence does not meet them.

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4 I will not be appealing to *Met*. 13.10 1087a 15-25, where Aristotle claims to resolve the *aporia* via a distinction between actual and potential knowledge. This seems to weaken the epistemological argument too much to take the *aporia* as a genuine problem about essences. See Witt, who finds a solution for Aristotle using this passage (Witt 1989, 163-75).
Chapter 1: Criteria for being primary substance in the *Categories* and *Metaphysics*.

For Aristotle, the highest principles and causes of substance themselves deserve the title of primary substance.\(^5\) To answer, then, whether the highest principles and causes of substance are particular or universal, we need to see in the *Metaphysics* what kinds of things Aristotle argues are substance in the primary sense. Any argument which claims that \(X\) is or is not a primary substance will have to do so with appeal to formal criteria. If formal criteria of primary substance can be developed, then if \(X\) completely satisfies the criteria, \(X\) will be a primary substance. But if \(X\) does not completely satisfy the criteria of primary substance, then either it is because \(X\) satisfies only some of the criteria (and \(X\) may be a substance but not primarily), or \(X\) satisfies none of the criteria (and \(X\) is in no sense a substance). Aristotle does appeal to such criteria to determine whether \(X\) is a substance and setting them out will help to clarify some of the key concepts in his arguments.

A set of criteria for being a substance is presented at *Metaphysics* 7.3. Substance is “that which is not predicated of a subject (*hupokeimenou*), but of which all else is predicated. But we must not merely state the matter thus; for this is not enough” (*Met.*

7.3 1029a 9-10)...for if we strip away those things which are predicated of body, (e.g., affections, products, potentialities, and particular quantities), the remainder will be the subject, and this is matter. But matter in itself is indefinite, and hence cannot be substance (*Met. 7.3 1029a 10-28, paraphrased)*... “for both separate (*choriston*) and this (*tode ti*) are thought to belong chiefly to substance” (*Met. 7.3 1029a 28-29*).\(^6\) The first part of the quotation is complex. Substance is that (a) which is not predicated of a subject but (b) of which all else is predicated. The meaning of the first condition is that substance is not the kind of thing that is predicated of anything else, i.e., substance is not a universal. Since the universal and the particular are interdefinable using negation,\(^7\) it follows that (a) is a way of saying substance is a this. The second condition says that everything other than substance is predicated of substance. This does not, however, entail that substance is the only subject. The *Categories* shows that that which is predicated of substance can itself be the subject of its respective genus. What is peculiar to substance, though, is that it cannot itself be predicated of anything further. Substance is, then, an ultimate subject.

Taking stock of the quote above, substance has three criteria: it is (1) an ultimate subject, (2) separate, and (3) a this. It should be noted that the last two criteria are qualified by Aristotle as belonging chiefly, or most of all, to substance. Does he mean

\(^6\) Revised Oxford Translation modified.

\(^7\) For comment on the interdefinability of these terms, see note 39.
to say that these characteristics belong to substance more than they belong to any other kind of being, or that these characteristics belong to substance more than any other characteristic does? The latter interpretation is most likely, since it is supported by the argumentation at Met. 7.3 1029a 9-29, as the focus there is what substance is, i.e., what it is that is most characteristic of substance.

This chapter will investigate what it means to be a subject, separate, and a this. Unfortunately, Aristotle does not provide detailed analysis of these terms in the Metaphysics. For the first and third criteria we can turn to Categories 5, where Aristotle argues that it is primary substances, what we may call particular sensible objects, that are subjects and thisses. As I will argue below, primary substance as an ultimate subject implies the condition of being separate. But in the Metaphysics, Aristotle explicitly introduces the criterion of separation and a new examination of primary substance proceeds: matter, essence, the compound of the two, and the universal are subjected to the three criteria. While the Categories will assist in developing the criteria of being a subject and a this, care is required to determine if Aristotle changes the meaning of either of these in the Metaphysics.
1. Being in the *Categories*.

In *Categories* 2, Aristotle tells us there are four kinds of beings to be distinguished according to their relation to a subject⁸ - (a) Some are said of a subject but are not in any subject. These are secondary substances, e.g., man, for man is said of a subject - the individual man (*tou tinos anthropou*) - but is not in any subject. (b) Some are in a subject but are not said of any subject. These are particular accidental attributes, e.g., a certain (*tis*) knowledge-of-literacy and a certain (*ti*) white, for they are in a subject but not said of any subject. (c) Some are both said of a subject and in a subject. These are universal accidental attributes, e.g., knowledge, which is both in a subject - the soul - and said of a subject, e.g., literacy. (d) Some are neither in a subject nor said of a subject. These are primary substances, e.g., a certain (*tis*) man or a certain (*tis*) horse, which are not said of or in subjects.⁹

Because I want to bring out from *Categories* 5 the criteria for being a substance, I will

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⁸ The subject here is significant, because it suggests that being a subject or having reference to a subject is the defining feature of being in the *Categories*. As we shall see, being a this is also definitive of substantial being in *Categories* 5, but it receives much less focus compared to that of the subject.

⁹ In *On Interpretation* (1 16a 3-8), Aristotle places spoken words third and written words fourth in an order of dependence: the objects of the world are prior to our mental experiences of them and our words are symbols of our experiences: language reflects reality. Thus Aristotle is not doing philosophy of language; grammatical clues are clues about the structure of reality.
be focusing on (a) and (d) primarily. However, the affirmation or denial of the condition being ‘in a subject’ appears in each characterization. “By ‘in a subject’ I mean what is in something, not as a part, and cannot exist separately (choris) from what it is in” (Cat. 1a 24-26). The beings of (b) and (c) affirm this condition, while those of (a) and (d) deny it. The effect this condition has on substance will be brought out in the next section.

2. Subject in the Categories.

The kinds of beings that may serve as subjects in the Categories are highly numerous, but the subject in its primary sense is primary substance. At Categories 5 we get the definitive answer of what substance is: “that which is called a substance most strictly, primarily, and most of all - is that which is neither said of a subject nor in a subject” (Cat. 5 2a 11-13). This definition is similar to the definition of substance in Metaphysics 7.3 1029a 9-10 quoted above, insofar as both say that substance is not said of, or predicated of a subject. But they have different second conditions. The Categories says that substance is not in a subject, i.e., substance does not exist the way individual and general accidental attributes do. ‘In a subject’ is given a three-fold definition: “I mean what is in something, not as a part, and cannot exist separately from what it is in” (Cat. 1 1a 24-25). Since substance is not in something, the first condition of the definition is
negated, as well as the second, since it presupposes the first. The third condition, which states that those beings in a subject are incapable of separate existence, is also negated. Thus not to be in a subject is not to be in something (but not as a part) or to be capable of existing separately, or both. The second condition of the definition of subject in Categories 5, then, can be interpreted to say that substance is separate from subjects. (In the Metaphysics, however, Aristotle has given up the theory of being in a subject in favour of a “predicated of” relationship between accidental attributes and substances.)

The examples Aristotle uses in the Categories to illustrate primary substances are a certain man and a certain horse. Secondary substances are the species and genera to which primary substances belong. A man belongs to the species man and the genus animal. As well, the species man belongs to the genus animal. But primary substances are the ultimate subjects of secondary substances and of individual and general accidental attributes - both the name and definition of species and genus are predicated of their subject, for it is these that reveal to us what a thing is, while only the name of an accidental attribute is predicated of substance, for an accidental attribute does not reveal to us what a thing is (Cat. 5 2b 19-25). Secondary substances are ontologically dependent on primary substances as subjects; universals in the Categories cannot exist separately from sensible individual objects like Platonic Ideas: “if the primary substances did not exist it would be impossible for any of the other things to exist” (Cat. 5 2b 5-6). Thus primary substance, which is not said of a subject, also does not exist the
way secondary substances do, i.e., primary substance does not require a further subject for its being. The cumulative effect of not being said of and of not being in a subject negates any and all ontological dependencies on subjects. This is to say that primary substances are separate. Primary substance, then, is an ultimate subject, which does not require any further subject, and is the ontological bedrock of the other beings listed in the *Categories*: beings either are subjects or owe their being to subjects.

At *Categories* 5 2b 6-22, Aristotle argues that the species is more a substance than the genus. Two strains of reasoning can be discerned in the argument - the first argues that species is more a substance than the genus from epistemological considerations (the species provides a more informative account of what a primary substance is than the genus) (*Cat. 5 2b 6-14*), while the second argues the same point from ontological considerations (*Cat. 5 2b 15-22*). I will look only at the second strain, since it argues from the subject:

1. It is because the primary substances are subjects for all the other things and all the other things are predicated of them or are in them, that they are called substances most of all.
   2.1.1 Genera are predicated of the species but the species are not predicated reciprocally of the genera.
2. The species is a subject for the genus.
3. As the primary substances stand to the other things, so the species stands to the genus.
4. Of the secondary substances the species is more a substance than the genus.

As we saw above, being is either being a subject or being something in relation to a subject. Primary substances are ultimate subjects, but the species acts as subject to the
genus (2.1) because the genus is said of the species (2.1.1). (The species and genera in
the argument above implicitly belong to primary substance; species and general belong
to every category of being). The genus, however, does not act as the subject for the
species (2.1.1). Thus species is more a substance than the genus.

But is genus a substance vis-a-vis subject? With respect to primary substance and
species, the genus has no claim to being a subject, since neither primary substance nor
species is said of it. But the conclusion expresses a relation according to which the
species is *more* a substance than the genus. According to the argument, this is because
the species is a subject for the genus but not vice versa. But the genus has to be some
kind of a subject if the relation ‘more’ is to hold, since from the premises it would be
better to conclude that the species is a secondary substance and the genus is not. The
textual solution is the following: while species is a subject for genus but not vice versa,
both the species and the genus are in a sense subjects for attributes. At *Cat.* 5 2b 30-3a
6, Aristotle explains that after primary substances only species and genera are called
secondary substance, since only they reveal primary substance through being said of it.
Attributes like white or runs do not indicate a primary substance. “Further, it is because
the primary substances are subjects for everything else that they are called substances
most strictly. But as the primary substances stand to everything else, so the species and
genera of the primary substances stand to all the rest: all the rest are said of these. For
if you will call the individual man grammatical, then you will call both a man and an
animal grammatical; and similarly in other cases” (Cat. 3a 1-6). So, while the genus is not a subject for the species, both the genus and the species can be subjects for other attributes as long as the primary substance of which they are said has those attributes too. If Socrates is a subject for being grammatical, then there is a man and an animal that are subjects for being grammatical.\(^\text{10}\)

Primary substance and its secondary substances are not the only things that are subjects. Subjects may be found in all of the categories of being: any beings which are in a subject and not said of a subject are themselves subjects for their species and genera. As well, those species and genera, if they are both said of and in a subject, are also subjects. Only the highest genera of being, i.e., quality, quantity, relation, time, place, posture, possession, action, and passion are not subjects.

To reflect on what has been said of *hupokeimenon*, a subject is relative to that for which it is a subject. So, the subject of knowledge may be the individual knowledge of literacy, and the subject of weight may be the individual 25 lbs. Subjects can be found in any category of being, although they cannot be the highest genera of beings. Only primary substances are ultimate subjects, i.e., subjects which are neither said of nor present in a subject. As well, to be an ultimate subject means to be separate, a condition of being a substance that is not explicitly stated in the *Categories*, but is in the

\(^{10}\) I provide a rejoinder to this argument in Chapter 3.1.
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Metaphysics.\textsuperscript{11}

3. \textit{Tode ti in the Categories.}

\textit{Cat.} 5b 10-13 argues that primary substance is a this:

1. The thing revealed is individual (\textit{atomon}) and numerically one (\textit{hen arithmoi}).
C. It is indisputably true that each primary substance signifies a certain this (\textit{tode ti}).

The meaning of ‘individual’ does not present a problem; it is a synonym for ‘this’. But to get clear on being numerically one, it is useful to turn to \textit{Cat.} 5 3b 13-18, which argues that secondary substances are not thissese:

1. (A secondary substance) is not, as the primary substance is, one (\textit{hen}), but (\textit{alla}) man and animal are said of many things.
C. Secondary substance signifies a certain qualification, not a certain this.

The premise says primary substance is one, but secondary substances are not one because they are said of many things. Primary substance cannot be said of many things, thus it is numerically one. Being numerically one, then, is just to say that something cannot be said of a subject, and that which cannot be said of a subject is a this. Primary substance, however, is just one example of a \textit{tode ti} - any being that is present in but not

\textsuperscript{11} Aristotle lists other characteristics of substance, but these do not make it into the \textit{Metaphysics} as criteria of being primary substance: substances, both primary and secondary, have no contrary (\textit{Cat.} 5 3b 25-33); primary substance does not admit of a more and a less (\textit{Cat.} 5 3b 24-4a 9); and primary substance is able to receive contraries while remaining numerically one and the same (\textit{Cat.} 5 4a 10-4b 4).
said of a subject is also numerically one, e.g., an individual colour or an individual weight. However, Aristotle sees the characteristic of being able to receive contraries while remaining one and the same as distinctive of primary substance, but not of particular accidental attributes (Cat. 5 4a 10-23).

Primary substance, then, is a tode ti because it is individual, or, to put it equally well, it is numerically one. According to Aristotle’s argument above, secondary substance is not a this, but rather a certain qualification (poion). In contrast, primary substance does not qualify any other thing, because it is not said of or present in a subject. It should be noted that Aristotle not only uses the word poion (of some nature or of some kind) to characterize secondary substances but also uses it to name qualitative attributes: “poioteta de lego kath’ hen poioi tines einai legontai” (Cat. 8 8b 25-26). But he does stress important differences: “It (secondary substance) does not signify simply a certain qualification, as white does. White signifies nothing but a qualification, whereas the species and the genus mark off the qualification of substance - they signify substance of a certain qualification” (Cat 5 3b 18-23). Qualities such as white, then, do not specifically qualify substance as secondary substances do.

Aristotle did not yet have a definitive theory of poion in the Categories, since he characterized both secondary substances and qualities by it, even though these relate to

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12 Synonymous expressions for ‘this’ so far identified are ‘not said of a subject’, ‘individual’, and ‘numerically one’.
primary substances very differently. In the *Metaphysics*, both the notions of secondary substance and the qualifying characteristic of species is dropped. The shift of meaning of *eidos* is remarkable. In the *Categories*, *eidos* is the secondary substance species and intermediate between the individual and genus. In the *Metaphysics*, *eidos* is still used to refer to species in contrast to genus (e.g., *Met*. 8.1 1042a 14-15), but it can also mean form - that which formally causes a being to be the kind of thing it is: “the cause is being sought (and this is the form [*eidos]*) of the matter’s being some definite thing, and this is the substance” (*Met*. 7.17 1041b 7-9). Further: “*eidos de lego to ti en einai hekastou kai ten proten ousian*”: I call form the essence of each thing and the primary substance (*Met*. 7.7 1032b 1-2). So, from being secondary to and descriptive of primary substance in the *Categories*, *eidos* has become in the *Metaphysics* the following: a causally effective species-form, the essence, and the primary substance. *Eidos* played second fiddle to primary substance in the *Categories*, but in the *Metaphysics* it is the *ti en einai* of sensible substances.

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14 Sykes translates *eidos* in both the *Categories* and the *Metaphysics* as ‘form’, creating what I consider erroneous translations and the potential for false inferences drawn from them. E.g., *Cat*. 30-32, “It is reasonable that, after the primary substances, the forms and genera alone of the other things are said to be secondary substances. For they alone of the things predicated reveal the primary substance” (Sykes 1975, 314). Inference drawn by Sykes: “forms are predicated of particular substances” (315). But Aristotle never says this. Instead, matter is the subject of form (see Chapter 2.3).
To draw on what has been said in sections 2 and 3 of this chapter, the subject is nearly a universal characteristic of being, and so being is defined in the Categories in terms of subjecthood. Subject is dealt with much more extensively than tode ti, for there are more beings that are subjects than there are beings that are thisses. The concept subject is wider than that of this, since any tode ti is a subject, but not all subjects are tode ti. Primary substances, species and genera, and attributes both particular and general, are subjects, but only primary substances and particular accidental attributes are thisses.

4. Subject and tode ti in the Metaphysics.

Subjecthood in the Metaphysics is different from subjecthood in the Categories. By the criteria of the Categories, a near infinite number of subjects could be named, since a subject is anything of which a higher genus is predicated. A species, for example, is the subject of its genus. But the species is also a universal, since it itself is said of subject(s), primary substance(s). However, a new condition of subject is introduced by its definition in the Metaphysics. “The subject is that of which the other things are said, while it is itself not said of anything else” (Met. 7.3 1028b 36-37).\textsuperscript{15} The first clause is

\textsuperscript{15} Furth’s translation.
congruent with what is in the *Categories*. The second clause, however, says that the subject is not said or predicated of anything else. This is exactly the first condition of substance stated at *Met.* 7.3 1029a 9-10. And it was seen in the previous section that not to be said of anything else is to be a *this*. Accordingly, the definition of subject in the *Metaphysics* contains implicitly the requirement that a subject be a *this*, eliminating thus as subjects the species and genera in the category of substance as well as universal accidental properties, although explicit references to the latter seem to be absent in the *Metaphysics*. Indeed, at *Metaphysics* 8.1 the subject is nothing other than substance: “Now the subject is substance, and in one sense this is the matter...in a second sense the formula and shape... and thirdly, what is out of these” (*Met.* 8.1 1042a 25-29). There is no longer an uncountable number of subjects, but candidates of three kinds, each of which in a sense is a substance because each is a subject: matter, essence, and the compound substance.

The *tode ti* plays a more prominent role in the *Metaphysics*, as explicitly stated at *Met.* 7.3 1029a 28-29. But *tode ti* also becomes a condition of the definition of subject, hence limiting just what can be a subject. The definition of subject is nearly identical to the definition of substance as an ultimate subject. And, since Aristotle wants to call the *eidos* of each thing its essence and primary substance, the inclination so far is to regard *eidos* and *ti en einai* to be *tode ti*, not universal.
5. Separation in the Metaphysics.

Even though Aristotle emphasizes separation in the Metaphysics, he tells us little of its nature. At Met. 7.1 1028a 31-1028b 3, he says: "Now, primary is said in many ways; but nevertheless substance is primary in all of them, both [1] in formula and [2] in knowledge and [3] in time. For [3] none of the other [types of] things-predicated is separate, only this [=substance] alone; and [1] in formula this is primary (for necessarily in the formula of each thing, that of the substance is present); and [2] we think we know each thing most of all, when we know what man is [for example,] or fire, more than the so-qualified or the so-much or the where, since even of these latter, we know each one when we know what the so-much is, or the so-qualified." We need only take note of the third type of primacy, where substance is primary in time (chronoi), since of all the other categories (ton gar allon kategorematon), only substance can exist separately.

At Met. 13.2 1077b 1-7 the notions of separability and inseparability are used by Aristotle to argue that not all things that are prior in formula are prior in substance:

1. Those things are prior in substance which when separated from other things continue to exist, but those are prior in formula out of whose formulae the formula

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16 Cf. Met. 8.1 1042a 28-29, 12.5 1070b 36, 13.2 1077b 3, 1077b 36 - 1080a 1, 13.10 1086b 17-19.

17 Furth’s translation.
of the other things are compounded.
2.1.1 It (e.g., an attribute) cannot exist separately, but is always along with the compound thing; and by the compound thing I mean the white man.
2.1 If attributes, such as moving or white, do not exist apart from their substances, the white is prior to the white man in formula, but not in substance.
2. These two properties (in 1) are not coextensive.
C. Not all things that are prior in formula are prior in substance.\textsuperscript{18}

Premise 2.1.1 says that such things as moving and white cannot exist separately, but exist only in compounds, such as a white man. This ontological dependence is akin to that found in the \textit{Categories}: the man is the subject for white, resulting in the compound white man. Premise 1 says that those things which when separated from the other things continue to exist are prior in substance. This is not an illuminating remark, since it is not clear if by “the other things” are to be understood things like white and moving or not, and whether “separated” is to be understood as actually or conceptually separated.

This premise aside, from primacy in time in 7.1 and premise 2.1.1 in 13.2 above, we can develop a contrast between substance and non-substantial beings which emphasizes separation as ontological independence, like that found in the \textit{Categories}. However, from the point of this sort of separation, we may be hard pressed to apply it to essence, by Aristotle’s own admission: “It might be thought impossible that substance and that whose substance it is should exist apart; how, therefore, could the Ideas, being

\textsuperscript{18} Aristotle uses this argument to show how something can be prior in formula but not prior in substance. In the context from which it was removed, the argument supports the claim that mathematical objects like point, line, and plane are prior in formula to spatial magnitudes, but not prior in substance.
substances of things, exist apart" (Met. 13.5 1079b 36-1080a 1). It may be that essence cannot ontologically exist apart from that whose essence it is. But Aristotle seems to insist that substance must be separate, “for both separability and thisness are thought to belong chiefly to substance” (Met. 7.3 1029a 28-29).

At Metaphysics 8.1, essence is given a different kind of separation: the subject, substance, in one sense is “the formula and the shape (he morphe), which being some this is separately formulated” (Met. 8.1 1042a 28-29). Essence, i.e., primary substance, is not separate in terms of ontology, but in terms of its definition or formula. Just what Aristotle means by this will become clear in chapter 3.2. For now we may conjecture that he may have thought to have found a sense of separation (in definition) that can accommodate the concern that the substance of a substance cannot exist separately from it.
Chapter 2: Essence is a **tode ti** and a **toionde**.

The task of this chapter is to show that the solution of the *aporia of essence* is that the highest principles and causes of things are at once particular and universal. This solution gives the *ontological* and the *epistemological arguments* of the *aporia* equal consideration. Yet, it was said in Chapter 1 that “universal” and “particular” are contradictory terms because they are interdefinable using negation; i.e., if something is not particular, then it is universal, and if something is not universal, then it is particular. So the exact senses in which essence is universal and particular will have to be formulated to show that they are compatible conditions. It is my claim that the role of matter is key to understanding how essence is at once a this and a such.

1. The relevant sense of essence.

The essence of something, the *ti en einai* of something, is the ‘what it is to be’ that thing. Aristotle identifies essences for each of the categories of being (*Met.* 7.4 1030a 18-21). But essence in its primary sense is that which belongs to the beings of the category of substance, since it is that which sensible substances are said to be in respect of themselves. All other essences are essence secondarily because they belong to beings in the secondary sense, i.e., those beings which are accidental attributes and predicated
of substance. To ask what is the essence of Socrates is to ask for the essence that belongs to Socrates insofar as Socrates is a substance, not insofar as he is cultured or so-and-so heavy (Met. 7.4 1029b 13-16). Therefore Socrates will not be identical with his essence; his essence will be something common, since Socrates is primarily a Man, just as Plato is. Thus to ask what it is to be Socrates is to ask what it is to be a Man. However, the case can be made that the essence of Socrates is particular.

2. **Essence is a tode ti.**

I will argue that one relation that essence has to material cause justifies Aristotle calling essence a this. The matter of a natural being is the accompanying cause of its form, i.e., matter and form are concomitant causes of natural beings. And in order to illustrate that essence has any relation to matter, it needs to be shown that Aristotle equates form with essence: “By form I mean the essence of each thing and its primary substance” (Met. 7.7 1032b 1-2). And since the relation of form to matter is explained in terms of actuality to potentiality,¹⁹ a brief discussion of the latter pair is needed.

Aristotle says “that which exists potentially and not in complete reality is the indeterminate” (Met. 4.4 1007b 28). This implies that matter is not a determinate being, and so is itself indeterminate since: “I mean by matter that which, though it is not some

¹⁹ “Matter is potentiality, form actuality” (DA 412a 10).
‘this’ actually, is potentially some ‘this’” (Met. 8.1 1042a 27-28). Matter is indeterminate and in contrast to what is determinate. Now, the proper definition of primary potency is “a source of change in another thing or in the same thing qua other” (Met. 5.12 1020a 4-6). But not all potentialities are potencies of potential movers, for matter is potentiality in the sense that it is the potentiality of a potential substance. This point will come through a discussion of actuality.

Actuality means “the existence of the thing, (but) not in the manner we call potentially” (Met. 9.6 1048a 30).\textsuperscript{20} Aristotle illustrates actuality not by supplying a definition in every case, but by providing analogies:

“...as what is seeing is to what has its eyes shut but has sight, and as what has been shaped out of the matter is to the matter, and as the wrought is to the unwrought - of this difference let one member be defined as the actuality, the other as the potential. ‘Actually’ is not said in every case in the same way, but by analogy: ‘as this is in this or in reference to this, so that is in that or in reference to that’. In some cases [actuality] is as movement in relation to potentiality; in other cases it is as substance in relation to some particular matter (Met. 9.6 1048a 35 - 1048b 9).\textsuperscript{21}

It is this latter sense of actuality and potentiality that is relevant to our investigation and Aristotle explicitly states their relationship. In Metaphysics 9.8 he says that “the matter is potentially, because it may go into the form; and when it is actually, then it is in the

\textsuperscript{20} My translation.

\textsuperscript{21} Furth’s translation.
form" (Met. 9.8 1050a 15-16). The relation of matter to form, then, is such that the matter of something is shaped or enformed by form.

An important passage for the claim that essence is particular is in Metaphysics 8.1:

"Now the subject (hupokeimenon) is substance, and in one sense this is the matter (I mean by matter that which, though it is not some 'this' actually, is potentially some 'this'), but in a second sense the subject is the formula and the shape, which being a this is separate in formula; and what is 'out of' these" (Met. 8.1 1042a 27-30).

Some general observations before focusing on the specific role of matter: (1) Aristotle identifies three kinds of subjects (a) matter, (b) form, (c) what is out of them. (2) Form is said to satisfy the condition of being a primary substance, since it is (a) this, (b) subject, (c) separate (in formula). As for matter, it is not some this actually, only potentially. How does matter come to be some this, like a man or a tree? According to Metaphysics 9.8 quoted above, when matter goes into a form. And when it is in a form, matter becomes actualized. Form is the immanent cause in virtue of which some indeterminate matter becomes definite, a this, like Socrates. Since form is that in virtue of which matter becomes a this, we have a basis for understanding what it means for form to be a this: it is that by which what is only potentially a this actually becomes

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22 Also: "But the matter exists potentially; for this is that which can become both the actual things (the form and privation)" (Met. 12.5 1071a 10-12: Furth's translation).

23 Furth's translation.
Aristotle says in places other than *Metaphysics* 8.1 that form is *tode ti*. For instance, in Book 5 there are two meanings of substance: “[a] the ultimate substratum, which is no longer predicated of anything else, and [b] that which is a this and separable - and of this nature is the shape or form of each thing” (*Met. 5.8* 1017b 24-26). At *Metaphysics 7.4*, Aristotle expresses the idea differently, choosing to characterize the ‘what’ or *ti esti* as *tode ti*: “The ‘what it is’, taken in one way, means the substance and the ‘some this’, but taken in another way, means each of the other things-predicated”

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24 Also taking her cue from Aristotle, Whiting argues that individual forms are principles of individuation because (1) matter is not itself something definite and (2) matter requires form to be an individual [Whiting (1986, 363) mentions *Met. 7.17* 1041b 4-7 as textual evidence of (2); this seems to be Aristotle’s most explicit statement to this effect in the *Metaphysics*]. Whiting postulates numerically distinct individual forms which account for the presence of numerically distinct individuals. However, this interpretation is too strong to accommodate the demand of the *epistemological argument* that essence is universal. I reject the claim, then, that forms are numerically distinct individuals.

Witt reports that Frede (in ‘Substance in Aristotle’s Metaphysics,’ *Aristotle on Nature and Living Things*, ed. Allan Gotthelf [Pittsburgh: Mathesis Publications, 1985], 17-26) treats individual forms as principles of identity for objects: “its form is that aspect of an object that must remain the same over time and through change” (Witt 1984, 144 fn.). His position does not change in 1987: “If we, then, analyze an ordinary physical object into matter, form, and properties, the only item in the case of animate objects that has to stay the same as long as we can talk about the same thing is, on this account, the form. And this may give some plausibility to the assumption that it is really the form which is the thing we are talking about when we at different times say different things about an object” (Frede 1987, 76). Frede’s conception of form is too static for my interpretation.
(Met. 7.4 1030a 18-20). In this quotation, Aristotle says that there are different kinds of ‘whats’ or universals. Accidental attributes in the Metaphysics are universals because they are predicated of sensible individuals. The species-form is also a ti esti, but this confers a special sense on it, since it is substance and tode ti. Thus tode ti refers not just to sensible particulars like Socrates, but also to his species-form.

Merely citing passages where Aristotle says form is a this does not explain why it is a this, and there is a temptation to regard a species-form as a secondary substance of the Categories. Species in the Categories are universals and subjects, but not thisses. But species-forms in the Metaphysics are the immanent formal principles of substances, that in virtue of which matter constitutes a sensible substance. This formal role is not attributed to secondary substances in the Categories. A species-form is the reason why some matter has a particular arrangement, i.e., a complex organism, and this provides a basis to understand the particularity of form. Form is the actualizing principle of sensible substances, that in virtue of which matter may be said to be something definite. As such, form is the primary intrinsic cause of the being of a substance, that without which a body could not be an individual of a certain kind. Thus, a species-form in the Metaphysics is that in respect of which something is a this, i.e., the particularity of individuality of sensible substance. Form is thus a principle of thisness or, equally, of

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25 Furth’s translation.
particularity or individuation. Aristotle expresses the idea by saying form is a this. Further, since the forms of sensible substances are essences, essences are particular.

We now understand the way in which essence is a this. The essence of a sensible substance is its form, and form has matter as an accompanying cause. Since matter is only potentially some this, something is needed to explain when it is a this in actuality. This is provided by form. Form is some this actually, not in the sense that Socrates is a this, but in the sense that form is the intrinsic cause of thisness.\(^\text{26}\)

Matter, then, plays a pivotal role in helping us understand the way essence is particular and the requirements of the ontological argument of the aporia thus have been met: the highest principle and cause of a sensible substance is particular.

3. Essence is a toionde.

It may seems contradictory to argue that essence is universal after having made the case that it is particular. However, a second appeal to matter will show that form is

\(^{26}\) Essence is not a this in the same sense that Socrates is a this. Socrates is an ultimate subject, which means he is not predicable of any further subjects. As it will be seen below, form understood as a universal is predicable of subjects. The difference between Socrates’ thisness and his form’s thisness is shown by the following relationships: form is determinant, matter is determinable, and Socrates is a determinate this. It can be said of form, then, that it is a this in the sense that it ‘thisifies’ indeterminate matter into a determinate this. Form is a ‘thisifying cause’, or a ‘this-cause’.
universal relative to matter in a way that is congruent with the claim that form is
particular relative to matter. It is the exact formulation of these relationships that shows
there is no contradiction in the dual characteristic of form.

In the following passage Aristotle implicitly says that form is a universal: “And when
we have the whole, such and such a form in this flesh and in these bones, this is Callias
or Socrates; and they are different in virtue of their matter (for that is different), but the
same in form; for their form is indivisible” (Met. 7.8 1034a 5-8). Form is called the
same for Callias and Socrates, an implicit reference to its universality. The matter of
Callias and Socrates is said to be different, but this is not to be mistaken as a principle
of individuation, since that was shown above to be the function of form. However, the
remark is important, because the fact that Socrates’ and Callias’ matter is different will
assist the argument that form is universal.

The argument that essence is universal also requires the premise that matter is a
subject. Indeed, Aristotle says in many places in the Metaphysics that matter is
substance insofar as it is a subject or substratum:

“‘That in virtue of which’, then, in the primary sense is the form, and in a secondary
sense the matter of each thing and the proximate substratum of each” (5.181022a 16-
18);
“...that to which the differentia or quality belongs is the substratum, which we call
matter” (5.28 1024b 8-9);
“the substance which exists as substratum and as matter is generally recognized, and this
is that which exists potentially” (8.2 1042b 9-10);
“The substratum is that of which everything else is predicated, while it itself is not
predicated of anything else...and in one sense matter is said to be of the nature of
substratum, in another, shape, and in a third, the compound of these” (7.3 1028b 35-
While these passages confirm matter is treated by Aristotle as subject, they do little to elucidate that to which matter is related as subject. The following will assist: "being subject is twofold, either being some this - as the animal is subject for the attributes - or else as the matter is subject for the completedness [entelekheia]" (Met. 7.13 1038b 5-7). Socrates, being some this, is the subject for his whiteness, beardedness, and other accidental attributes. Matter as a subject, however, is subject for the completedness. ‘Completedness’ requires some interpretation. Either it means a hylomorphic compound like Socrates, or a formal cause. The former interpretation is untenable, since Socrates is a subject which cannot be predicated of anything further - it wouldn’t make sense to say that Socrates belongs to his body, since Socrates just is his body so informed. I take completedness to be a teleological reference, whereby the forms of natural beings are their ends: “And since nature is twofold, the matter and the form, of which the latter is the end, and since all the rest is for the sake of the end, the form must be the cause in the sense of that for the sake of which” (Physics 2.8 199a 31-33). And the form or actuality of natural beings requires a co-extensive material cause: “As among substances what gets predicated of the matter is the actuality itself” (Met. 8.2 1043a 5-7).

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27 Furth’s translation with modification.

28 Furth’s translation.
But is the form a universal with respect to matter? To answer this, we return to the
Metaphysics' definition of subject, "the substratum is that of which other things are
predicated, while it is itself not predicated of anything else" (Met. 7.3 1028b 36-37).
Those things which are predicated of a subject in the Metaphysics are universals.
Aristotle is no longer working with the Categories theory of being "in a subject"; all
things not themselves subjects but related to subjects are predicable of subjects, and
those things which are predicable of subjects are universals. 29 What this means for form
is that it is predicated universally if there are different bodies that happen to have it.
Socrates, Callias, and Melitta are individuals whose bodies are constituted by the
species Man. That is, in some sense bodies act as thisses - the form Man is predicated
of these bodies. Thus Man is predicated universally: the form Man is in many bodies
at once, matter acting as its subject. Form, then, is universal. 30

The thesis that essence is universal satisfies the requirement of the epistemological

29 Aristotle says the converse: "The universal is said of some subject, always" (Met.
7.13 1038b 15). The change of form can be justified by adding a bi-conditional - being
said of some subject is sufficient and necessary for being a universal.

30 Code uses the language of 'predication' to express the relationship between a
particular species-form and matter: "A substantial form is a primary substance and, as
such, is a definable 'this' that is identical with its essence. Strictly speaking, it is not a
universal...On such a view, primary substance would be, strictly speaking, particular.
It is not predicatable of a plurality of actual substances, but rather is predicatable of
the matter, or potential substance, which is not an actual object" (Code 1984, 18). I
acknowledge the relation between form as a particular and matter as that between
actuality and potentiality (Chapter 2.2 above), but reserve the relation of predication for
form as a universal with matter as its subject.
argument that if we are to have knowledge of the principles, then the principles are universals. In the various statements of the aporia, knowledge is expressed as a relation to universals: “All knowledge is of universals and of the such” (*Met.* 11.2 1060b 20-21). Indeed, knowledge in the *Categories* is placed in the category of relation.\(^{31}\) The epistemological correlates of essences are definitions, themselves formulated as universals and the first principles of scientific knowledge. So, there is an isomorphism between essences as the first principles of being and definitions as the first principles of knowledge. Our knowledge begins with principles which are universals - definitions - but our definitions are the epistemological correlates of the universal principles of being. This reflects Aristotle’s commitment to the thesis of epistemological realism.\(^{32}\)

However, since Aristotle argues at *Metaphysics* 7.13 that no universal is a substance, a distinction between the sense of universal as a species-form and that argued against in 7.13 has to be developed. It would seem that the sense of universal that Aristotle argues against in 7.13 is that of the Platonic Ideas which are universals and ontologically separate from sensible beings. This comes through in the following passage: “And in general it follows, if man and such things are substances, that none of the elements in their formulae is the substance of anything, nor does it exist apart from the species or in anything else; I mean, for instance, that no animal exists apart from the

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\(^{31}\) *Cat.* 7 6b 1

\(^{32}\) *On Interpretation* 1 16a 3-8

37
particular animals, nor does any other of the elements in the formulae exist apart” (*Met.* 7.13 1038b 30-34). The issue of separation is key. The kinds of universals Aristotle is interested in here are those that are thought to be ontologically separate from sensible things or the things signified by the formulations of essences.\(^{33}\) For the “substance of each thing is what is co-extensive with each thing, what doesn’t belong to something else, but the universal is common, for that is said universally whose nature is to belong to a number of things (*Met.* 7.13 1038b 10-12).\(^{34}\) On my reading, a form or essence is co-extensive with each thing, because it is in a causal relationship with the matter of each thing.\(^{35}\) Thus we may be able to work around Aristotle’s concern about universals being substances, if we can interpret ‘universal’ in 7.13 as referring to beings which are ontologically separate from those things of which they are said, as the Platonic Ideas were thought to be.\(^{36}\)

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\(^{33}\) The constituent parts of essences will be discussed in Chapter 3 *vis-a-vis* essence as subject.

\(^{34}\) Furth’s translation.

\(^{35}\) The sense in which essence is separate, as required by the conditions of being primary substance in the *Metaphysics*, will be discussed in Chapter 3.

\(^{36}\) Reeve takes ‘universal’ in this passage to refer to secondary-substances of the *Categories*: “All he (Aristotle) is really claiming, however, is that there is no generic animal, separate from and in addition to particular animals belonging to different species...All he is precluding, therefore, is that genera should belong in the category of primary substance”, not that they should belong in that of secondary substance”. For separation is a mark only of primary substance, not of all substance” (Reeve 2000, 289). This interpretation, however, would have to take the secondary substances to be
Aristotle seems to be limiting the notion of universal to genera, like animal, as indicated in 1038b 30-34 quoted above. Indeed, in the course of argument he says that man is a substance: “Man is the substance of the individual man in whom it is present” (Met. 7.13 1038b 21-22). Thus when Aristotle argues that no universal is a substance, my interpretation that essence is universal should not be taken as being counter-doctrinal. He does argue that no thing thought to be ontologically separate and universal is to be taken as substance; but he also argues that species-forms are universal because they are predicable of the many bodies in which they are present. And because they are causally related to matter, they are not ontologically separate from sensible substances. Matter acting as subject and substance allows us to argue at once that

causes and principles. This is not found in the Categories. But it is the universal that is thought to be a principle and cause that motivates Aristotle’s discussion: “but the universal, too, seems to some to be par excellence a cause, and the universal to be an origin too” (Met. 7.13 1038b 7-8; Furth’s translation). This is just the character the Platonists thought the Ideas to have.

Bostock’s (2000) detailed analysis of Met. 7.13 argues that the chapter is internally incoherent, since one discernible line of argument claims no universal is a substance, while it is also presumed that the species-form is a substance. Bostock reconstructs the chapter as it might have appeared before later editing. His guiding principle for reconstruction is: “So long as the universal species-form is still allowed as a substance, the claim that anything more universal than this is not a substance fits well enough with Aristotle’s doctrine elsewhere” (Bostock 2000, 206). Bostock’s thesis about Aristotle’s intentions in 7.13 is the same as mine: “The thesis that he is opposing in this chapter is a thesis that he evidently credits to his Platonist opponents, i.e. that the more universal something is, the more it counts as a substance” (189).

37 Aristotle uses the word “zoon” for animal, as does Plato in the Timaeus 37c. There the form of the eternal living animal is “zoon”.

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species-forms are universals and that no Platonic universal is a substance.\textsuperscript{38}

The requirement of the \textit{epistemological argument} of the \textit{aporia} has thus been satisfied: the principles of things are universal, and thus suitable objects for scientific knowledge.

\textbf{4. The proposed solution does not lead to contradiction.}

Form, then, is a this and a such through one and the same act: on the one hand, form acts as a this-cause, enforming matter and making it something definite; on the other hand, various bodies are subjects for this act, so form is universal. Form or essence is a this because it is the individuating cause of sensible substances, and it is a such because it is common to many bodies. But the simultaneity of these conditions is not contradictory, because the formulations of the universality and the particularity of essence are different. In the case of it being universal, essence is related to matter as a universal to a substance. In the case of it being particular, essence is related to matter not as a particular to a substance, but as a this-cause to something only potentially a this.

The way we treat matter with respect to the universality and particularity of form keeps these terms from falling into contradiction. That is to say, essence is universal

\textsuperscript{38} Aristotle provides a psychological reason why people may argue for the existence of things like Platonic Ideas: "The thinkers of the present day tend to rank universals as substances (for genera are universals, and these they tend to describe as principles and substances, owing to the abstract nature of their inquiry)" (\textit{Met.} 12.1 1069a 26-28). Cf. Bostock in note 36.
and particular with respect to matter, but it is universal in one respect and particular in another. In this case, universal and particular are not interdefinable using negation, because the universality of essence is not contrasted with its particularity, and vice versa. Essence’s universality and particularity are to be contrasted only with the relevant formulations of matter.\footnote{Sykes argues that it is self-contradictory to believe form is both particular and universal: “to say of anything that it is both particular and universal leads to a breakdown of the rules of identity for that thing...to say of the form of this house that it is both particular and universal is to say both that it is not the same form and also that it is the same form as the form of that house” (Sykes 1975, 327-8). This is true, but only if form is particular and universal in the same respect. Since ‘particular’ and ‘universal’ are interdefinable using negation, and the respect in which Sykes is treating form is by its identity, the identity of a form breaks down. Code (1984) also uses the contradiction to steer his argument. My position is that contradiction is avoided with the introduction of matter; the respects in which form is particular and universal are different.}
Chapter 3: Are the essences of things primary substances?

In the previous chapter, the *aporia of essence* was solved by arguing that essence is simultaneously universal and particular without contradiction. This was assisted by the work of Chapter 1, which clarified the criteria of being primary substance in the *Metaphysics*. Essence satisfies the criterion of being a this, in the sense that it is the thisifying cause of a sensible substance. This chapter will demonstrate that essence is also a subject, but that it fails to meet the criterion of being separate.

1. Essence and subjecthood.

Socrates, as we have seen, is a subject for his affections. As a subject, his accidental attributes are ontologically dependent on him. But good sense cannot be made of an argument claiming the same of his form or soul, for while Socrates may be pale or run, it cannot be said that his soul is pale or runs. Socrates’ soul is of such a nature that Socrates has the capacity to run or be pale, but it does not follow that his soul is a subject for these, too. As well, the soul is not the proper subject of such attributes as being bold, fearful, angry, perceiving and thinking. The soul is that from which these movements originate or terminate, but it is flesh and blood Socrates who thinks over

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40 See *On the Soul* 1.4 408b 1-18

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the nature of virtue. To claim that the soul is the subject of Socrates’ attributes risks its reification, distorting our understanding of formal cause so far developed. Soul enables some matter to be a living thinking organism, but it is the organism which perceives, thinks and runs.\footnote{Thus I take issue with \textit{Categories} 2, which says that knowledge is in the soul.} There may, however, be a figurative sense in which the soul of Socrates is a subject for his attributes: “...if [Socrates’] soul is Socrates too...for some take [Socrates] as a soul, others as the composite” (\textit{Met.} 7.11 1037a 7-9).\footnote{Furth’s translation.} Thus, if it is figuratively understood that Socrates’ soul is Socrates, we may say that his soul is subject for certain attributes.

Based on this reasoning, we may cast some doubt on the claim made in \textit{Categories} 5: “As the primary substances stand to everything else, so the species and genera of the primary substances stand to all the rest: all the rest are said of these. For if you will call the individual man literate, then you will call both a man and an animal literate; and similarly in other cases” (\textit{Cat.} 5 3a 2-6).\footnote{Revised Oxford Translation with modification.} Species and genera in the \textit{Categories} are universals. The species also is subject for its respective genus. But it does not follow that if a man is literate, his species and genera are also literate. The universal character of species and genera seems to preclude individual accidental attributes being said of them. Accidental attributes are non-substantial beings and belong to the primary
substance in which they are. The claim above that both a man and an animal are literate, if an individual man is, is true. But this does not mean that the species and genus man and animal are literate, only that some individual man and animal is (as the use of indefinite articles indicate).

And yet we need to return to the *Categories* to find the sense in which essence is a subject. There we found that genera were predicatable of their species. And while secondary substances do not make their way into the *Metaphysics*, the species-forms in the latter text are subjects for genera too: ‘man is an animal’ is a predication which indicates that animal is an essential attribute of the species man, which is to say that man is necessarily an animal because that is the genus to which it belongs. Essence, then, is the subject of essential predication, by which a genus is predicated of a species as an essential attribute. As well, in the *Categories* differentiae are predicated of species (*Cat. 5 3a 24*). In the *Metaphysics* they are essentially predicated of species-forms, since ‘man is two-footed’ indicates an essential quality of man.

So far three kinds of predication have been identified in the *Metaphysics*: (1) Categorial predication illustrates the relation that holds between accidental attributes and sensible substances. (2) Material predication illustrates the relation that holds between a form and the matter that it is in. (3) Essential predication illustrates the necessary relation that holds between species-forms and their genera and differentiae. Note that (2) and (3) are types of metaphysical predication. In (3) essence acts as
subject for its own essential characteristics, but in turn essence as form is predicated of the matter it is in. Yet, because forms are not essentially predicated of anything, they satisfy the *Metaphysics* definition of subject: “the subject is that of which the other things are said, while it is itself not said of anything else (*Met.* 7.3 1028b 36-37). Genera and differentiae are essentially predicated of essences, but essences are not essentially predicated of further subjects.

2. Essence and separation.

Essence is said to be separate, but not in the sense that Socrates is separate. Socrates is separate because he is not said of some other subject: “it has been said in outline what substance is, that it’s that which isn’t [said] of a subject, but of which the other things [are said]” (*Met.* 7.3 1029a 8-9). Socrates’ accidental attributes are said of him. The being of these attributes is such that they are ontologically dependent on Socrates; they depend on him as the subject in which they exist. But Socrates himself is not said of some further subject. He is not himself an ontological dependent, i.e., Socrates is ontologically separate from subjects.

However, an analogous argument cannot be made for essence, since we saw in

\[\text{44 Furth’s translation.}\]

\[\text{45 Furth’s translation.}\]
Chapter 2.2 that formal cause has matter as its accompanying cause. Matter is the subject of which form is predicated. Thus form cannot be separate from a subject, unlike Socrates. But Aristotle argues that form is separate in some sense: “the formula and the shape...is separate in formula” (Met. 8.1 1042a 28-29).46 Chapters 10 and 15 from Metaphysics 7 will help to clarify the meaning.

To be definitionally separate means that essence is epistemologically separate from matter - the definition of an essence does not incorporate words that refer to body. Definitional separation evolves from the question of what may enter a definition as its parts. The suitable sense of ‘part’ for this question is “Those things ‘out of which’ the substance [is constituted]” (Met. 7.10 1034b 34 - 1035a 1).47 Note that ‘substance’ is left unqualified. This allows Aristotle to draw more than one conclusion about parts, since he recognizes more than one sense of ‘substance’: “if there’s matter and there’s form and there’s what’s ‘out of’ these, and if the matter and the form and what’s ‘out of’ them are substance, then there’s [i] a sense in which even the matter is called ‘part’ of a thing, and [ii] another sense in which it’s not, but rather these things ‘out of which’ the formula of the form [is composed] [are called “parts”]” (Met. 7.10 1035a 1-4).48 Matter is part of a hylomorphic compound, but not of the formula of a form. Only the

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46 Furth’s translation.
47 Furth’s translation.
48 Furth’s translation.
intrinsic constituents of form are articulated in a definition. Matter, though not an
intrinsic part of form, is an intrinsic constituent of a hylomorphic compound, yet the
words indicating bones, sinews, flesh and the like are not parts of a definition. They are
not "(parts) of the form; i.e., that which the formula is of; and for just this reason they
are not in the formulae" (Met. 7.10 1035a 22-23).49

Aristotle gives additional reasons why the mention of matter is not a part of
definition. For instance, he says "the form, and the thing qua having form, is to be
called in each case (the so-and-so, e.g. statue), but the material just in respect of itself
is never to be called [that]" (Met. 7.10 1035a 7-9).50 I interpret Aristotle to be saying
matter is not in itself something definite and hence cannot itself be called a statue, like
the composite or form. Matter, then, lacks the specific and intelligible content necessary
to be the subject (or part) of a definition. Material parts are parts only of the composite.

In Metaphysics 7.15, the reason for rejecting matter is that it is the origin and cause
of the generation and destruction of hylomorphic compounds. Forms, though, are
neither generated nor destroyed: "without any coming-to-be or ceasing-to-be they are,
or are not" (Met. 7.15 1039b 26-27).51 Aristotle says that the notion of generable forms

49 Furth's translation.
50 Furth's translation.
51 Furth's translation.
leads to an infinite regress. The idea is this: The generation of a sensible substance is causally explained by some matter coming together with some form. Form itself cannot be supposed to have been generated from matter and form, since the latter form will also have to have been generated from some matter and form, ad infinitum. Thus form cannot contain matter as a cause. And because composite individuals pass in and out of existence, there can be neither definition or proof of them, since definition and proof are of necessary things.

Essences, then, are separate from subjects, but only in definition. In a definition, only the intrinsic parts of a form are the parts of a definition - matter is left out. But since matter is the concomitant cause of form, the forms of plants and animals are not separate from it: essence is only epistemically or formulaically separate from its metaphysical subject. But is being separate in definition enough to satisfy the criterion of being separate? It was said that Socrates does not depend on some subject, making him an ontologically separate being. This is separation in a strong sense of the term, since Socrates is clearly the kind of thing that exists apart. Except for the immovable movers of the celestial spheres and possibly the productive intellect, form has matter as its subject. I will allow that in a weak sense the forms of sensible substances are separate,

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52 Met. 7.8 1033b 5

53 Met. 7.15 1039b 20-1040a 8

54 For the latter see Metaphysics 8.3 1043b 18-19 with On the Soul 2.1 413a 6.
since its formulation has no mention of bodily parts. But epistemic separation does not eliminate the fact that form has a subject. Essence, then, is separate in a weak sense, but not in the strong sense that it is in fact separate from some subject.

3. Primary substance in the *Metaphysics*.

After analyzing sensible substances and their essences in the *Metaphysics* and treating their criteria as criteria belonging to a naturalized metaphysics, sensible substance alone receives the title of primary substance. Socrates is a this in the sense that he is not said of anything else, he is the subject of his universal accidental attributes, and he is separate from other subjects. The essence of sensible substance is substance, albeit in a secondary sense, since it fails to satisfy one of the criteria. Essence is a this, in the sense that it is the thisifying-cause of sensible substances; it is also a subject, insofar as it is the subject of its own intelligible aspects. But essence is not separate in a strong sense, since Aristotle equivocates, saying it is separate in definition. Finally, matter is substance insofar as it is a subject for form. But since it is not a this and not separate, matter is substance in a tertiary sense.
Conclusion.

In this thesis I have provided a solution to Aristotle’s *aporia of essence* which gives equal consideration to its competing ontological and epistemological tendencies.

The method by which I proceeded was to first examine the criteria of primary substance in the *Metaphysics* and establish a conceptual framework through which the *aporia* could be solved. Then I argued for a solution that gave matter a central role. On the one hand, essence is particular with respect to matter, because it is the thisifying cause of indeterminate matter. On the other hand, essence is universal with respect to matter, because matter taken as substance is the subject for form. Thus, essence is simultaneously particular and universal: while it is the individuating cause of some matter, it is predicated universally of the bodies which have it. The exact formulation of these relationships reveals a solution which does not end in contradiction and satisfies the concerns of the ontological and epistemological arguments.

Finally, I argued that for Aristotle only sensible substance completely satisfies the criteria for being primary substance in the *Metaphysics*. Contrary to Aristotle’s claims that essence is primary substance, the case cannot be made without a significant equivocation on ‘separate’: essence is separate, but only in definition.
REFERENCES


