

# History of Philosophy

## 11 Aristotle's Metaphysics 2

### By Dr. Arthur Holmes of Wheaton College

#### Abstract:

This lecture by Dr. Arthur Holmes explores **Aristotle's metaphysics**, specifically his departure from Platonic thought by emphasizing the **primacy of particulars**. Aristotle defines metaphysics as the **science of being**, identifying ten categories of existence and establishing the **laws of non-contradiction, identity, and the excluded middle** as both logical and ontological foundations. He introduces the **four causes**—material, formal, efficient, and final—to explain the nature of change and the composition of reality. The text highlights the distinction between **primary substances**, which are individual entities, and **secondary substances**, which are the forms inherent within matter. Finally, Holmes describes Aristotle's cosmological argument for an **unmoved mover**, a purely actualized being that serves as the **final cause** of the universe.

#### Briefing Document:

Aristotle's Metaphysics: A Briefing on Being, Causality, and the Unmoved Mover

Executive Summary

Aristotle defines metaphysics as the "science of all sciences," focusing on the study of "being qua being"—being in its most general sense rather than particular manifestations. His system departs significantly from Platonic idealism by asserting that primary reality exists in "particulars" (individual things) rather than in a separate realm of forms.

The core of Aristotelian metaphysics rests on the "four causes" (efficient, material, formal, and final) and the hylomorphic composition of all things (the union of matter and form). This framework extends from the simplest inanimate objects to the "Unmoved Mover," an eternal, fully actualized being that serves as the final cause of

the universe. Reality is governed by three fundamental laws of being and thought: non-contradiction, identity, and the excluded middle, which reflect a rational correlation between the human mind and the structure of the world.

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### The Definition and Scope of Metaphysics

Metaphysics is the study of the most general principles of reality. While particular sciences deal with specific kinds of beings, metaphysics examines "being qua being."

### The Correlation of Thought and Reality

Aristotle posits a fundamental correlation between the way the mind functions and the way reality is structured. If reality is rational and humans are rational beings, then human rationality provides an "entrée to reality." This relationship is grounded in three laws:

1. **The Law of Non-Contradiction:** A being cannot both be and not be something at the same time and in the same respect ( is not non-).
2. **The Law of Identity:** A thing is identical with itself ().
3. **The Law of the Excluded Middle:** Something either is or is not; there is no third alternative (two-valued logic).

### The Ten Categories of Being

Aristotle identifies ten different ways in which we use the concept of being, including substances, qualities, places, and relationships. These categories represent both the ways we think and the ways things exist.

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### The Four Causes of Existence

To explain what anything is or why any change occurs, Aristotle appeals to four causal factors:

<b>Cause</b>	<b>Definition</b>
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<b>Material Cause</b>	The physical matter out of which a thing is made (e.g., bronze for a statue).
<b>Formal Cause</b>	The structure, pattern, or essence that makes a thing what it is.
<b>Efficient Cause</b>	The agent or force that brings about a change or produces the object.
<b>Final Cause</b> ( <i>Telos</i> )	The purpose, end, or "that for the sake of which" a thing exists.

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### Substance and Hylomorphism

Aristotle's most "revolutionary" break from Plato concerns the nature of substance. He distinguishes between different levels of substance:

- **Primary Substance:** These are particulars—individual entities like a specific marker, a desk, or a person. Unlike Plato, who viewed particulars as fleeting "becomings," Aristotle views them as the primary realities.
- **Secondary Substance:** These are the "forms" or essences of substances.
- **Tertiary Substance:** This refers to "bare matter" or "prime matter" (*materia prima*), a hypothetical state of unformed matter.

### Hylomorphism (Form + Matter)

Aristotle asserts that forms do not exist in an independent realm. Instead, they are only found in composition with matter. Every particular is a "hylomorphic" composite. The form gives the particular its nature and its "potential," while the matter is the substrate undergoing change.

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### The Hierarchy of Life and Human Flourishing

The relationship between form and matter creates a hierarchy of existence based on function and potential:

1. **Inanimate Objects:** Composed of elemental matter and basic spatial forms (e.g., a rock).

2. **Vegetative Life:** Possesses functions of nutrition and reproduction.
3. **Animal Life:** Includes vegetative functions plus sensation and locomotion.
4. **Human Life:** Includes all lower functions plus **rationality**.

### Ethics and the "Good"

Because the "final cause" is defined by the potential of the form, the "good" for a human being is "human flourishing." This is defined as a "full life under the rule of reason," involving the actualization of nutrition, sensation, locomotion, and—most crucially—rationality.

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### Change and Potentiality

Aristotle identifies four specific kinds of change:

1. **Change in "Thisness":** Generation (coming to be) or destruction (passing away).
2. **Change in Quantity:** Increase or diminution.
3. **Change in Quality:** Alteration of properties (e.g., an "affection").
4. **Change in Place:** Locomotion.

Change is explained through the transition from **potency** (potentiality) to **actuality**. While most things possess unactualized potential, Aristotle's system requires a peak of the hierarchy that is fully actualized.

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### The Cosmos and the Unmoved Mover

In his cosmology (Book 12), Aristotle describes a geocentric universe where different substances exhibit different types of motion.

### The Necessity of an Unmoved Mover

Aristotle observes the "endless circular locomotion" of the fixed stars. He argues that this eternal motion must have an unchanging cause.

- **Physical Substances:** Some are perishable (plants/animals), while others are eternal (the planets and stars).
- **The Unmoved Mover:** Beyond the perimeter of the universe exists a being that is "immovable" and "unmoved."

### God as Final Cause

The Unmoved Mover (God) is not an "efficient cause"—it does not exert power or force, as that would imply a process of change within God. Instead:

- **Pure Actuality:** God is pure being with no unactualized potential.
- **Final Cause:** God moves the universe as the "object of wonder." The souls of the stars and the elements of the cosmos are moved by a desire to be like the Unmoved Mover.
- **The Good:** God is the ultimate "Good" and the "that for the sake of which" the entire cosmos functions.

This cosmological model suggests that while matter and form are eternal (avoiding *creation ex nihilo*), the Unmoved Mover serves as the ultimate magnetism that maintains the order and motion of the universe.

## Study Guide:

### Aristotle's Metaphysics: A Comprehensive Study Guide

This study guide provides a detailed synthesis of Aristotle's metaphysical framework as presented in the lectures of Dr. Arthur Holmes. It covers the fundamental definitions of being, the laws of thought, the nature of substance, and the cosmological arguments for an unmoved mover.

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#### Part I: Review Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer the following questions in 2–3 sentences, ensuring all information is derived from the source context.

1. How does Aristotle define the scope and purpose of metaphysics?
  2. What is the "science of being qua being," and how does it differ from particular sciences?
  3. Explain the correlation Aristotle establishes between human rationality and reality.
  4. Describe the Law of Non-Contradiction and its symbolic representation.
  5. What is the distinction between "contradictories" and "contraries" regarding the Law of the Excluded Middle?
  6. How does Aristotle's view of "primary substance" differ fundamentally from Plato's view of reality?
  7. Define "hylomorphism" and explain the relationship between form and matter in particulars.
  8. What are the four kinds of change identified by Aristotle?
  9. According to the text, why can the Unmoved Mover not be an efficient cause?
  10. In Aristotle's cosmology, how do the "fixed stars" interact with the Unmoved Mover?
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## Part II: Answer Key

1. **Aristotle's Definition:** Aristotle defines metaphysics as the "science of all sciences" because it deals with the most general principles. Its purpose is to explain what anything is and to account for any kind of change by appealing to efficient, material, formal, and final causal factors.
2. **Being Qua Being:** While particular sciences deal with specific kinds of beings, metaphysics is the study of "being qua being," or being in general as the most general concept. This involves exploring the different categories of being, such as substances, qualities, places, and relationships.
3. **Rationality and Reality:** Aristotle posits a direct correlation between the way the mind functions and the way reality is structured. If reality is rational and

humans are rational, then human rationality provides a necessary "entrée" or access point to understanding reality.

4. **Law of Non-Contradiction:** This law states that a being cannot both be and not be something at the same time and in the same respect. It is typically symbolized as "A is not non-A," which also implies the Law of Identity, where A equals A.
  5. **Contradictories vs. Contraries:** Contradictories (like "white" and "not white") allow no middle ground, supporting the law of the excluded middle. Contraries (like "white" and "black") are opposites that are both part of a broader category (like "not green"), but they do not exhaust all possibilities like true contradictories do.
  6. **Primary Substance Distinction:** For Aristotle, "primary substances" are individual particulars, such as a specific person or object, making him a physical realist. This is revolutionary compared to Plato, who viewed particulars as fleeting "becomings" and considered universal forms to be the primary reality.
  7. **Hylomorphism:** This concept describes particulars as a composite of both form and matter. Unlike Plato, Aristotle argues that forms are not independent entities in a separate realm; they are only found in composition with matter as particular bodies.
  8. **Kinds of Change:** Aristotle identifies four types of change: change in "thisness" (generation or destruction), change in quantity (increase or diminution), change in quality (alteration), and change in place (locomotion).
  9. **Unmoved Mover as Final Cause:** The Unmoved Mover cannot be an efficient cause because exerting power or force would involve a process of change within the mover itself. Instead, it is the "final cause," meaning it is the "good" toward which all things are drawn or moved by wonder.
  10. **The Fixed Stars:** The fixed stars exist on the outer perimeter of the universe and undergo everlasting circular locomotion. They are moved by wonder and the desire to be like the Unmoved Mover, which is pure, fully actualized being.
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### Part III: Essay Format Questions

*The following questions are designed for deeper reflection and synthesis. No answers are provided.*

1. **The Hierarchy of Soul:** Based on the text, explain how Aristotle distinguishes between vegetative, animal, and human life. How does this hierarchy inform his definition of "the good" and human flourishing?
2. **Aristotle vs. Plato:** Compare and contrast the Aristotelian and Platonic views of "Form." Specifically, address where forms exist, their relationship to matter, and which philosopher is more "down-to-earth."
3. **The Nature of Being and Logic:** Discuss the three laws of being (Identity, Non-Contradiction, and Excluded Middle). How do these logical principles serve as both "laws of thought" and "laws of reality" in Aristotle's system?
4. **The Four Causes in Practice:** Choose an object (like a desk or a marker) and explain its existence using Aristotle's four causes. Detail the material, formal, efficient, and final factors that must be appealed to for a complete explanation.
5. **Aristotelian Cosmology:** Describe Aristotle's geocentric model of the universe. How does he use the concept of "locomotion" to argue for the existence of an eternal, unchanging Unmoved Mover?

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### Part IV: Glossary of Key Terms

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Accident</b>	A property of a substance that is not essential to its nature (e.g., eye color in a human).
<b>Actualized</b>	The state of being fully realized; the Unmoved Mover is described as "fully actualized" with no unactualized potential.
<b>Efficient Cause</b>	The agent or force that brings something into being or initiates change.

<b>Essence</b>	The essential properties that define the nature of a being (e.g., rationality in a human).
<b>Final Cause (Telos)</b>	The end goal, purpose, or "that for the sake of which" a thing exists or changes.
<b>Formal Cause</b>	The structure, pattern, or definition that makes a thing what it is.
<b>Hylomorphic</b>	From the Greek for "matter" and "form"; the doctrine that physical particulars are composites of matter and form.
<b>Locomotion</b>	Change in respect to place; Aristotle identifies circular locomotion as the only endless form of motion.
<b>Material Cause</b>	The physical matter or "stuff" out of which a thing is made.
<b>Metaphysics</b>	The science of being qua being; the study of the most general principles of reality and the science of all sciences.
<b>Materia Prima</b>	Also known as "bare matter" or "prime matter"; the hypothetical, unformed matter that lies at the bottom of the hierarchy of being.
<b>Primary Substance</b>	Particular, individual entities (e.g., a specific man or a specific horse) which Aristotle considers the primary reality.
<b>Privation</b>	The lack of a specific property or quality in a being.
<b>Secondary Substance</b>	The forms or essences of substances; for Aristotle, these are real but contingent upon their existence in particulars.
<b>Unmoved Mover</b>	An eternal, unchanging being that acts as the final cause of the universe's motion, moving other things through wonder rather than force.