

Aristotle's Ontology

Theory of change, actuality and potentiality,
Hierarchic Universe

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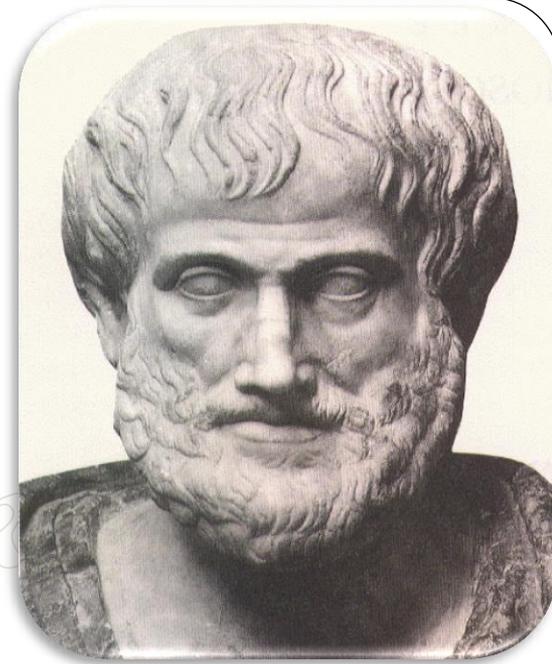
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Aristotle

384-322 BCE

- Son of a physician
- Born in Macedonia
- Attended the Academy of Plato
- Became Plato's foremost student
- Left the Academy when Plato died
- Founded the Lyceum in Athens
- Scientific thought



❑ Matter is that which may become anything according to the form imposed upon it.

❑ Matter is the possibility of everything though actually it is nothing

❑ “What becomes is matter and what it becomes is form”

❑ Matter is potentiality which is always in the process of becoming or achieving actuality

❑ Form is the that towards which development, change or becoming takes place.

❑ It is the ideal framework into which the thing is molded.

❑ In all types of changes matter is that in which change is made. It is that which it becomes . But the form is that towards which the change operates.

The concept of development implies two aspects –

1. That in which development take place
2. That towards which development leads

❑ Everything in the world has both form and matter .

❑ Everything is a matter trying to achieve a form

❑ Similarly everything is form which has realized itself in and through matter

❑ It is the individual which is the combination of these two.

What is Real ?

- ❑ The world can't be conceived as completely formless nor as completely formed, but as a forming and developing world
- ❑ Neither matter nor form in itself is real but Matter which is becoming form is real
- ❑ e.g: the seed is waiting to be actualized into a plant, plant--- tree--- a piece of wood---table/chair
- ❑ Thus the **reality of the world is development of the individual**. It is unfolding of its meaning and purpose

- The world of ' becoming' cannot be appearance as Plato says
- It has some meaning of its own. It is a teleological process
- World of Particulars cannot be mere appearance
- World of universals has no existence without particulars
- World of Sensory phenomena is real

Teleology

- ❑ Relationship of development between form and matter i.e. universal and particular is according to Aristotle of '**Purpose**'
- ❑ Purposeful self realization of a thing
- ❑ Purpose behind the change and development of the universe
- ❑ Most positive and fundamental principle of explaining the world
- ❑ The seed becomes a plant because the purpose of the seed is to become a plant and the purpose of the nature as a whole is to allow the seed to grow into a plant

- ❑ Form and matter are inseparable . They are distinguishable only in thought but not in reality
- ❑ Each of them is inconceivable when taken by itself
- ❑ Both are not absolute but they are relative
- ❑ In order of time, matter comes first but in order of thought form comes first

❑ Reason gives form while sensation gives matter.

❑ Matter is the perfect stage and form is the perfection

❑ Every form in turn becomes the matter of some higher form. This goes on until we come towards the '**First mover**' which is itself unmoved

❑ God is necessary for the world though the world may not be necessary for the god

❑ God – pure form without matter

Theory of substance

- ❑ What exists independently in the world are particular things or substance.
- ❑ Properties or the qualities of substance do not exist independently.

Nyaya theory of Universals

- ❑ Theory of form and matter resembles with that of *dravya* and *vishesha* of nyaya
- ❑ According to Nyaya, there exist *samavaya* (inherence) between two. Therefore they are inseparable
- ❑ **Aristotle** also assumes the same though he fails to mention it or explain the inseparability with any of the relation

❑ Particular things or substances like rose, horse exist independently.

Red roses

Brown horse

❑ Idea of Redness or brownness cannot exist independently without substance.

Substance

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graph TD; Substance[Substance] --- Essential[Essential properties  
Roseness, horseness]; Substance --- NonEssential[Non-essential properties  
Red, brown etc.]
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Essential
properties

**Roseness,
horseness**

Non-essential
properties

Red, brown etc.

Essential properties / species

- ❑ Essence of the thing
- ❑ Without which it cannot be called that particular thing
- ❑ **Horseness** makes that particular horse known as horse.

Plato : substance = idea

Aristotle: substance= particular/ concrete thing

Substance according to Aristotle = 3 elements

1. Universal
2. Qualities
3. An unknown substratum called matter by itself

Aristotle :

- ❑ An universal without qualities and substratum does not exist.
- ❑ For Aristotle, the Idea of Plato is not a substance. Because idea exist apart from individuals.

Plato : What really exists is the idea of horse and not the horse

Aristotle: What really exists is the substance that is particular things like horse, rose etc. Idea of horseness, roseness etc. being the **essential properties** of the substance exist in and with the substance

Plato :

- ❑ In order to perceive 'blue chair', one must possess the idea of chairness and blueness.
- ❑ Sense-experience is an imperfect form of knowledge. True knowledge is insight into the ideas. Looking into the world of 'ideas' behind the sensory phenomena.
- ❑ **Reason** has the prime importance in the philosophy of Plato

Aristotle

- ❑ Ultimately only particular things (substances) do exist. We can distinguish the universal forms with the aid of reason.
- ❑ Sense-experience has more positive status
- ❑ Equivalent status for **sense-experience** and **reason**.

Theory of potentiality and actuality

- ❑ All particular things are combination of actuality and potentiality.
- ❑ All things seek to actualize their potentialities.
- ❑ **Change** for Aristotle is the actualization of potentialities

Actuality and Potentiality

Seed- possess the **potentiality** of tree
Sprouting, growing, flowering, fructifying etc.
changes take place in order to realize its
actuality.

If the seed possesses potential of becoming
mango tree then it cannot be actualized in neem
or any other tree

❑ Child possesses the potential of becoming **Engineer.**

❑ In order to get actualization each step is taken

❑ Education- training – actualization

❑ One who has the potential of becoming Engineer cannot become a **lawyer.**

What is real?

- ❑ **Plato** : Actualized form. What the thing actually is/being (static world view)
- ❑ **Aristotle** : Real is that which strives for actualization/becoming/developing (dynamic world view)
- ❑ **Exception**: God – real inspite of being Pure actuality without any potentiality.
Without urge towards actualization.

Samkhya system

- Philosophical dualism of Prakrti and Purusha
- Both are real and equally important
- Aristotle also maintains both Form and matter as equally real

Hierarchic Universe

God

***(Pure
Actuality)***

**Human beings
(Rational Soul)**

**Animals
(Sensitive Soul)**

Plants (Nutritive Soul)

Inorganic things

Pure Potentiality

At the very bottom – lifeless things

❑ **Plants** = higher form of existence
Reproductive + vegetative soul

❑ **Animals** = Reproductive + vegetative soul
+ sensitive soul + motory soul

❑ **Human beings** = Reproductive +
vegetative soul + sensitive soul + motory
soul + Reasoning soul

Man is the rational animal.

Reasoning is the unique soul of human beings

Form of human beings- Reason

Material for human beings- animal form

Human being possesses all the animal properties but reason makes human being different

- ❑ In Aristotle's hierarchic universe, each particular thing has an inclination to realize its potentialities in the best way
- ❑ There is inner urge in all things to go higher – an upward yearning.
- ❑ Each thing is directed to realize its capacities.

Theology of the Aristotle

- ❑ Prime Mover (*Actus Purus*)
- ❑ Pure Actuality- free from potentiality
- ❑ Free from change
- ❑ Form of forms without matter
- ❑ Unmoved mover of the universe
- ❑ Final end of everything else

❑ **Spiritual monotheism of the west**

❑ Same as the Plato's Idea of Good

❑ Immovable, unchangeable, eternal,
perfect, independent

❑ God lives in eternal blessedness which
consists in ever lasting contemplation of his
own perfection

Plato & Aristotle



- True Knowledge is found “above”, in the world of ideas.

True Knowledge is found “here”, in the world of things.