

The thinghood primacy, how form and matter relates and the different types of exi...

[Philosophy](#)



It would seem that the ultimate goal of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is to solve the ultimate question: what is it to be? His numerous digressions make it difficult to comprehend what exactly his thoughts are however, he uses a multitude of strategies including his primacy of thinghood, the relationship between matter and form, and the various types of existence to argue a confusing and somewhat disarrayed unified existence of being as a whole. Aristotle's argument for the primacy of thinghood is his way of saying that thinghood itself binds the cosmos together.

It is necessary to cover the basics before delving into the daunting statement presented above. In order to do that, addressing the sense of being is imperative. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle raises the question of what it is to be a thing. Once the definition of what a thing is becomes apparent, it is still necessary to say what makes that particular thing a thing within itself and what the cause of its thinghood is.

According to Aristotle, thinghood is primary in three ways: articulation, knowledge, and time. When Aristotle mentions articulation, it is referred to in a grammatical sense. Whereas, when speaking of a "thing," one must include the predicate along with the subject in order for it be understood. For attributes to exist there must first be a substance for the attribute to be attributed to; attributes cannot exist if there is not a thing however, a thing can exist without any attributes. For example, one cannot say "the dog is black" without including both the predicate and the subject together because the dog itself says something more than "is black." Thinghood is primary in definition because the definition of a substance is the definition of what a thing is therefore to have a definition you must include in it thinghood, which <https://assignbuster.com/the-thinghood-primacy-how-form-and-matter-relates-and-the-different-types-of-existence-in-aristotles-book-metaphysics/>

one cannot do unless the thing exists. Knowledge is another primary form of thinghood because, in knowledge, our reason can only know finite existences and all finite things are substances; we cannot know a thing fully unless we know thinghood. Finally, thinghood is primary in the essence of time. Time is necessary because quantity and quality must exist. If quantity and quality did not exist, there would not be a thing.

Once the primary sense of thinghood is established, it is important for one to grasp the relationship between form and matter that essentially proves Aristotle's belief that thinghood binds the cosmos together. In order to better comprehend this, it is crucial to know that Aristotle believed thinghood was meant in four ways: what it keeps being in order to be at all (essence), the universal, the general class, and what underlies these.

First and foremost, the essence of thinghood is simply restated as the brute fact of a thing's thereness. Moreover, a thing has to be there in order to be at all. The universal sense of thinghood is essentially the platonic or mathematical form of the entity that describes the thing in a universal manner. Naturally, the genus class of thinghood is a broader aspect than the species category. The fourth and final way that thinghood is meant is the subject (what underlies thinghood). In his argument, Aristotle questions whether the underlying essence of thinghood is the matter, the form, or a composite of the two.

When thinghood is considered in the form of matter, it describes that in which is capable of taking on form which in turn becomes the potency of the thing. For example, a block of clay is nothing other than a block of clay

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however it contains the potential to become any shape or sculpture insofar that it is still clay. Aristotle argues that this is problematic because the block of clay never becomes an actual thing until someone gives it a shape; therefore, it cannot be matter that defines thinghood but rather, form. Form is used by Aristotle to describe a thing as everything that actually exists because, naturally, everything thing has a form. Without form, matter does not have meaning. At the conclusion of the argument, though, a reader of the *Metaphysics* can easily see that Aristotle believes thinghood is a composite of both matter and form. Matter and form cannot exist without each other and the composite is what constitutes the actual existing thing. If one were to consider the soul and the body of a human, it is evident that the two cannot be separated. The problem that arises for Aristotle is that a composite of things cannot be what simply underlies the existence of thinghood but rather, one of the two composites must be a primary.

For Aristotle, thinghood is neither universal nor particular. This is proven by his principle of individuation, which shows that matter takes a universal subject and individualizes it. For example, no individual cat is what-it-is to be a cat, which is why Aristotle believed that it is impossible to define an individual. Aristotle made it clear that only the universals can be defined. This is confirmed when Aristotle wrote, “ But the whole, this particular form in these particular bones and flesh, is already Callias or Socrates; and they are different on account of their material, but they are the same in form” (1034a6-8). If both Callias and Socrates were in the same form they would have to be of the same form, which essentially leads to them belonging to

the same predicated of two types of matter. If one is predicated in a plural sense, it then becomes universal.

Aristotle makes it apparent that the universals are superior to the particulars in his argument against Plato. He rejected Plato's Theory of Forms with a detailed argument against the universals and particulars on beauty and justice. Aristotle believed that universal concepts of beauty and justice derive from the instances of beauty and justice in the world. One can only reach a perception of beauty by witnessing particular instances of beauty, and the universal worth of beauty has no existence beyond the conception that an individual can build from an instance in particular.

His argument then turns to proposals that claim that thinghood is derived of form in the universal sense and that there is not a universal thinghood. This can be explained in the simplest form by describing the mind: when one understands a thing, the form of the thing is in the mind of that individual because the mind has the ability to see form without matter. Therefore, the only remaining candidate for primary substance is form which somewhat turns his thesis into the thinghood of something rather than the thing itself. Moreover, it is now what it is about an individual that makes it an independent thing. This postulate relates back to the potentiality of matter and the actuality of form. Both potentiality and actuality have a direct relationship to matter and form, respectively but it is important to realize that actuality occurs before potentiality.

Actuality is prior to potentiality in formula. Potentiality is understood in terms of actuality, and a formula is stated in terms of actuality. We can only know

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the potentiality of something if we know its fully actualized self. It is primary in time because nothing can have the potential to be something that does not exist, so actuality must come first. Actuality, most fully, shows a things form, and a form is substance. We cannot know the potentiality of thinghood if we do not first have knowledge of it in its fullest form, its most actualized self. It is important to note, for clarification, that matter provides potentiality and form provides actuality.

In summation from the previous proposal of actuality versus potentiality, Aristotle says that matter is potentially a certain kind of substance and becomes that specific substance in actuality when that thing takes on the form of that substance. By relating substance to form and actuality as a whole, he surmises in a further relationship between thinghood and the qualities that distinguish one species from another.

Through all of the arguments that Aristotle suggests, though, Aristotle's persistent mentioning of the primacy of thinghood exposes his belief that, essentially, there is not and cannot be one single category of being.

Existence can occur in numerous ways; colors, places, times, ideas, moments, and movements are just a few examples of differing types of existing "beings." It is important to realize that every being does not exist in the same manner. It is inherently clear that colors and ideas must exist in a different sense and, for Aristotle, this thought in itself becomes a problem. He writes, "So it is clear from these considerations that if thinghood is the cause of each thing's being, it is among these differences that one must look for what is responsible for the being of each of these things" (1043a2-4). If it

is so that every different thing exists in a different form than every other existing thing, how can there be one single cosmo where everything, whether it be colors, places, times, ideas, or moments, can all exist in harmony? It is then that we derive the notion that Aristotle argues the primacy of thinghood, as opposed to location or time that binds the cosmos together. For this to hapen, there must be a unifiedbase entity of existence on which all other kinds of existence depends.