



ON ARISTOTELIAN ESSENCE

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Hossein Khodadadi

Mestre em Filosofia pela University of Manitoba

khodadah@myumanitoba.ca

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9744-0144>

ABSTRACT:

The concept of essence holds a pivotal role in unraveling Aristotle's metaphysical framework. In his exploration of *Metaphysics*, Aristotle delves into the quest for fundamental being, positing that the primary substance is essentially synonymous with essence. This paper examines the criteria for essence, drawing from both the *Categories* and *Metaphysics Z*. Two distinct perspectives on essentialism, namely individual essentialism, aligned with the contemporary modal account of essence, and kind essentialism, are scrutinized. Through a critical analysis, this paper contends that both these essentialist accounts fall short in adequately elucidating the Aristotelian concept of essence. Consequently, this pivotal notion, governed by Aristotelian criteria, remains a perplexing enigma, challenging contemporary attempts to fully grasp its intricacies.

KEY-WORDS:

Aristotle. Categories. Essence. Metaphysics. Modality.

SOBRE A ESSÊNCIA ARISTOTÉLICA

RESUMO:

Na *Metafísica*, Aristóteles se debruça sobre a questão fundamental do ser, colocando que a substância primeira é expressamente sinônima de essência. Este artigo examina o critério para essência, partindo das *Categorias* e do livro *Z da Metafísica*. O conceito de essência desempenha um papel fundamental no entendimento da estrutura da metafísica aristotélica. Na *Metafísica*, Aristóteles se debruça sobre a questão fundamental do ser, colocando que a substância primeira é expressamente sinônima de essência. Este artigo examina o critério para essência, partindo das *Categorias* e do livro *Z da Metafísica*. Duas perspectivas distintas do essencialismo são analisadas, a saber,

essencialismo individual, alinhada com a abordagem modal contemporânea de essência, e essencialismo de tipo. Por meio de uma análise crítica, esse artigo defende que ambos os essencialismos não são suficientes para elucidar o conceito aristotélico de essência. Consequentemente, essa noção fundamental, governada por critérios aristotélicos, continua enigmática, desafiando tentativas contemporâneas a tentarem entender sua complexidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

Aristóteles. Categorias. Essência. Metafísica. Modalidade.

The importance of essence in Aristotle's philosophy

The concept of essence stands as one of the most impactful and contentious philosophical, particularly metaphysical, ideas that has significantly shaped the course of philosophical history. Unquestionably, Aristotle's philosophy emerges as a cornerstone in the discourse surrounding essence, firmly associating essentialism with his name and establishing his work as a pivotal source in the historical narrative of philosophy.

Aristotle's metaphysical inquiries revolve around the fundamental concept of being, seeking to address the profound question: "What is being?"¹ It is crucial to note that Aristotle's exploration of this question differs significantly from the inquiry of "What is there?"—a query that seeks a comprehensive, general description or enumeration of existent entities. Aristotle clarifies that his focus is on investigating "being qua being," signifying a precise examination of the essence of being. In essence, he seeks an elucidation of why something that exists does so, or in what manner something that has being derives its existence. Aristotle posits metaphysics as the most foundational science, dedicated to providing fundamental explanations (1026 a 29). To comprehend "being qua being," one must delve into the investigation to ascertain the most fundamental aspect, the primary substance.

¹ The issue at hand is not uncontroversial, and Aristotelian scholars have provided varying interpretations regarding the subject matter of metaphysics. Aristotle himself described his focus in several ways, such as 'first philosophy,' 'the study of being qua being,' 'wisdom,' or 'theology.' Further discussion on these descriptions, as outlined in Merlan (1968), can help clarify Aristotle's intended topic. It is worth noting that Aristotle's phrase 'the study of being qua being' can be easily misinterpreted, as it might imply that metaphysics has a singular subject matter—being qua being—under investigation. However, Aristotle's description entails three elements. Contrary to misconceptions, Aristotle does not propose a subject matter called 'being qua being.' Instead, his study focuses on beings, examining them specifically as beings, in so far as they are beings. While other fields like natural science and mathematics also investigate beings, they do so in different ways, emphasizing various aspects. Natural scientists study beings as subject to natural laws, emphasizing their motion and change, while mathematicians focus on the countable and measurable aspects. In contrast, metaphysics, or first philosophy, approaches the study of beings more broadly and abstractly—qua beings. For more detail on this see: Shields (2012).

Aristotle's view about substance in the Categories

Aristotle's *Categories* stands as a cornerstone in metaphysics, presenting a systematic classification of beings based on two crucial concepts: (1) said-of and (2) present-in. Any being is either said-of another or is not said-of another. Likewise, any being is either present-in another or is not present-in another. (1a24–5)² Aristotle's foundational concepts of said-of and present-in serve as the bedrock for categorizing entities in the *Categories*. While lacking precise definitions, these notions lead to a hierarchical classification, distinguishing particulars from universals and accidental from essential properties. Aristotelian scholars, by focusing on Aristotle's illustrations, conclude that beings which are not said-of others are particulars, and those which are said-of others are universals. By present-in others, Aristotle means accidental properties, and by not present-in others he has non-accidental or essential ones in his mind. Given the mentioned concepts now beings can be classified into four classifications: (1) accidental universals: Said-of and present-in; (2) essential universals: Said-of and not present-in; (3) accidental particulars: Not said-of and present-in; (4) non-accidental particulars: Not said-of and not present-in beings are the fundamental, or what Aristotle calls, *primary substances*³ (Studtmann, 2013). The resulting four classifications - accidental universals, essential universals, accidental particulars, and non-accidental particulars (fundamental substances) - set the stage for understanding the nature of substance in Aristotle's metaphysical framework.

A key aspect of Aristotle's metaphysical framework is the distinction between primary and secondary substances. It seems that primary substances, i.e., non-accidental individuals such as Socrates, Callias, this individual horse etc., are the fundamental beings according to the *Categories*. So, in the *Categories* Aristotle distinguishes substances from all other categories of beings such as qualities, quantities, relations, positions, etc. which are less real than substances in terms of being. These categories include things which cannot exist on their own, and their existence depends on substances. Aristotle also draws a distinction between two types of substances: primary substances which are not said-of and not present in others and secondary ones which are said-of but not present-in others such as species, genera.

This distinction prompts us to ask whether Aristotle's use of the term 'Substance' is guided by clear philosophical criteria. This question leads us to explore the differences in existence between primary and secondary substances, adding intricacy to Aristotle's understanding of substance. Essentially, because

² Here, it's noteworthy that this interpretation originates from Porphyry's well-known "ontological square" in his examination of the early chapters of the *Categories*. However, it's essential to recognize that this perspective is a matter of debate, and alternative readings exist; for instance, see: De Haas (2001).

³ *Ousia*, a form of the verb 'to be' is a Greek noun that is usually translated as 'substance' which indicates the fundamental being.

Aristotle employs the term ‘Substance’ for both primary and secondary substances, despite their ontological differences (one being concrete particulars and the other abstract universals), we need to determine which of them truly embodies the concept of substance in the category. To tackle this, we can examine the three characteristics of the substance derived from the characteristics of substance outlined in the Categories.

When Aristotle initially explains his use of the concept of substance in the Categories, he says that “a substance - that which is called substance most strictly, primarily, and most of all - is that which is neither said of a subject nor in a subject, for example the individual man or the individual horse” (Cat. 5, 2a11-18). In this phrase, Aristotle unequivocally defines a criterion for the fundamental nature of substance: the condition of not being ascribed to anything beyond its own existence. In the framework of the Categories, this criterion is uniquely satisfied by tangible entities. As a result, these entities are designated as ‘primary substances,’ while secondary substances do not meet this criterion.

The other characteristics that may help us here is embedded in the following paragraph where Aristotle holds:

It seems most distinctive of substance that what is numerically one and the same is able to receive contraries. In no other case could one bring forward anything, numerically one, which is able to receive contraries . . . for example, an individual man - one and the same - becomes pale at one time and dark at another, and hot and cold, and bad and good. Nothing like this is to be seen in any other case (Cat. 5, 4a10-22).

Here Aristotle introduces another characteristic of the substance. While secondary substances possess the capability to embody contraries, the focus on this capacity is not the central concern in the provided passage. Aristotle addresses the ability to embrace contraries specifically in the context of being “numerically one and the same.” However, it is crucial to note that numerical identity and individuality are not inherent features of secondary substances. In accordance with this characteristic, the phenomenon of a single entity embodying contraries at distinct times is exemplified by an individual man, for instance, becoming pale at one moment and dark at another. It is essential to recognize that, in the realm of secondary substances, the subject that accommodates these contraries can do so simultaneously. For example, a man can be both virtuous and vicious, provided there exists at least one individual man who embodies virtue and another individual man who embodies vice, and both coexist concurrently.

The third characteristic that can elucidate the concept of substance is highlighted by Aristotle in (Cat. 5, 2b26-28), where he observes that “no individual in a species is more substance than another individual in another species.” To rephrase, an individual, such as a man, does not possess a greater degree of substance than an individual belonging to a different species, like an ox. This observation emphasizes that no particular concrete object holds a higher status as a primary substance compared to any other

concrete object. However, a distinction arises with secondary substances, as certain ones can be considered more substantial than others. For instance, ‘man qua species’ is more of a substance than ‘animal qua genus.’ Therefore, the third characteristic reinforces the notion that the concept of substance is appropriately applied to primary substances. Therefore, based on Aristotle’s *Categories* primary substances are beings in virtue of themselves, and other entities exist in virtue of their relation to primary substances.⁴

Aristotle’s view about substance in the *Metaphysics*, namely the book Z

In *Metaphysics Z*, Aristotle poses a comparable query: “What is primary being?” Here, Aristotle underscores that the primary being is synonymous with substance, asserting that qualities, quantities, and other attributes are mere facets of substances.

The substance is primary in every sense of the word ‘primary’: in definition, in order of knowledge, and in time. For only substances can exist in their own right - nothing in any of the other categories can do this; the definition of each thing must contain the definition of a substance; we know a thing most fully when we know what it is (i.e., when we know its substance, not its quantity or quality or location). (1028a29-36).

Aristotle presents several contenders as potential answers to this fundamental question, seeking to demonstrate which one is most fitting as the primary substance. Broadly speaking, the candidates⁵ are the particulars, the universals, and the essence (1028b33–36). Aristotle dismisses the first two options, arguing that the essence is indeed the primary substance. An inquiry may arise as to why, from an Aristotelian perspective, particulars and universals are deemed unsuitable as primary substances. In essence, particulars and universals are inherent in things and their attributes, constituting general conceptualizations of the structural makeup of all things. Universals are applicable to particulars, but neither particulars nor universals, according to Aristotle, encapsulate the true essence of primary substance.

The term “universal” refers to a singular concept or property that can be applicable to multiple entities. In contrast, “particulars” can be characterized by having properties attributed to them, yet they, in turn, do not bestow those properties onto other entities. In the context of the subject-predicate pattern, the assertion “a is F” implies that something (a) possesses a certain property (F). F is considered universal

⁴ For further discussion on this issue see: Wedin (2000), Dahl (1994), Lewis (1991).

⁵ Aristotle enumerates four contenders: subjects, universals, genus, and essence. The subject, termed particular for its distinctive quality of being that of which everything else is predicated, yet is never predicated itself. Universals, being common and applicable to more than one entity, align with the characteristics of genus, which, belonging to multiple entities, can be treated as a universal. Consequently, it appears that there are three primary candidates: particulars, universals, and essence.

because it has the potential to be true of other entities, while a is classified as particular or a subject, as it cannot be predicated of anything else.⁶

Now, let's examine the fundamental structure of entities that indicates the truth of one thing about another. On one hand, there is an inclination to consider subjects and particulars as more foundational than universals. This perspective arises from the idea that universals derive their existence from being true of particulars, aligning with a viewpoint defended in the *Categories*. On the other hand, an argument can be made that universals hold a more fundamental status as entities. This is because it is the universal that defines the characteristics of the particular; it is through universals that particulars gain their specificity. (Politic, 2004, p. 14).

Now, we find ourselves grappling with a dilemma, attempting to discern which, between the particular and the universal, holds greater fundamentality. In navigating this quandary, Aristotle rejects both as true contenders for the primary substance and introduces the concept of essence to elucidate the nature of the primary substance in *Metaphysics Z*. Initially, Aristotle refutes the Platonic notion that universals dictate the characteristics of particulars or subjects. The crux of this matter lies in the understanding that particulars do not derive their determination from their relation to universals; instead, their determination stems from their intrinsic nature.

This perspective might lead one to posit that particulars are more fundamental than universals, suggesting they could be the primary substance. Such a stance gains traction when considering Aristotle's criteria for the primary substance in the *Categories*—being not said-of and not present-in others. However, the challenge arises as Aristotle explicitly dismisses subjects and, consequently, particulars as true candidates for what is deemed substance in *Metaphysics Z*.

In *Metaphysics Z3*, Aristotle proposes three entities that could be considered as subjects: what underlies when properties are removed, namely matter, form, and the compound of matter and form. Matter is dismissed as the primary substance because of its inherent lack of separability and the absence of thisness or individuality. Similarly, the compound is also rejected; “[t]he compound may be dismissed, for it is posterior and its nature is obvious”. Aristotle does not reject the second option i.e., the form, but he underlines that this will require further inquiry, “for this is the most perplexing kind of substance.” (1029a26-33)

⁶ It is important to note that the subject-predicate relationship, illustrating the particular-universal connection, in Aristotle's philosophy extends beyond a purely linguistic or semantic context. Aristotle delves into the realm of objects and things, addressing the nature of reality rather than focusing on semantic relations or the components of sentences. For further exploration, refer to works such as Perin (2007) and Loux, M., & Loux, M. J. (2008).

Aristotle overtly rejects the Platonic perspective on the primacy of universal beings. Simultaneously, he does not endorse subjects or particulars—the entities that underlie when attributes are dismissed—as primary substances. Despite this, a particular enjoys the distinct advantage of being inherently self-sufficient, a hallmark characteristic of substance. This intrinsic ability is not bestowed by matter or the compound of matter and form.

The pivotal question arises: What renders an ultimate subject and a particular self-sufficient? Aristotle's response introduces the third candidate, namely, the essence of an ultimate subject and a particular. Therefore, according to Aristotle, the primary substance is neither universals nor ultimate subjects (particulars); instead, the essence of particulars emerges as the most fitting candidate for primary substance.

Now, a challenging question emerges: What, from the Aristotelian perspective, constitutes the essence?

Aristotelian Essentialism: a perplexing puzzle

In *Metaphysics Z6*, Aristotle posits that the essence of an ultimate subject and a particular is not a distinct entity from, nor merely a characteristic true of, the ultimate subject and particular under consideration. Rather, Aristotle asserts that the essence of an ultimate subject and a particular embodies precisely what that subject and particular are, inherently and independently. This concept underscores the idea that the essence is synonymous with the inherent nature of the subject and the particular, representing what they are in virtue of themselves (1031a15).

With regard to those things that in the strict sense have an essence, namely primary beings, the essence of a thing is identical with the thing itself, i.e. with the ultimate subject of predication (1031b15–18).

Each entity is identical to its essence, implying that the essence cannot be universal. This distinction arises from the fundamental difference between the relationship of a particular to its essence and the relationship between a particular and a universal. For instance, consider Socrates and the essence of Socrates versus the relationship between Socrates and the universal category “philosopher” that is true of or said about him. The latter relationship, such as that between Socrates and philosopher, constitutes a connection between two distinct entities. In contrast, the former relationship, specifically the connection between a particular and its essence, is not a two-sided relation; it is, rather, a unique relationship between a thing and itself.

According to Aristotle's insights, the most suitable candidate for primary substance is the essence, and the relationship between a thing and its essence appears to be an identical relation. Building on these notions, and considering Aristotle's emphasis on the significance of particulars—directly contrasting Plato's belief that only universals (forms) possess essence and are fundamental—we find merit in the perspective that particulars, such as those directly perceived through sense perception and experience (e.g., Socrates), indeed have an essence.

This perspective is reinforced in *Metaphysics Z13*, where Aristotle contends that universals cannot be substances. The rationale behind this assertion is that universals are shared among multiple entities, while the substance of a thing is supposed to be unique to it. Additionally, substances are not predicable to their subjects, but universals are predicable.

While individuals possess essence, aligning with the notion from *Z6* that the essence of something is identical to it, a question arises. Does Aristotle advocate for a form of individual essentialism, attributing unique essential properties to each individual that distinguish it fundamentally from others? However, this interpretation is not without controversy. On one hand, Aristotle acknowledges that individuals have essence, and the essence of something is identical to it (a core idea in *Z6*). On the other hand, elsewhere in *Z*, Aristotle presents thoughts about essence that are not easily reconcilable with these ideas.

Aristotle explicitly states that particulars of the same kind, such as Socrates and Callias, share a common essence—they are not fundamentally different. In *Z7*, 10, and 17, he equates forms with essences, and in *Z8*, he asserts that forms are sharable, indicating different individuals can have the same form and, consequently, the same essence. Furthermore, throughout *Metaphysics Z*, the emphasis is placed on substances being truly definable and identical to their real definitions; in other words, the essence is the real definition. However, in *Z10*, Aristotle posits that individuals, being compounds of form and matter, lack a definition because they contain matter, which is inherently unknowable and indefinable. This leads us once again to a familiar dilemma regarding essence: What, from the Aristotelian perspective, is the essence? Is it universal or individual?

In the 20th century, the resurgence of interest in the traditional metaphysical doctrine of essentialism was sparked by the emergence of quantified modal logic and possible world semantics. This led many philosophers to delve into the analysis of the concept of essence. Consequently, the exploration of essence underwent a shift towards the lens of necessity, specifically metaphysical necessity, giving rise to what is now known as the modal account of essence. In broad terms, according to the modal account of essence, the essential properties of a thing are identified through their necessary properties—those that hold true for the thing in every possible world in which it exists. To put it differently, property P is considered essential

to object x if, irrespective of how x is specified, it necessarily possesses property P (Hashemi, 2013, pp. 135-36).

The Upshot

Given the challenges associated with analyzing the concept of essence in Aristotle's philosophy, the subsequent focus of this paper is to explore the question of whether Aristotelian essentialism can be comprehensively examined through the lens of the contemporary modal account of essence. Is this modern reflection on essence a viable pathway for gaining insights into Aristotle's perspective on the essence?

In the modal account of essence, essential properties find explicit expression through *De re* modality, in contrast to *De dicto* modality which pertains to sentences that are necessarily true, such as analytic sentences.⁷ Therefore, the initial step in embracing the modal account involves distinguishing between *De re* and *De dicto* modality. However, as Nicholas White (1972) points out, such a distinction is not clearly evident in Aristotle's philosophy.⁸

A clear-cut adoption of [the modal account] essentialism requires that one be able to distinguish between, e.g., a statement of the form 'Necessarily (x) (if x is F , then x is G)' and a statement of the form '(x) (if x is F , then necessarily x is G).' What this ability requires in turn is that one be able to grapple successfully with the subtle problems of the placement of modal operators. It is clear, however, that Aristotle's use of modal expressions does not exhibit meticulous care in their placement. (White, 1972, p 60).

White highlights a noteworthy issue in Aristotle's *Metaphysics Z*, where Aristotle appears to conflate statements of the form 'Necessarily (if p , then not-not- p)' with statements of the form 'If p , then necessarily not-not- p .' Additionally, in the *Prior Analytics*, Aristotle incorrectly asserts that "relative" necessity, i.e., the necessity of a conclusion "relative to" its premises, is attributed to the conclusion of a syllogism rather than to the conditional, where the conjunction of premises serves as the antecedent and the conclusion as the consequent (Ibid, p. 60).

The nuanced distinction between *De re* and *De dicto* modalities, a crucial component of the modal account of essence, lacks robust support in Aristotle's philosophy. According to the modal account,

⁷ A *De dicto* modal claim is one in which a whole proposition is attributed a modal property (e.g., 'Contingently there are nine planets in the solar system', or 'Necessarily, all bachelors are unmarried man'). A *De re* modal claim is one in which an object is attributed a modal property (e.g., 'The Prime Minister might have never been born', or 'Number 9 is necessarily odd'). If some *De re* modal claims are true, essentialism follows: objects have essences at least insofar as they have some properties necessarily (and other properties only contingently). In a *De re* modal sentence, we have a variable inside the operator's scope that's bound by a quantifier or other term outside that scope. We're quantifying in. E.g.: $\exists x (\Box Px)$. See: (Hashemi, 2017, Ch. 2).

⁸ The distinction between "De Dito" and "De Re" emerges not in contemporary modal analysis but finds its roots in the medieval period. This historical context is noteworthy, shedding light on the evolution of these distinctions over time. For further exploration of this historical trajectory and an in-depth discussion on the subject, see Movahed (2006) and Knuuttila (1993).

essential properties are deemed necessary, and vice versa. However, Aristotle contends that certain properties are necessary for an object without being essential. In his framework, the essence of an object is intended to unveil its nature and accurately communicate what the object truly is (Hashemi, 2023, p. 172).

Aristotle introduces the challenge of trivial necessary properties, such as ‘P or not P’, which, in his view, fail to illuminate the nature of anything. Furthermore, Aristotle posits the existence of *per se* accident properties—properties that are necessary but accidental. Examples include the property of a triangle having angles that add up to two right angles, the property of a nose being snub, the property of a number being even, and the property of an animal being female. This illustrates Aristotle’s recognition of necessary attributes that do not align with the core essence of the respective objects (75a18-22), (76b11-22) and (1025a30-33). *Per se accidents* are necessary properties but they are not essential properties, and they do not truly exhibit the essence of objects.

An additional factor preventing the equivalence of necessity with essence lies in the potential relativity and dependence of necessary features for an object. Contrary to this, the Aristotelian perspective posits essence as absolute and independent. For instance, it may be necessary that Socrates is distinct from the Eiffel Tower, yet this necessity doesn’t bear any relation to Socrates’s essence according to the Aristotelian framework. This necessary fact, while true, does not contribute to a deeper understanding of what Socrates fundamentally is. It underscores the idea that necessary features, even if true in different contexts, may not necessarily capture the essential nature of an object as envisioned in Aristotelian philosophy.⁹

Lastly, it appears to me that the modal interpretation of essence is intricately linked with individual essentialism. Within this framework, *De re* modality assumes the responsibility of carrying essential properties, enabling individuals to possess distinct essences. These individual essences play a crucial role as criteria for identifying objects, allowing us to distinguish a specific object across various possible worlds based on its essential or necessary properties, which are unique to that particular entity. In contrast, Aristotle posits that objects within the same genus share the same essence. For Aristotle, entities like Socrates and Callias may differ in accidental features, yet they share the same essence and are not essentially distinguishable.

⁹ Kit Fine (1994) contends, through analysis of analogous instances, that the notion of assimilating essence to modality is inherently flawed.

These considerations suggest that we must infer that the Aristotelian essence is not explicable within the framework of the modal account of essence.¹⁰

One could argue that Aristotelian essentialism can be interpreted through the lens of kind essentialism. According to this perspective, individual objects are categorized into various kinds, and the essence of each object is determined by its respective kind. While an object may belong to multiple kinds—for instance, Socrates being classified as a man, animal, and living creature—these kinds are organized in a species-genus hierarchy. Consequently, only the most specific and proximate kind, such as “man” for Socrates, defines the nature or essence of the object. This viewpoint aligns well with concepts expressed by Z, emphasizing that essence is general and shareable, individuals within the same kinds share the same essence, and essence unveils the nature of a thing. Therefore, Aristotelian essences can be understood as the various kinds that encompass different entities. Kinds are definable precisely because they do not involve material considerations and are synonymous with forms; the form of man is identical to the kind of man. But this interpretation is still problematic. It seems to me that this view explicitly presupposes that essences are universals.

However, it has been noted that the substance, equated with essence, is not universal, indicating that essence itself is not universal. This notion holds significant importance for Aristotle as it allows him to distinguish his essentialism from Plato’s perspective. This interpretation appears to conflict with Aristotle’s assertion in Z6 that each individual thing possesses an essence, and that essence is identical to the thing itself. The significance of this idea in Z6 is heightened when considering Aristotle’s anti-Platonic motivation and his stance in the *Categories*. These pieces of evidence create a challenge in accepting the interpretation that essence is construed as kinds, which are still considered universals.

Considering the points discussed thus far, there remains a substantial and intricate challenge in comprehending Aristotle’s concept of essence. In Aristotle’s philosophy, the essence, identified as the primary substance, plays a crucial explanatory role by addressing “Why” questions. Aristotle relies on essence to elucidate the reasons behind why something exists in a particular manner (1041a6-30). Therefore, a clear understanding of essence is pivotal to grasping the essence of all his works. However, an

¹⁰ However, it is not true to say that modal notions do not play any role in understanding essential features of things. Gareth Matthews argues that there are expressions in Aristotle’s works that Aristotle appeals to modal concepts to clarify what he means by essential features. In *Topics*, for instance, Aristotle mentions that:

“[I]t is impossible for a thing still to remain the same if it is entirely transferred out of its species, just as the same animal could not at one time be, and at another not be, a man.” (125b37-38). As Matthews points out at least some essential properties are necessary to everything that has them. (Matthews, 1990, pp. 256-257) Nonetheless, there is enough evidence that for Aristotle, necessity and essence are two different concepts, and the essence is not reducible or identical to necessity.

ambiguity persists, especially in Z, presenting significant obstacles to this understanding. As mentioned earlier, Aristotle turns to essence as the preferred candidate for primary substance to steer clear of the notion that primary substance is either universal or particular.

However, when delving into the clarification of the essence, a persistent and challenging dilemma arises: whether the essence should be interpreted as universal or particular. Both perspectives find support in Aristotle's works, especially in *Metaphysics Z* and the *Categories*. The Aristotelian essence resists easy categorization as individual essentialism or kind essentialism. Both frameworks offer only partial explanations of Aristotelian essentialism, leaving the true nature of essence in Aristotle's philosophy somewhat elusive. If the essence defies classification as either particular or universal, is there a third pathway to reconcile the aforementioned dilemma?

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