

Thomas Aquinas' Metaphysical Concept of Substance

SUBSTANCE:

1. He was largely concerned with substances: their cause, nature, why they change, & what ends they serve.

2. What is a substance? A thing that can have an independent existence:

(e.g., a dog is a substance because it can exist by itself; in contrast to the color blue-for it can only exist in something else)

3. Substances are what God created & continues to create:

- a. Corporeal substance, that is, the material world.
- b. Incorporeal substance, that is, angels & human souls.

MATTER & FORM

1. He held that substances consist of matter & form, neither of which can exist by itself.

a. By itself, matter has no properties, although it has the potential to take on properties.

b. Properties have no existence except in matter; they are what make matter into actual substance.

c. It is matter that individuates (to give individuality) substances-that makes it possible for there to be two of exactly the same kind of thing. For example, consider 2 copies of this chart. What makes them different charts, even though they are exactly alike in their properties, is their matter, not their properties, or form. If there were no matter, there could not be multiple instances of the chart, or of anything else.

d. Substances have substantial forms & accidental forms:

(1) A substantial form is what makes a thing the kind of thing that it is, or without which it would not be that kind of thing (e.g., substantial forms of living things is a soul), for it is the soul that makes a living thing to be alive, enabling its activities: growth, nutrition, reproduction, perception, etc). Your substantial form is a rational intellect or soul; without that, neither Aristotle or Aquinas thinks you would be the kind of substance you are, a human being.

(2) An accidental form is a property that thing happens to have, but could exist without (e.g., your hair color is an accidental property; you can change hair color, but you would still be you).

POTENTIALITY & ACTUALITY:

1. Distinction between form & matter can be thought of as a distinction between potentiality & actuality:

a. Matter by itself has no form, thus it has potential to take on form.

b. The form it takes on is what enables it to undergo change, thereby becoming actual.

c. Form is what makes matter into substance, that makes it potentiality become actual.

d. Aquinas example of bronze statue: (1) Bronze out of which statue is made is like matter; (2) Shape it take on becoming statue is like form. (3) The bronze out of which statue is made has potential to become a statue. (4) The form of the statue, its shape is what makes the bronze statue into an actual statue. Ex. is not perfect because bronze itself is a kind of substance, that is, it can exist by itself. Ultimately, the matter out of which all things are constituted is prime or first matter, which has no properties, but has the potential to take on any property.

CORPORAL & MATTER-LESS SUBSTANCES:

1. Aquinas agrees w/ Aristotle's analysis of substance as informed matter insofar as corporeal substances are concerned, that is, the material objects that populate the sensible world.

a. Because matter is basis of corporeal substances, & because corporeal substances are extended, Aquinas thinks of matter as being extensive quantity.

2. Matterless Substances:

There are substances with no matter at all; they are incorporeal (angels & human souls): simple substances, once created are immortal, & having no parts, they can't deteriorate.

a. They consist of form only, for they are not extended.

b. While matter can't exist by itself, uninformed (agrees with Aristotle), he believes some forms can exist by themselves, insofar as incorporeal substances are forms without matter.

c. Even though they have no matter, they still have potentiality

d. Since they have no matter, there can only be one incorporeal substance of any given kind (e.g., only one angel of any given kind).

e. Only God is pure actuality.