



Form, Matter, Substance

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Introduction to Part II

In Part I of this inquiry, I argued that a hylomorphic analysis of concrete particular objects is well equipped to compete with alternative approaches when evaluated against a range of desiderata. A successful application of the doctrine of hylomorphism to the specific case of concrete particular objects, among other things, hinges on how hylomorphists construe the *matter* or material parts composing a concrete particular object; its *form*; and the *hylomorphic relations* holding between a concrete particular object, its matter, and its form. In my view, hylomorphists should, firstly, conceive of the matter composing a concrete particular object not as prime matter or stuff, but as belonging to the same ontological type as the concrete particular object itself: according to the hylomorphic conception of matter I favor, the material parts composing a concrete particular object are to be construed as themselves matter-form compounds, as long as these material parts are also structured wholes. Secondly, hylomorphists, I argued, should reject the universal forms hypothesis (according to which forms are universal or general entities of some sort) and instead endorse a version of the individual forms hypothesis (according to which forms are particular or individual entities of some sort). Thirdly, I recommended that hylomorphists should opt for a robust compositional version of hylomorphic pluralism over its rivals, viz., non-robust hylomorphic pluralism and hylomorphic monism. As a result, according to my preferred analysis, matter and form are to be counted literally and strictly speaking as proper parts of the concrete particular object they compose, according to a single notion of parthood; and

forms, given their robust construal, do not simultaneously bear the same relation to the matter-form compound (essentially) and to the matter (accidentally).

In Part II of this inquiry, I turn to the question of whether concrete particular objects, when construed as matter-form compounds, deserve a privileged position of some kind within our ontologies and, if so, according to what criterion or criteria of “ontological privilege.” This question is particularly pressing for those who find themselves drawn to the following three tenets: (i) a hylomorphic analysis of concrete **(p.126)** particular objects; (ii) an independence criterion of substancehood; and (iii) the desire to assign substance status to at least some hylomorphic compounds. Firstly, as we know from Part I, the doctrine of hylomorphism, in its application to the specific case of concrete particular objects, holds that these entities are in some sense compounds of matter (*hylē*) and form (*morphē*). Secondly, proponents of an independence criterion of substancehood classify those entities as deserving of substance status which are ontologically independent of entities numerically distinct from themselves, while other entities, in turn, ontologically depend on them, according to some preferred notion(s) of ontological dependence and independence. Finally, philosophers who endorse the third tenet opt for the inclusion of certain composite entities (e.g., living organisms) in the ontologically privileged category of substances, despite their hylomorphic structure.

These three commitments, when taken together, appear to lead to the following conflict. Suppose, for example, that living organisms are analyzed in the hylomorphic fashion, as compounds of matter and form. Given their metaphysical complexity, one wonders whether these entities will not then turn out to be ontologically dependent on other entities numerically distinct from them, viz., their form and possibly their matter as well. Such an outcome, however, would seem to jeopardize the inclusion of these hylomorphic compounds in the category of substances.¹ The question of how best to resolve the apparent conflict which arises from these commitments should certainly be of central interest to those who find themselves attracted to the three tenets identified here. My main aim in the second part of this inquiry will be to present my own proposal as to how Aristotelians should proceed if they wish to resolve the apparent tension just noted in a way that is maximally consistent with their other central commitments.

I begin Part II by considering various relations which have been defined in the literature under the heading of “ontological dependence” (Chapter 5). I examine first existential construals of ontological dependence and turn next to construals of ontological dependence which are formulated in terms of a non-modal conception of essence. I argue that even the most promising ones among these candidate relations are nevertheless open to objections when evaluated against various plausible measures of success. Chapter 6 examines some initially

attractive attempts at formulating an independence criterion of substancehood in terms of a particular essentialist construal of ontological dependence. I argue that, in order for a criterion of substancehood to yield the desired results when applied to hylomorphic compounds, a *unity* criterion of substancehood for composite entities is more suitable to the task at hand than an independence criterion, despite a general preference among Aristotelians for the latter. Unity, however, has been a notoriously underdeveloped notion and my next job, in Chapter 7, therefore consists in providing a serviceable account of unity which **(p.127)** captures the idea that hylomorphic compounds exhibit a higher degree of unity than other composite entities (e.g., heaps, collections, or mereological sums). Chapter 8 investigates how artifacts fare with respect to the hylomorphic analysis of concrete particular objects developed in the foregoing chapters.

What hangs on the question of whether matter-form compounds can or cannot be included in the category of substance and, if so, relative to what criterion or criteria of substancehood? Although I will have much more to say on these matters in what follows, I take it that what is at issue here is a notion of substancehood that is construed as in some way indicative of ontological fundamentality. For the purposes of this introduction, we may consider Plato's well-known *Euthyphro* dilemma as an illustration of what I have in mind when I speak of ontological fundamentality. In his dialogue, *Euthyphro*, Plato famously has Socrates object to the proposed definition of piety as what is loved by the gods on the following grounds:

I'm afraid, Euthyphro, that when you were asked what piety is, you did not wish to make its nature [*ousia*] clear to me, but you told me an affect or quality [*pathos*] of it, that the pious has the quality of being loved by all the gods, but you have not yet told me what the pious is. Now, if you will, do not hide things from me but tell me again from the beginning what piety is, whether loved by the gods or having some other quality—we shall not quarrel about that—but be keen to tell me what the pious and the impious are.²

Socrates and Euthyphro agree on the existential question of whether the world contains things (e.g., acts, persons, etc.) that are loved by the gods as well as pious. Moreover, Socrates is also willing to admit that Euthyphro has managed to single out an “affect” or “quality” of the pious, namely that it is loved by the gods. In fact, Socrates would presumably even grant that being pious and being loved by the gods are *necessarily* correlated, i.e., that it is necessarily the case that whatever is loved by the gods is pious and vice versa. And yet, Socrates nevertheless wants to deny that Euthyphro's proposed account has succeeded in specifying a proper definition of piety, i.e., a statement of what piety *really* is, one that singles out its *ousia*.³ Even if necessarily something is pious if and only if it is loved by the gods, it is still the case, as Plato has Socrates argue in the *Euthyphro*, that something's being pious *explains* why it is loved by the gods,

and not the other way around. It would be wrong to say, so Socrates reasons, that something is pious because it is loved by the gods: for such a conception of piety would give the gods an oddly stipulative and capricious air, as if they just decide *by fiat* what to love, with no basis in the thing itself that is loved. Rather, a more plausible approach to how the gods operate is that, when they love something, there is some further basis in the thing itself which explains why it is worthy of the gods' love, namely, its being pious.

Plato's *Euthyphro* dilemma thus provides us with a case with the following features. Firstly, in it, we encounter two phenomena (viz., the pious and what is loved by the gods) **(p.128)** whose existence, or occurrence in the world, is not called into question by either of the disputants involved in the exchange at issue. The disagreement between Socrates and Euthyphro can therefore not be correctly characterized as an existential one, concerning such questions as "Does the pious exist?" or "Are there things which are loved by the gods?". Secondly, the properties at issue (viz., being pious and being loved by the gods) are instantiated by the very same things (viz., acts, persons, etc.) at the very same time. And, thirdly, even though (as I am assuming) both disputants take these two phenomena to be necessarily correlated, they nevertheless disagree over what explanatory relationship holds between them. After all, in Socrates' view, something is loved by the gods because of, or in virtue of, its being pious (and not the other way around), whereas for Euthyphro the reverse is the case: something is pious because of, or in virtue of, its being loved by the gods (and not the other way around).

There surely are different sorts of relations which give rise to an explanatory asymmetry and many of these are not relevant to the phenomena with which we will be concerned in Part II of this study. For example, one such relation is that of causation, at least when causation is understood as a contingent and typically diachronic relation between events (e.g., the relation between Caesar's death and Brutus' stabbing). According to such a conception of causation, the cause and the effect are both events; the cause usually precedes the effect in time (exempting special cases, such as those allegedly involving time travel, causal loops, and the like); and the occurrence of the earlier event causally explains the occurrence of the later event. Moreover, the relation between these events, in such cases, is considered to be contingent, in the sense that, for example, it is true to say that Brutus might not have killed Caesar. Clearly, if this is what is meant by "causation," then the relation between the pious and what is loved by the gods would not be appropriately described as causal.

A second sort of relation which gives rise to an explanatory asymmetry and which seems not to capture what is at issue in Plato's *Euthyphro* dilemma is the logical relationship which obtains, for example, between the truth of the premises of a valid argument and the truth of its conclusion. In such cases, the premises entail the conclusion and, we might say, the truth of the premises

logically explains the truth of the conclusion. In Plato's *Euthyphro* dilemma, however, the proposition that a particular act or person is pious does not by itself entail that this act or person is also loved by the gods, or vice versa. We can therefore assume that the explanatory asymmetry in question is not due to a purely logical relation between the phenomena in question.

A third category of relations which applies in probabilistic cases and also gives rise to explanatory asymmetries may safely be bracketed for present purposes as well. For example, the decay of a particle can be probabilistically explained by appeal to its half life or a patient's recovery from strep throat can be probabilistically explained by that patient's having taken antibiotics. But evidently the relationship between something's being pious and something's being loved by the gods is also not of this sort.

Given its long and illustrious philosophical pedigree, the idea that there can be explanatory asymmetries even between necessarily correlated phenomena of the sort **(p.129)** Plato singles out in the *Euthyphro* thus is, or at least should be, quite familiar to us. It is fair to say, however, that no consensus has as of yet emerged among philosophers as to how best to capture and illuminate such connections. Whatever exactly is the nature of the connection between the pious and what is loved by the gods, it seems quite clear that it is not a contingent and diachronic relation between events; it is not a purely logical relation; and it is also not a probabilistic relation. These characterizations are of course all negative. It is difficult to add much by way of a positive characterization of our subject matter to what has already been said without immediately becoming embroiled in controversy. For now, I will therefore limit myself only to the following preliminary specification: when I speak below of substantive non-existential disagreements in ontology over questions of fundamentality, I have in mind phenomena which are connected by means of a relation that is synchronic, necessary, non-logical, non-probabilistic, and gives rise to an explanatory asymmetry such as that noted by Plato in the *Euthyphro*.

In addition, relations which satisfy these characteristics are also sometimes described as "non-causal." As I remarked earlier, I am willing to go along with this characterization, as long as we are absolutely explicit that what is meant by "causation" here is a contingent and typically diachronic relation between events, such as that exhibited in the case of Brutus' killing of Caesar. However, there are also good reasons to avoid the characterization, "non-causal," just to minimize possible sources of confusion. Plato, for one, would want to describe the relationship between the pious and what is loved by the gods as causal, just not in the sense of "causal" identified earlier. For the position he endorses in the *Phaedo* and other middle period dialogues is precisely one according to which forms are causes. In these texts, Plato argues that the cause of a particular statue's being beautiful, i.e., that which makes the statue beautiful and or that in virtue of which the statue is beautiful, is its participation in the form, beauty. I

am sympathetic to Plato's assessment that the asymmetric explanatory relations in question is causal (see Section 4.5), though I would take the causal principles in question to be Aristotelian, and not Platonic, forms. Given this perspective, then, it seems wise not to adopt the label, "non-causal," to delineate the asymmetric explanatory relations that are relevant to my current project.

As I have argued in Koslicki (2016a), some of the most interesting and important debates which properly belong to the study of being, whether we call it "metaphysics" or "ontology," do not concern existential questions at all; rather, such disputes, as I have claimed, focus in some cases on non-existential disagreements over questions of fundamentality. To illustrate, consider a specific example of such a dispute in ontology, namely, that between two different kinds of trope theorists: E. J. Lowe, who takes tropes to be ontologically dependent on their bearers (see Lowe (2006)), and Keith Campbell, who accepts a reductive analysis of the bearers of tropes as trope bundles (see Campbell (1990)). If my diagnosis of this dispute is correct, then these two trope theorists precisely find themselves in a substantive non-existential disagreement in ontology over questions of fundamentality. The dispute at issue should not strike us as **(p.130)** one in which the engaged parties are simply talking past each other; rather, by reading the dispute in question as a substantive non-existential disagreement over a question of fundamentality, we can see that the reductive trope theorist precisely affirms what the non-reductive trope theorist denies, and vice versa.

The idea that such non-existential disagreements over questions of fundamentality can be substantive also plays a significant role in the defense of a realist outlook in metaphysics. For metaphysical realists have an important stake in maintaining, against their anti-realist opponents, that some disputes in ontology are non-verbal, i.e., cannot be resolved merely by pointing to a linguistic confusion or equivocation. If some of these substantive ontological disputes furthermore turn out to be non-existential, then the anti-realist's job will have been made even more difficult, since in that case no single piece of apparatus that is designed specifically to deal with existential disputes (e.g., a certain treatment of the existential quantifier) can be effective in showing that all apparently substantive disputes in ontology are really based on verbal disagreements.⁴

Thus, the proper classification of such substantive non-existential disagreements over questions of fundamentality has far-reaching consequences for how we should conceive of the nature and business of the study of being as a discipline. Since it is not at all obvious how Quinean or Carnapian conceptions of our discipline could accommodate the possibility and intelligibility of substantive non-existential disagreements in ontology over questions of fundamentality, the recognition of such disputes therefore bolsters the overall case for an alternative conception of the study of being, different from those put forth by Quine and Carnap or their more recent followers.⁵ The Aristotelian outlook defended here

aims to develop such an alternative proposal, in continuation with the project I began in Koslicki (2008a).

When I spoke of “fundamentality” earlier, I had in mind *relative* fundamentality, rather than *absolute* fundamentality. Surely, in the case of Plato’s *Euthyphro* dilemma, most philosophers, including Plato, would not be particularly tempted to say that something’s being pious is an absolutely fundamental matter, even if they agree that something’s being pious is more fundamental than its being loved by the gods.⁶ In what follows, although I remain neutral in my commitments concerning the absolutely **(p.131)** fundamental, I do recommend that we maintain a cautious attitude towards attempts to define absolute fundamentality in terms of relative fundamentality. This line of reasoning would proceed by taking an entity, *x*, to be absolutely fundamental just in case there is no entity, *y*, numerically distinct from *x* which is more fundamental than *x* in some specific way, or in any way at all. In what follows, we will consider an attempt to define a type of absolute fundamentality, viz., substancehood *simpliciter*, in terms of a relation which is often understood as indicative of relative fundamentality, viz., ontological dependence. As we will discover, this attempted definition, even if it might seem initially appealing, has unattractive consequences which need to be addressed by those who are tempted to endorse it.⁷

The notion of grounding has been hailed by philosophers in recent years as the right tool by means of which to approach relative fundamentality, with the potential to lead to a definition of absolute fundamentality in terms of ungroundedness.⁸ Grounding theorists generally assume that this notion is not reducible to, or analyzable in terms of, other familiar idioms such as identity, necessity, parthood, supervenience, realization, causation, or counterfactual dependence.⁹ At least with respect to its formal properties, grounding does appear to hold more promise than earlier modal-existential notions, such as supervenience, for the purposes of developing an approach to relative fundamentality, if only because grounding is commonly stipulated to be asymmetric and not definable in modal terms. However, as I have argued elsewhere (Koslicki (2015a, 2016b)), grounding suffers from some of the same deficiencies which were noted in connection with the concept of supervenience: most prominently, grounding, like supervenience, also fails to be sufficiently fine-grained to do its intended explanatory work. In addition, there is doubt as to whether the phenomena collected together under the rubric of grounding are really unified by the presence of a single relation. And, finally, grounding turns out not to be particularly helpful in capturing and illuminating what is philosophically important about the traditional substance/non-substance distinction. In the end, although grounding performs better than supervenience in some respects, it does not solve all of the problems to which supervenience-based approaches were found to fall prey.

If the absolutely fundamental turns out not to be straightforwardly definable in terms of available notions of relative fundamentality, one might be led to consider one of the following possible attitudes toward the absolutely fundamental. First, one might try to do away with the category of the absolutely fundamental altogether. A second strategy would be to aim at treating absolute fundamentality as a defined notion, **(p.132)** but one whose definition can be stated in terms of something other than relative fundamentality. Yet a third strategy would be to accept absolute fundamentality as a primitive undefined notion. Since my primary interest in what follows lies with relative fundamentality, I will not, within the current context, pursue the question of which approach to the absolutely fundamental yields the best results.

Overall, the conclusions reached in Parts I and II together allow us to classify hylomorphic compounds in a *comparative* way, as *more deserving of substance status than* other composite entities, due at least in part to their high degree of unity. When substancehood is understood in this way, a *comparative* notion of substancehood corresponds to a similarly *comparative* ranking of entities by their degree of *relative fundamentality*: such a notion of fundamentality allows us to assess an entity or type of entity as *more or less fundamental* (or *derivative*) *than* some other entity or type of entity. A comparative classification of entities, however, should not be confused with an *absolute* classification of entities or types of entities as substances *simpliciter*. When we encounter cases in which one type of phenomenon is alleged to be *more or less fundamental* (or *derivative*) *than* another, we should not immediately assume that we are dealing with a case in which the purportedly more fundamental phenomenon in question can also be correctly described as *absolutely* fundamental. Thus, I will take care in what follows to separate questions concerning relative (or comparative) fundamentality from those concerning absolute fundamentality.

A comparative classification of entities as more or less deserving of substance status suggests that a correct characterization of the world we live in requires the recognition of complex and widespread networks of relative fundamentality. As noted just now, such a *relative fundamentality* ranking is not to be confused with a classification of hylomorphic compounds as belonging to the category of the *absolutely fundamental* or the *substances simpliciter* (if there are any such entities). At the same time, however, the importance of assigning hylomorphic compounds to their proper position within the hierarchy of the relatively fundamental should not be underestimated. As I will go on to illustrate, many of the most interesting metaphysical projects, especially those dear to Aristotelians, take place within the sphere of what, in absolute terms, would count as ontologically derivative. In particular, in subsequent chapters, we will encounter reasons for thinking that multiple explanatory factors are relevant to the classification of an entity as *more or less fundamental* (or *derivative*) *than* another.

To illustrate, tropes, holes, boundaries, or Aristotelian universals are sometimes taken to be abstracted from, and hence derivative in one particular way of, the concrete particular objects that are their bearers. And yet, despite their abstracted status, these entities may nevertheless be regarded as highly unified, e.g., perhaps because they are taken to be simple in the sense of not being constructed out of constituents, and hence they would count as unified by default. Moreover, their abstracted status also leaves open whether the entities in question are artificial (e.g., a boundary around a particular piece of land) or natural (e.g., an Aristotelian universal or a naturally formed hole in a rock formation). Heaps, mereological sums, collections, artifacts, artworks, and **(p. 133)** natural unified wholes, in contrast, may be taken to be in some sense constructed out of their parts or constituents; but whether they are unified or disunified, artificial or natural, is not immediately settled by their status as constructed entities. And while artifacts, artworks, and intentional objects are arguably the results of certain kinds of creative acts involving intentional agents, some of these entities may be classified as abstracted (e.g., an after-image); others as constructed (e.g., a sculpture). In addition, some of these entities may have a relatively high degree of unity (e.g., certain artifacts whose constituents work together to fulfil a certain function), whereas others may exhibit a relatively low degree of unity (e.g., an artwork consisting of components that are scattered across multiple geographical locations). Finally, heaps, mereological sums, and collections, which may be taken to be constructed entities, also appear to exhibit a relatively low degree of unity compared to other more unified entities (e.g., natural unified wholes, tropes, simples, Platonic universals, etc.).

Given this multidimensional approach to relative fundamentality, one and the same entity can be classified, without giving rise to contradictions, as more fundamental than another in certain respects (e.g., its degree of unity) but not in others (e.g., its artificiality). According to this approach, when we ask in a particular case whether some entity, or type of entity, is more or less fundamental than another, we must always specify the particular respect in which something is to be categorized as more or less fundamental than something else to which it is being compared. Currently available approaches to relative fundamentality do not reflect the various dimensions of relative fundamentality and non-fundamentality I have distinguished earlier: (i) whether an entity is essentially *abstracted* from something more complex; (ii) whether an entity is essentially *constructed* out of other entities; (iii) whether an entity is essentially *artificial*; or (iv) whether an entity is highly *unified*. Just as one and the same thing can be both good in some respects (e.g., dancing) and bad in others (e.g., playing basketball), one and the same entity, according to this multidimensional approach, can be both more fundamental than another in certain respects (e.g., its degree of unity) and less fundamental than another in others (e.g., its naturalness). In its broadest statement, then, the second part of this book aims to bring out that the recognition of multiple dimensions of

relative fundamentality and derivativeness is required in order to do justice to the data that presents itself to those engaged in the study of being.¹⁰ (p.134)

Notes:

(¹) The apparent tension just identified will sound very familiar to those who have tried to wrestle with the relationship between Aristotle's *Categories* and *Metaphysics Z*, H, Θ.

(²) Plato, *Euthyphro*, 11b-c. Translation by G. M. A. Grube.

(³) The term, *ousia*, which derives from the verb, *einai* ("to be"), is translated by Grube in the *Euthyphro* passage cited above as "nature." But the same expression is also Aristotle's technical term for substance.

(⁴) See, for example, Hirsch (2002).

(⁵) See, for example, Quine (1948); Carnap (1950). For a more recent expression of the Quinean approach to ontology, see also "Thesis 2" of van Inwagen (2009): "Being is the same as existence" (p. 480). The neo-Carnapian approach to ontology and metaphysics is particularly well represented in Chalmers, Manley, and Wasserman (2009); see, for example, the contributions by Chalmers, Hirsch, Hofweber, and Thomasson; also in this vein is Chalmers (2012). Quine's conception of ontology as concerning questions of existence is so mainstream that it is usually just taken for granted as a presupposition which does not stand in need of justification. Quine's take on metaphysics at large, however, is considerably more controversial and assumes additional machinery such as his rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction, holism, pragmatism, ontological relativity, and so forth, on which there is much less consensus among contemporary philosophers.

(⁶) I take it that, for the Plato of the middle period, only the form of the good would count as an absolutely fundamental entity. All the other entities in Plato's middle period ontology (e.g., the other forms, the sensible particulars, or the mathematical objects) would receive only a comparative ranking depending on their relation to the form of the good.

(⁷) See also Zylstra (2014) for discussion concerning the relationship between ontological dependence and fundamentality.

(⁸) See, for example, Audi (2012a, 2012b); Bennett (2011a, 2011b, 2017); Correia and Schnieder (2012); Fine (2001, 2012); Hoeltje, Schnieder, and Steinberg (2013); Jenkins (2011); Raven (2012); Rosen (2010); Schaffer (2009, 2010); Trogon (2013).

⁽⁹⁾ See, for example, Kim (1984, 1990); McLaughlin (1995); and McLaughlin and Bennett (2005), for useful resources concerning the state of the literature on supervenience.

⁽¹⁰⁾ This multidimensional approach to questions of relative fundamentality is discussed in more detail elsewhere; see especially Koslicki (2012a, 2013a, 2013b, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b). In Chapter 7, I go on to develop a detailed account of unity as involving a particular kind of mutual interactional dependence among the parts of a whole and the whole to which they belong. The second dimension of fundamentality, viz., construction, has already been extensively studied by metaphysicians, including myself, as can be gleaned from the voluminous literature on various specific construction operations, such as mereological composition and constitution. The third dimension of non-fundamentality, viz., artificiality, will be addressed in Chapter 8. A detailed examination of the first dimension of non-fundamentality, viz., abstraction, will have to await another occasion.

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