Aristotle: Metaphysics & Epistemology
A Sense of wonder started men philosophizing in ancient times as well as today.... What is the result of this puzzlement? An awesome feeling of ignorance. Men began to philosophize, therefore to escape ignorance....

(Aristotle's *Metaphysics*)
Aristotle’s rejection of Plato’s Forms:

- Plato (left) is carrying a copy of his *Timeus*, and pointing upwards, which symbolizes his concern with the eternal and immutable Forms. Aristotle (right) is carrying a copy of his (*Nicomachean*) *Ethics*, and keeping his hand down, which symbolizes his concern with the temporal and mutable world.
Aristotle’s rejection of Plato’s Forms:

Three Objections to Plato’s Explanation Raised by Aristotle:

1. The problem of participation
2. The problem of change
3. The problem of plurality of forms: The “Third Man Argument”
Aristotle’s rejection of Plato’s Forms:

1. The Problem of Participation:

Plato claimed that objects in the material world “participate” in their proper Eidos. The problem raised by Aristotle is that it is impossible for something that is wholly material to participate in something that is wholly immaterial – if the dog exists in the Realm of Becoming and the Eidos Dog exists in the Realm of Being, they can participate in nothing. Aristotle referred to this explanation of Plato’s as poetic nonsense – “an empty phrase and a poetic metaphor.” (p. 87)
Aristotle’s rejection of Plato’s Forms:

- **2. The Problem of Change**
  
  Aristotle also pointed out that Plato could not account for change in the material world. Plato readily agrees that change occurs but also argues that the material world might lack qualities present in the Eidos (perfection, eternal being, etc.), but as dependent upon them, the Realm of Becoming could not have qualities that were not present in the Realm of Being. Herein lies the problem: Where does change come from?
Aristotle’s rejection of Plato’s Forms:

3. The “Third Man Argument” (This is a problem posed by Aristotle but also noticed by Plato – Below is Richard Rorty’s explanation)

“In the Parmenides (Plato) notices the following logical problem: If we explain the resemblance between f1 and f2 by a third thing, F, the following question arises: What is the relation between f1, f2, and F? If F does not resemble f1 and f2, it cannot explain them. But if it does, the same need arises—of another thing, F2, to explain that relation between F and f1 and f2—and so on, ad infinitum. This is the famous ‘Third Man’ problem, an infinite regress argument.

And as I hope I made clear, the problem is not about the nature of the forms per se; It is a problem in the logic of explanation. If it is a problem for you that things in the world are different than each other in some respects, and like each other in other respects, are changing and ephemeral, you have to develop an explanation of that fact that does not replicate the problem.”

To gain an understanding of “being qua being”: What does it mean to be?

To focus on understanding the physical world – this is real in itself and is the world we inhabit.

To explain how things change – for Aristotle, change is a real quality of this world.
What does it mean to be?

- The correct endeavor is to attempt to separate the thing (reality) from its characteristics or qualities - in order to get at the thing in itself:
  - primary category = substance [e.g. "Human"]
  - secondary category = quality [e.g. "female"]
  - quantity [e.g. "one"]

- Aristotle’s focus then is on substances – real and existing in the physical world and known mostly through their qualities.
Aristotle essentially reverses the hierarchy of reality we found in Plato - things in this world are the most real - definitions are more abstract therefore, less real than individual instances.

**primary substances** = the individual horse (Sal) or dog (Peter)

**secondary substances** = the species or genus - mammal, equine, canine
1. “That which is neither predictable of a subject nor present in a subject; for instance the individual man or horse.”

(Text p.90)
2. Whatever is most basic to reality - whatever is the same from the colt to the adult horse - That which underlies all the properties and changes

(Text, p. 90)
That which is essential
that aspect of an individual that identifies it as a particular individual
anything that does not have these essential features could not be that individual.
is distinguishable from accidental properties that are nonessential
4. Form (*eidos*) plus matter (*hyle*)

- Form and matter can be thought of separately but cannot exist separately – form is always informing some matter
- Aristotle can now explain change: it is a recombination of form and matter
Teleological World View

- “Nature does nothing in vain.”
- Argues that the world is orderly and purposeful – that nothing in it is by accident or without a purpose – that everything in the natural world has a “what it is for.”
- To understand a thing, one must understand what it is for and how it came to be.
“This is most obvious in the case of animals other than man: they make things using neither craft nor on the basis of inquiry nor by deliberation. This is in fact a source of puzzlement for those who wonder whether it is by reason or by some other faculty that these creatures work—spiders, ants and the like. Advancing bit by bit in this same direction it becomes apparent that even in plants features conducive to an end occur—leaves, for example, grow in order to provide shade for the fruit. If then it is both by nature and for an end that the swallow makes its nest and the spider its web, and plants grow leaves for the sake of the fruit and send their roots down rather than up for the sake of nourishment, it is plain that this kind of cause is operative in things which come to be and are by nature. And since nature is twofold, as matter and as form, the form is the end, and since all other things are for sake of the end, the form must be the cause in the sense of that for the sake of which.” (Phys. 199a20–32)
Aristotle’s Four Causes (Aition):

- The **material cause**: that from which something is generated and out of which it is made, e.g. the bronze of a statue.
- The **formal cause**: the structure which the matter realizes and in terms of which it comes to be something determinate, e.g., the shape of the president, in virtue of which this quantity of bronze is said to be a statue of a president.
- The **efficient cause**: the agent responsible for a quantity of matter's coming to be informed, e.g. the sculptor who shaped the quantity of bronze into its current shape, the shape of the president.
- The **final cause**: the purpose or goal of the compound of form and matter, e.g. the statue was created for the purpose of honoring the president.
Thus, understanding of a substance => understanding of the four causes which bring it about

In *Physics* ii 3, Aristotle makes twin claims about this four-causal schema:

- (i) that citing all four causes is *necessary* for adequacy in explanation; and
- (ii) that these four causes are *sufficient* for adequacy in explanation. Each of these claims requires some elaboration and also some qualification.