

METAPHYSICS

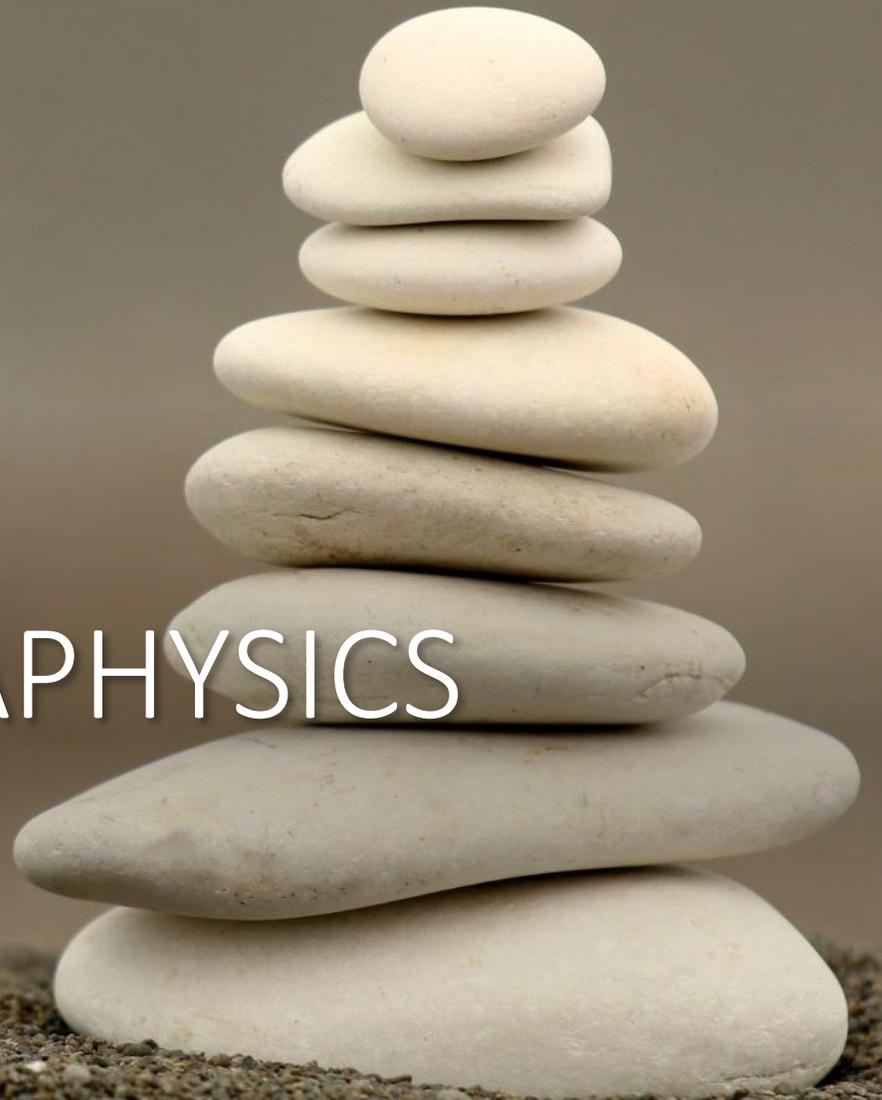


The Philosophy of Being

INTRODUCTION



ORIGIN OF METAPHYSICS



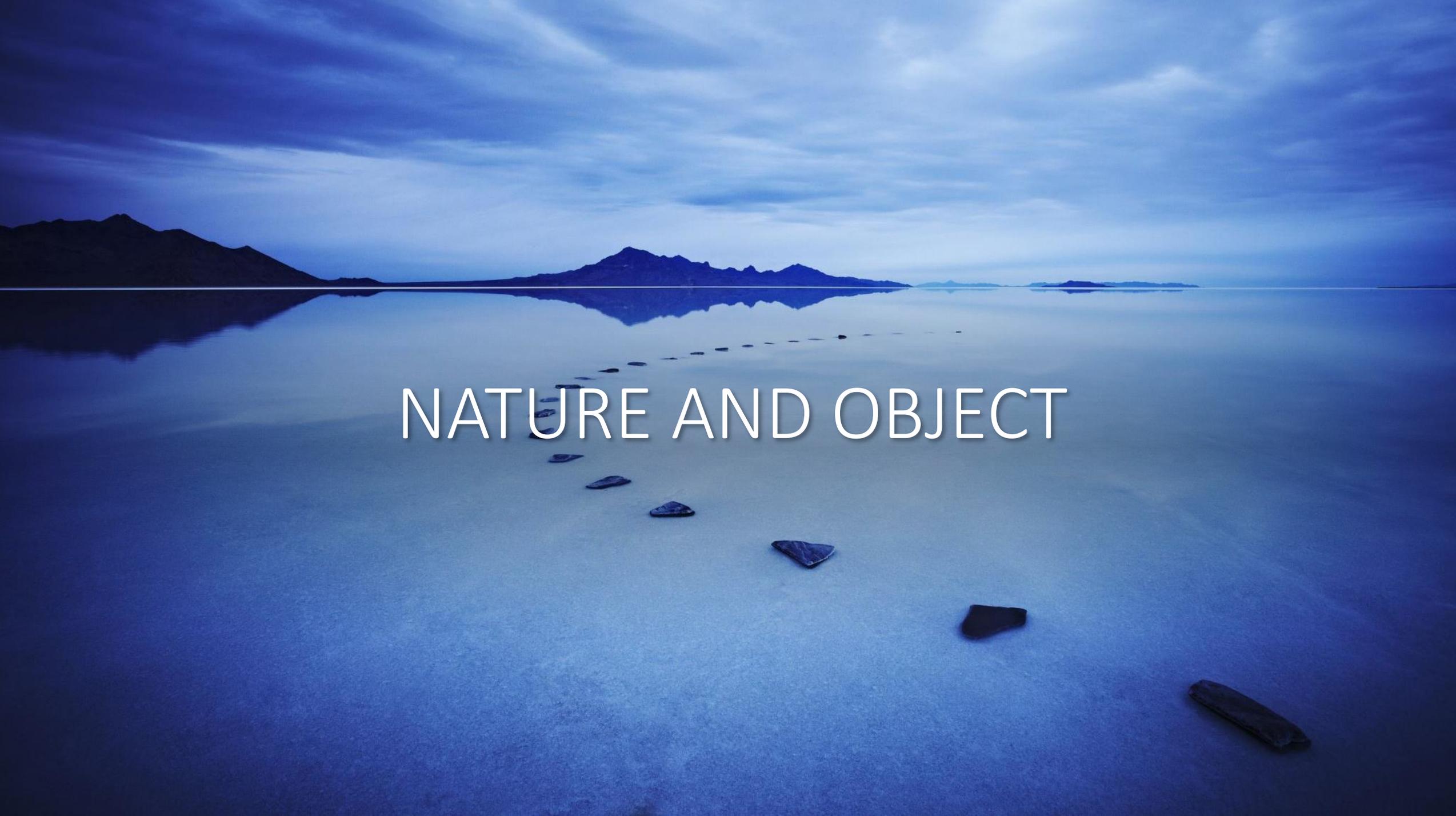
Metaphysics and Spontaneous Knowledge

- All humans have a global knowledge about reality, acquired through the light of natural reason. They know what they mean when they talk about “being,” “truth,” or “good.” They have some knowledge about human nature and the difference between “substantial” and “accidental” realities.
- This kind of knowledge which we can call spontaneous, deals with the same issues or topics studied by Metaphysics. Man has a natural tendency to know the world, his place in it, the origin of the universe and other related matters.
- Metaphysics still needs to be developed as a science because spontaneous knowledge is often imperfect or imprecise and can be influenced by popularly accepted ideologies prevailing within some cultural circles.
- The moral convictions of every person has a decisive influence on his/her knowledge about metaphysical questions. As people lose their moral uprightness, they lose their basic intellectual convictions and fall into scepticism towards the truth. In the end, man becomes the centre.

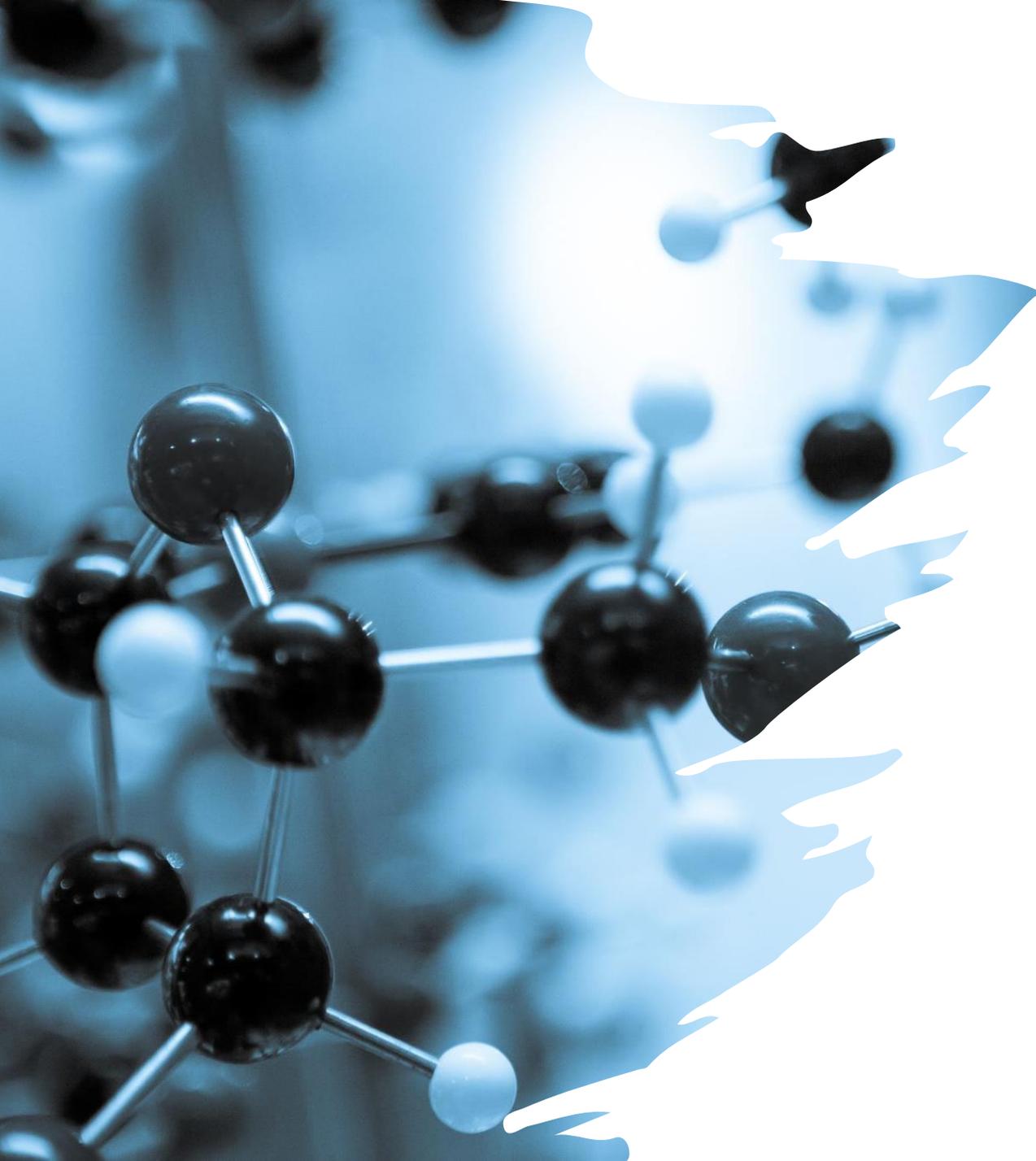


Historical origin of Metaphysics

- Since the time of the earliest philosophers, the science of *being* has been understood as a universal knowledge whose object is to discover the primary elements of reality. This element was invariably identified with some material element (like fire, air, water..), until Parmenides spoke for the first time of *being* as the fundamental aspect of reality.
- When Aristotle came on the scene, *being* was the prime object of the science of Metaphysics. He called it the First Philosophy, since it studies the first causes and principles of reality.
- The name “Metaphysics” was coined by Andronicus of Rhodes. It aptly expresses the nature of this science, which goes beyond the sphere of material reality studied by Physics.



NATURE AND OBJECT



Metaphysics as Science

- Every science has its own object of study which is an aspect of reality that it deals with. E.g. biology considers the world of living beings.
- The object of study of a specific science characterises or defines that science.
- A distinction is usually made between the *material object* and the *formal object* of a science.
- Material object: the sum total of what is studied.
- Formal object: the aspect of the material object on which the science concentrates.
- E.g. the material object of medicine: the human body. The formal object is the human body insofar as it is subject to health or sickness.

Metaphysics, science of being as being



There must be a science that studies the whole of reality by focusing on the most common aspect of everything: that everything “is.” This common aspect is presupposed by every other science.



The Material object of Metaphysics: reality in its entirety.



The Formal object: “being as being” or “being as such.”



RELATION WITH OTHER SCIENCES

Directive function of Metaphysics with respect to other sciences in the natural order

- Since metaphysics deals with the most fundamental questions of human knowledge, and since its object of study encompasses the whole of reality, it is natural that particular sciences (which study partial aspects of beings) should depend upon Metaphysics in some way.
- Metaphysical principles, the properties of being, and other basic notions about reality must somehow be reflected in the specific sector of scientific research covered by the particular science. These principles are assumed by the particular sciences.
- E.g. when physicists conduct experiments on the dynamics of bodies in their physical-chemical activity, they employ the principle of causality, with all its implications.

Metaphysics as instrumental science for Theology

- Over and above spontaneous natural knowledge and scientific knowledge, there exists a knowledge that pertains to the supernatural order. It arises from divine Revelation itself. It is a superior kind of knowledge for it perfects all human knowledge, directing it toward the supernatural last end of man.
- Metaphysics serves as a scientific instrument of theology – giving a better understanding of the supernatural mysteries which constitute the subject matter of Theology. Knowledge of the supernatural order presupposes knowledge of the natural order. E.g. in Christology, to say that Jesus Christ is “true man” requires a correct understanding of human nature. It is difficult to acquire an adequate knowledge of truths God has revealed without previously acquiring a deep natural knowledge.
- If Theology were to disregard metaphysics, it would fail to reach the rank of a science and fall into error and ambiguity. Erroneous interpretations of dogma in the course of history compelled theology to seek terminological and conceptual precision from a metaphysical point of view. E.g. transubstantiation, hypostatic union, matter and form of sacraments.



THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-CONTRADICTION AND OTHER FIRST PRINCIPLES

The Principle of Non- Contradiction; the first principle of being

- There are some fundamental elements in human knowledge which serve as bases for all other truths. Just as *being* is the first notion of our intelligence, implied in any consequent notion, so too, there is a judgment which is naturally first, and which is presupposed by all other judgements: *“it is impossible to be and not be at the same time and in the same respect.”*
- This first judgment is called the principle of non-contradiction because it expresses the most basic condition of things, that they cannot be self-contradictory. This principle is based on being and expresses the consistency of being and its opposition to non-being.
- It is the first condition of truth in any judgment.

Other first principles founded on the principle of non-contradiction: the principle of the excluded middle and the principle of identity.

- **THE PRINCIPLE OF THE EXCLUDED MIDDLE:** there is no middle ground between being and non-being. There is no middle ground between affirmation and negation. Either a thing *is* or *is not*, with no other alternative, and therefore, it is reduced to the principle of non-contradiction. A middle ground is impossible because its would *be* and *not be* at the same time. Although *being in potency* might seem to be a middle ground between being and non-being, it is actually between *being in act* and *not being in act*. Nothing can be in act and in potency at the same time and in the same sense.
- **THE PRINCIPLE OF IDENTITY:** “Being is being” or “whatever is, is what it is” or “being is, and non-being is not.”

THE METAPHYSICAL STRUCTURE OF BEING

SUBSTANCE AND ACCIDENTS

Substance, a reality whose essence pertains to being in itself.

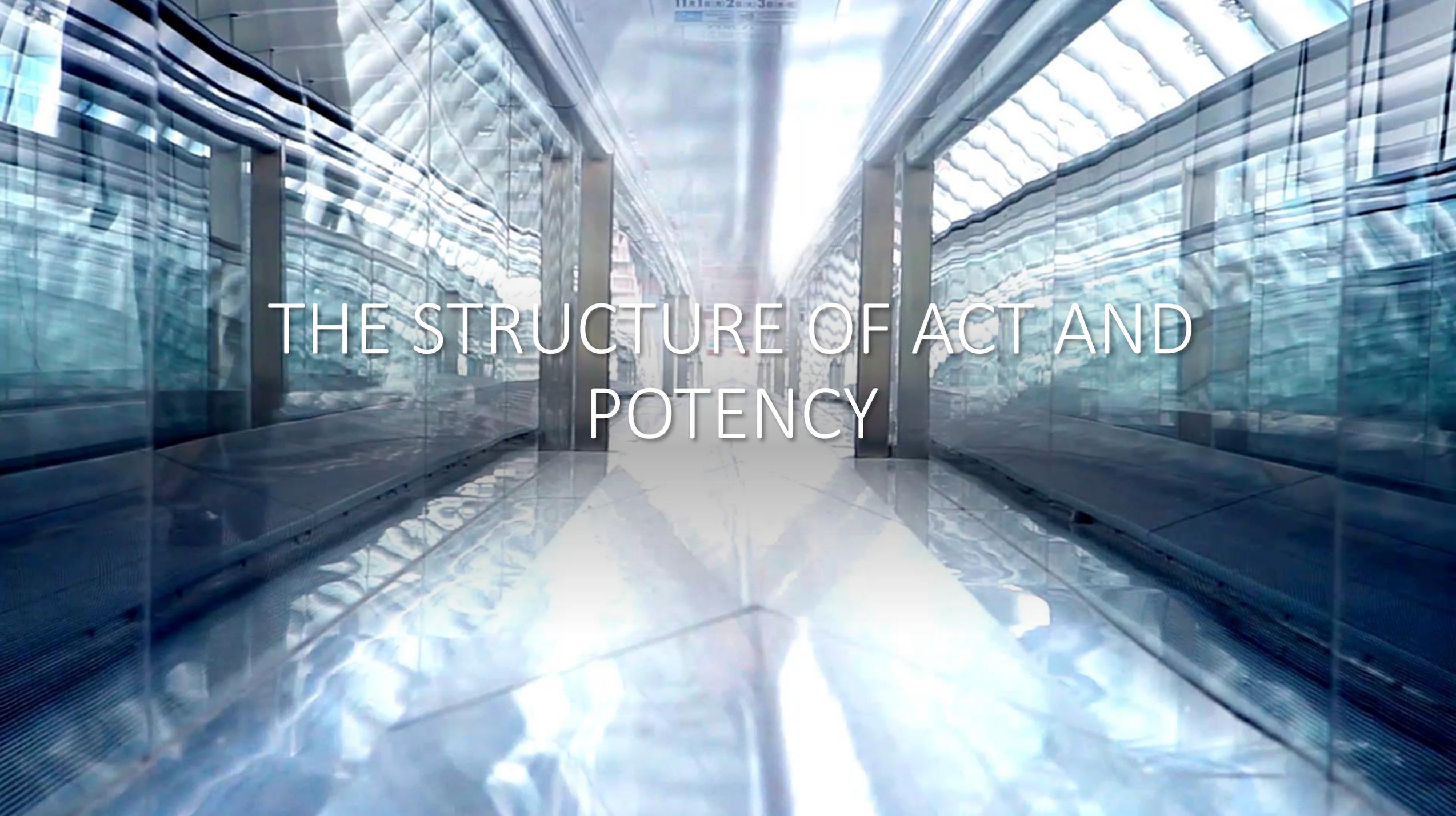
- Substance is the most important element in each thing, with two basic aspects:
- 1. It is the **subject** or *substratum* that supports the accidents. The Latin “substantia” is derived from “substare”, which means to stand under. The substance is that which stands beneath.
- 2. This role of the substance is itself based on the nature of the substance as something **subsistent**. i.e. it does not exist in something else, but **is by itself**, as opposed to the accidents, which need the support of something else – the substance – in order to exist. Therefore, substance is that reality to whose essence or nature it is proper to be by itself and not in another subject. E.g. a dog is a substance
- The essence determines a thing’s manner of being, and the substance is nothing but a certain manner of being that is actually subsisting. But essence and substance are not perfect synonyms. Both refer to the same reality, but essence designates it insofar as it constitutes a particular manner of being, by virtue of which it falls under a given species (e.g. man), whereas substance stresses its being the substratum of accidents and its receiving the **act of being** as its own act (i.e. it subsists.)

Accidents, a reality whose being corresponds to its being in another as in its subject.

- Each accident has its own essence, which differentiates it from other accidents, and to which dependence on the being of a subject is fitting. E.g. colour has an essence distinct from that of temperature, yet both of them **are in** some substance.
- **Accidents can be classified into 4 groups according to their origin:**
- **1. Accidents which belong to the species:** they spring from the specific principles of the essence of a thing, and are therefore **properties** common to all individuals of the same species. (e.g. the shape of a horse, the powers of intellect and will in man.)
- **2. Accidents which are inseparable from each individual:** they stem from the specific way the essence is present in a given individual, e.g. being tall or short, being fair or olive complexion, being a man or a woman – these are all individual characteristics which have a permanent basis in their subject.
- **3. Accidents which are separable from each individual:** e.g. being seated or standing, walking or studying, stem from the internal principles of their subject, but they affect it only in a transient manner.
- **4. Accidents which stem from an external agent:** some of these may be violent, i.e. imposed upon the subject against the normal tendency of its nature. E.g. coronavirus; others, in contrast, may actually be beneficial to the subject which receives them (instructions...)

The being, the foundation of the unity of substance and accidents

- Strictly speaking, what properly *is*, is that which has the act of being as an act belonging to itself, and this is only true of the substance.
- Since the accidents do not subsist, they do not have being strictly speaking: it is their subject that is, in one way or another, in accordance with these accidents. The weight of a horse does not exist by itself. It is more correct to say that the horse *is* heavy, precisely *because of having* this accident.
- Accidents depend on the act of being of the substance, which is their subject. This doesn't mean the accidents are nothing; they also *are*, as they form part of the substance and constitute specific determinations of that subject.
- Accidents always imply imperfection since their being consists in "being in another", on which it depends and therefore is part of a composition formed with some subject.

A futuristic, blue-toned corridor with reflective walls and floor. The walls are made of a material that reflects light in a wavy, rippling pattern. The floor is also highly reflective, mirroring the walls and the central pillar. A central pillar stands in the middle of the corridor, and a sign is visible at the top of the pillar. The overall atmosphere is clean, modern, and high-tech.

THE STRUCTURE OF ACT AND POTENCY

Act, perfection of a subject

In general, act is any perfection of a subject. E.g. the colour of a thing, the qualities of a substance etc.

The notion of act is a primary and evident one, therefore, it cannot be defined; it can only be described by means of examples and by differentiating it from potency.

Act is related to potency as one who builds to someone capable of building

Potency, is a real capacity to receive an act; real potency and logical possibility

- It is constitutive of potency to be directed towards some type of act. E.g. sight is the potency of seeing.
- Potency is distinct from act, but not purely of a temporal nature. The potency may or may not be actualised, but it always remains a potency. E.g. an empty glass has the capacity to contain liquid and when it actually contains it, the potency does not vanish but is fulfilled.
- Act and potency are not complete realities, but only aspects or principles which are found in things.
- Potency is to act as the imperfect is to the perfect. Potency is not act in a germinal state.
- In itself, potency is not a mere privation of act, but a real capacity for perfection.
- Being, in the strict sense, is *being* in act. In so far as it is in potency, a *being is not, but can come to be*.
- The *possible* is something intimately connected with potency. *The "possible" is that which can be*. The possible can be relative by virtue of a passive potency e.g. a wall can be painted because it has a real capacity to receive colour. This points to an active potency (man's ability to paint the wall.) Possibility can also be taken in an absolute sense. Everything that is not self-contradictory is "possible." This is also known as **logical possibility**.

Different Levels of Actuality

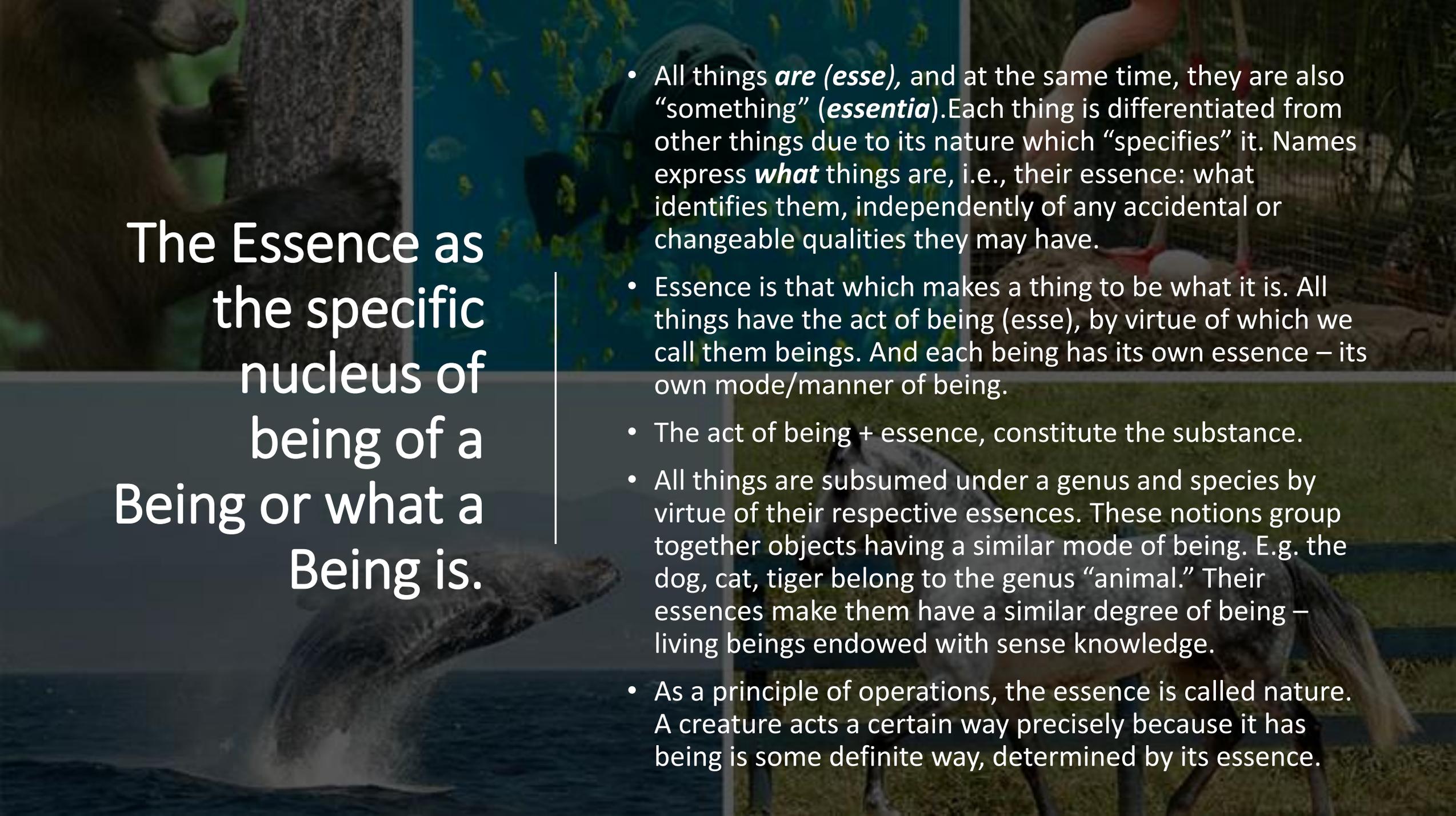
- **FIRST ACT:** also called the *entitative act*. Substantial form – it determines the matter and forms one or another type of corporeal substance. The substantial form has the Act of Being – The form is a determinate measure of participation in the act of being. The forms or essences are different ways of participating in being.
- **SECOND ACT: *Action or operation*:** operations arise in a subject by virtue of its first act – the act of being/substantial form, which is stable and more internal. Operations and their corresponding active powers are accidents. Operations stem from the internal perfection of the substance.

Scope of the doctrine of act and potency

- Act and potency initially appear as principles that account for the reality of motion or change. They are also seen as stable constituent principles of substances themselves (substance-accident, matter-form, essence-act of being.)
- The composition act-potency is the ever present characteristic revealed in the study of any aspect of finite being. It always points, by way of the primacy of act, to the subsistence of the Pure Act of Being, which is God.

A large field of white umbrellas, with one prominent blue umbrella in the center. The umbrellas are arranged in a grid-like pattern, creating a sense of depth and repetition. The blue umbrella stands out as the focal point.

THE ESSENCE



The Essence as the specific nucleus of being of a Being or what a Being is.

- All things *are* (*esse*), and at the same time, they are also “something” (*essentia*). Each thing is differentiated from other things due to its nature which “specifies” it. Names express *what* things are, i.e., their essence: what identifies them, independently of any accidental or changeable qualities they may have.
- Essence is that which makes a thing to be what it is. All things have the act of being (*esse*), by virtue of which we call them beings. And each being has its own essence – its own mode/manner of being.
- The act of being + essence, constitute the substance.
- All things are subsumed under a genus and species by virtue of their respective essences. These notions group together objects having a similar mode of being. E.g. the dog, cat, tiger belong to the genus “animal.” Their essences make them have a similar degree of being – living beings endowed with sense knowledge.
- As a principle of operations, the essence is called nature. A creature acts a certain way precisely because it has being in some definite way, determined by its essence.

The apprehension of the essences on the part of human understanding

- Insofar as the essence is known, it can be referred to many individuals; for this reason it is called **universal**.
- The essence is **really present only in individual things**.
However, our understanding setting aside the characteristics which belong to each singular thing, considers the essence as something universal, which can be attributed to all individuals having the same mode of being.

The Essence of material beings

- The constituent elements of the essence are matter and form and relate to one another as potency and act. This composition is characteristic of all material beings which can undergo generation and corruption – profound changes by which a being ceases to be what it was and becomes another thing.
- Matter cannot exist without a substantial form.
- The form is the first act which affects matter so as to constitute the substance.
- Matter and form do not exist separately. They are not themselves beings, but only principles of things. Therefore, only the composite of matter and form subsists when it is actualised by the **act of being (esse)**.
- The determining element of the essence is the form, which determines matter to be this type of matter (a human body, a plant, a rock etc.)
- In purely material substances, like animals, the form does not have the act of being in itself, but only insofar as it gives actuality to matter. The complete essence, composed of matter and form, is what has the act of being (esse).
- Man's substantial form is different. Being spiritual, the human soul (the form) has **esse** as something of its own and lets matter (the body) share in it.

The Essence in spiritual substances



- The primacy of form over matter makes us understand why there can be some types of forms which subsist without matter (spiritual substances.)
- God has revealed that apart from the human soul, whose operations reveal its spirituality even though it is by nature ordered towards a body, there are completely spiritual creatures – angels.
- The essence of a purely spiritual substance is simple, being identical to its form, which receives the act of being in itself as something of its own.
- The lack of composition in their essences does not, however, imply that spiritual creatures are totally simple, since only God is absolutely simple. Just like everything created, the pure spirits are composed at least of essence and the act of being, since they have a limited mode of being. God is subsistent Act of Being, whose essence is his very act of being.

THE ACT OF BEING

Divine Being and Created Being

- The real distinction between essence and the act of being enables us to have a correct understanding of how a creature depends on the Creator, of the nature of this dependence, and of the intimate presence of God in the created being.
- God alone is Pure Act or unlimited Perfection which subsists in itself. Creatures are limited, having their act of being **received** from God. Hence, they are **necessarily composed** of act and potency. This is only possible if the essence and the act of being are really distinct.
- The whole of creation depends on God as its fullest and radical Principle. The meeting point for creature and Creator is the act of being (esse).
- The act of being is what is innermost in each thing. God's presence in creatures through the act of being is more intimate than the creature's own presence in itself.

The Act of Being: act of all acts and perfection of all perfections; ultimate foundation of the reality of Beings

- The multiplicity of creatures reveals the existence of diverse perfections. At the same time, it also reveals a perfection which is common to all beings – esse.
- This common sharing in the act of being and the accompanying diversity in the way it is possessed and revealed, are an expression that all creatures are composed of an act (esse), which eminently encompasses all their perfections, and a potency (essence), which limits esse to a determinate degree.
- The act of being is an act in the full and proper sense, since it does not of itself include any limitation. Essences in contrast, are particular ways of being and, therefore, only potency with respect to the act of being.
- Esse can be fittingly described as the *ultimate act of being (ens)*, since esse is the act of all other acts of being, since it actualises any other perfection, making it be.
- Human activity > operative powers > substantial form > esse

Distinct grades of participation in being

- The act of being is possessed in different degrees of intensity by different beings.
- There is obviously a hierarchy of beings in the universe: an ascending scale of perfections possessed by things, starting from the mineral world and continuing through the diverse forms of life, until the greatest perfection is reached, God Himself.
- The diversity of perfections is rooted in the diverse ways of possessing the act of being (i.e. the degree of intensity in the act of being): since the source of the perfections of a thing is its *esse*.
- God is *Esse* in all its fullness and intensity, therefore he is all the perfections. Creatures possess less *esse*, and the more imperfect they are, the lesser *esse* they have, they enjoy a lesser degree of participation in the act of being.



The composition of essence-act of being, the fundamental structure of created Beings

- It is commonly said that the composition “essence-act of being” is of a transcendental order, since it is necessarily present in all created beings, whether they are material or spiritual.
- The metaphysical structure of essence and act of being must not be understood as the result of an aggregation of two complete and perfect realities. They are two metaphysical principles which unite to form a single being, and are related to one another as potency to act. Essence is potency with respect to the act of being, and it cannot exist independently of the act of being. We are dealing with a potency which is not separable from its act but is always united to it.
- By creating, God produces beings from nothing, i.e., he produces an act of being limited by its own essence. He does not produce two different things which are afterwards united, but one single limited thing, composed of potency (essence) and act (esse.)

Notion of Subsistent Subject

- Or Suppositum – designates the particular being with all of its perfections.
- Individual realities taken in their totality, whose distinctive characteristic is subsistence, i.e. the intrinsic possession of the act of being that actualises everything in its totality.
- Is being in the most proper sense, i.e., it is what subsists, what exists in itself as something complete and finished, and distinct from any other reality.

The distinction between nature and a possible being

- Essence, and more particularly the form, gives the individual whole a way of being similar to that of other individuals, thus situating it in a given species.
- The essence can be contrasted with the subsisting subject or individual, which is an unshared reality (distinct and divided from all others.)
- The relation between subsisting subject and its nature/essence entails a real distinction; the subsisting subject is distinct from its nature in the same way a whole is different from one of its parts.
- The real distinction can be seen in 2 ways:
 - a) in every individual there is a distinction between the individuated essence and the whole subsisting subject;
 - b) every individual is distinct from the common specific nature

The Person, a possible being of a rational nature

In conformity with Boethius, St. Thomas Aquinas defines a person as an individual substance of a rational nature.

A person is a particular type of suppositum/subsisting subject: one which possesses a spiritual nature.

Person is the name used to designate the most perfect beings that exist, namely, God, the angels and men.

Since all perfections stem from *esse*, the excellence of these substances is due either to the possession of the fullness of the act of being or to a high degree of participation in *esse*.

This intense way of sharing in the *esse* is made possible by the higher degree of perfection of the nature which receives the *esse* and it shows in certain operations only a person can carry out.

The Act of Personal Being

- By virtue of its single act of being, the suppositum's intrinsic unity rules out any distinction between the individual and the person in the case of rational creatures.
- Individuation encompasses the entire spectrum of human essence (including its material and spiritual aspects.) The soul's *being* actualises the body as well, and constitutes the root of all personal operations.



Some theological implications for the notion of person

- The metaphysical notion of person provides a good instrument for expounding the dogma of the Blessed Trinity. It also sheds some light on the mystery of the Incarnation: in fact, the two natures of Christ, the human and the divine, are united in the single Person of the Word, since in Christ there is only one act of being, which is divine.
- For this reason, the Blessed Virgin Mary is the Mother of God, since she is the mother of Jesus Christ, in whom there is only one Person (the Divine Person of the Word.)
- The human operations of Christ stem from his human nature as their principle, even though it is his Person who performs them, since the subject of all activity is the person.
- The relationship between the person and nature is also of help in understanding the reality of original sin as **a sin of nature** which affects all human individuals, and how it is transmitted from parents to children.

THE TRANSCENDENTALS



The background features a complex, abstract pattern of glowing blue and white lines and particles. The lines are wavy and flow across the frame, creating a sense of movement and depth. Small, bright white and blue dots are scattered throughout, resembling stars or particles in a field. The overall color palette is dominated by deep blues and bright whites, set against a dark, almost black background.

THE TRANSCENDENTAL ASPECTS OF BEING

The Transcendental notions and the Predicaments

- Being is the first reality understood by our intelligence and all further knowledge is resolved into it.
- What can be attributed to every being as such?
- **A) considering a being in itself**, without comparing or relating it to any other being. Any being is a ***single thing***.
- **1) In a positive way**: without any negations. The only characteristic common to everything that exists is that of ***having an essence*** through which it exists in one way or another. Being is never in the “abstract” state.
- **2) In a negative sense**: by denying internal division, we can say that every being has ***unity***. Anything is ***one***. Division causes a cessation of being a certain being.
- **B) considering a being in relation to others**: it has two opposite attributes – distinction from all beings and its conformity with certain other things.
- **1) in view of the distinction among beings**: each of them is something
- **2) the conformity of being with other things**: can only be considered in relation to something which encompasses ***being*** as such and therefore every being – i.e.. The soul. The soul is “somehow all things” because of the universality of the objects of the intellect and will. The last 3 transcendentals – truth, goodness and beauty – arise from this relationship.

The Transcendentals as aspects of being

Are the transcendentals realities or merely notions?
They are both. As real things, they are absolutely identical to being.

Unity, truth, goodness and the other transcendentals are not realities distinct from being but only aspects or properties of being.

The transcendentals **flow from** the act of being and therefore can be attributed to everything that in some way exists.

Being, the good and the true are identical realities. This equivalence is shown in the possibility of predicating one transcendental of another.



UNITY

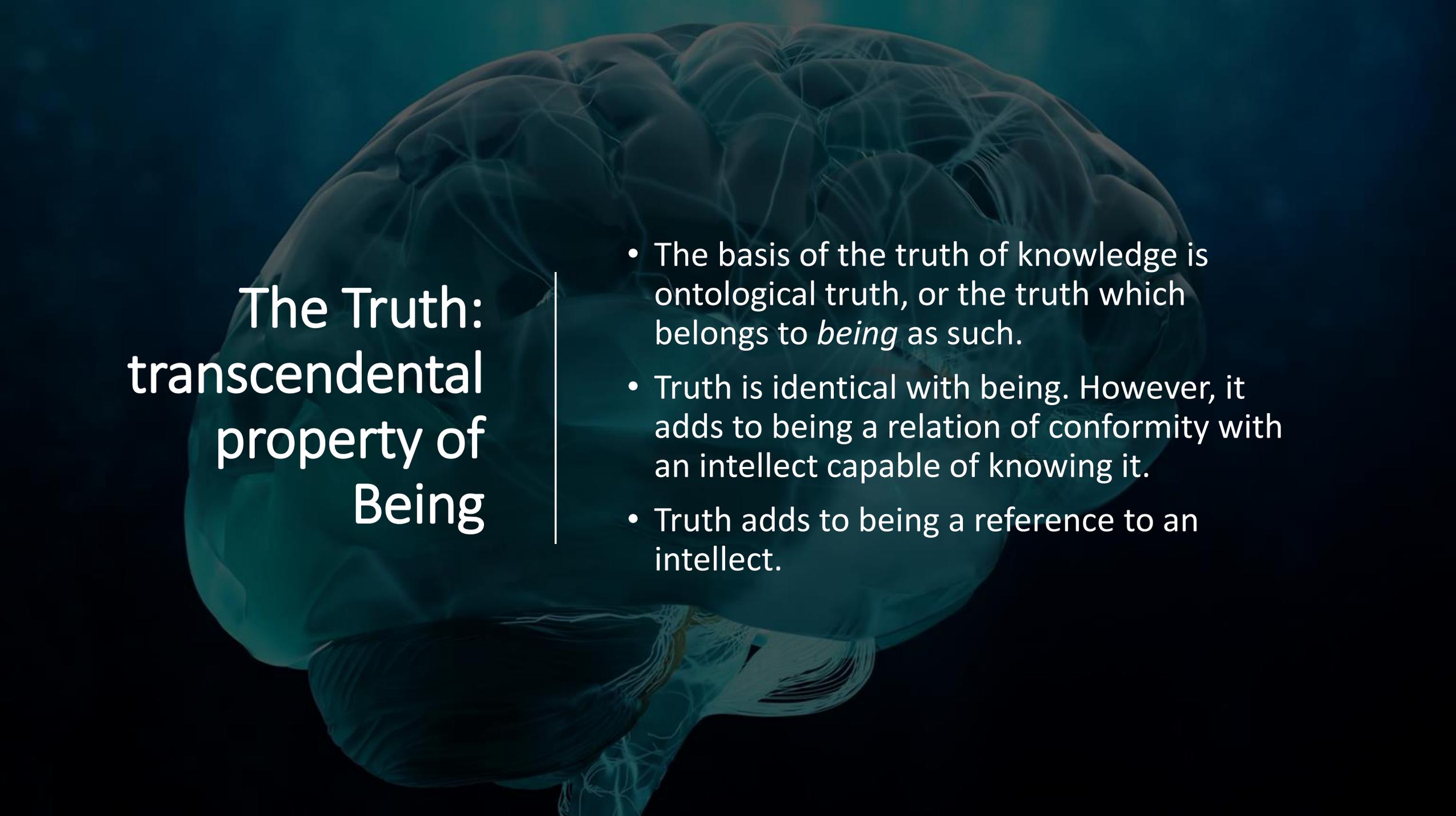
The Transcendental Unity

- The unity of being does not imply that there is only one being, but that anything which exists is intrinsically undivided, i.e., it has a certain unity.
- The destruction of unity by internal division necessarily entails the loss of being.
- Unity is always linked to being



TRUTH



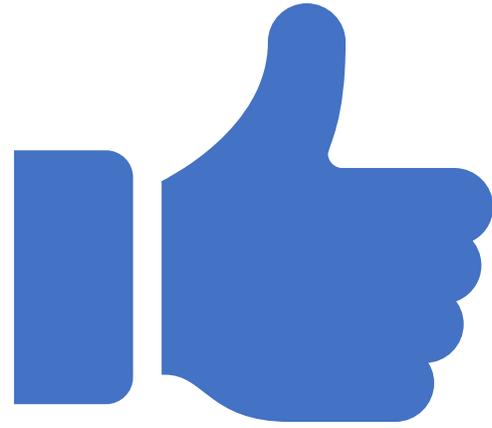


The Truth: transcendental property of Being

- The basis of the truth of knowledge is ontological truth, or the truth which belongs to *being* as such.
- Truth is identical with being. However, it adds to being a relation of conformity with an intellect capable of knowing it.
- Truth adds to being a reference to an intellect.

The Truth in the Human Understanding

- The truth of the human intellect, or logical truth, is the conformity of the intellect with reality.
- Falsehood can only arise in the human intellect as a defect, since being as such is always true.
- The human intellect is of itself directed towards the truth, since it is capable of knowing things as beings, which animals cannot do.
- The conformity of the intellect with being is ultimately based on the act of being of both intellect and things. When the intellect is true it does not physically become the thing known. It only conforms to it operationally (accidentally) by participating in its act of being in a certain way, called “intentional.”
- The intellect’s capacity to know the truth is not something alien to being, it is something which stems from the act of being, which is the basis of truth.



THE GOOD



The Being and the Good

- Whatever preserves or maintains their *being* or their nature is good.
- Evils are those privations which are opposed to a thing's natural perfection.
- Being and goodness are interchangeable or equivalent. The good is not a reality distinct from being: everything that is, is good. Things are good to the extent that they have esse. The intrinsic value or perfection of things is rooted in their act of being and in their essence.
- Goodness adds to being its desirability to an appetite. Things are not good because we want them; rather, we want them, insofar as they are good.
- God endows being and goodness on creatures because he loves them; this love is the basis of the goodness of creatures.

The perfection (or realization) most proper of a personal being is the love of donation.

- What is perfect has the capacity to transmit its perfection to others. The good tends to spread or to share itself.
- God is supremely good in this sense too, since he is the source from which springs all goodness. Secondly, and in dependence on God, human beings are said to be good when they concern themselves with the good of others in an effective way. Thus, when creatures communicate their goodness, they become more like God. The highest perfection in the human is their very self...the gift of oneself is the highest good we can give and this act perfects the being.



A close-up photograph of a red flower, possibly a gerbera, with numerous small water droplets on its petals. The background is a soft, out-of-focus mix of green and yellow. The word "BEAUTY" is centered in white, uppercase letters.

BEAUTY



Nature of the Beautiful

- When things are known, their truth and their goodness bring pleasure and delight to the person who beholds them. We refer to this property of things when we say that something is beautiful.
- The apprehension of the beautiful adds to simple knowledge the pleasure or delight which results from that knowledge.
- Beauty is a special type of goodness, since it is the object of a certain natural tendency that is set at rest by the contemplation of the beautiful, not on the possession of it.
- Beauty is not the pleasure or delight itself, but rather **those properties which are pleasing to behold**.
- The characteristics that make something beautiful arise from its act of being.

Beauty and Perfection

- By simply being, things already possess a perfection, which is the esse. This is the foundation of beauty, but it is not the only aspect of beauty.
- Something is beautiful in the fullest sense if it possesses all the perfections that correspond to its own nature.
- The principle meaning of beauty is shown through some characteristics:
- harmony or proportion in the object and with its surroundings,
- integrity or completeness – the perfections required by its substantial form or its accidental forms,
- clarity – both materially and spiritually. For the intellect it means intelligibility, for sight it means light, colour, brightness, limpidity, for hearing – the arrangement and composition of sounds that makes it pleasing



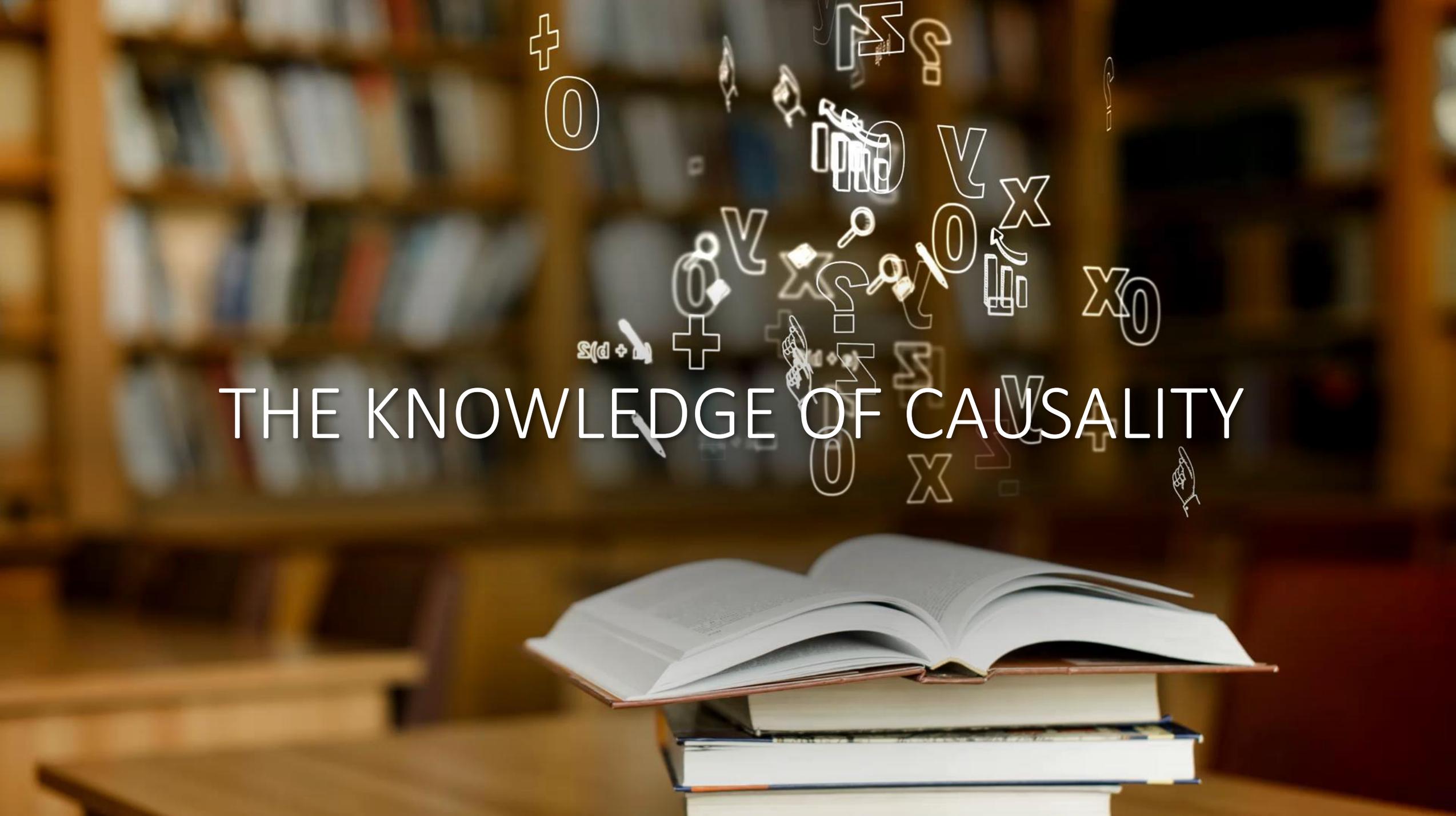


The human perception of beauty

- For man to be delighted by the beauty of things, there has to be a certain proportion between his knowing powers and the beauty which he apprehends. Our powers for knowing being, rejoice in the contemplation of what is perfect.
- The need for this proportion arises from our corporeal nature and from sense knowledge. There are aspects of beauty that elude some people, just as there are truths which are incomprehensible for certain persons. That is why a certain education in beauty is often necessary to be able to perceive the beauty of certain artistic productions. This merely confirms that beauty is an attribute of things.
- The beauty of an object **does not depend on** subjective taste. Natural beauty, as well as that arising from human activity, transcends man and is based on the nature of things.
- A person may have a disordered artistic taste or capacity to appreciate or compose beautiful things. They usually focus on a partial aspect of the being and overvalue it and thus lose sight of the real value of the beauty of the whole.



CAUSALITY

The image features a stack of books on a wooden surface. The top book is open, showing its pages. Above the books, various mathematical symbols and icons are floating, including a plus sign, a zero, a question mark, a magnifying glass, a pencil, a hand, and several Greek letters like alpha, beta, gamma, and delta. The background is a blurred bookshelf filled with books.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF CAUSALITY

The Notion of Cause

- A cause can be defined as that which really and positively influences a thing, making this thing dependent upon it in some way.



The Experience of Causality

- The notions of cause and effect are among those we refer to most often in our cognitive life. Everyday we perceive beings that carry out some acts, and beings that are acted upon. E.g. a stone falls into water and gives rise to a series of concentric waves.
- Both our practical behaviour and scientific activity rest on the conviction that things do effectively depend on one another.
- Our life is full of experiences in which causality is revealed:
 - 1. **External experience**: we observe the mutual influence of things external to us
 - 2. **Internal experience**: every individual is also aware that he is the cause of his own actions, such as moving his hand, walking or standing still, the power of the will over his other internal powers e.g. memory recall
 - 3. **Concurrent internal and external experience**: we are conscious of our causal activity on other things and of the influence that surrounding things have on us. E.g. we can mould certain substances and instruct others...
- These examples refer especially to **efficient causality** – the ordinary usage of “cause.”
- The basis of causality is being, which is able to cause because of its act of being.

The Principle of Causality

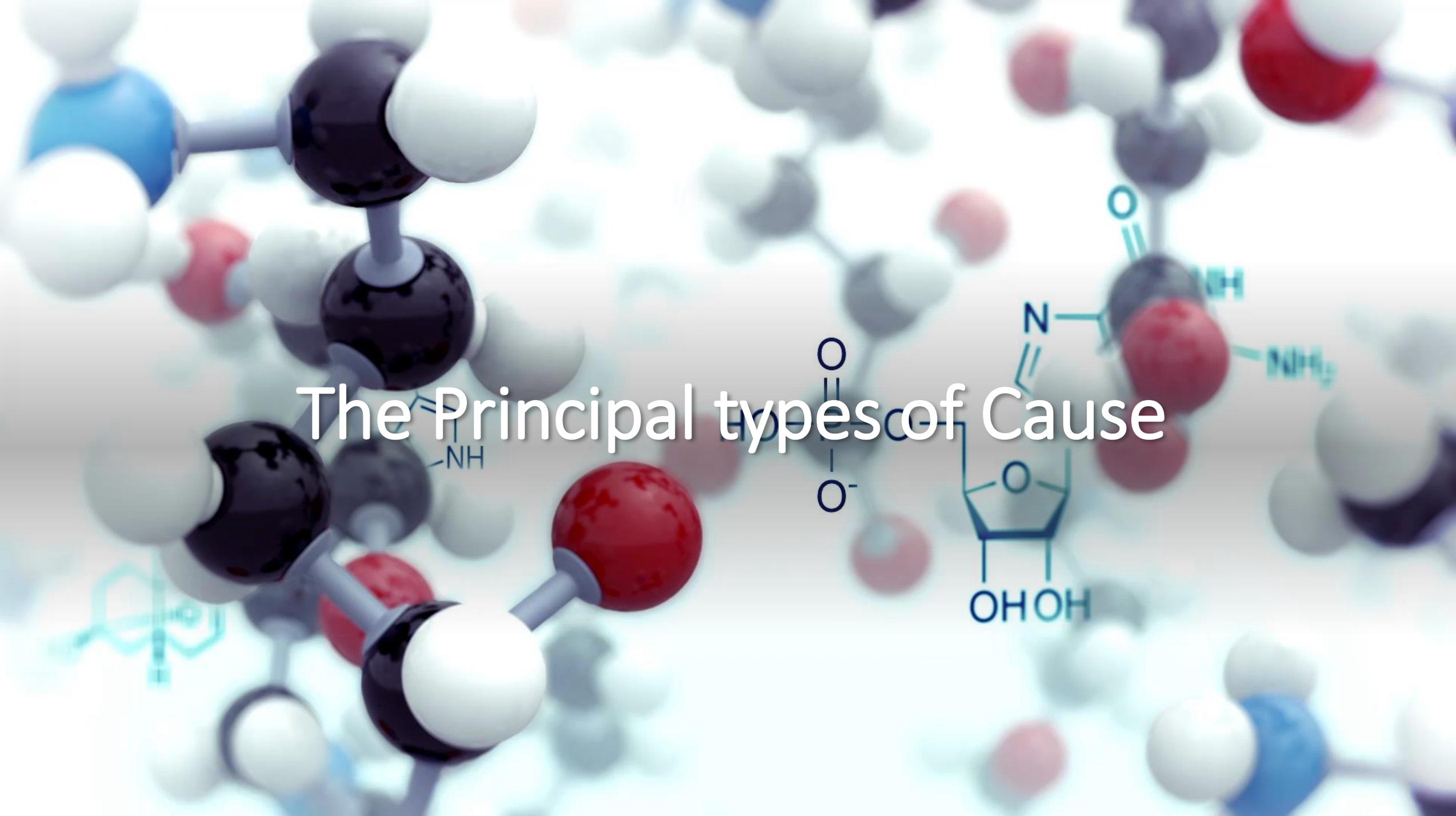
When we become aware of causality, we do not grasp the notions of “cause” and “effect” separately; we realise they are inseparably linked. We cannot understand one of them without the other.

The cause-effect dependence between things can be expressed in a universal fashion under the so-called ***principle of causality***. We are only speaking about efficient causality here. Material and formal causes are based on the efficient cause which always ***transcends*** the effect.

Various formulations of the Principle of Causality

- **1. Everything which begins “to be” has a cause.**
- **2. Anything which moves is moved by something else.** Movement is also the transition from potency to act or from a certain non-being to being.
- **3. Everything contingent requires a cause.** Anything which can act differently in some particular respect is called contingent. With respect to being, anything which in itself has the potentiality to cease to be is contingent, e.g. material creatures. If something contingent *is*, then there must be a cause of its being actual.
- **4. If something possesses a perfection which is not derived from its essence, that perfection must come from an external cause.** Man’s essence/nature causes his intelligence. But human knowledge, even though it is part due to our human nature, also originates from an external agent/cause, which can be a teacher, a book etc.
- This is of great significance when applied to the act of being. Esse, as a perfection, does not pertain necessarily to an essence. Esse cannot come from the essence because the essence is a principle of differentiation among individuals. In contrast, the act of being is the principle of unity or similarity among all things because all beings have it. So the act of being of a thing must come from a cause, and it is distinct from the essence of the same thing.

The Principal types of Cause



The Material Cause

Anything out of which and of which something is made is a material cause. E.g., a chair is made out of wood. The wood is the material cause.

The material cause is a passive potency that contains the effect in the way a potency contains its act. E.g., a block of marble is capable of being given shape

The Formal Cause

Is an intrinsic act of perfection by which a thing is whatever it is, either in the realm of substance or of accidents.

That which makes a man to be a man, namely, his soul, is a form, and is also that which makes him white (colour), heavy (quantity), good(virtue) and so forth.

Any form is a cause in relation to the matter if it “in-forms,” since it gives that matter the actuality of a determinate manner of being (i.e., essence).

The Efficient Cause

Is that primary principle or origin of any act which makes a thing to be, or to be in a certain way.

The efficient cause is a principle extrinsic to the effect.

The efficient cause imparts to the subject the perfection which makes it an effect of the agent, a perfection the agent must actually have. E.g. a teacher is the efficient cause of the knowledge of the student, because he imparts to the student a portion of his own actual knowledge.

The effect always pre-exists in its cause in some way. E.g. to warm another body, the warming body must have a higher temperature.

The Final Cause

- Is that for the sake of which something is done. It is what determines the agent to act, or the goal/end. E.g. a carpenter works on wood in order to make a table.
- It causes by way of attraction. It attracts insofar as it is something good and it can perfect others.

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The causality of God and the causality of creatures

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Creatures are particular causes of their effects

- The finitude of created causes is even more apparent as we take into account the way in which they act:
- A) **Natural agents always act by transforming something.** Both in accidental changes and the production of a new being, creatures act by merely altering an already existing reality.
- B) Hence, in their activity, **created causes presuppose a pre-existing object.** E.g. fire engenders fire in another material substance; plants grow from seeds, with the help of some other elements provided to them by their material surroundings. Animals beget their offspring by means of their own bodies.
- C) **The efficient causality of finite beings is limited by their own active capacity and by the conditions of the subject on which they act.** One cannot produce more perfection than what he himself possesses, no one can transmit knowledge which he does not have. No matter how intelligent a scientist may be, he can never transmit more knowledge than what his students are able to grasp.
- D) **The act of being of their effects is not the immediate and proper effect of the causality of creatures.** No created cause produces the **total being** of its effect. What the created cause immediately and directly influences is the effect's **manner of being**, (as a substance or as an accident), rather than its act of being. Its causal influence ends in the **form**. E.g. a horse is the immediate cause, not of the colt's **being** (its having the act of being), but of its **being a colt**.
- Hence, it must be said that in relation to the act of being, created causes are always **particular causes**

Created causality
requires a first cause
which is the cause of
the act of being.

- All causality of creatures necessarily demands the act of being that is presupposed. The cause of this act of being (*esse*) is the Subsistent Esse, the First and Universal Cause, in contrast to which other beings are merely *secondary causes*.



Characteristic features of the Primary Cause

A) It is the cause of the species as such.

Secondary causes only transmit them. E.g. a man cannot be the cause of human nature as such, or of all the perfections belonging to it, for he would then be the cause of every man and of himself, which is impossible.

B) It is also the cause of matter.

Creatures only give rise to successive changes of the form

C) It is the most universal cause.

Creatures are particular causes. The Primary Cause confers the act of being both on the particular cause and on the subject which is transformed.

D) It is the cause by essence.

Creatures are only causes by participation. Since everything acts insofar as it is put into act, only that which is Pure Act or Subsisting Act of Being can act and cause by essence. It has causal power in an unlimited way and so can produce things from nothing by giving them their act of being.

Relations between the Primary Cause and Secondary causes

- The being and the causality of creatures are based totally on the First Cause, the Cause by essence. This entails a relationship of total subordination. Just as a paint brush would be unable of itself to finish a painting, a creature would be devoid of its *being* and its power to act if it were to be deprived of its dependence on the Primary Cause.
- 3 consequences can be drawn from this total subordination:
- **1. Compared with the secondary cause, the First Cause has a greater influence on the reality of the effect.** A painting is more greatly attributed to the artist than the paint brush. The principal cause of an action is that by whose power the action is done, rather than that which acts, the action springs more strictly from the principal agent than the instrument.
- **2. Both the First Cause and secondary causes are total causes of the effect in their own respective order.**
- **3. The subordination of secondary causes to the First Cause does not diminish the causal efficacy of creatures;** rather it provides the basis for the efficacy of their activity.