

Some Basic Philosophical Concepts

Essence: what a thing is in itself, its particular distinguishing being; related to Substance (ousia)

Nature: essence ordered to operation

Accidents: those characteristics of a substance that can change without altering its being (quantity, quality, relation, *habitus*, time, location, situation (or position), action, and passion ("being acted on"))

Existence: the reality of a being (can be essential or contingent)

Transcendentals: unity, goodness, truth, beauty (they transcend or cross essences)

Form: the essence of a thing, its "shape" or identity abstracted from the material of which it is made (common examples: table, chair, tree); sometimes called "substantial form" (related to but distinct from Plato's Ideas)

Matter: the material of which corporeal beings are composed (wood, stone, glass, etc.)

Hylomorphism: Aristotle's term suggesting that all material objects are composed of form (*morphe*) and matter (*hule*)

Potency: the potential of a being to develop into its fullness

Act: the actualization of a being, its complete realization

Cause: the "why" of a being, the reason it is what and as it is. Aristotle classically proposed four distinct but interrelated causes: material (the matter out of which); formal (the shape or form by which); efficient (the agent who makes it which); final (the end, or purpose, for which)

Virtue: a habit (stable disposition towards action) that facilitates what is good (vices are habits that facilitate actions towards what is evil)

Natural Law: the rational creature's participation in the eternal law (truth and goodness) of God

Human Acts: voluntary, deliberate actions (or omissions) of a person arising from free will and reason (distinct from merely human actions, which can arise involuntarily, like a sneeze)

Intention: the reason or motive for the choice of a particular human act

Direct and Indirect Effects: direct effects are immediate consequences of an action; indirect effects are those that arise accidentally (the direct effect of paying my grocery bill is to recompense the vendor to satisfy justice; indirect effects include keeping me out of jail, keeping my cupboards stocked, keeping my family fed, reducing my bank account, etc.)

Double Effect: when the same action has more than one effect. An action that has negative consequences can be justified relative to four conditions:

- 1) The action itself is good or morally neutral
- 2) Only the good effect is directly intended; the negative effect may be foreseen but is not directly intended (the reason for choosing this course of action)
- 3) The good effect is proportionate to (outweighs) the negative effect
- 4) The good effect does not result directly from the negative effect

Totality: a part may be sacrificed for the good of the whole

Proportion: an appropriate relation between two aspects of a being (or action)