

**Block-2**

**MEANING OF BEING**

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## BLOCK INTRODUCTION

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Human finds oneself confronted by two types of beings in the world: finite things and finite persons. They are distinguished by their unique relationship to Being. Things participate in Being according to their essence, and strive towards the fullness of Being accordingly. But the things cannot distinguish Being from its concretization in essence. Hence their actuation does not break through to Being itself and ultimately explicate the essence. Hence things remain blank for themselves and for other things. They are of themselves silent partners for human. In persons, human encounters beings like oneself, i.e., other fellow human beings. The humans participate in Being through their essence in such a way that in their actuation they at once distinguish Being from essence and so attain to Being itself. In other words, the human person is capable of complete reflection on oneself (self-reflection). By virtue of this reflection the human can reduce the outermost externals of things to the most intimate inwardness of Being itself. Hence we see an essential connection between person and Being. In things, Being is alienated from itself, while in the person it is at home or has possession of itself. Consequently, things appear as diminished beings over which human persons or experiencing agents tower as full beings. That is why an understanding of Being calls for an analysis of the metaphysical structure of the human person or experiencing agent. The experiencing agent is structured as one's action is. 'As the action is, so the agent [agent = a being that acts] is.' The action is composed of exercise (exercise = the inner element of the action which accounts for its taking place) and determination (determination = the inner element of the action which determines or distinguishes one action from other actions). Hence the experiencing agent (person) must also be composed. The experiencing agent is composed of Being and essence. Essence is composed of substance and accidents. Substance is composed of prime matter and substantial form. Prime matter is in potency; whereas substantial form is in act. This Block has 4 units: 1. Being and Essence, 2. Substance and Accidents, 3. Matter and Form, and 4. Appearance and Reality.

Unit 1 is on "Being and Essence." In this unit learner will see the concept of being and essence. Learner will also find the discussion on the difference between these two concepts. Being is that which is in some way or something. It is unlimited in itself. But we know that we are limited beings. We come into being and come to an end. The same is with every other being (limited being). Hence, we have the experience of limitlessness and of limitation. The

principle of limitlessness is Being and the principle of limitation is essence.

Unit 2 is on “Substance and Accidents.” In this unit learner will study the problem of substance and accidents. The inner principle of permanence or sameness (identity) is substance, and the inner principle of the consequence of change or addition is accident. Substance is always being in itself; whereas accident is being in another.

Unit 3 is on “Matter and Form.” In this unit learner will study the problem of matter and form. All material beings become: become more or become less. No material being ever remains the same. Hence, all material beings in so far as they are material are capable of assuming innumerable forms; they are capable of receiving new forms. It is possible because matter in itself is indeterminate without any form; matter (especially prime matter) is the principle of indetermination, whereas form (substantial form) is the primary principle of determination of finite being.

Unit 4 is on “Appearance and Reality”. In this unit learner will be acquainted with the problem of appearance and reality, particularly in Plato, Sophists, Berkeley and Kant. Learner will also find a brief discussion of this problem in Indian philosophical school, especially *Advaita Vedānta* and Buddhism. Innumerable experiences of our lives, drawing our attention to the distinction between what things “seem” to be and what they “really” are. In our never-ending quest for Truth and certainty, we are constantly wanting to sieve out the Ultimate Reality from those objects and instances, etc. that merely seem to be real but are in fact just illusory appearances and half-truths.

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## UNIT 5 BEING AND ESSENCE\*

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### Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Ancient Philosophy: Being as Essence
- 5.3 Medieval Philosophy: Being as *Esse*
- 5.4 Modern Philosophy: Breakdown and Ferment
- 5.5 Contemporary Philosophy: Beyond Being and Essence
- 5.6. Let Us Sum Up
- 5.7 Key Words
- 5.8 Further Readings and References
- 5.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 5.0 OBJECTIVES

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The objective of this unit is to familiarize the student with the closely related terms *being* and *essence*. The method followed is historical, because it is more correct to speak of the history of the meanings rather than of ‘the meaning’ of being and essence. The limitation of the unit is that it concentrates mainly on the Western philosophical tradition.

By the end of this unit you should be able to distinguish and identify at least four great periods in the history of the meanings of being and essence in the West.

- The ancient identification of being and essence;
- The medieval identification of being with *esse*;
- The breakdown of the medieval synthesis in the modern period;
- Contemporary efforts to go beyond both being and essence.

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### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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What is the nature of reality? Is it ever constant or is it ever changing or there is another answer beyond constant and change? Some philosophers argue that reality is ever constant (Being), some argue in favour of change (Becoming). We have another term to describe the nature of reality, that is essence. Being and essence are closely related term. We will try to explore in the meaning of these two terms.

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\* Dr. Ivo Coelho, Divyadaan, Nashik.

The earliest Indian reflections on being may be found in hymn X, 129 of the *R̥gveda*, which speaks of a mysterious ‘One’ as the originator of the universe, noting that then there was neither Being (*sat*) nor Not-Being (*asat*). *Sat*, derived from the infinitive *as*, to be, here means the manifestly existent, all creatures distinguishable by their form and name (*nāmarūpa*), including gods; *asat* means the not yet differentiated material, the primal matter out of which names and forms emerge.

In the West, reflection on being achieved its first high point in the philosophy of Parmenides, which is characterized by an opposition between being and appearance, and a clear option for being as stability and unity. What is real neither arises nor perishes, and this thinking continues to influence the subsequent Presocratic nature philosophers who, however, unlike Parmenides, do not conclude that the objects of our everyday experience are mere appearances.

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## 5.2 ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY: BEING AS ESSENCE

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Plato is the first, in the West, to have explicitly raised the question, “What is being?” The question is answered in *The Sophist* by accepting a Form or Idea of being, but also by distinguishing two forms of being: Ideas, which have their own Being, and particulars, which have Being only through participation. Like Parmenides, then, Forms or Ideas are stable and unchanging; unlike Parmenides, there is a plurality of Forms. Plato refers, in fact, to the Forms as *ousiai*. His *ousia* is the decisive formulation of *einai*, being a substantive derived from the feminine participle of *einai*. *Ousia* is that of which ‘is’ is properly predicated. It is the real and primary being (*ontoson*). It is that which something is as such: its whatness. Thus, Plato equates being with Form or Idea. In contrast, the things of experience are merely imitations or images of the Ideas, and so while they are not absolutely nothing, they do not have any immanent *ousia*.

Against Plato, Aristotle upholds the individual existent as the paragon of reality, and calls it ‘primary substance’ (*prote ousia*), in opposition to ‘secondary substance’ which is merely conceptual. For him, the first substance is *hypostasis* or subject, because it is “that of which everything else is predicated, while it is itself not predicated of anything else.” (*Metaphysics* Book 7, ch. 3.) Still, this term is not yet specialized and Aristotle uses it to mean all sorts of subject, substrata, supports, or subject-matter. Perhaps we could say that for Aristotle, *hypostasis* is, in material substances, the essence (*to ti en einai*) composed of

matter and form, where form is that which makes matter into a substance. It is primarily the whatness of a thing, the essence, that makes a thing what it is. There is an equation in Aristotle between being (*ousia*) and essence.

Hellenistic philosophy repudiated both Platonic ideas and Aristotelian essences or forms. The Stoics held the view that only corporeal things exist, and that only such things can either affect or be affected by something. Since the soul, for example, can clearly be affected or be affected, they drew the reverse conclusion that the soul itself is corporeal. The denial of beings beyond the perceptible world remains a fundamental position of Stoicism. The Church Fathers, on the other hand, have a concept of being that is quite distinct, deriving it from an interpretation of the "I am who am" of *Exodus* 3, 14. Thus, Clement of Alexandria allowed that God can be named 'being,' in the sense of 'the real and only being,' who was, is, and will be, and who undergoes no change. According to Gregory of Nazianzen also, 'being' is a name that first and foremost describes the divine essence. Since God as 'being' encompasses being as a whole, Gregory calls him, in a famous metaphor, "as it were an unending and limitless ocean of Being."

The reception of Greek philosophy in the Latin-speaking world encountered significant difficulties with the translation of important words. *To on* was rendered by the non-classical *ens*. Seneca coined the word *essentia* as a translation of *ousia*: just as *ousia* is the substantive of the Greek infinitive *einai*, *essentia* is the substantive of the Latin infinitive *esse*. This usage, however, did not become established: under the influence of Aristotle's *Categories*, *substantia* became the dominant translation of *ousia*. The terms *ousia*, *substantia* and *essentia* play an important role in the Trinitarian and Christological controversies. At the time of these controversies, their meanings were still floating and ambiguous, together with those of *prosopon* / *persona*, *hypostasis* / *subsistentia* / *subjectum* / *suppositum*, and *physis* / *natura*. In Greek, *prosopon* retained its ancient meaning of mask or character, whereas in Latin its cognate *persona* attained the sense of *subjectum iuris*. Among the Greeks, it was *hypostasis* that acquired this meaning of *persona*, while its Latin cognate *substantia* only meant for the Latins essence (Gk. *ousia*) or substance or nature (Gk. *physis*), for which they also used *natura*. This led to imaginable confusion between Greek and Latin theologians. Finally, during the fourth century AD, it was agreed to say that Christ was, in Latin, one *persona* in two distinct *naturae* or *substantiae*, in Greek one *hypostasis* in two *physeis* or *ousiae*. Similarly, they declared that God is one Essence

or Substance (*ousia / substantia*) in three persons (*hypostaseis / personae*). These developments are significant for the medieval Christian reflection on being and essence.

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### 5.3 MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY: BEING AS *ESSE*

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The Muslim philosopher Avicenna (Ibn Sina) initiated an important distinction between being and essence. One of his theses was that 'being' indicates 'being-real', while 'essence' indicates the 'whatness' of a being. Being is to be understood as the act of some particular being; it is not a property of its essence; and it is related to its essence as an accident, even though not a categorical one. On the other hand, the essence has its own value: it is indifferent to determinations such as universality or individuality, and mental or real ways of being, and can be thought of without them. So essence and being are distinct. This teaching about the accidentality of the Being of created beings was accepted by Algazel (Al Ghazali) and Moses Maimonides, but rejected vigorously by Averroes (Ibn Rushd).

Thomas Aquinas takes over Avicenna's distinction of being and essence, but with Averroes rejects the accidentality of being. In fact, with him the act of being, which he refers to as *esse*, comes to occupy explicit primacy over essence understood as the 'whatness' of a being. Thus, if Aristotle may be regarded as the champion of essence, Aquinas is the champion of *esse*. Parmenides had established linguistic argument as an independent power that could challenge the evidence of the senses, thus making way for the distinction between sense and intellect. Plato had given pride of place to understanding, when he insisted on the reality of a world of eternal Forms. Aristotle had systematized the distinction between sense and understanding by distinguishing between matter and form in the essence of a thing, or the essence that is the thing, the *ousia*. To Aquinas, however, goes the credit of making systematic a further distinction between understanding and judgment. Thus, where Aristotle was content to say that among sensible things, 'that which is' is either the essence or at least an essential, with Aquinas being ceases to be identified with essence; it is now primarily the act of existence, or better, pure *esse*. Aristotle had, of course, a theory of judgment, but judging for him was the composition or division of concepts, not the absolute positing of what is true; thus, he reduced judging to experiencing plus understanding. Aquinas does tend to use Aristotelian language, but, with his superior grasp of the distinction between understanding and judging, he was able to acknowledge and

emphasize the real distinction between essence and *esse*.

Aquinas' doctrine can be synthesized in the following manner. Being has two denotations: being pure and simple, and being qualified in some sense. A being pure and simple is that which is. A qualified being does not itself 'be'; instead it refers in some way to an act of existence. Examples of qualified being are accidents, the intrinsic and constitutive principles of being, possible, and beings of reason. Examples of being without qualification are God, angels and material creatures. God is being as pure and unrestricted act. Angels are beings composed of form and act. Material creatures are beings composed of potency (matter), form and act.

Hence, essence also has three denotations. In God, essence is pure act itself. In angels, essence is form. In material creatures, essence is composed of potency and form. Form is related to matter as insight to sensible data. Essences are also divided into essences pure and simple, and essences qualified in some sense. An essence pure and simple is the essence of being pure and simple. An essence in a qualified sense is the essence of anything that pertains to a being pure and simple. *Esse* is the act of a being, the act of being, the act of an essence. In God, *esse* is pure act itself. In angels it is an act limited by form; in material creatures it is an act limited by essence composed of matter and form. There is a real, adequate, minor distinction between finite essence and contingent act of existence. There is a real, inadequate, minor distinction between a finite being and its essence. That which is, in other words, is not a finite essence, but a being composed of essence and act of existence. In God, being, essence and act of existence are the same. But in a creature, being pure and simple is indeed that which is; but it is by essence and act of existence that the creature is a being.

Substance has two denotations; further, it is understood in several ways. Substance is either first or second substance. Second substance is an abstraction, such as man or cow. First substance is a concrete reality such as, this man or this cow. But this may be taken in two ways: first, as including accidents; second, as prescinding from accidents. Further, first substance can be conceived without accidents, (1) as composed of potency, form and act, in which case it is, as regards substance, a being pure and simple; (2) as composed of potency and form, in which case it is not a *being* pure and simple, but an *essence* pure and simple.

The matter can be made clearer by noting that Plato has an analogy of form, Aristotle an analogy of substance, but Aquinas alone an analogy of being. Platonic forms (*ta eide*) are posited on the analogy of universal concepts: they are eternal, immutable, subsistent, immaterial, intelligible, but not intelligent. Aristotelian substances (*ousiai*) do not correspond to concepts; they proceed instead from an analogy of the intelligent and the intelligible. Thus, in material things they are the intelligible that is grasped in the sensible. In that which is immaterial, *ousia* or substance is both one who understands and what is understood; there is identity between the one understanding and what is understood. Material substances are known by an investigation of the formal cause. Separate substances cannot be known in this manner because they neither have senses nor are sensible things. So, Aristotelian analogy proceeds to a conception of separate substances through the intelligent and the intelligible. Human intellect is moved to understand by the mediation of sensible data; separated intellects are immovable, they are not moved by anything, in them intelligible and intelligent and intellect are one and the same. As for the Thomist analogy of being, its systematic root is the assertion that the object of intellect is unrestricted being or 'all things.' The intellect is in act or potency dependent on its relation to universal being. Only God's intellect is purely and simply in act, because no created intellect is unrestricted being. An angelic intellect is always in act, but only with respect to certain intelligibles. Human intellect is merely potency in the genus of the intelligible; even after it has received a species, without a phantasm it understands nothing in act. Thus, the Aristotelian doctrine is included in such a way as to be transformed. In material things, besides matter and form, there is also the act of existence. In separate substances, besides form there is also the act of existence. And beyond these there is God, who is subsistent act of existence itself, pure act. Thus, Aquinas proceeds by asking, not: what, analogically speaking, is a separate substance? but: what, analogically speaking, is the act of existence, being, that which is? To this, the answer is that being not only has a twofold denotation (being pure and simple, and being qualified in some sense), but also is twofold (being by its essence and being by participation), and is known in a twofold way (being *quidditatively* (essence) known, and being analogically known). The Thomist system simply and utterly transcends Aristotelian essentialism, for while it includes the Aristotelian doctrine, it adds to it another doctrine that is simply and utterly new, and it adds it in a systematic fashion.

We must note that such a systematic addition and transformation is possible only to the extent that, within the realm of sensible things, being does not denote the same thing as essence or essential. For, if these denote the same thing, one will ask with Aristotle about material and immaterial beings, and answer with him through a science of material things and of separate substances. For if 'being' and 'essence' have the same denotation, the question 'What is being?' is none other than the question of what this, that, or the other essence is. Only if being adds something above and beyond the essential does the question of what being is make sense; and only then is this question answered by dividing being into being by its essence, and being by participation.

Aquinas does not speak explicitly of a real distinction between *esse* and essence, but he does mean a non-mental difference between the two in the concrete existing thing. Opposition to the real distinction came from the Latin Averroists, the Dominicans and the Franciscans. The latter two groups, however, based themselves on a general and extrinsic reason: they objected to the use of Islamic and Aristotelian sources. The problem was brought sharply into focus by Giles of Rome, with his insistence not merely on the distinction but on a separation between essence and *esse*: without this, he said, there is no proof of creation, analogy, distinction of substance and accidents. Henry of Ghent countered with a rational distinction between essence and existence, and refused it a major role in philosophy and theology; he was joined in this later by Duns Scotus. But Aquinas remains the most important protagonist of the real distinction.

**Check Your Progress I**

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. How is being understood in the ancient period of the West?

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2. How is being understood in the medieval Western period?

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## 5.4 MODERN PHILOSOPHY: BREAKDOWN AND FERMENT

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The masterly sublation of Aristotle achieved by Aquinas in his philosophy of *esse*, soon suffered an eclipse and a breakdown, not only at the hands of his opponents but also at those of his own disciples and interpreters. Modern Western philosophy thus, inherits not so much the Thomist synthesis as the breakdown represented by late Scholasticism. A. MacIntyre has even referred to modern rationalism as the first cousin of late Scholasticism.

Descartes, in his effort to give philosophy a fresh beginning, refuses to engage in a systematic ontology; still, his *Cogito* contains certain assumptions about existence. Being is first one's own existence, discovered with intuitive certainty in the performance of thinking; the existence of things of the outside world is guaranteed ultimately only through the truthfulness of God. Again, Descartes insisted on a strict distinction between essence and existence. Essence, however, is not so much the 'whatness' of a thing or its definition, but the principal attribute of a substance. Thus, extension is the essence of corporeal substance, and thought the essence of thinking substance. As for existence, Descartes understands it as a perfection; he can therefore, say that it belongs necessarily to the nature of the most perfect being, God.

Hobbes rejects all metaphysical concepts such as essence and entity as futile and superfluous, and makes a break with Aristotle, when he holds that definitions are of names, not of things. An essence is merely that accident by which we give a name to a body. For Locke, only corporeal things are real, and their basic determination is the 'solidity' which is attained through the sense of touch. Everything that exists is either an idea in us or a real being outside us. In contrast to Hobbes, Locke does admit a real essence that is the bearer of qualities, but this real essence is mostly unknown to us. It is the colour, weight, etc. of a thing which gives it a right to a particular name, and that is its nominal essence. Hume admits that all our ideas are associated with the "most perfect idea and assurance of being." Still, the reality outside us corresponding to perception is ultimately only an object of belief. As for 'substance,' he rejects it as an 'unintelligible chimera.' One consequence of such thinking is that real essence becomes unimportant, and philosophy becomes a study of meanings.

In Leibniz, we find once again the effort to work out an ontology, but now it is not so much

the science of *esse* as of the most universal concepts such as something, nothing, thinkable, being, and thing. The idea of being is innate in all people, but we come to it by the Cartesian way of self-experience and distinct ideas. Being is thus, what can be clearly grasped, and the existent can be perceived through inner or outer sense. As for essence, it is basically the possibility of what one proposes; it is eternal because it is a pure possibility. This essence as possibility contains the act of existing. For Wolff, essence is that in which is found the ground of all the rest that belongs to a thing: one knows the essence of a thing when one understands how it is determined in its type. True essence here appears to be merely a possibility, but since possibility is something necessary, the essence of a thing consists in this, that it is a definite type of possibility; thus, essence is necessary, eternal, unchanging.

Given Kant's Copernican Revolution, the term Being plays a minor role in his philosophy. The place of traditional ontology is taken by the Transcendental Analytic, which replaces Being and beings with the pure ideas of reason, as the spontaneous conditions of possibility of experience. However, in the special context of the ontological proof of the existence of God, the concept of Being does play a central role. In this context, Kant distinguishes two meanings of Being: (1) if something is posited as a characteristic of a thing, then Being means the positing of this relationship; (2) if the thing is posited in and for itself, then Being means the absolute positing of the thing, or *Dasein*. The main point in this distinction is that Being in the sense of *Dasein* is not a predicate or determination of things. Thus, the statement 'God exists' brings to the concept God no new property. The real contains nothing more than the merely possible. The ontological proof of God's existence fails because existence cannot be derived from an analysis of transcendental ideals. Being as posited can never be affirmed *a priori*, because our awareness of existence is derived wholly and completely from the unification of experience. As for essence, Kant distinguishes between the logical essence, and the real essence or nature of a thing. Both refer to inner principles of things: logical essence is the principle of all the possibilities of a thing, while real essence or nature is the principle of what belongs to the *Dasein* of a thing. Thus, geometrical figures have a logical essence, but no nature. Kant holds that, while we can easily understand the logical essences of a thing, we cannot see the real or natural essence of a thing as a whole. However, he holds that it is necessary neither for the natural sciences nor for metaphysics to know the entire real essence of a thing.

The doctrine of Being is the subject of Hegel's Logic. Together with the doctrine of essence, the doctrine of being constitutes the 'objective Logic' that takes the place of traditional ontology. The Logic has its starting point in 'pure knowing.' Pure knowing presents itself as the 'undifferentiated.' In its non-differentiatedness, pure knowing is 'simple unmediatedness,' pure Being. As pure knowing should be called nothing but knowing as such, so pure Being must be called nothing but Being itself. Being is therefore, the non-determinate, the unmediated, empty intuition and empty thinking. In this total non-determinateness it is therefore, Nothing; it is simply identity with itself. However, insofar as Being is transformed into Nothing, a movement has taken place, and a new moment appears, which is Becoming. The unification of Being and Nothing in Becoming produces Dasein, and there arises 'determination as such.' Thus, in its attempt to know what Being is in and for itself, knowing cannot remain with the unmediatedness of Being; it enters into itself, and awaits the emergence of the Truth of Being. This emerges in the first negation of Being, in essence. Being in its truth reveals itself as having become Nothing— it emerges as appearance. Thus, one arrives at the second great step of ontology, to the Logic of Essence. Insofar as appearance appears not as the manifestation of another, but as itself, there emerges reflexion, the appearance of essence in itself. In the presentation of essences, reflexion reaches determination. With the Logic of Essence and the doctrine of concepts derived from it, the Logic of Being is abandoned; yet the movement of knowing leads back to Being. On the highest level of knowing, which is the Idea, there is pure unity. The Idea is simple relation to itself, and therefore, pure Being, but through the mediation of the concept it is Being brought to fulfilment, Being as the concrete, and as totality. Hegel's Logic can therefore, be understood as a universal doctrine of Being, as the explicitation of the meaning of 'is'. Since, however, primordial reality is the Absolute Idea, and since Hegel tends to equate Being with essence, we may say that Hegel returns in a sense to Aristotle.

Kierkegaard reacted against the absence of place for the individual, and the particular existent in Hegel's dialectic, but 'existence' has a different meaning for him: it means the manner of being proper to a human being. The 'ex' in existence is not the emergence of beings from their causes and from prior nothingness, but the intentionality of consciousness going towards something different from itself. For Dilthey, the concept of essence belongs to the life-categories that, in contrast to the formal categories of thought, express

a fact of life contained in the inner experience of the subject. Since however, life as a whole is ultimately not to be grounded through concepts, the concept of essence contains a dark and non-groundable core that we cannot discipline through any kind of logic. Instead, there is in each individual a centre of his essence and of the meaning of his existence, which we can understand through the consciousness of our relationship with him. As for Nietzsche, he completely rejects the distinction between essence and appearance. For him, the 'Outer' is the 'Inner', and 'appearances' are not masks of an unknown X, but rather manifestation, power and life itself. Yet in the end, manifestation almost always becomes essence and functions as essence.

Husserl's philosophy is a *sui generis* return to the immutability of essences. For Husserl, essence means above all that which can be found in the own most being of an individual as its what, that can be empirically experienced through individual intuition. What is intuited is the pure essence or *eidos*. To every individual object belongs an 'essential state,' and to each essence correspond possible individuals as its factual particularizations.

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## 5.5 THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD: BEYOND BEING AND ESSENCE

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The great re-emergence of the question of Being takes place, of course, in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger was one of Husserl's most brilliant pupils. His originality consists in adopting the phenomenology of Husserl and applying it, not to the rarefied world of pure essences, but to the factual world in all its temporality and concreteness. Heidegger's whole philosophy can be understood as concerned with the question of Being. *Being and Time* (1927) tries to explicitate the meaning of Being by examining a particular being, *Dasein*. The peculiarity of *Dasein* over other beings consists in the fact that the Being of this being is to be concerned about Being. That *Dasein* comports itself towards Being in this way gives its Being the character of Existence. *Dasein* essences thus, that it is the 'there,' the lighting up of Being. This Being of the there, and only this, has the basic relation of Ex-sisting, which means ecstatic dwelling in the truth of Being. Heidegger places the word 'essence' in inverted commas and verbalizes it, so that it means the Ek-stasy of *Dasein*. As for essence in the sense of a generic and universal concept, Heidegger calls it the 'trivial' and 'unessential essence,' in contrast to the 'essential essence' that consists in what a being really is. Understood as a verb, essence (*wesen*)

means 'to last' (*währen*). The enduring of that which, having come into unconcealment, remains there, is the 'presence' (*Anwesen*). The structures of Existence are the existentials, and together these existentials form the existentiality of *Dasein*. Further, since *Dasein* is always and primordially being-in-the-world, its meaning is concealed there. As being-in-the-world, *Dasein* begins to understand itself, when it grasps itself in its temporality. In the second part of *Being and Time*, Heidegger had planned to show the structures of *Dasein* as modes of temporality. But this part never appeared, and Heidegger left unanswered the question whether temporality is the path to the meaning of Being. His 'Turn' tries to think Being without thinking back to a grounding of Being on beings. According to Heidegger, the history of metaphysics has concentrated on beings and so has missed the 'Truth of *Seins*' that 'essences' as the hidden. When he uses expressions such as "A being is. Being essences," he is trying to avoid encapsulating Being in categories and in the language of presence-metaphysics. He also tries, with the help of a 'silent teaching' instead of a logic, to indicate that one can never directly speak of Being itself, because it only essences in silence. In his later writings he tries, with the help of a strikeout, to indicate the way in which the new thinking that does not articulate itself in statements dissolves Being. The concept of Being has thus, freed itself from all the coordinates of ontology. Interestingly, however, the late writings tend to think of Being as a power possessing the attributes of personality: Being 'speaks to', 'denies,' 'withdraws.' The high point in Heidegger's mythicization of Being comes when it becomes a cipher of salvation philosophy for 'the select few of the future,' for those who await 'the distancing and nearing of the last god.'

Taking off from Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger, Sartre addresses the Being question. Against Kant's separation of the thing-in-itself and appearance, Sartre insists on the self-manifestation of appearance; but this is not an abandonment of 'transphenomenality'. Rather, it means: the Being of appearance is distinct from appearance; it is the condition for the unveiling of being, but is not itself unveiled. The ontological difference presents itself thus, as the difference between the phenomenon of Being, and the Being of the phenomenon. The question about the Being of the phenomenon turns to consciousness. In so far as it is always consciousness of something, consciousness points away from itself to the thing in itself. Between the being in itself and consciousness, whose way of Being is to be for itself, there is a radical gap: while the in itself is an undifferentiated affirmation of itself, the Being of the for-itself lies in the annihilation of the for-itself – its Being is never

given, it is always deferred, is always in question and longs for Being, always conceives itself and shatters in the process. At the same time, the in-itself and the for-itself belong together. This *apriori* unity marks the concrete relationships of human beings in their Being in the world. Sartre's ontology explicates the human condition with emphasis on the consideration of existence with others and with special attention to the human body.

The groundswell against being and essence that we have noticed, since the inception of modern philosophy builds up into a wave with Nietzsche and Heidegger, and crashes down with the movement known as Postmodernism. Derrida, one of the stellar figures of this movement, describes the Western intellectual tradition as "a search for a transcendental being that serves as the origin or guarantor of meaning." Such an attempt to ground meaning, relations in an instance that lies outside all relationality, was referred to by Heidegger as logocentrism. Derrida argues that the whole philosophical enterprise is *essentially* logocentric, and that this is a paradigm inherited from Judaism and Hellenism. He further describes logocentrism as phallogocratic, patriarchal and masculinist. He was vigorous in pointing out and highlighting "certain deeply hidden philosophical presuppositions and prejudices in Western culture," arguing that the whole philosophical tradition rests on arbitrary dichotomous categories such as sacred/profane, sign/signifier, mind/body, and that any text contains implicit hierarchies, "by which an order is imposed on reality and by which a subtle repression is exercised, as these hierarchies exclude, subordinate, and hide the various potential meanings. Derrida refers to his procedure for uncovering and unsettling these dichotomies as deconstruction."

### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What is the fate of being and essence in the modern Western period?

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2. How is being understood in the contemporary period?

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## 5.6 LET US SUM UP

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Where Parmenides used various forms of the word *einai* to speak of Being that is stable, unchanging and one, Plato coined the word *ousia* to characterize his eternal Forms, in contrast to which material things are mere imitations. Aristotle instead upholds the individual existent as the paragon of reality, first *ousia*. These may be either pure immaterial essences, or else mixed essences composed of matter and form.

Where Aristotle had an analogy of substance, Thomas Aquinas worked out an analogy of *esse*: God is the pure *esse*; angels are substances composed of act of existence and essence; material things are composed of act of existence and essence, but the essence is itself composed of form and matter. Thus, Being for Aquinas is primarily, *esse* rather than essence.

This higher synthesis and transformation of Aristotle is broken up in various ways in the modern period. The empiricists regard essences as merely nominal. Kant recognizes that existence is not a predicate, but relegates Being to a minor role. Hegel ignores *esse*, to construct a Logic of Being and a Logic of Essence, culminating in the Absolute Idea. In reaction to his neglect of the particular and the individual, Kierkegaard works out a new meaning of existence as the manner of being proper to human beings.

Heidegger works out a phenomenology of factual existence, seeks the Being of meaning, and raises anew the question of Being. However, he abandons his early efforts when he opts for a poetic recognition of the Truth of Being that ‘essences’ in silence. Derrida is representative of postmodernism, when he proscribes all philosophy as logocentric, and conceives of his own task as one of deconstruction of the subtle violence of philosophy, and of civilization. Postmodernism therefore, seeks to get beyond the thinking of Being and essence/*logos* that has characterized the history of the West.

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## 5.7 KEY WORDS

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***Einai***: Greek word, infinitive ‘to be.’

***Ousia, ousiai***: Greek word, substantive derived from *einai*, variously translated as being or

substance.

*To ti en einai*: Greek word, expression coined by Aristotle, usually translated as essence.

*Esse*: Latin word, infinitive 'to be'; act of existence.

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## 5.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check your progress I

1. In the ancient period of the West, being tends to be identified with essence in the sense of the whatness of things, and essences are considered stable and unchanging in themselves.

Parmenides regarded only the stable and unchanging as being, and further regarded being as one.

Plato preserved this emphasis on stability when he spoke of a world of eternal, unchanging Forms, but admitted a plurality of such Forms or *ousiai*. Aristotle extended the word *ousia* also to material things, and indeed exalted the individual existent as the prototypical substance or *ousia*. Still, even for him *ousia* or being is largely its essence, though in material things the essence consists not only of form, but also of matter.

In the medieval period of the West, a distinction emerges between essence and existence.

Especially for Thomas Aquinas, being is primarily not essence but act of existence, or *esse*.

He establishes an analogy of *esse*: God who is pure *esse*; angels who are beings composed of form and act of existence; and material things that are composed of essence and existence, and whose essence is further composed of matter and form.

### **Check your progress II**

1. In the modern period, Hobbes and Locke begin insisting that essences or definitions are of names, rather than of things. Kant does recognize that existence is not a predicate, but relegates Being to a minor role as compared to the pure ideas of reason. Hegel swallows up both *esse* and movement, into the dialectic of the Absolute Idea. In reaction, Kierkegaard worked out a new meaning of existence as the manner of being proper to the human being, and Nietzsche refused to acknowledge any difference between essence and appearance. Thus, the modern period represents a breakdown of the synthesis achieved by Thomas Aquinas.

The contemporary period may be regarded as an ongoing effort to get beyond both Being and *logos*. Taking inspiration from Husserl, Heidegger creates a phenomenology of factual existence, and raises anew the question of Being. This he does by examining Dasein, which is that being whose Being is to be concerned about Being. Eventually he abandons this attempt, and opts for a poetic recognition of the Truth of Being that 'essences' in silence. Derrida goes one step further when he characterises the whole history of philosophy in the West, including that of Heidegger, as logocentric, and proposes to replace it by deconstruction of its violent and repressive dichotomies.

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## UNIT 6

## SUBSTANCE AND ACCIDENTS\*

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### Structure

6.0 Objectives

6.1 Introduction

6.2 The Notion of Substance

6.3 The Existence of Substance

6.4 Nature of Substance

6.5 A Misconception about Substance

6.6 Division of Substance

6.7 Union of Substance and Accidents

6.8 Accidents: Definition

6.9 Division of Accidents

6.10 The Reality of Accidents

6.11 Accidents have Their Own “To Be”

6.12 Real Distinction between Substance and Accidents

6.13 Let us Sum Up

6.14 Key Words

6.15 Further Readings and References

6.16 Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 6.0 OBJECTIVES

Every finite being is constituted of various intrinsic metaphysical principles. And one such metaphysical principle is that every finite being is composed of substance and accidents. In this unit, you will be helped to understand:

- Nature of Substance and Accidents
- Division of Substance and Accidents

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### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The word ‘Substance’ literally means ‘subject or substratum’ that which supports. It is derived from the Latin word ‘substantia’ which means ‘standing under’. Substance, thus, literally means

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\* Dr. Joseph Martis, St. Joseph’s College, Mangalore.

then “that which stands beneath”. Secondly, the role of substance is related to its nature that is something subsistent. This means that it does not exist in something else, but in itself, as the relatively permanent principle of a being. We can hence define substance as ‘the basic inner principle of relative permanence of a being that becomes.’ From this definition we may conclude that finite beings are composed of a relatively permanent principle which remains primarily the same, throughout secondary changes, and secondary principles which may come and go without producing a change in the primary mode of being. The relatively permanent principle is called “substance”, and secondary principles are called “accidents”. There is, however, far more to be said about these concepts hence, we need to examine them in greater detail.

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## 6.2 THE NOTION OF SUBSTANCE

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It is a primary experience that in finite beings there is a kind of multiplicity even within the confines of the individual being. Given the individual, the finite being shows itself to be manifold in the order of activity, i.e., it can undergo changes without becoming an altogether different individual. For instance, a small seedling will grow up into a tall tree, drop its leaves periodically, bring forth flowers and fruit; yet it remains the same tree. A baby will grow up and increase not only in size and age, but also in skill, knowledge, etc.; yet internal consciousness reveals to each one of us that we are still the same ego as five, ten or twenty years ago.

Thus, when a change takes place in a being in such a way that this change does not modify the thing in its individual essence, it merely adds a secondary determination; it gives a new mode of being, but does not take away the first or essential mode of being which the thing possessed prior to the change.

When the external senses perceive the changes that take place, the intellect may endeavor to find a rational explanation of this process on the level of being. Thus, it conceives the qualities which may come and go as determinations which affect something that is underneath these changes and modify them. The difference between the determinations, and their subject is expressed by the terms “accidents” and “substance”. Thus, our intellect acquires the concepts of substance and accidents as corresponding to a reality existing in the extra mental world.

The concept of substance may be acquired also from the analysis of our internal intellectual

activity. We are conscious that in our acts of knowing our own ego, which first did not think about a certain subject, e.g. electricity, now thinks about it. Hence, again, the acts of thinking are conceived as transitory affections or determinations of a more permanent Ego. This leads us to conceive them as accidental determinations of the substance of our Ego.

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### 6.3 THE EXISTENCE OF SUBSTANCE

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When a relatively permanent reality is compared to its transitory determination, the intellect perceives that the latter are real, no doubt, but not capable of existing in themselves. For instance, running, being blue, being struck, etc. are perceived by the intellect as incapable of existence except in a subject which is running, blue, struck, etc. But is the reality in which these transitory determinations exist capable of existing in itself? If so, then its nature is different from that of the transitory determinations or accidents, which cannot exist in themselves. It presupposes then something else which can exist in itself, and therefore, differs in nature from the accidents. Thus, we are led to the existence of substance.

If we wish to present a formal proof for the existence of substance, we may argue as follows:

If there is any reality at all, it will exist either in itself or in another. If it exists in itself, it is a substance. If it does not exist in itself but in another, this other exists either in itself or in another. But we cannot continue this series to infinity because an actually infinite series is impossible and does not explain anything. Therefore, substance exists.

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### 6.4 NATURE OF SUBSTANCE

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From all that is said so far we need to retain two aspects about the nature of substance,

- a) It is the subject, the substratum, in which accidents *inhere*. The term “substance” can express this function, for it is derived from the Latin “*substo*”, I stand under, I support.
- b) It exists in itself and does not need to inhere in another.

Now the question is to know which of those two is the primary reality of the substance, to support accidents or to exist in itself? While we are willing to admit that psychologically “to support accidents” is prior to “to exist in itself”, i.e., that we arrive at the knowledge of substance through its function of supporting accidents, it should be clear that ontologically, or in the order of reality, “to exist in itself” is prior to “to support

accidents”. For in order to act as a support of something else a thing must be capable of supporting itself, i.e. it must exist in itself. If a thing is of such a nature that it can exist in itself, it will be able to act as a support of others. Hence, to be subject or a support of accidents is a property which flows from such a nature if there are accidents to be supported. Accordingly, the proper definition of “substance” should not express the function of supporting but the nature which is such that it can exist in itself. Thus we arrive at the traditional definition of substance as “that to whose nature is due a “to be” in itself and not in another”.

“To be in itself”, is not merely a negation of existence in another, but expresses the positive perfection of independence in being. Independence in being, however, may be either absolute or merely relative. By absolute (intrinsic and extrinsic) independence in being is meant that a thing does not depend upon anything else in any way whatsoever it exists not only ‘in’ itself, but also ‘of’ itself. Such absolute independence, of course, can be found only in the pure act that is infinite being or God. Hence, if absolute independence in being were required of a substance, only God could be called a substance. But independence may be taken also in a relative sense, i.e., as merely intrinsic independence, which is had when a being exists “in” itself, but not “of” itself. It is in this sense that substances are said to be independent in being.

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## **6.5 A MISCONCEPTION ABOUT SUBSTANCE**

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Much of the modern opposition to the concept of substance is based upon a misunderstanding of its true nature. A misunderstanding for which perhaps the scholastic philosophers of the seventeenth century are most to blame. When we say that a substance is that where accidents inhere, this function of the substance might convey the impression that the substance is like a pincushion into which pins are stuck, or like an inert piece of rock in the middle of a stream to which things cling precariously. This idea is far from the truth. Substance is not an inert, unchanging support but a dynamic reality. Every time a new accident inheres in the substance, the substance itself is modified. Such accidental modifications take place continuously, so that the substance is continuously “becoming” something. Moreover, the substance is really identical with essence, and the essence is, in a way, the active principle of its proper accidents, which emanate from it “by a kind of natural resultance”. Thirdly, the reality which is the substance is identical with the nature or

essence of a thing, which is the primary principle of all activity of this thing; therefore, the reality which is the substance is also the principle of all activity exercised by this thing. Lastly, the activity of a finite being, especially if it is of an intellectual nature, gives meaning to its existence and tends to make it overcome as far as possible the limitation inherent to being finite. If this dynamic character of substance had been sufficiently stressed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, much of the subsequent confusion might perhaps have been avoided.

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## 6.6 DIVISION OF SUBSTANCE

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By an analogous division substance may be divided into finite and infinite substance. By a further analogous division, finite substance may be divided into complete and incomplete substance. An incomplete substance is one whose nature must be united to another substantial co-principle. Matter and form by their union become one substantial essence; hence they are substantial co-principles or incomplete substances. A complete substance is one whose nature does not have to be united to another substantial co-principle; for instance, the substances of a cat, a tree, a man. Substances may be incomplete in substantiality, or complete in substantiality but incomplete in specific perfection. A substance which is incomplete in substantiality cannot exist without being united to its substantial co-principle. Such are primary matter and purely material substantial forms. A substance which is incomplete in specific perfection but complete in substantiality can exist-in-itself, but cannot exercise all its functions without being united to its substantial co-principle. The human soul, as we see in rational psychology, is the only example of this type of substance. It can exist independently of the body, but without the body it cannot exercise all its functions, such as nutrition and sensation.

Another important division of substance is primary and secondary substance. In Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy, primary substance means that individual substance, i.e. that which ontologically is the subject of accidents and logically the subject of predicates. Primary substance itself has no subject, whether logically or ontologically, but is the subject.

Secondary substance, nevertheless has a subject in the logical order of attribution. In other words, secondary substance refers to the universal ideas (genus and species) under which individual substances are classified.

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## 6.7 UNION OF SUBSTANCE AND ACCIDENTS

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The union of substance and accidents results in such a way that this union does not bring to existence a new being but only modifies an already existing being. This union will be clearer when we compare this union with the union of essence and existence. The union of essence and “to be” in a being makes a thing to come into existence, that is it gives the first “to be” to the thing; but when an existing thing acquires a new mode of being without losing its first mode of being, as it happens in the union of substance and accidents it does not get a first “to be”, but only a secondary “to be”. When, for example, a bare tree gets leaves, it retains its “to be a tree”, but acquires in addition the secondary mode of being, “to be leaved”. When a man becomes skilled in mechanics, he retains his first mode of being, “to be a man”, but acquires in addition the secondary mode of being, “to be skilled in mechanics”. Thus, while the union of essence and “to be” results in being which is perfectly unified or “one”, the union of the primary and secondary modes of being does not result in a being which is perfectly unified.

As compared with the term “essence”, substance has a more restricted meaning. We may speak about the essence of an accident and about the essence of a substance, but generally we do not speak about the substance of an accident. If, however, we limit the use of essence to that of substantial beings, both terms “essence” and “substance”, indicate one and the same reality, although from a different point of view. By “essence” we indicate what a reality is, whereas by “substance” we indicate the mode of being of this reality.

A last remark, from the foregoing considerations it should be clear that in philosophy the meaning of the term “substance” is entirely different from that in physical science. In physical science “substance” is a subdivision of matter, i.e., of bodies and applies to those classes of bodies which under the same conditions have the same physical and chemical properties. The substance of physical science is opposed to “mixture”, which term indicates bodies with variable physical and chemical properties. In philosophy “substance” is opposed to “accident” and applies to any being whose nature is due a “to be” in itself.

### Check Your Progress I

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What is the definition, meaning, and nature of Substance?

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2. Enunciate different types of Substance

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## 6.8 ACCIDENTS: DEFINITION

Accident is defined “as a reality to whose essence it is proper to be in something else, as in its subject”. Concerning this definition let us retain a few points:

- a) Just like substance which has a nature or essence to which subsistence is fitting, and which places the subject within a species. Likewise, each accident has its own essence, which differentiates it from other accidents, and to which dependence on the being of a subject is fitting. For instance, colour has an essence distinct from that of temperature, and yet to subsist is not fitting to any of them.
- b) The words “as in a subject” are added to the definition to indicate the manner in which accidents are in another. They are not in another as a part is in the whole (a limb in the body) nor as the contents in the container (water in a glass), nor as a substantial form is in matter and gives it its first “to be”, but as form is in a subject to which it gives a further determination.
- c) Because accidents are such that to their nature is due a “to be” in another, they are by their very nature imperfect beings. Hence, for example, we do not say that accidents, say, whiteness, come to be, but rather that their subject becomes white. However, this imperfection of accidents should not be conceived as if the essence of an accident were incomplete, and in need of an essential co-principle. It is a complete essence, but one which lacks independence, and therefore, has to inhere in a subject.

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## 6.9 DIVISION OF ACCIDENTS

Accidents modify or denominate their subject in various ways, and to these

correspond to the nine "Categories" enunciated by Aristotle. They are:

- Quantity
- Quality
- Relation
- Action
- Passion
  
- Time
- Place
- Disposition
- Habit

These varieties of accidents can be classified into four groups according to their origin:

- a) Accidents which belong to the species : these are accidents which 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 understanding and willing in man).
- b) Accidents which are inseparable from each individual: these accidents stem from the specific way the essence is present in a given individual, for instance, being tall or short, being fair or dark-complexioned, being a man or woman – these are all individual characteristics which have a permanent basis in their subject.
- c) Accidents which are separable from each individual: these accidents such as being seated or standing, walking or studying, stem from the internal principles of their subject, but they affect it only in a transient manner.
- d) Accidents which stem from an external agent : some of these may be violent, that is they are imposed upon the subject against the normal tendency of its nature (viral disease) others in contrast may actually be beneficial to the subject which receives them.

Beside these, there is sometimes question of modal accidents, by which are meant further determinations of accidents. For instance, shape is a modal accident of extension, which it determines, and pitch is a modal accident which determines sound. Modal accidents affect directly the accident which they determine, and indirectly the subject in which this accident inheres.

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## 6.10 THE REALITY OF ACCIDENTS

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That there are real accidents which are really distinct from their subject is unanimously accepted by all philosophers, and follows immediately from what we have seen. If there are changes which do not result in a new substance, such changes take place in a subject which loses or acquires a perfection that does not belong to its substantial essence, but is a secondary determination of this substance. Now, if perfection can be lost without a change in the essence of its subject, it follows that this perfection is really distinct from the subject, i.e., from the substance.

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## 6.11 ACCIDENTS HAVE THEIR OWN “TO BE”

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It is to be noted that accidents have their own ‘to be’. For example we can conceive that “in Socrates there is one “to be” insofar as he is white, and another “to be” insofar as he is a man.

To be white is a “to be” of Socrates, not insofar as he is Socrates, but insofar as he is white. Hence, there is nothing to prevent the multiplication of this “to be” in one hypostasis or person; for the “to be” by which Socrates is white is other than the “to be” by which he is musician”. Keeping in mind that “to be” merely actualizes whatever is real, we should have no difficulty in accepting the view that each accident has its own “to be”.

There is however an objection to this view, is that it seems to militate against the unity of the individual substance. If substance and accidents each have their own “to be”, they may conceivably exist close together but they would not, so it seems, form a unit. To this, we may answer saying that “real distinction between substance and accidents does not destroy the unity of the being”. That both substance and accidents are abstractions of reality. The reality is the concrete individual whole, which is composed of substance and accidents. It is this whole which “becomes” something when a new perfection is acquired by the substance. Hence the “to be” of each accident is really a “to be” of the concrete individual whole. Substance and accidents are not several beings put together to form a whole, but the entire being forms a whole with substance and accidents. The accidents are not complete autonomous realities added to a substance, they are only determining aspects of the substance which complete it, and do not therefore, give rise to a plurality of juxtaposed things.

The unity of the composite also becomes evident in the case of operations. An animal, for instance, carries out many different actions which does not hamper its unity. In the case of man, it is neither the intelligence which understands, nor the will that desires, rather it is the person who understands and desires by means of these respective powers, and consequently all his operations are imbued with an underlying unity.

Thus, a being is a certain whole which is composed of a substance and certain accidents. These are elements which form a certain unity, and do not exist separately. No accident exists without its substance, and no substance exists without its accidents, except in God, who is perfectly simple where there are no accidents found. Hence, all finite beings are composed of substance and accidents which form a complete being.

Moreover, substance and accidents are related to one another as potency to act. Now potency and act by their union become one. Although this union of substance and accidents does not result in a perfectly unified being, nevertheless there is real, though imperfect, unity. Were we to require perfect, substantial unity for the composite of substance and accidents, it would be impossible to explain accidental change. Any change in that case would be a change of a substantial unity as such.

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## **6.12 REAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN SUBSTANCE AND ACCIDENTS**

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A substance and its accidents are really distinct from one another. This can be clearly seen by observing accidental changes, in which certain secondary perfections disappear and give way to other new ones without the substance itself being changed into another substance. Such alterations are possible if the accidents are really distinct from the substance which they affect.

The colour of the apple, for instance, is something really distinct from the apple itself since the apple changes in colour when it ripens but does not cease to be apple. All accidents by virtue of their very essence are distinct from their subject. For instance, to be divisible is by nature proper to quantity, whereas substance is by itself both one and indivisible. Relation is a reference to another, in contrast, substance is something independent.

From the above study, we understand that in the metaphysical structure of being we can see that being is constituted of two important principles that is substance and accidents.

The relatively permanent aspect is called substance, for it is that remains, although the being undergoes changes, and the accidents are the changing elements.

### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Describe the nature and division of accidents.

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2. Explain the relation between substance and accidents

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### 6.13 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have made an attempt to clarify the notions of substance and accidents, the two necessary components of finite beings. We have gone to the root words of these two notions and have enunciated their nature and division. By this lesson we have shown that in every finite being there is a changing element, and there is a permanent element. This study has highlighted the fact that though a being could undergo regular changes, at the core of itself it contains a permanent element it manifests, that it is the same being. This study brings to our minds that change is part and parcel of our very existence, but in all the changes that take place the core of the person or the being is not lost but it is enriched.

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### 6.14 KEY WORDS

**Substance:** Literally means ‘subject or substratum’ that which supports. It is derived from the Latin word ‘*substantia*’ which means ‘standing under’.

**Accidents:** are the perceptible qualities of an object such as its color, texture, size, shape, etc; things which change, but do not affect the essence of the object, are accidents.

**Act:** Refers to the mode of being which is existing in its actuality, in its present time. It is “that which is now”.

**Potency:** Mode of being which is not yet but the possibility towards the mode of being in act. That which will come into existence.

**Essence:** is properly described as that whereby a thing is ‘what it is’, it is the “whatness” of a thing, the *quiddity* of the thing.

**Existence:** is the act of being (*esse*). It answers to the question “whether a thing is”.

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## 6.16 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress I

1. The word ‘Substance’ literally means ‘subject or substratum’ that which supports. It is derived from the Latin word ‘substantia’ which means ‘standing under’. Substance, thus, literally means then “that which stands beneath”. It is to be noted that every finite being possesses two important components one which is relatively permanent principle, which remains primarily the same throughout secondary changes. This relatively permanent

principle is called “substance”. We see for instance, a small seedling will grow up into a tall tree, drop its leaves periodically, bring forth flowers and fruit; yet it remains the same tree. A baby will grow up and increase not only in size and age, but also in skill, knowledge, etc.; yet internal consciousness reveals to each one of us that we are still the same Ego as five, ten or twenty years ago. Thus, when a change takes place in a being in such a way that this change does not modify the thing in its individual essence, it merely adds a secondary determination; it gives a new mode of being, but does not take away the first or essential mode of being which the thing possessed prior to the change. Amidst the qualities which come and go in a being there remains something underneath these changes; a subject which keeps up its identity all through. This is the substance. The nature of substance is that it exists in itself and it is independent. Besides it supports the accidents which inhere in it.

2. Substance may be divided into finite and infinite substance. Finite substance refers to all beings other than the infinite being or God. When we talk of finite substance we can divide it into different types: complete and incomplete substance. An incomplete substance is one whose nature must be united to another substantial co-principle. A complete substance is one whose nature does not have to be united to another substantial co-principle; for instance, the substances of a cat, a tree, a man. Another important division of substance is primary and secondary substance. In Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy primary substance means that individual substance, i.e. that which ontologically is the subject of accidents and logically the subject of predicates. Primary substance itself has no subject, whether logically or ontologically, but is the subject. Secondary substance, nevertheless has a subject in the logical order of attribution. In other words, secondary substance refers to the universal ideas (genus and species) under which individual substances are classified.

### **Check Your Progress II**

1. Accident is defined “as a reality to whose essence it is proper to be in something else, as in its subject”. Accidents inhere in a subject called substance. They cannot exist on their own. Thus, for example colour cannot exist on its own, it is always in a subject like a cloth, building, or any object. Because accidents are such that to their nature is due a “to be” in another, they are by their very nature imperfect beings. Although accidents do not exist on their own they nevertheless have their own to be. For example, we can conceive in a

human person that he has a 'to be' of his colour, another 'to be' in his size, another 'to be' in his place and so on. Hence there is nothing to prevent the multiplication of this "to be" in one hypostasis or person. Accidents modify their subject in various ways. These modifying attributes Aristotle calls them as categories. They are nine: Quantity, Quality, Relation, Action, Passion, Time, Place, Disposition, and Habit.

2. Substance and accidents are mutually related to one another. Substance and accidents are not several beings put together to form a whole, but the entire being forms a whole with substance and accidents. The accidents are not complete autonomous realities added to a substance, they are only determining aspects of the substance which complete it and do not therefore, give rise to a plurality of juxtaposed things. We can verify the unity between substance and accidents in the activity of a being. An animal for instance carries out many different actions which does not hamper its unity. In the case of man, it is neither the intelligence which understands, nor the will that desires, rather it is the person who understands and desires by means of these respective powers and consequently all his operations are imbued with an underlying unity.

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## **UNIT 7 MATTER AND FORM\***

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### **Structure**

7.0 Objectives

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Essences as Substance and Accidents

7.3 The Problem of Individuation

7.4 Matter as Principle of Limitation

7.5 Matter and Form in Aquinas' Metaphysics

7.6 Distinction between Matter and Form

7.7 Role and Importance of Quantity in Individuation

7.8 Idea of Individuation in Aristotle's Philosophy

7.9 Idea of Individuation in John Duns Scotus' Philosophy

7.10 Idea of Individuation in Francisco Suarez's Philosophy

7.11 Let Us Sum Up

7.12 Key Words

7.13 Further Readings and References

7.14 Answers to Check Your Progress

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### **7.0 OBJECTIVES**

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In this unit our objectives are:

- to examine what exactly these essences are. In trying to explain what essences are we will discover that there are two intrinsic principles in the essence of limited beings: Matter and Form.
- to present matter and form as a solution to the problem of individuality of beings.

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### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

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The problem of "One and Many" or "Unity in Diversity" has been one of the important themes of philosophical thinking and discussions from the inception of the subject itself. It is of course the fact of change that we notice in nature around us that presents us with this problem. The problem of change, however, is only one of the issues connected with the problem of One and Many. The philosopher Parmenides discussed the notion of being as something outside of

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which there is simply nothing. Everything in every phase is being. However his monistic outlook on the nature of being contradicted the facts of experience. Hence there had to be a different solution to the problem of One and Many or Unity in Diversity. To find a solution, it is also important to look at the whole issue of limitation in the order of existence. Aristotle seems not to have paid much attention to the metaphysical problem of multiplication and limitation of existence but he contributed indirectly, in solving the problem by evolving the doctrine of potency and act, whereby he accounted for the unity-in-diversity involved in change. Aquinas, a medieval philosopher, extended this doctrine to the problems in the order of existence. Aquinas was able to synthesize the Platonic doctrine of participation, and the Aristotelian theory of potency and act. He then concluded that all finite beings are intrinsically composed of Being and essence as co-principles ordered to each other in a potency-act relationship. He went on to prove that Being and essence are really distinct in all beings except one – God. God's essence is identical with His Being. According to Aquinas beings which are multiple in existence are all totally alike in so far as they are and totally unlike in so far as each is what it is. Further, this means every being which is limited in being possesses an intrinsic principle whereby it is limited. It should be noted that these two principles are perfectly proportionate to each other. The essence specifies and limits Being, to be the Being of this finite individual. Being, on the other hand, actuates the essence so that it is an existing essence. Thus, we can arrive at a solution to the problem of One and Many in the order of Being by stating that beings are limited and multiple in the order of being, in as much as the act of being is received into diverse essences.

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## 7.2 MATTER AND FORM: A HISTORICAL SKETCH

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Matter is the stuff (substrate) out of which something is made or fashioned. The word, *matter* is derived from the Latin word, *materia*, meaning *wood*. *Materia*, itself, traces back to the word, *mater*, meaning *mother*. Thus considered, matter is the 'mother-substance.'

At a peripheral level, form is the external shape, appearance of a thing. At a deeper level form is that which specifies matter to be what it is. In metaphysics form is the active, determining principle of a thing as distinguished from matter, the potential principle.

The words 'matter' and 'form' have been used in a number of ways throughout the history of philosophy. For Anaxagoras (500-428 B.C.) matter is eternal. Originally it is a confused mass containing all the ultimate particles or seed mingled together. The static state of the confused

mass was, at some point, disturbed by a rapidly rotating motion which disentangled the seeds bringing about eventually the things of the world and the heavenly bodies. In fact the dualism between matter and form was introduced by Anaxagoras by his concept of *Nous*, which according to him is “the thinnest of all things”. It might be true to say that with the notion of *Nous*, Anaxagoras attempted to describe a spiritual reality in the inadequate conceptual terms of his time. For this reason, Aristotle termed him as being the only “sane man among drunkards”, referring to the absurdities of his predecessors.

Plato applied the term ‘form’ to identify the permanent reality that makes a thing what it is, and for him it belonged to the real world. Whereas, matter was finite and subject to time, change, multiplicity and belonged to the shadow world. Matter is essentially inferior to the forms. It can never be reducible to the other. Hence there is a dualism between the two. Matter lacks stability and unity. It is responsible for all the imperfections and disorders in the world. It is non-real and in this sense, it is non-being. It is not ‘non-existent’; rather it has a lower form of existence. Any reality it has is due to the reality of the forms. The world is the result of the inter-play of the forms and matter. The Platonic concept of form had its origin in the Pythagorean theory about numbers. Number is the ultimate element of reality; all reality is made of numbers. In this Plato found inspiration for his theory of “eternal form”, the immutable essence that is “imitated” by material, sensible things existing in the world of shadows.

Aristotle was the first to distinguish between matter (*hypokeimenon* or *hyle*) and form (*eidōs* or *morphe*). He rejected the abstract Platonic notion of form, and argued that every sensible object consists of both matter and form, neither of which can exist without the other. To Aristotle matter was the undifferentiated primal element; it is that from which things develop rather than a thing in itself. The development of particular things from this germinal matter consists in differentiation, and what constitutes the knowable universe. Matter is the potential factor, and form the actualizing factor. (Aristotle further posited the existence of a prime, or unmoved, mover, i.e., pure form separate from matter, eternal and immutable.) Thus according to Aristotle, the matter of a thing will consist of those elements of it, which, when the thing has come into being, may be said to have become it; and the form is the arrangement or organization of those elements, as the result of which they have become the thing which they are. Aristotle’s example of a house made out of bricks explains this issue. The bricks are the matter of the house, but bricks all by themselves do not account for the

house, as opposed to a pile of bricks. The form is a cause in the sense of that it is constitutive of the thing it is the form of, just as the matter is constitutive of the thing. But form has a certain priority and explanatory value because the form accounts for the matter being in a certain configuration while in that configuration, something that matter cannot do.

Aristotle's notion of form combines with his teleological viewpoint to give the conclusion that formal development has a direction, and may have a goal, and that some things are more informed than others. Bricks are more in-formed than clay, and a house more than bricks.

According to Plotinus (205-270 A.D.) matter is the lowest of all the emanations. If the One (Transcendent Absolute) can be regarded as the light which diffuses itself, then matter is the last extremity to which the light extends. It is the dimmest part. In relation to the One it is unilluminated darkness, the privation of light, the anti-thesis of the One. In itself matter is unconscious. It lacks all form and intelligibility. It gets its intelligibility from form, and from being an integral part of bodies as their substratum. Matter is also the principle of evil in so far as when the soul is in contact with matter, or with the external world, it forgets its origin and being engrossed in the world of matter, it degrades itself more and more.

Plotinus does not hold that matter is evil in itself. He studies matter not so much in itself as in its relation to form. Matter is that which remains after all the formal principles have been removed. Hence, any activity and goodness that it has, is not due to itself but due to a foreign principle, namely, the form to which it is unified, and it cannot diffuse itself. Matter strives after form and goodness, but it can never hold on to it. Matter is in constant change and movement. Hence, it is the principle of multiplicity.

Immanuel Kant treated form as if it is a property of mind; he held that form is derived from experience. In other words, he said, it is imposed by the individual on the material object.

### **Check Your Progress I**

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Define/describe Matter and Form:

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### **7.3 ESSENCES AS SUBSTANCE AND ACCIDENTS**

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The term 'essence' primarily refers to the substance, and in a qualified sense to the accidents. For the present our focus is on the term essence as referring to substance. The substantial essence is known and defined in terms of its characteristic modes of activity. A human being, for example, is a substance having vegetative, sensory, and intellectual activities. On the basis of these activities he/she can be defined as a corporeal, sentient, rational, and living substance. All human beings have the same definable types of activity. They are alike, therefore, in their specific notes: they are the same in species. The definition of a human being expresses this specific essence, and is predictable univocally of each and every human being, in so far as he/she is a member of the human species. However, for the very reason that it is truly universal, the definition does not express the individuality of the members of the species. Krishnan and Husain are alike as men, and yet they are completely diverse as individuals. How can this be?

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### **7.4 THE PROBLEM OF INDIVIDUATION**

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Aquinas insists upon locating the principle of this diversity within the essence of the individual being. The source of this diversity lies within and must therefore be represented by something in the individual essence. This in turn acknowledges the fact that each member of the class is a limited expression of all the conceivable perfections which could be attributed to the common essence of the class as a whole. It would amount to the view that each individual must be said to "participate" or possess in some degree the perfections of its class. It would further lead us to the need to place within the very essence itself of each member of the class an additional principle of limitation for the essence. Here it is the essence that is being limited and the principle of limitation can be termed as "prime matter" (material prima). The actual essence thus limited is called the substantial form. It should be noted that only the essences of material substances are thus limited.

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### **7.5 MATTER AS PRINCIPLE OF LIMITATION**

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Matter can be said to be the principle of limitation in the essence, which is itself a principle of limitation of act of existing. The actual essence which is limited by being received into the limiting matter principle is called substantial form. This doctrine of matter-form composition

of the essence in the material substances of our experience is known as hylemorphism, a conjoined Greek term for matter and form. Accepting matter as the limiting principle in the essence gives us a rational explanation for the multiplication of many similar essences in the class or species.

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## **7.6 MATTER AND FORM IN AQUINAS' METAPHYSICS**

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In Aquinas' Metaphysics, matter principle is the first intrinsic potential principle of limitation in the essence of the material substance, whereby each individual in such a class is distinct or individuated from every other member of its class or species. And the substantial form in material substances is the first intrinsic actual principle which renders the potential material principle actual, thus making the whole essence capable of receiving the act of existence. Using hylemorphism as a rational explanation of how there can be many distinct individuals who are nevertheless members of a single class is the special contribution of Aquinas. Taken together both are in potentiality to their act of existing, the principle by which the whole composite is actuated. Neither the matter nor the form can be in separation. Rather one act of 'to be' is received into both principles of the composite essence together. It is clear, however, that this actuation is received through the substantial form. Surely, the substantial forms cannot act in any way independently of their material principles. In other words, matter and form co-act. Thus from matter and form we get a unit, without any external bonding uniting them. Here we can note the force of the axiom: *Oneness of being follows its to be*. The material principle is constituted in its very nature as an essential relation to form. Form, in turn, is constituted as an essential relation to the material principle. They are correlatives in the same way the principles of essence and existence are in the being as a whole. They are co-causes of their actions too. It is right to conclude then that since the matter and form cannot act independently of one another they cannot exist too independently of one another. Hence the formula: No matter without form; no form without matter.

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## **7.7 DISTINCTION BETWEEN MATTER AND FORM**

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From what we said above it must be evident that there is a real distinction between the matter and form principles. This is not only because they are related to each other as potency to act but also because matter is a principle of limitation in the essence. It is as if matter is saying, "this much and no more" in the essence for this being. If the limiting principle in the essence were not really distinct from that which it limits, then one material substance in a

class would not be really distinct from another in the class. In a word, it would not be really individuated. Besides, in an essential change the form can be separated from the matter. Of course, the matter must instantaneously receive a new form. Thus the matter is separated from this particular form and immediately receives a new form. As is clear, separability is one of the simplest and best tests of real distinction. We should also note that matter represents limitation of such perfections as pertained to the common essence representing the whole class, whereas, form represents this unlimited aspect as the common essence in the individual. It, of course, pertains to the class or specific perfections. Matter pertains to the peculiarly individual perfections which separate one member of the class from all others, so-called individual differences. For instance, a human being's form (soul) represents such perfections as his/her human class possesses; his/her matter (body) represents the individual differences peculiar to him/her alone in his/her class. Indirect predication, however, is possible. Matter has form. Form has matter. Hence, matter is not form. Form is not matter. Therefore they are really distinct. The distinction, however, is a minor real distinction. For, here we are dealing with two principles of being rather than two distinct beings.

### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Describe the role of matter and form in Limitation:-

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2. Explain the distinction between matter and form:-

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## 7.8 ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF QUANTITY IN INDIVIDUATION

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At first sight it would seem obvious even to an ordinary person that an individual in its class is

recognized by its various particular appearances: its peculiar size, shape, colour, fixed quantity, and the like. Such observations are certainly not off the mark. But there is a hitch and we need to go beyond. The problem of individuation is not the simple one of how the individual is recognized. Rather it is one of finding a rational explanation of how the individual is metaphysically constituted as an individual in its very being. What is it within the being by which it is constituted undivided in itself and separated from all other beings?

It is evident that it is by the proper accident of the quantity of a material substance (in which the other accidents, such as colour, shape, weight, and the like, first inhere, and then, through the quantity, in the substance itself) that the individual is so recognized. Quantity is thus a very profound modifying factor, though still of an accidental character, in all material substances. Such substances are often designated as *quantified beings*. It is for these and other reasons, that Aquinas insists, that quantity exercises an auxiliary role with the essential principle of matter to complete the principle of individuation. It is by the principle of individuation that the individual being is distinct from similar beings belonging to a class. In Chapter two of his metaphysical work *On Being and Essence*, Aquinas writes: “We must realize that matter which is the principle of individuation is not any matter whatsoever, but only signated matter (*materia signata*). By signated matter I mean matter considered under determined dimensions.” According to commentators of his work, the reference to “determined dimensions” is to the accident of quantity which possesses certain dimensions in space.

Accidents, the causes of lesser determinations in a being, are as it were “con-created” or produced with the production of the essence or substance. Without them the substance would not be fully equipped for existence. Hence they are called “proper” accidents. They are said to flow as it were from the essence or substances necessarily, though not of the essence. Such an accident is quantity in material substances. Quantity is generally described as that proper intrinsic and absolute accident having dimensions inhering primarily in the material principle of a substance. When a material substance is said to be perfected by quantity in accordance with its role as an accident, it is done necessarily under certain determined dimensions.

Quantity by its nature is equipped to perform this auxiliary role. It is essentially divisible and, as such, is the basis of numerical designation. Moreover, without its proper accident of quantity with determinate dimensions, prime matter is not equipped of itself to exercise its

essential function of making a material substance fully individual in its class or species. The reason for this is that of itself matter is undetermined and common to all material substances. Matter must itself, therefore, receive a certain determination or perfection. Such determination or perfection comes from quantity, which is its proper accident. This does not in any way mean that quantity can become a co-constituent with the material principle in the individuation of the substance. It should be carefully noted that what is to be individuated is neither the matter nor the quantity but the received act of existence.

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## 7.9 IDEA OF INDIVIDUATION IN ARISTOTLE'S PHILOSOPHY

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Aristotle's doctrine of individuation uses the similar terms of matter and form. Aristotle did not reject his teacher Plato as much as it is sometimes thought. For Aristotle matter seems to be the principle of individuation. He says in his *Metaphysics*, "What is numerically different has matter; for one and the same concept, humanity for instance, belongs in many. Socrates however is one." For Aristotle, as for Plato, not only was the conceptual or universal and unchangeable essence the only object of science and true knowledge, but it was also ultimately identical with the real essence in the individual. In view of this the matter as principle of individuation cannot be a part of the individual essence even though Aristotle frequently says matter is part of the whole composite substance. Indeed matter has its own existence, as has form. Therefore, the difference between John and Simon, for instance, is due entirely to the fact that the one unchangeable universal form of man is received in one case by this flesh and these bones (matter), and in the other by this other flesh and bones. However, since these two human individuals agree with each other not only in having a form (soul) but also in having a body (the matter of the form), Aristotle even grants that there must be universal matter including bones and flesh in general. In Aristotle, the Idea or Form exists immanently in numerically different individuals as many times as it is itself received unchangeably into the various parts of changeable and divisible matter. Reception of the Form into this matter implies only an unessential individuation. No real limitation is involved. There is no individual being in the full sense of the term. Aristotle failed to give a rational explanation of the real and distinct individuality of each existing being because he failed to consider the act of existence as a distinct principle in finite beings. Therefore, he was in no position to answer the second and auxiliary question of individuation of such individual

beings within a species in view of the similarity of their respective individual essences. The complete absence of any doctrine of participation in Aristotle, in any full sense of that term, is the source of his failure on both counts.

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## 7.10 IDEA OF INDIVIDUATION IN JOHN DUNS SCOTUS'

### PHILOSOPHY

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Scotus followed Aristotle in identifying being primarily with essence. He rejected the general metaphysical principle of potency limiting act, and thus refused to accept Aquinas' doctrine of participation, with its consequent real distinction between essence and existence in all finite beings. He also rejected the matter-form doctrine of individuation as Aquinas presented it, and in these respects he followed Aristotle. Scotus also opposed the unicity of substantial form in material substances and insisted on a plurality of formally distinct forms corresponding to the several grades of being in the thing (for example, the vegetative, sensitive, and rational forms in the human substance). He further held for a final form by which every material substance is distinct from every other member of its class. It is known as the form of "thisness" (*haecceitas*). The real distinction of individuals presupposes that each of them contains "realities" which differ. They do not differ in their common nature. Therefore, some "reality" is added to the common nature by individuation. Scotus expresses this doctrine as follows: "Besides the nature there are accordingly in this individual and in that one some primarily different entities by way of which this one and that one differ; that is, that entity in that individual and this entity in this one. Thus, they cannot be negations ... nor some accident. Therefore they are certain entities of themselves positively determining the common nature." It is therefore by this unique individual property that matter in itself becomes this numerically one thing. The "*haecceitas*" or "thisness" form also renders quantity and all accidents individual.

Evidently, Scotus is forced to his position on individuation by his exaggerated realism, which seeks to safeguard the objective validity of our abstract and scientific knowledge. He overstates the reality of the common or universal form, making it something real on the part of the thing instead of having the so-called formal nature only in the mind. Every grade of perfection in the being, represented by a common form, is individualized by this ultimate form of thisness. It is unnecessary and really irrational to posit "thisness" to explain individuation.

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## 7.11 IDEA OF INDIVIDUATION IN FRANCISCO SUAREZ'S PHILOSOPHY

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Suarez stated that the abstract universal representing the common aspect of the class to which the individual belongs is contracted by an individual difference to constitute the individual. As realized in the individual, this abstract common nature is identical with the entire entity of the individual substance. The same is true of the conceived difference. Accordingly, the intrinsic principle of individuation, or the entity existing in the individual and making the realized specific nature incommunicable is only logically distinct from this realized, abstractly conceived nature. In reality, it is identical with the realized common nature or with the entire substantial being of the existing individual.

Suarez's position is deeply influenced by his theory of knowledge. His extreme emphasis on the fact that the existing individual is the only genuine reality is a truth. However, it should not be isolated from the problem of knowing the individual. Suarez claims that the active intellect can completely spiritualize the image so that its entire content in all its particularity is rendered intelligible. Thus, this spiritualized species or form represents the individual in the intellect in the same way it is represented in the senses by the particular image. In this way the intellect knows the individual immediately and directly, he insists. Here Suarez is being far too optimistic about the power of the human intellect, making it in certain respects equal in power to the intellect of purely immaterial substances (angels, for instance). Thus, his position on the principle of individuation, which is the result of his extreme claims for the power of the human intellect, inherits all the weakness of his very doubtful principles of knowing.

### Check Your Progress III

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Describe the role and importance of quantity in Individuation.

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## 7.11 LET US SUM UP

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Every individual within a species intrinsically possesses a principle whereby it is totally individual, and a principle whereby it has the same essential determinations as every other member of the species. By virtue of the principle of sufficient reason, each individual of a species has within itself that whereby it is totally like every other member of its species, and that whereby it is totally unlike every other member. For everything which exists has that whereby it is what it is. That element in each member of a species whereby it is like every other member is a principle which accounts for its substantial or essential determinations. For it is precisely in the common possession of the same substantial determinations that the likeness lies. This principle is thus the principle of substantial form, the metaphysical principle which intrinsically determines a being to its essential mode of existence. But since substantial form accounts only for the essential likeness of all individuals within a species, there must be another principle in the order of essence by which the beings differ from each other. This difference consists in the fact that the substantial form exists in different subjects. The principle of difference, therefore, is a principle in the order of essence capable of receiving and possessing substantial form and one which of itself confers no positive determinations. It is therefore, a principle of potency in the order of essence. This is the principle of prime matter, that metaphysical principle whereby a being is capable of being determined to its essential mode of existence. Now these two principles – substantial form and prime matter – are very much related. They form a composition, since they make up a union of two distinct elements, which do not actually include each other. This is a real composition, since the elements are really distinct, outside the mind considering the composition. Since the two elements coalesce to form the essence of one being, they are not complete beings themselves, but metaphysical principles constitutive of a being. Substantial form is a principle of actuality since it confers the specific determination on the being. Prime matter is potency since it receives substantial form. Thus, the composition is a metaphysical one, of principles related to each other as act and potency. Prime matter plays a role in the individuation of an essence. Since of itself prime matter is completely indeterminate the principle of individuation is not merely prime matter, but rather prime matter marked by quantity. There are different views on individuation especially those of Aristotle, Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and Suarez.

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## **7.12 KEY WORDS**

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**Hylemorphism:** It is the theory of the composition of matter and form.

**Individuation:** it is the limitation of an essence, which of itself is communicable to many individuals, to some definite singular realization.

**Quantity:** It is generally described as that proper intrinsic and absolute accident having dimensions inhering primarily in the material principle of a substance.

**Signated Matter:** Matter considered under determined dimensions.

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## 7.14 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check your Progress I

1. Matter is the stuff (substrate) out of which something is made or fashioned. At a peripheral level form is the external shape, appearance of a thing. At a deeper level form is that which specifies matter to be what it is. In metaphysics form is the active, determining principle of a thing as distinguished from matter, the potential principle.

### Check your Progress II

1. Matter (“prime matter”) is the principle of limitation in the essence. The actual essence thus limited is called the substantial form. It should be noted that only the essences of material substances are thus limited. Accepting matter as the limiting principle in the essence gives us a rational explanation for the multiplication of many similar essences in the class or species.
2. There is a real distinction between the matter and form principles. If the limiting principle in the essence were not really distinct from that which it limits, then one

material substance in a class would not be really distinct from another in the class. In a word, it would not be really individuated. Besides, in an essential change the form can be separated from the matter. Of course, the matter must instantaneously receive a new form. Thus the matter is separated from this particular form and immediately receives a new form. As is clear, separability is one of the simplest and best tests of real distinction. Hence, matter is not form. Form is not matter. Therefore, they are really distinct.

### **Check your Progress III**

1. It is evident that it is by the proper accident of the quantity of a material substance that the individual is so recognized. Thus, quantity exercises an auxiliary role with the essential principle of matter to complete the principle of individuation. It is by the principle of individuation that the individual being is distinct from similar beings belonging to a class. Quantity by its nature is equipped to perform this auxiliary role. It is essentially divisible and, as such, is the basis of numerical designation.

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## UNIT 8 APPEARANCE AND REALITY\*

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### Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Understanding the Problem of Appearance and Reality
- 8.3 Plato
- 8.4 Immanuel Kant
- 8.5 Protagoras and Berkeley
- 8.6 Some Indian Perspectives
- 8.7 Let us sum up
- 8.8 Key words
- 8.9 Further Readings and References
- 8.10 Answers to check your progress

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### 8.0 OBJECTIVES

The present unit tries to explore the distinction between the notions of “Reality” and “Appearance” primarily through the works of certain key Western Thinkers. It also contains a brief discussion of how this problem comes to be articulated in Indian Philosophical discourse, an elaborate elucidation of which can be found in the Unit titled “Indian Theories of Reality”. In the course of the present unit the reader will become acquainted with,

- The philosophical problem of Reality and Appearance.
- The stance taken by Plato, Kant, Protagoras, and Berkeley on the problem of Appearance and Reality.
- A brief overview of the *Bauddha* and *Advaita Vedānta* discussion on the problem of Appearance and Reality.

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### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

Think about a few scenarios you might have experienced at some point of your lives. For instance, waking up from a lucid dream/ nightmare, where you were being chased by a sword wielding murderer, and realizing that it was merely a dream and that nothing happened in

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\* Dr. Mahak Uppal, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Hindu College, University of Delhi.

*reality*. Waving at your friend from a distance, moving towards them and realizing that it was *not really* your friend but just someone who bore a striking *resemblance* and *appeared* to be like them. Looking at a stick dipped in a glass jar half filled with water, knowing quite well that the stick merely *appears* bent but is not *really* so. Throughout our lives, innumerable experiences like these engage us, drawing our attention to the distinction between what things (at times) “seem” to be and what they “really” are. In our never-ending quest for Truth, Certainty, Coherence, and Consistency, we are constantly wanting to sieve out the Ultimate Reality from those objects, instances, experiences, states of affairs, etc. that merely seem to be real but are in fact just illusory appearances and half-truths. This difference between “appearance” and “reality”, i.e., the difference between “what things seem to be” and “what they [really] are” (Russell 2017, 11) has been, according to Russell, a potent area that has “caused most trouble in philosophy” since the very beginning of philosophical theorization.

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## 8.2 UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM OF APPEARANCE AND REALITY

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In raising and trying to answer some of the most fundamental metaphysical questions, “what is reality?”, “what is real?”, “what is the true nature of reality?”; “how do we know whether/when  $X^*$  is real?”; etc. theorists more often than not end up demanding or enumerating the standard and conditions which characterize and define Reality. These standards are such that If  $X$  exhibits and meets the enumerated characteristics, then  $X$  is identified as Really Real; and when it does not, it is relegated to the realm of the unreal, seemingly real, apparently real, illusory, or simply identified as an “Appearance”. As F.H. Bradley too notes, Appearance is anything that fails to live up to the status of “Ultimate Reality”.

Across the history of western philosophical thought theorists have evidently differed in terms of how they define and identify Reality vis-à-vis mere Appearance. While both Heraclitus and Parmenides agreed that the Absolutely Real can be grasped and understood only by rational comprehension and not by sense experience, yet they disagreed in what they regarded as being the true nature of Reality. For Heraclitus, Reality was characterized by a state of constant Becoming and Flux, and he believed that our senses deceive us into believing that things persist and are unchanging. In stark contrast, Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Zeno held that the ultimate nature of reality consists in having an eternal unchanging Being. Parmenides said “there is

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\* Where  $X$  can be anything Self, Other, some object, thing, entity, state of affair, or phenomenon or property.

nothing but a single undivided whole, and nothing ever changes”. Following Parmenides’ suggestions Zeno too affirmed that Reality was Absolute and Unchanging, and he went on to denounce all motion and plurality as an illusory appearance. Adopting a similar conception of Reality Plato described it as something which is made up of unchanging, absolute Universals which he called Ideas. The Ideas, for Plato, could only be grasped through reason, and the particular objects which the senses revealed to us were mere appearances and at best faint copies of the Ideas. Descartes, following his ‘method of doubt’, reasoned that anything which lacks Clarity, Distinctness, and/or can be subjected to Doubt cannot be deemed as being sufficiently Real. The world revealed by the senses appears to be ever changing and uncertain, suggesting therefore that the senses are unreliable and dubitable as means for understanding the true indubitable Reality. Since Reality must be Indubitable, Clear, and Distinct, therefore it must at the same time be something which is different from what is revealed to us by our senses.

A review of these and other discussions also suggests that thinkers have also tended to hold varied and divergent opinions concerning the distinction (and even the interrelation) between Appearance and Reality. There are primarily two kinds of stances that have been taken in western philosophical thought on these issues. On the one hand we would find those thinkers who admit of a *duality* between the world as “Ultimately Real” and the world as “Apparently Real”, and assert that the “Ultimate Reality” is something over and above and apart from how things “Appear to us” in our common everyday perceptual/sensory experience. Additionally, despite their adherence to the duality position, these thinkers may disagree with regard to whether the “Ultimate Reality” can or cannot be known, i.e., whether or not it is even possible for us epistemic agents to ever know anything about the true nature of the ultimate reality. For instance, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Zeno, Plato, Descartes, etc. while maintaining the duality, would admit that the Real is within the scope of knowledge; whereas Kant would admit the duality and yet deny the very possibility of ever knowing the true nature of the ultimately real.

In contrast however, there are also thinkers like Protagoras and Berkeley, who would deny that there is any such duality, and would thereby assert that there is in fact no difference between the world revealed to us in and through sense experience and the ultimate reality. For these thinkers the world of appearance is in fact the “ultimately real” world. There is no other grade or kind of reality which is truer/better/more perfect/more real than the one revealed to us through sensory experience.

The next few sections will present a more detailed overview of some of these positions.

**Check Your Progress I**

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Explain the problem of Appearance and Reality.

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**8.3 PLATO**

Plato was one of the earliest thinkers to have addressed and articulated the problem of appearance and reality. His conception of Absolute Reality was charted out by him through his theory of Ideas/ Universals/Forms, which were described as eternal and objective entities, having a separate and independent existence. Ideas, for Plato existed in and by themselves. They were characterized as invariable, immutable, absolute, and changeless substances. The realm of Ideas was identified as the realm of absolute Being, as against which the realm of particular, sensible objects got identified as a realm of ceaseless Becoming.

The world as experienced by us through sense perception was regarded as merely a shadow or a faint copy of the true/ultimate reality. Just as your photograph is a representation and a copy of the real you, similarly individual objects of sensation were regarded as impressions which partake, imitate, hint at, and participate in, their corresponding ideas. Reality for Plato was not to be conflated with how things appear to us via sense perception. For him only Ideas were truly real, whereas particular entities were mere appearances. The world of sense perception was merely the world of appearance; whereas true reality consisted in concepts and ideas, which were comprehensible only through contemplation and reason. Sense perception was regarded as being dubitable, deceptive, and incapable of letting us know the Ultimate changeless Reality. For Plato, “Ideas can be thought but not sensed, and Percepts can be sensed but not thought” (Masih 55).

**8.3.1 Allegory of the Cave**

In book VII of his Republic, Plato takes recourse to an analogy, popularly called the Cave Allegory. This analogy acts as an extensive metaphor not only for understanding Plato’s Theory of Forms, but also for understanding how he conceives the nature of reality, the nature of knowledge, as well as the distinction between appearance and reality.

The metaphor makes the reader think about a group of prisoners who have been chained up

inside a dark cave/den since birth. They sit in a manner that they are always facing a wall, with their necks and hands chained such that they cannot move or look anywhere but at the wall. All that they have ever been able to see are shadows which appear on the wall because of a fire burning behind them. These shadows consist the only reality they have ever known. One day one of the prisoners is freed and brought outside the cave. The exposure to sunlight is almost blinding, and this individual is hardly able to see anything at first. But as his eyes adjust, he starts to see the “Real” world with Real objects. Having thus known the Real world he realizes that what he had taken for reality till now, was not really so, rather the shadows were purely imitations of the Real. The prisoner realizes that he had been living in a world of appearances, taking them to be the whole truth and the absolute reality, when it was merely an illusion, a faint copy of the reality.

The shadows in the cave represent the physical world we commonly experience through our senses. A world which is constantly changing, deceiving, dubitable, and uncertain. Whereas the Real world outside the cave, of which the cave images were faint shadows, is the world of Forms and Ideas, a world which is unchanging, immutable, eternal. Plato argues that most people are like the prisoners in the cave, living their lives in ignorance of the true nature of reality, and mistaking appearances for Absolute Reality. Only the philosopher who is able to know the forms through reason and contemplation, is the one who has true knowledge.

### **Check Your Progress II**

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Explain the significance of the Allegory of Cave in understanding Plato’s views on Appearance and Reality.

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## **8.4 IMMANUEL KANT**

In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant attempts at exploring the nature, conditions, means, and scope of our rational cognitive capacity. Notably, his project not only revolved around answering the question ‘how is it that we know what we know’, but equally and more importantly he was engaged in determining ‘what is it that we can legitimately claim to know?’ and ‘what are the actual and possible objects of knowledge?’ In the light of these concerns Kant

went on to draw a distinction between the “Appearances” or “Phenomena” and the “Things in Themselves” or the “Noumena”. Through his doctrine of Transcendental Idealism Kant claimed that we can and do have genuine, objective, and *a priori* knowledge only of “appearances” or things that we are acquainted with in our common everyday experience, and never of ‘things as they are in themselves’ or “things in themselves” (Scruton 2001, 55).

Kant maintained that all our knowledge is conditioned (on the one hand) by the two forms of intuition namely Space and Time; as well as (on the other hand) by the twelve categories of understanding. All these together constitute the conditions for the possibility of knowledge. Now, since all our knowledge is thus conditioned, it implied that anything which was *unconditioned* (a crucial characteristic of the noumena) was clearly *not knowable*. Every time we aspire to reach to objectivity and truth in our understanding, we tend to aspire to reach to the thing ‘as it is’, absolutely uncolored, unconditioned, and untainted by any perspective whatsoever. What Kant’s Transcendental Idealism tells us is that this very unconditioned “thing in itself”, or noumena, is not within the scope of knowledge, and that therefore, all that we can and do have access to is the knowledge of conditioned Appearances.

It needs to be noted however that, despite its revolutionary appeal Kant’s Transcendental Idealism has been criticized for the evident ambiguity surrounding the conceptualization and descriptions accorded to Appearance and Thing in itself; Phenomena and Noumena; Empirical Object and Transcendental object. It is still a matter of academic debate whether in using these terms and phrases Kant was trying to draw a distinction between Different kinds of entities or objects, different ontological domains such as different levels of reality, or was he treating them as different aspects of the same ontological domain.

Yet despite these ambiguities, what can be clearly gathered is that Noumena represents the *transcendentally ideal* world/object. It may thus be said that Kant utilizes the concept of noumena negatively, to primarily earmark the limits of knowledge; and not positively to describe what the nature of ‘thing in itself’ or of ‘absolute unconditioned reality’ is like. The phrase ‘thing in itself’ is therefore not meant to refer to an entity or realm which is relatively more real than what “appears” to us through sensation, but it is rather used as “a term standing proxy for the unrealizable ideal of perspectiveless knowledge” (Scruton 2001, 56). Moving a step beyond Plato, Kant was drawing attention to the proposal that even reason and rationality were inherently incapable of going beyond appearances to reveal the world “as it is”.

### **Check Your Progress III**

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Explain the doctrine of Transcendental Idealism given by Kant.

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## 8.5 PROTAGORAS AND BERKELEY

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Understanding the Protagorean maxim - “man is the measure of all things; of what is, that it is; of what is not, that it is not”, is crucial for deciphering the philosophical standpoint of the Sophists and in particular their theory of knowledge and a little more indirectly their metaphysics. In making this assertion Protagoras, one of the most famous Sophist thinkers, blatantly denies the sense and reason distinction which was a staple for earlier Greek thinkers especially Parmenides and Heraclitus, who asserted that the true nature of Ultimate reality can only be grasped with the help of reason and that the senses are incapable of revealing anything beyond mere appearances. As against such a view Protagoras was trying to defend the idea that each individual person is herself/himself the standard for Truth and Reality. The Sophist metaphysics and epistemology may be regarded as being relativistic. Protagoras is believed to have said “there is no truth except the sensations and impressions of each man.” (Stace 2003, 114). What we subjectively sense and experience is the reality for each one of us. There is no other, better, more absolute, or more objective grade of reality over and beyond sensations and impressions. What appears real to me is real for me and what appears real to you is real for you. Appearances are the “thing in itself”. Truth and Reality are what the individual and subjective sensations reveal to each one of us. Seeing a mirage is as true as seeing sand; experiencing thirst in a dream is as true as being thirsty while running. The assertion that the earth is round is as true as the assertion that it is a flat disc floating on water. Protagoras therefore does not admit of a duality or a difference between the world as it appears to us and the world as it really is. Rather for him, appearance and reality are in-distinct, appearance is reality, and reality is nothing over and above, or apart from, appearance.

George Berkeley was an idealist who also believed that things are as they appear to us in sense perception. Reality, for Berkeley, did not consist in an extra-mental world which may or may not be epistemically accessible. Rather for him Reality and existence consisted in being perceived. He asserted “*ess est percipi*”, i.e., “to be is to be perceived”. There is no reality apart for how

and when things are perceived. The only things that can be directly perceived are ideas in a conscious mind, making all reality mind-dependent. Any belief in the existence of mind independent matter, substance, objects, etc. was merely an illusion. He rejected the very possibility of a mind independent reality. Since, the existence of an object depends on its being perceived by a conscious mind, therefore unlike Plato, Berkeley treats Reality as not being something which is not given in immediate sense perception, and unlike Kant, he does not treat as being something which is altogether unknowable. Berkeley's idealism implies that Appearance and reality are in-distinct.

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## 8.6 SOME INDIAN PERSPECTIVES

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Elaborate discussions surrounding the distinction between appearance and reality can also be traced in the *Bauddha* and *Advaita Vedānta* schools of Indian Philosophical Thought. One of the central tenets of Buddhism is the doctrine of momentariness or *ksaṇabhangavāda*. Everything, according to this school, is momentary, transitory, and fleeting. The true nature of Reality is evanescent, it undergoes continuous and rapid change. Every moment comes into being and undergoes decay. It is for this reason, that any semblance of permanence is regarded as being merely apparent and illusory. It is due to conceptualization, and the process of granting *nāma*, *rūpa*, *jāti*, etc. (name, form, class, etc.) that discrete, fleeting, impermanent moments appear to continue and persist across time. *Nāgārjuna*, who belonged to the *Mādhyamika* school of Buddhism, described Reality as being *niṣprapañca*, *prapañca śūnya*, and *svabhāva śūnya*, i.e., as something which is free from all categorizations (*catuṣkotivinirmukta*) and devoid of any essence. Reality can neither be categorized as Being, nor non-Being, nor both, and not even neither. Due to our conceptual scheme, we end up conceiving things via these categories and therefore the Absolute nameless and formless reality appears as having the characteristics such as Being or non-Being etc., which do not in fact characterize Reality.

Reality according to *Śankarācārya* is non-dual or *advaya*. It was regarded as being part-less and changeless, and having an unalterable Being. This was the description of absolute Reality or *pāramārthika sattā*; as against which, any *vikāra*, transformation, or change was regarded as being part of either the *prātibhāṣika* or the *vyāvahārika sattā*. While change presupposes duality, Reality on the other hand is described as Absolute Being which is *nitya*, *śuddha*, *buddha* and *mukta*. Furthermore, Reality according to *advaita Vedānta* is non-sublatable in all three stages (*Trikāla abādhitā*), and anything which can be sublated in any of the three stages (*jāgrat*,

*svapna, susupti*) is therefore denounced as being merely apparent. But this apparent reality is not to be qualified as being wholly “unreal” either. Its key characteristic is that it is neither entirely unreal (like the horns of a rabbit), nor even is it absolutely Real (like Brahman). And since it is neither real nor unreal, it is identified as being *anirvacanīya* or indeterminate.

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## 8.7 LET US SUM UP

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The present Unit was an attempt to acquaint the learner with the difference between the ideas of “appearance” and “reality” which have been taken to represent the difference between what our immediate experience makes us believe is the case and what really is the case; i.e.; a difference between what things seem to be and what they really are.

Most of the philosophical discussions on this topic in western philosophical thought have revolved around questions about the nature, status, cause and interrelation between appearance and reality; including whether and how these aspects are related? ; whether they are absolutely distinct and independent?; or whether appearances constitute a precise representation of how things really are?; etc. Though this problem essentially raises important questions about the nature of reality, and thereby seems primarily metaphysical and ontological, yet it is simultaneously intertwined with questions concerning human nature, as well as the process, scope, and extent of our ability to know things.

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## 8.8 KEY WORDS

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**Theory of Forms** : Plato’s metaphysical theory which identifies Forms as eternal and objective entities, having a separate and independent existence of their own apart from the world of appearances.

**Transcendental Idealism** : Kant’s doctrine that we can have A priori knowledge only of “appearances” and never of “things in themselves”.

**Ess Est Percipi** : Berkley’s idea “to be is to be perceived”

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## 8.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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## **8.10 ANSWERS TO KNOW YOUR PROGRESS**

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### **Check Your Progress I**

1. The difference between the ideas of “appearance” and “reality” can be understood as the difference between what things seem to be and what they really are. Across the history of Western Philosophical thought theorists have evidently differed in terms of how they define and characterize Reality. There are primarily two kinds of stances that have been taken in western philosophical thought with regard to the problem of appearance and reality. On the one hand we would find those thinkers who admit of a *duality* between the world as “Ultimately Real” and the world as “Apparently Real”, and assert that the “Ultimate Reality” is something over and above and apart from how things “Appear to us” in our common everyday perceptual/sensory experience. In contrast however, there are also those thinkers who would assert that the world of appearance is in fact “ultimately real”.

### **Check Your Progress II**

1. The Allegory of the cave is an extended metaphor not only for understanding Plato’s Theory of Forms, but also for understanding how he conceives the nature of reality, the nature of knowledge as well as the distinction between appearance and reality. The shadows in the cave represent the physical world we commonly experience through our senses. A world which is constantly changing, deceiving, dubitable, and uncertain. Whereas the Real world outside the cave, of which the cave images were faint shadows, is the world of Forms and Ideas, a world which is unchanging, immutable, eternal. Plato argues that most people are like the prisoners in the cave, living their lives in ignorance of the true nature of reality, and mistaking appearances for Absolute Reality.

### **Check Your Progress III**

1. Kant draws a distinction between the “Appearances” or “Phenomena” and the “Things in Themselves” or the “Noumena”. Through his doctrine of Transcendental Idealism Kant claims that we can and do have genuine, objective, and *a priori* knowledge only of “appearances” or things that we are acquainted with in our common everyday experience, and never of “things in

themselves”.

