

# General / Opening - Comments on Existentialism / Nihilism

Post by "Cassius" of January 3, 2020 at 8:19 AM

Interesting comment from Wikipedia that Socrates was himself not impressed with "essentialism." My understanding of Aristotle echo's Dawkins comments - that Aristotle merely transferred the location of the ideal "essence" from the Plato's otherworldly realm of ideas into \*this\* world - postulating, for example, that there is an "essence" of yellow in all yellow things. And that this view is a major target of the portions of the Epicurean texts which attack the idea that qualities of objects arise from anything permanent within them. (This is also mentioned in Frances Wright's "A Few Days In Athens" as to color, if I recall.)

## Essentialism

---

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

*For the 2014 book, see [Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less](#).*

*Not to be confused with [Existentialism](#).*

**Essentialism** is the view that every *entity* has a set of attributes that are necessary to its *identity* and function.<sup>[1]</sup> In early Western thought, *Plato's idealism* held that all things have such an "essence"—an "idea" or "form". In *Categories*, Aristotle similarly proposed that all objects have a *substance* that, as *George Lakoff* put it, "make the thing what it is, and without which it would be not *that* kind of thing".<sup>[2]</sup> The contrary view—*non-essentialism*—denies the need to posit such an "essence".

Essentialism has been controversial from its beginning. Plato, in the *Parmenides Dialogue*, depicts Socrates questioning the notion, suggesting that if we accept the idea that every beautiful thing or just action partakes of an essence to be beautiful or just, we must also accept the "existence of separate essences for hair, mud, and dirt".<sup>[3]</sup> In biology and other natural sciences, essentialism provided the rationale for *taxonomy* at least until the time of *Charles Darwin*;<sup>[4]</sup> the role and importance of essentialism in biology is still a matter of debate.<sup>[5]</sup>