

Episode 313 - TD40 - Diagnosing When Words Are Empty Of Meaning

Post by “Joshua” of December 25, 2025 at 5:58 PM

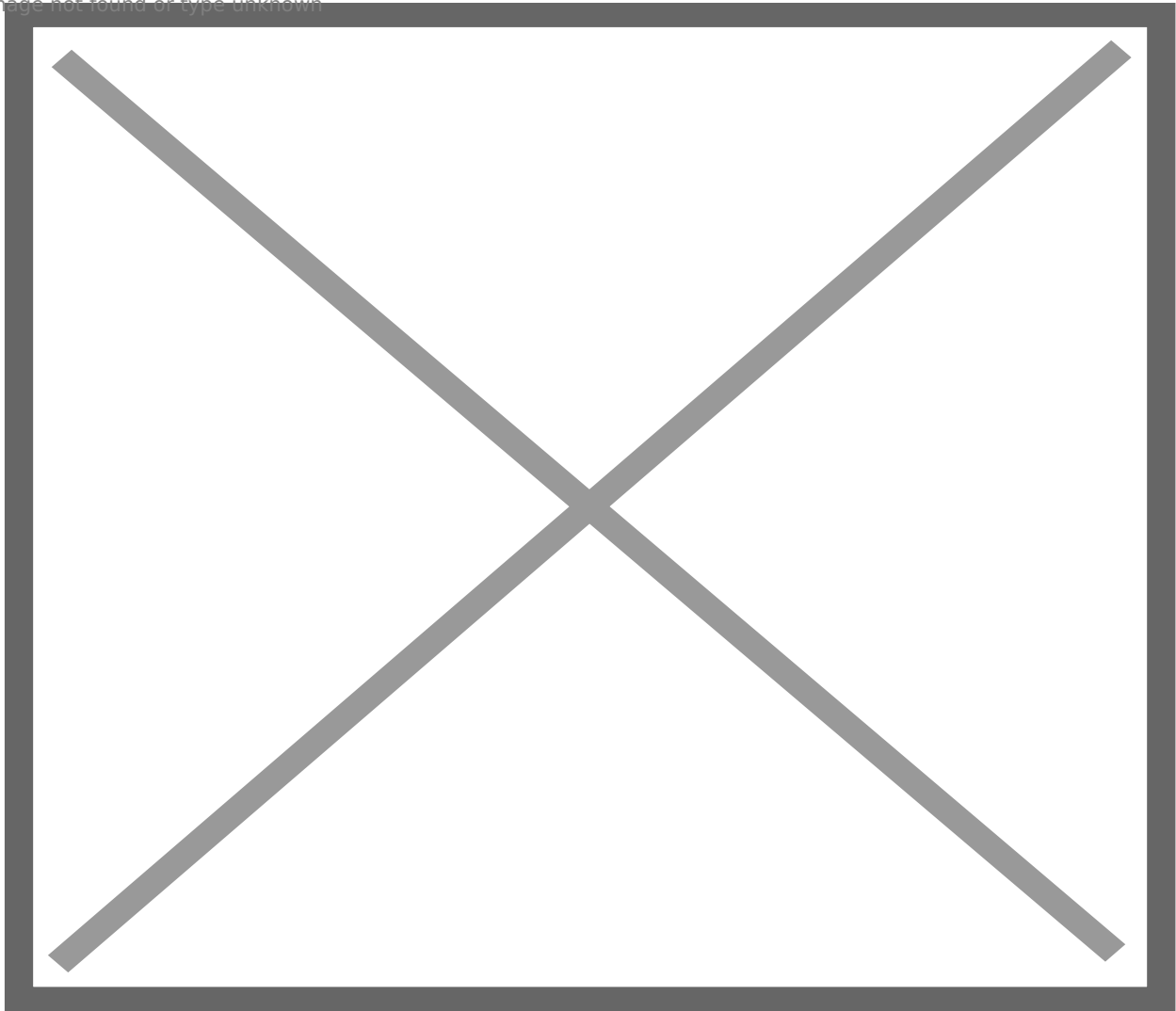
Quote

If you think, following the dictionary definition of essentialism, that the *essence* of rabbitness is "prior to" the *existence* of rabbits (whatever "prior to" might mean, and that's a nonsense in itself) evolution is not an idea that will spring readily to your mind, and you may resist when somebody else suggests it.

I don't remember if we discussed this on Sunday, but the question of whether essence is prior to existence or, to put it in Platonic terms, being is prior to becoming, is also related to Aristotle's teleology. Aristotle proposed that everything that begins to exist has four causes; the material cause describes the matter that makes up the thing, the efficient cause describes how it was made, the formal cause describes what shape it was made to take, and the final cause describes why it was made, or what purpose or telos it was made to serve.

With artificial objects it makes sense to speak of final causes, but Lucretius insists that such is not the case with natural objects like the eye. Book 4, line 823;

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Epicurus relies on a similar understanding of the relationship between existence and use in his Letter to Herodotus:

Quote

[64] Further, you must grasp that the soul possesses the chief cause of sensation: yet it could not have acquired sensation, unless it were in some way enclosed by the rest of the structure. **And [the body] in its turn having afforded the soul this cause of sensation acquires itself too a share in this contingent capacity from the soul.** Yet it does not acquire all the capacities which the soul possesses: and therefore when the soul is released from the body, the body no longer has sensation. **For it never possessed this power in itself, but used to afford opportunity for it to another existence,** brought into

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being at the same time with itself: and this existence, owing to the power now consummated within itself as a result of motion, used spontaneously to produce for itself the capacity of sensation and then to communicate it to the body as well, in virtue of its contact and correspondence of movement, as I have already said.