

# Defending ‘Compound Primacy’ in Aristotle

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## Abstract

In this paper, I defend the idea that Aristotle’s substances are organic hylomorphic composites against some recent attacks. In particular, I defend Mary Louise Gill’s version of this view which I call ‘compound primacy’ against two alternatives: 1) Michael Frede’s view that substances are forms that do not essentially involve some particular material instantiation of a material property, or ‘purism’, and 2) Michail Peramatzis’ ‘true grit’ position that substances are forms that essentially involve matter. To do this I first explain Frede and Peramatzis’ interpretations of Aristotle’s substances before critiquing both views. After this, I present Gill’s view and defend it from Frede and Peramatzis’ respective arguments against it. Finally, I defend the ‘compound primacy’ view against potential objections. I conclude by explaining some of the limitations and implications of my arguments.

Keywords: Michael Frede, Mary Louise Gill, Michail Peramatzis, Aristotle, Compound Primacy

## 1.1 Alternative Interpretations: Frede’s ‘Purism’

Frede begins a discussion of substance by noting that in Aristotle’s *Categories*, properties depend on natural objects for their existence (Frede 73). This is demonstrated by Aristotle’s analysis that “all the... things [other than substances] are either said of the primary substances or in them as subjects” (*Categories* I.5, 2a35-36, trans. Ackrill), or predicated of them, where the natural object human is a substance on which predicates like animal depend (*Cat* I.5, 2a36-37). Hence, in *Categories*, natural objects like humans are considered substances because they are the ultimate subjects of predication or the thing that can exist most separately from others. Frede proposes that Aristotle returns to this same criterion in trying to identify substance in his *Metaphysics* but notes that in that text he seeks to distinguish that thing without which an object cannot be itself, or that underlies an object’s changes, from an object’s non-essential properties (Frede 74-75). Aristotle’s return to ultimate subjecthood as the criterion of substance occurs where he proposes that substance refers to a substratum, or subject, that receives predication without being predicated of other things (*Metaphysics* VII.3, 1028b35-37, trans. Ross). Nonetheless, Aristotle’s new vision of ultimate subjecthood as the thing that underlies an object’s changes, without which an object cannot be itself,

motivates him to re-evaluate natural objects’ candidacy for substantiality in contrast to their matter and form’s candidacy (Frede 74-75). After arguing that an object’s form can be understood as its organizational disposition to function in a way specific to its kind, Frede proposes that such form meets Aristotle’s criterion for substantiality insofar as it is that which underlies an object’s change (76-77). Frede wants to defend form as substance because in *Metaphysics* Aristotle considers matter, form, and the compound of them as candidates for substance but rejects matter for being non-separable and non-individual and the compound for being posterior to form (*Met* VII.3, 1029a27-33).

Frede demonstrates his claim that form can be substance insofar as it is the ultimate subject of predication with an example about Theseus’ ship, which he calls *Theoris*. He reasons that if *Theoris* had all of its material parts replaced over time and added to another ship called *Theoris II* that was constructed of only the original’s parts, the refurbished *Theoris* would still be identical with the original *Theoris* and *Theoris II* would be a different ship with its own identical form (Frede 76-77). His explanation for the exact identity between the original *Theoris* and its refurbished version is that they share the same form over time; there is a continuous history of one ship disposition between the original and refurbished versions of *Theoris* even though its matter changed (Frede 77). *Theoris II* does not have the exact same form or

disposition as Theoris because having the same matter is neither necessary nor sufficient for such identity (Frede 77). It is not necessary because something can change its matter while maintaining the exact same form over time, like Theoris I, and it is not sufficient because if it was then something could not maintain its form through material change and the refurbished Theoris would not be exactly identical in form to the original Theoris. Since it is an object's form that persists through material change and grants it continuous identity, Frede proposes that forms succeed as substances insofar as they are that ultimate subject on which all else depends, or that receives predication without being predicated of other things.

To defend the view that forms are substance, Frede notes that such forms must and can be particular and not universal (77). Substances must be particular and not universals because Aristotle claims that substances are particular to individuals while universals are not particular (Met VII.13, 1038b8-12). In Frede's view, forms can be particular and succeed as substance because Aristotle claims they are particular (77). For instance, Aristotle describes "form [as]... being a 'this' [that] can be separately formulated" (Met VIII.1, 1042a29), where a 'this' is some particular thing. Frede argues that forms are particular at one time insofar as they are in different matter, and particular over time because they have one causal history, like the versions of Theoris (78). Thus, Frede thinks forms can be particular and succeed as substance insofar as they must be particular to be substance.

Finally, Frede argues that Aristotle settles on form as substance instead of compounds because he discusses another kind of substance beyond sensible substances (78). An example of this is where Aristotle states that "we shall get a clear view also of that substance which exists apart from sensible substances" (Met VII.17, 1041a8-9). Frede suggests such remarks indicate an Aristotelian framework of two kinds of substance: compound or sensible substance, and beyond it, primary substance as "pure forms" (79). Hence, Frede concludes that Aristotle's substance is form because everything else, like matter and compound objects, depends on it to exist such that it is the ultimate subject of predication that underlies an object's changes (80). He specifies that some forms are realized in compound objects while others, which are purely immaterial forms, are not (Frede 80). Moreover, he claims that while some forms require properties for realization, they do not require any particular properties, whereas properties do require some form to be realized (Frede 80). Having presented Frede's view on Aristotle's substance and contextualized the interpretive debate about it, I can now present Peramatzis' position before critiquing both funding for cultural institutions, and the increased presence of female photographers in Canadian camera clubs, this exhibition reflects a rich moment in Canadian photographic history which saw an increase in

the professionalization of women in the arts and the emergence of a more diverse national art collection.

## 1.2 Alternative Interpretations: Peramatzis' 'True Grit'

Peramatzis labels Frede's position on forms 'purism' and describes it as holding that substance as "a form is pure; it is essentially non-matter involving; its definition makes no reference to any material items" (Peramatzis 195). To avoid ambiguity, I specify that for my purposes Frede's 'purism' is the view that substance is form that does not essentially involve some particular material instantiation of a material property required for the compound object to which the form belongs to complete its characteristic function. The label 'purism' is accurate for this view because it posits that substance as form is purely non-particular or lacks essential involvement with some particular material instantiation of a material property. In contrast, Peramatzis wants to advance the 'true grit' view that substance as "a form is essentially matter-involving; its own definition, not just that of the compound, refers to some appropriate sorts of material item" (196). I follow Peramatzis in using his preferred labels for his and Frede's respective positions on form. Peramatzis recognizes that the 'purist' view is motivated by Aristotle's claim that definitions apply only to forms (Met VII.11, 1036a26-30), but Peramatzis interprets this idea to mean that forms are the definiens of a definition rather than its definiendum. This means both that forms provide the definition for matter and compounds and that these things are also subjects of definition, and not just forms (Peramatzis 196-197).

Furthermore, since Aristotle considers composite objects to have forms beyond their material components and by virtue of which they are unified and can be the kind of thing they are rather than a heap of parts (Met VII.17, 1041b11-28), Peramatzis concludes that forms must be "[entities] of a different ontological order" (199) that cause composites' existence and unity. As such, forms meet Aristotle's modified criterion that substance is the ultimate subject on which other things' existence depends and that in virtue of which an object is itself, or that underlies an object's changes. Peramatzis describes this relation between forms and compounds as an asymmetric causal-explanatory priority in which forms like 'being a human' are prior to compound objects like 'human' in existence and definition, as well as to any other possible parts of either the compound or form's definition, like 'flesh and bones' (201).

Forms are prior in existence and definition to the compound and its matter because Aristotle claims that compounds are themselves in virtue of their form being present and are thus defined by form (Met VII.17, 1041b1-9). Since Aristotle holds that definitions are formulas of essences where essences are substances (Met VII.5, 1031a12-13), as well as that essences are

those that make a thing itself (Met VII.4, 1029b13-14), essences are forms and definitions specify forms. This also suggests that forms are substance insofar as they are essences. The relation is schematized by Peramatzis' definition of the human compound as "bones, flesh, and so forth, thus... arranged because of being a human" (198). This matter and arrangement depend on being a human, the form, because it explains their relation and identity (Peramatzis 201).

Moreover, Peramatzis concludes from this that an account of form must explain how form causes and unifies compounds (199). He suggests this can be explained by an account on which forms possess an even greater degree of unity than composites (Peramatzis 201). As an example, Peramatzis hypothesizes a form may be defined as being interdependent formal and material parts (201). He reasons that since interdependent parts are defined in terms of each other, neither part is predicated of the whole form as something distinct from it, and thus the whole form can be one united thing composed of interdependent parts (Peramatzis 201). This is a stronger unity than that possessed by compounds because compounds' unity is of distinct, not interdependent, things. In a human compound's definition, 'being human' or human form unifies flesh and bones with their proper arrangement by specifying their relation and identity and it unifies itself with these materials and arrangement insofar as they asymmetrically depend on it for relation and identity (Peramatzis 202). This constitutes a two-tiered unity of the compound object by its form. Since Aristotle thinks compounds must be unified enough to not be like heaps of things (Met VII.17, 1041b12), forms must have strong enough unity to ground compounds being unified in a way stronger than heaps, or in this two-tier way, and Peramatzis' interdependent unity of forms can ground this unity because it is a stronger degree of unity (203).

After articulating that forms must have causal-explanatory priority and ground compounds' unity, Peramatzis argues that 'true grit' meets these conditions while 'purism' does not. In Peramatzis' view, forms contain material parts that can ground and explain a compound's particular causal-explanatory features (208); for instance, they can ground Aristotle's hypothetical necessity claim that a saw must be iron to saw or cut, and thus to be a saw insofar as saws saw or cut (Phys II.9, 200a9-14, trans. Hardie and Gaye). However, Frede's 'purism' cannot itself account for this necessary causal-explanatory feature of a saw because it considers forms to be "characterized purely in terms of formal aspects, [or] functions" (Peramatzis 208) to the exclusion of hypothetically necessary material components. Moreover, Frede cannot hold that the combination of hypothetical necessity claims and a form's definition ground a compound's necessary features without undermining the causal-explanatory priority of the form itself (Peramatzis 208). This is because on such a framework it would be a form's definition and hypothetical necessity claims taken

together that ground a compound's features, or that have causal-explanatory priority over a compound and its properties (Peramatzis 208). However, since Aristotle assigned such priority to form, it is not an option for Frede to suggest it belongs to the combination of form and hypothetical necessity claims. Hence, 'true grit' succeeds at having causal-explanatory priority while 'purism' does not.

Frede's 'purism' also fails to ground a compound's unity because his forms, which do not essentially involve some matter, require some matter to realize a compound (Peramatzis 212). Since this form and matter are distinct, their resultant compounds are not one essentially unified thing but instead a union of distinct parts, form and matter (Peramatzis 212). Peramatzis insists that Aristotle thinks form has a strong unity in which material and formal parts depend on each other (210). Since Frede's view cannot account for this interdependency insofar as matter and form are distinct, his position cannot ground the unity of compound objects. Hence, Peramatzis concludes that 'true grit' is a superior interpretation of Aristotle's form to Frede's 'purism' because it meets these conditions (Peramatzis 213).

## 2.1 Critiquing Frede's 'Purism'

I can now critique Frede and Peramatzis' respective views. Frede specifies that "though an object must always have a certain [set of properties like weight and height]... there is no [set of particular material instantiations of these material properties] which it has to have all the time" (76). He later adds that "no form needs [a particular material instantiation of a material property] to be realized" (Frede 80). In this view, an object like a human must have some weight but no particular weight measurement (Frede 80). This justifies Frede's view that only a compound object's form must be present for it to be identical to itself (76). However, his view encounters a problem with the fact that objects require their material properties to be materially instantiated such that they can complete their characteristic functions. I will next elucidate this difficulty for Frede's view with Aristotle's example of a saw (Phys II.9, 200a9-14). If it is necessary that a saw is made of iron (or some similar material) and sufficiently sharp in order for it to saw and be a saw insofar as saws saw, then the only saws that can saw and be saws are those whose constitutive matter is arranged such that it is within a particular range of material instantiations of some material property or properties, like sharpness, that enables the object to saw. This is demonstrable by the fact that an object would fail to be a saw if its constitutive matter was not sufficiently sharp, or sharp enough to saw. Hence, to be a saw, an object's matter must be sufficiently sharp, or rather, it must be arranged such that it instantiates the property sharpness in a way that enables the object to saw. Such an instantiation of sharpness will fall within a range or spectrum of instantiations of sharpness that are

sufficient to saw, where the bottom end of this range is the minimum degree of instantiated sharpness required to saw and the top end is the maximum degree of sharpness that can saw. This point can be generalized: some compound objects require their constitutive matter to be arranged such that the object possesses a material instantiation of some material property or properties that enable it to perform its characteristic function. Such instantiations fall within a particular range of material instantiations of that material property that are sufficient to complete the object's characteristic function, where this range is capped at bottom by the minimum degree of the property required for the object to complete its function and at top by the maximum degree of this property by which it can do its function.

The problem for Frede's view is that he cannot simultaneously claim both that some compound objects require their constitutive matter to be arranged such that the object possesses a material instantiation of some material property or properties by which it can complete its characteristic function and that "the only item... that has to stay the same as long as we can talk about the same thing is... the form" (76). These claims are inconsistent. If the former claim is true, then the latter claim must be false because it follows from the first that for an object to remain the same object through change it must continuously possess some material instantiation of the material property or properties required for the object to perform its function. Using a human as an example, we can see that if "the form of a human being needs a body of a weight within certain limits" (Frede 80), then a particular human ceases to exist once its weight exceeds those limits. Thus, Frede cannot account for the fact that some objects require material instantiations of some material property or properties that enable them to perform their characteristic function without also conceding that form is not the only thing required for something to exist through change, and therefore also that form is not itself substance insofar as substance is that which always underlies an object's experience of change and makes an object itself. Since the view that form is itself substance is the general position Frede advances, I conclude that his view is problematic insofar as it cannot account for the necessity that some objects have material instantiations of some material property or properties that enable the object to perform its characteristic function without inconsistency. A stronger interpretation of substance would account for this necessity without inconsistency.

Another problem for Frede's 'purism' is that he insists that forms are substance insofar as they are the ultimate subjects of predication, or that which is most capable of separate existence and on which all else depends for existence (80). This is the criteria for substantiality that Aristotle introduces in the Categories and uses again in the Metaphysics when trying to determine substance as substratum or the ultimate subject of predication. Yet Aristotle writes that "the substratum is substance, and this

is in one sense the... formula or form (which being a 'this' can be separately formulated), and in another sense the complex of matter and form, which... is, without qualification, capable of separate existence; for of substances in the sense of formulae some are separable and some are not" (Met VIII.1, 1042a25-32). In this passage, Aristotle declares that insofar as substance is the ultimate subject of predication and the most capable of separate existence, compounds are more separable than forms. Compounds can exist separately without any qualification while only some forms can do so and others cannot. Thus, Frede is wrong to suggest that forms have the most separate existence because Aristotle claims that compounds are more capable of separate existence. A superior interpretation of Aristotle's substance would account for his statement that compounds are more capable of separate existence than forms.

A final problem for Frede's 'purism' is that he thinks forms are particular. He argues that forms are particular at one time insofar as they are in different matter and over time insofar as they have continuous histories (Frede 78). Aristotle forwards that "the 'form'... means the 'such', and is not a 'this'—a definite thing" (Met VII.8, 1033b22-23). Thus, form denotes a type of thing, like 'humans', and not a particular thing, like 'this human'. Furthermore, Aristotle also states that "when we have the whole, such and such a form in this flesh and in these bones, this is Callias or Socrates; and they are different in virtue of their matter (for that is different), but the same in form; for their form is indivisible" (Met VII.8, 1034a5-9). I suggest this means particular compound objects of the same kind are different because they have different matter despite having an identical form. Moreover, the notion that compounds' forms are indivisible indicates that one cannot separate one compound's form from another to distinguish the compounds, and this aligns with Aristotle's suggestion that they are different precisely in virtue of their matter and not their form. As such, it is not clear that Frede is correct that forms can be particular by being in different matter because Aristotle proposes that two of the same form are indistinguishable from each other. If two compounds' forms were particular in virtue of being in different matter, then their forms should be distinct insofar as they are in different matter, but Aristotle claims they are indivisible. A superior view of Aristotle's substance would account for the notion that the forms of two composite objects of the same kind cannot be distinguished.

## 2.2 Critiquing Peramatzis' 'True Grit'

Having critiqued Frede's 'purism', I can now critique Peramatzis' 'true grit'. The primary problem with Peramatzis' view results from his belief that form is substance because "a form is ontologically prior to the items it is the form of: for it makes the latter what they are but not conversely" (205). He thinks that compounds depend on forms ontologically, or to exist, and this is part

of the previously described asymmetric causal-explanatory dependency of compounds on forms. This dependency also entails that forms are conceptually prior to compounds, or prior in definition and explanation (Peramatzis 205). Such dependency is also present in compounds' dependence on form for unity in definition and existence. Peramatzis argues that forms have ontological priority over compounds and their material parts on the basis of Aristotle's analysis that compounds must have some further thing beyond their matter that makes them themselves and that this is substance (Met VII.17, 1041b11-33). But rather than justifying forms' ontological priority, I suggest this idea from Aristotle means that forms are conceptually prior to compounds because they cause them insofar as they make them identifiable by function as some particular compound, like flesh. On my interpretation, forms are substance at this point in the text to the extent that they have conceptual priority but not ontological priority. This means that they are prior to matter and compounds in definition and explanation but not in existence such that forms must be defined and explained before matter and compounds but these things precede forms in existence. This is supported by Aristotle's claim that forms and compounds are different kinds of substance where not all the former are separate in existence, or ontologically independent, but all the latter are (Met VIII.1, 1042a24-32). Moreover, since Aristotle states this in the context of summarizing his previous discussion of substance in Metaphysics Z (Met VIII.1, 1042a3-4), there is interpretive dialectic evidence to suggest that he settles on the view that compounds have ultimate ontological priority or separability. Thus, to the extent that Aristotle considers substance that which is most ontologically prior insofar as it is the ultimate subject of other things' dependence and capable of separate existence, compound objects succeed as substance and forms do not. A superior account of Aristotle's substance would reconcile the unqualified separate existence or ontological priority of compounds with the conceptual priority of forms.

The second criticism of Peramatzis' 'true grit' is the problem of distinguishing between a compound's matter and its form's material components, and he anticipates this issue. This problem applies to his view because he posits that forms have essential formal and material components, where the latter are material ways of being in which forms are realized (Peramatzis 209), like a saw's iron or similar metallic part. If forms have material parts like the fact that they are realized in particular matter and compounds have such matter as one of their parts too, then it is not clear how to distinguish between their respective matter. Furthermore, it is not clear how the definition of a form differs from the definition of its compound insofar as both will involve specifying the same form in the same kind of matter. Peramatzis cannot appeal to the interdependency of a form's material and formal items because a compound may have the same interdependency insofar as its form cannot be realized without certain matter and matter does not lack form. This interdependency is plausible because it can explain the non-heap-like unity of compounds. Without

a stronger positive account of the difference between a form's interdependent material parts and its compound's material parts, it is not clear how the matter of Peramatzis' forms can be differentiated from their compounds' same matter. This also makes it less clear how forms and compounds are definitionally distinct. A superior interpretation of Aristotle's substance would explain these differences such that a form and compound's respective material components can be separately identified and definitionally distinct.

### 3.1 Gill's Interpretation: 'Compound Primacy'

Having presented and critiqued alternative interpretations of Aristotle's substance from Frede and Peramatzis, I can now explain and defend Gill's 'compound primacy'. I take Gill's position as representative of my interpretation of Aristotle's ideas in the same way Peramatzis' position represents the 'true grit' interpretation and Frede's position illustrates the 'purism' view. Peramatzis labels Gill's position 'compound first' and describes it as holding that "form and matter are abstractions in thought derived from the compound itself. The compound is a material (type of) object and it is metaphysically basic" (Peramatzis 195). This description of the position accurately emphasizes that Gill's position considers compound objects ontologically basic or prior to other things, including forms. Since they are the ultimate subject on which form and matter depend, compounds are substance instead of forms. I call this position 'compound primacy'. This name follows Aristotle's differentiation between primary and secondary substances, like a particular human and humans, where the former compounds are primary (Cat I.5, 2a13-18).

Like Frede, Gill recognizes that Aristotle suggested compound objects were substance in his Categories because he thought they were that on which all else depended to exist, or that which exists most separately such that they have ontological priority (Gill 379). She also notes that the hylomorphic analysis of Aristotle's Metaphysics in which a compound's form and matter can be considered as candidates for substance provides room for many others to interpret that substance is form (Gill 379). Yet Gill contends that while Aristotle defends "various candidates in the course of his dialectical journey [in Metaphysics Z-θ, he] ultimately returns to living organisms as the primary substances" (379). Gill argues that Aristotle maintains ontological priority as a criterion for substantiality in his Metaphysics in addition to another criterion, conceptual priority (Gill 380). Aristotle maintains separability as a criterion for substantiality where he considers substance as substratum (Met VII.3, 1028b33-1029a1), and again when he rejects universals as substance insofar as they are predicable, or dependent on a subject, whereas substance is not because it is this subject (Met VII.13, 1038b15-16). Furthermore, Aristotle holds that compounds have greater separability than forms (Met VIII.1, 1042a27-32). All this leads Gill to conclude that organic compounds have ontological priority over forms

and matter, and thus that they succeed as substance insofar as such priority is a criterion of substantiality (380).

Gill holds that conceptual priority is possessed by things that can explain other things and do not require reference to other things to be explained (380). Aristotle describes this priority and implies it is a condition for substantiality in writing that “by a primary substance [he means] one which does not imply the presence of something in something else” (Met VII.11, 1037b3-4), as well as that “primary things are those which do not involve one thing’s being said of another” (Met VII.4, 1030a10-11). Thus, a primary substance has conceptual priority insofar as it can be defined or specified without reference to anything else, and Gill proposes that this makes them definable unities (380). Gill also argues that compounds seem to fail to meet this criterion for substantiality (381); this is because they are defined as a form in matter and involve something’s being said of another (Met. VII.11, 1036b28-33). However, she insists that while this is the correct reading of *Metaphysics Z*, it is not Aristotle’s ultimate view (Gill 382).

In *Metaphysics H*, Aristotle proposes that definitions are problematic insofar as they need an explanation of how their parts are united to make a whole compound definition (Met VIII.6, 1045a7-8). He then suggests this difficulty is resolved by recognizing that “one element is matter and another is form, and one is potentially and the other actually” (Met VIII.6, 1045a23-25). On this view, a compound’s definition can be united because a compound is potentially matter and actually form such that “matter and form are one and the same thing, the one potentially, the other actually” (Met VIII.6, 1045b18-19). Gill proposes that matter is potential in a compound because it can return to separate existence when the compound is destroyed (389). Within the compound, matter is called generic matter and functions as a modifying property of a subject (Gill 389-90). However, since Aristotle thinks matter is like accidental properties insofar as they are both indeterminate (Met IX.7, 1049a36-1049b1), Gill suggests that they are indeterminate because they depend on a subject to modify and for which they are non-substantial properties or accidental properties that do not contribute to their subject’s essential nature (390). Hence, a compound’s matter is potential and indeterminate such that it depends on form for differentiation or a subject to which it can non-essentially apply (Gill 391).

Gill concludes that compounds can be definitionally unified because their matter need not be mentioned in their defining accounts due to its non-substantiality (391). Since compounds can be definitionally unified and such unity is one of Aristotle’s criteria of primary substance, compounds can be primary substance. Gill stipulates that this makes organic compounds substances, not all composite objects (392). This is because non-organic composite objects like houses have definite parts like bricks that inhibit their definitional unity (Gill 392). Nonetheless, Gill thinks her view is supported by Aristotle’s claim that artefacts are not substance but analogous to it (Met VIII.2, 1043a4-5). Moreover, although organic composites have generic matter molded into functional

matter insofar as it is organized into parts with functions like fingers by form (Gill 386), this functional matter does not need to be mentioned in the compound’s definition because it is defined by the compound’s function (392), and so the definition can be unified. The compound’s generic matter does not undermine its definitional unity because it is only potentially and not essentially in it and its functional parts (Gill 393). As such, instead of being defined as form in matter where form and matter are conceptually independent, organic composites are defined as form in functional matter where functional matter is defined by form such that the compound’s definition is only the definition of the form. Thus, organic composites can be definite unities such that they have conceptual priority and succeed on both of Aristotle’s criteria as substance (Gill 394).

### 3.2 Defending Gill’s ‘Compound Primacy’ from ‘Purism’ and ‘True Grit’

Having presented Gill’s view, I can now defend it from Frede and Peramatzis’ arguments against it. Frede observes that Aristotle casually dismisses compounds as substance (79); for instance, Aristotle claims “the substance compounded of... matter and shape, may be dismissed; for it is posterior and its nature is obvious” (Met VII.3, 1029a30-32). However, Frede himself notes that this is insufficient to justify forms being prior to compounds (79). He claims that sufficient justification for this comes from Aristotle’s belief that substances are not truly composite (Frede 79). Frede justifies this interpretation of Aristotle by noting that Aristotle posits substance that is purely form like the unmoved mover (79). Additionally, he suggests that studying sensible substances is advantageous for later studying intelligible substances which are more primary (Met VII.3, 1029a34-1029b2). I contend this argument fails in several ways.

First, the sample of a single non-enmattered substance is not large enough to conclude that substances are not composite; the unmoved mover may be an exceptional substance, and this seems fitting given its exceptional status in Aristotle’s universe. Second, although Aristotle implies that studying sensible substances is advantageous for studying intelligible substances, or forms, this does not entail that the latter are ontologically prior to the former such that they are more truly substance. Third, if Aristotle had decided in this passage that form as substance has ontological priority over compounds, then it would be inexplicable why he later claims that compounds are completely separable in existence while forms are not (Met VIII.1, 1042a27-32). I contend that in light of this subsequent passage, it is more reasonable to take Frede’s supposed evidence as describing how one ought to study form as substance. Thus, I reject Frede’s evidence for the interpretation that Aristotle holds substances are not truly composites. Without this justification, Frede’s argument against compounds as substance is reduced to Aristotle’s brief argument that Frede specified was insufficient to

ground the priority of forms over compounds as substance. Hence, Frede's argument against composite objects as substance fails insofar as it is insufficiently justified.

Peramatzis cites ideas from Aristotle that seem to be problems for Gill's account. For instance, he notes Aristotle's claim that "wholes which include matter... are not the same as their essences" (Met VII.11, 1037b5-7). Peramatzis emphasizes this to propose that compound types like human possess an essence or form and are therefore non-identical with it (204). He adds that a compound and its form are non-identical because a compound is a type or token of a type of an object, like human or Socrates, whereas their essences or forms are accounts of what it is to be the particular object they are (Peramatzis 204). This argument indicates that Gill is incorrect to think organic compound objects are substances insofar as they have conceptual priority by virtue of being definitional unities where the compound is identical to its form in definition.

As Gill may suggest, however, Peramatzis' view does not account for Aristotle's complete view on the issue. Aristotle also claims that "to be man and man are not the same, unless indeed the soul is to be called man; and thus one interpretation the thing is the same as its essence, and on another it is not" (Met VIII.3, 1043b2-4). This idea implies that although Aristotle dialectically considers the notion that substance compounds are not identical to their essence, there is a sense in which a compound is the same as its essence, and that is where it is identified with or defined as its form. Hence, the previous passage in which Aristotle appears to reject the possibility that compounds can be identical to their essences can be seen as a moment in the dialectical journey that leads to this alternative interpretation.

On this view, one may interpret the previous passage as holding that things that include matter essentially, like saws that need iron or similar material to saw, are not the same as their essences because they require matter too. My interpretation of these ideas is supported by the fact that Aristotle later argues that compounds' definitions are unproblematically unified because they are potentially matter and actually form (Met VIII.6 1045a21-25). If Aristotle thought that all compounds could not be identical to their definitions because they have matter, then this would contradict his later argument that a compound's definition is unified because its matter and form are potentially and actually the same. It would contradict this argument because it would insist that essences and matter are distinct such that they cannot be identical. But then why would Aristotle later argue that they are united insofar as they are potentially and actually the same? Since Peramatzis' interpretation conflicts with Aristotle's account of how the difficulty of compounds' definitional unity is resolved by their material and formal parts being potential and actual, I propose that my interpretation is superior insofar as it avoids this issue.

### 3.3 Further Defense: 'Compound Primacy' versus the Problems for 'Purism' and 'True Grit'

Having defended Gill's 'compound primacy' from conflicting ideas, I can now explicate how her view succeeds in the ways that Frede and Peramatzis' interpretations fail. The first way in which Frede's 'purism' is problematic is that his view cannot account for the fact that some compound objects necessarily require a material instantiation of some material property or properties that enable the object to perform its characteristic function, where such instantiations are within a particular range of possible instantiations of that property that enable the object to complete its function. Gill's 'compound primacy' is not problematized in the same way. This is because her position, unlike Frede's 'purism', does not hold that form is substance insofar as only it underlies an object's change. As such, Gill's view avoids the inconsistency I discussed in section 2.1 that renders Frede's view of substance incompatible with this necessity and therefore problematic.

Although Gill's 'compound primacy' is not problematized in the same way as Frede's 'purism', one might wonder whether it can account for the aforementioned necessity or is similarly problematic. Gill's 'compound primacy' can account for the fact that some compound objects necessarily require some material instantiation of a material property that enables the object to perform its characteristic function because there is no inconsistency between this fact and the position that organic compounds are substances. In Gill's view, compounds are composed of generic matter that has been arranged into functional matter by form, where functional matter is that matter by which an object can complete its functions, which thus necessarily presupposes the presence of material instantiations of the material properties required for the compound to complete its characteristic function. It follows that Gill thinks compounds possess their necessary material instantiations of material properties by definition. This is consistent with Gill's position that organic compounds succeed as substance insofar as they have both ontological and conceptual priority over forms and matter.

Gill's position that organic compounds have ontological priority is consistent with thinking that such compounds require some material instantiations of material properties that enable them to complete their characteristic functions. This is because the fact that such compounds possess material instantiations of their required material properties by definition does not cause them to be ontologically posterior to form or matter. Moreover, for any object to be some kind of organic compound it must possess material instantiations of the properties required to perform this kind's function such that if organic compounds exist such that they are ontologically prior to forms and matter, then they necessarily have material instantiations of the material properties they require to perform their function. Gill's view that organic compounds have conceptual priority is also consistent with thinking that they require these

material instantiations. This is because their status as definite unities is unaffected by this necessity; it remains the case that functional matter and organic compounds are defined in reference to the compound's form and that generic matter need not be mentioned in the compound's definition regardless of the fact that functional matter presupposes material instantiations of particular material properties. Thus, Gill's 'compound primacy', or the view that organic compounds are substance insofar as they have ontological and conceptual priority over matter and form, is not inconsistent with the aforementioned necessity and thus not problematic in this way.

The second problem for Frede's 'purism' was that it cannot account for Aristotle's insistence that forms have less ontological priority, or separability than composite objects. This is not an issue for Gill's 'compound primacy' because she argues that compounds are substances in part because Aristotle insists on their ultimate separability. Thus, Gill's view is superior in this way too. The third issue for Frede's view was his argument that forms could be particular. It was problematic because Aristotle elsewhere suggests that forms cannot be distinguished from each other or are indivisible. This does not problematize Gill's interpretation for at least two reasons. First, Gill does not insist that a compound's form is particular to it as Frede does. Second, Gill's view does not need to hold that forms are particular because it argues that compounds are identical with their form such that compounds of the same kind have identical form but different matter. Hence, Gill's view is superior to Frede's insofar as it is not impeded by this issue.

Regarding Peramatzis' 'true grit', the first problem was that his argument for forms' ontological priority seems to be undermined by Aristotle's subsequent summary of *Metaphysics Z* in which he claims composites have ultimate separability or ontological priority. I interpreted that Aristotle was actually arguing for the conceptual priority of forms over composites, and I emphasize that I think this is a dialectical moment in Aristotle's discussion because he later argues for the definitional unity of composites. Hence, like Gill, I propose that it is correct to interpret *Metaphysics Z* as arguing for form as substance but that this argument is undermined by evidence from other parts of Aristotle's texts, including *Metaphysics H-Θ*. Furthermore, it is not problematic for Gill's view that Aristotle claims composite objects have ontological priority over forms because she argues that they are substances instead of forms. This shows that Gill's argument is superior to Peramatzis' insofar as it avoids this dialectical difficulty.

My second challenge for Peramatzis' position was that it is not clear how one can distinguish a form's material parts from its compound's material parts. This was a difficulty for Peramatzis because he argues that substance is form conceived as interdependent formal and material components. However, this is not a problem for Gill's view because she does not conceive form as essentially containing material parts but rather thinks compounds are identical to their form where neither specify matter. Thus,

Gill's 'compound primacy' is superior to Peramatzis' 'true grit' to the extent that it avoids this problem.

#### 4. Objections and Responses

Having defended Gill's view from Frede and Peramatzis' arguments for their interpretations and explained how 'compound primacy' is not problematized in the same ways as Frede and Peramatzis' positions, I can now present and respond to some objections to my arguments. The first objection to my interpretation of Aristotle's substance is the following: if Aristotle thinks that compounds are ultimately substance, why does he seem to insist on forms as substance? I have two responses to this objection. The first is that it is clear in *Metaphysics Z* and beyond that Aristotle is interested in the sense in which each of form, matter, and the compound of both are substances. This means that it is not out of place or strange for Aristotle to insist on any interpretation of substance as one of these three things at any point within the *Metaphysics*, at least given some context. Second, it is also clear from how the discussion unfolds and changes focuses across *Metaphysics Z-Θ* that this text constitutes a kind of dialectic exploration of multiple perspectives on its issues, including substance. Hence, it follows from both points that it is not strange or contradictory for Aristotle to seemingly insist on forms as substance but ultimately hold compounds are substance. One cannot object to my interpretation on the basis of this apparent discord alone because it accounts for it.

A second objection responds to my third argument against Frede's 'purism'. One might object that forms are particular insofar as each compound must have its own particular identifiable form. They could justify this by holding that if each compound does not have its own particular identifiable form, then form must be universal and not substance. But if we are not trying to justify form as substance, then it is not problematic for forms to be universal such that they are not substance. Thus, this objection begs the question insofar as it presupposes that form must be substance. Of course, compound objects can succeed as particular and substance insofar as they are embodied in particular matter.

Finally, the third objection to my position responds to my first argument against Peramatzis' 'true grit'. One might object that Peramatzis successfully accommodates Aristotle's claim that compounds have greater separability than forms, or that forms depend on compounds for their existence, by holding that "an Aristotelian way of being... [is] the ontological correlate of an open sentence" (Peramatzis 204). In response, I suggest that this objection both reflects why Gill's view seems more accurate and undermines Peramatzis' argument. It illustrates that Gill's position is more accurate by admitting that Aristotle does think forms ontologically depend on compounds such that the latter are prior to the former and have greater candidacy for substantiality. Moreover, it weakens Peramatzis' argument by noting that Aristotle does not think forms have ontological priority over compounds. As such, this objection

fails to problematize Gill's interpretation because it reinforces the strength of her case in relation to Peramatzis' view.

## 5 Conclusion

In conclusion, I have defended Gill's 'compound primacy' view of Aristotle's substance from Frede and Peramatzis' arguments in favour of their respective 'purism' and 'true grit' views. I first described Frede and Peramatzis' positions in detail before critiquing them. I contended that Frede's 'purism' was problematic in three ways. The first was that it cannot account for the fact that some compound objects necessarily require some material instantiation of some material property or properties that enable the object to perform its characteristic function on pain of inconsistency with holding form as substance. The second was that it cannot account for Aristotle's insistence on compounds' ultimate separability. The third was that it incorrectly interprets Aristotle as holding that forms are particularly distinguishable. Next I outlined that Peramatzis' 'true grit' encounters two issues. First, it cannot account for Aristotle's insistence that compounds have ultimate ontological priority because it supposes forms have this priority. Second, it lacks an explanation of how a compound's material parts differ from its form's material parts such that the two things and their matter can be separately identified.

After this, I explicated Gill's 'compound primacy' and defended it from an argument from each of the other authors. In response to Frede's justification of Aristotle's casual dismissal of compounds as substance insofar as they are posterior to form, I argued that his reasons are insufficient to justify this brief argument. They were insufficient because one example of an immaterial substance is not enough to conclude all substances are immaterial, as well as because Aristotle's subsequent discussion of substance as intelligible does not necessarily mean such substance is prior to sensible substance, and finally because if it did, then his later statements in favour of compounds' priority would be inconsistent and inexplicable. In response to

Peramatzis' argument that Aristotle thinks compounds are not identical to their essences, I argued that Aristotle subsequently considers compounds' definitions to be unities in a way that would be inconsistent with holding this non-identity such that we should think Aristotle prefers the dialectic interpretation that renders these things identical to the one that does not.

I also demonstrated that Gill's 'compound primacy' is not made problematic by any of the problems for Frede and Peramatzis' positions such that it is a less problematic interpretation of Aristotle's substance than the other authors' alternatives. Finally, I presented three objections to my arguments and defended them against these ideas. The first objection failed because Gill's interpretation is consistent with Aristotle's dialectically arguing for form as substance. The second objection failed to reject my third

argument against Frede's conception of particular forms because it circularly presupposed that form cannot be universal for it to succeed as substance. The third objection failed to justify Peramatzis' view in a way that made my first argument against it fail because it reflects the strength of Gill's view while undermining Peramatzis' position.

I can now highlight some of the limitations and implications of my paper. One limit to my paper is that for the sake of scope and brevity, I could not respond to all possible objections to my position. This means that further defense of my view in relation to unstated objections may be necessary. Another limitation is that my argument only directly considers ideas in Aristotle's *Categories*, *Metaphysics*, and *Physics*. Since I have argued that 'compound primacy' emerges as a dialectic option in relation to others across the texts, it follows that my position may be further defended or rejected by interpretation of other texts or more ideas in those texts. A third limit of my argument is that it considers only organic compounds and not artefacts as substance. An implication of this is that defenders of my view must specify how artefacts are analogous to but precisely different from organic composites such that they are not substance. Moreover, since Aristotle identifies multiple kinds of substance and 'compound primacy' holds that organic compounds are more ultimate than others, my argument implies that proponents of this view ought to conceptually distinguish the kinds of substances for clarity. Finally, and chiefly, it follows from my argument that for Aristotle, organic compounds are the ultimate subjects of ontological and conceptual priority such that everything else depends on them for their existence.

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