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Categorial hylomorphism: an inquiry into the significance of categories for the doctrine of hylomorphism through a confrontation of the ideas of Aristotle and Kant

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Citation

Pantoja Quiroz, D. R. (2026, February 19). *Categorial hylomorphism: an inquiry into the significance of categories for the doctrine of hylomorphism through a confrontation of the ideas of Aristotle and Kant*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4292367>

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CONCLUSION

From what we called in Chapter 3 the relative character of matter and form, we were able to arrive at a hylomorphic understanding of matter, according to which we reintroduced the core problem of categorial forms into the context of the discussion of matter. And from these principles (i.e., the relative character of matter, form and the consequent hylomorphic conception of matter), common to both Aristotle's essential hylomorphism and Kant's functional hylomorphism, we were able to arrive at another principle common to both positions, namely the hierarchical or vertical character of hylomorphism.

In this context, our confrontation was carried out in two parts³⁰²: one related to (1) the dimension of the plurivocity of categorial forms and the other related to (2) the dimension of the ontological scope and limits of the hylomorphic doctrine. The first part was achieved through a confrontation between the unity constituted by the vertical character of the Aristotelian composition of both [A] the substantial compound and [B] the substantio-accidental compound, and the compositional unity found in our vertical analysis of the system of Kantian categorial forms of quantity, quality, relation and modality. In this sense, we succeeded in revealing the richness of Kant's categorial variation from anamorphic, katamorphic and endomorphic perspectives—the latter of which considers the connection between the form of 'substance and accident' and what we termed 'categorially quantified and qualified aesthetic matter'. The second part was based on a confrontation between what we called in Aristotle the internal composition of the object, which was ultimately labelled the internal hierarchical composition of individual or lower-order objects, and what we called in Kant, on the basis of the peculiarity of the forms of relation, the external or inter-objective hierarchical composition of the object, which was ultimately labelled the hierarchical composition of higher-order objects.

It was precisely on the basis of the second part of our confrontation that we finally arrived at the idea that Kant's functional hylomorphism, particularly with regard to the composites formed by the categorial forms of relation ('cause and effect', 'interaction' and 'community'), constituted an expansion of the ontological scope of hylomorphism. In particular, in the sense that the objective field of application of this type of hylomorphism corresponded to the hylomorphic analysis of objects that went beyond the individual or internal character of the application of Aristotle's essential

³⁰² For the first part see Ch. 3, sect. 3.3.3 and for the second, see Ch. 3, sect. 4.

hylomorphism (as well as of Kantian functional hylomorphism with regard to the composites constituted by the categories of quantity, quality and the first category of relation, which, to distinguish it from the Aristotelian one, we called the comparatively internal hierarchical composition of lower-order objects). From this idea, we also suggested that since the ontological field of application of Kant's relational hylomorphism in particular was shown to be different from that of Aristotle, these two doctrines were not necessarily incompatible.

In light of the aforementioned context, we can now answer the following questions, which bring together the two topics that we used to divide the confrontation between Aristotle and Kant in Chapter 3: what is the systematic significance of considering forms in relation to categories in the context of the vertical character of hylomorphism, and what bearing does this have on the fact that Kantian relational hylomorphism ultimately extended the ontological scope of this doctrine? Finally, to what extent can the answers to these questions enrich our general understanding of hylomorphism in some of its contemporary variants? From the discussion of all these elements, that is to say, from a discussion of the systematic unity of the two parts of this dissertation (i.e. the discussion of forms and formation, on the one hand, and of matter and the verticality of hylomorphic composition, on the other), let me conclude highlighting the merits of our categorial approach, both for the relation between Aristotle's essential hylomorphism and Kant's functional hylomorphism, and for hylomorphism in general.

To a certain extent, our answer to these questions was already anticipated in the convergence point of the first part of our dissertation, namely the problem of the hylomorphic composition of substance and accident, when, at the end of Chapter 2, after pointing out the meta-formal or meta-categorial character of the Kantian categorial forms of relation with respect to the Aristotelian ones, we suggested the idea that we had encountered with a T-junction³⁰³. Let me elaborate on this image. When we concluded Chapter 2, we said that the road we had travelled so far presented us with a T-junction, where—starting from our point of convergence—Aristotle's and Kant's hylomorphisms diverged and moved away from each other in opposite directions. Our point of convergence, or intersection, which was, strictly speaking, the end of the path we followed there, was precisely the combination of substance and accident. And the road perpendicular to our path was constituted, at one side, by Aristotle's essential internal hylomorphism and, at the other, by Kant's functional (relational) external hylomorphism. On the basis of what we have done in Chapter 3, we can now

³⁰³ See Ch. 2, sect. 5.

add verticality to this perpendicular road in such a way that the lower part of this now vertical road belongs to the domain of Aristotle's hylomorphism and the upper part to Kant's relational hylomorphism. If we consider that the upper limit of the Aristotelian hierarchical composition is the accidental form, we could say that, from the perspective of the T-junction (i.e. from the perspective of our point of convergence), Aristotle proceeds on a descending path. From the point of intersection, then, Aristotelian hylomorphism moves downwards on a descending path from [B] the accidental form and compound to [A] the substantial form and its internal hierarchical composition. From the same point of intersection, which in turn overlaps with the upper limit of Aristotle's vertical composition, Kant's relational hylomorphism moves upwards on an ascending path from (a) the predicative composite (which is actually his own version of the substantio-accidental compound) to the other composites formed by the remaining forms of relation ((b) the subjunctive and (c) the composites corresponding to the category of 'community', i.e. (c.2) the interactive and (c.1) the disjunctive composites) in an orderly fashion, one after the other³⁰⁴.

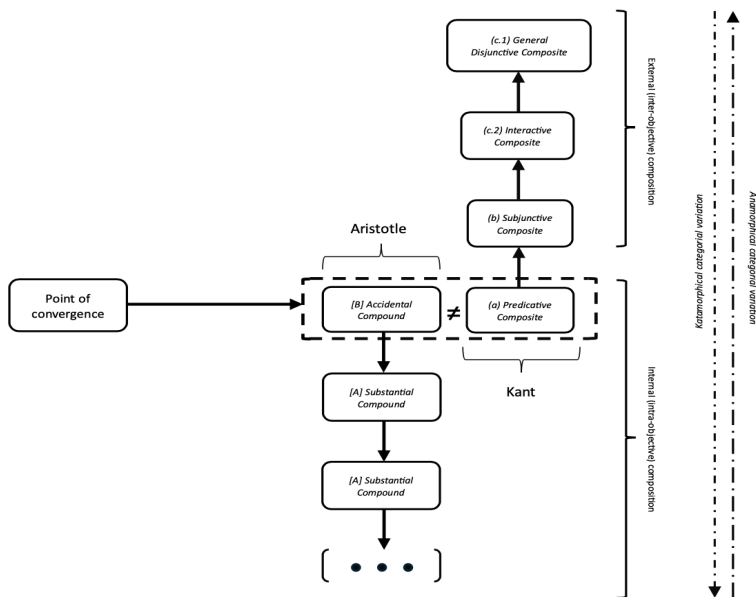


Fig. 4 T-junction³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ See Ch. 3, sect. 3.4.3.2.4.

³⁰⁵ It should be noted that this diagram is a simplified representation of both Aristotle's and Kant's hylomorphisms. Regarding the former, the fact that the substantial compounds that perform the role of matter for higher substantial forms can be a plurality, not just one, is

According to this image, and thanks to the systematic link between forms and categories that we traced in the first part of our dissertation, Aristotle and Kant converged at one point (i.e. the connection between substance and accident), but thanks to the verticality and our concern with the ontological peculiarity of Kant's categories of relation that we added in the second part, they might be represented as following opposite paths. In this sense, we could add that, from this point of intersection or convergence, Aristotelian hylomorphism, on the one hand, descended *katamorphically* towards the internal hierarchical structure of substance, while Kant, on the other hand, ascended *anamorphically* towards a hierarchical system of relations between objects, thus constituting what we have called higher-order objects, which belong to what we have called the externality of the object³⁰⁶. Accordingly, in contrast to Aristotle's *internal hylomorphic composition* of the object (of the lower-order), we arrived at Kant's *external hylomorphic composition* of objects (of the higher-order). In this sense, Kant's great merit with regard to hylomorphism is precisely to have taken it beyond the ontological limits of Aristotelian hylomorphism. But before addressing this point, I would like to raise another. Might this image not suggest that the two doctrines are complementary, despite their apparent divergence? Indeed, even if they overlap at a key point, the one around which we developed our confrontation in the first part of this work (i.e. the connection between substance and accident), is it not still possible to think that the remaining parts of their systems, precisely because they deal with different domains, are not necessarily incompatible with each other? In short, can we envisage an integration of the two systems? This point is very important because it may allow us to reflect on the nature of hylomorphism beyond Kant and Aristotle. Let me address this subject a little further.

Why should ontology, or more precisely hylomorphism, necessarily be concerned only with the internal structure of objects, i.e. with the internal composition of individual objects? It is, of course, a fact that hylomorphism serves this purpose, as the whole Aristotelian tradition up to the present day testifies. Moreover, ontology might also be concerned with how these objects have properties. And, as we have shown, since Aristotle hylomorphism has also been able to provide an answer to this question via the hylomorphic composition of substance and accident. Kant himself could even be said to have provided analyses of individual objects (under the compound formed by

omitted (see Ch. 3, sect. 2.2.3). Regarding Kant, please refer to Fig. 3 (Ch. 3, sect. 3.4.3.2.4) for a more complete diagram of his relational hylomorphism.

³⁰⁶ See Ch. 3, sect. 3.4.2.1.

the categorial forms of quantity and quality³⁰⁷) and of the composition of substance and accidents (under the categorial form of ‘substance and accident’³⁰⁸). In addition to all this, however, ontology, at least as it is to be understood in general, could also be concerned, apart from the internal structure of the object and its properties, with the specific ways in which these objects relate to each other, thus forming new types of composites. This is precisely what Kant’s functional-relational conception allows us to think from a hylomorphic perspective. A kind of hylomorphism for which the forms themselves are precisely these relations. In my view, this allows Kant’s hylomorphism not only to be presented in opposition to Aristotle’s hylomorphism, but rather to be seen as an enhancement of hylomorphism itself, in the sense that it opens the way to a new ontological dimension that Aristotle’s essentialist, substance-based hylomorphism is simply not prepared to account for. By directing the functional forms of relation precisely into the realm of objects, by regarding them not as mere logical forms of judgment but as forms of the object, i.e. as categories, Kant is able to bring the focus of hylomorphism into a new field of application. This makes hylomorphism even more ontologically far-reaching, as we said at the end of our final confrontation, thus extending this doctrine beyond its standard limits of application.

These ideas highlight the possibility and even the usefulness of seeking complementarity between these two systems. Might not hylomorphism itself, given its integrative nature, help us to achieve this complementarity? After all, as we have shown several times in this thesis, was hylomorphism not intended to unify the seemingly disunited? Wasn’t hylomorphism designed to unite two apparently opposed worlds, thus creating a third or middle way between extreme positions³⁰⁹? This is precisely the idea we were aiming at when we said that Kant’s relational categories could be understood as meta-categories in respect of Aristotle’s, and that Kant’s hylomorphism in its relational part could be understood as a meta-hylomorphism in relation to Aristotle’s hylomorphism³¹⁰. In this sense, hylomorphism itself could provide a solution to this problem, where the essential hylomorphism of the *concreta*, or rather of the individual objects, could be seen as the matter of Kant’s relational hylomorphism, in such a way that, to express it straightforwardly, we could go *anamorphically* from Aristotle to Kant and *katamorphically* from Kant to Aristotle. In short: a

³⁰⁷ See Ch. 3, sect. 3.3.1.

³⁰⁸ See Ch. 2, sect. 4.3 and Ch. 3 sect. 3.4.3.2.2.

³⁰⁹ See the introduction to Ch. 3 for this point.

³¹⁰ See Ch. 2, sect. 5 and Ch. 3, sect. 4.

hylomorphic model where the most fundamental levels of composition follow Aristotelian-based forms and compounds, while the more complex, higher-order levels are structured by Kantian-based relational functions and composites.

This grows even more significant when we recall—as noted in this dissertation’s introduction—that contemporary hylomorphism, despite viewing itself as heir to Aristotle’s tradition, has sought (e.g., in Fine’s work) to transcend the limits imposed by concrete particulars while still preserving their doctrinal importance. In fact, Fine (1992) argues that while Aristotle assumes concrete substances “are not, strictly speaking, the matter of anything else” and thus “constitute the terminus of the matter-of-relation”, “the idea that there is a distinctive notion of constitution, terminating in the concrete substances is one that should be given up” (p. 38). While these quotes appear to overlook the material character of Aristotle’s substantial compound in relation to accidental forms³¹¹, Fine (1999) later offers an innovative perspective suggesting that hylomorphism should lead

to a picture of the material world that has much more in common with the abstract realms of sets or of propositions than with the realms of concreta envisaged by the mereologist [...]. Material things enjoy a hierarchical structure; they can embody a significant intensional element; and they will belong to a vast superstructure, of which the objects we usually recognize are but a small part. Thus, if I am right, it is only by abandoning our usual conception of material things as relatively unstructured, completely unconceptual, and ontologically limited in their nature that we can attain a proper understanding of what they are (p. 74).

But is this not what we have repeatedly shown Kant to be doing, i.e. depicting a world that not only has elements in common, but is actually determined by the functions that analogically correspond to the “abstract realm” of logic, thus allowing hylomorphism to go beyond the “ontologically limited” conception of individual objects? Have we not already shown that the fundamental point of Kant’s ontology is that the constitution of the object is possible only through the application of the ‘conceptual’, which for Kant is nothing other than the categories, and that in this context the form of each object is identified with the functions of logic, thus forming a “vast superstructure” which operates hylomorphically over “the objects we usually recognize” (i.e. what we have called the individual or lower-order objects)? Although the image presented by Fine is very suggestive and, in my opinion,

³¹¹ Cf. Ch. 2 sect. 3.3, and Ch. 3 sect. 2.3.

represents the path that hylomorphism must follow, it should be added that it is therefore no exaggeration to say that Kant's absence from the contemporary debate represents more a sign of weakness than of strength, especially if we take into consideration that these ideas have been at our disposal for more than two hundred years!

Nevertheless, it is important to note that in one key respect, Kant's doctrine of categorial forms differs starkly from Fine's conception. Fine's assertion that material things "can embody a significant intensional element" suggests a strong, essentialist view of form. Indeed, Fine (1999) claims that this intensional element means forms are "involved in the identity" of material things as much as "they are constitutive of the propositions concerning those things" (p. 73). Accordingly, as Fine's conception of forms provides a determinate conceptual unity that fundamentally characterizes *what the object is*, he appears to be more closely aligned with Aristotle's essentialist position than with Kant's functionalist view. Indeed, Kant's function-based conception of forms is radically extensional³¹². Consider, for example, Kant's relational form of disjunction (category of 'community'), which does not specify the essence or identity of the object, but is instead conceived as a general, extensional operation that combines possible states or propositions without fixing a unique or essential identity. This is an interesting topic of controversy that I cannot pursue further here as additional research is needed.

Returning to our previous point, the compatibility or harmonization of Aristotle's and Kant's hylomorphisms presents us with a problem that forces us to choose between the two models in at least one respect. In fact, even if their ontologies are different in scope and thus have different domains of application, there is a point at which they overlap, which was the crux of our argument in Chapter 2. By this point I mean, of course, our point of convergence: both philosophers explain hylomorphically the combination of a substance and its accidents. While the Aristotelian model turned out to be simpler in the sense that the accident itself was treated as the form, the Kantian model turned out to be more complex because it took the connection or *nexus* of a substance and its accidents to be the form. This is therefore the most uncomfortable point for those who wish to integrate the two hylomorphisms into one, where the essential is the infrastructure and the functional the superstructure, because it necessarily leads us to choose one combination of substance and accident over the other.

³¹² See Ch. 2, sect. 4.3.

To try to solve this problem, one might ask which of these hylomorphic complexes (the Aristotelian [B] substantio-accidental compound or the Kantian (a) predicative composite) is more suitable for a functional or relational type of form hierarchy. One might say, first, that the Aristotelian accidental compound [B] is simpler and, in this sense, more desirable. Indeed, as we have seen in Chapters 2 and 3, the fundamental difference between Aristotle and Kant on this important point was that, whereas for the former the accident constituted the form and the substantial compound the matter, for the latter the accident did not constitute the form but merely another material component in tandem with the substance. Indeed, in Kant's case, form appeared as a third element which, instead of the accident, played the role of the form that made the combination of substance and accident possible, constituting thus a composite more complex than the Aristotelian one. However, we could also point out a certain disadvantage of the Aristotelian accidental compound, particularly if we take into consideration that the matter over which a higher form exerts its formative power is itself a hylomorphic compound³¹³, whose respective form actually constitutes the proximate matter and whose respective matter only constitutes the remote matter of the higher form. In this sense, if we were to adopt the Aristotelian model, we would be faced with the strange picture that Kant's "superstructure" of functional relations would operate via the accidental form (since this form constitutes the upper terminus of the Aristotelian hierarchy³¹⁴). In this context, one might wonder what peculiar capacity the accidental form could have in order to be considered as the proximate matter of the relational forms. In this sense, despite the increased complexity of the Kantian (a) predicative composite (i.e. the *substantia phaenomenon*), the form of this composite as a unifying nexus of substance and accident might be more suitable to receive the higher order relational or functional forms.

However, while there may be an unresolved incompatibility on this point (i.e. between [B] and (a)), this need not be the case for the other parts of their hylomorphic doctrines. While we are deciding which kind of substantio-accidental combination to choose, either the Aristotelian or the Kantian, both Aristotle's [A] substantial hierarchical hylomorphism and Kant's relational hierarchical hylomorphism (as regards (b), (c.2) and (c.1)) remain immaculate as they have different fields of application. In my view, the "What is?" question should never be abandoned in ontology. And by that, I mean that we shouldn't abandon the question of what an individual thing is, what its essence is. The very fact that this ancestral concept of philosophy has

³¹³ See Ch. 3, sect. 2.2.2.

³¹⁴ See Ch. 3, sect. 2.4.

been preserved to the present day testifies to the value it has and will continue to have for ontology. Moreover, one would not want to abandon the hylomorphic complexity of the individual object, which is hierarchically organized under the formative power of this kind of form. In the same line, if one accepts relations such as Kant's, I believe that there are no relations without relata, or rather, without an analysis of the relata that does not reduce them to the relations themselves, just as there are no forms without matter. Relations without a truly internal analysis of the object, such as Aristotle provides, would thus constitute an incomplete ontology.

On the other hand, the fundamentality of the particular or individual objects should never deprive hylomorphism of the connections in which these particulars can be hylomorphically entangled with each other. The ontological domain is not just a bunch of particulars disaggregated in an empty space. Instead, phenomenologically speaking, they are always presented in certain types of connection, and by "certain types" I mean that they do not present themselves *in all types of connection*. Accordingly, it is not the mere addition or aggregation of any objects that constitutes a complex, but precisely those connections which themselves respond to certain rules of combination, which give these objects their *well-formedness*. And these are precisely the types of rules that Kant provides with his categories of relation. Kant provides a hylomorphic framework that is, at least in general terms, adequate for this task. Unlike the Aristotelian framework, which only represents ordinary individual objects such as tables, pencils or Socrateses, Kant's framework can hylomorphically represent complex states of affairs, such as *Socrates sitting on a table while holding a pencil in his right hand*. In this case, all of these objects could be understood as *one* higher-order (inter-objective) hylomorphic complex. Consider the form of 'community' (corresponding to the disjunctive form), for example, where Socrates, the table and the pencil become the relational matter of this form, which structures their coordinated coexistence through mutual spatial determination³¹⁵. It could be argued that such a state of affairs could also be explained by Aristotle's model. However, while hierarchical, his substance-centered conception would not allow us to conceive of this complex as a single hylomorphic complex, but rather as a plurality of them, fracturing its unity into isolated substance-accident compounds: Socrates-being-seated (accident of Socrates), table-being-pressed (accident of table), pencil-being-held (accident of pencil), and so on. In other words, Aristotle lacks a formal principle, such as Kant's disjunctive logical form, to integrate these into a single hylomorphic whole. Thus, where Aristotle sees fragmented particulars, Kant's relational categories enable

³¹⁵ See Ch. 3, sect. 3.4.3.2.4.

hylomorphic unity across lower-order objects, revealing his unique capacity to model hierarchically integrated yet relationally unified phenomena. These ideas could be used to improve the current understanding of hylomorphism in such a way that hylomorphic composition could be conceived as a vertical structure that goes from the “fundamentals” (i.e. the concrete compounds, the individual objects of the standard position) to everything that could be built on top of these fundamentals according to this type of functional forms. However, further research is required to properly substantiate this position.

In any case, an important point to note here is that, thanks to what we called in our general introduction the neutrality regarding the ontological status of what is form and what is matter in Aristotle and Kant, it is possible to use the advantages of this compatibilist model in different ontological frameworks (be it in nominalist, conceptualist, or realist versions, among others). Indeed, although this might be the subject of great controversies among scholars, one could, for example, postulate the real status of Kantian-type functional forms without major drawbacks, or the nominal status of Aristotelian forms, and so on. In fact, the points I have made about the compatibility of these two models can take us beyond Kant’s and Aristotle’s hylomorphism, since they can be sustained in other ontological and categorial frameworks. This is what I meant in the introduction when I pointed out that this dissertation is neither a defense of Aristotle nor of Kant but is meant to be a contribution to the development of hylomorphism *per se*.

In order to bring this inquiry to its conclusion, let me make a few more points about the value of the systematic connection between the notions of categories and forms within a hierarchical framework for hylomorphism in general. As I suggested in the introduction, contemporary hylomorphism tends to work with a univocal concept of form. This means that discussions of forms mostly focus on what the general, definitive conception of forms is, rather than on the internal distinctions that might be identified by adopting a categorial approach to hylomorphism. Indeed, besides revealing how categories delineate hylomorphism’s ontological boundaries, this capacity to reveal nuanced structural differences constitutes one of the primary advantages of applying a categorial approach to hylomorphic theory. This is exactly what makes Aristotle’s and Kant’s ideas so important, as their categorial frameworks demonstrate how formal plurivocity emerges from categorial diversity.

At this point we can revisit the issue discussed in the introduction regarding the systematic connection between the different core-problems of hylomorphism according to which we structured the present dissertation (namely, the problems of [I.1] categorial forms, [I.2] formation and [II.3] the

hierarchical composition of the object). For, after all, how can different categorial forms find a place in the same hylomorphic system? The answer to this question was precisely anticipated by the hierarchical understanding of composition and its underlying hylomorphic conception of matter developed through Chapter 3. In this sense, my point is that the idea that there is a compositional system in which complex relational entities are constituted from simpler essential components in a hierarchical fashion, in such a way that each level or layer is composed of material and formal elements from the level below, in a process that continues upwards to produce an increasingly complex structure, might also help us to integrate in one system a plurality of differentiated categorial forms. Indeed, if hylomorphism is hierarchical and has a relative conception of matter and form, why should it be bound to only one general conception of form? In other words, if hylomorphism comes in levels, why not have some types of form for some levels of analysis and other types for the remaining levels? In this context, my main suggestion would be that a categorially extended or enriched hylomorphism could put an end to this internecine dispute over which general conception of forms is best suited to hylomorphism precisely by focusing on the ways in which categorial forms can be understood in the context of the hierarchical character of hylomorphic composition. In this sense, in a hierarchical, integrated and category-dependent plurivocal conception of hylomorphism, forms should not necessarily correspond to a single general conception. Alternatively, we can conceive of a general conception that integrates forms that appear to be irreconcilable.

In my view, while contemporary hylomorphism demonstrates both systematic rigor and undeniable value in its treatment of forms, its tendency toward a univocal approach—one that fails to properly account for the role of categories—ultimately leaves its definitions of forms relying on intuitive general characterizations. This kind of characterization can be found, for example, in Fine (2008), who has pointed out that

[f]rom the intuitive point of view, we might think of the form F in the matter-form combination $\Sigma(m, F)$ [where Σ represents the method of composition] as a kind of mould to which the matter m is meant to conform. In moulding the matter to the form, we obtain a composite of which both the mould and the matter will then be parts (p. 112; text in square brackets my addition; see also p. 106).³¹⁶

³¹⁶ On this point see Goswick (2018, p. 55, n. 15).

While it might seem that what Fine calls method of composition is a form on a higher level of the hierarchy, performing the same function as a form in Kant's sense, my problem in this case has to do with the fact that it is not identified as a form by Fine. Indeed, one of the main features of hylomorphism is that it is self-sufficient so to speak, that is, that the concepts of matter and form alone should do all the work. In this sense, if matter m is meant to conform to the form F as its mould, that should be enough to explain the hylomorphic composition between the two. Accordingly, if the method of composition Σ is form for F and m then either F and m should be considered as the proximate matter of Σ or they should be represented at different levels of constitution (with F as the proximate matter of Σ and m as its remote matter). I remind the reader here that Aristotle introduced matter and form in order to overcome the infinite regress produced by the Platonic concept of participation³¹⁷. In this sense, any additional entity or connection required to explain the connection of matter and form should be regarded as alien to hylomorphism. Kant avoids these issues precisely turning his categories into forms where nothing that goes under them is other than matter (either proximate or remote) in relation to that form.

Furthermore, as Shields (2022) has noted, Fine's "suggestion, though fertile, leaves unspecified what precisely it means to treat form as a mould", as "it does not specify under what conditions some matter m conforms to a form so conceived" (p. 109). These conditions could be specified more clearly if our conception of forms were to depend on categories, as we have argued throughout this dissertation. Consequently, the problem remains the same: the lack of consideration of the systematic connection between categories and forms.

A similar problem can also be found in Koslicki (2008). Indeed, on the basis of her sophisticated conception of form in terms of a structure, at the core of which lies the distinction between "what is taken as *variable* in a given domain and what is taken as *invariable*, relative to a set of admissible transformations" (p. 236), she ultimately postulates that structure is

the sort of entity which makes available "slots" that can be filled by other objects, as long as these objects satisfy certain type restrictions; the objects in question, as a result of occupying the slots made available by the structure, will exhibit a particular kind of arrangement or configuration (p. 235).

³¹⁷ See Ch. 2, sect. 3.2.1 (cf. *Metaph.* 1045a12–25 and 1045a21–22). Cf. Koslicki (2008), who is also aware of the risks of infinite regress when the matter of a given form consists of a plurality of objects (see p. 198, n. 40). She refers to this as a 'neo-Bradleyan regress', a problem that I would argue was already anticipated by Aristotle and can be avoided through a proper understanding of hylomorphic composition, as exemplified by Aristotle and Kant.

Once again, what are these “type restrictions”? What specific criteria must an object meet to be available for a given structural slot?³¹⁸

Clearly, it is not my intention at this stage to provide a full evaluation of these fruitful and relevant concepts present in the contemporary discussion of hylomorphism. Nevertheless, one could still argue that using the terms ‘moulds’ and ‘slots’ is an overly general way of referring to forms. In such a context, I would formulate the following questions: what kinds of moulds and slots are there? Do they each correspond to different forms, or just to a single one? For, to take Kant’s case, the asymmetrical slots that could be made available by the category of ‘substance and accident’ are not the same as the symmetrical ones that could be made available by the category of ‘community’. And the same holds true for these forms if we treat them as moulds. Likewise, in Aristotle, while we could argue that substantial forms mould their matter, this is hardly the case with accidental forms. The same applies to the image of slots: what slots could an accidental form have when its matter is constituted by a single substance, as we have shown? In this case, we could not talk of slots in the plural, so what would be the meaning of this image then? More generally, should all forms act as moulds or make slots available? What if some should and some should not? It is important to recall that my point here is not that these images are useless. Rather, in this scenario, I contend that a categorial approach could help us to formulate precise characterizations of each form belonging to a given system. So, while these images could be useful in some ways they could also be unhelpful in others; how useful they are should depend particularly on the categories we admit. My selection of Fine and Koslicki is neither arbitrary nor coincidental. Indeed, they are among the most significant contemporary hylomorphists precisely because they uphold and defend a principle that might otherwise have been lost to the history of philosophy, namely, a hierarchical conception of hylomorphic composition³¹⁹. This principle, I argue, establishes the necessary framework for developing both a plurivocal and functional understanding of forms. Fine’s (1999) very demand to move beyond hylomorphism’s traditional ontological limits points in this direction.

³¹⁸ It is important to note, however, that Koslicki (2008) poses the right questions when she asks: “To what ontological category do structures belong? Are they themselves objects, or are they rather properties and relations?” (p. 252; cf. pp. 174–175). Yet, she does not provide an answer, instead leaving “this question to be addressed by future research” (p. 254).

³¹⁹ Cf. Fine (1992, pp. 36 ff) and Koslicki (2008, pp. 186–187). See also my criticism of Fine’s hierarchical conception and my partial adherence to Koslicki’s hylomorphic conception of matter in Ch. 3, sect. 2.2.2.

While it is true that it is necessary to reflect on what it is that makes a form a form in general, and consequently to determine its essential features, my point can be summarized as follows: it is also necessary to ask what the specific nature of each form is, and what formative role each fulfils. Only by paying attention to the question of what our categories are will we be able to answer questions such as what a form is, how many there are, what their specific roles are and how they differ from each other in terms of their formative power in a hierarchical context—as we have done in this dissertation with Aristotle and, in more detail, with Kant. Certainly, our ontology might contain just one category—and consequently, only one general type of object. But the crucial issue is whether we can justify that this is truly the case, rather than simply assuming it. For if it is not, i.e. if we have more than one kind of category in our ontology and admit more than one kind of object in it, then our conception of forms must be conditioned by this fact, and in this sense deeper distinctions must be made that enable us to place each of these forms in its proper place in the vertical structure that characterizes hylomorphism.

Let me now present one final consequence emerging from our systematic integration of categories, forms, and the hierarchical structure of hylomorphism, particularly as manifested in Kantian relational forms, for contemporary discussion. As we have said in several parts of this work, hylomorphism is a theoretical device designed to preserve the best of two worlds in a single theory. This character of hylomorphism still persists today. In this context, Shields (2022) has rightly argued the following with regard to contemporary hylomorphism:

Its adherents also mainly affirm, or at least assume, that hylomorphism affords a kind of metaphysical moderation: hylomorphism follows a middle course between mereological nihilism, according to which only simples exist, and universal mereological aggregationism, which, after allowing that complex entities exist, adds for good measure that in fact every possible combination of simples yields an object (p. 97).

In this way, one could add that the integration of a Kantian-based type of relational form could also be useful in this middle way in which contemporary hylomorphism is situated between mereological nihilism and universal mereological aggregationism. Precisely in the sense that these kinds of categorial forms provide rules which, with regard to the first of these positions, do not produce a single type of entity but open the space for complexity, and which, with regard to the second, allow only some determinate types of objects to exist. In fact, these categories are *rules of*

combination which, as we have seen, clearly delimit what kind of complexes can exist, that is, those that conform to the requirements of these forms (and are therefore well-formed), and what kind of complexes cannot, as they do not conform to these forms. In this sense, if we take Kantian relational categories as rules of synthesis or combination, then the systematic connection between hierarchical hylomorphism and the problem of categories makes the Kantian position even stronger. And even if one has misgivings about the specific forms defended by Kant, insofar as they are understood as rules of combination, his point still holds in general. In the final analysis, Kantian forms—through their prescriptive nature that selectively generates only *certain* complexes—seem better suited to the demands that contemporary hylomorphists place on their forms, in a way that is more natural than the Aristotelian framework and that at the same time propels the research program forward.

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