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*Essence and Cause: Making Something Be What It Is*

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Aristotle frequently describes essence as a “cause” or “explanation” (αἴτιον or αἰτία), thus ascribing to essence some sort of causal or explanatory role. This explanatory role is often explicated by scholars in terms of essence “making the thing be what it is” or “making it the very thing that it is”. I argue that this is problematic, at least on the assumption that “making” expresses an explanatory relation, since it violates certain formal features of explanation (especially the requirement that the *explanans* be distinct from the *explanandum*). I then consider whether Aristotle is vulnerable to this problem by examining the explanatory role of essence in *Posterior Analytics* and *Metaphysics Z 17*.