

Reading 5, Aristotle's Categories

Aristotle's Categories does not mention Plato by name but it is a kind of manifesto for an anti-platonic metaphysics.

Chapter 1: A point about method.

Equivocals, or *homonyms*, are things called by the same name but having different definition eg a human being and an image of a human can in Greek, both be referred to with the word (ζῷον) ('zôon', 'animal').

Univocals, or *synonyms*, are things having the same name and the same definition eg a human being and an ox are both referred to with the name 'animal' and both satisfy the same definition of 'animal'.

The third distinction, that of *derivatively*, or *denominatively*, (= *paronymously*) named things is important because a relation between names may indicate of a relation between the things. For example that between a just (man) and justice.

Aristotle's most basic methodological point in dealing with philosophical claims is beware of equivocals. In particular being is equivocal. This is basically the principle that Aristotle uses against Plato - there is more than one sense in which something may be 'good'.

Aristotle's New Ontology.

According to the categories what is ultimately real are individual substances like Socrates and Plato. The reality of anything else depends upon, and is derived from, the reality individual substances.

Chapter 2: Aristotle produces an 'ontological inventory' by considering the different kinds of things we can truly say about the world. He distinguishes four different kinds of things by appealing, in part at least, to the way we talk about the world. We say 'Socrates is a human being' - saying 'human being' of the subject Socrates. He also appeals to the relationship of 'being in something' - His thought seems to be that 'whiteness', say, is in Socrates skin. In fact, he holds, that Socrates' whiteness is in Socrates' skin and that is a different whiteness from Plato's whiteness.

The conclusions about the most fundamentally distinct items that we can find in the world can be represented in a table:

	Not in a subject (Substance)	In a Subject (Accident)
Said of a subject (Secondary)	Human Being (a natural kind)	White (a kind of accident)
Not said of a subject (Primary)	Socrates (an individual Substance)	This White (an individual Accident)

Chapter 3. Some remarks on predication. In particular if ‘*P*’ is predicated of ‘*S*’ and ‘*Q*’ is predicated of ‘*P*’ then ‘*Q*’ is predicated of ‘*S*’. That is to say, predication-of, or being-said-of, a subject is *transitive*.

Chapter 4. Offers another kind of inventory of the world on the basis of what we can say about it.

Aristotle locates ten different kinds of being - This is his famous list of the ten *categories*:

1. Ultimate realities = substances = beings in the most fundamental sense. Answer the question ‘What is it?’ e.g. a human being.

2. Accidental = supported beings:

(2.1) ‘Quantity’ (answers: ‘how much?’) - e.g. two feet long.

(2.2) ‘Quality, or qualification’ (answers: ‘how?’) - e.g. white.

(2.3) ‘Relation or relative to’ (answers: ‘how related to’) e.g. double.

(2.4) ‘Place’ (answers: ‘where?’) e.g. in the Lyceum.

(2.5) ‘Time’ (answers: ‘when?’) e.g. yesterday.

(2.6) ‘Position’ (answers: ‘how situated?’) e.g. seated.

(2.7) ‘Habit’ (answers: ‘has what?’) e.g. has shoes on.

(2.8) ‘Action’ (answers: ‘doing what?’) e.g. cutting.

(2.9) ‘Passion’ (‘suffering what?’) e.g. being cut.

The basic model here is the subject - predicate or *categorical* proposition - a simple as distinct from a compound proposition. In ‘Socrates is a human’ The subject is ‘Socrates’, the predicate is ‘human’, or being human. The form of the sentence is ‘*S* is *P*’.

According to the *Categories*, contrary to Plato, the fundamental realities are particular individuals such as Socrates and Spot the dog. Natural kinds, for example the species human being, are secondary substances.

Chapter 5 is the most important. Aristotle notes that primary substances have the following properties:

1. They are most properly and strictly speaking real. Plato held that the Ideas are what is ultimately real.
2. Substances are all equally real and *ontologically* entirely independent of one another ('there is nothing contrary to a substance').
3. The existence of secondary substances depends on the existence of primary substances. The opposite to what Plato claimed.
4. Secondary substances are predicated synonymously of primary substances - this holds of whatever is predicated of a subject. That is to say if human being is predicated of something, then the definition of human being is predicated of it. So since Socrates is a human being, Socrates is a mortal rational animal (assuming that mortal rational animal is the definition of a human being). Here human being is the species, animal, the genus, and mortal and rational its differentia. The definition consists of the genus (animal) qualified by the appropriate differences (mortal, rational).
5. Everything else is either in a primary substance or said of a primary substance. According to Aristotle this entails that individual substances are more 'substantial', i.e. more real than their species, and the species are more substantial than their genera. Non-substantial accidents are equally dependent, though in another way, on individual substances for their being - they only exist in them. Plato held that the Forms, or Ideas, - which he also called 'species' - are more real than individuals.
6. 'Every substance appears to signify that which is individual' - Substances come in kinds and we can count them. We are dealing with a substance when we are able to say such things as 'this is an *X*' and 'this is an *X*' and 'there are two *X*s' and 'this is the same *X* as was here before'.
7. Being a substance is not a matter of degree - something is or is not a human being, no human is more or less human than any other human.
8. Most important: substances remain numerically one and the same while subject to contrary accidents. That is, they remain the same individuals while undergoing changes.

The *Categories* offers no answer to four questions:

1. What makes an individual the individual that it is?
2. What makes an individual the kind of thing that it is?

3. How is change possible?

4. What are the limits to change ?

These questions begin to be answered in the *Physics*.