

# Fragmentation in Aristotle?

Ligerz, March 2, 2018

Philipp Blum

Τὸ δὲ ὄν λέγεται μὲν πολλαχῶς, ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἓν καὶ μίαν τινὰ φύσιν καὶ οὐχ ὁμωνύμως ἀλλ' ὡσπερ καὶ τὸ ὑγιεινὸν ἅπαν πρὸς ὑγίειαν, τὸ μὲν τῷ φυλάττειν τὸ δὲ (35) τῷ ποιεῖν τὸ δὲ τῷ σημείον εἶναι τῆς ὑγείας τὸ δ' ὅτι (1003b) δεκτικὸν αὐτῆς, καὶ τὸ ἰατρικὸν πρὸς ἰατρικὴν (τὸ μὲν γὰρ τῷ ἔχειν ἰατρικὴν λέγεται ἰατρικὸν τὸ δὲ τῷ εὐφυεῖς εἶναι πρὸς αὐτήν τὸ δὲ τῷ ἔργον εἶναι τῆς ἰατρικῆς), ὁμοιοτρόπως δὲ καὶ ἄλλα ληψόμεθα λεγόμενα τούτοις, -- οὕτω δὲ καὶ τὸ ὄν λέγεται πολλαχῶς μὲν ἀλλ' ἅπαν (5) πρὸς μίαν ἀρχήν· τὰ μὲν γὰρ ὅτι οὐσίαι, ὄντα λέγεται, τὰ δ' ὅτι πάθη οὐσίαις, τὰ δ' ὅτι ὁδὸς εἰς οὐσίαν ἢ φθοραὶ ἢ στερήσεις ἢ ποιότητες ἢ ποιητικὰ ἢ γεννητικὰ οὐσίαις ἢ τῶν πρὸς τὴν οὐσίαν λεγομένων, ἢ τούτων τινὸς ἀποφάσεις ἢ οὐσίαις· διὸ καὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν εἶναι μὴ ὄν φαμεν. (10) καθάπερ οὖν καὶ τῶν ὑγιεινῶν ἀπάντων μία ἐπιστήμη ἔστιν, ὁμοίως τοῦτο καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων. οὐ γὰρ μόνον τῶν καθ' ἓν ἐν λεγομένων ἐπιστήμη ἔστι θεωρῆσαι μῖα ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν πρὸς μίαν λεγομένων φύσιν· καὶ γὰρ ταῦτα τρόπον τινὰ λέγονται καθ' ἓν. δῆλον οὖν ὅτι καὶ τὰ ὄντα μῖα θεωρῆσαι (15) ἢ ὄντα. (1003a22 – 1003b16)

There are many senses in which a thing may be said to 'be', but they are related to one central point, one definite kind of thing, and are not homonymous. [35] Everything which is healthy is related to health, one thing in the sense that it preserves health, another in the sense that it produces it, another in the sense that it is a symptom of health, another because it is capable of it. And that which is [1003b1] medical is relative to the medical art, one thing in the sense that it possesses it, another in the sense that it is naturally adapted to it, another in the sense that it is a function of the medical art. And we shall find other words used similarly to these. [5] So, too, there are many senses in which a thing is said to be, but all refer to one starting-point; some things are said to be because they are substances, others because they are affections of substance, others because they are a process towards substance, or destructions or privations or qualities of substance, or productive or generative of substance, or of things which are relative to substance, or negations of [10] some of these things or of substance itself. It is for this reason that we say even of non-being that it is non-being. As, then, there is one science which deals with all healthy things, the same applies in the other cases also. For not only in the case of things which have one common notion does the investigation belong to one science, but also in the case of things which are related to one common nature; for even these in a sense have one common notion. It is clear then that it is the work of one science [15] also to study all things that are, qua being. (Aristotle 2011: 341f)

The multiplicity of 'to on' is shared by 'to hen', as they differ only by logos:

εἰ δὴ τὸ ὄν καὶ τὸ ἐν ταῦτόν καὶ μία φύσις τῷ ἀκολουθεῖν ἀλλήλοις ὡσπερ ἀρχὴ καὶ αἴτιον, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὡς ἐνὶ λόγῳ δηλοῦ-μενα (δι-αφέρει δὲ οὐδὲν οὐδ' ἂν ὁμοίως ὑπολάβωμεν, ἀλλὰ (25) καὶ πρὸ ἔργου μᾶλλον)· ταῦτό γὰρ εἰς ἄνθρωπος καὶ ἄνθρωπος, καὶ ὄν ἄνθρωπος καὶ ἄνθρωπος, καὶ οὐχ ἕτερον τι δηλοῖ κατὰ τὴν λέξιν ἐπαναδιπλούμενον τὸ εἰς ἄνθρωπος καὶ εἰς ὄν ἄνθρωπος (δῆλον δ' ὅτι οὐ χωρίζεται οὐτ' ἐπὶ γενέσεως οὐτ' ἐπὶ φθορᾶς), ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ ἐνός, ὡστε φανερόν ὅτι (30) ἢ πρόσθεσις ἐν τούτοις ταῦτό δηλοῖ, καὶ οὐδὲν ἕτερον τὸ ἐν παρὰ τὸ ὄν, ἔτι δ' ἢ ἐκάστου οὐσία ἐν ἔστιν οὐ κατὰ συμβε-βηκός, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἕπερ ὄν τι. — ὡσθ' ὅσα περ τοῦ ἐνός εἶδη, τὸσαῦτα καὶ τοῦ ὄντος. (1003b22-34)

If, now, being and unity are the same and are one thing in the sense that they are implied in one another as principle and cause are, not in the sense that they are explained by the same formula (though it makes no difference even if we interpret [25] them similarly – in fact this would strengthen our case); for one man and a man are the same thing and existent man and a man are the same thing, and the doubling of the words in 'one man' and 'one existent man' does not give any new meaning (it is clear that they are not separated either in coming to be or in ceasing to be); and similarly with 'one', so that it is obvious that the addition in these cases means the [30] same thing, and unity is nothing apart from being; and if, further, the essence of each thing is one in no merely accidental way, and similarly is from its very nature something that is: – all this being so, there must be exactly as many species of being as of unity. (Aristotle 2014: 341f)

Being and being one co-entail each other: as one man is automatically one existing man (so *on* does not add anything to *hen*), so existing man is automatically one existing man (and *hen* does not add anything to *on*).

Is being a species? Is this required for there being a science of being qua being? In the immediate continuation of this, Aristotle says that the first science is ‘generically one’:

περὶ ὧν τὸ τί ἐστὶ τῆς αὐτῆς ἐπιστήμης τῷ γένει θεωρῆσαι, λέγω δὲ ὅσον περὶ (35) ταύτου καὶ ὁμοίου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν τοιούτων. σχεδὸν δὲ (1004a) πάντα ἀνάγεται τάναντία εἰς τὴν ἀρχὴν ταύτην· τεθεω- ρήσθω δὲ ἡμῖν ταῦτα ἐν τῇ ἐκλογῇ τῶν ἐναντίων. καὶ τοσαῦτα μέρη φιλοσοφίας ἔστιν ὅσα περ αἰ οὐσίαι· ὥστε ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι τινα πρώτην καὶ ἐχομένην αὐτῶν. ὑπάρ- χει γὰρ εὐθὺς γένη ἔχον τὸ ὄν [καὶ τὸ ἔν]· διὸ καὶ αἰ (5) ἐπιστήμαι ἀκολουθήσουσι τούτοις. ἔστι γὰρ ὁ φιλόσοφος ὡσπερ ὁ μαθηματικὸς λεγόμενος· καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴ ἔχει μέρη, καὶ πρώτη τις καὶ δευτέρα ἔστιν ἐπιστήμη καὶ ἄλλαι ἐφεξῆς ἐν τοῖς μαθημασιν. (1003b34-1004a8)

And to investigate the essence of these is the work of a science which is generically one – I mean, for instance, the discussion of the same and the similar [35] and the other concepts of this sort; and nearly all contraries are referred to this source; but let us take them as having been investigated in the Selection of [1004a] Contraries’. – And there are as many parts of philosophy as there are kinds of substance, so that there must necessarily be among them a first philosophy and one which follows this. For being falls immediately into genera; and therefore the [5] sciences too will correspond to these genera. For ‘philosopher’ is like ‘mathematician’; for mathematics also has parts, and there is a first and a second science and other successive ones within the sphere of mathematics. (Aristotle 2014: 3412-3)

But how does this fare with the passage in *Physics* where Aristotle seems to **deny** fragmentation? In *Physics* I.6, Aristotle briefly considers the possibility that there might be more than one pair of opposites, more than one way of things being different from each other than by either having or lacking qualitative characteristics. The argument he gives to rule out this possibility is very interesting:

ἅμα δὲ καὶ ἀδύνατον πλείους εἶναι ἐναντιώσεις τὰς πρώτας. ἡ γὰρ οὐσία ἐν τι γένος ἐστὶ τοῦ ὄντος, ὥστε τῷ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον διαίσευσιν ἀλλήλων αἰ ἀρχαὶ μόνον, ἀλλ’ οὐ τῷ γένει· αἰ γὰρ ἐν ἐνὶ γένει μία ἐναντιώσις ἔστιν, πᾶσαι τε αἰ ἐναντιώσεις ἀνάγεσθαι δοκοῦσιν εἰς μίαν. (189b22-27)

Moreover, it is impossible that there should be more than one *primary* contrariety. For substance is a single genus of being, so that the principles can differ only as prior and posterior, *not* in genus; for in a single genus there is always a single contrariety; all the other contraries in it being held to be reducible to one. (Aristotle 2014: 718)

Moreover, there cannot be more than one primary opposition. Reality is a single kind of thing, so that the principles can differ only in being prior or posterior to one another, and not in kind. In any one kind there is always one opposition, and all oppositions seem to reduce to one. (Aristotle 1992: 14)

“*ousia*” is here to be understood as “thing”, whatever fundamentally is, so that its genus encompasses absolutely everything.<sup>1</sup>

## References

- Aristotle, 1992. *Physics, Books I and II*. 2 edition. Clarendon Aristotle Series, ed. J.L. Ackrill and Lindsay Judson, Oxford: Clarendon Press. Translated by William Charlton.
- Aristotle, 2011. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press. Translated, with an interpretive essay, notes, and glossary by Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins.
- Aristotle, 2014. *The Complete Works of Aristotle – The Revised Oxford Translation*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

1. It is an interesting fact that Aristotle is both a pluralist about modes of being (“being is spoken of in many ways”...) and at the same time allows for absolutely unrestricted quantification, over the genus of *ousia*.