

The Problem of the Transcendentals

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Being is not a genus

Suppose Being were a genus and substances one of its species, SUBSTANTIAL being the specific difference. SUBSTANTIAL also is, so it is itself among the exemplars of the genus. Does it belong to the species of substances or not? If it does, then it is a substance and is substantial. But then it is separated and the same in kind as its exemplars, and shares with them itself – a third man problem if there ever was one. If it does not belong to itself, on the other hand, then it is not a substance and not separated – but how can it then be, and be the specific difference of a species?

If ANIMAL were predicable of RATIONAL, taken apart from RATIONAL ANIMAL, then RATIONAL would be an animal, but then RATIONAL would be ANIMAL, i.e. all animals would be rational and RATIONAL would not mark out a species among the genus, but be the same as ANIMAL.

How being can be unified even if it is not a genus is one of the problems set for the *Metaphysics* to solve. The question is involved already in the 7th aporia of *Met.* Beta:

πρὸς δὲ τούτοις εἰ καὶ ὅτι μάλιστα ἀρχαὶ τὰ γένη εἰσὶ, πότερον δεῖ νομίζειν τὰ πρῶτα τῶν γενῶν ἀρχὰς ἢ τὰ (15) ἔσχατα κατηγορούμενα ἐπὶ τῶν ἀτόμων; καὶ γὰρ τοῦτο ἔχει ἀμφισβήτησιν. εἰ μὲν γὰρ αἰεὶ τὰ καθόλου μᾶλλον ἀρχαί, φανερόν ὅτι τὰ ἀνωτάτω τῶν γενῶν· ταῦτα γὰρ λέγεται κατὰ πάντων. τσαῦτα οὖν ἔσονται ἀρχαὶ τῶν ὄντων ὅσα κατὰ πάντων. τσαῦτα οὖν ἔσονται ἀρχαὶ τῶν ὄντων ὅσα περὶ τὰ πρῶτα γένη, ὥστ' ἔσται τό τε ὄν καὶ τὸ ἐν ἀρχαί καὶ (20) οὐσίαι· ταῦτα γὰρ κατὰ πάντων μάλιστα λέγεται τῶν ὄντων. οὐχ οἷόν τε δὲ τῶν ὄντων ἐν εἶναι γένος οὔτε τὸ ἐν οὔτε τὸ ὄν· ἀνάγκη μὲν γὰρ τὰς διαφορὰς ἐκάστου γένους καὶ εἶναι καὶ μίαν εἶναι ἐκάστην, ἀδύνατον δὲ κατηγορεῖσθαι ἢ τὰ εἶδη τοῦ γένους ἐπὶ τῶν οἰκείων διαφορῶν ἢ τὸ γένος ἄνευ τῶν αὐτοῦ (25) εἰδῶν, ὥστ' εἶπερ τὸ ἐν γένος ἢ τὸ ὄν, οὐδεμία διαφορὰ οὔτε ὄν οὔτε ἐν ἔσται. ἀλλὰ μὴν εἰ μὴ γένη, οὐδ' ἀρχαὶ ἔσονται, εἶπερ ἀρχαὶ τὰ γένη. (998b14-28)

For if the universal is always more of a principle, evidently the uppermost of the genera are the principles; for these are predicated of all things. There will, then, be as many principles of things as there are primary genera, so that both being and unity will be principles and substances; [20] for these are most of all predicated of all things. But it is not possible that either unity or being should be a genus of things; for the differentiae of any genus must each of them both have being and be one, but it is not possible for the genus to be predicated of the differentiae taken apart from the species (any more than for the [25] species of the genus to be predicated of the proper differentiae of the genus); so that if unity or being is a genus, no differentia will either be one or have being. But if unity and being are not genera, neither will they be principles, if the genera are the principles. (Aristotle 2014: 3397)

It recurs in the *n*th one horn of which is that there is no universal knowledge (knowledge of something true of everything), if there is not anything all things share:

Ἔστι δ' ἐχομένη τε τούτων ἀπορία καὶ πασῶν χαλεπώτατη καὶ ἀναγκαιότατη θεωρῆσαι, περὶ ἧς ὁ λόγος ἐφέ- (25) στηκε νῦν. εἴτε γὰρ μὴ ἔστι τι παρὰ τὰ καθ' ἕκαστα, τὰ δὲ καθ' ἕκαστα ἄπειρα, τῶν δ' ἀπείρων πῶς ἐνδέχεται λα- βεῖν ἐπιστήμην; ἢ γὰρ ἐν τι καὶ ταῦτόν, καὶ ἢ καθόλου τι ὑπάρχει, ταύτη πάντα γνωρίζομεν. —ἀλλὰ μὴν εἰ τοῦτο ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστι καὶ δεῖ τι εἶναι παρὰ τὰ

καθ' ἕκαστα, ἀναγκαῖον (30) ἂν εἴη τὰ γένη εἶναι παρὰ τὰ καθ' ἕκαστα, ἦτοι τὰ ἔσχατα ἢ τὰ πρῶτα· τοῦτο δ' ὅτι ἀδύνατον ἄρτι διηπορήσαμεν. (999a24-32)

If, on the one hand, there is nothing apart from individual things, and the individuals are infinite in number, how is it possible to get knowledge of the infinite individuals? For all things that we know, we know in so far as they have some unity and identity, and in so far as some attribute belongs to them universally. – But if this

is necessary, and [30] there must be something apart from the individuals, it will be necessary that the genera exist apart from the individuals, – either the lowest or the highest genera; but we found by discussion just now that this is impossible. (Aristotle 2014: 339b-9)

The other horn of the dilemma is that whatever it is that all things have in common, it will not be different from them, but rather identical to each of them; because it is identical to itself, everything will be one, i.e. there will only be one thing:

ἔτι δὲ περὶ τῶν ἀρχῶν καὶ τὸδε ἀπορήσειεν ἄν τις. εἰ μὲν γὰρ εἶδει εἶσιν ἓν, οὐθὲν (25) ἔσται ἀριθμῶ ἓν, οὐδ' αὐτὸ τὸ ἓν καὶ τὸ ὄν· καὶ τὸ ἐπίστα-σθαι πῶς ἔσται, εἰ μὴ τι ἔσται ἐν ἐπὶ πάντων; — ἀλλὰ μὴν εἰ ἀριθμῶ ἓν καὶ μία ἐκάστη τῶν ἀρχῶν, καὶ μὴ ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἄλλαι ἄλλων (οἷον τῆσδε τῆς συλλαβῆς τῷ εἶδει τῆς αὐτῆς οὔσης καὶ αἱ ἀρχαὶ εἶδει αἱ αὐταί· καὶ (30) γὰρ αὐταὶ ὑπάρχουσι ἀριθμῶ ἕτεραι), — εἰ δὲ μὴ οὕτως ἀλλ' αἱ τῶν ὄντων ἀρχαὶ ἀριθμῶ ἓν εἶσιν, οὐκ ἔσται παρὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα οὐθὲν ἕτερον· τὸ γὰρ ἀριθμῶ ἓν ἢ τὸ καθ' ἕκαστον στοιχεῖα οὐθὲν ἕτερον· τὸ γὰρ ἀριθμῶ ἓν ἢ τὸ καθ' ἕκαστον λέγειν διαφέρει οὐθέν· οὕτω γὰρ λέγομεν τὸ καθ' ἕκαστον, (1000a) τὸ ἀριθμῶ ἓν, καθόλου δὲ τὸ ἐπὶ τούτων. ὥσπερ οὖν εἰ τὰ τῆς φωνῆς ἀριθμῶ ἦν στοιχεῖα ὠρισμένα, ἀναγκαῖον ἦν ἂν το-σαῦτα εἶναι τὰ πάντα γράμματα ὥσπερ τὰ στοιχεῖα, μὴ ὄντων γε δύο τῶν αὐτῶν μηδὲ πλειόνων. (999b24-1000a4) ἀλλὰ μὴν εἴ γ' ἔσται τι αὐτὸ ὄν καὶ αὐτὸ ἓν, πολλὰ ἀπορία πῶς ἔσται τι παρὰ (30) ταῦτα ἕτερον, λέγω δὲ πῶς ἔσται πλείω ἐνός τὰ ὄντα. τὸ γὰρ ἕτερον τοῦ ὄντος οὐκ ἔστιν, ὥστε κατὰ τὸν Παρμενίδου συμβαίνει ἀνάγκη λόγον ἐν ἅπαντα εἶναι τὰ ὄντα καὶ (1001b) τοῦτο εἶναι τὸ ὄν. (1001a29-1001b1)

Again, one might ask the following question also about the first principles. If they are one in kind only, nothing will be numerically one, not even unity-itself and [25] being-itself. And how will it be possible to know, if there is not to be something common to a whole set of individuals? But if there is a common element which is numerically one, and each of the principles is one, and the principles are not as in the case of perceptible things different for different things (e.g. since this particular syllable is the same in kind whenever it occurs, the elements of it are also the same [30] in kind; only in kind, for these also, like the syllable, are numerically different in different contexts), – if the principles of things are not one in this sense, but are numerically one, there will be nothing else besides the elements; for there is no difference of meaning between ‘numerically one’ and ‘individual’. For this is just what we mean by the individual—the numerically one, and by the universal we mean that which is predicable of the individuals. Therefore it is just as, if the [1000a] elements of articulate sound were limited in number, all the literature in the world would be confined to the ABC, since there could not be two or more letters of the same kind. (Aristotle 2014: 3400-1) But if there is to be a being-itself and a unity-itself, there is much difficulty in seeing how there will be anything else besides [30] these—I mean, how things will be more than one in number. For what is different from being does not exist, so that it necessarily follows, according to the argument of Parmenides, that all things that are are one and this is being. (Aristotle 2014: 3405)

What is Aristotle’s solution of the aporia? In what sense is being unified in the absence of there being a being-itself? By being said in many ways. It is unified by being exhausted by the reference point that is common to everything there is: *OUSIA*, which is a genus. But it is variegated by being (in each of its four senses?) only homonomously predicable across categories. The first philosophy studies *ousia*, i.e. the kind *OUSIA* and the exemplars of its species, and all other things that are related to it, like medicine studies *health*, i.e. the kind *HEALTHY STATE OF BODY* and its exemplars, and all other things that may be said (in different ways) to be healthy as well. It is in virtue of its first characteristic (common reference point) that it is possible at all that there is a first philosophy; and it is in virtue of its second characteristic (in no single way universally predicable) that there are other sciences than it.

One is not Being, but is not Notbeing either

The problem of the transcendentals: how can intensionally different predicates be universally predicable?

Everything there is, is one and whatever is one, is. Being and One both are, so they are one. But they are not identical, for they are two; but they are not really non-identical either, because in the absence of an extensional difference, they would have to differ in account, i.e. to differ by some property; but whatever property is had by being, is had by everything there is, including One; and everything that is true of one, is true of everything, including Being.

The grounds of numerical multiplicity

Numerical multiplicity is a given: in the same way we are entitled to *assume* that there is change, we are entitled to assume that there is more than one thing. As with change, however, we need an account: what is it in virtue of which there are two things that are not identical? Two such things, because they both are, do not differ with respect to Being – they need to differ by something else than Being.

Esse autem, in quantum est esse, non potest esse diversum: potest autem diversificari per aliquid quod est praeter esse. (Sum. c. Gent. II, 52) Being, as being, cannot be diverse; but it can be diversified by something beside itself. (St. Thomas Aquinas 1975: 153)

What they differ in is in having different contraries: there is no contrary to being, but there is multiplicity:

ἐπεὶ δὲ μιᾶς τάντικείμενα θεωρῆσαι, τῷ δὲ ἐνὶ ἀντίκειται πληθὺς—ἀπόφασιν δὲ καὶ (10) στέρησιν μιᾶς ἐστὶ θεωρῆσαι διὰ τὸ ἀμφοτέρως θεωρεῖσθαι στέρησιν μιᾶς ἐστὶ θεωρῆσαι διὰ τὸ ἀμφοτέρως θεωρεῖσθαι τὸ ἐν οὐ ἢ ἀπόφασιν ἢ ἢ στέρησιν (ἢ <γὰρ> ἀπλῶς λέγομεν ὅτι οὐχ ὑπάρχει ἐκεῖνο, ἢ τινὶ γένει· ἔνθα μὲν οὖν τῷ ἐνὶ ἢ διαφορὰ πρόσεστι παρὰ τὸ ἐν τῇ ἀποφάσει, ἀπουσία γὰρ ἢ ἀπόφασιν ἐκεῖνου ἐστίν, ἐν δὲ τῇ στέρησει καὶ ὑποκει- (15) μένη τις φύσις γίνεσθαι καθ' ἣς λέγεται ἢ στέρησιν) [τῷ δ' ἐνὶ πληθὺς ἀντίκειται]—ὥστε καὶ τάντικείμενα τοῖς εἰρη- μένοις, τὸ τε ἕτερον καὶ ἀνόμοιον καὶ ἄνισον καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα λέγεται ἢ κατὰ ταῦτα ἢ κατὰ πληθὺς καὶ τὸ ἐν, τῆς εἰρημένης γνωρίζειν ἐπιστή- μης· ὧν ἐστὶ καὶ ἢ ἐναντιό- (20) τῆς διαφορὰ γὰρ τις ἢ ἐναντιό- τῆς, ἢ δὲ διαφορὰ ἕτερό- τῆς. ὥστ' ἐπειδὴ πολλαχῶς τὸ ἐν λέγε- ται, καὶ ταῦτα πολ- λαχῶς μὲν λεχθήσεται, ὅμως δὲ μιᾶς ἅπαντ' ἐστὶ γνωρί- ζειν· οὐ γὰρ εἰ πολλαχῶς, ἕτερας, ἀλλ' εἰ μήτε καθ' ἐν μήτε πρὸς ἐν οἱ λόγοι ἀναφέρονται. (1004a9-25)

Now since it is the work of one science to investigate opposites, and plurality is [10] opposite to unity, and it belongs to one science to investigate the negation and the privation because in both cases we are really investigating unity, to which the negation or the privation refers (for we either say simply that unity is not present, or that it is not present in some particular class; in the latter case the characteristic difference of the class modifies the meaning of 'unity', as compared with the meaning conveyed in the bare negation; for the negation means just the absence of [15] unity, while in privation there is also implied an underlying nature of which the privation is predicated),—in view of all these facts, the contraries of the concepts we named above, the other and the dissimilar and the unequal, and everything else which is derived either from these or from plurality and unity, must fall within the province of the science above-named.—And contrariety is one of these concepts, for [20] contrariety is a kind of difference, and difference is a kind of otherness. Therefore, since there are many senses in which a thing is said to be one, these terms also will have many senses, but yet it belongs to one science to consider them all; for a term belongs to different sciences not if it has different senses, but if its definitions [25] neither are identical nor can be referred to one central meaning. (Aristotle 2014: 34¹²⁻¹³)

References

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