

# The Ten Categories of Being



*The Primacy of Substance*



# Two Sentences

- ❖ Socrates is pale.
- ❖ Socrates is human.
- ❖ Two observations:
  - ❖ There is no reason to assume that the deep grammar of these sentences matches their surface grammar.
  - ❖ There is some reason to assume that the first is a case of *accidental* predication, and the second of *essential* predication.



# Two Consequences

- ❖ There are irreducibly distinct kinds of beings.
- ❖ To ask whether something exists or not is, in part at least, to ask what kind of thing it is.



# An Odd Sort of Contention

‘Of things said without combination, each signifies either:  
(i) a substance (*ousia*); (ii) a quantity; (iii) a quality; (iv) a  
relative; (v) a where; (vi) a when; (vii) being in a position;  
(viii) having; (ix) acting upon; or (x) a being affected’ (*Cat.*  
1b25-27).



# Said without combination?

- ❖ Consider: 'Man runs.'
- ❖ The expression 'man' signifies something said without combination.
- ❖ The expression 'runs' signifies something said without combination.
- ❖ Aristotle evidently presumes that there are semantic and metaphysical *basic units*.
  - ❖ On the semantic side, they are below the level of the truth-evaluable.
  - ❖ On the metaphysical side, they are below the level of facticity, or of truth-makers.
  - ❖ N.b. that 'basic' does not mean absolutely simple.



# The Ten Categories of Being

The Categories:

Category	Example
Substance	man, horse
Quantity	two-feet long
Quality	white,
Relative	double, slave
Place	in the Lyceum
Time	yesterday, now
Position	lying, sitting
Having	has shoes on
Acting upon	cutting, burning
Being affected	being cut or burnt



# Two Obvious Questions (Two Difficult Questions)

- ❖ What do these categories categorize?
- ❖ Where do these categories originate?



# The categories of being categorise. . .

- ❖ . . .beings (*Cat.* 1a20).
  - ❖ . . . not words, but things signified by words.
  - ❖ . . .not just any things, but basic units.
  - ❖ . . .not our conceptual scheme, but what our conceptual scheme reflects (if it adequately reflects the basic divisions of the world).
    - ❖ Aristotle assumes—and does not argue for—a basic metaphysical realism: the world exists as structured prior to our conceptual interaction with it.



# Whence the categories?

- ❖ A reasonable complaint from Kant (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A81/B107)
- ❖ ‘Aristotle’s search for these fundamental concepts was an effort worthy of an acute man. But since he had no principle [of generation for them], he rounded them up as he stumbled upon them, and first got up a list of ten of them, which he called **categories** (predicaments). Subsequently he believed that he had found five more of them, which he added under the name of post-predicaments. But his table still had holes.’



# Three Methods of Generation

- ❖ Codified Common Sense
- ❖ The Way of the Interrogative
  - ❖ Iterated 'What is it?'
  - ❖ Articulated 'What kind is it?'
- ❖ Necessary Connections



# The Way of the Interrogative

- ❖ Take a random specimen, Socrates and:
  - ❖ ask repeatedly of him, ‘What is it?’
  - ❖ ask selectively of him, ‘What kind is it?’



# On Behalf of the Way of the Interrogative

- ❖ It coheres with Aristotle's actual procedure
- ❖ The category heads seem to be adjectival versions of questions one might ask:
  - ❖ what is it? ⇨ what it is (*ti esti/ousia*) = substance
  - ❖ what sort? ⇨ this sort (*poion*) = quality
  - ❖ how much? ⇨ this much (*poson*) = quantity



# Against the Way of the Interrogative

- ❖ It seems ultimately liable to Kant's complaint:
- ❖ How do we restrict our initial answers?
- ❖ What justifies the selection of questions?



# Necessary Connection

- ❖ A category is the kind of thing a primary substance must be if that primary substance is to exist at all.
- ❖ So, e.g., if Socrates is to exist, then he must be some sort of thing or other.
- ❖ Again, if Socrates is to exist, then he must have some quality or other, have some quantity or other, be somewhere or other. . .



# The Primacy of Primary Substance

- ❖ N.b.: a primary substance is a primary *being* (*protê ousia*)
- ❖ Primacy:
  - ❖ Every primary substance signifies ‘some this’ (a *tode ti*), that is, a particular of some sort (*Cat.* 3b10-23).
  - ❖ Substances have nothing contrary to them (*Cat.* 3b24-32).
  - ❖ Substances do not admit of a more or less (*Cat.* 3b33-4b9).
  - ❖ It is most distinctive of substance that it remains numerically one and the same while receiving contraries (*Cat.* 4b10-21).



# Most Importantly

‘All other things are either *said-of* primary substances, which are their subjects, or are *in* them as subjects. Hence, if there were no primary substances, it would be impossible for anything else to exist’ (*Cat.* 2b5-6).



# The Argument

1. If all things other than primary substances are either said-of or in primary substances, then if there were no primary substances, nothing else could exist.
2. All other things are either said-of or in primary substance.
3. Hence, if there were no primary substances, nothing else could exist.
4. If (3), then primary substances are primary.
5. So, primary substances are primary.