

Being into Substance

A Principle of Being?

Being into Substance Substance into Substance

- ✿ ‘Indeed, what was sought of old and is sought at present and always, and what is always a matter of difficulty, namely what is being? (*ti to on*) is this: what is substance? (*tis hê ousia*) (*Met.* 1028b2-4).’
- ✿ ‘If there is no substance other than those which are formed by nature, natural science will be the first science; but if there is an immovable substance, the science of this must be prior and must be first philosophy, and universal in this way, because it is first. And it will belong to this to consider being *qua* being—both what it is and the attributes which belong to it *qua* being.’ (*Met.* 1026a 23-32)

General and Special Ontology

- ✿ General Ontology (GO): that science (*epistêmê*) which takes as its object being (*to on*)
 - ✿ Taken intensionally: this object of study would be the property *being*, which all and only beings have in common
 - ✿ Taken extensionally: this object is the class of all beings (all *onta*)
 - ✿ Here the *qua* locution might be understood as a sort of filter, such that this study might simply consider any arbitrary being (*on*) as representative
- ✿ Special Ontology (SO): that science (*epistêmê*) which takes as its object substance (*ousia*)
 - ✿ Substance (*ousia*) is here understood to be a certain kind of categorially delimited being, something held to be somehow primary and prior to other kinds of beings.
 - ✿ Here we might also highlight Super Special Ontology (SSO): that science (*epistêmê*) which takes as its object one special substance (*ousia*), namely the divine being.

Some *a priori* Possibilities

- ✿ SO alone is in view: SO supplants general ontology.
 - ✿ This is a witting or unwitting change of topic.
 - ✿ BqB is SSO, and its object is the divine being (Asclepius, *in Met.* 1.1-20; Schwegler (1847, §IV)
- ✿ GO alone is in view. SO never makes an appearance, even implicitly.
 - ✿ Core-dependent homonymy licences the shift. (Robin, Owen)
 - ✿ Being (*to on*) is the subject matter; substance is the principle (*archê*) or cause (*aition*) [Aquinas's contention]
- ✿ Both GO and SO are in view.
 - ✿ This is unfortunate, since they are distinct and Aristotle conflates them.
 - ✿ This is perfectly fine, since though distinct these two sciences are somehow complementary—perhaps, e.g., one is a species of the other, or one is causally focal (Theophrastus, *Met.* I, 1-4)
 - ✿ This is perfectly fine, since though distinct these two sciences are somehow together from one science. (Alexander, *in Met.* 245.29-246.13; Syrianus, *in Met.* 55.3-16)

SO/SSO

- ✦ No-one has hitherto made clear that this equivocal conception of the task of πρώτη φιλοσοφία [first philosophy] contains an insufferable contradiction, because ὄν ἀπλῶς or ἡ ὄν [being *simpliciter* or *qua* being] and τι καὶ ὄν γένος τι [something and being some genus] are mutually exclusive opposites. . . As a result it is impossible that it should in fact be on the hand a universal science, the science that is fundamental for all beings, but on the other hand, at the same time, a science of immaterial, unchangeable Being, as the most excellent class of Being.’—Natorp (1888, 49-50)
- ✦ Accordingly, there is no special science of god, no ‘theology’ different from the πρώτη φιλοσοφία [first philosophy]; but just as little can πρώτη φιλοσοφία be identified with θεολογική [theology], because the divinity cannot form the object, but only one object of the πρώτη φιλοσοφία. Natorp (1888, 52-53)
- ✦ The gloss (scil. ‘universal in this way, because it is first’; *Met.* 1026a30) does not remove the contradiction. On the contrary, it only makes it more obvious. —Jaeger (1923, 218)

An Argument and a Postponement

✿ The argument:

1. Sciences (*epistêmai*) are individuated by their domains.
2. If (1), then if two sciences have non-co-extensive domains, they cannot be the same science.
3. So, if two sciences have non-co-extensive domains, they cannot be the same science.
4. The science of being *qua* being takes as its domain all beings, just in so far as they are beings.
5. Theology (first philosophy) takes as its domain the separate, immobile substance.
6. The separate, immobile substance is not co-extensive with all beings, just in so far as they are beings.
7. So, theology (first philosophy) is not the same science as the science of BqB.

✿ The postponement: let us see which, if any of these premises is false by looking at Aristotle's actual treatment of substance (*ousia*).

The Extension of Substance

- ✿ Are only animals and plants and their parts substances? Are natural bodies (specified as fire and water and earth and anything of this kind) and their parts substances? Are the things constituted by natural bodies (the cosmos and its parts, the sun, the moon and stars) substances? Should we say that (i) some of these and not others, or (ii) some of these and some things not mentioned, or (iii) none of these are substances (*Met. Z* 2. 1028b8-15)?
- ✿ Here we may reflect on variously progressive sense of 'things'.

Some Candidates

- ✿ ‘Substance is spoken of if not in more senses, still at least in reference to four main objects; for both the essence and the universal and the genus are thought to be the substance of each thing, and fourthly the substratum. Now the substratum is that of which other things are predicated, while it is itself not predicated of anything else. And so we must first determine the nature of this; for that which underlies a thing primarily is thought to be in the truest sense substance.’ (*Met.* 20128b33-1029a2)

Some Initial Observations

- ✿ In *Met. Z 2*, we seemed concerned with the question: what is substance (*ousia*)?
 - ✿ This question seemed an extensional question, viz. which things are substances? Here ‘substance’ (*ousia*) is evidently count-nounish.
 - ✿ Call the free-standing substance, or FSS.
- ✿ In *Met. Z 3*, we kick off with a seemingly very different question, at least at first: what is the substance *of* something?
 - ✿ Call this the syntactically incomplete substance, or SIS: it always requires a complement for completion.
 - ✿ Substance is always the substance *of* something. Here ‘substance’, if not obviously mass noun-ish, is not obviously count-nounish.
 - ✿ ‘...at least at first’ because our fourth candidate, the substratum does not appear to be treated in a co-ordinate manner.

A Question from these Initial Observations

- ✿ What is the relation between FSS and SIS, if any?
- ✿ Two preliminary possibilities:
 - ✿ x is a substance *iff* (i) there is some y and (ii) y is the substance of x
 - ✿ This seems to privilege FSS.
 - ✿ x is a substance *iff* (i) there is some y and (ii) x is the substance of y
 - ✿ This seems to privilege SIS
- ✿ One small argument on behalf of the latter: Z 3 seems to argue that *if* we say that the substance of a thing is its substratum, then matter will be a substance, which is impossible.
 - ✿ This seems to rely on the thought that when x is the substance *of* something (SIS), then it is *a* substance (FSS).

The Substratum

- ✿ The substratum is, in any event, a candidate for being *ousia*—and we should deal with it first:
 - ✿ Recall: ‘Now the substratum is that of which other things are predicated, while it is itself not predicated of anything else.’ (*Met.* 1029b36-37)
 - ✿ x is a substratum (*hupokeimenon*) =_{df} (i) other things are predicated of x; and (ii) x is not predicated of anything else.
- ✿ Cf. *Categories* 2a11-14
 - ✿ There, however, Aristotle seemed not to recognise the metaphysical complexity of hylomorphism.
 - ✿ The substrate test seems to favour matter and the compound of form and matter as substance.
- ✿ Here we may likewise reflect on progressively restrictive notions of ‘subject’.

A Surprising Gloss

- ✿ ‘And in one sense matter is said to be of the nature of substratum, in another, shape (*morphê*), and in a third sense, the compound of these.’ (1028b36-7; cf. 1046b30-32)
 - ✿ In one way, this is unsurprising: these are all subjects of predication.
 - ✿ In another way, though, one candidate is arresting: the form is predicated of the matter.
 - ✿ In fact, as Bostock (75) says: ‘This is immensely puzzling. . .form must surely be predicated of the matter, and apparently of the compound too.’ (Cf. 1038b4-6, 1043a5-6, 1049a4-6, but also 1042a4-6, where we have this same contention.)
 - ✿ Irwin’s way out: accept the refined version of the subject criterion from the next chapter (1030a10-11): the actual criterion for substance is being an ultimate subject, where this involves one thing’s being predicated of another, in which case, arguably, form will fail this test.
 - ✿ Another way out: universal forms fail the criterion, but particular forms pass.

General Tendency of Z 3

1. If we think that the substratum is substance, then we will be compelled to think that matter is substance.
2. Matter cannot be substance.
3. So, we should not think that the substratum is substance.
 - ✿ Why (2)?
 - ✿ Well, whatever is substance must be both separate (*chôriston*) and some this (*tode ti*). So,
 1. If x is a substance, x must here both be both separate (*chôriston*) and some this (*tode ti*).
 2. Matter is neither separate (*chôriston*) nor some this (*tode ti*) [or matter is not *both* separate (*chôriston*) and some this (*tode ti*)].
 3. So, matter cannot be substance.

Against the Substrate Criterion

- ✦ Applied remorselessly, the substratum tests yields matter as substance, but ‘this is impossible’:
- ✦ ‘For those who adopt this point of view, then, it follows that matter is substance. But this is impossible; for both separability and individuality are thought to belong chiefly to substance. And so form and the compound of form and matter would be thought to be substance, rather than matter. The substance compounded of both, i.e. of matter and shape, may be dismissed; for it is posterior and its nature is obvious. And matter also is in a sense manifest. But we must inquire into the third kind of substance; for this is the most difficult.’ (*Met.* 1029a25-a34)

Two Tasks

- ✿ Why does the substrate criterion lead to matter as substance?
- ✿ Why is it impossible that matter should be substance?

Stripping Off

- ✦ ‘The statement itself is obscure, and further, on this view, matter becomes substance. For if this is not substance, nothing apparent remains. When all else is taken away evidently nothing but matter remains. For of the others some are affections, products, and capacities of bodies, while length, breadth, and depth are quantities and not substances. For a quantity is not a substance; but the substance is rather that to which these belong primarily. But when length and breadth and depth are taken away we see nothing left except that which is bounded by these, whatever it be; so that those who consider the question thus matter alone must seem to be substance.’ (*Met.* 1029a10-19)

Applying the Substratum Criterion

- ✦ Begin with a random individual, and say of it: what underlies is the substance; but what underlies is what receives the predicate, not what is predicated.
- ✦ To discover what underlies, then, strip away the predicates, and see what is left.
- ✦ So, take Socrates: strip away his properties, his capacities, even his length, breadth, and depth.
- ✦ What is left?
 - ✦ An amorphous substratum of predication.
 - ✦ That, we say, is matter.

Impossible

- ✿ Recall our little argument: (i) if x is a substance, x must be both separate (*chôriston*) and some this (*tode ti*); (ii) matter is neither separate (*chôriston*) and some this (*tode ti*) [or matter is not *both* separate (*chôriston*) and some this (*tode ti*)]; so, (iii) matter cannot be substance.
- ✿ Why is matter not some this (*tode ti*)?
 - ✿ Presumably, matter so stripped is neither a this (*tode*) nor any particular ϕ . Still less, then, is it this ϕ .
- ✿ Why is matter not separate (*chôriston*)?
 - ✿ Presumably, to be separate is to manifest some manner of independence or autonomy. This, though, is consistent with:
 - ✿ x is able to exist on its own (= existential independence)
 - ✿ x is separable from y *iff* x can be defined without reference to y (= definitional separation)
 - ✿ But matter so stripped manifests nothing of the sort.