

Being *qua* Being

The Science Sought

Aristotle's Announcement

‘There is a science (*epistêmê*) which studies being *qua* being, and the attributes belonging to this per se (*kath' hauto*)’ (*Met.* 1003a21-2).

Ἔστιν ἐπιστήμη τις ἣ θεωρεῖ τὸ ὄν ἢ ὄν καὶ τὰ τούτῳ
ὑπάρχοντα καθ' αὐτό.

Four Expressions of Note

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- Science (ἐπιστήμη)
- Being *qua* being (τὸ ὄν)
- *Qua* (ᾧ)
- *Per se* (καθ’ αὐτό)

Two Surprises

- That there is a science of being *qua* being
 - ‘Just as being is not something single for the things mentioned [viz. the categories], neither is the good; nor is there a single science of being or of the good’ (*EE* 1217b33-35)
 - ὥσπερ οὖν οὐδὲ τὸ ὄν ἓν τί ἐστι περὶ τὰ εἰρημένα, οὕτως οὐδὲ τὸ ἀγαθόν, οὐδὲ ἐπιστήμη ἐστὶ μία οὔτε τοῦ ὄντος οὔτε τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ.
- That being can be spoken of *per se* (*kath’ hauto*)

The First Surprise

1. The requisites of *epistêmê* seem to preclude any such science.
2. Aristotle seems precisely to execute his science by cutting off some sector of beings—*ousiai*, even just one *ousia*—to the neglect of the others.

Traditional Problems

- * A Problem of Extension

- * What is the genus under consideration?

- * Can there be such a genus?

- * Is being *qua* being a special or general *epistêmê*?

- * If being *qua* being takes as its object of study *all* beings, then it cannot study just one kind of being (*ousia*); and still less could it study just one instance of that kind, the divine being.

The Requisites of Science

- (1) There is an *epistêmê* of Δ only if there is a genus of Δ .
- (2) There is no genus of being (*APo.* 92b14, *Top.* 121a16, b7-9; cf. *Met.* 998b22).
- (3) Hence there is no science of being.

Refined Slightly

- (1) There is a science of Δ only if there is a genus of Δ .
- (2) There is no genus of being *qua* being ($\tau\acute{o}\ \omicron\nu\ \hat{\eta}\ \omicron\nu$)).
- (3) Hence there is no science of being *qua* being ($\tau\acute{o}\ \omicron\nu\ \hat{\eta}\ \omicron\nu$).

Science, Cause, Modality

* We think we understand a thing without qualification, and not in the sophistic, accidental way, whenever we think we know the cause in virtue of which something is—that it is the cause of that very thing—and also know that this cannot be otherwise. Clearly, science (*epistêmê*) is something of this sort. After all, both those in possession of science and those without it suppose that this is so—although only those in possession of science are actually in this condition. Hence, whatever is known without qualification cannot be otherwise. (*APo.* 71b9–16; cf. *APo.* 71b33–72a5; *Top.* 141b3–14, *Phys.* 184a10–23; *Met.* 1029b3–13)

Altogether, then

- * A science (*epistêmê*) of being should:
 - * Take as its object being *qua* being (τὸ ὄν ᾗ ὄν).
 - * State the features belonging per se (*kath' hautô*) to being *qua* being (τὸ ὄν ᾗ ὄν)
 - * State the causes (*aitia*) of being *qua* being (τὸ ὄν ᾗ ὄν)
 - * This Aristotle appreciates: 'Hence, it is also necessary for us to find the first causes of being *qua* being' (*Met.* 1003^a31-2).
- * Consider those features of *to on hê(i) on* incapable of being other than they are—presumably those features *essential* to it (?)

Special or General?

* One of the most difficult problems of interpretation set by the *Metaphysics* lies in the fact that in book IV the 'sought-for science' is characterised very precisely as the science of 'being qua being'. . . Unlike the particular sciences, it does not deal with a particular area of being, but rather investigates everything that is, in its most general structural elements and principles. This description fulfils the expectations the reader has derived from books I and III, which repeatedly aim at insights of the highest generality. But, on the other hand, and startlingly, we also discover that in *Metaphysics* VI 1 - only a few pages further on, if we exclude book V as not part of the collection Aristotle seems first to accept this opinion and then, immediately afterwards, to embrace its exact opposite. For in VI 1 we again find an analysis of the sciences designed to establish the proper place of 'first philosophy'. Here, however, Aristotle does not, as he did in book IV, distinguish the 'sought-for science' from all other sciences by its greater generality. First he divides philosophy into three parts: theoretical, practical, and productive; and then he splits theoretical philosophy into three disciplines. To each of these disciplines he entrusts well-defined areas as objects of research. The 'sought-for science', referred to in IV as the 'science of being qua being', he now calls 'first philosophy', and defines it as the science of what is 'changeless and self-subsistent (*akinêton kai chôriston*)'. He explicitly gives it the title of 'theology'. Physics and mathematics stand beside it as the two neighbouring disciplines in the field of theoretical philosophy. (Patzig, 'Theology and Ontology in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*,' 1960).

An Extension-Based Solution: Homonymy

* [L]et us try to understand how it is that theology is not concerned only with a particular kind of beings, but with a particular way of being, peculiar to its objects, and how it addresses itself to this way of being. By distinguishing a kind of beings and a way of being I mean to make a distinction of the following sort. Horses are a kind of beings, and camels are a different kind of beings, but neither horses nor camels have a distinctive way of being, peculiar to them; they both have the way of natural substances, as opposed to, e.g., numbers which have the way of magnitudes, or qualities which have yet a different way of being. The way magnitudes can be said to be is different from the way qualities or natural substances can be said to be. The claim, then, is that the way separate substances can be said to be is peculiar to separate substances. (Frede, 'The Unity of General and Special Metaphysics: Aristotle's Conception of Metaphysics,' 87)

Second Surprise

* A Problem of Intension

- * How is being to be spoken of *per se* (*kath' hautō*)?
- * If the *epistēmē* of being *qua* being captures the essence (*to ti ên einai* or *ti esti*) of its domain of inquiry, what might that essence be? What is—or could be—the essence of being?
- * Two issues:
 - * An Aristotelian essence seems to presuppose *minimal complexity*: Aristotle's essentialism is more fine-grained than merely modal essentialism.
 - * An Aristotelian essence seems implicitly *contrastive*. One is inclined to ask: which of being's intrinsic features belong to it coincidentally (*kata sumbebēkos*)?

What Translators Expect

*Owen: 'There is a science which considers Being *qua* Being, and what belongs to it *per se*.'

*'This science treats universally of Being as Being' (Owens (1978), 259).

*'The short opening of Book IV is quite succinct. It must have required considerable amplification for the "hearers" during an ensuing discussion in the Lyceum' (Owens 1978, 262).

*Ross (rev. Barnes): 'There is a science which investigates being as being and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature.'

*'This description of metaphysics distinguishes it from other sciences not by its method but by its subject' (Ross 1924 vol. i, 251).

*Irwin: 'There is a science which studies being *qua* being and its intrinsic properties.'

*'The science of being studies not primarily a distinct class of objects, but a distinct property of objects' (Irwin 1988, 169).

*Apostle: 'There is a science which investigates being *qua* being and what belongs essentially to it.'

*'The contrast between "accidentally" and "qua" seems to be that between an accidental cause and an essential cause' (Apostle 1966, 282).

*Kirwan: 'There is a discipline which studies that which is *qua* thing-that-it-is and those things that hold good of this in its own right'

*'"In its own right" is opposed to "coincidentally"' (Kirwan 1971, 76).

A Desideratum

- * Primarily, scholars have focussed on the problem of extension.
- * Even if this can be solved in isolation, the consequences of its (putative) solution for the problem of *epistêmê* and the problem of intension are opaque at best.
- * One *desideratum*: a co-ordinated solution, if available, is to be preferred.

A Worrisome Thought

- * 'Simple notions cannot be defined, since an infinite regress in definitions is impossible. But actuality is one of those simple notions. Hence, it cannot be defined.' (Aquinas, *Comm. in Aris. Meta.* IX. 5. 1826)
- * How, then, are we to define being *qua* being (τὸ ὄν ᾗ ὄν)?
- * Conversely, if we are not to define it, then how does it admit of *epistêmê*?

Two types of *kath' hauto* Predication

* Two kinds of *kath' hauto* (*per se*) predicates (*APo.* 73a34-b5):

* ϕ is predicated *kath' hauto* (*per se*) of x if (a) ϕ is predicated of x ; and (b) ϕ must be mentioned in an (essence-specifying) account of x .

* Thus, *animal* is predicated *kath' hauto* of Alcibiades, since any essence-specifying account of him will be at best incomplete for failing to mention this property.

* F is predicated *kath' hauto* (*per se*) of x if (a) ϕ is predicated of x ; and (b) x must be mentioned in an (essence-specifying) account of ϕ .

* Thus, *oddness* is predicated of a given number; but any account of what oddness is will perforce advert to number in its definiens. In saying that oddness is predicated of number *kath' hauto* we are highlighting a metaphysically binding reciprocity between subject and predicate, though we are not thereby indicating something essential to the subject.

Aristotle's Approach to This *Epistêmê*

- * It is evident that this (viz. wisdom, *sophia*) is a science (*epistêmê*) of certain principles and causes (*archai* and *aitiai*). But since this is the science we are seeking, this is what we must consider: of what sorts of principles and causes is wisdom (*sophia*) a science (*epistêmê*)? (*Met.* 982a1-6)
- * It (wisdom, *sophia*) must be a science (*epistêmê*) of first principles and causes (*prôtai archai* and *aitiai*) (*Met.* 982b9-10)
- * It is from them and through them [the first principles and first causes (*prôtai archai* and *aitiai*)] that other things are known; but they are not known through the things under them (*Met.* 982b2-4).

An Informed Caution

- * Although this science studies the three things mentioned earlier [*scil.*, first causes, maximally universal principles, and separate substances], it does not study any of them as its subject, but only being in general. For the subject of a science is the thing whose causes and attributes are studied; and it is not the very causes of the genus which are themselves under investigation. For cognition of the cause of some genus is the end which investigation in a science attains (Aquinas, *Comm. in Meta*, prol.)

Which Science Studies being qua Being (τὸ ὄν ᾗ ὄν)?

- * If there is no substance other than those which are constituted by nature, physics would be the first science (*protê epistêmê*); but if there is some other, immovable substance, the science of this will be prior and will be first philosophy—and universal in this way, because it is first. And it would belong to it to study being *qua* being—both what it is (*ti esti*) and the attributes belonging to it *qua* being (*Met.* 1026a27-33)
- * N.b. This does *not* say that god is the exclusive object of such a science.
- * Rather, the study *individuated* by beings including this being is universal because first.

What Belongs *Kath' Hauto* to being?

- * Since being (*to on*) is said in one way with reference to what something is, or some quality or quantity, and in another way with respect to potentiality and actuality (*entelecheia*) and with respect to function, let us make determinations about potentiality and actuality—first about potentiality most properly so called, even though this is not the most useful for what we want now (*Met.* 1045b32-1046a1).
- * Three καθ' αὐτό (per se) features of being:
 - * Beings are as beings *logically circumscribed*.
 - * Beings are as beings *categorially delineated*.
 - * Beings are as beings *modally enmeshed*.

Framing Our Puzzle More Fully

- (1) Every science begins with principles which are necessary, invariant, and explanatorily basic (NIE).
- (2) A property ϕ is (NIE) only if ϕ is (i) predicated *kath' hauto* (*per se*) and (ii) essential.
- (3) A property ϕ is predicated *kath' hauto* (*per se*) and essential only if ϕ is (or is subordinate to) a generic property.
- (4) Being (*to on*) is not a genus; so, being is not a generic property.
- (5) Hence, nothing is (or is subordinate to) being.
- (6) Hence, no science is a science of being.

Yet, there is. . .

‘There is a science (*epistêmê*) which studies being *qua* being, and the attributes belonging to this *kath’ hautō* (*per se*)’ (*Met.* 1003a21-2).

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