

Lorem Ipsum Dolor

Privileged Ontology

Categories of Being

What Really is?

- ❖ Ἄρα τὸ ἀληθινὸν ὄντως ὄν λέγων;
- ❖ ‘So, you mean what is true is what really is?’ (*Sophist*, 240b3)

Levels and Degrees

‘Talk of a “fundamental level of reality” pervades contemporary metaphysics. The fundamentalist starts with (a) a hierarchical picture of reality stratified into levels, adds (b) an assumption that there is a bottom level which is fundamental, and winds up, often enough, with (c) an ontological attitude according to which entities at the fundamental level are primarily real, while any remaining contingent entities are at best derivative, if real at all’ (Schaffer, 2003).

Contrasting Ontologies

- ❖ An ontology might be:
 - ❖ Flat:
 - ❖ All beings exist on an ontological par.
 - ❖ Privileged:
 - ❖ Some beings are ontologically prior to other beings, in the sense that there are asymmetric dependency relations between them.

Some Examples

- ❖ Flat
 - ❖ Nihilism: only atoms and the void exist
 - ❖ Mad dog nihilism: the world is atomless gunk
 - ❖ Unrestricted Mereological Aggregation
- ❖ Privileged:
 - ❖ Brutish moderation
 - ❖ Substance-based category theories: substances are basic beings.

Governing Assumptions

- ❖ Being is univocal =_{df} being is simple in the sense that there are not different kinds of being (as opposed to different kinds of beings).
- ❖ Nothing subsists as opposed to exists.
- ❖ Existing in a 'strict sense' is, as Lewis rightly contends, existing in some restricted sense or other.
- ❖ Being is non-scalar =_{df} being does not admit of degrees
- ❖ Being is binary; and nothing has more or less of it than anything else.
 - ❖ The following is not syntactically complete, meaningful, and assertoric:
 - ❖ 'x is more than y.'
 - ❖ We shall always want to know: 'x is more what than y?'

Some Observations

- ❖ Neither univocity nor non-scalarity commends any form of flat ontology.
- ❖ Setting aside intention-dependence, the question dividing flat and privileged ontologies is rather: do some kinds of entities depend ontologically on the beings of other kinds of beings?
 - ❖ Flat: No.
 - ❖ Privileged: Yes.
 - ❖ Non-basic beings depend ontologically upon basic beings.

Basic vs. Non-Basic Beings

- ❖ Two Approaches:
 - ❖ Non-basic beings are *determined* by basic beings.
 - ❖ Non-basic beings are *ontologically dependent* upon basic beings.

Basic Beings

- ❖ Our questions, then, concern Basic Beings (BB) and such beings as may be ontologically dependent upon them:
 - ❖ Are any beings BB?
 - ❖ If so, in virtue of what are BB basic?
 - ❖ What forms of dependence do non-BB bear to BB?
 - ❖ Further, supposing that there are BB, are they (so to speak) really or merely conceptually basic?

A Question of Categories

- ❖ This last question makes sense only against the backdrop of an articulated category theory.
- ❖ That is, if some kinds of beings are basic, and others not, then beings as a class divide into kinds or categories.
- ❖ Further, unless this distinction (between BB and non-BB) is primitive, there is some principle of division in virtue of which these kinds are sorted.
- ❖ This principle of sorting is the question of category theory.

Two Approaches

- ❖ Realism (broadly Aristotelian): a system of categories specifies the highest, irreducible kinds of beings there are—these beings populate an objective, mind-independent reality.
- ❖ Conceptualism (broadly Kantian): a system of categories specifies those features of our conceptual scheme which are a priori necessary for the possibility of any cognition of objects—these objects are partly constituted by our own rational psychologies or deep conceptual schemes.

Conceptualism vs. Realism

- ❖ 'It was an enterprise worthy of an acute thinker like Aristotle to search for these fundamental concepts. But as he did so on no principle, he merely picked them up as they came his way, and at first he produced ten of them, which he called categories (predicaments). Afterwards he believed that he had discovered five others, which he added under the name of post-predicaments. But his table still remained defective' (*Critique of Pure Reason* A81 / B107).
- ❖ 'Kant, it is well known, did not put himself to much trouble in discovering the categories' (Hegel, *Logic* §42).

Let's Be Realistic

- ❖ Realistic Category Theory seeks to transcend the bounds of experience, yielding unverifiable, even unintelligible taxonomies of reality.
- ❖ A Bad, if Seductive Argument
 1. Our thought about the world is always and of necessity mediated by our own conceptual scheme.
 2. If (1), then all objects of study are at least partly constituted by features of our own conceptual scheme.
 3. If (2), then realistic category theory—an attempt to characterize the structure of the world as it is in itself and outside of our own conceptual scheme—is doomed to failure.
 4. So, any enterprise in realistic category theory is doomed to failure.

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* prediction, 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.
 - ❖ Thus, the SCQ is hopelessly underdetermined.
 - ❖ Recall: What necessary and jointly sufficient conditions must any x s satisfy in order for it to be the case that there is an object o composed of those x s?
 - ❖ Our question: what is meant by *object* in this connection?

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

Two Obvious Questions (Two Difficult Questions)

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

The categories of being categorize. . .

- ❖ . . .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?'
- ❖ Modal Requisites

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?

Modal Requisites

- ❖ 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).

Ontological Independence

- ❖ A crucial thought of realistic category theory: BB are independent beings; they do not require other beings for their existence, whereas other beings require them for their existence.
 - ❖ N.b. It is not necessary that there is at most one kind of BB.
- ❖ One may speak of the ontological dependence of x on y , when:
 - ❖ x depends on y in some more than merely causal manner
 - ❖ perhaps modally
 - ❖ perhaps essentially
 - ❖ perhaps even in terms of identity conditions

BB I: Modal Independence

- ❖ x depends ontologically on $y =_{df}$ Necessarily, if x exists, then y exists
- ❖ x is a BB $=_{df}$ there is no y such that x ontologically depends on y
 - ❖ This will prove much too coarse.

BBII: Essential Independence

- ❖ x depends ontologically^e on $y =_{df}$ Necessarily, (i) an essence-specifying account of x makes reference to y ; and (ii) an essence-specifying account y makes no reference to x .
 - ❖ Informally: x exists only because y exists
 - ❖ Slightly more formally:
 - ❖ x depends ontologically^e on $y =_{df}$ Necessarily, (i) if x exists, then there is a function f such that x is necessarily identical with $f(y)$; and (ii) the converse does not obtain.
- ❖ x is a BB $=_{df}$ there is no y such that x ontologically^e depends on y .