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Aristotle's Categories-notes

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Chapter 1 [Names]

Vocabulary

Equivocally: when two things share the same name but have different definitions.
- E.g., a real man and a picture of a man are both examples of *animals*, but not in the same way

Univocally: when two things share the same name and the same definitions.
- E.g., how a man and an ox are both animals

Derivatively: when something acquires its name from some other name even though they are not identical beings
- E.g., *courage* is a virtue, and the *courageous man* is so-called derivatively (but he is still a man, and not a virtue)

Chapter 2 [Speech and Being Present In]

Vocabulary

Simple (forms of speech): atomic expressions such as words
- E.g., ‘man,’ ‘runs’

Composite (forms of speech): expressions of speech that convey meaning beyond that of an individual term
- E.g., ‘the man runs,’ ‘the ox eats’

Being Present In a Subject: “being incapable of existence apart from the said subject.”
- E.g., accidental beings such as whiteness (what will be explained as categories 2-10)

Chapter 3 [Predication]

- Predicates are anything you can say of a subject after a *copula* (an ‘=’ or an ‘is’).
- For Aristotle, genera and species are nesting. So, one thing can be both a genera to another thing (something more specific than itself) while itself being a species of some other genera (because it is more specific than its genera. So whether we call something a genera or a species is relative).
- If two genera are different, their *differentiae* (that which distinguishes them from other things) will also be different.
• If two genera are related (one is subordinate to the other), they may have differentiae in common.
  o E.g., what it is to be a mammal will share some things in common with what it is to be an animal, since all mammals are animals.
  o When this happens, the greater class is predicable of the lesser (but not the other way around).

Additional Vocabulary

• Transitivity
  o If A, then B. If B, then C. Therefore, if A, then C.
  o If one thing is predicated of another thing, ALL that is predicable of the predicate will be predicable also of the subject.
  o E.g., the universal man is predicable of an individual man (e.g., Tony). But the universal animal is also predicable of man...so it is also predicable of Tony.

Chapter 4 [The 10 categories]

• We first get the list of the 10 categories. The name of each category is underlined:
  1. Substance—the thing itself, the “what it is” (two ways to speak of substance—primary and secondary)
  2. Quantity—three feet tall (measurement) [It is NOT three of something...but measurement of one thing]
  3. Quality—how something appears to the senses (E.g., colors, smells, texture)
  4. Relation—comparison of two or more things [that “being related” can be said of any one thing is what is being considered]
  5. Place—location (E.g., downtown, my house)
  6. Time—(E.g., yesterday, an hour ago)
  7. Position—relative to itself (E.g., sitting, standing, curled up)
  8. Possession/State—armed, clothed
  9. Action—that it does something (E.g., cuts, burns)
  10. Passion/Affection—passivity, being acted upon, susceptible to a given action of another (E.g., being burned, being cut)

• None of these by itself is an assertion.
• Assertions are in sentence form.
• Assertions are either true or false.
Additional Vocabulary

- **Category Mistake**: erroneously applying one category to a substance or accident that is not the kind of thing that bears such properties.
  - E.g., ‘Big red’—a color is not the kind of thing that can be big or small.
  - E.g., calling a single substance ‘two,’ or ‘many’ when it is one.

Chapter 5 [Substance]

- **Primary substance**
  - The individual
  - A unity
  - A “this”
  - Actual individual people, things, etc. (E.g., Tony, Mark, Elise, Sophie)

- **Secondary substance**
  - The kind of thing that the individual is
  - A universal (a class with a certain qualification (3b 14))
  - A species (which could also be a genus, or not)
  - Predicable of more than one subject (3b 16)
  - “Signify substance qualitatively differentiated” (3b 20)
  - It is permanent—if this changes the thing ceases to exist
  - Does not admit of degrees (3b 32-4a 9)
  - What is relevant to the definition
  - E.g., “man” (understood as human nature), “horse” (understood as horse-ness).
  - “Everything except primary substance is either predicable of a primary substance or present in a primary substance” (2a 34).

- If there weren’t any individual men, ‘animal’ could not be predicated of the species *man* at all.

- Primary substances ground all existence. Without them, nothing else would exist.

- Since the species is more like the primary substance than is the genera, it is more substance than a genus is.
  - This is why explaining a thing via its species is “more instructive” (i.e., more informative).
  - So, when you have a species that is not a genera, it is more substance than the genera. Of these, no one species is more substance than any other (2b 23).
  - Species : Genus :: Subject : Predicate (2b 20)

- No one primary substance is more truly a substance than any other (2b 27).

*Aristotle’s Categories*, 3
- Substances cannot be present in—they are predicated of (predicated univocally when they are a predicate of a proposition).
- Differentia cannot be present in—they are predicated of (predicated univocally when they are a predicate of a proposition).
- Neither primary nor secondary substance has a contrary (3b 24).
- Substance can admit contraries (i.e., they can change, or can have contrary qualities, etc. at different times).
  - They do this by changing. The substance retains its identity while the characteristic is swapped out for another contrary to it.
  - When a statement is true of a subject at one moment and false of a subject at another (because it changes), the alteration in facts determines the truth-value of that claim. But the claim itself remains unchanged (4a 20-4b 5).

**Aside Notes**
- While this chapter is not about quantity, Aristotle tells us that there are no contraries to quantities.
- There may be contraries to relations, such as great or small (3b 29-30).
- PNC (see below*) about categories 2-10.

**Additional Vocabulary**
- **Transcendent Realism**: the belief that universals exist independently of the particulars, which instantiate them (this is Plato’s view).
- **Immanent Realism**: the belief that universals exist but only insofar as they are instantiated in particulars (this is Aristotle’s view).
- **Nominalism**: the belief that universals (and/or abstract objects) are not real. They are merely words that we seem to apply with regularity.
- **Hylomorphism**: the view that matter does not exist absent form (Aristotle subscribes to this view).
- **Principle of Non-contradiction (PNC*)**: Nothing can be X and not X at the same time and in the same respect.

**Chapter 6 [Quantity]**
- Quantities are divided into discrete or continuous.
  - Discrete quantities: E.g., speech and numbering
  - Parts are not contiguous.
  - Parts do not bear a relative position each to each other (5a 16).
- **Numbering:**
  - “There is no common boundary at which [numbers] join” (4b 25).
  - Numbers are always separate.
- **Speech:**
  - Measured in long and short syllables (vocal)
  - There is no common boundary where syllables join.
  - “Each [syllable] is separate and distinct from the rest” (4b 35).
  - Continuous quantities have common boundaries: E.g., lines, surfaces, solids, time, and place.
  - Parts that bear a relative position to each other (5a 15).
    - Exception—Aristotle claims time is an exception since “none of the parts of time has an abiding existence” (5a 27).
    - Speech also does not have an abiding existence (it is ephemeral)—and it is discrete
    - Like number, time has a relative order (e.g., one is prior to two, etc. just as yesterday is prior to today).
- **Lines**
  - The common boundary is the point
- **Plane**
  - The common boundary is the line
- **Time**
  - Past, present, and future form a continuous whole (5a 6).
  - Quantities have no contraries.
  - Quantities do not admit of degrees (6a 20).
  - Equality and inequality are predicated of the category of quantity (6a 25-30).
    - Either something IS equal to something else, or it isn't (so, equality does not admit of degrees)
    - Either something IS NOT equal to something else, or it is (so, inequality does not admit of degrees...though similarity does, which is why it is a relation).
    - ONLY quantities can be said to be equal or unequal.
    - Challenge—might one prefer to call equality and inequality relations? Why can’t this be the case?
      - Category mistake—two quantities are either equal or not...not the substances of which the qualities are true/said of.
• Relations require two or more distinct substances. Quantities are attributes of substances.

Aside Note

○ Quality, however, can have contraries and comparisons of how much a feature can exist with a subject.

○ “Much” and “little” are not quantities, but rather relations. They rest on an act of comparison.

○ “Much” and “little” and “great” and “small” are NOT contraries of each other (though we might think so). They are not contraries because one and the same object can be great compared to one object and small compared to another object. If these were contraries, then one and the same object would possess contradictory properties (which, according to PNC, cannot be the case).

Chapter 7 [Relation]

• In reference to an external standard
  ○ E.g., superior, double, to the left of, greater than

• When something is described with a relation it is in reference to something else.
  ○ This is true both in object and abstraction.
    ▪ E.g., The ball is to the left of the bat (object relation).
    ▪ E.g., Stan is knowledgeable in math (abstract relation because Stan knows a lot of math).

• It is possible for relatives to have contraries (e.g., knowledge to ignorance, virtue to vice (6b 15)).

• But it is not required that relatives have contraries (e.g., ‘double’ has no contrary).

• Relatives can admit variation and degree (again, with some exceptions)
  ○ Here Aristotle actually uses equal and unequal, which he said were marks of quantity (Why not relations?)
  ○ These are distinguished by the modifiers more and less (e.g., more vicious than someone else)

• “All relatives have correlatives: by the term ‘slave’ we mean the slave of a master” (6b 26-27).
  ○ If there appears not to be a correlative, then a category mistake must have been made and what you have isn’t really a relation.
  ○ All correlatives are interdependent (7b 14).
  ○ Though they often come into existence simultaneously, this is not always the case (E.g., Grandfather’s pre-date their grandchildren).
In apprehending a relative thing, one apprehends the correlative (8a 35).

- Relatives reciprocate (12b 21)
- Helpful passages for the overall definition:
  - “There are, moreover, other relatives, e.g. habit, disposition, perception, knowledge, and attitude. The significance of all these is explained by a reference to something else and in no other way. Thus, a habit is a habit of something, knowledge is knowledge of something…” (6b 4-6).
  - “Those terms, then, are called relative, the nature of which is explained by reference to something else, the preposition ‘of’ or some other preposition being used to indicate the relation” (6b 6-7).
  - “The former definition does indeed apply to all relatives, but the fact that a thing is explained with reference to something else does not make it essentially relative” (8a 34).

Chapter 8 [Qualities]

- “By ‘quality’ I mean that in virtue of which people are said to be such and such” (8b 25).
  1. Dispositions (includes habits)
     - Habit is a quality that is firmly established (e.g., knowledge, virtue)
     - Dispositions are qualities that can change frequently (i.e. hot, cold, sickness, health)
     - Habits are dispositions, but not all dispositions are habits (9a 10)
  2. Inborn capacity or incapacity: Native talents are qualities (E.g., naturally good boxers, runners, sickly people)
     - E.g., Hardness—it has “a capacity for resistance which enables it to withstand disintegration” (9a 25)
  3. Affective qualities are qualities that affect the senses (sweetness, bitterness, sourness, etc.)
     - “These said qualities are capable of producing an ‘affection’ in the way of perception” (9b 6)
     - Semi-permanent. They can change (like a white man’s skin can be sun-burnt, so isn’t white at the moment), but it is not easy to change them.
       - If something is easily and quickly changed (e.g., heat, cold, wet, dry, blushing, etc.) we do not call them affective qualities. We just call them affections (see that Category).
       - If Juan is ill-tempered, it is a quality. If, on one single occasion, he is made very angry, his anger is an affection and not a quality.
4. **Figure and Shape**

- E.g., the straightness of a line, the curviness of a line, the physical, three dimensional-ness of a thing)
- You might think that rarity, density, roughness, and smoothness are qualities…but Aristotle thinks they are relations, “For it s rather a certain relative position of the parts composing the thing thus qualified which, it appears, is indicated by each of these terms” (10a 19).

- One quality may be the contrary of another (E.g., justice and injustice)
  - Not always. Colors such as red, yellow, green, etc. do not have contraries, but these are qualities (10b 17).
  - If one of two contraries is a quality, the other is a quality as well (10b 18).

- Qualities can admit of variation and degree.
  - Well...for the most part. We worry about justice and other such important dispositions. (10b 20-30).
  - Oh...and triangular and square don’t seem to admit of degrees (don’t they? What about triangular things with rounded edges? Aristotle wouldn’t count these as triangular—it’s all or nothing with figures).

- This category’s distinctive feature is that LIKENESS and UNLIKENESS are predicated of it exclusively.

- “We did say that habits and dispositions were relative. In practically all such cases the genus is relative, the individual not.” (11a 24, emphasis mine)

- “Individual branches of knowledge are not relative. And it is because we possess these individual branches of knowledge that we are said to be such and such. It is these that we actually possess: we are called experts because we possess knowledge in some particular branch. Those particular branches, therefore, of knowledge, in virtue of which we are sometimes said to be such and such, are themselves qualities, and are not relative.” (11a 32-36, emphasis mine)

- “Further, if anything should happen to fall within both the category of quality and that of relation, there would be nothing extraordinary in classing it under both these heads” (11a 37-39).

**Chapter 9 [Action and affection]**

- Action and Affection/Passion BOTH admit of contraries.
  - E.g., heating/cooling, being heated/being cooled, being glad/being vexed
- Action and Affection/Passion BOTH admit of variations of degrees.
  - E.g., heating to a lesser or greater degree
- The other categories are self-explanatory.
Chapter 10 [Opposites]

- Things are said to be opposites in four senses:

  1. As correlatives to one another
     - E.g., ‘Double’ and ‘Half’
     - Such pairs of opposites might fall under the category of relation.
     - ‘Double’ is relative since it is the double of something.
     - ‘Knowledge’ is the opposite of ‘The thing known’ in the correlative sense (e.g., the thing known is that which is known by something (i.e., knowledge)) (11b 25-30).

  2. As contraries to one another
     - E.g., ‘Bad’ and ‘Good’
     - These are not interdependent.
     - “Those contraries which are such that the subjects in which they are naturally present, or of which they are predicated, must necessarily contain either the one or the other of them, and have no intermediate...” (12a 2-4).
       - E.g., disease and health—one or the other are present in an animal
       - E.g., ‘odd’ and ‘even’ must be predicated of every whole number...but never both.
     - Some, where no such necessity obtains (see above), always have an intermediate (12a 4-5).
       - “Badness and goodness, again, are predicated of man, and of many other things, but it is not necessary that either the one quality or the other should be present in that of which they are predicated” (12a 15-16 my emphasis).
         - This pair (and others like it) have intermediates
         - “The intermediate between good and bad is that which is neither the one nor the other” (12a 19).

  3. As privatives to positives
     - E.g., ‘Blindness’ and ‘Sight’
     - Each has reference to the same subject (‘Sight’ and ‘Blindness’ refer to the eye).
     - The reference is that which the positive is natural.
     - Privation is the absence of a faculty or possession that the thing in question should, under normal circumstances, possess.
• **Technicality:** *Blindness is a privative; to be blind is to be in a state of privation, but this is not a privation.* A man can be blind without being blindness (i.e., we can predicate ‘blind’ the adjective but not ‘blindness’ the noun).

• “To be in a state of [**possession**] is, it appears, the opposite of being in a state of ‘privation’, just as ‘positives’ and ‘privatives’ themselves are opposite” (12b 1-3).

• “It is not necessary that a subject receptive of the qualities should always have either the one or the other; that which has not yet advanced to the state when sight is natural is not said either to be blind or to see. Thus ‘positives’ and ‘privatives’ do not belong to that class of contraries which consists of those which have no intermediate” (13a 4-6).

• “...on the other hand, they [positives and privatives] do not belong either to that class which consists of contraries which have an intermediate...” (13a 7-8).

• Aristotle believes that we do not go from a privative to a positive. So, if you lose your teeth, they will not return, if you go bald, you cannot reverse it, etc. (13a 35-36)

4. As affirmatives to negatives

- E.g., propositions like ‘he sits’ and ‘he does not sit’
- Technicality: That which is affirmed or denied is NOT the same thing as an affirmation or denial (it is the referent, or object).
- Affirmation=affirmative proposition
- Denial=negative proposition
- “For in this case, and in this case only, it is necessary for the one opposite to be true and the other false” (13b 2-3) (because only propositions can be true or false).

**Referent**

If there is not a referent (the thing in question does not exist), you can see why it isn't the case that everything said of the thing has to have one contrary as true and the other false.

- If Socrates does NOT exist:
  - “Socrates is ill” and “Socrates is well” are BOTH false.
  - “Socrates has sight” and “Socrates is blind” are BOTH false.
  - “Socrates is ill” and “Socrates is not ill”—the first is false while the second is true. (13b 29-35)
    - If Socrates does not exist, anything of the form “Socrates is not X” will be true.
Chapter 11 [Categorizing Contraries]

- “That the contrary of a good is an evil is shown by induction”—we learn this through experience (13b 36).
- Sometimes the contrary of an evil is a good.
  - E.g., a contrary of pain is pleasure
- Sometimes a contrary of an evil is also an evil.
  - E.g., the contrary of cowardice is rashness; the contrary of wastefulness is stinginess
  - This is akin to Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean, which we will study in his ethical treatises.
- It is not always necessary that if one contrary exist its partner contrary must exist.
  - E.g., the world would be a fine place if everyone were just—we would not need unjust people to exist for there to be just people.
- It is the case that no two contraries can exist within the same subject at the same time in the same respect (PNC).
- Contrary attributes must be present in subjects that share a species or genus.
- Pairs of contraries can:
  - Belong to the same genus
    - E.g., White & Black both belong to the genus color
  - Belong to contrary genera
    - E.g., Justice & Injustice belong to contrary genera (virtue and vice, respectively)
  - Be genera
    - E.g., Good & Evil are genera, but are so broad they do not fall under other genera (they just subsume other terms under them)

Chapter 12 [Prior]

Four (okay—five) senses in which something can be prior:

1. Time-
   - One thing is older than another
2. Sequence-
   - It cannot be reversed
   - If 2 exists, 1 must exist (but not the other way around)
   - In this sequence, 1 is prior to 2
3. Order-
   • In sciences, the basic elements come before the complex theorems
   • Letters before words and sentences in grammar

4. Better-
   • That which is better
   • That which is more natural
   • That which “comes first” or is a priority

5. Causation-
   • Causes are prior to their effects.
   • Facts determine the truth or falsity of propositions about them, so they are what contemporary metaphysicians call *truthmakers*.

**Chapter 13 [Simultaneity]**

- **Time**
  - The genesis of one thing begins at the same moment as the genesis of another thing.

- **Nature**
  - Interdependent beings that do not cause each other.
    - E.g., “Double” and “Half”
  - Species within a genus
    - Careful! There is still a sense in which genera are *prior* to species, since the sequence cannot be reversed
      - E.g., the existence of a species *water animal* implies the genus *animal*, but not vice versa
  - “Those things, therefore, are said to be ‘simultaneous’ in nature, the being of each of which involves that of the other, while at the same time neither is in any way the cause of the other’s being; those species, also, which are distinguished each from each and opposed within the same genus. Those things, moreover, are ‘simultaneous’ in the unqualified sense of the word which come into being at the same time” (15a 8-10).

**Chapter 14 [Movement]**

- Six sorts of Movement
  1. Generation
  2. Destruction
3. Increase
4. Diminution
5. Alteration
   - “We may say that all affections, or nearly all, produce in us an alteration which is distinct from all other sorts of motion, for that which is affected need not suffer either increase or diminution or any of the other sorts of motion” (15a 20-24).
6. Change of Place
   - Rest is the contrary of motion.
   - But each type of motion has its own contrary:
     - Destruction/Generation
     - Increase/Diminution
     - Rest in place/Change in place
     - Maintaining affection (or lack thereof)/being affected (differently)

## Chapter 15 [To Have]

- Reference to quality
  - E.g., to have a habit or disposition
- Reference to quantity
  - E.g., to have a weight of 100 lbs.
- Reference to apparel
  - E.g., to have a coat
    - Possession: to be cloaked is to have a cloak on at the moment
- Reference to parts
  - E.g., to have feet
- Reference to content
  - E.g., the jar has mayonnaise in it
- Reference to acquisition
  - E.g., I have [acquired] a house
- Reference to relation
  - E.g., Have a husband
    - Aristotle thinks this is the “most remote” since it just means that husband and wife live together.
**Study Questions**

1. What are these categories describing? What are they about?
2. Which category is *special*? What makes it different from the other nine?
3. How many ways can something be a substance?
4. Why can’t quantity involve plurality?
5. What is the difference between habits, dispositions, inborn qualities, and affective qualities?
6. What does Aristotle mean when he says that habits and dispositions are in a way *relatives* but in a way they are *qualities*?
7. What is the difference between an *affective quality* and an *affection*?
8. What are the ways in which a pair can be opposite?
9. To what genera can pairs of contraries belong? Must they?
10. How many ways can something be prior?
11. What does it mean to be simultaneous?
12. What are the six kinds of motion?
13. Why isn’t alteration just a conglomerate of some of the other five kinds of motion?
14. What are the various senses we might say that a thing *has* something?

**Reflection Question**

Do you think that Aristotle needed all ten categories to explain the ways something can be said to *be*? Do any categories do too much work? Should some be divided? Should any be rejected? Why or why not?

**Resources**

- Aristotle, *Categories*, Translated by E. M. Edghill (various prints)
- Authors of Some Popular Ancient and Medieval Commentaries on Aristotle’s *Categories*:
  - Ammonius
  - Averroes
  - Philoponus
  - Porphyry
  - John Duns Scotus
  - Simplicius