**Aristotle: Categories**

**A. Summary.** *Categories* is both a logical and a metaphysical treatise. As a logical work, *Categories* proposes ten fundamental types of predicates. The ten logical categories are paralleled by ten categories of *being*. Different kinds of form make a thing what it is (substance), give it qualities, quantities, etc. The main thesis of *Categories* is that primary substances, or individual things (men, trees, horses) are “most real”. If they did not exist, nothing would (353). This is a direct attack on Plato’s doctrine that individual immaterial Forms are the most real entities.

**B. Analysis of *Categories*, chapter 2**

There are three types of things:

i) **Universals.** X is “said of” a subject if X can be predicated of that subject (as in “Socrates is X”).
   
   Ex: human, animal, white

ii) **Individual characteristics.** X is “present in” a subject if X is in that subject and can’t exist apart from it (as in “X is in Socrates”).
   
   Ex: Socrates’ individual whiteness.

iii) **Individual substances.** X is neither “present in” nor “said of” a subject.
   
   Ex: Socrates, an individual horse.

*Special fourth case:* individual knowledge and individual perceptions may be both present in a subject (Socrates’ individual knowledge or perceptions) and said of a different subject (Socrates’ individual knowledge is of Greek grammar; his individual perception is of Plato). We set aside this very important case for now.

**Remarks and puzzles**

1) Individual substances are fundamentally opposed to universals. They can never be predicated of (“said of”) any subject and they are ‘numerically one’, i.e., they never recur. By contrast, universals can be predicated of many things; they are recurrent.

2) First puzzle: if X is “said of” a subject, then everything that we can say of X must be said of the subject also (chapter 3, chapter 5). This *inheritance principle* works fine when X is ‘human’ or ‘animal’, but not when X is ‘white’. We say “Socrates is white” and “white is a colour”, but not “Socrates is a colour.”

   Aristotle clarifies a little in chapter 5 (using the example of white) and elsewhere (e.g., *De Interpretatione*). *White* is definitely a universal, but the inheritance principle does not apply. In *Categories*, he is most interested in species and genera; the inheritance principle applies only to these universals.
3) Another puzzle: where do Socrates’ individual humanity or animality fit in? Are these individual characteristics “present in” Socrates”? Yes and no.

- Yes: we might say “Socrates’ humanity is in Socrates”.
- No: For X to be present in a subject, there must be a subject prior to the predication. But that is not the case for Socrates’ humanity, animality, etc. They constitute the subject rather than being present in a subject.

We need a distinction between characteristics such as humanity, which are constitutive of an individual subject (they ‘reveal’ the primary substance and make it what it is) and characteristics such as whiteness, which we apply to an already well-defined subject. For medieval thinkers, the former are substantial forms and the latter are accidental forms.

**Aristotle vs. Plato**

Three Platonic theses about Forms:

1. **Individual.** Platonic common natures or Forms are individuals that express (and explain) all features common to the individuals that share that nature.

2. **Distinct from particulars.** The common nature (goodness, humanity) is distinct from any of the individual things that share it (good things, humans).

3. **Self-predicable.** The common nature must be predicable of itself. Goodness is good, Humanity is human, etc.

**Third Man** paradox:

*Human* is predicable both of Socrates and of humanity. So *human* must be distinct from both Socrates and humanity. So we need yet another common nature *human* distinct from *human* and from Socrates. And yet another nature again that is distinct from *human*, *human* and Socrates. But this will go on forever, which means we really have no explanation for what makes Socrates human. The same problem occurs with “white”.

*Aristotle’s solution*: individual things are never predicated and universals are not individuals.

In more detail, first, distinguish between substance and all of the other nine categories (following Porphyry, call these accidents). Then:

*Accidental predicates* (e.g., white) correspond to an individual characteristic present in an already well-constituted subject (e.g., whiteness is in Socrates). We avoid the Third Man by giving up self-predication: whiteness is not itself white.

*Substance predicates* (e.g., human) do not correspond to a characteristic (e.g., humanity) present in a subject because humanity is a constituent of the subject (e.g., Socrates). We avoid the Third Man by giving up distinctness: there is no individual thing distinct from Socrates.
C. Analysis of *Categories, chapter5* (the fundamental characteristics of substance)

**Primary Substance.**

1. Not predicated of any subject; rather, the subject of predicates.
2. A ‘this’ (numerically one).
3. Has no contraries; and does not admit of degree.
4. Able to receive contraries at different times. (Persists through change as the same subject.)

**Secondary substance.**

*Humanity*, or man in general. Ultimate species are the prime example of secondary substance.

But there is no satisfactory account provided. Is Aristotle talking about Socrates’ humanity, an abstract Platonic Form, or something else?