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Lecture 6 – Aristotle, Difference, and Analogy

Introduction

In today's session, I want to look at the problem of the highest genus in Aristotle's philosophy, and how this opens the possibility of a future philosophy of difference. As we saw last week, a species is defined by a genus and a difference, thus man is a 'rational [difference] animal [species]'. In effect, if we look at Porphyry's tree, therefore, each term is defined by the term above it and by a division. This brings us to a potential problem with this schema. If each term is defined by terms above it, how are we able to define the highest term in the hierarchy, which, presumably, is being itself. If we try to give a definition of it, then we presuppose something higher than being, which simply reintroduces the problem at a higher level, but leaving it undefined is also problematic.

Aristotle also believes that knowledge has to be given in terms of universals, writing that "names are finite and so is the sum total of accounts, while things are infinite in number. Inevitably, then, the same account and single name qualify several things."[i] Obviously, a language made up simply of singular terms would be incapable of capturing the world itself, as the world contains an infinite multiplicity of things. This means that difference can only occupy the middle ground between the genera and the individual. As Deleuze puts it, "specific difference refers only to an entirely relative maximum, a point of accommodation for the Greek eye which sees the mean, and has lost the sense of Dionysian transports and metamorphoses" (*DR*, 40). This opens up two possibilities. The first is the recognition that there are limits to representation, or to judgement, and that judgement is grounded in something fundamentally non-representational. This is Deleuze's position: 'Diversity [or empirical difference] is given, but difference is that by which the given is given as diverse.' (DR 280) The alternative possibility will be to introduce the final principle of representation, analogy, in order to attempt to cover over any question of the origin of representation. While we will be focusing exclusively on Aristotle in this session, it is worth pointing out that the same problem of the highest genus also emerges in Bertrand Russell's early set theory, in the form of Russell's paradox. Here, paradox emerges when we try to make statements about all sets, equivalent to making statements about all beings. Russell's solution, the theory of types, mirror's Aristotle (and Aquinas') solution to the problem, with Russell's notion of systematic ambiguity taking the place of analogy.

The Highest Genus

The problem of the highest genus is fully recognised by Aristotle. In the *Metaphysics*, he formulates it in the following way:

> It is not possible that either unity or being should be a single genus of things; for the differentiae of any genus must each of them have both being and be one, but it is not possible for the genus taken apart from its species (any more than for the species of the genus) to be predicated of its proper differentiae; so that if either unity or being is a genus, no differentiae will either have being or be one (*MP*, 998b).

This argument is fairly condensed, and so will require some explication.[ii] First, as we saw last week, a genus is "what is predicated in the category of essence of a number of things exhibiting differences in kind." (Aristotle, *Topics*, 102a) Therefore, a genus, along with the differentiae, determine what it is to be a particular such and such. Now it should be clear that a difference cannot be the same type of thing as that which it differentiates. We can show this by taking an example

from further down Porphyry's tree, for instance, the case of living bodies. If the difference between living bodies was itself a living body, then we would be caught in an infinite regress, as in order for *this* living body to function as a difference, we would need to differentiate it from other living bodies. Thus, we would require a further difference, which would in turn need to be differentiated and so on to infinity. Therefore what differentiates living bodies, the difference sensible/non-sensible, must itself not be a living body. This presents a serious problem when we apply this criterion to the case of being, however, as it now means that what differentiates beings into different species cannot itself be a type of being. Therefore, if being is a genus, then difference itself cannot be a being. As Deleuze puts it, 'Being itself is not a genus...because differences *are*.' (DR 41) It is not simply the difference in being that would lack being, but as differences are inherited (man is a rational animal, but also a material substance), all differences would lack being. For this reason, the ultimate categories through which being is understood must be multiple, as they themselves are species in relation to the undefined genus. Aristotle lists ten in total.[iii] This means that the terms in the hierarchy are now to be characterised in two divergent ways. In the intermediate terms, difference will descend from the identity of the genus, whereas for the highest genus, difference itself will reign, as it does not itself partake in a higher identity. We therefore have a radical split, in that we cannot talk about being in the same way as we talk about particular beings. As Deleuze puts it, "it is as though there were two 'Logoi', differing in nature, but intermingled with one another: the logos of species, … which rests upon the condition of the identity or univocity of concepts in general taken as genera; and the logos of Genera … which is free of that condition and operates both in the equivocity of Being and in the diversity of the most general concepts" (*DR*, 41).

The Science of Being *qua* Being

This situation presents some serious difficulties when it comes to our attempts to develop a science of metaphysics. We want to be able to say that there is some kind of enquiry possible into the nature of being. In order to do so, however, we need to find a way of reconciling three key claims be Aristotle:

> (A) "There is a science of being as being and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature" (*MP*, 1003a).
> (B) "For every single class of things, as there is one perception, so there is one science, as for instance grammar, being one science, investigates all articulate sounds. Therefore to investigate all species of being *qua* being, is the work of a science which is generically one …" (*MP*, 1003b)
> (C) "There are many senses in which a thing can be said to 'be'" (*MP*, 1003b).

Clearly, any two of these statements can be asserted together, so we could have by (A) and (B) a science of the single sense of being, if this hadn't been ruled out by our previous arguments relating to the highest genus. Likewise (A) and (C) together allow the possibility of a science of being which ranges over multiple classes. (B) and (C) together would assert that although science in general is possible, a science of being is not. Taking all three statements together, however, would assert the existence of a science of that which is multiple, as being is not a unified concept, which is also a science of the one, as this follows from statement (B). It therefore appears as if, for Aristotle, metaphysics would be impossible, and the most we could have would be a series of sciences dealing with particular aspects of being. In order to resolve this problem, Aristotle is going to argue that while these different senses of being are not identical, neither is it a case of simple equivocation to

relate these various concepts together. Rather they are going to be related on the model of paronymy.

Homonymy, Synonymy and Paronymy

If we are to be able to talk meaningfully about the world, it is necessary that for Aristotle, species and genera don't merely define general 'heaps' of things, but group things together according to criteria which capture something common to their essence. It is for this reason that right at the opening of Aristotle's *Categories*, we have a discussion of three terms, homonymy, synonymy, and paronymy.[iv]

Aristotle defines these various terms in the following ways:

> When things have only a name in common and the definition of being which corresponds to that name is different, they are called *homonymous*. Thus, for example, both a man and a picture are animals.
>
> When things have a name in common and the definition of being which corresponds to the name is called the same, they are called *synonymous*. Thus, for example, both a man and an ox are animals.
>
> When things get their name from something, with a difference in ending, they are called *paronymous*. Thus, for example, the grammarian gets his name from grammar, the brave get theirs from bravery.[v]

What is important in these definitions is the recognition that certain forms of differentiation of species may not capture what is essential to the species itself. As terms range over different objects, it is possible that, if we rely on the fact that the same term is used to designate different entities, we may be forced into a definition of a species which does not accurately capture what it is to be that particular thing. Thus, in the case above, the species, animal, may refer both to the man and the picture of a man, despite the fact that it is clear that in these cases the term animal is being used in substantially different ways. Whilst it is clear from the comments made earlier about the universal nature of language that homonymy cannot be avoided at some level, much of Aristotle's logical work consists in a struggle against the possible encroachment of homonymy within the logical system.[vi] Instead, we need to look for synonymous expressions, as it is these that capture something essential about the thing in question. How do these terms relate to the question of being? Being clearly cannot be synonymous, as the problem of the highest genus shows that it is impossible to give it a straightforward definition. Being could be homonymous, in this case, each of the different categories of being would be arbitrarily related to one another. Being would therefore just be a conjunction of different terms – in effect, a 'heap', rather than a unified concept. Instead, Aristotle proposes that we consider being to be a paronymous concept. What would such a concept look like? Aristotle gives the following example of a paronymous concept:

> Just as that which is healthy all has reference to health – either because it preserves health, or because it produces it, or because it is a sign of health, or because it is capable of

> receiving health - ..., so too that which *is* is said in several ways, but all with reference to a single principle. (MP 1003a)

If we take the case of health, we can see that a paronymous definition has several consequences:[vii]

First, different things can all be said to be healthy. Second, the definition of health will apply to each of these objects in different ways. Clearly health is different from, for instance, a healthy diet, or a medical instrument which is capable of promoting health. Third, each of these different meanings is related to a central meaning, known as a *focal meaning*. For instance, if we see health as the proper functioning of the organism, we can see that there is an asymmetry between our uses of the term. While a healthy diet will have reference to this proper functioning, perhaps the intake of foods which allow the proper functioning of the organism, the definition of health itself does not need to incorporate anything from these secondary definitions.

It's quite straightforward to relate this idea of paronymy to the concept of being. Rather than simply being a heap, the different categories of being are all related to a single concept. Different things can therefore be said to be, for instance, properties, substance and differentia, despite being different from one another. Second, the way in which these things exist may well be different, and yet still be related to one another. Third, these different notions of being will all relate to a central concept of being. If we look at the notions of substance and properties, for instance, it is clear that a property can only exist as a property *of* something. Therefore it is going to be logically secondary to a more focal meaning, in this case the notion of substance to which properties are attributed.

This concept of focal meaning is the one that is going to be taken up in the scholastic tradition, and opposed by Deleuze. This is essentially the analogical conception of being, as each different kind of being is not understood or defined directly, but by analogy with a central concept. As we shall see next week, this concept will be taken up by Aquinas, and will be opposed by the univocal conception of being introduced by Duns Scotus. In scholastic philosophy, these two notions of being will be the infinite being of God, and the finite being of man.

We can say therefore that whereas for synonymy, the term and its focal meaning coincide, and with homonymy, there is no focal meaning for the different terms, paronymy provides a situation where there is a focal meaning, but one which does not coincide directly with any of the terms. Thus, Aristotle will claim that what is really at issue in the definition of a science is not the identity of the sense through which the class is spoken, but rather the identity of the focal meaning which underlies the differing senses. This seems to close off the possibility which Deleuze has highlighted, that of difference becoming an essential moment of the system in its own right, as, once again, the concept of a self-identical concept stands at the centre of Aristotle's ontology, albeit one which must be said in many senses.

Whilst on the surface, this solves the problem of providing a ground to the system, it cannot be said to be ideal. Following Bencivenga,[viii] we can see that the problem of the determination of the focal meaning now becomes serious. The purpose of the concept of paronymy is to move us from a conception of being as a 'heap' to a concept of an organised constellation of coordinated meanings. Whilst Aristotle believes that throughout the multitude of categories, an underlying focal concept of being shines through, Deleuze's opening up of the mere *possibility* of the concept of an ontology of difference throws the certainty of this concept into doubt. Now the onus falls on Aristotle to show that the concept of being, or unity, really is itself a unified concept. The difficulty is that this appears to be an empirical issue. If being is to be a universal concept, Aristotle has to show the universality of its application across the multitude of seemingly different domains. Given that Aristotle requires that there is in fact a definitive central meaning of being,[ix] the empirical account must explain how these various divergent meanings of being come to both be separated from the central meaning and yet remain semantically related. Beyond Bencivenga's analysis of this point, a further problem

emerges of the radical ontological difference between the term being and the species. This emerges because even if a focal meaning for the concept of being could be established, this focal meaning could not be integrated into the hierarchy, as if it became the highest genus in a formal sense, we would revert to the previous problem of the highest genus. Being must therefore remain outside of the world as described by the hierarchy, and merely be referred to indirectly through the categories, as opposed to the categories themselves, of which we can speak. This throws into doubt the possibility of using an empirical concept of paronymy to describe that which exists outside of the hierarchy.

Common Sense and Good Sense

At this point, I want to turn to two of the key concepts that Deleuze introduces in relation to judgement. Deleuze's account of Aristotle is in fact a more general critique than the particular structures of species and genera. Instead, Aristotle provides and instantiation of a more general schema of explanation employed by representation. Deleuze claims that 'judgement has two essential functions, and only two: distribution, which it ensures by the *partition* of concepts, and hierachisation, which it ensures by the *measuring* of subjects.' (DR 42) For Aristotle, a thing is defined through falling under a species, so the essence of a particular man is given by understanding him as a rational animal. Judgement operates in a similar manner by subsuming an individual under a given concept. Every concept which is used in judgement therefore in effect defines a class of entities (for instance, objects that are red, ideals that are just) much as a species does. Just as species form a hierarchy of entities, so we form hierarchies by adding together judgements. Common sense and good sense are the names for these two operations of judgement. Common sense, which allows for the partition of concepts, is what guarantees that the structure of judgement by dividing concepts into subjects and predicates. That is, it is common sense which deals with the basic structure of subsumption of one term under another. 'This square is red', where the square falls under the concept of redness (like an individual under a species) Good sense is what governs the proper formation of the hierarchy of species and genera: the selection, for instance of rationality as the difference that is definitive of the essence of humanity. Both of these categories function to allow judgement to provide a proper determination of the subject. The problem of the highest genus is also present in judgement in general. Russell discovers this problem in trying to formulate the most universal concept in his own system: the set of all sets. Just as for Aristotle the highest genus cannot be differentiated without contradiction, so any attempt to formulate the set of all sets leads to contradiction.

Conclusion

I want to conclude this week by summing up Aristotle's position, and it's relation to the shackles of representation. If you remember from last week, these were identity, analogy, opposition and resemblance. Identity operates by providing the notion of a genus, through which concepts are partitioned on the basis of their opposition. Resemblance was necessary to allow imperfect finite things to be related to their essential determinations. We now see that analogy plays an important role too, as it allows representation to explain how we are able to develop a unified metaphysics. It allows us to provide something like a definition of the highest moment of identity in the system.

What are the problems with this conception of the world? Well, the first is that while it can explain the concept of difference in between individuals and genera, it breaks down at its extremes. Analogy and resemblance are both ways of covering over the inability of the conceptual schema to adequately deal with these 'catastrophes of thought'. Judgement cannot deal with the singular (the

problem of incongruent counterparts), nor can it provide a conception of the world as a being which is unified. Instead, a heterogeneous field of different modes of existence must be united purely by analogy with the focal meaning. These inadequacies provide an immanent criticism of the system of species, genera and analogy, but we could perhaps note from the outside that there are serious problems with the notion of species more generally. We will come back to this when we look at Spinoza and the move to understanding distinction in terms of affect rather than essence, but the central problem will be how we are able to understand the evolution of life, as well as concepts such as symbiosis in the context of eternal and self-contained concepts such as that of species. From this perspective, the key point that Deleuze makes with his arguments against Aristotle's metaphysics is to note the dependence of species and genera on a notion of analogy. The importance of this is that if we are able to develop a non-analogical conception of being, we then open the possibility of developing a logic which does not depend on species, genera or essences. Such a logic will give due prominence to the notion of accident (as was also found in Kierkegaard's concept of farce), and provide the possibility for an account not just of the unity of the organism (which essence does very effectively), but also the openness of the organism to change and constitutive relations with its environment. For this reason, we will focus next week on the concept of univocity, as providing an alternative to analogy.

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[i] Aristotle, *Sophistical Refutations*, 165a, quoted from Bencivenga, *Hegel's Dialectical Logic*, 10.
[ii] A more rigorous dissection of this argument can be found in Bochenski, *History of Formal Logic*, 54.
[iii] Aristotle, *Categories*, 1b. For a discussion of the role of the categories in other works by Aristotle, and their development as well as significance, see Ross*, Aristotle*, 21.
[iv] Bencivenga, *Hegel's Dialectical Logic,* places great stress on the importance of these definitions. C.f. especially, chapter one. Whilst he recognises that these definitions are central to the problem of the definition of terms in Aristotle's logic, he does not extend his enquiry to the problems inherent in the structure of the logic itself which become clear especially in the scholastic idea of analogy. Bochenski, *History of Formal Logic*, notes these structural features of Aristotle's logic, and their relations to set theory, but fails to realise that these features may be problematic for an ontological enquiry such as Aristotle's. A thorough analysis of Aristotle's various uses of equivocity can be found in Owen, *The Doctrine of Being in Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 107-135.
[v] Aristotle, *Categories*, 1a.
[vi] C.f., for example, Aristotle, *Topics*, 106a to 107b.
[vii] Vasilis Politis, *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, (UK: Routledge, 2004)
[viii] Bencivenga, *Hegel's Dialectical Logic*.
[ix] "Even if one has several meanings, the other meanings will be related to the primary meaning" (*MP*, 1005a).