Reading Aristotle's **Categories** Rorty 11/25

Chapter 1: Aristotle begins by giving us some tools.

He is going to be talking about the nature of reality in language; and language is both a crude tool and a very very suble one. If we are using words to make things clear, we have to understand—right up front—that we can use the same words to express, to convey to each other, different things.

So he starts this little book by calling to our attention that words that are meant to convey information can be used in several different ways. It is a very useful and sometimes difficult task to figure out how you might convey the same message he wishes to convey about the use of language, using different words than his. (Indeed, sometimes I think that the history of philosophy consists mainly of just that task! You too can be an interpreter of Aristotle!)

Homonyms:

Typically, his first sentence, the first example, doesn't make any sense to me. "When things have only a name in common, and the definition of being which corresponds to the name is different, they (the things) are called *homonymous*." His example is calling a man and a picture "animals."

> Does he mean "a man" and "a picture of a man"? That would make some sense: If I show you a picture of a man next to a horse and point at the horse and ask: 'what's that?' you might respond 'a horse;' so when I pointed to the guy next to it, you'd say 'a man.' So then I'd point to john in the front row, and ask 'what's that?' and you'd also say 'a man.' If I challenged you, you might say 'the same word is the answer to both questions—but that doesn't mean that the two things indicated are identical.' Or you might respond, if you are Aristotle: 'the definition of being that corresponds to each name is different.' One weird difference: Contemporary linguistics is interested in the characteristics of the **words**; Aristotle is interested in the characteristics of the **things** picked out by the words. The things are homonymously men, in my example.

Synonyms:

"When things have a name in common and the definition of being which corresponds to the name is the same, they are called *synonymous."* His example here is calling a man and an ox both animals. To put it more clearly: in the two sentences, 'a man is an animal' and 'an ox is an animal', the term 'animal' [which is predicated of each] can be understood in the same sense for both of the things of which it is predicated; the things, in his arcane usage, are synonymously animals. [I can make more sense of this example than of his homonymy example.]

Paronyms:

"When things get their name from something with a difference of ending they are called *paronymous*." Example: the grammarian gets his name from grammar. Paronymy in contemporary linguistics refers to words that have the same root but different grammatical form.

> An on-line dictionary of philosophical terms distinguishes Aristotle's use as follows:
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> "Aristotle's distinction among different uses of a term: they are said to be homonymous if the uses are entirely distinct, synonymous if they are the same, and paronymous if they are different but related. Thus, for example: In "Colleen is a cat," and "Garfield is a cat," "cat" is used homonymously. In "Carter was

> president in 1978," and "Bush was president in 1990," "president" is used synonymously. In "Jean was brave," and "What Jean did was brave," "brave" is used paronymously."

These specifications of different ways to understand words are both extremely boring and opaque in themselves—and, unfortunately, potentially useful in chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Of things that are said.

The next tool Aristotle gives us looks at first glance like the difference between words singly and words in combination. He gives us both nouns and verbs as examples of things that are said, as are the sentences that are the result of combining words. [Not all words can be put together to make sentences, though—'ox runs' makes a sentence, but 'man ox' doesn't.] But it's worse than that. What this chapter is doing is distinguishing different kinds of things—different ways of Being—all of which can be talked about, all of which we have words for—but which have different ontological status.

Of things there are [=things that can be said of other things],
(a) 'Some are said of a subject, but are not in any subject.' Example: Socrates is a man; but [the general term] 'man' is not IN Socrates. [=being a man is not necessarily identical with, does not reduce to, does not apply only to, being Socrates?] Socrates and Alcibiades are both (synonymously) men. If nothing else, this seems to be a straightforward denial of any interpretation of the role of F/forms that would claim [as some interpretations of Plato do] that Socrates is made a man, is identifiable as a man, by virtue of instantiating in some way the Form of man.
(b) 'Some are in a subject but not said of [predicates of?] any subject.'
The examples here are interesting. They are supposed to be examples of something that is 'in a subject but not as a part, and cannot exist separately from what it is in.' An individual's—my—knowledge-of-x/ perception-of-y/ virtue-of-z—seems to be something I can be said to have, but not BE. The claim that it cannot be said of any subject seems to be at least a way of distinguishing a particular from the language used about it. If we want to utilize the distinctions he made in chapter 1, my knowledge-of-grammar might make me a grammarian (=a person who has a knowledge of grammar), but this is somehow paronymous. Or: the 'is' in 'Jane is brave' is NOT the 'is' of identity.

Another example: 'the individual white is in a subject (for all color is in a body), but not said of any subject.' He seems to be distinguishing different logical and ontological levels here. The particular yellow of this pencil is something it possesses uniquely. This is kind of confusing, because I do want to be able to say "this pencil is yellow," just as I want to be able to say (and can say) "Socrates is a man." Our question here is: If it's not the same thing to say those two sentences—what is the difference that he is trying to convey? Maybe he wants to say: there is a general term yellow, and it can be predicated of this pencil. But there is also the particular yellow of THIS PENCIL, and that is something it has, because it is an ontological, existing individual. And this very distinction—between the particular, the individual, and general terms, applicable predicates—is very important to Aristotle. Particulars have a very very real ontological status that is not reducible to the universals that make them up.

(c) ‘Some things that can be said are both in a subject and can be said of a subject.’ Knowledge is in a subject, and also of a subject: I have my particular knowledge-of, and its content consists of the fact that it is knowledge-of a specific kind, eg, knowledge-of grammar. The word ‘subject’ that occurs twice in this sentence is homonymous: that is, the ‘subject’ that the knowledge is in is a concrete individual particular, eg me; and the ‘subject’ that the knowledge is of , is about, has ‘a differerent definition of being’—it is not a concrete individual particular.

(d) ‘Some things-that-are-said are neither in a subject nor said of a subject’—eg, the individual man, the individual horse. Again, this seems to be getting at a difference in logical / ontological level. *This* particular man/horse/pencil—*this* token x—you can not only point at but talk about—but when you talk about it, you use words, you name it, classify it, categorize it—and those words can indicate different conditions of being or different status when applied to different things in the world or in language.

Professor Hood in her notes put this in what I consider a very useful form: she calls this “Aristotle’s Ontological Square.”

Notice that both of us (and everyone else for 2000 years) interpret Aristotle here as talking about language and its logic, but also is using the things he says about language to say things about the world—about the things that language is used to describe, and their characteristics.

In Hood’s Ontological Square

--there is a ‘different definition of being’ for Socrates and the universal (in our example, man) that is used to classify him. He is a particular substantial individual, differentiated (by being classifiable as ‘man’) from, eg, the dog named Socrates that his neighbor bought.

--his particular knowledge of a bit of greek grammar, is in him, dependent upon him for its persistence. It is individual—but it’s not substantial. It does not have the ontological primacy of the particular substantial individual. He could forget his grammar and still exist—but if he ceased to exist it could not persist without him. So: it has a ‘definition of being’ that is different than that of Socrates.

Both things in the bottom of her square are ‘particular.’ Both things in the top of her square are not particular—that is, they do not uniquely describe, indicate, point out one thing, so much as indicating kinds of things.

--on the top corners of her square are indicators of kinds of things: Socrates the particular individual is a man-not-a-statue, a man-not-a-dog, maybe a Greek-not-a-Persian—you can imagine lots of different things you might want to put there—and things of different generality, too: he is an animal, as is the dog named Socrates (but not the statue of Socrates)….And we will talk more about that in Chapter 3.

--and language applies not only to describe and differentiate particular independent individuals, but also those things like his knowledge of greek—or the yellow of this pencil—that are dependent individuals. My knowledge of greek is an instance of knowledge. Socrates is an instance of man.

Put a BIG CIRCLE around the lower left category of being: those are substances. And a big square around the lower right category: those are predicates. More in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3

In this brief chapter Aristotle wants to point out the logical relation between things in the upper quadrant, and Hood's square is useful for understanding what he wants to convey. You can say of Socrates that he is a man, and can say of any and all men that they are animals, of all animals that they are alive, or self-moving, or mortal: and if you can truly say it of all animals, and Socrates is an animal, then you can truly say it of him too (thus the famous syllogism, all men are mortal, Socrates is a man, thus Socrates is mortal…) About the predicates the same series can be generated: this pencil is yellow, all yellow things are coloured, all coloured things are visible… He introduces the useful term 'differentiae'—this pencil is differentiated from that pencil by the fact that although they are both properly described as pencils, this one is red and this one is yellow.

Chapter 4

This chapter is CRUCIAL and sets out all 10 of the categories, to wit, SUBSTANCE, about which too much cannot be (and is) said; and nine other kinds of things that can be said about (predicated of) substances: quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, possession/having, doing (activity) and affection (being done by). The rest of the book mainly expands on them.

For "things that can be said without combination" understand "words." You can say 'yellow' and people will know what it means; that one, for instance, is a quality of a thing. But just saying things without combination does not convey any information; to affirm, or state, or convey meaning, you need to combine words, in which case you say something that can be either true or false. (Remember? I said something about that when talking about chapter 2.) Language is a way of picking out things and saying something about them. Words are the medium of language, but their meaning is derivative from the kinds of sentences/propositions/affirmations that they are used in.

Two examples, the important difference between which will be seen in Chapter 5:

Yellow is a color. (predicates something—a genus, a 2nd ary substance—of a quality)

This pencil is yellow. (predicates something—a quality—of a subject/thing.)

Chapter 5

This chapter distinguishes between primary and secondary sense of the term 'substance' (the first category). Primary substances are individual things (Socrates, this horse). Genus and species are substances in a secondary sense. And genus and species are the only other predicates that are given the status of substance, because (2b30-1) "only they, of all things predicated, reveal the [nature of] the primary substance."
"If primary substances did not exist, it would be impossible for any of the other things to exist--" (2b5-6) –and I think that is true of the 2nd ary substances as well. [can you say the same about Plato's Forms?]

"If something is said of a subject, both its name and its definition are necessarily predicated of that subject." 2a19. For the other categories, eg qualities, you can predicate its name to the subject ("Socrates is ugly")—but not the definition.