

Aristotle: The Problem of a General Science of Being

Two problems:

(A) How can there be a general science of being?

(B) How can theology = the general science of being?

A. How can there be a general science of being?

Aristotle distinguishes a primary way of being (that of substance) and a secondary way of being (that of any non-substance) which is systematically connected to the primary way of being; and then identifies the study of being in general with the study of being in the primary way, the being of substance.

(B) How can theology = the general science of being?

(1) As Aristotle distinguishes a primary way of being and a secondary way of being, so within the category of **being for a substance** Aristotle distinguishes primary and secondary ways of *being for a substance* and identifies the study of the being of substance with the study of the primary way of being for a substance.

(i) Just as *being* is not a genus, *substance* is not a genus that applies to all substances in the same way, as a proper genus such as **color** applies to all colors in the same way. Form is prior to matter and the composite of matter and form (*Metaphysics Z.3*). It is a kind of substance prior to these other kinds of substance and **IS** in a primary way.

(2) There are different kinds of substantial forms and the being of one kind of form is prior to the being of the other. One kind of form exists apart from matter while another kind of form exists only when embodied in matter (the souls of living things, for example).

The being of independent, separate form is primary for two reasons:

(i) it is pure actuality and contains no potentiality, and

(ii) it is *separate* – independent – of matter.

The separate form independent of matter is god – the object studied by theology.

So the answer to **(B)** is in three steps:

To understand *being in general* (or being qua being) we must understand the primary way of being, the being of substance.

To understand the being for a substance we must understand the primary way of being for a substance – the way of being for a form.

To understand the being of a form we must understand the primary way of being for a form, viz. the way of being for form independent of matter, i.e. the way of being for god – the object of study for *theology*.

So the study of being in general can be identified with theology.

Aristotle: *Metaphysics* Book VII (Z)

1. VII.1: What is being? = What is substance? Bk. VII addresses the question: what is primary substance?

2. The main candidates for primary substance:

ch. 3: the substratum

ch. 4-12: form or essence

ch. 13-16: the universal and the genus

3. Ch. 3: the substratum: that of which other things are predicated and is itself predicated of nothing.

If the substratum were primary substance, then matter would be primary substance since form is predicated of matter. But matter is neither (a) a *this* nor (b) separate, and so cannot be primary substance.

Since the composite of form and matter contains matter it too cannot be primary substance.

So form is primary substance.

This conclusion is reached already at the end of ch. 3. Chapters 4-12 investigate form *because* it is primary substance (cf. 1042a17-18) and 13-16 argue that the form and essence is not a universal.

4. (a) x is a *this* = x is one in number, an individual.

Form and the composite are individuals, but matter is not an individual.

(b) x is *separate* = (maybe) the definition of x does not include a reference to entities

other than x.

Form and matter are defined without referring to any other entities, so they are separate. But matter must be defined with reference to the form whose matter it is, so matter is not separate.

5. Pervasive features of composite substances not explained by any specific physical science which are explained by individual substantial forms:

1. Why, *at* a time, an individual is one thing rather than many
2. Why numerically distinct objects are distinct
3. Why an object can persist through time and change.

Aristotle On the Soul

1. Is Aristotle a materialist, a dualist or a functionalist?
2. Two cases considered: the soul and psychological events.

3. The Soul

i. What must one believe to be a dualist?

ii. Aristotle must consider the soul an immaterial entity since he argues in *On the Soul* I.3 and 4 that the soul is said to be changeless. *Phys.* VI.4, 234b10-20: any subject of change must possess magnitude. The soul, being a form, cannot change because it has no magnitude.

iii. Nor can the soul be identified with the body's ***organization***

- a. *On the Soul* I.4 argues against this view.
- b. *On the Soul* 408b20-29 argues that the soul is unaffected by non-fatal damage to the body.
- iv. Different types of forms in regard to their relation to matter: the soul is a type of form a materialist would reject.
- v. Unclearly about how to distinguish the physical from the non-physical and so how to distinguish materialism and dualism.

4. *Psychological Events*

i. *On the Soul* I.1, 403a3-b19: a psychological event is a kind of composite of "form" and "matter." The form is something true of the soul, the matter something true of the body. The matter of a psychological event is a *change* in the living thing's *body*.

What is the form? It cannot be a power or a property or a state since it constitutes an event.

ii. Aristotle distinguishes change from another kind of event which he calls **activity**. The subject of a change moves *from* one feature over a path *to* another, e.g. a change from green to brown, or from here to there. Hence when a subject *is changing* from one feature to another, it is never the case that at the same time it *has changed* to the second feature.

The subject of an activity, e.g. *seeing red* or *thinking of god*, is not thereby moving from one feature to another. Hence at the same time I *think of god* and *have thought of god*.

iii. A change is, and an activity is not, divisible into different temporal parts or phases.

iv. Consider the **activity** seeing red. It must either be (i) the composite of "form" and "matter" or (ii) the form alone of a psychological event. It cannot *be* (i) the composite of change in the body and something else since then what has no temporal parts would be composed of what has temporal parts. The *activity* of seeing red is the event occurring in the soul – the form – when a living thing "sees red" (where "sees red" refers to (i) the composite of activity in the soul and change in the body).

A materialist could not allow such an account of psychological events.

v. Functionalist interpretation of Aristotle: the form of a mental event is a functional property of the change in the body. This is compatible with materialism.

But Aristotle is not a functionalist.

1. Contrary to functionalism, Aristotle thinks that a type of mental event is necessarily tied to a **specific type** of change in the body: anger in *On the Soul* I.1; **De Part. Anim.** 692a24-25.
2. Examples of definitions in **Rhet.** II.3. A. first **defines** growing calm and **then** points out what can cause it.
3. A functional property is a disposition, and therefore Aristotle could not allow it to constitute an event.

Aristotle *ACTIVITY AND CHANGE*

Why Aristotle needs the notion of activity

- i. To give an account of psychological events consistent with his view that the soul is changeless.
- ii. The most real and most valuable entities are *events*, not potentialities or states. Change is an event but if a type of change is *good* or *valuable* it typically occurs *for the sake of* the end-point – quality, quantity, place or substance (***non-event***) – which will therefore be of *greater value* than the change itself. If events are to be the entities of greatest value we need an event whose nature is not such as to lead to a non-event beyond itself – an activity. Aristotle's god is an activity.

Fundamentals of Change

1. *Phys.* I.7 3 factors
2. Kinds of change
3. Generic and specific identity

Specific identity: same limits and path; locomotion

4. Path of change – magnitude a continuum
5. Numerical identity: same in species, same time, same subject

Differences between change and activity

1. Change has a path that is infinitely divisible – features and stretches. Activity has no path. Activity must be distinguished from rest.
2. Hence, the subject of a change exhibits a series of features during the change. The subject of an activity exhibits none.
3. At the end of a change its subject has a new feature and has lost an old one. No such loss or acquisition in a subject of activity.
4. The species of a change is divisible into species of parts of the change which differ from each other and the species of the whole change. The species of an activity indivisible.
5. The subject of change is divisible into parts with magnitude. The subject of an activity is not. VI.4
6. Tense test *Metaphysics* IX.6 Simultaneity of states of affairs not truth.

Both present and perfect must refer to the same event.

Rejection of atomism.

7. A change is incomplete or without its end as long as it exists. An activity is complete and = its end. End of change outside it. End of change its end point, not an agent's goal. Nor necessarily good.

A change is incomplete in that as long as it exists, there is more of it to come. Spread out over time. Temporal parts.

An activity is temporally partless and so in that sense complete: "all" of it is present whenever it exists. Like a point.

8. A change has temporal parts, an activity has none.

9. The species of a change is undetermined as long as it exists. It depends on what happens later. The species of an activity is determined as soon as it exists.

10. The numerical identity of a change is undetermined until its over. An activity's identity determined immediately.

i. Species essential to a change's identity & (9)

ii. The parts of a change essential to its identity and that's

undetermined until the end.

11. A change is a continuum but not an activity. Continuity of a change determined by the nature of its path.

12. The end of a change is its limit. So a change is not indefinitely continuable.

The end of an activity is not a limit standing outside it but = the activity itself. So indefinitely continuable.

My seeing red, an activity, must stop but only because I am mortal, not because of the nature of the activity itself.

13. A change can be fast or slow, an activity not. In a change you get from S to E in a short or long period of time, and so quickly or slowly. With an activity you do not go from any S to any E and so you do not go from S to E in a short or long period of time – quickly or slowly.

14. A change doesn't exist in a moment, an activity does.

Argument at VI.3

Doesn't apply to activity, given (13).

15. A change exists only if it exists for a period of time. An activity can exist at one and only one moment.

i. Distinguish (14) and (15).

Being F exists in a moment but in some cases must last for a time. (14) by itself doesn't entail that an activity needn't.

ii. A change must exist over time because of the nature of magnitude. Magnitude is a continuum and so must be divisible into parts with size. Ditto for change and time.

iii. Arguments (a) *Physics* VI.3

(b) *Physics* 237a19-25 – limits at different moments not next to each other

Neither applies to activity.

16. No first or last time of change's existence. But for activity.

17. Generation of change but not activity.