

Z.13: Substances and Universals

Summary of Zeta so far

Let us now take stock of what we seem to have learned so far about substances in *Metaphysics Z* (with some additional ideas about essences from *APst.* and *Topics*).

- The substance of a hylomorphic compound is a substantial form.
- Each substantial form corresponds to (i.e., is correlated one-to-one with) a species.
- A substantial form is an essence.
- An essence is what is denoted by the definiens of a definition.
- Only universals are definable.

From these, it follows that:

- Substantial forms are universals that can be shared by different specimens of the same species

The Conflict with Z.13

Z.13 seems to undercut this interpretation entirely by arguing that **universals are not substances**:

It would seem impossible for anything spoken of [or, predicated (*legetai*)] universally to be substance (1038b9).

It is evident that nothing that belongs universally is a substance (1038b35).

This leaves us with a fundamental tension in Aristotle's conception of substance, since he seems to be committed to each of the following three propositions:

- i. Substance is form.
- ii. Form is universal.
- iii. No universal is a substance.

The depth of this tension is evident from the number of passages in which these points are made, which are listed below.

Evidence of the Inconsistency

i. Substance is form:

By 'form' I mean a thing's essence and primary substance. (Z.7, 1032b1-2)

It is evident, then, that what is called substance as form does not come to be, but the compound substance, which is called substance insofar as it is substance as form, does come to be. (Z.8, 1033b17)

It is also clear that the soul is the primary substance, the body is matter, and man or animal is composed of the two as universal. (Z.11, 1037a5)

For <the primary> substance is the form present in the thing, and the compound substance is spoken of as composed of the form and the matter. (Z.11, 1037a29)

By 'primary substance' I mean the substance that is so called not because x is in y and y is the subject of x by being the matter of x. (Z.11, 1037b2-4)

Now, an animal's soul—the substance of what is ensouled—is the substance corresponding to the account; it is the form and essence of the right sort of body. ... Hence the parts of the soul, either all or some of them, are prior to the compound animal, and the same is true in the case of the particular. The body and its parts are posterior to this substance <i.e., the soul>, and its parts are the matter into which the compound, but not this substance, is divided. (Z.10, 1035b15-21)

Hence we search for the cause on account of which the matter is something, i.e., for the form; and this cause is the substance. (Z.17, 1041b7)

Obviously, therefore, substance or [i.e.] form is actuality. (H.8, 1050b2)

Since the ultimate species are substances, and individuals which do not differ in species are found in them (e.g. Socrates, Coriscus), we must either describe the universal attributes first or else say the same thing many times over (*De Part. An.* 644a24-5)

ii. Form is universal:

What sorts of parts are parts of the form, and what sorts are parts of the combined thing, not of the form? If this is not clear, we cannot define anything; for definition is of the universal and of the form. (Z.11, 1036a29)

... whenever anyone who looks for a formula is defining a particular, he ought to realize that the definition can in very case be undermined, since particulars cannot be defined. (Z.15, 1040a6-7)

And the whole—this sort of form in this flesh and bones—is Callias or Socrates; and they differ because of matter, since their matter is different, but they are the same in form, since the form is indivisible. (Z.8, 1034a5-8)

... the universal is common—for what is called universal is what naturally belongs to more than one thing. (Z.13, 1038b11-12; cf. also *De Part. An.* 644a26-7)

... the universal and [i.e.] the form is prior (M.8, 1084b5)

iii. No universal is a substance:

For it would seem impossible for anything spoken of universally to be substance. (Z.13, 1038b8-9)

It is clear, then, that nothing said universally is a substance, and that no substance is composed of substances. (Z.16, 1041a3-5)

... even being and one are not substance, since nothing else common is substance either. (Z.16, 1040b23)

Further, neither the universal nor the genus is substance. (H.1, 1042a22)

Now, man or horse or anything else that applies in this way to particulars, but universally, is not a substance (Z.10, 1035b28)

If then no universal can be a substance, as has been said in our discussion of substance and being, and if being itself cannot be a substance in the sense of a one apart from the many (for it is common to the many), but is only a predicate, clearly the one also cannot be a substance. (I.2, 1053b16-18)

A further difficulty is raised by the fact that all knowledge is of universals and of the 'such', but substance does not belong to universals, but is rather a 'this' and separable, so that if there is knowledge about the first principles, the question arises, how are we to suppose the first principle to be substance? (K.2, 1060b21)

But if the principles are universal either the substances composed of them are universal too, or non-substance will be prior to substance; the universal is not a substance, and the element or principle is universal, and the element or principle is prior to the things of which it is the principle or element. (M.10, 1087a1-2)

Responses to the apparent inconsistency

Interpreters of Aristotle can be divided into three groups:

- A. Those who think that the inconsistency is unavoidable.
- B. Those who think that forms (or essences) are particular (in the sense that different members of the same species have different forms or essences).
- C. Those who deny that forms (or essences) are particular in this sense, but think that the inconsistency can still be avoided.

There are many further subdivisions. Group B is divided between (i) those who think that individual essences of members of the same species differ only numerically, and (ii) those who think that such essences differ qualitatively as well. Group C interpreters are so diverse that they will be listed separately.

Group A

The inconsistency is fundamental and cannot be resolved (Leshner [1971], Sykes [1975]).

Group B

Ambiguity in *form*: particular vs. general (Sellars [1957], Harter [1975], Hartman [1977], Frede [1978], Irwin [1988], Witt [1989]).

- 1) No universal is a substance.
- 2) General forms are universals.
- 3) Particular forms are substances.

Group C

a. Ambiguity in *substance* (Lacey [1965], Wedin [2000]): substance-as-thing vs. substance-as-essence (=substance of).

- 1) No universal is a substance (=thing).
- 2) Forms are universals.
- 3) Forms are substances (=essences, i.e., substances of things).

b. Ambiguity in *universal*.

i) Woods [1967]: universal (*katholou*) vs. spoken of universally (*katholou legomenon*).

- 1) No universal spoken of universally is a substance.
- 2) Forms are universals (but are not spoken of universally).
- 3) Forms are substances.

ii) Modrak [1979]: universals_p vs. substance-types.

- 1) No universal_p is a substance.
- 2) Forms are universals (=substance-types).
- 3) Forms are substances.

c. Vagueness in *universal* (Albritton [1957])

- 1) Nothing universal in relation to species is the substance of any of the species.
- 2) Form is universal in relation to individuals of a species.

d. Ambiguity in *eidōs*: form vs. species (Loux [1979, 1991]).

- 1) Nothing universal in relation to x is the substance of x .
- 2) *Eidōs* (form) is universal in relation to the parcels of matter it is predicated of.
- 3) *Eidōs* (species) is the substance of its concrete individual members.

e. Two kinds of predication: IZZing vs. HAZZing (Code [1986]).

- 1) Nothing universal in relation to x is the substance of x .
- 2) Form is universal with respect to matter (matter HAZZes form).
- 3) Form is (the) substance (of itself, i.e., of the substance that it IZZes).

My response

My own response, which belongs to Group C, combines ideas from Code, Loux, Modrak, and Wedin. A brief version can be found in Cohen [forthcoming].

Two Requirements on Substances

According to Z.1 (1028a11-15), a substance must be both:

- a. a ‘this’ (*tode ti*)
- b. a ‘what it is’ (*ti estin*)

(a) argues against universals (since a universal is a ‘such’, and not a ‘this’). (b) argues against particulars (since to know something is to know *what it is*, and knowledge is of the universal).

So what is needed seems to be something that is neither a universal nor a particular. But how could there be such a thing? The answer is to find something that is in a sense a universal (so it can be a *ti estin*) and in a sense not a universal (so it can be a *tode ti*).

Two Kinds of Universals

For Aristotle there are two ways of being predicated—essentially and accidentally:

A **universal_E** is predicated essentially of many things.

A **universal_A** is predicated accidentally of many things.

Some universals are both universal_E and universal_A. E.g., red is a universal_A, since it is predicated accidentally of the many red things, but also a universal_E, since it is predicated essentially of the many shades and individual bits of red.

Species and genera of substance, on the other hand, would seem to be universals_E but not universals_A (they are predicated essentially of their specimens, but not predicated accidentally of anything at all).

The solution I favor proposes that a substantial form is universal_A but not universal_E. As a universal_A, it is a *ti estin*; as something that is **not** a universal_E, it is a *tode ti*.

Particulars vs. Individuals

A **particular** (*kath' hekaston*) is what is not universal in any sense. That is, a particular is something that is neither universal_E nor universal_A.

An **individual** (*tode ti*) is what is not a universal_E.

So every particular is an individual, but not every individual is a particular. This is what a substantial form is—a *tode ti* that is not a particular, and is therefore a universal_A but not a universal_E.

Form predication vs. Species predication

Form is predicated of matter; species are predicated of their specimens. Now consider the flesh-and-bones that constitutes Callias, and the following two predications.

- a. Socrates is a man.
- b. These flesh-and-bones are a man.

(a) is a species predication. The species *man* is a universal_E that is essentially predicated of the individual man, Callias.

(b) is a form predication. The substantial form *man* is a universal_A that is accidentally predicated of these flesh-and-bones—the ones that constitute the man, Callias.

To make this move, we must draw these two distinctions:

A particular substance vs. its matter

Callias is not identical to the clump of matter that constitutes him. This seems right. For the former is member of the species *man* and the latter is not. Nor do they have exactly the same spatio-temporal career: the matter that Callias is made of will survive Callias's death, although Callias will not.

A species vs. its corresponding specific form

The term 'man' in (a) refers to the **species** (a universal_E); the same term in (b) refers to the **form** (a *tode ti*, i.e., a non-universal_E).

The relation between (a) and (b) is this: (b) is the hylomorphic analysis of (a). (b) is supposed to be explanatory of (a): what makes Callias count as a member of the human species is that the human form is predicated of the flesh-and-bones that Callias is made of.

Categories-style species predications are thus explained in the deeper hylomorphic context of *Metaphysics Z*.

The inconsistency resolved

The inconsistency is thus removed by taking (ii) and (iii) to be talking about different kinds of universals. (ii) asserts that form is universal_A, and (iii) denies that substance is universal_E.

How does this resolution fit the text?

The major stumbling block for all Group C interpretations is the first argument in Z.13, which purports to show that it is “impossible for anything predicated universally to be a substance” (1038b9).

But notice that this argument does not conclude with the simple generalization that no universal is a substance, but with the more qualified claim that **no universal is the substance of any of the things of which it is universally predicated**.

For the details of this analysis, see Code [1978]; for a short version of the analysis see the handout “Analysis of *Metaphysics Z*.13, 1038b11-15,” on the course web site.

This means that a universal_A is not the substance of any of its instances, since it is accidental to them, and the substance of a thing cannot be accidental to it. E.g., the form *human* is not the substance of the flesh-and-bones that composes Callias, or of any other packet of flesh-and-bones.

It also means that a species or a genus, which is universally_E predicated of all the specimens that fall under it, cannot be the substance of any of them. E.g., the species *human being* is not the substance of Callias, or of any other human being. This seems odd, so we will have to return to it.

What about a substantial form that is universally_A predicated of the various clumps of matter constituting the specimens of those species and genera? Is it the substance of anything? And if so, of what?

The answer here is twofold:

A substantial form, e.g., *human*, is, in an extended sense, the substance of the specimens of the species it is the form of. But it is not a universal with respect to those specimens, for it is not predicated of them. Rather, it is predicated accidentally of the clumps of matter of which they are composed. So it is not the substance of anything of which it is universally predicated.

What, then, is it predicated essentially of? That, after all, is what it is the substance of. The answer is given by the Z.6 thesis: each definable thing is identical to its essence. So a substantial form (a definable thing *par excellence*) is the essence of, and the substance of, **itself**. In an extended sense, it is the essence of the specimens of the species it defines. For when we ask the “what is it?” (*ti esti*) question about one of those specimens, the form is the individual (*tode ti*) that our answer ultimately appeals to. That is why it is the **form** man, not the **species** man, that is the substance of Callias. A form is a *tode ti*, ;and so it can be a substance. A species is not a *tode ti*—it is a universal_E—and so it is not a substance at all.

Concluding comments

Z.17 seems to support this interpretation. For there Aristotle tells us that “a substance is a principle (*archê*) and a cause (*aitia*)” (1041a9-10). It is substance that we appeal to when we explain such predicational facts as *Callias is a man*, or *Fallingwater is a house*.

Notice that the explanandum in these cases involves a species predication, in which a species (*man*, *house*) is universally_E predicated of an individual (Callias, Fallingwater). The explanation is couched in terms of a hylomorphic analysis: we must state “why these things, e.g., bricks and stones, are a house” (1041a26).

In the explanation, the predicate is a substantial form (*house*) that is universally_A predicated of the matter (bricks and stones) that constitute the house:

What we seek is the cause, i.e., the form, by reason of which the matter is some definite thing; and this is the substance of the thing (1041b6-9) and the primary cause of its being (1041b27).

Man is universally_E predicated of Callias because the form or essence of man is present in (i.e., universally_A predicated of) the flesh and bones that constitute the body of Callias; *house* is universally_E predicated of Fallingwater because the form of house is present in (i.e., universally_A predicated of) the materials of which Fallingwater is made. In general, a species predication (involving a universal_E) is explained in terms of an underlying form predication (involving a universal_A).

A substantial form, as a primary definable, is essentially predicated of itself alone, and is therefore, in a primary way, the substance only of itself. But the substantial form of a material compound, because it is predicated (accidentally) of the matter of the compound, is the cause of the compound’s being (essentially) the kind of thing that it is. The form is therefore, in a sense, the substance of the compound as well.

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