

# *Normativity: Contemporary Challenges*

Collection of essays by the Department of Logic,  
Ethics and Aesthetics, Faculty of Philosophy at Sofia  
University “St. Kliment Ohridski”



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# Aristotle's Essentialism

*Todor Polimenov*

In the present article I will focus on some basic features of Aristotle's essentialism by first showing his distinction between necessary and contingent properties, and then briefly outlining his early ontology developed in the *Categories*. This topic is of relevance to the contemporary debate because after the theories of Kripke and Putnam concerning the concepts of *natural kinds*, and Strawson's and Wiggins' studies on the notion of *identity*, the Aristotelianism is once more seen as an attractive philosophical position.

I shall begin with the Aristotelian idea of metaphysics as a universal science of being. At the beginning of the *Metaphysics Gamma* Aristotle gives an account of the difference between the specifically philosophical knowledge and that found in other sciences, (*i.e.* mathematics, physics, biology), producing an extremely influential formulation:

“There is a science (ἐπιστήμη) which investigates being as being (τὸ ὄν ἢ ὄν) and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature (καθ' αὐτό). Now this is not the same as any of the so-called special sciences; for none of these others deals *generally* with being as being. They cut off a part of being and investigate the attributes of this part—this is what the mathematical sciences for instance do.” (*Met.* IV 1, 1003<sup>a</sup>21–26. Italics mine.)<sup>1</sup>

Aristotle calls the science in question “first philosophy” in order to distinguish it from the other “philosophical” – which for him means “theoretical” – disciplines (*viz.* “mathematics” and “physics”). He

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle will be cited in the article in the usual way: after the abbreviations of the writings, after their books, marked by Roman numerals, and chapters, marked by Arabic numerals, are quoted the pages, the columns and the lines from the edition of Bekker (Berlin, 1831), whose pagination is imparted in all contemporary editions and translations.

accords it the status of, to use a contemporary expression, a “fundamental ontology”: it does not study separate sub-domains (“genera”) of being, as special sciences do, that are, so to say, “regional ontologies”, but is rather interested in the character of being of all objects, in the *manner* of their existence. Thus, further in *Metaphysics Kappa* we can read the following on the first philosophy:

“The science of the philosopher treats of being *qua* being universally (καθόλου) and not of some part of it.” (1060<sup>b</sup>31–32) “Philosophy does not inquire about particular subjects in so far as each of them has such and such attributes, but considers each subject in relation to being *qua* being – Natural science is in the same position as mathematics; for natural science studies the attributes and the principles of the things that are, *qua* moving and not *qua* being, whereas the primary science, we have said, deals with these only in so far as the underlying subjects are existent, and not in virtue of any other character.” (1061<sup>b</sup>25–32)

Hence, what characterizes philosophical knowledge is that it is, in the first place, *more general* than other types of knowledge. Its generality is rooted in its subject-matter. For all that can be said to be a “thing” in any sense, one can also say that it “is”, that it is a being (and respectively, that it exists in a certain sense). That is why being is the “most universal of all” (*Met.* III 4, 1001<sup>a</sup>21). However, it does not constitute its own genus (*Met.* III 4, 998<sup>b</sup>22). In order for given things to belong to a genus, they have to share a certain common feature. But the only thing in common among beings is that they are beings and this fact, in turn, does not provide a material characteristic (so Aristotle’s “being” seems rather to correspond to what contemporary logic would understand by an unrestricted “universe of discourse”).

Philosophy studies being – “that which is” in the sense of “that which exists” – only as being (*i.e.* only with respect to the mere fact that it *is*) and for that purpose ignores its specific modes of being: the circumstances of *how* it is (constituted); *how big* it is; *where* it is (situated), etc. Other sciences consider being taking their lead from the observation that, for example, it is a moving being (the fact that it moves thus-and-thus), as physics does, or from the observation that it is a living being (the fact that it lives thus-and-thus), as biology does, and thereon from the fact that it is male or female, as the theory of

procreation does and so on. Therefore, while other sciences separate certain domains of existence through some specific characteristics – for instance, being in so far as it is moving; being in so far as it is living; being in so far as it is male or female etc. – and turn them into their objects of study, philosophy is concerned with being in the most general manner, namely in so far as it is just a being. In that sense philosophy is a *universal* science.

However, philosophy is not interested in gathering particular facts, for example, the fact *that* something is what it actually is, but strives to find out *why* a thing is precisely what it is and not something else. Thus, since philosophy searches for “reasons” for the states things are in, for the “reasons”, therefore, that would serve as both what the cause of being for those things is and what makes their being explicable, its task can be, more strictly, defined as the investigation of the *principles* of being *qua* being (*Met.* VI 1, 1025<sup>b</sup>3–4). This means: philosophy is concerned with discovering the ontological conditions that most generally obtain to the domain of being. In this sense, it as “first philosophy” leaves to the other sciences the task to describe the regularities that can be encountered in the respective sub-domains in the unitary domain of being, namely, in the sub-domains which, as we saw, are formed by taking into account the specific modes of being, factually characterizing the objects, and focuses on – we can add now – the *necessary* dependencies in the domain of being.

Here we reach a further characteristic of first philosophy which is a consequence of the distinction between factual and necessary properties. As one can clearly see in the citations above, Aristotle appeals to this distinction in the definition of first philosophy, including in it his own distinction between things that are predicated of an object “in virtue of its own nature” (καθ’ αὐτό), and things that are predicated “accidentally” (συμβεβηκός), *i.e.* that pertain to an object only factually. What is said to pertain to an object “x” in virtue of its own nature is what find expression in predicates describing x’s “what-ness” – what is named in the answer to the question “What is x?”. Such predicates denote features of x’s essence. Paradigmatically, these are precisely those properties of x which are articulated in the definition of the *kind* of object x is. (If what “x” stands for is not a

particular, for instance, Socrates, as it was admitted up to now, but a universal, for instance, designated by “a human”, then the properties in question will be those, which will be given in the definition of this universal.<sup>2</sup>) In addition to these *substantial* or essential properties, the object “x” may, of course, have a number of other properties, for example, those that are mentioned when one says of it “how” it is, “where” it is, “when” it performed an action or has been acted upon, in relation “to whom/what” it stands etc. What characterizes this second type of properties is that x may or *may not* possess them without – and that is the point – his identity being affected. This means that if x loses some of those properties it would not cease to be *the same* thing it actually is. That is why one can say that while the first type of properties are necessary – they belong to the object no matter what it goes through (and in this sense: “in virtue of its own nature” regardless of what happens to it), the second type of properties are contingent: they are such that although factually comprising a part of an object’s properties, they may not pertain to *this* object in a different situation.

We can further elucidate the distinction between necessary and contingent properties by way of two examples. With a statement such as:

(1) “Socrates is a man”

we ascribe Socrates a property of the first type, while a statement such as:

(2) “Socrates is an Athenian”

asserts to him a property of the second type. “Being a man” is a necessary property of Socrates, because he would not be the same “object” he is if he ceased to be a man. In this sense, *as long as* Socrates is precisely this particular object, it is impossible for him

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<sup>2</sup>The strict distinction between a particular (object) and a universal (concept) – and respectively between singular statements (such in which one talks about a single object: “Socrates is mortal”) and general statements (such in which the subject is a universal: “Every man is mortal”) – is not quite clearly conveyed in logic until Frege.

to not be a man, which means: it is *necessary* for him to be a man. On the contrary, it is quite possible to turn out that Socrates was not born in Athens or that he spent the greater part of his life somewhere else or that although for a given period he was a member of the Athenian society for some reason or other he was affiliated with another city, and from none of these facts it would follow that in the case of Socrates we have to do with a different object. In other words: *if* Socrates is indeed the kind of thing we take him to be, then (1) cannot be false. It must be true. On the contrary, even if (2) is factually true, there remains a possibility for a conceivable situation in which, if certain circumstances had been (or were) different, it might have been (or would be) false. Therefore, (2), in itself, does not predetermine the issue of its truthfulness. Its truth would depend on what actually happens. Things stand differently with the necessity of (1), *i.e.* with its necessary truth. When we speak of Socrates, we *presuppose* that he is (was) a man. That is why we would not *understand* the statements we make, when we say that he was a philosopher, Plato's teacher, that he drank the cup of hemlock or that he was an Athenian if we did not *already* know that in each of these cases we refer to one man.

The relevance of the distinction between necessary and contingent properties in the context of the question of being and the science treating it, philosophy, comes as a result of the intimate link which, according to Aristotle, obtains between *what* something is and *whether* it is (*Met.* VI 1, 1025<sup>b</sup>18–19), *i.e.* between the questions about essence and existence. The thesis of the mutual dependency of “what-it-is” and “whether-it-is” is a borderline case of Aristotle's essentialism, according to which it is exactly the *essence* of an object what determines the mode of its existence. For a given x of the kind F *to be* (to exist) is for it *to be what* is included in the definition of F. For instance, the species form of Socrates (his “eidos”) is the one of a man. When we answer the question, what it means for x *to be a man* (when, in other words, we give a definition of what a thing has to be in order to be a man), we also answer the question, what it means for a man *to exist*. Hence, Socrates exists in the form that is explicated through the definition of what is for an x to be a man (in this connection Aristotle speaks of giving the τί ἦν εἶναι of man, the

“what-it-is-[for-a-man]-to-be”, *i.e.* the human “definitional being”). Thus, for Socrates, who is a man, *to be* (to exist) is for him to be a *rational animal* (of course, if we assume that the definiens of “man” is exactly “rational animal”, “ζῷον λόγον ἔχον”).

The above can be explained from another perspective. There is no bare existence. What *is* is always something determinate. This determinateness of being is articulated for us in speaking of it. Whatever predicate we take, by the word “is” it expresses a certain determinateness of being. This should be taken in the sense that every assertion of the type “x is such-and-such” has to be understood as a statement in which the “being” of x is specified by some determination: “x is a such-and-such being”. In Aristotle’s doctrine of categories, depending on the category to which the predicate “such-and-such” belongs, the assertion points to either x’s substantial form, or given features that comprise it (paradigmatically, genus and difference), or some quality of x, or a certain quantitative dimension, relation, position etc. of the object. And precisely in so far as they refer to essential or non-essential aspects of x’s existence, the predicates express determinations of x’s being. The non-essential or accidental determinations are exactly those that do not principally alter x’s basic mode of existence, since x’s identity is independent of the acquisition or loss of such attributes. The essential or, as we can also say, substantial determinations are, just the opposite, those properties that are characterized by being able to directly affect x’s existence. To summarize the above points: for x *to be* (to exist) is for it *to be what it is by virtue of its substantial form*.<sup>3</sup>

We can also use Aristotle’s theory of categories to interpret his view that being is the most universal of all (*Met.* III 4, 1001<sup>a</sup>21) and that it does not form a genus (*Met.* III 3, 998<sup>b</sup>22–27). Being can be considered the most universal not simply because we can say of *every* object which is an object that it *is* (in the general sense that it somehow exists), but rather because, when speaking of objects, we paradigmatically use the word “is” in order to apply predicates

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<sup>3</sup> This Aristotelian thesis reminds Quine’s formula “*to be is to be the value of a variable*” (Quine 1948, p. 34), if this formula is supplemented by the clarification that here we talk about exemplification not of any properties, but only about essential ones, since, of course, only essential properties are constitutive of identity and therefore of the way objects exist.

to them and to hereby reveal determinations of their being. Such determinations can most generally be classified into the ten Aristotelian categories as the very top genera of being (although of course the first category – in the *Categories*, not in the *Topics* – has a special place in the list of categories in so far as it does not primarily cover entities which are designated by predicates, but rather things which are ultimate bearers of properties and thereby exclusively subjects of predications [see below]). For Aristotle, it seems, the primary meaning of “is” consists not so much in the “verbal” role played by the word as an expression of the *property* of being, but in its “copulative” role, in which it *relates* determinations to the being of the object which is referred to by the subject expression in the respective sentence. This supposition is supported by the fact that Aristotle considers the sentences formed through the use of copula as fundamental. All the sentences that, at least on the face of it, do not contain a copula can be reduced to the former ones. According to him, “Socrates walks”, for example, has the same meaning as “Socrates is walking” (*Met.* V 7, 1017<sup>a</sup>27–30; *Int.* 12, 21<sup>b</sup>9–10). Hence, being is not a genus, because the word “is” is not a predicate in a material sense but is rather co-asserted with the assertion of *every* predicate.

If we go back to Aristotle’s first philosophy, we can say that it should reveal the necessary features of being, answering, in the most general manner, the question “what” with respect to objects. Mathematics, for instance, is not concerned with the question of what the objects it deals with are, namely “What are numbers?” This is a task for philosophy, which, in posing this question, should elucidate the mode of the existence of numbers. By presupposing *that* numbers exist and *how* they exist – as is presupposed, in Aristotelian sense, by their “what”<sup>4</sup> – mathematics directs its attention to describing the particular regularities that obtain in the domain of numbers. These regularities find expression, for example, in the properties that characterize numbers with regard to their relations. Unlike the properties which by definition follow from their “what” and which, for that reason, are necessarily characteristic for all numbers (*e.g.*, the conjunction of the feature

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<sup>4</sup> Compare, *e.g.*, the *Analytica Posteriora* where Aristotle points at arithmetic as an example of presupposing about “the one” (μὴνός) “what it is”, as well as “that it is” (*An. post.* I 1, 71<sup>a</sup>15–16; see also I 10, 76<sup>a</sup>35–36, 76<sup>b</sup>4–6; II 9, 93<sup>b</sup>24–25).

“immobile” (ἀκίνητος), *i.e.* immutable and respectively eternal, and the negation of the feature “separate” (χωριστόν), *i.e.* ontologically autonomous), the special properties in question (*e.g.*, the property of a number to be perfect, *i.e.* to equal the sum of its divisors<sup>5</sup>) have a type of inherence resulting, so to say, from the particular “position” which a certain number or a certain set of numbers occupy in the numerical series, *i.e.* in the domain of numbers. These properties, of course, are not predicated “καθ’ αὐτό”, since they are not deducible from the “essence” of numbers. They should rather be discovered through a mathematical inquiry or, in this special case, be “calculated”. The situation is similar in the fields of the other particular sciences. We can translate the Aristotelian conception of philosophy into contemporary language by saying that philosophy deals with the clarification of the existential presuppositions and the ontological assumptions of the rest of the sciences (with the question of the ontological status of the corresponding category of objects whose existence is presupposed in the claims of these sciences and whose domains form nothing but these sciences’ fields of study).

To better understand this conception, we could use the distinction Carnap makes between two categorially different types of questions of existence. He calls them “internal” and “external” (Carnap 1948, p. 206 *et seq.*). The internal ones are questions of existence within the framework of a certain *presupposed* domain of objects. For example “Are there centaurs (do centaurs exist)?” is a question in the domain of living organisms or, possibly, in that of the spatio-temporal objects but not in the domain of abstract entities or in that of fictional speech (*i.e.* in the fictional world of mythology, literature, or more generally – of fantasy); “Is there a number, different from two, whose square equals two to the power of it?”, “ $?(∃x(x^2 = 2^x \wedge x \neq 2))$ ”, is a question in the domain of numbers or, possibly, in that of abstract entities, but not in the domain of spatio-temporal objects or that of fictitious objects. On the contrary, the external questions are questions about the existence of a *whole* domain: “Are there material objects (do material objects exist)?”, “Do ideas exist?”, “Do numbers exist?” (“And if so, how do they exist?”, “What is the

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, 6 and 28 are perfect numbers since  $6 = 1 + 2 + 3$  and  $28 = 1 + 2 + 4 + 7 + 14$ .

mode of their existence?”). Exactly these kind of questions form the type from which the genuine philosophical questions are – according to Aristotle – because precisely with them one asks about the ontological status of the corresponding objects, about the necessary features of their existence, and not about properties which some (or in a borderline case – all) objects from the domain (may) possess, while others (or they themselves may) do not possess.

Now we can summarize Aristotle’s conception of philosophy as follows. Firstly, philosophy is the most general science (the science of being *qua* being). Secondly, it studies the laws and dependencies that obtain in the domain of being (as the science of the principles of being *qua* being). Thirdly, philosophy questions those dependencies which, in characterizing objects in their essence, necessarily hold between them (as the science of the principles of being *qua* being that constitute it in virtue of its own nature).

The distinction between the questions concerning the *factual* regularities that are present in a certain sphere of reality and that are disclosed by the specific knowledge of the corresponding sphere, on the one hand, and the questions concerning things that apply to the objects of all spheres and that show in this sense the *necessary* features of their nature, on the other hand, was a base on which the philosophical type of knowledge was distinguished from the other kinds of scientific knowledge, not only during the Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages (and, respectively, in the framework of the ontological paradigm), but also during the Modernity, and after that, to a certain extent, in contemporary philosophy. In other words, this distinction provides a perspective towards the philosophical knowledge which has been preserved in all three stages of development which consecutively appear in the history of philosophy despite the fact that those three fundamentally differ in their orientations, *i.e.* orientation towards “reality”, towards “mind” and towards “language”. The distinction in question is formulated in an exemplary way by Leibniz, who introduces a distinction between “truths of reason” and “truths of fact”. Kant adopts Leibniz’s distinction (and the related to it notions of analyticity and apriority) and leaning on it develops a large-scale philosophical theory, which aims at explicating precisely the “necessary conditions” of the possibility of experience and the human knowledge

of it (which, as Kant's theory suggests, coincide). Finally, one of the main goals which Wittgenstein sets to himself in the *Tractatus* when revising philosophical questions is – exactly by specifying the notion of necessity (and demonstrating how it should be grasped in the sense of the so-called “logical necessity”) – to show the limits of language (and respectively of “sense”), not the actual limits of a particular language indeed but the absolute ones, those which come from the language's nature itself, from the essence of its fundamental unit: the proposition.

Let us turn our attention back to Aristotle. He is not interested just in the existence of everything that actually exists, but sees his project in the tradition of the Early Greek philosophy which, by the way he interprets it in the light of a reductionist's ontology, asks the question of the *primary* being; the question of what exists in a primary and fundamental way. For Aristotle this question gains the form: (a) which and (b) of what kind are those things which must be thought of as properly or genuinely existing (and thanks to which for all the rest of things it should be said that they exist only as far as they are in certain relations to them)? (a) could be grasped in an “extensional” sense as a question about things which form the elements of the class of the primary beings. That is why when listing candidates for primary beings, Aristotle (*Met.* VII 2) turns his attention to things which his predecessors regarded as such: bodies (of animals, plants, etc.), natural bodies (fire, air, water, earth), the limits of bodies (plane, line, point), the atoms, the numbers, the ideas, etc. (b) refers to the same class of things, but, on its own turn, emphasizes the “intensional” side of the problem of the primary kind of being by taking as a starting point the explicating of the features defining the conditions that a thing must fulfil in order to belong to the class of the primary beings. This one is the approach which Aristotle (*Met.* VII 3) adopts discussing then four features: (i) that of being the “what-it-is-to-be” of a thing (= its essence), (ii) that of being a “universal”, (iii) that of being a “genus” and (iv) that of being a “substratum” of these (in the sense of being something which “underlie” them: ὑποκείμενον).<sup>6</sup> Of course, the two questions are linked. What is even

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<sup>6</sup> I mention here these four features only to give an example of the Aristotelian approach. They could be refined. Aristotle differentiates (iv) as a “bearer” in the sense of a “form”, of a “matter” and of the concrete thing “composed” by them,

more, the definitive answer of (a) obviously presupposes that (b) has already been answered in a certain way.

Aristotle's analysis should point at which are the ontologically autonomous things and clarify in what sense they exist as such. As "ontologically autonomous" could be classified the things which exist on their own and to which, therefore, is inherent a certain degree of independence (and not only in terms of their being in space and time, but also in terms of their definability and cognoscibility which is particularly important for the Aristotelian approach). Aristotle calls these things "substances" (οὐσίαι). That is why the question of *what being is* is nothing but the question of *what substance is* (*Met.* VII 1, 1028<sup>b</sup>3–4). If we are now to differentiate the wider sense in which the first philosophy arises as a science of being *qua* being from the narrow sense in which it accomplishes its particular study goals using as an orientation the question of what primary being is (= what substance is), we can say that for Aristotle the first philosophy acquires the form of a theory of substance: a theory of things to which an ontological priority before the rest of the existing things is inherent.

Thus, for example, even in his early work *Categories* Aristotle is led by questions of the type: Which things are substances? Which of the substances are such in basic and absolute sense (primary substances) and which things – even though they can be conceived of, to a certain degree, as substances – have such a "substantiality" which is still only relative (secondary substances)? These questions are, of course, also connected with the questions of the character of things

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while, on the contrary, he unifies (ii) and (iii) (which are actually Platonic and not Aristotle's suggestions). The questions about (i)–(iv) are elements of Aristotle's mature ontology, developed first of all in *Met.* VII and VIII. Due to lack of space, I cannot extrapolate upon them, nor upon their relation to Aristotle's early ontology from the *Categories*. Let us in the present context pay attention only to the circumstance that unlike the candidates for the primary being of Aristotle's predecessors, the features (i)–(iv) have, so to say, an "formal" character. The "what-it-is-[for-an-F]-to-be" (the so-called "definitional being" [of an F]) and the "genus" appear in the *Topics* (I, 5) as a part of the Aristotelian theory of predication; more precisely, as two of the "predicables", *i.e.* two of the four main types of predication (*cf.* fn. 9). "The universal", in turn, is defined as "that which is capable by its nature to be predicated of many things" (*Int.* 7, 17<sup>a</sup>39–40). Finally, the notion of "substratum" can be understood best, if it is examined in the light of an *ontological* interpretation of the notion of logical subject in the sense of a "bearer" of properties (*Categories*) or – more specifically – of changes (*Physics*).

which are not substances at all – the things which, in other words, do not exist independently and on their own, but appear, so to say, as “affections” (πάθη) of the substances (as their quantities, qualities, relations, locations, moments, havings, actions, and passions). In the light of such questions Aristotle (*Cat.* 2) gives as criteria for ontological autonomy the following two dependency relations:

- (A) *To be said of a bearer*      (καθ’ ὑροκειμένου λέγεσθαι),  
 (B) *To be in a bearer*      (ἐν ὑροκειμένῳ εἶναι).

The combinations of these two criteria and their negations produce the following ontological picture:

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| (A) and (B):          | <i>accidences</i> (universal non-substantial properties)<br>e.g. the colour red, the virtue sincerity, the size three elbows |
| (A), but not (B):     | <i>secondary substances</i> (species, genera)<br>e.g. human, horse, mammal   |
| not (A), but (B):     | <i>individual accidences</i><br>e.g. Socrates’ baldness, Hector’s bravery, this particular shade red                         |
| neither (A), nor (B): | <i>primary substances</i> (one “this-such-and-such”<br>(τόδε τι))<br>e.g. this human, this horse, this bush                  |

(A) is the relation of “predicability”. Using it, we define the class of things to which we relate, by making statements, as referents (denotata) of predicates and which, in this sense, can be considered as ontic correlates of possible predicates. This is the class of those things, which, therefore, we could call “universals”. That is why the negation of (A) serves as a guarantee of the *individuality* of the primary substances. If we now ask the question whether (A) expresses, however, a certain form of ontological dependence, it should be answered positively at least as far as the things we mention – when making statements – as references or meanings of the predicates used, do not exist independently (precisely in the role of what predicates denote), but are always related to other things to which we ascribe them. The universals, of course, could be thought of as “separated” from what they are applied to in predication as well (*viz.* by turning them into subjects of statements), but this happens, as Aristotle emphasizes, only in the area of thinking (since the

references of the subjects in question – as we could add – cannot be identified in space and time<sup>7</sup>).

(B) was traditionally called a relation of “inherence”. This relation gives the genuine criterion serving for establishing the border between substances and non-substances. Whatever the rest of the circumstances, if (B) is present between two things, one of them will be a substance, while the other – a certain kind of accident (= inessential property) of this substance. The notion of inherence needs several clarifications. First, although Aristotle expresses it through formulations suggesting that in this case we have to do with a relation of the type “x is contained in y”, the relation between x and y should not be regarded as a relation between a part and a whole, but in the sense of existential dependence: “x is in y”  $\Leftrightarrow$  “the existence of x depends on the existence of y” (i.e. “x cannot be without y”). What is involved in the relation of inherence is, therefore, not so much some “containment in”, but above all, that relation which holds between substances, whose existence is independent, on the one hand, and all other things which exist only as far as they are a certain kind of “affections” (accidences) of substances, on the other hand.<sup>8</sup>

As it seems, Aristotle uses the word “in” (ἐν) in the phrase “to be in a bearer” to describe the relation in question, since this corresponds to his view, that substances differ from the rest of entities in their ability of *obtaining* different features or attributes without changing their identity. That is why we could explain the character of “x is in y”, if we bear in mind, that its converse relation is “y obtains x” (in the specific sense of “obtains” as “has such and such – accidental – attributes”): “x – as an accidental attribute – is in y”  $\Leftrightarrow$  “y obtains – as an accidental attribute – x”.

A special case of this ability is the predisposition of the substances to obtain *opposites* (ἐναντία) (although not simultaneously): Socrates

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<sup>7</sup> The point of this criterion is not whether something can be turned into a subject (“every *human* is mortal”), but whether we can refer to it with a predicate and, in this sense, as to a universal (“Socrates is a *human*”).

<sup>8</sup> While the term “inherence” (in the sense of the ability of “being in a substance”) was used in the scholastic philosophy in order to describe the dependent way the accidents exist, in order to describe the autonomous way the substances exist the term “subsistence” was introduced: if x *inheres* in y (in the sense of “x exists as an accident of y”), then y *subsists* (i.e. exists on its own (“per se”) and respectively independently from x).

now is sitting here, but after a while he will head there; today he is sad, but tomorrow he will be happy; at the moment he looks tired, but after he has a rest, his freshness will come back; he is now pale, but tomorrow he will be ruddy; he sometimes gets fat, but then he loses weight; when he was young he had thick hair, but at this age he is already bald and so on. None of these sets of opposites – and that is the point – changes Socrates' existence in his status of the object which he is; in his existence as exactly this particular representative of the kind "human". Unlike accidental attributes which an object can *obtain* – as we saw in the example with Socrates – in the form of properties, which it really carries "in" himself (but which *this* object also might have not possessed), the secondary substances are not able to be, as Aristotle emphasizes, "in" a bearer. This Aristotelian view would seem odd only when we consider the "secondary substances" from the perspective of the circumstance that they also, as it seems, are *properties* of a bearer. And indeed, they, as Aristotle himself states, can be said (predicated) of a bearer. That is why they also should be, in a certain sense, its "properties". But for sure they are not the kind of properties which an object can *obtain* in itself (in the described sense of "obtain" as an ability of obtaining opposites), because then this object should also be able not to obtain them. Constituting the substantial form of an object, they are precisely the things which turn the object into *what* it is: this concrete object, recognizable as one and the same (and numerically one) in all his accidental affections and on all its way through space and time. That is why it is obviously impossible for an object, so to say, not to obtain its substantial properties. For this reason, it does not seem really to make sense to say that it "obtains" them, at least not in the sense in which this could be said of its accidental properties. In other words, since an object necessarily possesses its substantial properties (= its species form, its *eidōs*), this object cannot be said to "obtain" them in itself (and respectively they are not "in" it) as for the "obtaining" of a property it is characteristic that it includes the possibility of its loss and, in particular, of the possession of the respective opposite property. Thus, even if secondary substances can be "predicated" of on object and, therefore, this object appears as their bearer in the sense of *a subject of predication*, they – as natural species and genera – still are not properties which an object can "obtain" in itself in the sense in which it

can obtain opposites and in which it is a bearer of accidental attributes.<sup>9</sup>

All these logical and ontological distinctions are refined, developed further and even partly revised in Aristotle's later works. Thus, while in the *Categories* substances are said to be the concrete particular things (this man, this horse), in the *Metaphysics* VII and VIII Aristotle reaches the conclusion that the substance of a thing consists in its "species-form" (εἶδος), since this form actually makes from it the concrete thing *what* it is. The work *Physics* seems to play a key role for this development (it supposedly takes place between the early *Categories* and the late *Metaphysics*). To explain motion and change, Aristotle distinguishes there two aspects of a particular thing: its form and its matter. This deepening of the Aristotelian position should, however, be the topic of a further study.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Literature cited*

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<sup>9</sup> The distinction between accidental and substantial properties is described perhaps in a simpler way in the *Topics* (I, 5) by using modal concepts. There Aristotle gives two criteria which characterize the relations between the predicate and the subject of a statement: (fl) Does the predicate necessarily belong to the subject? (B) Does the predicate belong only to this subject? Here again four cases are possible: 1. both (fl) and (B): *definiens*; 2. (fl), but not (B): *genus*; 3. not (fl), but (B): *unique property* ("proprium"); 4. neither (fl), nor (B): *accidence*. Properties which are referred to in (fl)-predications are substantial. [In the *Topics* (I, 9) all ten Aristotle's categories appear for the first time. There they are the most general classes of "predicates" with which questions of the type "what", "how much", "how", "where", "when" etc. can be answered, while in the *Categories* – in terms of the "ontological" program of this work – the ten categories rather designate "things that are said without combination" and, therefore, the meanings of predicates (but also of subjects).]

<sup>10</sup> The present text was part of my habilitation project. I would like to thank Evgeniya Toneva for her considerable help in extracting this piece from the habilitation text and also for the useful suggestions regarding style.