

SUMMARY OF THE CATEGORIES

Substance (οὐσία, *ousia*, essence or substance).^[6] *Substance* is that which cannot be predicated of anything or be said to be in anything. Hence, *this particular man* or *this particular tree* are substances. Later in the text, Aristotle calls these particulars “primary substances”, to distinguish them from *secondary substances*, which are universals and *can* be predicated. Hence, Socrates is a primary substance, while man is a secondary substance. *Man* is predicated of Socrates, and therefore all that is predicated of man is predicated of Socrates.

Quantity (ποσόν *poson*, how much). This is the extension of an object, and may be either **discrete** or **continuous**. Further, its parts may or may not have relative positions to each other. All medieval discussions about the nature of the continuum, of the infinite and the infinitely divisible, are a long footnote to this text. It is of great importance in the development of mathematical ideas in the medieval and late Scholastic period. Examples: two cubits long, number, space, (length of) time.

Quality (ποιόν *poion*, of what kind or quality). This determination characterizes the nature of an object. Examples: white, black, grammatical, hot, sweet, curved, straight.

Relative or **Relation** (πρός τι *pros ti*, toward something). This is the way one object may be related to another. Examples: double, half, large, master, knowledge.

Where or **Place** (ποῦ *rou*, where). Position in relation to the surrounding environment. Examples: in a marketplace, in the Lyceum.

When or **Time** (πότε *pote*, when). Position in relation to the course of events. Examples: yesterday, last year.

Being-in-a-position, posture, attitude (κεῖσθαι *keisthai*, to lie). The examples Aristotle gives indicate that he meant a condition of rest resulting from an action: ‘*Lying*’, ‘*sitting*’, ‘*standing*’. Thus *position* may be taken as the end point for the corresponding action. The term is, however, frequently taken to mean the relative position of the parts of an object (usually a living object), given that the position of the parts is inseparable from the state of rest implied.

Having or state, condition (ἔχειν *echein*, to have or be). The examples Aristotle gives indicate that he meant a condition of rest resulting from an affection (i.e. being acted on): ‘*shod*’, ‘*armed*’. The term is, however, frequently taken to mean the determination arising from the physical accoutrements of an object: one's shoes, one's arms, etc. Traditionally, this category is also called a *habitus* (from Latin *habere*, to have).

Doing or **Action** (ποιεῖν *poiein*, to make or do). The production of change in some other object (or in the agent itself *qua* other).

Being affected or **Affection** (πάσχειν *paschein*, to suffer or undergo). The reception of change from some other object (or from the affected object itself *qua* other). Aristotle's name *paschein* for this category has traditionally been translated into English as “affection” and “passion” (also “passivity”), easily misinterpreted to refer only or mainly to **affection as an emotion** or to **emotional passion**. For action he gave the example, ‘*to lance*’, ‘*to cauterize*’; for affection, ‘*to be lanced*’, ‘*to be cauterized*.’ His examples make clear that action is to affection as the active voice is to the passive voice — as *acting* is to *being acted on*.

Aristotle: *Categories*

Part 6

Quantity is either discrete or continuous. Moreover, some quantities are such that each part of the whole has a relative position to the other parts: others have within them no such relation of part to part.

Instances of discrete quantities are number and speech; of continuous, lines, surfaces, solids, and, besides these, time and place.

In the case of the parts of a number, there is no common boundary at which they join. For example: two fives make ten, but the two fives have no common boundary, but are separate; the parts three and seven also do not join at any boundary. Nor, to generalize, would it ever be possible in the case of number that there should be a common boundary among the parts; they are always separate. Number, therefore, is a discrete quantity.

The same is true of speech. That speech is a quantity is evident: for it is measured in long and short syllables. I mean here that speech which is vocal. Moreover, it is a discrete quantity for its parts have no common boundary. There is no common boundary at which the syllables join, but each is separate and distinct from the rest.

A line, on the other hand, is a continuous quantity, for it is possible to find a common boundary at which its parts join. In the case of the line, this common boundary is the point; in the case of the plane, it is the line: for the parts of the

plane have also a common boundary. Similarly you can find a common boundary in the case of the parts of a solid, namely either a line or a plane.

Space and time also belong to this class of quantities. Time, past, present, and future, forms a continuous whole. Space, likewise, is a continuous quantity; for the parts of a solid occupy a certain space, and these have a common boundary; it follows that the parts of space also, which are occupied by the parts of the solid, have the same common boundary as the parts of the solid. Thus, not only time, but space also, is a continuous quantity, for its parts have a common boundary.

Quantities have no contraries. In the case of definite quantities this is obvious; thus, there is nothing that is the contrary of 'two cubits long' or of 'three cubits long', or of a surface, or of any such quantities. A man might, indeed, argue that 'much' was the contrary of 'little', and 'great' of 'small'. But these are not quantitative, but relative; things are not great or small absolutely, they are so called rather as the result of an act of comparison. For instance, a mountain is called small, a grain large, in virtue of the fact that the latter is greater than others of its kind, the former less. Thus there is a reference here to an external standard, for if the terms 'great' and 'small' were used absolutely, a mountain would never be called small or a grain large....The terms 'two cubits long, "three cubits long,' and so on indicate quantity, the terms 'great' and 'small' indicate relation, for they have reference to an external standard. It is, therefore, plain that these are to be classed as relative.

Again, whether we define them as quantitative or not, they have no contraries: for how can there be a contrary of an attribute which is not to be apprehended in

or by itself, but only by reference to something external? Again, if 'great' and 'small' are contraries, it will come about that the same subject can admit contrary qualities at one and the same time, and that things will themselves be contrary to themselves. For it happens at times that the same thing is both small and great. For the same thing may be small in comparison with one thing, and great in comparison with another, so that the same thing comes to be both small and great at one and the same time, and is of such a nature as to admit contrary qualities at one and the same moment. Yet it was agreed, when substance was being discussed, that nothing admits contrary qualities at one and the same moment. For though substance is capable of admitting contrary qualities, yet no one is at the same time both sick and healthy, nothing is at the same time both white and black. Nor is there anything which is qualified in contrary ways at one and the same time.

Moreover, if these were contraries, they would themselves be contrary to themselves. For if 'great' is the contrary of 'small', and the same thing is both great and small at the same time, then 'small' or 'great' is the contrary of itself. But this is impossible. The term 'great', therefore, is not the contrary of the term 'small', nor 'much' of 'little'. And even though a man should call these terms not relative but quantitative, they would not have contraries.

It is in the case of space that quantity most plausibly appears to admit of a contrary. For men define the term 'above' as the contrary of 'below', when it is the region at the centre they mean by 'below'; and this is so, because nothing is farther from the extremities of the universe than the region at the centre. Indeed, it seems that in defining contraries of every kind men have recourse to a spatial metaphor, for they say that those things are contraries which, within the

same class, are separated by the greatest possible distance.

Quantity does not, it appears, admit of variation of degree. One thing cannot be two cubits long in a greater degree than another. Similarly with regard to number: what is 'three' is not more truly three than what is 'five' is five; nor is one set of three more truly three than another set. Again, one period of time is not said to be more truly time than another. Nor is there any other kind of quantity, of all that have been mentioned, with regard to which variation of degree can be predicated. The category of quantity, therefore, does not admit of variation of degree.

The most distinctive mark of quantity is that equality and inequality are predicated of it. Each of the aforesaid quantities is said to be equal or unequal. For instance, one solid is said to be equal or unequal to another; number, too, and time can have these terms applied to them, indeed can all those kinds of quantity that have been mentioned.

That which is not a quantity can by no means, it would seem, be termed equal or unequal to anything else. One particular disposition or one particular quality, such as whiteness, is by no means compared with another in terms of equality and inequality but rather in terms of similarity. Thus it is the distinctive mark of quantity that it can be called equal and unequal.

Section 2

Part 7

Those things are called relative, which, being either said to be of something else or related to something else, are explained by reference to that other thing. For instance, the word 'superior' is explained by reference to something else, for it is superiority over something else that is meant. Similarly, the expression 'double' has this external reference, for it is the double of something else that is meant..... So it is with all other relatives that have been mentioned. Those terms, then, are called relative, the nature of which is explained by reference to something else, the preposition 'of' or some other preposition being used to indicate the relation. Thus, one mountain is called great in comparison with another; for the mountain claims this attribute by comparison with something.... It is possible for relatives to have contraries. Thus virtue has a contrary, vice, these both being relatives; knowledge, too, has a contrary, ignorance. But this is not the mark of all relatives; 'double' and 'triple' have no contrary, nor indeed has any such term.

It also appears that relatives can admit of variation of degree. For 'like' and 'unlike', 'equal' and 'unequal', have the modifications 'more' and 'less' applied to them, and each of these is relative in character: for the terms 'like' and 'unequal' bear a reference to something external. Yet, again, it is not every relative term that admits of variation of degree. No term such as 'double' admits of this modification. All relatives have correlatives: by the term 'slave' we mean the slave of a master, by the term 'master', the master of a slave; by 'double', the double of its half; by 'half', the half of its double; by 'greater', greater than that which is less; by 'less,' less than that which is greater.....

Part 8

By 'quality' I mean that in virtue of which people are said to be such and such....

A third class within this category is that of passive qualities and 'having been affected'. Sweetness, bitterness, sourness, are examples of this sort of quality, together with all that is akin to these; heat and cold, whiteness, and blackness are passive qualities. It is evident that these are qualities, for those things that possess them are themselves said to be such and such by reason of their presence. Honey is called sweet because it contains sweetness; the body is called white because it contains whiteness; and so in all other cases....

For pallor and duskiness of complexion are called qualities, inasmuch as we are said to be such and such in virtue of them, not only if they originate in natural constitution, but also if they come about through long disease or sunburn, and are difficult to remove, or indeed remain throughout life. For in the same way we are said to be such and such because of these....

The fourth sort of quality is figure and the shape that belongs to a thing; and besides this, straightness and curvedness and any other qualities of this type; each of these defines a thing as being such and such. Because it is triangular or quadrangular a thing is said to have a specific character, or again because it is straight or curved; in fact a thing's shape in every case gives rise to a qualification of it.

Rarity and density, roughness and smoothness, seem to be terms indicating

quality: yet these, it would appear, really belong to a class different from that of quality. For it is rather a certain relative position of the parts composing the thing thus qualified which, it appears, is indicated by each of these terms. A thing is dense, owing to the fact that its parts are closely combined with one another; rare, because there are interstices between the parts; smooth, because its parts lie, so to speak, evenly; rough, because some parts project beyond others

One quality may be the contrary of another; thus justice is the contrary of injustice, whiteness of blackness, and so on. The things, also, which are said to be such and such in virtue of these qualities, may be contrary the one to the other; for that which is unjust is contrary to that which is just, that which is white to that which is black. This, however, is not always the case. Red, yellow, and such colors, though qualities, have no contraries.

If one of two contraries is a quality, the other will also be a quality. This will be evident from particular instances, if we apply the names used to denote the other categories; for instance, granted that justice is the contrary of injustice and justice is a quality, injustice will also be a quality: neither quantity, nor relation, nor place, nor indeed any other category but that of quality, will be applicable properly to injustice. So it is with all other contraries falling under the category of quality.

Qualities admit of variation of degree. Whiteness is predicated of one thing in a greater or less degree than of another. This is also the case with reference to justice. Moreover, one and the same thing may exhibit a quality in a greater degree than it did before: if a thing is white, it may become whiter.

Though this is generally the case, there are exceptions. For if we should say that

justice admitted of variation of degree, difficulties might ensue, and this is true with regard to all those qualities which are dispositions. There are some, indeed, who dispute the possibility of variation here. They maintain that justice and health cannot very well admit of variation of degree themselves, but that people vary in the degree in which they possess these qualities, and that this is the case with grammatical learning and all those qualities which are classed as dispositions. However that may be, it is an incontrovertible fact that the things which in virtue of these qualities are said to be what they are vary in the degree in which they possess them; for one man is said to be better versed in grammar, or more healthy or just, than another, and so on.

The qualities expressed by the terms 'triangular' and 'quadrangular' do not appear to admit of variation of degree, nor indeed do any that have to do with figure. For those things to which the definition of the triangle or circle is applicable are all equally triangular or circular. Those, on the other hand, to which the same definition is not applicable, cannot be said to differ from one another in degree; the square is no more a circle than the rectangle, for to neither is the definition of the circle appropriate. In short, if the definition of the term proposed is not applicable to both objects, they cannot be compared. Thus it is not all qualities which admit of variation of degree.

Whereas none of the characteristics I have mentioned are peculiar to quality, the fact that likeness and unlikeness can be predicated with reference to quality only, gives to that category its distinctive feature. One thing is like another only with reference to that in virtue of which it is such and such; thus this forms the peculiar mark of quality.

MIT OpenCourseWare
<https://ocw.mit.edu>

ES.113 Ancient Greek Philosophy and Mathematics
Spring 2016

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <https://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.