

Spring 2013

## Aristotle, Wittgenstein and Beholding Categories

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### Recommended Citation

Shapiro, Samuel Jonathan, "Aristotle, Wittgenstein and Beholding Categories" (2013). *Senior Projects Spring 2013*. 13.

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# Aristotle, Wittgenstein and Beholding Categories

Senior Project submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies of Bard College

by  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2013

In memory of

Karolina Mroz

1991-2013

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*In the particular is contained the universal.*

--James Joyce

## Preface

My hope is that the chapters within, in addition to their being reflections and explorations that assess categories and natural classification, that they each contribute to a cumulative argument about the confluence of the projects of Aristotle and Wittgenstein. Aristotle's *Categories* and Wittgenstein's later work (the *Blue Book* and *Philosophical Investigations*) are related in the respect of their epistemological implications about categories. I want to disavow claims about the similarity of the problems that motivated their work, or similarity of the content of their specific views. The project deals with several authors who are not in direct contact. I compare them for the sake of a conceptual reward.

The lasting importance of Aristotle's contribution to categorial classification is not in his own classification of plants and animals as a naturalist since there is no real record of his methods, but rather in his earlier logical texts that inform how one might go about using a system of categories to classify nature. In attempt to avoid a facile argument claiming similarities between figures for whom there is a lack of direct textual contact I spend a long time (the first two chapters) in cultivating an exposition of several figures in order to narrow my position. The chapters to follow each address the epistemological quandary of categorial classification-- whether we impose orderly patterns on the world, or whether this order exists of itself, independently of our encountering it. The *Categories* addresses the problem that, in Wittgenstein's words, "We don't notice the enormous variety of all the everyday language-games, because the clothing of our language makes them all alike" (335).

I do not contest the differences between the very distinct figures, Aristotle and Wittgenstein, nor the differences of the other figures that I include. I include each of them with

the intention of elucidating points of contact between some of their notions with regard to ascertaining a category in relief against their differences. The project is more directly focused on the epistemological question surrounding the recognition of categories, than a broad reflection on natural classification itself.

Stanley Cavell reads Part I of the *Investigations* as a multifaceted response to the passage Wittgenstein opens with from Augustine. Augustine recounts learning the “names of objects”. In considering why Augustine’s remarks gave Wittgenstein pause, and what sort of philosophical problem Wittgenstein is attributing to Augustine here, Cavell follows a thread of what he calls criteria, or sometimes searching for an essence of a thing (*Philosophical Passages* 139). The thread leads Cavell to find interest in Wittgenstein’s idea of a category difference<sup>1</sup>. Wittgenstein writes that Augustine “does describe a system of communication, but not everything we call language is this system” (3). In this case, as I believe Cavell suggests, the reason for Augustine’s category mistake with regard to language acquisition results specifically from his *philosophical* disposition. It is because Augustine is engaged in philosophy that he comes to look at language in a particular way. A method or an attitude normally adopted in moments of perplexity (or perhaps empirical investigation) leads the philosopher to lose sight of the appropriate level of categorial complexity in the matter. The attitude is one that surmises the existence of an obscure object that must be revealed by some methodology.

Cavell extracts the following question from Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*, particularly regarding the Augustine passage: “how can the obvious not be obvious?” (*PP* 138). It strikes me

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<sup>1</sup> Norton Batkin and Timothy Gould each refer to this phrase in section 111, Part II of the *Investigations* in writing about Wittgenstein’s aspect perception in *Aesthetic Analogies* and *An Allegory of Affinities* respectively.

that there is an uncanny resemblance to Aristotle's own relation to such obvious statements as "a real man and a figure in a picture can both lay claim to the name 'animal'; yet these are equivocally so named" (7). Uncanny because on the one hand this statement prompts one and the same question about why one wouldn't be able to see what is obvious, and yet on the other hand, there is no interruption that lets us pause and consider that Aristotle's statement is both remarkable and unremarkable, to use Cavell's terms. There is something arbitrary or unprompted in Aristotle's calling attention to the fact that "animal" may be *predicated of* this or that thing, though it remains indisputably a true statement. Aristotle's case showing things having nothing in common to answer to the same name is a point of direct opposition to Augustine's account of establishing a link between things and names.

Just as Cavell takes interest in Wittgenstein's beginning from Augustine, which Cavell identifies as pausing at, I find Aristotle's starting the *Categories* with an example of a homonym to shed light on the project as a whole. Augustine's names and things are contrary to Aristotle's homonym. The first joins words to substance, the latter maybe breaks them apart, or at the very least presents a difficulty for the link. The vague outline of the question of my project--the justification of our knowledge of categories--surfaces here as something each of the figures mentioned above grapples with.

It is certainly not always obvious when categories are invoked, but this is not because the situations are obscure or complex, but because we tend to pass over these times without paying attention, without finding cause for an interruption like the interruption that takes place between Augustine and Wittgenstein (from Cavell's perspective it is not clear who is interrupting who). In ordinary language it is very common to speak in terms of categories (which is the Greek word



for “predicate”). If Socrates walked into the room, we might report that a man walked into the room. It would be odd however to say that an animal walked into the room, because somehow a different level of specificity is called for.

To say that it is inappropriate to report that an animal walked into the room is to be interested in one kind of appropriateness, and not another. “Animal” is indeed an appropriate predicate for Socrates, or any other person, insofar as the predicate is a more general category that contains the predicate man, which is in turn a general predicate that applies to Socrates<sup>2</sup>. The inappropriateness of the predicate lies in its lacking a level of specificity that fits the context of Socrates walking through the door. The sense of appropriateness that allows us to use certain words in certain contexts beckons us to approach a word as a category.

A word as category is supported by a structure: the context of surrounding words. The structure surrounding a word is analogous to the structure that organizes genera and species in Aristotle’s classificatory scheme, which I will discuss in more detail. The “place” of a word in a sentence informs it, that is, the place gives the word at least part of its meaning, and the same can be said of the “place” of a genus in a scheme. For instance, “If genera are different and co-ordinate, their differentiae are themselves different in kind. Take as an instance the genus ‘animal’ and the genus ‘knowledge’. ‘With feet’, ‘two-footed’, ‘winged’, ‘aquatic’, are differentiae of ‘animal’; the species of knowledge are not distinguished by the same differentiae. One species of knowledge does not differ from another in being ‘two-footed’” (Mckeon 8). The order of genera in a way makes up the background of genera, which allows us to ascertain their

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<sup>2</sup> This summarizes the first paragraph of Chapter 3 in Aristotle’s *Categories*: “When one thing is predicabile of another, all that which is predicabile of the predicate will be predicabile also of the subject. Thus, ‘man’ is predicaded of the individual man; but ‘animal’ is predicaded of ‘man’; it will therefore be predicabile of the individual man also: for the individual man is both ‘man’ and ‘animal’.”

boundaries and wholeness. That the genera ‘knowledge’ and ‘animal’ are co-ordinate makes it plain that they are at the same level of generality (or particularity), yet it does not tell us about what sort of species are sub-ordinate to them. For this we need what Aristotle explained as *differentiae*, and I take this to mean the same as what Cavell intends by “criteria”.

After describing the example of a chess student taking a non-verbal hint from his teacher, Cavell writes,

It may even now be worth noting that Wittgenstein’s idea of a criterion has only with my latest example, that of taking a hint, come well within view, and still quite unthematically or unceremoniously. The example takes the idea that our concept of understanding (our ordinary understanding of understanding) is grammatically related to, or manifested in, the concept of taking a hint, and the scene in question produces the criterion of giving a hint (153).

We might say that the teacher’s hint was an instruction that the student saw, and followed. But Cavell’s example is intentionally more complex. The teacher gave a non-verbal hint, so subtle, that only his chess student would be able to notice that it even occurred. The implication is that the criterion that the student caught onto does not work in any way resembling that of a mechanical transfer of information. The student actively caught hold of this hint in his engagement with the chess problem. The context of the situation provided cues that allowed the student to recognize whatever the teacher did as a hint, as opposed to a random shuffling around in his chair.

I will use the example of a child learning to identify a kind of fossil on the beach to talk about criteria. In order to recognize something as a specific kind of thing, to recognize among many rocks that one of them is a specific kind of fossil, some criteria is needed. Say the fossil of interest is disc-shaped. We could show one such fossil to the child, telling him that *this* is how this kind of fossil is. He can then go look among the rocks for things that are disc-shaped. A

criterion stands out of our experience. Of course this criterion alone is not enough to guarantee that the child will be able to properly identify the fossil. Criteria must be learned by cultivating a sensitivity through experiencing many examples.

The interest in criteria on Wittgenstein's part is motivated by a desire to expose a myth of Essentialism, rather than to establish an order of a categorial scheme, which I take to be Aristotle's interest in *differentiae*. Despite the divergent angles toward the concept, the fruits of these labors are compatible.

In one case we are dealing with words, in the other, genera. The analogy is strange because it collapses into itself if words are in fact genera of their own, and then it is not so much an analogy as two parallel cases. What is most important about the question for Wittgenstein, and in turn I hope to show, Aristotle alike, is the way one goes about asking this question, and the awareness of concomitant assumptions of the process of handling the issue.

The remark in the *Investigations* that "The philosopher treats a question; like an illness" (255) implies that supplying an answer in the form that a question demands of us will not necessarily take away the question, and to remove the question is what Wittgenstein wants to do. This attitude is a radical break from "traditional" philosophy<sup>3</sup>. Rather than a discovery of criteria, or method of discovering criteria, Wittgenstein looks for way to eliminate our philosophical craving to know the criteria of a category. If we pay attention to the fact that we expect a criterion in the first place, that we look for a kind of object in the world that might be the epistemological cause or reason for the nature of a category, we begin to face an engrained epistemological assumption. Part of the assumption is that our philosophical problems should be

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<sup>3</sup> See Garry Hagberg's "Wittgenstein, Aspect Perception and Retrospective Change" (114, 117, 119) for a description of the nature of later Wittgenstein's philosophical project, and Cavell's *Philosophical Passages* (148) for attempt to qualify what "traditional philosophy" might mean with respect to the *Investigations*.

approached as if they were like those of empirical science, namely that a given phenomena can be explained by an obscure cause. It is worth spending time to let assumptions of this sort come into focus.

In both cases, that of language for Wittgenstein, and that of categories for Aristotle, there is a danger of the same problem. For Wittgenstein, it is the problem of justifying the meaning of a word, for Aristotle, it would be (he importantly does not address this matter) the problem of justifying the definition of a category, and of primary substance. This problem arises from the difficulty of language, or a set of categories, existing on their own without external aid. The example of a primitive language urges us to fill in explanations that are mythological manifestations of our assumptions. The order of categories prompts us to search for what this structure is supported by, what metaphysical entities are imbuing it with existence. It is “the scene in question” that “produces the criterion of giving a hint,” Cavell writes. We have the idea that the surrounding context provides criteria for a concept, and so it makes sense to look at context. Yet we must be careful; already we risk facing an infinitely recursive search for context.

Both Aristotle and Wittgenstein avoid being led this way. Being isn’t a category for Aristotle, not because it is too general, but oddly rather because it is too particular.<sup>4</sup> Being is primary substance, “the individual man or horse,” (Mckeon 8) and is not an abstract concept. Aristotle begins with being, primary substance, as the particular, and from the particular he

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<sup>4</sup> This addresses what seems to be a problem in talking about what categories are for Aristotle. Aristotle claims there are ten (and sometimes it appears that there are only eight) different categories absolutely irreducible to each other. Then if we look elsewhere, say at Kant’s categories, and see there is a different number of them, it seems like there are two contradictory claims about the world. Though I am not familiar with other accounts of categories, such as Kant’s, I am not motivated to be concerned about this problem. I am at least confident that Aristotle is not approaching the matter in the same way. If Kant is talking about categories of possible ways of thinking about the world, while the world in-itself is necessarily not directly available, Aristotle is firstly concerned not with thought alone, but with the world directly, and secondly, because Aristotle does not consider “being” to be a single overarching genus which the ten categories are subordinate to, Aristotle’s order of categories are not necessarily exclusive of other categorial organizations of being. The stronger, and in my view more important, points from Aristotle are ontological implications of his categorial organization.

works out his categories which advance in abstraction as they contain more sub-ordinate categories (predicates). Similarly, Wittgenstein near the end of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* adeptly expresses the situation in simple terms:

Logic fills the world: the limits of the world are also its limits.  
 We cannot therefore say in logic: This and this there is in the world, that is there is not.  
 For that would apparently presuppose that we exclude certain possibilities, and this cannot be the case since otherwise logic must get outside the limits of the world: that is, if it could consider these limits from the other side also (168).

Like Aristotle, Wittgenstein sees that any logical system he devises, no matter how basic, cannot take an Archimedean vantage point from outside the world, or from outside all of being.

Wittgenstein's argument with regard to language serves not to answer, but to dissolve the problem. I propose that we consider the epistemological problem with regard to the *Categories* in the same manner. We will then be able to see that Aristotle's *Categories* in fact lacks the problem in the first place, as if it were dissolved to begin with. Wittgenstein's philosophical progress is corroborated by Aristotle's *Categories*, and at the same time it encourages us to return to the *Categories* (and possibly more of Aristotle's work) with fresh eyes.

I will first consider some of the more influential scholarship on the *Categories* in order to situate my reading of Aristotle's text before turning to the *Investigations*, at which point it will be possible to see what light the two texts shed on each other after seeing their relation in the respect of their bearing on the epistemological justification of natural classification. In an intermediate chapter I will assess examples of classifications that contain the concepts I am interested in. A notion of categories that organize the natural world is one of the fundamental assumptions of empirical science. It is puzzling to try to place the notion of categories ontologically. Are categories rooted, perhaps, metaphysically in the physical world? Are they,

on the contrary, tools that humans are innately skilled at artificially constructing in order to make sense out of the otherwise chaotic bombardment of sensory information? In other words, are categories in fact “out there” or merely in our minds? This is the initial motivating question of my entire project, and the question I have in mind in reading Aristotle’s *Categories*.

Chapter One:

**Aristotle's *Categories***

**I. The Pre-Predicamenta**

“Categoriae” is the title of Aristotle’s first work in the *Organon*, a compilation of “tools” that are fundamental in other fields such as politics, sometimes considered basic logical works. “Categoriae” is the Greek word for “predicates,” which suggests rightly that the work is concerned with grammar. Yet for Aristotle, grammar is not necessarily an arbitrary human construction, nor is it just a reflection of how we organize our understanding of the world. It in fact informs how the world is. For this reason many scholars have discussed the *Categories* (often in conjunction with other works in the *Organon* and the *Metaphysics*) as an ontological work. The ontological project then is somehow related to the assembly of different kinds of words, which as Donald M. Mackinnon points out, is not only indispensable to understanding and speaking about the world, but also shows us how the world is, and in this way helps one be at home in the world (117).

I bring up the idea of grammar and then the idea of ontology because this seems to be a natural process of thinking while reading the *Categories* now, many centuries after it was written. Much influential philosophy has entered western philosophy since then, which I would imagine inevitably impacts our reception of the *Categories*, making it more important to return closely to the text. Aristotle has a way of writing that leads the reader to a natural conclusion that he will not always explicitly state. This style is evident in the pre-predicamenta—the first

four chapters that precede the main discussion of the ten categories. For example, the first chapter is about homonyms, synonyms and derivatives; the second is about simple and composite expressions, in which he first mentions “forms of speech,” then “things themselves,” and subsequently explains what scholars often refer to as the four-fold division that is made up by combinations of the criteria of that which is, or is not predicable-of and present-in a subject. In the third he talks about the relations between predicate and subject and then the relations of genus and species. The sequence of these chapters informs us of a program that is perhaps more powerful than the contents, and that is to expose inconsistencies in tempting assumptions about an ontological structure underlying the grammar of our language.

Aristotle begins the *Categories* by bringing to our attention that our speech contains homonyms. By placing a description of homonyms at the beginning of his work, Aristotle gives it preference, which he refers to as “naming things ‘equivocally.’” This definition initiates a discussion that disintegrates a mythological juncture between grammar and ontology. The first chapter alone generally addresses the way in which “things are said to be named,” so from the beginning we have a sense of things and names and several ways in which they might be connected. In consequence, it is tempting to read the opening of the *Categories* as evidence that Aristotle has certain assumptions about things and names, and how they are, or can be, related. Yet he is in fact doing just the opposite. For Aristotle to begin with homonyms, synonyms and derivatives in the first chapter is at least a refusal to trust blindly assumptions of the most fundamental sort pertaining to words corresponding to definitions. Aristotle’s explanation of homonyms, synonyms and derivatives is of philosophical interest in the first place only because his analysis exposes weak and vague aspects of names corresponding to things. I cannot see a



more viable motive behind the content of the *Categories*, particularly the beginning. Chapter One begins,

Things are said to be named 'equivocally' when, though they have a common name, the definition corresponding with the name differs for each. Thus, a real man and a figure in a picture can both lay claim to the name 'animal'<sup>5</sup>; yet these are equivocally so named, for, though they have a common name, the definition corresponding with the name differs for each. For should any one define in what sense each is an animal, his definition in the one case will be appropriate to that case only.

On the other hand, things are said to be named 'univocally' which have both the name and the definition answering to the name in common. A man and an ox are both 'animal', and these are univocally so named, inasmuch as not only the name, but also the definition, is the same in both cases: for if a man should state in what sense each is an animal, the statement in the one case would be identical with that in the other (Mckeon 7).

I identify philosophical inclinations of my own in reading J.L. Ackrill, and so my criticism of his writing serves to strengthen my grasp of the material. Ackrill notes that “the terms ‘homonymous’ and ‘synonymous’, as defined by Aristotle in this chapter, apply not to words but to things.” Ackrill claims that the *Categories* “is not primarily or explicitly about names, but about the things that names signify...Aristotle relies greatly on linguistic facts and tests, but his aim is to discover truths about non-linguistic items” (71). I am inclined in the same manner as Ackrill to read the first chapter as an intention to understand things as they are--this is an ontological task. And certainly, keeping with Ackrill, it is revealing that Aristotle begins by taking note of the way in which “things are said to be named”. Aristotle throws a linguistic light onto his project by beginning as he does. If nothing else, Ackrill’s comments should at least provoke interest or uncertainty about how one should read Aristotle. Aristotle’s texts are engaging because they call for reading between the lines. What exactly is “linguistic” about the *Categories*? Is this a way of describing the philosophical approach or method of Aristotle? Does

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<sup>5</sup> Ackrill explains that Aristotle uses ‘Animal’ as an example of homonymy because in Greek it had both our meaning of animal as well as the meaning of a picture, not necessarily of an animal.

it describe the content of his text? In response to this question I would point out that if Aristotle is thinking in terms of names corresponding to things (as Ackrill's claim implies, a terminology that influences a bifurcation of word and entity), it must be said that Aristotle's intention here is to establish a logical taxonomical hierarchy.

As it stands on its own, this chapter does not invoke a dualism of words related to things in a disjointed fashion. In fact, it dissolves a dualistic notion into a unit. A "homonymous"<sup>6</sup> case is one in which two things with no obvious connection answer to one name. The things are named "equivocally". In a "synonymous" case two things answer to one name as well and the definitions are named "univocally". We need to look at Aristotle's examples to see the sort of distinction there is supposed to be between equivocally and univocally named things.

A picture and a man do not correspond to the same definition, whereas, according to Aristotle, a man and an ox do. In each case the example is given that two things are named "animal," though the one case is not the same in *kind* as the second case. Aristotle is not making an inference about a causal relation that distinguishes the two cases, but rather appeals to an intuitively logical explanation: when we say an ox and a man are both animals, we are saying something different in kind than that a man and a picture are both animals. There is a deeper level of dissimilarity between the two listed items.<sup>7</sup> Each case is rooted to a different assumption about the ontological chemistry of the terms "thing," "name," "definition". The distinction here is not merely one of definitions--a definition cannot be cleaved from the thing it defines. An ox, a man, and pictorial figure cannot be deprived of either their names or their definitions as things,

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<sup>6</sup> "Homonymous" and "synonymous" are from Ackrill's translation, though neither of these terms or related terms appear in Richard Mckeon's preferred translation by Ella Mary Edghill. I use "homonym" and "synonym" for convenience is referring to the parts of the first chapter, though our conventional sense of these words, particularly "synonym" misconstrues Aristotle's intention. To be named univocally is not to have equivalent meaning, but to be subordinate to the same genus.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Wittgenstein's consideration resemblances and differences between items of a list.

and so while Ackrill is right to say Aristotle is concerned about things, it is misleading to make the characterization of “things that names signify”. Such a dualism is absent in the language of Aristotle’s examples.

Ackrill believes that “Chapter I makes it seem unlikely that Aristotle had yet seen the importance of distinguishing between words that are straightforwardly ambiguous and words whose various senses form a family or have a common nucleus” (72). Yet it seems that this is precisely the distinction Aristotle is making between things named equivocally and things named univocally. The first ambiguity seems to be an effect of coincidence, the second ambiguity is a case in which two species are subordinate to the same genus, and the ambiguity lies in the level of generality of the genus. That a man and a picture are both called “animal” is “straightforwardly ambiguous” in Ackrill’s words, while a man and an ox are members of a family. Chapter one on its own terms does not inform us of what membership in a family might entail. Aristotle has more to say about this in the following chapters.

In these first short few sentences there is the seed of the question that opens Wittgenstein’s *Blue Book*, “what is the meaning of a word,” and that continues to fuel his steadfast *Investigations*. In pointing out this parallel direction of interest between the two philosophers, I cannot claim that Aristotle and Wittgenstein have the same argument with regard to this question, nor even the same kind of philosophical relation to it.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps Aristotle in his own work makes the assumption that a “definition” is unproblematic--he doesn’t further elaborate on what it is for a word to share a definition or have differing definitions. Even so, the comparison of “a real man and a figure in a picture” points to the shadow of a confusion that

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<sup>8</sup> Wittgenstein is careful to keep distinct those matters that are of philosophical interest to him, and that which is merely the material that is suitable for philosophical treatment, i.e. that a mathematician takes his formulas to be metaphysical entities (*PI* 254).

runs through much ontological inquiry. At first the distinction Aristotle makes may seem plainly simple. A picture of an animal and a “real” animal are distinct--their definitions are distinct--in that on one hand we are speaking about an object, on the other hand, a representation of an object. Yet the example opens up the notion of using names as a code that signify objects in the world, allowing us to ask further about what names really correspond to.

Aristotle’s discussion of synonyms similarly reveals an idiosyncrasy with respect to names, and also begins to suggest an underlying structure that allows the names to function. “A man and an ox are both ‘animal’, and these are univocally so named inasmuch as not only the name, but also the definition, is the same in both cases: for if a man should state in what sense each is an animal, the statement in the one case would be identical with that in the other” (7). That is they belong to a category (or genus) called “animal”. For Aristotle there is more to synonyms than two names sharing a definition. Ordinarily one might not think of the terms “man” and “ox” as synonyms because saying one does not evoke the other, and they correspond to two different kinds of animal. Aristotle’s remark implies that they are synonymous because they are both contained, so to speak, in the name “animal”. The vague sense of differing “definitions” attributed to homonyms is here given a structural inflection. In this case, a definition of one name is yet another name, so it is clear that the “ox” and “man” are instances of the broader category “animal,” and this relation of particular names described or defined as general names is what Aristotle’s classificatory scheme looks like. So far definitions are positions in classificatory scheme with some degree of generality or particularity that is evident given the relation to other genera and species, which in turn are definitions.

Derivatives fit into the schematic organization according to the same principle of the relation of the general to particular. “Things are said to be named ‘derivatively’, which derive their name from some other name, but differ from it in termination. Thus the grammarian derives his name from the word ‘grammar’, and the courageous man from the word ‘courage’ (7). Like synonyms, derivatives are names related to other names as particular instances of a general category. We can already see that derivatives are of a different kind than synonyms and homonyms. Derivatives seem to be oriented in the opposite direction than synonyms with respect to the hierarchical structure of category names that Aristotle carves out. Synonyms and homonyms are both attached to broader categories by nature of some common defining feature that make them members of the group of those categories, though derivatives seem to be more artificially constructed in that their names are taken from the categories they are associated with, implying that they are things that are named only after their category is established or named, extending horizontally out from the classificatory tree rather than relating to its general-particular axis.

It is easy at this point to conflate names with things, especially because a name seems to be defined by its place in a hierarchy of categories. That Aristotle himself might be confusing names and things or that he is unconcerned whether his reader might have this confusion is doubtful, given that Aristotle begins each of the first three chapters, “Things are said to be named...”. By getting clear about what is said about things, he is starting an ontological project by way of a linguistico-epistemological approach. In general we can see that Aristotle delineates homonyms, synonyms and derivatives according to a concept of definition (which we still must

admit is vague for the time being). Things are named in different ways, and Aristotle goes through these different ways in an effort to give an account of *categoriae*, predicates.

From this analysis one might make an argument, counter to what I earlier suggested, that Aristotle is not exposing names and things to be disparate entities, but rather that he is laying out a taxonomical structure that reconciles things and names in their differing manifestations. By bringing attention to three different ways in which things are named, Aristotle might be said to be dealing with the anomalies of an otherwise consistent system of communicating about objects in the world. The four-fold classification laid out in the second chapter does a lot to help understand what is meant in the expression “things are said to be named...”. What remains clear nonetheless is that Aristotle’s interest with regard to names lies in vague regions that give way to instances of names and grammatical relations that challenge our understanding of how they work.

In the final part of the first chapter Aristotle introduces derivatives: “Things are said to be named 'derivatively', which derive their name from some other name, but differ from it in termination. Thus the grammarian derives his name from the word 'grammar', and the courageous man from the word 'courage'” (7).

Ackrill deems that what he translates as “paronyms,” things that are derivative of each other, are separate from synonyms and homonyms.

The derivativeness in question is not etymological. Aristotle is not claiming that the word ‘brave’ was invented after the word ‘bravery’. He is claiming rather that ‘brave’ *means* ‘having bravery’; the brave is so called because of (‘from’) the bravery he has. For an *X* to be paronymous requires both that an *X* is called *X* because of something (feature, property, &c.) which it has (or which somehow belongs to it), and that ‘*X*’ is identical with the name of that something except in ending (72).

The carefully and methodically formulated comment attributes to Aristotle an adherence to a strict sense of Platonic Essentialism. Aristotle inherits the idea of Essentialism from Plato, yet it is not obvious how closely he follows this idea. Certainly the concept of Essentialism can be detected in the *Categories*. For instance by attributing a common definition to a man and an ox, we may say Aristotle is talking about the essence of an animal that they share. Yet in contrast to Plato's project in the *Euthyphro*, Aristotle is not trying to locate the essence itself as if he were searching for an object, or an imperceptible form of something. To gain an understanding of Platonic Essentialism, it is helpful to look at the *Euthyphro*, in which Socrates discusses with Euthyphro the question "what is piety?" The topic of the *Euthyphro* on one level is indeed piety. The impact of the work however has much more to do with its doctrine of Essentialism: a question is asked in the form of "what is x," and to answer this question is to know what the essential qualities of x are, that is the qualities of x that are necessary and sufficient in defining x.

Aristotle first considers the particular example, comparing the common name "animal" in the case of an ox and a man, and in the case of a picture and a man. It is only by considering these cases side by side that Aristotle then goes on to distinguish the examples in kind. One might say he skipped a step--he did not first define the essence of animal, and then show that both a man and an ox possess this essence. The desire for this intermediate step is motivated by an epistemological assumption about categories. I identify this sort of assumption in Ackrill's comments.

The categories classify things, not words. The category of quality does not include the words 'generosity' and 'generous'; nor does it include two things corresponding to the two words. It includes generosity. 'Generosity' and 'generous' introduce the very same thing, generosity, though in different ways, 'generosity' simply naming it and 'generous' serving to predicate it (73).

I would be prepared to say that Ackrill is not wrong in this comment, but that he is making a mistake about how words work, which is bound up in an assumption packaged in Essentialism. Essentialism itself is not *wrong* in theory so much as in its application. The items that share a name synonymously have *something* in common in the sense that we recognize these things as having the same name, and yet this *something* is not *a thing* qua substance<sup>9</sup>. There is nothing more to it than our ability to recognize a concept, which is what makes concept recognition, or aspect-perception worth looking into<sup>10</sup>.

There is a danger of reading into Aristotelian categories a metaphysics or ontology. To make a metaphysical conclusion from a grammatical distinction is to ignore Wittgenstein's work in the *Investigations* which leads him to be cautious of a correspondence theory of language and reality. Once we dismantle this kind of dualism, it is hard to see what we are left with, and this is the problem at hand.

Ackrill partially avoids interpreting Aristotle as subscribing to a correspondence theory of knowledge in saying that "categories classify things, not words." Ackrill is saying Aristotle is not interested in words, or linguistic rules, presumably because they do not necessarily correspond to ontological reality. Then words do not necessarily represent *things*. But this would depend on what is meant by "things". When we use words to talk about things, the things do not have an independent life outside of the words. If we are extending the meaning of things to universals (or Forms) then there is a problem in saying that words represent things, as

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<sup>9</sup> Paronymy is commonly involved when items in categories other than substance are ascribed to substances. If we say that generosity is a virtue or that giving one's time is a (kind of) generosity, we use the name 'generosity'; but if we wish to ascribe generosity to Callias we do not say that he is generosity, but that he is generous--using a word identical except in ending with the name of the quality we are ascribing (Ackrill 72).

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle's sense of "inter-weaving," the literal translation of "complex" terms or terms in "combination" (Ackrill 73) calls to mind Wittgenstein's account of words.



Wittgenstein points out, because we find that there is no single attribute (“essence”) in common to all the instances in which a word is applied. There is a separation of words and the ontological world, so that a linguistic or grammatical point does not necessarily have any bearing on an ontological point. Considering Ackrill’s position that Aristotle is concerned with things, and not language, we might stop short in noticing the fact that Aristotle necessarily relies on language to communicate about ontological things.

Akrill notes that Aristotle “assumes that each thing there is has a unique place in a fixed family-tree. What is ‘said of’ an individual  $X$ , is what could be mentioned in answer to the question ‘What is  $X$ ?’, that is, things in direct line of  $X$  in the family-tree, the species (e.g. man or generosity), the genus (animal or virtue), and so on” (75). Ackrill goes on to say, importantly, “Aristotle does not explicitly argue for the view that there are natural kinds or that a certain classificatory scheme is the one and only right one” (75). Here is a point of contact with the tension between projection and perception of categories, evoking the question: what is the status of a universal that does not lay claim to any particular instance? The problem with the question for Aristotle is that all degrees of universals depend upon primary substance, which is described by Aristotle’s four-fold classification.

## II. Substance

Before Aristotle moves to the ten categories at the heart of the text he discusses the difference between *predicated of* and *present in*, known as the four-fold classification:

Of things themselves some are predicated of a subject, and are never present in a subject. Thus ‘man’ is predicated of the individual man, and is never present in a subject. By being ‘present in a subject,’ I do not mean present as parts are present in a whole, but being incapable of existing apart from the said subject.

Some things, again, are present in a subject, but are never predicated of a subject. For instance a certain point of grammatical knowledge is present in the mind, but is not predicated of any subject; or again, a certain whiteness may be present in the body (for colour requires a material basis), yet it is never predicable of anything.

Other things, again are both predicable of a subject and present in a subject. Thus while knowledge is present in the human mind, it is predicable of grammar.

There is lastly, a class of things which are neither present in a subject nor predicable of a subject, such as the individual man or the individual horse. But to speak more generally, that which is individual and has the character of a unit is never predicable of a subject.

Yet in some cases there is nothing to prevent such being present in the present in a subject. Thus a certain point of grammatical knowledge is present in a subject.

All substances (substance is the first of the ten categories that Aristotle later lists) are either present in other substances or not, and all substances are either predicated of other substances or not. These two binary characteristics of substance treated specially by Aristotle at the beginning of his text yield four logical possibilities: (1) predicated of and present in, (2) predicated of and not present in, (3) not predicated of and present in, (4) not predicated of and not present in. The fourth of the combinations Aristotle refers to as primary substance. Paul Studtmann discusses the difficulty of defining Aristotle's notion of primary substance, which Studtmann claims Aristotle gives "pride of place" to among the combinations.

In highlighting the fact that primary substances are not the sorts of beings which can be accidents, Aristotle, seems to be indicating both that they are not predicated of anything accidentally and that they are not entities which are manifestly temporary, accidentally characterized, or artificially unified, such as Socrates-sitting-in-a-chair. Similarly, by treating them as not said-of anything, Aristotle draws attention to the fact that primary substances are not predicated of anything either. Rather, they are themselves essential unities, and indeed not predicable at all (Studtmann "Aristotle's Categories").

In my view the difficulty in understanding Aristotle's notion of primary substance stems from a certain dualistic disposition to view substance, that is, the stuff of the world, as the concrete individual things, referents, that words and names stand for. The history of philosophy since Aristotle's time has accumulated archaeological layers that obscure some of the unity and totality

that his system of categories can be. The excavation efforts of Wittgenstein (and probably some who influenced Wittgenstein) serve to delicately reveal some of the subtleties substance that allow the Aristotelian Categories to resonate as something closer to their full potential. For the time being though, my task is to introduce important elements of the *Categories*, before I move on to a side by side reading of Wittgenstein and Aristotle. Among the categories, Aristotle devotes much description to substance.

Substance, in the truest and primary and most definite sense of the word, is that which is neither predicable of a subject nor present in a subject; for instance, the individual man or horse. But in a secondary sense those things are called substances within which, as species, the primary substances are included; also those which, as genera, include the species. For instance, the individual man is included in the species 'man', and the genus to which the species belongs is 'animal'; these, therefore-that is to say, the species 'man' and the genus 'animal,-are termed secondary substances. (chapter 5)

Primary substance is that which exists of itself. Secondary substance are predicates, in the sense of categories, of primary substance. Socrates is an example of primary substance, while man, or animal are examples of secondary substance. It is crucial to recognize Studtmann's point that primary substance is not meant to be a concrete physical object as we encounter it in time and space, which artificially binds accidental predicates to substance--sitting-in-a-chair is not Socrates' position by definition. If it is hard to imagine what Socrates as a primary substance might look like, that is because as Studtmann accounts for it, this is outside of our experience<sup>11</sup>. If we follow Studtmann's line of thinking, then Aristotle's discussion of primary substance is strictly logical, and "the individual man or horse" must then be concepts from our mind, not belonging to the world. So instead of having a *picture* of Socrates in our

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<sup>11</sup> It turns out that the source of the difficulty of imagining substance, especially primary substance is akin to the difficulty of defining a word as Wittgenstein sets out to do.

minds as primary substance, we have a negative concept of Socrates as not predicated of anything, and not present in anything.

Yet the negative definition leaves an epistemological gap: how do we come to have the concept of Socrates, an individual man? How do we come to know the primary substance “Socrates”? Encountering Socrates, or even imagining Socrates, would not bring the concept closer, because these images necessarily Socrates in time and space, real or imagined. All we have to go by is that Socrates is an individual member of the species ‘man’ and in turn that ‘man’ is species of the genus ‘man’ and so forth, until we reach the irreducible category of substance. We are right to suspect that these elements of a definition, our way of identifying things, are insufficient.

One might interpret the four combinations of the characteristics predicated of and present in as being on a spectrum from more general to more specific. Indeed Studtmann labels (1) and (2) as universals, (3) and (4) as particulars, which is confluent with what Aristotle seems to mention as an afterthought at the end of the second chapter: primary substances are neither predicated of, nor present in other substances<sup>12</sup>. We can think of the term predicated of as, “said-of”. Aristotle’s example of the individual man or the individual horse for primary substance shows that “individual man” cannot be predicated of anything or anyone else. *An* individual man is more specific than calling a being, “man,” and yet *an* individual man is less specific than something present-in, or an accidental being-in-the-world, i.e. *the* man that Aristotle sees

<sup>12</sup> Studtmann’s account of the four-fold division is as follows (“Aristotle’s Categories”):

(Aristotle’s terms)	(Studtmann’s account)
predicated-of and present-in	universal and accidental
predicated-of and not present-in	universal and essential
not predicated-of and present-in	particular and accidental
not predicated-of and not present-in	particular and essential

standing before him at a specific time. (There is no indefinite article in Greek, so lack of article “the” preceding a noun signals indefiniteness (Ackrill 76).)

In other words, despite being the most particular of substances, primary substance is still abstract, at least to some degree. Yet primary substance is not difficult to grasp merely because it is abstract; primary substance is abstract, yet also quite particular—*an* individual man is indefinite and is not necessarily one man rather than another, and yet *an* individual man does not represent or call attention to all of mankind. An individual man is in a sense an abstraction of one of the members of a species, but we must hold this concept distinct from—more particular than—the name or the concept of the species as a whole.

This is perhaps one way in which Aristotle has a different mindset than the modern interpreter of the problem. The fact that his pre-predicamenta system excludes the empirically concrete particular might imply something about his philosophical view of definitions that will come to light in considering Wittgenstein’s work with definitions.<sup>13</sup> The vacuousness of Aristotle’s description, and the fact that he makes it impossible to imagine a picture of primary substance provokes a desire for more answers, yet it may pay to remain with our deficit of answers and pictures, as Studtmann’s summary nicely suggests. In my view while it is tempting to hold Aristotle at fault for the lack of clarity or precision especially with regard to primary substance in the pre-predicamenta, we can read the ambiguity as a way of preventing falling into epistemological grooves of thought which do ontologically connect concepts to mental images.

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<sup>13</sup> Wittgenstein notices that roughly speaking we might define something either ostensively or verbally. The ostensive, in contrast to the verbal, is a way of attaching meaning to a word by referring or pointing to that which the word stands for. The verbal on the other hand uses more words to describe a word. The problem is that the verbal definition necessitates one already understanding words to learn a new word, and so it is hard to imagine originally learning meaning for a word. In fact the ostensive only points to what further require words to demarcate, and so there would remain an inevitable unbridgeable distance between words and things.

Beyond these few remarks, however, it is difficult to say exactly, given only what is made explicit in the Pre-predicamenta what a primary substance is. But this, one might argue, is appropriate for a metaphysically fundamental entity — we can say of it what it is not, but because it is so basic, we lack the vocabulary to say in an informative way what it is. And indeed, Aristotle thinks that primary substances are fundamental in this way, since he thinks that all other entities bear some type of asymmetric dependent relation to primary substances (2a34-2b6).

An even more difficult problem is exposed in the idea that it is only “appropriate for a metaphysically fundamental entity” to be in some manner incomprehensible. There is no further explanation from Aristotle himself, so we are left to our own devices. This may seem frustrating at first, but perhaps it is no coincidence that we do not hear any more from Aristotle on what primary substance *is*. If we “lack the vocabulary” to define primary substance, it is likely that Aristotle too lacked the vocabulary to express what primary substance is any more than he has attempted to do so.

The negative definition of primary substance may incline us to take the direction that the meaning of primary substance is *pre-linguistic*, suggesting that having access to a sort of code--knowing what symbols signify what objects--allows us to learn and understand language. The seemingly innocuous idea effectively paralyzes language<sup>14</sup>. The phrase primary substance is in language, and one may only discuss or search for its meaning *in language*. If we have in mind a “vocabulary” that is itself outside language (an Archimedean stand-point that might examine or analyze language as a whole from without), then logically it is evident that we do in fact lack this vocabulary, for it is a logically meaningless possibility. The meaning of words is only apparent in relation to one another, as opposed to measuring them against some absolute standard. As

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<sup>14</sup> See section 120 in Part I of the *Investigations* for Wittgenstein’s discussion of this matter.

mentioned before, such an external standard of meaning is logically impossible when talking about language.

While Studtmann and other scholars refer to the topic of the *Categories* as metaphysical, we might equally name this subject meta-lingual, if indeed the physical world is not the object of examination. Perhaps the tools for dealing with the physical world, namely language, is what Aristotle is working with here.

In the pre-predicamenta not once does the notion that the four-fold division *stands for* an entity in the physical world enter the discussion. While to the modern reader this may seem strange, it is not strange for Aristotle, who unlike the modern reader isn't constrained by grooves of thought, deepened over the centuries.

Whether the ten categories are themselves about words or about the objects that the words refer to is a contentious question, and one that reflects a tension between categories being an artificial construction and their being ontologically justified. It is important to point out however that it is not certain this kind of question troubled Aristotle. The debate can only occur in a setting that assumes a dualistic view of mental and physical states, or words and things. Looking back on Aristotle's language, we can ask what he meant by *ta legomena*--things that are said--which Aristotle will call words (Studtmann). The only reason the way in which Aristotle has framed his project seems ambiguous to us in retrospect is because we differentiate between what we think of as something non-physical, namely thought, and physical objects in the world. There is no reason to believe Aristotle would have had this problem or made this distinction.

The reason I make this point is because I believe, in some respects, Aristotle was at an advantage by not seeing a dualistic ambiguity in his project, which only brings about an aporia for those of us looking back on Aristotle presently. Consider Studtmann's summary of the reasons why, given the ambiguity facing modern scholars, Aristotle would not be as interested in dualism of physical objects and the non-physical words that represent them.

[Aristotle's] locution *ta legomena* is in fact ambiguous, as between 'things said'—where these might or might not be words—and 'things spoken of'—where these are more naturally taken to be things referred to by means of words. Second, Aristotle's examples of items belonging to the various categories are generally extra-linguistic. For instance, his examples of substances are an individual man and a horse (Studtmann).

These two points assume a worldview in which words and the things to which they refer are not necessarily distinct. From this perspective, to pose categories of 'things said' is only ambiguous if we bring ambiguity to it. The individual man seems to be an element of language as much as a physical object in the world. It must be noted however that Aristotle was writing in a time when there was an assumed (one might call it epistemological) distinction between mental content and the *things* that mental content represents. In fact, Aristotle himself writes about this in *On Interpretation*, the work that follows the *Categories* in the *Organon*. Aristotle starts the text by saying:

Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words. Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the mental experiences, which these directly symbolize, are the same for all, as also are those things of which our experiences are the images. (40)

Aristotle speaks in terms of symbols and the natural world, which is symbolized, and it seems that in this way he embraces a copy-theory of knowledge, a dualistic view of the world. The mental images that are the same for each individual have an exact correspondence with whatever



arbitrary symbol with which they are paired, although Aristotle does not necessarily think of this symbolic relation in terms of “corresponding”. Rather, he says words “directly symbolize” something else (“mental experience), as if it were the case that while there are several layers of representations of the world, there is one world as opposed to two distinct worlds, subjective and objective. In reference to the above passage from *On Interpretation*, Studtmann writes “Aristotle explicitly accepts a doctrine of meaning according to which words conventionally signify concepts, and concepts naturally signify objects in the world”.

I do not disagree with the claim that Aristotle is concerned about objects in the world. Yet the conclusion that “words conventionally signify concepts” comes to soon. My criticism is directed towards the question, not the answer, that this claim is responding to, which I take to be, is Aristotle dealing with words, or objects in the world. This distinction inhibits understanding not only of the full force of Aristotle’s project, but also of the extent to which it prefigures more recent developments in philosophy.

Without primary substance, there wouldn’t be any of the subsequent abstract qualities (*Categories* 2b6). We might say that in this way his starting point is the outside world—and there is some truth in this—though this would be a mistake in that there remains an assumption about the outside world in opposition to something else. It is imprudent to think the history of philosophy has not yielded anything but beneficial progress over time.

In Aristotle’s third chapter, following remarks about words and then things, we immediately see a superimposition of two pairs of terms, subject/predicate and genus/species. Terms such as “subject” and “predicate” carry similar enough meaning to our usage that they are self-explanatory. The grammatical aspects of the prepredicamenta help explain the structure of

the ten categories that comprise Aristotle's system of classification, and moreover this system is affected by the problem of what a word means. The ten categories are hierarchically on a par with one another, though they have no common genus containing them—they are irreducible kinds of the world. That said, they are not necessarily equally of interest or conducive to philosophical investigation, and substance has a special status in the *Categories*.

Due to the fact that substance is tangible unlike the other categories, it tempts the tendency to consider its source of being as independent of our noticing it, whereas the category of quality on the other hand seems to lend itself more so to our judgment, and so seems dependent on our active presence. There is little doubt as to the existence of these categories, one might say. The issue is one of the source of their being with regard to us as knowing subjects. "Aristotle's doctrine of substance belongs to his doctrine of categories. It cannot be understood except as the fundamental section of his attempt to explore the anatomy of being qua being. To treat the theory out of context is to be sure to misunderstand what it is that in spite of subsequent philosophical history makes Aristotle's ideas continually fertile and suggestive" (Donald Mackinnon 98). I take it that the possible misunderstanding that Mackinnon refers to has to do with treating substance as data to be collected empirically, something that is independent of our confronting it.

From the fourth chapter of the *Categories*, in which Aristotle in outline briefly describes the nature of each of the ten categories, Mackinnon surmises that Aristotle's intention is to create an "inventory of the kinds of things in the world" (98). That Mackinnon assumes without question that the subject matter is the *things* in the world, rather than the names of things in the world, or the grammatical system that structures these names is noteworthy given that it is

not clear--especially due to the historical perspective that Mackinnon is writing from, whether the *Categories* aims to discuss things in the world, or the language that stands for those things, or, equally plausibly, whether such a distinction should be at all meaningful to Aristotle.

Mackinnon's lack of pause at this point indicates that if the latter were true of Aristotle, than it is also true of Mackinnon, who does not note a distinction between words and things.

Mackinnon does however seem at least to begin to approach this issue in stressing that his phrase "in the world" is not intended to indicate a definite or necessarily physical space, but rather as "an incomplete symbol" for all that may exist. In fact, it might be said that language is an obstacle to Aristotle's project in the sense that the common use of language misleads us, as Aristotle says, about the way things really are. For Aristotle, and those who have commented on Aristotle's earlier work, the various ways of expressing the concept "to be" provides the most confusion. Being, in its broadest usage, does not fit into Aristotle's categorical scheme, nor can it apply uniformly to all of the categories. "Commonly, though not always, [Aristotle] uses "homonymous" and "synonymous" to describe not words but things to which a word is applied" (G.E.L. Owen 73).

The way in which we now think of the world, philosophically and scientifically, owes much to Aristotle classifying species of objects under genera, and working out the relations between these groups.<sup>15</sup> Yet Aristotle's statements do not always clearly indicate the relation between the general and the particular, or the formal and the material aspects of the categories<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> "...we must acknowledge that we do in everyday life and even in the elementary stages of such sciences as botanical taxonomy employ the kind of distinctions I have set out. We do suppose there are individual things which we can group together into sorts or kinds, and we distinguish the characters that make those things the things they are from other characters" (Mackinnon 102).

<sup>16</sup>The argument in Studtmann's *Foundations of Aristotle's Categorical Scheme* attempts to reconcile Aristotle's theory of hylemorphism, the theory that substance is a composite of form and matter.

These difficulties will surface in examining the first category, substance, without which the other categories could not occur. It may seem obvious what Aristotle means by “the individual man or horse,” but if we press his only example of primary substance, it gives way to ambiguity. Recall that Aristotle defines primary substance as that which is neither predicated-of nor present-in anything. This means that the individual man is not the name of a group or kind of men, but refers solely to a singular man. Yet is Aristotle’s man necessarily either numerically singular, or qualitatively singular, or both? It intuitively seems that since this man is neither predicated-of nor present-in anything that he is necessarily both numerically and qualitatively unique. If this is the case, we are compelled to turn to the question of whether Aristotle is dealing with a projected or perceptible reality, with words or things.

It would seem that there is an inherent impact of language on the way we understand Aristotle’s primary substance. Mackinnon addresses this by noting a tension between two Aristotelian views one might hold about primary substance<sup>17</sup>. On the one hand, “primary substantiality is identified with the substratum element which we may say that the subject/predicate structure of our language encourages us to suppose to be there as the underlying vehicle of change and decay” (103). With the words “substratum element,” Mackinnon is referring to the materiality and transience of primary substance as opposed to the formal aspects of secondary substance. The fact that subjects may maintain their identity while adopting different predicates over time is characteristic of change and ultimately decay, due to the grammatical mechanism that is inherent in our use of subject and predicate. The predicates change while the subjects remain constant. This view is directly in contrast to Plato’s idea of

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<sup>17</sup> Mackinnon stresses his interest in two philosophical positions rather than an accurate or thorough reading of Aristotle in making this distinction (102).

forms, which are eternal and immutable, while primary substance is what changes and decays.

On the other hand, it seems equally to be an Aristotelian view that primary substance is more than just transient material. In a sense, primary substances rely on the scaffolding with which secondary substances support them. An individual man is what he is by virtue of being *a* member of the class of mankind, which is in turn a member of the class of animals and so on. The problem is that nothing, not even the most particular of Aristotle's categories, primary substance, can exist by itself. (For us to talk about an individual man as primary substance without thinking of him as an instance of the more general categories he belongs to, i.e. mankind, animal, is meaningless or absurd--this is not to say that these more general categories are either fixed, or arbitrary).

Aristotle's doctrine of substance is opposed to Plato's in that Aristotle gives ontological preference to the individual transient entity, rather than the general immutable form. The transience of primary substance necessarily entails its individuality, and its individuality in turn allows us to see universals in its being. Mackinnon uses an appropriate level of delicacy in revealing the elusive nature of primary substance, which serves to advance the project, or the problem of perception and projection.

We have to reckon on this second view with an emphasis on Aristotle's enquiries whereby he seeks less to define or articulate the subject of change than to answer the question: what exists of itself? And to answer it formally by presenting as best he can the relation of the self-existent to derivative modes of existence. What is substantial on this view, what is truly individual, is the concrete thing, the determinate individual, the cat which is what *it* is, the table which is what *it* is. (103)

The above interpretation leads to a rejection of the ambiguity of grammar, a refusal to let language contaminate what *is*.<sup>18</sup> This intransitive use of the word “is” gives rise to an obscurity, and leaves open the way in which we come to locate individuals in the world such as a cat or a table. Though clearly Aristotle is motivated to locate the kind of concrete individual that Mackinnon is talking about--primary substance--Aristotle stops short of our ability to recognize objects as singular entities with some boundary: for us to relate to a table is to be able to determine a boundary. *This is the table, this is not the table, the edge of the table is here*. This kind of recognition does not entail anything like “pure perception” that would return some kind of raw sensory data<sup>19</sup>. While the texts of Aristotle that are available to us do not extend so far as to deal with our ability to pick out objects in our field of vision and name them as entities with boundaries, his merit lies in not overextending too far. He does not rest on (philosophical) assumptions; he vigilantly confronts assumptions.

Aristotle thought it “a mistake to engage in the general search for the...(elements of existing things)” (G.E.L. Owen 69), because this would be to approach existing things as if they were general forms that admitted to analysis instead of myriad particular cases that must be dealt with on their own. This is not to say that Aristotle’s classificatory system is absolutely correct. There are few authors, if any, who hold this position. The way in which the verb “to be” (for which there is more than one word in Greek) is distinguished in the following examples shows what Aristotle was concerned with.

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<sup>18</sup> It is impossible to completely neglect Kant in this discussion, though his contribution to the issue is outside the focus of this investigation. Kant might allow for the theoretical existence of such a category of substance—what he would call being-in-itself—though this kind of being for him is hopelessly outside of our perception and understanding. Rather, what is available to us is a synthesized product of a priori concepts and empirical impressions of the world.

<sup>19</sup> The topic of seeing boundaries of objects is taken up in Part II of Wittgenstein’s *Investigations* (338). More generally, I look at Wittgenstein’s discussion of aspect perception in Part II in my third chapter, which brings the tension between “perception” and “projection” into focus, allowing it to dissolve.

There is one obvious sense in which the verb, both in Greek and in English, does have many uses...Namely, in some contexts it serves to couple subject and predicate, as it does in “Arrowby is idle”; in others it serves as identity sign, as it does in “Arrowby is the mayor of Margate”; in yet others it has (still provisionally speaking) the sense of “exist,” as it does in “Arrowby is no more” (Owen 70-71).

Aristotle’s project must not be conflated with existentialism. Predication differs from identification and stating existence in that it is the only grammatical structure among them that links some characteristic--necessarily a secondary substance no matter which category is being discussed—to a subject. Predication requires a transitive use of the verb “to be”. This sheds light on primary substance, which cannot be predicated-of, and thus the verb cannot be applied transitively to primary substance (which is one of the reasons it is difficult to speak about the concept). There is nothing in any category that we can say “is Socrates” (other than Socrates himself). We can only say “Socrates is” some secondary substance, i.e. “an animal”.

Kant may have thought of the way Aristotle divides up the world into categories as arbitrary and not necessarily rooted in a metaphysical reality, as opposed to Kant’s own categories (which I do not intend to discuss) that Kant deemed necessarily to dictate how we can understand the world. This means that we cannot access in any way *being-in-itself*, which for Kant would be the way objects in the world are independent of our perception and mechanism of understanding, and categorizing of objects. Consequently, for Kant this is a subject that we cannot even begin to talk about—it is a meaningless and futile project to attempt to do so. I bring up Kant’s *being-in-itself* because it may be helpful in broad terms to compare it to Aristotelian primary substance. Following from traditional interpretations of Aristotle’s four-fold classification,<sup>20</sup> primary substance cannot be applied as a description of anything else, that is, it

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<sup>20</sup> See Studtmann’s *Foundations of Aristotle’s Categorical Scheme* (9).

is particular; and primary substance is non-accidental, that is, it is essential, and not the essence of another being--though for Aristotle, the idea of essence, while derived from Platonic Essentialism, is distinct. While Kant is explicit about what he takes to be the rationalist, as opposed to empiricist, aspect of understanding a natural phenomenon, that is, whatever we as subjects bring to the picture that we attain of objects, Aristotle is silent on this matter. A synthesis of rationalism and empiricism may not have been necessary for Aristotle given his historical environment, but this does not mean that his project is not congruent to the synthesis. Unlike Kant's *being-in-itself*, we can indeed speak about Aristotle's primary substance as available to our knowledge, while acknowledging the complexity or vagueness of the concept.

Given Aristotle's grand historical pre-eminence, it is only natural that there are many issues and questions philosophers have raised since Aristotle that Aristotle does not directly address. There are several possible reasons for this. The question may not have occurred to Aristotle at all. Aristotle may have been aware of the question, though its relevance or what might be at stake for the question may have been diminished by the philosophical context. Aristotle may have seen and interpreted the same force of a question in different terms than the ones in which subsequent philosophers have put them. Or, similarly, the terms or assumptions that Aristotle may have had might make a question that makes sense to us now meaningless to Aristotle. It is impossible to know for certain the nature of Aristotle's terminology, scope of content, or silence on any particular matter, yet the only way to begin to enquire into Aristotle's intentions is by careful excavation of philosophical assumptions that support and inform *our* questions. In this project I am concerned with excavating some assumptions behind a question that perplexes me, one which creates an impasse in epistemological investigation. In our



quotidian encounter with the world, we hold categories of objects, and this seems natural and unproblematic unless we realize that we may come to see one and the same thing as belonging to a different category. This may still be unproblematic if we came to see an object before us, say a table, as belonging to several categories of increasing generality (furniture, man-made object). Yet to come across the same object that before was recognized as a table, or piece of furniture in a dream-like state so that it loses *table*-ness, is disorienting. What can be especially odd is that it strikes one that the concept of “table” all of the sudden seems arbitrarily assigned, or equally that what is designated as “table” ends where the legs meet the floor, or that there is any possibility of carving out, distilling, objects from sensory experience. The disorientation of such an illumination is rooted in our coming face to face with our own agency in picking out objects-- objects that we comfortably took to exist (objectively) independently of our encountering them. Note, an experience no different may be had with respect to a word.

The following problem ensues: on one hand, the categories that we regularly operate with are evidently artificially developed and applied to reality as stencils. Yet on the other hand, to recognize a kind of object in nature over and over again (a leaf for instance) despite variation from individual to individual, suggests that something existing inherently of itself is available to us. It is a question of whether we project the categories on reality, or perceive them in reality. This kind of question is the cause of dispute between rationalism and empiricism, nominalism and realism.

What bothers me about the question is that I cannot imagine a possible answer that would be satisfactory, and yet it persists as a meaningful problem for me. I believe that such an excavation will lift a cloud that obfuscates the true nature of the problem, and will, as in other

philosophical investigations, show that the question as it is formulated is meaningless, or the wrong question to ask. And so I will turn to some of the ideas that have come to be engrained assumptions in western philosophy.

The point Mackinnon raises cannot be over-emphasized, namely “what is it that makes an individual thing an individual thing?” (102). The difficulty of answering this question reveals the difficulty of understanding Aristotle’s concept of primary substance. We are in danger here of falling into a tautology, for the issue can also be put as “what makes primary substance primary substance?” The difficulty arises from a messy relationship between the format of the question and the content of the question.

One might take a position saying, yes, the question “what is primary substance” does indeed lead to infinite regress, and thus is impossible to answer and is impossible to know or even imagine (being-in-itself). Once we have demonstrated that the very question posed is not possible to ask in a way that would yield an imaginable response in terms of an essence, the question becomes one no longer worth troubling over.<sup>21</sup>

We cannot say that primary substance is strictly physical, as Mackinnon goes to great length to show. This does not imply that primary substance is only a mental state. In accord with Studtmann’s characterization of the four-fold division of the pre-predicamenta, primary substance is essential as opposed to accidental. The characteristic “essential” alone precludes the possibility that primary substance is alike to what Mackinnon calls a substratum, or pure materiality--that primary substance is an essence means that it is carved out from a plane of

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<sup>21</sup> The Medieval philosopher Maimonides, writing centuries in advance of the epistemological scandals brought to our attention by figures such as Kant, took a similar position with regard to how we might know anything at all. To such skepticism Maimonides admits that it is possible that we cannot know anything at all, yet if this were the case, such an objection must be meaningless, not to mention that it would be impossible to conduct any sort of philosophical investigation.

sensory perception. Paying closer attention to substance yields the fact that it is neither independently purely physical, nor only mental, content.

We can see that primary substance is not merely an independent material layer of reality to which other predicates attach (how would one attach a predicate to undifferentiated being?) Next, considering that primary substance is not present in anything, recalling that present-in means “incapable of existence apart from the said subject,” implies that it must be independent of our mental grasping of it. For Studtmann this is evident in that the instance of Socrates-sitting-in-a-chair is not one of primary substance, because it is too specific to be essential, that is, too narrow to be an appropriate fit for what we normally recognize as an individual man. These two criteria in Studtmann’s account make primary substance particular (as opposed to universal) and essential (as opposed to accidental). Mackinnon also thinks in terms of essence and accident, though finds it problematic to apply them to the category of substance instead of quality.

The distinction between substance and accident is, [Aristotle] seems to realize, one which requires to be drawn at the level of quality rather than that of substance where substance is construed as the concrete realisation of form—the *this such*. In fact, the distinction between essence and accident drawn within the category of quality is to the modern less artificial than one drawn at the category of substance, where by the very drawing of the distinction at that point the risk seems to be run of evacuating the individual of that which makes him one rather than another—Socrates rather than Callias—through relegating the differentiating element to the status of the accident (Mackinnon 106).

I take it that here Mackinnon means by “accident” what Studtmann identifies as one of the criteria of four-fold distinction that primary substance does not have. The accidental is that which belongs to substance as a characteristic, but is not essential to it. This means that one can

in no way define or categorize substance from its accidental characteristics, as you cannot identify Socrates by the fact that at one time you find him sitting in a chair.

Mackinnon and Ackrill are writing in a time after the influence of Wittgenstein's later work (the early 1960s), which may account for Ackrill's commitment to the idea that "Aristotle's fourfold classification is a classification of things and not names, and that what is 'said of' something as subject is itself a thing (species or genus) and not a name". I am interested in Ackrill's reading because he holds genera and species, Aristotelian secondary substances, each to be a "thing" on equal footing with the particular individuals that are described by genera and species. The words "man" and "animal" as species and genus which describe the particular individual, Socrates, have as much ontological justification in their own right as Socrates himself, though the secondary substances are dependent on Socrates and other primary substance. It would follow that genera and species are not then names-for-things, but are themselves things, which occupy a position according to a hierarchical system with respect to particular things, such as the individual, Socrates (and here I mean things-in-the-world, ontologically speaking). Ackrill makes no explicit mention of Wittgenstein, so there is no reason to think that his reading of Aristotle intentionally attempts to make any associations between the two figures, other than the fact that Ackrill is writing in a time in which Wittgenstein's influence may have refreshed the importance of language and ontology.

When Ackrill says "it is not the linguistic items but the things they signify which are 'said of a subject'" (75) he is assuming that language corresponds to the world ontologically. My intention is to make a case for a more nuanced interpretation of the four-fold classification in which Aristotle is not necessarily assuming such a correspondence between language and

ontology. I agree with Ackrill in that of the terms “said-of” and “present in,” one is not more or less linguistic or ontological than the other. Ackrill portrays Aristotle as a realist, which he is to an extent, but Ackrill does not acknowledge the lack of the assumption that language necessarily corresponds to things-in-the-world in *Categories*.

As regards ‘subject’, it is true that if virtue is said of generosity as subject it follows that the sentence ‘generosity is (a) virtue’--in which the name ‘generosity’ is the grammatical subject--expresses a truth. But ‘virtue is said of generosity as subject’ is not about, and does not mention, the names ‘virtue’ and ‘generosity’. It would be absurd to call generosity a *grammatical* subject: it is not generosity but ‘generosity’ that can be a grammatical subject. Again, if *A* is in *B* as subject then *B* is substance (76).

Akrill is correct in saying that Aristotle is not concerned with names, but Ackrill himself thinks that use of a word in a grammatical or linguistic way is synonymous with using it as a name.

Akrill finds it “somewhat surprising that [Aristotle] says: ‘were it predicated of none of the individual men it would not be predicated of man at all.’ For in view of the meaning of ‘said of’ he could have made the stronger statement: ‘were it not predicated of *all* of the individual men...’” (82-3). However, we should not find this statement surprising, and further we should not expect Aristotle to make any statement resembling Ackrill’s ‘were it not predicated of *all* of the individual men...’. There is not one predicate that all individuals of any sort necessarily have in common for Aristotle. Ackrill rightly identifies Aristotle’s larger point here, that there could be any predicates, or any species and genera to arrange substances if there were no primary substances in the first place, a special standing to the post of primary substances. Primary substance for Aristotle is substance more so than secondary substance, however it is not the case that it is in any way inaccessible to or divorced from language or our ability to speak about it. Primary substance leaves no further question of identity, while secondary substances may apply to multiple instances.

Wittgenstein writes, “Of course, if water boils in a pot, steam comes out of the pot, and also a picture of steam out of a picture of the pot. But what if one insisted on saying that there must also be something boiling in the picture of the pot?” (297). I might be unjustified in imagining Ackrill as saying neither the name nor the definition of boiling is predicable of the pot of water, though it would be right. If there is an essence of boiling that occurs, it is not to be found in the pot along with the steam emitted. The sensitivity of the doctrine of Essentialism shown in this example is present in the *Categories*.

It is not quite clear that Della Robbia white and [the whiteness of] this paper are homonymous with respect to the word ‘white’, in the meaning given to ‘homonymous’ in Chapter I. For there the case was that the word (e.g. animal) stood in its two uses for two different things with two different definitions. Now, however, we have ‘white’ in one use standing for a thing (a quality) which has a certain definition, but in the other use not standing for a different thing with a different definition but introducing differently the very same thing (Ackrill 87).

Here Ackrill touches on the heart of the matter. The issue is how much we can bend a word towards a particular experience, away from an abstract generally agreed upon concept. Compare Ackrill’s point about the pre-predicamenta in the *Categories* to Wittgenstein’s discussion of the same topic in the *Investigations*:

But how is it even possible for one to be tempted to think that one uses a word to *mean* at one time the colour known to everyone--and at another time the ‘visual impression’ which *I* am getting *now*? How can there be so much as a temptation here?--I don’t turn the same kind of attention on the colour in the two cases...(277).

Wittgenstein’s critical focus is on the ontological merit of grammatical *predicates*<sup>22</sup>. Play isn’t nonsense. Wittgenstein calls for a certain epistemological approach when it comes to predicating things. We do not determine predicates by measuring purely empirically, but also by judging a

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<sup>22</sup> “only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious” (281). This passage shows that certain predicates are only appropriate to certain kinds of things or in certain contexts. These predicates are real only when applied logically, that is in the right context, though there is no empirical criteria for the right context.

quality. “If he now said, for example, “Oh I know what ‘pain’ means; what I don’t know is whether *this*, that I have now, is pain”--we’d merely shake our heads...” (288).

Putting Aristotle aside for the time being, I turn to the initial tension between projection and perception of categories as it appears in situations apart from either Wittgenstein or Aristotle. An outside angle, though carrying with it additional complexity, may help bring the tension in question out of an obscuring background. My hope is that the following chapter will reconfigure the approach to the epistemological struggle with categories. And reconfigure it in a way that opens points of entry for a kind of philosophical pausing at our encounter of categories. (Cavell sees the *Investigations* as being prompted by Wittgenstein’s being interrupted. The content in the second chapter gives me philosophical pause. It is an introduction and a reintroduction to beholding categories.)

## Chapter Two:

### **Classifying Nature**

#### **I. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Nature**

Emerson decries the indirect relation to Nature that he senses in his generation. Like Wittgenstein, Emerson does not specifically refer to many preceding figures or schools of thought, favoring . “The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?” (*Nature* 35).

This lamentation opens the way to an essay concerning a re-appropriation not only of nature, but of a way of speaking and writing about it. Emerson wrote *Nature* three years after his visit to the *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris, and evidently sought after something current, in motion. The methodological approach Emerson takes in the essay is neither one of history nor empirical science. As the essay unfolds, we see that nature is too responsive to “new lands, new men, new thoughts” to be a mere object of our perception, and still nature is not only the product of our imagination--it is certainly not the arbitrary product of our fancy. The essay is a call to return to the present-ness of nature, as we have strayed “so far from the road to truth” (36). Language is a means to clarity, if we let it be; but it has a record of being confusing, as both Emerson and Wittgenstein want to tell us. Thus, it is Emerson’s approach more than anything else that



prompts me to make the otherwise odd pairing with Wittgenstein, whose own philosophical approach is sometimes called therapeutic.

It is called therapeutic because it calls attention to what is in plain sight by slowly, carefully examining particular instances. The effect may be therapeutic because it can unhinge assumptions that were clouding the view of plain and ordinary parts of our experience. The description of this kind of therapy is not necessarily meant to imply a practical element of this way of working through examples, but to help describe what it philosophically accomplishes. In a different context, Emerson comes to regard individual specimens as a “composition,” which is “Not a form so grotesque, so savage, nor so beautiful but is an expression of some property inherent in man the observer” (*JMN* quoted in Brown). Ralph Waldo Emerson’s 1833 trip to the *Jardin des Plantes* two years following the death of his wife proved to be a turning point for Emerson as a person and as a writer.

The points I want to make about Emerson pertain specifically to the issue of universals and particulars as Wittgenstein discusses them. Both Wittgenstein and Emerson consider the particularities of their experience without, or at least prior to, the notion of a universal form that gives rise to instances (in a reversal of the notion of Platonic forms)<sup>23</sup>. In other words, they shed a copy-theory of the world in which we take our thought, or our language, to *stand for* things that belong to an objective reality<sup>24</sup>. Stanley Cavell argues that “Emerson is out to destroy the ground on which such a problem takes itself seriously, I mean interprets itself as a metaphysical fixture” (169-170). The problem of whether the world is subjectively or objectively available to

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<sup>23</sup> Giving epistemological precedence to the particular over the universal is an element of the later development in the thinking of Emerson and Wittgenstein respectively, suggesting this approach is not immediately intuitive.

<sup>24</sup> The copy-theory of knowledge reflects Hume’s proposal that all knowledge is composed of sensation and reflection.

us is Kant's. Emerson's position, as Cavell reads it, is that it is of little consequence whether we attribute objecthood to the world, claiming subjecthood for ourselves. Along with Emerson, Cavell moves away from framing the question of our "relation to, or revelation of, the natural world" as one of either imparting our patterns onto it, or locating and anchoring its own metaphysical roots. Neither view is stable according to Cavell's reading of Emerson.

The fact that we are taken over by this succession, this onwardness, means that you can think of it as at once a succession of moods (inner matters) and a succession of objects (outer matters). This very evanescence of the world proves its existence to me; it *is* what vanishes from me. I guess this is not realism exactly, but it is not solipsism either (*Thinking of Emerson* 169).

The last remark acknowledges a tension between inner and outer "matters," and at the same time imparts that there is no need to be paralyzed by what seems like the contrary forces of objective and subjective accounts of the world. If there is any medium between us and the world for Emerson, it does not make the world finally inaccessible, whereas for Kant we are limited to "a function of the configuration of our own nature," meaning that the world as it exists of itself is not something that may be revealed.

To take issue with Kant's proposal that our configuration *limits* our understanding of the natural world is an epistemological undertaking on Emerson's part. Emerson re-appropriates our "configuration" as a source of agency in revealing the world. For instance, the fact that we distinguish between different objects in the world, that we see boundaries, seems to be rooted in our interest as viewers, suggested by the fact that we may gain the ability to pick out an individual object that we were previously blind to.

For instance, walking on the beach a child might see before him various shapes and sizes of rocks randomly scattered. Then if he learns that a specific type of fossil can be found in the

area, and is shown an example or several examples of the type of fossil, he is now able to pick out more instances of the fossil among the rest of the rocks as he walks along. There is no doubt that this kind of fossil existed, that is, was *present* as it is, before the child gained the ability to recognize it among the enormous variety of rocks on the beach. And yet what remains obscure and thus interesting is whether the *boundary* that divides this object from others existed before the knowledge (the learned ability) to distinguish it as a desirable object. Imagine that among the fossils that the child picked up, all of which were of the kind he learned to be interested in, there were several different sub-species represented in his collection. Say he had not learned to distinguish between the sub-species--or that the possibility of this further classification did not occur to him. Then would the boundary exist? It would be odd however, to say that no one could imagine the *possibility* of dividing a species into sub-species--perhaps it seems that there would always be more subdivisions in classification that we aren't aware of, that we don't have the means to see, or that we are prevented from seeing by the limits of our "configuration".<sup>25</sup>

The position that there are and will always be patterns, that is, that there is an infinite extent of criteria for differentiating species, has several implications. First, it would make all individuals also universals, for there would always be several kinds of each individual. Second, the orders of classification would exist independently of our knowing them--we cannot not know the world in infinite complex detail. The boundaries between genera and species, as well as the criteria that subsumes individuals under universal kinds would be inherent in nature, at least a large extent of which would be inaccessible to us. Emerson's description of experiencing objects as subordinate to species and genera dispels the notion that the order of this classification is

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<sup>25</sup> Such a view would evidently be contrary to Aristotle's notion of primary substance, which cannot be subdivided into more specific species of its own. My claim here is that Emerson's account of classification also does not admit of infinite subdivisions (as is the case with Wittgenstein).

inherent in nature. Furthermore he dissolves the contention between the notion that a classificatory order is independently inherent in nature, and that it is a result of our arbitrary convention. Lee Rust Brown explores Emerson's impressions of the *Jardin*.

The Museum's arrangement of visible things revealed the higher forms--family, order, and class--that contained them; these forms were invisible but presumably just as real as the things themselves. In fact, natural history suggested that such forms might be presupposed by both nature and intellect (Brown 58).

“Natural history” at this time surely does not have claim to legitimacy over other accounts of natural history. What is important about the Museum's presentation is the impression it leaves on the visitor: on one hand the naturalists have organized abstract information by laying out numerous specimens in juxtaposition, on the other hand the visitor re-collects these individuals by ascertaining overlapping similarities, thereby constructing a hierarchical network of categories as subjects. Without patiently attending to experience, to *what* one is seeing by way of noticing *how* one is seeing, the process of seeing universals in the juxtaposition of individuals and groups of individuals becomes occluded. Emerson muses in his journal:

We have thoughts but we don't know what to do with them, materials, that we can't manage or dispose. We cannot get high enough above them to see their order in reason (*JMN* 4:49, quoted in Brown).

It is tempting to say that experience belongs to the self, or that occurs in the self. Such cases of tempting images are what Wittgenstein is skeptical of: “A *picture* held us captive. And we couldn't get outside of it, for it lay in our language” (*PI* 115, Wittgenstein's emphasis). Here, as noted in Emerson's journal, there is an acknowledgment of an urge to get *outside*, to get a

more complete view of situation, a context in full. In continuation of the therapeutic attending, “A main source of our failure to understand is that we don’t have *an overview* of the use of our words.--Our grammar is deficient in surveyability (*PI* 122 Wittgenstein’s emphasis). The problem is not that we cannot survey an entire context--as we cannot survey infinite bifurcations among a classification of objects. The philosophical contribution with regard to understanding of categorial classification for Emerson and Wittgenstein lies in their assessment, their noticing, that our desire to understand takes the form of wanting an all-encompassing perspective of what there is to be classified with the expectation that this will enable the understanding of how to categorize particular objects.<sup>26</sup> If there is an urge to obtain such a perspective, noticing it and acknowledging it as an assumption underneath empirical methods makes it possible to consider whether or not it is a good assumption. Suppose as the child notices that he now is able to pick out a certain pattern among the rocks, it occurs to him to ask whether this pattern resides in his own ability and judgment, or whether it resides in the fossils themselves, independently of his focusing on their familiar aspects. This question contains the assumption about the viewer as a subject that confronts and focuses on an object, which leads to the desire to zoom out, in order to get a picture of both subject and object at once, thereby gaining the ability to locate the source of the pattern (this inclination is partially due to the way the question is, and can be, phrased). But what would it mean for us to have a vantage point outside of ourselves, or outside of the world as

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<sup>26</sup> The ways Emerson and Wittgenstein go about doing this are not similar. Wittgenstein carefully develops multiple examples about use of language. Emerson, trained as minister, comments on his experience with a poetic sensibility. Each of them are after an authenticity and clarity, though they have differing beginnings and trajectories.

we see it? It is Emerson's achievement to dismantle this kind of project, allowing for more clarity in the issue of understanding categories.

The Universe is a more amazing puzzle than ever as you glance along this bewildering series of animated forms,--the hazy butterflies, the carved shells, the birds, beasts, fishes, insects, snakes,--& the upheaving principle of life everywhere incipient in the very rock aping organized forms. Not a form so grotesque, savage, nor so beautiful but is an expression of some property inherent in man the observer,--an occult relation between the very scorpions and man. I feel the centipede in me--cayman, carp, eagle, & fox (*JMN*, 4:199-200).

Emerson's sense that natural concepts are "inherent in man the observer" demonstrates an awareness that when we talk about nature, we are talking about subjects viewing something that they as subjects are also a *part of*, which is foreign to the way seeing is normally articulated. Looking at nature as ontological project (as opposed to a strictly empirical project) does not allow for observation of an object from an Archimedean viewpoint. The naturalist is embedded in his object of inquiry, and trying to escape this fact or failing to realize it leads the inquiry astray.

For Emerson, the *loci* of identification in the Muséum's "natural" compositions were subdivisions of textuality per se. Form, relation, series, organization--these are the counters by which nature's fragments become legible as pieces of an "amazing puzzle." Hence Emerson's response to the zoological cabinet's "bewildering series of animated forms" had as much to do with the organizing terms of science as with the animals, whose apparent vitality, after all, was only a measure of the taxidermist's skill (Brown 58).

Emerson's understanding of the composition of form is not guided by a tendency to have a wide scope, but to zoom in on pieces of the composition. The taxidermist's skill lies in the ability to

direct focus to certain aspects of physical objects, and in this way, generalizations are discovered, rather than starting from formalized conceptions of order. The museum prompted Emerson to think about the “radical correspondence between visible things and human thought” (*Collected Works* 1:19, quoted in Brown, 60). Brown makes the case that the impression the museum had on Emerson was one of language. “Indeed, unmistakable resemblances to modes of textual organization were implicit all through the Muséum...the Muséum selected, abridged, and arranged the useful contents of nature’s hieroglyphic plenitude” (61).

The museum invites the the visitor to play a sort of game, following the paths exhibiting specimens presented in an organization that draws attention to certain aspects that link species together, forming genera<sup>27</sup>.

On the smallest scale--the micropaedic scale of the single living animal or plant, the mineral sample, the fossil, even the heart or skull shown in the Comparative Anatomy cabinet--the representative aspect of the thing superseded the thing itself. So instead of particular creatures the visitor beheld “specimens,” the representatives of species; and just as “species” were the conceptual containers of specimens, a shift upward in the conceptual register resulted in species themselves being treated as “specimens” placed within the more abstract container of the genus; and so on” (Brown 62).

The fact that a particular member of a species can represent the species as a whole in fact goes a long way to fortify Aristotle’s idea of primary substance. Specimens that are not themselves species are primary substance, (an individual horse is a specimen of the species of horses, though the individual horse is not a species). Yet there first must be an individual horse, or individual

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<sup>27</sup> To see that one item belongs to the same class as another is not a given. The child walking on the beach initially cannot discern any patten at his feet. To recognize a category in this way demands a kind of judgment.

horses, before there is a horse species. In walking through the *Jardin*, the objects one sees are in no way accidental particulars, but are essential particulars. Between different specimens of the same genus, or the same family, class or kingdom, there are what Wittgenstein might call “intermediary links,” a network of resemblances between particular details that make up something other than their own materiality. The intermediary links allow one to see the specimens *as* members of their species, and as they see the links between species, they can see these species *as* instances of a genus. This pattern has been turned into a fixed scheme by the *Jardin des Plantes*, which does not only use “species” and “genus” as relative terms as Aristotle does, but labels the higher categories, “family, order, class.”

Brown emphasizes the naturalist Georges Cuvier’s commitment to “Aristotelean classificatory theories” and his “belief in the essential reality of hierarchical classification” (64) in natural history museums at the time of the *Jardin des Plantes*. The naturalists in charge of the arranging the specimens of the *Jardin* “had been primarily interested in higher classifications than in genera, species, and varieties. Though these higher classes were present and, to the naturalist, legible in single natural organisms, they could most clearly be shown by juxtaposing a number of representative members” (65). Brown brings up an example of Cuvier’s description of different families that make up an order, Edentata, of which the only single unifying characteristic is negative: no front teeth. Such a negative attribute is hardly enough to alone justify the collection of groups into a higher classificatory category, and so there must be, in Cuvier’s words “some positive mutual relations”. These are relations of some, though not all,



Edentata, and enough of these characteristics overlap each other that the one may judge individual Edentata as being such.

An adept array of Edentata with different overlapping features in common, “positive mutual relations,” would make it evident that these specimens are “representative members of” to a common order. The projects of Wittgenstein and Emerson come out of an Aristotelean tradition of seeing categories. A common notion attributed to Aristotle is that every member of a category must share a common essence, which is clearly not the case in the above example. And yet seeing these individual members in juxtaposition allows one to gain a sense of their common identity. The essence in this case is invisible, but is not altogether absent. This kind of relation between particular instances and general categories is explained in detail in Renford Bambrough’s essay “Universals and Family Resemblances”.

We can see in Brown’s account of Emerson’s visit to the museum that there is some process of distilling “essences” from numerous representative instances of a category. Brown uses quotation marks to talk about the conceptual category as being “behind” the specimens, or being an “invisible” element of what the naturalists present. This suggests an awareness of what Wittgenstein might point to as a misunderstanding due to language. The categories that contain individuals are not empirically accessible “behind” the specimens, or “invisible” to the naked eye, requiring a more advanced means of acquiring images. This is not a matter of empirical difficulty, but a matter of conceptual missteps and entanglement. Conceptual confusion is in part due to the assumption that because our notion of categories are subject to change as we notice

certain aspects of individuals, allowing us to see new categorial relationships, either reality is unstable, or our subjective projection of categories does not inherently belong to the material objects we encounter. Emerson is able to diffuse the incidentally contrived notion that a category is an empirically available object. In his writing, Emerson demonstrates an awareness of the misleading conceptual assumption that a category really “resides” somewhere.

A truth, separated by the intellect, is no longer a subject of destiny...And so any fact in our life, or any record of our fancies or reflections, disentangled from the web of our unconsciousness, becomes an object impersonal and immortal (*CW*, 2:194 quoted in Brown 67).

These sentences are sensitive to a great complexity that I may only begin to address. Looking at the passage in the context of holding categories that contain elements of the natural world, we can see that to record a “truth” is a double-edged sword; it is both immortal and impersonal. A category that we identify in the natural world can only be an everlasting thought if it is dead. Such a “truth” cannot be sensitive a fresh set of eyes returning to the scene that might pick out new aspects that entail a new organization. If we take “truths separated by the intellect” to be thoughts about the world that are frozen and prevented from development, we can see that Emerson is wary of, and attentive to the subtlety of a problem like the one of perception and projection.

We cannot distill an empirical essence that stands for a species or genus within an individual. Rather than being “impersonal and immortal” (perhaps a rendition of the Platonic Form), the categorial organization of individuals must be living and transient. A truth “no longer

a subject of destiny” indicates a subject that is present-in something (according to Studtmann’s account of Aristotle’s four-fold scheme) because this truth cannot exist outside of its conceptual house--it is not prone to random or accidental forces, which is an affirmation that the category is not an empirical object<sup>28</sup>. The significance of the museum’s impact on Emerson was that it afforded him the realization that the natural world itself is a museum in the sense that one cannot look at individual objects without putting them into classificatory order, and cannot “honor minuteness in details, so long as there is no hint to explain the relation between things and thoughts; no ray upon the *metaphysics* of conchology...” (*Nature* 28). What is true of our encounter with nature became evident for Emerson in the *Jardin*, namely that things and thoughts are not two distinct things, but one and the same.

Michel Foucault circumnavigates the unity of thing and thought, though does so in terms that have dualistic remnants.

Animal species differ at their peripheries, and resemble each other at their centers; they are connected by the inaccessible, and separated by the apparent. Their generality lies in that which is essential to their life; their singularity in that which is most accessory to it. The more extensive the groups one wishes to find, the deeper one must penetrate into the organism’s inner darkness, towards the less and less visible, into that dimension that eludes perception; the more one wishes to isolate the individuality of the organism, the further one must go towards its surface, and allow the perceptible forms to shine all their visibility; for multiplicity is apparent and unity is hidden (*The Order of Things* 267-8, Quoted in Brown 67).

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<sup>28</sup> Recall Aristotle’s example that a certain whiteness is present in (cannot exist apart from) the body, meaning that the whiteness cannot “reside” anywhere except when we notice that a body appears to have this whiteness.

Foucault is not putting forth his own view on the order of nature in this passage, but is commenting on Cuvier's. Foucault's project in *The Order of Things* is to identify the classification of schemes of others throughout history, and to note their discontinuities. Foucault identifies the essentiality that binds the particular to general forms in Cuvier's classification as "inaccessible," "inner darkness...that dimension that eludes perception," concluding that "multiplicity is apparent and unity is hidden". Foucault is right to point out the darkness or obscurity of the object, because its form is not in the object alone, but also in the judgment that classifies the object, and in this way Foucault shows Cuvier's arrangement to be on the cusp of dismantling a copy-theory of knowledge that presumes objects to exist independently of thought and judgment; this is only fully realized in Emerson's writings after seeing Cuvier's (and others') taxonomical arrangements. At the same time, Emerson will not admit we have so much agency in knowing nature, that nature is the arbitrary product of our whims.

The ultimate landing place in the hierarchy was indeed that of biological or biotextual unity...Far from being an unresolvable essence, however, "unity" was nothing other than the highest classification. In "Circles," Emerson would later push such realism into a skeptical nominalism by suggesting that the highest classification is, after all, only "the most recent" (Brown 68).

Emerson recounted the botanical gardens of the *Jardin* as "a grammar of botany" (*EL* 1:7). As Aristotle begins his most basic logical work, the *Categories*, with a discussion of kinds of words, Emerson is drawn to talk about language after he vows to himself to become a naturalist during a profound turning point in his life as a thinker. Words do not refer to shrouded interiors, but rather, if anything, signal their own surface. The entirety of the content of language

is to be found in plain sight. The work of Emerson elevates the ordinary, brings to life the mundane, in rejecting an empirically accessible and dead metaphysics. Emerson notes in *Nature*, “If the Reason be stimulated to more earnest vision, outlines and surfaces become transparent, and are no longer seen; causes and spirits are seen through them” (*CW* 1:30), implying shedding a copy-theory of knowledge allows for a relationship to nature that does not take it to be exotic, but rather as familiar as our own thoughts.

Emerson’s intention is to alleviate the epistemological ache brought about by a copy-theory of knowledge that posits our imagination of objects to be a layer of obscurity which needs to be peeled away. As Brown’s comments suggest, considers the copy-theory of knowledge to be a myth.

Transparency, as he would later develop it, was a genetic and epistemological metaphor as fundamental to Emerson as the metaphor of repression was to Freud...In cabinets and botanical gardens, the spectator’s practice of critical focus saw “through” natural surfaces to meanings (classifications) that were themselves nothing other than means to higher meanings: so transparency only revealed more transparent conceptual space, with each circumscribed outline or *allée* either inviting or memorializing a critical deed of seeing through. The real subject matter of the Muséum was not raw nature but rather was the specimen form of classification, a form, both pragmatic and ideal, most clearly represented in transparent media of display (71).

“Raw nature” is not something that we come into contact with, not because we lack a means, or a position from which to survey it, but because its existence is an ontological misconception<sup>29</sup>. At this point, returning to the question of whether we as subjects impart categories onto objects, or

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<sup>29</sup> I see Brown’s contrasting “raw nature” from “a specimen *form* of classification” (my emphasis) as congruent with Mackinnon’s criticism of the interpreting Aristotle’s primary substance as a raw “substratum” as opposed to individuals that already support a classification of predicates.

whether objects contain and admit categories to us as subjects, it now no longer seems that this is the appropriate question to ask. For it seems that *both* positions offered take a category to be a formal organizational element with a locus. Either way, it follows that objects and our categorizing them are separate or separable. Yet inasmuch as there is an intent to know about the relation of category and object categorized, the question is still pertinent.<sup>30</sup>

Foucault points out that in the Eighteenth Century, scientists were concerned to have a way of talking about nature that would not only be accurate in its reflection of content, but would also share the “grammar” of nature, a concern informing their investment in natural classifications (*Order of Things* 138-145, qtd in Brown 73). My project is not historical, and so I’m not concerned with one particular period of science. The danger of talking about a grammar (a conventional system of meaning) of nature lies in the tendency to assume it is either inherent in nature, or detached from nature, “And yet, however thoroughly the techniques of the Muséum managed to assimilate nature to the model of the book and its technologies, it was inevitable that *the model itself* had also to change under the pressure of nature’s diversity and magnitude” (Brown 74). If there is a shared grammar between nature and our conception of it, than it is not dead, not strictly logical in the sense that it rests immutable and consistent. It is alive to the shimmering of thought. “The peculiarity of natural history consists, for us, in the intimate degree to which technique inhered in the final nature of the reality sought after” (74).

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<sup>30</sup> Cuvier’s taxonomy is partial to the empirical observation, though still allows for an interdependency of individual and species. In *Animal Kingdom*, Cuvier thinks of a “scaffolding of divisions” as “a sort of dictionary, in which we proceed from the properties of things to arrive at their names; being the reverse of the common ones, in which we proceed from the name to arrive at the property.”

For the naturalist to *describe* or *capture* nature in his conceptual grasp is not altogether different or separable from the *being* of nature.

I bring Emerson into the discussion to complement and complicate the modern approach to categories of nature, which I put alongside the ancient categories of Aristotle. Following a passage in *Nature* noting that “stars awaken a certain reverence,” and “nature never wears a mean appearance,” Emerson muses:

When we speak of nature in this manner, we have a distinct but most poetical sense in the mind. We mean the integrity of impression made by manifold natural objects. It is this which distinguishes the stick of timber of the wood-cutter, from the tree of the poet. The charming landscape which I saw this morning, is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet. This is the best part of these men's farms, yet to this their warranty-deeds give no title.

I want to tread lightly in pairing “the integrity of impression made by manifold objects” with the recognition of a category from multiple individuals . What Emerson is bringing to our attention by speaking about “a property in the horizon,” is something he cannot *point* to, and this is why he designates the task to the poet. The individual farms are certainly not individual instances of the broader category of the landscape--here there is no possibility of likening the situation to a category. The point of contact between the passage and Aristotle’s theory of categories is in the “property in the horizon which no man has be he whose eye can integrate all the parts...”. The property here may be something like an Aristotelian, as opposed to Platonic, Essence. The horizon<sup>31</sup> is not recognizable in absence of Emerson’s elusive “property” and at the same time, when Emerson talks about the “property in the horizon” he is talking about something different

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<sup>31</sup> Emerson’s turning from “landscape” in one breath to “horizon” in the next, while he has apparently not gone on to talk about something different, is an example of what I mean by a category being live rather than a dead immutable symbol.

in kind than the “stick of timber” or “some twenty or thirty farms”; the property is evidently not physically present in nature, and yet it is there for us to recognize, much like the negative characteristic of missing front teeth in Cuvier’s order, Edentata.

If the landscape has an essence, it is neither the sum of the farms, nor Emerson’s unbounded imagination. Emerson’s gaze at the horizon takes up the landscape as a whole. To speak of or to see substance, which we can now say is not always simply the “concrete realisation of form,” is to see past the accidental characteristics of individuality, or the fragments that make up a whole. Mackinnon notes Aristotle’s attentiveness to the subtle variation in taking something to be an essential unity, that is something that is not merely the sum of its parts. There is no reason Mackinnon would have had Emerson in mind, though he touches on a characteristic of Aristotle that is sympathetic to Emerson’s horizontal gaze: “Where what was fundamental in the world, where what indeed spanned the sensible and the transcendent worlds was concerned, this sensitivity of Aristotle to the sorts of hardly manageable unity was at its height,” (107). Indeed, as Mackinnon suspects, to make a distinction between accident and essence with respect to substance (as opposed to qualities *of* substance) does not entail the assumption that an essence resides in something as part of a whole. Aristotle (and Emerson) do however hold onto a more flexible notion of an essence, and an assumption that there is a unity in the landscape that Emerson experiences.

Like Aristotle, Emerson is concerned with substance at root, not as material, but as what I venture to call whole experience. Experience may be a misleading term because it carries a subjective inflection that neither Aristotle nor Emerson intend. Or, perhaps it would be better to put it that Emerson and Aristotle do not view this subjective perception to be in tension with



an objective reality. This tension underlies much of modern thought, and can be identified as a dualism. Though contrasting in obvious ways from Aristotle, the angle Emerson takes in approaching the organization of natural specimens into genera and species is one that begins with a cluster of individuals, and more significantly in terms of my aim, one in which subject and object as viewer and viewed are integrated into a unit.

## II. Michael Thompson: A Critique of Empiricism

The common thread that I am interested in is the relationship of categories to knowledge of the world. Though Aristotle states things as if they are clear, there are subtleties as well as holes in this treatise that lead to problems about classification systems. It is unlikely a coincidence that these same problems are inherited by modern biology. In *Apprehending the Human Form*, Michael Thompson critiques the epistemological method of classifying animals<sup>32</sup>. Thompson claims to be a neo-Aristotelian. I intend to use Aristotle as a lens to see more clearly what Thompson's project is, with the hope that in turn, this will also allow for a better understanding of Aristotle.

Aristotle writes: "It is by themselves changing that substances admit contrary qualities," (Mckeon 13) and yet these substances maintain stable identities that can be represented in natural history. Aristotle's primary substances allow for predicates to take form. The existence of primary substances may be inconstant and fleeting, but they may be categorized (predicated) and thus taken as representations of universals.

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<sup>32</sup> Thompson inherits, and therefore must take up issues with, Kant in his argument. For structural reasons I am not discussing Kant, and will only refer to him when absolutely necessary. Inevitably this limits the depth of my exposition of Thompson, though for my purposes, his example of the naturalist looking at jelly fish will suffice for the material that I comment on.

Readings of the *Categories* range from believing that Aristotle's primary intention was to classify all things in general to the belief that Aristotle initially considered one particular body (a person) to contemplate classification (Cooke 6). In the latter case, the subject in question is a unique phenomenon in the world about which we are able to make judgments. The particular subject in question, be it a man in the Lyceum or anything else, is an instance of a form.

The *Categories* contain the possibility of moving between the particular and the general. This bridge between particular and general is what allows for inductive judgments. Aristotle states, "the species is to the genus as the subject is to the predicate, since the genus is predicated of the species" (Mckeon 10). Yet the relation of species to genus is not merely one of grammar for Aristotle, but a relation that necessarily informs our encounter with nature.

We link the particular case to a higher form by predicating it a property. For example, a rudder is the "correlative" of all ruddered things; a rudder is related to ruddered things as a predicate (19 Mckeon). For the terms to be formulated correctly the two (a rudder and ruddered things) must be correlated in all cases. Aristotle will admit that many cases are not so facile, though he adheres to a system (or the possibility of such a system) in which a rudder and ruddered things are a simple example.

Thus it is essential that the correlated terms should be exactly designated; if there is a name existing, the statement will be easy; if not, it is doubtless our duty to construct names. When the terminology is thus correct, it is evident that all correlatives are interdependent (Mckeon 20).

What we are really doing when we "construct names" is building a classificatory scheme to accommodate an aspect of experience. However, Aristotle seems to contradict this in saying that

“the object of knowledge would appear to exist before knowledge itself, for it is usually the case that we acquire knowledge of objects already existing” (20)<sup>33</sup>.

While Aristotle is often held to be the first champion of empiricism, this is at best an exaggeration. The above remark at first makes Aristotle look like an empiricist as he is concerned with knowledge of objects that exist before that knowledge. In other words, this makes it seem that Aristotle favors perception of knowledge in objects, rather than projection of knowledge onto them. In context this remark serves as an anecdotal counter-example to Aristotle’s assessment that correlatives come into existence simultaneously, i.e. “if there is no double there is no half”. The previous statement can equally be read as saying that the objects of knowledge already existing may in a certain sense be exterior objects, but they are not outside our minds, that is, they are objects of thought just as much as they are objects of the world.

The bulk of *Apprehending the Human Form* deals with the task of making generalizations, or inductive judgments, in a way that moves from individual cases to natural history claims. Thompson identifies five different kinds of judgments that pertain to observing and classifying organisms in the style of natural history. Thompson’s exposition of the judgments taken as an account of how natural history works serves to show that for each and every one of these judgments there is an interdependence between rationalism and empiricism. The seed of this idea was arguably planted by Aristotle, yet Aristotle almost takes it for granted experience of nature is neither purely derived from thought nor from a raw substratum, or is not motivated to be concerned about the issue.

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<sup>33</sup> A compelling argument could be made that here Aristotle is subscribing to a copy-theory of knowledge. That is, our knowledge of the world is an approximate perception of objects, and the assumption of this theory is that these are, “objects already existing”. This theory has been criticized by scholars such as Nelson Goodman, who proposes a theory of projection in *A Study of Qualities*.

One of Thompson's key points inexplicitly rests on an Aristotelian premise: primary substance is never predicable of a subject. Thompson's naturalist attempts to create a monograph of natural history about a certain species by going out and looking at various instantiations of this species. The possible judgments about this species for Thompson are five:

- 1-this individual organism belongs to species  $x$
- 2-species  $x$  is such and such
- 3-this particular individual of species  $x$  is such and such
- 4-this particular individual of species  $x$  is sound/defective
- 5-species  $x$  is sound/defective if such and such is the case

Right away, it is evident that there are judgments about particular individuals, and about the general species. Thompson is in this way mindful of a difference resembling primary and secondary substance. Thompson holds that the information about the general life form in question is gathered by looking at its individual members. Yet it is not the case, perhaps oddly, that the statistical average accounts for the natural history that is to be recorded in the monograph. So Thompson's naturalist is indeed performing a kind of inductive logic, though this inductive logic is peculiar in that it is not empirical in the way modern biology claim to be empirical in terms of justifying claims with significant statistical data. This is because Thompson will eventually deny that any of his five claims are strictly empirical. Rather, there is an interdependent relationship between apprehending an organism in an individual encounter with it, and a knowledge that Thompson claims we bring with us into the encounter. Looking back at Aristotle, we can see that understanding what a rudder is, is reciprocally dependent on the

understanding of the class of ruddered things, that they come to our attention simultaneously, at least most of the time.

Thompson looks at the description of an aquatic life form he calls the “umbrella jelly” by way of example. “The better your natural historical knowledge of the umbrella shaped bell that the umbrella jelly grows...the more clearly you will be able to tell when this individual jelly here and now before you in the reef is moving up or down the water column and when instead it is being moved by currents” (4). Earlier I considered the suggestion that we can only know a subject from its predicate (or predicates). Thompson challenges this claim, sharpening the understanding of how we classify a species. Rather than approaching primary substance in a vacuum and attach predicates by observing its raw characteristics, Thompson writes: “Armed with your extensive knowledge of the phylum, you set out, inevitably, to study the local gelatinous fauna” (Thompson 1). The hypothetical scenario invokes the Aristotelian concept of reciprocity, and refines what it means for a correlative and a relative to have an interdependent relationship. Based on the observation of certain features such as the tentacles, “you wonder whether it might not be a defective instance of a species familiar to you” (Thompson 1).

It only occurs to the naturalist that he has encountered a distinct species previously unknown to him after he spots more and more jellyfish that resemble the first peculiar one he noticed. Yet what was the sequence of events that allowed him to ascertain that this was a novel species? Another way to put this question is, was it the physical characteristics of the organisms or was it the concept of what a species might be or *should* be that initially allows the naturalist to see this as a distinct species? Thompson denies the possibility that it could alone observation of physical characteristics. These tentacles could just be defective versions of a species already known as opposed to those of an undiscovered species.

The last point demonstrates the importance of the interdependence of perception and projection. Given this reciprocity it seems impossible to answer the question, or that the question pushes one into a constrained position of response. Thompson additionally points out that though the naturalist may encounter an individual organism before it is reproductively mature, the atemporal natural historical knowledge that these are its reproductive organs will allow one to identify them in the individual even if they are not yet functionally reproductive. These examples are meant to show that direct observations such as these depend on certain assumptions.

Thompson successfully denies that classifying species is strictly empirical on the grounds that this kind of knowledge is mutually dependent on imported assumptions in observations. The idea of interdependence of saying that “this individual belongs to species *x*” and an assumption of what species *x* means has roots in Aristotle’s *Categories*. The question remains how precisely Thompson adheres to the Aristotelian notion. It is a peculiarly Aristotelian claim that all relatives have correlatives and not vice versa, which Aristotle explains with the following example.

If a man states that a wing is necessarily relative to a bird, the connexion between these two will not be reciprocal, for it will not be possible to say that a bird is a bird by reason of its wings. The reason is that the original statement was inaccurate, for the wing is not said to be relative to the bird *qua* bird, since many creatures besides birds have wings, but *qua* winged creature (19).

It is the nature of the basic work of *Categories* that the principles should apply to all things. Here we can see that an observable characteristic of an organism such as a wing is not necessarily an essential feature. This corroborates Thompson’s point that the naturalist cannot identify a species based on its peculiar tentacles, mouths, and bell structure alone. The naturalist must work through conceptual assumptions in addition to observation.

Referring to the five initial “empirical” judgments, Thompson continues,

On reflection, that is, it appears that our whole five-fold grammar comes into deployment together. If this is right, then we are very far from the account of the concept of a life form as an abstract precipitate of observation...The concept of a life form, or the specific form of generality associated with it—or the apprehension of the concomitant form of unity of things happening here with things happening there—are everywhere at work in any materials of experience from which it might be abstracted. We arrive at an explicit conception of it by reflection on certain of the forms of thought of which we are capable—as we arrive, for example, at the general concept relation. The opposition of individual organism and life form is, as we might say, a more determinate form of the opposition of individual and universal in general...(14).

The way in which Thompson uses the term “relation” here seems to rely on Aristotle’s sense of it. There opposition between general and particular organism recalls Aristotle’s classificatory scheme of genus, species, individual. For Thompson, the answer to the difficult question of how one arrives at a general concept after encountering several instances of the particular lies in an inherent “grammatical” framework in our minds but is also true of the material world.

Thompson’s argument is driven by Aristotle, but in some cases the continuity lapses. A lot of the weight of Thompson’s argument lies in the conclusion drawn from the fact that in the “articulation of the natural history of the umbrella jelly your thoughts exhibit a certain form of generality, as one might say, but is clearly very far from familiar Fregean or statistical or *ceteris paribus* form” (3). Thompson’s logic is that if the ability of the naturalist to form generalizations—which he persuasively shows is indeed an ability-- about what the proper form of a species is, is completely independent of the average member of that species, then this generalization is not

empirical, or at least part of the judgment is not empirical<sup>34</sup>. Thompson then infers on this basis that the naturalist making a statement along the lines of *a healthy member of this species has this many legs* relies heavily on an assumption held prior to observing any members of the species.

Whether Aristotle had a congruent epistemological method in mind of identifying a species is not a simple matter. To what extent Aristotle was paying close attention to the natural world while writing works such as the *Categories* is open to speculation. As Thompson thinks of the general form of a species relying on conceptual assumptions, the criteria of a species for Aristotle are its essential qualities. In adapting Essentialism for his own purposes, Thompson succeeds in placing more rigorous demands on the application of Essentialism. Thompson also goes a long way to showing the complex and interdependent nature of Essentialism that is at most unarticulated thought between the lines of the *Categories*.

Needless to say the members of a species are alike to one another. What accounts for this “likeness” for Aristotle is 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 (Mckeon 27).

If Thompson’s naturalist is determining the number of legs of a species, he might notice that two individuals have the same number of legs, that they share this quality. Yet clearly this particular likeness is not enough to determine what a species is because different species have the same number of legs. In fact, it is rare that one characteristic alone can account for what we name a

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<sup>34</sup> Thompson cites Ernst Mayr, a prevalent contemporary biological theorist, as a stricter empiricist in the sense that he defines species based on members that are capable of interbreeding. This qualification is empirical—it could not have been logically determined before observation, and at the same time it does not rely on statistics. This definition does not interfere with any part of Aristotle’s theory of which I am aware. That is, although it provides an alternative criterion for identifying a species, it is still possible for certain qualities to be predicated to a species exclusively. Eliot Sober makes an argument in “Evolution, Population Thinking and Essentialism” that essentialism can still stand up as a way to identify species despite Mayr’s theory.



species, but rather a collection of characteristics. Even then it is evident that this collection of traits will not always overlap at once, which necessitates a way of thinking about essentialism that hasn't yet been discussed.

In his Introduction to *Apprehending Human Form*, Thompson mentions that the essay have "an epistemological and in the end metaphysical interest" (1) which prompts a question about what the relationship between epistemology and metaphysics might be. I would argue that there is a Wittgensteinian influence evident here: Wittgenstein writes, "what we do is bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use," (*PI* 116) implying that epistemological inquiry serves to therapeutically excavate metaphysical assumptions, exposing them to plain view.

## Chapter Three:

### **Wittgenstein's Inheriting Aristotle**

#### **I. Words as Categories**

In the “Blue Book” Ludwig Wittgenstein deals with the problem of what a word means. The question is parallel to the question, what makes an object belong to a specific class of objects? Wittgenstein, perhaps pejoratively, proposes the idea of objects having “ingredients”. At bottom, Wittgenstein is excavating an issue at the heart of what Aristotle grappled with so long ago. Intuitively we have a way of moving from the particular to the general, and a way of isolating the particular instance against the backdrop of the general; this process is mysterious to the extent that it is difficult not to talk about it in misleading way. Wittgenstein successfully shows that there is much more at stake in this matter than meets the eye. This issue can be seen as a problem inherited from Aristotle's *Categories*. In the *Categories* Aristotle lays out a system of what we would now call predicate logic. Insofar as language and entities in the world are indistinct for Aristotle, the task of writing a logical treatise would be somewhat undermined by the fact that he is explaining the metaphysical (or meta-lingual) with language itself. This is a problem because it seems there is no justification for language that one can put into words without an assumed meaning or way of operating in language. In general Aristotle resisted the notion of elusive beginnings, appealing to a theory of an unmoved mover, which cannot be justified or dismantled.

Wittgenstein recognizes the need to re-approach this ancient problem. Even so,

what makes it difficult for us to take this line of investigation is our craving for generality.

This craving for generality is the resultant of a number of tendencies connected with particular philosophical confusions. There is--

(a) The tendency to look for something in common to all the entities which we commonly subsume under a general term.—We are inclined to think that there must be something in common to all games, say, and that this common property is the justification for applying the general term “game” to the various games; whereas games form a *family* the members of which have family likenesses. Some of them have the same nose, others the same eyebrows and others again the same way of walking; and these likenesses overlap (*PI* 17).

Wittgenstein discerningly returns to and extends Aristotle’s project, and has a way of proposing explanations only to show that they are inadequate. Discussing the Galtonian-composite-photograph model of how one acquires the general image of class of objects, Wittgenstein says “this is again connected with the idea that the meaning of a word is an image, a thing correlated to the word” (18). This statement implies that words need not necessarily be correlated with something outside of them. Returning to the question of what a word means, this suggests that asking what a word stands for is the wrong way of going about answering the question. Indeed, Wittgenstein goes on to suspect that the scientific tendency to generalize “is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into darkness” (18).

Some have made comments to the effect that Wittgenstein has resolved or ended philosophy, in describing his philosophical contribution. Wittgenstein himself wrote that one may be “cured” of his philosophical puzzlement. It seems that Wittgenstein’s method of lifting philosophical perplexity does not lie in providing a direct answer to a question, but rather in showing that the question is not in fact problematic, or that it is meaningless in the sense that there is no answer that might meaningfully be given. Wittgenstein’s method of dealing with philosophical questions in this regard is appropriate for the instance of the question of whether we perceive or project objects in nature.

Wittgenstein spends much time in the investigations considering a certain kind of “connection”. This alleged connection might be, for example, between a word and its meaning, between a name and the bearer of a name, or perhaps, between an classification system, and what one might call the underlying nature that informs those categories. “Let’s not imagine the meaning as an occult connection the mind makes between a word and a thing, and that this connection *contains* the whole usage of a word as a seed might be said to contain the tree” (73-74)<sup>35</sup>. Wittgenstein contemplates this connection with regard to several familiar processes, and comes to the following remark about reading:

So I might say that the written word *intimates* the sound to me.--Or again, that when one reads, letter and sound form a *unity*--as it were an alloy. (A similar fusion occurs, for example, between the faces of famous men and the sound of their names. [70] It seems to us that this name is the only right one for the face.) Once I feel this unity, I might say that I see or hear the sound in the written word (*PI* 171).

Wittgenstein intends to persuade his reader that any such connection, as an underlying phenomenon that helps us to better understand the true nature of the process of reading, is a myth. We cannot purify the connection by stripping away elements--these elements are not extraneous--and we would no longer recognize the process of reading when we lose them. Wittgenstein will point out that if we are teaching a student to read, we might say that he is reading when he stops making frequent grammatical mistakes, but we can strip away an element of this vague characterization by making the student copy out typed letters in handwriting (162). Wittgenstein says, “in order to find the real artichoke, we divested it of its leaves. For (162) was, to be sure, a special case of deriving; what is essential to deriving, however, was not hidden here beneath the exterior, but this exterior was one case out of the family of cases of deriving” (164).

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<sup>35</sup> Incidentally this language is in direct confrontation with Wittgenstein’s remark about an “occult relation between the very scorpions and man” which I discuss on page 46.

The ability to connect a sound to a word, or a name to a face is an ability that is not independent of language itself.

Returning to the notion of Essentialism in light of these assessments, it as if we suspect that the connection, say between letters and sounds, is one element that universally describes all situations in which we read in this manner. Wittgenstein's point is that there is no one single element that somehow invisibly accompanies, or lies buried beneath the process of reading words on a page, and that any connection that exists moment to moment (because there "*must*" be some connection, which motivates Wittgenstein in the first place) is peculiar, perhaps sharing no similarity to other instances of reading. The "connection" that Wittgenstein is talking about is not defined by a single essential element.

And none the less, I do not read Wittgenstein as saying that we were then wrong when we thought that there *must* have been some connection between a word and our reading it out loud (otherwise we wouldn't be able to do so). This leaves us in a position in which we must confront the "connection" under investigation not as a recognizable situation with one common defining element, but as a recognizable situation that has diverse manifestations that do not all share common elements, yet that do have enough overlapping characteristics that we still recognize instances of, say reading, as reading.

I hope that the consideration of Wittgenstein's example allows the advancement of discussion in the following ways. First of all, we are now talking about something that cannot be defined by a static rule, or set of rules. Because Wittgenstein's connection is a category bound together by overlapping, yet not uniformly consistent, characteristics, or resemblances, we can see that the category might lack boundaries, while still we we recognize the process of reading.

This means that the instances that we call reading, are necessarily organized in a way that is meaningful to us. This fact may raise alarm because it makes it seem as though the objectivity of what we are talking about is in jeopardy. The “difference between influence and absence of influence” of words on a page that one reads surely refers to an influence *on the reader*. If we are looking for a philosophical answer in the form of a hard and fast rule, the conclusion that what influences us (as subjects) cannot be purified into an objective list of empirical qualities would be disconcerting.

So far, I have not made an explicit case for reading Wittgenstein in order to help justify, or re-invigorate Aristotle’s writing in the *Categories*. In general, the attention Wittgenstein pays to language in the *Investigations* shows a motivation on his part to acknowledge the difficulties of his former writing, in which he one might say he attempted to locate a meaning encoded in symbols. The relation a word has to what it is used for is fundamental to the argument Aristotle defends in the *Categories*. Wittgenstein and Aristotle take on tasks that by nature are in danger of being swayed by assumptions about the function of a word in order to make a broader argument.

We can see the concern these two authors share about universals and the instances that evoke universals in their writing. “If I picture to myself such a particular experience, it seems to me to be *the* experience of being guided (or of reading)” (173). I take Wittgenstein’s emphasis on the definite article to be crucial to his argument. To understand a recognizable situation, we zoom in to a particular example, *and in that moment* that particular experience qualifies as *the* definition of that experience, yet we reserve the capacity to zoom back out (at which point we have no definite concept--and not for lack of essential attribute--of the situation, and yet we might speak of *an* example or experience of the recognizable situation. Compare Aristotle’s

discussion of substance. I have not encountered any authors who have noted the distinction between indefinite and definite articles when considering primary substance.

In some of Wittgenstein's earlier writing, there is a spatial metaphor about our understanding. There was an idea that we could not understand a rule that we were following because we were somehow within its jurisdiction as it were. We cannot grasp something in its entirety if we ourselves are inside of it. As much as this makes sense spatially, it is this spatial metaphor that is the source of confusion. In fact there is a metaphorical language surrounding rule-following that Wittgenstein must dissolve to understand it. We say we are governed by a rule, that we interpret a rule, that a rule dictates possibilities, which Wittgenstein rhetorically likens to "shadows". This follows from Wittgenstein's initial intuition that there "*must*" (Eldridge 163-4). This intuition is not inaccurate, yet its significance is divested and averted in Wittgenstein's later work.

Knowing is not a mental state--it does not happen in time or space (179). Wittgenstein claims "there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an interpretation, but which, from case to case of application, is exhibited in what we call 'following the rule' and 'going against it'" (201). The difficulty is not due to an inability to attain a position hovering over the rule in order to see it as a whole, but because the nature of rule-following as Wittgenstein discusses it is not reducible to elements that one can pin down. It is not that we lack the acuity to articulate or discover the rule, but that rules are as Wittgenstein says "a practice" (202).

We are mistaken to make statements such as "the possibility of the movement stands in a unique relation to the movement itself; closer than that of a picture to its subject". There is nothing that can link a picture to its subject other than our recognition of the subject in the

picture, and this lack of a fixed essential element of connection is parallel to a the case of following a rule. There is no essential formula behind, above, or outside the rule. Our understanding of the rule is not reducible to a formula. We are left with an unexplained understanding, an ability to grasp and follow the rule. The undermining of the idea that there is an essential formula dictating the rule that lies behind it does not render the rule ineffective.

Notice that there appear to be two directions of rule-following or category recognition: recognizing a rule given some particular cases (starting from the instance, moving to the rule) on the one hand, and pointing to an instance in accordance with a rule (starting with the rule, moving toward the instance). To paraphrase an example thoroughly developed by Wittgenstein, suppose someone asks you to go outside, pick a yellow flower and bring it back. Such a task involves following a certain kind of rule, that of finding a *yellow* flower as opposed to another color (or an object other than a flower). Then Wittgenstein stops to ask how you know what to do in this case. A reasonable person may consider such a question to be naive, or not serious. To humor Wittgenstein, we do our best to provide an answer, which will probably go something like *I picture a yellow flower so I know what to look for*. So then I tell myself that I have a system of matching in which I compare an image in my mind's eye to the things I see around me. But surely I cannot picture precisely the flower that I might find before I find it, with its exact properties, i.e. number of petals. The response: the image I have is general, and applies to all yellow flowers. This kind of conversation might go on a while longer, though at some point it becomes clear that Wittgenstein is prepared to take the case to court. He relentlessly presses the question *how can you know how to find a yellow flower*, and eventually by way of this therapeutic technique, it occurs to us that we have are tightly holding onto the assumption that



we have a way of knowing what a yellow flower is before finding it (it seems “we *must*”). Yet if we do let go of the assumption that we are able to find a flower *because* we have a general image of this kind of flower, then we can understand an important part of rule-following.

Releasing the assumption that we use a general image as comparison tool to follow rules suggests that we do not move in the second direction of rule-following that I earlier mentioned-- we do not move from a general rule to a particular instance. So we can instead explain our ability to find a yellow flower by saying that we go out into the field in the absence of a picture<sup>36</sup> and look not expecting anything in particular, and all of the sudden we recognize among the field a yellow flower. This is a step in the right direction, though how such a recognition is to take place if we don't have a mental picture is still not clear. Furthermore when we are walking around, the fact that we can pick out individual objects among our field of vision seems uncanny in light of dropping the notion that mental images are a mechanism that cause us to recognize objects.

The exposition of Wittgenstein's rule-following prepares me to compare rule-following to the parallel case of categorizing (or perhaps recognizing a category is a kind of subdivision of rule-following). In terms of categories, here also two directions are available: moving from particular instances with common features to seeing that they all belong to one category, or on the other hand, moving from a general category to pointing to a specific instance (Wittgenstein's “ostensive” definition). Excavating many layers of asking how we can point to an instance of a category yields no satisfactory answer, as in the case of rule-following, revealing the fact that we

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<sup>36</sup> A philosopher very faithful to the notion that we in such cases rely on a mental picture of yellow, very well may in the event of being charged with the task of bringing back a yellow flower, picture something a flower or a patch of yellow in his mind, and then return with a yellow flower, all the while thinking he understands the mechanism of how he is able to know how to carry out such a task. He is committed to a causal connection, and he is not necessarily right.

have the tendency of guarding an epistemological assumption. In this case, if I ask you to point to an instance of the category of flowers, you may point in the direction of a flower, yet someone who is unfamiliar with the category, might just as well think you are pointing to the category of yellow objects, the category of living objects, the category of objects in this place--there are an unlimited number of possible categories (from an unlimited number of individual attributes of categories) that might occur to someone who does not have in mind the category of flowers. Once more, the example provokes a curiosity about how we pick objects out of our field of vision--whence the objects, whence their boundaries?

It is possible that when we start talking about natural objects that we lose Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein is decidedly not interested in empirical science because he attributes the confusion in philosophy that he clarifies to conflating the aims of philosophy and empirical science. He does not talk about physical laws, biological processes. An over-arching argument in the *Investigations* is that the meaning of a word is not open to an empirical investigation that will yield an essence in the form of "pre-linguistic content", though words do really have meanings.

The discussion of how to ascertain a concept provides an alternative to searching for the meaning of a word with the misleading assumption that we ought to locate what the word stands for. Yet the idea of a concept here is augmented as well--"I'll teach him to use words by means of *examples* and by *exercises*.--And when I do this, I do not communicate less to him than I know myself" (208). I am persuaded by this rendition of how we ascertain concepts, because it exposes assumptions that are contrary to experience (i.e. that there is an essential formula beneath the concept that we possess in grasping the concept) and only posits actual experience, i.e. learning by example and encouragement or discouragement.

Wittgenstein's stance towards empiricism is subtle, and can be seen in his consideration of a machine. He is not saying something like, "the natural or ontological world cannot simply be understood to work as we understand a machine to work". He is rather saying that a *machine* cannot be understood to work as we are tempted to understand it.

But when we reflect that the machine could also have moved differently, it may now look as if the way it moves must be contained in the machine *qua* symbol still more determinately than in the actual machine. As if it were not enough for the movements in question to be empirically predetermined, but they had to be really--in a mysterious sense--already *present*. And it is quite true, the movement of the machine *qua* symbol is predetermined in a different way from how the movement of any given actual machine is (193).

"The actual machine" is what we see, and it is all there is, just as an actual word as we use it is all there is to our understanding of it.

This is really a movement away from something we inherit from Platonic forms. The idea that a machine operates according to a series of non-material symbols which inform the machine's movements is mistaken if we are led to believe that the symbols are *behind* the machine's operation, just as one is led to believe the meaning of a word is behind it when it is used. For the movement of the machine to be "in a mysterious sense--already present" is akin to a word having meaning before it is used, for us to possess some pre-linguistic content, or for a rule in a game to contain within it the precise application to all potential circumstances. Wittgenstein is saying that we should not look for causes in response to a question about how something works.

The perplexity remaining from the examples of rule-following and category recognition, namely our seeing the world as myriad objects as opposed to undifferentiable visual perception, is taken up by Wittgenstein. This question drives towards the issue of what is happening when we do in fact see a yellow flower--and simultaneously recognize it as an instance of the kind of

thing we were looking for. The specimen is recognized as being a member of its species, but we have seen that this purely accounted for by empirical observation from Thompson's critique, and we have seen that this is not purely accounted for by a mental image that we carry from tracing the assumptions rooted in rule-following examples. Oddly however, we do know that when we bring back what we recognize as a yellow flower, our friends agree that it is a yellow flower, or when we refer to the category 'horses', someone else than knows that we are also talking about the category of 'animals'.

The essential thing about private experience is really not that each person possesses a different specimen, but that nobody knows whether other people also have *this* or something else. The assumption would thus be possible--though unverifiable--that one section of mankind had one visual impression of red, and another section another (272).

For Wittgenstein, the fact that we can communicate at all is enough to show that we do share concepts. Our sharing of concepts, I would argue is enough to say that they are ontologically sound, and not arbitrarily selected. This is not the case because we can triangulate a concept, as we would a measurement in an empirical inquiry by repeated tests. Empirical inquiry alone is not what allows us to grasp a concept. It is rather a "grammar"<sup>37</sup> that affords us the meaning of words, and the ability to grasp concepts.

The idea that one's personal impression of something like the color red, to take Wittgenstein's example, is in conflict with what in fact is *red* in the world, or in conflict with *red* as what other people refer to as red rests upon a notion of dualism that is not sound. This notion of dualism misunderstands the way in which language works, that is, the way in which we communicate. There isn't something definite that we can claim about the use of words "as if we detached the colour *impression* from the object, like a membrane" (276). For the word "red" in

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<sup>37</sup> I have abandoned the idea that the grammar of our language maps onto the world. Yet I believe Thompson uses this word as a kind of metaphor for a structure that conveys a conventional format for sorting out and ascribing meaning to various situations, and it is in this sense that I use the word.

our language does not refer, indicate, or signify something other than itself. The word “red” is a tool that we use to convey what we are trying to say, and in using it, it functions within our system of grammar (as an adjective), and therefore is entirely dependent on its context, not on something that it stands for.

What does it mean when we say, “I can’t imagine the opposite of this” or “What would it be like if it were otherwise?”--For example, when someone has said that my mental images are private; or that only I myself can know whether I am feeling pain; and so forth. Of course, here “I can’t imagine the opposite” doesn’t mean: my powers of imagination are unequal to the task. We use these words to fend off something whose form produces the illusion of being an empirical proposition, but which is really a grammatical one (251).

The grammatical mistakes that Wittgenstein is cautioning against are category mistakes in the sense of Aristotelian categories, as well as in the sense of Thompson’s critique of empiricism. The surprising implication of the fact that words do not signify objects is that a word is not an essence. There is no single characteristic that all of the instances in which it is used share in common, nor an object for which it stands. This leads Wittgenstein to the question, “how is it possible for one to be tempted to think that one uses a word to *mean* at one time the colour known to everyone--and at another time the ‘visual impression’ which *I* am getting *now*?” (277). This question is about the relation of the general to the particular, or a category to instances of the category. The theory of universals that Aristotle develops (beginning to branch away from Platonic Essentialism), I claim, explains this relationship. “I don’t turn the same kind of attention on the colour in the two cases” Wittgenstein observes. This is because we cannot grasp the general or the particular independently, but rather a concept that entails both of general and particular, one giving rise to the other, neither capable of existence without the other. We encounter the object as particular instance, and representation of general form. Wittgenstein

would likely prefer to say that at any given moment we see may see a (any) general form represented in an object or may see it as a particular individual, differentiated from others of its species. The live transience of the nature of the encounter evokes Emerson's voice describing the "occult relation between the very scorpions and man".

Not all words are predicates, clearly, such as conjunctions. Categories and predicates are interchangeable terms, not only because our word category comes from the Greek word meaning predicate, but because in English alone, a predicate is always a category, and conversely a category may always be a predicate of something. Therefore it is not so that all words are categories. Some words categories. All words that are predicates are categories, and this is the extent of the relationship of words and categories.

## **II. Family Resemblances and Ramsey's Maxim**

Renford Bambrough highlights a thought that Wittgenstein develops in the *Blue Book*, and in *Philosophical Investigations* about overlapping characteristics. This idea comes out of, and turns away from, a Platonic Essentialism, which Aristotle certainly inherits in some form in his theory of classification. From Plato's *Euthyphro*, we can see that Socrates is really interested in what it is that allows us to properly call someone pious. "Pious" is a predicate that can be attached to a subject, making that subject an instance of a general category, and it is this connection that allows Aristotle to lay out his theory of classification. Each category is defined by an essential feature that is true of each belonging instance.

Wittgenstein notes that we are in need of a more sophisticated rendering of Essentialism, noting that a group of things may share overlapping "family resemblances," as opposed to one

common characteristic<sup>38</sup>. Yet even in a “family” of overlapping characteristics, it is not clear what constitutes as one characteristic. Bambrough tests the idea that we can recognize members of a family without there being a defining characteristic by imagining the Churchill family, all having some combination of facial features that are family features. “And if we remember that what goes for faces goes for features too; that all cleft chins have nothing in common except that they are cleft chins, that the possible gradations from Roman nose to snub nose or from high to low cheekbones are continuous and infinite, we see that there could in principle be an infinite number of unmistakable churchill faces which had no feature in common” (211). Note here we are thinking of what is in a family as that which we *recognize* as a family member. Of a family then, it is not really possible to discreetly identify “a feature.” When we do talk of identifying a feature, i.e. “cleft chin,” perhaps this feature is that of a distinct “Churchill” family. We might ask whether these features are in fact part of the group of family resemblances we look at, or whether they artificial markers that we use to associate faces together.

Bambrough downplays the importance of features in favor of the face as a whole in writing: “The members of the family will have no *feature* in common, and yet they will all unmistakably have *the Churchill face* in common” (210). Perhaps a better question then is whether *the Churchill face* is indeed an inherent characteristic of the Churchill family--is it ontologically-speaking a defining characteristic of the family. This would look very much like Essentialism. The difference is we are talking about characteristics that can’t be merely empirically determined--some other kind of judgment is infused in the process. (Apect

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<sup>38</sup> But [Wittgenstein’s] alternative suggestion that what we see among these instances is no more than what he calls a “family resemblance” can seem even more disappointing, although it has evidently satisfied some who are devoted to Wittgenstein’s thought. My sense, rather, is that we are right to look for a sense of essence or necessity in our concepts, only we are looking in the wrong place...(Cavell *Touch of Words* 93).

perception, is required to see these characteristics.) What is driving this line of questions is the desire to ask if a family, or a category, in the first place is ontologically present.

I present Bambrough's reading of Wittgenstein because it allows us to see the nuance of Wittgenstein's relation to Essentialism. Wittgenstein refers to his own writing as "one of the heirs of the subject which used to be called 'philosophy'" (BB 28). Presumably Plato and Aristotle qualify as contributors to this former notion of philosophy, and so it is reasonable to guess that Wittgenstein considers himself an "heir" of Essentialism, "but he did not relate the results of his activity to the results of the enquiries to which it was an heir" (212).

An heir is at once related to and divergent from the past. Wittgenstein's inheritance of Essentialism gives rise to a debate between Realism and Nominalism. Bambrough makes the case that these conflicting positions obscure Wittgenstein's contribution in seeing universals as families. Bambrough employs Ramsey's Maxim to diffuse the entanglement of Nominalism and Realism, which I will elaborate on.

The Nominalist believes that the world is devoid of knowable content unless our intellect supplies it by assigning names to things without input from entities existing of themselves. To call a collection of things by a conventionally agreed upon name is the only criteria by which the things have something in common. Recall the child learning to find fossils on the beach. The Nominalist will say that the kind of object he picks up and identifies as the fossil he has gained interest in, is only really this object insofar as the child calls it a kind of fossil, for instance a "crinoid" fossil. Bambrough makes a key point about universals as families that allows us to see that if the nominalist makes an arbitrary list of things that will answer to a name, an artificial class according with the Nominalist view, this would be a "closed class," and consequently



would not belong to the world of meaning or understanding (219). The substance of the world is alive, by which I mean it is not grounded by immutable, eternal forms.

The Realist believes there is an Essence in, or behind, a universal. The realist will claim that categories are metaphysically inherent in the world, and that consequently our language is metaphysically inherent in the world. Bambrough explains that “When he is provoked by the nominalist's claim” that there is no criteria by which we identify crinoids other than the fact that we have named them crinoids, the realist wants to respond that there exists something that crinoids “have in common apart from being” crinoids (Bambrough 215).

Following Ramsey's Maxim, Bambrough reveals Wittgenstein's achievement that often goes unnoticed due to its modesty. Ramsey established a model in which

the truth lies not in one of the two disputed views but in some third possibility which has not yet been thought of, which we can only discover by rejecting something assumed as obvious by both the disputants (*Foundations of Mathematics* quoted in Bambrough 217).

Beginning by dismantling what is assumed to be true by both Nominalists and Realists, Bambrough points out that Wittgenstein is often misread by Realists and Nominalists alike because they each hold a deep commitment “to the idea that there must be something in common to the instances that fall under a general term that they treat Wittgenstein's examples as special cases, as rogues and vagabonds in the realm of concepts, to be contrasted with the general run of law-abiding concepts which *do* mark the presence of common elements in their instances” (215). Wittgenstein's intention is to show that general terms are in fact vague and do not strictly admit of instances that can be identified by common features. The “rogues” are not the exception, but the norm.

Thus, “The nominalist rightly holds that there is no such additional common element,” in universals, yet he stops short of realizing there is an objective justification of universals. On the other hand, “The realist rightly holds that there is an objective justification for the application of general terms” which leads him to mistakenly assume that there “*must* be some additional common element” (217).<sup>39</sup> When Bambrough employs Ramsey’s Maxim, we shed a layer of polemic debate that, however interesting, has led us astray from a clear epistemological understanding of categories.

Wittgenstein makes a more sophisticated argument than Aristotle does with regard to the problem of misunderstanding and misuse of language.<sup>40</sup> This can be attributed to the much greater epistemological demand at by the time Wittgenstein is writing to rigorously work out the way language works. Wittgenstein considers our knowledge of a sensation to illustrate the problem of a concept’s ontological status (which divides the Nominalist and Realist, though as Bambrough notes, Wittgenstein doesn't often refer to common philosophical issues or figures). The sensation itself is “not a Something, but not a Nothing either! The conclusion was only that a Nothing would render the same serve as a Something about which nothing could be said. We’ve only rejected the grammar which tends to force itself on us here” (*PI* 304). Here Wittgenstein simultaneously rejects Nominalism and Realism, as Bambrough has demonstrated adeptly.

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<sup>39</sup> Compare Bambrough’s application of Ramsey’s maxim to Wittgenstein’s example of retrieving a yellow flower.

<sup>40</sup> Given what scholars can know about Aristotle, some issues inevitably remain merely available to speculation. Any reading of the *Categories* speaks to other works from Aristotle, and how much consistency there is between views in different texts, i.e. between the *Categories* and the *Metaphysics*, is controversial. By focusing entirely on a single work, my claims have a smaller scope concerning Aristotle’s view on certain matters. As to his use of language, I rely on the English translation, though the number of times it has been translated prior to the version I’m reading surely obscures some of the style.

Bambrough's essay contains the insight that for Wittgenstein, all words are universals, meaning that all categories are universals (214). Here, Wittgenstein takes a stark departure from Aristotle. Aristotle's four-fold classification entails that all categories are universals *with the exception of* primary substance. The definition of primary substance, that it is not predicated of anything and not present in anything precludes it from being a universal, it is absolutely and totally individual, and exists of itself. This may give rise to an internal coherency problem for Aristotle in that he uses an "individual man or horse" as an example of primary substance. To take Socrates as an example of an individual man would demand that "Socrates" is not a universal term. If Wittgenstein were to accept that "Socrates" is not a universal, it would force him to say that it would be impossible for us to know who or what Socrates is. We cannot know who Socrates is by pointing, and we cannot know who Socrates is by describing him, as was discussed in the previous section. And so we are forced to admit one of the two options: either "Socrates" is a universal category, that refers to

Yet it is also possible that on one hand, "Socrates" is universal term in the sense that the term applies to Socrates as he is standing up, and to Socrates as he is sitting down (these variations pertain to one of Aristotle's ten fundamental categories, position, and we might admit that "Socrates" is a universal term with regard to any of the ten basic Categories other than Substance. Yet within the category of Substance, Socrates remains absolutely particular. In this case, and in this case only, the word "Socrates" is a name, and it has *a* referent in the world. Yet the referent is necessarily deprived of a unity that we normally grant to substance. The only thing that is granted the exception of claiming to be the particular referent of "Socrates" is

Socrates-as-Substance, which is merely one aspect of Socrates, while Socrates-sitting is a secondary substance, and thus a universal.

Although it at first seems that admitting the particularity of Socrates as primary substance contradicts Wittgenstein's later work, the nuance that the term "Socrates" is still universal in many respects, and only primary substance existing of itself in one respect due to our sensitivity to Aristotle's unique ten basic Categories, there is in fact no direct conflict between the two views.

### III. Aspect Perception

In light of the last insight with regard to primary substance, it seems that primary substance is in some blurry region between the basic Categories of substance and quality. There is only an aspect of Socrates that is isolated and fixed as primary substance, existing of itself. It is a rather bizarre conclusion to say that a lone "aspect" of Socrates is primary substance, for the most part because it seems contradictory for an aspect to be a substance as opposed to a quality. Primary substance is constrained as a certain *aspect* of a universal category (which of course is unique among aspects in its not being predicated of anything, nor present in anything). I now want to return to a comment Mackinnon made that I discussed previously in the section on Substance:

The distinction between substance and accident is, [Aristotle] seems to realize, one which requires to be drawn at the level of quality rather than that of substance where substance is construed as the concrete realisation of form—the *this such*. In fact, the distinction between essence and accident drawn within the category of quality is to the modern less artificial than one drawn at the category of substance, where by the very drawing of the distinction at that point the risk seems to be run of evacuating the individual of that which

makes him one rather than another—Socrates rather than Callias—through relegating the differentiating element to the status of the accident (Mackinnon 106).

Part of the definition of primary substance as charted in the four-fold classification is that it is distinctly essential as opposed to accidental. Yet if, as Mackinnon remarks, the distinction between accidental and essential is necessarily drawn with respect to the category of Quality as opposed to Substance, then yet again the basic categorial division of primary substance is ambiguous. By definition the ten basic categories are irreducible, so it is theoretically impossible for there to be any ambiguity between these categories. Primary substance is unsalvageably splintered. There is no way around the contradiction that this entails for Aristotle.

Notwithstanding the hole in Aristotle's theory, it becomes interesting to think of primary substance as belonging to the category of Quality. It seems we are left with some sort of *primary aspect*. What Wittgenstein means when he says "The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity" (129) is that which we grasp. In other words, we "grasp" "aspects of things" without difficulty;<sup>41</sup> we become confused only when we try to fixate or contain the nature of this grasping in a word, a symbol, or a picture. The Aristotelian term *nous* is the faculty by which we grasp aspects (Eldridge calls this discursive thinking), though we may be misled by our *phantasia*, or our desire to link images to concepts. We have a way of knowing categories, or words, *nous*, that does not admit to either an ostensive or a verbal definition. These two ways of coming to know either the meaning of a word, or the understanding of a category do not exhaust our full capability of knowing--they merely exhaust what we can precisely isolate. "But we *understand* the meaning of a word when we hear or say

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<sup>41</sup> In splicing Wittgenstein's words together in this way, I do not mean to suggest that his writing lends itself in general to this kind of logical replacement--such a notion would be completely antithetical to his philosophy. In this particular case it seems to work incidentally.

it; we grasp the meaning at a stroke, and what we grasp in this way is surely something different from the ‘use’ extended in time!” (138). What we grasp in a particular instance, as opposed to a vaguely general term, is a particular aspect.

Because Wittgenstein is interested in the particular case before the general form to answer his questions, i.e. “what is a word?”, in the manner of Aristotle, Wittgenstein’s remarks about aspect perception provide an enlightening angle into his project. Eldridge aptly states that discursive seeing is to “notice or see *that* this is (like) that” (175), for to say X is F is always to say X is *like* F--this is how classification works.

When we try to understand the nature of any object, be it part of a novel experience, or part of reexamination of an ordinary experience, our understanding is closely linked to aspect perception. Richard Eldridge, like Michael Thompson, is interested in the agency we have which allows us to see an object as an instance of one category rather than another, and the awareness of this agency in a familiar way seems to put the objective justification of objects in jeopardy.

Historically, the apparently special character of human judgmental consciousness has motivated a variety of attempts to explain it, including...Aristotle’s theory of *nous* as actively instancing essences both in us and in things (Eldridge 162-3).

That *nous*, our ability to grasp, or hold, aspects, gives rise to essences both in things in us means that the positions of the Realist as well as the Nominalist are precluded by Aristotle’s theory.

Wittgenstein may be at odds with many philosophical positions regarding the the objective justification of universals, yet his view is parallel to Aristotle’s in its rejection of the potential conflict between the Realist and the Nominalist.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> I am not aware that Nominalist and Realist positions were taken in Aristotle’s time, yet testing them against his theory of categories in retrospect still speaks to the strength of his position.

The full-blooded representationality or judgmental-discursive character of thought and language are--it is now proposed--matters not of any 'substructure' of simple names and simple objects lying underneath the surface, but matters rather of words having a role within public language as a matter of common practice (164).

Eldridge says that using a word in language means drawing another's attention to an object in the world. To know how to use a word means to not be confined to a single definition but to construe and reconstrue objects as one learns through experience more instances in which the word does something. If one person is teaching another what a crinoid fossil looks like, the person learning the concept of crinoid might first latch onto a certain aspect of crinoids, i.e. that they resemble cheerios, and this might constrain his notion of a crinoid to a subdivision of crinoids. So one comes to learn about a category by grasping its aspects--and these aspects are not arbitrary, as Eldridge points out. "The availability of these symbolic representations to a now developed genuine subject, in possession of explicit cognitive and linguistic skills, marks the difference, in Aristotelian terminology, between a being with *phantasia* or sensory awareness alone, and a being for whom *phantasia* is informed and structured by *nous*, whose awareness is then fully discursive" (171)<sup>43</sup>. Then as the person on the beach is shown more and more examples of crinoids, he will grasp new aspects of crinoids, which then cultivates a nuanced notion of the crinoid category.

If this is so, then it is impossible to find a stable, let alone eternal, immutable, rule for a word that one can use. Conversely, if one adheres to a fixed rule or definition of the word and the rule alone is her approach to understanding the word, there is little hope of using the word to

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<sup>43</sup> The Aristotelian terms that Eldridge refers to are in *de Anima*, (*On the Soul*), and cannot be found in the works that comprise the *Organon*.

communicate effectively<sup>44</sup>, that is to draw the attention of others towards an aspect. Using words in this way yields entrainment--a number of individuals focus their attention on one event or object, *and* they conceive of it in the same way, using the same terms. It is also true that these people are attaching predicates to the object as Aristotle explains predicates in the *Categories*.

To attach a predicate to a subject is to “construe” it as something, and Aristotle recognizes--I would say even fervently emphasizes--that something may be construed in more than one way. This is evident in his placement of homonyms at the start of the *Categories*. Homonyms (things that are said to be named equivocally) are examples of one word being construed in several ways, as one might construe a real man and a figure in a picture as “animal,” though these things are distinct.

In this light, we can see that “construing” things in a certain way, or to use words as Eldridge describes it serves to assign things in the world to categories, and it is in this way that we can share conceptions of the same object. So there is thus both an element of perception and projection in attaching predicates to subjects.

Like Wittgenstein though, Aristotle’s contrasting things named equivocally and things named univocally demonstrates his sensitivity for what Bambrough has called an objective justification of the category in question. It follows that things named equivocally (i.e. man and pictorial figure) do not belong to the same genus, though things named univocally, (i.e. man and ox) are both instances of the category of animals. This is the case, I claim, because an

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<sup>44</sup> To indulge Eldridge taking this in a cognitive science direction based on empirical results, it is an equivalent distinction to separate responses to information in a pavlovian sense, to understand how to “play” with words, that is, use them as we ordinarily do. Eldridge quotes Tomasello claiming this distinction is “due entirely to the social nature of linguistic symbols” (170).



Aristotelean genus such as ‘animal’ is a family in the manner of Renford Bambrough’s treatment of universals as families of overlapping characteristics.

The hierarchical structure of categories is objectively of the world, and at once is amenable to the “playfulness” with which individuals use words, construe and reconstrue aspects that give rise to various categories. Aspect perception is not arbitrary as the Nominalist would have it. And aspect perception is not metaphysically linked to anything other than the aspects.

I have been interested in what primary substance is in order to help answer, or re-approach the question of whether our classification of nature is perceived from, or projected onto, the world. I turn to Wittgenstein’s later work in which he is concerned with the question of what a word means because this speaks to what an Aristotelian predicate is, which is part of the definition of primary substance. I am choosing this way before other ways of working out this problem, though I cannot be sure this is the best way to do so. It is where my research has led me.

This brings up once more the most tenuous of Aristotle’s ideas, and the point at which he differs most from Wittgenstein. The status of primary substance within the categorial order, in terms of its degree of generality, is peculiar. Primary substance is not the most particular of all substances (although it is arguably afforded the highest degree of particularity in the four-fold classification)--it is also universal in some ways, as mentioned earlier, in that there is a family of instances in which we might say “here is Socrates”. There are no remaining ways in which “Socrates” is not a family, or universal category, and we are forced to concede that Aristotle’s claim to primary substance is unfounded.

While in the several ways that I have discussed Aristotle's project is confluent with Wittgenstein's, there is no possibility of entirely reconciling Aristotle's commitment to primary substance in the *Categories* with Wittgenstein's excavation of philosophical assumptions. "Our problem is not a causal but a conceptual one...What is at issue is the fixing of concepts" (*PI* 203e, 204g). Much of the work laid out in the *Categories* is not in need of conceptual fixing. The doctrine of primary substance is an exception. Socrates is predicated of multiple instances in which we encounter Socrates, and Socrates is present in (not capable of existing apart from) the contexts in which we meet him, i.e. *in the lyceum*, or *at Piraeus*. And so the example that Aristotle gives for primary substance in the *Categories* does not comply with the definition given for primary substance in the *Categories*. "The question of what a word means is not a microscopic process that requires a medium to be viewed indirectly; 'nothing is hidden, one might say'" (Eldridge 172). Wittgenstein's wisdom is that a primary substance would be hidden from us if it were indeed true that it could not be predicated of anything--that it was not a universal, and if it were not present-in anything, if it were not bound to a context.

The "discursive" nature of our seeing in Eldridge's sense means that aspects of objects are not fixed but are always changing. The notion that there is an objective concrete reality belonging to or associated with the "outside" world as opposed to a subjective "internal" landscape interferes with the comprehension of such a claim. This is easily an unsettling thought for someone who thinks of the world as obeying constant laws of universals.<sup>45</sup>The physicality of particular objects--their accidental nature--remains unchanged, yet the aspects that we see are prone to oscillate and progress, and these aspects are a remnant of the idea ascribed to primary

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<sup>45</sup> Plato's notion of the eternal immutable form, for example, is in conflict with this idea, much like the motivation behind empirical science, which seeks to discover fixed laws that have universal explanatory power.

substance in that the aspects that we grasp and allow us to understand things as we understand them, as they are, namely that they are particular and essential (though essential in the sense of Bambrough's family resemblance traits).

What Eldridge describes as a triumph or an achievement in seeing discursively, that is recognizing different aspects in the same particular object is what for Aristotle would only be natural. This is a triumph for someone who was previously trapped in the misuse of language that provided the impression that the world is objectively "out there", confusingly resisting discovery and correct perception. Recognition appropriates the novel particularity into a general picture of familiarity, allowing a sense of feeling at home in the world.

Wittgenstein's careful examination of exactness (*PI* 88) leads him to a view that is remarkably akin to Aristotle's attitude toward universals and particulars. Aristotle is more invested in (the flawed idea of) primary substance, a particular object, i.e. "this man," or "Socrates," than the universal that envelops the particular object, i.e. the species of men.

With these considerations we find ourselves facing the problem: In what way is logic something sublime?

For logic seemed to have a peculiar depth--a universal significance. Logic lay, it seemed, at the foundation of all the sciences. --For logical investigation explores the essence of all things. It seeks to see to the foundation of things, and shouldn't concern itself whether things actually happen in this or that way.--It arises neither from an interest in the facts of nature, nor from a need to grasp causal connections, but from an urge to understand the foundations, or essence of everything empirical....it is, rather, essential to our investigation that we do not seek out anything *new* by it. We want to *understand* something that is already in plain view. For *this* is what we seem in some sense not to understand (*PI* 89).

For Wittgenstein, logic is admittedly something different from what Aristotle would have thought of as logic. Yet Aristotle's logic, despite some internal inconsistency, is motivated by an interest in what is in plain view. Wittgenstein notices that we tend to treat our generalizations as

if they had a closer bearing to the truth than particular instances. Wittgenstein is saying that there are no buried or invisible logical foundations. Logic, rather, is “in plain view”. The essence does not lie in the general form of a picture that lies at the zoomed-out or surface level, but rather in the myriad particular instances. From the particular we can move towards the general, not the other way around.

Both Wittgenstein and Aristotle seem to arrive at a view that places importance in the particular over the universal from a similar starting point in that they each scrutinize the assumptions of other philosophical theses. Without going into depth in this matter, it may be said generally that Plato valued the eternal immutable form as the Truth rather than transient objects in the world directly available to view. Similarly, there is a long tradition that cannot be summarized here of a dichotomy between a subjective view of the world and an objective view<sup>46</sup>.

The philosophical project that traces theses back to misguided assumptions is of a different nature than the philosophy that advanced those theses in the first place. “Our inquiry is therefore a grammatical one,” that is, of “Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, brought about, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of our language” (*PI* 90). The “different regions of our language” perhaps function in the same way as Aristotle’s different categories. Wittgenstein has traced the identification of a misunderstanding to a category mistake: a word is lifeless outside of its context, the structure that supports its meaning, our ability to take it in our grasp of understanding.

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<sup>46</sup> For example, see Bernard Williams’ *Descartes: the Project of Pure Inquiry*.

These concepts: proposition, thought, language, world, stand in line one behind the other, each equivalent to each. (But what are these words to be used for now? The language-game in which they are to be applied is missing) (*PI* 96).

But what is Aristotle's categories if not a system of symbols? Aristotelian logic differs from modern logic in the fact that it deals only with real examples of language. In retrospect, we might criticize Aristotle for using vague phrases, i.e. "the individual man or horse," instead of using abstract symbols. This criticism comes from a position that assumes a copy-theory of knowledge--that our sensations give rise to thought and language which are (approximate) facsimiles of nature, or the external world. The problem with this, as Wittgenstein slowly came to realize over the course of a philosophical lifetime, is that "we are not *striving after* an ideal, as if our ordinary vague sentences had not yet got a quite unexceptionable sense, and a perfect language still had to be constructed by us. --On the other hand, it seems clear that where there is sense, there must be perfect order. --So there must be perfect order even in the vaguest sentence" (*PI* 98). Language does not lend itself to abstraction in the way of an ideal form, i.e. system of logical symbols.

Put simply, words do not stand for the things in the world. We use them in contexts that we recognize to mean various things, but unlike in logic, words are not symbols. Aristotle's vague sentences are appropriate to his task, which in my view nothing more than to look at things that are already in plain sight. The inexact meaning of a particular phrase or sentence is its strength, not its weakness, for language is a means of communication, which means it must be alive to constantly varying contexts. It does not represent a dead substratum of material reality--the substratum does not carry meaning for us, and thus our words do not correspond to it. Our language is "discursive" in nature, the concrete example is by definition vague. Just as

predicates or categories of objects change as we come to recognize different aspects in them, language shimmers depending on the light that is thrown on it, or the context it appears in.

Acknowledging this allows us to turn back to see that the initial question of whether we impart the boundaries of categories onto the world, or whether we discover them as they inherently are, unnecessarily takes as an assumption a dualism severing knowledge we grasp and our grasp of it.

To approach the point from another angle, we must leave behind the assumption that our ability to recognize categories is due to categories being an “object”. In section 46 of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein himself takes a parallel position to Aristotle as he quotes Socrates from Plato’s *Theaetetus*:

There is no explanation of the *primary elements*--so to speak--out of which we and everything else are composed; for everything that exists in and of itself can be *signified* only by names; no other determination is possible, either that it *is* or that it *is not*...But what exists in and of itself has to be...named without any other determination. In consequence, it is impossible to give an explanatory account of any primary element, since for it, there is nothing other than mere naming; after all, its name is all it has.

Wittgenstein follows this quotation noting, “Both Russell’s ‘individuals’ and my ‘objects’ (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*) were likewise such primary elements.” Wittgenstein is phrasing one of most profound insights of a former way of thinking that he subscribed to in the *Tractatus* in such a way that we can see it is flawed. There are no “individuals” or “objects”, and in accordance with my discussion of Aristotle’s primary substance (which I take to be Aristotle’s own version of *primary elements*), it seems more so as though there are primary *aspects*, aspects that we grasp in a particular case, which inform a categorial classification.

The ideal, as we conceive of it, is unshakable. You can’t step outside it. You must always turn back. There is no outside; outside you cannot breathe. -- How come? The idea is like a pair of glasses on our nose through which we see whatever we look at. It never occurs to us to take them off (*PI* 103).

Upon reflection, it seems odd to be so concerned with *vantage point*. Built into this concern is an assumption about seeing. What we see are not copies of objects, but rather aspects--not aspects *inherently of* "objects" in Wittgenstein's early sense, but aspects that allow us to grasp categories. Seeing-as, or aspect perception does not presuppose a defined being, but a discursivity.

One predicates of the thing what lies in the mode of representation. We take the possibility of comparison, which impresses us, as the perception of a highly general state of affairs (*PI* 104).

To take aspect perception as a "general state of affairs" is a mistake. There is no greater degree of particularity or intimacy than that of seeing-as. The characterization of primary substance as not predicated-of and not present-in anything is conserved in Wittgenstein's notion of aspect perception in that aspect perception is the grasp of a particular resemblance (and the resemblance can be thought of as reformed notion of essence).

The basic idea, or motivation, behind Essentialism is not entirely wrong, but we can appreciate this nuance only after seeing the assumptions behind Essentialism in full, and why they are problematic. Then we can see where specifically the theory goes wrong, and where it makes sense. The idea that there is one essence among lots of extraneous features of an object that do not ontologically belong to its identity mistakes a part for the whole. In fact we might say there is an essence of a phenomenon, say, a man, or a color, but this essence would necessarily be one and the same as both the word and the object in question itself. It is as if the project of Essentialism is searching for a signal amidst noise, when in fact it is a mistake to make such a distinction in the first place. If we are talking about the individual man, Socrates, we know whom it is we are talking about not because of one characteristic or a certain set of

characteristics that pertain to his identity--in different cases, we latch on to different aspects, and these aspects are what is conserved in primary substance. If we imagine the first scene in the *Republic* when Polemarchus and the other interlocutors catch Socrates as he is leaving Piraeus, one might say that Polemarchus recognizes Socrates by grasping some essential quality that denotes or signifies Socrates. This is a misleading use of language that suggests a copy-theory of knowledge. We might recognize a particular person by their gait, but this does not mean they are defined by only this aspect in all cases.

### **Conclusion**

Recognizing a person entails the same recognizing that happens in recognizing the appropriate instance in which to use a word. Aristotle's ten Categories and his project in the text *Categories* are a fairly good answer to the question that might be considered to be the entryway into Wittgenstein's later work: "what is the meaning of a word?" Socrates walks into the room and we say the name "Socrates" when we see Socrates. If we instead did not know the person who walked in the room, we would not be able to use a name in this way. And yet we might recognize another situation: a man walked into the room. This is a more abstract recognition, yet a recognition nonetheless. Any time we notice that there is *something*, more to the point, we are operating with a kind of language. That is, to notice or recognize something is to be able to find meaning in an experience by contextualizing it. Meaning comes with language (when it is doing work as a language) as steam comes with boiling water. There is nothing other than this that goes on invisibly.

The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something--because it is always before one's



eyes.) The real foundations of their inquiry do not strike people at all. Unless *that* fact has at some time struck them.--And this means we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful (*PI* 129).

Wittgenstein is cautious of wanting to “describe phenomena that evade our grasp” (436). In fact, such a notion is meaningless if we pause to see what such a desire really assumes. I read this expression as a volition to ascribe words to the experience of a blank stare. Yet in this blank stare, we are not *grasping* things, which is why we call it blank, or a distant gaze. And so there isn’t anything to say about it.

The assumption to be wary of looks something like “it must be that either the essence grasped in the process of aspect perception is previously or innately carved out in a physical symbol, or our grasping of an aspect is a whim that is solely something that occurs in our minds, independently of the world.” To let go of this assumption is to synthesize Nominalism and Realism, or requires such a synthesis, which Bambrough shows Wittgenstein to have accomplished. As William Day and Victor Krebs point out, Wittgenstein shifts the philosophical starting point from what is *x*?, to how we can see “a given *x* in a new way” (6). Aristotle’s starting point in the *Categoires* (the discussion of things named equivocally as opposed to univocally) is the same in that he calls attention to the different ways in which we see things--and in the case of things named univocally, the way we see things (our seeing-as) structures the world in a kind of classificatory order.

The distinction between the essence of a thing (along with its properties) and an aspect of a thing or a situation is not abolished by Wittgenstein’s work. Nonetheless, Wittgenstein dismantles the fixed importance that philosophy has assigned to such distinctions (Gould 70).

The notion of metaphysics that Wittgenstein undermines is not in conflict with Aristotle’s account of the world. The classificatory system of genera and species as Aristotle considers

them does allow us to see the world as “a realm of familiarities”. The *Categories* does not deny agency or subject-hood to us.

While there is no closed system of concepts in which the world is revealed to us, our confidence in tracking the shared world is shifted to the improvisation and systematicity of language, where grammar tells us what kind of object anything is because talkers acquire in acquiring grammar the facility to share criteria in which grammar is invited to the individual case (“It is part of the grammar of the word ‘chair’ that *this* is what we call ‘to sit on a chair’” [BB 24]) (95).

We do not see things independently of aspects. Things necessarily have a context--we only encounter ‘objects’ in context, we do not encounter them in a vacuum, and further more, we never imagine or conceptualize anything independent of some context. There is a mutual dependence of an aspect noticed in one case, and a family of aspects that this particular case is moving towards. This moves us away from the question, “do we project categories in nature or do we perceive categories in nature?” One might just as well ask, “do we project words into circumstances or do we perceive words into circumstances,” which is the wrong question for the same reasons. We can notice more than one aspect (attach more than one predicate) to one and the same experience. The reason that there is a hierarchy of Aristotelean categories is that if we see for the time being one predicate, it follows that there will be certain other predicates the first one is subordinate to. This does not mean there is only one tree of genera and species, or that there is one place that is the starting place of aspects that belong to families of resemblances.

Because I am focusing on a single text of Aristotle’s it would seem unfair to draw a conclusion from a point made in a different text. Furthermore, the consistency of Aristotle’s position across various works over the course of his life is controversial<sup>47</sup>. Yet the third chapter of Book One in the *Nicomachean Ethics* imports its thinking from the *Categories*:

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<sup>47</sup> See Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (265).

Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions, any more than in all the products of the crafts. Now fine and just actions, which political science investigates, admit of much variety and fluctuation of opinion, so that they may be thought to exist only by convention, and not by nature<sup>48</sup>...it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits (trans. W.D. Ross 936).

To call attention to the fact that some subjects will not yield to classification at some levels of precision is yet another way of saying that we should not start with a general concept and try to locate instances that bear a mark indicating membership. Nor should we always assume there is a family of overlapping resemblances given a cluster items or aspects. After talking about what it means to judge something, for instance a length, Wittgenstein writes,

To say ‘The height of Mont Blanc depends on how one climbs it’ would be odd. And one wants to compare ‘ever more accurate measurement of length’ with getting closer and closer to an object. But in certain cases it is, and in certain cases it is *not*, clear what ‘getting closer to an object’ means (338).

Measurements are significant according to their context. In the context of a climbing expedition on Mont Blanc, the height of the mountain in centimeters is insignificant, and this clearly has nothing to do with the mountain by itself, but is determined by the context of the mountain in a particular case. It would be a category mistake to talk about a mountain’s height in such a small unit of measurement when the issue is climbing the mountain. To do so would be non-sensical for Wittgenstein as it would go in the face of Aristotle’s insistence that we must stipulate the level of precision according to what the subject matter demands. The notion of primary substance adopted as the grasping of primary aspects should not be conflated with the issue of

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<sup>48</sup> This remark seems to take a position on one side of my initial question at least with regard to “fine and just actions”. However, on the whole Aristotle’s remarks are more nuanced.

precision. One can always look at something with more precision, with a more powerful microscopic lens that brings into focus, perhaps measurements, that weren't visible otherwise.

In feeling his way through different kinds of seeing in the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein admits, “well it is tangled” (200), suggesting that kinds of seeing do not conform to a fixed categorial scheme.<sup>49</sup> The fact that a substance admits of different categories at different times doesn't lessen the ontological status of these categories. The “tangled” situation of seeing means that if we approach seeing in one context, it will inflect a certain meaning, and along with this meaning comes an order of categories. We can approach the same word “seeing” from another angle, and now we will have a different order of categories to deal with.

Wittgenstein is concerned with a kind of “categorial difference between the two ‘objects’ of sight” (111), and this difference is not delineated by the words themselves nor the grammatical structure that houses the words. The categorial difference is not one that belongs completely to the world, available to pure empirical inquiry, nor is it strictly our own arbitrary convention. “I *see* that it has not changed; and yet I see it differently” (113) and this difference is not somehow relegated to a psychological state that does not bear on reality--“Its *causes* are of interest to psychologists” (114), though not to Wittgenstein, because what is really happening when we talk about a kind of seeing is not comprised of its empirical causes. Wittgenstein talks about the “concepts of experience” as the topic of interest in the discussion about aspect perception. The hundreds of sections leading up to this point that allow us to see that language does not account for the complexity of our experience, that the hard and fast rules of grammar are not imprinted with ontological form.

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<sup>49</sup> In *Wittgenstein, Aspect-Perception, and Retrospective Change* Garry Hagberg, writing about a parallel problem of “perception” and “projection”, points to this passage (107).

It may be that a contemporary investigation of categories inevitably takes on our colloquial use of the word "predicament" which is adopted from the latin rendition of the greek "category". The trajectory of my project dismantles rather than answers the question posed, which may be disconcerting and jarring (after a long exposition of the what the question is driving at).

Wittgenstein implies that the ostensive definition is endless, and thus not helpful in defining words. Instead Wittgenstein urges us to look at instances of words in use. Aristotle says that eventually there is an end to being able to point out a universal characteristic--this is primary substance. The only way to know a primary substance, to know an individual man, is to encounter one in experience, not to sit and deliberate the meaning of 'individual man'.

I do not mean to say that Aristotle and Wittgenstein are making the same argument, or that they intend to make the same argument. Yet given the starkly contrasting contexts they writing in, the force of their projects turn about to complement one another. Aristotle settles on an ideal that he adheres to, though he is willing to admit its obscurity, letting it be shaped and reshaped by experience. Wittgenstein suggests that we leave behind any ideal, and remove its influence as if they were a pair of glasses. In their respective contexts, each argument clarifies the philosopher's conceptual confusion by relieving the philosopher of concepts themselves.

Wittgenstein's project does not solve all philosophical problems--or, arguably, any philosophical problems--it shows that we have problems which may be dissolved by shedding closely guarded conceptual assumptions. Aristotle, on the other hand, reserves a capacity to (be)hold concepts, though they are not immutable or everlasting, they can only be grasped through experience, and experience is inconsistent. The work is not done, it is cut out for us.

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