

An Inconsistency in *Metaphysics Zeta*?

In Book VII (*Zeta*) of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle seems to be committed to the following three propositions, which apparently form an inconsistent triad:

1. No universal is a substance.
2. Form is universal.
3. Form is substance.

Evidence (drawn mainly from Book VII, but with supporting passages from elsewhere):

1. No universal is a substance:

VII.13, 1038^b8-9: “For it would seem impossible for anything spoken of universally to be substance.”

VII.16, 1041^a3-5: “It is clear, then, that nothing said universally is a substance, and that no substance is composed of substances.”

VII.16, 1040^b23: “... even being and one are not substance, since nothing else common is substance either.”

VIII.1, 1042^a22 (in a summary of *Zeta*): “Further, neither the universal nor the genus is substance.”

VII.10, 1035^b28: “Now, man or horse or anything else that applies in this way to particulars, but universally, is not a substance”

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

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

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

2. Form is universal:

VII.11, 1036^a29: “What sorts of parts are parts of the form, and what sorts are parts of the combined thing, not of the form? If this is not clear, we cannot define anything; for definition is of the universal and of the form.”

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

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

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

XIII.8, 1084^b5: “... the universal and [i.e.] the form is prior”

3. Form is substance:

VII.7, 1032^b1-2: “By ‘form’ I mean a thing’s essence and primary substance.”

VII.8, 1033^b17: “It is evident, then, that what is called substance as form does not come to be, but the compound substance, which is called substance insofar as it is substance as form, does come to be.”

VII.11, 1037^a5: “It is also clear that the soul is the primary substance, the body is matter, and man or animal is composed of the two as universal.”

VII.11, 1037^a29: “For <the primary> substance is the form present in the thing, and the compound substance is spoken of as composed of the form and the matter.”

VII.11, 1037^b2-4: “By ‘primary substance’ I mean the substance that is so called not because x is in y and y is the subject of x by being the matter of x.”

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

VII.17, 1041^b7: “Hence we search for the cause on account of which the matter is something, i.e., for the form; and this cause is the substance.”

VIII.8, 1050^b2: “Obviously, therefore, substance or [i.e.] form is actuality.”

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

Responses

- a. The inconsistency is fundamental and cannot be resolved (Leshner [1971], Sykes [1975]).
- b. Ambiguity in *form*: particular vs. general (Sellars [1957], Harter [1975], Hartman [1977], Frede [1978], Irwin [1988], Witt [1989]).
 - 1) No universal is a substance.
 - 2) General forms are universals.
 - 3) Particular forms are substances.
- c. Ambiguity in *substance* (?Lacey [1965]): substance-as-thing vs. substance-as-essence (=substance of).
 - 1) No universal is a substance (=thing).
 - 2) Forms are universals.
 - 3) Forms are substances (=essences, i.e., substances of things).
- d. Ambiguity in *universal*.
 - i) Woods [1967]: universal (*katholou*) vs. spoken of universally (*katholou legomenon*).
 - 1) No universal spoken of universally is a substance.
 - 2) Forms are universals (but are not spoken of universally).
 - 3) Forms are substances.
 - ii) Modrak [1979]: universals_p vs. substance-types.
 - 1) No universal_p is a substance.
 - 2) Forms are universals (=substance-types).
 - 3) Forms are substances.
- e. Vagueness in *universal* (Albritton [1957])
 - 1) Nothing universal in relation to species is the substance of any of the species.
 - 2) Form is universal in relation to individuals of a species.
- f. Ambiguity in *eidos*: form vs. species (Loux [1979]).
 - 1) Nothing universal in relation to *x* is the substance of *x*.
 - 2) *Eidos* (form) is universal in relation to the parcels of matter it is predicated of.
 - 3) *Eidos* (species) is the substance of its concrete individual members.
- g. Two kinds of predication: IZZing vs. HAZZing (Code [1986]).
 - 1) Nothing universal in relation to *x* is the substance of *x*.
 - 2) Form is universal with respect to matter (matter HAZZes form).
 - 3) Form is (the) substance (of itself, i.e., of the substance that it IZZes).

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