“Being is said in many ways”

1. Textual references:

Metaph. \( \Gamma.2, \ 1003^{b}5 \) \* \( \Delta.7, \ 1017^{a}22 \) \( \Delta.11, \ 1019^{a}5 \)
\( \Delta.28, \ 1024^{b}13 \) \( \Delta.7, \ 1017^{a}22 \)
\( \Delta.28, \ 1024^{b}13 \) \( \Delta.11, \ 1019^{a}5 \)
\( H.2, \ 1042^{b}25 \) \( \Theta.1, \ 1045^{b}33 \)
\( K.3, \ 1060^{b}32 \) \* \( K.8, \ 1064^{b}15 \)

Phys. 185\(^{a}21 \)
De An. 410\(^{a}13 \)

* = “focal meaning” passages: ‘is’ is like ‘medical’ or ‘healthy’.


It looks as though a new sense of the word will have to be conjured up for each sort of thing we want to talk about; but it is absurd to suggest that a word has not merely more than one sense but an unrestrictedly large number of senses [as Aristotle argues, 1006a34-b11]. Aristotle’s answer is the theory of categories. Ultimately, he holds, to be is always to be either a substance of a certain sort, or a quality of a certain sort, or a quantity of a certain sort — the list notoriously varies, but the nucleus remains stable and the number remains small. … it seems that the verb ‘to be’ in its existential role enjoys a number of irreducibly different senses. …

4. What are these alleged senses? Owen’s suggestion seems to be:

‘exists\(_1\)’ means ‘is a substance’
‘exists\(_2\)’ means ‘is a quality (of some substance)’
‘exists\(_3\)’ means ‘is a quantity (of some substance).

Existence-Claim Analysis

Horses exist. Horses are substances.
Pallor exists. Pallor is a quality.
Hatred exists. Hatred is a relation.

This is implausible. Consider: “Everything that exists is either a substance or a quality or a quantity, etc.” What is the sense of ‘exists’ in this claim?

5. Counterpart paraphrases (explicit definitions):

Sentence Paraphrase

Tarzan swings. Tarzan dangles from a rope.
Benny Goodman swings. B.G. plays syncopated rhythms.
6. Non-counterpart paraphrases (contextual definitions):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Paraphrase</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Octogenarians exist.</td>
<td>Some people live to be 80.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corruption in the police department exists.</td>
<td>Some policemen take bribes.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

7. Aristotle’s analysis of existence claims about non-substances involve non-counterpart paraphrases; the definitions are contextual, not explicit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existence-Claim</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pallor exists.</td>
<td>Some substance is pale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running exists.</td>
<td>Some substances run.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are qualities.</td>
<td>Substances are qualified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are relations.</td>
<td>Substances are related.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are actions.</td>
<td>Substances act.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Are there counterpart paraphrases in Aristotle? The best evidence for them seems to be H.2 (1042b25). We’ll look at three different translations of this passage:

- So it is clear that ‘is’ is said in just as many ways. A threshold is because it is situated so, and [in this case] being signifies its being so situated ….” [Bostock]

- Plainly, then, the word ‘is’ is used in a corresponding variety of ways. A threshold *is*, in that it is situated thus and so: ‘to be’ means its being so situated …. [Owen]

- Clearly, then, ‘is’ is said in just as many ways. Something is a threshold, for instance, because it has this position, and its being a threshold signifies its having this position …. [Fine & Irwin]

For 1042b25 to be a counterpart paraphrase, the first ‘is’ must be existential, and the subject of ‘is situated’ must be ‘threshold’. I.e.,

‘A threshold exists’ is analyzed as ‘it [sc., a threshold] is situated at the foot of a doorway’.

On Fine & Irwin’s translation, the first ‘is’ is predicative, not existential:

\[ x \text{ is a threshold iff } x \text{ is situated at the foot of a doorway.} \]

which is supported by 1043a7-12:

“… if we have to define a threshold, we shall say that it is wood or stone in such a position…”

So we have a non-counterpart paraphrase: ‘A threshold exists’ can be paraphrased as ‘There is a piece of wood or stone at the foot of a doorway’. The existence of a threshold is analyzed in terms of a predicational statement in which form is predicated of matter. The ‘exists’ in that statement is not given its own (counterpart) paraphrase.