

Theory and History of Ontology (www.ontology.co) by Raul Corazzon | e-mail: rc@ontology.co

Selected bibliography on the History of "Substance" in Philosophy

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"Among the many still unsolved problems of Aristotelian exegesis is that concerning the relationship between the three types of substance which are distinguished in book XII of the *Metaphysics*, that is to say, terrestrial (mobile and corruptible), celestial (mobile and incorruptible), and supracelestial (incorruptible and immobile) (1). In fact some scholars supposed they could regard this relationship as an instance of *pros hen* homonymy (2), involving a priority of the immobile substance which is not only ontological but also logical (3); some identified it with the relationship of succession (*to ephexes*), understood as a particular sort of *pros hen* homonymy and therefore as implying logical priority as well (4); finally, some identified it with the relationship of succession itself, without specifying whether this should be regarded as implying not only ontological, but also logical priority (5). In spite of this variety of solutions, it seems to me that the problem has not been discussed with sufficient thoroughness and, especially, that the following issues have not been definitively clarified : a) whether in fact the three above-mentioned types of substance are irreducible to a common genus, and therefore give rise to a true and proper homonymy or equivocity of the notion of substance; b) whether this homonymy, if it subsists, allows some sort of logical unification, i.e. a priority of a genus in relation to the others which is not only ontological but also logical; also, what would be the precise nature of this logical priority.

An answer to these questions seems important for the general interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy. As a matter of fact, since substance, for Aristotle, is what gives unity to all being, a decision concerning the type of unity which it possesses determines the conception which we must have of the very unity of being; and since, furthermore and that of the other types of substance, that is to say, the problem of the unity, and therefore of the possibility, of the science of being qua being, i.e. of philosophy itself.

The present investigation does not claim, of course, to provide a definitive reply to the questions enumerated above, but merely offers itself as a contribution to their discussion, by analyzing some passages in Aristotle which have not been sufficiently taken into account in this connexion." pp. 55-56

(1) Cf. Aristot., *Metaph.* XII 1, 1069a33-34; 6, 1071b3-4. For convenience I mention the former under the denomination of terrestrial substances, though they occupy the whole sphere under the sky of the moon, and the latter under the denomination of supracelestial substances, though, to be exact, they, being immaterial, could not be localized spatially.

(2) J. Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, Toronto, 1963 (2nd ed.), 279-300, 455-473; G. Patzig, *Ontologie und Theologie in der "Metaphysik" des Aristoteles*, Kant-Studien 52, 1960-61, 199-201.

(3) By "ontological priority" (*physei* or *ousiai*) I mean the possibility that some things have of existing independently of others, while the latter cannot exist without them (cf. *Metaph.* VII, 1019a1-4); by "logical priority" (*logoi*) I mean the fact that the notion of some things is necessarily contained in the notion, or definition, of others, while the notion of these others is not contained in the definition of the former (*Metaph.* V 11, 1018b30-36). On this distinction cf. G. E. L. Owen, *Logic and Metaphysics in some earlier works of Aristotle*, in: *Aristotle and Plato in the mid-fourth century*, Goteborg 1960, 170-72.

(4) H. J. Kramer, *Zur geschichtlichen Stellung der "Metaphysik" des Aristoteles*, Kant-Studien 58, 1967, 349; H. Happ, *Hyle*, Berlin 1971, 337-342.

- (5) G. Colle, Aristote, *Métaphysique*, Livre IV, Louvain-Paris 1931, 63; J. Tricot, Aristote, *La Métaphysique*, Paris 19622, I, 190, n.4; G. Reale, Aristotele, *La Metafisica*, Napoli 1968, I, 329.
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"Basil is somewhere in between Stoic and Aristotelian doctrines of substance, while his mind is also guided on these matters by his theological predecessors and contemporaries. It is possible to see evidence in Basil of deeply ingrained habits of

thought which he carries into his writings from his early training in Stoic dialectic. One outstanding example of this may be seen in his insistence that the ousia of God must have its being securely rooted in a hypostasis, while the Stoics would say that nothing can exist without the possession of ousia (their first category) as a qualified thing (*poion*). What one does not find in Basil is a doctrine of divine substance and persons which can support a consistent conceptuality derived from Stoic logic."

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 "Dans le présent article, nous nous proposons d'examiner un aspect de la théologie d'Augustin, à savoir son emploi du terme *essentia*. P. Hadot se demande si Augustin «a ignoré la théologie trinitaire de Victorinus ou a renoncé à l'utiliser», sans choisir l'un des termes de l'alternative (1); peut-être une lecture attentive de quelques passages montrera-t-elle qu'Augustin a volontairement renoncé à suivre son prédécesseur." p. 436
 (1) P. Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, Paris 1968, p. 477.
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"The Ages of Reason and Enlightenment aimed not only to advance knowledge but also tried to distinguish carefully between things which can and cannot be known. Characteristic of those ages is the manner in which metaphysical speculation was reduced by the sciences or brushed aside by the leading philosophical schools. The general problem of the *limits of human understanding* became one of the leading philosophical themes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Doubts about the possible scope of human reasoning concerned not only God, the spirits, and the nature of the human soul, (1) but also went to the very core of that reality which man was then trying to subdue intellectually; several conceptual elements were discovered whose nature many thinkers found mysterious and inaccessible to the mind. In fact, beside a clear awareness of the limits of human understanding in general, the notions of *mathematical infinity*, (2) *force*, (3) and *substance* were considered by many philosophers to be above man's reason. The purpose of the present paper is to study the criticisms which were directed against the last of these notions, criticisms which played a rather important role in the famous "Copernican revolution" of 1769 at the start of Kant's critical period. (4) We shall consider not only criticisms of the notion of substance itself, but also those of the closely related notions of *essence* and *materia prima*; these often include the notion of substance, or serve as a foundation for." (pp. 285-286)

(1) For opinions about the human soul in that period see: G. Tonelli, *Elementi metodologici e metafisici in Kant precritico* (1745-1768), Cap. VII, § 30 and foll. About God's unintelligibility, *Ibid.*, Cap. VII, § 17 (In the II Vol., to be published in short. Vol. I, Torino 1959).

(2) See G. Tonelli, *Le problème des bornes de l'entendement humain au XVIIIe siècle et la genèse du criticisme kantien particulièrement par rapport à la question de l'infini*, "Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale", 1959.

(3) See Tonelli, *Elementi*, Cap. VII, § 21 and foll.

(4) A not very thorough history of the notion of substance is in K. Heidmann, *Der Substanz-Begriff von Abälard bis Spinoza*, Berlin 1889, (Dissertation).

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