

## A PROEMIUM TO THE CATEGORIES

Reason knows things in a confused way before distinctly and, therefore, in general before in particular. We must follow this road in coming to know what the *Categories* is about.

The *Categories* in general is about *the distinction and order of names signifying things through thoughts*.

But we must say more precisely and in particular what it is about, determining more each part of what has been said in general.

It is about names signifying things, but we can say more precisely that it is about names signifying *what things are*. Hence, it is about the distinction and order of genera and species for these names signify what things are. A genus signifies what one general kind of thing is and a species signifies what one particular kind of thing is under that general kind of thing. *Animal*, for example, signifies what one general kind of thing is and *dog* signifies what is one particular kind of thing under animal. Hence, the *Categories* is about the distinction and order of genera and species

Names signifying *what it is* in things sensed or imagined are names said of many things. Both genera and species are names said of many things. But taken strictly, they are names said of many things with the *same* thought in mind of what they are.

Thus, the *Categories* is about *names said of many things with the same thought in mind of what they are*.

It is about the distinction and order of such names. We can distinguish such names from other names and from each other. And we can discover their order to other names and to each other.

We distinguish names placed upon things (such as *man*, *seven*, *courage*) from names placed upon names (such as *genus*, *species*, *noun*, *verb*) or names placed upon speeches (such as *definition*, *statement*, *sylogism*). We can also distinguish them from names placed upon many

things *not* signifying what they are and from names placed upon many things with *other* thoughts or meanings in mind.

We place names upon things before we place names upon names. And we place names upon things before we place names in speeches, such as in definitions or in statements or in syllogisms. Thus, in two senses, the *Categories* is about the *first* placing of names.

But in the *Categories*, Aristotle brings out the distinction and order of the names of the genera and species of things. The distinction of the names of the highest genera of things (the genera which are not species) is before other distinctions. The second distinction is that of the names of what are placed under one of these highest genera.

The highest genera are distinguished by how a name can be said of individual or first substances. The *Categories* is about names said either univocally or denominatively of individual substances. It is about the distinction of such names into ten genera by what they signify when said of individual substances.

Names are said of individual substances, such as Socrates or Lassie, either univocally, signifying what it is (as the names *man*, *dog*, *animal* etc.), or denominatively, signifying how much it is, or how it is, or how it is toward something, or where it is, or when it is, or how it is laid out, or how it is outfitted, or its acting upon (another) or its undergoing (from another).

Names said denominatively of individual substances can also be said univocally of the species placed under them.

Hence, the names considered in the *Categories* are ordered in two ways. One is from individual substances and the other is from each highest genus. Beginning from individual substances, we can order the names by how they are said of individual substances. And beginning from each highest genus, we can order the names of genera and the species under them. These two orders are of the names considered in the *Categories* among themselves.

Since we are said to place the less universal *under* the more universal, we might call the ordering of species under their highest genera

the *vertical* ordering of these names. And the ordering of them from individual substances could be called in contrast their *horizontal* ordering.

The above fits the first and second parts of the *Categories* (what the Latin tradition calls the *ante-predicaments* and the *predicaments*). But the third part (what the Latin tradition calls the *post-predicaments*) is about names equivocal by reason. (In this way, it is more like the fifth book of *Wisdom* or *First Philosophy* which is about distinguishing the names equivocal by reason used in wisdom and in the axioms (and to some extent everywhere). Some have even doubted whether the third part should be part of the same work. But perhaps the question of whether or how the post-predicaments complete the *Categories* is out of place in a Proemium

The philosopher is a lover of wisdom and wisdom is a knowledge of all things in some way.

The *Categories* is for the sake of understanding what things are. It is a beginning for understanding what things are. (Since every thing is either a substance or exists in substance as in a subject, for example, such a distinction (in the *Categories*) is a beginning of understanding what things are.)

DUANE H. BERQUIST