Aristotle on Thises, Suches and the Third Man Argument

JOAN KUNG

Framework Questions

According to Aristotle, questions concerning the basic framework within which a science proceeds are radically different from questions concerning the nature, existence and attributes of various kinds within a science. The former are pre-scientific and can only be dealt with dialectically. Dialectic is not itself a science, yet it provides the "path to the principles of all inquiries" (Top. 101b4). These principles cannot be discussed within the sciences on pain of regress or petitio principii, since they are the pròaitai, the "firsts," of everything within them (Top. 101a36-101b4). Thus, it could only be the business of dialectic and not of any science to consider whether we should speak of "thises" (tode ti) and "suches" (toionde) and whether there are substances and qualities and quantities (Phys. 185a27-8). In a science, on the other hand, we ask such questions as: "Does the sun suffer eclipse?" "What causes an earthquake?" "Are there centaurs?" and "What is man?" (An. Post. B.1).

Quine has pointed out that a radical distinction between framework questions and questions within the sciences is "of little concern ... apart from the adoption of something like the (Russellian) theory of types."1 Without some such theory, there will be no distinction in principle between such questions as "Are there properties?" and "Are there substances" on the one hand, and "Are there centaurs?" on the other. With the adoption of some such type theory, however, although we can't know in advance, for example, what particular species there are, we can know that whatever we come across in the world will be assignable to one of an antecedently determined number of categories, so the division will make sense. There will be fundamental segregations of expression and entities, and attempts to violate type distinctions will lead to absurdity and paradox.

In light of Quine's insight, it is perhaps not surprising to discover that a type distinction emerges early and remains fundamental throughout Aristotle's work. I owe notice of it to Terry Penner.2 It is the distinction between a this (tode ti) and a such (toionde or sometimes poion), as Aristotle sometimes puts it. I shall assume that it is the same distinction he has in mind in charging Plato with trying to turn universals (katholou) into particulars (e.g. Met. 1038b34-1039a2, 1040b23-31, 1041a4, 1053b9-24, 107
1086a32-34) or supposing they exist alongside or in addition to (para) particulars (e.g. An. Post. 77a5-7, Met. 1040b26-27).³

Thises are portrayed by Aristotle as substances, individual rather than common or universal, separate, the subjects of which species-forms and praedicata⁴ from other categories are predicated, the subjects of accidental change, prior to their attributes and modifications, determinate and, in at least most cases, capable of acting as efficient causes. For example, Socrates, Bucephalus and the First Mover are thises. Suches are common or universal, inseparable, not genuine subjects of change or predication, predicated of the thises, dependent, not able to act as efficient causes. They include the species and genera of substances as well as praedicata from non-substance categories. The contrast is drawn especially clearly using these terms at Soph. El. 178b36, 179a8-10; Met. 1003a9, 1033b9ff., 1034a6, 1038b23ff., 34ff. 1039a32.⁵ See also Cat.3b10, An. Post. 71a20, 73b7; Phys. 191a12; De Caelo 278a12; GC 317b7-12, 21-22, 26-28, 31-33; De An. 402a27, 410a14, 416b13; Met. 1001b32, 1014a15-25, 1029a28, 1030a3-5, b11, 1033b19-23, 1038b24, 34-36, 1042b3, 1069b11, 1070a9-30, 1086a25-b11, 16-27, 1087a18, 1089b23-25.⁶

After mentioning some type distinctions in recent thought, I shall argue that understanding the this-such distinction as a distinction of logical type that is allied with these enables us to give a plausible account of Aristotle's response to the Third Man Argument, one which avoids the difficulties of some other important interpretations. I shall then indicate, more briefly, how reading the distinction in this way also helps to illuminate a number of otherwise perplexing passages. Such considerations constitute evidence for the correctness of so understanding it.

Type Distinctions in Some Recent Thinkers

When I say that in contrasting thises and suches as he does, Aristotle is forging a type distinction, I have in mind certain aspects of Russell's theory of simple types, given a realistic interpretation.⁷ These are, in particular, its assumption of the dependent, incomplete character of entities above the level of particulars and its strict prohibition of mixed types, the latter in contrast to some other set theories, of which Zermelo-Frankel's is perhaps best known.⁸ I do not mean to suggest that Aristotle developed all the paraphernalia of Russell's theory, which itself underwent a number of revisions. That theory involves a complex hierarchy, but it is not clear that in his talk of thises and suches Aristotle envisions more than two basic