

Understanding Predicables

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In understanding predicables as such an understanding would refer to how Scott Sullivan speaks about predicables in his *Introduction to Traditional Logic*, please note that we should not be misled by a traditional conceptuality which speaks about predicables and predicaments. A category is not a predicable but a predicament where, for instance, when referring to the ten categories of Aristotle, we find language which refers to them as predicaments. Aristotle's *Ten Categories* refer to ten attributes or ten *predicamenta*¹ (predicaments) which can be used to speak about anything which engages our interest in a manner which elicits a possible scientific investigation. Please distinguish between scientific description and scientific explanation. The ten predicaments or the ten categories or the ten attributes of Aristotle are to be understood as referring to constituents, albeit, “constituents of corporeal being.”² Hence, when we want to speak about the status of their reality, they exist not only as specifications of conceptual or mental being but also as specifications of real being (even if we admit that the categories of Aristotle refer to descriptive conjugates or descriptive determinations and not to explanatory conjugates or explanatory determinations).³ Predicaments refer to being without referring to the causes of being. Predicaments (categories) refer to substance, quantity, relation, action, passion, place, time, time, posture, and habit while, in Aristotle, causes refer to end, agent, matter, and form.⁴ Summarily put, predicaments (what we say about any given thing) is to be distinguished from predicables (how we speak about any given thing) even as we admit that, when we try to speak about any given thing as a body and not as a substance or thing, we use categories which can be derived or which can be identified when we refer to the ten categories of Aristotle.

Predicables exist as beings of reason (they exist as logical entities) since, unlike the categories of Aristotle, they do not exist as objects or as the terms of our acts of sense and experience. In a manner which is proximate to our acts of reasoning and understanding (internal to our acts of reasoning and understanding) but which is remote or not immediate to our acts of sense and experience, we find an order of five predicables that we can distinguish from each other (genus, difference, essence or species, property, and accident) when we reflect on our acts of thinking and reasoning which attend to how a given meaning or concept relates or compares to another meaning or another concept.

In one way, to unite the particulars of Sullivan's articulation into a general whole, we can start with a distinction that was drawn by Aquinas (a distinction that is probably derived from Aristotle). The proper object of the human intellect (the proper object of our human inquiry) is not to be confused with the final or ultimate object of our human inquiry. The proper object refers to the presence of a form, a nature, or an intelligibility which exists within a given set of material conditions. Because, as human knowers, we exist in an embodied way (a soul or spirit living within a body), the kind of knowing that we engage in as human beings explains why we can properly understand anything which exists with a

¹Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 380, nn. 1-2; Bernard Lonergan, *Understanding and Being: The Halifax Lectures on Insight*, eds. Elizabeth A. Morelli and Mark D. Morelli; rev and aug. by Frederick E. Crowe with the collaboration of Elizabeth A. Morelli, Mark D. Morelli, Robert M. Doran, and Thomas V. Daly (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 8.

²Ron Shady, email message, October 7, 2012.

³Please note that it is a distinct question to ask if Aristotle's categories refer to descriptive conjugates or if, in fact, they refer to explanatory conjugates.

⁴Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, University of Toronto ed., p. 8.

similar order or structure of constitution. The proper object of our inquiry is anything which exists as a composite: a material component being united to a formal or intelligible component. However, the final or ultimate object of our human knowing is the total sum of reality or, put more simply, it is being or reality. Despite our human limitations as questioning, thinking, and knowing beings, there is nothing about reality that we do not want to know or understand. Our limited inquiries exist in function to a higher, greater goal: a comprehensive knowledge of all things. Hence, with Aristotle, we refer to this general objective or general goal as a “known unknown.” As human questioners, we are directed toward being or reality in a way which refers to all that is. In our curiosity and in our asking of questions, a conscious awareness exists which refers to reality or Being even if we know that being or Reality is not something that is entirely understood or known by us. We performatively acknowledge the being of its existence and the reality of its existence is something that spurs us on. We are drawn toward it.

On self-reflection, we know that our sense of being or reality is fuzzy and dim. And yet, on further self-reflection, we can find that, within us, there exists a cognitive desire which wants to move toward being or reality (more fully). We begin with an undifferentiated knowledge or an undifferentiated sense of being. But, when we begin to ask questions about what is or what could be, we begin to move toward a differentiated, fragmented, partial knowledge of being. The asking of questions, when we identify the kinds of questions which we ask and when we attend to how the asking of one question leads to the asking of another question, we then find that we can now engage in a self-reflective form of inquiry which can ask about predicables and the nature and status of predicables. Our questioning (our analysis and self-analysis) reveals our predicables. Our inquiry into the kinds of questions which we ask, for instance, leads us to distinguish between what exists as a genus and what exists as a specific difference. If, for instance, we begin with an undifferentiated notion of being and if we add a specific difference to it (say, for instance, we import a quality which refers to the condition of being alive), we can then distinguish between what exists as a living being and what exists as a non-living being (two kinds of genus). A genus refers to a general category of some kind although, by adding further differences, we can move toward subcategories of genus and, from there, by adding yet further new differences, we can come eventually to a unique species of kind or type. A genus is distinguished from a species. But, as we attend to our analysis and understanding, we will find that the nature or the specific intelligibility of a species will indicate what exists as its specific properties (its essential characteristics, its peculiar traits) and then, if we want to speak about events or qualities which are not proper to a given species, we can refer to a class of events or qualities which refers to accidents. It is proper for a human being to have skin and that this skin be a certain color. But, the particular color exists as an accident. It is to be regarded as an accident. Properties differ from accidents. To the degree then that we move from a genus to a species, to the same degree it can be said that we grow in our understanding. However, in a similar way, growth in understanding occurs if we can also begin to speak about proper attributes and how these stand in relation to accidents. Our understanding grows in specificity; it is aware of a larger number of distinctions. And yet, if, by our questions, by our further questioning, we can discover other possible genera in the existence of things, our understanding will also grow in another way. Breath of comprehension can be matched with depth of understanding.