

Leila Haaparanta and Heikki Koskinen (eds.)

Categories of Being: Essays on Metaphysics and Logic.

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As I begin this review, I can hear the faint tick of a clock hanging on the wall in the background. This experience and the underlying object of my experience appear to contain certain necessary features that might in turn be characterized. So each tick of the clock arises and in turn falls away. There is an underlying temporal condition inherent in this passage. Does time pertain to the thing itself or to my experience of time alone? The same might in turn be said of my encounter with the spatial conditions inherent in this experience. The clock is *somewhere*, has a specific coordinate position in reference to me and the other surrounding objects within the room. It possesses various properties of color, shape, size, etc., and emits a peculiar tone in reference to the ‘tick-tock’ of the moving second hand. These reflections, which pertain to my experience of the clock, may in fact be extended still further. So I might ask, in what way do the properties of the clock and the clock itself pertain to the *thing itself* of my encounter? In what way is the object as existent thing *there*? In what way is the thing uniquely one and divided from the surrounding environment? In what way does the clock both *exist* and *subsist* and in what way are the properties that flow forth from the being of the clock related to it, according to the character of being itself?

These latter reflections draw us away from the mere characterization of experience and plunge us into the deep waters of metaphysical reflection. From this perspective, the collection of papers that comprise the volume *Categories of Being: Essays on Metaphysics and Logic* serves as a wonderful edition to the contemporary literature in regards to the study of being and in general to present-day metaphysical reflection. In the first place, what marks this edition as such a fruitful contribution is without doubt the fact that each of the twenty essays contained within addresses a particular historical period in regards to the study of being, not in a haphazard way, but rather according to the guiding thread of the study of the categories, and it is this thread which appears in turn to guide metaphysical reflection throughout its history.

Although we often tend to neglect or even forget this fact, the history of metaphysics is in many ways inextricably bound to each present age of metaphysical reflection. In consequence, we might liken this history to a great ocean. So within the ocean of human reflection we encounter historical tides of interest that wax and wane. For example, a hundred years ago the word ‘metaphysics’ was almost anathema to philosophy, as seen among its wholesale rejection among many positivist and deconstructivist thinkers. Today, we in turn encounter something of a rebirth of interest in the historical questions governing the human encounter with being, questions that once struck the ancient and medieval mind as both fascinating and perplexing. This interest is subsequently expressed within *Categories of Being* as each historically-situated essay serves to mirror some interest within the contemporary debate. We find this first of all in Michael Loux’s discussion (Chapter 1, ‘Being, Categories, and Universal Reference in Aristotle’) of the nature of

the categories in Aristotle, where the Stagirite's concern with the meaning of being serves undoubtedly to mirror contemporary interests in relation to problems of language, logic and reference. Still more, although we might consider ourselves an age of logic, within medieval ontology, logic likewise reigned. Indeed, as Taneli Kukkonen informs us (Chapter 2, 'Dividing Being: Before and After Avicenna'), prior to Avicenna, the discussion of the categories was often understood as, in the main, pertaining to the discipline of logic first and metaphysics second.

What appears as a minor change would in turn have major consequences for the understanding of metaphysics, so that the brilliance of this Arabic thinker would come to influence the understanding of metaphysics within the likes of such thinkers as Thomas Aquinas. In spite of this, we see a return to almost 'logician' tendencies within later medieval thinkers such as John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, as discussed in the essays of Simo Knuuttila (Chapter 3, 'The Metaphysics of the Categories in John Duns Scotus') and Calvin G. Normore (Chapter 4, 'Ockham on Being') respectively. From this perspective it is worth mentioning that contemporary modal logic, discussed in the essay of Sanford Shieh (Chapter 13, 'Logic, Modality, and Metaphysics in Early Analytic Philosophy: C.I. Lewis Against Russell'), in fact finds something of an origin among the earlier medieval thinkers. For instance, within John Duns Scotus we discover what would appear to be the first explicit use of the notion of a *possibile logicum*, viz., 'anything that can coherently be thought' (68).

Like the ocean, metaphysics is historically speaking both shallow and deep, and within the depths we often encounter powerful tides and undercurrents that flow beneath. Thus Leibniz, as Henrik Lagerlund discusses (Chapter 5, 'Leibniz (and Ockham) on the Language of Thought, or How the True Metaphysics Is Derived from the True Logic'), would later in many ways transform Occam's nominalism through development of a logical calculus as the background to his theory of language and thought—a change which foreshadows later advances within logical positivism. But with the Kantian critique of metaphysics, as Olli Koistinen observes (Chapter 6, 'The Critique of Pure Reason as Metaphysics'), the great historical tides of metaphysics seem to shift so that the subject (the 'I') now enters center stage within the encounter with being such that the categories are displaced from the domain of reality into the transcendental domain of subjective experience.

Following Kant, we have of course Hegel, the German master of the history of philosophy, wherein we find further transformation of our understanding of the categories so that, as Paul Redding notes (Chapter 7, 'The Relation of Logic to Ontology in Hegel'), 'the categories do not simply reveal the forms of thought that is able to be conceived apart from and opposed to the world; they reveal the structure of the world itself' (147). Thereafter, among continental philosophers, phenomenology and in general descriptive psychology emerges, all influenced by these earlier critical standpoints with respect to metaphysics and through the efforts of such thinkers as Franz Brentano, Edmund Husserl and Alexius Meinong. A wonderful discussion of these developments can be found in Peter Simon's contribution (Chapter 11, 'To Be and/or Not to Be: The Objects of Meinong and Husserl'), an essay that highlights, in particular, the distinction between Husserl and Meinong regarding the analysis of the nature of objects. Still more, although the work of Martin Heidegger was largely unknown and often misunderstood among analytic

philosophers, today we see some interest in this great post-metaphysical thinker among both continental *and* analytic thinkers. The relationship between positivism and the phenomenology of Heidegger regarding the account of being, for instance, is discussed in detail in the essay of Leila Haaparanta (Chapter 14, ‘On “Being” and Being: Frege Between Carnap and Heidegger’).

As Sami Pihlström (Chapter 20, ‘Transcendental Philosophy as Ontology’) further emphasizes, in spite of Kantian critique, analytic metaphysics has historically (with some exceptions, e.g., Wittgenstein) and at present largely taken a realist and naturalist standpoint regarding the study of being. This is perhaps due to the fact that present-day analytic metaphysics blossomed from the scientific positions of their earlier positivistic predecessors. So Quine, who certainly played a great part in the development of these contemporary trends, adopts a naturalist perspective in relation to ontology, whose thought is discussed by Heikki J. Koskinen (Chapter 15, ‘Quine, Predication, and the Categories of Being’). The early developments of analytic metaphysics in relation to logic and the standpoint here in discussion are further detailed through a broad sketch of these influences in the essay of Michael Beaney (Chapter 12, ‘Logic and Metaphysics in Early Analytic Philosophy’) and furthermore elucidated and comprehensively discussed in a third or so of the contained essays within the edition—including Arianna Betti’s (Chapter 8, ‘Bolzano’s Universe: Metaphysics, Logic and Truth’) account of Bolzano’s metaphysical universe, Torjus Midtgarden’s (Chapter 9, ‘Charles S. Pierce: Pragmatism, Logic, and Metaphysics’) account of the pragmatism of Pierce, Claire Ortiz Hill’s (Chapter 10, ‘Georg Cantor’s Paradise, Metaphysics, and Husserlian Logic’) discussion of Cantor; and later analytic thinkers including Kevin Sharp’s (Chapter 16, ‘Wilfrid Sellars’s Anti-Descriptivism’) discussion of the naturalistic metaphysics of Sellars, Hans-Johann Glock’s (Chapter 17, ‘Strawson’s Descriptive Metaphysics’) account of Strawson, and Keith Campbell’s (Chapter 18, ‘D.M. Armstrong and the Recovery of Ontology’) discussion of Armstrongian ontology to which is coupled Ilkka Niiniluoto’s (Chapter 19, ‘On Trope Realism’) detailed account of trope theory.

So as I review within my mind and in writing the above articles and edition, I am once again transformed back into my experience of time and the ticking of the clock. As testified by the above articles, we have a very great history of thinking around a great variety of topics within metaphysics that in many ways find their focal point around the discussion of the categories. Without doubt, even Aristotle recognized this at a very early point, for as is well-known, within the opening sections of book *Z* of the *Metaphysics*, he concludes that the study of being must in the main entail the study of substance. That substance and the categories should thereafter become such a troublesome topic for the history of philosophy was perhaps not immediately clear to Aristotle, though the difficulties that he there encounters within this great work show that some hint and sign of these later debates must have been apparent to him on some level. So among the later medieval thinkers, the categories once again become a central topic of consideration and this concern is highlighted in the precise point of Kant’s assault upon metaphysics insofar as he is faced with the task, throughout the *Critique*, of finding a ‘place’ for the traditional categories of being.

Understanding this history in turn serves to shed light upon the reasons why the categories have remained such an enduring problem within metaphysics up unto today and among both analytic and continental philosophers. For as the clock ticks and time passes we must inevitably be drawn to the problem of the relationship between the sound itself, the various correlative experiences that we encounter in reference to it and the underlying being and unity of the being of the object of this experience. The search for the ground of unity is where category theory departs and among those who would pass off such a search as somehow insignificant to philosophy and even to metaphysics, the edition *Categories of Being* provides a quite ‘substantial’ response: objections to such a study must in each case be trumped by the next generation of thinkers who will without doubt see the search after the ground of the objects of experience a matter worthy of further consideration. So it is that the history of philosophy itself serves as a fitting testimony to the enduring significance of the question of being and the various problems, including the problem of categorizing being, that serve as the subject matter constitutive of metaphysics itself.

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