

On Aristotelian Universals and Individuals: The “Vink” that is in Body and May Be In Me

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G. E. L. Owen, in his influential paper “Inherence,” talks of “vink,” a name he has created for a particular shade of the color pink, and this “vink” serves as an individual in the Aristotelian category of quality. Owen was one of the first to aim to discredit the belief that J. L. Ackrill and his camp espoused, the belief that Aristotle thought that “general attributes are not in individuals, particular attributes are not in more than one individual.” I postulate that there is nothing here that does not preclude the existence of transferable nonsubstantial particulars, and base this view on passages from Aristotle’s Categories and certain examples found in Ammonius’s commentary and On Colors. Given this, a nonsubstantial particular of “vink” would not have to rely on having inhered in just one particular body to have existence, however, it would have to inhere in at least one particular body.

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G. E. L. Owen, in his influential paper “Inherence” (Owen 1965: 97–105), talks of “vink,” a name he has created for a particular shade of the color pink, and this “vink” serves as an individual in the Aristotelian category of quality.¹ Owen was one of the first to aim to discredit the belief that J. L. Ackrill and his camp espoused, the belief that Aristotle thought that “general attributes are not in individuals, particular attributes are not in more than one individual” (Owen 1965: 100).

¹ “...analogous to Socrates in the category of substances” (Owen 1965: 98). Owen replaces the word Aristotle used, *leukon*, which represents all light colors, with the word *pink*, for no single English equivalent exists for *leukon*. “*Leukon* covers all light colors as *melan* covers all dark colors: that is why the commonplace that all colors range between or are composed of *leukon* and *melan* (Cat. 12a17–19, Phys. 188b3–5, DA. 442a12–13) is sense...” (Owen 1965: 98).

Owen claims that, given Aristotle's schema, something must contain an individual, such as "vink," if the individual is to exist at all (Owen 1965: 105). Here "vink" represents a fully determinate universal-type color,² a repeatable entity that could be shared among more than one particular body. It is included as an individual by Owen because he viewed it as not being "said of" anything else. Michael Frede has offered his interpretation by saying that it is a sufficient condition that an individual, such as "vink," be found in body in general (Frede 1987: 60–61). Given both Owen's and Frede's interpretations, it could be inferred that a color, such as "vink", would inhere in particular bodies as a universal-type entity, due to the view that it is able to manifest in a number of particular bodies.

Owen's and Frede's interpretations are both different than that of J. L. Ackrill's, Michael Wedin's (Wedin 1993: 163–164) and others' which view an individual as a trope-like, that is non-recurrent, nonsubstantial particular. However, Owen, Frede and Wedin all agree on the interpretation that a quality inhering in a particular body does not entail that the quality could not exist without that particular body.

So, a major issue is how, according to Aristotle, a quality is individuated in a particular body; for the color "vink," this calls into question how it is manifested in a particular body, such as me. The question of whether or not a particular "vink" is particular insofar that it belongs to a particular body goes to the heart of the matter; if the particular body stopped existing, would that particular "vink" as well? I believe that this would not have to be the case. A relevant passage here is Aristotle's *Categories* 1a24–25:

By "in a subject" I mean what is in something, not as a part, and cannot exist separately from what it is in.³

Interpreting this passage in the way it appears Frede does produces the following:

x is an accident =_{df} there is something, y , such that x is in y , x is not in y as a part, and x cannot exist separately from y (Matthews 1989: 96).

I find that there is nothing in this interpretation that does not preclude the existence of transferable nonsubstantial particulars. Given that this is the case, a nonsubstantial particular of "vink" would not have to rely on having inhaled in just one particular body to have existence, however, it would have to inhere in at least one particular body. A possible example of this would be when color from a particular body

² Aristotle is not specific about whether the general nature of color is that of a universal, but it can be inferred, as Owen has, given Aristotle's general schema of universal to particular.

³ There are not too many places in which Aristotle makes a "distinction between *being in a subject* and *being said, or predicated, of a subject*" (*Cat.* 1a20–b9, 2a11–14, 2a27–b6, 2b15–17, 3a7–32, 9b22–24; *Postpred.* 11b38–12a17, 14a16–18; *Top.* 127b1–4). It is typically within these bounds that the whole theory of what it means to be "in a subject" is played out in.

is transferred to another, such as is what happens with color dyeing; a similar example comes from Ammonius's commentary on the *Categories*. More on these examples will follow. In my next section, I produce the traditional view.

I

Ackrill believed that Aristotle's notion of color in body was "compressed and careless" (Aristotle [Ackrill's notes] 1963: 83) when Aristotle stated that:

All the other things are either said of the primary substances as subjects or in them as subjects. This is clear from an examination of cases. For example, animal is predicated of man and therefore also of the individual man; for were it predicated of none of the individual men it would not be predicated of man at all. Again, color is in body and therefore also in individual body; were it not in some individual body it would not be in body at all. Thus all the other things are either said of the primary substances as subjects or in them as subjects. So if the primary substances did not exist it would be impossible for any of the other things to exist.⁴

Ackrill read this passage from the *Categories* as stating that color as a universal would be found in a particular body. However, he believed that Aristotle did not really mean what he wrote there, that is that he had mistakenly written it. He further interpreted Aristotle as having meant to say that a nonrecurrent "instance" of color would be in and dependent on a particular body and that universal color would be in and dependent on universal body. Thus, universal color would not be in a particular body for it did not depend on it (Aristotle [Ackrill's notes] 1963: 83).

So, according to Ackrill's view, the universal-type "vink" would be found in a universal body and could not exist apart from it, and similarly, an instance of the color "vink" would be found in a particular body and could not exist apart from that particular body. On this definition, each instance of "vink" would be uniquely associated with a particular body and transfer of that certain instance to another particular body would not be possible, that is, that certain instance was viewed as inseparable from the particular body it inhered in. An instance of "vink" that had inhered in my sweater thus could not be transferred my dress.

Although I agree with Ackrill's reasoning that universal color would not be found in a particular body, I am not convinced that Aristotle had Ackrill's idea of instance in mind.

II

Matthews, in his characterization of Frede's interpretation of Aristotle's "in a subject" condition, includes a scenario where a person may

⁴ *Cat.* 2a34–2b6.

have a grandmother in their class who is not their grandmother, but rather the grandmother of another person. In this way it is demonstrated that not every subject that an accident inheres in is a subject that it could not exist without (Matthews 1998: 96).

I agree with Matthew's characterization of Frede, and I agree with both Frede and Matthews, as well as Owen, that universal color would still exist even if a particular body, which color had inherited in, had ceased to exist. However, I disagree with the notion that color as a universal inheres in a particular body. Rather, I postulate a view here that universal color inheres in universal body, and particular color inheres in particular body as a nonsubstantial particular, in that this particular color would not have to rely on just one particular body to have existence, that is, it could change subjects.

An example that I present in this section is found in a passage in a work entitled *On Colors*.⁵ This work had traditionally been attributed to Aristotle but is now often ascribed to Theophrastus (c. 371—c. 287 BCE), Aristotle's designated successor at the Lyceum (Kuehni and Schwarz 2008: 32), or Strato (c. 335—c. 269 BCE), the third director of the Lyceum after Theophrastus's death. Outside of the question of whether Aristotle was the actual writer, it is regarded by many to be Aristotelian in nature (Desclos and Fortenbaugh 2011: 307, see also Edel 1982: 157 and Thomson and Missner 2000: 7). Even so, there are still some issues that need to be addressed when applying this example in support of my view that a nonsubstantial particular may be capable of transferring from one particular body to another.

The example is as follows—with regards to the entire process of dyeing, a particular object is moistened or heated and some of the color of that object is then transferred to another particular object. For a time then, no matter how brief, the color is transported by a liquid or by heat to a new particular object. The original particular object would continue to exist, with the same type of color or a less intense hue of the type of color that had transferred, dependent on the particular object's substance and pore-structure.⁶ The color that has now transferred to another particular object may blend into the original color of this object due to this particular object's

⁵ *On Colors*, 794a16–b10. A part of the pertinent passage from *On Colors* is:

All dyed things take their color from the dye. Common sources of such coloration are the flowers of plants and their roots, bark, wood, leaves, or fruit, and again, earth, foam, and inks. Sometimes coloration is due to animal juices (e.g., the juice of the purple fish, with which clothes are dyed purple), in other cases to wine or smoke, or lye mixture, or to sea-water, as happens, for instance, to the hair of marine animals, which is always turned red by the sea. In short, anything that has a color of its own may transfer that color to other things, and the process is always this, that color leaving one object passes with moisture and heat into the pores of another, which on drying takes the hue of the object which the color came.

⁶ This is suggested by *On Colors*, 794a16–b10.

substance and pore structure, so it is possible that after dyeing, this object may end up with a color that is not the exact color that was transferred.⁷

Notwithstanding, however, it is clear that the color that came from one particular object had transferred into another particular object. The question is, what is the ontological picture behind this occurrence? Has some of the original particular object, the host of the color, been transferred with its color to another particular object? Another example from a later Greek commentary on the *Categories* may be useful in thinking this through.

The example of dyeing found in the passage from *On Colors* happens to be similar to an example that Ammonius (c. 435/445—c. 517/526 CE) had presented in his commentary on the *Categories* (Matthews 1989: 91–104). Ammonius's example had to do with the fragrance of an apple and how it appeared to exist separately from the apple. However, according to Aristotle, that which is in a subject could not exist separately from what it is in. One of Ammonius's solutions to this puzzle, which is a repetition of a solution that had previously been put forth by Porphyry (232–309 CE), is that some fragrance of the apple had transferred from the apple into the air. This solution, called the “tense solution” by John Ellis, “allows particular accidents to migrate to other subjects” and maintains “that a particular accident must always be in *some* subject” (Ellis 1990: 291–292). The tense solution, as explained by Porphyry and echoed by Ammonius, is:

For neither did he [Aristotle] say, “cannot exist separately from that in which it was,” but “cannot exist separately from that in which it *is*.” For the fragrance can be separated from that in which it is, though it is impossible [for it] to exist separately on its own, but it either perishes or is transferred to another subject. For that it is inconceivable for an accident to exist separately on its own, this he indicated, but not that it cannot be separated (Ellis 1990: 291–292).

Ammonius also adds to this that it is perhaps our sense of smell that picks out the fragrance of the apple.

Matthews places more stock in the tense solution than another that Ammonius seems to favor (although this may be disputed) (Matthews 1989: 100; Ellis 1990: 291–302),⁸ which Ellis calls the “effluence solution” (Ellis 1990: 293). The effluence solution has the fragrance first

⁷ *On Colors*, 794a16–b10.

⁸ Ammonius never states that he favors the effluence solution, he just wrote more lines about this solution than the tense solution. It may be that he felt he did not have to write as much on the tense solution since it was an already established and well-known solution. That is, Ammonius may have been listing and explaining solutions rather than attempting to provide a point of view on which solution to favor. Later medieval solutions move away from the tense solution to more psychological solutions, but this may be due to the particular evolution of solutions to the fragrance-in-apple problem and changes in cultural and scientific thought, rather than efforts to provide a direct reflection of what Aristotle might have had in mind as a solution during the period in which he lived.

in the apple, then in bits of the apple that are carried along with fragrance into the air.

In this case, the apple, which is the host of the fragrance, somehow has a part of itself broken up into bits, with those bits carried into the air; this is postulated in order to preserve the view that an accident could not exist separately from its particular body. However, as Matthews keenly points out (Matthews 1989: 100), the effluence solution is not the relevant solution to ensure this is the case, for the fragrance could indeed exist separately from the particular body of the apple. Particular bits of apple separated from a particular apple are like particular toes separated from a particular man. Particular toes are not equivalent to a particular man, and similarly, particular bits of apple are not equivalent to a particular apple.

The tense solution allows for a transfer of a particular accident from one particular body to another particular body; this solution does not appear to allow for the simultaneous sharing of a particular accident among two or more particular bodies. The effluence solution, on my and Matthews's interpretation, allows for a transfer of a particular accident from one particular body (a particular apple) to a particular entity (that is, a particular bit from a particular apple; I am clear not to call this a particular body, for it would be hard to imagine a universal bit of apple as part of Aristotle's ontology). Even though the transfer of the particular fragrance in the effluence solution is not due to any action on the particular fragrance's part, rather it is the particular subject in which it inheres itself that appears to have actively changed, the particular fragrance has nonetheless been transferred. In addition to the tense solution, the effluence solution also does not appear to allow for the simultaneous sharing of a particular accident in multiple particular bodies.

Both the tense solution and the effluence solution may be seen to apply to the "transfer of color by dyeing" example. In the version utilizing the tense solution, the nonsubstantial particular shade of color that is transferred from one particular body to another particular body is first transferred via some particular moisture or particular heat in which the particular color inheres. Then, this particular color is transferred once more to another particular body, the particular body that will be dyed by that particular color.

With the effluence solution, the nonsubstantial particular shade of color which is inhering in the original particular body then inheres in bits of the original particular body that have been separated from that body, which in turn are situated in some particular moisture or particular heat. After this, the particular color inhering in particular bits of the original particular body is transferred to another particular body. Any issues of dye fading or running out of this particular body after the dyeing process are not relevant, for in the effluence solution case, it is the transfer of the nonsubstantial particular shade of color between the

original particular body and the bits of the original particular body that are important. However, as in the “fragrance-in-apple” example, an issue that may never be resolved is exactly what kind of entity would Aristotle have thought a bit of apple was. Although, it is clear to me and others such as Matthews that a particular bit of apple is not equivalent to the particular original whole apple it had separated from.

III

Man, the universal, is said of a particular man. On my view, a fully determinate, universal-type color, such as “vink”, is said of a nonsubstantial particular of “vink”. This nonsubstantial particular of “vink” inheres in a particular body and may be transferred. I believe that color in general, moreover, is said of any of the determinate, universal-type colors that range in shades between *leukon*, all light colors, and *melan*, all dark colors.

To summarize, I interpret Aristotle to say that without some particular body or other, there would be no universal body, no color in general, and no color in particular. Furthermore, this color in particular is a nonsubstantial particular that is capable of being transferred, and only a nonsubstantial particular can inhere in some particular body.

In contrast, Wedin interprets Aristotle’s schema as allowing nonsubstantial universals to inhere in particular bodies, while also allowing for “the nonrecurrent status of nonsubstantial particulars” (Wedin 1993: 164). Examples provided by Wedin of these phenomena would have been helpful, for it is difficult to grasp the dynamics of how they could appear in nature, and thus appears far-fetched; as a result, I do not believe Wedin’s structure is what Aristotle had in mind. In another opposing view, Cresswell theorizes that Aristotle believed that all whiteness was only individual whiteness, with no whiteness in general existing (Cresswell 1975: 244–245); this view does not seem to fit with Aristotle’s notion of a general ontology.

Conclusion

I have postulated that Aristotle, according to the *Categories* and bolstered by certain examples found in Ammonius’s commentary and *On Colors*, found that universal color inhered in universal body, and that colors as nonsubstantial particulars inhered in particular bodies, though not necessarily inhering in any one particular body, and furthermore, that colors as nonsubstantial particulars may have the capability of transferring from one particular body to another particular body. So, on my interpretation, the universal-type “vink” would be found in universal body, and a nonsubstantial particular “vink” would be found in some particular body or other and may have the capability to transfer from one particular body to another.

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