

Aristotle on Otherness and Difference

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1) *Otherness versus difference*

Aristotle differentiates between otherness (ἑτερότης) and difference (διαφορὰ). Otherness has no definite respect: one thing is other than another thing only because they are not the same. Every two things which are not the same are other than each other. Therefore, two things other than each other do not need something in which they are other than each other. Difference, on the other hand, has a definite respect and one thing is different from another thing in some respect. Thus, there must be something identical whereby two different things differ. (Met.¹, I, 1054b23-27) Therefore, there is no difference between anything and the things outside its genus. (Met., I, 1055a26-27)

2) *Difference*

Aristotle takes two things as identical things in which difference occurs: genus and species. All things that differ differ either in genus or in species. (Met., I, 1054b27-28)

a) *Difference in genus*

Two things are different in genus if they ‘have not their matter in common and are not generated out of each other,’ which means that they belong to different figures of

¹ Abbreviations used in this paper:

Cat.	<i>Categories</i>
Met.	<i>Metaphysics</i>
OI	<i>On Interpretation</i>
PsA.	<i>Posterior Analytics</i>

predication. (Met., I, 1054b28-29) They have no way to one another and are too far distinct and are not comparable. (Met., I, 1055a6-8)

b) Difference in species

Two things are different in species if they have the same genus (Met., I, 1054b29-30) but are not subordinate one to the other. (Met., Δ, 1018a38-b7)

3) Contrariety

Aristotle mentions five senses. In the first sense he calls contraries ‘those attributes that differ in genus, which cannot belong at the same time to the same subject.’ (Met., Δ, 1018a25-27) Three senses emphasize on having the most difference either in the same genus, the same receptive material or the same category, all similar to genus. The fifth sense also insists on having the greatest difference but mentions species besides genus as where difference occurs. (Met., Δ, 1018a27-31) It seems that Aristotle is more inclined to the second sense as his definition in *Metaphysics*, I, 1055a27-29 might concede: ‘The things in the same genus which differ most are contraries; for the complete difference is the greatest difference among these,’ though he agrees with the third sense too and regards those that differ most in the same receptive material also as contraries. (Met., I, 1055a29-30) In fact, Aristotle speaks of all kinds of contraries within, without or in genera: ‘All contraries must either be in the same genus or in contrary genera or be themselves genera.’ Their corresponding examples are white and black (in the same genus), justice and injustice (in contrary genera) and good and bad (themselves genera). (Cat., 11, 14a19-25)

To speak generally, as one of the four kinds of opposition, contraries are those that cannot belong at the same time to the same thing. (Met., Γ, 1011b15-18) Thus, contrariety (ἐναντιότης) is complete difference (Met., I, 1055a16-17) and contraries are the extremes of things that differ in species for which generation takes place and have the greatest distance. (Met., I, 1055a8-10; Δ, 1018a38-b7) Since contraries have the extreme difference, there cannot be more than one contrary and extreme for each thing. (Met., I, 1055a19-21)

Thus, the things in the same genus which differ most are contraries. (Met., I, 1055a27-28) Aristotle says that the meaning of calling two things ‘other in species’ is that they are contrary and this being other in species he posits versus being the same in species. (Met., I, 1058a17-28)

Aristotle even calls ‘the difference between things which differ in species’ a difference that belongs only to things in the same species. (Met., I, 1058a26-28) The reason is that ‘all things are divided by opposites and ... contraries are in the same genus ... and every difference in species is a difference from something in something ... Hence also all contraries which are different in species ... are ... other than one another in the highest degree- for the difference is complete-, and cannot be present along with one another.’ The conclusion is that ‘The difference, then, is a contrariety.’ (Met, I, 1058a8-16)

There are some characteristics for contraries in Aristotle’s philosophy:

- a) One thing cannot have more than one contrary for there can be neither anything more extreme than the extreme, nor more than two extremes for the one interval. (Met., I, 1055a19-21)
- b) The primary contrariety is the contrariety between state and complete privation. (Met., I, 1055a33-37) Aristotle regards privation both as a kind of contradiction (Met., I, 1055b3-11) and as that of which contrariety is a kind: all contrariety is a privation but not all privation is contrariety. (Met., I, 1055b11-17) In fact, every contrariety involves a privation as one of its items (Met, I, 1055b17-19 and b25-29): ‘of the contraries, no less than of the contradictories, one is a privation- and a privation of substance; and privation is the denial of a predicate to a determinate genus.’ (Met., I, 1011b18-20) Nonetheless, the relation between contrary, privation and contradictory seems to be even more complex: ‘For within a single identical genus the contrary of a given attribute is either its privative or its contradictory; e.g. within number what is not odd is even, inasmuch as within this sphere even is a necessary consequent of not-odd.’ (PsA., A, 4, 73b21-24)

- c) A contrary cannot be an intermediate because otherwise it would not be a perfect contrary, which must be based on definition. (Met., I, 1056a12-14)
- d) Contraries always accept intermediates between themselves. (Met., I, 1056a14-15)
- e) ‘Contraries do not involve one another in their composition, and are therefore first principles.’ (Met., I, 1057b22-23)
- f) ‘All the inferior classes, both the contraries and their intermediates, will be compounded out of the primary contraries.’ (Met., I, 1057b31-34)
- g) None of the intermediates can be predicated of either of the contraries. (Met., K, 1063b19-22)
- h) Contrary propositions (as defined in OI, I, 7, 17b3-6) can never both be true because they state contrary conditions which cannot subsist at one and the same time in the same subject. (OI, II, 14, 24b7-)

4) *Otherness in kind*

Aristotle also speaks of things other in kind (ἕτερα τῷ γένει) by which he means an otherness between things ‘whose ultimate substratum is other and one cannot be analysed to the other nor both into the same thing. His example of this otherness in kind is the otherness of form and matter. (Met., Δ, 1024b9-12)

5) *Network of difference and wholism*

Aristotle speaks of a theory based on which the knowledge of each thing depends on the knowledge of its differentiae distinguishing it from every single other thing. Therefore, to know and define one thing we need to know the whole existence. (PsA., B, 13, 97a6-11) Aristotle rejects this theory based on the fact that ‘not every differentia precludes identity’ and, thus, many differentiae inhere in things specifically identical, though not in the substance of these nor essentially.’ (PsA., B, 13, 97a11-14)

6) *Knowledge and difference*

There must be some kind of relation between knowledge and difference in Aristotle's saying that sight, more than other senses, makes us know and bring in light many differences between things. (Met., A, 980a24-27)