

THEORY OF CATEGORIES AS BASED ON THE PRINCIPLE OF ACQUAINTANCE: A CRITIQUE OF JORGE J. E. GRACIA'S METAPHYSICAL NEUTRALISM

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ABSTRACT: In the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition, the problem of categories looms large. Plato's Supreme Genera and Forms were attacked first by Aristotle and later by his medieval followers. These attacks constituted the triumph of individuality for the Post-Aristotelian ontologies. Empiricism, however, discovered an opponent to the basis of the Aristotelian categorial system: the bundle of properties. The pupils of Brentano analyzed this ontological novelty. Old questions were also raised again: What are the universals? Meinong and Husserl were cardinal for the birth of formal and fact ontologies. In the analytical tradition, complexes also appeared. Frege, Russell, and Polish School were central. But a problem was raised by ontologists: Where do we place the categories of set, whole, states of affairs, number, etc., in an Aristotelian ontology of substances and accidents? Type theory, formal and fact ontologies discovered the key. But ontologists faced the question: How should we understand the status of the new categories in the light of the existence-subsistence dichotomy traditionally applied to substances and universals? A discussion of these three cardinal questions for the contemporary categorial ontology is the main purpose of this paper. In order to accomplish this task, Jorge J. E. Gracia's Aristotelian theory of categories will serve as the connecting thread of the inquiry.

KEY WORDS: metaphysics, criteria of identification for, status of, categories, reductions, fact ontology.

Teoría de las categorías basada en el principio de conocimiento directo: Crítica del Neutralismo Metafísico de Jorge J. E. Gracia

RESUMEN: En la tradición platónico-aristotélica, el problema de las categorías ocupa un lugar preponderante. Los Géneros Supremos y las Formas de Platón sufrieron primero los ataques de Aristóteles y después de sus discípulos medievales. Estos ataques constituyeron el triunfo de la individualidad para las ontologías post-aristotélicas. El empirismo, sin embargo, descubrió un oponente al fundamento del sistema categorial aristotélico: los haces de propiedades. Los discípulos de Brentano analizaron esta novedad ontológica. Viejas cuestiones se plantearon de nuevo: ¿qué son los universales? Meinong y Husserl tuvieron una importancia central en el nacimiento de las ontologías formales y de hechos. En la tradición analítica, los complejos también aparecieron. Frege, Russell y la Escuela Polaca fueron fundamentales. Pero los ontólogos plantearon un problema: ¿dónde podemos ubicar las categorías de conjunto, todo, estado de cosas, número, etc., en una ontología de sustancias y accidentes? La teoría de tipos, las ontologías formales y de hechos descubrieron la clave. Pero los ontólogos se enfrentaron a la cuestión: ¿cómo debemos entender el estatus de las nuevas categorías a la luz de la dicotomía existencia-subsistencia tradicionalmente aplicada a sustancias y universales? Una discusión de estos tres problemas centrales de la ontología categorial contemporánea es el propósito principal de este escrito. Para lograr esta tarea, la teoría de las categorías aristotélica de Jorge J. E. Gracia servirá como hilo conductor de la investigación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: metafísica, criterios de identificación para, estatus de, categorías, reducciones, ontología de hechos.

1. THE SEARCH FOR THE CATEGORIES OF THE WORLD

According to Gracia, *metaphysics studies the categories* (Gracia, 1999a: 132). This study is the task of metaphysics; categories are its objects. Moreover, they are, for him, *the foundation of knowledge* (*Ibidem*: 220). Later we will consider this matter. At present,

I agree partly with him on his first claim on the task and object of metaphysics. I say *partly* because, as we shall see in a moment, Gracia's claim involves two assumptions that qualify importantly the nature of the task and object of metaphysics. The two important assumptions are the following:

- (1) Predication is an epistemologically neutral criterion of identification for categories, i.e., it does not affect to whether or not its status is real, mental or linguistic (*Ibidem*: 202).
- (2) The status of categories is neutral with respect of the existence. They do not exist, but rather subsist (Gracia, 1987: 112).

Gracia's claim can thus be paraphrased: *metaphysics studies predicatively identified categories whose mode of being is the subsistence*. From the viewpoint of the task and object of metaphysics, it is clear that an important difference exists between asking *what categories are there?* and asking *what predicatively identified categories subsist?* In order to show that it is the first rather than the second question that is the proper one to be asked by a general metaphysics, I shall discuss in the next sections a number of epistemological and ontological issues related to (1) and (2).

2. THE CRITERION OF IDENTIFICATION FOR CATEGORIES

In advance, it is surprising that Gracia thinks that his criterion of identification for categories is epistemologically neutral. It is so because, for him, it is not related to the question of the real, mental or linguistic status of categories. Now, as we shall attempt to show in the next sections, Gracia's criterion is not only epistemologically non-neutral in important respects, but also, and more importantly, ontologically non-neutral.

Let me quote the first condition of his epistemologically neutral criterion to be a category:

«Whatever is expressed by a term or expression, simple or complex, which can be predicated of some other term or expression».

(Gracia, 1999a: 134)

And now let me quote the second condition of Gracia's epistemologically neutral criterion to be a category:

«True predication requires that the conditions specified by the predicate be satisfied by what is expressed by the subject. This means that the conditions specified by a term that expresses a particular category must be satisfied by the members of that category. In the pertinent cases for us, that is, cases of necessary or essential predication, the conditions are given by the category's definition. (...) Of course, in cases of nonnecessary or nonessential predication this is not so. In "The paper is white", the conditions specified by the predicate are not given by the definition of "white" in the sentence. But is not the kind of predication that is pertinent for us here».

(*Ibidem*: 200)

Thus, Gracia advocates his thesis on the neutral character of his criterion of identification for categories:

«This formula allows us to talk about categories without committing us to a *particular view of categories*, and leaves open the question of their ontological status».

(*Ibidem*: 134; my italics)

3. THE ONTOLOGICAL REDUCTION

In order to show that Gracia's criterion is epistemologically non-neutral, we have to see firstly how it reduces certain ontological categories. We can see a clear example of this ontologically non-neutral character of his criterion in a passage where Gracia discusses the category of *collection*:

«If categories are predicable and, as this view maintains, they are collections, we may ask how a collection may be predicated of its members».

(*Ibidem*: 190; my italics)

One can ask why Gracia asserts without hesitation the emphasized portion of the passage. It seems obvious that Gracia fails to realize that *collections* (homogenous or heterogeneous sets) have a different categorial identity condition from that of *being predicable*. On the other hand, he does not see that one thing is *the categorial identity condition of an entity* (for instance, *having members*) and another different thing is *the relation between this entity and its category* (say, *exemplification*, etc.). He talks about these two different things as if they were the same. It is clear that Gracia here does not take into account the categorial identity condition of the members of collections. Simply he imposes them the first condition of his criterion.

But what about the second condition of Gracia's criterion to be a category when applied to collections? In an attempt to save the category of *collection* by reducing it to that of *feature*, he tells us the following:

«Things are grouped into collections because they have certain features which are similar to or, depending on one's interpretation, are the same as the features of other things in the collection, not vice versa».

(*Ibidem*: 191)

If the first condition of our criterion presents a problem with the categorization of a certain entity, it is not, for Gracia, a better thing to search for a different criterion, but it is better to impose it the second condition of our criterion to be a category. Once again it is not matter the peculiar categorial characteristic of the member of the category, but only the form in which presumably would make sense *being* and *belonging to a category* in general. For Gracia, a collection which is not determined by a feature seems to make no sense. I shall not discuss whether or not there are arbitrary sets and whether or not these are primitive and basic entities. Set-theory and my ordinary experience say to me that there are such sorts of collections. Thus, it is perfectly possible for me to reconcile both the fact that a collection has the categorial identity condition of *having members* and *being related by the membership relation* and the fact that this categorial identity condition can be shared by each member of the collection in the form of, say, the exemplification. Gracia's task of metaphysics, then, seems to depend on a mechanical procedure to define its objects according to a priori established identification criterion.

4. THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL REDUCTION

Now I wish to raise a first objection to the epistemologically non-neutral character of Gracia's criterion of identification for categories in the light of the previous section. For as we shall see his criterion not only reduces categories, but also ignores certain important ontological categories, for example, those of *whole* (*Gegenstand höherer Ordnung*,

structure or *Boolean algebra*) and *fact* (*Objektive, Sachverhalt* or *state of affairs*). Here we will be concerned with the first category. We shall consider the category of *fact* in a section devoted to Gracia's view on the relation between individuals and universals.

Consider, then, whether or not Garcia's criterion can categorize the structures formed from relations of non-independence between properties (in Garcia's terminology, *features*) of different sensory dimensions, which were explored by Husserl in his *Zur Lehre von den Ganzen und Teilen* (Panzer, 1984: 227 ff.). Such structures are, for example, *color* (a certain shade of red) *is inseparable from* (a particular) *extension*. Well, how Gracia's criterion could categorize this complex entity? Well, it would seem obvious to me that the two features, the shade of red and the particular extension, could perfectly satisfy the conditions to be a category.

Some difficulties, however, appear in connection with the category of *relation*. Firstly, relations seem to be rejected by Gracia due to the famous Platonic, Bradleyan or Rylean regress argument (Gracia, 1999a: 188). Secondly, since *connectives* or the copula *is* cannot function, according to him, as terms of his criterion, they are excluded by him from the ontological categorization (Gracia, 2004: 278). Thirdly and as we shall see later, relations seem to be, for Gracia, mental acts of predicating (Gracia, 1999a: 134). Lastly, Gracia's quoted words on the traditional main kinds of predication seem to exclude kinds such as *this shade of red is inseparable from this particular extension*. Of course, the question is not whether the constituents of the structure, the color shade and the extension, could be *essentially predicated* of its *species*. Gracia has no problem. At least, the two features could be essentially predicated of its species (Gracia, 2006: 234). Rather, the question is: Could our shade of red, for Gracia, be *essentially and necessarily predicated* of the referred extension? Obviously, not.

Lastly, could *this shade of red is inseparable from this particular extension* and *structure* function respectively as subject and predicate of Gracia's criterion? This could not be possible without the acknowledgement of the (special kind of) relation between the two features. And if because of this reason, *this shade of red is inseparable from this particular extension* cannot function as subject of Gracia's criterion, then it makes no sense to raise any categorial question.

Gracia's criterion, then, can merely categorize (two of the three) constituents of the structure, namely, the two *features*. But of course, the categories of the constituents of the structure are not the category of the *structure*. And it would be clear that if the relation between the constituents is not categorized as a constituent of the structure, then no structure existed (Cf. Butchvarov, 1974: 16). The existence of the structure is, therefore, called into question by Gracia's criterion. Now, if the structure cannot be categorized, then the following could never be the case:

«The definition of a category, then, is an identity sentence in which the predicate is interchangeable with the subject».

(*Ibidem*: 201)

As I understand the question, the problem is not that the structure has not a definition and, therefore, it does not exist (!), but rather that Gracia's conditions and his subsequent definition of categories ignore this complex category. The epistemological (and therefore, ontological) non-neutrality of Gracia's criterion of identification for categories becomes to be clear. But of course, even if Gracia's criterion wants that colors and extensions are separable, colors and extensions are inseparable! I do admit that I do know of no persuasive argument for my claim other than the experience. Logically speaking, the form of the experience of those ontological wholes is as follows:

1. If x is a category, then x is predicable: $(\exists x) (Cx \rightarrow Px)$;
2. There is at least an entity which is a category and is not predicable: $(\exists x) (Cx \ \& \ -Px)$;
3. Existential Specification of 2.: $Ca \ \& \ -Pa$;
4. Universal Specification of 1.: $Ca \rightarrow Pa$;
5. Simplification of 3.: Ca ;
6. Simplification of 3.: $-Pa$;
7. Modus Ponens of 4. and 5.: Pa ;
8. Conjunction of 6. and 7.: $Pa \ \& \ -Pa$;
9. Therefore, negation of 1. by contradiction of 8.: $\neg(\exists x) (Cx \rightarrow Px)$.

Gracia fails, then, to realize that there are categories which are not —and this was one of the most important ontological revolutions of the XX century— *features* (of individuals) (Cf. Bergmann, 1967/2003: 3 ff.; Tegtmeier, 1992: 19 ff.; and Grossmann, 1995: 163 ff). In general, the question of whether or not we need criteria of identification for categories depends on our answer to another cardinal question at stake: *What is more basic, primitive and irreducible: A category or a criterion?* But what would be simpler than if I see that two different color shades share all of their attributes, then they belong to the same category, the category of *property*? (Cf. Grossmann, 2009: 23).

5. UNEXEMPLIFIED UNIVERSALS: THE UNDETERMINED GROUND OF THE CRITERION

Why does Gracia accept categories such as *nothing* and *circle square*? I am not really sure about it due to his following claim:

«One should always be suspicious of any view which summarily dismisses what is given in experience in order to accommodate an abstract theory».

(Gracia, 1999a: 204)

But besides, it is surprising that Gracia criticizes the *Principle of Acquaintance* (PA: «The terms used in theoretical descriptions should refer to entities with which one is directly acquainted»; *Ibidem*: 173) of the empiricist tradition because of its reductive character (*Ibidem*: 174) and he accepts, however, the referred categories. In my view, the (PA) would have been here helpful for him —at least, according to his own suspicion expressed in the quoted passage.

Why, however, does Gracia refuse, contrary to his own advice in the quoted passage, ordinary experience and, therefore, he does not use the (PA) concerning the categories of *nothing* and *circle square*? Again I really do not know. He even tells us that the coming into scene of these categories is just what allows us to distinguish between two sorts of categories: (proper) *categories* (in my terminology, *unexemplified universals*) and *universal categories* (in my terminology, *universals*). *Nothing* or *circle square* are proper categories; *redness*, a universal category. For Gracia, categories such as *nothing* or *circle square* are the proof that the categoriality has nothing to do with being exemplified (*Ibidem*: 209).

Lastly, and still more importantly, he tells us, as I said at the beginning of this paper, that proper categories such as *nothing* and *circle square* (contradictory entities) are the foundation of knowledge! It would seem obvious to me that nothing related to this sort of entities could be some kind of knowledge —and of course, much less its foundation. Contradictory entities as the foundation of knowledge would seem to be a slip of Gracia's pen. My own standpoint is that these categories and its function in Gracia's metaphysics are nothing but the result of a criterion without a determined epistemological ground.

For him, anything could be a term of his criterion. But Gracia does not advance any argument for this undetermined epistemological ground of his criterion. A delimitation of the ground could have avoided the calamitous conclusion that contradictory entities are the foundation of knowledge.

These sorts of consequences are why I regard propositional contexts as a mistaken epistemological ground for discovering categories. They would not have any categorial power. In this way, I do not admit other epistemological ground to search for the categories of the world than the experience.

6. UNIVERSALS AND FACTS: THE EXISTENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF EXEMPLIFICATION

In the last section, we have had the opportunity to consider Gracia's proper categories. Now we will be concerned with his universal categories—in particular, with its relation to individuals. In this section, then, we will have go back to the category of *relation*. Moreover, here we shall deal with the category of *fact* or *state of affairs*.

Gracia's ontology of universals distinguishes between *individuals*, *instances of universal categories*, and *universal categories*. A part of the basis of this distinction is described by Gracia in a passage of *Individuality*:

«We can begin, for example, by asking whether things such as Aristotle, Socrates, my cat Minina, the shrub I planted in my garden last spring, and so on, what philosophers call “material substances”, are noninstantiable. And the answer seems to be quite clear: They are. Socrates, for example, does not seem capable of instantiation. (...). He is not instantiable in the way that “human being” is. (...). Moreover, the very features of things do not seem to be instantiable. Neither Socrates' hair color nor any of the other features he possesses seems to be capable of instantiation, for his hair color appears to be rather a noninstantiable instance of a color, which is in turn instantiated in Socrates' hair and may be instantiated elsewhere as well. These examples could be multiplied to no end, since the world of experience seems to be full of noninstantiable instances».

(Gracia, 1987: 96)

We can see which that part of the basis of Gracia's distinction is empirical in character. The other, and really essential, part of its basis is, as we know, a predicative criterion. Phenomenologically speaking, individuals and their features, according to Gracia, appear to be *noninstantiable* things; universal categories, according to the criterion, *instantiable* things. But now the most important question is: Is Gracia's phenomenological distinction correct?

Consider two black billiard balls, A and B. Cannot this shade of black color be precisely the same both in A and in B. As we have just seen, Gracia seems to think negatively because only the criterion can, according to him, acquaint us with *instantiables*. For him, the situation would be more perspicuously described in the following way:

A has black₁
and

B has black₂

(where black₁ and black₂ are two different individual instances of a certain universal feature *blackness*).

Is Gracia's phenomenological description correct? I do not think so. It is prejudiced by the questionable belief that only a criterion of identification for categories could acquaint us with *instantiables*.

Consider again two black billiard balls. And assume that I show you one of them and you concentrate on its black. Assume also that a while later I show you the other black billiard ball and again you concentrate on its black. Well, suppose now that I ask you whether the black billiard ball which I am now showing is the same as the billiard ball I showed earlier. It would seem obvious to me that if you are not be able to differentiate the two billiard balls according to its black, then it is because these shades of black are, as a matter of ontological fact, universal rather than particular properties! If such shades were really particular properties (that is, $black_1$ and $black_2$), as Gracia thinks, then we could perfectly differentiate the two billiard balls according to these particular blacks.

If my analysis is correct, then in our ordinary experience we are acquainted with *instantiables* rather than with *noninstantiable instances* (*individual accidents, perfect particulars, property-instances, tropes, modes* or similars). In this way, contrary to Gracia's phenomenological description, it appears to be possible for the feature of a certain individual to be capable of multiple exemplifications. Gracia's phenomenological distinction seems to fall prey of the Platonic-Kantian dogma that space and time are the forms of sensibility. A defective phenomenological analysis of properties is the reason by which Gracia requires a criterion of identification for categories, and postulates his two sorts of metaphysical categories.

Assume here that Gracia's phenomenological description is unproblematic. Assume also that his criterion argument for universals is correct. Well, the next thing we have to consider is Gracia's view on the connection between *noninstantiables* (individuals and individual instances) and *instantiables* (universal categories). Following his criterion of identification for categories, Gracia gives an account of this peculiar relation between them in terms of *predicating* (a certain linguistic/mental act):

«Predicating is the act of putting together linguistic terms in a certain way. The aim of predicating is to make a claim that the conditions specified by the predicate are satisfied by whatsoever the subject expresses».

(Gracia, 1999a: 134)

Then Gracia tells us that the related terms of his criterion *express* entities. In his own words:

«I would like to use "to express" technically in such a way that "Socrates" expresses Socrates and "black" express black, and this regardless of whether the terms in question function as subjects or predicates».

(*Ibidem*: 135)

This means, for example, that in a sentence like «Socrates is black». *Socrates* expresses Socrates; and *black*, black. Now I wish to stress that Gracia's phenomenological distinction between *individuals* and its *individual features* (*Individuality*: 96) is called into question by that of his own criterion between *noninstantiables* and *instantiables* (*Metaphysics and Its Task*: 134). For if in the mental act of predicating *Socrates is black*, the non-predicable term *Socrates* expresses the noninstantiable individual Socrates, and the predicable term *black* expresses the instantiable universal category blackness, then there are no reason to admit, in addition to universal categories such as blackness, also individual instances of them as $black_1$, $black_2$, etc. —as Gracia seems to conclude according to his phenomenological distinction. Of course, the cardinal question is whether the copula *is* expresses a relation between both entities. Now, it would be an absurd to think that these expressed entities co-exist in isolation from each other. This is the time to consider the category of *fact* or *state of affairs* within the heart of Gracia's categorial metaphysics.

What would be the ontological significance of Gracia's criterion if all terms but not the copula *is* expressed entities? At this point, a dilemma for Gracia's metaphysical neutralism, I think, appears. Or he has to reject his phenomenological distinction between *individuals* and *individual features*, and he has to admit that of his criterion between *noninstantiables* and *instantiables* (and as a consequence, the reality of its connection implies the birth of the ontological category of *fact* or *state of affairs*). Or he has to reject his criterion distinction and he has to admit that of phenomenological sort between *individuals* and its *individual features* (and therefore, there are no instantiables, categorial entities, but only noninstantiables, that is, *material substances*). Unfortunately, we cannot assume here that both horns are compatible with each other. It becomes to be clear the ontological significance of the exemplification connector and relations in general.

It would be obvious that if Gracia embraced the first horn of dilemma, then his thesis on the neutral status or the subsistence of categories had to be rejected. For both individuals and universals would be connected in the form of facts or states of affairs such as *Socrates exemplifies the property blackness* (Cf. Grossmann, 1983: 44 ff.; and Tegtmeier, 2000: 131 ff.). In a *Fact ontology* as opposed to a *Substance ontology*, we have no reason to conclude that *blackness* has a different *mode of being* from that of *Socrates*. And this does mean that no existential priority among the different categories, in this case, the category of *individual* and the category of *universal*, exists (Cf. Bergmann, 1967/2003: 5; Grossmann, 1983: 291-292; and Tegtmeier, 1997: 37). As a consequence, I advocate a univocal and transcendental concept of being for categories.

7. A CONCLUDING REMARK: THE PROPER QUESTION OF A GENERAL ONTOLOGY

Because of the previous discussion, it seems clearer to me now that the proper question to be asked by a general ontology is not *What categories predicatively identified subsist?*, but rather *What categories are there?* or simply *What exists?*

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