CHAPTER 1

Being
Logos in the Categories

The focus of this chapter is the meaning of logos in the *Categories*. More specifically, here I shall elaborate the expression “logos of being” which appears at the very opening of the traditional Aristotelian corpus. Since this expression distinguishes synonymy from homonymy, I shall study “homonymy” in section 1 below, and then “synonymy” in section 2, by drawing out an experiential stance, a governing principle, and an example for each of the two. In section 3, by the comparison of synonymy and homonymy, I shall basically claim that logos here means “standard.” But, as I shall show in our discussion of the Cartesian concept of “substance,” if logos is to distinguish synonymy from homonymy, this “standard” must be inherent to the being at hand. Thus, the question of this chapter extends into a discussion of *On Interpretation*, the focal text of the next chapter of this book.

1. Homonymy

Words are conventional signs for things according to Aristotle. The Atlantic Ocean has a name in a weaker sense than the sense in which we have a name for it. At this level, language seems to be the realm of an inadequacy or distortion, but this inadequacy entails an unlimited indifference, disregard, and freedom: the freedom of naming things, calling them as we wish, and articulating those words, forming higher units even more loosely related to things themselves. This freedom is indeed at the level of language or thought, indeed it does not touch the world—and that is precisely its virtue. This freedom, this infinite malleability of anything by means of language makes it possible to consider the world as wide open to our conventions, our interpretations, our projects, our retrospective distortions, our capricious manipulations and arrangements. Hence the acquisition of language is the acquisition of an immense power which may well provoke the fantasy of a world presented to
us instead of standing outside us, around us, and often against us: the fantasy of an undetermined, infinitely determinable world.

And yet, for the most part, we do not live in a world that appears to be waiting for us to be shaped all along, preparing treasures or traps for us. We also live in a world we await and adapt to. The world is less a candidate for answering our own demands than a question we are answerable to. But how, if at all, can, and indeed does, the world divert us from this tendency to interpret it in terms of our own control and egocentrism? What, if any, are the powers of the world for dissuading us from the capricious significations we may give it? These are the questions in the background of this first chapter.

Aspect
What does logos mean in the Categories? Since we are investigating the functions of logos in Aristotle’s philosophy, it may be reasonable to begin our investigation with one of his logical works, the Categories, insofar as logic already seems to promise us at least something relating to logos. Hence, in the Categories, there is a clearly philosophical and yet cursory remark concerning the priority of things themselves to logos (Cat. 12, 14b15–20). Apart from this, there is one use of logos in the Categories that seems to be philosophically loaded and extensively employed in the text. This usage of logos appears in the very first sentence of the Categories within the phrase “logos of being”:

Those whose names only are common, but whose logos of being according to this name is different, are called homonyms, such as “animal” for both the human being and the representation; for if one supplies what is it for each of them to be animal, one will supply a particular logos for each. Those whose names are common and whose logos of being according to this name are also common, are called synonyms, such as “animal” for both the human being and the ox; for each of these are addressed with the common name “animal” and their logos of being is the same. For if one supplies the logos of what it is for each to be animal, one will supply the same logos. (Cat. 1, 1a1–13)

We may understandably call both a human being and her picture an “animal,” and to this extent they are homonyms. In Aristotle’s work, homonymy can designate the relation between a representation and a thing represented as in this example. But it may equally refer to a number of other relations: the relation between leukon as color (“white”) and leukon as sound (“clear”) (Top. I, 15, 106b6–10); the relation between a particular circle and “circle said
simply” (*Metaph.* VII, 10, 1035b1–2), between a hand of a living being and a wooden hand or the hand of a corpse (*PA* I, 1, 641a1), between a part and a whole (*PA* II, 1, 647b18), and even between a species and its genus (*Top.* IV, 3, 123a27). Besides this wide range of relations, two random namesakes in English such as a “latch” (a collarbone) and a “latch” (a kind of lock) are no less homonyms (*NE* V, 1, 1129a29–31). Further, given that the relation between beings and words is not natural for Aristotle, we may call any two beings by the same name and thus make them homonyms. Moreover, homonyms need not share a name uttered, but simply a way of being “addressed.”

As his examples suggest, such as the hand of a statue being a hand in name only, even one being can be “addressed” homonymously as long as it is addressed regardless of what it is for it to be, as long as its *logos* of being is disregarded. If language is conventional, we may designate two things with any word, and a fortiori we may designate any one thing any way we want.

What then is there in a being that is apart from its *logos* of being, such that it can be addressed homonymously? We encounter a conceptualization and an example of this in section 2. I shall quote extensively for later reference:

> Of beings some are said of some underlying thing but are not in an underlying thing, for instance human being is said of some underlying human being, but is in no underlying thing. Then some are in an underlying thing but are not said of an underlying thing (by “in an underlying thing” I am not saying that which is present in something as a part, but that for which it is impossible to be apart from that in which it is), for instance grammar is in an underlying soul, but is not said of any underlying thing, or the “a certain whiteness” is in an underlying body (for all color is in a body), but is not said of any underlying body. Then some are both said of an underlying thing and in an underlying thing, for instance knowledge is in the underlying soul and is said of the underlying grammar. Then some are neither in an underlying thing nor said of an underlying thing, for instance this human being or this horse. (*Cat.* 2, 1a20–b5)

Aristotle’s fourfold distinction here is made along two criteria: (1) being in or not being in an underlying thing, and (2) being said of or not being said of an underlying thing. “Being in an underlying thing” (*en hypokeimenoi einai*) here is used, not in the sense that a man is in a house or my wallet is in my pocket, but rather broadly in the sense that grammar is in a soul and all whiteness is in a body. On the other hand, the second criterion of Aristotle’s fourfold distinction here, “being said of some underlying thing” (*kath'...
hypokeimenou tinos legesthai), is used very narrowly in the sense that animal is said of a human being and knowledge is said of grammar, but whiteness is not said of a body. In order to address a being homonymously, in order to address it while disregarding its logos of being, one then may address it merely with respect to that which is in it—not, Aristotle emphasizes, as that which is present in something as a part, but as that which cannot be apart from that in which it is. Thus, to consider an ox not as an ox per se, but as meat, or as a mascot, is to address it homonymously. Similarly, a book may be used as a fan, a person as a corpse, a bottle as a weapon, a key as a saw, or perhaps most simply as something right here (tode ti). The easiest and safest way to avoid addressing a being in its logos of being is to address it in the most immediate way possible, as “just this right now.” For this homonymous appearance, for this appearance of that which is in an underlying being and yet is not considered in its logos of being, I shall use the term “aspect.”

Aspects of Somnolence
The wide range of homonymy is irreducible to a lexicological class of namesakes; it rather implies a certain experiential stance, a corresponding understanding of the relation between aspects and, most importantly, an understanding of being. To get a more firm hold on homonymy and on what is implied by its disregard for the “logos of being,” let us first elaborate it in its experiential form.

The homonymous way of viewing things as aspects, however abstract, is not foreign to routine everyday experience. Waiting for a bus, one is not really thinking of the bus. One is rather thinking of “all sorts of things.” If interrupted and interrogated about what exactly was on one’s mind, one may say: “I was just thinking . . .” If insisted, one may say: “A yellow blur, a rattling, then something said yesterday, then something a little bit far away . . .” All this adding up to: “Nothing really.” The content of thought here is a sequence of free-floating aspects as in daydreaming. A similar loose texture shows itself in casual conversations where people engage in small talk, “just talking,” where they talk about “this and that,” about “nothing really.” And indeed the world is such that it can be treated in this way: to the daydreamer waiting for a bus, it offers at all times a yellow blur, a rattling, things said yesterday, then something a little bit far away, and so on; to people chatting, it always supplies a “just this now” and then a “just that.” In everyday life, experience often takes the form of a sequence of aspects that do not, and are not expected to, add up to anything—aspects of “nothing really.”

To be exact, however, we must acknowledge that there is something fundamentally inaccurate about our enumerations of aspects: a yellow blur, a
rattling, and so on. For, first of all, they are made after the fact, from our sober analytical viewpoint. Hence, once enumerated, each aspect comes to mean more than it in fact did. These enumerations fail to reflect the way in which these aspects precisely do not count, the way in which their flow adds up to “nothing really.” To be more precise, we may say that these aspects were less aspects of nothing really than they were simply not aspects of. The experiential form of these discreet homonymous aspects is comparable to somnolence.

An Exclusive Version of the Principle of Non-Contradiction
However inadequate our sober analytical perspective may be when it comes to thematizing this somnolence, we may say in retrospect that these free-floating aspects are detached from one another. Each aspect is just what it is, no more or less. That is why it defies description. It either is or is not. Aspects do not imply one another. They are not of one another or of anything else. They are so isolated that they cannot explicitly oppose or reject one another either. If there is anything regulating these disparate aspects, it is a broad or formal version of the “principle of non-contradiction,” formulated as a negated conjunction: \(~ (p \& \sim p)\), and its complement, the “principle of the excluded middle,” formulated as an exclusive disjunction: \(p \lor \sim p\). Since this version of the principle of non-contradiction excludes an aspect from anything other than itself, it may be called the exclusive version of the principle of non-contradiction.15

It is indeed Aristotle himself who first formulated both the “principle of the excluded middle” and the “principle of non-contradiction” in this exclusive form as “most certain” and “most familiar” (On Int. 9; Metaph. III, 1, 996b26–30; IV, 7, 1011b26–27; 3, 1005b10, 13). This he did in explicit opposition to what Heraclitus supposedly says: “it is impossible for anyone to suppose the same to be and not be, as some think Heraclitus says” (Metaph. IV, 3, 1005b23–25).16 A reformulation later in the same chapter of Metaphysics IV underlines a temporal qualification: “it is clear that it is impossible for the same to be and not be the same at the same time” (Metaph. IV, 3, 1005b30–32).17 Thus, as each aspect is present to the exclusion of all others, the only relation between aspects is a formal, temporal one: pure succession. A yellow blur, then a rattling, then something said yesterday, and so on.

“Underlying Thing”
But is there any constant underlying being in which these homonymous aspects inhere temporarily in pure succession? If so, what is it? What might this being be that keeps receiving aspects at different times, although never at the same time?
According to chapter 5 of the *Categories*, there is indeed something of which it is “most characteristic” to admit contraries. It is called *ousia*, which we shall translate as “being”: “Most characteristic of being seems to be that, while the same and numerically one, it admits contraries, in such a way that one cannot show anything else which is not a being that, while numerically one, admits contraries” (4a10–13). Admitting contraries without itself becoming a contrary is what is most characteristic of being and unique to it. So a being is somehow uniquely capable of being now white and later not white while remaining the same being it is. A being cannot be and fail to be at the same time any more than an aspect can, and a being cannot present this aspect and another aspect at the same time either; but unlike anything else, there is a being which can present this aspect *at one time* and that aspect *at another*, without itself ceasing to be (2b5–6). What is being, as both detached from and implied by the somnolent flow of homonymous aspects? Aristotle says: an “underlying thing.”

But how is this underlying thing not just another aspect? What is this underlying thing which admits and subtends different qualities that *are in* it at different times? One may think: that which remains constant after the abstraction of aspects. If it is true that aspects are abstractions, then being turns out to be the abstraction of those abstractions.

**An Example**

Descartes’s famous wax example may be of some assistance in clarifying this conception of being. As it is well known, the “Second Meditation” engages in such a systematic abstraction of sensuous aspects in order to prove that the underlying thing is perceived by the mind alone and that the mind is therefore better known than the body.

Let us take, as an example of the thing [*causa*], this piece of wax. It has been taken recently from the honeycomb; it has not yet lost all the honey flavor. It retains some of the scent of the flowers from which it was collected. Its color, shape, and size are manifest. It is hard and cold; it is easy to touch. If you rap on it with your knuckle, it will emit a sound. In short, everything *is present in* it that appears needed to enable a body to be known as distinctly as possible. (AT, VII, 30; AT IX, 23; emphasis is ours)

Descartes’s emphasis that the characteristics of all five senses “are present in” (*adsunt*) the piece of wax translates literally the way Aristotle says that color
“is in” (en esti) an underlying being. Descartes thinks that, in order to prove that the mind is better known than the body, the sensuous characteristics in the piece of wax must turn out to be less known than the mind. So, in order to demonstrate this, he burns the piece of wax and observes that the aspects of hardness, whiteness, or coldness vanish, and are replaced by softness, darkness, and heat. For, indeed, contraries cannot coexist. The crucial question is whether anything remains throughout the experiment: “Does the wax still remain? I must confess that it does; no one denies it; no one thinks otherwise” (AT VII, 30; AT IX, 24). Descartes thus infers that there is something unchanged although all sensuous characteristics have changed. He then asks: “So what was there in the wax that was so distinctly grasped?” The answer is: something extended, flexible, and mutable.

But isn’t this alleged “underlying thing” simply just another aspect like others, albeit relatively more constant? No. For, as Descartes acutely emphasizes, unlike any actual aspect whatsoever, the underlying thing is neither flexed nor unflexed, but flexible. The underlying thing is neither mutated nor unmutated, but mutable. It is not even simply extended: “What is it to be extended? Is this thing’s extension also unknown? For it becomes greater in wax beginning to melt, greater in boiling wax, and greater still as the heat is increased” (AT VII, 31; AT IX, 24). Properly speaking, then, that which underlies the change of aspects is a thing minimally extended and further extendable or retractable, flexible and mutable. As it is precisely not determined by any actual magnitude or shape, the underlying thing can neither be seen, nor heard, nor smelled, since all sensation is of something actually exhibiting the sensuous characteristic it has; nor can it be an object of imagination, since one can imagine only one of a finite number of actually flexed and mutated things each time, whereas the underlying thing is infinitely flexible, mutable, and, perhaps, extendable. Thus, Descartes claims, the only possibility is that the underlying thing is inspected by the mind alone, free from both sensation and imagination—and this essentially distinguishes the “underlying thing” from any aspect whatsoever. The underlying thing can be anything, but by itself it is pure indeterminacy, a “just this,” an x. Further, according to Descartes’s argument, being purely extendable, flexible and mutable, it reflects that which may change it. In other words, being purely indeterminate, it simply reflects the mind’s power of determination, the mind’s power of judgment asserting: this is such and such. It indeed reflects the power of judgment regardless of the truth and falsity of the judgment: as the object of a true or false judgment, the underlying thing attests the very existence of the mental act of judgment. Descartes concludes that the mind
is clearly and distinctly known to itself as giving a judgment, regardless of the correctness of this judgment. To return to our initial question, then: what is this underlying thing admitting and subsisting different aspects that are in it at different times? Descartes’s answer is the following: something infinitely indeterminate.

In our task of understanding the *logos* of being as the differentia between homonymy and synonymy, here we come to the end of our brief elaboration of homonymy. Homonymy is a way of addressing beings in mere aspects; its experiential form is a kind of somnolence where the relationship between aspects is nothing more than pure succession, a relationship governed alone by an exclusive version of the principle of non-contradiction; and finally, the understanding of being implied in this stance is that of a purely indeterminate substratum—Cartesian *substantia*.

2. Synonymy

Seen from a somnolent viewpoint, “being” in Aristotle is not different from Cartesian *substantia*. This can be seen from Aristotle’s discussion with his predecessors about the number of the “sources” in the first book of the *Physics*. There he starts by asserting that the source is either one or many (185a5):¹⁹ in a dialectical procedure, first he takes up the Parmenidean hypothesis that the source is one (184b15ff.), criticizes it for implying the impossibility of motion, change, and nature as such (184b27–185a1), ²⁰ and gradually picks from this hypothesis the term “underlying thing” (*hypokeimenon*) (185a32);²¹ then he takes up the hypothesis of the “Physicists” according to which the sources are many, and specifies it by claiming that in one way or another all take contraries to be sources (*Ph.* I, 4, 187a12; I, 5). In a word, Aristotle there takes both the term “underlying thing” and the contraries from both sides of the argument concerning the number of sources. What does Aristotle do with this underlying thing and the contraries? He simply puts the underlying thing beneath both contraries to ensure the transition from one to the other.²² Aristotle even calls this underlying thing an “underlying nature” (*hypokeimenê physis*) and his examples are akin to Descartes’s wax example:

The underlying nature is knowable through analogy: as bronze is in relation to a statue, or as wood is in relation to a bed, or as the formless is before taking on its form in relation to any of the other things that have form, so is this [underlying nature] in relation to a being [*ousia*] or to the “this” [*to tode ti*] or to that which is [*to on*]. (*Ph.* I, 7, 191a7–12)
Thus, here at least Aristotle is clearly not at odds with the idea that transient sensuous aspects inhere in something constant that is indifferent and irreducible to them. Even if it is clearly true that Aristotle does not connect this constant being with the “subjectivity” of the thinker as Descartes does, both the idea and the Latin word *subjectum* translate, or at least are derived from, Aristotelian *hypoikeimenon*.

This being said, the concept of being implied in homonymy as indeterminate stuff is Descartes’s conclusion, not in Aristotle’s. To be the underlying being in which aspects inhere is only half of the account of “being” in Aristotle, and we must return to the first chapter of the *Categories* in order to see what is left out: the *logos* of being.

**Logos of Being**

Homonyms have their names in common, not their *logos* of being. Synonyms, however, have both in common, which is why they are key to our investigation of the first meaning of *logos*:

Those whose names are common, and whose *logos* of being according to this name are also common, are called synonyms, such as “animal” for both the human being and the ox; for each of these are addressed with the common name “animal” and their *logos* of being is the same. For if one supplies the *logos* of what it is for each to be animal, one will supply the same *logos*. (*Cat.* 1, 1a6–13)

Just as homonyms, synonyms too seem to at first come in pairs: a human being and an ox, as “animal,” are synonymous, because what it is for them to be animal is the same, their *logos* of being is the same, unlike that of homonyms. My calling a cloud “a whale” is due to my association; but the commonality between an ox and a human being as both “animals” is *their* commonality, since they nourish themselves, they perceive, they move, they desire. Thus a being can be addressed synonymously on its own as well: if one can address an ox and a human being not as “white” or “powerful,” but as “animal,” one already has in view the *logos* of being of each, and can address them one by one on their own.

Note that the unlimited possibilities of homonymous designations are here suddenly limited by a condition not emerging from language or thought, but from the thing at hand: what it is *for it* to be. Simultaneously, the power of naming the aspects that *are in* an underlying being is limited by that which *is said of* it. According to Aristotle’s examples, the difference between homonymy and synonymy is the difference between the way a representation of a
human being is an “animal” and the way a human being is an “animal.” Thus, despite our analyses in the last section, being is not only that in which all others are, but also that of which they are said: “All others are either said of these underlying beings or are in them” (Cat. 5, 2b5–6).

What is the implication? The implication is that the world is not simply made out of underlying beings and whatever is in or on it. Being is not simply an underlying thing similar to Anaximander’s apeiron, in which determinations come and go while it remains undetermined. The world is neither mere stuff, nor some stuff plus external determinations. Being, in turn, is no more a purely indeterminate being than it is a mere aspect. It has a particular determination that is irreducible to an aspect, but it also does not survive the coming to be and passing away of any determination. Birth and death are not simply changes. Then not all motion and change occur in and out of beings; there are beings that come to be and pass away themselves. They have a limit which binds them and, if transgressed, leads to their destruction. Indeed, it is “most characteristic” of being to admit contraries, yet being is not defined as that which underlies simply any change from one contrary to the other. Aristotelian being is not infinitely indeterminate and determinable as such, but already has determination. For a being, to be is not to be anything in any way, but to be something in a certain way.

This is the second half of the account of being we find not in Descartes, but in Aristotle.

A Kind of Waking

Everyday life is not exhausted by examples of somnolence where one is “just thinking” or “just talking,” where homonymous aspects parade while adding up to “nothing really.” Thought also seems capable of some kind of waking. To take up our previous examples, then, a daydreaming while waiting for a bus may be disturbed by an event, an accident, an object, or a memory. A chat may be interrupted by the emergence of an issue, the telling of a story, or a discussion. In Latin, such a matter for speech and deliberation is called a causa as a cause one is engaged in or as a case debated in court. It is also called res, as has been suggested by the answer of the daydreamer saying he was thinking of “nothing really.” There is then something “real” about this waking stance, in the sense that it is concentrated around an issue. This does not imply that there is something necessarily serious, truthful, and objective about this stance or that the matter at hand is important, but it does imply that, once awake, the somnolent thinker is no longer at the center of the world. Instead of being the pivot of disparate transient aspects, experience now gravitates around an “issue,” a “case,” “something real.”
Already, when one interrupts a daydreamer and asks what she was thinking, one is operating in a waking stance, and there is already something at issue. It is indeed from a waking stance that somnolence can be thematized and analyzed, and indeed this thematization will be made after the fact and will remain inaccurate to that extent. This waking stance is obvious from our present argument as well, since here we are not thinking or speaking about “just this” and we hope that all that we say does not add up to “nothing really.” Although somnolence can be thematized only in retrospect, the advantage of a sober stance is that it can keep in mind this inappropriateness and recognize that neither thought nor the world are exhausted by somnolence.

Indeed, the world is such that it offers “something real,” instead of aspects that add up to “nothing really.” Instead of “just something bulky” or “just something warm” or “just something moving,” what appears now is a living being, say, an ox: the ox is bulky and warm, he is laying down on the grass and he is moving his tail and digesting food and he is turning to look at me. He is where his tail is and where his horns point and where his chest lays and wherein his eyeballs revolve. It is however only in comparison to the somnolent viewpoint that we may remark that these aspects are no longer simply exclusive of one another and constitute an aggregate. From a properly sober standpoint, we should rather say that the sober appearance is less a conjunction of formerly disparate aspects than the appearance of a standard. Aspects have not vanished here, but they appear as aspects according to this standard, that is, aspects of something. In a way, what distinguishes synonymy from homonymy, or sobriety from somnolence, is this simple conjunction: of. A selfsame aspect of “nothing really” is open to infinite manipulation because its only “demand” is to be clearly and distinctly selfsame, to be just “this”—which it actually is anyway. But the sober world offers something that is not infinitely malleable, something that has a demand, or better, something that is such a demand: to be an ox is to be what it is for an ox to be so.

Similarly, the small talk that could go in any direction is now interrupted by something to attend to: a story that organizes characters, actions, and circumstances, a topic of discussion that articulates different aspects of an issue, a suggestion that demands responsiveness. Note that this demand may well be rejected, the ox may well be seen as a lump of meat or a mascot, and one may well refuse to attend to an issue raised in a conversation. Nevertheless such a rejection will never make it as if the demand has never been made. A somnolent stance is conceivable only in reference to, and as a departure from, the sober world. “Nothing” as an answer almost always means “Nothing really.” Hence Aristotle’s definition of the “fictitious” (plasmatôdes) necessarily involves not pure creation out of nothing, but compulsion, a counterforce exerted against
a preexisting force resisting it: “By ‘fictitious’ I mean ‘forced in [bebiasmenon]
for the sake of a hypothesis’” (Metaph. XIII, 7, 1082b3). The rejection or dis-
missal of this demand will turn the demand into a rejected one, and to that
extent will affirm its having been. Logos of being means this standard of being.

An Inclusive Version of the Principle of Non-Contradiction
Every extended being has magnitude. So every extended being is at once
“here” and also “elsewhere.” Similarly, the ox occupies some stretch of space.
But further, the motion of his tail depends on the fact that it moves in certain
ways while his body remains still. The motion of the tail of the ox depends
on his somehow being at once “here” and “elsewhere.” The head of the ox
is cooler, harder, and more silent than his stomach. This “of” does not sim-
ply tack on different aspects, it does not just connect the formerly disjoined
coldness and hardness and heat. The word “of” refers to an original that orga-
nizes, hierarchizes, and defines aspects according to something that is not an
aspect. Aspects here are no longer simply subject to the exclusive version of
the principle of non-contradiction. The motion and rest of the ox’s tail is far
from excluding the motion and rest of all its other parts. In short, here the
principle of non-contradiction works no longer as a formal law of disjunction
and exclusion, but as an original demand of inclusion. The principle here can
no longer simply preclude the cohabitation of contraries at the same time; it
must also proclaim that contraries can and are typically meant to belong to the
same at the same time—but in different respects.

Aristotle’s discussion of the principle of non-contradiction seems to
have its roots in the fourth book of Plato’s Republic. In the passage from the
Republic, while discussing the unity of the soul, Socrates suggests to Glaucon
that “it is clear that the same will not be willing to do or undergo opposites
at the same time in the same respect [kata tauton] and in relation to the same
[pros tauton]” (IV, 436b8–c1). Later, Socrates shifts this emphasis from the
unwillingness of being toward impossibility (436c5–6). After considering
the examples of a man moving his arms and a spinning top, to which we shall
return shortly, he modifies his first statement:

Then the saying of such things will neither scare us nor persuade
us that something, being the same, would ever suffer, be, or do
opposites at the same time, in the same respect [kata to auto] and in
relation to the same [pros to auto]. (436e8–437a2)

Here then Socrates states at least a qualified version of the exclusive principle
of non-contradiction: the exclusive version holds in the same respect and in
relation to the same, thereby implying that it would not necessarily apply if different respects were involved. Simply put, he draws our attention to the respects in which contraries are not disjoined, but conjoined. Let us call this version the “inclusive principle of non-contradiction.” Then, while it is true that a top either moves or does not move absolutely, it may well be, and in fact must be, moving and not moving in different respects—in this instance, with respect to its different parts—according to the inclusive version.

In fact, Aristotle’s statement of the principle in the Metaphysics takes into account these respects in which it is possible for the same to be and not be the same at the same time: “it is impossible for the same to belong and not belong to the same at the same time in the same respect [kata to auto]” (IV, 1005b19–20). Although Aristotle’s version of the exclusive principle of non-contradiction was formulated precisely in opposition to “what Heraclitus is supposed to have said,” here, on the contrary, Aristotle joins Heraclitus in recognizing the need to modify the exclusive version and, as Heraclitus says, to “understand how that which is disrupted has the same logos as itself: a back-stretched harmony as in the bow and the lyre” (Fr. 51). In fact, precisely in order to reject the absolute disjunction or conjunction between being and non-being, Aristotle appeals to these respects or ways:

In one way they [those who simply conjoin being and non-being] speak correctly, in another way they do not know. For, being [to on] is said in two ways so that in a way being can come into being out of non-being, in another way it cannot. And the same can at once be and not be, but not in the same respect [all’ ou kata tauto]. (Metaph. IV, 5, 1009a32–35)

This passage is a major part of our textual evidence for claiming that Aristotle is a thinker of inclusion and that the recognition of this depends on the central notion of logos. Hence, the inclusive version of the principle of non-contradiction will inform us more about “what it is for this being to be” than the exclusive version: where the latter will compellingly show that the same thing cannot be both white and not-white, moving and not-moving at the same time, the former will add that this is true not absolutely, but only as long as we are considering the same respect. The latter will view the motion of the tail of an ox as simply moving, while the former will illuminate the interconnection between the motion of the tail and the stillness of the spine of the ox, and agree with Heraclitus that “changing, it is at rest” (Fragment 84).

Aristotle then has both the exclusive and the inclusive versions of the principle of non-contradiction. Without the inclusive version, one cannot draw
the difference between homonymy and synonymy, between free-floating aspects and beings having a logos of being in their own right, a standard of being. Logos here means “standard.”

Another Sense of “Underlying Thing”
Let us briefly return to Socrates’s examples in the Republic in order to see how logos mediates respects that previously were mutually exclusive. Socrates’s first example is of a man standing still while moving his arms and head. The example may seem to present us with a trunk standing still, an arm and a head in motion. A surgeon or a beauty contest jury member may well give judgments and advice from this stance, focusing on each part of the human body in isolation from the others. A gym teacher, a coach, or a dance teacher may well approach the human body in this way, having different diagnoses and exercises for each of its parts. For, as the exclusive principle of non-contradiction dictates, his arms cannot be moving and not moving at the same time, no more than his head or his trunk.

But Socrates’s example is not about a trunk and two arms and a head, but about a man. The motion of his arms and of his head, as well as the stability of his trunk, are not random aspects of his motion and rest. They are not aspects, they are rather respects precisely regulated by a standard, by the man’s logos of being, by what it is for him to be (Metaph. VIII, 6, 1045a14ff). To be a human being is to be a living body, and to be a living body is to be the natural demand that one’s motion and rest originate in oneself, the demand to articulate motion and rest in such a way that the body can find in itself both a stable ground and a joint around which motion is possible (Ph. II, 1, 192b8–23; MA 1–2). However different and contrary the possible motions of his arms may seem, they do remain specific in comparison to all possible motions as such. For they make up, or take part in, a certain species-character of a being. Even further, the motion of a living body is a demand not only to orchestrate its internal parts, but also to adapt itself to the system between the organism and its environment: the earth underneath, the water, the air, the heat of the sun, and ultimately the celestial spheres. Briefly put, to move his arms and head while standing still is not a challenge to the selfsameness and unity of the man’s body and life; it is precisely an indispensable part of what it is for him to be, of what it is for him to be human, of his logos of being.

Socrates’s second example is a top which is spinning, that is, moving with respect to its periphery but not with respect to its axis. Again, this motion and rest are not primarily exclusive aspects in their own right, but rather respects precisely regulated by what it is for a top to be, since to be a top is to be the very conjunction of peripheral motion and axial rest. Once this
conjunction is disrupted, once this demand is rejected, one has a top in name only. For if the axis cannot stand still vertically while spinning, one has a wheel. And if the axis cannot stand still in any respect, then one has a ball. Either way one does not have a top that is adequate to what it is for a top to be. Aristotle would say “one has a top only homonymously.” In this case as well as in the previous one, the principle of non-contradiction is at work not by simply excluding different aspects, but by offering different respects in which the same can conjoin contraries and in fact demands this conjunction according to what it is for it to be—according to its *logos* of being.

Here, then, we find out that being is not simply that *in which* determinations are indifferently applied, but also that which has an inherent standard, a claim or a “say” on its being. Here, then, we find Aristotle much closer to the Heraclitean “*logos* of being” than to Cartesian *substantia*. To go back to Heraclitus’s examples, both the bow and the lyre require that the cord be pulled in two opposite directions, that it be stretched within a certain range, according to a ratio or a standard. In fact, the notes of the lyre and the accuracy of the bow depend on how well their cords are thus stretched. Requiring that their cord be pulled in two opposite directions, they also require a stable frame to hold the tension together without one pull yielding to the other. One would disrupt what it is for a bow to be not by establishing such an opposition, but by removing it, for instance by pulling the cord too hard or by burning it like Descartes did to the piece of wax.

**Return to the Example**

If it is true that the regard for *logos* of being that we find in Aristotle and Heraclitus is the second half of our story, how are we to modify our previous treatment of the famous wax example? After all, wasn’t it true that the wax survived the alteration of all its sensuous aspects under fire, and that its true nature was to be pure indeterminacy, that is, pure possibility?

There is something one-sided about Descartes’s argument. Now that we have a better understanding of *logos* of being, we can shed light on what it is. First, one may ask: Why does Descartes take a *piece of wax* as his most crucial example? Because, as he says, it exhibits various sensuous aspects? Or because the “demand” of the piece of wax as a thing is almost unapparent and thus already seems to be immediately reducible to infinite possibilities of manipulation—which will be Descartes’s conclusion? In other words, suspiciously, the piece of wax *seems to be* a thing that is not a *res* or a *causa* at all, an object that only minimally makes a *case* on its own. Descartes does not take an ox, a country, or an artwork, but a piece of wax as his example. The wax is thus an almost perfect example for muffling the *logos* of being and for
thereby reducing all synonymy to homonymy, all inherent determinacy to plasticity, all waking to somnolence. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Descartes grants the possibility that he is at sleep throughout the Meditatio
des, and makes recurrent references to his own sleepiness. In fact, his argument against skepticism draws much of its power from his noncommittal stance as to whether he is awake or not. As Heraclitus puts it in his first fragment: “Of the logos of being, humans are always uncomprehending . . . they forget what they do when awake as they forget [what they do] in sleep.” Descartes’s meditations as well as his wax example are excellent descriptions of somno-
lence, but not of the piece of wax as having a “logos of being.”

For it is true that the sweetness, the scent of flowers, and the whiteness were in the wax and that after being heated these properties were replaced by other properties. As we have said, Aristotle’s exposition and criticism of his predecessors in the first book of the Physics often suggests this structure of an underlying thing which remains constant throughout the transition from some property to its contrary. But, to return to the language of Categories, everything other than beings is either in them or they are said of them. Descartes’s reasoning omits the question as to whether anything is said of beings, suppresses the fact that, however unthingly, the wax is a thing, it is a res and a causa. There are not only things that are in the wax, but also things that are said of it.

What then is said of the wax? In the History of Animals, one finds an elabo-
rate account of the various functions of wax and hence the corresponding kinds of material used in its production:

After the hive has been handed over to them clean, they build the wax combs, bringing the drops from the flowers and especially from the trees, from willow and elm and others that are very gummy. With this they also smear the floor against the other creatures; the bee-keepers call this dusting. They also build up the entrances if they are wide. They fashion first the combs in which these bees themselves are produced, then those in which the so-called kings and the drones are produced. (HA IX, 40, 623b27–34ff.)

As the rest of the passage makes abundantly clear, for Aristotle wax is a substance taken from flowers and trees by bees for the sake of building honeycombs and other complex structures. However muffled, wax does seem to exhibit a standard: just like the bow requires that the cord be tended neither too much nor too little, and in both directions, the piece of wax must have the appropriate consistency for building a honeycomb, the right dosage of
softness and hardness, of cold and heat, of dry and wet. It seems then that wax does have an “essential formula,” a *logos* of being, a standard stating *of it* what it is *for it* to be wax. One can always reject, dismiss, or omit this demand, deform this specific form, as Descartes does, but one can do so precisely because there is already something to reject, dismiss, or omit to begin with. Indeed, the wax can be seen as something infinitely malleable, but it will not survive all manipulation *as the wax it is*. Turning from sweet to not-sweet and from white to not-white, the wax is perhaps still what it is for it to be so; but the piece of wax is no longer what it is for it to be itself when it is heated and loses the consistency that is required for the construction of a honeycomb.

For Descartes, if it is true that the wax remains throughout the transformations of all its sensuous aspects, then it validly follows that the wax was nothing but pure extension to begin with—an object of the mind alone. Thus, Descartes asked the crucial question: “Does the wax still remain?” Then he immediately gave a strong, straightforward answer: “I must confess that it does.” Although he was alone in his meditation, he added: “No one denies it; no one thinks otherwise.” Why must he confess that the wax remains? Who is there to deny it? Who are these others that “do not think otherwise”? (AT VII, 30; AT IX, 24) It seems as if Aristotle, for one, would think otherwise, claiming that after the heating the wax remains *only homonymously*, and not synonymously, because the fire *did* disrupt its *logos* of being as wax. Before the experiment, Descartes seems to have already assumed that the wax would remain independently from its properties and to have simply inferred that the wax is indeed pure extension. Descartes’s reasoning may appear to be a *petitio principii*. It is not true that the wax remains throughout the experiment, unless homonymously, thus it does not follow that the mind perceived the same piece of wax all along and was thereby confirmed in its own existence. Did anything remain constant throughout the experiment, if not the wax? Perhaps only a purely indeterminate thing, a “just this,” an *x*. But the piece of wax did not remain as a piece of wax that it was.

Note that Aristotle was not unaware of philosophers who reduced the *logos* of beings to incidental properties, and all being to indeterminacy—precisely the ones who deny the principle of non-contradiction:

In general those who say this [those who deny the principle of non-contradiction] do away with being and what it is for something to be. For it is necessary for them to say that all things are incidental [*symbebêkenai*] and that there is no such thing as the very thing it is to be human or animal. (*Metaph.* IV, 4, 1007a20–23)
In order to demonstrate that the mind is better known than the body, Descartes picks up a most “unthingly” thing as a paradigm for all extended beings, treats it as indifferent to all of its aspects. He thereby spreads a waxy texture to all things, as it were, and tailors sober experience on the model of somnolence. He reduces all synonymy to homonymy and brackets the possibility for beings to have a *logos* of being, and the possibility for other beings to attend to that *logos*.

**3. Recapitulation and Reorientation**

What then does *logos* mean in the *Categories*? It means _standard_. In general, it is what it is to be _for the being at hand_; in the case of an ox or a human being, this means at least what it is for each of them to be an animal. The emphasis here is not so much on “being x” or “being y” as it is on the phrase “for each of them” (*autôn hekaterôi*). The question “What is ‘being x’?” can be investigated from the perspective of the interested being itself only if synonymy is distinguished from homonymy. One may well designate a representation and a human being homonomously as “animals.” But what is overviewed here is not the question “What is being animal?” itself, since a detailed representation of a human being may well be more “informative” than a blurred perception of one, but rather what being animal has to do _with the being at hand_. By distinguishing synonymy from homonymy at the very opening of the *Categories*, Aristotle suggests that it is possible to address, and equally to fail to address, beings from the perspective of their being, and not simply in the aspects that appear to us. *Logos* articulates the way in which a being presents one aspect not at the expense of another or of an underlying thing. *Logos* means the standard that articulates the being at hand in the manifold of its aspects.

*Logos* is a promise to provide us something no sculpture, representation, impression, or name necessarily does: the way of being for the very thing at hand. To address an ox as an animal is to consider it with respect to what it is for it to be: to address it not only as something here, something there, something now, something then, something brown or black, but as a being that grows, desires, perceives, and moves. *Logos* captures a being from within the perspective of that being, that is, in its temporal stability, in its spatial spread, and in its inherent manifoldness. *Logos* captures the “extendedness” of beings with a crucial connotation of “stretch” that will pervade the rest of this book. Unlike Nietzsche who thinks that Aristotle simply accuses Heraclitus of contradicting the principle of non-contradiction, Aristotle’s seminal use of *logos* at the opening of the corpus is a retrieval of the Heraclitean effort to
“understand how that which is disrupted has the same logos as itself: a backstretched harmony, as in the bow and the lyre.”

Logos means “standard” in the Categories: a being’s holding on both to its being and to what it is for it to be, without letting one yield to the other. There remains an essential question: even though things may seem to be irreducible to free-floating aspects, is it true that a piece of wax, a spinning top, a bow, or a lyre has itself a logos of being? Aren’t we speaking loosely or metaphorically when we claim that being a “substance taken from flowers by bees for the sake of building a honeycomb” is what it is for the piece of wax to be? Shouldn’t logos be imputed not to the piece of wax, but to us or to bees, and interpreted accordingly as a result of a mental synthesis carried out by us, in us and for us, instead of taking place “in the world,” in and for the beings themselves, within and for the piece of wax? Even though we have seen how synonymy cannot be reduced to homonymy in the Categories, we need to make a dialectical step back in our argument in order to pursue the meaning of logos in Aristotle’s philosophy: what warrants for the inherence of the standard we concluded logos in the Categories to be?