CATEGORIES
Historical and Systematic Essays
Edited by Michael Gorman and Jonathan J. Sanford
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## PART IV. EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METAPHYSICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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It is impossible to think without using categories. Consider the judgment that the rose is red. To make this judgment, one must use the category “red” and assign the rose to it; one must also, perhaps in a somewhat different way, make use of the category “rose.” And what is true here about judging that the rose is red is, \textit{mutatis mutandis}, true about asserting it, which means that categories are needed for language as well. To be sure, there is more to thinking than judgment, even as there is more to speaking than assertion. But other mental and speech acts involve categories: pondering, hoping, intending, asking, ordering, promising, and many others. Without categories we would, in short, be speechless and thoughtless.

The word “category” comes from the Greek term \textit{καταγορεύω}, which means to denounce or accuse publicly; it is, in other words, to name some attribute belonging to an individual, as when someone says that George is a thief. And it was the Greek philosopher Aristotle who, building on the work of his predecessors, inaugurated the systematic discussion of categories in his work of that name. Later philosophers have not failed to notice the ubiquity of categories, nor have they hesitated to ask questions about them. The present volume is a collection of essays on categories. Before describing the essays themselves, we would like to bring out some of the main issues in category theory. A convenient way of doing so is to reflect on a simple fact: something can be a member of more than one category. This flower, for instance, is not only red; it is also a rose, a physical object, an item for sale, and so on. How is this possible?

One thing that makes it possible is that categories can be arranged hierarchically. Every rose is a physical object, but not every physical object is a rose. “Physical object” is thus a category that includes “rose” as a proper subcategory of itself, along with “car” and “stone.”
allows a particular flower to belong not only to the category “rose” but also to every category above it: flower, plant, living thing, physical object, and so on. So this brings out one important issue in category theory: hierarchy.\(^1\)

The idea that categories are related in this way suggests something else, namely, that perhaps there is a highest categorical level. And, if there is, one might ask whether there is just one category at this level, a category to which absolutely everything belongs, or whether even at the highest level there is still a multiplicity. Thinking about such matters brings us immediately to Aristotle, who used the term “category” to refer to these highest sorts of categories and who held the view that there was more than one category in this sense. Here we find one terminological issue and a host of substantive ones. The terminological issue is simply the need to keep track of when the word “category” means “highest category” and when it means “any sort of category.” The substantive issues begin with the relation between the lower categories and the highest ones: in what sense are the highest ones most basic? If the answer is that they are basic in an ontological or metaphysical sense, then one might wonder about the unity of reality: if there is no single category that everything falls into, is reality ultimately fragmentary? Or, are there relations among the various categories that are sufficient to bring reality into a unity?

These are just some of the issues that arise when we use the notion of hierarchy to understand how something can belong to more than one category. But hierarchy does not always help. It can happen that something belongs to more than one category but that the categories are not related in a hierarchical way. The rose is both a plant and something for sale, but not all plants are for sale, and not all things for sale are plants. These categories, then, overlap, something that hierarchy-minded categorizers have traditionally sought to avoid.\(^2\)

Thinking about how one might avoid such overlaps raises further issues, even to the point of calling into question the project of categorical metaphysics. Consider the following way of avoiding the overlaps. It is true, one might say, that a rose is both a plant and an item for sale, and it is also true that “plant” and “item for sale” are overlapping, non-hierarchical categories. But this is not a deep problem, because “item for sale” is not a natural category. Nothing is, of its own nature, for sale;

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1. For a recent discussion of categories in hierarchical terms, see chap. 1 of Joshua Hoffman and Gary Rosenkrantz, *Substance among Other Categories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
something belongs to this category only because human beings have made a certain decision. By contrast, a rose is, of its own nature, a plant. So, if we restrict our attention to natural categories, setting aside categories that exist only because of human concerns, we will find that a hierarchical ordering can be preserved. And perhaps this is what we as metaphysicians ought to have been focused on all along, since metaphysics is concerned with the way things are in themselves, not with the way they are relative to us.

Simply to consider such a solution—evaluating it goes far beyond the scope of this introduction—is to come up against the question of which categories are humanly constructed and which are natural. There is, to be sure, a trivial sense in which all categories are humanly constructed. We cannot think in terms of a certain category without thinking through what that category is. The category must, in other words, be something that we have “come up with ourselves.” But this is not the issue. The issue is whether the categories we come up with correspond to or map onto divisions that are already there in the world or whether, by contrast, they impose divisions on the world.

That people impose divisions on the world is beyond doubt. Someone who paints lines in a parking lot is not trying to reflect any underlying structure in the asphalt, nor ought he to. If saying this amounts to advocating a limited kind of antirealism about categories, then it would be hard to find a philosopher who is not a category antirealist. The serious question of antirealism is not this but something else. Might it be the case that no categories are real or natural, that all categories are imposed on what is, in itself, wholly devoid of structure? If so, then what of categories in metaphysics?

A related issue is the following. Reality can be looked at in a number of ways, each of which involves our thinking in terms of a particular category scheme. For example, the way in which florists divide up the world of flowers is different from the way in which botanists divide it up. From this one might be led to think that (i) there is no single right categorical scheme, and (ii) there is no single right way to relate all the schemes to one another. This would leave us with a hodgepodge of categorical schemes serving different purposes. Such a position might seem midway between realism and antirealism. Consider the islanders in Bambrough’s example who think of trees as “boat-building trees,” “house-building trees,” and so on. Their practical interests lead them to divide up the world in a way that is different from the way in which

we divide it up. Suppose there are neither good reasons to prefer one scheme over the other nor uniquely right ways to construe one scheme as more basic than the other. From that it would not follow that there is no correct way to divide trees into boat-building trees and house-building trees. A relativity of category schemes might be able to coexist with a certain kind of realism about the world: which scheme we use is up to us, but once we decide on one, there is a right and a wrong way to apply it.

From what has been said, it is clear that there are many important and difficult issues surrounding the nature and use of categories. An there are many other issues that have not been discussed. For example, all the points that have been made so far about categories have been metaphysical or ontological in nature. But thinking about categories has wider relevance as well. Questions of value and morality are often closely connected to questions about the categories we put things into—think of the issues and decisions that turn on whether one considers certain living beings to be human or not. Likewise, questions of knowledge and language are often closely connected to questions about categories. And this brings us back to what was said at the beginning, that our knowing and saying involves placing things in categories.

Hence it is that categories are crucial in metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological ways. The purpose of this volume is to make available some of the best recent thinking on this topic. Before taking note of the individual essays themselves, it is well to note that the essays constitute a mix of historical and systematic reflections. Including essays of both sorts embodies the editors’ conviction that philosophical reflection is best carried out in dialogue with the great thinkers of the past. Sometimes the best wine is a mix of the old and the new.4

In the remainder of this introduction the various wines that make up the volume are described briefly; that is, we offer but a taste here, leaving consumption to your own discretion. Five of the sixteen essays focus on categories either in Aristotle himself or in the work of figures who have adopted an Aristotelian approach to categories. Then follow four essays focusing on categories in modern philosophy. In these first nine essays there is, to be sure, systematic reflection on categories, but this

reflection is undertaken in tandem with explication of historically sig-
nificant philosophers’ reflections on categories. The last seven essay
are more exclusively systematic. The first two focus on categories inso-
far as they bear on normative thinking, and the last five focus on cate-
gories insofar as they relate to epistemological or metaphysical con-
cerns.

Sanford’s “Categories and Metaphysics: Aristotle’s Science of Being”
starts us off, yoking Aristotle’s earlier thought on categories to his ac-
count of the science of being in the *Metaphysics*. Sanford argues that
categories are crucial for the development of any science, focusing pri-
marily on Aristotle’s account of how categories are used rather than on
his account of what they are. Sanford further argues that the science of
being *qua* being demands that primacy be given to being in the sense
of the categories, as opposed to the other three senses of being, noting
on the one hand Aristotle’s insistence that metaphysics is to be a *science*
of being, and on the other hand the special emphasis given to being in
the sense of the categories in the central books of the *Metaphysics*. San-
ford concludes with some comments on the relevance of Aristotle’s
take on categories and his view of metaphysics.

Lang’s “Aristotle’s Categories ‘Where’ and ‘When’” brings to light
important aspects of two of Aristotle’s categories. She argues that the
standard translations—of τὸ ποῦ as “place” and of τὸ ποτέ as “time”—
are mistranslations, that they are grammatically deficient insofar as the
treat these two categories as substantives, and that they lead to two sorts
of philosophical confusion. First, Aristotle’s account of place (ὁ τὸπος) in
*Physics IV*, 1–5, and his account of time (ὁ χρόνος) in *Physics IV*, 10–
14, are sometimes muddled with his accounts of “where” and “when” in
the *Categories*. Lang argues that there are systematic differences be-
tween what Aristotle examines in his *Physics* as “place” and “time” and
his accounts of the categories of “where” and “when” in the *Categories*.
At the same time she argues that Aristotle’s accounts of place and time
solve some problems he inherited from Plato. Second, the special role
of the categories “where” and “when” can be obscured if we do not see
them functioning within Aristotle’s accounts of place and time.
“Where” and “when” are better understood in their role as predicates
within a view of the cosmos that already designates all natural things as
being in place and within time; when these categories are employed,
we can see that they indicate where and when a substance is within the
ordered whole. Lang concludes by noting that when we make the effort
not to confuse “where” and “when” with “place” and “time,” we can bet-
ter see the relevance of Aristotle’s *Categories* as not just a logical work
but as one that intends to give us a better purchase on reality.
Stump’s “Aquinas’s Metaphysics: Individuation and Constitution” moves us beyond Aristotle to one of his most prominent philosophical successors. Stump focuses on the role of Aquinas’s view of things for his metaphysics. By “things” Stump means “not only substances and artifacts but also at least some of the parts of which substances are constituted.” She explores the individuation, identity, and constitution of things, and especially of human things, in Aquinas’ work in order to show the importance of his theory of things for his philosophical and theological views generally.

McMahon’s “Reflections on Some Thirteenth- and Fourteenth Century Views of the Categories” traces some of the first substantive refinements and rejections of the Aristotelian—and for a long time standard—account of the categories. The philosophers he deals with—Henry of Ghent, John Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, and John Buridan—are still working within the Aristotelian tradition, but at the same time they open the door for some of the wholly different views on categories that one finds in Kant and other modern figures. The thinkers McMahon touches upon begin to tinker with such claims as that there are only ten categories and that these categories exhaust the senses of simple categorematic terms. The essay shows how thirteenth- and fourteenth-century thinkers in the Latin West began to reexamine the accepted view of the categories and their relation both to how we think and to how the world is organized.

Whereas McMahon’s essay signals the beginning of the end of Aristotelian dominance in thought concerning the categories, Sim’s “Categories and Commensurability in Confucius and Aristotle: A Response to MacIntyre” reasserts the pervasiveness of Aristotle’s view of the categories. She makes the case that the relevance of Aristotle’s account of the categories is not just a phenomenon of the West, but that one finds similar lines of thought in Confucius and his successors. Sim challenges MacIntyre’s claim that there is a breach of incommensurability between Confucians and Aristotelians. She builds her case by looking at each of Aristotle’s categories and demonstrating how Confucius employs the same categories in his writings. Underlying Sim’s paper is the presupposition that the Aristotelian categories are not just the products of Aristotle’s imagination, or just the product of a Western mind; instead, they manifest the way in which human beings in general encounter the world. Sim’s paper thus widens the discussion of categories in two ways: first, she moves consideration of categories beyond Western philosophy; second, she broaches the subject of the relation between categories and ethical thought.

We find in modern and contemporary thinkers approaches to the
categories that are neither Aristotelian nor even explicitly concerned with reacting to the Aristotelian view of categories. Quinn’s “Kant: The Practical Categories” is the first in our next set of essays. Rather than dealing only with Kant’s theoretical categories and their deduction, an issue that has been belabored in Kant scholarship, Quinn focuses on the relation between categories and ethical thought. The goal of his essay is to explain Kant’s idea of the practical categories and what those categories reveal about the way in which reason acts in the world.

Quinn accomplishes this goal through several steps. First, he introduces us to Kant’s theoretical categories as a help to understanding the practical categories. Second, he explains Kant’s practical categories. Third, he compares the practical and theoretical categories. Quinn is then able to draw some general conclusions about the role of categories in Kant’s thought, arguing that the practical categories are more evocative of reason’s unique power than are the theoretical categories.

Hausman’s “Charles Peirce’s Categories, Phenomenological and Ontological” explains that Peirce’s categories, known alternately as Oneness, Twoness, and Threeness, or as the monad, dyad, and triad, are generated logically as well as phenomenologically. Though these methods of generating the categories differ, on both the logical and the phenomenological accounts the categories are seen to have ontological bearing, for, as Hausman argues, Peirce’s categories reveal features of reality. After discussing the generation of the categories, Hausman turns his attention to the relation between Peirce’s categories and his unique evolutionary realism. To explore this issue, Hausman explains certain features of Peirce’s view of evolution as it is found in his early and in his later works. He then looks explicitly to the connection between the categories and Peirce’s mature view of evolution. Hausman concludes by arguing that the relation between Peirce’s categories and his evolutionary realism can be seen to be complete only when we also introduce the role of Peircean agape into the account.

Føllesdal’s “Husserl and the Categories” introduces us to the ways in which categories are employed within Husserl’s phenomenology. This is, Føllesdal says, not an easy thing to do, because in none of his works does Husserl provide a careful analysis of categories. Instead, one has to collect Husserl’s thoughts on categories from a number of his writings. In spite of the lack of an explicit formulation of a category theory, Husserl relies nonetheless on such categories as noematic, noetic, eidetic, ontic, material, and many others. Føllesdal introduces Husserlian category theory by situating it in the general context of Husserlian phenomenology, highlighting such themes as the distinction between transcendental and transcedent, intentionality and directedness, noema-
and hyle, and the eidetic, transcendental, and phenomenological reductions.

Garver’s “Language-Games as Categories: An Aristotelian Theme in Wittgenstein’s Later Thought” argues for a connection between Aristotle’s account of the categories and Wittgenstein’s mature work. This may seem a surprising connection, since Wittgenstein does not mention Aristotle when introducing language-games, and Aristotle’s categories and the metaphysics they are often seen to support are not generally regarded as having much in common with Wittgenstein’s language-games. Important to Garver’s case are his claims that Aristotle’s *Categories* is ambiguous as to whether categories refer to speech-acts only or also to the way things stand in the world, and that Aristotle did not necessarily intend to limit the number of categories to ten. Garver sees connections between Aristotle and Wittgenstein in their naturalistic approach to categories, in the common assumption that categories and language-games respectively are designated within the context of human activity, and in the methodology for distinguishing between different categories or language-games. Garver sees Wittgenstein to be revitalizing Aristotelian naturalism while not denying Hume’s insight that it is unsatisfactory to presume necessities to be matters of fact.

Gorman’s “Categories and Normativity” is the first of the last set of essays, those that deal with categories systematically. One of the goals of Gorman’s essay is to argue that normativity is more bound up with our thinking than contemporary philosophers tend to acknowledge. Gorman takes a careful look at what he terms the “unity problem,” the problem of giving an account of the unity of a category. After exploring several ways of thinking about the unity problem, Gorman focuses attention on the normative version of this problem. He argues that this version is best dealt with by recognizing that at least some categories are constituted, and so given their unity, by norms. After responding to some objections to his proposal, and distinguishing the sense of “normative” he employs from other senses, Gorman makes some suggestions about what grounds normative categories.

Like Gorman’s essay, Weissman’s “Categorial Form” explores the relationship between categories and normativity. Remarking on the split between metaphysics and ethics that is one of the chief marks of philosophy since Hume, Weissman makes clear that his aim is to “reaffirm the linkage of metaphysics and morals.” Categorial form is the bridge between metaphysics and ethics. Weissman supports his proposal in several steps, among them the following: arguing that there is indeed categorial form and that there are appropriate methods for discovering it;
responding to Kantian objections to his proposal; outlining individualism, communitarianism, and holism as possible candidates of categorial form; and then drawing some practical implications from what has been argued. One of the practical conclusions that W eissman draws is that human life is not unrestrictedly variable; successful interaction among human beings is limited by categorial form.

Thalos, in her “Distinction, Judgment, and Discipline,” turns our attention from normative considerations to some of the ways in which categories bear on epistemological and metaphysical concerns. Thalos focuses on categories insofar as they undergird the sorts of distinctions and judgments we make. Thalos begins by pointing to what she considers a problematic distinction common in analytic thought between fact and knowledge of fact. What is problematic about the distinction is that it gives preference to the fact over the knowledge of it. What Thalos develops in her essay is a way of distinguishing between fact and knowledge that puts neither fact nor knowledge in an independent, and so privileged, position. The linchpin of her account is the claim that the sort of distinction one makes depends on the sort of activity one is engaged in. She then explains some of the ways in which distinguishing, judging, and defining overlap in various human activities, focusing in particular on scientific activities. Thalos closes with a series of observations and questions concerning the impact of her analysis of distinction and judgment on efforts to naturalize epistemology.

Sokolowski’s “Categorial Intentions and Objects” is a reprinting (with very slight modifications) of chapter 7 of his Introduction to Phenomenology. Because it grows out of Sokolowski’s studies of Husserl, the chapter reprinted here can be compared with Føllesdal’s treatment of Husserl; nonetheless, it was written without footnotes as a systematic account, not as a work of historical research, and for that reason it is included in the present volume as a systematic account of categorial intentionality. Distinguishing between the basic intentionality involved in perception and the more complex intentionality involved in categorial activity, Sokolowski demonstrates how the latter goes beyond, but is rooted in, the former. He further explains how we establish categorial objects via our categorial intentions and argues that truth or meaning is not to be found in mental or conceptual things, but rather in the successful articulation of states of affairs. Along the way, Sokolowski also clarifies a number of technical terms employed by phenomenologists when discussing categorial intentionality. He concludes first with reflections on vagueness in categorial intentions, and then, on a more positive note, with thoughts on some ways in which categorial intentionality manifests what is most distinctive about human beings: their intelligence.
Smith’s “Carving Up Reality” focuses on the ways in which we partition reality. The more common way for philosophers to partition reality is to divide it into classes, elements, species, categories, and the like. There are, Smith argues, other sorts of partitionings that occur, however. For example, in perception we divide between background and foreground, and when we develop theories we divide reality into what does and what does not fall into our theory. Smith’s paper seeks a general theory of the way in which we partition reality, one that is capable of accounting for the various specific ways in which we divide reality. After sketching such a theory, Smith draws out some of its implications for our understanding of categories, our understanding of vagueness, and our understanding of what he terms “the granularity of perception.” Smith concludes with a reflection on the realism of his approach central to which is his distinction between bona fide and ficta boundaries.

DeMarco’s “The Generation and Destruction of Categories” investigates why human thought and language are inextricably tied to categorial formulations and why nature itself is receptive to categorial division. DeMarco’s essay addresses, then, both epistemological and metaphysical concerns, while focusing in particular on the role categories play in making it possible for reason and nature to become intertwined. In building his case DeMarco clarifies what he considers to be the function of categories, the relation between categories and qualifications, the ways in which we generate categories, and what it means to categorize successfully—that is, what it means for our categorizations to allow an adequate meeting of reason and extra-mental reality. DeMarco’s essay presents what he calls “a moderate realism about categories,” an approach that accounts for the multiplicity and variability of categorial schemes while at the same time arguing that such schemes must be at least in part anchored to reality if they are to be intelligible.

The volume concludes with Gracia’s “Are Categories Invented or Discovered? A Response to Foucault.” Gracia’s essay presents a valuable finale because it brings together many aspects of the inquiries into categories undertaken in the previous essays, while at the same time paving the way for further investigations. Gracia uses as his foil Foucault’s influential claim that categories are a matter of invention, a claim he finds suspect, to say the least. Also suspect, however, is the claim that all categories are discovered. Gracia’s essay cautions us against overly sweeping claims concerning categories. If we avoid unwarranted generalizations, Gracia argues, careful analysis is likely to lead us to recognize that some categories are, indeed, invented, others are discovered, and still others are partly invented and partly discovered. Investigations of categories are, Gracia urges, not easy affairs; but
when carefully undertaken they are capable of producing important clues to how we think, how we speak, how we act, and how the world is.

Let us close with a few words of thanks. We are grateful to David McGonagle and Susan Needham of the Catholic University of America Press for their help in bringing this volume to completion, as well as to Jude Dougherty, the general editor of the series in which it appears. We are grateful to James Despres for helping to prepare the bibliography, to Jennifer Angelo for helping to prepare the indexes, to Gregory Doolan for hunting down some hard-to-find references, and especially to Jorge J. E. Gracia for first suggesting we work together on this project. Finally, we are grateful to our wives, Anne-Marie and Rebecca, and to our children, for their support.
PART I

THE ARISTOTELIAN TRADITION