Essence
Spanish and Latin American Metaphysics
Peter of Spain (13th c.)
Logic

From the 13th to the 17th century in Europe, logic, as one of seven liberal arts, formed part of the core of university education.

The standard textbook taught in the universities, which went through 166 editions, was the *Tractatus*, also known as the *Summulae Logicales*, of Peter of Spain.
Scholasticism

Peter of Spain became a leading emblem of Scholasticism, the method of dialectical reasoning that dominated medieval universities.
The Scholastic Method

Examine a *question* or a work by a significant author.

Survey various *approaches* to the issue.

Find points of *disagreement* among these sources.

Use *logic* and the *analysis of language* to resolve the dispute, ideally by reconciling the views and revealing a deeper agreement.
Tree of Porphyry

Supreme genus:

Differentiae:

Subordinate genera:

Differentiae:

Subordinate genera:

Differentiae:

Proximate genera:

Differentiae:

Species:

Individuals:

Substance

material

immaterial

Body

animate

inanimate

Living

sensitive

insensitive

Animal

rational

irrational

Human

etc.

Spirit

Mineral

Plant

Beast

Socrates

Plato

Aristotle
Language --> World

To understand the structure of the world in its broadest outlines, we need to understand the structure of language.

Structure of language --> Structure of World
Compositionality

To analyze the structure of language, we must distinguish

- *complex* expressions, which have other expressions as components, from

- *simple* expressions, which do not.

We break down complex expressions into their simple components.
Some simple terms, such as *not, if, of, such, as,* and the like, are *syncategorematic:* They organize language but themselves *do not refer* to anything in the world.

Others, including proper names and common nouns, are *categorematic;* they *refer* to substances or things of other categories.
Ontological Commitment

We can understand what there must be in the world by

analyzing categorematic terms and

seeing what they refer to.
Semantics --> Ontology

Peter’s central idea is that metaphysics rests on *semantics*, the theory of meaning.

To find out what there is in the world,

analyze language,

understand what it means, and

see what objects have to exist for what you say about the world to be true.
Peter’s Ontology

Peter’s own metaphysical stance is fairly neutral.

His theory of supposition holds that

proper names stand for objects and that

common nouns stand either for a kind of object or for the individual objects falling under them.

He commits himself, in other words, to what Aristotle would call primary and secondary substances: individual objects and kinds.
Categorematic Terms

Essence: Triangularity

Daniel

‘Triangle’

refers to, denotes

means, connotes

A triangle

Sunday, November 3, 19
Identity through Change
Contrary Qualities

- Substances admit contrary qualities
- How is that possible?
Contrary Qualities

- Substances admit contrary qualities
- Change:
  - $x$ can be $F$ at time $t$ but not $F$ at time $t'$
- How is that possible?
Descartes

Solid

Not Solid
Change

\( F \)  
Solid

\( \text{Not } F \)  
Not Solid
Change

• \( a \) is \( F \) at \( t_1 \)

• But nothing can be both \( F \) and not \( F \)

• So: The premises can’t be true together
Parmenides

Solid

Not Solid
Parmenides

- Principle: Nothing can have contrary qualities
- Change: $Fa \rightarrow \text{not } Fa$
- But a can’t be $F$ and not $F$
- So, change is unreal:
  - $Fa \rightarrow Fa$
Parmenides

WTF? Change is impossible!

Solid

Not Solid
Heraclitus

Solid

Not the same wax!

Not Solid
Heraclitus

• Principle: Nothing can have contrary qualities

• Change: $Fa \rightarrow$ not $Fa$

• But $a$ can’t be $F$ and not $F$

• So, it’s not the same object:

• $Fa \rightarrow$ not $Fb$
Heraclitus

Not the same wax!

Solid

Not Solid

Sunday, November 3, 19
Common Sense

• Principle: Nothing can have contrary qualities

• Change: $Fa \rightarrow \neg Fa$

• Not the same quality:

• $a$ is $F$-at-$t$ and not $F$-at-$t'$
Aristotle

- Principle: Substances can have contrary qualities
- Change: \( Fa \rightarrow \neg Fa \)
- \( F \) is accidental to \( a \)
- Why is it the same object? Same essence (E):
- \( Ea \) and \( Fa \rightarrow Ea \) and not \( Fa \)
Locke

• Principle: Substances can have contrary qualities

• Change: Fa —> not Fa

• Why is it the same object? Continuity of stages:

  • Ea and Fa —> Ea and not Fa —> not Fa and Ga —> Ga and Ha —> ....
Essences
Accidental Properties

• Accidental property: without it, the thing can remain the same

• Accidental properties are contingent
Essential Properties

• Essential property: without it, the thing wouldn’t be what it is

• Essential properties are necessary

• Thing has them by virtue of what it is
My Accidental Properties
My Essential Properties

“Nietzsche

“You are to become the person you are.”
Essential properties

• The essence of $x =$
  • what it is to be $x$
  • what $x$ is by virtue of itself
  • what $x$ is by its very nature
  • what is expressed by a definition of $x$ (a “formula for the nature of” $x$)
What is a substance?

- Matter
- Form
- Combination of matter and form
- Essence
- The river can remain the same even though the water constantly flows
Essences and causes

• St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274)

• Essences as causes

• Quiddity: “whatness”, “what it is”— definition in re

• Nature of x: what makes x what it is; that by virtue of which x is what it is
Four causes

- Formal: relies on essence or definition
- Material: matter
- Efficient: chain of events, production
- Final: goal, purpose, function
Four Causes

- Formal Cause
- Efficient Cause
- Material Cause
- Final Cause
Four Causes of a House

• Efficient Cause:
• Final Cause:
• Formal Cause:
• Material Cause:
Four Causes of a House
Aquinas on Essence

• The *essence* of $x$ = the properties necessary to $x$, without which $x$ would not be what it is

• The *quiddity* of $x$ = what corresponds to $x$’s definition in the world

• The *nature* of $x$ = what makes $x$ what it is
Aquinas on Essence

• The essence of wax = the properties necessary to wax, without which wax would not be wax

• The quiddity of wax = what corresponds to wax’s definition in the world

• The nature of wax = what makes wax what it is
Aquinas on Essence

• The essence of wax = ?? a combination of:

• The quiddity of wax = compound that is malleable near ambient temperatures

• The nature of wax = organic compound that consists of long alkyl chains ($C_nH_{2n+1}$ or $C_nH_{2n-1}$).