

Metaphysics, Existence, and Essence

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Avicenna on Common Nature

The first two passages below are translated from the Latin text in *Avicenna, Opera*, tr. Dominic Gundissalinus (Venice: Bonetus Locatellus for Octavianus Scotus, 1508). Unless there is a modern critical edition, this 1508 edition is the one usually cited. The last three passages are translated from the Latin text in *Avicenna Latinus, Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina*, ed. S. Van Riet, 2 vols (Louvain: E. Peeters; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977, 1980). For these last three passages, I have also given the folio reference to the 1508 edition.

Logica, III, folio 12ra

Animal is in itself a certain something, and it is the same whether it is sensible or is understood in the soul. But in itself it is neither universal nor is it singular. For if it were universal in itself, so that animality from the fact that it is animality would be universal, it would be necessary that no animal be singular. Rather, every animal would be universal. If, on the other hand, animal from the fact that it is animal were singular, it would be impossible for there to be more than one singular, namely, the very singular to which animality is due. And it would be impossible for another singular to be an animal.

Now animal in itself is a certain something, understood in the mind that it be animal. And according as it is understood to be animal, it is nothing but animal only. If, on the other hand, beyond this it is understood to be universal or singular, or anything else, then beyond this, namely, that which is animal, there is understood a certain something that happens to animality.

Metaphysica V, 1, ed. Van Riet, II,
p. 228, lines 31–6; 1508 edn, folio 86va

Horsehood, to be sure, has a definition that does not demand universality. Rather it is that to which universality happens. Hence horsehood itself is nothing but horsehood only. For in itself it is neither many nor one, neither is it existent in these sensibles nor in the soul, neither is it any of these things potentially or actually in such a way that this is contained under the definition of horsehood. Rather [in itself it consists] of what is horsehood only.

p. 231, lines 74–81; 1508 edn, folio 86vb

Hence, if someone should ask whether the humanity that is in Plato, insofar as it is humanity, is other than that which is in Socrates, and we say no, as we must, we will not have to agree with him when he says, “Therefore, this one and that one are the same in number”, because the negation was absolute and we understood in it that that humanity, insofar as it is humanity, is humanity only. But insofar as it is other than the humanity that is in Socrates, that is something extraneous. On the other hand, he did not ask about humanity except insofar as it is humanity.

p. 233, line 36–p. 234, line 44; 1508 edn, folio 87ra

Now animal can be considered by itself, although it is together with what is other than it. For its essence is together with what is other than itself. Therefore, its essence belongs to it by itself, but its being together with what is other than it is something that happens to it, or something that accompanies its nature, like *this* animality, or humanity. Therefore, this consideration, [“insofar as it is animal”,] precedes in being both the animal that is this individual because of its accidents, and also the universal that is in these sensibles and is intelligible, as the simple precedes the composite, and as a part the whole. For from this being there is neither genus nor species nor individual, neither one nor many. Rather from this being there is animal only, and man only.