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ARISTOTLE'S THEORY OF BEING

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Is *Ousia* Equivalent to Substance?

IT MUST BE APPARENT to any reader of the Greek text of Aristotle's writings that the terminology employed in the Latin tradition for the translation and discussion of Aristotle's metaphysics does not exactly correspond to Aristotle's Greek terminology. This is conspicuously so for the word which designates what may be called the central concept of Aristotle's metaphysics—viz., *ousia*. *Ousia* has been translated, or rather replaced, by *substantia* and its vulgar derivatives. The two words, *ousia* and *substantia*, differ in their etymological meaning and in their location and systematic connections within their respective languages.[1] This discrepancy in terminology has, I believe, been partly responsible for some inadequacies in interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine.

In the following pages, I wish to present an interpretation of Aristotle's theory of *ousia*, principally as it appears in Books *Z*, *H*, and *Θ* of the *Metaphysics*, which is based on the assumption that Aristotle's terms are to be taken literally—i.e., in their plain, etymological meanings. The terms principally involved are three, *οὐσία*, *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*, and *ἐνέργεια*, which will be assumed to have the following meanings:

1. *οὐσία* means Being, since it is derived from the present participle of the verb *εἶναι* ("to be"); just as *παρουσία*, from *παρεῖναι*, means being present. It may also, on occasion, be translated as "mode of being." "Substance," which means a standing under, or that which stands under, is misleading when it is used for *ousia*.[2]

2. *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*, which has been construed in different ways, to be discussed in a later chapter, will be taken to mean "what it was to

[1] The notion of the location of a word in its language is taken from an article by Fred Sommers, "The Ordinary Language Tree," *Mind* 68 (1959) 160–185.

[2] For an account of the history of the term *substantia* and a discussion of its unfitness to translate *ousia*, cf. Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics* (Toronto 1951) pp. 67–71, and notes, pp. 341–343. Father Owens adopts "Entity" as the most satisfactory rendition of *ousia*.

be," or "what it means to be." Similarly, *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι ἀνθρώπῳ* will mean "what it was for a man to be," and *τὸ εἶναι ἀνθρώπῳ* will mean "a man's being." "Essence," which is the traditional translation, does not convey the full meaning of the Greek phrase, and too many irrelevant connotations have accrued to it.

3. *ἐνέργεια*, in some connections, has traditionally been translated as "actuality," while in other places it is given its normal meaning of "activity." Thus, Aristotle's assertion that *ousia* is *energeia*[3] has been taken to mean that substance is actuality. We shall try to show that it means, "Being is activity."

On the basis of these meanings, the following positions will be defended:

1. The basic question of Aristotle's metaphysics—viz., "What is *ousia*?"—means not "What is substance?" but "What is Being?" The continuity of Aristotle's inquiry with the inquiries of Parmenides and Plato about being will thus become more evident.

2. Since "to be" means "to exist," *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* means "what it is for each thing to exist," and designates a mode of being or existing. Consequently, in identifying *ousia* (Being) with *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*,[4] Aristotle is asserting that the fundamental reality on which everything else depends is the existence of individuals, each existing according to the mode proper to its species. Moreover, if *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* is taken literally, a basis is provided for distinguishing the essence, conceived as the mode of being of each thing, from the properties and attributes of the thing.

3. From the notion of what it is to be, or to exist, where "to be" is taken as a real verb and not simply as a copula, it is natural to pass to the judgment that Being is activity, which is the meaning we proposed above for the statement that *ousia* is *energeia*. Interpreted thus, Aristotle's statement can be seen to be a continuation and a correction of the proposition advanced in Plato's *Sophist* that "to be" means to be able to act or be acted on. It must be noted, however, that the kind of activity with which Being is identified is not motion or change, as we shall see in a later chapter.

Before we proceed to the exposition and defense of the position just outlined, it will be well to prefix some remarks about certain more or less commonly accepted notions concerning Aristotle's doctrine.

[3] *Met.* Θ.8 (1050b 2–3).
[4] *Met.* Z.4.

It might be maintained, in opposition to what was said above, that, although "substance" is not an accurate translation of *ousia* from the purely linguistic point of view, it can nevertheless be justified on doctrinal grounds; i.e., it might be affirmed that the meaning which *ousia* has in Aristotle's system is adequately represented by "substance." Such a justification of "substance" is ruled out if the interpretation offered in the present essay is correct. It might be said, alternatively, that the word "substance" has been freed from its etymological limitations when it has been used to interpret Aristotle's theory of *ousia*. This proposition also does not seem to be completely true.

Of course, Aristotle does speak of *ousia* as that which is not predicated of any subject but of which everything else is predicated, or as that which is neither predicated of nor present in any subject—in short, as *τὸ ὑποκείμενον*, "subject" or "that which underlies."[5] There is not much difficulty in this notion as it occurs in the *Categories*, where Aristotle's concern is largely with words and where *ousia* is considered from the point of view of logic as the subject of a sentence. What is there asserted is that proper names and designations, such as "Socrates," "a certain man," "a certain horse," which denote concrete individuals, cannot be predicated of anything else; i.e., you cannot say of anything other than Socrates, this man, or this horse, that it is Socrates, this man, or this horse. The concrete individuals are, from this point of view, the primary *ousiai*. When the notion of ultimate subject or substratum is carried over into metaphysics, however, it creates a problem. If we strip the subject of all predicates or attributes in order to find that which is absolutely and solely the subject or substratum, to which all the attributes belong, we are reduced to an unknown and unknowable *x*.[6] This is the conception of substance which prevailed in modern philosophy after Locke defined it as a supposition of we know not what support of qualities or accidents,[7] and which succumbed to the attacks of phenomenalists and idealists.

[5] Zeller calls it a definition of substance (*Aristotle* [London 1897] I. 331). Ross calls it "the primary meaning of substance" (*Aristotle*, 3d ed. [London 1937] 166, and *Aristotle's Metaphysics* [Oxford 1924] I. xcii).

[6] Concerning this difficulty, see H. W. B. Joseph, *An Introduction to Logic*, 2d ed., rev. (Oxford 1916) 54; and W. D. Ross, *Aristotle*, 166.

[7] "So that if any one will examine himself concerning his notion of pure substance in general, he will find he has no other idea of it at all, but only a supposition of he knows not what support of such qualities, which are capable of producing simple ideas in us; which qualities are commonly called accidents" (Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. II, Chap. 23, Sect. 2).

This modern rejection of the concept of substance cannot be taken as a rejection of Aristotle's concept of *ousia*, for Aristotle refused to define *ousia* as a substratum for very much the same reason. In *Metaphysics Z*, Chapter 3, where, after listing four possible definitions of *ousia*, he proceeds to the discussion of one of the candidates, viz., substratum or subject (ὑποκείμενον), he declares that it cannot be regarded as a sufficient or clear definition of *ousia* to say that it is that which is not predicated of any subject, but of which everything else is predicated, for on this definition *ousia* would be simply matter. Moreover, since it would be what is left after all attributes have been taken away, it would be a sort of matter of which, in itself, nothing either affirmative or negative could be said. *Ousia*, he says, cannot be matter as thus conceived, for *ousia* is preëminently something separable and definite.

In spite of this apparent repudiation, however, Aristotle continued to regard it as a true statement that *ousia*, which we are taking to mean Being, is τὸ ὑποκείμενον—that which underlies everything else and has nothing else underlying it. Furthermore, he did not cease to regard matter—even the attenuated matter of the sort we have just described—as in some sense *ousia*, i.e., Being. We shall have to discuss both these statements later.

In the meantime, it may be remarked that to describe substance as a support of attributes, or as that which underlies everything else, is a mere tautology. This is not surprising if, as seems to be the case, the description came first and the word "substance" was adopted as a suitable name for the thing thus described.[8] On the other hand, the assertion that Being has nothing underlying it and itself underlies everything else, which is Aristotle's meaning if *ousia* means Being, is not a tautology but a significant statement.

The conception of substance as an unknown support of accidents has been more prominent in the history of modern philosophy than in Aristotelian interpretation. In the latter, the conception of substance as logical subject, identified as the concrete individual, has played a larger part, and the treatise on the *Categories* has been given more importance in discussions of Aristotle's metaphysics than it

[8] Boethius' logical commentaries, in which *substantia* stands for *ousia* in the sense of logical subject, were no doubt responsible for the prevalence of the term in the Western tradition. Cf. Owens, *The Doctrine of Being*, 68.

deserves.[9] Aristotle has been depicted as the philosopher of common sense, insisting on the reality of concrete things in opposition to the idealism of Plato. This may be granted, but the identification of *ousia* with the concrete individual is only the beginning of Aristotle's metaphysical inquiry, not the goal or outcome. Aristotle's inquiry, as the present essay will attempt to show, is a quest for Being, directed not only to the discovery of what exists, or what exists primarily, but also to the discovery of what it is to be or to exist.

We now pass on to a consideration of substance as essence. In Book *Z* of the *Metaphysics*, where Aristotle attempts to answer the question, What is *ousia*?, it is clear that the question can no longer be answered by saying that the concrete individual is *ousia*, for here Aristotle is asking what the *ousia* of each thing is. He answers that it is τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι. Furthermore, he indicates here, as elsewhere, that not only the concrete individual but the matter and form of which it is composed may also be called *ousia*. Now, it has evidently been felt, and justly, that "substance" is not suitable as a translation for *ousia* when it stands for the form, or the τί ἦν εἶναι; and so, although it is said that form also is substance, it is customary to use the word "essence" for *ousia* in this sense.

Essence is taken to mean what something is in itself, the characteristic or set of characteristics in virtue of which something is what it is—in short, what something is defined as. The difficulties involved in this conception, both in itself and in relation to Aristotle's doctrine, are notorious. It is hard to see how the essence is to be distinguished from the properties, which are always present when the essence is present; indeed, even accidents seem to be necessary for distinguishing individuals from each other, since the specific essence and the properties are common to all members of a species.[10] Aristotle is thought to have contributed nothing to the solution of this difficulty.[11] For

[9] A student who had just read the *Categories* for the first time, after having read the *Metaphysics*, told me delightedly that here was Aristotle's doctrine of substance in a nutshell. This seems to have been the attitude of some scholars. Of course, the *Categories* was first in the field in the early Middle Ages, and, as has already been pointed out, the term "substance" was probably adopted from Boethius' commentaries on logical works.

[10] Cf. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, I. xciv–xcv: "This exclusion of certain attributes from the essence of an *individual* is somewhat arbitrary. It is obvious that you would not be the same you that you are now if you ceased to be musical."

[11] Cf. Joseph, *An Introduction to Logic*, 56: ". . . it would seem to be his considered doctrine in the *Metaphysics* (however hard to reconcile with some of his other statements) that what makes Socrates Socrates is his form, or *what* he is, and not the matter in which this form is realized. This form is really his substance, or substantial being; and it is neither merely

modern writers, the word "essence," if it is retained at all in connection with definitions, means the arbitrary or conventional definition of a word, or those attributes of a thing which cater to our current interest in it.

What is most pertinent to note, for our present purpose, is that the concept of *ousia*, when it is interpreted in terms of substance and essence, has nothing to do with the question of what it means to be or to exist, which would seem to be peculiarly the subject of metaphysics or ontology, the science of being. *Ousia* as substance or the subject of predication, i.e., as the concrete individual, answers the question, What is? *Ousia* as essence answers the question, What is it? As essence, *ousia* seems to be simply the definition, and so the metaphysical quest for *ousia* turns into the logical quest for definitions.

Gilson has insisted more vigorously than anyone else that existence has no place in Aristotle's metaphysical system. On the basis of the traditional interpretation he is right. The following passage sums up his indictment:

> For, indeed, if the thing does not exist, there is nothing more to say; if, on the contrary, it exists, we should certainly say something about it, but solely about that which it is, not about its existence, which can now be taken for granted.
>
> This is why existence, a mere prerequisite to being, plays no part in its structure. The true Aristotelian name for being is substance, which is itself identical with what a being is. We are not here reconstructing the doctrine of Aristotle nor deducing from his principles implications of which he was not aware. His own words are perfectly clear: "And indeed the question which was raised of old and is raised now and always, and is always the subject of doubt, namely, what being is, is just the question: what is substance? For it is this that some assert to be one, others more than one, and that some assert to be limited in number, others unlimited. And so we also must consider chiefly and primarily and almost exclusively what that is which is in this sense." All we have now to do is to equate these terms: what primarily *is*, the *substance* of that which is, *what* the thing is. In short, the "whatness" of a thing is its very being[12].

To this it may be replied that in the most obvious sense "substance" is not the true Aristotelian name for being, since Aristotle wrote not English or Latin, but Greek, and the Greek word which he employed,

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the specific form of man, nor does it include all that can be predicated of him; but we are not told how to distinguish it from predicates in the other categories." For the difficulty of distinguishing essence from properties, cf. *ibid.* 91ff.

[12] Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto 1949) 46.

ousia, means literally not substance but Being. Hence, the passage which Gilson quotes would be more accurately translated thus: "the question . . . what being (τὸ ὄν) is, is just the question: what is Being (*ousia*)."[13] Moreover, the "whatness" of a thing may indeed be, for Aristotle, its very being; but also its very being may be, for him, its mode of existence. We shall attempt in a later chapter to show that this is the case. Of course, it will still be true that existence does not occupy the same place in the structure of Aristotle's metaphysics as in the structure of Gilson's neo-scholastic doctrine.

It would be surprising if Aristotle did not discuss existence, or what it means to be. He announces as the subject of his metaphysical inquiry τὸ ὂν ᾗ ὄν.[14] This, whether translated "being *qua* being," "that which is as that which is," or "the existent as existent," clearly leads one to expect some discussion of existence, just as, to use Aristotle's example, a discussion of "healthy" involves "health." Moreover, in the *Sophist*, Plato had raised the question what the verb "to be" means, and had suggested an answer to it. In view of the obvious connections between Aristotle's metaphysics and the *Sophist*, we should expect Aristotle to pay some attention to the question. That he does, and that he does it precisely in the doctrine of *ousia*, is one of the theses of the present essay.

It might be thought that, if existence were not treated in the doctrine of *ousia* and the categories, it would be treated under the other sense of being which Aristotle includes in the subject-matter of metaphysics, namely potential and actual being. But *energeia* also seems to have lost its active sense in translation and interpretation, so that it means simply the "actuality," the completed product or the essence of the completed product.[15] Hence, Aristotle's statement that *ousia* is *energeia* becomes "substance, or essence, is actuality." Essence, moreover, is conceived in static, structural terms. Essence, as Ross

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[13] This is confusing in English. In Greek it reads: τί τὸ ὄν, τοῦτό ἐστι τίς ἡ οὐσία (*Met. Z.*1 [1028b 4]). τὸ ὄν is ambiguous and may mean either "being" or "that which is." The passage will be discussed in a later chapter, where it will be maintained that *ousia* means Being itself, as opposed to all the beings, or things which are, in the other categories.

[14] *Met. Γ.*1 (1003a 21ff); *E.*1 (1025b 3ff).

[15] Even the scholastic word "act" has come thus to express a static concept. Cf. P. Coffey, *Ontology, or the Theory of Being* (New York 1938) 56: "The term 'act' has primarily the same meaning as 'action,' 'operation,' that process by which a change is wrought. But the Latin word *actus* (Gr. ἐνέργεια, ἐντελέχεια) means rather that which is achieved by the *actio*, that which is the correlative and complement of the passive potentiality, the actuality of this latter: that by which potential being is rendered formally actual, and, by way of consequence, this actual being itself."

says, is "the principle of structure of the concrete thing."[16] Yet, in the *Physics* and elsewhere, Aristotle identifies the *ousia* of a thing with its nature, which is a principle and cause of motion. It is doubtful that Aristotle was proposing to explain the motion or functioning of a thing in terms of an inert structure. Hence, after maintaining that *ousia* is the mode of being or existence of a thing, I shall attempt to show that Aristotle also says that it is a sort of activity, and that this is what he means when he says that *ousia* is *energeia*. There seems to be a better chance of making *ousia* a cause of motion and functioning if it is itself an activity.[17]

The interpretation offered in the following pages is meant to be applied, in its entirety, only to Books *Z*, *H*, and *Θ* of the *Metaphysics*, without any attempt to determine how far it is applicable to Aristotle's other writings. Passages from other works are quoted only in illustration or explanation. I have wished thereby to avoid the problems of chronology and the development of Aristotle's thought which have occupied so much space in the literature concerning Aristotle since the nineteenth century and especially since Jaeger's epoch-making studies.

[16] Ross, *Aristotle*, 172.

[17] Interpretations of Aristotle's doctrine of *ousia* in terms of motion, function, or process have been given by Walter Bröcker, *Aristoteles* (Frankfurt am Main 1935); Kurt Riezler, *Physics and Reality; Lectures of Aristotle on Modern Physics at an International Congress of Science, 679 Olymp. Cambridge, 1940* A.D. (New Haven 1940); and John Herman Randall, Jr., *Nature and Historical Experience* (New York 1958), Chap. 6, and *Aristotle* (New York 1960).

2

Ousia and the Various Senses of Being

THE BEGINNING of Book *Z* of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* may be translated tentatively as follows, so as to provide a basis for reference in the following discussion:

> The word "being" is used in many ways in discourse, as we indicated before in our division of its meanings in the book on the diverse meanings of words; for sometimes it signifies what something is and a "this," sometimes that something is a quality or a quantity or one of the other things thus predicated. But although "being" is used thus variously, it is evident that among these the primary sort of being is what something is, which signifies *ousia*. For when we ask "Of what quality is this?" we say "good" or "bad," but not "three cubits long" or "a man;" but when we ask "What is it?" we say not "white" or "hot" or "three cubits long," but "a man" or "a god." The other things are called beings (ὄντα) because they are quantities, qualities, affections, etc., of that which is primarily. Hence one might question whether to walk, to be healthy, or to be seated designates a being (ὄν), and likewise for all other such cases; for none of them is of such a nature as to exist by itself or to be separable from *ousia*, but rather, if anything, that which is walking or seated or healthy is a being (ὄν). These appear, more than the others, to be beings (ὄντα), because there is something definite underlying them, viz., an *ousia* and an individual, which is implied in such a designation; for "that which is good" or "that which is seated" has meaning only on this assumption. It is clear, then, that each of these is [or exists] only through *ousia*. So that that which is primarily, and is not that which is something but that which is simply [or absolutely], would be *ousia*. [1028a 10–31]

Aristotle thus introduces Book *Z*, which is devoted largely to the discovery of the identity of *ousia*, with the statement that "'being' is said in many ways"(τὸ ὂν λέγεται πολλαχῶς)—i.e., the word "being" has various uses in discourse, or various meanings. This means, of course, that not merely "being" (ὄν), whether taken as participle or noun, but the verb "to be" (εἶναι) has various uses. The phrase can hardly mean anything else; but, if proof were needed, one might cite

other passages in which similar statements are made concerning other forms of the verb—e.g., *ὁσαχῶς γὰρ λέγεται, τοσαυταχῶς τὸ εἶναι σημαίνει* ("in as many ways as they [*sc.*, the figures of predication] occur, in so many ways does 'to be' signify")[1]; and *ὥσπερ γὰρ καὶ τὸ ἔστιν ὑπάρχει πᾶσιν, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὁμοίως ἀλλὰ τῷ μὲν πρώτως τοῖς δ'ἐπομένως, οὕτω καὶ τὸ τί ἐστιν ἁπλῶς μὲν τῇ οὐσίᾳ πῶς δὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις* ("as 'is' belongs to all the categories, but not to all in the same manner, but to one primarily and to the others secondarily, so 'what is it' belongs primarily to *ousia* and only in a way to the others").[2]

The same statement, that "being" has many senses, is used in Book *Γ*, Chapter 2, of the *Metaphysics*, just as in Book *Z*, to lead up to the assertion that the primary business of metaphysics is with *ousia*. Indeed, it pervades the whole of Aristotle's metaphysical theory and may be said to provide one of its most distinctive characteristics.[3]

In *Metaphysics Δ.7*, to which the second clause of Book *Z* refers, being, or that which is (*τὸ ὄν*), is said to include, among its various meanings, accidental being, being taken by itself, being as truth, and potential and actual being; and being taken by itself (*τὸ ὂν καθ' αὑτό*) is said to have various meanings according to the various categories, or figures of predication.[4] It is the meaning of "being" according to the categories with which Aristotle is concerned in Book *Z*, for he continues: "'being' sometimes signifies what something is and a this, sometimes that something is a quality or a quantity or one of the other things thus predicated."[5]

The questions concerning the origin and primary meaning of the doctrine of the categories need not be answered for our present purpose.[6] It has been both asserted and denied that the categories were originally intended as a classification of the various meanings of "being." Those who have denied it have maintained that the categories

[1] *Met. Δ.7* (1017a 23–24).

[2] *Met. Z.4* (1030a 21–23).

[3] Concerning its importance in Aristotle's thought, cf. Heinrich Maier's statement: "Und frühzeitig schon ist er sich darüber klar geworden, dass die Irrgänge der bisherigen Philosophie, insbesondere der skeptischen Erkenntnistheorie, in der Verkennung der dem Seinsbegriff eigenen Vieldeutigkeit, die sich weiterhin auch dem Begriff des 'Einsseins' mitteilt, ihren letzten Grund haben" (*Die Syllogistik des Aristoteles*, II.2 [Tübingen 1900] 279). Cf. also Maier's footnote, on the same page.

[4] A very similar classification of the meanings of "being" is given in *Met. E.2*.

[5] *σημαίνει γὰρ τὸ μὲν τί ἐστι καὶ τόδε τι, τὸ δὲ ὅτι ποιόν ἢ ποσόν ἢ τῶν ἄλλων ἕκαστον τῶν οὕτω κατηγορουμένων* (1028a 11–13). The construction of the sentence and consequently the exact meaning are doubtful; we shall have to consider it again presently.

[6] For a review of the various opinions of scholars and references to the literature, cf. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, I. lxxxii–xc.

are the widest classes either of beings (realities) or of predicates, and they have found support in the various designations which Aristotle employs for the categories: *γένη τῶν ὄντων* (genera of beings, or of the things that there are), *γένη τῶν κατηγοριῶν* (genera of predicates, or of predications), *σχήματα τῆς κατηγορίας* or *τῶν κατηγοριῶν* (figures of predication).[7] On neither of these latter two interpretations do the categories seem obviously to entail a diversity of meanings for "being" or the verb "to be": for if they are classes of beings, or of all the things there are, then being might be predicated univocally of all of them; and if, on the other hand, they are classes of predicates, it might not be thought necessary to suppose that the copulative verb, "is," has a different meaning for each category. We may, therefore, pass over these aspects of the categories, since it is the various meanings of "being" with which we shall be concerned.

Aristotle recognizes these various meanings of "to be" both in its copulative usage, as in "Socrates is white," and in its absolute or existential usage, as in "Socrates is (exists)," "White is (exists)."[8] In *Metaphysics Δ.7*, it is the copulative usage which seems to be meant:

> "To be," taken by itself, has as many uses in discourse as are signified by the figures of predication; for in as many ways as the latter occur, in so many ways does "to be" signify. Accordingly, since some predicates signify what a thing is, while others signify quality, quantity, relation, doing or undergoing, where, or when, "to be" has a meaning corresponding to each of these; for there is no difference between "the man is flourishing" and "the man flourishes," or "the man is walking" or "cutting" and "the man walks" or "cuts," and so on. [1017a 22–30]

At the beginning of this passage, *καθ' αὑτὰ εἶναι* must be the plural of the infinitive and subject of the verb *λέγεται*, so that we might also translate thus: "Beings by themselves mean as many things as are signified by the figures of predication."[9]

[7] For the occurrences of these various designations cf. Bonitz's *Index* under the word *κατηγορία*, especially 378a 32–38.

[8] Maier is right in maintaining this against Apelt's interpretation, which limits the categorial differentiations of being to the copula. Cf. Maier, *Syllogistik*, II.2, 307ff, note 2; and 312ff. We need not decide whether Maier was also right in thinking that the categories were applied to existential being before they were applied to copulative being, as he says in his exposition (312ff) beginning: "Das accidentielle Sein der nicht-substantiellen Bestimmungen nun bildet die Brücke vom existentialen Sein zum kopulativen."

[9] If the clause beginning with *ὅσαπερ* is taken as the subject of *λέγεται*, the sentence would mean that all the things designated by the categories are *per se*, which would contradict Aristotle's assertion that only *ousiai* are *per se* (*Anal. Post.* I.4 [73b 5–10]); or that any term which signifies a figure of predication is *per se*, which is meaningless.

I think it is possible, although not necessary, that τὰ κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς εἶναι λεγόμενα, a few lines before the passage we have translated (1017a 19–20), means similarly, "beings which are expressed in an accidental, or adjectival, predication." At any rate, it is clear that the accidental beings of which Aristotle speaks in this chapter are not the predicates which are accidental attributes of their subjects, but the whole complex of subject, being, and attribute. For example, he does not mean primarily that the adjective "musical" designates an accidental being (ὂν κατὰ συμβεβηκός) because it occurs only as an accidental predicate of some subject, but that a man's being musical is a case of accidental being because, in this complex whole, one part ("musical") belongs accidentally, or adjectivally, to the other ("man").[10]

In contrast with such cases, "being," or "to be," taken by itself, seems to mean the whole predicate (i.e., the copulative verb and the predicate adjective or noun) taken by itself in isolation from the propositions into which it may enter—e.g., "is musical" as opposed to "The man is musical," or "being musical" as opposed to "a man's being musical."[11] The point of the examples which Aristotle gives—"is flourishing," "is walking," and "is cutting" as equivalent, respectively, to "flourishes," "walks," and "cuts"—is not that all verbs can be reduced to a standard form with "is"[12]; it is rather the other way

[10] Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *In Metaphysica*, Lib. V, Lect. vii (ed. Fretté, 538): "Sed ens secundum accidens prout hic sumitur, oportet accipi per comparationem accidentis ad substantiam. Quae quidem comparatio significatur hoc verbo, Est, cum dicitur, homo est albus. Unde hoc totum, homo est albus, est ens per accidens."

[11] Ross, in his edition of the *Metaphysics* (I. 306–308), supposes that the "beings" which are contrasted in this chapter of Book *Δ* are, on the one hand, the being implied in a proposition which asserts an accidental connection between subject and attribute, and, on the other hand, the "essential being" exhibited in propositions where there is a necessary connection between subject and predicate; and he further limits essential being to those cases where the predicate is the genus of the subject. Since the genera can all be ultimately reduced to the categories, which are the highest genera, essential being has ten ultimate meanings answering to the ten ultimate kinds of things that are. St. Thomas' interpretation agrees, at least in part, with Ross's: "Unde patet quod divisio entis secundum se et secundum accidens, attenditur secundum quod aliquid praedicatur de aliquo per se vel per accidens" (*In Metaphysica*, ed. Fretté, Lib. V, Lect. vii, 538). This interpretation, although possible, seems to me less likely than the one proposed above because, as Ross admits, Aristotle's examples ("The man is walking," etc.) are against it, being examples of accidental predication. In any case, the main point to be made, viz., that the copulative "is" has different senses corresponding to the categories, remains valid even if we accept Ross's interpretation, in which, indeed, this point is explicitly made (*loc. cit.*).

[12] This is the meaning which Kurt von Fritz gives to the passage. He says: "Aristoteles löst daher die verbale Aussage: 'Sokrates schneidet' auf in 'Sokrates ist schneidend,' um auch hier die Kopula zu bekommen" ("Der Ursprung der aristotelischen Kategorienlehre," *Archiv für Gesch. der Philos.* 40 [1931] 452). The translations, "is flourishing," "is walking," "is cutting," while literal, are misleading. The English forms are most naturally taken as belonging to the present progressive tense. Greek verbs do not have the progressive form, and Aristotle's phrases are artificial constructions, in which "is" is grammatically the copula and the participles are predicate adjectives. In effect, however, if the interpretation given here is correct, Aristotle proposes to understand these forms as if they were equivalent to the progressive forms employed in English.

around, that "is" with the participle is equivalent to a simple verb. The inference is that the verb "to be" forms one notion with the participle—and presumably with other predicate words—with which it is combined, and must consequently have a different significance in each case. It seems probable, however, that "beings by themselves" means not the verb "to be," or "being," in its various meanings, but the beings which are expressed by predicative phrases—being a man, being musical, etc.[13]

It is important to note that Aristotle clearly implies in this passage that "to be" has a different meaning not only for each of the categories, but for each of the terms with which it is used in predication. From this point of view the categories, or figures of predication, would be the highest genera, having no common genus above them, of all the species of predication. Similarly, in *Metaphysics H.2*, "is" is said to have as many meanings as the differentiae by which things are defined, so the being (εἶναι) of a threshold is its lying in a certain position, the being of ice is its being solidified, etc. We shall have occasion, in a later chapter, to notice that a corresponding assertion can be made with regard to τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι.

The classification of the meanings of "being," or "to be," according to the categories, when "to be" is used absolutely[14] (i.e., without a further predicate), appears in Chapter 1 of Book *Z*, and so we return to the examination of that chapter.

The first sentence lends itself to two interpretations.[15] It may mean that, when the verb "to be" is used in predication, it is sometimes used to say what the subject *is* (as in "Socrates *is* a man"), sometimes to indicate that he has a certain quality (as in "Socrates is musical"), or is of a certain size (as in "Socrates is so many inches tall"), etc., depending on the category to which the predicate belongs. If we

[13] It is interesting to note that this accords with Zeller's contention that in *De Interpretatione* Aristotle "was not yet able to distinguish the Copula expressly from the Predicate" (*Aristotle I. 231*), that "Aristotle nowhere says that every proposition . . . consists of three parts" (*ibid.* 231), and that ῥῆμα "includes both copula and predicate" (*ibid.* 229).

[14] The verb εἶναι does service in Greek, as *esse* does in Latin, for both "to be" and "to exist," and so I have translated it by "to exist" where this seems permissible and advisable.

[15] I have retained ὅτι before ποιὸν, although Ross, following Codex A^b, omits it.

interpret the sentence thus, taking ποιὸν and ποσὸν as adjectives, then it concerns the meanings of the copulative "to be," like the passage from Book Δ already quoted, and is illustrated a few lines down by the sentence, "For when we ask 'Of what quality is this?' we say 'good' or 'bad,'" etc. On the other hand, if ποιὸν and ποσὸν are taken as nouns, the meaning is that when you say of anything that it is, or is a being, or is existent—i.e., when you call anything a being,—you mean sometimes that it is what something is or is a concrete individual, sometimes that it is a quality, sometimes that it is a quantity, etc., so that "being" used absolutely means variously "being this," "being a quality," "being a quantity," etc., according to the subject of which it is asserted; e.g., "White is" or "White exists" means "White is a quality of something, or of some things." This interpretation is more in accord with the rest of the chapter, as we shall see.[16]

The primary sort of being, Aristotle continues, is that which answers the question "What is it?" This designates an *ousia*, for when we ask "What is it?" we answer "a man" or "a god," not "white" or "hot" or "three cubits long." All the other things are called beings (ὄντα), or are said to be, or to exist, only because they are quantitative or qualitative determinations, or determinations of some other sort, of the primary kind of being, *ousia*. One might even question, he says, whether to walk, to be healthy, and to be seated are beings or existents (ὄντα) or not, for none of them can be or exist by itself, apart from *ousia*. That which is walking, or seated, or healthy, is more properly called a being (ὄν), because such a designation includes an *ousia*, i.e., a concrete individual, as a subject underlying the attribute. Clearly, then, entities in the other categories have being or existence only through *ousia*. "Hence," Aristotle concludes, "that which is [or exists] first, and which may be described not as 'that which is something' (τὶ ὄν) but as 'that which simply is [or exists],' would be *ousia*."[17]

[16] On this interpretation, moreover, the sentence constitutes a denial of the position suggested in the *Physics* (I.3 [186a 32–33]) as an interpretation of Parmenides, viz., that being has only one meaning, whatever it may be predicated of. We shall have to discuss this passage presently. Aristotle does not make a radical distinction between "is" used copulatively and "is" used absolutely; in fact, they are mingled together both in this chapter (*Z*.1) and in the chapter already cited (Δ.7). Consequently, he could easily infer that if the being asserted by "is a man" differs from the being asserted by "is white," then there must be a similar difference in "A man is" and "White is." Maier, as we have observed in a previous footnote, supposes that Aristotle, in his doctrine of the categories, proceeded from existential to copulative being. Ross asserts that the existential "is" may be logically distinguishable from the copulative "is," but that metaphysically it is not (commentary on *Met.* Δ.7 [1017a 22–30] in *Metaphysics* I. 308).

Here we have the first characterization of *ousia* which we must take into account, and, moreover, the first justification for the name, *ousia*, which we may henceforth consent to translate as "Being,"[18] in accordance with its etymological meaning. Only an *ousia*, a Being, may properly be said simply to be, or to exist. If you say of an entity in one of the other categories that it is, or exists, you really mean that it is something, namely, a quality or a quantity or some other determination or affection of a Being.[19] Hence, such an entity cannot itself properly be called a Being (or a Be-ing) because it has no separate being or existence of its own. It is, or exists, only because something else—namely, the subject in which it inheres, or of which it is an attribute—*is* it. "White exists" really means "Something is white." In such a case, it is almost as if "is" were a transitive verb, indicating that the subject confers being upon the attribute.

We may, perhaps, be permitted to draw an analogy between Aristotle's doctrine and Berkeley's. If, in Berkeley's system, you take perceiving and thinking as equivalent to being or existing, then only perceiving and thinking minds or spirits could properly be said to be or to exist, and hence only they could strictly be called Beings. The ideas, on the other hand, whose being consists in their being perceived, would correspond to the attributes or accidents of Aristotle's system, which owe their being to the subject to which they belong.

[17] ὥστε τὸ πρώτως ὂν καὶ οὐ τὶ ὂν ἀλλ' ὂν ἁπλῶς ἡ οὐσία ἂν εἴη (1028a 30–31).

[18] I have spelled "Being" with a capital "B" when it stands for *ousia*, to distinguish it from "being" standing for ὄν, the participle. Such typographical devices are distasteful, especially in writing about Greek philosophy, which was so largely an affair of the spoken word; but I have not been able to discover a satisfactory alternative. "Existence" is not ordinarily used as a concrete noun in English, and it has the further disadvantage of failing to preserve the connection with the verb "to be" that *ousia* has with εἶναι.

[19] Ross, both in his Oxford translation and in his edition of the *Metaphysics*, supposes τὶ ὄν to mean that which *is* "in a qualified sense," as opposed to that which is "without qualification"; but the contrast which Aristotle makes elsewhere between being simply (or absolutely) and being something (εἶναι ἁπλῶς and εἶναί τι—e.g. *Soph. Elench.* 5 [166b, 37ff]) and between absolute coming to be and coming to be something (ἁπλῶς γίγνεσθαι, τόδε τι γίγνεσθαι, *Physics* I.7 [190a 32]) favor a similar interpretation here. We have already proposed a similar interpretation for the first sentence of the chapter. Also in its favor, I think, is *Met. Z*.4 (1030a 24–27), where the being of a quality is compared to the being of not-being, which cannot be said to be simply but only to be not-being. I do not believe, however, that the acceptance of Ross's interpretation of τὶ ὄν would require any other change in what is said above. Maier takes τὶ ὄν to mean "ein etwas (eine Bestimmung eines anderen) Seiendes" (*Syllogistik* II. ii. 312), as opposed to "das einfach Seiende." This is the position which we have adopted above. On the other hand, he interprets the first sentence in the chapter as concerned with the copulative "is" (*ibid.* 314, note, and 302, note).

Before proceeding further with the examination of Book *Z*, we shall make another digression for the purpose of showing the connection of Aristotle's doctrine of the many meanings of "being" and also his doctrine of *ousia* with the theories of Parmenides and Plato concerning being. Our starting point will be a passage in which Aristotle states explicitly that the former doctrine was directed against Parmenides.

"Some people," he says, "think that 'being' and 'one' each have always the same meaning; others resolve Zeno's and Parmenides' argument by asserting that both 'one' and 'being' have many meanings."[20] It is evident from this passage that Aristotle did not regard himself as the discoverer of the non-univocity of "being," although the explicit statement that "being" has a variety of uses or meanings seems to be due to him. We may conjecture, from other passages, that those whom Aristotle regarded as having assigned more than one meaning to "being" were the atomists and the Platonists, on the ground that they maintained, in opposition to Parmenides, that non-being *is*.

Of Leucippus and Democritus he says (*Met. A*.4 [985b 4ff]) that they regarded the "full" as being (ὄν) and the "void" as non-being (μὴ ὄν)—"wherefore," he adds, "they say that being no more is than non-being." The conclusion, which Aristotle does not draw, but which evidently follows, is that, since non-being is, it must be being; and consequently "is" and "being" must mean different things, because they are applicable both to being and non-being. In another place (*De Gen. et Corrupt.* I.8 [324b 35–325a 32]) he makes it appear that Leucippus adopted the notion of the void as non-being, and asserted that the void is, in opposition to the Parmenidean doctrine that all is one.

With regard to Plato and his followers, the following passage may be quoted:

> For they thought that all things that are would be one (viz. Being itself), if one did not join issue with and refute the saying of Parmenides:
>
> 'For never will this be proved, that things that are not are.'
>
> They thought it necessary to prove that that which is not is; for only thus—of that which *is and something else*—could the things that are be composed, if they are many. [*Met. N*.2 (1089a 2ff), translated by Ross.]

[20] *Soph. Elench.* 33 (182b 25–27): τοῖς μὲν γὰρ δοκεῖ ταὐτὸν σημαίνειν τὸ ὂν καὶ τὸ ἕν· οἱ δὲ τὸν Ζήνωνος λόγον καὶ Παρμενίδου λύουσι διὰ τὸ πολλαχῶς φάναι τὸ ἓν λέγεσθαι καὶ τὸ ὄν.

The reference is obviously to the doctrine maintained in Plato's *Sophist*, especially if the rest of the passage be compared; and there is a similar reference to Plato at the conclusion of the discussion of the Parmenidean doctrine in the *Physics* (I.3 [187a 1ff]). The doctrine of the *Sophist* might easily suggest the view that "being" has various meanings, for the being which is abstract being, or Being itself, is not the same as the being of the other concepts—motion, rest, the same, and the other,—which are, in a sense, not being, because they are not identical with Being itself, but, on the other hand, are because they participate in Being. In one place, indeed, Plato almost says explicitly that "being" has different meanings: "It is necessary for us . . . to maintain that not being, *in some respect, is*, and, on the other hand, that being, *in a way, is not*."[21]

The connection not only of the doctrine of the many senses of "being" but also of the doctrine of *ousia* with Parmenides' theory as well as Plato's appears most clearly, I think, in *Physics* I.3. After having, in the preceding chapter (I.2), objected against Parmenides and Melissus that "being" has more than one meaning, Aristotle now attempts to show that even if it be assumed that "being" means only one thing it still does not follow that all is one. For, he says, if we assumed that there are only white things ("white" having one meaning), the white things might nonetheless be many in number and not only one. Furthermore, even though there would, on this assumption, be nothing apart from the white, the being of the white would be other than the being of the subject to which the white belongs; so that the white would not even be one in concept, since it would include both subject and attribute.[22] The purpose of the analogy is to show that, if "being" (ὄν) be taken as an adjective, analogous to "white," it would have to be predicated of a subject, and τὸ ὄν would have to be taken concretely, as "that which is," rather than in its abstract meaning, as simply "being." Thus the door would be opened to multiplicity. For "being" might be predicated of many subjects, thus destroying numerical unity; and also the subject would have a being of its own, different from the being

[21] *Sophist* 241d: ἀναγκαῖον ἡμῖν . . . βιάζεσθαι τό τε μὴ ὂν ὡς ἔστι κατά τι καὶ τὸ ὂν αὖ πάλιν ὡς οὐκ ἔστι πῃ.

[22] ἄλλο γὰρ ἔσται τὸ εἶναι λευκῷ καὶ τὸ δεδεγμένῳ and τῷ εἶναι ἕτερον τὸ λευκὸν καὶ ᾧ ὑπάρχει (186a 28–29, 31). Of course, τὸ λευκόν, like other Greek adjectives, can have either the abstract meaning of "whiteness" or the concrete meaning of "that which is white." Similarly, τὸ ὄν can mean "being" or "that which is."

which is predicated of the subject, so that there would also be a conceptual difference in being.

> It is necessary, then [Aristotle continues], to assume not only that "being" means one thing, whatever it may be predicated of, but that it means "what being is" [*ὅπερ ὄν*] and "what one is." "What being is" will, of course, not be an attribute of anything else; for an attribute is predicated of some subject, so that that to which being is ascribed as an attribute will not be, for it will be other than being; consequently it will be a non-being. For it will not be possible for it to be a being, unless "being" means various things, so that both the subject and the predicate *are* something. [*Physics* I.3 (186a 32–b3)][23]

Some remarks must be made on the construction and meaning of *ὅπερ ὄν* and *ὅπερ ἕν*. Ross (in his edition of the *Physics*, analysis and commentary on the passage) translates *ὅπερ ὄν* as "What is just being" or "What is just existent," and *ὅπερ ἕν* as "What is just one." Hardie and Gaye (Oxford translation) render the phrases similarly: "What just is" and "What is just one." The first objection to these translations is that, in the Greek, *περ* ("just") is attached to the relative pronoun (*ὅπερ*, "just what"), not to *ὄν* (being) and *ἕν* (one). The principal question, however, is whether the relative *ὅπερ* is subject or predicate—i.e., whether the phrase means "what is being" or "what being is."

This use of *ὅπερ* is to be explained, I think, in accordance with the distinction made in the *Categories* between being predicated of a subject and being present in a subject. It is said there (3 [1b 10ff] and 5 [2a 19ff]) that when one thing is predicated of another thing as of a subject, whatever can be said of the predicate can also be said of the subject. E.g., man is predicated of an individual man and animal is predicated of man; therefore animal can be predicated of the individual man. On the other hand, in the case of something present in a subject, e.g., white, although it is sometimes possible to predicate the

[23] I have taken the liberty of transposing the clause *οὐ δὴ ἔσται ἄλλῳ ὑπάρχον τὸ ὅπερ ὄν* (186b 1–2) to a position before *τὸ γὰρ συμβεβηκός* (a 34). As the passage stands, *γάρ* ("for," a 34) is not easily interpreted except by assuming an ellipsis. In fact, Cornford inserts "'Being' will then no longer be regarded as an attribute" and the Oxford translators insert "It must be so" before "for." In the second place, *οὖν* or *ἄρα* or *ὥστε* ("therefore" or "so that") would be more natural than *δή* ("of course," "now") in b 1, as the text stands; but with the proposed rearrangement *δή* makes sense. In the third place, the subject of *ἔσται* ("will be," b 2), which we should normally expect to be the same as the subject of the preceding sentence, is not so in the present arrangement of the text, but must be got somewhat awkwardly from the dative *ἄλλῳ* ("anything else") of the preceding sentence. With the proposed transposition there is no change of subject.

name, it is not possible to predicate the definition (or, it might be added, the genus). A body, for example, may be said to be white; but the definition of white cannot be predicated of a body, for a body is not a color. Now this assertion about "white" is the same one which Aristotle makes elsewhere with the use of *ὅπερ*: "For white is an accident of man, because a man is white but not what white is" (*οὐχ ὅπερ λευκόν*).[24]

The distinction we have noted in the *Categories* is equivalent to the distinction between predication of a noun and predication of an adjective. In the passage in the *Physics* Aristotle has already shown that if "being" is taken as an adjective, like "white," Parmenides' thesis that being is one must be rejected. He now proceeds to the supposition that "being" means "what being is," i.e., that "being" is a noun, and that when you say "*x* is" or "*x* exists" you must mean that *x* is what being is—i.e., that *x is* being, or *x* is existence, not that *x* has being, or is existent. Being, then, or existence, cannot be an attribute or accident of anything else, for anything which you might suppose to be the subject of which being is an attribute would not exist. It would be other than being, for no subject is what its attribute is; e.g., a white man is not whiteness or color. Consequently, being, which we have taken to mean "what being is," cannot be an attribute of anything else unless we give up the supposition that "being" has only one meaning.

On the other hand, Aristotle continues (186b 4ff), neither will it be possible for anything else to be an attribute of being. For suppose white to be such an attribute; suppose, that is, that being, or that which is what being is (*τὸ ὅπερ ὄν*), is white. Now, obviously, white cannot itself be being, for being is the subject of which it is predicated, and the attribute cannot be identical with its subject. But neither can white have being as an attribute; for, as we have seen, being cannot be an attribute of anything else. Therefore, white is not being—not merely not this or that, but absolute non-being. It follows that being, or "that which is what being is," will not be; for it was assumed that it is true to say that being is white, and white has turned out to be non-being, so that "Being is white" is equivalent to "Being

[24] *Met.Δ*.4 (1007a 32–33): *τὸ γὰρ λευκὸν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ συμβέβηκεν, ὅτι ἔστι μὲν λευκὸς ἀλλ' οὐχ ὅπερ λευκόν*. Cf. *Anal. Post.* I.22 (83a 28–30): *οὐ γάρ ἐστιν ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὔτε ὅπερ λευκὸν οὔτε ὅπερ λευκόν τι, ἀλλὰ ζῷον ἴσως· ὅπερ γὰρ ζῷόν ἐστιν ὁ ἄνθρωπος*. Cf. also *Anal. Post.* I.4 (73b 7–8): *ἡ δ' οὐσία καὶ ὅσα τόδε τι σημαίνει, οὐχ ἕτερόν τι ὄντα ἐστὶν ὅπερ ἐστίν*. For further examples see Bonitz's *Index*, 53b 36ff, 59ff.

is non-being." This argument seems unnecessarily involved; for it would seem to be obvious that, if being means only being itself, or existence itself, it could have no attributes, since any attribute proposed could neither be being nor have being. Whatever may be the merits of the argument, however, its purpose is clear—namely, to show that being, as Parmenides must have conceived it, could have nothing predicated of it as an attribute or accident.

This conclusion about being would be contradicted by Aristotle's assertion that "being" has more than one meaning, so that attributes, although they could not be being itself, or substantive being, could nevertheless be in the way appropriate to them. With regard to the prior judgment, that being as understood by Parmenides could not be an attribute of anything else, it may be noted, in anticipation of what follows, that in this respect the Parmenidean being would resemble Aristotle's *ousia*, which is repeatedly described as that which is never predicated of anything else as of a subject.

The rest of the chapter (186b 14ff) is obscure, but I believe its meaning can be discovered sufficiently well for our purpose. It is evidently Aristotle's intention to show that even if "being" is limited to the sense of "that which is what being is" (τὸ ὅπερ ὄν)—even if, that is, "being" must always be taken as a noun and never as an adjective, so that "*x* is" or "*x* exists" means always "*x* is being" or "*x* is existence" and never "*x* has being" or "*x* has existence,"—yet being, even in this limited sense, admits of diversity. This, he says, is evident from a consideration of definitions. For suppose that man is a being; then animal and two-footed, if these define man, must also be beings. Animal and two-footed cannot be predicated of man merely as accidents or attributes, for they are contained in the definition of man, so that it is impossible to be a man without being animal and two-footed. Neither can animal and two-footed be predicated of anything else as accidents or attributes; for, if they could, so could man, since the concept of man is made up of the concepts of animal and two-footed. But man *is* a being, i.e., man is what some being is, and consequently cannot be an accident or attribute of anything else; for, as we have agreed, that which is what being is cannot be an accident or an attribute. Since, then, "man" describes some being as it is in itself, so must "animal" and "two-footed," and consequently animal and two-footed, as well as man, must be what some being is. This, I think, is the meaning of the argument in this passage.

It can hardly be doubted that Aristotle has here been using τὸ ὅπερ ὄν ("that which is what being is") as equivalent to *ousia*.[25] Now, since he has already put τὸ ὅπερ ὄν in the place of Parmenides' concept of "being," it may be inferred that he also regarded *ousia* as replacing that concept.

At the end of the chapter (187a 1ff), after mentioning those who attempted to escape the conclusion that all is one, if being means one thing, by asserting that not-being is, Aristotle says: "To say that, if there is nothing else besides being itself, all things will be one, is absurd. For who understands being itself to be anything but τὸ ὅπερ ὄν τι (something which is what being is)?" The reference is obviously to Plato. Here τὸ ὅπερ ὄν is taken as a substitute for "Being itself," which was Plato's substitute for Parmenides' "being." Hence, I believe, we are justified in concluding that Aristotle regarded *ousia*, which is equivalent to τὸ ὅπερ ὄν, as replacing not only Parmenides' "being," but also Plato's "Being itself."

From this we may further conclude that *ousia* retains something of the character which being had for Parmenides and Plato, so that, for Aristotle, *ousia* represents Being itself. It will be important to remember this when we come to consider Aristotle's assertion that *ousia* is τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, i.e., that the fundamental meaning of "Being" is "what it is to be, or to exist."

The examination of the first chapter of Book *Z* of the *Metaphysics*, from which we have so long digressed, may now be concluded. As we have seen, Aristotle asserts that "being," or "to be," has a different meaning for each of the categories. Of these, only the being of the first category, *ousia*, is a case of being simply or absolutely, while "to be" in all the other categories means to be something, i.e., to be an attribute or accident of some *ousia*. Hence, only *ousia* has separate being, or existence, and all the entities in the other categories depend upon *ousia* for such being or existence as they have. Accordingly, Aristotle continues, *ousia* is first in knowledge and definition as well as in time; the other categories both exist and are known only in virtue of *ousia*.

"Indeed," he says, "the old question, which is even now, as always, a subject of investigation and doubt, viz., What is being (τὸ ὄν)?, is

[25] Ross likewise takes τὸ ὅπερ ὄν to mean "substance," both here and in 187a 8–9. See the commentary in his edition of the *Physics*.

really the question, What is *ousia*?"[26] No doubt he regarded the question about τὸ ὄν as ambiguous, or rather as including a multiplicity of questions, since, besides having both the abstract meaning of "being" and the concrete meaning of "that which is," τὸ ὄν also has a different meaning for each of the categories. As he says, his predecessors were really seeking for the primary existent, or existents, on which everything else depends for its being; and this is what he calls *ousia*.

The question "What is *ousia*?" is itself ambiguous, for it may be asking for the denotation of the term or for its definition. In the next chapter, where he lists the various things which have been regarded in the popular mind or by some philosopher as primary existents—bodies (including animals and plants and their parts, as well as the physical elements and the things compounded out of them), and the Ideas and mathematical entities championed by the Platonists,—he is concerned with the denotation. At the end of the chapter, however, he proposes to postpone answering the question about the denotation of *ousia* until an answer to the question "What is *ousia*?" has been sketched out. Moreover, in Chapter 1 of Book *Z*, Aristotle mingles the concrete individual (the "this") and what it is in a somewhat disconcerting way, and in the second chapter he alternates between the concrete *ousia* and the *ousia* of something (where, however, to complete the confusion, the genitives may be appositional).

I would suggest that Aristotle first asks the question, "What is *ousia*?," from a point of view which transcends, or rather antecedes, the different uses to which the term *ousia* is later put. Starting from the connotation which the word *ousia*, Being, has in virtue of its derivation from the verb "to be," he asks what this word may be most appropriately employed to designate. From his predecessors, especially from the Eleatics and Plato, he had inherited the question about being in the form, τί τὸ ὄν? But τὸ ὄν covers all the different ways of being and of being something which the verb "to be" is used to express, and which had had to be distinguished in order to break up the monolithic being of Parmenides' theory and answer the puzzles about being and predication which Zeno and others had raised in the wake of that theory. Hence, τί τὸ ὄν? is a multiple question and must

[26] καὶ δὴ καὶ τὸ πάλαι τε καὶ νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ ζητούμενον καὶ ἀεὶ ἀπορούμενον, τί τὸ ὄν, τοῦτό ἐστι τίς ἡ οὐσία (1028b 2–4). Aristotle says also in *Met.* Λ.1 (1069a 25–26), that his predecessors were actually seeking the principles and elements and causes of *ousia*.

be replaced by another. We must seek for the fundamental meaning of being, the meaning from which all the others are derived. It will be the being which, in the passage from the *Physics* already cited, appeared as "that which is what being is" (τὸ ὅπερ ὄν) and which was regarded as replacing Parmenides' "being" and Plato's "Being itself." For this fundamental meaning of being, Aristotle employs the word *ousia*, Being.

A similar progression from τὸ ὄν to *ousia* appears at the beginning of Book *Γ* of the *Metaphysics*. There it is said that the business of metaphysics is with τὸ ὄν ᾗ ὄν—being *qua* being, that which is as that which is, the existent as existent. Things may be said to be in many senses, Aristotle continues, but these are not unrelated, as in the case of homonyms, for all the other senses may be referred to one. Just as all the things that are called healthy or healthful are so called in virtue of some relation to health, so whatever can be said to be, or to exist, is an affection or quality of an *ousia*, or productive of an *ousia*, or related in some other way to *ousia*. As health is related to the healthful, so *ousia* is related to all the other beings (ὄντα). It is Being itself. Here, also, Aristotle comes to the conclusion that the primary business of metaphysics is with *ousia*—Being. Just as, in Plato's theory, everything else is, or exists, by participation in Being itself, so, for Aristotle, everything else is in virtue of some relation to being.

To the identification of Being (*ousia*), therefore, Aristotle proceeds in the third chapter of Book *Z*.

3

Being as Substratum and Matter

ARISTOTLE now leaves behind the question of the denotation of Being (*ousia*) in the concrete sense, and proceeds on the assumption that at least perceivable things are Beings. He asks what the Being of each thing (*οὐσία ἑκάστου*) is, i.e., what it is in things which may be called their Being, and suggests four possible answers: *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* (literally, "the what it was to be"), the universal, the genus, and the substratum or subject (*τὸ ὑποκείμενον*).[1] He proposes to consider the fourth suggestion first; for, he says, the claim that the ultimate subject, or substratum, is Being (*ousia*) seems especially plausible.[2]

It is reasonable to identify the universal and the genus as belonging to the Platonists. *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*, "the what it was to be," under this name and conceived as it is in the following chapters, may be regarded as Aristotelian, although it has a basis in Plato's concern with definitions and forms. Whose is the judgment that Being (*ousia*) is substratum or subject?[3]

One might naturally suppose that Aristotle here has in mind the theory of those earlier philosophers who, as he says in the first book of the *Metaphysics*, thought that the only principle of things was the matter of which all existent things consist, from which they all come into being, and into which they are finally dissolved—"the underlying Being remaining (*τῆς μὲν οὐσίας ὑπομενούσης*), but changing in respect of its affections (*πάθη*)."[4] Yet, though Aristotle could hardly have failed to recall the speculations of the natural philosophers when he was speaking of *ousia* as substratum, it does not seem that in

[1] *Met. Z.*3 (1028b 34–36).

[2] *μάλιστα γὰρ δοκεῖ εἶναι οὐσία τὸ ὑποκείμενον πρῶτον* (1029a 1–2).

[3] The reiterated use of the alternation, "substratum or subject," for *τὸ ὑποκείμενον* is tiresome but unavoidable; for the Greek word covers both the notion of subject of predication and the notion of matter underlying form.

[4] *Met. A.*3 (983b 7ff).

*Metaphysics Z.*3, it is those earlier theories of matter which are the immediate subject of criticism; for, in the first place, he does not mention them, and, in the second place, he does not begin from the hypothesis that *ousia* is matter, but argues that if *ousia* is defined as the ultimate substratum it would have to be matter. I am inclined to think, therefore, that in this passage Aristotle reconsiders his own conception of *ousia* as *τὸ ὑποκείμενον*, which has its best known exposition in the *Categories* and which appears as the first meaning of *ousia* in the list of meanings given in *Metaphysics Δ.*8. The words in which he describes *τὸ ὑποκείμενον* in our present passage, "that of which everything else is predicated, while it is itself not predicated of anything else,"[5] echo the words of the *Categories* and of *Metaphysics Δ.*8, and are more immediately applicable to the logical subject than to the material elements of the natural philosophers. It is more than likely, however, that the earlier materialism also is aimed at in the passage, although secondarily, especially since, in the passage in *Metaphysics A.*3, to which we have already referred, Aristotle compares the earlier doctrine that the elements neither come to be nor pass away, but persist as a permanent substratum of change, with his own conception of the individual, e.g., Socrates, as a subject of change which neither comes to be nor passes away in the absolute sense when it acquires or loses some quality.[6]

The criticism to which Aristotle subjects the judgment that Being (*ousia*) is the ultimate subject or substratum is very much the same as the modern objections to the concept of substance, as we indicated in our first chapter. I shall first offer a translation of the passage, with the prior reminder that it is *Being* of which Aristotle is seeking the identity.

> The subject, or substratum, is that of which the other things are predicated, while it is itself not further predicated of anything else; wherefore we must first decide about this, for the primary subject, or substratum, especially seems to be Being (*ousia*). In one way matter is said to be underlying, in another way the shape, and in a third way that which is made up of these (I mean by the matter, e.g., the bronze, by the shape the figure of the form, and by that which is made up of these the statue, which is the whole); and so, if the form is prior to the matter and is being (*ὄν*) more than matter is, the form will also be prior to that which is made up of both, by the same argument. It has now been said in outline, in answer to the

[5] 1028b 36–37. The idea is repeated in almost the same words a few lines farther along, 1029a 8–9.

[6] *Met. A.*3 (983b 10ff).

question what Being (*ousia*) is, that it is that which is not predicated of a subject but is itself the subject of which the other things are predicated. But we must not describe it only thus, for it is not enough; for this is itself unclear, and besides it is matter that turns out to be Being (*ousia*). For if this is not Being (*ousia*), what else is escapes our grasp; for if the other things be stripped away, there is apparently nothing remaining underneath; for the other things are affections and doings and powers of bodies, while length and breadth and depth are quantities and not Beings (*ousiai*), for quantity is not Being (*ousia*). It is rather the first thing to which these belong which is Being (*ousia*). But if length and breadth and depth are taken away, we see nothing left underneath, unless there is something bounded or determined by these; so that, necessarily, matter alone appears as Being (*ousia*) to those who view the matter thus. Now, by matter I mean that which in itself is not said to be something or so much or any of the other things by which the existent (τὸ ὄν) is determined. For there is something of which each of these is predicated, whose being (εἶναι) is other than the being of each of the predicates, for the other things are predicated of Being (*ousia*), while this is predicated of the matter; so that that to which we come in the end is in itself not something and not of a certain quantity and not anything else; but neither is it the negations of these, for the negations also belong to it accidentally. Hence, if we take this view, it turns out that the matter is Being. But this is impossible, for being separate and being a "this" seem especially to belong to Being (*ousia*); wherefore the form and that which is made up of both would seem to be Being (*ousia*) more than the matter. Now the Being (*ousia*) which is made up of both, I mean of both matter and form, may be set aside, for it is posterior and obvious, and the matter, too, in a way, is evident. Hence, we must examine the third sort of Being (*ousia*), for this presents the most difficulties. [1028b 36–1029a 33]

There are two questions with regard to this passage to which I wish to propose answers: (1) whether it is to be regarded as a repudiation of the proposition that Being (*ousia*) is that which underlies everything else and which has nothing else underlying it; and (2) what place the completely indefinite matter of which Aristotle here speaks has in his metaphysical theory, and in what sense it is Being (*ousia*).

With regard to the first question, it is clear that he does not wish to deny that Being (*ousia*) is subject or substratum. He accepts this characterization of Being as permissible when he says (1029a 7–9): "It has now been said in outline, in answer to the question what Being (*ousia*) is, that it is that which is not predicated of a subject but is itself the subject of which other things are predicated." His objection is that it is not a sufficient characterization of the notion of Being to equate it with the bare notion of a subject underlying predicates and

having no further subject underlying it of which it might be predicated in its turn. If Being were nothing but subject, or substratum, it could only be matter. This matter, moreover, would be what is left after we take away from our conception of a particular individual everything which might be predicated of it; and such a matter, regarded purely by itself, could not be said either to be or not to be anything, or of any quantity, or determined in any other way, for all of these predications would be only accidental characterizations of it. This cannot be the fundamental meaning of Being (*ousia*), for a Being must be separate, individual, and distinctly characterized.

If, however, being a ὑποκείμενον is regarded as a property of Beings (*ousiai*) rather than as their essence, the reduction of *ousia* to prime matter does not follow. By the assertion that *ousia* is subject or substratum Aristotle commonly means that concrete individuals are the logical subjects of predication, or the substances to which attributes belong; e.g., we may say that Socrates is a man or that Socrates is white, but we cannot say of anything other than Socrates that it is Socrates. This is the doctrine of the *Categories*, where it is set out at greatest length, and it is the doctrine implied by the description of the ὑποκείμενον with which Aristotle begins in *Metaphysics Z*.3, the chapter we are considering. Moreover, from the conception of *ousia* presented in *Metaphysics Z*.1, it necessarily follows that *ousia* is the ultimate subject of predication but never itself a predicate; for *ousia* is there said to exist simply, or absolutely, while everything else has being only as belonging to some *ousia*. That which exists simply and which, therefore, may be said to have an existence of its own, does not need something else to be it; indeed, one Being (*ousia*) could not be another, for then two actual Beings would be one, which Aristotle later declares to be impossible.[7] Hence, the traditional translation of *ousia* as "substance" is justified insofar as *ousia* is subject or substratum, but it is misleading because it presents a constant temptation to regard *ousia* as primarily, or by definition, that which underlies, and obscures its real meaning in Aristotle's philosophy. It points to a conception of *ousia* which, as Aristotle says, is "unclear" and "insufficient."

The purpose which the characterization of Being (*ousia*) as subject or substratum seems to serve in Aristotle's search for Being is to indicate the place where one must look for it. Obviously, the funda-

[7] *Met. Z*.13 (1039a 3ff).

mental sort of being, Being itself, cannot be found in those entities which are only attributes of something else, which *are* only in virtue of the subject in which they inhere. Being, we may suppose Aristotle to have thought, must be a principle which has nothing prior to it, for otherwise it would be derivative from non-being, which is impossible. Now, as Aristotle says elsewhere, "a principle must not be predicated of a subject, because then there will be a principle of the principle; for the subject is a principle and seems to be prior to that which is predicated of it."[8] Hence, Being (*ousia*) must be sought in those things which are always subjects and never predicates. The things which we perceive in the world about us—animals, plants, and inanimate bodies—seem to be such subjects, and so we may begin our search for Being in them. The question then becomes, What is the Being in virtue of which these things are called Beings?[9]

Our answer to the first question, therefore, must be that, although Aristotle warns against taking *ὑποκείμενον* as the definition of *ousia*, he does not cease to maintain that *ousia* is *ὑποκείμενον*.

Our second question was about the place of "prime matter," as it is usually called, in Aristotle's system, and its relation to *ousia*. We must begin by recognizing, I think, that a primary matter of the completely indeterminate sort described in the passage we are discussing is a necessary part of Aristotle's theory.[10] He maintains, especially against Empedocles, that all the elements can be generated from one another.[11] He maintains also that in every change there must be a substratum as well as a pair of contraries.[12] It follows necessarily that there must be one substratum, or matter, underlying all the elements, since each can be changed into any of the others. Of this prime

[8] *Physics* I (189a 30ff).

[9] Cf. what Gilson says with regard to the statement in the *Categories* that *ousia* is neither predicable of a subject nor present in a subject and that a particular horse or a particular man is an *ousia*: "But this seems to be little more than a restatement of the problem, for, if it tells us that Plato was right in refusing actual being to sensible qualities, while he was wrong in ascribing it to abstract notions, it still does not explain what makes reality to be real. We now know where to look for it, but we still do not know what it is."—*Being and Some Philosophers*, 43.

[10] Hence, we must reject the thesis of Hugh King's ingenious and illuminating article, "Aristotle without *Prima Materia*" (*Journal of the History of Ideas*, 17 [1956] 370–389), with regard to the doctrine of prime matter, that "no trace of it can be found within his philosophic remains . . ." (370). His remarks seem, however, to be directed mainly against the view that prime matter is a sort of stuff, and we could agree with him that this is not to be found in Aristotle.

[11] *De Gen. et Corrupt.* I.1 (315a 3ff); II.1 (329b 1ff); II.6 (333a 16ff); *De Caelo* III.6 (304b 23ff).

[12] *Physics* I.6 (109a 34ff); *De Gen. et Corrupt.* II.1 (329a 24–27).

matter Aristotle says that it is not a body, not perceptible, and not capable of separate existence.[13] It is clear, therefore, that we should be wrong if we thought that he conceived of prime matter as a sort of indeterminate stuff. Prime matter is introduced to explain universal transformability, and as such it is simply the potentiality, present in every material thing, of becoming any other material thing, directly or indirectly.[14]

In what sense can this potentiality for becoming everything be called *ousia*? We must note, first, that when Aristotle applies the term *ousia* not only to the concrete individual but also to the form and matter of which the individual is composed, he cannot be supposed to mean that the material itself, regarded as what it actually is, e.g., bricks, is *ousia*, for then he would have reduced the meaning of *ousia* as matter to one of the other meanings, viz., the composite whole of matter and form. He means, rather, that the potentiality of the matter for entertaining the form, which, in combination with it, makes up the concrete Being (*ousia*), may itself be called Being (*ousia*)—not, however, in the sense of actual Being, but in the sense of potential Being. The bricks, as bricks, are actual Being; regarded, however, under the aspect of their potentiality for being the material of a house, they are potential Being. Applying this to prime matter, we may say that prime matter is Being in the sense that it is the potentiality for all physical Being.[15]

Up to this point in Book *Z*, Being (*ousia*) has been presented as the concrete individual and as substratum, or matter. We may now pass on to the more fundamental meaning of *ousia* which is expressed by the phrase *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*.

[13] *De Gen. et Corrupt.* II.1 (328b 32ff to the end of the chapter). Cf. especially: "Our own doctrine is that although there is a matter of the perceptible bodies (a matter out of which the so-called 'elements' come-to-be), it has no separate existence, but is always bound up with a contrariety" (329a 24–26, translated by H. H. Joachim in the Oxford translation).

[14] Cf. *De Anima* II.1 (412a 9): *ἔστι δ' ἡ μὲν ὕλη δύναμις*; and *Met.* *Θ*.8 (1050b 27–28): *ἡ γὰρ οὐσία ὕλη καὶ δύναμις οὖσα, οὐκ ἐνέργεια, αἰτία τούτου.*

[15] Cf. Zeller, *Aristotle* I. 329: ". . . undetermined universality, which is the possibility of Being, not yet determined this way or that, is considered as Matter in opposition to Form."

4

The Syntax and Meaning of τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι

BEFORE PROCEEDING FURTHER in the text of *Metaphysics Z*, we must stop to consider the grammatical construction and the meaning of that uncouth and obscure phrase, τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι,[1] which plays such an important part in Aristotle's metaphysics. To translate it as "essence" conceals the fact that it is evidently intended as a definition or analysis of the notion which otherwise Aristotle might have continued to express by *eidos* or *ousia*.

The first but less important problem is presented by the imperfect ἦν ("was"). No evident reason for its use appears in Aristotle's employment of the phrase. We can only conjecture in what context the phrase might have originated in which the imperfect would have been relevant and from which it might have been exported to other contexts as a fixed technical expression.

The interpretations of the imperfect may be divided into two classes: those which assign a metaphysical significance to it as indicating the timelessness of the essence or form, its logical or temporal priority to the concrete being, or its persistence or duration throughout the existence of things, while their accidents change[2]; and those

[1] Literally, as we shall endeavor to show, "the what-it-was-to-be." The construction of the phrase, which is ambiguous in English, appears more clearly in "what it was for each thing to be." For the various interpretations of the phrase, with references to the literature on the subject, see the following, especially Owens' book, which contains a very extensive report on the views which have been held:

Schwegler, Albert, ed., *Die Metaphysik des Aristoteles* (Tübingen 1847–48) Bd. IV, Exkurs I, pp. 369–379.

Ross, W. D., ed., *Aristotle's Metaphysics; a Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford 1924) I. 127.

Arpe, Curt, *Das τί ἦν εἶναι bei Aristoteles* (Hamburg 1938) 14–19.

Owens, Joseph, C.Ss.R., *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics* (Toronto 1951) 93–95, and the notes, 353–358.

[2] One or more of these meanings is assigned to the imperfect by Trendelenburg, Schwegler, Zeller, Robin, Ross, and Owens. For references, see Schwegler and Owens.

which take it as the so-called "philosophical imperfect," referring to something already said, meant, or supposed.[3]

Not much evidence has been adduced to justify the supposition that the imperfect does have any of the metaphysical implications attributed to it in the first class of interpretations. Most of the attempted justifications are interpretations of passages where τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι occurs, assuming the meaning of ἦν which was to be proved. Schwegler cites three passages without τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι in Aristotle and one in Plato as examples of the use of the imperfect to indicate persistence or duration; but all of these passages can be taken as examples of the "philosophical imperfect."[4] It might be argued that ἦν takes the place of the gnomic aorist, the verb εἶναι having no aorist; but I have not seen this argument advanced, and it would not be worth much unless examples could be given. That the form exists before the individual in the begetter or in the mind of the maker is, of course, a familiar Aristotelian doctrine, and the use of the imperfect in *De Partibus Animalium*, I.1, where this doctrine is advanced,[5] might be thought to support this interpretation; but even if the ἦν

[3] So Paul Natorp, *Platos Ideenlehre* (Leipzig 1903) 2; Hermann Dimmler, *Aristotelische Metaphysik, auf Grund der Ousia-Lehre entwicklungsgeschichtlich dargestellt* (Kempten & München 1904) 56; Curt Arpe, *op. cit.*, 17–18; and others. I am inclined to agree with Dimmler's suggestion that Aristotle may have preferred τί ἦν εἶναι to τί ἐστιν εἶναι partly because it sounds better.

[4] Ross also refers to three of the passages, omitting the reference to *Oeconomica*. But in *Rhet.* I.8 (1363a 8–9) οὐ γὰρ πάντες ἐφίενται τοῦτ' ἀγαθὸν ἦν undoubtedly means "for, as has been shown, that is good which is sought after by everybody," as W. Rhys Roberts renders it in the Oxford translation, referring to 1362a 23. In *De Caelo* I.9 (278a 11), τὸ γὰρ αἰσθητὸν ἅπαν ἐν τῇ ὕλῃ ὑπῆρχεν, if there is not a reference to somewhat similar statements earlier in the chapter and the book, at any rate the assertion might be regarded by Aristotle as already familiar enough so that he could say, as in J. L. Stocks' Oxford translation, "everything that is perceptible subsists, as we know, in matter." In *Oecon.* I.5 (1344a 24), τοῦτο δ' ἦν ἄνθρωπος may mean, "of the two things we mentioned [at the beginning of Chapter 2], this is man." In Plato's *Theaetetus* 156a, ἀρχὴ . . . ἥδε αὐτῶν, ὡς τὸ πᾶν κίνησις ἦν seems to mean simply, "Their first principle was this, that all was motion," the tense of the subordinate clause being assimilated to that of the main clause. Antisthenes' alleged definition of λόγος as ὁ τὸ τί ἦν ἢ ἔστι δηλῶν (Diog. Laert. VI. 3), since we have no further information about it, tells us nothing about Aristotle's use of the imperfect. The alternation ἦν ἢ ἔστι ("was or is") suggests that the imperfect has its ordinary temporal meaning. Liddell and Scott give a few examples from other authors where ἦν is perhaps used "ethically," i.e., to express something which has always been true.

[5] In *De Part. An.* I.1 (640a 15ff), in opposition to Empedocles' interpretation of natural generation in terms of mechanical necessity, Aristotle points out this pre-existence of the form and its role in determining process and product, saying: "For man begets man, so that the generation of the child is such as it is because of the parent's being such as he is" (640a 25–26). He concludes διὸ μάλιστα μὲν λεκτέον ὡς ἐπειδὴ τοῦτ' ἦν τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι, διὰ τοῦτο ταῦτ' ἔχει. οὐ γὰρ ἐνδέχεται εἶναι ἄνευ τῶν μορίων τούτων (640a 33–35)—"therefore the best mode of explanation is to say that since the essence of man was so-and-so, therefore he has such-and-such parts; for he cannot exist without them." Here, "the essence of

had to be so taken in this passage, it could hardly be claimed on the basis of this alone that the ἦν in τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι always has this meaning, even in passages where there is no explicit reference to the doctrine in question. In sum, these interpretations of the imperfect have little support from philology. They are largely attempts to read into the imperfect ἦν some interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine based originally on other considerations.

The "philosophical imperfect," on the other hand, is common enough, especially in Plato and Aristotle, to have got a name and a place in the grammars.[6] Here the difficulty that there is usually no obvious backward reference in the passages where τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι occurs has to be met. Natorp suggested that the imperfect is used to indicate that the term of which a definition is to be given is already familiar from its usage.[7] Arpe, carrying this suggestion further, says that the situation to which the question with the imperfect is appropriate is one in which a word has been predicated of an actual subject, e.g., "Socrates is a man"; whereupon one may ask, "What was it for him to be a man?" or "What did you mean by calling him a man?" (τί ἦν αὐτῷ τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι). As an exception that proves the rule, he cites τί ἐστι τὸ ἱματίῳ εἶναι[8] ("What is the being of a cloak?"), where ἱμάτιον ("cloak") is being used with an assumed meaning which it did not have before, viz., "white man"; here the present, ἐστι, is used instead of the imperfect, ἦν.[9] Arpe further points out that τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, having the definite article prefixed to it, is not a question, but rather the answer to a question, so that it suggests "what you meant by 'man'" rather than "What did you mean by 'man'?" On the other hand, "What is the being of a cloak?," in the passage just cited, where

man was so-and-so" may refer to the pre-existence of the form in the parent. More probably, however, the imperfect implies that this *was* the result aimed at and that it was the condition necessitating the production of such-and-such parts. Cf. Wicksteed and Cornford's translation of *Physics* II.7 (198b 8, ὅτι τοῦτ' ἦν τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι): "that the result manifests the *essential nature* aimed at by the process" (Loeb Classics). Understood in this way, the imperfect in the two places just cited would have a certain analogy to the "philosophical imperfect," which refers to something previously said or established as a condition for the conclusion now to be drawn. In any case, it does not seem likely that a use of the imperfect suitable only for referring to the essence in connection with production should be incorporated in τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, which is more often used in other contexts.

[6] Two examples from Aristotle will suffice: ἐπεὶ δ' ἦσαν τρεῖς οὐσίαι ("since there are, as we have said, three kinds of *ousia*," *Met. Λ*.6 [1071b 3]); and τοῦτο γὰρ ἦν αὐτῷ τὸ χρώματι εἶναι ("for this, as we have seen, is its being color," *De Anima* II.7 [419a 9–10]).

[7] Natorp, *Platos Ideenlehre* 2.

[8] *Met. Z*.4 (1029b 28).

[9] Arpe, *Das τί ἦν εἶναι bei Aristoteles*, 17–18.

the present is used, is a question.[10] As an alternative to Arpe's proposal, one might suppose that τὸ τί ἦν ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι meant originally "the answer which we have already given to the question, What is the being of a man?"; in other words, τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι represents a definition already agreed upon. Some such interpretation of the phrase, imputing to it a reference to the meaning implied in a prior use of the word or to an already established definition, seems to me more likely than the interpretations which find some profounder, metaphysical meaning in it, especially since it is recommended by the fairly frequent occurrence of the "philosophical imperfect" (i.e., the imperfect with backward reference) in other contexts.

Since, however, the imperfect, on this interpretation, seems to add little, if anything, to the philosophical meaning of the phrase, and since the other interpretations are too uncertain to be adduced in support of the general interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine of forms or essences (on which, rather, they rely for support), it does not seem that much can be gained from consideration of the question.

The more significant problems concern the construction of the phrase as a whole, and in particular the syntax of the datives which commonly occur with it. Here several expressions must be taken into account.

(1) τὸ εἶναι.

(*a*) Alone; e.g., τῷ εἶναι ἕτερον τὸ λευκὸν καὶ ᾧ ὑπάρχει (*Physics* I.3 [186a 31]). This seems to be rare.

(*b*) With a noun or pronoun in the dative case; e.g., τὸ ἑκάστῳ εἶναι, τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι, τὸ εἶναι ἀγαθῷ. This is so common that no references need be given.

(*c*) With two datives; e.g., τοῦτο γὰρ ἦν αὐτῷ τὸ χρώματι εἶναι (*De Anima* II.7 [419a 9–10]), and ἀλλ' ἄλλο λέγεται τῷ ἕτερον εἶναι αὐτοῖς τὸ εἶναι· οὐ ταὐτὸν γάρ ἐστιν ἀνθρώπῳ τε τὸ εἶναι ἀνθρώπῳ καὶ λευκῷ ἀνθρώπῳ τὸ εἶναι ἀνθρώπῳ λευκῷ (*Top.* V.4 [133b 33–35]).

(2) τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι.

(*a*) Alone, as a name for essence or form in general. This occurs frequently, as in *Metaphysics Z*.

[10] The present, ἐστι, is found also in *Met. I*.1 (1052b 3): τί ἐστι τὸ ἑνὶ εἶναι, and twice in *Cat.* 1: ἂν γάρ τις ἀποδιδῷ τί ἐστιν αὐτῶν ἑκατέρῳ τὸ ζῴῳ εἶναι (1a 5) and similarly a few lines below (1a 11). In these cases, also, the definite article is not prefixed, and the construction is that of an indirect question.

(*b*) With a noun or pronoun in the dative case; e.g., τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι ἑκάστῳ and τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι ἵππῳ. Examples with a pronoun are common; but with a noun in the dative τὸ εἶναι is generally used, rather than τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι.

(*c*) With two datives. The closest example, and apparently the only one with τί ἦν, is τί ἦν αὐτῷ τὸ αἵματι εἶναι ("what it was for it to be blood," *De Part. An.* II.3 [649b 22]). Here Bekker's text has the indefinite τι instead of the interrogative τί, but the latter reading seems better.[11] The same construction appears twice in the first chapter of the *Categories*, but with ἐστιν instead of ἦν: τί ἐστιν αὐτῶν ἑκατέρῳ τὸ ζῴῳ εἶναι (1a, 5 and 11).

(3) Phrases such as τοῦτ' ἦν τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι (*De Part. An.* I.1 [640a 34]) and τοῦτο γὰρ ἦν αὐτῷ τὸ χρώματι εἶναι (*De Anima* II.7 [419a 9–10]).

The proposals which I have seen for construing these phrases are in principle four:

(1) Léon Robin proposed as translations of τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι ἑκάστῳ (where there is one dative): *"ce qu'il a été* donné à chaque chose *d'être,"*[12] and later, "ce qu'il *lui appartient et lui a dans le passé toujours appartenu, d'être."*[13] There are some objections to taking the phrase in this way:

(*a*) There seems to be no evidence that ἦν or ἔστι was ever used in this way and with this meaning. ἔστι or ἦν thus construed with the infinitive means "it is (was) possible," like ἔξεστι, not "it is given" or "it belongs."

(*b*) τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι with two datives cannot be construed after this pattern; for in Robin's interpretation τί is the predicate with εἶναι, but where there are two datives one of these is the predicate. To this objection one might reply that the examples with two datives are rare and do not conform strictly to the pattern of τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι.

(*c*) The τί of τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι might be expected to have the same construction as τοῦτο in τοῦτο γὰρ ἦν αὐτῷ τὸ χρώματι εἶναι, listed under (3) above. Robin construes it differently.

[11] Owens argues that Bekker's τι should be retained (*The Doctrine of Being* 353, note 83, a).

[12] Robin, *La pensée grecque* (Paris 1923) 299. Dobie translates: "what it has been given to each thing to be" (Robin, *Greek Thought*, tr. by Dobie [London and New York 1928] 250).

[13] Robin, *Aristote* (Paris 1944) 88.

(*d*) τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι as thus construed cannot be connected so easily with the shorter phrases with τὸ εἶναι, for it could not accommodate the τὸ of τὸ εἶναι. The τὸ, however, is retained with εἶναι in the examples under (2*c*) above. Moreover, according to Robin's construction, τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι does not emphasize the "being" or the "to be," but the "what."

(2) Another interpretation makes τί ἦν predicate: "its being what it was."[14] Thus "what it was" would take the place of the second dative in "what it was to be blood" (the phrase quoted above under 2*c*). There are, I think, cogent arguments against this construction also.

(*a*) A relative pronoun would have been more proper than the interrogative τί in this construction. We should have expected something like τὸ εἶναι ὅπερ ἐστίν, which Aristotle actually uses elsewhere.[15]

(*b*) Where τί is clearly interrogative, as in τί ἐστι τὸ ἱματίῳ εἶναι (*Met. Z*.4 [1029b 28]), this construction is impossible; and so such cases would have to be explained differently.[16] It may be replied that such cases differ anyway, because they have the definite article before εἶναι.

(*c*) The phrases with two datives obviously cannot be construed thus, for εἶναι already has a dative predicate in such cases. One might reply, as in Robin's case, that these phrases do not conform to the pattern of τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, since they have the definite article before εἶναι and should therefore be classified with the simpler phrases with τὸ εἶναι.

(*d*) In ὃ ἦν οἰκίᾳ εἶναι, it seems impossible to construe ὃ ἦν as predicate, although the phrase appears to be only a variant of τὸ τί ἦν οἰκίᾳ εἶναι.[17]

[14] The phrase is interpreted thus by R. D. Hicks in his edition of *De Anima* (Cambridge 1907) 315. Ueberweg-Praechter (*Gesch. d. Philos. d. Altertums* 11th ed. [Berlin 1920] 396), followed by the 1940 edition of Liddell and Scott's *Lexicon*, seems to mean that τί ἦν replaces the possessive dative of, e.g., τὸ ἀγαθῷ εἶναι. Such a construction seems highly unlikely, and is impossible where either one or two datives are combined with the phrase. Cf. Owens' criticism of Hicks and Ueberweg (*The Doctrine of Being*, 354).

[15] *Top.* VI.4 (141a 35). The word order in τὸ εἶναι ὅπερ ἐστίν also seems more natural for a phrase meaning "its being what it was."

[16] The same would be true of the phrases cited under (2*c*) above, and τί ἐστι τὸ ἑνὶ εἶναι (*Met. I*.1 [1052b 3]).

[17] *Met. Z*.17 (1041b 6). The sentence reads: οἷον οἰκία ταδὶ διὰ τί; ὅτι ὑπάρχει ὃ ἦν οἰκίᾳ εἶναι. It might be thought that τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι grew out of the τί ἦν attributed to Antisthenes (Diog. Laert. VI. 3). Even so, "what it was" might as easily have developed into "what its

(3) and (4). The two proposals remaining for consideration must be discussed together, for they differ only concerning the syntax of the dative. Both agree in understanding τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι as "the what-it-was-to-be," or "what being was." This is surely the most natural way to read the phrase. It has also the advantage of allowing all the forms we have mentioned, including those with two datives, to be explained in one way. Moreover, on this interpretation it is easy to pass from the shorter form, τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι ("the being of a man"), to the longer form, τὸ τί ἦν ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι ("what the being of a man was").[18]

The remaining point at issue is whether the dative is possessive or predicative—whether we should translate the phrase as "what it was for a man to be" or as "what it was to be a man." When there are two datives, one may be taken as possessive and one as predicative—"what it was for it to be blood" (the passage already quoted above from *De Partibus Animalium*); and if we assumed that this was the original form from which all the shorter forms were derived, we might suppose that the single dative, as in τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι ἀνθρώπῳ, is the predicate dative of the original phrase. But this form with two datives is rare and each of the occurrences departs from the standard form. Moreover, phrases with τὸ εἶναι are more common than the longer form with τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, so that it seems likely that the former construction is the original.

There are several arguments in favor of taking the dative as dative of possession or interest. In the first place, the predicate of an infinitive is regularly in the accusative case, unless there is an expressed subject of the infinitive in the dative to which the predicate is attracted.[19]

being was." Ernst Kapp (quoted by Arpe, *Das τί ἦν εἶναι bei Aristoteles*, 19) suggests plausibly that τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι represents an attempt to find an unmistakable formula for the request for a definition, since the question τί ἐστι ("What is it?") is too broad, permitting the name or the genus to be given in answer as well as the definition, even when it is taken in a strict sense. "Its being what it was" would not serve this purpose. Moreover, the sentence in Diogenes Laertius seems to refer to statements in general, rather than definitions. The sentence reads: πρῶτός τε ὡρίσατο λόγον εἰπών, "λόγος ἐστὶν ὁ τὸ τί ἦν ἢ ἔστι δηλῶν." I should translate this as, "He was the first to define statements, saying that a statement is that which declares what was or is." It is not necessary to translate, "what a thing was or is."

[18] This construction is clearly implied by τί ἐστιν αὐτῶν ἑκατέρῳ τὸ ζῴῳ εἶναι (*Cat.* 1. 1). The τὸ before εἶναι is omitted in τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, one may suppose, in order to avoid an awkward repetition. Cf. also Alexander's ὁ τί ἐστι τὸ εἶναι αὐτῷ δηλῶν λόγος (on *Top.* 101b 39, in Brandis, *Scholia*, 256b 14–15), which suggests that Alexander construed τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι as here suggested.

[19] Arpe admits this, and so takes the expressed dative as possessive. He refuses, however, to take εἶναι absolutely: "Aber Aristoteles spricht nicht vage von 'dem' (welchem?!) Sein des Menschen, sondern nur ganz bestimmt von dem Menschensein des Menschen"

Second, when the dative is a pronoun, e.g., ἑκάστῳ, as it quite frequently is, there is general agreement in taking it as possessive—"what the being of each thing was," or "the essence of each thing," not "what it was to be each thing."[20] Third, if the dative is predicate, there is no difference in meaning between τὸ εἶναι with the dative and τὸ εἶναι with the accusative, as far as grammar goes; so that where they are contrasted, as in *Metaphysics Z.6* (1031b 5–6)—εἰ μήτε τῷ ἀγαθῷ αὐτῷ ὑπάρχει τὸ εἶναι ἀγαθῷ μήτε τούτῳ τὸ εἶναι ἀγαθόν—the distinction is purely arbitrary. Fourth, there are passages where τὸ εἶναι is used alone to express the being or essence, e.g., τῷ εἶναι ἕτερον τὸ λευκὸν καὶ ᾧ ὑπάρχει ("the white and that to which it belongs are other in being," *Physics* I.3 [186a 31]), which would justify taking εἶναι absolutely in τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι ("for a man to be," "the being of a man") and the other phrases.

On the other hand, there are not a few places where the dative is most naturally taken as predicate, e.g., τὸ γὰρ οἰκοδόμῳ εἶναι τὸ δυνατῷ εἶναί ἐστιν οἰκοδομεῖν ("to be a builder is to be able to build," *Met. Θ.3* [1046b 34–35]); and still others in which it is difficult to tell how the dative is to be taken. We must, therefore, resign ourselves to the necessity of deciding each case as it arises. Since, however, Greek grammar is against taking the dative as predicate where no subject in the dative is expressed, preference should, I think, be given to the other alternative where possible.

A first proposal as to the meaning of the phrase may now be put forward. If the single dative is taken as a dative of possession or interest, and consequently εἶναι is taken absolutely (i.e., without a predicate), the phrase will mean "what the 'to be' [of something] was," "what it was [for something] to be," or "what the being [of something]

(*op. cit.* 18). Hence, he proposes to understand a second dative—"what is was for a man to be (a man)." He defends this on the ground that a predicate is required for εἶναι, adding: "so ist die Doppelung für das griechische Sprachgefühl ohne weiteres da." But the absolute use of εἶναι to mean "to exist" is so common in Greek that this statement cannot be accepted. Moreover, if Aristotle always thought of the dative as doubled, he would have been likely to write it thus once in a while; but τὸ τί ἦν ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι ἀνθρώπῳ seems never to occur. We do find this doubling in οὐ ταὐτὸν γάρ ἐστιν ἀνθρώπῳ τε τὸ εἶναι ἀνθρώπῳ καὶ λευκῷ ἀνθρώπῳ τὸ εἶναι ἀνθρώπῳ λευκῷ (*Top.* V.4 [133b 34–36]); but there it is required by the context.

[20] In τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι ἑκάστῳ, the dative may be taken with the whole phrase—"the what-it-was-to-be for each thing," instead of "the what it was for each thing to be." The genitive ἑκάστου must be taken thus if it is retained in *Met. Z.*4 (1029b 14), in place of the dative in this phrase.

was." Now, "to be," used absolutely, means "to exist,"[21] and so "what it was to be" may be translated into "mode of existence." If this is so, the definition of a substantive Being (*ousia*) would describe its mode of existence, and would thus be distinguished from other propositions about the same Being with predicates drawn from other categories; for these would describe it not simply as being, but as being this or that—they would state what is present in the concrete Being in addition to its Being, as accidents, or concomitants, or adjectives (*συμβεβηκότα*).

In favor of taking *εἶναι* absolutely, it may also be pointed out that "the being of a man" or "what it is for a man to be" seems like a more apt expression for essence than "being a man." The soul of an animal is said by Aristotle to be the "what it was to be for a body of a certain kind"[22]; but "being an animal" means "having a soul" rather than just "soul."

If this explanation of *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* is accepted for those cases where *εἶναι* is used absolutely, we still have to find an interpretation for the phrases (which we have assumed to occur) where the dative is predicate—where, e.g., *τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι* means "being a man." This seems to be the case in *Metaphysics Γ*.4 (1006a 31ff): "Again, if 'man' has one meaning, let this be 'two-footed animal'; by having one meaning I understand this:—if 'man' means '*X*,' then if *A* is a man '*X*' will be what 'being a man' means for him" (Ross's Oxford translation). Here a dative subject, *αὐτῷ* ("for him"), is easily supplied from the preceding *τι* (*A*).

It seems desirable to understand the phrases where *εἶναι* has a dative predicate in such a way that they will be consonant in meaning with the phrases where *εἶναι* has no predicate. I propose, in order to accomplish this, that where, e.g., *τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι* means "being a man," or better, as in Greek, "being man" (without the indefinite article), the dative predicate should be interpreted not as a predicate

[21] Cf. *Anal. Post.* II.1 (89b 31–33): *ἔνια δ' ἄλλον τρόπον ζητοῦμεν, οἷον εἰ ἔστιν ἢ μὴ ἔστι κένταυρος ἢ θεός. τὸ δ' εἰ ἔστιν ἢ μὴ ἁπλῶς λέγω, ἀλλ' οὐκ εἰ λευκὸς ἢ μή.* "About some things we ask another sort of question, e.g., whether there is or is not a centaur or a god [*or*, whether gods or centaurs exist]; I mean 'whether they are or are not' to be taken absolutely, not as in the phrase 'whether they are or are not white.'" Cf. also the assertion that the subject of a real definition must exist (*Anal. Post.* II.7 [92b 4–8]): "He who knows what a man or anything else is, must know also that it is (*ὅτι ἔστιν*); for as to that which is not, nobody knows what it is, but only what a phrase or a word means, as when I say goat-deer; what a goat-deer *is* cannot be known."

[22] *ἡ τῶν ζῴων ψυχή . . . τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι τῷ τοιῷδε σώματι* (*Met. Z*.10 [1035b 14–16]).

connected with a subject by the copulative verb "to be," but as internal, so to speak, to the *εἶναι* ("being"); that is, as specifying or describing the being. It would thus resemble the so-called cognate accusative, as in "dancing a waltz" or "running a race," where the accusative is said to denote an "internal object," repeating or limiting the idea already contained in the verb. On this interpretation there would be no difference between "the being of a man" and "being a man," and one might say that the being of Socrates is being a man. If Aristotle did understand the phrase in this way, it would be intelligible why he took no pains to distinguish clearly whether and when the dative should be taken as possessive or as predicative in a phrase such as *τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι*, since in either case the meaning would be the same.

As we noted earlier in the present essay, the subject which Aristotle proposes for metaphysics is *τὸ ὂν ᾗ ὄν*; and, whether we translate this as "being *qua* being," "that which is as that which is," or "the existent as existent," it seems plainly to require a discussion of what it means to be or to exist. Such a discussion seemed to be missing in the interpretation of the *Metaphysics* in terms of substance and essence; it appeared that Aristotle had nothing to say about existence but only about what exists. If, however, *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* is taken in the manner we have proposed in the last few paragraphs as "the what it was to be" of a thing, or its mode of existence, then Aristotle has introduced existence, or the "to be," into his system, and has, in fact, made it central.[23]

In the next chapter Aristotle's doctrine of *ousia* as "the what it was to be," which is presented in Books *Z* and *H* of the *Metaphysics*, will be examined in the light of the hypotheses put forward in this chapter concerning the meaning of *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*.

[23] It is interesting to note that in the book where Gilson accuses Aristotle of having talked about what exists but never about existence, he calls the "act whereby any given reality actually is, or exists" a "to be" (*Being and Some Philosophers*, 3). According to the interpretation proposed above, Aristotle uses the same form of speech in Greek when he speaks of *τὸ εἶναι* or *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*—the "to be" or "the what it was to be" of a thing. Gilson follows the common practice of translating the Greek as the essence or substance or form of a man.

5

Being as "What It Was for Each Thing to Be"

IF THE PROPOSITION which Aristotle takes up in *Metaphysics Z*.4, viz., that *ousia* is τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, is translated literally, it means that Being is what it is for something to be. Interpreted thus, this proposition—unlike the proposition that Being is substance or substratum, which was the topic of the preceding chapter—may be regarded as a tautology, and is so obvious that we should expect it to turn up in an investigation of being *qua* being. It is reasonable, therefore, to suppose that this is what Aristotle means here.

There is an analogous progression of thought in Plato's *Sophist*. In that dialogue Plato introduces the opinions of those who say that τὸ ὄν (being) or τὰ ὄντα (beings) are the elements from which all things are produced (this corresponds to Chapters 1–3 of *Metaphysics Z*), and then asks (with special reference to Parmenides' hot and cold): "What is that which you say of both things, declaring both and each of them to be? As what shall we conceive this 'to be' of yours?"[1] It is a plausible supposition that there is a connection between Aristotle's phrase, τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι ("what is was to be"), and Plato's question, τί τὸ εἶναι τοῦτο ("What is this 'to be'?").

Of course, Plato asks what being in general is, whereas Aristotle speaks of the being of each thing, or of each kind of thing (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι ἑκάστῳ). It may be pointed out, however, that in the *Sophist* (247d–e, etc.) Plato suggests that being may be defined as δύναμις—potentiality, potency, the capacity to act on other things or to be acted on by them. It is a matter of dispute whether Plato himself accepted this definition or not, but in any case it may have seemed to Aristotle that, if being is potency or capacity, then different things

[1] τί ποτε ἄρα τοῦτ' ἐπ' ἀμφοῖν φθέγγεσθε, λέγοντες ἄμφω καὶ ἑκάτερον εἶναι; τί τὸ εἶναι τοῦτο ὑπολάβωμεν ὑμῶν; (*Sophist* 243d–e).

would have different sorts of being, since their capacities are different. Thus there would be some precedent for his asking about the being of each thing, as if their beings were different.[2]

Aristotle now characterizes τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι as what each thing is said to be in itself[3] (more literally, "what it is spoken of as in itself"). I do not believe that this phrase is intended by Aristotle to give the whole meaning of τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι. What he means, rather, is that what the being of a thing is must obviously be something which belongs to it in itself and cannot be something merely accidental or adjectival to it; for without its being, it would not be.

His example is: "For you to be is not to be musical, for you are not musical in yourself, or simply as you." This example obviously implies that Aristotle is here taking τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι as an ontological principle, present in each individual, and not in the logical sense as definition. It is that in a Being in virtue of which it is a Being. Hence, σοὶ should not be taken as predicate, as if the question were, "What is it to be you?" This would be the trivial question, "What is it for you to be you?," or a request for a definition of you; but Aristotle asserts that there is no definition of concrete individuals.[4] The question must be, "What is it for you to be?," and τὸ σοὶ εἶναι must mean "for you to be" or "your being." This, then, is further evidence for the supposition that τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι is to be taken literally as indicating the "to be" of a thing, i.e., its mode of existence, which is contrasted with its being this or that, e.g., "musical," where this or that is something present in the concrete thing in addition to its absolute being. If it meant merely what something is *per se* in the sense of what it is defined as, it would apply only to terms or words, not to individual existents.[5]

The rest of the chapter (1029b 22ff) is likewise difficult to interpret

[2] That the definition of being as potentiality occupied Aristotle's mind will, I think, appear plausible when we come to discuss Aristotle's own statement that *ousia* is *energeia*—that Being is act or activity.

[3] ὃ λέγεται καθ' αὑτό (*Met. Z*.4 [1029b 14]).

[4] *Met. Z*.15 (1039b 27ff).

[5] The difficulty created by such passages as this, if we begin with the assumption that τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι is the essence or definition, is evident from the remarks of Ross and Arpe. Ross (*Aristotle's Metaphysics*, xciv–xcv), in speaking of this passage, finds the notion of the essence of an individual disconcerting, since essence is the object of definition. He says that Aristotle, after this one reference to "your essence," "refers henceforward to the essence of general types," and he adds a footnote: "Probably indeed τὸ σοὶ εἶναι . . . is not meant to be taken as the essence of an individual in distinction from the essence of a kind. τὸ σοὶ εἶναι is τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι" (p. xcv, note 1). In the Oxford translation, Ross translates τὸ σοὶ εἶναι by "being you." Cf. Arpe's objections to ascribing an essence or a definition to the individual (*Das τί ἦν εἶναι bei Aristoteles*, 54).

on the assumption that the "what it is to be"[6] means the definition of a term. Here Aristotle maintains, first, that compounds such as "white man" cannot be properly said to have a "what it is to be," although a statement of what they mean is possible. What is more surprising is that he goes on to say that terms in categories other than *ousia* cannot properly be said to have a "what it is to be." If, however, we take the "what it is to be" literally, these statements seem plausible enough.[7]

Aristotle denies that there is a "what it is to be" for white man on the grounds that "what it is to be" is what some "this" is and that white man is not a this, for in it one part is predicated of the other; only a Being (*ousia*) is a "this." This means that white man is a case of something being something, and so we cannot ascribe to it simple being, which is limited to Beings (*ousiai*), according to the first chapter of Book *Z*.[8]

He next proceeds to limit "what it is to be" to Being (*ousia*), denying it to the other categories in the strict sense. "What it is" (*τί ἐστιν*), he says, has various meanings for the various categories, for "is" belongs to all, although not in the same way, but to Being (*ousia*) first and to the others only subsequently; so that we can ask "What is it?" concerning a quality, though not simply, just as we might say that not-being *is*, though not simply, but "is not-being." Similarly, "what it is to be" belongs primarily and simply to Being (*ousia*), while to the others belongs not "what it is to be" simply, but "what it is to be a quality or a quantity."[9] Here, I think, it is desirable to take "quality" and "quantity" as predicates in spite of their position and in spite of what we said above about the dative; for "the others"

[6] It seems unnecessary to keep the imperfect "was" in this phrase henceforth, for what ever the imperfect may imply in the Greek, it is lost in the English.

[7] Arpe (*op. cit.* 39–40) finds this passage difficult also. Having adopted the position that *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* was originally, in the *Topics*, a technical term meant to designate the content of a definition in any category, he says that in the present passage Aristotle abuses his own technical term by limiting it arbitrarily to the first category. Aristotle is led to do this, he says, by giving *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* the double meaning (categorial and definitory) which *τί ἐστι* has in the *Topics*. The categorial and the definitory realms, i.e., the ontological and the logical, are thus confused, says Arpe, in a way which is characteristic of Aristotle's ontology.

[8] The next assertion (1030a 6ff), that there is a "what it is to be" only for those things of which the formula (*λόγος*) is a *ὁρισμός*, is puzzling, for *ὁρισμός* seems elsewhere in Aristotle to mean simply "definition." Perhaps he is thinking of the original meaning of the word as "setting bounds to something so as to separate it from other things." In "white man" there is not a complete separation or division, for it includes two things, man and white. Hence, there is "definition" in this sense only when something primary is reached.

[9] *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι ὁμοίως ὑπάρξει πρώτως μὲν καὶ ἁπλῶς τῇ οὐσίᾳ, εἶτα καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις, ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ τί ἐστιν, οὐχ ἁπλῶς τί ἦν εἶναι ἀλλὰ ποιῷ ἢ ποσῷ τί ἦν εἶναι* (1030a 29–32).

(*τοῖς ἄλλοις*) precedes, supplying a subject, and the analogy with "not-being is not-being" seems to require that we take them as predicates. If this is correct, Aristotle means here that you can ask what the being of a Being (*ousia*) is, because you can say of the Being (*ousia*) that it is or exists simply (i.e., without adding a predicate); but a quality, e.g., white, *is*, only because it is a quality of some Being (*ousia*) and to say that it *is* or exists means really that something else *is* it; hence, its being will not be simple or absolute being, but being a quality.

I believe that the remaining chapters of Books *Z* and *H* would be found upon examination to be consistent with the hypothesis which we have put forward concerning the meaning of *ousia* and *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι*. In the following pages, however, I propose only to indicate some passages which seem to me to confirm or supplement what has already been said.

In Chapter 6 Aristotle asks whether each thing and what it is for it to be are the same or other. This, he says, is a pertinent question for the investigation about Being (*ousia*), for each thing seems to be not other than its Being, and the "what it is to be" is said to be the Being of each thing. The purpose of the chapter is apparently to show that the Being of a thing, that in virtue of which it is, is to be found within it and not outside it. The argument is directed against the theory of Ideas, which sought for the principle of being of things outside them in the Ideas, or Forms: "they provide the Forms as the 'what it is to be' for each of the other things and the One as the 'what it is to be' for the Forms."[10] But the Forms "give no help either toward the knowledge of the other things (for they are not their Being (*ousia*), otherwise they would be in them) or toward their being [existence, *τὸ εἶναι*], since they are not present in the things which participate in them."[11]

The first part of the chapter (1031a 19–28) is exceedingly elliptical and obscure. In the case of complex terms where one part is adjectival to the other, Aristotle says, it would appear that the thing and its essential being are distinct—e.g., white man and the being of white man, or being a white man (Aristotle appears to blend these two together in this chapter). What Aristotle seems to have in mind is some argument designed to prove that a concrete individual cannot be identified with its essence, for then all the accidents or adjectival

[10] *Met. A.7* (988b 4–5).

[11] *Met. A.9* (991a 12–14).

predicates of the individual would have to be included in the essence. The argument is probably of the type arising from a confusion of identical with accidental predication such as those mentioned in Chapter 5 of *De Sophisticis Elenchis*: "If Coriscus is other than man he is other than himself, for he is (a) man"[12]; and "If Coriscus is other than Socrates and Socrates is (a) man, then Coriscus is other than man." The argument contemplated in *Metaphysics Z.6*, seems to imply the reverse of the latter of these two—namely, if Coriscus is not other than man, since he is (a) man, and if the same is true of Socrates, then Coriscus and Socrates are the same; but this is impossible; hence, both Coriscus and Socrates are other than man, and man is something distinct from individual men.

The argument actually presented in the *Metaphysics* is that if a white man is the same as his being, i.e., being of white man, then, since the white man is a man, he is also the same as the being of man, and consequently the being of white man is the same as the being of man. This means that being a man is the same as being a white man, which is impossible. Aristotle rejects the argument on the ground that man and white man are only accidentally the same, because the same individual who is a man happens also to be white.[13] Hence, it does not follow that they are the same in definition.

Aristotle does not claim, of course, that the individual is the same as its essential being in the sense that it is nothing but its essential being. He is not concerned with this question here, but with the question whether the being of a thing is distinct and separate from it; this is indicated by the proposal to separate the good from the being of the good later in the chapter. Hence, what he wishes to assert is that the being of an individual must be identical with the individual in the sense that it must be a factor in the concrete whole, as soul is one of the factors in the concrete whole of body and soul which constitutes the living being.

In the rest of the chapter (1031a 28ff) Aristotle turns the argument upon the Ideas themselves.[14] If the good itself is other than the being

[12] It is important to note that in Greek you say "Socrates is man," not "Socrates is a man." This is one of the sources of the confusion.

[13] This, I take it, is the meaning of *οὐ γὰρ ὡσαύτως τὰ ἄκρα γίγνεται ταὐτά* (1031a 25).

[14] Ross, supposing that Chapter 6 is about universals and their essences or definitions, thinks that the introduction of the Ideas here is uncalled for: "It is not obvious why Aristotle should have chosen as his illustration of the identity of a *καθ' αὑτό* term with its essence a class of *καθ' αὑτό* terms which he does not believe in, the Ideas" (*Aristotle's Metaphysics*, commentary on 1031a 29).

of the good, animal other than the being of animal, being other than the being of being, etc., then there will be another set of Beings (*ousiai*), Natures, or Ideas prior to the first set. And if they are separate from them—if, for example, the being of good (*τὸ εἶναι ἀγαθῷ*) does not belong to the good itself, and being good (*τὸ εἶναι ἀγαθόν*) does not belong to the being of good, i.e., if being good is not good—then the good will not be knowable, since to know something is to know what it is for it to be; and the same will be true of all the other members of the first set of Ideas. Furthermore, the being of good, or what it is for good to be, will not be, or exist, and similarly in all the other cases. For, since the being of being itself, or of the existent itself (*τὸ ὄντι εἶναι*), will not be being, i.e., will not be existent, neither will the being of any other being or existent be or exist. Furthermore, if we apply the same principle to the "what it is to be," we shall have an infinite regress, for there will be a "what it is to be" of the "what it is to be," etc. (1031b 28ff). Hence, the Ideas and their essential being, i.e., what it is for each of them to be, must be the same.

The implication is that the Being of things in the perceptible, physical realm must also be in them if they are to be knowable. Their Beings are their modes of existence. Hence, the names which we give them will connote their Being. The word "man," for example, denotes the individual men of whom it is predicated, but the meaning it conveys is the definition of their Being (*λόγος τῆς οὐσίας*). Hence, when you call an individual a man, what you say about him is that he has the sort of Being proper to a man, that he exists in the mode peculiar to human beings. What he is as man is the Being of a man. If nothing is its own being—i.e., if nothing *is* being, but each thing *is* only by participation in something outside itself,—then nothing can be or be known.

In Chapter 17 Aristotle states that in anything which is a compound of elements there must be something besides the elements which gives it unity; for the whole may be dissolved into its elements and thus cease to be, although the elements are still there. For example, a syllable may be broken up into the letters of which it was composed, and flesh may disintegrate into fire and earth. He concludes:

> This would seem to be something which is not an element, and to be the cause why one thing is flesh and another a syllable. And the same is true in all cases. And this is the Being (*ousia*) of each thing, for this is the first

> cause of its being (*αἴτιον πρῶτον τοῦ εἶναι*). And, since some things are not Beings (*ousiai*), but those which are Beings are constituted according to nature and by nature, it would seem that this nature is their Being, which is not an element but a principle. An element is something present in the thing as its matter into which it is divided, e.g., *a* and *b* in the syllable. [1041b 25–33]

"First cause of its being" must designate the first cause of its being absolutely, or existing, not the cause of its being this or that. For what Aristotle asserts is that the cause of a thing's being flesh, or a syllable, or whatever it is, is the Being of the thing *because* it is the first cause of its being.

This may be supported by a reference to the second book of the *Posterior Analytics*. In the first chapter of that book Aristotle lists four subjects of inquiry, saying that we may try to discover (1) that *a* is *b*, and, if so, (2) why; or (3) whether something exists, and, if so, (4) what it is. In the second chapter he says that, when we ask why or what it is, we are looking for a middle term, and the middle term is the cause.

It is easy enough to see what Aristotle means when he says that, in asking why *a* is *b*, we are seeking for a middle term and a cause; but the same assertion made with regard to the question "What is it?" may seem puzzling.[15] He cannot mean merely that what a thing is is the cause of its being what it is. He says:

> The cause of a thing's being not this or that but simply, viz., the Being, or of its being not simply but some one of its properties or accidents, is the middle term.[16]

And at the end of the chapter he concludes:

> As we say, then, to know what something is is the same as knowing why it is; and this is either why it exists simply and not why it is one of the things predicated of it, or why it is one of its predicates, e.g., why it is equal to two right angles, or why it is greater or smaller. [90a 31–34]

From these quotations it seems clear that, when Aristotle says that what a thing is, or its definition, is a middle term and a cause, he

[15] Cf. Ross's comments in his edition of the *Prior and Posterior Analytics*, Introduction, 75–76, and Commentary, 609–612.

[16] 90a 9–11. *τὸ γὰρ αἴτιον τοῦ εἶναι μὴ τοδὶ ἢ τοδὶ ἀλλ' ἁπλῶς τὴν οὐσίαν, ἢ τοῦ μὴ ἁπλῶς ἀλλά τι τῶν καθ' αὑτὸ ἢ κατὰ συμβεβηκός, τὸ μέσον ἐστίν* (Ross's text). The text and the construction are uncertain. Note that Aristotle here says expressly that *εἶναι*, in *τὸ αἴτιον τοῦ εἶναι*, is to be taken absolutely. This is a further justification for so taking it in the passage from *Met. Z*.17.

means that it is the cause of its being simply, or existing. Now, the cause of a thing's being, i.e., the formal cause, must itself be Being or Existence, for otherwise it could not confer being or existence. Hence, once more we are lead to suppose that *ousia* means Being and that *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* means "what it is for a thing to be."

Compare what Aristotle says in the *De Anima* concerning the soul:

> The soul is cause and principle of the living body. But cause and principle mean various things. Likewise, the soul is cause in the three ways which have been defined; for it is the source of motion, and that for the sake of which, and the soul is also cause as the Being (*ousia*) of bodies which have souls. That it is cause as Being (*ousia*) is evident; for the Being (*ousia*) is the cause of existence for all things, and to exist is to live in the case of living beings, and the soul is the cause and principle of this.[17]

This passage is especially valuable as indicating unmistakably that, when Aristotle calls *ousia* the cause of being, the being which he has in mind is existence. To live, which he says is the "to be" of living beings, is the mode of existence of living beings. Hence, the "to be" of other things must likewise be their existence; and as the soul, which is the life of living beings, is the formal cause of living, so in every case the *ousia*, which is the Being of each thing, is the formal cause of its existence. Obviously, then, Aristotle does not mean cause of being in the merely logical sense of that in virtue of which a thing is what it is, but in the ontological sense of that in virtue of which a thing exists.

Another point may be noted in connection with *Metaphysics H.2*, where Aristotle says, after remarking that things differ from one another in many ways:

> Consequently, it is clear that "is" has as many meanings; for something is a threshold because of its situation, and for the threshold to be means its being so situated, and for ice to be means its being in a congealed state. . . . Therefore, we must collect the kinds of differentiae, for these will be the principles of being. . . . Clearly, if the *ousia* is the cause of each thing's being, the cause of the being of each of these things is to be sought in these differentiae. None of the differentiae we have listed is *ousia*, even joined with matter, but it is the analogue of *ousia* in each of these things. [1042b 25ff]

Here Aristotle extends the doctrine of the many meanings of "being"

[17] *ἔστι δὲ ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ ζῶντος σώματος αἰτία καὶ ἀρχή. ταῦτα δὲ πολλαχῶς λέγεται. ὁμοίως δ' ἡ ψυχὴ κατὰ τοὺς διωρισμένους τρόπους τρεῖς αἰτία· καὶ γὰρ ὅθεν ἡ κίνησις αὐτή, καὶ οὗ ἕνεκα, καὶ ὡς ἡ οὐσία τῶν ἐμψύχων σωμάτων ἡ ψυχὴ αἰτία. ὅτι μὲν οὖν ὡς οὐσία, δῆλον· τὸ γὰρ αἴτιον τοῦ εἶναι πᾶσιν ἡ οὐσία, τὸ δὲ ζῆν τοῖς ζῶσι τὸ εἶναί ἐστιν, αἰτία δὲ καὶ ἀρχὴ τούτου ἡ ψυχή* (*De Anima* II.4 [415b 8–14]). I have retained the *τούτου* which Hicks prints in his text in place of the more usual *τούτων*.

much beyond the meanings corresponding to the categories, which were the meanings mentioned in Chapter 1 of Book *Z*; for here "being" is said to have a different meaning for each of the characters by which things may differ from one another. Consequently, even when "being" is limited to one of its fundamental meanings, corresponding to one of the categories, say *ousia*, Aristotle would apparently assert that it admits of further differentiations. Whereas, however, the meanings corresponding to the categories were only analogous to each other, the meanings reached by further division under *ousia* will differ specifically and generically. Hence, what it is for a concrete Being of one kind to be or exist will differ specifically or generically from the being or existence of Beings of other kinds. Furthermore, it would seem, the differentiae which are stated in the definition of a species of Beings ought to indicate how Beings of this species differ from Beings of other species in their mode of being or existing. It may be remarked that this is consonant with the interpretation given above, in Chapter 2, of the statement which Aristotle makes in *Physics* I.3, viz., that even if "being" is limited to the one meaning of "that which is what being is," it is still evident from definitions that being can be divided.

A question which has been the subject of much debate, namely, whether *ousia* in the sense of essence, or "the what it is to be," is universal or individual, must be discussed briefly. Aristotle states repeatedly in the *Metaphysics* that no universal and nothing which is common to many things can be *ousia*. In Chapter 13 of Book *Z*, where he discusses the question whether *ousia* can be the universal, which was one of the identifications proposed in Chapter 3, he attempts to prove that the universal cannot be *ousia*, or the *ousia* of anything, or the "what it is to be" of anything; "for," he says, "those things of which the *ousia* is one and the 'what it is to be' is one, are themselves one."[18] Moreover, the soul, which is the *ousia* and the "what it is to be" of a living being, is not a universal, for Peter's soul is not Paul's. On the other hand, Aristotle asserts that there is no definition or demonstration of individuals[19]; but essences are definable and are objects of scientific knowledge. Moreover, in the *Categories*[20] he calls the species and the genus secondary *ousiai*.

[18] 1038b 14–15; cf. also 1040b 16–1041a 5, 1003a 8, 1053b 16, 1060b 21, 1087a 2.
[19] *Met. Z.*15 (1039b 27ff).
[20] *Cat.* 5 (2a 14ff).

In reply to the first argument for universality, it should be pointed out that Aristotle does not say that definitions are not applicable to individuals. In fact, they are so applicable; for, as Aristotle says, "if it is true to say that something is a man, then that thing must be a two-footed animal."[21] What he means by saying that individuals are not definable is that no definition distinguishes one individual from others; it distinguishes the members of one class from the members of other classes. This would be better expressed by saying that definitions are universal, or general, rather than that they are *of* universals.

With regard to the statement concerning secondary *ousiai* in the *Categories*, it must be pointed out that these secondary *ousiai* are not what is expressed in the *Metaphysics* by "the what it is to be"; they are, rather, specific and generic terms, class concepts, of the sort which in the *Metaphysics* are said not to be *ousiai*: "Man and horse and other terms predicated in the same way of individuals, but which are universal, are not *ousia* but a composite whole made up of a certain formula and a certain matter regarded universally."[22] In the *Categories*, *ousia* is used primarily to indicate the logical subject of predication, and so a general term may be called a secondary *ousia* because it can be a subject of predication: e.g., "Man is a tool-making animal"; "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" In the *Metaphysics*, where the object of investigation is being as being, general terms are fittingly said not to be Beings. The same difference of viewpoint accounts for the fact that in the *Categories* the concrete individual is regarded as primary *ousia*, while in the *Metaphysics* the essence, or "the what it is to be," is called "primary *ousia*"; for the essence is the very Being (*ousia*) of the individual, that in virtue of which it can in its turn be called a Being (*ousia*).

It must be admitted, however, that the existence of each man is numerically distinct from the existence of all other men, while "the being of a man," or "what it is for a man to be," expresses something which they all have in common. Furthermore, one may think of the definition of man without thinking of the existence of any individual, so that the object of the definition as it is in the mind seems to be universal, or at least not individuated. In order to overcome this difficulty as to whether "what it is for a man to be" expresses a

[21] *Met. Γ.*4 (1006b 28ff).
[22] *Met. Z.*10 (1035b 27–30).

universal or not, I propose to make a distinction which Aristotle might have sanctioned. I propose that "what it is for a man to be," or "the being of man," when it is used to express what is common to all men, means the *mode* of being or existing exhibited in the being or existence of each man. On the other hand, when "what it is to be" expresses the Being (*ousia*) of an individual man, it means his being or existing in a certain mode. The distinction, then, is between a way, or pattern, of being or existing, and an act of being or existing in accordance with that pattern. It is in the latter sense that it is most properly called Being (*ousia*) and in this sense it is individual.

In the last two chapters we have tried to show that *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* should be taken literally as meaning what it is for a thing to be; that, so taken, it indicates the mode of being or existing of the thing; that it is an ontological principle and, as the Being (*ousia*) of each thing, is that in the thing which is the cause of its being or existing; and that the definition of a Being (*ousia*) will be a characterization of its mode of being and hence will include those of its predicates which characterize its absolute being, omitting all the accidental or adjectival predicates which describe it not as being simply but as being this or that. Adapting a manner of speaking from the *Categories*, we may say that the essential predicates of a Being (*ousia*) are those which are predicated of its existence and are not merely present in its existence.

In the next chapter, we turn to the final hypothesis presented in our opening chapter, namely, that when Aristotle says *ousia* is *energeia* he means Being is activity.

6

Being as Activity

IN BOOKS *Z* AND *H* of the *Metaphysics* Aristotle has discussed that which *is* in the primary sense of the word, namely, *ousia*, on which all the other categories of being depend. In Book *Θ* he proposes to treat of being as divided from another point of view into *τὸ δυνάμει ὄν* and *τὸ ἐνεργείᾳ ὄν*. If we translate these as "potential being" and "actual being," or "that which is potentially" and "that which is actually," the construction of the original is obscured, and so is the connection with the other uses of *dynamis* and *energeia*. I shall, therefore, sometimes use the scholastic terms, "being in potency" and "being in act," since they are closer to the original.

By potential being, or that which is potentially, Aristotle means primarily that which has a potentiality for becoming something (e.g., the bricks which may become a house), not that which might but does not yet exist (e.g., the house which might be built from the bricks).[1] Consequently, the distinction with which he is concerned in Book *Θ* is not a distinction between two realms of being, actual and potential—the one containing all the things which exist and the other the things which are possibilities but have not as yet come to be. It is rather a distinction in the physical world between what things actually are and what they can become. The potential, or that which is potentially, designates usually, for example, the bricks which are potentially a house and not the house which may be built from the bricks.

The statement in which we are mainly interested in Book *Θ* is that *ousia is energeia*. Concerning this, however, Aristotle has here said so little that our exposition will be more conjectural than, I hope, it has been in our preceding chapters. Consequently, since the conception of *ousia* as *energeia* is necessary for the complete understanding

[1] The latter usage does, of course, occur; e.g. *Met.* *Θ* (1047b 1–2): "Some of the things that are not, are potentially; but they are not because they are not actually."

of the former term, we shall supplement our discussion of the doctrine from other sources.

In Book Θ Aristotle first takes up *dynamis* and *energeia* as they apply to motion, where *dynamis* means the power or potency in one thing for acting upon or producing a change in another, and, conversely, the potentiality in the second thing for being acted upon by the first. This, he says (1045b 35ff), is the most proper meaning of *dynamis*, but not the one most useful for distinguishing being in act from being in potency. We may, therefore, pass over the first chapters, noting only two points.

The first is that the counterpart of the verb δύνασθαι, "to be able," is ἐνεργεῖν, "to be doing, or acting," and that the contrast between *dynamis* and *energeia* corresponds to the contrast between the verbs. Of course, *energeia* has the meaning of "activity" so commonly in Aristotle that it will be sufficient to refer to the familiar first chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where it is synonymous with πρᾶξις.

The other point is that the application of *energeia* to motion is the primary one, with the implication that the other uses are derived from it.

> The word *energeia*, which is associated with the word *entelecheia*, has been transferred to other things from motions, to which it is especially applicable; for motion above all things seems to be *energeia*, for which reason non-existent things are never said to be moved, although other predications are made of them; e.g., non-existent things are said to be thinkable and desirable, but never moved, because then, while not being in act (ἐνεργείᾳ), they will be in act. For some of the things that are not, are potentially; but they are not, because they are not actually. [1047a 30–1046b 2]

This follows after a sentence in which sitting and, more significantly, being are included among *energeiai*. Hence, when a man is sitting, or even just being, although he is not in motion he is doing something.

In Chapter 6 Aristotle comes to those meanings of *dynamis* and *energeia* at which he was aiming.

> Act (*energeia*) is the thing's being there (ὑπάρχειν) otherwise than potentially. We say, e.g., that the Hermes is potentially in the wood and the half in the whole, because they might be separated out, and we say that a man has knowledge even when he is not thinking of it, if he is able to think of it. Opposed to this is that which is in act. It will be clear from particular instances by induction what we wish to say, and we need not seek a definition of everything but may appeal to analogy. The actual is to the potential as a man building is to a man who can build, as the waking to the sleeping, as one who is seeing to one who possesses sight but has his eyes closed, as that which has been separated out of the matter is to the matter, and as the accomplished to the unaccomplished. To one of the terms in each case let us assign act (*energeia*), to the other potentiality. Not all things are said to be in act in the same way but only by analogy: as that is in that or to that, so this is in this or to this; for some are as motion to power or potentiality, others as Being (*ousia*) to some matter. [1048a 30–1048b 9]

In this passage Aristotle distinguishes that which is actually, or in act, from that which is only potentially. As we discovered in Chapter 2 of the present essay, "is," or "to be," has a different meaning for each of the categories. It follows that actual and potential being, also, will each have different meanings for the different categories.

In the last sentence of the quotation it is said that as motion is to power or potentiality, so *ousia* is to matter. It would seem rather pointless to compare matter and *ousia* regarded as two static terms, one of which is already there at the beginning of production and the other at the end, viz., the finished product or its form, to the potentiality of motion and the actual motion. If it be accepted, however, that *ousia* means the Being or mode of existence of a thing, as we have tried to show, then it may be supposed that Aristotle is comparing an act of being and the matter whose potentiality is realized in that act to motion and the power or potentiality of which it is a manifestation.

The latter part of the same chapter (1048b 18ff) contains an important distinction between two kinds of activities: those which do not have their end or goal in themselves and those which do; i.e., those which are not their own end and those which are. As an example of the former, Aristotle gives reducing, which is undertaken not for its own sake, but in order to be slender. As long as the motion, or process, of reducing is going on, the end has not been reached. As examples of the second sort of activity he gives seeing, thinking, living, being happy. He characterizes these by saying that a man at the same time sees and has seen, thinks and has thought, lives and has lived. The one sort of activity is motion, which is ἀτελής—i.e., lacking its end. The latter sort he here calls *energeia*, although he commonly uses this word to cover both kinds, and indeed has said earlier in this book that it most properly designates motion.

In Chapter 8 he advances several arguments to show that act is prior to potency, and that which is in act prior to that which is potentially. Then he inserts a discussion of those cases where, he says,

the end is a motion. Here it would appear that he wrote "motion" inadvertently, or else that the word is used in a broader sense than in Chapter 6, where it was distinguished from *energeia*; for the examples he proceeds to give are *energeiai*. At any rate, in what follows he utilizes the distinction between activities which are their own end and those which are not.

The product, or work, he says, is the end; and in these cases the activity is itself the product or work. Hence, it is also the *entelecheia*; i.e., it has the end in itself. In some cases there is no product beyond the use or exercise of a power, and the exercise is itself the end, as seeing is the end or product of the power of seeing. In other cases there is a further product; e.g., the ability to build a house results not only in the building but in the house. A further distinction is that where the product is something beyond the exercise of the power, the act or activity is in that which is being made, as building is in that which is being built, weaving in that which is being woven, and, in general, motion in that which is being moved, not in the mover. In the cases where there is no other product beyond the activity, the activity and, consequently, the goal are in the actor, as seeing in the seer, thinking in the thinker, and life and happiness in the soul.

"So that," Aristotle concludes, "it is evident that the Being or form is act."[2] The "so that" tends to indicate that this statement follows from what immediately precedes. Moreover, *energeia* means an act or activity as opposed to a product in the sentences just before this, and so it seems better not to change the meaning of *energeia* in this sentence to "actuality," making the sentence mean that "the substance or form is actuality."

The interpretation just given seems to gain further confirmation from a comparison with Plato's *Sophist*, to which we have already referred in connection with "what it is to be," or "what being is." In that dialogue (247d–e) Plato suggests as a definition of being that it is *dynamis*, i.e., power, or potentiality, or capacity. It is a plausible hypothesis that Aristotle's assertion that *ousia* is *energeia*, that Being is act or activity, was made in conscious opposition to the suggestion in the *Sophist*.[3] *Metaphysics* Θ.8, is primarily devoted to proving that *energeia*

[2] 1050b 2: *ὥστε φανερὸν ὅτι ἡ οὐσία καὶ τὸ εἶδος ἐνέργειά ἐστιν.*

[3] The definition of the existent as that which can act or be acted upon is mentioned at least twice in the *Topics* (V.9 [139a 4–8]; VI.7 [146a 22–32]; cf. also VI.10 [148a 18–21]). This suggests that it may have been a commonplace in debates.

is prior to *dynamis*. One of the proofs is that *energeia* is prior in *ousia*; and what is prior in this sense, as he tells us elsewhere, can exist without other things, while the other things cannot exist without it.[4] We may complete the argument thus: since nothing can be without being, and since *ousia* is the primary Being on which all other beings depend, *ousia* must be *energeia* rather than *dynamis*. Now, the *dynamis* by which being is defined in the *Sophist* is the power to act on something else or the potentiality for being acted on by something else. Hence, if Aristotle is contradicting or correcting the doctrine of the *Sophist*, the assertion that *ousia* is *energeia* should mean that Being is an act, or activity, as opposed to the power to act.

There is another point of opposition. The *Sophist* speaks of *dynamis* as a potentiality for acting on something else or for being acted on. Aristotle, as we have seen, makes a distinction between transitive actions, which have their effect in something else or result in some product outside the actor, and immanent activities, which are their own end. It is the latter sort of act under which Aristotle subsumes Being (*ousia*). The *Sophist*, therefore, was wrong not only in choosing potency rather than activity for the definition of being, but also in the kind of activity involved.

Nevertheless, the suggestion of the *Sophist*, that being is power or potentiality, as well as the assertion which we have ascribed to Aristotle, that Being is activity, constitutes a rejection of any characterization of being in purely static terms. There is a fundamental agreement between the two statements in that they both connect being with activity.

A brief survey of Aristotle's theory of the soul will clarify the assertion that *ousia* is *energeia*. The appeal to that theory may be permitted because the *De Anima*, at least in its first two books, is generally attributed to the same period in the development of Aristotle's thought as the central books of the *Metaphysics*. The appeal would surely have Aristotle's sanction also, for in the introductory sentences of the treatise on the soul he says: "Knowledge about the soul seems to have much to contribute to truth as a whole, and especially to knowledge about nature; for it is, one may say, the principle of living beings."[5]

[4] *Met.* Δ.11 (1019a 1–4): *τὰ μὲν δὴ οὕτω λέγεται πρότερα καὶ ὕστερα, τὰ δὲ κατὰ φύσιν καὶ οὐσίαν, ὅσα ἐνδέχεται εἶναι ἄνευ ἄλλων, ἐκεῖνα δὲ ἄνευ ἐκείνων μή· ᾗ διαιρέσει ἐχρῆτο Πλάτων.*

[5] *De Anima* I 1 (402a 4–7).

In the first book of the *De Anima* Aristotle reviews the theories of his predecessor about the soul. The theory of Democritus explained animal motion by supposing that the soul was itself made up of small bodies in perpetual motion, which moved the animal body containing them by pushing it along with themselves. Aristotle rejects mechanical theories of this sort, saying that the soul moves the animal by choosing and thinking.[6] Against the Empedoclean theory that the soul perceives because it is made up of the same elements as the things perceived, Aristotle objects that then something would be needed to give unity to the soul; but the soul itself is what gives unity to the body.[7] The theory that the soul is a "harmony," i.e., the way in which the component parts of the body are blended or fitted together, is also rejected, for the motion of the living being and the doings and sufferings of the soul cannot be accounted for by the "harmony" of the body, which at most explains bodily health.[8] Finally, against the earlier theories in general Aristotle complains that they do not take into account the close relation of soul to body and of a specific kind of soul to a specific kind of body.

Aristotle has thus committed himself to finding a theory of the soul which will account for the unity of the living being and what it does and has done to it as living, and also for the intimate connection of the soul with the body.

In the second book of the *De Anima* Aristotle approaches his own definition of the soul from the notion of Being (*ousia*).[9] As usual, "Being" (*ousia*) is said to designate three things: the matter, the form, and that which is composed of matter and form. Matter is described as potentiality. The form is here characterized not as *energeia*, but by the term which in the *Metaphysics* is associated with *energeia*—namely, *entelecheia*.[10] That the form is *entelecheia* means that it is the realization of the potentialities present in the body, the purpose or end which the body serves. Soul, then, is the Being (*ousia*), in the sense of the form, of a natural body having life potentially; consequently it is the

[6] *De Anima* I.3 (406b 24–25).

[7] *De Anima* I.5 (410b 10ff; 411b 6ff). Cf. *Met. Z*.17 (1041b 11ff), where *ousia* is represented as the unifying factor in that which is made up of elements.

[8] *De Anima* I.4 (407b 27ff, especially 407b 34–408a 5). Aristotle's rejection of this theory is equivalent to saying that behavior cannot be accounted for by structure alone.

[9] *De Anima* II.1 (412a 3ff).

[10] It seems likely, on the basis of the passages in *Met. Θ*.6 (1048b 18ff) and 8 (1050a 21ff), which we have already discussed, that Aristotle took *entelecheia* to mean "having the end in it," from the three parts of which the word is composed, *ἐν-τέλος-ἔχειν*.

entelecheia of such a body. But *entelecheia* has two applications, since it may designate, e.g., either knowledge acquired but not now present in consciousness, or the conscious entertainment of such knowledge in the mind. Soul is *entelecheia* in a way analogous to knowledge, rather than to the conscious entertainment of knowledge; for it is present not only in waking but also in sleep. Therefore, soul is the first *entelecheia* of a natural body having life potentially. But such a body must be organic, i.e., one which provides organs or instruments for the fulfillment of the soul's purposes; and so the definition may be rephrased: soul is the first *entelecheia* of a natural, organic body.

Two remarks must be made on the definition. The first is that "a natural body having life potentially" does not mean a body before it has got a soul; for Aristotle says, "It is not the body which has lost its soul but that which has it which is potentially such as to live; the seed and the fruit are potentially such a body."[11] On the other hand, Aristotle can hardly mean that the body which has a soul is sometimes actually living and sometimes living only potentially. The distinction between potentiality and actuality here intended is functional rather than chronological. In the organism compounded of body and soul, the body is that factor which contributes the means or instruments for living; while the other factor, the soul, provides the ends in which the potentialities of the means are realized.

The second remark is that, although Aristotle compares the soul to knowledge rather than the exercise of knowledge, and although he says that the soul is related to the body somewhat as the power of cutting to the axe,[12] nevertheless the soul is not to be regarded as simply a power or potency (*dynamis*) for living.[13] As *ousia* and *entelecheia* it is clearly *energeia*, and it is so called in the *Metaphysics*.[14] Furthermore, the soul cannot be the structure of the body, for Aristotle has rejected this doctrine in the first book of the *De Anima*. In calling soul *first entelecheia*, he wishes to deny that it is to be identified with the multifarious activities or operations of the living being. None of these operations can be the soul; for they come and go, while the soul, as the Being (*ousia*) of the living organism, is constantly present until the death of the organism. The soul is therefore prior to all

[11] *De Anima* II.1 (412b 25–27).

[12] *De Anima* II.1 (412b 10ff, especially 413a 1).

[13] Hicks takes this to be Aristotle's meaning. Cf. his edition of the *De Anima*, p. xliv.

[14] *Met. H*.3 (1043a 35).

the particular actions and reactions of the living being, and yet is itself, in some sense, act or activity. How this can be we shall see presently.

A general definition of the soul, such as Aristotle has given up to this point, does not carry us very far, as he himself says.[15] "It would be absurd," he says, "in this case as in others, to search for the common definition which will not be the peculiar definition of any existent according to its proper, indivisible species, and to neglect to seek definitions of the latter type."[16] Hence, he proposes a fresh start which will give a more intimate view of the soul.

That which has soul is distinguished from that which has not, he says, by the fact that it lives. But living includes various sorts of activities—reproduction, feeding, growth and decay, motion and rest, perceiving, and thinking,—and if any one of these is present in a thing we say that it lives. Soul, then, is the principle of all these activities and of the corresponding powers.[17] Soul, he says later in the same chapter, is that by which primarily we live and perceive and think, in the same way as health is that by which we are healthy, for it is form and the defining factor.[18] He might have added, carrying out the analogy with health, that soul is the life by which we live. Now "life," as St. Thomas says, signifies the same thing as "living," but from an abstract point of view.[19] We might suppose, then, that the soul of an individual is the specific character exhibited at every moment throughout the course of its existence, or the law to which its living constantly in one way or another conforms; just as health may be regarded as the character exhibited in our being healthy. But this is not sufficient, for the soul is act or activity. Moreover, as we shall see in a moment, it is a source of motion, an efficient cause; and it does not seem that this can be said of a character or law.

In Chapter 4 (415b 8ff) Aristotle asserts that the soul is the cause and principle of a living body in three senses: as source of motion, as "that for the sake of which" (final cause), and as *ousia*. (1) We have already discussed soul as *ousia*—as the formal cause of life and existence—in our preceding chapter. (2) As to soul as "that for the sake of which," Aristotle is not here referring to the fact that the soul, as form, may be regarded as the end aimed at in procreation. Here he speaks rather of the fact that the bodily parts are instruments of the soul. This, of course, does not mean that the body serves the soul as the boat serves the boatman,[20] for this notion of the relation of body and soul is inconsistent with Aristotle's theory of the soul as form. (3) As efficient, soul is said to be the cause of motion from place to place, of the qualitative change involved in sense-perception, and of growth and decay. The definition of soul must explain how it can be cause in all these ways.

[15] *De Anima* II.2 (413a 11ff); 3 (414b 20ff).

[16] *De Anima* II.3 (414b 25–28).

[17] *De Anima* II.2 (413a 20ff, 413b 11ff).

[18] *De Anima* II.2 (414a 4ff).

[19] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 18, a. 2: "... vivere nihil aliud est quam esse in tali natura: et vita significat hoc ipsum, sed in abstracto; sicut hoc nomen *cursus* significat ipsum *currere* in abstracto."

There is an illuminating passage in the *De Partibus Animalium*:

> Since every instrument is for the sake of something, and each part of the body is for the sake of something, and "that for the sake of which" is some activity, it is evident that the body as a whole has also been put together for the sake of some comprehensive activity. For sawing is not for the sake of the saw, but the saw for the sake of sawing, since sawing is an instance of putting something to use. So that the body, too, is, in some sense, for the sake of the soul, and its parts are for the sake of the functions for which each is fitted by nature.[21]

Since that for the sake of which the body exists is identified here both as a comprehensive or all-embracing activity and also as the soul, I should like to suggest that the soul is, in a sense, this comprehensive activity. It is not so, of course, in the sense of being the totality of the events which make up the life of a living being; it is rather that life regarded from an abstract point of view as representing continuously the type of activity proper to the species of which the individual is a member.

As an all-embracing activity it may be said to be efficient and final cause of all the actions or operations which are subsidiary to it. Hunting for food may give rise to a host of actions in the hungry animal, all of which contribute to the general purpose of the hunt. Similarly, if man is to be defined as a rational animal, then a man's soul will be his life regarded from an abstract point of view as the life of a rational animal. Hence, his soul will remain the same throughout the

[20] Cf. *De Anima* II. 1 (413a 8–9).

[21] *De Part. An.* I.5 (645b 14–20): *ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ μὲν ὄργανον πᾶν ἕνεκά του, τῶν δὲ τοῦ σώματος μορίων ἕκαστον ἕνεκά του, τὸ δ' οὗ ἕνεκα πρᾶξίς τις, φανερὸν ὅτι καὶ τὸ σύνολον σῶμα συνέστηκε πράξεώς τινος ἕνεκα πλήρους. οὐ γὰρ ἡ πρίσις τοῦ πρίονος χάριν γέγονεν, ἀλλ' ὁ πρίων τῆς πρίσεως· χρῆσις γάρ τις ἡ πρίσις ἐστίν. ὥστε καὶ τὸ σῶμά πως τῆς ψυχῆς ἕνεκεν, καὶ τὰ μόρια τῶν ἔργων πρὸς ἃ πέφυκεν ἕκαστον.*

constantly changing course of his existence, but will have no existence of its own except in the multiplicity of events which make up the history of the man's life.

As we saw earlier in this chapter, Being (*ousia*) seems to be regarded in the *Metaphysics* as an act or activity which is not motion or change or process. It appears now, however, that the Being of a natural, material existent, is not something apart from change, but is manifested in change. Indeed, the activities given as examples in the *Metaphysics*—seeing, living, being happy—all involve changes in the living being; but regarded simply as seeing, living, and being happy, they are not changes.

We have now to connect the interpretation of *ousia* as *energeia*, given in this chapter, with the interpretation of *ousia* as what it is for something to be, given in the preceding chapter. We said there that Aristotle's identification of *ousia* with τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι meant that the Being of a thing is what it is for it to be, and that this was equivalent to its mode of existence. We have tried to show in this chapter that when Aristotle says *ousia* is *energeia* he means that Being is act, or activity. We have further suggested, through the example of the soul, that *ousia*, as *energeia*, is the fundamental and comprehensive mode of activity of an individual; and that this activity as such is unchanging but, in the case of a natural Being, is manifested only in the multitude of particular acts which make up the history of the individual. Hence, what it is for a thing to be, its mode of existence, turns out to be its primary mode of activity.

7

Conclusion

In the pages of this essay, starting from the proposal to try taking Aristotle's technical terms in their literal meanings, I have suggested that Aristotle in his metaphysics continues the search for being which he inherited from his predecessors, particularly Parmenides and Plato; and that *ousia*, which represents the fundamental type of being, is Aristotle's substitute for Parmenides' "being" and Plato's "Being itself." The concrete individual is called a Being (*ousia*) because, as something which is or exists simply and not as a predicate of something else, it has Being, and hence is the locus where Being is to be sought. Matter is Being because as such it is a potentiality for Being; and prime matter, as the potentiality for all natural Beings, represents the fact that each of the elements of which natural Beings are composed can be transformed into any other element. Being (*ousia*) as the form of the concrete Being is Being itself, or existence. It is what it is for each thing to be (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι ἑκάστῳ), and differs from one species to another, so that it may also be called the specific mode of existence of the individual. Finally, Being (*ousia*) is act, or activity (*energeia*); so that the Being of a thing, or what it is for the thing to be, is the fundamental principle of its activity, or rather its activity regarded from the point of view of its fundamental principle as a single, persistent act rather than as a succession of events.

Such an interpretation of *ousia* gets rid of some of the difficulties of the interpretation in terms of substance and essence which were pointed out in our first chapter. First, the unknown *x* underlying all physical substances turns out to be the potentiality for existence which manifests itself as the mutual transformability of the elements. Second, existence is given a place in the system. Third, the essence, expressed by the definition, includes only those predicates of a thing which characterize its mode of being, or which, in other words, describe its activity in its most comprehensive aspects; thus, a

criterion seems to be provided for distinguishing the essence from the properties and accidents.

Aristotle sometimes says that the investigation of material, perceptible Beings in metaphysics will contribute to the solution of the problem whether there are any immaterial Beings. His characterization of the Being of material things as activity may be said to lend support to his postulation of a God whose Being is an immaterial activity of thinking.

The connection between the conception of Being as activity and Aristotle's ethical doctrine is obvious, for his ethics begins with the function of a human being as such, and defines happiness, the chief end of man, as activity in accordance with virtue or right reason.

It is sometimes regarded as a weakness in Aristotle's conception of scientific method that he lays so much stress on definitions as first principles, as if he proposed to deduce the properties and actions of things from easily acquired definitions or even verbal ones. This is a misrepresentation. We have seen that he regarded the general definition of the soul as only a beginning of investigation, leading the way to definitions of the various species of souls. Such definitions must provide the basis for explaining the various attributes and activities of the subjects defined, and hence must be framed with the aid of empirical observation.

Aristotle's emphasis on definitions is connected with his rejection of explanations which appeal solely to mechanical necessity and with his preference for teleological explanations. It is clear from the methodological discussion at the beginning of the *De Partibus*, from which we have already quoted, that what he sought in biology were explanations of the parts, motions, etc., of living beings on the basis of their role in the comprehensive function of the organism. In the *Physics* (II.8 and 9) he similarly demands teleological explanations for the phenomena of the inorganic realm as well—explanations, that is, in terms of a whole. Of course, he recognized that many things happen not for some end but simply from necessity, e.g., eclipses[1]; and he by no means refused a place in natural science to such phenomena. What he wished to maintain was that ultimate explanations must be teleological in the sense described; the cases of mere mechanical necessity are by-products of activities which occur for some end. With this conception of science the account which we have given of Aristotle's theory of *ousia* seems to be in accord.

[1] *Met. Z.*4 (1044b 9–12).

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