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ARISTOTLE’S
THEORY OF BEING

EMERSON BUCHANAN

UNIVERSITY, MISSISSIPPI • CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS
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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. 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, *oduia*, τὸ τί ἐνεστὶ, and ἐνέργεια, which will be assumed to have the following meanings:

1. *oduia* means Being, since it is derived from the present participle of the verb ἔνεστι ("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. τὸ τί ἐν ἐνεστὶ, which has been construed in different ways, to be discussed in a later chapter, will be taken to mean "what it was to

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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.

be," or "what it means to be." Similarly, τὸ τί ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος will mean "what it was for a man to be," and τὸ ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος 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. Εἴδησις, 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 οὐσία is energia 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 οὐσία?"—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 ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος means "what it is for each thing to exist," and designates a mode of being or existing. Consequently, in identifying οὐσία (Being) with τὸ τί ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος, 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 ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος 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 οὐσία is energia. Interpreted thus, Aristotle's statement can be seen to be a continuation and a correction of the proposition advanced in Plato's Σοφίτης 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.

It might be maintained, in opposition to what was said above, that, although "substance" is not an accurate translation of οὐσία 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 οὐσία 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 οὐσία. This proposition also does not seem to be completely true.

Of course, Aristotle does speak of οὐσία 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 ὄντος ἐνεργοῦν, "subject" or "that which underlies." There is not much difficulty in this notion as it occurs in the Categories, where Aristotle's concern is largely with words and where οὐσία 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 οὐσίαι. 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. 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, and which succumbed to the attacks of phenomenalists and idealists.


* "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 preeminently 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. 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 deserves. 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 ἴδιον ἐνίου. 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 ἴδιον ἐνίου; 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. Aristotle is thought to have contributed nothing to the solution of this difficulty.

*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, 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. 91f.

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 ὄν ὁ 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

12 This is confusing in English. In Greek it reads: ἡ ὄσια, ὡς ὁ ὄσια (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.

13 Met. Γ.1 (1003a 21ff); E1 (1025b 3ff).

14 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 (Cf. ἄργεια, ἀνάλγεια) 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."
Aristotle’s Theory of Being

Aristotle’s Theory of Being says, “the principle of structure of the concrete thing.” 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 energéia. There seems to be a better chance of making ousia a cause of motion and functioning if it is itself an activity.

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.

Ross, Aristotle, 172.

Interpretations of Aristotle’s doctrine of ousia in terms of motion, function, or process have been given by Walter Bröcker, Aristoteles (Frankfurt am Main 1933); 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).

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 (dpore) 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 (Ov), 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 (Ov), 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 (Ov). These appear, more than the others, to be beings (dpore), 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 ὅπερ λέγεται πολλαχῶς)—i.e., the word “being” has various uses in discourse, or various meanings. This means, of course, that not merely “being” (Ov), whether taken as participle or noun, but the verb “to be” (eivai) 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., ὅσα ἔχει γὰρ λέγεται, τοσαυτάκες τὸ εἶναι σημαίνει ("in as many ways as they [sc., the figures of predications] occur, in so many ways does 'to be' signify") and ἄπειρον γὰρ καὶ τὸ ἔτιν ὑπάρχει πᾶσιν, ἀλλ' ὅσα ὄρμοι ἀλλὰ τῷ μὲν πρῶτος τοῖς δ' ἐπομένοις, οὕτω καὶ τῷ τί ἐτιν ἐπάλλος μὲν τῇ οὔτε πῶς δὲ τῶν ἄλλων ("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' belongs primarily to οὐσία and only in a way to the others").

The same statement, that "being" has many senses, is used in Book 7, Chapter 2, of the Metaphysics, just as in Book Z, to lead up to the assertion that the primary business of metaphysics is with οὐσία. Indeed, it pervades the whole of Aristotle's metaphysical theory and may be said to provide one of its most distinctive characteristics.

In Metaphysics A.7, to which the second clause of Book Z refers, being, or that which is (τὸ ἄν), is said to include, among its various meanings, accidental being, being taken by itself, as truth, and potential and actual being; and being taken by itself (τὸ ἄν καθ' οὕτως is said to have various meanings according to the various categories, or figures of predications. 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."

The questions concerning the origin and primary meaning of the doctrine of the categories need not be answered for our present purpose. 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 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 δικτῶν (genera of beings, or of the things that there are), γένη τῶν κατηγοριών (genera of predicates, or of predications), συγκρήτωσε θεία κατηγορίας οίκου των κατηγοριών (figures of predications). 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)." In Metaphysics A.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 predications; 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' οὕτως 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 predications."
I think it is possible, although not necessary, that τὰ κατὰ συμβεβηκός 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 (ὡς 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, in this complex whole, one part ("musical") belongs accidentally, or adjectively, to the other ("man").

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." 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"; it is rather the other way 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.

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 (ἐίναι) 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 τι ἐν ἀλβῳ.

The classification of the meanings of "being," or "to be," according to the categories, when "to be" is used absolutely (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. 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

"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.

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 ἐίναι includes both copula and predicate (ibid. 229).

The verb ἐίναι 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.

I have retained ἔναν before μαθῶν, although Ross, following Codex A, omits it.
interpret the sentence thus, taking πουίν and πουίν as adjectives, then it concerns the meanings of the copulative "to be," like the passage from Book A 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 πουίν and πουίν 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.\(^\text{16}\)

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 (δύναμις), 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 (δύναμις) 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 (δύναμις), 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 sometimes..."

\(^\text{16}\)On this interpretation, moreover, the sentence constitutes a denial of the position suggested in the Physics (1.1 [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 absolutely and "is" used absolutely; in fact, they are mingled together both in this chapter (\(\Delta.7\)) and in the chapter already cited (\(\Delta.7\)). 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. \(\Delta.7\) [1017a 22–30] in Metaphysics I. 308).

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**OUSIA AND THE VARIOUS SENSES OF BEING**

thing (\(\tau\ \delta\nu\)) but as 'that which simply is [or exists],' would be ousia.\(^\text{17}\)

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," 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.\(^\text{18}\) Hence, such an entity cannot itself properly be called a Being (or a Being) 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.

\(^\text{17}\) See the 3rd passage to\(\tau\ \delta\nu\) and o\(\tau\ \lambda\nu\) of\(\tau\ \delta\nu\) (1028a 30–31).

\(^\text{18}\) I have spelled "Being" with a capital "B" when it stands for ousia, to distinguish it from "being" standing for \(\delta\nu\), 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 \(\tau\ \delta\nu\).
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.” It is evident from this passage that Aristotle did not regard ground that they maintained, in opposition to Parmenides, that the void is.

Of Leucippus and Democritus he says (Met. A.4 [985 b 4 ff]) that they regarded the “full” as being (δό) and the “void” as non-being (μὴ δό)—“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 [324 b 35–325 a 2]) 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 being.

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—if that which is and something else—could the things that are be composed, if they are many. [Met. N.2 (1089 a 2 ff), translated by Ross.]  

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 [187 a 1 ff]). 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.”

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. The purpose of the analogy is to show that, if “being” (δό) be taken as an adjective, analogous to “white,” it would have to be predicated of a subject, and to δό 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.  

20 Sophist 241 d: ὁ λοιματιν ἡμῶν... βρέθηκα τοι τα μὴ δό σοι ἐμέ κατά τι καὶ τα δό σου πάλιν ὡς ὅνε ἄτομον ἀκρα.  
21 ἄλλο γάρ ἔτωσα το λευκόν λευκό καὶ το δεδημένον καὶ το ἐτερον το λευκόν καὶ φ ύσης (1864 28–29, 31). Of course, το λευκόν, like other Greek adjectives, can have either the abstract meaning of “whiteness” or the concrete meaning of “that which is white.” Similarily, τα δό 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" [σὰρκα δὲν] 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)]

Some remarks must be made on the construction and meaning of σὰρκα δὲν and σὰρκα ἕν. Ross (in his edition of the Physics, analysis and commentary on the passage) translates σὰρκα δὲν as "What is just being" or "What is just existent," and σὰρκα 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 principal question, however, is whether the relative δὲν or δὲν ἕν (being) and ἕν (one). The principal question, however, is whether the relative σὰρκα is subject or predicate—i.e., whether the phrase means "what is being" or "what being is."

This use of σὰρκα 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

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 σὰρκα: "For white is an accident of man, because a man is white but not what white is" (ὁὐκ ἄγον ταύτα τειχύρων).

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 σὰρκα δὲν), 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

23 I have taken the liberty of transposing the clause σὰρκα δὲν σὰρκα δὲν σὰρκα δὲν (186a 1–2) to a position before τὰ γὰρ συμβεβεβηκαν (a 34). As the passage stands, γὰρ ("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, δὲν or δὲν or δὲν ("therefore" or "so that") would be more natural than δὲν ("of course," "now") in b 1; as the text stands; but with the proposed rearrangement δὲν makes sense. In the third place, the subject of πάντα ("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 δὲν ("anything else") of the preceding sentence. With the proposed transposition there is no change of subject.

It can hardly be doubted that Aristotle has here been using τὸ δὲν τὸν ("that which is what being is") as equivalent to ὄσια. Now, since he has already put τὸ δὲν τὸν νῦν in the place of Parmenides' concept of "being," it may be inferred that he also regarded ὄσια 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 δὲν τὸν νῦν τὸ (something which is what being is)"? The reference is obviously to Plato. Here τὸ δὲν τὸν νῦν 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 ὄσια, which is equivalent to τὸ δὲν τὸν νῦν, as replacing not only Parmenides' "being," but also Plato's "Being itself."

From this we may further conclude that ὄσια retains something of the character which being had for Parmenides and Plato, so that, for Aristotle, ὄσια represents Being itself. It will be important to remember this when we come to consider Aristotle's assertion that ὄσια is τὸ ἄθανον τὸν, 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, ὄσια, 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 ὄσια. Hence, only ὄσια has separate being, or existence, and all the entities in the other categories depend upon ὄσια for such being or existence as they have. Accordingly, Aristotle continues, ὄσια is first in knowledge and definition as well as in time; the other categories both exist and are known only in virtue of ὄσια.

"Indeed," he says, "the old question, which is even now, as always, a subject of investigation and doubt, viz., What is being (τὸ δὲν)?, is
really the question, What is ousia?" 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 Ζ, 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, ὃ ἔσται; 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, ὃ ἔσται is a multiple question and must 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 ὄν ὃ ἔσται) 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 I of the Metaphysics. There it is said that the business of metaphysics is with τὸ ὄν ὃ ἔσται—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 (ὅστε). 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 Ζ.
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 (oudia ekatos) is, i.e., what it is in things which may be called their Being, and suggests four possible answers: to ti eivai (literally, “the what it was to be”), the universal, the genus, and the substratum or subject (to upokelemon). 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.

It is reasonable to identify the universal and the genus as belonging to the Platonists. to ti eivai, “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?

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 (tis mel oudia upokelemon), but changing in respect of its affections (pathi).” 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 molias yip dokiei eivai oudia to upokelemon prouta (1029a 1–2).
3 The reiterated use of the alternation, “substratum or subject,” for to upokelemon 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 reconsidered his own conception of ousia as to upokelemon, 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 A.8. The words in which he describes to upokelemon in our present passage, “that of which everything else is predicated, while it is itself not predicated of anything else,” echo the words of the Categories and of Metaphysics A.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.

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 (de) 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

6 1028b 36–37. The idea is repeated in almost the same words a few lines farther along, 1029a 8–9.
7 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 (ousia), 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 (tò ón) is determined. For there is something of which each of these is predicated, whose being (eíme) 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 ὅσον ἐμφάνισθην is regarded as a property of Beings (ousia) 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 predications, 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 ὅσον ἐμφάνισθην 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.” 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 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 transformatibility, 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 ὢν εἶναι.

9 Physics I (189a 30ff).
10 Cf. what Gilson says with regard to the statement in the Categoriae that ousia is neither predicatable 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.
11 Hence, we must reject the thesis of Hugh King’s ingenious and illuminating article, “Aristotle without Prima Materialia” (Journal of the History of Ideas, 17 [1966] 370–389), with regard to the doctrine of prime matter, that “no trace of it can be found within his philosophic remaines . . .” (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.
12 De Gen. et Corrupt. I.1 (315a 3ff); II.1 (329b 1ff); II.6 (333a 16ff); De Caelo III.6 (304b 23ff).
13 Physics I.6 (109a 34ff); De Gen. et Corrupt. II.1 (329a 24–27).
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.”
The Syntax and Meaning of

to ti t'v eina
had to be so taken in this passage, it could hardly be claimed on the basis of this alone that the ἤν in τὸ τί ἤν 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 ἤν 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. Here the difficulty that there is usually no obvious backward reference in the passages where τὸ τί ἤν 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. 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 ἤν αὕτω τὸ ἀνθρώπων εἶναι). As an exception that proves the rule, he cites τί ἔστι τὸ ἵππος εἶναι (“What is the being of a cloak?”), where ἤστιν (“cloak”) is being used with an assumed meaning which it did not have before, viz., “white man”; here the present, ἔστιν, is used instead of the imperfect, ἤν. Arpe further points out that τὸ τί ἤν 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...
(b) With a noun or pronoun in the dative case; e.g., τὸ τί ἢν ἐλθεῖν ἐκάστῳ and τὸ τί ἢν ἐλθεῖν ἑπείρο. Examples with a pronoun are common; but with a noun in the dative τὸ ἐλθεῖν is generally used, rather than τὸ τί ἢν ἐλθεῖν.

(c) With two datives. The closest example, and apparently the only one with τί ἢν, is τί ἢν αὐτῷ τὸ αἴματα ἐλθεῖν ("what it was for it to be blood," De Part. An. II.3 [649b 22]). Here Bekker's text has the indefinite τί 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 ἐστὶν instead of ἢν: τί ἐστίν αὐτῶν ἑκάστῃ τὸ ἔργον ἐλθεῖν (1a, 5 and 11).

(3) Phrases such as τὸντι ἢν τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐλθεῖν (De Part. An. I.1 [640a 34]) and τὸντι γὰρ ἢν αὐτῷ τὸ χρώματι ἐλθεῖν (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 ἢν ἐλθεῖν ἐκάστῳ (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 ἢν or ἐστὶν was ever used in this way and with this meaning, ἐστὶν or ἢν thus construed with the infinitive means "it is (was) possible," like ἔγερετο, not "it is given" or "it belongs."

(b) τὸ τί ἢν ἐλθεῖν with two datives cannot be construed after this pattern; for in Robin's interpretation τί is the predicate with ἐλθεῖν, 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 ἢν ἐλθεῖν.

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

11 Owens argues that Bekker's τί should be retained (The Doctrine of Being 353, note 83, a).
12 Robin, La pensé 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).
from which all the shorter forms were derived, we might suppose 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 τὶ ὑπὲρ εἶναι ἀνθρώπως, 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 τὶ ὑπὲρ 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 that the single dative, as in τὸ τὶ ὑπὲρ εἶναι ἀνθρώπως, 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 τὶ ὑπὲρ εἶναι, so that it seems likely that the former construction is the original.

Second, when the dative is a pronoun, e.g., ἐκάθεν, 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.”

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)—οmouseenter τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτῷ ὑπάρχει τὸ εἶναι ἀγαθὸν μὴ τοῦτῳ τὸ εἶναι ἀγαθὸν—the distinction is purely arbitrary. Fourth, there are passages where τὸ εἶναι is used alone to express the being or essence, e.g., τὸ εἶναι ἐτέρων τὸ λευκὸν καὶ ὁ ὑπάρχει (”the white and that to which it belongs are other in being.” Physics L.3 [186a 31]), which would justify taking εἶναι absolutely in τὸ ἀνθρώπως 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 όικοδομῶς εἶναι τὸ ὑπαρχὸν εἶναι ἐστὶν ὕικοδομήν (”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] was.”

(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 τὶ ὑπὲρ 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 ἀνθρώπως εἶναι (“the being of a man”), to the longer form, τὸ τὶ ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπως εἶναι (“the being of a man was”).

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 τὶ ὑπὲρ εἶναι ἀνθρώπως, 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 τὶ ὑπὲρ 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

19 This construction is clearly implied by τὰ ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶν ἔκαθεν τὸ ὑπέρ εἶναι (Cat. 1. 1). The τὸ before εἶναι is omitted in τὸ τὶ ὑπὲρ εἶναι, one may suppose, in order to avoid an awkward repetition. Cf. also Alexander’s δὲ τὸ τὶ ἐστὶ τὸ εἶναι αὐτῷ δὴ ἐλεύθερος λόγος (On Top. 101b 39, in Brandis, Scholia, 256b 14–15), which suggests that Alexander construed τὸ τὶ ὑπὲρ εἶναι as here suggested.

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17 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”
was.” Now, “to be,” used absolutely, means “to exist,” 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 (συμβεβεβήκτο.).

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”; but “being an animal” means “having a soul” rather than just “soul.”

If this explanation of τὸ τί ἐστι 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 ἀνθρώπων εἶναι means “being a man.” This seems to be the case in Metaphysics Τ.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, αὐτῶν (“for him”), is easily supplied from the preceding τί (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 ἀνθρώπων 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 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 ἀνθρώπων 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 ὅπως ἐὰν, 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 ἐστι 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.

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 ἐστι εἶναι.

21 Cf. Anal. Post. II.1 (98b 31–33): ἡπὶ δὲ ἀλλά τριστάματι ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος, ἐαν ὁ οὐκ ἐστιν ἃ μὴ ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος ἢ θεός, τὸ δὲ ἀνθρώπων ἢ μὴ ἀνθρώπων, ἢ τὸ ἄνθρωπος ἢ μὴ ἄνθρωπος. “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 ἐστι); 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 ὁ τῶν ἄλλων φωνῇ...τὸ τί ἐστι τὸ τούριδε ὁμώνυμον (Met. Z.10 [1035b 14–16]).
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 ἐστιν 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 δὲ (being) or τὰ δύοι (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?" It is a plausible supposition that there is a connection between Aristotle’s phrase, τὸ τί ἐστιν 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 ἐν εἶναι ἑκάστου). It may be pointed out, however, that in the *Sophist* (247d–e, etc.) Plato suggests that being may be defined as δύνασθαι—potency, power, 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 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 ἐστιν εἶναι as what each thing is said to be in itself² (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 ἐστιν 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 ἐστιν 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.¹ The question must be, "What is it for you to be?," and σοὶ εἶναι must mean “for you to be” or “your being.” This, then, is further evidence for the supposition that τὸ τί ἐστιν 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.

¹ 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.
² ἡ λέγειν καθ’ αὐτὸ (Met. Z.4 [1029b 14]).
³ Met. Z.15 (1039b 27ff).
⁴ The difficulty created by such passages as this, if we begin with the assumption that τὸ τί ἐν 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 henseforth 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 αὐθαίρετον εἶναι” (p. xcvi, 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 (Dar τί ἐν εἶναι bei Aristoteles, 54).
on the assumption that the "what it is to be" 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" (τι ἔστιν), 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." 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"

4 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.

5 Arpe (op. cit. 39-40) finds this passage difficult also. Having adopted the position that τό τι έστιν 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 abases his own technical term by limiting it arbitrarily to the first category. Aristotle is led to do this, he says, by giving τό τι έστιν the double meaning (categorial and definitory) which τι έστοι 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.

6 The next assertion (1030a 6ff), that there is a "what it is to be" only for those things of which the formula (ὁμοιότης) is a ὁμοιότης, is puzzling, for ὁμοιότης 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.

7 τό τι έστιν έστις ὁμοιότης ὁμοιότητος μέν καὶ ἀνάλοις τῇ συνθέσει, εἶτα καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις, ὡσπερ καὶ τό τι ἔστω, νῦν ὁμοιότατον τό έστιν ἄλλα ποιήσαι· τον έστιν (1030a 29-32).

8 Met. A7 (98b 4-5).
9 Met. A9 (99a 12-14).
4—A.T.B.
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"; 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. 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. If the good itself is other than the being 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 (rò elwv ónyav) does not belong to the good itself, and being good (rò elwv oxabv) 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 (rò òvri eIovn), 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 (logos oúías). 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 (οὗτον πρῶτον τοῦ ἐμν). And, since some things are not Beings (ουσία), 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 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 ούσια means Being and that τὸ τὶ ἐστὶν ἐμν 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 (ουσία) of bodies which have souls. That it is cause as Being (ουσία) is evident; for the Being (ουσία) 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 ούσια 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 ούσια, 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 ούσια 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 ούσια, even joined with matter; but it is the analogue of ούσια in each of these things. [1042b 25ff]

Here Aristotle extends the doctrine of the many meanings of “being”...
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 1.3, 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.” 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 individual; but essences are definable and are objects of scientific knowledge. Moreover, in the Categories he calls the species and the genus secondary ousia.

14 1038b 14-15; cf. also 1040b 16-1041a 5, 1003a 8, 1053b 16, 1060b 21, 1087a 2.
15 Met. Z.15 (1039b 29ff).
16 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.” 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.” 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
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 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, ὅν and τὸ ἐνεργεῖα ὅν. 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). 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.”

5—A.T.B. 51
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 δύναμις, "to be able," is energeia, "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 πράξις.

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 (energeia), 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 30–1048b 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 (δοξάζεσθαι) 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 ἀρχής—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." 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*. Metaphysics 9.8, is primarily devoted to proving that *energeia* 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. 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."
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.\(^4\) 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.\(^9\) 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

\(^4\) 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.

\(^9\) De Anima I.4 (407b 21ff, especially 407b 34–408a 5). Aristotle’s rejection of this theory is equivalent to saying that behavior cannot be accounted for by structure alone.

\(^10\) De Anima II.1 (412a 3ff).

It seems likely, on the basis of the passages in Met. Θ.6 (1046b 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 τῇ ἐνέργειᾳ τῇ ἐνθελεχείᾳ.

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 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.
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.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{ousia}. (1) We have already discussed soul as \textit{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,\textsuperscript{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.

There is an illuminating passage in the \textit{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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{18} De Anima II.2 (413a 11ff); 2 (414b 20ff).
\textsuperscript{19} De Anima II.3 (414b 25ff).
\textsuperscript{20} De Anima II.2 (413a 11ff).
\textsuperscript{21} De Anima II.2 (413a 11ff).
\textsuperscript{15} De Anima II.2 (413a 11ff).
\textsuperscript{16} De Anima II.2 (413a 11ff).
\textsuperscript{17} St. Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae}, I, q. 18, a. 2: “... vivere nihil aliud est quam esse in talia natura: et vita significat hoc ipsum, sed in abstracto; sicut hoc nomen cursus significat ipsum currere in abstracto.”
\textsuperscript{19} De Anima II.1 (413a 9-9).
\textsuperscript{20} De Part. An. I.5 (645b 14-20): εστι δε τα μιν εργανω παν ένεκα του, τας δε το των ουσιων μοριων δικαιον ενεκα του, τα δ' αν ενεκα πραξει τοις, φανερον δη και τα συνολον ουσια συνεντευκτικα πραξεις των ένεκα πλημνος, ου γραμ δε εν των ουσιων χαραι μεγαλου, ου λεγεν το ουσιων η εστιν χρισεις γερα τε τη εστιν η καθεν, ου μοι και τα συνολα παν της ψυχης ενεκεν, και τα μορια των εργων προι των ενεκων δικαιων.”
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 ἔχειν 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.

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 ἔχειν εἶναι ἐκάστου), 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 χ 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; 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).