Introduction

In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle claims that he is seeking to establish a science of being. Being, at the most general level, is divided by Aristotle into the following four types:

1. Accidental being
2. Being as truth
3. Potential/actual being
4. *Per se* being[1]

Per se (*kath hauto*) being can also be translated as "being in its own right" or "intrinsic being". This type of being has been referred to by Aristotle in different ways. The list of *per se* beings includes substance, quantity, quality, place, time, etc., and this is also the list of categories. At *Meta.* ix.1, 1045b28 Aristotle calls this list the "categories of being" (*hai katēgoriai tou ontos*). At *Meta.* vi.2, 1026a36 and ix.10, 1051a33-b2 *per se* being is called "being with reference to the figures of predication" (*ta schēmata tēs katēgorias*, or "figures of categories").[2]

Of these four types of being, accidental being is briefly treated in *Meta.* vi.2-3 and there Aristotle claims that the study of accidental being can be dismissed on the grounds that accidental being is indeterminate and cannot be the object of knowledge.[3] He also does not pay much attention to being as truth and treats it briefly in two short texts: *Meta.* vi.4 and ix.10. His reason is that being as truth depends on combination and separation in thought but not in things, and hence "that which is in this sense is a different sort of being from the things that are in the full sense (for the thought attaches or removes either the 'what' or quality or quantity or one of the other categories), and that which is accidentally and that which is in the sense of being true must be dismissed." (vi.4, 1027b30-34) The science of being, then, is mainly concerned with *per se* being (or categorial being) and potential/actual being.

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[1] *Meta.* v.7. Cf. also *Meta.* vi.2, 1026a34-b2, ix.10, 1051a33-b2.

[2] The relation between being and category will be discussed in Chapter 1, section 1. I shall use the term "categorial being" interchangeably with "*per se* being".

[3] *Meta.* vi.2,1026b4, vi.2, 1027a20, vi.4, 1027b17.

According to the structure of the *Metaphysics* as we have it, the discussion of these two types of beings occupies the central books of the *Metaphysics*: *Meta.* vii, viii, and ix.[4] Aristotle himself indicates explicitly that these two kinds of beings are the subject-matter of these central books:

> We have treated of that which is primarily and to which all the other categories of being are referred – i.e., of substance. ... Since being is in one way divided into this thing, quality, and quantity, and is in another way distinguished in respect of potentiality and fulfillment, and of function, let us discuss potentiality and fulfillment. (*Meta.* ix.1, 1045b28-35)

This passage singles out *per se* being and potential/actual being from the four-fold division of being, and indicates that these two types of being belong to separate investigations.

The central books of the *Metaphysics* have been regarded as the most mature and fundamental texts, but they are notoriously difficult. Indeed, almost everything said in these books is open to various interpretations and debates, and the scholarship on these books is marked by numerous controversies and debates.[5]

However, although these books have been the subjects of intensive discussions, the distinction between *per se* being and potential/actual being has been commonly treated as something verbal. F. Brentano representatively expresses this widely-shared indifference toward this distinction: "They [*per se* being and potential/actual being] have in common that the science of being, metaphysics, is concerned in the same way with one as with the other."[6] Commentators usually say that *Meta.* vii and viii deal with *per se* being, and ix with potential/actual being.[7] Yet, to divide the texts in this way is a matter of convenience in exposition rather than a division of any philosophical significance. Even this expository division can be seen as an indication of how trivially the distinction has been treated. For it has been noted that the most evident difference between *Meta.* vii and viii is that potentiality and actuality

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[4] Some commentators prefer to use Z, H, and Θ to refer to these three books respectively. For the sake of consistency, I modify the references in relevant quotations.

[5] J. Barnes summarizes the situation in this way: "The argument is tortuous in the extreme, and it is far from clear what Aristotle's final views on the subject are—if indeed he had any final views." (1995, 67) M. Loux in the preface to his *Primary Ousia* remarks: "Having had at least ten different opinions on virtually every sentence I am not naïve enough to suppose that the views I express here will be my final ideas of vii and viii." (1990, xi)

[6] F. Brentano, 1975, 27.

[7] The following comments of W. D. Ross on the treatment of the four types of beings in the *Metaphysics* are routinely followed among the commentators: "Of the four senses of 'being' mentioned there [*Meta.* v.7], *ta kata sumbebēkos* [accidental being] is briefly discussed in vi.2 and 3, *to hōs alēthes* [being as truth] in vi.4; *to kata ta schēmata tēs katēgorias* [being with respect to the figures of predications] or rather substance, the first category, is discussed in vii and viii, and *to kata dunamin kai entelecheian* [potentiality and actuality] in ix." (1924, i, 358)

are the main subject-matter of viii, but not of vii.[8] If the distinction between *per se* being and potential/actual being is taken as a serious one, one might wonder whether it could still be maintained that *Meta.* vii-viii are, as a unity, concerned with *per se* being, while *Meta.* ix is about potential/actual being.

Consequently, so far as I am aware, it has never been taken to be the case that in these central books there are two separate and distinct discussions: one belonging to the study of *per se* being, and the other to the study of potential/actual being. Rather, the assumption that is often made is that in these central books, the issues raised and discussed in *Meta.* vii are further explained and developed in *Meta.* viii and ix. Furthermore, books viii and ix are considered to be supplementary to or some development of the argument of vii.[9] Accordingly, these central books have been thought to constitute a complex but single argument, and the doctrines in all three books are taken to address the same question.

What I try to do in this book is to explore the significance of the distinction between *per se* being and potential/actual being in Aristotle's metaphysics. I will show that Aristotle is utterly serious in setting apart these two types of being and in claiming that they need separate discussions. His metaphysics of being, in its core, contains the following two studies:

1. the investigation of *per se* being which is about the basic constituents of reality and is related to predication, categories, and definition, and
2. the study of potential/actual being which deals with the motion, process, and function of the world, as motion is defined by Aristotle as "the actualization of the potentiality as such".

These two studies are of course connected, yet each has its own perspective and agenda. It is not accidental that he never puts potentiality and actuality on the list of categories. As I shall argue, the distinction between *per se* being and potential/actual being suggests that Aristotle views the world in two ways: statically and dynamically. Indeed, in his discussion of the soul, Aristotle

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[8] As W. D. Ross says: "The expressions potentiality and actuality, almost entirely absent in vii, play a considerable part in viii." (1924, i. cxxiv) The same observation is also made in the *Notes On Eta and Theta*: "while a concern with substance as actuality is the mark of viii, it is conspicuously not a mark of vii." (M. Burnyeat *et al.*, eds., 1984, 3)

[9] The dominance of this position can be seen from W. Jaeger's remark made earlier in the 20th century that the discussions of substance "begin with vii; then came viii; viii was presumably followed by ix, as now" [1948/1923, 201-2], and from T.H. Irwin's comment that viii and ix "explain some of the major claims in vii" (1987, 207). M. L. Gill holds a position that there are two stages of development in these central books and that much said in book vii is denied later. Nevertheless, she insists that "Aristotle's works can be approached as an intelligible whole and that his systematic of cross-references is our most reliable guide in deciding how the treatments relate to one another." (1989, 114)

himself expresses clearly that he has these two ways of approaching the study of the soul:

> First, no doubt, it is necessary to determine in which of the *summa genera* soul lies, what it is, is it 'a this-somewhat', a substance, or is it a quale or a quantum, or some other of the remaining kinds of predicates which we have distinguished? Further, does soul belong to the class of potential existents, or it is not rather an actuality? Our answer to this question is of the greatest importance. [10]

By exploring the implications of this distinction, I seek to develop an alternative understanding of the program that Aristotle pursues in the *Metaphysics*.

Given that these two types of being are discussed in the central books of the *Metaphysics*, if the distinction of these two types of being is serious, we are led to think that these books contain two, rather than one, doctrines of being. Since substance is primary being and the question of what being is is investigated in terms of what substance is in these central books, we would like to think that there are two theories of substance in them: one takes substance as a *per se* being, and the other takes it as a potential/actual being. Furthermore, since in these central books substance is the composite of form and matter and is discussed in terms of the matter/form relation, it should be the case that the matter/form relation is treated in two different ways:

1. One belongs to the study of *per se* being in which the matter/form relation is not associated with the potentiality/actuality relation.
2. The other belongs to the study of potential/actual being in which the matter/form relation and the potentiality/actuality relation are interwoven.

The bulk of this book seeks to establish and justify that the distinction between these two kinds of being runs through Aristotle's theory of substance in these central books.

In my reading, a demarcation of these two studies of being in the central books is *Meta.* vii.17, a text which starts with an announcement that "we should say what, and what sort of thing, substance is, taking another starting-point." (1041a6-7) As most commentators do not take seriously the distinction between *per se* being and potential/actual being, they also dismiss vii.17's claim of a new start and view it as a mere figure of speech. However, there are strong reasons to believe that this claim is seriously and should be taken accordingly. I shall argue that the approach initiated in vii.17, which takes form as a formal cause, is continued in books viii and ix, but is contrasted with the

[10] *DA.* i.1, 402a23-7.

main argument in vii.3-16. Accordingly, I submit, the three central books should be divided into two groups:

1. vii.3-16, which belong to the study of *per se* being, and
2. vii.17, viii and ix, which belong to the study of potential/actual being.

Each has its own distinct set of issues to discuss. Vii.3-16 is concerned with which element of substance—form, matter, or the composite—is primary substance and with the universality and particularity of primary substance. In contrast, vii.17, viii, and ix deal with the issue of how a sensible substance can be generated and unified and how it functions. The theory of substance in this group of texts is neither supplementary to nor a different stage of the argument of the same theory that is investigated in vii.3-16. The common practice of lumping them together is probably one major reason why *Meta.* vii-ix are so controversial. To separate them in the way that I recommend will help us to see the internal agenda of each group of texts, and also to set many disputed issues in different perspectives, which I will try to present when we move on.

To treat seriously Aristotle's distinction between *per se* being and potential/actual being also sheds new light on the relation between *Metaphysics* vii and the *Categories*. In the *Cat.* the concrete particulars are said to be primary substances, whereas in *Meta.* vii form is the claimant to the title of primary substance. How to explain this inconsistency has been one of the central issues in understanding Aristotle's metaphysics. My view is that these two texts belong to two levels of discussion in the study of *per se* being. They are complementary and do not conflict. The *Cat.* deals with the relation between substance and other categories, while *Meta.* vii mainly deals with the relation between form, matter, and the composite--a relation that is within the category of substance itself. However, the approach to reality in these two texts is similar. Both seek to distinguish different elements and to determine which one really exists in virtue of itself (*per se*). The *Cat.* divides beings into different categories of beings and argues that substance is the most fundamental, while *Meta.* vii divides substance into form, matter, and the composite and takes pains to determine that form is primary substance (being) among these. Further, as the *Cat.* distinguishes between universality and particularity within each categories, and in particular within the category of substance, *Meta.* vii also tries to determine whether form is particular or universal. It is true that in *Meta.* vii substance is divided into form, matter, and the composite, a division which was missing in the *Cat.* But this does not entail that the theory in the *Cat.* is denied or replaced in *Meta.* vii: *Meta.* vii.1 does not mention the division of form and matter either, and its discussion of the relation between substance and the other categories is continuous with *Cat.* 5. Hence, *Meta.* vii should be seen as presupposing the essential truth of the

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The Structure of Being in Aristotle's Metaphysics

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