Chapter 3
Hylomorphism and Its Two Approaches

Aristotle has established that the study of being, both *per se* being and potential/actual being, should be investigated through the study of substance. The central books of the *Metaphysics*, books vii, viii, and ix, are the texts dedicated to the discussion of substance. However, the central books presuppose a position that substance itself is no longer metaphysically simple, but becomes a composite of form and matter, and consequently, the study of substance in these books is reflected in the study of the relation among form, matter, and the composite. Here we face a turning point in Aristotle's metaphysics. Yet how does this turning point occur? What is the motivation behind it? The *Metaphysics* itself does not provide answers to these questions. We need to turn to the analysis of the elements of change in *Ph.* i for enlightenment. This chapter, then, starts with an introductory discussion to show that it is in the analysis of the elements involved in change that Aristotle is driven to the conclusion that a sensible substance is a composite.

The theory of matter and form presented in *Meta.* vii, viii, and ix, however, is far from simple. The concepts of matter and form, and the discussions of their relations, are so varied and even contradictory that commentators remain perplexed over what exactly these concepts mean and what their relation is. Regarding the notion of form, P. Geach writes, "There is hardly a statement about form in the *Metaphysics* that is not (at least verbally) contradicted by some other statement."[1] Regarding the notion of matter, W. Wieland claims that the task of arriving at a clear conception of matter is "a hopeless one".[2] After listing Aristotle's various remarks about matter, M. Schofield also remarks: "Exactly how these related themes of Aristotle's thinking about matter are to be understood is a question for debate."[3] Regarding the matter/form relationship, J. Ackrill states that "Where things or materials are produced, whether in nature or by technology, or by chemical action, the matter-form analysis is in difficulty."[4] For F. Lewis, though Aristotle always asserts that form and matter

[1] P. Geach, in E. Anscombe and P. Geach, 1961, 75.
[2] W. Wieland, 1975, 137.
[3] M. Schofield, 1972, 100.
[4] J. Ackrill, 1972-3, 133.

compose an individual substance, the precise way in which they combine "remains mysterious",[5] and for D. Graham, "in any event the form-matter scheme is itself indeterminate".[6]

Although, in content, *Meta.* vii, viii, and ix discuss the relation between form and matter, Aristotle still says, as the remark at the beginning of ix.1 indicates, that in these central books he is studying *per se* being and potential/actual being. We therefore have reason to believe that for Aristotle the distinction between these two types of being is transferred into in the discussion of the matter/form relation. In other words, there must be a distinction in the discussion of the matter/form relationship that reflects the distinction between the two types of being. Thus, the main job of this chapter is to show how the distinction between *per se* being and potential/actual being is carried over to the discussion of the relation between form and matter. I argue that in the central books of the *Metaphysics*, the discussion of the matter/form relation, according to whether the relation is associated with the potentiality/actuality relation, shows two distinct approaches. That is, one approach belongs to the study of *per se* being, and the other to the study of potential/actual being. Many controversies over form, matter, and the matter/form relation, in my diagnosis, result from the lack of attention paid to the distinction between these two types of being.

I argue further that the demarcation line for these two approaches to the matter/form relationship lies in *Meta.* vii.17. Aristotle claims at the beginning of vii.17 that he will discuss substance from "a new start", but his claim has been dismissed as merely verbal and never receives the serious consideration it deserves.[7] Instead of taking it as a new beginning, many interpreters take vii.17's view that form is formal cause as a standpoint to interpret the whole of book vii, although the interpretations resulting from this strategy are various and even incompatible.[8] In contrast, I will contend that vii.17's claim of a new

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[5] F. Lewis, 1985, 60.

[6] D. Graham, 1987, 60.

[7] A popular reading of vii.17 suggests that this text should still be viewed as a concluding chapter to the whole book vii, and that its function is to provide a response to the problem which vii.3-16 has sought to solve, i.e. what is substance? As W. D. Ross (1924, i. cxi, ii. 222) remarks: "Having shown that the substance of things is neither their substratum nor their universal..., Aristotle, next, in ch. 17, essays to show that it is form or essence." This opinion is dubious. That form or essence is primary substance has been affirmed before vii.17 (e.g. vii.7, 1032b1-2). Furthermore, vii.17's affirmation that substance is form or essence is hardly derived from the preceding discussions. Other scholars believe that vii.17 is not a conclusion, but merely a step in the unfolding of Aristotle's thought. J. Owens (1963, 376) says that Aristotle has reduced being to entity (or substance) in vii, and now in vii.17 further reduces it to formal cause. In the same spirit, M. Frede and G. Patzig (1988, ii. 307-8) claim that vii.17 is a *Zwischenergebnis* from the study of the sensibles to the study of separate substances. Still others are sceptical. For instance, E. Ryan (1973, 219) holds that vii.17 is neither a new beginning nor a conclusion, and his own view is that "vii.17 is not at all that definitive, on any reading".

[8] I shall mention only a few who base their overall strategies on this interpretation or make use of

beginning is serious and substantial.[9] It contrasts with the study of *per se* being and provides an introduction to the study of potential/actual being.

Finally, based on my discussion of the two approaches to substance and form in *Meta.* vii, viii, and ix, I suggest dividing these three books into two groups: vii. 3-16, which discuss form and matter as *per se* beings,[10] and vii.17, viii, and ix, which deal with form and matter as potential/actual beings.

I. THE COMPOSITION OF SUBSTANCE

I start with Aristotle's introduction of the matter/form relation. Why do sensible substances need to be analyzed into form and matter? For Aristotle, this new position is developed out of his investigation of the principles or elements of generation, and in particular, of the generation of substance in *Ph.* i.

After a dialectic examination of the principles that his predecessors used to explain change, Aristotle promises, at the beginning of *Ph.* i.7, to offer his own view on change or generation. He starts with a consideration of how in daily language we say that something comes to be one thing from another different thing. For instance, to express that a man comes to be musical from

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it as the main support for their theses. J. Driscoll (1981) argues that form in *Meta.* vii is not the secondary substance in *Cat.*, but the formal cause which is different from species. M. Furth (1988, 241) tries to appeal to this notion to solve the tension between form as *tode ti* and form as *toionde* by saying that form is not *tode ti* itself but the cause of *tode ti*. Both M. Loux (1991) and F. Lewis (1991) appeal to it to justify their theories of two predications, though Loux's two predications are species-predication and form-predication; and Lewis' two predications are accidental predication and form predication. Both M. Furth (1988, 232) and F. Lewis (1991, 173-4) derive the distinction between "substance of" and "substance" on the basis of it. C. Witt (1989, ch. 4) argues that since vii.17 has identified form or essence as cause, form or essence is not a property of individuals, and so the traditional understanding of Aristotelian essentialism is mistaken. Most recently, M. Wedin (2000, 6) still believes that vii. 17 is the key of the whole book of vii: "In the background of the entire enterprise is vii.17's charge that form must explain why a given portion of matter counts as a thing of a certain kind — a man, for example, or a horse. It does so thanks to the presence of the appropriate form in a suitable kind of matter. This bestows a causal role on form and this causal role, in turn, shapes the over-all strategy of *Metaphysics* vii."

[9] It is true that several times Aristotle claims to make a fresh start, but only makes an additional argument (see, *Ph.* viii.7, 260a20-21; *EN.* vi.2, 1139b14, vii.1, 1145a15; *EE.* ii.1, 1218b31, ii.5, 1222b15), but this does not entail that *Meta.* vii.17 must be the same case.

[10] *Meta.* vii.1, like the *Cat.*, talks only about the relation between substance and other categories, and the matter/form relation does not appear in that text. Vii.2 is a review of the views of previous philosophers on substance. Since the matter/form analysis does not appear in *Meta.* vii.1-2, I take it that the project of book vii starts from vii.3.

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Jiyuan Yu

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