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A pursuit of ontological truth in Aristotle's philosophy

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Chapter Four

Categories, Potentiality and Actuality

In the light of considerations in chapter Three, it is clear that there is a hierarchy of truth in which there is a causal process between different levels of truth in Aristotle. Specifically speaking, truth in things is the cause and prior to truth in thoughts that are expressed by truth in words. Given the last sentence in *Metaphysics* α.1, each thing is in respect of truth as it is in respect of being,²⁰² the purpose of this chapter is to investigate whether there is a hierarchy of being in the structure of beings reported in *Metaphysics* Θ.10 in which some certain mode of being is prior to or the cause of other modes of being. As we have seen in chapter Two, it is clear that Aristotle provides us with three ways of articulating being or non-being in *Metaphysics* Θ.10, two of which are being in accordance with the categories, and potentiality and actuality. All three of these methods were articulated by Aristotle to refer to being, and if these three methods can be equally applied to refer to being, then the being with reference to categories and the being with reference to potentiality and actuality may indeed tell us something about truth as being in the strictest sense. As is well-known, according to Aristotle, being is a concept which has a single highest point of reference.²⁰³ Thus, the aim of this chapter is to explore how being in the strictest sense as truth and falsity serves as a mode of being prior to being according to the categories, as well as to being in terms of potentiality and actuality, so that to reveal that there is a hierarchy of being established by Aristotle.

In the following section, I would like to turn to related passages in *Categories*, *Physics*, and *Metaphysics* to highlight the relevance between these three ways of articulating being, and further to reveal certain fundamental points underlining the whole structure of these three ways of articulating being.

1. Being with reference to categories

Aristotle frequently discussed the topic “what is being” with regards to his discussions of assertions. In particular, he introduced the structure of assertions by means of combinations. As we studied in chapter Three, names and verbs are singular categories and both signs of something. Combinations of names and verbs consist of the formulation of assertions with truth-values.²⁰⁴ According to the view that names and verbs are categories and indeed composing elements of assertions with truth-values, we need to keep in mind that it is the verb which expresses the combination of a subject and a predicate. In contrast to combinations of categories, categories without combinations should be considered as a more fundamental element and be studied in further detail. After all, categories without combinations are prior to and more basic than assertions consisting of combinations of categories.

²⁰² *Met.* α.1, 993b29-993b30

²⁰³ *Met.* E.1, 1206a30-1026a33.

²⁰⁴ Those topics was discussed in chapters Three.

1.1 Categories and the priority of primary substance

Mohan Matthen (1983) points out that Aristotle posits his theory of categories in several different ways, arguing that ‘is’ is sometimes articulated differently, that sometimes the categories are ‘figures of predication’,²⁰⁵ and in other places that the categories are kinds of the things-that-are.²⁰⁶ These categories without combinations can be considered the latter:

T42: Of things that are said, some involve combination while others are said without combination. Examples of those involving combination are: man runs, man wins; and of those without combination: man, ox, runs, wins. Of things there are: (a) some are said of a subject but are not in any subject. For example, man is said of a subject, the individual man, but is not in any subject. (b) Some are in a subject but are not said of any subject. (By ‘in a subject’ I mean what is in something, not as a part, and cannot exist separately from what it is in.) For example, the individual knowledge-of-grammar is in a subject, the soul, but is not said of any subject; and the individual white is in a subject, the body (for all colour is in a body), but is not said of any subject. (c) Some are both said of a subject and in a subject. For example, knowledge is in a subject, the soul, and is also said of a subject, knowledge-of-grammar. (d) Some are neither in a subject nor said of a subject, for example, the individual man or the individual horse— for nothing of this sort is either in a subject or said of a subject. Things that are individual and numerically one are, without exception, not said of any subject, but there is nothing to prevent some of them from being in a subject—the individual knowledge-of-grammar is one of the things in a subject. (*Cat.* 2, 1a16-1b9)

There are a few insights to take away from this text. Apart from things articulated by means of combinations, these categories without combinations are prior to and more basic than predications, as well as their truth. What is more, these categories without combinations are “said of” or “in” a subject.

Predication cannot exist without singular categories, but singular categories can still exist without predication. Following with this line of reasoning, Aristotle further specifies the familiar list of the categories said without combination.²⁰⁷

T43: Of things said without any combination, each signifies either substance or quantity or qualification or a relative or where or when or being-in-a-position or having or doing or being-affected. To give a rough idea, examples of substance are man, horse; of quantity: four-foot, five-foot; of qualification: white, grammatical; of a relative: double, half, larger; of where: in the Lyceum, in the market-place; of when: yesterday, last-year; of being-in-a-position: is-lying, is-sitting; of having: has-shoes-on, has-armour-on; of doing: cutting, burning; of being-affected: being-cut, being-burned. (*Cat.* 4, 1b25-2a4)

According to T43, it is clear that categories without combinations are divided into ten kinds by Aristotle –substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, state, activity, passivity. Aristotle further clarifies substance:

²⁰⁵ *Met.* Δ7, 1017a23.

²⁰⁶ *Cat.* 4, 1b25.

²⁰⁷ *Met.* A.1, 981a3-981a7, A.3, 983a27-983a28.

T44: A substance—that which is called a substance most strictly, primarily, and most of all—is that which is neither said of a subject nor in a subject, e.g. the individual man or the individual horse. The species in which the things primarily called substances are, are called secondary substances, as also are the genera of these species. For example, the individual man belongs in a species, man, and animal is a genus of the species; so these—both man and animal—are called secondary substances. [...] All the other things are either said of the primary substances as subjects or in them as subjects. (*Cat.* 5, 2a13-2a18; 2a35-2a36)

T45: Another characteristic of substances is that there is nothing contrary to them. For what would be contrary to a primary substance? For example, there is nothing contrary to an individual man, nor yet is there anything contrary to man or to animal. This, however, is not peculiar to substance but holds of many other things also, for example, of quantity. For there is nothing contrary to four-foot or to ten or to anything of this kind—unless someone were to say that many is contrary to few or large to small; but still there is nothing contrary to any definite quantity. (*Cat.* 5, 3b24-3b31)

Following T44, we can see that primary substances are singled out by terms such as “strictly,” “primarily,” and “most of all.” Aristotle continues to use the division of categories without combinations through “said of” and “in” a subject to specify a primary type of substance. Aristotle refers to some examples to his argument – for instance, the individual man or individual house. Apart from introducing the secondary substances in the following sentence, the last sentence of T45 calls for our attention. By contrast with other categories, the individual substances as primary substances are said to be ‘most strictly,’ because this primary substance does not imply any involvement with a subject; it is itself the subject of which or in which the other categories are said to be. It is clear that the primary substance is “most of all” among all the categories in Aristotle.

From T45 a further characteristic of substance is that neither primary nor secondary substances have a contrary. This characteristic matches the account of essences of substances in *Metaphysics* Z.²⁰⁸

Moreover, due to the fact that Aristotle considers primary substances as the familiar individuals that occupy our world, we can uncover the kind of relationship between primary substances and other. The special character of this primary substance is that it can be separated, and constitutes a this-something (*tode ti*).²⁰⁹ None of the other categories is separable or a this-something. It would be impossible for any of the other things to exist if the primary substance does not exist, but not vice versa. Based on this separability and individuality²¹⁰ of the primary substance, it is obvious that there is an independent structure of being expressed by categories without combinations that underlies the structure of predication by means of categories.

In other words, the function of the categories is to show that other features of the world, and predicates of sentences, must be related to the substances and can be so logically related. But if

²⁰⁸ See above p. 39.

²⁰⁹ Rist, 1989, 96. Aristotle, *Cat.* 5, 2a35-2b7.

²¹⁰ Bolton, 1996.

logically related, then they are also metaphysically related.²¹¹ In this case, it is a mistake to assume that categories are simply about words, or even simply about logic – categories are also concerned with the identification of the contents of the universe as being of different sorts. Since “the *Categories* is a sort of inventory of items of phenomena which can be named; thus it is both logical (in that it distinguishes different ways in which predicates can be said of a subject), and metaphysical in a weak or descriptive sense in that it tells us what is important and what is subordinate in the world itself.”²¹² Besides the characteristics of primary substances offered by Aristotle in *Categories*, it is apparent that Aristotle has introduced several concrete examples to clarify that all other modes of being depend on the existence of primary substances as prior modes of being:

T46: All the other things are either said of the primary substances as subjects or in them as subjects. This is clear from an examination of cases. For example, animal is predicated of man and therefore also of the individual man; for were it predicated of none of the individual men it would not be predicated of man at all. Again, colour is in body and therefore also in an individual body; for were it not in some individual body it would not be in body at all. Thus all the other things are either said of the primary substances as subjects or in them as subjects. So if the primary substances did not exist it would be impossible for any of the other things to exist. (*Cat.* 5, 2a35-2b7)

From T46 we can learn once more, from concrete examples, that the other categories are either said of primary substances as subject or in them as subjects. For instance, the example of animal to man in virtue of being said of individual men, and the example of color in the body by means of being in an individual body. It is clear that we can confirm an ontological primacy of the primary substances prior to other categories without combinations. In this case, the other categories—such as quality, quantity, and relation—are ontologically dependent on that which is primary, i.e. the primary substances. So, the primary substances does not only enjoy the ontological priority that they can exist in their own right—over the other modes of being expressed by other categories—but also enjoy a sort of logical priority over the second substances.

This argument has been supported by more than one scholar. For example Jonathan Lear (1988) has explained this ontological priority in terms of the ontological independence of substances. He argues that for Aristotle, each thing has a nature that is a substance. At the same time, for Aristotle, reality forms a hierarchy of dependencies. For instance, the color white may exist, but it can only exist as the color of something. In this case, substance stands at the base of the hierarchy on which the reality of other things depends, while it is not dependent on anything else. As a result, we may know which substance is ontologically independent yet remain ignorant of what fits this ontological independence²¹³ Moreover, there is more than one degree of ontological independence as Aristotle has distinguished

²¹¹ Rist, 1989, 104.

²¹² Rist, 1989, 94.

²¹³ Lear, 1988, 24-25.

substance in the primary sense from various other things we also call substance because they have some degree of ontological independence. In the end, whatever emerges as a primary substance, we can say that things which have a nature enjoy at least some degree of ontological independence.²¹⁴

Charlotte Witt (1989) explicitly argues for the ontological priority of primary substances by stating that “the being of non-substances intrinsically involves the notion of ontological dependence on a subject, whereas the being of a substance does not involve that notion. So what it is for Socrates as a substance to be is different from what it is for a quality of Socrates to be, because any quality of Socrates is ontological dependent upon him but not vice versa.”²¹⁵ In this case, the primary substance is viewed as the being of substance, which is the primary mode of being. In turn, the other categories—neither primary substance nor secondary substance—are treated as the being of non-substances, which also could be viewed as various modes of being that can change over time.²¹⁶

Moreover, the importance of the position occupied by categories without combinations in Aristotle’s philosophy has been appreciated by Mann (2000) who suggests that Aristotle completed the task of discovering things as things.²¹⁷ Specifically, what Mann is calling Aristotle’s ‘discovery of things’ is the claim that things are particular objects in the sense given by his construction of distinctions of ‘Said Of’ and ‘In’. Among these categories without combinations, particular objects are the only things there are – which means the primary substance is a concrete, individual object with various attributes. In this regard, these particular objects are ontologically fundamental.²¹⁸ In other words, the discovery of things amounts to the answer to the question of what there is by discovering objects with attributes. By stressing the ontological independence of the particular object, the ontological priority of the first primary substances that is a particular thing can be discovered.

2. Being with reference to potentiality and actuality

In *Metaphysics* Θ.10 Aristotle states that being can be articulated with reference to potentiality and actuality, and discussed composites that may change over time. Here it is relevant to note that Aristotle also applies the term of potentiality and actuality to the topic of motion. Apart from the familiar explanations of motion with reference to the four causes—material, formal, efficient and final causes—Aristotle also introduces several new terms—such as potentiality and actuality—to investigate motion in virtue of an analogy between matter and potentiality,²¹⁹ and form and actuality respectively.

2.1 Motion in terms of potentiality and actuality in *Physics*

²¹⁴ Lear, 1988, 24-25.

²¹⁵ Witt, 1989, 43.

²¹⁶ Some scholars hold that the particular object as the primary substantial being highlights how Aristotle is philosophically committed to the idea that the primary being or primary substance or particular objects are most real, as opposed to the other possible candidates that we can think of. See, for example, Boongaling, 2019, 130.

²¹⁷ Mann, 2020.

²¹⁸ Mann, 2020, 4.

²¹⁹ *Met.* H.6, 1045a20-1045a32.

T47: To begin then, as we said, with motion. Some things are in fulfillment only, others in potentiality and in fulfillment— one being a ‘this’, another so much, another such and such, and similarly for the other categories of being. The term ‘relative’ is applied sometimes with reference to excess and defect, sometimes to agent and patient, and generally to what can move and what can be moved. For what can cause movement is relative to what can be moved, and vice versa. (*Phys.* III. 1, 200b25-200b32)

T48: Hence there are as many types of motion or change as there are of being. We have distinguished in respect of each class between what is in fulfillment and what is potentially; thus the fulfillment of what is potentially, as such, is motion. (*Phys.* III.1, 201a8-201a12)

As we can see from these passages, when referring to motions, beings have been divided into two kinds with potentiality and actuality. The first is only in fulfillment, while the second one is in potentiality and in fulfillment in different times. In the case of that which can move and that which can be moved are relatives. Aristotle defines motion as the fulfillment of what is potentially. The relation between mover and moved is defined in terms of potentiality and actuality.²²⁰ Motion is what happens when an object makes the transition from being potentially in a certain state to being actually in that state. Besides, Aristotle further explains his formulation by introducing some characteristics of motion in terms of potentiality and actuality.

T49: Hence motion is the fulfillment (*entelecheia*) of the movable as movable, the cause being in contact with what can move, so that the mover is also acted on. The mover will always transmit a form, either a ‘this’ or such or so much, which, when it moves, will be the principle and cause of the motion, e.g. the actual man begets man from what is potentially man.

The solution of the difficulty is plain: motion is in the movable. It is the fulfillment of this potentiality by the action of that which has the power of causing motion; and the actuality of that which has the power of causing motion is not other than the actuality of the movable; for it must be the fulfillment of both. A thing is capable of causing motion because it can do this, it is a mover because it actually does it. But it is on the movable that it is capable of acting. Hence there is a single actuality of both alike, just as one to two and two to one are the same interval, and the steep ascent and the steep descent are one—for these are one and the same, although their definitions are not one. So it is with the mover and the moved. (*Phys.* III.2-3, 202a7-202a20)

Aristotle describes motion as fulfillment in which the mover and the moved are complementary. The mover is capable of acting on the potentially moved, while the potentially moved is capable of this being acted on. Given the structure of motion, potentiality and actuality have been regarded as agent and patient to analyze motions.²²¹ Moreover, the principle or cause of motion is a form, and the mover is the provider of this form. Aristotle offers the example of the generation of a human being to support this argument.

²²⁰ For more detailed interpretations see, for example, Kosman, 1969, 140-162; Graham, 1988, 209-215.

²²¹ Lear, 1988, 61. For a thorough discussion of this passage see Coope, 2005, 201-21.

Aristotle notices a difficulty of this topic, in that there are different definitions for the same actuality embodied in the same motion from different perspectives. Since both the potentiality of the mover and the potentiality of the moved are actualized by means of a single motion, the motion can be conceived as the fulfillment of each of the two possibilities at the same time. Moreover, if we consider that potentiality and actuality are relative terms, then they affect one another reciprocally. In this regard, the relationship between potentiality and actualization is interdependence. This means that this motion cannot be understood simply in terms of what is potential, since at that point the motion has not yet begun. It also cannot be understood simply in terms of what is actual, for that points either to the mover who is not yet moving, or to the actual motion that is taking place as a result,²²² which always exists in the moved.

Apart from the investigation of potentiality and actuality in the context of motion, we have already met potentiality and actuality with reference to being as a key point for Aristotle. The shift in the investigations in terms of potentiality and actuality that is from ‘motions of beings’ to ‘ways of being’ may give us some clues as to what is fundamental in this investigation of being with reference to potentiality and actuality.

2.2 The priority of actuality

Aristotle has also applied the terms potentiality and actuality to various modes of being in the *Metaphysics* Θ.10. Potentiality and actuality with reference to being can be considered more basic than the potentiality and actuality of motions.

As motion is merely an optional situation of being, this can be distinguished from potentiality and actuality:

T50: We have treated of that which is primarily and to which all the other categories of being are referred—i.e. of substance. For it is in virtue of the formula of substance that the others are said to be quantity and quality and the like; for all will be found to contain the formula of substance, as we said in the first part of our work. And since ‘being’ is in one way divided into ‘what’, quality, and quantity, and is in another way distinguished in respect of potentiality and fulfillment, and of function, let us discuss potentiality and fulfillment. First let us explain potentiality in the strictest sense, which is, however, not the most useful for our present purpose. For potentiality and actuality extend further than the mere sphere of motion. But when we have spoken of this first kind, we shall in our discussions of actuality explain the other kinds of potentiality. (*Met.* Θ.1, 1045b28-1046a4)

Here, it is clear that—apart from the previous analysis of being through substances, quality, and quantity—Aristotle introduces another way to distinguish being in respect to potentiality and actuality. Notably, he underlines that potentiality and actuality are extended further than the scope of motion – and what is more, when we speak of potentiality in the strictest sense, it is in the discussion of actuality. Therefore, we can use this discussion of actuality to explain the other kinds of potentiality. It is also worthwhile to recognize that there is a connection

²²² *Phys.* III.1, 201b5–201b13, 201b18–201b35.

between the investigation of being with reference to categories and the investigation of being with potentiality and actuality.

Aristotle specifies the concrete content of potentiality and actuality as being separately:

T51: We have pointed out elsewhere that ‘potentiality’ and the word ‘can’ have several senses. [...] But all potentialities that conform to the same type are starting points, and are called potentialities in reference to one primary kind, which is a starting-point of change in another thing or in the thing itself qua other. For one kind is a potentiality for being acted on, i.e. the principle in the very thing acted on, which makes it capable of being changed and acted on by another thing or by itself regarded as other; and another kind is a state of insusceptibility to change for the worse and to destruction by another thing or by the thing itself qua other, i.e. by a principle of change. In all these definitions is contained the formula of potentiality in the primary sense.—And again these so-called potentialities are potentialities either of acting merely or of being acted on, or of acting or being acted on well, so that even in the formulae of the latter the formulae of the prior kinds of potentiality are somehow contained. (*Met.* Θ.1, 1046a5-1046a6; 1046a9-1046a18)

T52: Every potentiality is at one and the same time a potentiality for the opposite; for, while that which is not capable of being present in a subject cannot be present, everything that is capable of being may possibly not be actual. That, then, which is capable of being may either be or not be; the same thing, then, is capable both of being and of not being. (*Met.* Θ.8, 1050b9-1050b13)

Here, Aristotle points out that the concept of potentiality can be explained more than one way. However, the common point among these explanations is that it is necessary for potentiality to refer to a primary kind – and this primary kind is understood to be a starting-point of the changes in things. Moreover, Aristotle underlines the basic formula of potentiality in the primary sense in which potentiality is both capable of being and of not being.

Aristotle further argues for what is actuality, when actuality is considered as being:

T53: Actuality means the existence of the thing, not in the way which we express by ‘potentially’; we say that potentially, for instance, a statue of Hermes is in the block of wood and the half-line is in the whole, because it might be separated out, and even the man who is not studying we call a man of science, if he is capable of studying. [...] But all things are not said in the same sense to exist actually, but only by analogy—as A is in B or to B, C is in D or to D; for some are as movement to potentiality, and the others as substance to some sort of matter. (*Met.* Θ.6, 1048a31-1048a35; 1048b6-1048b9)

As for how to define actuality, Aristotle argues that actuality means the existence of a thing. Differing from the potentially existent, actuality means that something must actually exist in relation to some sort of matter.

Except for these specific statements of potentiality and actuality, Aristotle further explores their contents by researching their relationship through investigations on differences in their priority.²²³

²²³ A specific discussion about the priority of actuality over potentiality can be observed in various papers. For instance, in

T54: We have distinguished the various senses of ‘prior’, and it is clear that actuality is prior to potentiality. And I mean by potentiality not only that definite kind which is said to be a principle of change in another thing or in the thing itself regarded as other, but in general every principle of movement or of rest. For nature also is in the same genus as potentiality; for it is a principle of movement— not, however, in something else but in the thing itself qua itself. To all such potentiality, then, actuality is prior both in formula and in substance; and in time it is prior in one sense, and in another not. (*Met.* Θ.8, 1049b4-1049b12)

Here, various kinds of priority have been introduced by Aristotle.²²⁴ Aristotle explicitly argues that actuality is prior to potentiality, and further distinguishes three kinds of priority in the relationship between actuality and potentiality. Specifically, Aristotle argues that actually being X is prior to potentially being X in definition or formula²²⁵, in time²²⁶ and in substance. Aristotle further specifies these priorities separately:

T55: Clearly it is prior in formula; for that which is in the primary sense potential is potential because it is possible for it to become actual, e.g. I mean by ‘capable of building’ that which can build, and by ‘capable of seeing’ that which can see, and by ‘visible’ that which can be seen. (*Met.* Θ.8, 1049b13-1049b15)

T56: In time it is prior in this sense: the actual member of a species is prior to the potential member of the same species, though the individual is potential before it is actual. I mean that the matter and the seed and that which is capable of seeing, which are potentially a man and corn and seeing, but not yet actually so, are prior in time to this particular man who now exists actually, and to the corn and to the seeing subject; but they are posterior in time to other actually existing things, from which they were produced. For from the potential the actual is always produced by an actual thing, e.g. man by man, musician by musician; there is always a first mover, and the mover already exists actually. (*Met.* Θ.8, 1049b17-1049b27)

T57: But it is also prior in substance; firstly, because the things that are posterior in becoming are prior in form and in substance, e.g. man is prior to boy and human being to seed; for the one already has its form, and the other has not. Secondly, because everything that comes to be moves towards a principle, i.e. an end. For that for the sake of which a thing is, is its principle, and the becoming is for the sake of the end; and the actuality is the end, and it is for the sake of this that the potentiality is acquired. [...] Further, matter exists in a potential state, just because it may attain to its form; and when it exists actually, then it is in its form. (*Met.* Θ.8, 1050a4-1050a10; 1050a15-1050a16)

More than one point can be gleaned from these three kinds of priorities. First, actuality is prior in definition or formula to potentiality and determines the definition of potentiality. The definition of potentiality includes mention of its corresponding actuality, not vice versa.

order to defend the priority of actuality over potentiality, Senteny has introduced three kinds of analysis about the priority of actuality, including the Structure argument, the Etymological argument, and the Location argument. (Senteny, 2019, 69-70.)

²²⁴ For this large topic see e.g. Frede, 1994, 173-93; Witt, 2003; Anagnostopoulos, 2011, 388-425.

²²⁵ Peramatzis, 2011.

²²⁶ *Met.* Θ.8, 1049b10-11.

Second, priority in time is fairly straightforward – which is temporal priority. However, this temporal priority of actuality is limited to the species, rather than a concrete individual. For from the potential, the actual is always produced by an actual thing – e.g., man by man, musician by musician. There is always a first mover, and the mover already exists actually.

Finally, priority in substance is explained by means of a form, a principle, or an end. Actuality is the end for the sake of which the potentiality is acquired. For that for the sake of which a thing is, is its principle, and the becoming is for the sake of the end – the actuality is the end, and it is for the sake of this that the potentiality is acquired. Due to this, it can be inferred that potentiality is defined in terms of teleology, by reference to the actualization which is its end. That is a reason why someone may further reduce these ontological dependencies of potentiality on actuality ultimately to the teleological relationship between potentiality and actuality. In this regard, being in motion can be viewed as a transformation from potentiality to actualization by means of the teleological relationship within them.

Among these various priorities of actuality over potentiality, the priority of actuality in substance is the focus point of our project here. In *Metaphysics* Δ.11, 1019a1–1019a4, Aristotle explicates priority in nature or in substance in terms of asymmetric ontological independence.²²⁷ Elsewhere he further provides similar formulations for what he labels ‘priority in being.’²²⁸ This ontological priority of actuality refers to the existential dependence of being potentially on being actually. In this regard, the priority of actuality in substance or being shall be formulated as “A is ontologically prior to B just in case A can be without B but B cannot be without A.”

In what follows, I shall use the term ‘ontological priority’ to characterize this notion of priority in substance or in being.²²⁹ Meanwhile, the notion of ontological priority plays a significant role as a criterion for primary substance-hood in the *Metaphysics*. Importantly, based on the priority of actualization in substance, being in terms of the categories and being in terms of potentiality and actuality have been linked together and intersect at this point in which the fundamentals are identified with the ontological priority. Since the primary substance also has a priority position over other categories, the primary substance enjoys ontological priority. Meanwhile, ways of being have been discussed with reference to the potentiality or actuality primarily in *Metaphysics* in which terms of potentiality and actualization have been further conceived as certain modes of being.

2.3 Eternal beings and perishable things

Based on these three kinds of priority of actuality over potentiality, especially priority in substance or being, Aristotle introduces eternal being and perishable things as related in terms of potentiality and actuality. In this case, actuality and potentiality are both regarded as ways of being:

²²⁷ The symmetrical relationship of ontological dependence has been discussed by Katz, 2017, 34-35, 38.

²²⁸ *Met.* Z.10, 1034b30–1034b32, M.13, 1077b2–1077b3.

²²⁹ Peramatzis, 2011, 205.

T58: Obviously, therefore, the substance or form is actuality. From this argument it is obvious that actuality is prior in substance to potentiality; and as we have said, one actuality always precedes another in time right back to the actuality of the eternal prime mover. But actuality is prior in a higher sense also; for eternal things are prior in substance to perishable things, and no eternal thing exists potentially. (*Met.* Θ.8, 1050b2-1050b8)

According to T58, the interdependence of actuality and potentiality is embodied by the eternal prime mover and perishable things that can be expressed by actualization and potentiality at the same time. It is clear that the argument in Θ.8 is concerned with a chain of causal dependence from the first substance and form, the unmoved mover, through eternal substances which lack potentiality (except for motion in a circle) down to perishable things. Priority in being thus follows from priority in actuality. Moreover, Aristotle continues to study the relationship between these two kinds of being:

T59: The reason is this. Every potentiality is at one and the same time a potentiality for the opposite; for, while that which is not capable of being present in a subject cannot be present, everything that is capable of being may possibly not be actual. That, then, which is capable of being may either be or not be; the same thing, then, is capable both of being and of not being. And that which is capable of not being may possibly not be; and that which may possibly not be is perishable, either without qualification, or in the precise sense in which it is said that it possibly may not be, i.e. either in respect of place or quantity or quality; ‘without qualification’ means ‘in substance’. Nothing, then, which is without qualification imperishable is without qualification potentially (though there is nothing to prevent its being potentially in some respect, e.g. potentially of a certain quality or in a certain place); imperishable things, then, exist actually. Nor can anything which is of necessity be potential; yet these things are primary; for if these did not exist, nothing would exist. (*Met.* Θ.8, 1050b8-1050b20)

From T59 the broad outline of Aristotle’s argument at 1050b8-20, on this reading, is as follows: (1) perishable things have potentiality for opposites, but eternal things have actuality. (2) Eternal, actual, and necessary things are prior to perishable things, because without the former the latter would not be. This is ontological priority. Therefore (3) things whose nature is actuality are prior to things whose nature involves potentiality. So (4) actuality is prior to potentiality.

Thus, we learn that the actualization of perishable modes of being has reference to actualization of eternal modes of being – since Aristotle attributes the ontological priority to eternal beings in relation to the imitation of the eternal beings by perishable moving beings.²³⁰

The ontological priority of eternal beings is able to account for the independent existence of eternal beings without potentiality. Aristotle explains that the existence of an eternal being is independent of the existence of perishable things, by arguing that eternal beings are always in actualization. In this case, his argument identifies eternal beings with actualization of being ultimately to point to a connection between potentiality and accident. As John M. Rist states

²³⁰ *Met.* Θ.8, 1050b6-1050b28.

“[t]he primary and authoritative example of a substance turns out to be the prime mover which is also the only being entirely in act without potentiality.”²³¹ and: “[t]he existence of the prime mover is the necessary conclusion of arguments about the eternity of motion. Although we cannot reach the prime mover by a mental process or processes based on direct sense perception, since it does not offer itself as a sense object, we can affirm its existence as a result of an understanding which is itself based on empirical evidence. There is every sign of its existence and the world is unintelligible without it. Since there is every reason to discover intelligibility in the world, the Prime Mover must be there as a first principle.”²³²

Charlotte Witt draws attention to the fact that actualities as ways of being are the goal of potentialities as ways of being. Since for something to exist potentially, it is also for it to exist for the sake of existing actually or actively. For instance, the ability to see exists for the sake of seeing. In this case, potentiality is a way of being, and not simply a causal power, even though causal powers, when inert, exist potentially in relation to their way of being when active.²³³ Therefore, Aristotle's distinction between being potentially X and being actually X applies to causal powers themselves, which exist potentially when they are inactive, and which exist actually when they are active. What is more, due to the reason that actuality is the end of potentiality, potentiality should be defined by its own actuality.

Going further, Charlotte Witt argues that Aristotle has established his theory of actuality and potentiality as ways of being on the priority of activity or actuality, in relation to potentiality. She states that “The priority of activity or actuality, and the threefold dependency of potentiality on activity or actuality, is the linchpin of Aristotle's hierarchical organization of being, which is crowned by the unmoved mover, a being of pure activity. Aristotle's hierarchy of being in *Metaphysics* IX is not primarily a hierarchy of kinds of beings, it is a hierarchy of ways of being. That is, although Aristotle's claim that actuality is prior to potentiality mentions different kinds of beings (e.g., eternal and perishable substances), his priority argument turns on the way of being that each exemplifies.”²³⁴

In sum, since Aristotle's value hierarchy rests on the hierarchy of ways of being erected upon the priority of actuality, it cannot be properly understood independently of the distinction between potential and actual being.²³⁵ In this case, potentialities and actualization are not only relative terms to describe motions, but are also regarded as certain ways of being. More importantly, the investigation of being with reference to categories and the investigation of being with reference to potentiality and actuality intersects with the primary substances as a particular thing as an actualization of being.

3. The hierarchy of being in terms of truth

We have seen in earlier chapters that truth in being is prior to truth in thought and statements. Truth truth also exhibits the type of 'focal meaning' hierarchy that Aristotle suggests for being

²³¹ Rist, 1989, 104. 279-280.

²³² Rist, 1989, 104. 279-280.

²³³ Witt, 2003, 11.

²³⁴ Witt, 2003, 8.

²³⁵ Witt, 2003, 5.

in general in this chapter.

The top of the hierarchy of truth, according to Aristotle, is the unmoved mover: a God which is the highest substance and independent pure actuality, and serves as the final cause of all other things in this world. Aristotle argues that:

T60: Substance is the subject of our inquiry; for the principles and the causes we are seeking are those of substances. (*Met.* Λ.1, 1069a29-1069a30)

T61: Further, even if it acts, this will not be enough, if its substance is potentiality; for there will not be eternal movement; for that which is potentially may possibly not be. There must, then, be such a principle, whose very substance is actuality. Further, then, these substances must be without matter; for they must be eternal, at least if anything else is eternal. Therefore they must be actuality. (*Met.* Λ.6, 1071b28-1071b30)

The inquiry of first philosophy concerns the principles and causes of substance. Aristotle argues that the eternal movement of the eternal heavenly bodies requires a principle that is always in actuality. God as the eternal being must always be in the same state and without any changes to be the final cause of the other things in the world.

T62: That that for the sake of which is found among the unmovables is shown by making a distinction; for that for the sake of which is both that for which and that towards which, and of these the one is unmovable and the other is not. [...] But since there is something which moves while itself unmoved, existing actually, this can in no way be otherwise than as it is. [...] The first mover, then, of necessity exists; and in so far as it is necessary, it is good, and in this sense a first principle. [...] It is clear then from what has been said that there is a substance which is eternal and unmovable and separate from sensible things. (*Met.* Λ.7, 1072b13-1072b15; 1072b20-1072b21; 1072b23-1072b24; 1073a13-1073a14)

T63: In general, it is absurd to make the fact that the things of this earth are observed to change and never to remain in the same state, the basis of our judgement about the truth. For in pursuing the truth one must start from the things that are always in the same state and suffer no change. (*Met.* K.6, 1063a17-1063a20)

Based on these passages, it is evident that the starting-point of the pursuit of truth must be always true. Then, there is a similar pattern of causation linking all levels of truth, and as one instance of truth in things. Truth in things as what is always in actuality is the cause of truth in other things. Similarly, the unmoved first mover as the eternal being is always in the same state and suffers no changes it exists actually and functions as the final cause of other things in the world. And this eternal being is always what it is, which is an example of truth in things mentioned in chapter Two. Based on this line of causes and the hierarchy of truth investigated in chapter Three, a hierarchy of being has been established in this chapter in which certain modes of being can be instantiated as ontological truth, such as the eternal first mover that is always in actuality.

4. Conclusion

According to *Metaphysics* Θ.10, it is clear that categories, potentiality, and actuality—as well as truth and falsity—are three sets of manners of being. The division itself is reason not to identify being in the strictest sense as truth with any one of the other two sets. If truth and falsity identify a mode of being in the strictest sense, it is likely that the nature of ontological truth somehow underlies these hierarchies within the other modes of being. Since in *Metaphysics* Θ Aristotle does not further clarify ontological truth, we gathered clues of its nature from other applications in the Aristotelian corpus.

In the *Categories*, based on the fundamental position of primary substance, other categories must depend on the primary substance to exist. Thus, the primary substance is ontologically prior to other categories, so as to reveal a hierarchy between the first substances and other categories.

In the domain of being with reference to potentiality and actuality, Aristotle first applies the concepts of potentiality and actuality to the explanation of composites with motions. Also, Aristotle regards potentiality and actuality as ways of being, and uses them to indicate the hierarchy among eternal and perishable beings. Eternal beings are always actual, therefore eternal beings are ontologically prior to perishable things. From the ontological priority of actuality, the ontological priority of beings follows. In this case, a hierarchy of beings has been established by Aristotle, one of which is primary, i.e. an individual substance, form, and actuality.

Correspondingly, we are getting a hierarchy of being in terms of truth, in the structure of *Metaphysics* Θ.10. The primary substance, which has no contrary, and the eternal beings which are always in actuality are concrete examples of being in the strictest sense as truth, which is fundamental to, higher than, and prior to the other categories of being, or actuality and potentiality. Ontological truth, then, is what is found in simple things and the actualization of composites, due to a cause, which is an essence, and an actuality.

Based on our investigations on the hierarchy of truth and the hierarchy of being, we have now arrived at a point where the principle on non-contradiction should be considered more closely. For it seems that this pattern of causation linking all levels of truth, is in some sense generated by the principle of non-contradiction. This will be pursued at two levels, firstly, ontological truth in definitions of essences in *Metaphysics* Θ, which will be the object of immediate premises functioning as the first principle of demonstrations. In this sense the truth of conclusions of demonstrations depends on essences that always are what they are and never undergo any changes. The indemonstrable axioms, in their turn, act as the starting-point of all other principles. Primary among them is the principle of non-contradiction which is capable of ensuring truth of everything worthy of the name. The question that remains is then: is the principle of non-contradiction a being itself, or not—is it rather the most fundamental feature of all being as such and therefore a proper subject of metaphysics as the science of being qua being, as Aristotle has claimed in *Metaphysics* Γ. 3 and K.5. This is why I am going to proceed by investigating demonstrations and the principle of non-contradiction in the following chapters.

