

Book VII (Book Z) Thinghood and Form¹

Chapter 1 Being is meant in more than one way, just as we distinguished earlier in the chapters concerning the number of ways things are meant.² For it signifies what something is and a *this*, but also of what sort or how much something is, or any of the other things attributed in that way. But while being is meant in so many ways, it is obvious that the way that is first among these is what something is, which indicates its thinghood (for whenever we say that this or that is of a particular sort, we say that it is either good or bad, but not three feet long or a human being, but when we say what it is, we say not that it is white or hot or three feet long, but a human being or a god), and the other kinds of being are attributed to something that *is* in this way, some of them as amounts of it, others as qualities of it, others as things that happen to it, and others as something else of that kind. And for this reason, someone might be at an impasse whether each thing such as walking or healing or sitting is or is not a being, and similarly with anything else whatever of such a kind; for none of them is either of such a nature as to be by itself nor capable of being separated from an independent thing, but instead, if anything, it is the thing that walks or sits or gets well that is one of the beings. And it is obvious that these *are* more so, because there is something determinate that underlies them (and this is the independent thing or the particular), which is reflected in a predicate of such a kind; for the good or the seated are not meant apart from this. So it is clear that each of those former things *is* by means of this one, so that what is primarily, not being in some particular way but simply being, would be thinghood.

But then primary is meant in more than one way, but all the same, thinghood is primary in every sense, in articulation, in knowledge, and in time. For none of the other ways of attributing being is separate, but only this one; and in articulation this one is primary (for in the articulation of anything, that of its thinghood must be included); and we believe that we know each thing most of all when we know *what* it

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¹ This title for Book VII supplied by the translator.

² See Bk. V, Ch. 7.

1028b is—a human being or fire—rather than of what sort or how much or where it is, since we know even each of these things themselves only when we know *what* an amount or a sort is. And in fact, the thing that has been sought both anciently and now, and always, and is always a source of impasses, “what is being?”, is just this: what is thinghood? (For it is this that some people say is one and others more than one, and some say is finite and others infinite.) So too for us, most of all and first of all and, one might almost say, solely, it is necessary to study what this kind of being is.

φανερωτατα

1028b 10 Chapter 2 Now thinghood seems to belong most evidently to bodies (and therefore we say that animals and plants and their parts are independent things, as well as natural bodies such as fire and water and earth and each thing of that kind, and as many things as are either parts of these or made out of them, out of either some or all of them, such as the cosmos and the parts of it, the stars and the moon and the sun). But whether these alone are independent things or there are also others, or just some of these are, or some in addition to some other things, or none of these but something different, must be examined. And it seems to some that the limits of bodies, such as a surface and a line and a point and the unit, are independent things more so than are a body or a solid. Further, while some believe that there is no such thing apart from what is perceptible, others believe that there are everlasting things that are more in number and that

1028b 20 *are* more, just as Plato believed that the forms and the mathematical things are two kinds of independent things, while the thinghood of perceptible bodies is a third, and Speusippus believed in still more kinds of thinghood originating from the one and from each source of thinghood, one source for numbers and another for magnitudes, and next one for soul, and in this way he extended the kinds of thinghood. But some people say that the forms and the numbers have the same nature, and that the other things follow upon them, lines and planes all the way down to the thinghood of the cosmos and the perceptible things.

1028b 30 Now about these things, what is said well and what not, and what the independent things are, and whether there are any apart from the perceptible things or not, and in what way these are, and whether there is any separate independent thing, and why and in what way, or

none at all apart from perceptible things, must be examined by those beginning to sketch out what thinghood is.

Chapter 3 Now thinghood is meant, if not in more ways, certainly in four ways most of all; for the thinghood of each thing seems to be what it keeps on being in order to be at all, but also seems to be the universal, and the general class, and, fourth, what underlies these. And what underlies the others is that to which they are attributed, while it is itself not attributed any further to anything else; therefore one ought to distinguish this sort first, since thinghood seems most of all to be the first underlying thing. And in a certain way the material is said to be of this sort, but in another way the form is, and in a third that which is made out of these. (And by the material, I mean, for instance, bronze, by the form, the shape of its look, and by what is made out of these, the statue.) So if the form is more ^{πρῶτον} primary than the material, and is more, it will also, for the same reason, be more primary than what is made of both.

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So now, in a sketch, what thinghood is has been said, that it is what is not in an underlying thing but is that in which everything else is; but it is necessary not to say only this, since it is not sufficient, for this itself is unclear, and what's more, the material becomes thinghood. For if thinghood is not this, what else it is eludes us, since, when everything else is stripped away, it does not seem that anything is left; for some of the other things are attributes of bodies, or things done by them, or capacities of them, while length, breadth, and depth are certain quantities but not independent things (for how much something is is not thinghood), but it is rather the first thing in which these are present that is an independent thing. But when length, breadth, and depth are taken away, we see nothing left behind, unless it is what is bounded by these, so that, to those who look at it in this way, the material must seem to be the only independent thing. By material I mean that which, in its own right, is not said to be either something or so much or anything else by which being is made definite. For there is something to which each of these is attributed, and of which the being is different from each of the things attributed (for everything else is attributed to thinghood, and it is attributed to the material), so that the last thing is in itself neither something nor so much, nor is it anything else; and it is not even the negations of these, for these too would belong to it as attributes.

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1029a 30 So for those who examine it from these starting points, thinghood turns out to be material. But this is impossible, for also to be separate and a *this* seem to belong to an independent thing most of all, on account of which the form and what is made out of both would seem to be thinghood more than would the material. And surely the thinghood that consists of both, I mean of the material and the form, should be put aside, since it is derivative and obvious; and in a certain way the material too is evident, but one must investigate about the third kind, since this is the greatest stumbling block. And it is agreed that there are some independent things among perceptible things, so one ought to look first into these. For it is convenient to pass over toward what is most knowable. For learning happens in this way in all areas, by way of what is less knowable by nature, toward what is more knowable. And this is the task: just as, where actions are concerned, one's job is to make what is completely good be good for each person *out of* the things that are good for each one, so too it is to make what is knowable by nature known to oneself *out of* the things that are more known to one. But the things that are known and primary to each person are often scarcely knowable, and have little or nothing of being; nevertheless one must try to come to know the things that are completely knowable *out of* the things that are poorly known but known to oneself, passing over, as was said, by means of these very things.³

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Chapter 4 But since at the start we distinguished in how many ways we define thinghood, and of these a certain one seemed to be what something keeps on being in order to be, one ought to examine

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λογικῶς

that. And first let us say some things about it from the standpoint of *-logic*,⁴ because what it is for each thing to be is what is *said* of it in its own right. For being you is not being cultivated, since it is not in virtue

³ The last three sentences are misplaced in the manuscripts, after the first sentence of Ch. 4. They are undoubtedly genuine, and form one of the major structural connections of the whole *Metaphysics*. They make it clear that the sort of being found in perceptible things, while it must be first for us, is not first in the nature of things. On this order of study, see also *Physics* Bk. I, Ch. 1, and *Topics* 101a 35–101b 4.

⁴ The rest of Bk. VII, except for Ch. 7–9, is logical in character, an analysis starting from the way we speak and think. For Aristotle, this is always secondary to examining the way things are by nature. (See, for example, *Physics* 204b 3–11.) The last chapter of Bk. VII forms a bridge from the logical to the natural by means of the notion of cause.

of yourself that you are cultivated. Therefore, being you is what you are in virtue of yourself, but it is not even all of this, for it is not what is in virtue of itself in the way that white is in a surface, because being white is not being a surface. But surely neither is the thing made out of both, being-a-white-surface, what it is to be white, because white itself is attached to it. Therefore that articulation in which something is not itself present, when one is articulating *it*, is the statement of what it is for each thing to be; so if being a white surface is being a surface that is smooth,⁵ being, for white and for smooth, is one and the same.

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But since there are also compounds that result from the other ways of attributing being (since there is something underlying each of them, such as the of-what-sort, the how-much, the when, the where, and the motion), one must consider whether there is for each of these a statement of what it is for it to be, and whether what-it-is-for-it-to-be even belongs to them, for example to a person with a pale complexion. Now let's suppose the name for a pale person is "sheet." What is the being of a "sheet"? Now surely this is not even among the things attributed to anything in virtue of itself. But "not in virtue of itself" is meant in two ways, and of these one results from attaching something, but the other from not attaching something. For the former way is stated by sticking the thing one is defining onto something else, as if, when defining being-pale, one were to state the articulation of a pale person; the latter way occurs because something else *is* attached to the thing being defined, as if "sheet" meant a pale person and one defined the "sheet" as pale.⁶ The pale person is of course pale, but what it is for it to be is not what it is for pale to be.

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But is being-a-"sheet" any sort of what-it-is-for-something-to-be at all, or not? For what it is for something to be is the very thing that

$\tau\iota \ \eta\upsilon \ \epsilon\lambda\upsilon\alpha\iota$

⁵ See *On Sense Perception and Perceptible Things* 442b 10–13. Democritus, like Galileo and Descartes in a later time, sought to reduce the proper objects of the senses to mathematical attributes. Aristotle does not think white can be reduced to anything else, but his point is that, even though white by its very nature must be in a surface, being-in-a-surface is no part of the nature of whiteness, whatever that nature might be.

⁶ The statement of what something is in virtue of itself can fail by including too much, or by omitting something necessary. Aristotle is implicitly asking, in the two preceding sentences, why a "sheet" can't be what it is in virtue of itself, so long as one states that properly, and his answer is in the next paragraph.

^{Τι εστι}
 something is, and whenever one thing is attributed to another, the compound is not the very thing that is a *this*, as in this instance a pale person is not the very thing that is a *this*, if indeed *thisness* belongs only to independent things. Therefore there is a what-it-is-for-it-to-be of all those things of which the articulation is a definition. And it is not the case that there is a definition whenever a name means the same thing as a statement (for then all statements in words would be definitions, since there could be a name for any group of words whatever, and even the *Iliad* would be a definition), but only if the statement articulates some ^{πρωτης} primary thing, and things of this kind are all those that are not articulated by attributing one thing to another. Therefore there will be no what-it-is-for-it-to-be belonging to anything that is not a species of a genus, but only to these (for the species seems not to be meant as something a thing has a share in and is affected by, nor as an incidental attribute); but there will still be a statement for each of the other things as well, of what it means, if it has a name, stating that this belongs to that, or a more accurate statement instead of a simple one, but there will be no definition nor any what-it-is-for-it-to-be.

pale person sheet

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Or else, are the definition and the what-it-is-for-something-to-be both alike meant in more than one way? For also what-something-is in one sense indicates its thinghood and a *this*, but in another sense indicates any of the ways of attributing being, how much something is, of what sort it is, and everything else of that kind. For just as the "is" belongs to all of them, though not in the same way, but to one of them primarily and to the rest derivatively, so too the what-it-is belongs simply to the thinghood but in a certain respect to the others; for we might also ask what an of-this-sort is, though not simply but in the same way that, in the case of what is not, some people say logically that what is not *is*, not that it is simply but that it is what is not. It is the same way also with what is of-this-sort. Now one ought to consider how one should speak about each thing, but surely not more than about how the things are; so also now, since it is clear what is meant, the what-it-is-for-something-to-be, in the same way as the what-something-is, will also belong primarily and simply to thinghood, and secondarily to the other ways of attributing being, not as a what-it-is-for-something-to-be simply, but as what it is for an of-this-sort or a so-much to be.

For one has to say that these are beings either ambiguously or

by adding and subtracting,⁷ in the same way that one can say the unknown is something known, since the right thing to say is that they are called beings neither ambiguously nor in just the same way, just as what is medical is so called not by being something that is one and the same but by pointing to something that is one and the same, and so not in an ambiguous way either. For a medical cadaver, a medical action, and a medical instrument are meant neither ambiguously nor as one thing, but as pointing to one thing.⁸ But it makes no difference in which of the two ways one wants to speak about these things. This is clear: that a definition and a what-it-is-for-something-to-be belong primarily and simply to independent things. It is not that they do not belong to the other things in a way that resembles this, but only that they do not belong to them primarily. For it is not necessary, if we assume this, that there be a definition of whatever means the same thing as a group of words, but only that there be one of what means the same thing as a certain kind of group of words, and this is one that belongs to something that is one, not by being continuous in the way that the *Iliad* is, nor by being bundled together, but in just those ways that one is meant. Now one is meant in the same ways as being, and being signifies in one way a *this*, in another a so-much, and in another an of-this-sort. And for this reason there will be a statement and a definition of a pale person, but in a different way than of pale, or of an independent thing.

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Chapter 5 But there is an impasse: if one denies that a statement that adds things together is a definition, will there be a definition of anything that is not simple but consists of things linked together? For it is clear that it would have to be defined by way of addition. I mean, for example, that there is a nose and there is being-squashed-in, and there is also snubness that means something made out of these two, this one in that one, and it is not incidental that the being-squashed-in or the snubness is an attribute of the nose, but in its own right, nor is it in the way that paleness is in Callias, or in a human being, because Callias, who is incidentally a human being, is pale, but in the way that maleness

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⁷ That is, since a quantity (say) is a being only in a qualified sense (with an addition), it is a being in less than the full sense (with a subtraction).

⁸ See the first paragraph of Bk. IV, Ch. 2.

been everlasting independent things besides the ones we knew, so that now too, even if we cannot say what they are, it is still presumably necessary that there be some. That, then, none of the things attributed universally is an independent thing, and that no independent thing is composed of independent things, is clear.

Chapter 17 But what one ought to say thinghood is, and of what sort it is, let us speak about again, as though making another start; for perhaps from these discussions there will also be clarity about that kind of thinghood that is separate from perceptible independent things. Now since thinghood is a certain kind of ^{ὄν}source and ^{αἰτία}cause, one must go after it from that starting point. And the why of things is always sought after in this way: why one thing belongs to something else.⁴³ For to look for the reason why a cultivated human being is a cultivated human being is to seek either what was just said, why the human being is cultivated, or something else. Now why something is itself is not a quest after anything (for the *that* or the being-so has to be present all along as something evident—I mean, say, that the moon is eclipsed—but “because a thing is itself” is one formulation and one cause that fits all, why a human being is a human being or cultivated is cultivated, unless someone were to say that each thing is indivisible from itself, and that is what it is to be one; but this is common to everything and a shortcutting of the question). But one could search for the reason why a human being is a certain sort of animal. And in that case this is clear, that one is not searching for the reason why that which is a human being is a human being; therefore, one is inquiring why something is present as belonging to something. (That it is present has to be evident, for if that is not so, one is inquiring after nothing.) For example, “why does it thunder?” is, “why does noise come about in the clouds?,” for thus it is one thing’s belonging to another that is inquired after. Or why are these things here, say bricks and stones, a house? It is clear, then, that one is looking for what is responsible, which in some cases, as presumably with a house or a bed, is that for the sake of which it is, but in some cases it is that which first set the

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το γινῆσθαι τὴν αἰτίαν
 ἑστίν αὐτῶν

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⁴³ In *Posterior Analytics* II, Ch. 1–2, Aristotle says that all questions fall into four kinds: what is the case, why, whether something exists, and what something is. He argues that they all go back to the why, as a search for a middle term through which one thing belongs to another.

thing in motion, since this too is responsible for it. But while the latter sort of cause is looked for in cases of coming into being and destruction, the former applies even to the being of something.

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But the thing in question escapes notice most of all in those cases in which one thing is not said to belong to another, as when the thing one is seeking is what a human being is, because one states it simply and does not distinguish that these things are this thing. But it is necessary to inquire by dividing things at the joints; and if one does not do this, it becomes a cross between inquiring after nothing and inquiring after something. But since it is necessary that the being of something hold on to and be present to something, it is clear that one is asking why the material is something; so, "why are these things here a house?"—because what it is to be a house belongs to them. And this thing here, this body holding on in this condition, is a human being. Therefore what is being sought is the responsible thing by means of which the material is something, and this is the form. Accordingly, it is clear that

ἡ ἀπορώμενος

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~~in the case of simple things, there is no process of inquiry or teaching, but a different way of questing after such things.~~

He fails to translate the sentence
τοῦτο δ' ἡ ἀνάγκη

But then there is what is composed of something in such a way that the whole is one, in the manner not of a heap but of a syllable—and the syllable is not the letters, nor are B plus A the same as the syllable BA, any more than flesh is fire plus earth (for when they are decomposed, the wholes, such as flesh or a syllable, no longer are, but the letters, or the fire and earth, are); therefore there is something that is the syllable, not only the letters, the vowel and the consonant, but also something else, and the flesh is not only fire and earth, or the hot and the cold, but also something else. Now if that something else must necessarily either be an element or be made of elements, then if it is an element

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there will be the same argument again (since flesh would be made of this plus fire plus earth, and something else again, so that it goes on to infinity), but if it consists of an element, obviously it would consist not of one but of more than one, or else it would itself be that one, so that again in this case we will state the same argument as in the case of the flesh or the syllable. But it would seem that this something else is something, and is not an element, and is in fact responsible for the flesh's being this and the syllable's being that, and similarly too in the other cases. But this is the thinghood of each thing (for that is what is primarily responsible for the being of it)—and since some things are not independent things, but those that are independent things are put

together by nature and in accordance with nature,⁴⁴ it would seem that it is this nature that is thinghood, which is not an element but a source—but an element is that which something is divided into, being present in it as material, such as the A and the B of the syllable.

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⁴⁴ Products of art or craft have thinghood in a derivative sense, since they borrow their materials from natural things, and do not maintain themselves by activity. Random heaps are scarcely things at all. Attributes and properties belong to wholes, and parts are potencies that contribute to the maintenance of wholes. What else is there? At this stage of the inquiry in quest of being itself, Aristotle has cleared away everything but plants, animals, and the ordered cosmos.