The Avicennian Moment
Separation and the science of being (qua being)
in Aristotle and Avicenna

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Abstract

This thesis considers the fundamental conception of first philosophy (metaphysics) in the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle and its reception–reform in a major work of Abū ‘Alī al-Husayn Ibn-Sīna (Avicenna): the Metaphysics of the *Healing* (*al-(Ilāhiyyāt: al-Shifāʾ*). Specifically, it examines some of the main theoretical features that underpin both the conception and programme of first philosophy (understood as a study both of being *qua* being and of immaterial being) in these works, including the notions of ‘separation’ and ‘abstraction’, which both Aristotle and Avicenna employ pervasively. In doing so, this thesis seeks to show, first of all, how each thinker solves the problem of the relationship between the ontological and theological dimensions of first philosophy, and how their solutions, and the arguments they depend on, both reflect and are reflected in their wider views on being and the nature of scientific enquiry. It is argued that while the notion of separation as *independence* is fundamental for Aristotle (as seen, for example, in his treatment of the *aporai* of *Metaphysics* B), by contrast, for Avicenna, the notion of abstraction as *immateriality*, is central. Similar points of comparison are presented, such as the very notion of a *notion or meaning* which Avicenna employs constantly, as in his unique treatment of the problem of the homonymy of being; and it is argued that the conception of meaning that Avicenna uses here is not, as such, found in Aristotle, who instead relies on a notion of *logoi*. These differences, then, represent some of the main sources of disagreement between the two philosophers with respect to their accounts of *being*. Finally, the preceding questions are also examined in connection with the problem of whether we find a distinct notion of *existence* in Aristotle, such as we find in Avicenna, and if so, how this notion is treated in the context of his scientific investigation of being and its divisions. In this way, this thesis seeks to illuminate, from one perspective, what separates and connects these two key moments in the history of philosophy and the reception–history of the *Metaphysics*. 
Declaration

This thesis comprises only my original work towards the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used. The thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, bibliography and appendices.

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Introduction

I. Preliminary remarks

In the opening lines of the fourth book of his definitive treatise on first philosophy, the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle introduces the enquiry he is engaged in there using a formula that has become well known, describing this science as a study of “being qua being and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature” (*Met.* Γ.1, 1003a21-22). So familiar has this formula become, in fact, that it has tended to eclipse several other characterizations that Aristotle gives of the wider investigation that he is engaged in in this treatise, including the identification of first philosophy, or wisdom, as theology in *Met.* E.1—that is, as the study of separate (immaterial) and immoveable being.

So much is suggested, anyway, by even a cursory look at the bulk of both the general and specialist literature on Aristotle. At the same time, it is fair to say that modern scholarship has been deeply affected by the view that these two conceptions of first philosophy—the ontological and the theological—stand, if not opposed, then at least in tension with one another; for it has been widely accepted that they belong either to two different stages of Aristotle’s intellectual development or, in any case, represent two ways of ‘doing’ metaphysics that had better be kept apart. Thus, the idea that the two conceptions might be reconciled—shown to belong to a unified enquiry in the context of the *Metaphysics*—is generally given short shrift today (that is, if the matter is even given consideration), while the ontological conception is given a privileged place in its scheme.

It is not only modern scholars who have discerned a problem here, though; medieval philosophers grappled with it too, and indeed one can argue that it is their diagnoses and treatment of it that remotely explain, in important respects, our own (received) pattern of reading the *Metaphysics*. And here, one figure stands out especially: Abū ‘Alī al-Husayn Ibn-Sīnā¹ ("Avicenna", ca. 970–1037), for in his grand work *al-Shifā‘*, Avicenna presents a solution to the apparent problem of the relationship between the study of being *qua* being and the divine that would have far-reaching consequences (that is, beyond the mere question of the correct interpretation of Aristotle).

¹ In this thesis I refer to Ibn-Sīnā by his Latinized name, “Avicenna”. I do so merely because of convention: this has become the dominant practice in English-language studies, and it is followed by (for example) Bertolacci (2006), Kalbarczyk (2018), and Wisnovsky (2003b), which are among the most important monograph-length studies on Avicenna published in recent years.
In Avicenna, then, metaphysics is conceived as constitutively ontology and theology—as it had been too for many thinkers of Late Antiquity—but not because the designation(s) of the two terms (being qua being and the divine) are simply identified. Rather, basing his argument on different things that Aristotle and later thinkers said about the nature of a proper scientific enquiry, and following an interpretation that he already found in al-Fārābī, Avicenna shows that they belong to each other as two inseparable ‘moments’, as it were, of a single enquiry: the first of them as its subject-matter, and the other its sought-for principle. But this very move, it might be said—despite it being intended to show that the two moments form a necessary unity—paved the way for their separation. For just as Avicenna (employing a procedure that he found in Aristotle) secured a place for being qua being as the subject-matter of first philosophy by directing us to consider being ‘abstractly’, so too later philosophers would consider this subject-matter no longer (as) part of larger enquiry, but quite simply apart, or separate, in a way that echoes one of the other meanings that Aristotle accords this term: namely, as self-subsistent. No doubt for Avicenna, though—and no less for Aristotle too—this could only have meant one thing: depriving this science of its foundation.

It is not my intention, though, to consider such far-reaching consequences of this decision in this thesis; and I should note too that I have sketched this picture just in order to set the scene, since both its arc and its details provide a useful starting point and framework for the investigation that I will pursue in this thesis.

The argument and analysis that I present in thesis, then, concern the conception of Aristotelian first philosophy that we encounter in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. These are examined in the light of Avicenna’s reception—‘reform’ of this text, specifically in the context of his *al-Shifāʾ*, in order to discern how and why each of their definitive treatises on this subject differ in certain respects, both as regards their form and their content. Those respects chiefly concern: (i) the relationship between the so-called “ontological” and “theological” dimensions of this enquiry; (ii) the different notions of “separation”, “abstraction”, and “immateriality” that each thinker employs in this context; (iii) questions about the scientific method appropriate to this enquiry; and (iv) logical–semantic and related questions that emerge in connection with the categorial ontology that the two philosophers develop and present in their respective works.

Thus the present thesis seeks to understand and to compare the conceptions of first philosophy that we find in Aristotle and in Avicenna; but since our starting point and orientation concerns a problem that *Avicenna* found in Aristotle, as well as the solution that he presents in response to it—one that would have a profound impact on the reception–history of the *Metaphysics* and the history of philosophy generally—we describe the theme and focus of this thesis as concerning the “Avicennian ‘moment’”.²

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² Christian Jambet’s thoughtful study (2006) of the philosophical system of the seventeenth century Iranian philosopher Mullā Sadrā Shīrāzī (1571-1640) also contains an eponymous chapter which explores “the Avicennian moment” in relation to the genesis of this system. Jambet’s study provided part of the initial
II. Research questions

The main question that this thesis seeks to answer is the following:

I. How do the fundamental conceptions of first philosophy and its object of enquiry in the Metaphysics of Aristotle and Avicenna stand in relation to each other? What separates and unites their different conceptions?

In connection with this question this thesis also investigates the following sub-questions:

i. How does Avicenna resolve the problem of the relationship between first philosophy as (at once) an enquiry into being qua being and immaterial being?

ii. What roles do the notions of separation and abstraction play in the different conceptions of first philosophy and of its object of enquiry in the Metaphysics of Aristotle and Avicenna?

iii. How do Aristotle and Avicenna approach specific problems about the nature of being and its divisions?

iv. What other semantic and conceptual concerns underlie the different views of Aristotle and Avicenna on being and its divisions?

III. Scope and approach

In order to answer the above research questions this thesis examines and compares the fundamental conceptions of first philosophy (and its objects of enquiry) that we encounter in the Metaphysics of Aristotle and the section on Metaphysics (Ilāhiyyāt) in Avicenna’s Kitāb al-Shifā’. The reason for focusing on these two texts has already been mentioned above: by his own reckoning, Avicenna wrote the latter work in response to Aristotle’s, not in order to refute it, but to clarify its contents. In it, then, we encounter what an ideal Metaphysics should look like, according to Avicenna.3 We are concerned, once again, with the reception–history of the Metaphysics, chiefly. (For the same reason, works by Avicenna outside of al-Shifā’ are not examined.)

In examining these texts, our main aim is to understand their global arguments, primarily: that is, arguments concerning the form or structure of the wider enquiry that each is engaged in. So, we will focus on passages that explain details about the programme of metaphysics and its object of enquiry as described in each work, as well as the main arguments that support their conceptions. Other passages in Aristotle’s and Avicenna’s Metaphysics are examined for the sake of understanding their global arguments, or in order to see how the latter are pursued in specific contexts, and in relation to specific problems. So, for example, we will focus on the contents of Metaphysics A-B, Γ.1-2, E.1, and Shifā’: Ilāhiyyāt I.1–5, V.1–2, VII.2, VIII.1–4, since they contain crucial details about the programme and argument of their respective enquiries.

3 See Menn (2013).
Other works by each philosopher are examined in order to clarify details and arguments that appear in these latter works. For example, certain passages in the Logic of al-Shifā’ and Aristotle’s Organon (especially the Categories and Analytics) are examined in order to provide further details about logical–semantic notions and distinctions employed in metaphysical contexts, as well as details about the nature and objects of scientific enquiry.

The approach of this thesis, then, is primarily comparative–philosophical, since our aim is to understand, and to compare, the doctrinal content of the Aristotle’s and Avicenna’s Metaphysics. However, since we are concerned with the wider reception–history of Aristotle’s Metaphysics, we also examine some (late) ancient and Arabic sources that shaped the history of interpretation of this text, including Avicenna’s reception–reform of it.

IV. Method
The method of this thesis is qualitative and involves (i) close textual analysis of primary-text sources as well as (ii) extensive engagement with the secondary literature on these and some related texts.

As discussed in the previous section, the main primary texts examined are the Metaphysics of Aristotle and Avicenna’s al-Shifā’: Ilāhiyyāt. These texts have been examined in the Greek and Arabic (respectively) as well as English (and occasionally Italian) translation.

Passages from Greek and Arabic primary texts are included in this thesis in English translation (with Greek and Arabic technical terms provided in brackets). Unless otherwise noted, I use the revised Oxford translation of the complete works of Aristotle and follow the standard Bekker numbering. The English translation of al-Shifā’: Ilāhiyyāt by Michael Marmura (The Metaphysics of the Healing) is used. Passages from this work are cited using the chapter–section and paragraph–page numbering in Marmura’s text (e.g Shifā’: Ilāhiyyāt I.1.1, p.1). Technical terms are also glossed in Greek and Arabic.

In addition to primary-text analysis, this thesis engages widely with the secondary literature on these texts, as well as other relevant literature on the topics they discuss. This is done both for the sake of analyzing the primary texts, but also in order to situate different lines of interpretation in the secondary literature within the wider context of the reception–history of Aristotle’s Metaphysics.

Footnotes are used extensively for the purposes of providing additional explanation, as well as citations, in order not to clutter the main text.

V. Objectives
The main objectives of this thesis reflect the research questions presented above.

With regards to the overarching question about how the fundamental conceptions of first philosophy and its object of enquiry in Aristotle’s and Avicenna’s Metaphysics stand in relation to each other, our aim is to show the reasons why Aristotle and Avicenna hold different (but still
related) conceptions of the ambit of first philosophy and the relationship between its objects of enquiry. Towards that end, we have examined the key texts dealing with this issue in order to locate the main sources of (dis)agreement between them.

With respect to the first sub-question:

i. How does Avicenna resolve the problem of the relationship between first philosophy as (at once) an enquiry into being *qua* being and immaterial being?

We aim to show that, while Aristotle and Avicenna agree that the two objects are connected as an effect is to its cause, the philosophical account that each thinker gives of the nature of these objects is somewhat different, and this is connected to the different (but related) notions of separation and abstraction that each is philosopher working with. But the two thinkers employ several different notions of separation, and, while all of them are found in Aristotle in some form, Avicenna develops them in ways that Aristotle did not, and applies them to solving the problem just discussed in a somewhat novel way.

So with respect to the second sub-question:

ii. What roles do the notions of separation and abstraction play in the different conceptions of first philosophy and its object of enquiry in the Metaphysics of Aristotle and Avicenna?

Drawing on recent work in this area, our objective is to show that, while Aristotle and Avicenna both employ notions of separation and abstraction in the context of discussing the division between the sciences and their respective objects of consideration, Avicenna focuses more on the notions of separation *in definition* and separation *from matter*, including in the context of examining the fundamental problems of metaphysics. This is in contrast to Aristotle, who focuses more (though not exclusively) on separation as *ontological independence*.

Our aim is also to see how this is borne out in the different approaches that Aristotle and Avicenna follow in establishing the first principles that are sought for in this enquiry. Thus, we will examine how the path of *aporiai* that Aristotle follows, and in which fundamental problems related to separation are raised, is largely ignored by Avicenna, who—as Amos Bertolacci has shown—attempts to place this enquiry on a firmer scientific foundation.

With regard to the third sub-question:

iii. How do Aristotle and Avicenna approach specific problems about the nature of being and its divisions?

Our objective is to show that—pace Avicenna and much modern scholarship—the enquiry into being (*qua* being) and its *pros hen* structure as presented in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* does reflect the same concerns that Aristotle discusses in the *Posterior Analytics* with regard to the structure of a proper scientific enquiry. But this has (arguably) been obscured by a contemporary line of research

4 For example: Bäck (2014); Menn (2013); Porro (2011).

5 Bertolacci (2006).
that understands the doctrine of the “multiplicity” of being (or “being”) in Aristotle as a doctrine about the multiple “senses” of being, primarily.

In connection with this point, then, it is argued that the broader conceptions and divisions of being that Aristotle and Avicenna present in their respective logical and metaphysical works reflect important differences with respect to their underlying logical–semantic and conceptual approaches. This includes Avicenna’s understanding and pervasive use of a notion of a “meaning” (maʿnā) where Aristotle would more often refer to definitions or logoi, as well as the notion of a concept which is arguably lacking in Aristotle.

Finally then, with respect to the last sub-question:

iv. What other semantic and conceptual concerns underlie the different views of Aristotle and Aristotle on being and its divisions?

Our objective is to show how the preceding lines of analysis might also help to understand another (supposed) point of difference between the two thinkers, which is related to the question of whether we find a distinct notion of existence in Aristotle, such as we find in Avicenna. It is argued that Aristotle’s approach to explaining the meaning and divisions of being do not exclude a concern with the notion of existence (or “exists”). But this concern is shaped by his view of the reasons for things’ existing as explicable in terms of different patterns of belonging. Thus, our objective is to show that the difference between Aristotle’s and Avicenna’s views in these areas have more to do, perhaps, with their different conceptual approaches rather than the different languages that each philosopher was working with.

Further details about these objectives and arguments are included in the following chapter summaries.

VI. Chapter summaries

Chapter 1

I begin in Chapter 1 with a broader examination of the the reception–history of the Metaphysics of Aristotle and the solution(s) that Avicenna proposed (in the context of his reform of the Metaphysics in al-Shifāʾ) with respect to the problem sketched in the introduction about the double conception of first philosophy, or the two moments that constitute this enquiry—being qua being and the divine—and others related to the subject-matter and scientific profile of this enquiry.

After introducing the problem of determining the subject-matter of metaphysics, then, I examine the question of in what sense metaphysics is a universal science and in what sense it is concerned with studying immaterial things, and how Avicenna responds to these problems in the Ilāhiyyāt of al-Shifāʾ. I also examine questions about the scientific profile and method of metaphysics (specifically in connection with the model of science that Aristotle presents in the Posterior Analytics, which Avicenna thinks metaphysics should conform to, even if this model was not perfectly realized by Aristotle, at least in its transmitted form in the Metaphysics).
After presenting the main outlines of Avicenna’s conception of metaphysics as it appears in the Ilāhiyyāt, I then examine the extent to which this conception agrees with the broader enquiry that Aristotle pursues in his own Metaphysics. Given the complexity of this question and the scholarly disagreement that surrounds it, I examine it from a select point of view only, presenting one possible interpretation of the (roughly uniform) argument–structure of the Metaphysics and the enquiry that it transmits. It is argued that both the ontological and theological determinations of first philosophy are encompassed by a broader aetiological conception of first philosophy (which is at the forefront in Met. A): namely, as the study of—or the search for—first causes and principles of being qua being (and its per se attributes). In line with this interpretation, Met. B (which presents a series of fundamental problems—aporiai—associated with the search for first causes and principles) is seen to occupy a crucial place in determining the (unfolding) programme of the enquiry that Aristotle pursues in this work. For example, it is in response to the ‘methodological’ aporiai of B that the conception of first philosophy as a study of being qua being (and its per se attributes) is advanced, while the ‘substantive’ aporiai of B (which concern the different candidates for first causes and principles (and elements) advanced by earlier philosophers—above all the platonists and presocratic natural philosophers) are pursued in Books ZH and beyond. Aristotle’s investigation of these problems largely involves asking whether a candidate cause or principle satisfies the criterion of separability or not (which it must if it is to qualify as a true first cause or principle); and thus the main line of enquiry in the Metaphysics can be seen as search for separately-existing and universally-acting principles and causes.

Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, I examine more closely what it is that separates and unities the two conceptions of first philosophy (the study of being qua being and of immaterial being) both as conceptions and as real objects of philosophical consideration for Avicenna: namely, the very notion of separation (or abstraction) and the conceptual and logical tools that Avicenna uses to articulate it. These ‘tools’ have already been alluded to in the preliminary sketch above: as well as the epistemological distinction between the two complementary features of a science (the distinction between its subject-matter and its object), for Avicenna this conception rests on a distinction between two modes of separation or abstraction, and two corresponding modes of negation, which Avicenna develops using a set of logical and conceptual tools that he finds in Aristotle (including the theory of reduplication (signalled by ‘qua’ locutions) and καθ’ αὑτο predication), and in turn uses to correct certain defects that he saw in the original (Aristotelian) presentation of first philosophy. This chapter demonstrates the central importance of these devices for Avicenna, both with respect to the structure of first philosophy as a whole as well as several doctrines for which Avicenna is well known.

6 On this topic see Porro (2011). This important study has deeply informed the argument of this chapter and, indirectly, this thesis as a whole. Cf. Menn (2013).
The notions of separation and abstraction, as just indicated, also hold fundamental importance for Aristotle, and the logical and theoretical tools that Avicenna uses in deploying them ultimately go back to him. However, Avicenna makes slightly different, and often wider, use of them (as in his well-known doctrine of the threefold distinction of quiddity). Moreover, just as Aristotle employed these notions as part of his running plato-critique, so too, it is argued, their place and application in the larger argument of al-Shifāʾ raises important questions about the persistence of platonism in the philosophy of Avicenna.

Chapter 3

Building on this theme, in Chapter 3, I examine some further questions about being and separation that Aristotle discusses, but in a slightly different context: namely, his treatment of the aporiai of B in different parts of the Metaphysics. This is considered important for two reasons. First, it provides a good illustration of the different ways that Aristotle and Avicenna approach such questions. (Amos Bertolacci, for example, approaches this issue in the context of discussing the (diminished) place of dialectic in the metaphysics of Avicenna. Stephen Menn, moreover, has shown that Avicenna arrives at a quite different solution to the eleventh aporia about Being than Aristotle does (which I also examine in this chapter). My assessment is basically the same as that of Menn, but I give a fuller treatment of the problem, and my aim is ultimately to connect it to a broader set of considerations.) Second, as Bertolacci has shown, since Avicenna is attempting to secure a foundation for metaphysics as a first-order demonstrative science, he shows little patience for the sort of dialectical approach that Aristotle follows in examining these problems. But, I argue, the problems of B, or their resolution, belong to an important pole in the argument-structure of the Metaphysics that Avicenna largely ignores. So examining these issues helps to see from another perspective what separates and unites their different philosophical approaches.

Chapter 4

There are, of course, other respects in which the thought of the two masters overlap in similarly interesting and complex ways, and in Chapter 4 I introduce one more that is closely related to the earlier question about the subject of first philosophy (as indeed the question about separate being examined in the preceding chapter); namely, the well-known Aristotelian dictum that being is not a genus, and the doctrine that usually goes along with it: that of the multivocity or homonymy of “being” (which is introduced by Aristotle in several places using the formula: “being is said in many ways”). Its connection with the preceding problem is also well-known. As noted in the introductory section of this chapter, in Met Γ.1, Aristotle boldly announces: “There is a science which investigates being as being and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature”.7 In the immediately following lines, he then adds:

7 Met. Γ.1, 1003a18–19.
Now this is not the same as any of the so-called special sciences; for none of these others treats universally of being as being. They cut off a part of being and investigate the attribute of this part; this is what the mathematical sciences for instance do.\(^8\)

(Incidentally, this passage is important because the sense in which the special sciences, like mathematics, “cut off”—ἀποτελοῦμεν—”a part of being will have much to do with the notion of abstraction introduced above.) But these words point to a problem that has to do, precisely, with the very possibility of a scientific investigation of being, which Aristotle has just now (it appears) told us is actual (“There is a science…ἐστιν ἐπιστήμη τις…”). For Aristotle is of the view that every science studies a particular genus (APO. I. 28, 87a38; I. 9, 76a11-12), but that being is not a genus (MET. B.3, 998b22; APO. 92b14). So, we might presume, either there is no such science, on the grounds that its putative object does exist, or—to put the emphasis differently—because the enquiry that Aristotle has just announced is not a scientific enquiry in the proper sense, or in the same sense as these other sciences.

The solution to this dilemma, it is generally agreed, rests on two qualifications that Aristotle makes concerning this enquiry. In the first place, it rests on the very qualification that Aristotle has already provided: that this science studies not simply being, but being qua being—τὸ ὅν ὅν. In a second move, which he introduces in the second chapter of Γ, Aristotle declares:

[The term] “being” is said in many ways, but [they are] related to one central point, one definite kind of thing [πρὸς ὅν καὶ μίαν τινὰ φόσιν], and not homonymously [οὐχ ὀμονόματι].\(^9\)

It is notoriously difficult to say just what Aristotle is getting at here, and how this formula is supposed to resolve the dilemma that I have just noted (and too, how it overlaps with the doctrine of the categories, as well as raising other worries). But it is not the interpretation of this passage, as such, that concerns us now. The important thing is that it is supposed to contain such a resolution, such that the science of being qua being (in its Aristotelian formulation) is supposed to stand or fall with it. In that case, we should expect Avicenna to say something about it; and indeed he does, both in his general discussion and application of different types of homonym. But as recent scholarship has shown, Avicenna adopts a somewhat different approach here, and once more shows that his relationship to the philosophical-past he inherited is one of both continuity and rupture. For example, Alexander Treiger,\(^10\) besides documenting the long history of development of the notion (from Aristotle) that the term “being” governs an intermediate kind of predication between pure equivocity and univocity (and is thus a modulated term), has argued that Avicenna represents a special stage in this history, introducing for the first time the notion that “being” as predicated

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\(^8\) Met. Γ.1, 1003a19–22.

\(^9\) Met. Γ.2, 1003a33-34.

\(^10\) Treiger (2012)
across the transcendental divide (that is, between God and created beings) represents a case of 
transcendental modulation.

However, it is not this latter claim, but the general account of predicamental modulation in
Avicenna that I shall focus on; for whether or not we accept the latter proposition, still, this account
is highly significant as yet another example of what separates Aristotle and Avicenna. However, it
is not enough to show simply that the two thinkers thought differently about this issue. A stronger
account should also show why. Its structuring idea, then, is the very notion of a notion (Arabic
maʾnā) which—much like the notion of abstraction discussed in Chapter 2—Avicenna employs in
developing this account, and pervasively elsewhere.

**Chapter 5**

In Chapter 5, I return to examine some of the preceding issues, but from a slightly different
perspective, presenting a detailed ‘case study’ that draws together several of the main themes
discussed in the preceding chapters. I examine how the account of the pros hen structure of being
that Aristotle presents in the *Metaphysics* both reflects and relies upon several important
considerations that he develops in the *Posterior Analytics*. This is shown to shed light not only on
the scientific character of this account (and how it constrasts with Avicenna’s), but also how
Aristotle tends to approach questions about existence in his philosophy—a distinct notion that is
often thought to be lacking among Greek (as opposed to Arabic) philosophers.

**Chapter 6**

Finally, in Chapter 6, I examine several different interpretations—both ancient and contemporary—
of the supposed relationship between the (so-called) ontological and theological conceptions of first
philosophy, and where the interpretation that Avicenna presents in the Metaphysics of his *al-Shifāʾ*
fits in this scheme.

**Conclusion**

In the conclusion chapter I summarize the main arguments and findings of the preceding chapters
and discuss how they relate to the above research questions.

**VII. Literature**

Given the wide-ranging theme and breadth of topics examined in the present thesis, discussion of
the relevant literature pertaining to specific topics and studies that I draw on or am responding to in
this thesis will be included in the relevant chapters. However, it will be useful to provide here first
of all a general overview of the current state of scholarship on Avicenna (including some of the
most relevant studies) as well as the relevant scholarship on Aristotle to situate the present study
within these two broad fields.
Avicenna studies

The study of Avicenna entered a new phase in the 1980s, and the last two to three decades in particular have seen a steadily increasing number of (English and other European language) studies published on his philosophical activity as a whole as well as on specific topics. In the following short summary, I shall note the most important recent studies in the field, and those that have either contributed to, or are most relevant to, the argument of the present thesis.

Unquestionably, the most important study produced in this field in recent years is Amos Bertolacci’s *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitâb al-Šifâ': A Milestone of Western Metaphysical Thought* (2006). In this book, Bertolacci exhaustively documents the reception–reform of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in the context of Avicenna’s *Kitâb al-Shifâ’,* providing (as its synopsis says) “a detailed account of Avicenna’s reworking of [its] epistemological profile and contents” as well as “a comprehensive investigation of this latter’s transmission in pre-Avicennian Greek and Arabic philosophy”.11 Like every researcher working in this field today, I have not only found it an essential and indispensable resource but have also had many occasions to draw on its results. I refer to it often in this thesis. In particular, I have benefited greatly from the analysis that Bertolacci provides (in Chapters 3-5 especially) of Avicenna’s conception (and reform) of the subject-matter of metaphysics, and his account of Avicenna’s method (including his critical attitude toward dialectic) in *al-Shifâ’.* I provide a slightly different interpretation (one that is complementary, rather than wholly critical) of this last topic, specifically in connection with the (dialectical) *aporiai* that Aristotle presents in *Metaphysics B* (which problems, I maintain, play a central place in determining the programme and argument of this text).12

Bertolacci was in turn continuing in the footsteps of Dimitri Gutas, who is to be credited with shifting the focus and direction of Avicenna studies (and Islamic philosophy more broadly) by attending to the intellectual background and milieu that Avicenna inherited and worked within—especially the (Arabic) Aristotelian tradition. His *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* (1988/2014) is a landmark text in this respect.

In addition, Robert Wisnovsky’s *Avicenna’s Metaphysics in Context* (2003) has to be singled out for its significant impact on recent Avicenna studies. Though focussed on slightly narrower topics than the preceding monographs, it is notable for exploring Avicenna’s dependence on two sources: the *kalām,* and the Greek Commentators of Late Antiquity—above all Ammonius. Wisnovsky thus portrays Avicenna’s metaphysics as “the culmination of a period of synthesis during which philosophers fused together a Neoplatonic project (reconciling Plato with Aristotle)

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11 Bertolacci (2006)

12 In addition, as well as producing a number of important articles on topics that I also examine in this thesis—the most important being Bertolacci (2011), which discusses the (non-univocal) predication of “being” and Bertolacci (2012) which re-examines Avicenna’s “essence-existence” distinction—Bertolacci has also produced an Italian translation of the Metaphysics of *al-Shifâ’* (2015) which includes insightful notes and a list of corrections to the Arabic text.
with a Peripatetic project (reconciling Aristotle with himself)” and as standing “at the beginning of a period during which philosophers sought to integrate the Arabic version of the earlier [Neoplatonic] synthesis with Islamic doctrinal theology”.

Alongside these book-length studies, and often drawing on their results, we should point to several article-length studies that have significantly shaped the field of Avicenna studies (specifically with respect to the topics studied in this thesis). Notable among them are Alexander Treiger’s “Avicenna’s Notion of Transcendental Modulation of Existence and Its Greek and Arabic Sources” (2010/2011), which examines the topic of non-univocal (modulated/equivocal) predication of terms such as “being” in Avicenna and earlier Greek and Arabic sources (ultimately going back to Aristotle), and a recent article by Daniel de Haan, “The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being in Avicenna’s Metaphysics” (2015), which treats the same topic. Both are important studies in connection with the problems examined in this thesis.

Similarly, Pasquale Porro’s article “Immateriality and Separation in Avicenna and Thomas Aquinas” (2011) examines one of the key conceptual ‘tools’ (the distinction between eidetic and real separation as two modes of immateriality) that Avicenna deploys throughout, and at critical points in, the argument of his Metaphysics, including in those sections that discuss its subject-matter and the well-known doctrine of quiddity-in-itself. This paper has has helped to shape the argument of the present thesis.

Though ostensibly an ‘overview’ of Avicenna’s metaphysics, Stephen Menn’s densely packed critical essay “Avicenna’s metaphysics” (2013) provides a thoughtful examination of several deeper issues that I also examine in this thesis. In particular, Menn connects his analysis of the “metaphysical machinery” supporting Avicenna’s doctrine of quiddity-in-itself (in effect, the distinction between eidetic and real separation: see the previous item) to Aristotle’s discussion of the eleventh aporia about Being (itself) in his Metaphysics (comparing their different responses). He also provides an important analysis of Avicenna’s conception of the subject-matter of metaphysics and of his views on the (non-univocal) predication of ‘being’.

Finally, it is essential to mention the singular contribution that Michael Marmura (1929-2009) made to Avicenna studies as a whole, as well as to our understanding of several key doctrines for which Avicenna is well known, and which I examine in this thesis; for in addition to producing the first complete English translation of the Metaphysics of al-Shifā’ (2005), Marmura also wrote pioneering articles on topics ranging from the division of the sciences in this work (1980) to the doctrine of primary notions (1984) and the problem of quiddity/universals (1979; 1992).

What all these studies have in common, then, is their close attention to the place of Avicenna in the Aristotelian tradition and—to a slightly lesser extent—the wider intellectual heritage that Avicenna drew on (including the kalām); and it is fair say that this reflects a change in orientation or perspective compared to earlier generations of studies. For on the one hand, much of the scholarship on Avicenna produced in the last half-century or so has been motivated, whether directly or indirectly, by an attempt to steer a new course away from another approach that
dominated an earlier phase of Avicenna scholarship—above all that represented by Henry Corbin (1903-1978)—which was, many argue, too fixated with the question of Avicenna’s Oriental philosophy. Dimitri Gutas, for instance, admits this in the preface to his major study of Avicenna (discussed above). For these scholars, then, this trend of scholarship erred in failing to place Avicenna in his proper milieu—the Aristotelian tradition. (I shall not approach this issue further, though, since—it might be argued—the supposed maligning influence of Corbin misses the point anyway: namely, that both his methods and his relation to the thought of Avicenna reflected a quite different orientation, one that was not guided by philological or historical concerns so much as a desire to understand the thought of Avicenna from within—as a source and springboard of philosophical speculation. This explains not only his concern with the question of Oriental philosophy in Avicenna, but also the Eastern reception and context of Avicennism as a living tradition.)

On the other hand, the scholarship of the last half-century or so represents a renewed effort (in the West) to engage with the thought of Avicenna more directly—not mediated by the Latin Avicenna. Indeed, the complex place that Avicenna has occupied in the European imagination extending back to the Middle Ages has deeply coloured modern scholarly interpretations. From the twelfth–thirteenth centuries onwards, Medieval philosophers critically engaged with and discussed the philosophical doctrines of the “Arabian” thinker in ways that, today, fewer and fewer scholars would regard as always faithfully representing the original; and this carried over into modern scholarship—especially within those schools still directly influenced by the Scholastic tradition (above all Thomism). Thus, despite the (partial) dependence of this tradition on the thought of Avicenna (something they often try to cover over), their presentations of it sometimes reflect and have perpetuated serious misunderstandings. A case in point is the doctrine of essence and existence, and their (purported) “real distinction”, which is so often singled out by Medieval philosophers; for an exaggerated stress on this distinction by modern interpreters, or a particular way of reading it, have led to a number of unwarranted interpretations not only of this doctrine but of Avicenna’s philosophy as a whole. To wit, it is often said that Avicenna “subordinated” existence to essence or considered existence a real “accident” super-added to essence in re—a ens in alio, in Scholastic parlance: something which exists in another. Indeed, Ibn Rushd (the Latin Averroës, 1126-1198) himself voiced such concerns, and they were amplified in their transposition from Arabic to Latin. But not only Averroës belaboured the point; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī also included it amongst his (so-called “Fakhrian”) Sophisms. In the Latin West, thinkers including Aquinas were even more vocal in denouncing it; and their denouncements were in turn picked up

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Aquinas inherited the same argument from Averroës. See his Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics (1993), vol. 26, IV, 2.
by scholars like Étienne Gilson (1884-1978), and from there infiltrated Western scholarship more broadly. But other voices (more sensitive to Arabic) have since come to his defense.\(^{15}\)

This is important (and I note it for this reason) because it demonstrates that some of the (mis)interpretations that have prevailed in Western scholarship ultimately go back to Arabic philosophers themselves,\(^{16}\) and thus it shows how deeply interpenetrated the Western and Arabic (Medieval and modern) traditions are—even to the point that a more “faithful” interpreter such as Corbin was destined to interpret the course of Islamic peripatecism in the light of the supposed achievements of later Scholasticism, arguing that al-Fārābī and Avicenna inaugurated a “metaphysics of essences” which reigned supreme until Mulla Sadrā Shīrāzī (c. 1571-1641) wrought his “existential revolution”.\(^{17}\)

The scholarly orientation of the present thesis, then, is clearly aligned with the former group of studies, all of which seek to situate, and to understand, Avicenna’s philosophy within its immediate philosophical context: the (Arabic) Aristotelian and wider (tenth-eleventh century) Islamic intellectual tradition. However, while their aims are often more philological than strictly philosophical, the present study primarily aims to compare the (philosophical) doctrinal content of the two main works under investigation here: the Metaphysics of Avicenna and Aristotle. Taking as its starting point and focus several (related) theses that Avicenna presents in his Metaphysics about the subject-matter of first philosophy and the relationship between its two constitutive moments (namely: being \textit{qua} being and the divine) and their conceptual foundation (namely: the notion of separation and the modulated structure of being) it casts a look back to Aristotle to discover whether and how they agree or disagree—and for what philosophical reasons. In this way it seeks to grasp from one perspective the development of both Metaphysics and of metaphysics as a discipline.\(^{18}\)

\(^{15}\) Fazlur Rahman was perhaps the first to seriously re-examine this claim (though as early as the thirteenth century, Henry of Ghent argued that a wider notion of accidentality was involved here). See Rahman (1956) and Rahman (1981). Rather, Rahman argues, Avicenna does consider existence an accident, something which “happens” or “occurs” to quiddity; but it is an accident only in a very special sense.

\(^{16}\) In another landmark, Stephen Menn (2011a) has shown how—remarkably—the reception-history of Avicenna on the problem of being (and unity) was shaped by Averroes’ deployment of an argument (used against both Avicenna and al-Ghazali) that he found in al-Fārābī (who of course precedes Avicenna).


\(^{18}\) Such “histories” are, I take it, inherently philosophical in this sense: philosophers rarely, if ever, engage in philosophy without having read or encountered some philosophy in their lives. To the extent that this is true, it will be possible to see the \textit{reasons} for philosophers thinking and writing what they do as being \textit{causally related} to the past of philosophy—what past philosophers thought and wrote or communicated. The historian of philosophy examines these very reasons \textit{qua} causes. Such causes will not (necessarily) be exhaustive; but there is a necessary connection here (though let us say, not a sufficient one), inasmuch as the appearance of an Avicenna, say, would have been \textit{impossible} without the prior appearance of Aristotle. And it is because of such causal relations that we are able to produce intelligible histories of philosophy—that we are
Aristotle studies

It is surely no exaggeration to say that no philosopher has been commented on as extensively or for as long as Aristotle has been commented on. The present thesis, then, is just the latest episode in a drama that has lasted two millennia already—and one that has had several climaxes: first in Late Antiquity, twice in the Medieval period (in two different cultural spheres), and again in the nineteenth century. To be sure, this last phase represents a break with those that preceded it in this respect, at least, that those working within it have, for the most part, engaged with Aristotle for quite different reasons: not in order to discover truth in his writings, but simply to understand them, perhaps too for the purpose of understanding what other thinkers thought (and why they thought what they thought). But it shares with those earlier phases, perhaps, the same air of scholasticism. Indeed, the sheer number of studies that continue to be produced on Aristotle, and above all his metaphysics, is bewildering.

Given the broad theme and scope of this thesis, it would be impossible to summarize the state of scholarship on all the aspects of Aristotle’s thought that concern us. So instead, I shall simply describe briefly the area of Aristotle scholarship that the present study is most closely related to—or rather the larger question that a few scholars in this area have sought to answer while others have largely ignored it.

As I have discussed above, that question is the one that Avicenna himself might be credited with bringing into the open; namely, the question of what the Metaphysics is actually about. A broad question, to be sure; but the truth is that relatively few researches have taken it up in the last century. Many simply take the answer as settled or get to work without giving it much of a thought. But others have, including towering figures like Werner Jaeger, who, through his groundbreaking study, Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of his Development (1934), (famously) popularized the view that Aristotle’s Metaphysics contains several “strata” that correspond to different phases of his intellectual development. Though connected, Jaeger argues, these strata nevertheless do stand in tension, and this poses a problem for the view that Aristotle presents or pursues in this work is a single and unified argument. Thus, Jaeger initiated a pattern of reading the Metaphysics that is in marked contrast with that of nearly all earlier commentators and philosophers who had engaged with this work.

I shall not present a summary of this text or its critical reception. Nor is it my intention to engage directly with this work (much less attempt to refute it) in this thesis. But it should be noted that that this “pattern” of reading the Metaphysics which Jaeger, along with other developmentalists, popularized has, whether or not they are aware of it, continued to influence later scholars working in this area. For one of the main results of the (direct or indirect) influence of such “developmental” readings is the view that among the different argument strata of the Metaphysics,

able to tell at least a partially true story about philosophical development. (Philosophical history, in this sense, is rational.) See Normore (2006), “What is to be Done in the History of Philosophy”.

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one of them is to be privileged as belonging to a later and (thus) more authentically “Aristotelian” phase and, as such, is treated as isolable. This is reflected in the current trend of describing Aristotelian philosophy simply as the study of being qua being, or of commenting ad nauseum on Books ZHO and the doctrine of “sensible substance” that they contain.

This is a regrettable and embarrassing situation in Aristotle scholarship, not only because so few researchers feel it necessary to rehearse (or even seem to be aware of) the arguments in support of this butchering of the Metaphysics, but also because it is, perhaps, one of the main causes of that scholasticism I mentioned a moment ago—a fuddle into which each new generation of scholars has to wade still deeper.

But it is not my intention to wade into it either. Rather, since my starting point and aim involves examining the solution that Avicenna gives to this problem and how he arrives at it (that is, based on what reading of Aristotle) I assume it as an a priori possibility that there is a way of reconciling the different conceptions of first philosophy presented in the Metaphysics (stressing again that I am only concerned in this thesis with the larger argument-structure of this text). As Allan Bäck (2014, p. 24) encourages: I take a unitarian view as the “null-hypothesis”.

However, this entails that it is possible to demonstrate such unity. Towards this end, then, I present such an interpretation of the (roughly uniform) argument–structure of the Metaphysics that is in broad agreement with that of several earlier interpreters who have engaged with this subject. These include Reale (1980), Decarie (1961), and Mansion (1958). Many other studies could have been selected; but I have highlighted these studies because—unlike those of (e.g.) Patzig (1979), Merlan (1957), Owens (1978), and others—they do not simply identify the objects associated with the two conceptions of first philosophy (namely, being qua being and God). In this sense, these studies—or certainly the interpretation that I draw from them—is a ‘weak’ version of the unitarian view, both in the sense that it does not go to this extreme (it preserves the two conceptions as distinct moments), but also does not assume that Aristotle actually ‘achieved’, so to speak, a unified program of first philosophy in the Metaphysics. Thus, it allows that Aristotle’s metaphysical thinking may well have developed, whilst still granting the possibility that a unified conception and programme (whether or not it was successfully executed) stands beneath this text.
This chapter examines a number of ‘global’ concerns about the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle that bear upon Avicenna’s reception–reform both of this text and of the science that it transmits in the *Ilāhiyyāt* of al-Shifā’. This includes the problem of determining the subject-matter of first philosophy (in the light of its double characterization in Aristotle as ontology and as theology) as well as questions about the possibility and unity of this science (its scientific profile) and the type of enquiry that it pursues (its method).

### 1.1 The reception–history of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*

The history of the discipline of first philosophy or metaphysics is inseparable from the reception-history of its founding text, and the one that influenced most of all, perhaps, the course of metaphysical thinking from Late Antiquity through the Middle Ages, namely, the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle. Along with the rest of the Aristotelian corpus, it formed one ‘pole’ (besides the Platonic dialogues) in the increasingly inter-dependent Peri-Platonic tradition of philosophy which was carried on through Late Antiquity into the period of classical Arabic philosophy, even in the more firmly-rooted Platonic schools where, for both scholastic and polemical reasons, reading it was considered propaedeutic and essential for the aspiring philosopher. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that throughout this period ‘doing’ philosophy meant, to a great extent, either seeking to understand this text or responding to it in one way or another.

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1) The term itself, [τὰ] μετὰ [τὰ] φυσικά—both as a title for this work and as a name for the type of investigation pursued in the individual treatises it comprises—is closely related to the systematic ordering of Aristotle’s work, as represented in the first ‘edition’ of the Aristotelian corpus, produced by Andronicus of Rhodes sometime in the first half of the first century BCE. There is, however, as Menn (1997) argues, no basis for the all-too-often repeated claim that the title of this collection of books refers (simply) to its position in the catalogue of Aristotle’s works, that is, its coming after the books on natural philosophy—the *Physics*. Rather, it probably refers to the place of these books (and their content) in “an ideal order of learning” (Menn, 1997). Used in this sense, the term is attested as early as Nicholas of Damascus. “*Metaphysics*” is also the name of another early Peripatetic treatise: that of Theophrastus.

2) On this term, see Normore (2015).

3) D’Ancona (2005), pp. 13–18, presents an excellent brief summary of these developments.
Now, the reception-history of both the text *Metaphysics* and the science it transmits, as Amos Bertolacci notes, can be portrayed as a sequence of reforms that bear upon both their form and their content, beginning with Aristotle’s editors’ efforts to ‘repair’ the text of the *Metaphysics* (which may or may not have included Andronicus of Rhodes’ ordering of its individual treatises, resulting in their present arrangement), and continuing with the commentators’ attempts to bring clarity to the contents of the *Metaphysics* by filling in occasional gaps in its arguments. And about the latter: though their ‘reforms’ were at first slight, the increasing interdependence of the Peripatetic and Platonic traditions meant that the task of understanding shifted towards demonstrating the agreement between Plato’s and Aristotle’s thought; and so the latter occasionally, but increasingly, found incorporated into itself elements of the former. And this pattern continued into the Islamic period.

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5 About the need for these reforms: the text of the *Metaphysics* is in a fairly ruinous state, it has to be agreed. It is full of fissures—arguments break off or intrude unexpectedly; it announces problems it subsequently fails to discuss, and discusses problems that seem, oftentimes, out of place; it is written in the craggliest Greek—barely intelligible at times—and in general, its arrangement is difficult, and the text is full of duplications. In short, no-one could deny that, as regards its literary form, the *Metaphysics* is in a poor state. But frustrating as they are, it is not difficult to account for these deficiencies, since its contents, as is well known, consist of something like “lecture notes” (Jaeger’s term)—school writings that were (probably) constantly revised by Aristotle and intended to be read (or heard) by a limited audience in the Peripatos (see Jaeger (1934), pp. 148–163). But supposing, as most today do, that Aristotle himself authored their contents (except, perhaps, for K, which may be a student’s class notes), another question (see the following note) concerns whether Aristotle himself played a hand in arranging the individual treatises of the *Metaphysics* into their final form, or whether this represents the work of later editors (in other words: whether, or to what extent, the order and contents of its treatises reflect a single intention, and roughly uniform or structured argument that reflects Aristotle’s pursuit of a consistent type of enquiry).

6 Menn (1995), pp. 202–208, has argued against the popular argument about the order of the *Metaphysics* being post-Aristotelian—the work of the editors—pointing out that there is scarcely any ancient testimony for this view, and that the only reports that we do have about editorializing influence suggest that the editors inserted some material from other works (the *Physics*) or from earlier books (as in K) to “patch holes” in the text. Even Jaeger (1934) held that, except for α, Δ, K, and Λ, which were (he thinks) added by later editors, the other books, though written at different times, were put together by Aristotle in their current order: a failed execution of a unified program.

7 On the stages of the history of exegesis of Aristotle’s works, see e.g. Moraux (1970), and Sorabji (1990); and in connection with the Arabic-Islamic reception of Aristotle, Martini Bonadeo (2013), chs. 1–2.

8 In connection with this and the preceding point, Wisnovsky (2005), pp. 92–136, identifies two projects that the commentators pursued as part of their ‘harmonization’ efforts: the ‘lesser harmony’ and the ‘greater harmony’. The former project—the lesser harmony—which was pursued by the first commentators, and notably by Alexander, aimed at reconciling Aristotle with himself, clarifying the apparent ‘inconsistencies’ between what Aristotle says in different places about the same topics in order to arrive at a more uniform reading of his philosophical system. The latter project—the greater harmony—which was pursued by Porphyry, Proclus and others, was aimed at reconciling Aristotle’s and Plato’s thought, as we have mentioned
The reception of Greek metaphysics, and the text of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in particular into the orbit of Islam roughly in the eighth-to-ninth centuries represents a decisive moment—and a new ‘beginning’— in the reception-history (and history of ‘reforms’) of this text, and not (or not only) because Aristotle’s thought now found itself translated into a new linguistic register and for a new cultural milieu; it is decisive as well because Aristotle’s Arabic audience, consciously or not, introduced a new ‘trend’ of reading the *Metaphysics* following a slightly different pattern—or several different patterns—compared to their Greek predecessors; and in regard to the science it transmits, they also introduce reforms that are no longer slight but bear upon its actual structure and profile as a science. And in this stage of reforms, one figure in particular stands out: Avicenna; for he conceived that part of his own philosophical summa—al-Shifā’—dealing with the science of first philosophy (al-Ilāhiyyāt) as a re-working of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, and one which, though he intended his *Metaphysics* to have the same content as Aristotle’s,9 is also intended to clarify or improve upon certain limitations that he saw in the latter both in regard to the epistemological profile of the science it transmits as well as its disordered presentation.10

But what were the reasons for those needed reforms? In the following sections I shall focus on two connected problems concerning Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* that Avicenna sought to address as a way into the discussion that will follow: both of them related to questions about what metaphysics studies—its object, or subject-matter—and about its scientific profile. And that these questions were perceived as ‘problems’ (and not only by Avicenna) has to do with the fact that Aristotle’s views on them are not entirely clear or settled; and this, as Avicenna and many more recent interpreters have thought, is because (they think) there is something ‘wrong’ with the text of the *Metaphysics* as we have it, in the sense that its order is supposed not to reflect Aristotle’s true views, or because the different things he says about the science that it transmits are somehow inconsistent with what Aristotle says in different places or within the context of his broader philosophical views.

1.1.2 Avicenna’s question: the subject-matter of Aristotelian metaphysics

So the first question—Avicenna’s question, and ours too—has to do with the problem of what metaphysics studies, or what Aristotle’s aim in the *Metaphysics* is; for it is not entirely clear what

above. Wisnovsky argues that Ammonius “synthesized” these two projects, joining them together “to form the basis of a newly systematized Aristotelian philosophy” (p. 98). Avicenna, as heir to the Ammonian synthesis, was deeply influenced by this phase. Cf. Wisnovsky (2003b).


10 So, Bertolacci (2006), p. 107, notes: “Avicenna’s ‘reform’ of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in the Ilāhiyyāt aims primarily at providing the discipline expounded in the work with a new ‘form’, i.e. a proper scientific status. The epistemological profile of metaphysics that emerges from the *Metaphysics* is regarded as imperfect by Avicenna, who—the heir, in this, of a long tradition—endeavours to transform this discipline into a fully accomplished science. The changes that Avicenna introduces in his reworking of the *Metaphysics* in order to fulfill this task are profound.”
its subject-matter is. Or better perhaps, it is not clear how what Aristotle actually does in the *Metaphysics* relates to its stated subject-matter(s); and the difficulty stems from this first of all, that Aristotle gives at different points, different (and perhaps conflicting) ‘descriptions’ or characterizations of the kind of enquiry that it is concerned with, as we have seen, describing it on some occasions as a ‘universal’ science of being (*qua* being), and on other occasions as an enquiry into a special kind of being—immoveable, timeless, and existing separately from matter: the divine.

Thus, as Aristotle famously announces in the opening lines of Γ.1, “There is a science that studies being *qua* being and the properties inherent in it in virtue of its own nature—ἐστιν ἐπιστήμη τις ἣν θεωρεῖ τὸ ὑπὸ τὸν οὐ ὡς καὶ τὰ τοῦτῳ ὑπάρχοντα καθ᾽ ἀυτὸν”11; and that this science should be regarded in some sense as a universal science follows from the fact that, as Aristotle describes, it is unlike the particular (natural and mathematical) sciences, which do not deal “generally with being”, but rather “cut off [ἀποστειομένη] a part of being and study the attributes of this part”12; and we find the same formula more or less repeated in E.1.13 Every science studies being, for everything that is, as we said earlier, is (a) being; but physics, for example, studies what-is—being, or beings—but *qua* moveable, and the essential attributes that are connected with their being associated with matter. But this science—the sought-for science of first philosophy—is described as studying what-is, or being, and what belongs to being *per se*,14 not from this or any other limited perspective, but simply *qua* being, or insofar as something is (a) being.15

Now if, as we have said, everything is being, and this science is concerned with studying being as such, or *qua* being, then it sounds like what Aristotle is describing is a perfectly general—a universal—science. But in E.1—where again, Aristotle has used the same formula to describe this science—its subject-matter (and its relation to the particular sciences) is described in quite different terms: that is, as that kind or γένος of being (or substance) that is eternal and immoveable and separable (from matter), in contrast with the science of physics, on the one hand, which studies being that is separate16 but moveable, and mathematics, on the other hand, whose objects are

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11 *Met.* Γ.1, 1003a21.
12 *Met.* Γ.1, 1003a24–27.
13 *Met.* E.1, 1025b10–11: “...but all these sciences mark off some particular being—some genus, and inquire into this, but not into being simply [ἄλλ᾽ οὐχὶ περὶ ὁνόματος ἄνικος] nor *qua* being [οὐδὲ ἣν ὄν]”. See also *Met.* K.3 (1061b17): “the philosopher treats of being *qua* being universally and not some part of it”, and passim. References to a science of “being *qua* being” are more frequent in K than in any other book.
14 “τὰ τοῦτῳ ὑπάρχοντα καθ᾽ ἀυτόν”, as opposed to “τὸ συμβεβηκός”—we will discuss below the sense in which each science is concerned with studying the essential properties and attributes of its genus.
15 We provide a detailed analysis of *qua*-locutions, including in the context of determining the field of a particular enquiry (to study “*x qua x*” as opposed to “*x qua y*”), in the following chapter.
16 Accepting Schwegrler’s emendation: χωριστά for ἄχωροστα, following Ross (1924) and Jaeger (1934). I.e., the objects of physics are ‘separate’, obviously not meaning here ‘separate from matter’, but ontologically independent (this meaning of χωριστόν will be discussed below), while the objects of divine science are both ontologically independent and separate from matter. The objects of mathematics are
immovable, but not separate from matter except in abstraction; and furthermore, because of the dignity—the pre-eminence—of its object, it is explicitly called ‘theology’. So Aristotle writes:

But if there is something which is eternal and immovable and separable \(\chiωριστόν\), clearly the knowledge of it belongs to a theoretical science,—not, however, to physics (for physics deals with certain movable things) nor to mathematics, but to a science prior \(\piρτήρας\) to both. For physics deals with things which exist separately \(\piρ\iota\chiωριστά\) but are not immovable, and some parts of mathematics deal with things which are immovable but presumably do not exist separately, but as embodied in matter \(\acute\omegaς\ \acuteιν\ \acuteιλη\); while the first \[\text{science}\] \(\piρ\omicron\omicron\omicron\eta\) deals with things which both exist separately and are immovable. Now all causes must be eternal, but especially these; for they are the causes that operate on so much of the divine as appears to us. There must, then, be three theoretical philosophies, mathematics, physics, and what we may call theology \(\thetaεολογική\), since it is obvious that if the divine is present anywhere, it is present in things of this sort. And the highest \[‘most honourable’\] science must deal with the highest \[‘most honourable’\] genus.\(^{17}\)

The contrast with the particular sciences (physics, and mathematics) is preserved; but it is not because it studies what belongs to every being just insofar as it is (a) being that it is held to be ‘first’ in relation to them (and in which case, its first-ness would reflect its universal scope, in the sense that it should not exclude from its purview any kind of being), but rather because it is concerned with studying a superior kind of being: that which is immovable and immaterial—supersensible being or the divine.\(^{18}\) But for a science to study one kind of being just is, we should think—since Aristotle has just told us this after all—to ‘exclude’ from its consideration one or more of the ‘parts’ of being; and though it will be fairly clear how this science might be held to be first in relation to the other particular sciences, if it is also supposed to be a universal science (and not just the highest science because it is concerned with studying the highest genus of being), then it must be universal in another way than we were earlier led to believe; but only in case, that is, Aristotle is presenting us (in Γ.1–2 and in E.1) with two descriptions of the same science, or a unified science—or better perhaps: two formulae describing the same subject-matter that is studied in this science. So the question is: do ‘being \textit{qua} being’ and ‘separate and immovable being’—the divine—coincide?\(^{19}\)

\(^{17}\) \textit{Met.} E.1, 1026a.10–23.

\(^{18}\) As is well known, we find a similar conception of the object of first philosophy in book Α—i.e. that kind of substance that is immovable and capable of existing apart. Thus: “There are three kinds of substance—one that is sensible (of which one subdivision is eternal and another is perishable, and which all recognize, as comprising e.g. plants and animals)… and another that is immovable, and this certain thinkers assert to be capable of existing apart… the former two kinds of substance are the subject of natural science (for they imply movement); but the third kind belongs to another science, if there is no principle common to it and to the other kinds” (Α1, 1069a30–b1).

\(^{19}\) See, for example, Owens (1978, 1982), Merlan (1967), and Frede (1987), each of whom (in slightly different fashion) answers this question positively. We will cite several other authors (classical and modern) that have held a similar position in Chapter 6. A crucial passage pertaining to this question and the following
Once again, the problem is not simply that Aristotle uses various labels or formulae to describe this science and what it aims to study;⁰ the problem is rather understanding, or figuring out, how the actual investigations carried out under each description, or in relation to each of its objects, relate to one another, or whether they do relate at all; for there certainly does appear to be a question here—one that concerns the exact nature and scope of the science of first philosophy, or of its subject-matter—since Aristotle seems to hold two different views of its subject-matter; and perhaps even—as many interpreters have thought—these may correspond to two different projects: a universal science of being as being, on the one hand, and on the other, an enquiry into just that kind of being or beings that are immaterial—separate from matter—and immoveable (in other words: what became known as ‘general’ and ‘special metaphysics’ respectively).

Since the nineteenth century, many strategies or solutions have been tried in order to account for this apparent ‘discrepancy’ or rift in the Metaphysics, from Natorp’s ‘violent’ strategy of excising whole chunks of the text, which he saw as later editorial or peripatetic insertions,¹¹ to the more influential ‘genetic’ reading of Jaeger, which posits that Aristotle’s thought developed over time, so that the Metaphysics as we have it is supposed to contain various ‘strata’ belonging to different phases of his metaphysical thinking;²² and what both of these strategies have in common is the general the idea, also shared by a very large number of modern interpreters, that the different descriptions of first philosophy—the double (ontological and theological) characterization of its subject-matter—are more-or-less irreconcilable, or at odds at least, and point to different aims or philosophical projects, with the first of them—the ‘ontological’ perspective—usually being ‘privileged’, since it is assumed to represent Aristotle’s final and true position concerning the exact nature and scope of metaphysics.

Now this perspective—both the idea that the Metaphysics contains two ‘competing’ and probably irreconcilable conceptions of the subject-matter of first philosophy, as well as the privileging of the first—is reflected in most contemporary approaches to reading Aristotle’s Metaphysics, and it has deeply influenced modern scholarship (whether or not the question is directly countered, which very often it is not).²³ But what is striking is that it is not really to be found in the ancient Greek commentaries on Aristotle (or any ancient sources) at all.²⁴ Not to say

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⁰ Décarie (1961) has brought together all of the relevant texts and formulae that Aristotle uses to describe the object of first philosophy.

¹¹ Natorp (1888a; 1888b)

²² Jaeger (1934). See Patzig (1979) for an overview of these solutions.

²³ See Witt (1996) and the other essays in Wians (1996) for an excellent survey of the history of developmental interpretations.

²⁴ The best general account of the Commentators’ views on this issue is in Verbeke (1981). Again, we will return to discuss their (and some modern commentators’) general ‘solution’ to this problem in Chapter 6.
that their interpretations do not bear on this question in different respects, or that they all agree about what, exactly, they take to be the primary object of that enquiry presented in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, which they do not. The point, rather, is that each of them seems to find in this text only a single and more-or-less unified project, and in no instance does this exclude the theological conception. If anything, as we shall see in Chapter 6, this tends to be emphasized, and there is little or no hint that they took notice of the problem that we began discussing in the section.

In fact, the recognition that there is a problem here—an explicit problem requiring resolution: the need to reconcile the idea of a science of being as being with the theological conception—seems to have emerged quite late, and only really for the first time in the blossoming period of Arabic-Islamic philosophy.

### 1.1.3 Al-Fārābī and Avicenna on the subject-matter of the metaphysics

Famously, in his autobiography, Al-Fārābī records his struggle with the question that we have been now discussing. He read the *Metaphysics* forty times, he tells us, but still failed to grasp its purpose; and it was not until he read a short work by al-Fārābī, *On the Aims of the Metaphysics*, that this became clear.

Turning to the opening pages of al-Fārābī’s short treatise, we read:

> Our aim in this treatise is to indicate the goal that Aristotle’s book known as *Metaphysics* contains, and the primary divisions of it. For many people have the preconceived notion that the import and contents of this book consist of a discussion of the Creator—He is praiseworthy and most high—the Intellect, the Soul, and other related topics, and that the science of metaphysics and the science of the profession of God’s oneness [theology] are one and the same thing. For this reason we find most of those who examine it perplexed and astray, since we find most of the discussion in it devoid of this goal, or, rather, we do not find in it any specific discussion of this goal, except [the discussion] that takes place in the eleventh treatise, the one designated as “A”.

Now, Avicenna was one of those who laboured under the ‘misconception’ that the science of metaphysics is identical with the science of theology; and the reason that he did seems to be that his initial encounter with Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* was through the interpretation produced by the al-Kindī circle of Baghdad; for—very simply—their pattern of reading this text basically involved ‘singing out’ chapters α.1–2 and Λ.6–10 dealing with theology, and reading these within a Neoplatonic/kalām framework; and it appears to be this ‘Kindīan’ interpretation of the science of

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27 Al-Fārābī, in Bertolacci (2006), p. 67 (p. 34, 8–13)
first philosophy (in which it is simply identified with philosophical theology) that al-Fārābī is seeking to correct.  

But importantly, the solution that Avicenna found in al-Fārābī’s text, and which he takes up in his own ‘reform’ of the *Metaphysics*, was not simply to abandon the theological conception of first philosophy, but rather to find a way of uniting this conception with the first—the ‘ontological’ conception. If we recall that the problem requiring a solution involved having to determine how the conception of a universal science of being (as described in Γ.1 and E.1) might be reconciled with the claim (also in E.1) that what this science investigates is a particular ‘kind’ of being, i.e., that which is unchangeable and exists separate from matter—divine things—what al-Fārābī proposes is the following: firstly, that the science of metaphysics is a ‘universal science’ (*al-ʿilm al-kullī*) because it deals at one and the same time with what is ‘common’ (*al-ʿāmm*) to all beings, but also with the common principle (*al-mabdaʿ al-mushtarak*) of all existents, which is God. So, after describing the ambit of the particular sciences, which are each concerned with studying one class of existents, but none of which “investigates what is common to all existents”, al-Fārābī writes:

Universal science, on the other hand, investigates the thing that is common [*al-shayʿ al-ʿāmm*] to all existents (like existence and oneness), its species and attributes, the things which are not proper accidents of any of the subject-matters of the particular sciences (like priority and posteriority, potency and act, perfect and deficient, and similar things) and the common principle [*al-mabdaʿ al-mushtarak*] of all existents, namely the thing that ought to be called by the name of God—may His glory be exalted.

The divine science ought to belong to this [universal] science, because God is a principle of the absolute existent [*al-mawjūd al-muṭlaq*], not of one existent to the exclusion of the other.

So now metaphysics, al-Fārābī is able to say, is constitutively ontology and theology, and this need not threaten its supposed universality as a science, since it is concerned with what is ‘universal’ or

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28 See Bertolacci (2006), pp. 58–63 and Gutas (2014), pp. 275–288. However, as Gutas (Ibid, p. 278) acknowledges, this probably has more to do with the “traditional” understanding of Kindī’s position, promulgated by (for example) Ibn-Farīghūn. If we read al-Kindī’s actual words about what he takes to be Aristotle’s aim in the *Metaphysics*, we see that he falls far short from simply identifying first philosophy with theology. In an introductory essay to the works of Aristotle (“On the Quantity of Aristotle’s Books”), for example, al-Kindī writes: “Aristotle’s purpose in his book called *Metaphysics* is: (a) to expound, among the things which are neither connected nor united with matter, those which subsist without matter but are found associated with something material, and (b) to declare the oneness of God, and to expound His most beautiful names and that He is the efficient and perfecting cause of the universe [or, of all], God of the universe, and governor of the world[ governing it] with His perfect management and complete wisdom” (in Gutas (2014), pp. 276–277). About (a), al-Kindī is probably thinking of universal concepts such as being and unity, or mathematicals perhaps, and if the former, then his interpretation actually broadly agrees with al-Fārābī’s and Avicenna’s, as we shall see. Cf. Adamson (2007), p. 32.

29 Al-Fārābī, in Bertolacci (2006), p. 68 (p. 35, 8–12)

30 In Bertolacci (2006), p. 68 (p. 35, 16–19)
‘common’ in two ways; namely, (1) with the absolute existent, or the existent as such, and its species and properties, which are absolutely ‘universal’ notions, but also (2) with God, since God is the ‘principle’ of all existents (or the absolute existent), and so perhaps ‘causally’ universal. As we shall see, Avicenna basically follows al-Fārābī here to the letter.

Now this interpretation is certainly suggested by what Aristotle says in E.1. To wit:

For one might raise the question whether first philosophy is universal, or deals with one genus, i.e. some one kind of being; for not even the mathematical sciences are all alike in this respect,—geometry and astronomy deal with a certain particular kind of thing, while universal mathematics applies alike to all. We answer that if there is no substance other than those which are formed by nature, natural science will be the first science; but if there is an immovable substance, the science of this must be prior and must be first philosophy, and universal in this way, because it is first. And it will belong to this to consider being qua being—both what it is and the attributes which belong to it qua being.32

Somehow then, for Aristotle it seems, studying one genus or kind of being—immovable substance—is held to be compatible with the idea that the science that sets itself this task will still be a universal science (and first), and will consider being qua being and the attributes that belong to it qua being, and al-Fārābī has showed us a way how. But there is a further problem here, as we have already noted, which is that—setting aside the question of its claim to being a universal science, to which al-Fārābī has just given us an answer—Aristotle appears simply to identify first philosophy with the enquiry into those “things which both exist separately (from matter) and are immovable”, so we should still wonder how this idea fits with the claim that in studying being qua being, first philosophy is concerned with investigating what is common to all existents in the first sense—the ‘attributes’ existence and unity and so on.

Here al-Fārābī offers another ingenious solution, which is not yet fully explored by him but is taken up and developed by Avicenna with profound results, and it involves saying that things can be immaterial or separate in two ways. Firstly, referring to the things “common to all existents” mentioned earlier (the notions existence, unity and so on, the species and attributes of the existent as such and the things which are not proper accidents of the subject-matters of the particular sciences), al-Fārābī notes:

Since these things are not proper to natural objects but are loftier than them in universality, then this science is loftier than the science of nature and [comes] after the science of nature. Therefore it should be called ‘metaphysics’.

He then writes:

31 See also, al-Fārābī, in Bertolacci (2006), p. 69 (p. 36, 9): “The primary subject-matter of this science [i.e. metaphysics] is the absolute existent and what is equivalent to it in universality, namely the one”.
32 Met. E.1, 1026a23–32; emphasis added.
33 Met. E.1, 1026a.10–11.
Although mathematics is loftier than the science of nature—since its subject-matters are abstracted from matter—it ought not to be called “metaphysics”. For its subject-matters are abstracted from matter in imagination [only], not in existence. As to existence, they do not exist except in natural things. Of the subject matters of this science, on the other hand, some have no existence at all (be it imaginary or real) in natural things. It is not that imagination has abstracted them from natural things; rather, their existence and nature [itself] is abstracted [i.e. immaterial]. Others exist in natural things, even though they are imagined as abstracted from them. However, they do not exist in natural things essentially, i.e. in such a way that their existence is not independent from these and they are things whose subsistence is due to natural things. Rather, they exist both in natural things and in non-natural things (these latter being separate either really or in imagination).  

So, much like al-Fārābī’s distinction between the two ways in which things can be common or universal, he also holds that things can be immaterial or ‘separate’ in two ways, namely, in the manner of really-existing imperishable and immaterial things (the immaterial or divine substances of Met. E.1 and Λ), or like the objects of mathematics, which have an ‘existence’ in natural things, but which may be abstracted from matter in the imagination. So by analogy, al-Fārābī argues, the universal attributes like existence and unity (or that which is common to all existents as such—both natural and non-natural—but which are not essential attributes of natural things) can also be taken as immaterial—i.e. as abstracted in the imagination.

The distinction between real separation (or immateriality) and abstraction (as I shall put it, following e.g. Pasquale Porro) becomes fundamental for Avicenna, and not only in the context of his classification of the sciences—i.e. in determining what is the precise subject-matter of first philosophy, including his distinction (from al-Fārābī) between the ‘existent’ as such (and its species and properties), which is the subject of this science, and God, described as its object (see Ilāhiyyāt I.1–2—to be discussed further below); for both this distinction and, in particular, the logical tool that Avicenna uses to explain it are used to develop or to support a number of crucially important ‘doctrines’ that he advances in the Ilāhiyyāt, including his well-known distinction between essence and existence (as in Ilāhiyyāt V.1–2), and another distinction that Avicenna draws between the being or existence that explains the Necessary Existent, and the being or existence that is common to all other existents (Ilāhiyyāt VIII. 4). I shall turn to investigate this issue in the following chapter. For now, we should simply stress the significance of this formula in providing Avicenna with a solution to the problem concerning the double-conception of first philosophy in Aristotle, for it is indeed profound.

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35 On mental existence in al-Fārābī and Avicenna, see Black (1999).
36 Porro (2011)
37 On Avicenna’s division of the sciences—including theoretical sciences (physics, mathematics and divine science), which division results from the association between the ‘objects’ studied in each and matter, and corresponding to different degrees of abstraction—see the Introduction (Isagoge) of al-Shifā’ (al-Madkhal I, 1, pp. 12–20), and below.
1.1.3 The profile of first philosophy as a study of being *qua* being

In connection with the problem that we have just discussed about determining the subject-matter of first philosophy in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, we should examine another one (or a cluster of related problems) too—and a question that will become important as well in Avicenna’s reception–reform of the *Metaphysics*—and this has to do with in what way being is a suitable object for study in a science at all, or more precisely, how a universal science of being is even possible; for on the model of science that Aristotle presents in the *Posterior Analytics*, every science is concerned with a single genus, but Aristotle argues in several places that being is not a genus. Now, Aristotle does present us with a solution to this problem in *Metaphysics* Γ.1–2, as we shall see below, and it basically involves saying that being is a *quasi* genus. It is true, Aristotle says, that ‘being’ is predicated of everything; but it is not predicated univocally, since the things-that-are are called ‘being’ in various ways, and therefore it is not like an ordinary genus; there are, rather, multiple significations of ‘being’, and these are not like multiple species of a common genus; rather each of them is, as we might put it, a sort of supra-genus itself; but they are still related, ‘pros hen’, as Aristotle will say, or primarily in relation to one ‘kind’ of being, *substance*, on which the other (non-substance) kinds of being depend; and this means that being—or beings—exhibit(s) a different kind of unity than that found in a usual genus-species structure.

So this argument about the *pros hen* structure of being, alongside the formula describing first philosophy as a science of being *qua* being, basically provides the key to solving the one-genus per science problem raised a moment ago. But all this does still appear slightly at odds with what Aristotle had said in the *Posterior Analytics*, since he makes no clear indication there that this move is open to him; so it seems to involve, at the very least, some kind of ‘expanded’ notion of what Aristotle thinks constitutes the foundations of a properly scientific enquiry (on the model developed and presented in the *Posterior Analytics*), and this has led many modern interpreters to suggest that it represents another case of development in Aristotle’s views.

But there is another worry here too, which is that—in addition to the question about whether or in what sense being, as a quasi genus, is a suitable subject-matter of properly scientific enquiry—the method of scientific enquiry developed in *Posterior Analytics* is supposed to involve demonstration (ἀπόδειξις): a kind of scientific reasoning that begins from premises that are self-evident, primary and true in order to reach necessary conclusions that are deduced syllogistically. But again, turning to the *Metaphysics*, its method appears not to be demonstrative but rather—or

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38 *ApO* I, 28, 87a38; I, 9, 76a.11–12. Aristotle argues that the subject-matter of a science is self-evident (Cf. *ApO* 1.1, 1.3; *Met*. A.9; *NE* VI 6); that of which existence is in question must be sought, and cannot be the subject of a science. For Avicenna, as we shall see, this becomes its *object*.


40 See for example, Owen (1960); challenged by Yu (2003).

very often anyway—closer to a kind of dialectical enquiry, where the premises involved are merely accepted, not self-evident or necessarily true, and thus the conclusions reached fall short of producing scientific knowledge; and this raises a host of questions, since dialectic is usually described (by Aristotle) as an inferior philosophical method compared to demonstration. Moreover, dialectic is described as a (merely?) critical method “wherein lies the path the principles of all inquiries” and as we shall see, the core argument of the Metaphysics seems to involve something just like this: a search for the first principles, which proceeds by examining (dialectically) the endoxa or commonly held opinions about them, as well as a dialectical treatment of other related topics (and above all, about substance). But most importantly, as we have just suggested, dialectic reasons towards, or seeks to establish, premises, while demonstration begins from premises that, because they are primary, cannot themselves be demonstrated. So the general point is clear: in whatever way first philosophy turns out to be an enquiry into, or a search for, first principles, if they are indeed primary, then they cannot be demonstrated. So Irwin observes: “If, then, first philosophy is to fulfil its task, it cannot be demonstrative”; and it is for this reason that scholars such as Leszl and Irwin think that first philosophy cannot be a first-order (demonstrative) investigation, but must instead be understood as a second-order enquiry that is somehow involved with clarifying the presuppositions and common principles of the sciences or providing their epistemological and ontological foundations.

Not that we should necessarily see this all this as a problem: has Aristotle told us that first philosophy must conform to the model of scientific that he develops in Posterior Analytics, or that it should involve demonstrations? Not quite; so perhaps this need not worry us. But it did worry Avicenna, and it is this weakness, as he sees it—the fact that Aristotle’s actual procedure in the Metaphysics fits ill with the model of demonstrative science presented in the Posterior Analytics—that led to his major ‘reforms’; for he thinks both that a science of first philosophy should be demonstrative, and that Aristotle thought so too, but that he failed to ‘execute’ such a programme fully or properly. So he set himself this task, piecing together what Aristotle says in different places, while also drawing on things that he finds in both al-Fārābī and the Greek commentary tradition.

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42 Both the idea that dialectic is an inferior method, and suggestion that (first) philosophy employs some other, stronger method than this are found in Metaphysics—e.g. “Dialectic is merely critical where philosophy claims to know” (Met. Γ.2, 1004b25–26).
45 See Ibid; Leszl (1975).
46 Alexander does say, commenting on Met. Γ.1, 1003a21–22: “…Aristotle holds that there is a science of being qua being, namely a science which considers being qua being, and which demonstrates its essential attributes” (In Met. 239, 6–8, emphasis added). See Bertolacci (2006), chapter 5 passim.
Now, one of Avicenna’s most significant reforms that deserves mention here (in light of what we discussed in the previous section about the double-object of first philosophy, and the preceding remarks about the application of the model of science presented in the Posterior Analytics to this enquiry) concerns a distinction that Avicenna draws in the Ilāhiyyāt between the ‘subject-matter’ of metaphysics and what is ‘sought after’ in this science. As we have just heard, for Aristotle each science is concerned with a single genus which it posits to exist, and demonstrates its per se properties and attributes, reasoning from principles that are assumed (and not, that is to say, demonstrated, as we saw). But this raises the question: if the object of first philosophy includes the first causes and principles of all being(s) qua being, in what way is it concerned with studying them? They cannot be demonstrated for the reason that we have just heard; and as we shall see, Aristotle himself characterizes the enquiry that he is carrying out in the Metaphysics as a search for them. Thus, Avicenna writes:

If the existent is made the subject of this science then the principles of the existent cannot be established in it, since in every science, investigation is of things concomitant to its subject, not of its principles.  

Avicenna’s solution to this problem, then, involves making a distinction between the subject-matter (mawḍūṭ) of this science, and that which is sought in it (maṭlūb), including the principles and causes of the existent, along with its concomitant states. So he writes:

Thus, [some of] the things sought after in this science are the causes of the existent inasmuch as it is a caused existent; some [of the things sought after] pertain to the

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47 “Every demonstrative science is concerned with three things: what it posits to exist (these items constitute the kind [γένος] of which it studies the attributes which hold of it in itself [tòv καθ’ αὑτὰ παθηµάτων]; the so-called common axioms, i.e. the primitives from which its demonstrations proceed; and thirdly, the attributes, where it assumes what each of them means.” (APo I.10, 76b11–15). Cf. Avicenna, al-Shifā’: Burhan III.8, p. 247, 3–5: “[Different] investigations belong to a single science only [a] when they share the first subject-matter and concern nothing else than the essential accidents occurring to it, or to its parts, or to its species, and [b] when they share the first principles from which those essential accidents are demonstrated as belonging to the first subject-matter, or to its parts or to its species.” In Bertolacci (2006), p. 196.

48 Avicenna, Shifā’: Ilāhiyyāt I.2.14, p. 10

49 And we should add too: metaphysics will also be concerned with clarifying the principles of the particular sciences. See Avicenna, Shifā’: Ilāhiyyāt I.1.16, p. 11: “What adheres necessarily to this science [therefore] is that it is necessarily divided into parts. Some of these will investigate the ultimate causes, for these are the causes of every caused existent with respect to its existence. [This science] will [also] investigate the First Cause, from which emanates every caused existent inasmuch as it is a caused existent, not only inasmuch as it is an existent in motion or [only inasmuch as it is] quantified. Some [of the parts of this science] will investigate the accidental occurrences to the existent, and some [will investigate] the principles of the particular sciences...” etc.
accidental occurrences to the existent; and some [pertain] to the principles of the particular sciences.\textsuperscript{50}

For Avicenna, then, God, and the First Causes and principles, are among the things sought-for in metaphysics, and knowledge of them will be arrived at through investigating the “states”—the species and properties—of the existent (qua existent), which is described as the subject-matter of this science. So then, combining this perspective with the clarifications introduced in the previous section in relation to Aristotle’s outline of that enquiry pursued in the \textit{Metaphysics}, we see how Avicenna imagines a unified science of first philosophy should ideally look, even if this was not fully achieved by Aristotle himself:

This, then, is the science sought after in this art. It is first philosophy, because it is knowledge of the first thing in existence (namely, the First Cause) and the first thing in generality (namely, existence and unity). It is also wisdom, which is the best knowledge of the best thing known. For, it is the best knowledge (that is, [knowledge that yields] certainty) of the best thing known (that is, God, exalted be He, and the causes after Him). It is also knowledge of the ultimate causes of the whole [of caused things]. Moreover, it is knowledge of God and has the definition of divine science, which consists of a knowledge of the things that are separable from matter in definition and existence. For, as has become clear, the existent inasmuch as it is an existent, and its principles and the accidental occurrences [it undergoes] are all prior in existence to matter, and none of them is dependent for its existence on [matter’s] existence.\textsuperscript{51}

In an impressive feat, Avicenna manages to combine all of the perspectives discussed above (about the subject-matter of first philosophy, its goals, method, and scientific profile) into a single schema, drawing (almost) entirely on things that Aristotle himself said in different places.

\*\footnote{\textsuperscript{50} Avicenna, \textit{Shifā’}: \textit{Ilāhiyyāt} 1.2.17 (p. 11).}

\textsuperscript{51} Avicenna, \textit{Shifā’}: \textit{Ilāhiyyāt} 1.2.18 (p. 11–12).
existent as such (and its states). Thus, metaphysics is also an aetiology. (As we shall see below and in the following chapters, for Aristotle, the aetiological dimension of first philosophy is arguably prior to both the ontological and theological dimensions.) Finally, in addition to the epistemological distinction between the subject-matter of a science and the things searched for in it, the ontological and theological dimensions of metaphysics correspond to two notions of separation (or abstraction) that Avicenna finds in Aristotle (once again, via al-Fārābī).

With regard to (2)—and closely related to his clarification of the problem of what this science studies—Avicenna provides metaphysics with a clearer and more coherent structure than Aristotle did—that is, one that reflects its proper scientific profile. Thus, as Bertolacci notes, “the core of metaphysics... is the result two vertical axes”: the study of (i) existent *qua* existent (Ontology); and the study of (ii) one *qua* one (Henology). These two axes, in turn, “intersect with three horizontal lines”, namely the species, properties, and causes of (i) and (ii). As the proper subject-matter of this science, Ontology forms its main axis, while the study of the causes of (i) leads to theology (since God is the first cause of existent). From a slightly different perspective, then, metaphysics can be divided into three parts: the first part examines the *species of existent* (including the categories), and the second examines the *properties of existent* (including the one and the many; the particular and the universal; the potential and the actual; possible and necessary, and so on), while the third section is devoted to *theology*. Finally, it should be noted that this structure reflects the central importance that Avicenna places on Book Γ of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Thus, his interpretation is in agreement with—and is perhaps the remote origin of—that of many modern interpreters who also view Book Γ (its subject-matter) as the ‘real beginning’ of this text (apropos the science that it transmits).

Finally, with respect to (3) the method of metaphysics—and once more reflecting the new scientific profile that this science receives through Avicenna’s reforms—Avicenna places much greater emphasis on apodictic or demonstrative procedures compared to Aristotle, and so too limits the sort of dialectical procedures (evidently) employed by Aristotle, including the examination of ἐνδοξα (the reputable opinions of earlier thinkers) and of *aporiai* which figure prominently in the *Metaphysics*. (This extends too to the doxographical details that Aristotle presents in A, M and N.)

*It is reasonable to ask, though, how authentically ‘Aristotelian’ this resulting schema and conception of metaphysics is—that is, whether or to what extent it agrees with the model presented in the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle. This is indeed a difficult question, and impossible to answer fully within the scope of this thesis; but it is still necessary to approach it given our present aims. In the following sections, then, I provide a schematic overview of the argument-structure of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, focusing on his determination of the science that it transmits as a study of, or rather a

search for, the first principles and causes, and how this aligns with the view that what metaphysics studies is being qua being.

1.2 The structure of Aristotelian first philosophy

In the preceding sections we examined the main outlines of Avicenna’s conception of metaphysics in the context of the Ilāhiyyāt of al-Shifā’. It was also shown how this schema resulted from, and reflects, Avicenna’s conception of the ideal argument—structure and scientific profile of this science as communicated by Aristotle in his Metaphysics—‘ideal’ in the sense that it was not, Avicenna thinks, perfectly achieved by Aristotle (or at least not perfectly communicated in this text in its received form). In connection with this point—and following Amos Bertolacci—we also showed that one of the defining features of Avicenna’s reception—reform of the Metaphysics is reflected in the high systematic value that he places on Book Γ and that, in this respect, Avicenna anticipates—and is perhaps remotely responsible for—the contemporary way of reading the Metaphysics of Aristotle.

So then, to give an example, in his commentary on Book Γ, Kirwan declares: “Γ thus stands, by the traditional ordering, at the start of Aristotle’s main discussion of metaphysics; it announces its subject-matter in the first chapter; and its argument is hardly more dependent on what has preceded than on other parts of Aristotle’s works”.53 For Kirwan, then, as for Avicenna, the determination of metaphysics as the science of being qua being is considered fundamental. Indeed, metaphysics is identified with the science of being qua being as its subject-matter (cp. Avicenna).

However, as Stephen Menn has argued,54 if we begin with the idea that Aristotelian first philosophy, or metaphysics, is simply to be identified from the beginning with the study of being qua being, then, if we turn to the opening pages of the Metaphysics—the only text of Aristotle’s that we have dealing with this science—then we are likely to be disappointed—or simply perplexed (in other words: if we read the text, its individual treatises, in their received order). For in its opening books—AB—we do not find this conception discussed at all, or not explicitly. There, rather, Aristotle simply explains that the sought-for science of wisdom,55 or “the knowledge we are seeking” is, rather, about causes and principles—indeed, the first causes and principles—for, Aristotle writes, “all men suppose what is called Wisdom to deal with the first causes and the principles of things”56—and again: “Since we are seeking this knowledge, we must inquire of what kind are the causes and the principles, the knowledge of which is Wisdom” (A.2, 982a4). The same conception is found throughout A and in B (as we shall see in Chapter 3).

53 Kirwan, (1993), p. 75; emphasis added.
55 Thus, at the end of Met. A.1, 983a22–23: “We have stated, then, what is the nature of the science we are searching for, and what is the mark which our search and our whole investigation must reach”.
56 Met. A.1, 981b25.
But too, in connection with the *aporia* discussed in the previous section, that the sought-for science—wisdom—is, or should turn out to be, once its determination becomes clearer, a universal science is also clear. Thus: “We suppose first, then, that the wise man knows all things, as far as possible, although he has not knowledge of each of them in detail”\(^{57}\); and again, “knowing all things must belong to him who has in the highest degree universal knowledge; for he knows in a sense all the instances that fall under the universal”\(^{58}\); and it is clear that in grasping the *first* causes and principles of all things, we will be grasping the most universal causes. So once again: universality and eminence somehow coincide in the domain of this science. We are not far, then, from the idea that we found in *Met.* E: “but if there is an immovable substance, the science of this must be prior and must be first philosophy, and *universal in this way, because it is first*”\(^{59}\); and Aristotle had there described “those things that exist separately and are immovable” as eternal *causes*.

It is worth noting, however, the same tentative language that Aristotle uses throughout these passages: “but *if* there is an immovable substance...”, and “*if* there is something which is eternal and immovable and separable, clearly the knowledge of it belongs to a theoretical science”,\(^{60}\) since this is key for several reasons. First, Aristotle has not yet said (neither in A, nor yet in E) that this science is—so to speak—‘actual’; in A (and in B, as we shall see), once again, it is only described as “the science we are seeking”, and I suggest that A and B are preliminary in that aim, and that even Γ.1’s claim that “there is a science that studies being as-being” is still only one more stage—but an important one—in the unfolding argument or investigation that Aristotle is carrying out.

So then, we should expect that that argument or investigation will turn out to be about the first principles and causes of things; but Aristotle has not yet said what these causes and principles are (and that is right, for he has only said that we should seek them), nor what they are causes and principles of. But what we do know—or what we can infer from what we have already established—is that these principles and causes should be the most fundamental, in some sense, and also the most universal, just because they are (as we might put it) responsible for producing the widest effects. But what effects? Recalling what we said earlier, there is good reason to think that Aristotle is thinking here of things like being (and unity and the other *per se* attributes of being).

Returning to Γ.1, a very similar picture to this emerges:

> Now since we are seeking the first principles and the highest causes, clearly there must be some thing to which these belong in virtue of its own nature. If then those who sought the elements of existing things were seeking these same principles, it is necessary that the elements must be elements of being not by accident but just because it is being. Therefore it is of being as being that we also must grasp the first causes."\(^{61}\)

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\(^{57}\) *Met.* A.2, 982a8–9.  
\(^{58}\) *Met.* A.2, 982a22–24.  
\(^{59}\) *Met.* E.1, 1026a30.  
\(^{60}\) *Met.* E.1, 1026a28–32.  
\(^{61}\) *Met.* Γ.1, 1003a28–32.
This passage clearly brings out, then, that it is not simply being *qua* being that is the subject of investigation, but rather the *highest causes and principles* of being *qua* being (and also: these principles and causes as belonging to being καθ’ αὑτό). That is, Aristotle is clear both that it is a *causal* investigation he is undertaking, and also that in seeking the first principles and the highest causes, what we are seeking is the causes (or the *per se* causes) not, as it were, of being from some limited perspective, or in a way that would give us the causes and principles of this genus of being to the exclusion of that kind of being (say, of animals as opposed to plants), for in that case, they would not be the highest or most universal causes; rather, this is the job of the particular sciences, to study the (*per se*) causes of such diverse kinds or genera of being.

But we are back at the same problem: if the particular sciences are all concerned with reasoning about these genera of being (or the species that they include) by studying their universal causes, then what causes are there ‘left over’, so to speak, to study in a ‘universal’ science of being as-being? Are there further causes beyond those examined in the particular sciences that also explain, in some way, the different genera and species of being? What are the universal causes and principles that first philosophy seeks? Moreover, as we discussed earlier, their very idea of a universal science of being seems to stand in contradiction with two well-known arguments (or theses) that Aristotle repeats often: namely, that (i) ‘being’ is not a genus, and, closely related, that (ii) ‘being’ is said in many ways”. Focusing on the first claim, the problem here is that, on the model of scientific enquiry that Aristotle describes in the *Posterior Analytics*, each science is charged with studying a *single* genus⁶²; so to ask the same question that we have just heard, we might wonder what is, so to speak, ‘left over’ for the (universal) science of being *qua* being to study, or in what sense the latter is suitable as a subject-matter for scientific investigation.

I shall pause here to discuss this issue at some length since it will be important in what follows.

1.2.1 The *pros hen* structure of being

Now about this question—we get a clue in the first and following sentences of *Met. Ι.2* (and I shall quote the passage at length, for we will need to refer back to it often):

[The term] “being” is used in various senses [τὸ δὲ ὅν λέγεται μὲν πολλαχῶς], but they are related to one central point, one definite kind of thing [πρὸς ἐν καὶ μίαν τινὰ φύσιν], and are not homonymous [οὐχ ὀμοιόμοιος]. Everything which is healthy is related to health, one thing in the sense that it preserves health, another in the sense that it produces it, another in the sense that it is a symptom of health, another because it is capable of it. And that which is medical is relative to the medical art, one thing in the sense that it possesses it, another in the sense that it is naturally adapted to it, another in the sense that it is a function of the medical art. […]

So, too, there are many senses in which a thing is said to be, but all refer to one principle [πρὸς μίαν ἀρχήν]; some things are said to be because they are substances, others because

⁶² *APO* I, 28, 87a38; I, 9, 76a11–12.
they are affections of substance, others because they are a process towards substance, or
destructions or privations or qualities of substance, or productive or generative of
substance, or of things which are relative to substance, or negations of some of these things
or of substance itself. […] As, then, there is one science which deals with all healthy things,
the same applies in the other cases also. For not only in the case of things which have one
common notion does the investigation belong to one science, but also in the case of things
which are related to one common nature; for even these in a sense have one common
notion.

Aristotle then concludes:

It is clear then that it is the work of one science also to study all things that are, qua
being.—But everywhere science deals chiefly with that which is primary, and on which the
other things depend [καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὅλα ἡρμηνεύεται], and in virtue of which they get their
names. If, then, this is substance, it is of substances that the philosopher must grasp the
principles and the causes.63

About this important statement: first of all, it is generally agreed that Aristotle is here (and in Γ.1–2
more broadly) responding to aporiai 3–4 from Met. B (to be examined in closer detail below),
which raise several questions that are concerned with the unity and scope of first-philosophy. These
aporiai ask whether it falls to a single science to study all kinds of substance, and whether this
science studies not only substance but also its essential attributes.64 Aristotle answers in the
affirmative, and in Γ.1–2, he shows how this is possible.

But again, we should recall the exact issue that is at play here. As we noted above in
connection with the problem of determining the subject-matter of first philosophy, Aristotle holds the
view that science studies some one genus, but that being is not a genus,65 and his argument for
this—or one version of it—is roughly that every genus must be differentiated (into its species) by a
differentia that falls outside of it (the genus). So if being were a genus, it would have to be
differentiated by nonbeing, which is absurd (and it also leads to monism, Aristotle thinks, for in that
case, being would lack any differences at all—everything would be one; and so importantly, this
seems to rule out that there is any single highest kind.66 We will examine this argument in more
detail in further on.) To put the point slightly differently: though ‘being’ is predicated of everything
that-is, it is not predicated of everything univocally (synonymously, Aristotle will say); for “being’
is said in many ways— τὸ δὲ ὃν λέγεται μὲν πολλὰχως”.

63 Met. Γ.2 1003a30-b20
64 Aporia 3 (Β.2, 997a15–17) asks: “And in general, of substances, is there one science of all substances,
or several? Well, then, if it is not one, of which kind of substance should we posit that this science is
science?” Aporia 4 (Β.2, 997a25–26) asks: “Further, is the study about substances alone, or about their
attributes as well?” We shall examine book B in closer detail in the following chapter.
65 Met. Β.3, 998b22; see also APo 92b14.
66 Moreover, a science of being, or any highest ‘kind’ or genus that embraces the lower kinds would
threaten to ‘swallow up’ the individual sciences which study the latter. This, of course, is the fault that
Aristotle sees in Plato’s science of the Good (Republic VI-VII).
So rephrasing this claim slightly: in Γ.2, Aristotle is arguing that being is *not* a single kind, and that we must recognize that there are several kinds of being—as many as the figures of predication or categories of being; but also that this need not threaten the supposed *universal* scope of first-philosophy, nor the *unity* of this science, now described as a study of being *qua* being and its *per se* attributes; for suppose that the various kinds of being were totally un-related (because of the ‘homonomy’ of τὸ ὄν): in that case, a science of being would at least threaten to break up into various discrete sciences—one corresponding to each kind being—or at worst, be impossible, and Aristotle himself seems (or has been argued) to have held a similar view at one point—as we shall see below.

But if he did, it is clear that in Γ.1–2 he is revising this view, for in the passage we are examining Aristotle is clearly arguing that the kinds of being are not unrelated—that ‘being’ is not strictly an homonymous (equivocal) term, for the kinds or meanings of being are in some way related, and in a way that makes being a suitable object for scientific enquiry, whether or not this means that he is also making a revised claim about what might count as a suitable object for scientific enquiry; and the reason that Aristotle presents (by way of his argument that the different kinds of being *are* related) is that the term ‘being’ is always said πρὸς ἐν, or in relation to one principle—namely: substance or οὐσία. Some things are said ‘to be’ (or are called beings: ὄντα λέγοντα), Aristotle remarks, recalling the doctrine of the categories, because they are substances—οὐσίαι—others because they are modifications of substance and so on. So just as the things that are called ‘healthy’ are all said πρὸς ἐν or in relation to the health that exists in a person (which is the primary reference of the term health; a healthy-complexion being a sign of health in a person, healthy-food or exercise being productive of health and so on), all of the (non-substance) categories of being are called being πρὸς ἐν or in relation to substance; and now expanding this claim, what this means is that each of them somehow ‘depends’ on substance.

Now, there is certainly a question about what this means exactly—the view that those things that are called being are so-called either because they are substances, or stand in some relation to substance, entails some kind of ‘dependence’ relation—and we shall have to examine it further. But its import is clear enough; for what it is meant to show is that the different categories of being,

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67 Noting, once again, that the multiple ‘significations’ of being reflect the multiplicity of being. As Ackrill (1963), p. 71 observes: “it is important to recognize from the start that the *Categories* is not primarily or explicitly about names, but about the things that names signify…”.

68 Above at Γ.2, 1003b17–18, Aristotle says that πανταχοῦ δὲ κυρίως τοῦ πρώτου ἡ ἐπιστήμη, καὶ ἐξ οὗ τά ἄλλα ἡρήστει (καὶ δι’ ἰ’ λέγοντα)—“Now in every case knowledge is principally concerned with that which is primary, i.e. that upon which all other things depend (and from which they get their names)”. Aristotle does say exactly what kind of dependence relation he has in mind here (the verb ἡρήστει means variously ‘to fasten to’ or ‘hang onto’, or ‘depend upon’). But it is clear that the term can be used to indicate some kind of ‘ontological’ dependence. For example, at Met. Λ, 1072b13–14, speaking about the first principle of movement, Aristotle says that ἐκ τοιούτης ἀρα ἄρχης ἡρήστει ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ φύσις—“such is the first principle on which the heavens and nature depend”.

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while not forming a single genus, are unified in another way that makes being suitable to be studied under one science, “For it is not only in the case of terms which express one common notion that the investigation belongs to one science, but also in the case of terms which relate to one particular characteristic; for the latter too, in a sense, express one common notion”, and ‘being’ represents one such example of a term expressing “in a sense” a common notion, since everything that is called ‘being’ is so-called in relation to one particular characteristic: substance. So we should expect the science of first philosophy—alias the science of being qua being—to turn out to be a science of substance, primarily; and turning to the later books of the Metaphysics—and especially ZH—we are not disappointed, for those books are mostly taken up with an investigation of this subject.

But we should note that there is still a question that remains to be answered in light of the preceding analysis, which is that, even if we accept the amended claim that we have examined in close detail in the previous chapter about in what sense being constitutes a single genus, this whole picture still seems to pose a threat to the autonomy of the (particular) sciences; and the reason is that it is still not entirely clear how this argument is supposed to ‘fix’ the domain of first philosophy, since the claim that being is said pros hen or primarily of substance and subsequently of the other (non-substance) categorial beings (which are said to depend in some way on the former) seems to be directed more at the question concerning in what sense the science of first philosophy (as a science of being) is one science, and not (straightforwardly) about in what sense it is a universal science.

To explain, Aristotle has told us that this science (marked out as science of being qua being, in contradistinction to the particular sciences, which each study one of the ‘parts’ of being) is still a unified science, despite the fact that every science studies a single genus, and Aristotle has said that being is not an ordinary genus; but the pros hen structure of being means that being is still unified in a way, and so it will fall to a science that is one—a single science—to study it.

But now this leaves us with our original problem: if everything-that-is is being or has being predicated of it, then, even accepting the claim that the term ‘being’ is always predicated pros hen or primarily of substance, it is still not clear what it means to enquire into being as being, as opposed to studying one of the ‘parts’ of being. If this means to study the sum of all beings or being universally, as we might have thought, then this science which is one—or unified in the way that we have just learned—will swallow up all the particular sciences; so either ‘being qua being’ names yet another one of the parts of being (which Aristotle seems to reject in giving us this very formula—though we shall have to come back to this point), or it is concerned not with this kind of being or that kind of being, but with all beings; and so, as an inquiry into being, or beings, it will cut across all of the ‘genera’ that fall within the scope of the particular sciences: biology, astronomy, mathematics and so on.

\[69\] Met. Γ.2, 1003b13–16.
So again—if we do follow this line—Γ.1–2 is not really responding to the problem about whether this enquiry is ‘one’ in the sense that it should meet the one-genus-per-science criterion from *Posterior Analytics*, but rather the problem about whether it is ‘one’ (or a unified enquiry) in another way—one that meets the objection, first of all, that being is predicated equivocally (*pros hen*) according to the categories. But equally importantly, we should also read this as another kind of argument, which Aristotle is using to defend *himself* against *himself*—to wit, that this enquiry counts as a properly scientific one even though it *does*, in a way, cut across the different genera whose investigation falls to the particular sciences. It is for this reason that he writes:

For not only in the case of things which have one common notion does the investigation belong to one science, but also in the case of things which are related to one common nature; for even these in a sense have one common notion. It is clear then that it is the work of one science to study all things that are, *qua* being.\(^{70}\)

In other words, the emphasis here too is on this investigation (the investigation of being *qua* being) still counting as a science *at all*; *even though*, that is, what it studies does not belong to one genus.\(^{71}\)

### 1.2.2 The first causes and principles of being *qua* being

To return to the question that we begin with discussing: in the opening sentence of Γ.1, and in E.1, as we have seen, Aristotle records that the subject-matter of first philosophy involves the study of ‘being’ or ‘the-things-that-are’ *qua* being, and in the latter book, in close proximity to this passage, we also read that this enquiry is somehow involved with the study of super-sensible being—with what is immovable and exists apart; and what we are seeking now is some way to connect these two conceptions, or a way to tell whether they are connected, and do not in fact correspond to two different (and perhaps conflicting) projects that Aristotle pursued at different stages of his career, one of which he possibly abandoned, meaning that E.1 (either in whole or in part) represents merely an attempt (whether Aristotle’s or a later editor’s) to connect them. It is my view that we *should* see them as connected, and demonstrating how they are is the task that I pursue in this section.

\(^{70}\) *Met.* Γ.1. 1003b12–16.

\(^{71}\) So now this brings us back to, or recalls, what we said in the previous sections about the distinction between the demonstrative and dialectical models of science or methods of enquiry. Again, in addition to the kind of premises and reasoning employed in each case, the important difference between demonstration and dialectic rests in this fact, that while demonstration must proceed within a single genus, dialectic “is not... concerned with any determined set of things, not with any one genus” (*APo* I, 12, 77a32–33); again, Γ. 2 (1004b19–20) explicitly notes that dialecticians deal with that which is ‘common’ to all things, and in this passage, Aristotle is drawing an explicit connection between the dialectician and the ‘philosopher’; and while his intention here is to argue that there is a difference between their respective methods, that difference, he appears to say, has more to do with their goals, or the strength of their methods. Thus: Irwin (1988), chs 1.6 and 8, contrasts the pure dialectic of the former with the strong dialectic of the philosopher; and it is only the latter than can reach a knowledge of first principles.
The answer, I suggest, is that Aristotle is, throughout the investigation being carried out in *Metaphysics*, seeking eternal and imperishable causes as A and E suggest, and as causes (and principles) of being and unity and the other *per se* attributes of being, as we have learnt in Γ. But because (as Aristotle argues) there are different kinds of cause and principle, and because things can be apprehended as being in different ways, the same things studied in one way in one science may be investigated in another way in the universal science of being *qua* being (without this threatening the autonomy of the particular sciences), because this science is only concerned with investigating the principles and causes of any-thing, any being, *qua* being (and the *per se* attributes that belong to a being *qua* being), and not, for instance, *qua*-kind of thing that moves, and so on. That is, the principles and causes that are being sought will be universal and belong essentially to beings in different genera.

But this is still not quite right; for it seems to suggest, first of all, that there are—such principles and causes, or that we already know that the principles and causes of (for example) moveable beings do not already explain their being as being (that is: even if it is agreed that things have different principles and causes that might explain their being). So let us say: if something is a moving thing essentially, and has an actual principle of being in it (a cause) that explains its being *qua* some-thing-that-moves, as Aristotle describes, then is this invitation to investigate being *qua* being directing us to apprehend in such things, or in relation to such things, some other principle that explains their being? In other words, it is still not entirely clear on this picture what it means to investigate being *qua* being, rather than, say, *qua* moveable.

But once more—and this should help us to understand the problem raised a moment ago (about whether, in enquiring into being *qua* being, we are being directed to apprehend in things, like moving things, some other cause or principle that explains their being (as-being) than the causes and principles that explain their being as moving things, and so on)—since the enquiry into being as being is a causal enquiry, as we have said, we can now add: to consider being as being, and to seek the causes and principles of being as being, just is to ask, for example, what are the causes and principles of all categorial beings generically, or isomorphically, and of substance primarily.

But now I suggest, this should be understood in two ways, and only in the first place, with great caution, in the sense that this is directing us towards a kind of second-order enquiry which might ask (for example) what is it to be a principle and a cause and a substance at all (that is, an intensional question), or perhaps, an enquiry into the nature of causality itself, and so on. (Again, this is what interpreters like Leszl and Irwin think.) 72 I agree with this interpretation only in this

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72 So, Leszl (1975), p. 124, says that Aristotle “ended by admitting that the science of being *qua* being deals with the four causes (as different types of causal action), because it deals with them from a conceptual point of view, that is to say, by considering what it is for something to be an end or an efficient cause, and not by establishing what causal dependencies exist between this and that kind of things. This sort of inquiry involves determining the relationship of each of the types of explanation to the other ones…” See also Irwin (1988), p. 541.
sense, that it will be necessary (for the philosopher) to engage in such a ‘second-order’ enquiry (to consider the intensional question, or from a conceptual point of view, what it ‘means’ to be a cause and principle at all) as a sort of preliminary stage in what is, ultimately, a first-order enquiry, namely, a search for real principles and causes that are not the causes and principles studied in the particular sciences (even though the search will have to examine them in order to determine whether they are the sought-for causes and principles); for, those principles and causes—if they are discovered—will be, or should turn out to be, universal principles and causes in the sense that they are the principles and causes of all substances, and not of a limited kind of beings only; and we should add: they must be eternal and unmoving principles and causes that exist separately. So if it turns out that the principles and causes of natural things, for example, are the highest causes that exist, then physics (or perhaps mathematics) will be the highest science.

But in that case, Aristotle will argue, first philosophy as such will turn out to be impossible; for as we shall see, Aristotle argues that its principles and causes—if they exist—must be eternal and motionless…and capable of existing apart (separate from matter), while the principles and causes both of physics and of mathematics are not separable…except (in the case of mathematics) through abstraction.

Recalling that Aristotle distinguishes at least two kinds of separation that are relevant to this enquiry (real separation and separation from matter), and because the first kind of separation applies to substances primarily, for Aristotle the search for first causes and principles should involve a search for separately existing (immaterial) substances. And in the search to discover them, Aristotle will basically examine various candidates (principles and causes) and ask whether they are substances, by asking whether they meet the ‘separability’ and other related criteria that he thinks they must meet if they are to be the first causes and principles of things. This is, basically, the larger aim and argument that Aristotle is pursuing throughout the Metaphysics, I argue, and it is quite clearly the conception found in Metaphysics B, which is crucial in setting the agenda of the following books.

I shall turn to discuss this book briefly since it will be important in what follows and in the argument of Chapter 3.

1.2.3 The method and approach of B

So looking back to Book A: Aristotle has announced there that as philosophers—seekers of wisdom—we are seeking the first causes and principles. But in this book (A)—which as we have said is still preliminary—Aristotle’s aim is not to tell us what these principles and causes are, nor yet even how we should search them, but a wider one, which is first of all to ‘situate’ this search and discipline in its historical context; for there have been previous seekers of wisdom, though as Aristotle tell us: “they do not all agree as to the number and the nature of these principles”.

73 Met. A.3, 983b20–21.
the first philosophers, then, most thought the principles which were of the nature of matter were the only principles of all things”, referring (in the first instance) to the pre-socratic natural philosophers; but there have been others, and notably the platonists, who posited other principles and causes as the outcome of their search—formal, and not material principles and causes; and in the long discussion that follows (in A.3–9) Aristotle surveys their views (along with the Pythagoreans’, and some others).

Now once again, about each of these parties, Aristotle does not say that their searches were absolutely fruitless; to be sure, their views (both here in A, and beyond these books) come in for close inspection, and about the Platonists’ in particular, as we know, Aristotle is highly critical; but still, each of them hit at the truth to a certain degree, Aristotle thinks, and so the real problem is this: that they disagree. Or in slightly different terms: what we want to know is, if each party is or was engaged in the same search, and has reached a degree of truth, then for what reasons do they disagree? So in the first place, these are the phenomena that we must begin with: the different opinions—or endoxa—that others have held about the first principles and causes, just because the call to begin from what-appears-to-us points not only to the fact that we are outfitted with senses that allow us to get-hold of that ‘reality’ that clothes itself in sensible appearances, but also the recognition that, since it is difficult to grasp the ‘real’, we should not begin our search afresh, as it were, but rather orient ourselves by way of the positive and negative results of those earlier searches.

Thus at the opening of B.1, Aristotle announces:

It is necessary, with a view to the science we are seeking, for us first to go through the issues about which one must first raise aporiae. These are issues about which people have held different views, as well as anything else that has been overlooked. For those who wish to be well supplied <with truth>, it is advantageous to go through aporiae well. For the subsequent good supply <of truth> is the untying of points of aporia raised previously, and it is not possible for those who are unaware of a knot to untie it, but the aporia of thought makes this clear concerning the object. Thought in aporia is like people hose are tied up: it is impossible in either case to move forward. This is why one must have studied all the difficulties in advance: for these purposes, and because those who inquire without first going through aporiae are like people who do not know where they have to go, and in addition, because one <who has not gone through aporiae> does not even know whether he has ever found the object sought for or not. For the end is not clear to this man, but to one who has first raised aporiae it is clear. Further, one is necessarily in a better position to judge when one has heard all the conflicting arguments, like opposing parties in court.

This passage raises several important points about what the approach of B will be. First of all, the same call to survey the opinions of the philosophers is there, and once again this recalls Aristotle’s

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75 So for Aristotle, philosophy, like all science, is an historical (and progressive) activity. And perhaps we can also say—in a more recent language—that, for Aristotle, really is always-already interpreted for us.
76 Met. B.1, 995a24-b4.
‘endoxic’ method, which he appeals to often at the beginning of any enquiry.\textsuperscript{77} About this procedure, then: since it is a species of dialectical argument, as agreed by most interpreters,\textsuperscript{78} what it usually involves is a process of reasoning (dialectically) through opposed premises—here, the \textit{endoxa}, or conflicting opinions about the first principles and causes—and thus, it resembles the broader model of dialectic that Aristotle employs elsewhere, which in the first place involves asking yes-and-no questions with the aim of either refuting an opponent, or of arriving at conclusions that are true.\textsuperscript{79}

Now, there is a major question, as we have seen, about the possible presence and function of dialectic in Aristotle’s \textit{Metaphysics} generally; but here in \textit{B}, while it is generally agreed to involve some such procedure, it is also true that his dialectical handling of the \textit{endoxa} about the principles is quite compressed and terse, and that he does not employ the full dialectical procedure that we find discussed in the \textit{Topics}. For instance: Aristotle mainly sets out, but does not really attempt to ‘solve’ the problems that he presents—those difficulties which, as Aristotle puts it, “tie our thoughts in knots”. In other words, at this stage of enquiry, it appears that Aristotle is neither concerned with refuting his opponents as such, nor with establishing first principles.

But this is right, for as Aristotle himself suggests here, his only aim is “to get clear of difficulties” (διαπορήσαι), in order that we might proceed, which is perhaps to say that: since the current opinions about what the first principles and causes are are in conflict, we no longer know where and how to look; and no doubt, this has to do too with the fact that (again, as Aristotle has remarked) the “farthest things” that we are seeking are difficult to grasp, for they are far removed from the senses. So we are lost on the path, and thought has tied us in knots; we have reached the stage of ἀπορία: quite literally, an ‘impasse’; so in order to re-orient ourselves, we must sort through these difficulties—diaporetically—to see more clearly the path that is before us.

This is the task that Aristotle pursues in this book and beyond. That is: he begins by laying out the puzzles that confront the aspiring philosophers (fifteen of them on most counts) and then sets out to resolve them in the argument that follows (on the path to wisdom: the search for first causes and principles).

\textsuperscript{77} See for example: \textit{EN} VII.1, 1145b2–7.
\textsuperscript{79} Once again, dialectic is usually contrasted by Aristotle with demonstration, and recalling what was said earlier about the distinction between demonstration and dialectic, the difference between them concerns primarily the premises employed in each case, and that towards which each of them aims. Demonstration, on the one hand, \textit{begins} with premises that are true and primary, while dialectic attempts to \textit{establish} first principles. About the relationship between these two procedures as involved in establishing the first principles used in any science, see \textit{Top.} I.2 (101a36-b4): “It is also useful in connection with the first things concerning each of the sciences. For it is impossible to say anything about the science under consideration on the basis of its own principles, since the principles are first of all, and we must work our way through about these by means of what is generally accepted about each. But this is peculiar, or most proper, to dialectic: for since it is examinative with respect to the principles of all the sciences, it has a way to proceed”.

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Far from merely setting-the-stage, then, the aporiai of B are crucial in determining the larger argument of the Metaphysics. In Chapter 3, I will examine one of the most important aporiai of B—the eleventh (which asks whether Being and Unity are substances or the substance(s) of beings).

1.2.4 A model of the argument—structure of the Metaphysics

Now to summarise the main outlines of that argument—the plan of the Metaphysics—bringing together the details that we have already presented, and filling in the additional parts that we will need\textsuperscript{80}, as Aristotle makes it clear in A, first philosophy, or wisdom, seeks the highest causes and principles; and the same conception is found in B, where Aristotle discusses a series of problems—aporiai—in connection with this search: the different opinions of philosophers about what the first causes and principles are and how they should be reached. Γ.1–2, responding to the ‘methodological’ aporiai of B, says: the causes and principles that are sought are of being \textit{qua} being (and its \textit{per se} attributes such as unity). (That is, since every science is of an object through its causes, as Aristotle thinks, we have to distinguish that of which these principles and causes are sought, and the principles and causes themselves; and in Γ.1–2 we get an answer.)

But ‘being’ (like ‘unity’, and so on), which is, as it were, the effect-to-be-explained, is ambiguous—said in many ways—and this is somehow connected to the claim that being is not a genus; so Aristotle has to show how a science of being \textit{qua} being is possible on the grounds of its unity, and his reply is that the things-that-are always depend for their being on (or that ‘being’ is always predicated \textit{pros hen} of) substance; and so too the principles and causes that we are seeking will be the principles and causes of substance primarily,\textsuperscript{81} and not of this or that genera of substances, but of all substances, in the sense that, though there will exist others belonging to the different genera of being, these will belong essentially to all substances, or to each being, insofar as it is a being (and this is possible, and need not threaten the autonomy of the particular sciences, because there are different kinds of principle and cause, and some of these (though we have first to seek them) may be common to all beings); and it is in this sense that (here, in Γ.1–2) the enquiry into being \textit{qua} being is put forward as universal science; and we saw, the same (or a similar) conception—the idea that this science is universal because it is concerned with being \textit{qua} being, and not one of the ‘parts’ of being—is found in E.1.

\textsuperscript{80}This following interpretation of the argument—structure of the Metaphysics (in particular, in the way it seeks to connect A to E.1, and Γ to both, in a way that sees them as interconnected by a roughly uniform aim) is more typical among the French-Italian interpreters. Some representative examples are: Reale (1980); Décarie (1961); Mansion (1958).

\textsuperscript{81}See, for example, in book L: “The subject of our inquiry is substance; for the principles and the causes we are seeking are those of substances… And the early philosophers also in practice testify to the primacy of substance; for it was of substance that they sought the principles and elements and causes” (Met. L.1, 1069a29–1069b2).
But in E.1, as we recall, we found another conception: one that said that the object of this science is the highest being: immoveable, eternal, and separate (from matter); and we detected here a tension at first between the ideas of universality and eminence, or the two objects that Aristotle appeared to assign to this science: being \textit{qua} being, and the divine; but now adding to these two conceptions (the ontological and theological) a third: the aetiological (or causal) project announced in AB, we see that there is no problem of ‘unifying’ this science after all (as it is transmitted in the received-text of the \textit{Metaphysics}, that is), after all, in the sense that we might have thought it to contain two more or less conflicting projects, as it were; for we can now say, the universal science of being \textit{qua} being (‘ontology’) emerges into theology, just because it is the universally-acting first causes and principles of being \textit{qua} being that this science is seeking, as confirmed in Γ.1–2, and which it had always sought from the beginning. So again, these books—Γ.1–2—do not announce a new beginning, but rather are part of a progressive and unfolding argument.

Now I should add: all this is not to say that in pursuing this science, Aristotle’s views did not develop over time, which would be strange indeed, nor that in Γ, and in the books immediately connected to it, and in their connection to AB and Λ especially, we do not see signs of development. We do. Rather, what I am suggesting is that the different parts of the \textit{Metaphysics} in which we encounter these conceptions do not fundamentally disagree in the sense that they should be thought to correspond to two (or more) radically different projects, one of which (the theological one) was ‘abandoned’ in favour of a less luxurious, or more sober project—a general ontology of the sensible world (as in Z), or something akin to contemporary analytic ontology (as in Γ—a second-order or conceptual enquiry that seeks to investigate the most general features of reality)—for once again it is the aetiological conception (the search for first principles and causes) that provides the key to understanding both of them.\footnote{But I should add too that the plan that I have now sketched should not be thought to exhaust all that belongs to this science, and in connection with this point, one important example (recalling what we said in the previous chapter) is that in Γ, Aristotle does appear to be engaged in something like establishing the common principles and fundamental notions employed in all of the sciences (or demonstrative reasoning), in a way that brings it closer to the conception of a universal science (and perhaps second-order or meta-inquiry—a philosophy of science) which—though not quite swallowing them up, in the way that dialectic threatened to—does accord it a position of ‘crowning’ the sciences in another way; and this appearance deeply influenced Avicenna, for example.}

This last point is crucial, for if it is correct to say that it is the aetiological dimension that underlies and unites the larger enquiry that Aristotle is engaged in in the \textit{Metaphysics}, then it arguably brings his conception into closer agreement with that of Avicenna. The difference is that while for Aristotle the path to the first principles and causes is pursued by examining (quasi-dialectically) the different candidates that thinkers have proposed as the first causes and principles (and after rejecting them—usually because they fail the separability-criterion—enquiring into them a different way), for Avicenna, the path rather lies in demonstrating them (after investigating the (posited) subject-matter of which the sought-for principles and causes \textit{are} principles and causes).
The difference, that is, lies in their respective methods and their strength. (For Aristotle, after the preliminary (doxographical) account and determination of first philosophy as a search for first causes and principles—the enquiry begun in B unfolds in a more searching manner. (Note, for example, the number of “fresh starts” that Aristotle commences after a particular attempt has failed to establish the sought-for principles and causes, as in Z17.)

Moreover, and in connection with the last point, in describing this enquiry as a ‘search’, Aristotle seems open to the possibility that there may not be higher causes—that they may turn out not to exist—even if the investigation still achieves results that will have pass-down effects for the other sciences (as with the “failed” argument of ZH which, though it turns out not to lead to separate (immaterial) causes and principles, nevertheless shows that sensible substance is definable through the essence with which it is identical).

Now this ‘hesitation’ may simply be for dramatic effect, in the sense that it is not a genuine search, but rather one that has been ‘staged’ in order to highlight that it is only after the earlier approaches to wisdom have been overcome (and perhaps incorporated in the manner of the Hegelian aufhebung) that it can be finally achieved. But in either case, it is evident that Avicenna dispenses altogether with this preliminary phase. So as regards the aporiai of B about the possibility of this science, he simply considers the issue as settled, and so sets it down that metaphysics is the study of “existent qua existent”. Finally, after probing this subject-matter (the species and properties of existent qua existent) in a manner that befits a proper scientific enquiry, he then proceeds to demonstrate the nature and existence of its first causes and principles.
Chapter 2: Separation

In the previous chapter we examined several related problems about determining the subject-matter of Aristotelian first philosophy in the light of (1) its double characterization as an enquiry focused on being qua being (ontology) and God (theology); and (2) the suggestion that the objects it studies exist apart from matter (and are eternal and motionless). In connection with both (1) and (2) we also examined (3) the problem of in what sense first philosophy is a universal science.

As we saw, Avicenna (following al-Fārābī) solved (1) and (2) first of all by distinguishing between the subject-matter of metaphysics and what is searched for in it—a distinction that he found in the Posterior Analytics and applied following a pattern that was also affirmed by Alexander Aphrodisias (and which allowed Avicenna to place metaphysics on a stronger scientific foundation than Aristotle managed to). Furthermore—and most importantly in the present context—we saw that his solution (also inherited from al-Fārābī) also rested on a crucial distinction between two modes of immateriality or abstraction.

So, Avicenna holds, in the first place: (i) some things can be considered apart from their connection with matter—abstracted—even though they are always associated with matter. These include not only the objects of mathematical enquiry (mathematics being concerned with the study of quantity essentially abstracted from matter) but also—so Avicenna argues—“the things that are separable from matter in subsistence and definition—al-umūr al-muğārīga li-l-madda bi-l-qiwām wa-l-hadd” which are studied in metaphysics. These include the ‘abstract’ common notions such as being or existent (al-mawjūd) and the proper accidents that belong to the existent qua existent (al-mawjūd bi mā huwa mawjūd) (the contraries unity and plurality; potentiality and actuality; particularity and universality, and so on). But in the second place, Avicenna argues: (ii) there are some things that truly exist apart from matter—not as mere abstract considerations but as real immaterial beings—the paradigm case being God.

Thus the apparent tension in and between claims (1) and (2) (namely, the various conceptions of first philosophy that Aristotle presents in Met. Γ.1–2 and E.1) is preliminarily resolved; for not only does this give Avicenna a way to show that first philosophy is at once—that is, constitutively—both a science of being qua being and a science of divine things, but also—as Aristotle had suggested in E.1—a science of immaterial things. Finally, Avicenna argues, since God

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1 *Shifāʾ*: Ilāhiyyāt 1.1.6 (p. 2)
is the common principle (al-mabda’ al-mushtarak) of all existents\(^2\) (or of the absolute existent, al-mawjūd al-muṭlaq, another name for “being qua being”—to be discussed below), God is causally universal.

In this chapter, I shall examine this conception in closer detail, or rather its theoretical basis, focussing on the notions of separation and abstraction (and their logical and conceptual foundation) in Avicenna and in Aristotle, and how they are deployed in different philosophical contexts, mostly related to their broader conception(s) of metaphysics and its enquiry.

### 2.1 Separation and abstraction

As we have seen, then, Avicenna’s view that first philosophy will be concerned, in one way, with studying immaterial things basically follows Aristotle’s way of dividing the theoretical sciences (physics, mathematics, and divine science or first philosophy) in Met. E.1 and K, where the resulting division relates to the degree of separation of their respective objects from matter:

For natural science deals with things which are (in)separable (from matter) but not immovable, and some parts of mathematics deal with things which are immovable, but probably not separable, but embodied in matter; while the first science deals with things which are both separable and immovable.\(^3\)

Avicenna follows suit. But as we have discussed, he (arguably) adds at least two further details to this account. In the first place, he clarifies that the relevant kind of separation may involve (either) abstraction, or real separation from matter, and secondly, he clarifies that both kinds of separation are in fact relevant to metaphysics, insofar as the first pertains to its subject-matter (being qua being) while the second pertains to the ultimate principle(s) that this science seeks to establish.

This view is consistently held throughout al-Shifā’. It is already announced, for example, in the Introduction to the Logic (al-Madkhal I, chapter 1), which corresponds to the Isagoge of Porphyry. There, Avicenna writes:

Regarding those things that can mix with motion, but have an existence [wujūd] other than this, these [include] such things as individual identity [al-huwiyya], unity, plurality and causality. Thus the things that it would be true for them to be separated [tajarrud] from motion are either such that this truth is necessary, or not, being, rather, such that this is not

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\(^2\) In Bertolacci (2006), p. 68 (p. 35, 8–12). “The divine science ought to belong to this [universal] science, because God is a principle of the absolute existent [al-mawjūd al-muṭlaq], not of one existent to the exclusion of the other”. In Bertolacci (2006), p. 68 (p. 35, 16–19).

\(^3\) Met. E.1, 1026a 14–16. Cp. the Arabic translation of Met. E.1, 1026a15–21: “As to the first science, it regards the things that are separate (li-l-ashyā’-muṭārīqat, χωρίστα) and those that do not move either. It is required that all of them are eternal, these most of all, since they are causes of the evident things among the divine [things] (al-ilāhiyya, τῶν θειῶν). Therefore the species of theoretical philosophy are three: mathematical, natural and theological. For it is not ignored that, if the divine exists, it is in such a nature”. In Bertolacci (2006), pp. 131–132. See also Met. K.7, 1064b14–1064b28
impossible for them— for example, the state of unity, individual identity, causality and number which is plurality.

These [latter] are either (a) regarded inasmuch as they are [the things] they are (min haythu hiya hiya), in which case viewing them in this way does not differ from looking at them inasmuch as they are abstracted [mujarrada]— for they would then be among [the things examined through] the kind of examination that pertains to things not inasmuch as they are in matter; since these, inasmuch as they are themselves (min haythu hiya hiya) are not in matter; or, (b) regarded inasmuch as an accidental thing that has no existence except in matter has occurred to them.⁴

This description of the manner in which things that can mix with motion might also have an “existence” other than this, namely, insofar as they are considered, or viewed, just “insofar as they are in themselves”, is fundamental. It will emerge constantly in al-Shifā’, with profound results. Most importantly, given the present context, it provides Avicenna with a way to connect the two conceptions of first philosophy described above, and the idea that this science studies immaterial things. For, Avicenna argues, it is precisely in this manner that the existent (qua existent) must be understood as “existing” apart from matter “in subsistence and definition”—namely, as abstract considerations, or, what Avicenna suggests is the same thing: inasmuch as they are themselves (min haythu hiya hiya).

Now, it is not obvious that Aristotle was thinking here of an immediate connection between “being qua being” and the “things which are both separable and immovable”, meaning that he sought to identify the one with the other in this way. Rather, as we have seen in the previous chapter, this seems to have been al-Fārābī’s novel idea. But it is worth noting that this interpretation is by no means un-Aristotelian, which is to say, whether or not this is what Aristotle actually intended (viz, to present first philosophy as a unified enquiry into immaterial things in this double manner), still, it is certainly right to understand the enquiry into being qua as involving a process of abstraction.⁵ Indeed, for Aristotle, to consider some-thing S qua M just is to consider that thing from an ‘abstract’ point of view, as we shall see. In other words, this is just what the ‘qua’ operator asks us to do: to exclude from our consideration of S everything that falls outside the consideration of M, where M denotes either some part or aspect of S—one of its “moments”⁶—or a descriptive context within which S might be considered.

We will examine this topic at length below. For now, then, it suffices to mention that by ‘abstraction’ we are referring to just such a process of ‘selective viewing’, and that, for both Aristotle and Avicenna, such locutions as “(to consider) S qua M” are intended to introduce abstract objects or considerations into the discourse. Moreover, the most interesting cases for our purposes

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⁵ About this interpretation, Menn (2013), p. 146, says it is “very unlikely to be what Aristotle meant, but it saves his words”.

⁶ On the notion of a ‘moment’, see Smith (1982)
are those examples in which we are invited to consider $S$ qua $S$ or $S$ insofar as it is itself ($S$), as in “human qua human”, or indeed “being qua being” (introduced in Greek using the formula “$A \overset{\text{H}}{\vdash} A$”, and in Arabic with such formulae as “$A \text{min haythu hiya hiya}$” or “$A \text{ bi mā huwa A}$”).

So then, it is reasonable to suppose that the study of being qua being is, for Aristotle, just as it is for Avicenna, an abstract enquiry in the above sense. Nevertheless, Aristotle nowhere explicitly describes his study of being qua being as involving a process of abstraction; and again, nor does he describe this enquiry as such (that is, under this description: as the study of being qua being) as a study of immaterial things, either—unless, that is, we follow Avicenna in reading Met. E.1 in this way. What Aristotle does affirm, though, and not only in E, is that the enquiry he is engaged in is concerned with things that are or may be considered χωριστός (separate or separable); and I suggest that it is this situation that is probably motivating Avicenna here. That is, it is probable that Avicenna connected (more strongly than Aristotle did, or following a slightly different pattern) these three conceptual moments: being-qua-being—separation—immateriality.

It should be recalled first, though, that Aristotle in fact distinguishes between several different meanings of ‘separation’ or several ways in which some $X$ may be (said to be) separate. In addition to the first meaning that we have been discussing—where some $X$ is said to be separate from matter—Aristotle also holds that some $X$ may be separate in definition; locationally (with respect to time or place); or absolutely (without qualification—ἄπλος). This last kind of separation is no doubt the most difficult to grasp—indeed there has been a vigorous scholarly debate about just what separation in this sense is supposed to entail—but a brief digression here will help to see how and why the different kinds of separation that Aristotle discusses are relevant at different stages of his enquiry.

2.1.1 Varieties of separation in Aristotle

Although, as we have said, there is some disagreement about the philosophical meaning of ‘separation’ (in this last sense—separation without qualification), in the literature it is usually explained in terms of some-thing being “ontologically independent” or having a “capacity for independent existence”: a capacity that individual substances (paradigmatically, instances of natural kinds such as an individual man or horse) are supposed to possess while the things that are predicated of them (both their universal genera and species and particular and universal accidents) are supposed to lack. Thus, separation in this sense is usually analysed in terms of a relation of (ontological) priority (and posteriority) between two items ($A$ and $B$) that are entangled in this way (namely, where $A$ is a substance and $B$ is what is predicated of $A$). Or to adapt a formula that

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8 See for example, Met. Δ.8, 1017b24; Z.1, 1028a33–4; H.1, 1042a28–32 (where the “compound [form-matter] substance” is described as χωριστόν ἄπλος—separate without qualification or absolutely).
9 Corkum (2008)
Aristotle uses in the Categories (and which is recalled in the Metaphysics): A is prior to B (is separate) iff A can exist apart from B, but B cannot exist apart from A.\textsuperscript{10} So for example, an individual man such as Socrates, it is said, can exist apart from the pallor that is predicated of him, but not vice versa.

There are many complications to be dealt with here. For example, while it may be true that Socrates can ‘be’ without being pale, it is not obvious that he can be without having anything predicated of him at all,\textsuperscript{11} since the whole thrust of Aristotelian essentialism is against such a ‘bare particular’ view of substances; but we are getting ahead… For now, it is enough to recognize what kinds of things Aristotle seems to regard as separate in this sense: namely individual substances. So we might summarize: separation (or separability) in this sense then refers to a grounding relation between a subject and (its) predicates. As the ultimate subjects of predication (or the bearers or ground\textsuperscript{12} of properties) individual substances exhibit a capacity for independent existence that neither universals nor accidents possess. No (particular) substance is itself predicated of another thing; and so whatever exists separately will exist in the manner that individual substances do.

Now, it should be recalled that this notion of separation comes into focus most clearly or explicitly in Metaphysics ZH, where (as I have argued in the preceding chapter) Aristotle examines various candidates put forward as the substances of individual substances to ask whether these in turn exist separately (and so might qualify as first causes or principles). That is to say: the wider

\textsuperscript{10} This is affirmed in the entry discussing “priority” in Δ.8 (1019a2–a14). “Some things then are called prior [πρότερα] and posterior in this sense, others in respect of nature and substance [κατὰ φύσιν καὶ οὐσίαν], i.e. those which can be [καὶ] without other things [ἀνευ ὀλλων], while the others cannot be without them,—a distinction which Plato used.” What Aristotle here calls priority ‘in respect of nature and substance’ (κατὰ φύσιν καὶ οὐσίαν) is also explicitly referred to in Cat. 12 (14b9–14b23). “There are, then, this many ways of speaking of the prior. There would seem, however, to be another manner of priority besides those mentioned. For of things which reciprocate as to implication of existence, that which is in some way the cause of the other’s existence might reasonably be called prior by nature”. Cp. Cat. 12 (14a26–35): “One thing is called prior to another in four ways. First and most strictly, in respect of time, as when one thing is called older or more ancient than another; for it is because the time is longer that it is called either older or more ancient. Secondly, what does not reciprocate as to implication of existence. For example, one is prior to two because if there are two it follows at once that there is one whereas if there is one there are not necessarily two, so that the implication of the other’s existence does not hold reciprocally from one; and that from which the implication of existence does not hold reciprocally is thought to be prior.”

\textsuperscript{11} Stephen Menn (2009) has made the same point in his contribution to the Beta Symposium papers. Just because an attribute cannot exist apart from substance does not mean substance can exist apart from attributes—it must, after all, have some attributes; but what Menn calls here ‘Plato’s test’, which is meant to determine when a thing is prior (i.e., X is prior to Y if Y cannot exist apart from X) is meant to show, at least, if not that substance can exist apart from attributes, that attributes cannot exist apart from substance: pallor is dependent on man in a way that man is not dependent on pallor. But secondary substances—genera and species of substances and accidents—might be different, since species-genera are the causes of being to primary substances and particular accidents in the sense of being what they are—see discussion below.

\textsuperscript{12} On ontological dependence or “grounding” in Aristotle see Corkum (2016)
context of this enquiry—both in ZH and beyond (and notably in MN)—has to do with a critique of the candidates that earlier thinkers put forward as ostensible first causes and principles. These include of course Platonic Forms; but other candidates are discussed too: most notably mathematical entities.

With respect to the former—and as is well known—Aristotle severely and often criticizes his teacher and others in the Academy for committing this one fundamental error: that they separated the Forms from their instances—made them exist apart. Thus (we are led to believe) Plato treated the Forms as if they were individual substances—a move that Aristotle rejects precisely on the grounds that they do not satisfy the priority conditions described above. But Aristotle does not dispense with the Forms altogether either. Rather—and again as is well known—his first move will involve arguing that the form (or essence) of a thing is present in it as its immmanent cause and the source of its true being, but it is inseparable from its matter (thus the form–matter complex constitutes a whole, so that form and matter represent two inseparable moments). However, in a second move, Aristotle will argue that as the target of a formula (λόγος) which states the essence (tó tí ἐστι έσώτερος) of a thing, the form might still be, as it were, considered apart ‘in definition’. Thus the mistake that Plato (and others in the Academy) made is to suppose that the one sort of separation (definitional) entails the other (real or ontological).

Moreover, in Books MN, Aristotle launches effectively the same argument against those who would make mathematical objects (including numbers and geometrical entities) exist apart. But here Aristotle describes in greater detail that the objects of mathematics (and so the subject-matter of mathematics) are the product, as it were, of the possibility of conceiving something apart from matter. Which is to say: it is here (in MN) that the notion of abstraction (as a kind of separation from matter achieved through the act of conception: a way of considering, or selective viewing) emerges most clearly. And now, because Aristotle argues that mathematical and geometrical objects can be considered apart—abstracted—from material things, even though they never exist as such apart from matter, it results that both the natural philosopher and the mathematician or geometer study physical objects; it is simply that the latter study physical objects not qua physical objects or in motion, but rather with respect to their shape or quantity, and so on.

13 “Those who believe in the forms are right in making them separate, if indeed they are substances, but are wrong in supposing that the one over many is a form” (Z.16, 1040b26–28).

14 See for example Met. H.1, 1042a28–30: “What underlies is a substance, and in one way this is the matter… though in another way it is the formula [ἄλλος δ’ ὁ λόγος καὶ ἡ μορφή] which is a this and is separable in formula [ὅ τοι δέ τι θεί τοῦ λόγου χωρίστου ἐστιν]”.

15 Spellman (1995) argues that for Aristotle (ontological) separation means the ontological correlate of separation in definition and does not entail the numerical distinctness of forms. See especially Chapter 5 of this work.
Now this is fundamentally important for us because it highlights that the difference between physics and mathematics is not like the difference between physics (which studies objects that are essentially associated with matter and moveable) and a putative science of divine things whose objects are essentially separate from matter and immoveable (and timeless). To put it one way: while the objects of physics and first philosophy (as theology) form, as it were, two extensionally distinct (and exclusive) classes, the objects of physics and mathematics are, as it were, only intensionally distinct: they differ with respect to each discipline studying a different aspect of material objects.

But now this leads us to ask: suppose that we (and Avicenna) are right to consider the science of being qua being an abstract enquiry along the same lines as mathematics; in that case we should ask what ‘aspect’ of being it is that this science is concerned with studying (and why, given its sheer generality, studying being in this way poses no threat to the other departmental sciences).

I shall turn to examine some of these issues below and in the following chapters. For the moment, our immediate concern is to examine more closely the conceptual and logical features of abstraction, as described above, in Aristotle and in Avicenna. I begin with Aristotle.

### 2.2 Abstraction and reduplicative analysis in Aristotle

In this section I shall approach the topic of abstraction in Aristotle chiefly via an examination of so-called ‘qua-propositions’ (as in ‘*S qua M is P*’, statements which later came to be associated with the theory of ‘reduplication’ in Aristotle) and of what we might call ‘qua-objects’, which are, in a sense, the result of abstraction. That is, I shall not be concerned to discuss the cognitive or psychological processes associated with abstraction as such, but rather the logical and ontological aspects of the theory that Aristotle presents in different places, and how all this is relevant to his metaphysical enquiry especially. Nevertheless, a few remarks on Aristotle’s general views on abstraction will help to situate our investigation.

The fundamental importance of the notion of abstraction in Aristotle’s theory of knowledge and cognition is well-known. Perception begins with the data of sense-experience. What is immediately given to the senses is an impression of the proper objects corresponding to the different sense faculties: sight, hearing and so on. Aristotle describes what is received as a (sensible) form without its matter. Perception therefore already involves—and represents the earliest stage of—a process of abstraction. So too in describing the nature of cognition Aristotle explains that the universal-conceptions which are the objects of scientific knowledge proper are

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16 Bäck (1996). In logical contexts Aristotle develops the theory of reduplication in discussing logical fallacies—particularly the fallacy of *secundum quid ad simpliciter*, i.e. where there is an invalid inference from (S is P *qua* M) to (S is P), as in “The man is white *qua* his teeth” to “The man is white”. See *Sophistical Refutaions* 167a10.

17 *DA*, II. 12, 424a17–24
ultimately abstracted from individuals. Perception (of singular-things) and true knowledge (of universals) therefore represent two modes or degrees of abstraction in which the sensible and intellectual faculties, respectively, somehow receive a (sensible or intelligible) form.

This much Aristotle tells us in his De Anima, for example. But understanding the nature and details of these psychological and cognitive processes is not easy. In the text just referred to, for instance, Aristotle is clearer about the fact that perception and thought are supposed to involve such a process than he is about the fine details of how this works exactly. What we learn is that perception comes about through the sensitive faculties being “moved and acted-upon”, and therefore, Aristotle says, perception “seems to be a kind of alteration [\(\text{ἀλλοίωσις}\)]”. We also learn that in sense-perception, the relevant faculty becomes somehow “like” the object it perceives. As we have already seen, too, knowledge and perception are also explained in hylomorphic terms. What the soul or intellect thinks is a form without its matter; hence the former is also described as a certain “potentiality” to to receive the latter.

It is not these technical details that are our immediate concern, however, but rather the more general notion of abstraction that stands in the background. But here too we encounter some difficulties; for Aristotle often discusses these issues at length without explicitly mentioning “abstraction” or explaining what this process involves. Fortunately, though, a clear and quite consistent picture can be assembled by examining what Aristotle says in diverse contexts—that is, outside of these narrower discussions of the processes involved in perception and knowledge.

We are faced then with answering two questions. The first concerns what this very operation, ‘abstraction’, involves; and the second concerns the nature of those ‘abstracted’ objects that result from this operation. We can begin by briefly considering the meaning and uses of the term ἀφαίρεσις (abstraction) and its cognates in Aristotle. Here and in the discussion that follows I shall draw on the results of the most recent lengthy study on this topic—that of Allan Bäck.

2.2.1 The nature of abstraction

Like so many terms that we find in Aristotle, the technical meaning of ἀφαίρεσις (from the verb ἀφαίρεω) reflects its usage in ordinary discourse. The central notion here is that of ‘taking-away’ or ‘removing’ something (from an object); an act of ‘selection’ or of ‘setting-aside’. Ἀφαίρεσις, then, involves choosing from among available options—from what is ‘ready-to-hand’—and this is
reflected too in its verbal-root, ἄφεω, whose meanings include ‘to take-away’ (with the hand) or ‘to grasp’ or ‘seize’. Finaly, the term also suggests the notion of exclusion or separation.

As Bäck has noted, though, a question arises here about whether the notion of ‘abstraction’ that we find in Aristotle should therefore be understood as involving a process of taking-away or removing something (i) in the manner of subtraction, whereby we ‘chip off’ certain parts as it were, fashioning a new object, or rather (ii) in a way that involves selecting something, whereby we isolate and (in some sense) remove the thing itself. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive options, and Bäck considers both possible readings (there is strong evidence to support each). But he leans towards the second (‘selective’) interpretation, and I argue that this is probably the correct one. To see why, it is necessary to consider the sort of operations with which the term ‘abstraction’ is associated.

As we have already noted, Aristotle does not always use the terminology of ἀφαίρεσις explicitly when he is discussing its (related) operations. Most often, in fact, Aristotle announces that he is talking about abstraction or abstract objects by using a qua-locution—that is, a construction that uses the Greek particle ὑ (meaning ‘qua’, ‘as’, ‘insofar as’, etc.)—as in the locution ‘being qua being’ (τὸ ὑ ὑ ὑ). In what follows, then, I shall treat the theory of abstraction and the theory of ‘qua-propositions’ (or reduplication) in Aristotle as interchangeable.

The very fact that Aristotle refers to the enquiry introduced in Metaphysics Γ.1 as a science of ‘being qua being’ rather than a science of ‘being’, simply, is highly significant; for as Roberto Poli has suggested, if the two expressions are not equivalent (so that Aristotle thought there is a difference between a theory of ‘being’ and a theory of ‘being qua being’), then, it behoves us to understand what role is being played by the functor ‘qua’ here. This is important too because, as we discussed in the previous chapter, Aristotle uses a similar formula to define each of the theoretical sciences (such as physics, which studies being ‘qua moveable’, and mathematics, which studies being ‘qua measurable’).

It is clear, then, that the theory of abstraction, as a theory of reduplication, will be important in regard to how Aristotle divides the sciences, or secures for each of them a distinct separate subject-matter. Moreover, these preliminary remarks already give us some indication of the nature of

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25 So in describing how perception grasps its objects, Aristotle writes: “The soul, then, acts like a hand; for the hand is an instrument which employs instruments, and in the same way the mind is a form which employs forms, and sense is a form which employs the forms of sensible objects.” DA. III.9, 432a2–432a4.

26 Here too we should note the connection between the verb ἄφαντεύω—“to cut off” or “sever”. As noted in the previous chapter, Aristotle explains that so-called special sciences, like mathematics, “cut off” (ἄφορεμαν) a part of being and study that. As we shall see, this is precisely the same as to consider one of the parts of being abstractly.

27 Cleary (1985; 1995)

28 In support of the ‘subtraction’ interpretation, see, e.g. Met. 1061b20; 1023b13–5; 1024a27.

abstraction in Aristotle; for the idea that each of these sciences studies being(s), though in some restricted way (qua being, or qua moveable, or qua measureable) suggests that the difference between them does not lie in their studying different objects, as such, but rather, a single object—namely being(s)—though each from a different perspective.

This accords too with the proposed meaning of ‘abstraction’ that we discussed a moment ago. That is, following Bäck, I suggest that to study some object $S$, qua $M$, involves ‘selecting’ a certain perspective from which to study $S$ based on one of its ($S$’s) relevant aspects or properties. Abstraction, then, is “selective attention” or “selective viewing”, and an abstract object is one that results from this act of viewing $S$, or “taking” it in isolation, apart from some other possible point of view. Crucially, too—and here we arrive at the connection between abstraction and the notion of separation, as discussed earlier—such “selective viewing” might also involve “taking” something apart from, or as separate from, its matter, or individuating circumstances. Indeed, it is this aspect of abstraction that Aristotle perhaps discusses the most; and one reason is that it provides him with a way to explain in what sense mathematical objects should be considered “separate”—a way that avoids the errors of the Platonists, who (so Aristotle tells us) held that mathematical entities are ontologically separate.

As is well-known, Aristotle criticizes this doctrine in Metaphysics MN. It is not necessary to record the full details of his criticism here; instead we can simply refer to the following section of M.3, in which Aristotle details how mathematical objects exist (and how the mathematical disciplines study them), since it is the most relevant for our present purposes. Aristotle writes:

For just as the universal propositions of mathematics deal not with objects which exist separately [κεχωρισµένον], apart from [παρὰ] extended magnitudes and from numbers, but with magnitudes and numbers, not however qua [οὐχ ἦ] such as to have magnitude or to be divisible, clearly it is possible that there should also be both propositions and demonstrations about sensible magnitudes, not however qua sensible but qua possessed of certain definite qualities [µὴ ἦ δὲ αἰσθητά ἄλλ᾽ ἦ τοιαδί]. For as there are many propositions about things merely considered as in motion, apart from what each such thing is [χωρὶς τοῦ τι ἐκαστὸν τῶν τοιούτων ἐστι] and from their accidents, and as it is not therefore necessary that there should be either a mobile separate from sensibles [κεχωρισµένον τι ἐλατο κινούµενον τῶν αἰσθητῶν], or a distinct mobile entity [φύσιν] in the sensibles, so too in the case of mobiles there will be propositions and sciences, which treat them however not qua mobile but only qua bodies [οὐχ ἦ κινούµενα δὲ ἄλλ᾽ ἦ σώµατα µόνον], or again only qua planes, or only qua lines, or qua divisibles, or qua indivisibles having position, or only qua indivisibles.

The point of this passage is clear. Mathematics, Aristotle argues, does not study objects that exist separately, as such. To be sure, it is concerned with things like sensible magnitudes and numbers (that is, really-existing objects having extension, or things that are divisible). But, Aristotle says, it

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30 Bäck (2014), pp. 16f.
31 See Annas (1976).
32 Met. M.3, 1077b18–34.
does not study these things \textit{qua} sensible, but simply \textit{qua} (having) magnitude or \textit{qua} divisibility. So too, while there is a science of sensible things that move, this science does not not consider them as such, but rather, “apart from what each (such thing) is and from their accidents”, or simply “\textit{qua} mobile”. That is to say, we arrive at this subject-matter of physics through \textit{abstraction}: by focusing on this aspect of sensibles—motion itself—and ignoring whatever else pertains to them. But this does not entail that motion exists apart from sensible things, as a separately existing subject, nor that there is “a distinct mobile entity in the sensibles”. Again, abstraction need not entail the real separability of the thing in question—namely, the abstract object that results from this operation. And finally, Aristotle notes that we can study mobiles, not \textit{qua} mobile, but \textit{qua} bodies, or planes, or lines, and so on, meaning that the same object(s) can be considered from \textit{multiple} (select) points of view, corresponding to the different aspects or properties that properly belong to it. (That is, the same moveable objects are also extended bodies, and so they might be considered under several \textit{different} investigations—namely, as part of the different enquiries that correspond to, and investigate, each of these aspects.)

Now, what this last point reminds us is that the result of such select viewing, or abstraction, is grounded in the natures and real properties of things themselves. For this reason, we should add too, it is also grounded in a strong conception of essentialism. That is, if there is a science of \(\phi\), such as the science of measure or of motion, for instance, it is because \(\phi\) is a real (inherent, shareable) property that belongs \textit{essentially} to a certain class of beings; and it is for this reason too—the fact that \(\phi\) belongs essentially to the members of this class—that a science of \(\phi\) applies to individual \(\phi\)s (bodies or moveables).

The theory of abstraction, then, refers to the way in which these objects are arrived at (through select viewing) and how they ‘exist’ (not separately, as such, but as inherent, universal properties that are isolable through an act of abstraction). Understood in this way, too, the connection between the theory of induction (discussed earlier) and the theory of abstraction is clear. They are, in effect, two ways of approaching the same issue. In the latter case, to consider some \(S\) \textit{qua} \(M\) (where ‘\(M\)’ refers to some aspect or property that belongs essentially to \(S\)), or what results from this point of view—an abstract object—is a consideration of \(S\) that filters out, or disregards, any aspect of \(S\) that is not contained in the essence of \(M\).

This last point requires clarification, however, for what it seems to suggest is that to consider \(S\) \textit{qua} \(M\) just is to consider \(M\). But as the preceding discussion has highlighted, what this whole approach is intended to secure, first of all, is a way of thinking about \(M\) that does not entail its \textit{separate} existence. Instead, on this approach, \(M\) is considered as one of the essential properties of \(S\), from which it is unable to exist apart; so in a sense the emphasis here is on studying \(S\), albeit from one respect.

Moreover—and as Aristotle himself makes clear in the above passage—a given science will not only be concerned with studying \(S\) \textit{qua} \(M\), but more importantly, in producing “universal propositions” regarding this subject. \(S\) \textit{qua} \(M\) is not yet a proposition, but only gives us the \textit{subject} of a proposition. Science, then, will be concerned with producing (true) statements of the form “\(S\) is
"P qua M" (or "S, qua M, is P"), as in “an isosceles, qua triangle, is equal to two right angles”, or “the bronze, qua moveable, is moveable”. Indeed, such examples appear frequently in Aristotle’s writings. This includes sample propositions that Aristotle considers false, as in “the doctor, qua doctor, builds a house”, as well as many which strike us as trivial (or at least odd), as in “the doctor, qua doctor, doctors”.

Comparing these examples, though, it is quite easy to see what Aristotle is getting at. Ultimately, what the theory of reduplication aims to do is to locate the proper, per se subject of P, for any universal statement of logical form S is P, such that a statement “S is P” will be necessarily true, because S and P are related in way that Aristotle requires for properly scientific demonstrations, namely, per se or essentially. This, then, is what the function “qua (M)” achieves; it qualifies in what respect the predicate (P) belongs to the subject (S) of the proposition, or, in virtue of what (aspect of S) it belongs to S. In other words, it gives the reason why P belongs to S.

The theory of reduplication, then, underpins Aristotle’s theory of scientific demonstration. Specifically, a reduplicative proposition (of logical form S qua M is P) will produce a scientific demonstration when S and M are, as Bäck says, “commensurately universal”. Understood in this way, we can see why Aristotle thinks a statement like (1) “an isosceles, qua triangle, is equal to two right angles” is demonstratively true, while a statement like (2) “a triangle, qua figure, is equal to two right angles” is not. (1) is (demonstratively) true because it gives the reason why (S) an isosceles is (P) equal to two right angles: because every S is M and every M is P. (2) is false because it is not the case that every (M) figure is (P) equal to two right angles.

Furthermore, as Bäck notes, when S = M (so that (S qua M is P) ≡ (S qua S is P)) Aristotle, holds that S is P καθ᾽ αὐτό or ἦν αὐτό (per se/in virtue of itself). Hence, “a triangle is equal to two right angles καθ᾽ αὐτό” is demonstratively true because a triangle is equal to two right angles qua triangle. Clearly, such examples of reflexive reduplication will be highly important for Aristotle, including in that enquiry which Aristotle introduces in Metaphysics Γ.1 as the study of τὸ ὅν ἦν ὅν καὶ τὰ τοῦτο ὑπάρχοντα καθ᾽ αὐτό— the study of being qua being and the attributes that belong to it per se.

Lest we lose sight of the issue that concerns us immediately, though, we should pause to note once again what this conception has to do with the notion of abstraction, which we began discussing in this section.

As we have examined, for Aristotle, to consider S qua M is to consider some object abstractly because it involves “selecting” a point of view from which to consider S, namely, qua M, where M

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33 APo. 74a36–4
34 Physics 201a25-30
35 See Aristotle, APr I.38.
36 Bäck (2014), p. 205. Bäck gives the following truth conditions: “Every S is P qua M” is demonstrative if and only if: ((Sx ⊃ Mx) & (Mx = Px)).
37 APo 73b27.
designates some (intrinsic) feature of \( S \) that the abstractor uses to “filter out” or exclude other features that belong to or describe \( S \). Again, it is crucial that we understand “abstraction” here as involving an act of selective viewing. But that act, in turn, is fundamentally related to the possible points of view from which \( S \) may be considered; and in the last analysis, this depends on the (intrinsic) features of \( S \). So it goes in science, anyway. (Which is to say, while it may be possible to consider some \( S \) from any point of view, not all of them will have an intrinsic relation to \( S \), and hence not all of them will be relevant to properly scientific analysis. Again, this whole way of viewing things depends on Aristotle’s essentialism.)

Moreover, in saying that abstraction involves such an act of selective consideration, a way of “taking” something apart from its surrounding circumstances, what we (or Aristotle) are arguing is that the resulting ‘abstraction’ does not really exist apart, or separately. This applies equally to the consideration of some ‘\( S \) καθ’ αὑτό, which, as we have seen, exactly corresponds to the consideration of \( S \) qua \( S \). The per se triangle that is studied by the geometer is, for Aristotle, merely an abstraction; it is emphatically not like a Platonic Form, an \( F \)-itself, which, Plato says, exists (αὐτό) καθ’ αὑτό.\(^{38}\) The terminology that Aristotle uses is telling.

This is, I argue, the proper way to understand the connection between the theory of reduplication and abstraction in Aristotle. As in so many other areas of Aristotle’s philosophy, the theory of ‘qua-objects’ represents the continuation of an originally platonic insight, but one that has been—in some way—‘corrected’. In the present case, the correction lies in Aristotle’s preserving the idea of an ‘F-itself’ that can serve as an object of true knowledge and scientific demonstration, whilst denying that it exists apart in the way that Plato (so Aristotle tells us) thought necessary for true knowledge. Instead, for Aristotle, such an \( F \)-itself will be the result of abstraction—a way of looking at a certain nature \( S \) from a given perspective \( M \), whereby the latter serves to exclude from our consideration of \( S \) anything that is not intrinsically connected to it. The object of ‘abstraction’ then, will be a the result of a point of view or perspective, but not a freewheeling one, for the selection of perspectives will ultimately be grounded in the essential structure of the subject considered.

Finally, in must be emphasized that, as the result of a certain way of viewing a subject, the object \( S \) qua \( M \) is not different to \( S \). I therefore agree with Bäck when he argues that “for Aristotle, ‘being’ and ‘being qua being’ have the same reference (when used in a sentence). ‘Being qua being’ does not name something different from ‘being’”.\(^{39}\) This is important because, as we shall see, it is sometimes suggested that ‘being qua being’ either describes a universal property which all beings share, or instead names an individual, the paradigmatic instance of being, namely, God. This is surely wrong, and in Chapter 6 I will consider objections to this interpretation. But it certainly raises once more the question: what does it mean to theorize about ‘being qua being’?

\(^{38}\) See, e.g., Phaedo (65d4–66a10); Republic (476b9–10); Sophist (238c).

2.2.2 The science of being qua being and abstraction

Indeed, besides the specific case of ‘being qua being’, there does still seem to be a puzzle about what it means to consider any given S qua S; for if abstraction, or reduplication, as described above, involves selecting an aspect of S from which to consider it before forming propositions about this subject, then, just what ‘aspect’ are we selecting when we consider S qua S? Again, Roberto Poli clarifies this when he says, “what we have here is reduplication in the sense of a mechanisation which selects the canonical perspective from which A is considered”.\(^{40}\) Poli goes on:

For every entity, the perspective selected by the reflexive reduplication is that which is most proper to it, that which asserts it in its essence. As regards general terms, it may be their definition. As regards proper names, it is the direct consideration of the individuality involved, in the sense of ‘this particular individual’. In this latter case, however, reduplicative analysis is no different from direct analysis. The expressions ‘Socrates is…’ and ‘Socrates qua Socrates is…’ give rise to the same consequences. Hence it follows that reflexive reduplication performs an independent theoretical role only in cases of general terms. One therefore understands why it is possible to simply in only one of the two cases. These specifications further emphasise the function of reduplication as a tool for scientific analysis.\(^{41}\)

So just as the consideration of ‘human qua human’ or ‘triangle qua triangle’ will focus on what is immediately contained in the essence or definition of ‘human’ and ‘triangle’, excluding (from this consideration) any of those material or individuating circumstances that attach to a particular human or triangle, or one of their species, the consideration of τὸ ὄν ἤ ὄν—of ‘being qua being’—will also consider τὸ ὄν from the perspective of its essence or definition, focusing on what belongs to a being, just in virtue of (its) being a being.

But what is the essence of being? We can quite readily conceive the determinate nature of human or triangle. But what determinate nature is being? This is important because—as we shall examine again in the following chapter—Aristotle denies both that being is a genus and (roughly) that being-itself is the essence of anything.

As we shall see Aristotle does deny that being is (or has) an essence in the same way that determinate kinds such as human and triangle (etc.) do. In a sense, what Aristotle does is to reduce being—τὸ ὄν—to the very fact of having (or being) an essence (and ultimately to the nature of substance). This is the argument of Metaphysics Z.\(^{42}\) But this very move (pursued in Z) is the result of the consideration of τὸ ὄν ἤ ὄν—the enquiry which Aristotle introduces in Γ.1. So we will still have to clarify what it means to study being (qua being).

\(^{41}\) Ibid, p. 254; emphasis added.
\(^{42}\) This is already prefigured in the famous statement of Z.1 (1028b2–4): “Indeed the question that was, is, and always will be asked, and always will cause difficulty—that is, the question ‘What is being?’—is the question ‘What is substance?’”
Part of the problem, as Christopher Shields observes, is that in translating τὸ ὄν ‘being’ we are liable to think of being as a property. 43 But such constructions in Greek involving the (neuter) participle plus definite article can be used both “as a substantive, in a count-nounish sort of way”, and “used non-substantively, as an abstract participle”. 44 In connection with the latter, the term τὸ ὄν, then, can be taken as referring to that “property” (loosely speaking) “which beings in the substantive sense might be said to have or share”. 45 (I would add to this the observation that Aristotle is often thinking of both at once—and too, that the neuter article τὸ might also be used to indicate and indefinite construction; so here we might also take τὸ ὄν as meaning ‘a being’ or ‘beings’.

Thus Shields asks:

Given this linguistic distinction, one must ask whether, when Aristotle insists that the science of being qua being does not cut off any part of being, he is thinking of being abstractly or substantively. That is, does the science of being qua being study being, that feature all and only beings have in common, or does it study, rather, all the beings there are, considered as beings, but in no other way? 46

The analysis that I have presented in this and the preceding sections clearly indicates the second option, though the science of being qua being too will be an ‘abstract’ enquiry, in the way that we have suggested. Moreover, this analysis answers the problem of why this science, as an enquiry into “all the beings there are, considered as beings”, does not simply ‘swallow up’ the sciences, in the way that Aristotle thought that platonic dialectic or a science of the highest kinds” would. For as we have discussed, insofar as reduplicative analysis (or abstraction) is concerned with general terms, while ‘being’ is the most general term, applying universally (to everything that there is), one might wonder what room there is left over, so to speak, to consider the essences of human and triangle and so on, given that they will be subsumed by the universal being. However, it is now evident that this problem is solved by Aristotle’s adoption of a reduplicative kind of analysis. The enquiry into being qua being poses no threat to the autonomy of the particular sciences since what belongs to being qua being is excluded from every other possible consideration or qualification. For instance, while it is true that being a body and being measurable are among the ‘parts’ of being, the study of bodies qua measurable will not include as part of this consideration the attributes that belong to being qua being; and the obvious reason is that ‘being’ and ‘measure’ are not commensurately

44 Ibid, p. 345.
universal. Not everything that is a being is measurable. So too for any other aspect of ‘being’ that might be singled-out using the qualifying formula qua $M$—any other aspect, that is, than being.$^{47}$

But now—and to include—we must ask once again what are the attributes that belong to being qua being. Aristotle mentions several. These include (the contraries) unity, plurality, sameness, otherness, difference, contrariety, and so on, including many other attributes that Aristotle discusses in *Metaphysics* $\Gamma$ and, importantly, $\Delta$—Aristotle’s so-called “philosophical lexicon”. Indeed, I suggest that this is how we read $\Delta$—basically, as providing a list of the attributes that belong to being qua being. (It is significant that $\Delta$ follows $\Gamma$ immediately—that is, after Aristotle has first introduced the enquiry into τὸ ὑπάρχοντα καθ᾽ αὐτό.) In that case—and recalling what was said earlier in this chapter about the reduction of the nature or essence of being (in $Z$) to the fact of being or having an essence—we can say that such attributes belong to being in virtue of the fact that each being is something that exists and is one and—importantly—has a determinate nature. This is as opposed to such attributes belonging to a being in virtue of the fact that is the determinate kind of thing it is; and it is no threat to this conception that being does not itself have a determinate nature.

### 2.3 Avicenna on abstraction and immateriality

To recap, in the preceding sections we have examined the meaning of ‘abstraction’ for Aristotle, as well as the application of this notion in several contexts related to the object of scientific knowledge and the division between the sciences. We argued (following Allan Bäck) that the notion of abstraction in Aristotle can be understood in terms of “selective viewing”, and this is supported by the connection between abstraction and reduplicative analysis, so that to consider some $S$ qua $M$, or the properties that belong to $S$ qua $M$, is the same as to consider $S$ abstractly—that is, from a select point of view. We also argued that the possible ‘points of view’ from which an object might be considered (in science) are grounded in the objective properties of $S$; and finally, in connection with this last point, we argued that to consider some $S$ qua $S$ is to consider $S$ with respect to its essence, or definition. So, to consider the per se attributes of some $S$ qua $S$ (as in ‘being qua being’ or ‘triangle qua triangle’) is to consider those attributes that belong to $S$ in virtue of its very (essential)

$^{47}$ Thus, I (partially) disagree with Poli (1999), p. 245, who argues “The main reason for distinguishing between theory of being and theory of being qua being rests on Aristotle’s opinion that the analysis of being simpliciter cannot be developed in a scientific fashion. Aristotle's intention to submit being to scientific analysis was the principal reason for his adoption of a reduplicative kind of analysis. His position derived from the thesis that being is not a genus.” While the first point is correct, given the general features of scientific enquiry that Aristotle is committed to, the fact that being is not a univocal genus emerges as a further complication. Aristotle’s response to it is the pros hen structure of being, not the claim that the present enquiry studies being qua being as opposed to being simpliciter. As we have seen, every science studies some subject $S$ qua $M$ and seeks to produce scientific demonstrations (necessarily true statements) on this basis. Cf. Bäck (2014), p. 207, n. 11.
nature: a triangle is equal to two right angles *qua triangle* (and not, for example, *qua figure*), while a man is risible *qua man* (not *qua animal*); but while a triangle and man, as determinate kinds, are each *one* (or a *unity*), they are not one, as such, *qua triangle* or *qua man*, but simply *qua being*. (Though, as we shall see in the following chapter, since ‘being’ is not a univocal term, but said in as many ways as the categories, ‘unity’ too will be predicated in as many ways as ‘being’ or ‘is’.)

Both ‘abstraction’ and reduplicative analysis, then, play a fundamental role the theory of scientific-knowledge that Aristotle presents in the *Analytics*, insofar as they serve to ‘locate’ a proper (*per se*) subject and its essential attributes which become the basis of a scientific demonstration. In addition, as we have seen, they play a fundamental role in the division of the sciences. Physics, for instance, studies what-exists insofar as it is *moveable*, while mathematics studies what-exists insofar as it is *measureable*. Both sciences, then, study being, but from a certain *aspect*. Or as Aristotle explains, each of them ‘cuts off’ a part of being, and studies that (*Met. Γ.1, 1003a23f*). In this respect, the ‘particular sciences’ are unlike the science of being *qua being*, which does not ‘cut off’ a part but considers being ‘universally’. However, as we argued in the previous section, this is still, precisely, to consider being ‘abstractly’.

In the following sections, then, our aim is to examine how Avicenna develops this notion of abstraction in his own philosophical writings and applies it (above all) to problems about the nature and object of metaphysical enquiry. Indeed we have already noted above and in the preceding chapter the fundamental importance of the notion of abstraction for Avicenna in connection with the double-conception of first philosophy (as a study of being *qua being* and of immaterial things, respectively).

But as we discussed there, the notion of abstraction in this context is more closely related to, or is explained in terms of, the notion of *separation*: specifically, that of separation from matter (or immateriality). Indeed, as we have seen in Chapter 1, it is this connection (which was pointed out to him by al-Fārābī) that allowed Avicenna to solve the problem of how the abovementioned two conceptions of Aristotelian first philosophy are related. So Avicenna says: both existent (*qua existent*) and the divine refer to two modes of immateriality or separation. In the first case this is achieved through an act of abstraction, whereby the things that exist are *considered* apart from their surrounding material circumstances. In this way, ‘existent’ and ‘one’ and so on become abstract general notions that apply to everything that exists; but they are immaterial only in the sense that they result from this act of ‘taking something apart’ from its matter. In the second case, though, Avicenna refers to a mode of ‘abstraction’ that involves real immateriality or separation from matter, and which applies to God alone.

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48 The psychological and epistemological aspects of the theory of abstraction in Avicenna have been examined in several studies. See especially Hasse (2001); McGinnis (2007a); D’Ancona (2008). However—as with the preceding analysis of abstraction in Aristotle—we are less concerned with the psychological processes associated with abstraction than we are with its logical and metaphysical aspects.
In a sense, then, it is the connection between separation and immateriality that is more important and distinctive here. Thus, as we have seen, Avicenna refers to the things investigated in metaphysics as “the things that are separate [al-umūr al-mufāriqa] both in matter and in definition [li-l-madda bi-l-qiwām wa-l-hadd].” Of course, it should be noted again that such problems of separation are important for Aristotle, too, especially in his Metaphysics where, as is well known, many of its author’s arguments are about whether a certain object exists ‘apart’ or ‘separately’ in one of the several senses that Aristotle accords this notion (the prime example being about the separation of Platonic Forms, which Aristotle often, and famously, criticizes). But while the question of whether a certain object (or class of objects) exists separately or apart from matter is certainly important for Aristotle (notably, in connection with the issue of mathematical objects, as in Metaphysics MN, which we have discussed above), for the most part, the kind of ‘separation’ that Aristotle appears to be concerned with more often in the Metaphysics is that of separation in definition and so-called ontological separation (as in Metaphysics ZH, where Aristotle considers both kinds of separation to characterize primary substance).

All this is to say that, based on the preceding observations, Avicenna seems to focus on material separation, primarily, as evidenced by the fundamental distinction between two kinds of material separation that Avicenna draws, namely abstraction, and immateriality. But it is noteworthy too, though, that Avicenna (following al-Fārābī) refers to the abstract notion of ‘existent’ which is the subject-matter of first philosophy (namely, the existent qua existent: al-mawjūd bi mā huwa mawjūd), as al-mawjūd al-muṭlaq—“the absolute existent”. Though the immediate background of this term (in al-Fārābī) is Aristotle’s remark in Met. E.1 to the effect that, while the particular sciences mark of some particular being, they “do not inquire into being simply [οὐχὶ περὶ ὄντος ὑπέρκειν] or qua being”, this formula also recalls Aristotle’s claim that substance is what-is primarily (ὑπέρκειν). At Metaphysics Z.1, for instance, Aristotle writes:

Clearly then it is because of substance that each of the things referred to exists. Hence that which is primarily, not in a qualified sense but absolutely [ὅν ὑπέρκειν], will be substance.

Again, this is significant because the claim that substance is what-is or being ὑπέρκειν (= muṭlaq) is made alongside the claim that only substance exists in itself (καθ’ ἄντικο) and separately (χωριστῶν).

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49 Shīfā: Ilāhiyyāt I.1.6 (p. 2)
51 See, for example, Ilāhiyyāt IV.1 (20), p. 130; VI.3 (30), p. 215; VIII.4 (13), p. 276.
52 Met. E.1, 1025b8–9.
53 Met. Z1, 1028a29–30
54 Met. Z1, 1028a24
55 Met. Z1, 1028a24, 27, 34
It might be argued, then, that Avicenna’s emphasis on the science of existent *qua* existent being an *immaterial* science reflects his pattern of connecting Aristotle’s idea that being in the primary sense, or absolutely (ἀπλως), is *separate* (χωριστόν), whereby the latter term is taken to mean primarily the things that are separate from *matter* (mufāriq... li-l-madda), rather than ‘ontologically’ or ‘definitionally’ separate. Again, Avicenna appears to connect more strongly than Aristotle did, *prima facie* at least, the notion that being which is *separate* refers to the *immateriality* of being.

2.3.1 Avicenna on abstraction as selective viewing

We argued above that, for Aristotle, the main feature associated with the notion of abstraction, including in its application to his discussion of the division of the sciences, is that of “selective viewing”, not immateriality, as such. Thus, the preceding (brief) remarks concerning the ‘abstract’ nature of metaphysical enquiry for Avicenna, in which the notion of *immateriality* is central, perhaps suggest that this procedure—abstraction—is playing a quite different role in this context for each philosopher. However, a closer inspection of Avicenna’s views here reveals that he too sees a close connection between the notion of abstraction, as described above, and that of “selective viewing”—and precisely in the sense that we examined in connection with the theory of reduplication in Aristotle.

Indeed, we have already encountered this connection above, in the passage from *al-Madkhal* I, chapter 1, where Avicenna writes that the notions of identity, unity, plurality, causality, and so on, “can mix with motion”, but also “have an existence [wujūd] other than this”, since these can be “regarded [yunzar] inasmuch as they are [the things] they are”, in which case:

viewing them in this way does not differ from looking at them inasmuch as they are abstracted [fa-lā yufāriq dhālik al-nazaru l-nazara ʿilayhā min ḥayth hiya mujarrada] – for they would then be among [the things examined through] the kind of examination [al-nazar] that pertains to things not inasmuch as they are in matter, since these, inasmuch as they are themselves (min ḥaythu hiya hiya) are not in matter.56

This is striking, for what it tells us is that, for Avicenna, to consider such notions not inasmuch as they are in matter—that is, as immaterial—just is to consider them inasmuch as they are themselves. We are presented, then, with the same mode of *reduplicative* analysis that we encountered in Aristotle; and moreover, Avicenna refers to each consideration as a select point of view: a *nazar*.

So, while for Aristotle, this mode of viewing was initially involved in how we come to grasp a thing in its essence or with respect to its definition, it also came to be associated with the consideration of being *qua* being, and what belongs to it as such. There, we did not *explicitly* encounter the idea that the possibility of such a mode of viewing entails that these objects have a

kind of ‘existence’ apart from matter—the closest explicit nod to this was the idea, chiefly associated with mathematics, that such an enquiry might consider the things that are in fact always associated with matter or motion, but “qua immovable and qua separable from matter—ἡ ἀκίνητα καὶ ἡ χωρίστα”⁵⁷—but it is not difficult to see why Avicenna might apply this same idea to the nature of the enquiry into the existent qua existent—al-mawjūd bi mā huwa mawjūd. First philosophy too, then, considers fundamental notions that “mix” with motion and matter (such as existent, one, plurality, causality and so on), but “qua immovable and qua separable from matter”, by regarding these notions just inasmuch as they are themselves.

Importantly, this same idea underlies Avicenna’s famous doctrine of the triplex status naturae or threefold distinction of essence or quiddity—namely, the idea that quiddity can be considered from three points of view (al-iʿtibārāt) corresponding to its three modes of being: (i) in the mind, (ii) in matter, and (iii) in itself, or absolutely, apart from its ‘existence’ in the mind or in things—as well as that other doctrine with which Avicenna’s name is usually associated, namely, his so-called ‘existence-essence’ distinction. But the notion that quiddity can not only be considered apart from these modes of existence, but in fact exhibits a mode of being of its own—an esse proprium—despite its influence on later philosophy (both Arabic and Latin), was also subject to criticism: the chief one being that it seemed to make existence a mere ‘accident’ added to quiddity (thereby giving quiddity in itself an ontological priority). But this interpretation has in turn been challenged in recent decades, largely based on a revised understanding of the same arguments that we have been considering in this chapter.

2.4 Quiddity in Itself

In this section, then, we shall examine more closely the Avicennian doctrine of quiddity or essence (māḥiyya) as it emerges in al-Shifāʾ, and its connection with the notion of ‘abstraction’ as “selective viewing” that we have examined in the preceding sections. Our starting point and procedure will involve clarifying what it means to consider quiddity just in terms of what it is in itself by ignoring or setting aside every external consideration which does not bear upon its immediate conception. This is precisely what Avicenna directs us to do at various crucial junctures, both in the Logic and Metaphysics of al-Shifāʾ—to consider quiddity “absolutely”, abstracted from all those “accidental” conditions or considerations which affect it, including the condition of existence. Moreover, this procedure underpins numerous other distinctive Avicennian theses. He deploys it constantly in order to solve old and new problems, just as countless other thinkers would do after him.

The doctrine of ‘quiddity in itself’ combines two lines of argument. The first—already mentioned above—concerns the threefold consideration of quiddity. I examine it in the following section.

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⁵⁷ Met. E.1 1026a9
2.4.1 The threefold consideration of quiddity in the Isagoge (al-Madkhal)

The first line of argument supporting the doctrine of quiddity in itself is presented Chapter I.2 of the Isagoge (al-Madkhal) of al-Shīfā’. The following paragraph is the most relevant for our present purposes:

The quiddities of things may exist [wa-māhiyyāt al-ashyā‘ qad takūn] in the real instances of things [fi a’yan al-ashyā‘] or in conception [fi tasawwur]. They will thus have three aspects [i’tibārāt]: (1) a consideration of the quiddity inasmuch as it is that quiddity [al-māhiyya bi-mā hiya tilka al-māhiyya], and what attaches to it inasmuch as it is such; (2) a consideration thereof inasmuch as it is in external reality [min hayth hiya fi-l-a’yan], where there will then attach to it accidents [a’rāz] proper to this existence [wujūd-hā] it has; and a consideration thereof inasmuch as it is in conception [al-taṣawwur], where there will then attach to it accidents proper to this existence, for example, being a subject, predication, universality and particularity in predication, essentiality and accidentality in predication, and other things that you will learn [in this book].

So again, besides the two considerations that attend a quiddity as it exists in things or in conception, Avicenna describes a third: the consideration of quiddity inasmuch as it is quiddity, apart from the two kinds of ‘existence’ just mentioned—real and mental. This consideration, then, is unrelated to existence. Hence, it is usually described in terms of the consideration of a “neutral” quiddity. But we should stress that this is, so far as Avicenna has told us anyway, a point of view only. It is to say that, while we can think of a quiddity or form as an object of intellectual consideration or as it is actually found in external reality, it is possible to ‘abstract’ from these two considerations, ignoring the question of where it exists through a sort of selective attention.

In these terms, this sounds like a merely mental operation, which is to say that the existence that is being excluded from this consideration—whether mental or real—is itself a consideration. That is, Avicenna is not saying that a quiddity may actually be stripped of its real or mental existence, so that what is left behind is another sort of existent; rather, we perform this operation intellectually, by focussing on what is contained in the idea itself, apart from what attaches to a quiddity insofar as it is found existing in reality or in conception. It is notable, though, that what attaches to it in each case is described as an “accident”. Hence, the accidents that attach to a quiddity as it is conceived in the intellect, for example, are “being a subject, predication, universality and particularity in predication, essentiality and accidentality in predication”. But this sounds odd: one might have thought that a quiddity or form was already a universal. And again, what does it mean to say that “particularity” and “essentiality” and so on also belong to quiddity as accidents?

To understand this, we should turn to the second main line of argument that Avicenna discusses in support of the doctrine of quiddity in itself. It concerns the problem of the nature of

58 Shīfā’: Madkhal I.12 (15.1–7) (in Marmura 1979, pp. 44–45)
59 On mental and real existence in Arabic philosophy, see Black (1999).
universals; and in this context the important issue is the distinction that Avicenna draws between them: between a quiddity in itself and a universal. The argument is first presented in the Isagoge (al-Madkhal), I.12, and again, with some further details, in a famous passage of the Metaphysics of al-Shifā’, V.1. I consider both in the following two sections.60

2.4.2 The problem of universals in the Isagoge (al-Madkhal)

Turning to Shifā’: Madkhal I.12: in this chapter, Avicenna is explicitly concerned with discussing the five “predicables”, or universals—genus, species, difference, property, and accident. Avicenna begins:

…it has been the custom61 to understand these five [universals] to say that some are natural, some logical, and some mental. It is sometimes [also] said that some are prior to multiplicity, some in multiplicity, some after multiplicity.

Again, following custom, Avicenna singles out the genus and species, and what follows is a quest to understand their nature. That is, as Avicenna notes: each thing that occurs as an example of one of these five is “one thing in itself, and another in being a genus, species differentia, property or general accident”.62 Already, then, Avicenna uses a formula similar to the one that we have been examining: the universal, in this case, can be considered in itself; apart from its being (considered as) a genus, or an accident, and so on. Thus, taking an example from the order of the genus, he says:

Animal in itself is a meaning (maʾnā), regardless of whether it exists in external reality (fī-l-ayān) or is conceived in the soul (fī-l-dhihn). In itself it is neither general (ʿāmm) nor particular (khāṣṣ).63

Animal in itself, then, is neither particular nor universal. But this seems strange: are the two not contraries—exhaustive? Consider: the negation of particularity just is universality; and conversely, the negation of universality just is particularity. How can a quiddity such as animal be neither universal nor particular? Surely this is a mistake.

60 Marmura has studied the chapter on universals in the Isagoge (al-Madkhal) I.12 and its argument in (1979). He also provides a complete English translation of the relevant passages. I use this translation below, providing additional notes and clarification based on the Arabic text. The same author examines the problem of quiddity and universality in the second passage, Metaphysics V.1, in Marmura (1992).

61 I.e., this reflects the (post) Porphyrean way of introducing the categories. However, as Marmura (1979), pp. 36–37, notes, what follows is not strictly Porphyrean. For example, Avicenna does not mention the Porphyrean warning (Isagoge I.9–16) that he will not discuss the nature of genus and universal—i.e. whether they are ‘real’ or depend on thought. This warning is ignored. What follows is a discussion that ventures into the ontology of universals—questions about their nature and existence. This reflects Avicenna’s general view that the discussion of the categories belongs to metaphysics, not logic. See Sabra (1980); Kukkonen (2012); Kalbarczyk (2018).

62 Shifā’: Madkhal I.12 (65.9–10)

63 Shifā’: Madkhal I.12 (65.11–13)
But no, Avicenna avers. He advances an argument from predication. Let us suppose, he says, that “animality, by reason of being animal”—that is, in itself—“is general”. In that case, Avicenna argues, “it would follow that there would be no individual animal”. That is, every animal would be general. Similarly, then:

…if animality by virtue of being animal were individual, it would then be impossible for it to be anything but one individual, that individual required by animality, and it would be impossible for any other individual to be an animal.64

This whole argument, then, seems to rest on the application of a principle like the famous nota notae est nota rei ipsius—the principle, which derives from Aristotle,65 that the predicate of a predicate66 is the predicate of the subject. That is, Avicenna thinks, if the ideas of universality or individuality were contained in the essence or definition of a quiddity such as animality, then, that of which the quiddity is predicated would itself be universal or individual.

Again, then, the whole argument rests on a distinction between the quiddity itself and the universal; and Avicenna already alluded to this above, saying that a universal is “one thing in itself, and another in being a genus…”, etc. Indeed, it seems to be this very problem of predication that is motivating the distinction. But too, it clearly rests on the notion of abstraction as ‘selective viewing’ that we have been examining above. To consider animality, just in itself, or in virtue of being animality, is to consider animality with respect to its essence and definition; and here Avicenna suggests that if either universality or individuality were contained in its definition, we would face the above problem—if animality were by definition universal, there would be no individual animal, and if by definition individual, there could only be one animal. Thus, Avicenna says, “animal in itself is something conceived in the mind as animal and in accordance with its conception as animal it is simply animal”.67

This conception both reflects and supports the distinction between primary and secondary intentions (or intelligibles) which forms the basis of Avicenna’s conception of the subject-matter of logic.68 The latter discipline, Avicenna says, studies the second-level notions (maʿānī) such as universality, particularity, being a genus, being a species, and so on, which are predicated of first-level notions such as animality, which refer to beings in the real world. Such quiddities, then, form part of a Porphyrean predicable; but this depends on our distinguishing between the quiddity just as it is in itself and insofar as it ‘becomes’ part of a universal (in which case, the quiddity as such conceived in the mind—fi-l-dhihn), or it becomes associated with matter in an individual (in which case, the quiddity as such exists in reality—fi-l-aʿyān). Thus, Avicenna writes:

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64 Shifāʾ: Madkhal I.12 (65.14–16)
65 Cat. 3, 1b10; Cat. 5, 3b4.
66 Or, “the mark of a mark”, where a mark is an intelligible note contained in the concept.
67 Shifāʾ: Madkhal I.12 (65.16–17)
68 Sabra (1980); Street (2004).
If [besides the conception of animal as animal] it is also conceived as general, particular and the like, then an idea additional to its being animal, occurring accidentally to animality, is conceived with it. For animality does not become and individual to which one points except through the association of some-thing that renders it [a thing] to which one points.

Turning to the Metaphysics of al-Shifā’,70 we find precisely the same argument presented in a well-known chapter, V.1.

2.4.3 Quiddity itself and universals in Ilāhiyyāt V.1

Ilāhiyyāt V.1 is one of the most significant—and the most discussed—chapters in al-Shifā’ with respect to the reception–history of this text insofar as it is the main locus and source of the two (related) doctrines that came to be seen as defining the Avicennian moment: the doctrine of quiddity in itself and the essence–existence distinction. As we shall see, though, this is problematic; for a proper understanding of the contents and argument of V.1 depends on our grasping other details that Avicenna presents earlier in this text (both the Logic and the Metaphysics).71 The result is that its details are often presented out of context, giving rise to an interpretation that is not entirely faithful. (What we are attempting to do in this section is precisely to understand this passage in its wider context.)

So Shifā’: Ilāhiyyāt V.1 begins:

It behooves us now to discuss the universal and the particular (al-kullī wa-l-juz ‘ī). For this is also properly related to what we have finished [discussing]. [These] are among the accidents specifically belonging to existence (bi-l-wujūd).

In this chapter, then, Avicenna discusses the same problem; but here he adopts a slightly wider approach, considering (metaphysical) questions about the existence of ‘universals’ (or quiddities) which do not belong to logical enquiry as such.

Thus, after noting the three ways in which “universal” is said of a meaning (al-ma’nā), Avicenna summarizes:

It is possible to combine all this [in saying] that this universal is that whose very conception does not prevent its being predicated of many. The universal used in logic and what is akin to it must be this. As for the particular that is singled out, this is [the thing] whose very conception prevents its meaning from being predicated of many, as with the essence of this

69 Shifā’: Madkhal I.12 (65.17–66.1)
70 Shifā’: Ilāhiyyāt V.1.1 (p. 148)
71 Bertolacci (2012) makes the same point about the reception–interpretation of Avicenna’s famous essence–existence distinction, which interpretation, as we have just noted, largely depends on a selective reading of the present passage.
72 Shifā’: Ilāhiyyāt V.1.1 (p. 148)
Zayd to whom one points. For [the essence] cannot be imagined except as belonging to him alone.\textsuperscript{73}

Once again, then, the “universal” meaning or intention (\textit{al-maʿnā}) is first of all described as what is actually or potentially \textit{predicated of many}. This is the “universal” proper (as examined in logic). In addition, the same “meaning” is found in the essence (\textit{dhāt}) of an individual, in which case, it is considered as a \textit{particular}. This corresponds to the two modes of quiddity described above, namely, its consideration \textit{fi-l-dhihn}, and its existence \textit{fi-l-ʿyān}, respectively. But then Avicenna goes on:

The universal, then, inasmuch as it is a universal, is one thing; and, inasmuch as it is something to which universality attaches, it is [another] thing. The universal inasmuch as it is a universal is that which is denoted by one of [the above] definitions. If that [indicated thing] happens to be “human” or “horse,” then there is another meaning other than the meaning of universality—namely [to take the latter example] “horseness.” For the definition of “horseness” is not the definition of universality, nor is universality included in the definition of “horseness.” For “horseness” has a definition that is not in need of the definition of universality, but is [something] to which universality accidentally occurs. For, in itself, it is nothing at all except “horseness”; for, in itself, it is neither one nor many and exists neither in concrete things nor in the soul, existing in none of these things either in potency or in act, such that [these] are included in “horseness.” Rather, in terms of itself, it is only “horseness.” Rather, oneness is an attribute that conjoins with “horseness,” whereby “horseness” with this attribute becomes one. Similarly, in addition to this attribute, “horseness” has many other attributes that enter it. Thus, “horseness”—on the condition that, in its definition, it corresponds to many things—becomes general; and, because it is taken with properties and accidents to which one points, it is specific. “Horseness,” however, is in itself only “horseness.”\textsuperscript{74}

As we have already seen in the \textit{Madkhal} passages, Avicenna notes that a “universal” such as humanity can be found existing in concrete things or in the soul. But just for this reason, Avicenna observes, it must admit a third consideration, namely, just as it is in itself. The argument that Avicenna presents in the following lines follows the same pattern. If the notion of universality proper—being predicable of many—were contained in the definition of “humanity” or “horseness”, then neither could belong to a \textit{particular} human or horse. And vice versa: were the notion of \textit{paricularity} contained in their definition, then they could not be predicated of many. For this reason, Avicenna says, universality is something which “occurs” (\textit{yaʿrīz}) to it. And so too the rest of the properties and accidents that belong “humanity” and “horseness”, and so on, \textit{insofar} as they “become” universal or particular; in itself, “horseness” is nothing but horseness. It is neither one nor many and exists neither in potentiality nor in actuality. These, rather, are attributes that “conjoin” with horseness insofar as it becomes one or many, particular or universal. It can be said, then: just in order that the self-same quiddity can fulfil both roles (as a component of a universal, proper, and as the essence of an individual), \textit{in itself}, it must be neither.

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Shifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt} V.1.3 (p. 149)

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Shifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt} V.1.4 (p. 149)
So, Avicenna continues:

There is here something perceived by the senses—namely, animal or man, together with matter and accidents. This is natural man. There is [also] here something which is animal or human—viewed in itself in terms of it itself, without taking with it what has mingled with it and without its having the condition that it is either general or specific, one or many, whether in actuality or also through the consideration of potency, inasmuch as it is in potency. For animal inasmuch as it is animal, and man inasmuch as it is man—that is, with respect to its definition and meaning, without any attention being paid to other matters conjoining it—is nothing but animal or human.

As for animal—in the general [sense], particular animal, animal with respect to its being considered in potency as either general or specific, animal considered as existing in the concrete or intellectually apprehended in the soul—it is animal and a thing. But it is not animal viewed alone…

Once more, the language that Avicenna uses is striking in its similarity to that employed by Aristotle in the contexts we examined above, where, to consider triangle, for example, qua triangle, or in itself, just is to consider it with respect to its essence and definition. Quiddity, then, can be considered apart; and this seems to correspond nearly enough to the notion of separability in definition in Aristotle which we also discussed. Moreover, Avicenna refers to the three ‘moments’ that pertain to the three-fold consideration of quiddity as acts of viewing. They are, Avicenna says, i’tibārāt. But as we discussed in connection with the notion of abstraction in Aristotle, here, too, they are considerations that are grounded in the real natures of things. The difference, though, is that for Avicenna the consideration of quiddity viewed in itself results from our taking it ‘apart’ from its existence in things, or in the intellect; and in this context, this consideration is pursued in response to a problem which was not explicitly posed by Aristotle—the problem of universals—though it has its origins in the history of commentary and reflection upon his Categories.

A question does arise, though, as to the ‘status’ of this third point of view or its resulting object—the notion of a quiddity in itself. That question is whether quiddity in itself is a ‘mere’ abstraction or point of view, or something more than this. To be sure, Avicenna has said above that, although quiddity can be considered from three aspects, it is (only?) found existing in things or in the intellect. But he also writes that universality and particularity, along with all those attributes that “conjoin” with quiddity insofar as it is universal or particular, including its existence in things (fi-l-a’yān) or in the intellect (fi-l-dhihn), are “accidents” the occur (ya’riz) to quiddity in itself; and this seems to suggest that it is already in some sense a possible subject of predication, but one that neither exists in things or in the intellect (since its being found there has just been described as an accident).

Furthermore, in the lines that immediately follow the last cited passage above, where we were directed to consider animal in itself, Avicenna writes:

75 Shifā’: Ilāhiyyāt V.1.16–17 (p. 152–3)
Considered in this way, it is prior in existence [fi-l-wujūd] to the animal, which is either particular by [reason of] its accidents or universal, existing [in the concrete] or [in the mind] in the way that the simple is prior to the complex and the part to the whole.\(^{76}\)

Prior in existence? Is this a slip? Logically prior, we might be pressed to say.\(^{77}\) But prior in existence? As if to reassure us, Avicenna goes on to say:

In this [mode of] existence, it is neither genus nor species, neither individual, nor one, nor many. But, in this [mode of] existence, it is only animal and only human.\(^{78}\)

It is this suggestion—that a quiddity in itself has a sort of “existence” prior to existence in individuals or in the mind—that has caused so much debate about its ontological status, and its significance for Avicenna, leading to the charge that, here, he has returned to a sort of platonism.\(^{79}\)

Moreover, the fact that Avicenna describes what attaches to quiddity in itself, including the notions of existence, as “accidents”, is the source of the famous controversy surrounding the distinction between essence and existence.

This problem, and the surrounding controversy, has been much discussed in the literature, and since it is not the immediate focus of the present thesis, it is not necessary to examine it in full. Nevertheless, since a proper understanding of the nature and significance of this distinction for Avicenna is related to the notion of separation as selective viewing, we shall present an overview of it in the following sections. There, we discuss the issue in relation to Avicenna’s distinction (presented in Ilāhiyyāt I.5) between the intentions or notions (al-maʿāni) of “thing”/“reality”/”quiddity” (al-shay’, al-haqīqa, al-māhiyya) and “existent” (al-mawjūd), and Aristotle’s argument that these are concomitant attributes. This is to say that, like the convertible notions of “being” and “one” in Aristotle, quiddity and existent are distinct in the sense that they refer to an intensional difference (which Avicenna describes in terms of their corresponding to two “intentions”—maʿāni), but one that does not imply an extensional difference, as indicated by their very necessary concomitance. Again, this is just to say that, as we have already seen above, while a quiddity can be considered in itself, regardless apart from its being real or mental existent, quiddity and existent are coextensive, and mutually entail. Whatever is a quiddity also exists in one of the two modes. (As Aristotle would say, the terms signify the same thing, though their logoi or definitions are different. We examine this issue in Chapter 4.)

Part of the problem—and the source of the controversy—is that this distinction is transformed into a distinction between two kinds of being (wujūd).

\(^{76}\) Ilāhiyyāt V.I.18 (p. 153)

\(^{77}\) What I mean is: as we have seen in the preceding section on the ‘logical’ formulation of the essence-existence distinction, from the point of view (as it were) of the definition of quiddity, the formula, existence must be viewed as an ‘accident’ occurring to quiddity; that is, it is not contained in quiddity as an essential or necessary attribute. In this sense, quiddity “in itself” can be seen to possess a certain logical priority.

\(^{78}\) Shifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt V.I.18 (p. 153)

\(^{79}\) As we have seen, this is the accusation of, for example, Gilson (1952).
2.5 The essence–existence distinction

To recall, the main issue motivating the problem about the (so-called) ‘essence–existence’ distinction is twofold. On the one hand, Avicenna suggests that quiddity in itself exhibits its own mode of being, or existence. On the other hand, Avicenna suggests that its existence in things or in the mind, as well as those attributes that attach to quiddity in one of these modes, are “accidents” that “occur” to quiddity.

The problem, of course, is that term “accident” has a precise meaning—one that was originally given to it by Aristotle. An “accident”, according to its usage in the *Categories* and elsewhere, is said of, or inheres in, a substance. A real accident, then, “depends on” substance for its realisation. Now whether it is simply this way of putting the matter—it remains for us to see—the claim that existence is “accidental” with respect to quiddity involved Avicenna in all sorts of difficulties.

Technically—this is the well-known rebuke of Averroës—the distinction threatened to violate the Aristotelian priority of substance as “that which exists by itself”.

To wit: if “substance” is properly defined as “that which exists by itself”, then the addition of any accident to it will depend on the prior existence of substance. It is not by the addition of an accident that a substance is said to exist. Rather the opposite is true: an accident exists because of substance. Moreover, the removal of an accident in no-wise threatens the existence of substance, for it has just been defined as that which exists by itself. Rather, we say that an accident “exists” in its substratum. For example, the accident “whiteness” exists in its substratum, a particular body. If the accident-“existence” is described in the same way, however, then absurd conclusions follow. For instance, it would seem to follow that “existence” itself exists in its substratum. And thus a regress follows (the accident-“existence” will be described as “having” existence, and so too the existence of this existence, and so on, ad infinitum).

The problem, according to Averroës, is that what begins as a logical argument was extended to the real order. That is: Avicenna stands accused of treating the logical accident as if it were an ontological accidental—a real predicate—or a categorical or predicamental accident.

This accusation has become familiar. After Averroës it was repeatedly asserted that Avicenna considered existence an “accident” super-added to essence in re—as an *ens in alio*, in Scholastic parlance, something which exists in another. And he was strongly criticized for this view—both in the Islamic world and in the West. But others have come to his defense.

In our own day Fazlur Rahman was perhaps the first to re-examine this claim. Rahman in effect argues that logical and metaphysical issues have been confused here. Existence is an “accident” for him, it is claimed; and given the Aristotelian requirement that a substance is “that which exists by itself”, consequently, it should be possible to remove that accident without

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80 The relevant argument can be found in Averroës’ *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, I, pp. 313–15; *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, pp. 236–237.

81 This is what al-Suhrawardi argues too very concisely. See his *Hikmāt al-Ishrāq* I.3, p. 59.

destroying it. But in the case of the accident-“existence”, an unwelcome result follows; namely, it seems possible to remove the accident-“existence” from an object, but continue to talk about that object as existing. That is, even though it does not exist, it nevertheless exists, and exists qualified by the attribute non-existence, which is absurd.

The confusion here, according to Rahman, is that “existence” in relation to actual objects is said to be an “accident”. But this is wrong, he argues. It is not that an individual substance is said to be qualified by existence, but rather, quiddity as conceived as a thing in the mind, or in itself. The term “accident” here is employed to describe a relation between two concepts which are not the same in part or in whole. That is, quiddity in itself is one thing, and its being found in an individual existent is another. Existence is extrinsic to essence as conceived in the mind, and is not constitutive of it. But in reality, in the concrete existent, existence is not something additional. Existence is not a predicamental accident.

The point, Rahman claims, is that Avicenna was attempting to distinguish two intentional concepts; namely, the “thing” (al-shay‘), and the existent (al-mawjūd), which Rahman describes as “a positive, spatio-temporal existent”. This distinction, he argues, corresponds to two uses of “exists” in Avicenna; namely, “existence” as “is something”, or “thingness” (Arabic: šay‘iyya), and existence as “instantiation”. The latter use is “more profitable”, Rahman argues. To demonstrate: we say (using his example) that the species “elephant” exists; but we also say a particular elephant exists. This is not individuation, but instantiation; a more restricted notion of existence than “thingness”. In other words, the distinction is between a thing conceived in the mind (namely, essence, or quiddity), and “a positive, spatio-temporally determinate existent”. Existence means instantiation. It is not a real predicate. Hence, Avicenna is not open to Averroës’ criticism, for that criticism, if it is to stick, must assume that Avicenna meant a real predicate—a categorical or predicamental accident.

The problem, it seems to us, is that the intellectual operation which, at a high level of abstraction, view existence as “occurring” to quiddity “from the outside” is mistaken for a true representation of what happens in external reality. From this point of view, quiddity and existence appear to possess two separate existences, at it were. This, however, is a mistake. Quiddity, in external reality does not possess a kind of “separate” existence, for quiddity cannot be independent of existence except in the intellect. But this should not be taken as a kind of separate existence.

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84 Ibid, p. 8
85 On the notion of “thingness” in Arabic philosophy, cf. Wisnovsky (2000; 2003b); Druart (2001); and the discussion below.
87 Ibid, p. 7.
88 That is to say, the occurrence (Arabic: ‘urūq, related to the term ‘araz—“accident”) is extramental. In other words, the object “qualified” by the accident in question is existent in concreto.
because “being-in-the-intellect” is itself a kind of existence. Rather, this is to say that the intellect can “observe” quiddity without considering its existence. The qualification of quiddity by existence is an “event”, a “happening”, which occurs but in the intellect. It is a kind of dramatization. It is different from the qualification of a body by whiteness for example. In external reality, it is not as if two “things”, or “realities” (essence, and existence), were to become “united”, like when the recipient and the thing received become united. The being of quiddity is its existence. Existence is not something actualised in the quiddity, but is the very actualisation of quiddity itself. At the level of external reality, existence and quiddity are completely “united”; they are one and the same reality and form a concrete unity.

Subsequent studies have shed further light on the significance of the distinction, and notably by examining its immediate history. Robert Wisnovsky, for instance, has examined its background in kalām discussions concerning the priority and extension of concepts such as “thing” (shay') and “existent” (mawjūd) along with the problem of creation or origination (ibdā') and of non-being (ʾadam). According to Wisnovsky, the Muʿtazili mutakallimūn, for example, generally held that the notion “thing” has universal extension, and can be divided into the species “existent” (mawjūd) and “non-existent” (maʿdūm). In other words, they thought the category “thing” was the widest category applicable to reality, and could not be brought under a broader one. This led to the general problem, however, of the “thingness” of the non-existent (shayʿiyya al-maʿdūm). Ashʿarī theologians in turn argued that “thing” and “existent” have identical extension and are not even intensionally distinct. This allowed them to argue more forcefully for creation ex-nihilo; if the non-existent is also a thing then the risk is that such “things” might be thought to keep company with God prior to existing. The important thing to note is that we find al-Fārābī and Avicenna using the very same vocabulary as the mutakallimūn. Al-Fārābī comes closer to affirming the Mutazilī position and seems at times at pains to distinguish himself from them. Avicenna seems to hold a compromise position between the Mutazilīs’ elevation of the thing and the Ashʿarīs identification of thing and existent. He argues that although “thingness” and “existent” have identical extension, their meanings differ. “Thingness”, he says, is what sets something apart, makes it one thing as opposed to another. “Existent”, on the other hand, signals that it exists.

The main source for this formulation of the distinction is Metaphysics I.5, and I will examine this important chapter in the following section. This passage is important because, in it, Avicenna switches between, or combines, the language of the kalām and that of falsafa; and thus, the distinction between thing and existence is transformed into the distinction between between quiddity (māḥiyya) and existence (wujūd).

The important point to note here, then, is that the pair “thing”—“existent” corresponds to to intentions. Each of these, Avicenna says, is a maʿnā, and this colours everything that follows. (I return to discussing the notion of a maʿnā at length in Chapter 4.)

2.5.1 The notions thing and existent in Ilāhiyyāt I.5

In this text, Avicenna presents a version of the so-called “essence–existence” distinction in the context of discussing the doctrine of primary notions. Thus, “thing” and “existent” along with “necessary” (al-ḍarūrī), are introduced as notions that are “impressed in the soul in a primary way”. That thing and existent should be considered primary notions here means that they are (1) ‘concepts’ of the widest generality, applicable to everything (“the things common to all matters”: al-ashyā’ al-ʿāmma li-l-umūr kullihā); and (2) epistemologically ‘prior’ in the sense that they are not reducible to other (better known) notions—we cannot define (or grasp) them through any other term (or ‘sign’), the latter being (ultimately) known through them. Similarly, the acquisition of every other (less general) concept depends on our prior graspo of these, and thus they play the role of ‘first principles’ in the order of conception (al-taṣawwur) in the same way that first principles of demonstration play a foundational role in the order of assent (al-taṣdīq).

Beginning with the concept “existent”, Avicenna notes that it is synonymous with the expressions “established” and “realized”, saying that they signify a single notion (maʿnā). He then immediately proceeds to discuss the notion of “thing”, saying:

“The thing,” or its equivalent, may be used in all languages to indicate some other meaning. For, to every-thing [li-kull ʿamr] there is a reality [ḥaqīqa] by virtue of which it is what it is [huwa bi-mā-huwa]. Thus, the triangle has a reality in that it is a triangle, and whiteness has a reality in that it is whiteness. It is that which we should perhaps call “proper existence,” [al-wujūd al-ḥāss] not intending by this the meaning given to affirmative existence [al-wujūd al-ithbāt]; for the expression “existence” [wujūd] is also used to denote many meanings, one of which is the reality a thing happens to have. Thus, [the reality] a thing happens to have is, as it were, its proper existence.

We note several important points: first of all, that “thing” is (presumably) equivalent to (and therefore interchangeable with) the notion “reality” (ḥaqīqa), which is defined as that through

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91 Bertolacci (2012) presents the clearest analysis of this passage.
92 On this topic see Aertsen (2008); Bertolacci (2008a); De Haan (2014); Marmura (1984a).
93 On these foundational terms in Arabic epistemology see Avicenna, Shīfāʾ: al-Madkhal 17.7–17; cf. Black (1990).
95 Shīfāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt I.5.8 (p. 24)
96 Shīfāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt I.5.9 (p. 24)
which every-thing (‘amr) is what it is (huwa-bi mā huwa). Secondly, though the distinction between the notions of “thing” and “existent” stands in the background, the fundamental distinction that Avicenna does draw here is that between two meanings or notions of “existence” (wujūd): namely, proper existence and affirmative existence. The first (proper existence) is given as a further explication of the notion “reality”. Avicenna does not explicitly link the notion of affirmative existence (al-wujūd al-ithbāti) to “existent” (mawjūd), but the reference is there indirectly given Avicenna’s earlier equation of mawjūd and “what is established” (muthbat).

One further equivalence that Avicenna draws and which we will need here is found in the passage that immediately follows. Resuming the discussion, Avicenna says:

It is evident that each thing has a reality proper to it—namely, its quiddity [māhiyya]. It is known that the reality proper to each thing is something other than the existence [bi-ghayr al-wujūd] that corresponds to what is affirmed.97

So alongside “thing” and “reality”, or the “reality proper to each thing”, we find another notion, “quiddity” (māhiyya), which is also distinguished from affirmative existence (and so once again, should be presumed to correspond to proper existence). Note that the reality proper to each thing (=māhiyya) is simply described as “other [than]” (bi-ghayr “existence” (or affirmative existence: al-wujūd al-ithbāti). Avicenna does not say whether or not this is (merely) an intensional difference or anything about their logical or metaphysical relationship.

Now, taking these statements together, we encounter several subtle difficulties. Firstly, the suggestion that the expression “wujūd” may be used to denote both “proper” and “affirmative” existence, taken alongside the claim that proper existence is equivalent to “thing”, suggests that the notion of wujūd, prior to its divisions, is prior to both “thing” and (presumably) “existent”. If this is so, then it would seem that the latter notions should be explicable in terms of a still more general prior notion, existence, which divides into two: namely, proper and affirmative existence.

But this is not what Avicenna says. Instead, he clarifies the relationship between the two notions in this way:

This, then, is the meaning intended by “the thing.” The necessary concomitance of the meaning [ma ‘nā] of existence never separates [lā yufāriq] from it at all; rather, the meaning of existence is permanently concomitant [yulzim dā ‘im] with it because the thing exists either in the concrete or in the estimative [faculty] and the intellect. If [this] were not the case, it would not be a thing.98

This is fundamental. Recalling the account of quiddity in itself from Madkhal 1.2 and 1.3, Avicenna says—explicitly here—that “thing” (=quiddity) must exist either in concrete or in the intellect; thus,

97 Shifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt 1.5.10 (p. 24)
98 Shifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt 1.5.11 (p. 25)
the relationship between the two notions is that of necessary concomitance.\textsuperscript{99} The notion of existence, that is, always accompanies the notion of thing; the two are never found “apart” or separately. To be sure, we can conceive a thing apart from its existence in things, for not everything that can be thought is, or exists, in concrete. But just in that case, it will still exist in the intellect. Indeed, if it did not, Avicenna says, it would not be a thing.

It is worth recalling once more what was said above about the kalām background of this whole discussion. Evidently, some of the mutakallimūn held that there are non-existent things (maḍāmat) that can nevertheless be spoken about, and thus were committed to the (prima facie) contradiction that which does not exist can still have predicates. Indeed, this is precisely what Avicenna says a bit further on:

Concerning what is said—[namely,] “The thing is that about which information is given”—[this] is true. But when, in addition to this, it is said, “The thing may be absolutely nonexistent,” this is a matter that must be looked into. If by the nonexistent is meant the nonexistent in external reality, this would be possible; for it is possible for a thing that does not exist in external things to exist in the mind. But if [something] other than this is meant, this would be false and there would be no information about it at all. It would not be known except only as [something] conceived in the soul. [To the notion] that [the nonexistent] would be conceived in the soul as a concept that refers to some external thing, [we say] “Certainly not!”\textsuperscript{100}

Rather, Avicenna says, the notion “thing” still refers to something having being. In the first place, its being will be its proper existence, which refers just to what something is in itself—our “neutral quiddity”—which can be considered apart from its existence (either in thing or in the intellect); and in this respect, we are just considering what something is—what is contained in its definition. However, even so conceived, a thing, or quiddity, will still “have” existence in that it is being considered in the intellect. And it is there that their “separation” and their accidental occurring to one another—that of a quiddity conceived in itself and and as existent in one of the two modes—takes place.

2.6 Varieties of separation and their logical foundation in Avicenna

In this final section we will return to examine once more the problem that we began discussing in this chapter: the problem of (real) separation or immateriality versus separation as abstraction in Avicenna. Here we will focus on one last section in the Metaphysics of \textit{al-Shifā‘} in which the issue arises: VII.2, where Avicenna launches a critique against the separation of platonic forms and

\textsuperscript{99} Avicenna also notes this further on, at \textit{Shifā‘}: \textit{Ilāhiyyāt} I.5.19 (p. 27), “Hence, you have now understood the way in which “the thing” differs from what is understood by “the existent” and “the realized” and that, despite this difference, the two [that is, between “the thing” and “the existent”] are necessary concomitants [mutalāzimān].” The technical term for these necessary concomitants (or ‘implicates’) is “lawāzim”.

\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Shifā‘}: \textit{Ilāhiyyāt} I.5.12 (p. 25)
mathematicals.\textsuperscript{101} The argument that Avicenna presents here offers perhaps the clearest insight into the difference between these two modes of separation (which, following Pasquale Porro, we shall here refer to as “eidetic” versus “real” separation). One reason for its importance is that Avicenna gives a precise logical basis for the distinction and argument supporting the (merely) “eidetic” separation of forms versus their real separation (which Avicenna describes as the error of the platonists). Moreover, this same logical formula and argument turns out to be the same one that supports the distinction between the abstract separation “existent”, and the real separation, or immateriality, of God.

In \textit{Shifāʿ: Ilāhiyyāt} VII.2, then, Avicenna announces that he will present an argument against those earlier philosophers who treated forms and mathematicals as “separated principles” (\textit{al-mabādiʾ al-mufāriqāt}). Recalling Aristotle’s ‘doxography’ in \textit{Metaphysics} A, he describes how, during its earliest phase, philosophy became mixed with error and dialectical arguments. This led to the confusions which Avicenna will correct in the following sections.\textsuperscript{102} One group in particular—the Platonists—fell into error based on a confusion regarding what is apprehended by the senses and what is apprehended by the intellect they thought that this division “necessitated the existence of two things in each thing”, like two “humans” in the idea of humanity—a corruptible, sensible human, and a separate, eternal, changeless human.\textsuperscript{103} They assigned an existence for each of these two—precisely, a separable existence (\textit{al-mawjūd al-mufāriq}) which is termed “exemplary existence” (\textit{wujūda mithāliyya}). In this way, they held that there belongs to humanity one existing idea in which individuals participate (\textit{yashtarik fihi al-ashkhās}) and which continues to exist after them. Avicenna refers to this as the “separable intelligible meaning” (\textit{al-maʿnā al-maʿqūl al-mufāriq}). He goes on to develop the same criticism against those who made mathematicals separate, namely, the Pythagoreans.

Avicenna then introduces that the “bases of the causes of error” of the preceding views are five in number.\textsuperscript{104} We only need to mention the first error, for it is here that the distinction between abstraction and real separation is explicitly presented in detail. Avicenna writes:

\begin{quote}
…if a thing is abstracted such that the consideration [\textit{iʿtibār}] of another thing is not connected with it, then it is separate from it in existence [\textit{mujarrada fi-l-wujūd}...]. It is as though, if attention is paid to the thing alone—[a thing] that has an associate—in a manner that gives no attention to its associate, [this] would render it not adjoining its associate. In short, if it is considered without the condition of [its] conjunction with another [\textit{lā bi-shart al-muqāran-hu}], then it is believed that it is considered with the condition that there is no conjunction [with another] [\textit{bi-shart ghayr al-muqārana}], so that [according to this view] it was only suitable to be examined because it was not conjoined, but separate. For this reason
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{101} This chapter and its argument is examined by Porro (2011).

\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Shifāʿ: Ilāhiyyāt} VII.2.1–2 (p. 243)

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Shifāʿ: Ilāhiyyāt} VII.2.3–6 (pp. 243–244)

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Shifāʿ: Ilāhiyyāt} VII.2.15 (p. 247)
it was believed that, since the mind attains the intelligibles existing in the world without attending to what is conjoined to them, the mind attains nothing but [what is] separate among them. This, however, is not the case. Rather, each thing has one consideration with respect to itself and another consideration with respect to its relatedness to something conjoining it.105

Here all the preceding lines of analysis come together. On the one hand, the *eidetic* separation of a “thing” results from a manner of consideration (*iʿtibār*) whereby it alone is given “attention”, apart from what associates or joins with it. This, then, is selective attention; and this precise formulation that Avicenna gives is to say that the thing is considered without the condition (*lā bi-shart...*) of its conjunction with another. The error, then, is to suppose that this consideration is possible, not because the thing is simply considered without its association with another, but rather, because the thing itself is not conjoined, but rather separate (*mufāriq*). This is a mistake. Rather, Avicenna reminds us—recalling the same formula that we examined earlier—“each thing has one consideration with respect to itself and another consideration with respect to its relatedness to something conjoining it”. The link is made explicit in the following lines. Thus, Avicenna explains:

If we apprehend the form of the human intellectually—for example, inasmuch as it is the form of the human alone—we would have apprehended intellectually an existent alone with respect to its essence. But, inasmuch as we have [so] apprehended it, it does not follow that it alone is separate [in existence]. For that which is mixed with another, inasmuch as it is itself, is inseparable from [the other] by way of negation, not by way of equipollence [or metathesis], *in terms of which separation in subsistence is understood*. It is not difficult for us to direct attention through perception or some other state to one of the two things whose role is not to separate from its companion in subsistence—even though it separates from it in definition, meaning, and reality, since its reality is not entered in the reality of the other. For conjunction necessitates connectedness, not permeation in meanings [*al-maʿāni*].106

This is, once again, precisely the same formula that we encountered above, both in *Madkhal* I.12 and *Ilāhiyyāt* V.1, and in Aristotle too, in connection with the theory of reduplication. To consider the form of human alone, what we apprehend, intellectually, is “an existent alone with respect to its essence”. But this ‘eidetic’ separation (or separation in *definition*, as Avicenna says, recalling Aristotle’s own notion of formula describing one of the kinds of separation) need not entail real separation, or *separation in subsistence* (again recalling Aristotle’s formula describing so-called *ontological separation*).

But there is a crucial detail here that needs to be explained: namely, Avicenna’s suggestion that this latter kind of separation is said by way of “equipollence” (or “metathesis”: *maʾdūl*), in contrast with that which is “mixed with another”, which is inseparable by *way of negation*. As Porro has shown, this “logical tool”, described as the distinction between “plain negation” and “metathic affirmation”, provides the key to understanding the connected issues that we have been examining in this chapter. That is, it provides the logical basis for the distinction, not only between *eidetic* and

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105 Shifāʾ: *Ilāhiyyāt* VII.2.16 (p. 247)
106 Shifāʾ: *Ilāhiyyāt* VII.2.17 (p. 247)
real separation, as we have just explained, but also the distinction between the abstract “existent” and immaterial being, as well the distinction between quiddity in itself and the quiddity that exists ‘as’ a universal or a particular (that is, in one of its two modes of existence).

To explain: as we saw earlier and in the previous chapter, Avicenna, in Metaphysics I.2, presents the distinction between the two ‘moments’ of first philosophy—namely, the study of the existent qua existent, and of God—in terms of a distinction between two kinds of immateriality. As Porro shows, Avicenna is here relying on the same logical formula that was mentioned above and which is most clearly discussed in Metaphysics V.1. In the latter passage Avicenna writes that a quiddity in itself, such animal qua animal, is said to be considered “not on condition of anything else” (lā bi-sharṭī ākhara), as opposed to “bi-sharṭī lā ākhara”). In the first case, then, the quiddity in itself is said to be “unconditioned” by way of plain negation, such that the particle “not” (lā) negates the entire phrase. In the second case, something is said to be “unconditioned” by way of metathesis, such that the particle “not” negates the predicate. Applying this to the case of immateriality, what results is that the abstract existent is “immaterial” in the sense that it is considered “not on the condition being material”—that is, “apart” from its association with matter, or through eidetic separation—whilst the existent which is really separate from matter is considered “on the condition of not being material”, since it is really immaterial (not-material), not immaterial by way of abstract consideration.

Stephen Menn, too, has observed that this is remarkable since the same formula is also used to distinguish the “neutral” existence in which beings participate by way of predication, and the existence that belongs to God alone, since He is being itself, without anything else being added to it. It is this notion that we shall turn to examine in the following chapter. But to get to it, we will approach the problem from the side of Aristotle, and pursue a slightly different and more ‘perplexing’ path than Avicenna does: the path of aporia.

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Chapter 3: Separation problems

In Chapter 1, we argued that the fundamental conception of that inquiry announced in *Metaphysics* Γ.1, and recalled E.1, namely, of a science of being *qua* being, has to be interpreted in light of the conception of first philosophy that was introduced in *Met*. A.1–2, and there designated as an enquiry into the first causes and principles—indeed a *search* for them. Furthermore, we saw that in connection with *Met*. E.1, the first causes and principles, should they be discovered, will be eternal and immovable substances, existing separate from matter, and ‘universal’ in this sense, that they will be responsible for producing the widest ‘effects’, such as being and unity. Thus, the enquiry of *Met*. Γ.1 is described as a search for the causes of being *qua* being. But as we noted earlier, in arguing the case for this, Aristotle is providing an answer to a question about whether such a science was possible—one that he had earlier raised in book B.

In this chapter, then, I will examine in closer detail this book, which is dedicated to setting out a series of *aporiai* (problems, puzzles, or antinomies: the precise meaning and function of ‘*aporia*’, for Aristotle will be discussed below) that the aspiring philosopher or seeker of wisdom must ‘confront’ at the outset of his search: a necessary, but perplexing entry point on the path to wisdom. More prosaically, *Met*. B is important in determining the subject-matter of first philosophy, flagged in A.1–2 as a search for these principles and causes, and therefore it is crucial too in setting out the programme that Aristotle is pursuing in the *Metaphysics*—or so I argue.¹

¹ There is much debate about whether or how the *aporiai* of B are preliminary and relevant in setting out the programme of the *Metaphysics*. Jaeger (1948), pp. 195–202, agrees that B is programmatic, but argues that it belongs to an earlier (platonic) phase of Aristotle’s thinking, when he was still concerned with studying supersensible being. Γ and E stem from this earlier interest, and the programme carried out in MN in particular clearly relate to the ‘substantive’ *aporiai* of B (5–15, to be discussed below); but Jaeger thinks (as we have earlier pointed out) that the treatises ZΗΘ belong to a later phase and are no longer concerned with supersensible being. They make no reference to B (except that Jaeger thinks Aristotle edited B to remove anything that did not fit with the new view of metaphysics, pp. 213–214). Ross (1923), pp xx-xxiv, does not agree with Jaeger that we find such a strong distinction between two conceptions of the object of metaphysical investigation reflected in AΒΓΕ(MNL) and ZΗΘ respectively (though like Jaeger, he still considers the latter books to be somewhat independent of these), and thinks that the programme of B is roughly carried out in them, though he argues that these books make no explicit reference to its *aporiai*, and that Aristotle had already dealt with many of them by the time he came to write ZΗΘ (p. xx). Owens (1978) thinks that B is preliminary only in the sense that its aim or intention is to remove those initial obstacles of the
So like A, B is preliminary, in a sense—it sets the scene. But it is more argumentative than A, and raises real problems (many of which will be developed further, and responded to in later books) in connection with the search for principles and causes: questions about what the principles and causes are, or what many of Aristotle’s predecessors—above all the ‘Platonists’ and the presocratic natural philosophers—thought about them, and about how we should seek them; and these last two points are significant because at this initial (but important) stage of the enquiry, the search, Aristotle tells us explicitly, should involve first of all sorting through the conflicting ‘opinions’ (ἐνδοξα) of the learned (but not the ‘wise’...) about the principles and causes, because it is their disagreement that is one of the main reasons for ‘our’ being in a state of aporia, or confusion; and the reason they do disagree, or one reason, is that each of them (each ‘school’) tried to seek them in different ways, employing different ‘methods’ as it were. And it is this that led them astray.

In addition to discussing these preliminary issues, the main aim of this chapter will be to examine one specific problem raised in book B: the eleventh aporia, which asks about being and unity. Specifically, it poses the problem of whether being and unity are substances, or the substances of beings (as certain philosophers asserted), or whether instead they have to be understood in terms of some other underlying nature (a view which certain other philosophers held). After discussing the problem at some length and in close detail, we shall present Aristotle’s response to it, before turning to examine how Avicenna dealt with the same problem (though more indirectly), presenting a slightly different answer to it than Aristotle had. In doing so, our aim is not only to demonstrate the different attitudes that Aristotle and Avicenna display towards aporetic in general, or the different roles that such aporiai play in the larger argument–structures of their respective Metaphysics, but also to approach the the eleventh aporia as offering a window into, and a point of comparision regarding, the substantive doctrines of the two philosophers.

3.1 Metaphysics B

3.1.1 Overview of the contents of Metaphysics B

In Metaphysics B, then, Aristotle sets forth a number of aporiai—fifteen according to most interpreters, and I shall follow the standard numbering 1–15. The book can be divided into three understanding that the seeker-of-wisdom would already be familiar with from the platonic dialogues. It does not, as such, set the programme for the Metaphysics (pp. 232–234, 256–258). Irwin (1988), pp. 10f, thinks that B (which he argues is dialectical) is important from a methodological perspective: it signals Aristotle’s intention to employ a ‘strong dialectic’ (against the ‘pure dialectic’ of Plato) in his treatment of those substantive metaphysical problems that must be examined in the universal science of first philosophy. So B is preliminary and programmatic in this sense. However, recent interpreters such as Reale (1980); Madigan (1999); Menn (2009), and the contributors in Crubellier & Laks (2009), argue that B is indeed important in setting out the actual programme of the Metaphysics, and that in Z, Aristotle both refers back to, and is explicitly responding to, the aporiai of B.

unequal parts. B.1 (995a24-b4) is introductory. It discusses the advantage of examining *aporiai*—their necessity—as we have seen. B.1 (995b5–996a.17) then lists the problems that will be addressed in the remainder of the book. B.2–6 then discuss each of these problems (1–15) in detail. (As noted: the numbering 1–15 is not followed by Aristotle. It is used by modern interpreters for convenience of reference.) The treatment of the *aporiai* in B.2–6 follows a slightly different order to the outline in B.1; two *aporiai* are omitted altogether, and one *aporia* not mentioned in the outline is discussed. Furthermore, most of the *aporiai* in fact develop several problems, and could be further sub-divided; and there is also varying degrees of overlap. *Aporiai* 6–8, for instance, are closely connected.

More broadly, the fifteen *aporiai* are usually divided into two groups. (1) Problems 1–4—the question uniting this group is roughly the problem of reconciling the supposed universal scope of wisdom with the unity of its subject-matter required for a genuine science. So these concern the subject-matter of wisdom: its scope and its possibility. As such, 1–4 are sometimes referred to as the ‘methodological’ *aporiai*. (2) Problems 5–15—and it is these that we are most directly concerned with—mostly address substantive questions about the ἀρχαὶ and στοιχεῖα (principles and elements) of things. (The two groups of problems, however, are related, since the first also raises ‘substantive’ questions, and the second, ‘methodological’ questions, as we shall see, even though they do appear relatively independent.)

Finally, but importantly: several of the problems discussed in B are raised again in K.1–2. K is a sort of recapitulation of B and other books: a summary (though it comes two books before the end!) but it includes important differences (and omissions) that we will have to examine. The K versions of the *aporiai* are generally shorter than the B versions, and notably, the terminology used when discussing certain problems often differs. For example: the important term χωριστὸν (‘separate’) and its cognates appear more often in K.1–2 than in B.

I shall present a brief review of several of the ‘substantive’ *aporiai* of B (##5–15) that are relevant to the following discussion, even though I will focus on the eleventh below.

*Aporia* 5 asks whether or not there are non-perceptible substances, and consists mainly in attacks on them. *Aporia* 6 asks whether the principles and elements of things are (a) the kinds or genera predicated of them or (b) the primary elements of which things are composed. *Aporia* 7 assumes dialectically that *Aporia* 6 is solved in favour of kinds as principles. It then asks whether (a) the highest (or more universal) kind—the genus—or rather (b) the lowest kinds—species—are the principles. This aporia argues for and against both. But the arguments (despite *Aporia* 6) seem to discount the existence of kinds at all. *Aporia* 8 as such proceeds as if kinds have been ruled out. It asks whether anything exists besides particulars. The importance of this aporia is underscored by

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3 It is widely held that Aristotle either did not write this treatise (in its entirety), or that it was added by a later editor. Probably it consists of a students’ notes or something similar. There is, anyway, little philosophical disagreement between B and K1–2; they rather complement one another and we shall draw on both. See Madigan (1999), pp. xxxviii-xxxix.
Aristotle. (Note too that Aporias 6–8 are connected—they could in fact be seen as one long aporia. Their dialectical structure is interesting: in addition to the individual arguments or aporiai there is also a meta-dialectical argument going on.) Aporia 9 concerns whether principles are one in form or one in number as well. It asks: do particulars sharing the same kind have their own principles (which is not the principle of another particular) or is there one principle for all particulars of the same kind? This problem overlaps with Aporiai ##6–8, but it is developed in a slightly different direction. Aporia 11 is also said by Aristotle to be very difficult and important. It asks whether One and Being are (as Plato and the academics think) the substance (or substances) of all things. It argues for and against this claim. In favour of the claim is the argument that in order to account for the reality of universals, it seems necessary to hold that One and Being are indeed the substance (or substances) of all things. But against it: it seems to entail monism. Aporia 15 overlaps with Aporias 6–8 and 9. It asks whether the principles are universal or particular. If (a) the principles are universal then it appears that they are not substances, for substance is a ‘this’ (τὸ ἄτομο) and ‘separable’ (χωριστόν) (suggesting numerical unity and being ontologically independent—we shall discuss these terms below); but no universal is ‘separate’ and a ‘this’. But (b) if particulars are the principles of things then they are unknowable; for knowledge is always ‘of the universal’. (This is connected to ‘the greatest aporia’ mentioned in M.10, 1087a12–14, to be discussed below.)

The substantive aporiai, then, all talk about ‘principles’ and ‘elements’ (discussing kinds—genera and species—and whether they are particular and universal), and this reflects the conception of first philosophy announced at A.1 (981b27–29), where it was said that it is generally assumed that wisdom is περὶ τὰ πρῶτα αἰτία καὶ τὰς ἀρχὰς—that it is concerned with the primary causes and principles. But in B Aristotle is specifically thinking about the ‘candidates’ that earlier thinkers had put forward as ostensible first causes, and raising problems about them. In this way he intends to continue their project whilst working out the errors in their different approaches—above all those of the presocratic natural philosophers and platonic dialecticians, respectively.

3.1.2 The path to the principles: a dialectic search

So in B, Aristotle begins, as we have said, by surveying the endoxa of previous seekers-of-wisdom in his own search for the first causes and principles; and it is notable that his approach here—his endoxic method—does involve a kind of dialectical reasoning, since it indicates both its critical function for Aristotle, and therefore its limits, but also its necessity (in Aristotle’s own approach) in contributing to the resolution of substantive philosophical problems. Moreover, applied to this search, it raises important questions about the foundations of this sort of enquiry, for dialectic, like dialogue, must presuppose a set of common assumptions, which is to say that even to disagree, we must be disagreeing about the same thing. Now, as we have pointed out: the aporiai of B are, for the most part, about principles. That is, Aristotle is seeking to know what these principles are, and he thinks the proponents of the different views put forward in B sought the same thing. But this
supposes that Aristotle and his predecessors held certain shared assumptions about what a principle is; that is: what ‘criteria’, so to speak, something must satisfy in order to count as a principle at all. Were there no such basic agreement, then the disagreements about principles would amount to idle-talk and chatter.

Put differently, there must be some common ground between the disputants in the debate about principles, and this common ground cannot simply be the general claim that all parties are somehow interested in principles; for a principle—or a first principle—must be agreed to meet certain criteria so that we can tell whether or not a proposed candidate is even an adequate candidate. Again, suppose there were no such agreement, or very little agreement anyway, about these criteria; it would not be possible, in that case, to say which disputant is correct about their proposed principle, for the disputants might well imagine very different things about principles in general.

One way we could settle this would be to arrive at some agreed definition first—a principle must meet such-and-such criteria in order to be a principle. But this is not quite what Aristotle does in B (or in those parts of the Metaphysics where he is responding to its aporiai). Rather, his procedure more or less involves asking whether a proposed candidate meets the criteria for being a principle. That is, he assumes that we, and the proponents of the views he discusses, already agree about these criteria. Aristotle mentions some of them often; others are operating in the background. For example, he thinks (and thinks we will agree) that a principle must be separate, or χωριστόν, and numerically one or τὸ δε τι, and ‘exist’ καθ ἀὑτό.

This is very important, and it is crucial for understanding the dialectical discussion that unfolds in B. The endoxa about principles are, in a way, made to fit an already-existing argumentative scheme. Aristotle holds (but does not argue) that we will agree with this scheme—just as he assumes that it is a scheme his predecessors already held. He does so for the reason just outlined: dialogue or debate requires that the participants hold certain shared assumptions. But the question is: is it a genuine dialogue, or is Aristotle rather assuming that we—or rather his predecessors—agree about what should count as a principle? This is very hard to say, but I rather think the latter. In other words: Aristotle does not simply report the views of his predecessors on the subject of principles; he rather takes them over and asks whether they meet his criteria.

Now it is important to note that Aristotle does not exactly specify the meaning of several of those terms that I mentioned a moment ago as indicating the ‘criteria’ that a first cause or principle must meet—their being χωριστόν, numerically one, existing καθ’ ἀὑτό and so on. But he is clear that these features are all exhibited by primary substance, or οὐσία; and what they share in common is the idea of ‘priority’ (each of them describing, with slightly different focus, the different ways that something might be said to be prior); and this should not surprise us, since as we noted earlier, an ἀρχή or principle just is something that is prior. But things can be prior, too, in different ways; and a useful way of understanding what Aristotle is doing throughout those parts of the Metaphysics in which he is responding to the aporiai of B is to see him as examining the possible candidates that he (and previous thinkers) have advanced as principles in order to ask in what sense they are prior.
As a result of their dialectical method, for example, academic philosophers (arguably) put forward first principles that are logically prior, in the way that a genus or kind is prior to its species.

Correcting this method, Aristotle will argue that, since no genus can exist ‘apart’ from the individual species of which it is predicated—is not separable—it cannot be a true first principle. Similarly for any item that is predicated of a subject.

This, then, is how Aristotle will proceed in examining the eleventh aporia, which in effect asks whether being and unity are substances (specifically: the substances of anything that has being and unity of predicated of it); or in slightly different terms, whether there exists a being-itself and a unity-itself understood as separately-existing principles and causes in terms of which anything that is (a) being or is (a) unity exists and is one.⁴

I focus on this aporia not only because it is the one most directly relevant to the larger questions that I examine in this thesis but also because of its usefulness for understanding how the aporiai of B in general structure the whole enquiry that Aristotle is pursuing in the Metaphysics—a fact that is reflected in its superlative importance for Aristotle. As we shall see, Aristotle refers to the eleventh aporia as “the most difficult”, and one whose solution is “the most necessary for knowledge of the truth”; and indeed, his response to it does shed additional light not only on many of the other aporiai that he presents and solves in the Metaphysics, but also the positive doctrine of being that both underlies and emerges out of Aristotle’s response to the problems of B more generally.

In the following, then, I shall begin by examining Aristotle’s framing and discussion of the eleventh aporia in B, and his negative response to it at several crucial points in the Metaphysics. That is, in responding to the aporia, Aristotle will argue that there is no-thing whose nature it is just to-be being or to-be-unity, but that each of these—being and unity—have to be finally understood in terms of some other underlying nature (using terminology familiar from Posterior Analytics I.4 and I.22), which amounts to saying precisely that being and unity are not themselves substances (or the substances of things). Again, this is roughly because no universal is a substance—a position that Aristotle consistently holds, and which becomes especially important in Metaphysics Z. So Aristotle will say: it is not in virtue of ‘having’ being and unity as their οὐσίαι or principles that things are being and one; rather, being and unity are, as it were, per se (concomitant) attributes that belong to all beings in virtue of their being or having an essential nature.

⁴ Despite Aristotle’s own remarks about the importance of this problem, the only dedicated studies of the eleventh aporia that have been produced to date are Bell (2000) and Berti (1979), Cavini’s contribution in Crubellier & Laks (2009), and Madigan (1999). Shorter discussions appear in Ross (1924), Mansion (1958), Owens (1978) and Reale (1980). Despite not focusing on this particular aporia, Menn’s own contribution to Crubellier & Laks (2009) contains an extremely helpful discussion of important details related to it—especially his analysis of the technical phrase οὐχ ἐξερήσαν τι ὅλων in this aporia (to be discussed below) and its connection to the senses of per se being/predication from APo I.4. Cf. Menn (2008).
3.2 The eleventh aporia about being and one

As we have just described, aporia 11 raises a problem about being and (the) one—τὸ ὕν καὶ τὸ ἐν—which Aristotle considers “the most difficult” to solve but “the most necessary for knowledge of the truth” (χαλεπότατον… πρὸς τὸ γνῶναι τάλθῆς ἀναγκαῖότατον). Summarizing the aporia at B.1, Aristotle raises the question:

whether one and being are, as the Pythagoreans and Plato used to say, not something different […] ἀλλ’ ὑσία τῶν ὑντων], or not, but the subject is something else ἀλλ’ ἐπιρόν τὶ τά ὑποκείμενον], as Empedocles asserts it is friendship, someone else fire, someone else water or air.

In the longer version set out at B.4, Aristotle asks:

Most difficult of all even to study, and most necessary for knowledge of the truth, is whether being and one [πότερον ποτὲ τὸ ὕν καὶ τὸ ἐν] are <really> the substances of beings [ὑσία τῶν ὑντων] (and it is not by being something different [ὑσία ἐπιρόν τὶ τά ὑν] that they are, the one of them one and the other being), or whether it is necessary to inquire what being and one <really> are [τὶ ποτ’ ἐστὶ τὸ ὕν καὶ τὸ ἐν], supposing that another nature underlies them as subject [ὑς ὑποκείμενς ἄλλης φύσεως].

Coordinating these passages, one immediate difficulty arises in connection with Aristotle’s remark in B.4 about whether being and one are the “substances of beings” (ὑσία τῶν ὑντων), since at B.1 (996a5), Aristotle uses the singular ὑσία, and not the plural ὑσίαι. Furthermore, in A.6 (987b22–4), to be discussed below, τὸ ἐν, like τὸ ὕν, is simply described as (an) ὑσία or substance (not the ὑσία τῶν ὑντων), and similarly, in continuing the discussion of the aporia in B.4, and in the coordinate K.2 passage as well, Aristotle’s question is simply put in terms of whether or not being and one are themselves substances (and not, once more, the substance(s) of beings). But sometimes too (as at B.4, 1001a12–13), Aristotle asks whether the substance of (a) being and of (a) one (τὸ ὕν… τὸ ἐν) respectively is to-be-being and to-be-one (…τὸ ἐν ἐἶναι καὶ ὕντι).

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5 We should observe the following problems translating τὸ ἐν: ‘the’ one’, ‘one’, or ‘unity’? Sometimes Aristotle uses the definite article; sometimes not. ‘Unity’ already suggests an attribute, and so seems to prejudge the issue. The key issue though (as discussed below) is that the definite article + adjective (or participle) construction denotes both the property or attribute φ and/or a substantive: “that-which-is-φ”.

6 Cf. B.1 (996a4), where this problem is described as “the most difficult of all and containing the most aporia […] τῶν χαλεπότατον καὶ πλείστην ἀπορίαν ἔχον.” We shall discuss below why Aristotle considers the eleventh aporia to be of superlative importance.

7 Bell (2000), p. 14, n. 4 states that there is no strictly parallel discussion of the eleventh aporia in the recapitulation of K.1–2, but rightly points to K.2 (1060a36–b11) as highly relevant to its contents. Indeed this passage sheds much clarifying light on Aristotle’s treatment of the aporia in B, as we shall see below.

8 Met. B.1, 996a4–9. In this chapter I refer to the translation of Metaphysics B and K in Madigan (1999).

9 Met. B.4, 1001a4–8.

10 B.1, 996a5, Aristotle refers to one and being as the οὐσία (singular) of beings, not οὐσίαι (plural) as at B.4. At A.6, 987b22–4, the one is described simply as οὐσία (not οὐσία τῶν ὑντων).
So in light of all this, we shall have to address two questions: (1) about the connection between the 1-place and 2-place descriptions that Aristotle is employing here (i.e. whether X is a substance; ii. whether X the substance of Y); and (2), about the significance of Aristotle’s use of the singular and plural forms in describing being and one as the substance(s) of all beings—i.e. whether he is asking if there is a (or two) numerically single substance(s) (τὸ ὄν καὶ τὸ ἕν) that everything shares, or rather whether there are a plurality of beings and ones that are the substances of beings.

About the first question, we have already received a partial answer in Chapter 1 when we discussed the crucial programmatic statement found in Z.3, where Aristotle shifts from speaking (in 1-place terms) about what things are “substances” to using the 2-place formula, what is “the substance of each thing”. Again, we saw that Aristotle is here operating with two broad senses of the term “substance”, where the second question (“what is the substance of each thing”) refers to the cause of being or of substantiality to familiar substances—living organisms, natural bodies, artefacts and so on—noting that the substance of each thing (which is given in reply to the question: What is it?) is said to include the material-substratum, genus, universal, and essence. So once more, it is important to recall that the shift to speaking about the substance of each thing was there motivated by the causal or explanatory considerations that permeate Z-H, and indeed the whole enquiry that Aristotle is pursuing in the Metaphysics.

But this should help us to understand the second question that we have just raised as well; for the immediate problem is not in fact whether “being” and “one” name just one or two substances (τὸ ὄν καὶ τὸ ἕν) or many, but rather whether “being” and “one” are even true substances at all; and indeed this is how Aristotle seems to approach the question in B.4 (and in the K.2 parallel) and in his reply to it; for if it turns out that that there is nothing whose substance or essence just is to-be-being and to-be-one being, because being and one do not meet the criteria for being substances (as discussed earlier), then of course, neither being nor one will be the substances of anything, let alone the (numerically single) substances of all beings. So even though standing in the background here, as we shall see, is the Platonic-Pythagorean claim that there is a single Form of Being and a single Form of Unity in which everything that-is and everything that-is-one participates, Aristotle’s main approach in responding to this aporia, once again, will not involve attacking the supposed unicity of these principles, but rather their claim to being the kind of things that qualify as substances and principles at all.

We shall have occasion to return to some of these issues below. So leaving them aside for the minute, we should note that a further, and in a way more important, question concerns what might be the possible alternative replies to the dilemma that Aristotle is presenting us with here.

As noted in the preceding section, the aporiai of B are, for the most part, ‘dialectical’ problems in the sense that each of them presents two opposed or conflicting theses that we must choose between; and here, in the eleventh aporia, the two horns of the dilemma clearly are as follows (paraphrasing B.4, 1001a4–8):
(thesis) being and one are substances (or: the substances of beings); it is not by being something different that they are (respectively) one and being

(antithesis) being and one are not substances (or: the substances of beings); rather another nature underlies them as subject; so it is necessary to inquire what being and one really are

Using terminology that will be further explained below, we can also understand the eleventh aporia as asking: [thesis] whether there exists anything whose nature just is to-be-being or to-be-one (a being-itself or one-itself) or [antithesis] whether being and one are attributes that are predicated of an underlying subject (so that the nature or substance of any-thing that has ‘being’ or ‘one’ predicated of it will not be being-itself or one-itself).\(^\text{11}\) To put it even more simply: the underlying question here is whether being and one are themselves true substances.

To see this more clearly we should turn to examine the positions that Aristotle believes other (earlier) thinkers have held with regard to the aporia. For example, in the immediately following lines, Aristotle goes on to say that the Platonists and Pythagoreans hold the thesis, while the pre-Socratic natural philosophers, such as Empedocles, deny it. Thus the aporia continues:

Some think that nature is the former way, others the latter way. Plato and the Pythagoreans think that neither being nor one is something different, but that this is what their nature is \([οὐχ ἑτερὸν τι τὸ ὄν οὐδὲ τὸ ἐν ἄλλα τοῦτο αὐτῶν τὴν φύσιν ἔχει\), supposing that its substance is to be one and being \([ὡς οὖσης τῆς οὐσίας αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἕνι ἔλθει καὶ ὅντι]\).\(^\text{12}\)

It is notable that Aristotle here uses the same formula that he used in summarizing the aporia in B.1 and in the longer version in B.4 to set out the problem of whether being and one are substances (the thesis), or whether some other nature underlies them as subject (the antithesis). In each case,

\(^{11}\) Bell (2000), p. 1, argues that it is misleading to interpret the passage as asking whether being and unity are either substances or attributes. He says: “Usually, the aporia is taken as asking whether being and unity are substances or ‘attributes’ of some sort. Careful examination of the text of the aporia and various related texts reveals that this way of putting the question is, at the very least, misleading. What Aristotle rather means to ask is whether being and unity are principles of a certain kind or instead the sorts of thing that have principles in terms of which they are to be understood and defined. Once we understand the aporia in this way, we can appreciate its importance for Aristotle’s project.” In fact there is no such tension here. Aristotle is indeed asking whether being and unity are principles of a certain kind as Bell observes; but if it turns out that being and unity are not substances but rather attributes then they cannot be principles; for no attribute (which will necessarily be predicated of or belong to a substance) can be a principle since a principle is a substance. In short: in rejecting that being and unity are substances (or in asserting that being and unity are attributes) Aristotle is also denying that they are principles. Bell argues that the misleading interpretation is followed by Berti (1979), Owens (1978), Mansion (1958).

\(^{12}\) Met. B.4, 1001a4–8
Aristotle asks whether being and one, *not being something else* (οὐχ ἔτερὸν τι ὄν), are being and one.

Aristotle had used the same formula earlier in the doxography of A.6. There, he records that Plato held that “the one is a substance, and, *not being something else* (μὴ ἔτερὸν...τι ὄν), is called one”. Similarly, in A.5, Aristotle records that the Pythagoreans thought that the limited and the unlimited are not some other natures (οὐχ ἕτερας πνεύς...ἐναι φύσες), like fire or earth or some other such thing, but that the unlimited itself and the one itself (αὐτὸ τὸ ἄπειρον καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ἄν) are the substances of the things of which they are predicated (οὐσίαν εἶναι τούτων ὄν κατηγοροῦνται), and hence that number is the substance of all things.

This last passage is especially helpful for understanding the structure of the *aporia*; for, combining this and the previous passages, what we learn is that to say τὸ ἔτερον τι ὄν, [εἶναι] X (as in “the one, *not being something else*, is one”) is the same as saying that X-itself (αὐτὸ τὸ X) is the substance (or nature) of whatever ‘X’ is predicated of. This represents the **thesis**.

By contrast, then, if τὸ X, ἔτερον τι ὄν, [εἶναι] X, what this means is that X is not X-itself, and nor is X the substance (or nature) of τὸ X—namely, that of which ‘X’ is predicated. Rather some other nature will underlie it as subject.

So we are presented with two alteratives. Aristotle tells us:

1. If (the) X, *not* being something else, is X, then (the) X is (the) X itself (X is the substance of (the) X)
2. If (the) X, being something else, is X, then (the) X is *not* (the) X itself (X is *not* the substance of (the) X but is predicated of it)

Roughly, then, if X is not the substance of (the) X, but is rather predicated of it, then (the) X, being something else, is X.

As Menn has shown, this formula clearly recalls, and depends upon, an analysis both of the different senses of the term καθ’ αὐτό in Posterior Analytics I 4 (including the distinction between the things that exist καθ’ αὐτό as opposed to συμβεβηκότα) as well as the distinction between καθ’ αὐτό and κατὰ συμβεβηκός predication. Since this distinction provides the key to understanding the solution that Aristotle gives to the eleventh *aporia*, I shall turn to examine it in the following section.

### 3.2.1 Essential and accidental beings

In Posterior Analytics I.4, Aristotle writes:

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13 Met. A.6 987b22–4: τὸ μέντοι γε ἐν οὐσίαν εἶναι, καὶ μὴ ἔτερον γέ τι ὄν λέγεσθαι ἐν...
Again, certain items are not said of some other underlying subject [μὴ καθ’ ὑποκειμένου λέγεται ἄλλου τινός], e.g. as what is walking is something different walking [τὸ βαδίζον ἔτερόν τι ὐν βαδίζον ἐστὶ] (and similarly for what is white), while a substance, i.e. whatever signifies a ‘this’ [ὅς οὐσία καὶ ὡς τόσο τι σημαίνει], is just what it is not being something different [οὐχ ἔτερόν τι ὀντα ἐστὶν ὤπερ ἐστὶ]. Well, items which are not said of an underlying subject I call things in themselves [καθ’ αὐτά], and those which are said of an underlying subject I call accidentals [συμβεβηκότα].

In this passage, Aristotle presents a distinction between essential and accidental beings (καθ’ αὐτά and συμβεβηκότα) using terminology that is now familiar to us. This includes the formula τὸ Χ (οὐχ) ἔτερόν τι ὐν Χ ἐστίν and (in connection with it) the same distinction between being predicaded of an underlying subject or not: Χ (μὴ) καθ’ ὑποκειμένου λέγεται ἄλλου τινός.

Beginning then with the difference between the things that are said to be καθ’ αὐτά and συμβεβηκότα respectively, first of all, it is usually pointed out that this distinction corresponds to two kinds of predication that we find in Aristotle—what later became known as ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ predication. In cases of unnatural predication, the predicate Y in a statement of logical form ‘Χ is Y’ is said to be predicated of X ‘incidentally’, because X merely happens to be Y, or because it is not an underlying subject for Y since X is said of another underlying subject. In natural predication, then, X is said to be an underlying subject for Y, and so on.

What is important to note first of all then is that the difference between the two types of predication primarily concerns the subject-term, X, in both cases, even though we might have thought the difference here (between καθ’ αὐτό and κατὰ συμβεβηκός predication or the things that exist καθ’ αὐτό and συμβεβηκότα) would concern whether such an item was an X or a Y. But this is not quite what he tells us.

Now, Aristotle gives us more information about these two kinds of predication later, in APo. I.22:

We argue universally as follows. You say truly that the white thing is walking, and that that large thing is a log, and again that the log is large and the man is walking. When you speak in these two ways you make different sorts of statement. When I assert that the white thing is a log, I say that something which is incidentally white is a log, and not that the white thing is the underlying subject for the log. For it is not the case that, being white or just what is some particular white, it came to be a log—hence it is not a log except incidentally. But when I say that the log is white, I do not say that something different is white and that it is incidentally a log, as when I say that the musical thing is white (I am then saying that the man, who is incidentally musical, is white). Rather, the log is the underlying subject which came to be white not in virtue of being something different from just what is a log or a particular log [ἄλλα τὸ ξύλον ἐστὶ τὸ ὑποκειμένον, ὤπερ καὶ ἐγένετο, οὐχ ἔτερόν τι ὐν ἢ ὤπερ ξύλων ἢ ξύλων τί]. If we must legislate, let speaking in the latter way be predicking, and speaking in the former way either not predicating at all or else predicating

15 APo. I.4, 73b6–73b10.
16 Philoponus, In APo, 235.10–236.22; Barnes (1994), pp. 114–117
not simpliciter [ἐπλωξ] but incidentally [κατὰ συμβεβηκός]. (What is predicated is like the white, that of which it is predicated is like the log.)\(^\text{17}\)

This is a highly significant passage, and sheds much clearer light on what Aristotle is getting at in presenting the two types of predication mentioned earlier, as well as the distinction between the things that exist καθ’ αὐτό and συμβεβηκότα. As Aristotle explains here, to say that “the white thing is a man” or “the white thing is a log” represents an example of accidental predication because the subject (the white thing) of which ‘man’ or ‘log’ is predicated is itself only accidentally white. That is: it is not the white thing, as such, that is the underlying subject for both, but rather the thing that is white. Similarly when we say that “the musical thing is white”; for again, it is rather the man, who is accidentally musical, that is (also) accidentally white. So once more, while Aristotle thinks it may be true to say that (for example) “the white thing is a log”, it is at least misleading, since it follows an improper pattern of predication—one that fails to mirror accurately the structure of reality. It is more proper to say, then, that it is the log that is white.

But we should note too Aristotle’s way of explaining this (since it recalls the earlier phrase “X οὐχ ἔπερον τί ὅν X”). In correcting the example of something predicated accidentally that he had just given (that is, in transforming it into an example of natural, and not accidental predication) Aristotle explains: “when I say that the log is white, I do not say that something different is and that it is incidentally a log”. So, putting it back the other way around: to say “the white thing is a log” is to say that something different than the stated subject (i.e. the white thing) is white and incidentally a log; and we should note that, as Aristotle indicates, (1) this is the same as to say that the subject which is incidentally a log is not “being white” or “just what is some particular white” [καὶ γάρ οὔτε λευκόν ὅν οὐθ’ ὀπερ λευκόν τι ἔγενετο ξύλον, ὡστ’ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλ.’ ἢ κατὰ συμβεβηκός]; and also, (2) that “the log is the underlying subject which came to be white not in virtue of being something different from just what is a log or a particular log [ἄλλα τὸ ξύλον ἔστι τὸ ὑποκείμενον, ὀπερ καὶ ἔγενετο, οὐχ ἔπερον τί ὅν ἢ ὀπερ ξύλον ἢ ξύλον τί]”. (We will see what this means in the next paragraph.) And finally, since it will become important below, I suggest that we understand this as saying too that ‘white’ is not what the ‘white thing’ is (τί ἔστιν), and that this is the same as to say that it is not a καθ’ αὐτό item.)

Aristotle then adds:

Again, terms which signify substances [οὐσίαν] signify, of what they are predicated of, just what is that thing or just what is a particular sort of it [ὀπερ ἔκειν ἢ ὀπερ ἔκειν τι]. Terms which do not signify substances but are said of some other underlying subject which is neither just what is that thing nor just what is a particular sort of it, are incidental [συμβεβηκότα]. E.g. white of a man: man is neither just what is white nor just what is some particular white [οὐ γάρ ἔστιν ὁ ἀνθρωπος οὔτε ὀπερ λευκόν οὔτε ὀπερ λευκόν τι]—rather, presumably, animal: a man is just what is an animal [ὀπερ γάρ ζῷον ἔστιν ὁ ἀνθρωπος]. Items which do not signify substances must be predicated of some underlying subject, and there cannot be anything white which is not white in virtue of being something different

\(^{\text{17}}\) APo. 1.22, (83a1–22)
This passage is crucial to understanding Aristotle’s response to the eleventh *aporia* B (an many of the other *aporiai*), as well as his metaphysical views more generally. Despite its appearance in his logic, this passage (in conjunction with the first) contains much of the ‘machinery’ that Aristotle will employ in his *Physics* and in *Metaphysics* Z in attacking both the Eleatic and Platonic doctrines of being.

Here, Aristotle presents a slightly different take on the distinction between καθ’ αὑτό and κατὰ συνβεβηκός being (and although he does not use the term καθ’ αὑτό, but rather substance (οὐσία), we will see that a substance too just is something that is or exists καθ’ αὑτό). So he tells us: what a substance term “signifies” is “just what is that thing [ὅπερ ἔκειν] or just what is a particular sort of it [ὅπερ ἐκεῖνο τὲ]”. We saw Aristotle using similar terminology in the preceding paragraph when he said that “white” is predicated accidentally because the subject of which it is predicated is not “just what is some particular white” (ὅπερ λευκόν τι). Here, Aristotle tells us that man is not just what is white, though we should not say the same for “animal” (said of “man”), for “man is just what is an animal” (ὅπερ γὰρ ζῷον ἔστιν ὁ ἄνθρωπος). Again: “white” is always predicated of an underlying subject, and it is for this reason that nothing is just what white is, for “there cannot be anything white which is not white in virtue of being something different [μὴ εἶναι τὶ λευκὸν ὁ οὖν ἔτερὸν τὶ ὃν λευκὸν ἔστιν]”.

Fleshing this out: it is not strictly correct to say, perhaps, that it is because white is (always) *predicated* of an underlying subject that no subject will be just what white is; for are not “man” and “animal” too also predicated of a subject?—and has not Aristotle just said that man is just what is an animal?—yes. But again, the point is rather that when we say that “something is white”, this thing—the subject—will not be just what white is, but something different—a man, for instance—that “happens” to be white (or pale), while when we say that something is an animal, this thing will be “just what animal is”, because it will not merely happen to be white, but will be καθ’ αὑτό, or essentially, an animal.

So we arrive once again at Aristotle’s essentialism and his doctrine of the categories: the predicates ‘man’ and ‘animal’, as substance terms, indicate what something is—τί ἐστιν—while ‘white’, like other accidental terms in the category of quality, etc., describe what something is like (ποιῶν); each of them is predicated of an underlying subject, but predicated in different ways that reflect a different metaphysical relationship between the subject and predicate terms. And we should add too, perhaps, that when a predicate term is an essential predicate of the subject, what this represents is not a case of strict predication as such (which should also involve predicating or attributing τι κατὰ τινος—one thing of another); rather what it gives us (‘reveals’) is something that

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18 *APo.* 1.22, 83a25–35.
is part of the essence of the subject\(^\text{19}\) (and we should recall, we could equally translate ‘substance’ here as ‘essence’). Again, the substance-term ‘animal’ reveals what man is—\(\text{τι ἐστὶν}\)—and ‘belongs’ to it essentially, not accidentally, while ‘white’ is not what any subject is; it is rather what a subject may be like.\(^\text{20}\)

3.2.2 The solution to the eleventh aporia

We are now in a position to see how Aristotle will respond to the eleventh aporia. Drawing together the different parts of the preceding analysis, it becomes clear that, when Aristotle asks whether being and one (\(\text{τὸ ὄν καὶ τὸ ἕν}\), not being something different, are each being and one, what he is in effect asking is whether there is anything which is just-what-being-is (\(\text{ὅπερ ὄν}\)) or just-what-one-is (\(\text{ὅπερ ἕν}\)) in the way that man is just-what-animal-is,\(^\text{21}\) as opposed to \(\text{τὸ ὄν}\) and \(\text{τὸ ἕν}\) being like the white (\(\text{τὸ λευκὸν}\)) and other accidental beings (\(\text{σωματεῖκότα}\)); for as Aristotle has said: “there cannot be anything white which is not white in virtue of being something different [\(\text{μὴ ἔσται τί λευκόν ὃ οὖν ἔστων τί ὄν λευκόν ἐστὶν}\)]”, which is in effect to say that “white” is always predicated of some underlying subject, so that \(\text{τὸ λευκὸν}\), rather than being the white itself, or just-what-white-is (\(\text{ὅπερ λευκόν}\)), will be some other nature that merely happens to be white.

It is crucial to remember here too that part of the puzzle reflects the fact that, in Greek, this construction using the definite article + adjective (or participle), as in \(\text{τὸ λευκὸν}\), might refer either to the property (pale or white) or to a thing that has this property: that which is white or the white thing. The same then applies to \(\text{τὸ ὄν}\) and \(\text{τὸ ἕν}\) and so on: these not only mean ‘being’ and ‘one’ respectively but also—and perhaps most importantly for the argument—that-which-is (a being) and that-which-is-one.

Moreover, it is important to note that the distinction between \(\text{καθ’ ἄντο καὶ σωματεῖκός}\) (\(\text{per se and per accidens}\)) predication discussed above results in a distinction between things that

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\(^{19}\) See Mesquita (2012), provides the most exacting and detailed summary of the types of predication in Aristotle (focussing on Aristotle’s remarks in APo I.22). The interpretation of the distinction between essential and accidental predication that I have presented here follows Mesquita’s.

\(^{20}\) The first chapter of Metaphysics Z (1028a10–31) presents exactly the same doctrine. Z.1 begins with the now-familiar call that being or what-is—\(\text{τὸ ὄν}\)—is said in many ways. On the one hand then ‘being’ signifies what-it-is and some-this—\(\text{τι ἐστὶ καὶ τὸδε τι—}\)but also quality, or quantity, and whatever else is thus predicated; but while these are all called ‘beings’, Aristotle says, it is clear that the first among them is what-it-is, and this signifies \(\text{οὐσία}\); and the reason is that other things are said to be by being qualities or affections and so on. Aristotle continues by asking whether walking and being-healthy and being-seated signify each thing as being, but argues that none of them is by nature \(\text{καθ’ ἄντο};\) nor can any of them can be separated from \(\text{their} \) \(\text{οὐσία}\). For as Aristotle remarks, it is better to say that it is the thing that walks or which sits or which is-healthy that is; because something definite underlies them, and this is apparent in predication; for we cannot speak of a good thing or a seated-thing apart from this; and so it is on account of \(\text{οὐσία}\) that each of these is also; “that which is primarily, and is not that which is something [\(\text{oὐ τι ὄν ἄλλ᾽ ὄν}\) but which is simply, or absolutely [\(\text{ἄλλος}\)], will be substance.”

\(^{21}\) As Aristotle had said above: \(\text{ὅπερ γὰρ ζῴὸν ἐστιν ὃ ἄνθρωπος}\).
exist καθ’ αύτο and κατά συμβεβηκός, such that the latter—accidental beings like “the white” or “the walker”—are said to exist in virtue of the former, because “white” and “walking” are always predicated of some underlying subject such as the man, which exists καθ’ αύτο. Again, the entire analysis presented above, then, reflects Aristotle’s essentialism and the ontology of the Categories: the fourfold distinction between what is (not) said of a subject and what is (not) present in a subject.22 To wit: if the universal “white(ness)” exists, this is explained in terms of a particular white being in an individual subject; while the universal “man” or “animal” is said to exist not in virtue of the latter being in a subject, but rather, in virtue of their being the very essence of an individual man.

Thus, if we ask what the white (thing) or the walking (thing) is, we can arrive at two answers: either the definition of “white” or “walking” respectively, or, the (underlying) subject to which (the) white and (the) walking belong, and of which they are predicated, as explained above. So if I consider a particular white thing (rather than the quality white as such), such as a pale man, the answer to the what-is-it question will be that underlying subject that (merely) happens to be white, namely, the man. On the other hand, if we ask what the man is, though we can also reply by stating the definition of “man”, pursuing the second line of enquiry will not lead to a further, underlying subject, namely something that (merely) happens to be man or animal, since the man is just what man is. Or to use the same formula that we have examined above: ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὐχ ἔτερόν τί ὑπὲρ ἐστιν ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

In this light it becomes clear what Aristotle means when he asks “whether being and one are the substances of beings (and it is not by being something different that they are, the one of them one and the other being), or whether it is necessary to inquire what being and one are (τί ἐστι τὸ ὑπὲρ καὶ τὸ ἐν), supposing that another nature underlies them as subject”.23 That is—as Aristotle explains—the substance of a being is precisely what is given in reply to the question: What is it? And so if it turns out that being and one are not the substances of beings, then it will be necessary to ask what each of them is—what nature underlies them as subject.

This also sheds further light on the question of the presence of dialectic in book B and the wider approach that Aristotle follows in responding to its aporiai. Indeed—as in so many other areas—we can see Aristotle here as effectively synthesising (and thereby overcoming the apparent opposition between) the approaches of his predecessors: that of the platonists (whose dialectical approach involves asking of each thing: What is it? the answer to which is that Kind or Form in which a thing participates) and that of the presocratic natural philosophers (who sought to discover the underlying material causes or elements of all things by asking διὰ τί—through what—each thing comes to be). Or in another way, the Platonists had already combined both approaches, supposing that their τί ἐστι question can be pursued in two directions, as it were, such that, if we take any

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22 Cat. 4 (1a20–21b9)  
23 Met. B.4 (1001a8)
particular thing and ask: What is it? the possible replies include both the Form in which it participates and/or its material substratum.

In any case—and here we arrive at the really important point—what is sought-for in such an enquiry is that point at which such a line of questioning must come to a stop because we cannot ask any further: What is it? And this is precisely what Aristotle describes as a principle or ἀρχή.

As we have discussed earlier in the chapter, then, in the substantive aporiai of B and the subsequent investigation that Aristotle pursues in seeking to respond to them—an investigation that we have described as a search for the principles and first causes—Aristotle is working with a set of criteria that he thinks a principle (or first cause) must satisfy if it is to be counted as a principle (or first cause); and the preceding analysis was intended to shed further light on what those criteria are. In summary, then: a principle will be the (ultimate) answer to a what-is-it question in the sense that it will exist καθ᾿ ἀὑτό and not be predicated of an underlying subject (μὴ καθ᾿ ὑποκειμένου λέγεται ἄλλου τινός). We can also say then that a principle should be prior (to that of which it is a principle); and in fact this is precisely what Aristotle writes at N.1, where he is explicitly responding to the aporiai of B. To wit:

But since there cannot be anything prior (πρότερον) to the first principle of all things, the principle cannot be the principle as being something else [ἐπερόν τι οὕσαν εἶναι ἁρχήν]. To suggest this is like saying that the white is the first principle, not qua anything else but qua white [τὸ λευκὸν ἁρχὴν εἶναι οὐχ ἐπερόν ἄλλην ἡ λευκόν], but yet that it is predictable of a subject, and is white as being something else [ἐπερόν τι ὑν λευκόν εἶναι]; for then that subject will be prior.24

Finally—and recalling the topic of the previous chapter—to these criteria can be added that of being separable (χωριστόν) in the sense that we examined there—that is (roughly to say) as an ontologically independent thing; and this last point is important because what it clearly reminds us is that it is primary substance (or οὐσία) that fulfills each of the criteria we have examined. So the sought-for principles and first causes will also turn out to be substances; and as we discussed in the previous section this is basically how Aristotle presents the eleventh aporia.

But now if we keep in mind the conception of first philosophy that Aristotle presents in Book A—namely that it is concerned with unchanging and universal first causes and principles—then the problem that Aristotle is presenting here becomes even clearer; for the number and kind of substances is (potentially) unlimited, and clearly not all of them are unchanging—indeed all we are immediately familiar with aside from heavenly bodies are perishable substances—so there will be a question about how we arrive at knowledge of them (since they are not immediately familiar to us). Moreover, as universal principles and causes they must be the principles and causes of all beings—not of some beings to the exclusion of others—and so even if we discover further eternal substances

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24 *Met*. N.1, 1087a31–36. The same thought is expressed in *Physics* I.6 (189a30–32): “But what is a first principle ought not to be predicated of any subject. If it were, there would be a principle of the supposed principle; for the subject is a principle, and prior presumably to what is predicated of it.”
beyond the astronomical heavens (or underlying all things as material ἀρχαὶ) we will still have to wonder whether they are indeed universal principles and causes; and once again there will be a questions about how we might know that they are universal.

If we recall that Aristotle attributes the thesis presented in the eleventh aporia to the Platonists, we can see why they might have thought being and one to be the first principles of all things; for since their dialectical method led them to posit a universal Form of F for each class of things called F (like a Form of Beauty over-and-above all the things that are called beautiful) then—provided we understand their Forms as (ostensible) principles and first causes—we might suppose that a Platonist would hold Being and One to be the most universal principles and causes. Indeed this is exactly what Aristotle suggests in Metaphysics K in the parallel discussion of the eleventh aporia—note too the problems that will arise on this view:

Now if someone is going to posit those principles that seem most of all to be unchanged, being and one, then first, if each of them does not indicate a ‘this’ and a substance [ἐὰν μὴ τὸδε τι καὶ οὐσίαν ἐκάτερον αὐτῶν σημαίνει], how will they be separate and exist in their own right [χωρισταὶ καὶ καθ’ αὑτὰς]? But these are the kind of eternal and primary principles we are seeking. Yet it each of the two expresses a ‘this’ and a substance, all beings will be substances. For being is predicated of all things (and of some things one as well). But that all beings are substance is false.25

In other words, Aristotle is saying, if we follow the Platonists’ approach (by seeking what is common to everything) then we will indeed be led to posit Being and One as eternal and primary principles; for on this approach, the fact that everything that exists is a being (or as Aristotle puts it: because being is predicated of all things) will be explained by the ‘participation’ of all beings in a single Form of Being (and so too for everything that is one); but as Aristotle says, “if each of them does not indicate a this and a substance how will they be separate and exist in their own right?”

This signals the first line of argument that Aristotle will pursue against the thesis presented in the eleventh aporia. In short, he will argue that neither τὸ ὅν nor τὸ ἕν indicate ‘a this’ or a substance; and the reason for this is that, as universals (predicated of all things), neither of them will exist apart—separate—or in their own right. Thus, in Metaphysics Z.16 Aristotle writes:

Since the term ‘unity’ is used like the term ‘being’, and the substance of that which is one is one, and things whose substance is numerically one are numerically one, evidently neither unity nor being can be the substance of things, just as being an element or a principle cannot be the substance, but we ask what, then, the principle is, that we may reduce the thing to something more knowable. Now of these concepts ‘being’ and ‘unity’ are more substantial than ‘principle’ or ‘element’ or ‘cause’, but not even the former are substance, since in general nothing that is common is substance; for substance does not belong to anything but to itself and to that which has it, of which it is the substance. Further, that which is one cannot be in many places at the same time, but that which is

common is present in many places at the same time; so that clearly no universal exists apart from its individuals.\textsuperscript{26}

This represents Aristotle’s considered response to the eleventh aporia (though it should be noted, since it rests on the denial that any universal is a substance, it was already prefigured in Z.13). Moreover, the same argument is presented—in longer form—in Iota 2, which explicitly mentions the aporia:

With regard to the substance and nature of the one we must ask in which of two ways it exists. This is the very question that we reviewed in our discussion of aporiai, viz. what the one is and how we must conceive of it, whether we must take the one itself as being a substance (as both the Pythagoreans say in earlier and Plato in later times), or there is, rather, an underlying nature and it is to be explained more intelligibly and more in the manner of the natural philosophers, of whom one says the one is love, another says it is air, and another the indefinite.

If then no universal can be a substance, as has been said in our discussion of substance and being,\textsuperscript{27} and if being itself cannot be a substance in the sense of a one apart from the many (for it is common to the many), but is only a predicate, clearly the one also cannot be a substance; for being and one are the most universal of all predicates. Therefore, on the one hand, genera are not certain entities and substances separable [\textit{χωριστα} ἤ] from other things; and on the other hand the one cannot be a genus, for the same reasons for which being and substance cannot be genera.\textsuperscript{28}

Further, this must hold good in all categories alike. Now ‘being’ and ‘unity’ have an equal number of meanings; so that since in the sphere of qualities the one is something definite—some entity—and similarly in the sphere of quantities, clearly we must also ask in general what unity is [τί τὸ ἕν], as we must ask what being is [τί τὸ ὄν], since it is not enough to say that its nature is just to be unity or being. [ὁς οὐχ ἴκανὸν ὄντοϋ ὁ οὐθεὶ ψής οὐτοῦ].\textsuperscript{29}

Once again then the view that one and being are substances is rejected because, as universal predicates, or what is common to many, one and being cannot exist apart from the things of which they are predicated; they are not separable, and therefore do not qualify as substances.

It might be said though that as a response to the aporia this begs the question; for Aristotle here rejects the thesis (that being are one are substances) on the grounds that they are universals; but the aporia is basically asking whether being and one are universals or substances. Hence—and as we have just indicated—the response has to be understood within the wider argument-context of Book Z (especially Z.13 where the view that universals are primary substances is rejected). The question then becomes in what way Aristotle thinks that being and one are (like) universals rather than (like) primary substances which Aristotle argues (in Z.6) are identical with their essences. In other words: while Aristotle argues that a universal-kind such as man or animal does not exist apart

\textsuperscript{26} Met. Z.16, 104b16–26.
\textsuperscript{27} Referring to Met. Z.13
\textsuperscript{28} Referring to Met. B.3, 998b22: the claim that being is not a genus.
\textsuperscript{29} Met. I.2, 1053b9–29
from its instances (being predicated of them) their instances (particular men or animals) do exist apart—χωριστόν—and καθ’ αὑτό; so what we want to know is whether τὸ ὄν and τὸ ἐν are like ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

The answer to this problem is basically contained in the argument that Aristotle has just alluded to in the last quoted passage: namely the view that being is not a genus. That is why Aristotle argues:

on the one hand, genera are not certain entities and substances separable from other things;
and on the other hand the one cannot be a genus, for the same reasons for which being and substance cannot be genera.\(^{30}\)

In the literature this point is often not fully understood; for the claim that being and one are not genera is made in addition to the claim that no genus is a substance or separable (with the result that being and one have even less claim to being the substance of beings than the essences of natural kinds and so on). As Aristotle himself says, then, we must ask what (the) one is (τὶ τὸ ἐν) and what being is (τὶ τὸ ὄν) “since it is not enough to say that its nature is just to be unity or being”

The reply that he gives is indicated in the Z.16 passage quoted above. There, the point that Aristotle is making is that ‘being’ and ‘one’ are predicated of substances because the substance of that-which-is-one is numerically one; which is to say that the numerical unity of a substance is to be explained precisely by its having a numerically single essence, rather than it having unity as its essence. We predicate ‘one’ of whatever is (or has) a unified essence, not of that whose essence just is unity or being-one (in the way that ‘man’ and ‘animal’ are predicated of a particular whose essence is what-being-is-for a man or an animal). So too for being. Anything that is a being has ‘being’ predicated of it because it is (or has) a determinate essence, not because its essence is just-what-being-is (ὅπερ ὅν).

‘Being’ and ‘one’, then, as Aristotle explicity says in the Z.16 passage, are rather like ‘principle’ or ‘element’ or ‘cause’, in that none of them constitutes the substance of a thing. That is to say: while there are principles (etc.), it is not because their very substance is what-being-is-for a principle (etc.) that they are principles; rather, their being principles (etc.) will be explained by their having a determinate essence; and it is for this reason that Aristotle says we must ask “what, then, the principle is, that we may reduce the thing to something more knowable”.\(^{31}\) So too for any term that we predicate of different kinds, or trans-generically, including ‘being’ and ‘unity’.

Hence the view of interpreters such as Leszl and Irwin, who claim that so-called first philosophy, as an ontology, is rather like a second-order enquiry into the fundamental concepts that apply to all of reality is partially correct.\(^{32}\) But this enterprise should not be simply identified with

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\(^{30}\) Met. I.2, 1053b9–29.


\(^{32}\) So, Leszl (1975), p. 124, says Aristotle “ended by admitting that the science of being qua being deals with the four causes (as different types of causal action), because it deals with them from a conceptual point of view, that is to say, by considering what it is for something to be an end or an efficient cause, and not by
first philosophy. In the present context, it is still connected to a broader enquiry: namely the search for separately-existing and imperishable first causes and principles. At this stage, then, Aristotle has simply ruled out that being and one (as universally predicated notions) qualify as such. But the search continues.

3.3.3 Being is not a genus

As we have noted in the preceding section, in his response to the eleventh aporia Aristotle makes reference to his well-known dictum that being is not a genus. Since this forms an important part of his argument I shall consider it separately before turning to examine how Avicenna (indirectly) responds to the same problem.

The connection between the two arguments—the rejection of the thesis of the eleventh aporia and the positive claim that being is not a genus—is already suggested by Aristotle in his elaboration of the aporia. He writes:

But on the other hand, if there is to be some being itself and one itself [τι αὐτὸ ὄν καὶ αὐτὸ ἐν], there is much aporia about how different things will exist alongside them [πῶς ἐσται τι παρὰ ταῦτα ἐπερον]. I mean, how beings will be more than one [πῶς ἐσται πλείον ἐνός τὰ ὄντα]. For that which is different from being is not [τὸ γὰρ ἐπερον τοῦ ὄντος οὐκ ἐστιν]. So, in line with the argument of Parmenides, the necessary consequence is that all beings are one and that this is being [ἐν ἅπαντα εἶναι τὰ ὄντα καὶ τοῦτο εἶναι τὸ ὄν].

So here we learn that the eleventh aporia is not only connected to the question of whether there is a being-itself and a one-itself (a view held by Plato and the Pythagoreans) but also the argument of Parmenides: namely that all beings are one, and that the one is being. So the rejection of the thesis of the aporia also involves the rejection of monism; and so too does the claim that being is not a genus (though this is perhaps less immediately obvious). To see why we should recall the short argument that Aristotle presents at B.3:

But it is not possible for either one or being to be a single kind of being [οὐχ ὃν τε δὲ τῶν ὄντων ἐν εἶναι γένος οὐτε τὸ ἐν ὄντε τὸ ὄν]. For it is necessary both for the differences of each kind to be [εἴναι] and for each of them to be one [μίαν εἶναι], but it is impossible either for the species of the kind to be predicated of their own differences or for the kind to be predicated apart from its species. So, if one or being is a kind, no difference will be either a being or a one.

Though extremely compact, the argument Aristotle is making here and above is clear enough. If we suppose that all beings are of the same kind or genus (and are one in this respect) just because establishing what causal dependencies exist between this and that kind of things. This sort of inquiry involves determining the relationship of each of the types of explanation to the other ones…” See also Irwin (1988), p. 541.

33 Met. B, 1001a29- b1.

34 Met. B.3, 998 b 22–27.
everything-that-is is (a) being or has ‘being’ predicated of it, then we run into this difficulty: everything-that-is (being) will become an undifferentiated block. Not only change, but difference or multiplicity too will be impossible. And the reason that Aristotle gives is this: For such multiplicity to exist, it will be necessary to introduce some difference—something to disrupt being, to differentiate it. But then, that difference will turn out to be not-being (or non-being). For as Aristotle had said above, “that which is different from being is-not [οὐκ ἔστιν]”. But this is prima facie impossible. A differentia must also be. But then it cannot be non-being.

It should be noted, too, that this argument does not simply rest on an equivocation regarding the meaning or use of ‘being’ (and ‘is’) here. That is, it might be thought that in the first place, Aristotle (or Parmenides) is using the verb ‘be’ in its existential sense, and in the second place predicatively, meaning ‘is-something’. So everything-that-is is said to form one genus because ‘being’ means ‘what exists’ (or ‘existing’), while the multiplicity that is being denied has to do with beings being different in kind or in terms of what they are. But while there is a question here about whether Aristotle has both the existential and predicative senses of ‘being’ in mind, it boils down to the same problem. For even if Aristotle is searching for some differentia that will make being diverse with respect to the (predicative) kinds of being that exist, then, even if we call it ‘non-being’, the fact is that this differentia will also turn out to be being after all; for the very premise of the argument is that everything-that-is is being. And the results will be even worse if it turns out that what is required for the argument is a differentia that is opposed to existence. How can ‘non-existence’ differentiate being?

The same—or a similar—argument was already developed in Physics I.3. There, Aristotle discusses that Parmenides thought falsely that being—τὸ ὄν—is said with a single meaning, or that, since all things are said to be, they are one. He offers the following argument. Let us suppose that there are only white things, or that no-thing that is not-white is. In that case, even if we accept that ‘white’ only has one meaning—σημαίνοντος ἐν τοῦ λευκοῦ—there would still be many white things, not one—πολλὰ τὰ λευκὰ καὶ οὐχ ἐν—whether in virtue of being continuous/homogenous, or in account/logos—οὔτε γὰρ τῇ συνεχείᾳ ἐν ἑσται τὸ λευκὸν οὔτε τῷ λόγῳ. For, Aristotle says, there would still be a difference between being-white—τὸ ἐἶναι λευκὸ— and that in which white is ‘seated’ or received—τὸ δεδεχμένῳ; namely, the thing that is white.

Aristotle argues, then, that Parmenides erred not only in that he took ‘being’ to signify a single thing, but also—and most importantly—in that he supposed that ‘being’ and ‘one’ always signify just what being is and just what one is (δὲ περ ὄν καὶ δὲ περ ἐν). But now, suppose that being is just-what-being-is. In that case, being can have no attributes (and we will once again have to deny that multiplicity and difference exists). Aristotle provides another analogy. Imagine that just-what-being-is is also white and that the being of white (τὸ λευκῶ ὃ ἐἶναι) is not just what being is (μὴ ἐστὶν δὲ περ ὄν). In that case, being will have as an attribute non-being; for it was said that nothing is being except for just-what-being-is. It then it follows not only that white is not being, but that just-what-being-is will also not be (οὐχ ὄν); for it it has just been claimed that what-being-is is white, and that white is non-being.
All this follows (Aristotle thinks) unless we accept that ‘being’ signifies many things. Hence the doctrine of categories. The things that exist, beings, do not form a single genus, but rather ‘belong’ to different quasi-genera of being (substance, quality, quantity and so on) and are not reducible to a single genus except in this sense, that the being of anything that is will ultimately depend on the being of substance. Thus substance is prior to non-substance categories; but it is not prior in the way that a genus is prior to its species. (We shall examine this argument in the following two chapters.)

There is of course much debate about what a category is at all, or what sort of classification Aristotle is thinking of when he presents his σχήμα τῆς κατηγορίας—whether the categories are kinds of predicate (expressions) or kinds of predication (relations between a predicate and its subject), or kinds of being or entity (or existence/existents). Probably Aristotle usually has some combination of these things in mind. But the important point is this: when Aristotle denies that being is a genus, we should understand this quite literally, namely, as saying that being (or existing) is not the kind of thing that a being is, or what a thing is.

G.E.M. Anscombe captures this well in her paraphrase of Posterior Analytics 92b13–14, where Aristotle presents the same argument, that being is not a genus. She writes: “There is no such kind of thing as the things that there are; that there is such a thing as it is not what anything is”.35

Part of the problem is that we are more predisposed to think of a genus simply as a class or set, while for Aristotle and like-minded philosophers a genus (like a form or species) is equally a real property of things. Hence, while it is possible, perhaps, to form a single concept that embraces anything that is or exists, Aristotle thinks it is misleading to suppose on this basis that being or existing is (contained in) the essence of any thing, in the way that humanity, for example, is present in individual humans as their essence. Being, then, is not only not a single genus; even the so-called ‘genera’ of being, the categories, are kinds only in a sense; for as we have seen in the previous section, for Aristotle, when we predicated ‘being’ (and ‘one’) of something, this is not the same as when we predicated human or white of something; for as he argues, it is becomes something has a determinate, and unified, essence that we say that it ‘is’ and that it is ‘one’. What Aristotle’s claim that ‘being’ (and ‘one’) are said in many ways—as many ways as the categories—adds to this picture is the notion that things will be said to be in prior and posterior (or dependent) ways.

We shall turn to this issue in the following chapters.

### 3.3 Avicenna and the eleventh aporia

In the following sections we will turn to examine how Avicenna responds to the eleventh aporia, as well as discussing the presence and handling of the problems of Metaphysics B in the Metaphysics of al-Shifā’ in general. In a sense this task is much easier compared to the preceding analysis. This is not only because our examination above has already cleared up many questions about the nature

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and function of Aristotelian aporetic in general, and about the eleventh *aporia* in particular, but also because Avicenna’s position (with respect to both problems) is easier to glean.

Regarding his response to the eleventh *aporia*, Avicenna basically follows Aristotle. That is, he too denies the thesis, namely, that being and one are the substances of beings generally; and in fact we have already seen this in connection with our discussion of the doctrine of *quiddity* in Avicenna in the previous chapter. Neither being (existent) nor one (unity) are contained in the *quiddity* of any-thing; these are rather necessary concomitants or *attributes* (lawāzīm) of quiddity-in-itself or ‘thing’ (*shay*’); hence they are like the contraries universal/particular, one/many, potential/actual and so on, namely, the universal notions that Avicenna considers the properties of the existent *qua* existent, which is the subject of metaphysics. (See Chapter 1.)

For Avicenna, then, as *attributes*, neither being nor one is itself the substance of any being, with one exception: the Necessary Existent, which is, Avicenna says, *wujūd* itself (or rather Necessary Existence (*wājib al-wujūd*). Thus, Avicenna gives a qualified positive reply to (one half of) the eleventh *aporia*: being (existence) is not the *quiddity* of beings generally, though it is—in a way—the *quiddity* of the first or highest Being: God. (We say ‘in a way’ because Avicenna also denies that God is or has a quiddity as such.)

Before we examine this solution in closer detail, though, we shall examine Avicenna’s general attitude towards and handling of Aristotelian aporetic and the problems of *Metaphysics B* in his *al-Shīfā’,* for it is here that we do encounter clear differences between the two philosophers and their respective Metaphysics.

### 3.3.1 Avicenna’s reception of *Metaphysics B*

As we have discussed at length both in Chapter 1 and in the first sections of the present chapter, the *aporiai* of B are (we argue) crucial in determining the argument–structure of the Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* as a whole, for they not only raise (methodological) problems about the subject-matter and possibility of first philosophy, but also (substantive) problems that Aristotle will have to address as part of the search for first causes and principles which he pursues in this enquiry.

Now, while Avicenna too wrestles with many of the same problems that Aristotle raises in B, and presents—whether directly or indirectly—his own responses to them, in general, the presence of aporetic in his Metaphysics is markedly diminished compared to that of Aristotle. For example, his *al-Shīfā’* contains no single treatise that is comparable to *Metaphysics B*. Thus, while Avicenna mentions several of its *aporiai*, and even quotes parts of B (including the eleventh *aporia*), he does not do this in a single place. The references to the *aporiai* are scattered throughout his Metaphysics and are few in number.36

Bertolacci has summarized the main features of Avicenna’s reception of *Metaphysics B* well. He offers the following four points:

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36 See Bertolacci (2006), chapter 10.
(1) Avicenna is selective. He focuses on the crucial part of B, the third, where aporiai are discussed, and chooses five among them. (2) He is concise. No aporia is quoted in full; rather, all are summarized… (3) He is assertive. He never presents the aporiai as problems. In most cases, he embraces either the thesis or the antithesis… In so doing he solves the aporiai. When… he does not prefer the thesis over the antithesis, or vice versa, the unresolved conflict clarifies a distinction about which he takes a clear stand. (4) He quotes the aporiai not in a single portion of the Ilâhiyyât, but in different places of this work.

With respect to point (3), which is the most important for our purposes, Bertolacci explains the reason for this ‘attitude’:

Avicenna’s assertive reformulation of the aporiai is a reflex of his overall conception of metaphysics as a demonstrative discipline, in which non-apodictic procedures, especially the dialectical ones, are, as much as possible, effaced and replaced by more rigorous methods.

As we examined at the beginning of this chapter, most interpreters agree that Aristotle’s ‘aporetic’ approach in B (which involves examining the conflicting-endoxa of previous thinkers) is not confined to this book, but represents a dialogical and dialectic method that, to a certain extent, makes an appearance and is employed throughout the Metaphysics. Now, there has been much scholarly debate about this point (with some arguing that it is necessary to draw a distinction between the ‘ordinary’ dialectic involved in surveying the endoxa of various thinkers, and the ‘strong’ dialectic that Aristotle employs in more philosophical contexts), but most take their lead from Aristotle’s suggestion (in e.g. the Topics) that dialectic leads to a grasp of ‘first principles’. Dialectic, in this sense, is contrasted with the (apodictic) method of scientific demonstration, which most scholars also agree is lacking in most of Aristotle’s works. That is, while Aristotle (in the Analytics) presents demonstration as the ideal method of scientific research (or rather perhaps, the ideal way of presenting the results of scientific research: in the form of scientific demonstrations concerning the essences of things), it is generally agreed that this procedure is lacking in works such as the Metaphysics, such that actual examples of scientific demonstrations are barely present, if at all.

But again, as we examined in Chapter 1, in his reception–reform of the Metaphysics, one of Avicenna’s major aims was to place metaphysics on a firmer foundation than Aristotle had; thus, he reforms the epistemological profile of this enquiry so that it conforms to the model of science presented in the Posterior Analytics; and this crucially involves dispensing with Aristotle’s ‘dialectic’ method in favour of properly apodictic or demonstrative methods.

39 E.g. Irwin (1988)
40 E.g., Topics I.2, 101b3–4, where Aristotle argues that dialectic is a critical method “wherein lies the path the principles of all inquiries”.
Thus, Avicenna’s reception of *Metaphysics* B and its *aporiai* as well his attitude toward ‘aporetic’ and dialectic in general reflects these wider aspects of his reception–reform of the *Metaphysics*. We can see this in his response to the eleventh *aporia*.

### 3.3.2 Avicenna’s ‘response’ to the eleventh *aporia*

As we have already suggested above, Avicenna’s ‘response’ to the eleventh *aporia* can be gleaned from several arguments or doctrines that he presents in *al-Shīfā*, including his doctrine of quiddity-in-itself (to which ‘existent’ and ‘unity’ belong as necessary concomitants). But the most relevant and interesting passage that we might examine in connection with it is *Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.4, since Avicenna not only cites the *aporia* here, but presents a response to it that, in a sense, departs from the response that Aristotle gives, which we have examined above.

Book VIII of the *Ilāhiyyāt* is very important in the argument–structure of this text because it marks the transition from the ‘ontological’ to the ‘theological’ part of his metaphysics. Thus, it includes an examination of the ultimate causes leading to a demonstration of the existence and unicity of the First Principle and Cause: the Necessary Existent (= God). Avicenna references the eleventh *aporia* here in describing the features of the Necessary Existent, which he had examined in chapters 1–3.

Bertolacci has presented a short analysis of Avicenna’s quotation and treatment of the eleventh *aporia* that is mostly aimed at demonstrating the abovementioned (four) points regarding Avicenna’s reception of B and its *aporiai*; and while the author brings much clarity to this task, examining the passage with great precision and detail, I cannot agree with his (strangely brief) conclusion, which he summarizes: “As to Avicenna’s position regarding the issue, it can only be guessed, since he neither supports nor criticizes thesis and antithesis”. This is not right. To be sure, Avicenna’s position must be reconstructed, since—as Bertolacci shows—he does not refer to the *aporia* in order to resolve it, as such, but rather in order to illustrate the argument that he himself is making in *Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.4. Thus—and again, as Bertolacci notes—Avicenna uses the thesis and antithesis of the *aporia* “to exemplify a distinction… that he then employs in his doctrine of God as Necessary Existent”. But still, we can quite readily grasp Avicenna’s (indirect) response based on the surrounding discussion of the issue and other details that Avicenna presents in the *Ilāhiyyāt*.

Turning to this chapter, then, Avicenna begins by summarizing the results of the argument of the preceding chapters, saying:

> There has now been established for you something whose existence is necessary. It has [also] been established for you that the Necessary Existent is one. Hence the Necessary

41 See especially *Shīfā*: *Ilāhiyyāt* I.5 and 5.1–2. For the view that ‘one’ or ‘unity’ is an accident, see *Shīfā*: *Ilāhiyyāt* III, passim.

42 Bertolacci (2006), p. 435

Existent is one, nothing sharing with Him in His rank, and thus nothing other than Him is a necessary existent.\textsuperscript{44}

Avicenna adds:

We do not mean by “the First” an idea that is added to the necessity of His existence so that, by it, the necessity of His existence becomes multiple, but by it we mean a consideration of His relation to [what is] other [than Him].\textsuperscript{45}

Thus the immediate argument–context has to do with both the primacy and the unicity of the First Principle—the Necessary Existent—which Avicenna is here and in the following paragraph defending against misunderstandings.\textsuperscript{46}

Avicenna then argues that the quiddity or essence of the First Principles just is (His) individual existence (\textit{al-inniyah}), or more precisely, that the First “has no quiddity other than His individual existence”.\textsuperscript{47} This is contrasted with the view the Necessary Existent has a quiddity to which necessary existence belongs as a necessary concomitant. Here too the argument is intended to defend the unicity of God; but for our purposes the important point is that this introduces the notion that the Necessary Existent is being-itself (or [necessary] existence-itself), as opposed to some-thing to which (necessary) existence belongs as an attribute. Put in these terms it clear what connection the present argument has to the eleventh \textit{aporia}.

Thus the passage continues:

The Necessary Existent may be intellectually apprehended as the very necessary existent itself [\textit{nafs wājib al-wujūd}, just as the one may be intellectually apprehended as the very one itself [\textit{nafs al-wāhid}]. From this, one may intellectually apprehend that the quiddity [of the Necessary Existent] is, for example, a human or some other substance, when that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} \textit{Shi flav}: \textit{Ilahiyyat} VIII.4.1 (p. 273)
\item \textsuperscript{45} \textit{Shi flav}: \textit{Ilahiyyat} VIII.4.1 (p. 273)
\item \textsuperscript{46} Thus the following paragraph (\textit{Ilahiyyat} VIII.4.2 pp. 273–274) reads: “Know, moreover, that, if we have said—indeed, demonstrated—that the Necessary Existent does not become multiple in any respect whatsoever and that His essence is utterly unitary, pure truth, we do not mean by this that [certain] existences are also not negated of Him and that relation to existences does not occur to Him, for this would be impossible. This is because, in the case of every existent, certain modes of existence, varied and multiple, are negated of it. And every existent has a species of relation and reference toward [the other] existents. [This is] particularly [true of] the existent from whom all existence emanates. But [what] we mean by our statement that He is one in essence and does not become multiple is that He is as such in His essence. If, thereafter, many positive and negative relations become attendant on Him, these are necessary concomitants of the essence that are caused by the essence; they exist after the existence of the essence, do not render the essence subsistent, and are not parts of it. Should someone say, ‘If these are caused, then they would possess another relation [and so on,] and this would regress to infinity,’ we would obligate him to reflect on what we have ascertained concerning the category of relation in this [metaphysical] discipline, where we strove to show that relation is finite. In this is the resolution of his doubt.
\item \textsuperscript{47} \textit{Shi flav}: \textit{Ilahiyyat} VIII.4.3 (p. 274)
\end{itemize}
[same] human is [also] a necessary existent, just as one may intellectually apprehend of the one that it is water, air, or human, [each] being one.\textsuperscript{48}

The problem that Avicenna is addressing is posed using the very same terms as the eleventh aporia. In short, what we are being directed to consider is the difference between a Necessary Existent that is like human (or water or air) or some other substance that is also a necessary existent (because necessary existence is one of its attributes, rather than it being necessary existence itself: \textit{nafs wājib al-wujūd}), or—to put the problem the other way around—like the one, supposing that some substance (such as water, air or human) underlies it it.

It is at this point that Avicenna makes explicit reference to the eleventh aporia. He writes:

You may reflect and know this from the controversy over [the question] of whether the principle in the natural sciences is one or many. For some have made the principle one, some many.

Among those who made it one, some made the first principle not the essence [\textit{dhāt}] of one, but something [else] which is one [\textit{bal shay’} \textit{huwa al-wāhid}]—for example, water, air, fire, or some other thing. Some [on the other hand] have made the principle the essence [\textit{dhāt}] of one inasmuch as it is one [\textit{al-wāhid min ġayth huwa wāhid}], not something to which the one has accidentally occurred [\textit{lā-shay’ āraza lahu al-wāhid}]. Hence, there is a difference between a quiddity [\textit{māhiyya}] in which the one and the existent occur accidentally and between the one and the existent inasmuch as it is one and an existent [\textit{al-wāhid wa-l-mawjūd min ġayth huwa wāhid wa mawjūd}]\textsuperscript{49}.

Avicenna here focuses on the one (\textit{al-wāhid}), presenting the two sides of the aporia in the reverse order compared to the original, but the dilemma is ultimately the same. On the one hand, Avicenna describes those thinkers who considered the one not the essence of one (in Aristotle’s terms: just-what-one-is, or one-itself), but rather something which \textit{is} one, or—using the formula that he mentions in the following line—something to which the one accidentally occurs. This, then, represents the \textit{antithesis} of the aporia. On this view, one is not the substance of anything, but is rather to be understood in terms of an underlying subject (like the material principles that Avicenna mentions). On the other hand, Avicenna describes those thinkers who considered this principle the very essence of the one “inasmuch as it is one”, rather than some-thing (an underlying subject) to which the one occurs as an accident. This, obviously, represents the \textit{thesis} of the aporia; and it is striking how similar is the terminology that Avicenna uses.

His treatment of this issue differs from that of Aristotle, though, not only in that he focuses on ‘the one’ rather than ‘being’, but also insofar as he does not treat the aporia as problematic, as such. (This corresponds to Bertolacci’s point (3) above.) That is, Avicenna discusses the aporia for illustrative purposes only, or to clarify the immediate problem that he is dealing with—namely, the unicity of the Necessary Existent; for the distinction that Avicenna had been discussing in the preceding paragraph basically had to do with (1) a quiddity to which necessary existence attaches as

\textsuperscript{48} Shīfā’: \textit{Ilāhiyyāt} VIII.4.4 (p. 274)

\textsuperscript{49} Shīfā’: \textit{Ilāhiyyāt} VIII.4.5–6 (p. 274)
an attribute, versus (2) a quiddity which is just is necessary existence, or is necessary existent itself. The fact that Avicenna focuses on the one rather than being is of no importance here; the terms of the problem are the same (and as Bertolacci suggests, the fact that Avicenna focus on the one is probably “meant to avoid any confusion between the ‘necessary existent’, i.e. Avicenna’s topic, and ‘existent’ (= ‘being’), one of the two concepts with which Aristotle is dealing”\textsuperscript{50}).

Thus, as Menn notes, “Avicenna... seems to give very different answers to the eleventh aporia... Avicenna says that God is a self-substiting wujūd, but he denies at surprising length\textsuperscript{51} that there is such a self-substituting unity”.\textsuperscript{52} The same author has also written: “Avicenna thus gives an anti-Platonic answer to the aporia on unity but a Platonic answer to the aporia on being”.\textsuperscript{53} But is this right? Given that part of the aim of this thesis is to consider the persistence of Platonism from Aristotle to Avicenna, we should say something about it.

As we have already suggested, Avicenna’s response to this part of the eleventh aporia (about being) represents a \textit{partial} acceptance of the thesis (which Aristotle attributes to Plato and the Pythagoreans), namely, that there is a self-substituting being-itself—and picking up on this fact, Averroës\textsuperscript{54} sharply criticized Avicenna). But it should be stressed: if we say this represents a ‘partial’ acceptance of the thesis, it is because Avicenna does not draw quite the same conclusions here as the full Platonist might. To see why we only have to consider what was said at the beginning of our discussion of the eleventh aporia about the formula that Aristotle uses in presenting it—namely the shift from talking about whether being and one are substances (a 1-place question) to whether being and one are the substance(s) of beings (a 2-place question). As we noted there too this also raises the question of whether Aristotle means (1) that being and one are the substance(s) of beings \textit{distributively} or (2) that a numerically single being-itself and one-itself is/are the substance(s) of all beings collectively.

In a sense Aristotle is rejecting both options. That is: insofar as he reduces both being and one to the essence of individual substances he is rejecting (1), while insofar as he denies that anything that is predicated in common (such as universal genera) exist apart from that of which they are predicated he is rejecting (2). Again, the full Platonist (so Aristotle tells us) asserts (2) because he thinks that Being-itself and One-itself are (as separate Forms) both individual substances and \textit{common} items in the sense that anything that is and is-one gets its being and unity through participating in the latter.

\textsuperscript{50} Bertolacci (2006), pp. 434–435.
\textsuperscript{51} Referring to \textit{Shijā}: \textit{Ilāhiyyāt} III.2–6, where Avicenna argues that unity (as an accident in the category of ‘quantity’) is a \textit{per se} attribute of being or ‘thing’. In this respect Avicenna and Aristotle in broad agreement; for in \textit{Metaphysics} Γ Aristotle also treats ‘one’ as a \textit{per se} attribute of being. But Avicenna differs from Aristotle in treating one as a \textit{predicamental} accident that is said univocally of beings in all categories. Menn (2013), pp. 159–163, focuses on this part of their disagreement in his discussion of the eleventh aporia.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, p. 162.
\textsuperscript{53} Menn (2011a), p. 87.
But Avicenna denies this last point. For him to assert it would make his Necessary Existent the very substance of beings, as the eleventh *aporia* suggests, or in other words, to make beings dependent on the First in a way that would obliterate the ontological difference between uncreated and created being. But Avicenna does not believe that existence is common to beings in this way. Indeed, this is exactly what the difference between necessary and contingent existence (or necessity *through another*) is meant to preserve.

To be sure, Avicenna does say that all possible existents are dependent on the First in this sense, that they ‘receive’ their existence from Him; but—besides the very distinction between necessary existence *in itself* and necessary existence *through another*—Avicenna also develops (in the same chapter that we have been considering: *Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.4) a clear argument to the effect that the ‘pure’ existence which belongs to the First is radically different from the ‘absolute’ existence that belongs to (contingent) quiddities as a necessary concomitant, or that existence “in which there is participation by others”. I shall conclude the present chapter with a short examination of this argument since it not only provides clarification regarding the present issue, but also depends on the same (logical and metaphysical) distinction that we examined in the previous chapter: namely, the distinction between (real) separation and abstraction, or simple and metathetic negation.

### 3.3.3 Being-itself and being that is common

In the previous section we saw that Avicenna (in *Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.4) made reference to the eleventh *aporia* in order to illustrate a point about the unicity of the Necessary Existent, namely, that He is necessary existence *itself* (the *thesis* of the *aporia*), rather than some other nature or quiddity to which necessary existence belongs as a (concomitant) accident (the *antithesis*)—the point of this argument and illustration being that the First is lacking such ‘composition’ (*tarkīb*) as would threaten His unicity.

Hence, Avicenna continues,

> The Necessary Existent cannot be of a characterization that entails composition [*tarkīb*] so that there would be some quiddity (that quiddity being necessary in its existence) such that that quiddity would have a meaning [*ma’nā*] other than its reality [*ḥaqīqat-hā*] (that meaning being necessary existence).

Avicenna goes on to illustrate the point using the same example as above. Suppose that the Necessary Existent is a quiddity to which necessary existence *belongs*, like being a human. In that case, the fact of *being a human* would be other than the fact of being a *necessary existent*, even if the two were connected; and so considered in itself, it would not be the Necessary Existent inasmuch as it is the Necessary Existent. Rather, it would come to be “through something which is not itself” (*bi-shay’ laysa huwa*). In other words, its (necessary) existence would be *caused*, either by its quiddity or by another. But then, Avicenna argues, the former is impossible; for if its

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55 *Shifā*: *Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.4.7 (p. 274)
existence were due to (caused by) that quiddity itself, then it would have an existence prior to its existence, which is a contradiction.

Significantly, the conclusion that Avicenna draws is not only that the Necessary Existent, then, is pure necessary existence, and has no quiddity but also that “everything that has a quiddity is caused”,56 while the existence that emanates on them, or which is predicated of quiddity, is other than the pure necessary existence of God, precisely because it involves composition (with quiddities). The argument that Avicenna presents in support of this is last claim striking in its terminology; for again, it employs the same distinction between modes of separation and of negation that we examined in the preceding chapter. He writes:

The First, hence, has no quiddity. Those things possessing quiddities have existence emanate on them from Him. He is pure existence [mujarrad al-wujūd] with the condition of negating privation and all other description of Him. Moreover, the rest of the things possessing quiddities are possible, coming into existence through Him. The meaning of my statement, “He is pure existence with the condition of negating all other additional [attributes] of Him,” is not that this is the absolute existence in which there is participation [by others]. If there is an existent with this description, it would not be the pure existent with the condition of negation, but the existent without the condition of positive affirmation. I mean, regarding the First, that He is the existent with the condition that there is no additional composition [al-mawjūdu lā bi-sharti l-ziyādati], whereas this other is the existent without the condition of [this] addition [al-mawjūdu ma’a sharti l-ziyādati tarkīb]. For this reason, the universal is predicated of all things, whereas [pure existence] is not predicated of anything that has addition.’ Everything other than Him has addition.57

Like the distinction between real separation and abstraction that Avicenna (following al-Fārābī) presents in the context of discussing the subject-matter of first philosophy (the existent qua existent) and its object (God, whose separation from matter is real, not a result of abstraction), as well as the distinction between quiddity in itself (which, like existent qua existent, results from an abstract consideration of quiddity) and the Platonic Forms or Numbers that Avicenna criticizes in Ilāhiyyāt VII.2 (which ostensibly exist in themselves, self-subsistent), the present distinction between the pure existence that belongs to God alone and the ‘neutral’ being or ‘absolute existence’ (al-wujūd al-mutlaq) in which there is participation, or which is added to quiddity, rests on the same logical and metaphysical distinction between separation and abstraction, or two modes of negation. Here, Avicenna uses it to distinguish the pure existence of God, who is necessary existence itself, on the one hand, and on the other, the existence of everything else (possessing a quiddity), which is not existence itself, except through abstraction. Remarkably, in this way, Avicenna arrives at a somewhat different answer the eleventh aporia than Aristotle did using a very similar formula—namely, “the X, (not) being something different, is X”. And while this response leans perhaps more in a ‘platonic’ direction than Aristotle’s, it does not thereby mark a ‘return’ to Platonism. Rather, as

56 Shifā’: Ilāhiyyāt VIII.4.12 (p. 276)
in so many other areas, it represents one more instance of what is *distinctive* about the Avicennian moment: its simultaneous connection and rupture with its past.
Chapter 4: The meaning of being

As we examined in Chapter 1, the claim that ‘being’ is not predicated univocally but rather \textit{pros hen} emerges as a central idea in Aristotle’s \textit{Metaphysics}, specifically in connection with the quest to determine the exact subject-matter of that enquiry announced in \textit{Met.} Γ.1—the enquiry into being \textit{qua} being. We saw that Avicenna, too, denies that ‘being’ is a univocal term; but we noted that their approaches to these issues differ in important respects. In this chapter, I examine these questions in the context of discussing several wider issues to do with signification in the two philosophers’ works, including questions about the relationship between language, thought and reality. Specifically, I examine how the notion (or lack thereof) of ‘meaning’ in Aristotle and in Avicenna relates to their approaches to discussing multivocity (above all the multivocity of ‘being’), as well as related questions such as what a \textit{category} is and how the two philosophers’ (different) views reflect developments that occurred within Aristotelian and Arabic-intellectual traditions. It is argued that the notion of \textit{māʾnī} in Avicenna is fundamentally important in this respect.

4.1 Signification

By way of entry into the topic that we shall examine in this chapter, let me begin by proposing an idea that different interpreters will be certain to agree with, \textit{prima facie}, while perhaps disagreeing about what lesson we are to draw from it. The idea is this. In order ‘to make sense’, as we say, of what an earlier philosopher such as Aristotle has written about a given topic, often we feel it necessary, whether consciously or not, to employ a language that is both conventionally and conceptually, let us say, closer to our own. To clarify, I am not simply referring to our habit of sometimes substituting for his often unfamiliar or unwieldy terminology a conceptual vocabulary that is drawn from our own repertoire of philosophical terms. (Notable examples of which in Aristotle might include our rendering τὸ τί ἐστιν as ‘essence’.) Nor am I simply referring to those decisions involved in translating into English, Greek sentences which, for varied reasons, must be handled quite differently in our own languages. Rather, the sorts of examples that I am referring to include those decisions that we make—again, whether we are conscious of them or not—when we are engaged in the business of interpretation or explication. And naturally, these decisions do often bear on our translations.
To demonstrate: let us quote once again that well-known, but still puzzling, sentence from Aristotle that we have already mentioned, since its claim is one that will occupy our attention in this and the following chapters. The sentence appears in several places—famously in *Metaphysics* Γ.2 and Z.1—namely τὸ ὅν λέγεται πολλαχὸς. (A neutral translation might be: “being is said (or spoken of) in many ways”.)

The modern reader, of course, wonders whether Aristotle means here to say “being” or “’being’”—that is, whether the word ‘being’ is here being used or mentioned. Indeed, such confusion often arises when reading Aristotle, and not only when it is πολλαχὸς λεγόμενα that are under discussion. And indeed, the confusion is real, though not because Aristotle simply failed to recognize the use-mention distinction, but rather the opposite: precisely because Aristotle does recognize it, but fails to use it in cases where we consider this necessary, and often seems to slip between the two modes of speech.  

Whatever the case, though—whether Aristotle means to say “being is said in many ways” or “’being’ is said in many ways”, or perhaps intends to say both—we have to make a decision about what Aristotle is up to in such cases, and that often means rendering in our own terms what it is that (we believe) Aristotle means, but has not said explicitly. Thus, to choose a passage quite at random, we frequently encounter the following sort of interpretation:

But ‘being’, as Aristotle tells us in Γ.2, is “said in many ways”. That is, the verb ‘to be’ (εἰσαί) has different senses, as do its cognates ‘being’ (ον) and ‘entities’ (onta). So the universal science of being qua being appears to founder on an equivocation: how can there be a single science of being when the very term ‘being’ is ambiguous?  

And this is may well be a fair-enough interpretation of the passage, or the thought that it contains. But it is not the interpretation of this passage as such that concerns us (yet). Rather, I introduce it solely to illustrate the preceding point by providing a specific example since it will be important in what follows—namely, that often we feel it necessary, as the author has done here, to speak of

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1 The very use of the neuter definite article (τὸ) in the previous sentence and similar examples is often cited in this respect. Bäck (2000), p. 195, for instance, suggests that the very phrase X πολλαχὸς λέγεται as in the previous example indicates that Aristotle is mentioning a term.

2 Cohen (2016)

3 So Ross translates the whole passage: “There are many senses in which a thing may be said to ‘be’, but all that ‘is’ is related to one central point, one definite kind of thing, and is not said to ‘be’ by a mere ambiguity.” Similarly, we might recall here too another vexing, and equally ubiquitous issue, albeit one that is more closely related to Aristotle’s substantive philosophical views. It concerns the use of the terms λεγόμενα (what-is-said) and κατηγοροῦμενον (what-is-predicated) and the verbs from which they are derived to mean(!) both linguistic items, and the things referred to by means of them. Thus, in the *Categories*, Aristotle presents us with a list of ὅντα—things-that-are—that may be ‘said-of’ or ‘present-in’ another, despite this work prima facie being about linguistic expressions. Once again, it is not the doctrine of ‘ontological predication’ as such that concerns us (yet), but rather what it reveals: a situation that is well-enough summarised by Ackrill (1963), p. 71, who writes, that the doctrine of categories “is not primarily or explicitly about names, but about the things that names signify…”
‘senses’, and to emphasize that it is a term (like ὄν) that is said in many ways—is ambiguous—even though Aristotle does not say so explicitly.

Another example will help to bring out the point further.

Shortly after the lines quoted above, Aristotle famously puts forward the argument that being—τὸ ὄν—while it is said in many ways, is not simply ambiguous (‘homonymous’, Aristotle will say). Rather, being is said πρὸς ἐν or ‘in relation to one thing’: a single nature (πρὸς ἐν καὶ ἑνὲν τινὰ φύσιν); and, as we shall see, the explanation that Aristotle gives in support of this claim will have to do with the things that are called being (λέγεται ὄν, namely τὰ ὄντα) having (at once) a logical and ontological sort of ‘dependence’ on—their being defined, and their existing in relation to—a privileged kind of being, namely substance (οὐσία). Ultimately, that is, the claim that being is said πρὸς ἐν will be explained in terms of the different underlying natures of things, or the different modes of being exhibited by beings in different categories.

Nevertheless, as in so many similar cases that we encounter in Aristotle, the idea that τὸ ὄν is said in many ways (λέγεται πολλαχῶς) or ‘predicated’ πρὸς ἐν is, as we have said, commonly unpacked in terms of the different ‘senses’ of being. And perhaps this is harmless enough. Indeed, if we turn to consider Book Δ of the Metaphysics—a text that provides an entire repertory of terms that are used in this way—πολλαχῶς λεγόμενα—it is not unreasonable to think that Aristotle is here engaged in a project of ‘disambiguating’ the varied meanings or senses of ambiguous terms—terms whose multifariousness, perhaps, is a cause of confusion for the aspiring philosopher. But again, the fact remains that Aristotle never really speaks of words as having ‘senses’ or even ‘meanings’, or not straightforwardly anyway.4

Now, it may be perfectly germane to explicate Aristotle’s thought here, as in so many other cases, in terms of an effort to elucidate the different senses or meanings of a term, even if it is admitted that Aristotle has no word that exactly corresponds to our word ‘sense’ (and thus, that he lacked an entirely clear and distinct notion of ‘sense’ in…the modern sense, perhaps), as long as we are sure that Aristotle was working with such a notion, and that our attributing to him such a conception does not involve introducing into our interpretation elements that are in fact foreign to his thought. The lesson to be drawn from the preceding brief remarks, then, is simply that we should exercise caution in this domain.

To illustrate why caution is needed, let me cite an illustrative example that Gareth Matthews characterizes as the “Sense–Kind Confusion”.

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4 Here too, note that, even in Book Δ, this project of disambiguating the different senses of terms λέγεται πολλαχῶς—if we have characterized it correctly—takes different turns. For instance, the different ‘senses’ of ‘substance’ result in different candidates. Similarly, the different ‘senses’ of ‘being per se’ result in the categories of being. But ‘ἐἶναι’ is said not only in ten ways, but with four overarching ‘senses’: being per se, being per accidens, being as true-or-false, being-potential and being-actual. So the very phrase λέγεται πολλαχῶς is itself λέγεται πολλαχῶς.

5 Matthews (1972)
As we have seen, Aristotle’s claim that τὸ ὅν λέγεται πολλαχῶς is typically unpacked in terms of the multiple ‘senses’ of ‘being’. However, closely connected as it is with the doctrine of the categories, this claim is also frequently expressed in terms of, or in connection with, there being several distinct ‘kinds’ of being—ten on most counts—namely, as many as the categories: substance, quality, quantity… and so on.

The question is first of all, then, whether the two claims (1) that there are several distinct senses of the term ‘being’ and (2) that there are several distinct kinds of being should be interpreted as two parallel claims, so as to say that there are as many kinds as there are (corresponding) senses of being; for the problem, as Matthews has shown, is that the two claims appear to be incongruent, as substitution of the one for the other reveals. To wit—and on the condition that the two claims are indeed parallel, as just described—let us suppose that ‘being’ has two distinct senses, namely, (i) being{substance} and (ii) being{accident}, and that there are two parallel kinds of being, one corresponding to each sense. In that case, the claim that:

(a) there are two kinds of being

will have to be replaced by either

(b) there are two kinds of being{substance}: namely (i) being{substance} and (ii) being{accident}

or

(c) there are two kinds of being{accident}: namely (i) being{substance} and (ii) being{accident}

so (1) and (2) are clearly incongruent.

There is surely a way out of the confusion, though, which involves denying such ‘parallel talk’. In that case, ‘reconciling’ claims (1) and (2) might involve saying that while there are several distinct senses of ‘being’, several of which correspond to a distinct kind of being, there is in addition a generic ‘sense’ of being. The question then becomes whether Aristotle did in fact recognise such a sense.

We shall return to this point below.

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Here, we might briefly touch on one more notion that we as current-day readers and interpreters often have recourse to, whether we are casually describing the system of Aristotelian thought as a whole or articulating its fundamental elements—its basic concepts—a notion that bears close family resemblance to what we have just described as the ‘sense’ of a word: to wit, the very notion of a concept. Unlike the former example, though, the idea that Aristotle was committed to the existence of concepts—or was working with a notion of a concept—is surely to appear unproblematic. For it will be argued that Aristotle not only had at his disposal a word that we can fairly translate ‘concept’—namely νόημα—but also that he was committed to the existence of universals, and
surely it is not a stretch to think of Aristotelian universals as concepts. Be that as it may, it is still worth noting that our contemporary language habits—and so the language we often employ in speaking about Aristotle—do diverge from Aristotle’s in this respect, that where we are quite accustomed to speaking about “the concept (of) X”, as in “the concept (of) being” or “the concept (of) man”, Aristotle practically never speaks in this way. In the Greek of his day, it sufficed for Aristotle to speak of “being” and of “man”, even in those cases where he does seem to be speaking about these as concepts (as in “man is an animal” or “animal is a genus”). Indeed, philosophers like Aristotle writing in Greek seem not only to tolerate the ambiguity that might (to us) appear to result from this situation (such as the fact that the bare word “man”—ἀνήρ—might on any occasion be used to refer to “a man” or “the species man” or that property that men share, considered abstractly, namely “manhood”); they seem to have fully embraced it.

Moreover, as these very examples suggest, even on occasions when Aristotle does appear to be discussing “the concept (of) X”, there is a tendency, we can say, to treat concepts as objects. This is explicit in the ontologies of Aristotle and Plato. For both thinkers, a statement such as “Socrates is pale” is explained by the presence of pallor in Socrates (or his participating in the form of pallor). Both are interested, that is, in explaining why Socrates is pale (and so on), rather than the question of what “Socrates is pale” means, as such; and both philosophers appeal to forms to do so. But a form is not, in the first place, a concept; if it were, it could not fulfil this explanatory role.

Similarly, then, when Aristotle appears to pose the question of what “‘X’ means”, it is often better to think of him as asking what “X” refers to or signifies, that is, what kind of (extra-linguistic) object, rather than about the sense or meaning of a term as such. I shall examine this point too in further detail below.

What is striking though is that things are quite different with Avicenna and among Arabic philosophers generally. To see how it is enough to cast a look at almost any passage in Avicenna in which the topic of being and similar notions comes up. For instance, in a well-known passage in al-Shifāʾ, Metaphysics I.5, Avicenna announces:

ونقول: إن معنى الوجود ومعنى الشيء متصوران في الأنفس، وهما معنيان. فالموجود والمثبت والمحصل أسماء مترادفة على معنى واحد، ولا نشك في أن معناها قد حصل في نفس من يقرأ هذا الكتاب.

It might be argued that this whole point is jejune, if not entirely fallacious. When we speak in this way, we are speaking casually; that is, casual talk of ‘senses’ or ‘concepts’ should not be mistaken with a philosophical account of such notions. So the situation here is the reverse of the one I just noted: while Aristotle does not explicitly talk about senses, it may be perfectly apt to describe his system of thought in this way; similarly, our talk of senses does not commit us to the existence of things that Aristotle might reject—I have already admitted that the preceding interpretation is apt. The question is, what are we talking about?

Of course, it might turn out that for Aristotle “X” signifies the meaning of a word.
[Moreover] we say: “The meaning [or notion: *maʿnā*] of “existence” and the meaning of “thing”” are conceived in the soul and are two meanings, whereas “the existent,” “the established,” and “the realized” are synonyms. We do not doubt that their meaning has been realized in the soul of whoever is reading this book.  

Or similarly in *al-Shifāʾ*, Metaphysics III.2 (where the topic of the one is introduced):

فنقل: إن الواحد يقال بالتشكيك على معان تتفق في أنها لا قيمة فيها بالفعل من حيث كل واحد هو هو،

لكن هذا المعنى يوجد فيها يتقدم وتأخر، وذلك بعد الواحد بالعرض.

We say: The one is spoken of “equivocally” in [several] senses (*maʿānin*) that agree in that they partake of no divisibility in actuality insofar as each one is what it is. But this meaning is found in them in terms of priority and posteriority—the after [the meaning of] one by accident.

Not only do we encounter here a clearer notion of a concept (and of meaning); it might even be said that with Avicenna we find ourselves facing exactly the opposite problem to the one we described a moment ago, for—as we shall also examine in closer detail below—Avicenna will often speak of the meaning of X where we might expect him simply to talk about X.

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I noted at the beginning of this section that the foregoing ideas were to be proposed merely as a way into the issue, and what lesson we are to take from them is likely to be contentious. Now, lest the preceding observations suggest that the lesson I am going to draw here has to do with linguistic determinism of some variety, let me say outright: I do not think that the linguistic data presented just now tells us anything important in itself, or—to be more precise—that such differences of language-use point to radically different, and perhaps incompatible, conceptual schemes or anything of the sort. Rather, my aim in the following is to use these observations merely as an occasion to enquire into several related questions about Aristotle’s and Avicenna’s philosophical views, both in general and in relation to the specific topics that are the focus of this thesis. It is only there, both at the level of and proceeding from philosophical analysis, that we are destined to discover anything about (diverging) conceptual schemes.

Now to indicate the way forward: what I want to do in the following sections is to provide a brief outline of some of the basic features of Aristotle’s views on the relation between language, thought and reality as a way of penetrating more deeply into some of the issues discussed above under the rubric of questions about meaning and significatio. Following that I will provide a brief overview of Aristotle’s views on homonymy and, more generally, what is implied by his oft-repeated phrase that “X is said in many ways”. From there I will turn to discuss Avicenna’s views on homonymy.

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8 Metaphysics I.5.8, p. 24; emphasis added.
9 Metaphysics III.2.1, p. 74.
4.2 Language–thought–reality

There can be no doubting that Aristotle was crucially interested in language as a (or indeed the) tool of philosophical investigation and, even more importantly, considered the basic structure of reality to mirror (or be mirrored in) the way that we (or rather Greek speakers) use language. But that did not stop Aristotle having—and indeed suggests that he did have—his own substantive views about the relation between language, thought, and reality. Perhaps, too, Aristotle held fundamental commitments in this area—basic assumptions—that he was not fully aware of but which nevertheless coloured his philosophical views.

In connection with this point, Andreas Graesar has produced a judgement which, while too one-sided perhaps, helps us to see the problem. About Aristotle, he writes:

He had no conception of language apart from the sort of things that significant words were supposed to mean. He did not distinguish systematically between linguistic questions on the one hand and ontological questions on the other. In regard to words, he was interested in them only in so far as they stand for the things-that-are.

Unlike Graesar, we are not so much interested in the merits of Aristotle’s philosophical views as we are in simply understanding them. But despite its one-sidedness, this interpretation is useful to the extent that it helps to locate the problem (or cluster of problems) that we have just now introduced, and which I shall examine more closely in this chapter. Broadly speaking, the latter can be summarized as questions about Aristotle’s theory of language and meaning; and what our initial digression was intended to highlight was one aspect that we (as modern readers) might feel missing from this picture, such that we often feel it necessary to substitute it for the sake of understanding: namely, a conception of meaning.

Bearing in mind that we are only incidentally interested in these questions, our essential aim being to discern how they might help us to understand some narrower philosophical topics that Aristotle approaches, let us now summarize: the question of how language–thought–reality are related is clearly an important one for Aristotle—he discusses it explicitly at various places, for instance in a famous passage in De Interpretatione 1—and it is important too in the sense that, whether or not this is the same view that he explicitly discusses, Aristotle evidently was working with a model that presumes some kind of relation between language–thought–reality. I also noted

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10 “…for Aristotle, language was indeed Seinssprache and that is [sic] was considered to mirror relations that obtain between real entities existing independently from the mind”. Graesar (1977), p. 373; see below.


12 It helps to note that here that the author’s broader argument in this article is that the Stoic theory of language more closely approximates contemporary analytic concerns and is, for this reason, more acceptable or reasonable than the theory of Aristotle (and Parmenides–Plato).

13 It is a difficult and problematic task to attempt to uncover what views a philosopher holds other than on the basis of what he or she says, and it is not unreasonable to think that a good philosopher such as Aristotle would at least strive to see clearly in this domain. So let us suppose that the two do agree—the model of
that the several lines I have quoted from Graesar above are revealing, though not unproblematic, in this regard. So the author tells us, the conception of language that we find in Aristotle is as follows: significant words are supposed to mean (a certain) sort of things. Moreover, we are told, for Aristotle, words (are supposed to) stand for the-things-that are, and this is as far as his—Aristotle’s—interest extends: a fairly sweeping assessment summarily described in terms of a failure to systematically distinguish linguistic and ontological questions. But let us grant that it is still, more or less, a faithful assessment. In order to weigh it, it will be necessary to unpack what it means to say that, for Aristotle, words “mean” things, or—whether or not this is to say the same thing—“stand” for things.

Towards this end, let us observe that the negative assessment implied here cannot be due to the author’s unwillingness to attribute to Aristotle a conception of meaning. Everything depends, then, on what he means when he says that, for Aristotle, words “mean”. And this is indeed a vexing question, for it has been variously argued and denied that (or whether) Aristotle has a clear notion of, much less a clear theory of, meaning at all. To be sure, Aristotle has at his disposal, and often uses, a word—σημαίνειν—that can be variously used to mean ‘to signify’, ‘to denote’, and indeed, perhaps, ‘to mean’; but as this very cluster of terms suggests, and as has been much discussed, questions about (ostensible) meaning in Aristotle are often often bound up with wider issues of signification and reference that we might feel more inclined to separate out.

To explain: despite the widespread use of such locutions as “focal meaning” or “the multiple senses” of a given term to describe his philosophical views, there is broad scholarly agreement that—whether or not we agree that this amounts to a theory of meaning, much less an adequate one—when Aristotle discusses what a term “means” as in the phrase “A σημαίνει B”, what he is primarily thinking of is the significate of a term (or in cases where a term is “said in many ways”, of the multiple significates of terms and the connection(s) between them); and while it is natural to think of the significate of a term as the meaning of a term, it rather seems that Aristotle is here thinking, first of all, of the possible referents of a term. More precisely, in the case of correct reference (where a term has a real, extra-mental referent), what a term ‘signifies’ is that ‘property’ or ‘aspect’ of a thing in virtue of which it is (really) the sort of thing that it is, such that it is correctly picked out by the term, or the same thing qua (as instantiating) that property. What the term ‘man’ primarily signifies, then, is not so much a certain meaning as a certain property, let us

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14 The most influential interpretation that ascribes to Aristotle a notion of signification as “meaning” is from Owen (1965). This paper (or the interpretation it popularized) deeply shaped the general interpretation of Aristotle in the decades after it was published.

15 Thus, Hamlyn (1977–8), p. 11, argues that Aristotle holds “a theory of meaning according to which meaning amounts to reference”.

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say—one that all (individual) men share, namely, the same essence: manhood. And it is in virtue of sharing this property that the term “man” might also refer to an individual.

To explain this view, though, it is necessary to fill in more of the details. Most important here is the connection between this notion of signification on the one hand and the essence and definition (or formula) of a thing on the other.

As is well known, Aristotle often points to a close (indeed essential!) connection between (i) the essence of $F$ and (ii) the formula ($\lambda \gamma\omicron\zeta$) or definition ($\omicron\rhoi\sigma\mu\omicron\zeta$) of $F$. He also thinks that a name and a formula signify the same thing\textsuperscript{16}; and what the definition of $F$ signifies, Aristotle tells us, is precisely the essence of $F$. Now while it is possible to think of the formula or definition as expressing the meaning of $F$, it can be ruled out that the essence of $F$ is itself the ‘meaning’ of $F$ since, for Aristotle—and no less than for Plato—essences are real (extra-linguistic) properties or features of reality. (This is not diminished by the fact that Aristotle also describes essences as universals since, as we discussed in the previous section, linguistic predication is consistently explained by him in terms of underlying (ontological) states-of-affairs. For Aristotle, if “$F$ is predicated of $S$” is true, it is because (an) $F$ is present in $S$.)

Thus in his influential interpretation of Aristotle’s concept of signification, Irwin argues that:

The definition corresponding to ‘$F$’ signifies the same as ‘$F$’ not because it means the same, but because it is correlated with the same non-linguistic essence; both ‘biped animal’ and ‘man’ are correlated with the real essence of men.\textsuperscript{17}

Nor is this to say that for Aristotle signification is simply reference, either. Indeed it cannot be since Aristotle argues that two terms—the typical examples he gives are ‘being’ and ‘one’—may be co-referential\textsuperscript{18} but differ in their significations (or only signify the same “in a way”). In such cases this is because (the significates of) these terms do not share the same essence or (which is equivalent—see the preceding paragraph) because the formula and essence corresponding to each term is different.

But this very fact—namely, that signification has a non-extensional aspect—perhaps suggests that Aristotle is after all thinking of signification as ‘meaning’. Here though it is also useful to recall that for Aristotle a non-referring term $X$ (such as “goat-stag”) may signify something ‘to us’—namely the thought of $X$—without signifying a real essence.\textsuperscript{19} The whole thrust of Aristotle’s views on signification, then, is towards providing a properly scientific account (that is, an explanatory one) not of the ‘meaning’ of (different) terms but rather of the real essences of things, as discussed in the *Posterior Analytics*. (Thus, as Aristotle discusses in the passage just cited, *APo.* II.7, the


\textsuperscript{17} Irwin (1982), p. 246.

\textsuperscript{18} Indeed Aristotle thinks that the latter terms—‘being’ and ‘one’—are necessarily co-referential since they are convertible.

scientist begins by considering the ‘nominal definition’ of terms like “triangle” and “goat-stag” in order to discover whether they signify a corresponding real essence; and only if it is discovered that such an object does exist can the scientist proceed to demonstrate what it is.) Thus Irwin concludes his article: “Inquiry into words and their signification is part of inquiry into the world and the real essences in it.”

Moreover, it is important to recall that, for Aristotle, it is not only terms that signify, but things too. (So for example, both “man” and man signify “rational animal”.) Hence, for Bäck, ‘signification’ in Aristotle is more appropriately understood as “being a sign for”, and crucially, in the sense of “signifying objects” (not meanings).

Finally, we should consider one more example since it will be the main focus of our examination below. It concerns the difference between so-called homonymy (or equivocity) and synonymy (or univocity).

**4.2.1 Aristotelian homonomy and the pros hen structure of being**

In the very opening paragraphs of the *Categories* (Chapter I) Aristotle writes:

> When things have only a name in common and the definition of being (λόγος τῆς οὐσίας) which corresponds to the name is different, they are called homonymous (ὁµόνυμα). Thus, for example, both a man and a picture are animals. These have only a name in common and the definition of being which corresponds to the name is different; for if one is to say what being an animal is for each of them, one will give two distinct definitions.

> When things have the name in common and the definition of being (λόγος τῆς οὐσίας) which corresponds to the name is the same, they are called synonymous (συνώνυμα). Thus, for example, both a man and an ox are animals. Each of these is called by a common name, ‘animal’, and the definition of being is also the same; for if one is to give the definition of each—what being an animal is for each of them—one will give the same definition (τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον).

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20 Irwin (1982), p. 266.

21 So at *Cat.* 3b10 Aristotle writes that “Every substance seems to signify a certain ‘this’.” Cf. *Top.* 122b16–17, 139a21–31, 142b27–29, 146a17; *Apo.* 85b18–21.

22 Bäck (2000), p. 136. Here too Bäck highlights how this conception is related to the multiple significations of being in Aristotle. He writes: “Often Aristotle is concerned to distinguish different types of ‘significations’ of ‘being’. In this way he says, in *Metaphysics* VII. 1, that ‘being’ or ‘that which is’ (τὸ ὄν) may ‘signify’ (σημαίνει) a substance or a quantity or a quality etc. [1028a2] Here ‘signify’ seems to be used in its original sense of ‘being a sign for’. In this sense, when Aristotle lists the significations of ‘being’, he gives a list of the sorts of objects that have being and hence a list of objects to which that word may refer. He does not thereby list meanings of ‘being’, in the sense of giving definitions or synonymy. As ‘being’ (τὸ ὄν) is a substantive, Aristotle rather appropriately concentrates on the semantic question of what things are described by that substantive expression.” (p. 60)

23 *Cat.* 1, 1a1–6.

24 *Cat.* 1, 1a6–12.
Several things should be noted here. Firstly, it is remarkable that what Aristotle focuses on here is the things that are called homonyms (ὁμόνομα) and synonyms (συνόνομα) respectively—something which the translation perhaps obscures: not homonymous or synonymous terms as such.\(^{25}\) (In Aristotle’s examples, it is a man and a picture that are called homonyms, and a man and an ox that are called synonyms.) Secondly, the difference between homonymy and synonymy is explained in terms of (i) things having only a name in common while the formula corresponding to the name—the λόγος τῆς οὐσίας; hence the essence, as we have explained above—is different (producing homonymy) or (ii) things having both a name and a corresponding formula in common (producing synonymy).

In line with the more general account of signification we have presented above, then, we have here a specific example in which it is the fact of (not) sharing a formula or essence (rather than the meaning or sense) that corresponds to a term that Aristotle points to as the important distinguishing factor between the two given modes of signification; and this is brought out even more by the fact that it is the difference between the things-called “homonyms” or “synonyms” respectively that Aristotle singles out. There is still room in this picture for meanings, to be sure; but even so, it will remain the fact for Aristotle that if the term “animal” as predicated of man and ox (and other real animals: not their mere likenesses as in images) signifies a single meaning it is because the formula signifying the real-essence of each of them is the same.

This helps us to see why the attribution to Aristotle of a doctrine of “focal meaning” or some view concerning the “multiple senses” of a given term not so much confuses the matter as it perhaps misses the point; for what is shows is that even if Aristotle is concerned with discussing the meanings of terms (and so had a clear notion of meaning) his main concern in such contexts as we have just described is to distinguish between the different formulae or essences of things as signified by these terms; and this includes distinguishing between terms that are used homonomously (where a common term signifies multiple accounts or essences) and those that are used synonymously (where a common term signifies a single account or essence), as well of course as those terms that do not signify real essences at all, though they might “signify” (in a weaker sense) a thought or nominal-definition (like “goat-stag”); and such efforts to determine the signification of terms, finally, is pursued not within the context of, or for the sake of developing, a theory of meaning as such (a concern with semantics) but rather for the purposes of developing a scientific account in which essences play the central role.

Moreover, this helps us to see too what Aristotle is up to in a book like *Metaphysics Δ*, and elsewhere, when he is engaged in distinguishing the different significations of terms (πολλαχῶς λέγωνα) like ‘cause’ or ‘substance’ or ‘being’. Once more, we can say, it is not so much that Aristotle is concerned to disambiguate the senses or meanings of terms as he is to distinguish

\(^{25}\) This is part of the broader picture in the Categories we already discussed above: it is concerned at once with words and with things.
between the different *kinds* of cause or substance or being that there are. Thus Δ.2 on “cause” distinguishes between the material, formal, efficient and final causes, while Δ.8 mentions as examples of “substance” simple bodies, the formal-cause (like the soul, which is the being of an animal), a limit, and “the essence, the formula of which is a definition”. Δ.8 summarizes that “substance”, therefore, finally signifies “the ultimate substratum, which is no longer predicated of anything else, and that which, being a ‘this’, is also separable and of this nature is the shape or form of each thing”; and this is important because it highlights that, alongside the multiple significations of a term, Aristotle often identifies a single account that somehow binds together or overarches the rest, or is somehow the most authoritative. (Thus, Δ.1 on “principle” summarizes: “It is common, then, to all beginnings to be the first point from which a thing either is or comes to be or is known; but of these some are immanent in the thing and others are outside.”)

But even here, it is not strictly the case that Aristotle is thinking of this account as expressing the shared meaning or sense of these terms, as such. Rather, this ‘common element’ will be part of the account and real-essence of whatever is truly called a principle or cause or substance, and so on for all other items that are similarly ‘said in many ways’.

*Here we arrive at the crucial point concerning the theory of homonymy that we find in Aristotle; for the preceding remarks give a clue as to what it is that connects the apparently diverse significations of a term or—it is better to say—the diverse items signified by a single term.

It should be noted that Aristotle *does* recognize that terms do have something like senses or at least different uses in addition to signifying-essences (as we have been describing) and also engages in an effort to distinguish these. For example in his survey of the different significations of “being” Aristotle includes being as truth (the verb “is (not)” as asserting or denying the truth (falsehood) of a statement) and also (perhaps) different logical-types of predication or uses of the verb “is” (essential and accidental). The same might be said of other particles that Aristotle discusses in Δ. The result of this is that the phrase or notion of ‘being said in many ways’ (λέγεται πολλάχως) is itself said in many ways. See Brakas (2003; 2011). Cf. Hintikka (1959). Bäck (2000), pp. 59–60, also provides a very neat summary of the different ways in which Aristotle thinks can be said in many ways (and thus the different strategies he adopts to disambiguate a term). Focussing on the verb ‘be’ Bäck writes: “Aristotle makes distinctions of being on many different levels, and, in some passages, appears to conflate those levels. How many and what sorts of levels are distinguished is somewhat arbitrary and depends upon theoretical assumptions. Yet it is not completely anachronistic to make such distinctions. After all, Aristotle himself likes to assign parts of being to different special sciences… For my purposes, it will be convenient to distinguish the following levels: 1) a semantic level, where Aristotle gives the extension (“signification”) of ‘be’ (in its various grammatical forms), by listing the sorts of objects that have being 2) a syntactic level, where Aristotle gives inference patterns and truth conditions for statements containing ‘be’ 3) an intensional level, where he gives the various senses of ‘be’ by discussing the meaning of ‘be’ in Greek 4) a grammatical level, where he discusses how ‘be’ functions so as to make a sequence of words into a complete sentence, and so in effect gives formation rules for wffs containing ‘be’. A theory of predication will focus on the syntactic and semantic levels. After all, logic consists of syntax and (formal) semantics. Still, the intensional and grammatical levels have some relevance. Here I shall focus on with the intensional level, where Aristotle discusses meanings of ‘be’.”
To recap: the account I have just presented is in agreement with that of recent interpreters such as Julie Ward who consider homonymy (and synonymy) in general not to involve a semantic relation between words but rather (primarily) an ontological relation between extra-linguistic things—beings. I also agree that (following Irwin) signification is not primarily about meaning but rather about essence-specification, and that failure to signify a single definition or essence (as discussed above) is enough to establish homonymy. But as is well known—and as the preceding account was meant to illuminate—Aristotle holds that there are many examples of single terms that signify multiple essences, but which nevertheless share something in common, and thus fall in-between (pure) homonymy and (pure) synonymy.

Following Shields we can refer to such cases as as examples of “associated homonymy”; homonyms “whose accounts, overlap, but not completely”. In short, associated homonymy represents, for Aristotle, a tertium quid between (pure or discrete) homonymy and synonymy; and it holds a central place in his philosophical thinking.

Most important for Shields (and of course for Aristotle) are those examples of associated homonymy which he (Shields) describes as “core–dependent” homonyms and which Aristotle explicitly introduces using the formula (X is) πρὸς ἑν (or in relation to one thing). The illustrative example that Aristotle issues is “health” (ὑγίεια). Thus, he writes,

Everything which is healthy is related to health, one thing in the sense that it preserves health, another in the sense that it produces it, another in the sense that it is a symptom of health, another because it is capable of it

We describe both a diet and a certain complexion as being “healthy”; but each of these—namely, the items signified by the term: a diet and a certain complexion—is so-described (as “healthy”) because it has a certain relation (πρὸς ἑν) to one thing: namely, a healthy person. Thus, a healthy-diet is productive of health while a healthy-complexion is symptomatic (a sign) of someone’s state of health (the healthy person).

Aristotle does not explicitly discuss this sort of multivocity in the Categories passage examined above (and the fact that he did not has led many interpreters to suspect that here too we

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27 Ward (2008)

28 Thus Ward (2008), p. 13, writes: “…the referents of words are extra-linguistic entities, not other words”.

29 Shields (1999), p. 35f. Shields distinguishes between associated homonymy (and its quasi-species) and discrete homonymy—the kind of homonymy that embraces terms such as “bank” (as applied to a financial institution and a river embankment) and “ball” (as applied to a spherical object and a formal social gathering for dancing).

30 Shields (Ibid), p. 35.
have an example of philosophical development); but as I have suggested, it more-or-less this conception that we encounter in *Metaphysics* Δ and throughout the text. Most importantly—and here we arrive back at the beginning—it is this conception that explains why Aristotle’s claim that τὸ ὁν λέγεται πολλαχάς (that being is said in many ways) poses no threat to the possibility of a unified enquiry into being. For like health, Aristotle, tells us

[The term] “being” is said in many ways, but [they are] related to one central point, one definite kind of thing [πρὸς ὁν καὶ μίαν τινὰ φόσιν], and not homonymously [οὐχ ὁμονόμος]. (1003a33–34)

Recalling the problem that we introduced in Chapter 1: the notion of core-dependent homonymy emerges as one of the central doctrines in the *Metaphysics* for two reasons: firstly, it reflects that fact that the different sorts of being that Aristotle recognizes exhibit a kind of unity—a relation or association—in a way that makes being a suitable subject-matter for study (for, were the different sorts of being not related in this way, the science of being would break-up into several discrete inquiries: one for each corresponding sort of being); and secondly it shows that for Aristotle it is possible to study in a single science items that do not belong to a single genus (as its subject-matter in fact cuts across multiple genera) but without swallowing up the sciences in the fashion of platonic dialectic. The unity of the science of being (like the unity of the science of health or medicine) reflects the unity of a structure: a relation between beings. So again, just as the art of medicine, or health (which is at once concerned with studying healthy bodies, or those suffering the privation of health, as well as healthy-diets and medical instruments and so on) is not a unified science insofar as it studies a single genus or sort of being as such, but rather because everything that it studies has a relation to one principle: (un)healthy human beings, so too the science of being *qua* being announced in in Γ.1 is not a unified science insofar as it studies a single genus or sort of being as such, but rather because the different sorts of being that there are all have a relation to a single principle; and that principle is substance. Thus, Aristotle writes:

So, too, there are many senses in which a thing is said to be, but all refer to one principle; some things are said to be because they are substances, others because they are affections of substance, others because they are a process towards substance, or destructions or privations or qualities of substance, or productive or generative of substance, or of things which are relative to substance, or negations of some of these things or of substance itself. […] As, then, there is one science which deals with all healthy things, the same applies in the other cases also. For not only in the case of things which have one common notion does the investigation belong to one science, but also in the case of things which are related to one common nature; for even these in a sense have one common notion.

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31 See Owen (1960 1965). Alan Code (1997) has presented the strongest case against Owen’s argument, focusing on the connection between the discussion of homonymy in *EE* 1.8 and *Met*. Γ.1-2’s conception of a science of being.

32 *Met*. Γ.2 (1003a35–b15)
But of course, the comparison between this science and the art of medicine is meant to be illustrative only; for not only do they differ with respect to their ends (the one being a productive science and the other theoretical: it pursues knowledge for its own sake); the science of being qua being is also distinguished by its universality. Since anything that exists (anything that is-being) will exhibit this same same structure—namely the same πρὸς ἑν relation between the quasi-genera of being and substance primarily—in studying it the enquiry into being qua being will range over everything that is.

It is also crucial to keep in mind the significance of the functor ‘qua’ in the locution “being qua being”. For as we examined in Chapter 2, what this operation involves is not so much singling out a certain kind of being for investigation (as if “being” and “being qua being” were two different objects as such) but rather singling out a certain perspective from which to investigate being. Thus, while both mathematics and first philosophy investigate being, the former “cuts off” a part of being—it focuses on one aspect: being as measurable—while the latter considers being as being. This, then, will involve filtering out (or simply excluding from its perspective) those aspects of being that do not apply to being as such (aspects such as movement and measurability). What we are left with, then, after “being” has been abstracted in this way, is in a sense the very πρὸς ἑν structure of being itself—the quasi-genus substance and the quasi-genera that depend on it—and the attributes that belong (καθ’ αὑτο) to being as such. Moreover, because (as we discussed in Chapter 1) this science is ultimately a search for the first causes and principles of being qua being, and because whatever is-being is ultimately dependent on substance (which is precisely what the preceding argument concerning the πρὸς ἑν structure of being is directing us to see), by studying the causes of substance we will be (indirectly) studying the causes of of being universally.

All of which is to say that, even if it is argued that “being” has several senses, this is not really Aristotle’s chief concern here. The enquiry into being is not a semantic one, and nor is Aristotle’s approach really motivated by (semantic) worries about the multiple meanings of terms; rather, as we have examined above, even so far as questions about ‘signification’ are concerned, this scientific enquiry is directed towards understanding the essential natures of real-beings and their inter-relations, as reflected in their essence-stating accounts.

Now, this is important because an influential line of interpretation popularized by a number of different scholars during the last half-century (notably Owen, Frede/Patzig and others) does assume that something like a logical-semantic relation applies to the πρὸς ἑν structure of being, such that the priority of substance, as the “focal meaning” of “being” (its primary sense), involves a certain logical priority (like the priority a genus over its species); and this is supported by Aristotle’s remarks to the effect that the notion (or account) of substance is somehow contained in the notion (or account) of non-substantial beings. But as Enrico Berti has forefully argued, this picture is almost certainly wrong; and in the following chapter I examine how it is connected to a wider Neoplatonizing interpretation of Aristotle that actually has more in common with the conception of

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33 Berti (2002)
the relationship between being (qua being) and its first principle found in (or debated by) Medieval philosophers.

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At this point, then, we should turn to examine the account of the multivocity of being that we find in Avicenna, and how it overlaps with some of the same concerns examined in the preceding sections. After presenting a broad overview of this account (and recent scholarly examinations of the topic) I shall then focus on how it (arguably) reflects a concern with meanings that we do not find in Aristotle.

4.3 Avicenna on the modulated equivocity of ‘being’

In an important article published only a few years ago, ‘Avicenna’s Notion of Transcendental Modulation of Existence’, Alexander Treiger34 has presented a detailed study that aims to situate Avicenna’s various remarks about the predication of “being” (or “existent”, al-mawjūd) against the backdrop of the development of Aristotle’s views on synonymous and homonymous predication, including his argument that ‘being’ is neither a univocal, nor strictly homonymous term, but is rather (as we have discussed at length above) predicated pros hen. The historical survey that Treiger presents in this paper embraces both Greek and Arabic sources, and though what he ultimately seeks to show through it is that Avicenna is probably the first philosopher to discuss explicitly the transcendental predication of being,35 it is rather the positive connections that Treiger points to (linking Avicenna to Aristotle via the Greek and Arabic sources) in regards to the more general classification of univocal and equivocal terms (and those that stand between pure univocity and equivocity) within the wider Aristotelian tradition that is perhaps most illuminating.

Treiger’s paper overlaps with two other recent studies of Avicenna’s views on the predication of being as well—in Bertolacci (2011) and De Haan (2015)—and shall I draw on all three of them in the following sections, expanding on some of their results and exploring several other related issues that they do not directly discuss. In particular, I will focus on two important aspects of Avicenna’s views on the predication of being that these authors only mention cursorily: namely, the significance of Avicenna’s claim that being is predicated ‘by way of priority and posteriority’ (ṭarīq al-tagaddum wa-l-ta’akhkhur), as well as his claim that the roughly unified notion of being arises, in some way, through a process of ‘abstraction’. For it is arguably here that the most notable differences emerge between the two thinkers’ accounts. To wit: Avicenna’s doctrine of the modulation of being (and the wider treatment of equivocal and non-equivocal terms of which this doctrine forms a part) rests on a special notion of “sense” or “meaning” (ma’nā) that is, once again,

34 Treiger (2012)  
35 That is, the view that ‘existent’ as predicated across the transcendental divide, of God and of created beings respectively, is not a univocal term—the so-called doctrine of the ‘analogy’ of being which became associated with the metaphysics of Aquinas and later thinkers. See De Libera (1989).
arguably missing in Aristotle. That is, Avicenna regards modulated terms (those which fall between pure univocity and pure equivocity) as having a single concept and definition, and a ‘meaning’, that is shared or partaken of unequally of the things that they are predicated of.

But before we get to that, I shall begin by presenting the main details of Avicenna’s views on the predication of being in the light of his classification of univocal and equivocal terms.

4.3.1 Avicenna’s classification of the kinds of predication

The most detailed and systematic discussion of univocal and equivocal terms in Avicenna’s al-Shifā’ is, as we might expect, found in the first chapter of the Maqūlāt (I, 2)—Avicenna’s reworking of Aristotle’s Categories. There, Avicenna broadly follows Aristotle and the Greek commentary tradition in distinguishing between terms that are predicated uni
cally (ʿalā sabīl al-tawāṭu’) and those that are predicated ‘as a shared name’ or ‘by coincidence of name’ (bi-ittifāq al-ism)—i.e., equivocal terms. But his classification of the latter (i.e., the different varieties of homonymy), in particular, reflects both important developments in the history of commenting on Aristotle’s classification, as well as innovations that Avicenna himself introduces. Moreover, it is here—and specifically, under the heading of ‘modulated’ (mushakkik) terms—that Avicenna draws attention to the predication of being, so I shall focus on these.

(The following translation of Maqūlāt I.2 is from Bertolacci (2015), which is occasionally clearer or more accurate than that of Treiger. I shall note some important differences of translation in the footnotes.)

[a] As to what is not [predicated] by way of synonymy, in general it is said [to be predicated] by homonymy (bi-ittifāq al-ism). [38] [This class] is divided into three groups. [1] Either the notion (ma’nā) in them [i.e. in the things whose name coincides] is one as such, although it is different in another respect. [2] Or it is not one, but between the two things [whose name coincides] there is a certain resemblance. [3] Or it is not one, and between the two things there is no resemblance.

[In this tripartition of homonymous terms, it is [2], which Avicenna will refer to below as examples of a “modulated term” (ism mushakkik), that Avicenna focuses on. He further divides modulated terms into those that are used in an “absolute” and a “relative” sense.]

[b] The things in which the notion is one, but are different afterwards [in another respect], are like the notion of existence (wujūd). [i] For [existence] is one in many things, but it is different in them, since it is not found in them according to a single form in every respect, in so far as it belongs to some of them before, to some others afterwards. [i.i] For the

36 Note already that Avicenna is more emphatic that it is univocal and equivocal terms that he has in focus.
37 Including Alexander, Porphyry, and also later philosophers/commentators such as Elias and Fārābī—to be discussed below.
38 Literally “by coincidence of name”. Treiger (2012), p. 353, translates “as a shared name”.
39 Treiger, Ibid, p. 353, translates “the intended meaning”.
existence of substance [comes] before the existence of the other things that follow [substance], [i.ii] and also because the existence of some substances [comes] before the existence of other substances. [i.iii] Likewise, the existence of some accidents [comes] before the existence of others. This is the way of [predication according to] priority and posteriority (ṭarīq al-taqaddum wa-l-ta’akhkhur).

[c] [ii] Likewise, [existence] may be different according to major [and minor] worth and appropriateness (ṭarīq al-awlā wa-l-akhrā). For existence belongs to some things per se (min dhāṭihi), to some others in virtue of something else (min ghayrīhī). Now, what exists per se is worthier of existence than what exists in virtue of something else.

[d] Every thing that is prior with regard to a [certain] notion is also worthier of it, but not vice versa. For two things may share a certain notion in such a way that this latter does not belong to one of them before [and to the other afterwards], but both [relate] to it simultaneously; nonetheless, one of them is worthier of it, by being more complete or more stable with regard to it.

[e] [iii] As to what is different by intensity and weakness, it only applies to notions that admit intensity and weakness, like whiteness. Thus, ‘whiteness’ is not predicated of the whiteness in snow and the whiteness in ivory according to absolute synonymy, nor is ‘philosophy’ predicated of the philosophy of the Peripatetics and the philosophy of the Stoics according to absolute synonymy. We are just providing you with famous examples, about which one must be indulgent once [their] goal is grasped.

[f] The [name] in which the concept [mafhūn] of the term is one when it [i.e. the concept of the name] is abstracted (jurrīda), although it is not one in every respect, and is similar in the things that participate in that term [al-ashyā’ al-muṭāhidā], is called an ‘ambiguous name’ (ism mushakkik), although sometimes it is called otherwise.

[g] An ambiguous name may be absolute (muṭlaq), as we have said. But it may also be [predicated] on account of the relation (bi-ḥasab al-nisba) [i] to a single principle, as when we predicate ‘medical’ of the book, the dissecting knife, and the remedy, [ii] or to a single end, as when we predicate ‘healthy’ of the remedy, the exercise, and the phlebotomy. [iii] Sometimes it is [predicated] on account of the relation to [both] a [single] principle and a single end, as when we say that all things [of the universe] are divine.40

Leaving aside pure univocals (Aristotle’s συνόνωμα), the resulting classification, then, involves non-univocal terms (Aristotle’s ὁμόνωμα) that are:

1. Ambiguous (or modulated);
2. involve resemblance; or are
3. purely equivocal.

Avicenna in turn divides (1) into (1a) modulated terms used in an absolute sense; namely those that are predicated:

[i] by way of priority and posteriority

[ii] according to degrees of worth and appropriateness
[iii] according to strength and weakness

as well as the following types of (1b) relative modulated terms: those that are used in relation to:

[i] one principle
[ii] one goal
[iii] one principle and end

Now what is most immediately striking about this passage and its classification is that ‘existent’ (or ‘existence’: *wujūd*) turns up in the first grouping (1a), and not, as we might have expected, in the second grouping (1b), among those terms that are predicated (ii) ‘on account of [some] relation to’ a first (*bi-hasab al-nisba*), where Aristotle’s familiar examples of terms that are predicated *pros hen* (‘health’ or ‘medical’) are given. Specifically, ‘existence’ is given as an example of a term predicated both [i] by way of priority and posteriority and [ii] according to degrees of worth and appropriateness. The reason Avicenna gives is that, with respect to its being predicated by way of priority and posteriority, the existence of substance is prior to the existence of accidents; and furthermore the existence some substances is prior to the existence of some other substances (and the same for accidents). Moreover, with respect to its being predicated according to degrees of worth or appropriateness, Avicenna argues that existence belongs to something things *per se* and to others in virtue of something else (and so what exists *per se* is “worthier of existence”).

Again, this argument is highly significant because, even though Aristotle certainly describes substance as what is “prior”, and non-substances as (in some way) posterior on account of their being dependent on the latter for their being, still, he is usually careful to distinguish terms that are predicated *pros hen* and those that are, strictly speaking, predicated by way priority and posteriority. For Aristotle, the latter usually involve those species-terms that form a series or ordered genus, such as number and figure.\(^{41}\) So in the same way that the number one is prior to two, and the number two prior to three, and so on, the figure triangle is prior to quadrilaterals, and so forth. In each case, the former item is somehow ‘contained’ in the latter, all the way up the series. Hence, the inclusion of ‘existence’ among those terms that are predicated by way of priority and posteriority strikes us as surprising—especially since Aristotle still regards number and figure (and similar cases) as ordinary univocal genera.\(^{42}\) Or yet again, whether or not this single fact is striking, what makes it so is that

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\(^{41}\) In *Met. B.3*, Aristotle denies that a genus whose species are ordered by priority and posteriority cannot exist separately or apart from them; cf. *EN*. I 6, 1096a17–19. He does not deny that these species form an ordinary genus, for in no case can a genus exist apart from its species. See Lloyd (1962).

\(^{42}\) As far as I can tell, the only recent commentator to have explicitly noted this incongruity is Stephen Menn (2013), p. 163. n. 35. “The standard Aristotelian examples of things said *per prius et posterius* are “number” and “polygon,” and these are closer to univocity than health as said of an animal and of its diet; perhaps they can even be called univocal, but not in the way that a genus is said univocally of its species, since the species of a genus are simultaneous with each other and are all equally immediately related to the genus, whereas triangle is prior to quadrilateral and pentagon, and there are theorems that are true of all

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‘existence’ does not appear in the second group—specifically, among those terms (like ‘health’ or ‘medical’) that are predicated in relation to one principle (pros hen); for as we have examined at length, it is Aristotle’s considered position that being is not an ordinary (univocal) genus, but that whatever is-being always depends on, or exists in relation to, one principle—substance—and is unified in this way.

Turning to the next passage in which Avicenna discusses the modulated equivocity of ‘being’ or ‘existent’, however, we get a slightly different picture. In Chapter I.5 of the Metaphysics of al-Shifa’, Avicenna writes:

We now say: Although the existent (al-mawjūd), as you have known, is not a genus and is not predicated equally (bi-l-tasāwī) of what is beneath it, yet it has a meaning agreed on with respect to priority and posteriority (ma’nan muttafaq fihi ‘alā l-taqdīm wa-l- ta’khūr). The first thing to which it belongs is the quiddity, which is substance, and then to what comes after it. Since it [has] one meaning, in the manner to which we have alluded, accidental matters adhere to it that are proper to it, as we have shown earlier. For this reason, it is taken care of by one science in the same way that anything pertaining to health has one science.43

Here it is affirmed that existent is not a genus, since it is not predicated equally of what it is predicated of, and yet its meaning or notion is agreed on with respect to priority and posteriority, since ‘existent’ belongs first of all to the quiddity of substance, and then to what comes after substance; and it is because this notion is unified in this way that it is, like health, a suitable object for investigation in one science.

From the point of view of Aristotle, this schema appears slightly confused; for while Avicenna affirms that being (existent) is predicated of its instances by way of priority and posteriority, and not pros hen (hence, the comparison with the science of health is slightly odd—again from the point of view of the classification that Aristotle provides). Moreover, as we have noted above, Aristotle does not argue that a series ordered by way of priority and posteriority (like numbers) do not form a genus.44

But even more significant here is the claim that ‘existent’ “has a meaning (ma’nā) agreed on with respect to priority and posteriority”. A better translation or paraphrase of this last phrase might be:

polygons because they are true of triangles and because all polygons can be decomposed into triangles. Avicenna apparently regards being as more like polygon than like health, and this may allow him to explain how unity can be said univocally of beings in all categories, as “equal to a square” can be said of all kinds of polygons, whereas it is not clear that anything can be said univocally of health in an animal and in a diet”.

43 Shīfāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt I.5.21 (p. 27).
44 Note, Aristotle does hold that substance is prior—as we have discussed at length earlier. The issue here is in what way being (predicated of substance primarily and non-substances afterwards) is unified: pros hen or by way of priority and posteriority (as a series)?
‘existent’ is predicated unequally of what is beneath it [i.e. the instances that fall under the general concept ‘existent’]; nevertheless, it is a notion in which the latter [i.e. these instances] coincide by way of priority and posteriority.

The importance of these words is quite profound, but easy to miss, and the reason has precisely to do with the issue that we began this chapter discussing; for what this conception rests on is the very notion of a notion—and one that embraces, no less, the notions of a concept, sense, and meaning—that we suggested was lacking in Aristotle, but very much part of our own conceptual vocabulary. That is, Avicenna here tells us that it is the notion—the ma’nā—of ‘existent’ that is roughly unified, though it applies unequally (by way of priority and posteriority) to its instances, or what falls under it.

Casting a look back to the previous passage we examine in this section, Maqūlāt 1.2 (10:4–11:7), we find this same conception. To wit:

[b] The things in which the notion is one, but are different afterwards… are like the notion of existence…

And

[d] Every thing that is prior with regard to a [certain] notion is also worthier of it, but not vice versa. For two things may share a certain notion in such a way that this latter does not belong to one of them before…

And

[e] As to what is different by intensity and weakness, it only applies to notions that admit intensity and weakness, like whiteness…

And so on.

Now let us suppose that for Avicenna, no less than for Aristotle, such observations about synonymy, homonymy and predication as we have just examined are equally founded on—that is, explained by—the way that things are, that is, extra-linguistic states-of-affairs. In that case, for Avicenna too the fact that ‘existent’ is not a univocal term, but is rather predicated unequally of its instances, will be explained by the fact the things that exist exhibit such a mode of being; some will exist prior to others, and so we should say that ‘existent’ is predicated of these first of all, and of what follows them afterwards. Nevertheless, it will be said, even though things exist in different ways, they nevertheless coincide in this notion (muttafaq fīhi); or to put it another way, the mind can form a roughly unified notion of ‘existent’, even though whatever is an existent exists by way of priority and posteriority. In fact, this is almost what Avicenna tells us verbatim in the lines immediately following those quoted above. To wit:

[f] The [name] in which the concept of the term is one when it is abstracted, although it is not one in every respect, and is similar in the things that participate in that term, is called an ‘ambiguous name’.
Once again, then, the notion of abstraction emerges as a central feature in Avicenna’s analysis; and here it appears to be doing a lot of work, even leading him in a direction that Aristotle was not wont to be drawn; for it can be argued that Aristotle’s whole effort to distinguish not only between univocal and equivocal terms, but between various discrete kinds of multivocity, was aimed at remedying this mistaken thought—namely, that even when a single term is predicated of its instances unequally, we should still suppose that there is something overarching that these instances share. This applies not only to things that merely resemble each other, like a Socrates and his painted image, or a living and a dead human body (of which ‘man’ and ‘body’ are predicated homonymously),45 but more importantly, of those terms predicated pros hen, like ‘health’ and ‘being’ and ‘good’, which, rather than (each of them separately, and the items in different categories they are predicated of) belonging to or sharing in a single genus, even unequally, are united in that they are related to a single principle. Thus, their unity—which ultimately goes back to the unity of the figures of predication, the categories—is the unity of a structure, not the unity of partaking either equally or unequally in some overarching kind. Importantly, this is also reflected in the different accounts or definitions (λόγοι) of the essences of pros hen equivocals, such as ‘health(y)’; once again, what the things called ‘healthy’ will share in common with respect to their respective definitions is not a common genus but rather that very principle in relation to which each of them exists—health in a human body—and in virtue of which they are (paronomously) named ‘healthy’. Thus, they share a name while differing in account.

By contrast, for Avicenna, homonymy in general will be explained in terms of names having “a relation to the things via senses or concepts”, as Alan Bäck writes.46 Or as Alexander Key observes, for Avicenna, “what connects names is a certain connection to a particular mental content”. (In what follows, I shall loosely refer to ‘senses’, ‘concepts’ and ‘mental content’ interchangeably. Where greater precision is needed this will be explained.) That is, with respect to “absolute” modulated terms (type 1a above) like ‘existent’, these apply to two things (say, to substance and accident) in the same sense; or at least Avicenna can say—combining the two passages above—although the notion “is not one in every respect” in them, it is “similar” enough in the things that share in it that we can, through abstraction, still form a single notion of ‘existent’.47 Following Aristotle, perhaps, this single notion or sense will still differ from the proper accounts of each of the prior and posterior things to which the term applies, but the import is the same: Avicenna is evidently more inclined than Aristotle was to view ‘existent’ as a unified notion, and this has everything to do with his approach to homonymy (and synonymy) resting not only on a

45 See, for example, DA 2.1 (412b12–22)
46 Bäck (2008), p. 54.
47 It is notable that Avicenna speaks both of the ‘notion’ being in things and those things sharing in the notion.
notion of sense, but also a notion of abstraction and of (recognizing) similarity between things, whence we arrive at such a unified notion.48

As we have examined at length above, Aristotle does not appeal to “senses” or meanings in his own theory; instead, he cashes his theory in terms of things sharing a name but differing in their accounts. So we might put it, then, Avicenna’s theory can be seen as a stage in the transition from logos to meaning as the focus of philosophical thought and discourse.

But it should be said too that this transformation had a long history leading up to (and after) Avicenna. This includes not only the development of the (originally Aristotelian) theory of homonomy in the Greek and Arabic commentaries (which Treiger has documented so thoroughly in his study which we have referred to throughout this chapter), but also those developments that occurred within the wider philosophical context of discussing fundamental problems about the relationship between language, thought and reality. This is reflected, for example, in the well-known debates in Late Antiquity about the subject that is discussed in the Categories—namely, whether the categories are about words, thoughts, or things—a problem49 that was considered settled by Ammonius, who—following an interpretation that goes back to Porphyry—argued that in this treatise, Aristotle is talking about words, which signify things through the medium of concepts.50 Simplicius follows this interpretation too, placing even greater weight on significative thoughts in his schema51; and this is clearly felt in his account of homonomy. As Bäck writes, “the interpretation of Simplicius… makes homonymy more a matter of the relationship between concepts about things, than about the things themselves”.52,53

But here again Ammonius plays an important role in this history of transformation; for while this notion of a concept (νόημα pl. νοηματα) had been widely discussed by Plotinus and other Neoplatonists, Ammonius describes these concepts as ὑστερογενη—“later-born”—meaning that we derive them from sensible things through a process of abstraction.54 (This is in contrast with the Plotinian concepts (λόγοι) which we are born with, and which go back to the Forms themselves.) This conception fundamentally shaped Avicenna’s approach—both in his logic and in his

48 Another corollary, as Bäck (2008), p. 4, notes, is that synonymy and homonymy lie on a continuum, which includes analogy and metaphor.
49 Sorabji (2004) provides a good introduction and, especially, selection of primary texts that discuss the matter.
50 Ammonius, In Cat. 11.7–12.1; Cf. Porphyry, In Cat. 58, 3–6.
51 Simplicius, In Cat. 10.4–5; see Bäck (2008), p. 48.
54 In his important study on Avicennian and post-Avicennian readings of Aristotle’s Categories, Alexander Kalbarczyk (2018, p. 316) has shown that Avicenna had access to Simplicius’ commentary on this text, and drew upon his distinction between the two ways that a subject can be taken: as a mental subject and as in matter. This distinction is reflected in the threefold consideration of quiddity (in things; in conception; and in itself) examined in Chapter 2. See Simplicius, In Cat. 46.22–23. Cf. Key (2018), p. 161
metaphysics, it should be stressed—for it led him to view the content of mental conception itself (the cognitive result of abstraction as we have earlier discussed) as the locus of philosophical investigation. Thus the logician considers quiddities and the accidents that attach to them insofar as they exist in the mind while the metaphysician considers them just as they are in themselves.

Finally, among the Greek sources, we should also point to the Stoic notion of a *lekton*, whose similarity with the the Arabic notion of a *maʿnā* has been long observed (see the next section). Unfortunately—and as has also been long-discussed—it is notoriously difficult to say what Stoic sources Avicenna along with other Arabic philosophers had access to, whether directly or indirectly.

On this note, though, we should observe that, Greek sources aside, the single most important development that occurs within this context is the very appearance of the notion of a *notion* or a *concept* as we discussed above; the Arabic *maʿnā*, which became a key term in the conceptual vocabulary of Arabic philosophers from the very earliest days. Given its importance here, then, and specifically within the context and passages that we have been examining, I shall turn to discuss it in the following and final section of this chapter.

### 4.4 The notion of *maʿnī* in Avicenna and the Arabic (Aristotelian) tradition

The translation into Arabic of Greek works of philosophy from as early as the eighth century CE surely represents one of the most important stages in the history and development of philhellenic thought (and philosophy generally), for its transposition into a new linguistic register and for a new cultural milieu not only saw it more widely dispersed, and thus enter a new phase of commentary and expansion; it also gave rise to whole new questions, patterns of reading, and approaches to old problems that lay dormant in the transmitted texts and discussions.

Part of this metamorphosis surely has to do with the simple fact of translation. Greek and Arabic are quite different languages, and it is well-known that few philosophers of the likes of Avicenna had much, if any, knowledge of Greek. They read their Aristotle in translation, and what they read does show that their translators sometimes wrestled to understand and transmit what they read in Greek—no less than we do today. But despite this fact—and despite what is often said—our philosophers not only display full knowingness about the fact that they were reading works in translation, and possibly imperfect translations; they themselves express clear views about interpretative decisions that the translators were evidently forced to make owing to the differences between the two languages. Occasionally this extends to discussions about the relative facility of the two languages to express certain philosophical notions. Al-Fārābī for instance engages in such speculation in his *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* (and in doing so reveals that his knowledge of Greek was probably limited at best) noting the sort of confusions that Arabic philosophers are prone to fall into because of the idiosyncracies of their own language—confusions that are (he thinks) less likely to
occur in Greek. The important point is that our philosophers display full awareness that they were working with translations, and so approached them with the sort of caution that we might expect of any good interpreter.

Still, these translations do reflect interesting details about the interpretative decisions made by the translators, including the decision whether to draw on a piece of pre-existing Arabic conceptual vocabulary to render a particular Greek term or to coin a new one instead.

This is certainly not the place to examine these issues in extensive detail—it is far too complex a subject to attempt this in any case. (Fortunately, Alexander Key has recently published a comprehensive study on this topic, we refer to it below.) But these observations serve to remind us that Greek philosophy was received into the environment of an existing (and flourishing) intellectual tradition—not only the relatively new theological tradition, but also the older literary tradition in which grammar and poetics were and continued to be highly developed disciplines. Moreover, these traditions—the old and the new—not only influenced each other, but came into conflict at times; and so it came to be that the younger discipline—logic especially—not only inherited some of its conceptual vocabulary from the older one, but also some of its thinking (even if it did so for polemical reasons).

An interesting case involves that very same word that we are concerned with here—maʾnā—and the several notions that it was used to express. Again, we shall only discuss the basic details here, referring to further studies as necessary.

Etymologically, the word maʾnā in Arabic means what a thinker or speaker intends. In grammar it is considered the counterpart of the term lafẓ (verbal expression), and so implies meaning. (Alexander Key thus suggests that the general term “mental content” best captures it.) In philosophy, the term maʾnā was used to translate several Greek terms and concepts. This includes the very word for ‘concept’ that we discussed above—νόημα. Thus, Hunayn ibn Ishaq uses it in his translation of Aristotle’s De Interpretatione. The ‘affections in the soul’ (Ar. āthār, corresponding to the Gk. παθήματα) that Aristotle discusses in this same text is also identified by al-Hasan ibn Suwār with the notion of maʾānī. But this word also does service in translating the Greek πράγματα, namely, the notion of ‘real things’ (cp. Ar. āmūr); thus a maʾnā could be taken both as an idea or an intention, as well as the thing itself that is its source or referent—its extra-mental foundation. And so it was used, inter alia, by Arabic philosophers, though chiefly with the meaning of ‘concept’, as we mentioned above. Hence, it corresponds to another widely used Arabic philosophical term—maʿqūl. Indeed, the two are wielded as near-synonyms, and are often interchangeable, in philosophical Arabic. But different philosophers display different preferences, and al-Fārābī is one who clearly prefers maʿqūl to maʾnā. Avicenna, on the other hand, is more flexible. We can conjecture why.

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56 Key (2018)
In an illuminating study published recently, Adamson and Key have examined the central importance of the notion of mental content in a protracted debate between Arabic philosophers and grammarians in the tenth-century concerning the relation between thought and language (and incidentally about the superiority of their respective disciplines). The locus of this conflict largely concerned the two different theories of linguistic content held by the two traditions: the tripartite theory consisting of sounds–thoughts–things (φωναί–νοήματα–πράγματα) from Aristotle and the bipartite theory held by the Arabic grammarians consisting of the pair vocal form–meaning (lafz–maʾnā). In short: arguing that grammar is chiefly about expression, while logic is about meaning, the Baghdad Aristotelian philosophers had tended to argue that the latter—the language of thought—is more important, and that their approach allowed them to dispense with grammar. The grammarians in turn argued that such logical analysis could not deal with familiar problems of language such as polysemy and synonymy.

What is striking about this debate, though, is that—despite the surface disagreements between the two parties about the relative merits of their different endeavours—it is not, as Adamson and Key argue, “the result of any prima facie incompatibility between the two epistemologies”. In fact—and this is what the authors intend to show—“the tripartite and bipartite theories of meaning that each tradition brought to the table proved perfectly compatible and mutually productive”; and this has everything to do with the central importance and notion of “mental content” in their respective accounts.

At the same time it has to be noted that while both sides use the term maʾnā in this context, the philosophers often prefer the term maʾqūl (pl. maʾqūlat); and again, this surely has something to do with their desire to differentiate themselves through the very difference and precision of their local terminology. (The term maʾnā, widely used as it is, is somewhat more slippery in its meaning than the former, as we have already seen.) Nevertheless, as we have said, the two terms played essentially the same functional role in this debate; and in the following century the term maʾnā would come to occupy a more central place in philosophy as the quarrel between logic and grammar gradually dissipated. Moreover, as in so many other respects, Avicenna represents an important stage in this history too, as it was he who paved the way for their eventual reconciliation. Thus he uses the terminology of both parties, at the same time as clarifying the relation between the disciplines and their proper domains.

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60 Ibid, p. 74.
61 Thus, as Zimmermann (1981), p. xlii, n. 2, observes: “Significantly, al-Fārābī in this connexion avoids using the word maʾnā, which does not permit a clear distinction between the semantic content of a phrase and its referent…. and instead persists in using maʾqūl, which in the translations represents vō̂nμα”.

But to return to our main line of argument: standing in this tradition, Avicenna was not only heir to this fundamental piece of terminology, but also to the highly developed notion of “mental content” that went along with it—a notion in which no less than two streams of thinking coalesced: that of Alexandrian Neoplatonism (which, in its interpretation of Aristotle, emphasized the middle-term in the relationship between language–thought–reality) and that of the autochthonous Arabic literary tradition (with its considered view of how complex verbal forms give rise to mental content)—both of them received directly and through the Baghdad school of Aristotelian philosophy. He also contributed to its further development and put his notion to work with new applications.

One of the concepts associated with the term *maʾnā*, for example (and with the term *maʾqūl*), is the very notion of an *intention*, which became a cornerstone of later medieval philosophy.\(^{62}\) It has been much debated whether we do find in Avicenna (or earlier or later Arabic philosophers) a theory of intentionality along the same lines as those later medieval theories; but as Deborah Back has argued, most of core theses common to theories of intentionality are found in Avicenna, and, “as an interpretation of the fundamental idea behind the generic and technical use of *maʾnā* in Arabic, *intentio* is an entirely legitimate Latin rendition of the term”.\(^{63}\) Thus she points to the following short but highly important passage from Avicenna’s commentary on Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*.

> What is emitted vocally signifies what is in the soul, and these are called impressions (*āthāran*), whereas what is in the soul signifies things (*al-umūr*), and these are what are called ‘meanings’ (*maʾānī*), that is, the things intended by the soul (*maqāṣada li-nafs*). In the same way, the impressions too, by analogy to the expressions, are intentions.\(^{64}\)

These brief remarks are actually quite telling. The same distinction between (extramental) things (*πράγματα*) and their impressions in the soul (*παθήματα*) that we found in Aristotle is preserved here; but Avicenna also refers to the former—the things signified—as “meanings”, explaining that the latter are the things *intended* by the soul. The result is that a *meaning*, for Avicenna, is what Aristotle had referred to as *πράγμα*—an object, or extramental thing or state-of-affairs—but *insofar as it is a referent “of a deliberate act of signification by the mind”*.\(^{65}\) Again, as Black notes, an

\(^{62}\) Just because the term *maʾnā* was later translated into Latin as ‘*intentio*’ does not mean that this term means ‘intention. This is the argument of Gyekye (1971). Knudsen (1982) is less certain but only briefly discusses the Arabic roots of the conception of intention. Gutas (2012), p. 430, warns that the fact that the term *maʾnā* was later translated as *intentio* in medieval Latin “does not mean by itself that the term means ‘intention’ in any sense”.

\(^{63}\) Black (2010), p. 70.


\(^{65}\) Ibid, p. 6. Here, Avicenna follows the Arabic translation of Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*, which rendered *πράγμα* as *maʾnā*. See Key (2018), pp. 154–155.
“intention” is not therefore simply *synonymous* with an object; rather, “things are only called intentions inasmuch as they are understood and signified linguistically”.

Lest we venture too far, let us now turn to consider how these remarks might help us to understand more deeply the account of modulated terms that Avicenna developed.

With respect to the broader issue of the relationship between language–thought–reality that we have been examining throughout this chapter, as we have seen, Avicenna was the heir to two traditions, each of which had developed a theory capable of answering questions in this domain: the originally Aristotelian tripartite theory (which by the time of Ammonius had come to view abstracted ‘concepts’ as occupying the middle-term in this scheme) and the autochthonous Arabic tradition of grammar which opposed verbal form to ‘meanings’. So in answering the problematic question of what the categories are, for example, we find these philosophers arguing that they are about *words* insofar as they signify *things* through the medium of *concepts*. This is the interpretation of al-Fārābī, for example, in his Long Commentary on the *Categories* (preserved in Hebrew translation). Its first line reads:

The intention of the *Categoriae* is to enumerate the single notions related to sense objects, as far as single expressions signify those notions….

Al-Fārābī then goes on to say:

[Aristotle’s] intention in this book is to enumerate the single universal notions related to sense-objects as far as single expressions signify them, by referring to the most general things through which it is possible to think of those notions.

We cannot be sure what Arabic word corresponds to the Hebrew ‘*inyanim*, “notions”, but Zonta suggests either *maʾnā* or *maʾqūl*. We noted above that al-Fārābī tends to prefer the latter term, which literally means an “intelligible”. But he was also wont to use the former roughly in the same sense. Indeed, we saw above that the two are roughly interchangeable, but that the term *maʾnā* is more flexible, perhaps, and wider in its extension, as reflected in the fact that it is sometimes necessary to translate it “thing”, “subject-matter”, and of course “intention”. Certainly, as meaning *intelligible*, it would be difficult to employ the term *maʾqūl* with this same flexibility. Is there any relevance then in the fact that Avicenna expresses a slight preference for the term *maʾnā* in such contexts?

66 Back (2010), p. 6. Knudsen (1982), p. 480, neatly expresses the complexity of this situation, saying, “Thus an intention [according to Avicenna] is nearly the same as a concept as well as the foundation of a concept’s content—one reason why the ontological status of intentions was ambivalent from the beginning” (emphasis added).


Perhaps the reason has already been suggested above; for when Ammonius ‘solved’ the Porphyrian problem about the categories by answering that they “signify things through the medium of concepts”, what he was discarding, as Kalbarczyk remarks, was the idea that there were only “three one-dimensional positions that may be taken on this issue”; namely, that categories are either about words or about thoughts or about thoughts. Thus, Kalbarczyk argues

...against the background of the semiotic triangle sketched in De Interpretatione 16a3–8, the Ammonian formula of the scope of the Categories understands each of the ten categories as a simple generic expression which signifies an extra-linguistic and extra-mental reality via the conceptualization process taking place in the human soul.  

Perhaps it was the fact, then, that the term maʾnā was somehow already fitted to express (at one and the same time?) the notion of a thing existing extra-mentally, as well as that of an intention (the thing insofar as it appears before the mind in an act of conception), as well as the ‘intension’ of a word (its sense) made it a more suitable choice for Avicenna in these contexts. Again, we can only speculate. But in any case—and to now return to the main issue that we set out to consider in this chapter: the details of Avicenna’s account of homonomy—these observations should lead us to treat with some caution the suggestion that, because the term maʾnā primarily means “meaning” or “sense”, Avicenna was thinking of homonomy as a semantic question only. The interpretation of Alexander Key that we have extensively drawn on this chapter, for instance, arguably leans too far in this direction. Thus, in his analysis of Avicenna’s handling of the Aristotelian homonomy (specifically, the pros hen “ambiguity” of being), he writes, “Aristotelian homonymy was an account of the relationships between things in the outside world... whereas Arabic homonymy was linguistic and lexical”, going on to explain that:

Aristotle had been trying to explain how “being” was an appropriate subject matter for his Metaphysics, hence the need to exclude what he thought was an unscientific type of connection such as that exemplified by “animal” in “picture of an animal” and “man is an animal.” … But the homonymy that the pre-Avicennian Arabic Aristotelians wanted to exclude was the homonym of the lexicographers.

Looking forward, Key argues that the same pairing between vocal form and mental content as that found in the lexicographers provided Avicenna with “a stable framework to talk about the relationship of language to logic, the nature of being itself, and to actually do logic”. We can agree with this, to an extent; but once more, caution is needed, for placing undue emphasis on the fact that ‘mental content’ is central for Avicenna, including in his analysis of homonymy, risks prejudging

69 Kalbarczyk (2018), p. 12. This is also reflected in Avicenna’s views on the subject-matter of logic—the secondary intelligibles. For Avicenna, “there can be no doubt that the primary intelligibles and their corresponding entities in the phsyical world fall outside the scope of logic”. Ibid (2012), 298.

70 Key (2018), p. 178.

71 Ibid, p. 178.

72 Ibid, p. 182.
the question of whether, for example, or to what extent, *being* is a unified notion for Avicenna. For it has to be remembered that for Avicenna, the *maʿnā* in which several things might coincide is described as being *one as such in* those things whose name “coincides” (like the things called “existent”), although it is different in another respect, while in other cases, the notion is not one, “but between the two things [whose name coincides] there is a certain resemblance”\(^{73}\)—with the emphasis on these notions being (somehow) *in* the things themselves. In short, we should be careful to recognize that for Avicenna the difference between the ‘species’ of homonymy is, just as it was for Aristotle, a reflection of real, extra-mental states of affairs.

For this same reason, I argue, we should approach with extreme caution, and possibly reject, another recent interpretations of this subject that has appeared in the recent literature: that of Daniel De Haan, who argues that the doctrine of the “analogy of being” in Avicenna is part of a “systematic division of univocity, analogy, resemblance, and equivocity”, in which “what underlies this serial order is a logical spectrum of the various kinds of *intensional* unity found among the predication of names”.\(^{74}\) The author continues:

> The intensional spectrum of names reflects the way objects can be identified or distinguished from each other insofar as they are united according to the same name, the same intellectually understood intension, or by the same extension to various things. Pure equivocal names are merely accidentally united by the convention of names, whereas names of resemblance, analogy, and univocity are essentially united by the convention of names. Univocal and analogical names are essentially united by intension, but names of resemblance are intensionally unified only by accident. Finally, analogical names stand between names of resemblance and univocity insofar as they have more intensional unity than names of resemblance, but less intensional unity than univocal names.\(^{75}\)

As with the interpretation of Aristotelian multivocity examined earlier in this chapter, the present interpretation is, I argue, misleading to the extent that it considers the issue from the perspective of matters of (shared) meaning or sense primarily—here described as shades of “intensional unity”—such that the author can conclude that for Avicenna, “the notion of being has a central meaning that is antecedent to any notional amplifications or constrictions”.\(^{76}\) For while it is true, as we have seen, that the notion of being has a central meaning (or unified intension) for Avicenna, and that Avicenna was perhaps more willing than Aristotle was to grant this, what explains this is the fact that Avicenna, like Aristotle, recognizes that “the things that there are” exist in different ways; but just because they are all *existents* means that the mind can, *through a process of abstraction*, form a single notion of the “existent”—this and the fact, perhaps, that Avicenna had at his disposal a notion of a *thing* insofar as it appears before the mind—and one that is arguably lacking in Aristotle—namely, the very notion of a intention or *maʿnā*.

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\(^{74}\) De Haan (2015), p. 269 (emphasis added).

\(^{75}\) Ibid, p. 269.

\(^{76}\) Ibid, p. 286.
Chapter 5: Dividing being

In the present chapter we shall pursue a slightly different approach to that of the preceding chapters. Rather than examine the Aristotelian background of a certain problem that Avicenna engages with in his Metaphysics, our aim will be to examine several problems that pertain to Aristotle’s philosophy directly, but which emerge as problems through reflecting upon the significance of some of the developments that we have encountered in the previous chapters in connection with Avicenna’s reception–reform of the Metaphysics.

The first and overarching issue is related to the development of a notion of existence, such as we find in Avicenna; and the problem that we will examine in connection with it concerns whether, or in what sense, we find a similar notion in Aristotle. As we shall see, it has been variously argued, or assumed, that we do not find a distinct notion of existence in Aristotle (or Greek philosophy generally), but rather a more general notion of being that is primarily captured in the idea of being-something (as opposed to being simpliciter). This is evidenced by Aristotle’s handling of the verb ‘be’ in Greek (εἶναι), whose primary semantic value, we are told, is predicative—‘to be’ means to be something.77 Hence, Aristotle reduced questions about existence to questions about the whatness of things. This is in contrast to Arabic philosophers, such as Avicenna, who not only recognize a distinct notion of existence, but also make a distinction between two kinds of ‘being’ or existence, as reflected in the distinction between essence and existence (which would later be described as a distinction between esse essentiae and esse existentiae78).

But this interpretation—the view that Aristotle lacks a distinct notion of existence—is not universally held, and in the present chapter I shall present one alternative to it which does see Aristotle discussing this notion in philosophically interesting ways. Given the enormity of this issue, though, I shall focus on just one aspect of it which is connected to the same issues that we have already been examining in this thesis: namely, how the notion of existence emerges within the context of the doctrine of the categories and the pros hen predication of ‘being’ (and ‘is’), which we examined in the previous chapter. Thus, we shall discuss whether this doctrine entails that there are, for Avicenna, several different kinds or senses of being, or of existence (or both).

77 This is, for example, the interpretation of Charles Kahn, advanced in numerous studies, to be discussed below.

78 As in Henry of Ghent, Summa, art. 21, 28.
The interpretation that I shall present argues that the notion of existence that we find in Aristotle is closely related to the ‘hyparctic’ use/analysis of the verb ‘be’ in Aristotle, and that it turns up in important places in his philosophy, including in connection with the account of per se being/predication that Aristotle discusses in the *Metaphysics* and *Posterior Analytics*. This is significant, I argue, because it also supports Aristotle’s account of the pros hen structure of being, and thus provides the key to understanding how the investigation of being qua being in the *Metaphysics* meets the criteria of a properly scientific enquiry.

The second overarching issue that we will examine, then, is related to Avicenna’s complaint about the (imperfect) scientific profile of Aristotelian first philosophy in its transmitted form in the *Metaphysics*. As we have discussed in Chapter 1, it is this weakness, as he perceived it, that led Avicenna to ‘reform’ this text, along with the profile of the science it transmits, re-building it on the foundations that Aristotle himself laid in the *Posterior Analytics*. But as the preceding argument suggests, this criticism is, perhaps, too strong. Aristotle is still thinking of the *Posterior Analytics* account of the structure of a properly scientific enquiry in the *Metaphysics*; but this is most clearly reflected in his account of the pros hen structure of being—a doctrine that Avicenna approaches quite differently to Aristotle, as we have examined in the preceding chapter.

Finally, one last development that we find in Avicenna which relates to these issues is his treatment of the categories in *al-Shīfā’*. Again, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the problem at length, but the fundamental issue is well-known: closely related to the question (discussed in the previous chapter) about what a category is at all, a much-debated question amongst philosophers of Late Antiquity concerned where the proper place is to discuss this doctrine in the philosophical curriculum: in logic (as had been customary) or in metaphysics? Avicenna’s solution became the standard one. After him, the categories—since they are about primary intelligibles, Avicenna argues—are thought not to belong to logic, which is concerned with secondary intelligibles, but rather to the latter.

79 However, as Taneli Kukkonen observes, “neither do the categories really take root in metaphysics”. 80 Indeed, Avicenna’s treatment of this doctrine in *al-Shīfā’* is brief, and, significantly, it is not given anywhere near the same importance as we find in Aristotle based on the interpretation that I present in this chapter.

So then, while our focus will shift to Aristotle in the present chapter, Avicenna still stands in the background, since it is for the sake of understanding the development of several problems leading up to, and beyond, the ‘Avicennian moment’ that we examine these issues—namely, the question of whether we find a distinct notion of existence in Aristotle, and if so, how this is related to one of the core Aristotelian doctrines that we have been examining: that concerning the pros hen structure of being.

79 See Sabra (1980); Kukkonen (2012); Kalbarczyk (2018).
80 Kukkonen (2012), p. 52.
5.1 Being and existence in Greek and Arabic philosophy

Both Greek and Arabic philosophers are crucially interested in questions about being. As we have seen, they also have a science that purports to study being (qua being), its species and properties, as well as investigating other first-order questions about what there is—about the ‘kinds’ of things that there are—and perhaps too about the different ways that they are. Moreover, these philosophers devote much energy to discussing the different senses (or uses) of ‘being’ (or of ‘to be’—or whatever words they use that we have decided to translate as such); and, indeed, many of their disagreements about being might appear to boil down to problems about just this—about ‘being’ or ‘to be’, and not about being—which is to say, many of their debates might appear to be simply verbal, or the result of confusions about the logic and semantics of ‘being’.

But as Stephen Menn observes, these philosophers, like modern philosophers, do “enjoy distinguishing senses of being and accusing each other of ignoring crucial distinctions”. This includes the sense and syntax of ‘be’, and other vocabulary associated with the concept and logic of being. But, as Menn continues, “their distinctions stubbornly refuse to line up with ours”. What then are we to make of their disagreements?

Now, in one sense—and in an important sense—for something ‘to be’ is for it to exist; and perhaps many of the questions that I indicated earlier about our philosophers’ (and our own) disagreements about being might be better—or more intelligibly—discussed in terms of existence (so rather than discussing the kinds of things that are, we should rather talk about the kinds of things that exist instead—and so on—and in this way many of the questions that I indicated then might even become clearer for us); but since we talking about the concept of being among Greek and Arabic philosophers, and not our own concept of being, we should be cautious, for existence is not only a narrower concept than being; it is also often said that, unlike Arabic philosophers, the Greeks lacked a distinct notion of existence—not that they did not recognize that things do exist, of course, but that they did not distinguish the concept of existence from the more general notion of being as such; and one of the reasons—and the main reason—why this is so, we are usually told, has to do with the fact that in Greek, the same word for ‘be’ (είναι) is used to express a range of meanings, and to perform several functions that are more sharply distinguished in other languages—notably in Arabic; and though in Greek one of the uses of ‘be’ in Greek surely looks like ‘exist’, namely its complete use in such constructions as “X is (X èστιν)”, the fact that the copula uses of the verb—i.e. in predication—are usually said to be central means that the predicative and existential meanings of ‘be-ing’ are easily elided; and this is supposed to be reflected in the Greek philosophical concept of being too.

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82 Ibid, p. 391.
83 This is, for example, the argument of Charles Kahn (1966; 2009; and see below). It is also followed by Lesley Brown (1999) and reflected in the Owenite (1960; 1965) interpretation of the meaning of ‘being’ in Aristotle which gained very wide purchase in following decades.
So, for Greek philosophers of the classical period, we are often told—including for Aristotle—what it means for something to be—and even to exist—is explained in terms of its being what it is or the kind of thing that it is; it is the ‘essential’, rather than the ‘existential’ dimension of being that is foregrounded. Meanwhile, in Arabic philosophy, these two aspects of a thing’s being—its being what it is, and its existence—are often more sharply, and more easily distinguished, we are told.84

As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, this question—about whether we find a ‘distinct’ notion of existence discussed by Greek philosophers, chiefly Aristotle—is relevant to the overarching themes and argument of this thesis. We have already encountered the issue in Chapter 2, for example, when we examined the basis of the so-called essence–existence distinction in Avicenna. Moreover, it relates directly the question of the correct interpretation of the doctrine of the categories and of the idea that ‘being’ is predicated pros hen, which we also examined in the previous chapter. But too, these issues are more broadly connected to the question of how philosophers writing in Arabic—chiefly Avicenna, but also al-Fārābī and the broader Islamic philosophical tradition—read Aristotle, since they evidently do have a concept of existence, and they clearly imagined that Aristotle has one too. Thus, they develop a philosophical account of existence partially on the basis of things that they have read in Aristotle, even though—as modern interpreters might claim—his notion of existence is quite different to that of the Arabic philosophers. By way of introduction to the present topic, then, we should note briefly how these philosophers read Aristotle on existence.

In several pioneering articles, Stephen Menn has argued that al-Fārābī is to be credited with developing a distinction between two notions of existence (as reflected in the 1-place uses of the verb ‘be’ = mawjūd85) based on Aristotle’s discussion of being as truth and being per se in Metaphysics Δ.7, and in connection with his account of the scientific questions (what it is, whether it is) discussed in the Posterior Analytics.85 The most important aspect of this account is that, as Menn shows, al-Fārābī seems to be in rough agreement with many modern philosophers in treating existence-claims in terms of some concept’s being ‘instantiated’.86 So, what a statement such as “Man exists” means, for al-Fārābī, is something like: the property of being-a-man is instantiated, or, there is some x such that x is F, where the predicate F refers to the concept of man; and al-Fārābī even agrees with these philosophers too in holding that—in this sense of “F exists”—existence is a second-level predicate or a property of concepts, not of individuals; and he quite clearly says that the concept of F only exists in the soul or in the mind. So, existence here is not real or first-order predicate. But al-Fārābī also distinguishes another, and stronger sense of “existence” (wujūd), in which “exists” (mawjūd86) is a first-order predicate and signifies something like a thing’s having-

85 Menn (2008; 2011) The author’s discussion is mainly based on an analysis of al-Fārābī’s Kitāb al-Hurūf I (esp. 82–90).
86 Rahman (1958) presents a similar interpretation of Avicenna on existence.
an-essence; and Fārābī thinks existence here is real, but that it is identical with, and not external to, the essence of the thing.

Avicenna also holds a similar distinction between two senses of being, but with an important difference. In regards to the first sense—which al-Fārābī calls “being as truth”—Avicenna seems to think that when we say “F exists”, we are predicating existence not of some concept F, existing in the soul as al-Fārābī had suggested, but rather of the “quiddity” F; and as we examined in Chapter 2, Avicenna explicitly says that the quiddity of F exists neither in the soul nor outside the soul as such, and develops a long argument in several places indicating why we should think this. But as we saw, the basic result is that—on the standard interpretation of his argument—existence becomes a real property or “accident” that is superadded to the quiddity of F.87

Both al-Fārābī and Avicenna, then, follow a similar pattern of reading Aristotle on the different ‘senses’ of being. That is, as Menn has shown, each of them focuses on just two of the four senses of being that Aristotle distinguishes in Δ.7, namely being as truth, and being per se as divided by the categories, ignoring being per accidens and being as actuality and potentiality.88 (For this reason, I shall focus on these two—being as truth and being as divided by the categories—in the following discussion of Aristotle.)

The crucial point to make then is that, while there is no doubt that the distinctions that Aristotle draws between different ‘senses’ of being, and the way that he deploys them in different contexts, do not always neatly line up with Arabic philosophers’ views on being, it is doubtful whether this has much to do with the fact that the vocabulary for ‘being’ behaves differently in the different languages they were using; and it certainly has less to do with this fact than we are often told, since recent work has shown that many popular beliefs about the role and meaning of the verb ‘be’ in both ordinary and philosophical Greek are probably wrong, including the view that the copula uses of the verb are central, and that the absolute uses of ‘be’ are usually or always ‘incomplete’; but it is precisely these two ‘assumptions’ that have been used in a number of influential interpretations—whether directly or indirectly—to argue that Aristotle did not draw a clear distinction between existential and predicative being. But these claims have been seriously challenged in recent decades—and by a number of different interpreters—and drawing on their revised interpretations, it can be argued that the central use of ‘be’ in Aristotle's philosophy is perhaps better described as existential or ‘hyparctic’, and that this use covers, and even better explains perhaps, Aristotle's views on predication.

87 Menn (2011a). See the studies cited in Chapter 2 on the question of quiddity (and universalit) in Avicenna and the interpretation of the essence–existence distinction. The classic text on these issues Shīfā’: Ilāḥīyyāt V.1–2; I.5.
88 Instead, they treat potentiality and actuality as among the per se properties of ‘existent’. See Shīfā’: Ilāḥīyyāt I.2.13 (p. 10).
89 Bäck (2002); Hintikka (1999); Matthen (1983); De Rijk (2002).
The crucial point, which again Menn has so clearly shown, is not that Aristotle (or any other Greek philosopher) lacked a distinct notion of being as existence (or in other words, that he failed to acknowledge that either the 1-place or 2-place uses of ‘be’ might be used to mean ‘exists’), but rather that for Aristotle, in order to scientifically explain why something exists—why $S$ is—this must involve re-writing such 1-place examples in terms of 2-place being—$S$ is $P$—where the predicate $P$ belongs to its (per se) subject $S$, following the method of demonstration described in *Posterior Analytics*. That is to say, the demonstration that $P$ belongs (per se) to $S$ will involve explaining precisely why $P$ is (that is, exists).

The question, then, is not whether Avicenna (or al-Fārābī or anyone else) stumbled on a sense of being that had remained hidden, or obscure, hitherto; the question is rather about whether existence (or “exists”) is a first or second level property, or, of what existence (or “exists”) is predicated. Al-Fārābī thinks “exists” is predicated of a *mental* concept; Avicenna, of a neutral quiddity. Thus, their interpretations are just as dependent on their having a certain notion of a *concept* as much as a notion of existence. Indeed, the former seems to precede this notion. So, we might say, it is this *concept* that is lacking in Aristotle, not the notion of existence as such.

As to what this notion of *existence* amounts to—it is to this issue that we turn in the following sections.

### 5.2 Aristotle on the ‘senses’ of being in Δ.7

In chapter 7 of *Metaphysics* Δ—a book which is often taken to be a sort of philosophical lexicon or dictionary: a compilation or list of some important philosophical terms and their multiple uses or meanings—Aristotle presents us with a main fourfold division of the different ‘meanings’ of being, or in more literal Greek, the different ways that ‘being’ (τὸ ὄν, τὸ ἐίναι) or ‘is’ (ἐστὶν) signifies or is said (σημαίνει, λέγεται). They are: (1) being *per accidens* (2) being *per se* (3) being as truth (and falsity) (4) and potential being and actual being.\(^{90}\) Not only (3) and (4), but also (2), ‘being *per se*’, admits a further division: the latter, Aristotle tells us, is said in as many ways as signified by the figures of predication (the ‘categories’), and he lists ten of them.\(^{91}\) (So the meanings of ‘being’ (or ‘to be’) may turn out to be many more than four: fourteen if we admit the categories and being-potential or -actual as separate senses; many more if they are allowed to combine.)

To illustrate each of these meanings or senses of being, Aristotle presents us with many example sentences in which “to be” and “is” are used; examples of this kind: ‘$x$ is $y$’ or ‘for $x$ to be $y$’. We might also render some of his examples: ‘$x$’s being $y$’. More problematically: some of his examples drop the verb ‘to be/is’ altogether—which is possible in Greek—saying simply ‘$xy$’. In

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\(^{90}\) Met. Δ.7, 1017a8-b9

\(^{91}\) Met. Δ.7, 1017a23–30. “Those things are said in their own right to be that are indicated by the figures of predication; for the senses of ‘being’ are just as many as these figures—καθ’ αὐτὰ δὲ εἶναι λέγεται ὀσαπερ σημαίνει τὰ σχήματα τῆς κατηγορίας· ὀσαχῶς γὰρ λέγεται, τοσαυταχῶς τὸ εἶναι σημαίνει”
other examples, the verb ‘to be’ does not appear, although another verb does—‘xy’s’, rather than ‘x is y’. Aristotle even says that these are sometimes substitutable phrases—i.e., there is no difference between saying that “the man is recovering” (τὸ ἄνθρωπος ὑγιάινει), or “the man walks” (τὸ ἄνθρωπος βαδίζει) (1017a28–31)

Finally, and importantly: note that all of the (Greek-into-English) examples given thus far have been examples of 2-place (or dyadic) ‘is’—i.e. ‘x is y’, or ‘is xy’ (which is also possible in Greek). But Aristotle also gives examples of 1-place (monadic) ‘is’—i.e., ‘x is’, or ‘to be x’;92 for instance: “the not-white (is said) to be… because that of which it is an accident is”.93

It is at this point that, as English speakers, our rather literal translations of Aristotle’s Greek examples strike us oddly. We have not yet discussed what each of these senses of ‘to be’ means, but still: what sense could we make of Aristotle’s Greek examples of the different uses of ‘to be’ or ‘is’ (rendered in literal English)—examples that are meant to tell us about the meaning of ‘to be’ or ‘being;—when one of those examples fails to line up with our ‘uses’ of the copula’? If ‘is’, standing alone, sounds empty, then ‘x is’, standing alone, sounds incomplete.

Obviously, the Greek ἔστιν is here doing something that our little ‘is’ cannot. Roughly—in ordinary English, anyway—‘is’ is almost always dyadic. If I ask, “Is it raining outside”, and someone answers, “It is”, then I understand well what they mean. But Aristotle’s example—in our literal English rendering—“the not-white is”, just sounds odd. And we find many such examples in Aristotle: ‘x is’, ‘whether or not x is’… even ‘the-what-is’—i.e., apparently 1-place (or absolute) uses. Now, if we go searching for another word to do the job of ‘is’ in the example ‘x is’, or ‘the-x is’, and we resist the urge to complete the phrase by asking for a third term to complete it—‘x is y’—then we might come up with ‘exists’. To an ordinary English speaker, the phrase “He is no more” probably would register as meaning He exists no more, or He no longer exists. Just as “There are no unicorns” would register as meaning Unicorns do not exist. Nevermind that we have completed ‘is’ in these examples.

But the use of 1-place (monadic) ‘is’ in Aristotle’s example “the not-white is” was meant not to illustrate this meaning of ‘being’ or ‘to be’—namely, existence—or not explicitly anyway; rather, Aristotle was there giving us an example of accidental being. And in fact, none of the examples Aristotle gives us are explicitly identified as examples of ‘is’ to mean existence. Should we add this

92 I use ‘1-place being’ to indicate when only one term is required to complete ‘is’ in order to make a complete sentence (‘S is’); ‘2-place being’ when two terms are required (‘S is P’). Below, I shall also refer to the former as the ‘absolute’ or ‘complete’ use of the verb, and the latter, the ‘predicative’ or ‘incomplete’ use. Though not without qualification, the distinction between 1-place and 2-place ‘be’ basically lines up with (what I shall call) the distinction between existential and predicative being—to be discussed below. See Brown (1994), p. 214; Menn (2008).

93 “…οὐχὶ δὲ λέγεται καὶ τὸ μὴ λεύκον εἶναι, ὃτι ὁ συμβέβηκεν, ἐκεῖνο ἔστιν” (Δ.7, 1017a.19–20).
to the fourfold division of the meanings of ‘to be’, the ways that ‘to be’ is said or signifies, that Aristotle has given us?  

For many modern commentators, as we have said earlier, the reason that Aristotle does not discuss this meaning of ‘to be’—namely, ‘to exist’—in detail in this passage is that he lacked a clear notion of existence; not of course that he did not recognize that things do exist, or that some things cease to exist, but rather, that when Aristotle seems to be saying that ‘x exists’—or in Aristotle’s Greek: ‘x is’—what he is really saying is something else. For instance: that ‘x is something’—some ‘kind’ of thing.  

That might help us understand the meaning of that troublesome example from above: “the not-white is said to be, because that of which it is an accident is” (noting: the example is only ‘troublesome’ because our ‘to be’ is almost always dyadic). If it is true that 1-place ‘is’ is (always?) implicitly incomplete, meaning that ‘S is’ should (always?) be construed as ‘S is (something)’, then we will just substitute that ‘something’ ourselves, and Aristotle’s Greek will even conform to our English use of ‘is’. We will now say: “the not-white is said to be something, because that of which it is an accident is something”.  

This is a very strong claim; but it has been put forward in several different guises during the last fifty-or-so years, and it resonates with much else that recent scholarship in particular has said about Aristotle on being and existence; to wit, that when Aristotle talks about ‘being’, he is almost always thinking of the intelligible content of being, so to speak—its quidditative nature—and that this reflects his dependence on, or failure to break loose from, Platonism. It also accords with (or confirms) the view of Etienne Gilson and others that Aristotle ‘lacked’ a distinct concept of existence—a discovery that had to wait for Aquinas.

In the following sections, I will present (and subsequently argue against) two lines of scholarship (lines that have occasionally overlapped) that have attempted to defend the claim that the focal value of the verb ‘to be’ in Greek is roughly ‘to be something’, and the view that the

94 Thorp (1974), pp. 238–256, argues that Aristotle recognized a sense of ‘to be’ meaning to exist, which he uses casually in Δ.7 (1017A.19), though he does not mention it or systematically develop it in that section. Aristotle’s silence here has created much confusion, Thorp thinks, since it has led to a misinterpretation about the sense(s) of being per se; to wit: while the latter is semantically unvarying, the existential ‘to be’ is divided into ten senses according to the categories. We explore this idea in more detail below and in the following chapter.

95 We shall examine this claim (and its supporting evidence) in closer detail below. But in the modern literature, the most influential source of this view is G.E.L. Owen (1960), p. 165, who argues: “In [Aristotle’s] view, to be was to be something or other… And, at the level of greatest generality, to be is to be either a substance of some sort or a relation or a quality or a member of some other category. There is no general sense to the claim that something exists over and above one of the particular senses”. Cf. Owen (1965), p. 76: “To be, then, is always to be something or other: this comes naturally from the Greek idiom, a favorite of Plato’s, which expresses ‘A exists’ as ‘A is something.’”

96 Gilson (1952)
copula-use (2-place εἶναι) in Greek is primary, with the result that even (apparently) 1-places uses can be in some way construed as, or ‘analysed’ in terms of, 2-place being. In doing so, my aim is to clarify the question about whether, or in what sense, we find in Aristotle a distinct notion of existence.

5.2.1 Lesley Brown: ‘to be’ and ‘to be something’

In her well-known paper, “The verb ‘to be’ in Greek philosophy: some remarks”, Lesley Brown (drawing on the earlier work of Charles Kahn—to be discussed below)\textsuperscript{97} has laboured mightily to absolve the Greek philosophers of the charge that their concept of being rests on a confusion—a confusion that resulted from their failing to distinguish between those uses (or senses) of the verb ‘to be’ which, since Mill at least, we have come to see as sharply distinct: the predicative and existential uses.\textsuperscript{98} The Greek verb ‘to be’, as we have seen, admits both 1-place (complete) and 2-place (incomplete) uses; and we had reason to suspect that, while the incomplete ‘is’ (the ‘copula’) primarily signifies to-be-something, as reflected in its role in predication, the complete or absolute use of ‘is’ \textit{may} signify ‘to exist’. But if this is right, then we wondered why Aristotle would fail to point this out in \textsection 7, for ‘existence’ was not clearly to be found among the ‘senses’ of ‘to be’ that he seemed to be distinguishing there.

But before we accuse Aristotle of any confusion, we should carefully observe both Kahn’s and Brown’s warning that sense is not syntax,\textsuperscript{99} and that the appearance of a grammatical distinction (between complete ‘is’ and incomplete ‘is…’ as used in predication) need not entail a sharp semantic distinction: for in Kahn’s view, the absolute use (‘is’) can also mean ‘is true’, ‘is the case’, or ‘is real’, while the incomplete use (‘is…’, or ‘\(x\) is \(y\)’) too can have a variety of nuances.\textsuperscript{100} So Brown notes:

Thus Kahn identifies two assumptions involved in the ‘traditional dichotomy’: it assumes first that all absolute uses of ‘is’ bear the meaning of ‘exists’ and secondly that the predicative uses lack meaning and serve merely to join subject to predicate. He insists that both these assumptions are false of ancient Greek \textit{esti}, and that predicative uses lack meaning and serve merely to join subject to predicate. He insists that both these assumptions are false of ancient Greek \textit{esti}, and that questions about syntactically different uses should be kept apart from issues about meaning.\textsuperscript{101}

Very well. So we should not assume that the (syntactic) constructions ‘\(x\) is’ and ‘\(x\) is \(y\)’ should always conform neatly to a semantic scheme. But we will still have to figure out what ‘\(x\) is’ means, especially in the light of the distinction that Aristotle draws between being \textit{something} (εἶναι \(τι\)) and

\textsuperscript{97} Brown (1994). For Kahn’s view, see the collection of essays in Kahn (2009).
\textsuperscript{98} See Mill’s \textit{Logic}, I.iv.i.
\textsuperscript{100} Kahn (1986)
being simply (εἰναι ἄπλοδος) in such places as Sophistical Refutations (167a1–10, 180a33–35) and Posterior Analytics (II.1, 89b32–35). For as Brown herself admits, Aristotle seems quite clearly in these passages to be pointing to the distinction between being-something (‘is…’) and to be simpliciter, meaning to exist.

The problem becomes even more pressing when we consider the distinction that Aristotle draws (in APo, II.1—referred to above) between the questions “whether it is [εἰ ἔστι]” and “what it is [τί ἔστιν]” which, along with “the fact [τὸ ὄντι]” and “the reason why [τὸ διότι]” are among the things investigated in a proper scientific enquiry.

In the first question, εἰ ἔστι, it certainly sounds like Aristotle is here asking about existence—i.e., whether or not something is simply (whether it exists), and not whether it is F; and this is borne out in Aristotle’s clarifying remark: “I mean, whether or not [a centaur or god] is simply (ἄπλοδος), and not if one is white or not” (APo 89b32–33). In summary, Aristotle seems clearly to have recognized a sense of εἰναι meaning to exist, and even considered existence-questions as important to scientific enquiry, as evidenced by the following well-known passage:

Anyone who knows what a man or anything else is must also know that it exists [ὁ ὄντι ἔστιν]. (Of that which does not exist, no one knows what it is. [τὸ γὰρ μὴ ὃν οὐδὲς οὐδὲν ὃτι ἔστιν] You may know what the account or the name [ὁ λόγος ὃ τὸ ὅνομα] means when I say ‘goat-stag’, but it is impossible to know what a goat-stag is.) But if you are to prove what something is and also that it exists, how will you prove them by the same argument?

Definitions make a single thing plain, and so do demonstrations; but what a man is and that men exist are different [τὸ δὲ τί ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος καὶ τὸ εἶναι ἄνθρωπον ἄλλο]. (In APo II.7, 92b4–12)

For Brown, this passage does indicate that Aristotle recognized a sense (or use) of ‘to be’ that roughly corresponds to our ‘to exist’, and for his intention here is to show that, in order to define anything, which is the business of the philosopher, we must first know that what is signified by a name exists, i.e., that only existing-things have definitions (or can be defined, just because they are, or have, an essence, to which the definition corresponds. But just because, once we have settled this question—whether or not x is—Aristotle says that we must go on to ask for a definition, Brown concludes:

This suggests that Aristotle saw a close connection between the statement ‘X is’ and the statement ‘X is…’, at least where the latter tells you what X is… Unless X is, you can’t say what X is: again the connection between the complete and incomplete uses shines out.

102 APo I.1, 89b23–25 “The things we seek are equal in number to those we understand. We seek four things: the fact (τὸ ὄντι), the reason why (τὸ διότι), if something is (εἰ ἔστι), what something is (τί ἔστιν)”.

103 Cp. APo II.8 (93a21): “in the same way we plainly cannot grasp what it is to be something without grasping that it exists [ὁ ὄνομα γὰρ εἰδέναι τί ἔστιν ἀγνοοῦντας εἰ ἔστιν]” and 93a27–28 “…and to seek what something is without grasping that it exists is to seek nothing [τὸ δὲ ζητεῖν τί ἔστι δὴ ἔχοντας ὃτι ἔστι, μηδὲν ζητεῖν ἔστιν]”.

And a little further on:

What these points show, I suggest, is the following: though Aristotle does distinguish ‘is something’ from ‘is simpliciter’, his treatment of the distinction does not suggest that he saw here a semantic distinction, or even a syntactic distinction of general importance.\(^\text{105}\)

This reflects a general attitude towards Aristotle which says that, while he was concerned with questions about existence, he did not clearly distinguish them from questions about being-something, or what a thing is (which is revealed in an essence-stating definition), or at least, that he regarded the answers to the first as little more than a step on the road towards the more important task of defining what exists.\(^\text{106}\)

At this point in her analysis Brown seems to take over an interpretation of the relationship between the existent and predicative being in Aristotle that goes back (at least) to G.E.L. Owen—an interpretation that is connected to Aristotle’s oft-repeated claim that ‘being’ is said in as many ways as the figures of predication—the categories. Since it overlaps with what several other interpreters have said about the verb ‘to be’ in Greek, and since—as I pointed out earlier—I think both these lines of interpretation (applied to Aristotle anyway) are wrong, despite gaining wide acceptance in philosophical circles, it will help us to examine it in our quest to gain a clearer understanding of Aristotle’s semantics of ‘to be’.

5.2.2 G.E.L. Owen on being and existence in Aristotle

In his famous article “On the snares of ontology”, G.E.L. Owen\(^\text{107}\) has put forward an influential account of the relationship between the predicative and existential uses of ‘to be’ in Aristotle. Connecting his account to Aristotle’s discussion of the categories, Owen argues that Aristotle did recognize a use of ‘to be’ that corresponds roughly to ‘to exist’, but that that use is subject to the same semantic multiplicity that Aristotle attributes to the copula in predicative constructions. This is reflected in his interpretation of being per se (as divided by the categories) from Α.7 which we mentioned above.

\(^{105}\) Ibid, p. 235.

\(^{106}\) An even stronger version of this interpretation is that of Gilson (1952), p. 46, who concludes about the same passage: “In other words, the is of the thing is the what of the thing, not the fact that it exists, but that which the thing is and which makes it to be a substance. This by no means signifies that Aristotle is not interested in the existence or non-existence of what he is talking about. On the contrary, everybody knows that, in his philosophy, the first question to be asked about any possible subject of investigation is, does it exist? But the answer is a short and final one. Once evidenced by sense or concluded by rational argumentation, existence is tacitly dismissed. For, indeed, if the thing does not exist, there is nothing more to say; if, on the contrary, it exists, we should certainly say something about it, but solely about that which it is, not about its existence, which can now be taken for granted. This is why existence, a mere prerequisite to being, plays no part in its structure”.

\(^{107}\) Cf. Owen (1965)
For Owen, the ‘senses’ of being per se (corresponding to the categories) are admittedly all senses of ‘existence’; and evidently what is motivating Owen here is his attempt to make sense of the fact that Aristotle clearly seemed to recognize that, in some contexts, ‘$x$ is’ should be read as ‘$x$ exists’, but that ‘exists’ must have multiple meanings (depending on the value of $x$) just because Aristotle repeatedly denies that being is a genus—that ‘is’ (or ‘being’) is a univocal term applying to everything-that-is. This is exactly what the categories-account was deployed for, after all; and it seems to be the gist of his claim that “being” is said in many ways.

So it follows from Owen’s analysis that because (for Aristotle) τὸ ὄν (or εἶναι) is said in as many ways as the categories, ἔστιν, too, is said in just as many corresponding ways; and so again, by dividing the one, Owen thinks, Aristotle was also (implicitly) dividing the other. Thus, not only do substances, qualities, quantities and so on turn out to be different ‘kinds’ of being; each of them also is—that is, exists—in a different way. And so, if $A$ and $B$ belong to different categories, the ‘is’ that appears in 1-place assertions of being-existence will be equivocal in ‘$A$ is’ and ‘$B$ is’, and furthermore, in both instances this will represent a case of incomplete predication, since what each of them ‘means’ is (for example) ‘$A$ is a substance’ or ‘$B$ is a quality’.

Now, there are details of this account which I think are surely correct: it acknowledges that Aristotle was thinking of existence—that he recognized a sense of ‘to be’ or ‘being’ that corresponds to ‘to exist’. And I think it certainly also follows from Aristotle’s account of the categories that the things-that-are—substances, qualities and quantities and so on—are exist in different ways; for surely Aristotle meant something like this when he said that non-substances (the things are said-of and inhere-in substance) are in some way dependent on substances. But we should be cautious: is it really necessary to say that just because $A$ or $B$ might exist in a different ‘way’ depending on whether $A$ or $B$ is a substance or a quality or… etc.—because some things depend on substance for their existence but not vice versa—that ‘exists’ signifies something different in the sentences ‘$A$ exists’ or ‘$B$ exists’?—that we should recognize a different sense of 1-place ‘is’ corresponding to each sense of being καθ’ αὐτό?

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109 Russell Dancy (1983) expands on Owen’s account in his paper “Aristotle and Existence” and repeats the view that Aristotle did not recognize a sharp distinction between the copulative and existential “senses” of εἶναι. Dancy agrees that the existential sense is conveyed in statements of secundum adjacens (A is), but that the latter derive from an incomplete predication (A is…), and only strictly apply when the predication in question is essential (i.e. when the “cancelled” predicate states the τί ἔστιν of its per se subject). Thus, Dancy (p. 426) writes: “The ‘is’ of [“Socrates is a man”] is a by-virtue-of-itself ‘is’, and permits cancellation of the predicate. The ‘is’ of the residue, ‘Socrates is’, is then a by-virtue-of-itself ‘is’, and also an ‘is’ [ἀνθρώπος], ‘is #’, since it no longer has an attached predicate…”; “…the existential ‘is’ is, paradigmatically… a by-virtue-of-itself ‘is’, but the by-virtue-of-itself ‘is’ is, in the first instance, a predicative ‘is’, and only becomes existential by cancellation of the predicate.”

110 Cat. 1a20–1b10
111 Cat. 2a34-b6
The point is a subtle one, but important, for as David Charles and Gareth Matthews have pointed out separately,\textsuperscript{112} it seems to follow from Owen’s account that although ‘\(A\) is’ may be true, and that this sentence will affirm that \(A\) exists, we should understand such statements as affirming something else: that ‘\(A\) is something’. That is, we will always be led to understand existence-claims in terms of an underlying predication. Again, the difference between ‘to be simpliciter’ and ‘to be something’ seems to have faded out.

5.2.3 Charles Kahn on the Greek verb ‘be’

As noted above, Owen’s interpretation of the relationship between 1-place and 2-place being in Aristotle also provides support for, and overlaps with, another influential line of interpretation that we have already encountered: namely, Charles Kahn’s linguistic analysis of the verb “be” in ancient Greek; and the alternative analysis I put forward in the following section is also directed against this view. But it should be said: given the large number, and the enormous breadth of, those studies in which Kahn has presented his ground-breaking work, it would be impossible to go through all of the details of his argument, so we shall be mainly concerned with its main outlines.\textsuperscript{113}

The main points of Kahn’s analysis that we should highlight, then, are the following:

(i) According to Kahn, in both ordinary and philosophical Greek, the central use of the verb \(\epsilon\iota\nu\alpha\iota\) is linked to its role predication: the ‘copula’ construction. (ii) Secondly, while we do find in Greek a syntactic distinction between the absolute or complete and the predicative uses of the verb \(\epsilon\iota\nu\alpha\iota\) (so, 1-place and 2-place \(\epsilon\sigma\tau\iota\nu\) respectively: ‘\(S\) is’ and ‘\(S\) is \(P\)’), these uses are not ‘sharply’ distinguished, since the former are usually (or very often) ‘implicitly’ predicative. So once again (noting Brown’s earlier warning about “confusing” sense and syntax): even where we do find a syntactic distinction, this should not be assumed to conform to a clear semantic distinction (between two ‘senses’ of being: existence and predication). (iii) The notion of existence is subordinate to that of predication since, once more, to be is to be a definite kind of thing (\(\epsilon\iota\nu\alpha\iota\ \tau\iota\)). Existence as such does not emerge as a distinct notion in ancient Greek. (iv) Rather than ‘exist’, Kahn argues, \(\epsilon\iota\nu\alpha\iota\) in absolute constructions should primarily be construed as holding a veridical meaning (i.e. truth or reality). Thus, ‘\(x\) is’ means ‘\(x\) is so’, ‘\(x\) is (really) the case’, or ‘\(x\) is true’. (v) This ‘veridical’ meaning is also present in the predicative or copula uses of the verb. The ‘is’ used in sentence-predication, that is, will also carry existential force, but above all, an affirmation of truth or reality of (both) \(S\) and \(P\), or \(S\)’s really being \(P\), so that ‘\(S\) is \(P\)’ (as well as positing the existence of both \(S\) and \(P\)) will primarily mean ‘\(S\) is really \(P\)’, or ‘it is true that \(S\) is \(P\)’.


\textsuperscript{113} As indicated earlier, the following outline of Kahn’s view is based on the ‘synoptic’ presentation that he gives in Kahn (1986), “Retrospect on the verb ‘to be’ and the concept of being”: Cf. the collected essays in Kahn (2009).
Again, in presenting his analysis, Kahn examines a very wide range of examples, not all of them taken from philosophical contexts, so we shall not be able to mount a ‘direct’ argument against his general interpretation. But in any case, this is not my aim. Rather, I have introduced Kahn’s general view as a counterpoint to the analysis that I will present below, since—despite the overlap between them—they are importantly different, especially in regards to the connection between 1-place and 2-place being, and Kahn’s view about the primarily veridical meaning of the verb.

In the following sections, I will focus the discussion around Aristotle’s remarks on the verb ‘be’ in statement-making as presented in De Interpretatione 1–4, since these chapters include some of Aristotle’s clearest indications about the focal semantic-value of ‘be’ in philosophical contexts.

5.3 The role of ‘be’ in Aristotle’s analysis of the statement-making sentence

In a short but significant article published quite recently, Tomás Calvo has presented a penetrating analysis of the meaning of the verb ‘be’ in Aristotle, focussing on Aristotle’s discussion of statement-making in De Interpretatione 1–4. In its main outlines, Calvo’s account mostly agrees with (what I shall call) the ‘standard’ picture of the statement-making sentence (λόγος ἀποφαντικὸς) in Aristotle, and in this respect there is little in it that interpreters might find to disagree about; but his account also draws attention to several points that have been obscured by the standard picture, and most important is Calvo’s observation regarding the primarily ‘thetic’ function of the verb ‘be’ in such sentences (according to which ‘is’ co-signifies (‘asserts’) the actuality or existence of the predicate). On the basis of this interpretation Calvo offers some larger reflections on the meaning of being in Aristotle, and I think his general strategy is right. I begin with a general (and mostly uncontroversial) summary of the details of De Interpretatione 1–4 in order to set the scene.

5.3.1 De Interpretatione 1–4

The usual interpretation of Aristotle’s account of statement-making in De Interpretatione closely follows, or is explained in terms of, the standard model of categorical sentences in Aristotle (i.e. in terms of the grammatical ‘S is (not) P’ construction, whereby a ‘predicate’ (P) is said, or predicated of a ‘subject’ (S), the two terms being joined by the copula ‘is’) — the only (but important)

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114 Calvo (2014)

115 Calvo develops his account on the basis of Hintikka’s views on the ambiguity of ‘is’ in Aristotle, which is in turn a response to the Frege-Russell ambiguity thesis, which says that verbs for being are semantically ambiguous (as we have seen). Hintikka (1999; cf. 1986) claims that Aristotle knew (considered) but rejected the ambiguity thesis, and he argues that having “several senses” need not entail that ‘is’ ambiguous. (So, we can acknowledge that a word has several uses or semantic forces, but hold that these are components of one unitary meaning. Cf. Hintikka (2006) on the ambiguity thesis more generally.) For Hintikka, the different FR “senses” are just different “components” of a unitary meaning; one may be absent without affecting the basic meaning of the verb.
difference being that the former must be read as explicitly affirming or denying the proposition ‘that S is P’ (this being indicated by the predicate-function ‘is (not) P’).

Certainly, there is a strong basis for this reading in De Interpretatione, and I will assume that it is basically correct in the following outline, at the same time as introducing some important distinctions that Calvo’s analysis has highlighted. And that Aristotle did analyse statements in terms of the dyadic ‘S is (not) P’ formula (with ‘is (not)’ performing the role of joining/separation) is suggested most strongly, perhaps, by what he says in this passage about the difference between the two kinds of terms that make up a basic statement or proposition—‘names’ and ‘verbs’—and how they are related.117

Briefly, both names and verbs, Aristotle says, are ‘significant’—each signifies something (σημάινει… τι)—but while names signify, Aristotle says, verbs ‘signify-about’, or ‘additionally-signify’ (προσσημαίνει), and the point seems to be that verbs, in contradistinction to names, carry some predicate-function, and this should be understood first of all in terms of their ‘attributed to’ or ‘holding’ of a subject.118 But Aristotle also notes that it is characteristic of verbs that they additionally-signify time—and properly speaking, only the ‘present’ time—and we can recognize this in their grammatical form. Thus, while ‘health’ is a noun, ‘healths’ (or ‘recovers’) is a verb, ύγιειν μὲν ὄνομα, τὸ δὲ ύγιαίνει ρῆμα (16b8–9), because the latter additionally-signifies that this state (health) now holds (of some subject) or exists: προσσημαίνει γὰρ τὸ νῦν ὑπάρχειν (16b10).

We should highlight several crucial points in this account before moving on. (1) As regards their signifying elements, Aristotle treats both nouns and verbs as on par,119 and so (2) the ‘predicative’ function of verbs, for Aristotle, is tied to their signifying-about, or additionally-signifying (α) attribution (to a subject) and (β) time (the ‘state’ signified by the verb ‘holding now’); but this also implies that (3) uttered by itself, a verb is not really a verb, but rather a noun,120 just because (or in case) the proper function of verbs in statement-making (like in any categorical proposition) is to say something-about-something (λέγειν τι κατά τίνος). And so we can add: (4) a proper assertion should involve both a verbal and a nominal element.

116 That is, we should be careful to notice the distinction between a statement or proposition (an assertion or de-assertion), and a mere ‘dictum’ or sentence, which is non-assertoric. See De Rijk (2002), p. 32.
118 Thus: “[the verb] indicates always that something is said or asserted of something […] τὸν καθ’ ἔτερον λεγομένον σημείον)” (DI 16b7–8); “Then, a verb was an indication of something asserted of something; I mean, of a something predicated of a subject or found present in it [καὶ ἀν τὸν καθ’ ἔτερον λεγομένον σημείον ἐστιν, οἷον τῶν καθ’ ὑποκειμένου ἢ ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ]” (16b10–11).
119 That is: if we take the statement “man is-healthy” (or “healths”), it is not strictly because of what each term signifies that the one is called a “name” and the other a “verb”
120 SE 16b20–12: the time and predicate-function of a verb are both present, but unfulfilled if a verb is not joined to (or with) a subject.
Note that because of (2), it seems that we can set aside or isolate the properly verbal or consignifying element in a verb like ‘healths’, and treat this and its nominal or signifying element—‘health’—as two separate components. And indeed Aristotle suggests this very thing when (later, as at DI 21b9–10, and elsewhere, as we have seen in the previous section) he remarks that the statements “man walks” and “man is walking” mean just the same thing. Here the strategy of ‘converting’ a proposition consisting of a name-plus-verb (S-P’s) into a statement of tertium adjacens (‘S is (not) P’) is meant to better handle contradictory pairs; but the general lesson here is clear: for Aristotle, all those functions that we have identified as the properly ‘verbal’ or consignifying element in a proposition (that is, those that belong on the properly verbal, rather than the nominal side of a verb like ‘healths’) can be expressed by the copula ‘is (not)’, such that any statement of logical form ‘SP’s’ can be converted into one of logical form ‘S is P’ by transforming ‘P’s’ into a nominal-predicate (P) and joining it to S with the additionally-signifying copula ‘is’.\footnote{In that case, the ‘verb’ should perhaps refer not to P, but to the verb-phrase ‘is-P’. This is what Aristotle seems to be suggesting, and it will help us to keep this in mind when we turn to discussing the meaning of being \textit{per se} below.}

Furthermore, not only will, for instance, “man is walking” or “man is healthy” tell us the same thing as “man walks” or “man healths” on this picture; the former are also more logically perspicuous, Aristotle seems to think; and so we might view this whole strategy (the conversion of statements of logical-type S-P’s into S is P) as a kind of deep-structure analysis of statement-making in general.

I take it that our general interpretation of the details of \textit{De Interpretatione} 1–4 sketched thus far should not appear too controversial; and supposing that it is broadly accurate, it will be useful for us to take a closer look at exactly what ‘functions’ the co-signifying verb ‘is (not)’ is performing in Aristotle’s ‘deep-structure’ analysis of statement-making; and it is here that I think Calvo’s interpretation these chapters sheds further clarifying light on Aristotle’s views on being.

Once again, taking as our general framework the view that a statement of logical form ‘S is (not) P’ affirms (or denies) a ‘predicate’ (P) of a ‘subject’ (S), what the above analysis suggests for Calvo is that it is the properly ‘verbal’ element (whether it is contained in the verb, as in ‘healths’, or transferred to the ‘copula’ as in ‘is-healthy’) that (i) carries assertoric ‘force’ and co-signifies (ii) attribution (i.e. the attribution of the state or ‘attribute’ signified by the nominal-predicate, or which is contained in the nominal side of the verb) and (iii) time (i.e. that the attribution holds ‘now’). It is especially important to note in regards to (i) that, for Calvo, first of all, it is primarily the co-signifying verb (or properly verbal component of either ‘S is P’ or ‘S-P’s’) that performs this function, and not the statement taken as a whole; and secondly, that he understands this assertive or thetic function as indicating “the existence or actuality of what is signified by the verb”\footnote{Calvo (2014), p. 49} (and I take it that here he means what is signified by the “predicate” P, i.e. the nominal side of the ῥῆμα). So an ‘S is P’ statement is rightly understood as making an existence-claim; but for Calvo, “the verbal assertion of actuality or existence refers primarily to the predicate, not to the
subject, contrary to the way it is usually—almost universally—understood”. 123 What we affirm in such statements is “that \( P \) is taking place”, and so—using Calvo’s example—taking \( (S) \) as “[a] man” and \( (P) \) as “singing”, what “\( S \) is \( P \)” asserts is not (in Calvo’s words) “that there is someone who is a man, and who is singing”, but rather, “that there is singing, which is actualized in someone or by someone who is a man”. 124 Again, Calvo finds support for this view in Aristotle’s remarks on predication in the Analytics, where predicative sentences \( (A) \) is \( B \) are analysed in terms of \( A \)’s ‘belonging to’, or ‘taking place in’ \( B \): τὸ \( \alpha \) ὑπάρχει τῷ \( B \). 125 Thus, on this reading, “man is singing” becomes “singing belongs to, or takes place in—exists in—man”. 126

I think Calvo is absolutely right here in describing both predication and assertion (on both the \( S \) is \( P \) and \( A \) belongs to \( B \) construals) in terms of belonging or existence; and below, I will present an analysis of both the ‘is’ of predication and of existence in terms the ‘hypartitic’ verb εἶναι. But we should mention a few more details about Calvo’s interpretation before moving on.

We have just seen that the (primarily) thetic function of the con-signifying verb ‘is (not)’ in Aristotle’s view of statement-making, according to Calvo, is linked to the verbal assertion of existence or actuality, especially in relation to the predicate’s ‘holding of’ (or ‘existing in’) its subject; and I have suggested (or I have approved Calvo’s suggestion) that this idea of (the predicate’s) existing or holding (of its subject) neatly overlaps with Aristotle’s (alternative) ‘\( A \) belongs to/holds of \( B \) pattern’ of predication in the Analytics. But we have not yet mentioned the third con-signifying element that Aristotle attributes to the verb, namely, its con-signifying time. (Again: ‘holding now’.)

As noted above: it is most striking that Aristotle thinks only present-tense verbs are verbs properly speaking, referring to their past and future forms as merely “inflexions” of the verb—διαφέρει δὲ τὸ \( \rho\)ήματος, ὅτι τὸ \( μ\)ὲ \( τὸν \) παρόντα προσσημαίνει χρόνον, τὰ \( \delta \) τὸ \( π\)έριξ (16b18–19)—and we should add now that this is significant because the Greek word for the ‘present’ time (here: τὸν παρόντα… χρόνον) is already etymologically connected to the (locative) notion of being-present (πάρει: to be present, around, ready-at-hand). As Calvo reminds us too, the verb εἰμι itself originally connotes the notion of presence, being-there or being-present; 127 and I should like to add, that this notion is also connotated by the verb ὑπάρχειν. 128

123 Ibid, p. 49
124 Ibid, p. 49. It is here that Calvo most obviously follows Hintikka (1999; 2006) who also argues that in such statements, the ‘existence’ function belongs to the predicate, and not to any implicit or explicit quantifier (and Calvo adds: in the verbal, not the nominal side of the \( \rho\)ήμα).
125 See e.g. APr. 25A.15, et passim; 48b2–4.
126 Recall again the idea of Y’s ‘holding’ in X is Y: “…it additionally signifies that it is holding now. And it is always a sign of what holds, that is, holds of a subject” (DI 16b9–10).
127 So, Calvo (2014), p. 51, notes: “Thus it could be said that the Aristotelian thesis that a verb additionally signifies the present time is somehow connected to two relevant circumstances: (1) in the first place, it is related to the highly important fact that in Aristotle’s philosophical and grammatical approach the verb ‘be’ is not fully grammaticalized. Not yet. It is more than a purely grammatical (or logical) mark, insofar as it retains
What all this strikingly suggests then is that, on the current interpretation: (1) all of the co-signifying functions of ‘to be’ coincide in a single focal semantic-value that embraces the notions of presence, actuality, existence, belonging, taking place (in)… etc; and (2) that many, and perhaps all of these notions are also present in the verb ὑπάρχειν. Thus, despite Aristotle’s considered view that ‘be’ (like the properly verbal component in any ἐπίμα/verb) does not signify as such, but only co-signifies, and that it only does so when it is joined to a nominal element (whether subject or ‘predicate’), still on this interpretation, it turns out that ‘be’ is perhaps a far ‘richer’ notion than it is usually said to be; for on this interpretation—and against the standard view—on Aristotle’s philosophical analysis of the verb, ‘be’ does not simply perform a ‘copula’ function in categorical sentences or statements, but rather an assertive or thetic one; and in this respect it is closely tied to the notions of existence, actuality, presence and so on.\(^{129}\)

In the following sections, I build on this analysis of the thetic function of the verb ‘be’ in Aristotle’s account of the statement-making sentence, drawing on another line of interpretation—that of Mohan Matthen.

5.3.2 Mohan Matthen on the ‘is’ of existence-truth in Aristotle

In his ground-breaking article “Greek Ontology and the ‘Is’ of Truth”, Mohan Matthen (1983) has put forward another important account of the philosophical meaning and use of the verb ‘be’ in Aristotle (and Greek philosophy more generally), focusing on Aristotle’s account of statement-making (in De Interpretatione 1–4).\(^{130}\) The interpretation he develops in this paper is put forward as certain features belonging to its own past (Indo-European) meaning. As I have said, the verb ἑἰμί connotes the notion of presence according to its old Indo-European origins; and (2) in the second place, the reference to the present tense appears to be connected to the fact that, according to Aristotle, the most important verbal co-signification is the assertive or the thetic one; that is, the affirmation of the presence, existence or actuality of that which is signified by the verb; and the idea of actualization is immediately expressed by the present tense in the indicative: ἐστιν.”

\(^{128}\) See for example: Met. Θ1048a32–36: “‘Actuality’ means the presence [τὸ ὑπάρχειν] of the thing, not in the sense which we mean by ‘potentially’. We say that a thing is present potentially as Hermes is present in the wood, or the half-line in the whole, because it can be separated from it; and as we call even a man who is not studying “a scholar” if he is capable of studying. That which is present in the opposite sense to this is present actually.” It would be odd to translate ὑπάρχειν here as “belongs to”.

\(^{129}\) It is strange, then, that Calvo continues to talk about the “semantic emptiness of ‘be’”, for his whole interpretation concerns not simply the syntax of ‘be’, but precisely its semantics. See also the note above: in Calvo’s own words, the verb is “not fully grammaticalized”. Calov (2014), p. 51, his emphasis.

\(^{130}\) Despite several commentators’ acknowledgement of the fundamental importance of this paper, few have seriously taken up (or even respond to) its main claims. As far as I can see, the paper has only received only seriously reply in Ketchum (1998). De Rijk (2002) has developed Matthen’s account in his magisterial work, Aristotle: Semantics and Ontology (see esp. pp. 80–85), and Allan Bäck (2000), p. 109, acknowledges the similarities between his own and Matthen’s interpretations of Aristotle on predication. But this paper has not received the attention it deserves. There are surely problems in the details (and we shall mention some of
“an alternative semantic account of what Charles Kahn has called the ‘is’ of truth”,\textsuperscript{131} but it has far wider significance than this claim suggests, for his semantic account provides strong evidence against the view that we have heard several times now, that the verb ‘be’ is “essentially ambiguous” due to its performing distinct roles in predication\textsuperscript{132} (as ‘copula’) and as indicating or asserting (either) the truth or falsity of a proposition or the existence of a term’s or sentence’s referent. Thus, Matthen’s account is relevant to the broader question we are pursuing about the relationship between predication and existence (or predicative being and existence) in Aristotle, and whether or how Aristotle’s general notion of being lined up with one or the other sense’, or embraced both at once as a sort of con-fused notion of being.\textsuperscript{133}

About Kahn’s account of the ‘is’ of truth,\textsuperscript{134} his main proposal, and the one that Matthen is responding to, is that in philosophical contexts the ‘copula’ performs two functions. Matthen summaries:

It joins predicate to subject, and it states of the sentence in which it occurs that it (the sentence) is true. Further, there is an “essential ambiguity” in this second function of ‘is’: it can be taken not only as saying that the sentence in which it occurs is true, but also that the fact “corresponding” to that sentence is-so, or obtains.\textsuperscript{135}

My immediate concern is with Matthen’s response to the first point (in regard to the ‘copula’ performing these multiple functions) because many of the problems about the alleged “ambiguity” of ‘is’, and Kahn’s-Matthen’s remarks on the distinction between sentences being-true and ‘facts’ being-so, or obtaining,\textsuperscript{136} will become clearer once we have addressed this issue.

Interpreting \textit{De Interpretatione} 1–4, Matthen focuses on a crucial point that has been almost entirely overlooked by Aristotle’s modern commentators, and it concerns the distinction between them), but I think Matthen’s general strategy and argument are entirely correct. In what follows I am mainly concerned with Matthen’s ‘core’ thesis concerning the the absolute use of ‘is’ in Aristotle (and how it is related to truth-existence).

\textsuperscript{131} Matthen (1983), p. 113.
\textsuperscript{132} Under which I include notions of identity, subsumption and so on, which Aristotle does not, it is usually said, clearly distinguish (further evidence for the alleged ‘ambiguity’ of ‘is’ in Aristotle).
\textsuperscript{133} Even Ketchum (1998), p. 322, acknowledges, despite his contesting its hypothesis, that Matthen’s paper “presents and defends what is perhaps the most detailed and well worked out existence approach in the literature. After pointing out that Greek philosophers sometimes use the verb, ‘einai’, in such a way that it seems to express both existence and predication, he presents an interesting account of this phenomenon which allows us to read absolute occurrences of the verb as neither the copula nor as (con)fused but as meaning simply, ‘exists’.”
\textsuperscript{134} Based on the ‘synoptic’ view the author presents in Kahn (1996).
\textsuperscript{135} Matthen (1983), p. 119.
\textsuperscript{136} Both Kahn (1976), pp. 326–237, and Matthen (1983), p. 119, stress that being-so or obtaining, as applied to facts, is not existence.
dyadic and monadic ‘is’ (basically our 1-place and 2-place ‘being’). After presenting a similar analysis to the one we gave in the previous section on the role of dyadic ‘is’ (the ‘copula’) in linking “sub-sentential denoting expressions” (our names and verbs—the latter referring to the nominal component of the ῥῆµα, and which Matthen terms a “predicable-denoter”), Matthen points out in the following section of his paper the striking fact that nowhere in De Interpretatione does Aristotle explicitly mention dyadic ‘is’, although he does mention monadic ‘is’. …Thus he says thrice (16a9–19, 16b19–26, and 16b28–29) that both nouns and verbs need to be supplemented by ‘is’, but can we conclude that ‘Man running’ is similarly lacking an ‘is’?

In these passages, Aristotle’s claim (as we saw above) seems to be that any denoting expression lacks ‘co-signification of being’ until ‘is’ is added, and in the examples he gives (here and elsewhere in DI) clearly suggest that 1-place ‘Man is’ (and also ‘Running is’) are to be counted as sentences. But if this is so, how should we adapt these remarks to apparent cases of ‘dyadic’ ‘is’?

Matthen’s radical view is that it is monadic ‘is’ that attaches to both names and verbs and “to complex terms that involve a combination of simples”. That is, both in statements of secundum adjaciens and of tertium adjaciens, Matthen argues, monadic ‘is’ is performing the same role—that it can be made to perform the same role in (apparently) 2-place subject-predicate sentences by moving the predicate term to attributive position, with the result that ‘is’ is no longer attached to a

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137 Matthen (1983), p. 122. “Let us call a use of ‘is’ monadic if it must be completed by exactly one term to form a sentence, dyadic if it requires exactly two. Aristotle’s remarks [in De Int 1–3] suggest (a) that the copula is dyadic, and (b) that a subject-predicate sentence will incorporate a noun (the subject), a verb (since the predicate will signify-about the denotatum of the subject) and a copula (or equivalent) to “combine” or “separate” these”.


139 This is possible in Greek, because such particles can function as substantivized adjectives (here interpreted as the-running-man, etc.).

140 This is one of the limitations of Calvo’s interpretation. He does not mention 1-place is at all, and each of the three main functions that he assigns to ‘be’ refer to the predicate’s being asserted, or “holding” (now) of its subject. (Thus, he presumes that these functions only apply to 2-place instances.) Matthen points to two passages in De Interpretatione which suggest this view (and while I agree that they are far from conclusive, his subsequent discussion provides much further support). The first is Aristotle’s remark (at 16b16–18) that “Even ‘goat-stag’ signifies something, but not as yet something true or false—unless ‘is’ or ‘is not’ are added”, and the second, his remark that “Even the logos of man is not yet a statement-making sentence, unless ‘is’ or ‘will be’ or ‘was’ or something of that sort is added” (17a10–12). (Though Matthen does not explicitly raise this point, the first is remark is significant because Aristotle’s usually only regards truth and falsity as applying in 2-place contexts (where there is separation and combination—i.e. in predication, where a predicate is affirmed or denied of a subject).

noun or verb but to the complex term. Thus, just as monadic ‘is’ attaches to a single term in ‘Man is’ or ‘Running is’, the ‘is’ in ‘The man is running’ can be made monadic by attaching it to the complex term ‘The running man’, resulting in: “The running-man is” (or “is the running-man”).

It is crucial to note too that for Matthen, “both the dyadic ‘is’ and the monadic ‘is’ provide semantic paradigms to which all subject-predicate sentences can be assimilated, however these sentences may be phrased”; and so on either pattern, the use of the verb ‘be’ will comprehend a single, though perhaps nuanced notion related to assertion and de-assertion (applying to both the ‘truth’ of propositions or judgements and the ‘existence’ of single and complex terms’ referents).

On the basis of this evidence, Matthen puts forward a ‘copula-less’ exegesis of Aristotle’s philosophical analysis of the verb ‘be’.

5.3.3 De Rijk on the focal semantic value of hyparctic ‘be’ in Aristotle

Building on Matthen’s monadic analysis (presented in his “epoch-making paper”), De Rijk (2002) has provided an expanded account of the assertoric function of εἶναι in Aristotle’s semantic analysis of statement-making and developed what is arguably one of the most significant analyses of the semantics of being in Aristotle that has appeared in the literature in recent decades.

In line with the interpretation that we have presented so far, De Rijk also argues against the standard picture of the role of ‘is’ in statement making and predication in Aristotle, and specifically Kahn’s view concerning the ambiguity of ‘is’ in Greek and the centrality of the copula uses of the verb. Indeed, De Rijk rejects entirely the commonly-accepted ‘S is P’ pattern of predication (“the copula construal”) as applying to Aristotle’s analysis at all, arguing that it is “not only

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142 Matthen (1983), pp. 123–125. We note again that Aristotle not only allows this transformation, but that this syntactic pattern is frequent in both Aristotle and ancient Greek generally. DI 21b9. See also Met. 1017a28 and 1028a 15.
144 It is also important to note too that Matthen’s account is meant to apply to, and reflect not only Aristotle’s philosophical analysis of the verb, but also the semantics of ‘be’ in ancient Greek more generally; and this should explain (or dispel with) many of our “worries” about the apparent “confusion” between (or regarding) the supposedly “predicative” and existential uses (or senses) of the verb in Greek. For example, the readiness of Greek writers to slip between saying (i) ‘x is y’ and (ii) ‘x is’ when they apparently mean the same thing should not be explained in terms of (ii)’s being a suspect case of ‘incomplete’ predication. (See examples in Matthen (1983), pp.113–118.)
145 Note: we will still find examples of 2-place ‘is’ in Aristotle, since Matthen is describing Aristotle’s deep-structure analysis of statement-making, not the syntax of ordinary Greek. However, it is telling that all of the examples given in DI are of ‘emphatic’ (sentence-head) ‘is’.
147 Ibid, p. 81
148 Ibid, pp. 24–30
149 Ibid, p. 75
inappropriate but altogether misleading when it comes to expressing what Aristotle has in mind regarding the proper nature of statement-making”.\textsuperscript{150} Rather, similar to Matthen, he holds that Aristotle’s protocol model of statement-making and predication involves “an appositive attribution in terms of a monadic construct composed of an assertible and an assertoric operator”.\textsuperscript{151} So again, there is no place for the “linking” copula at all on this picture, since the terms are already joined in the appositional construction ‘Fa’ (De Rijk’s “compound assertible”).\textsuperscript{152}

For de Rijk then, the central function of the verb εἶναι in Aristotle is as an ‘assertoric’ operator,\textsuperscript{153} and its focal lexical-value is the stative value ‘to be (actually) there’ or ‘to be given’. When this meaning occurs in an emphatic use, it can refer to either (i) the being-there of both first-order entities such as subsistent objects and their properties, as well as ‘higher-order’ entities such as conceptual constructs (thus, suggesting ‘existence’, or ‘actuality’), as well as (ii) such higher-order entities’, propositions’ and events’ or states-of-affairs’ ‘being-the-case’ or ‘obtaining’.\textsuperscript{154}

5.3.4 Summary

What the preceding (re)interpretations of the meaning and function of ‘be’ in Aristotle share, then, is the view that, based on his philosophical analysis, the focal value of “is” (ἔστιν), even in copula constructions, is as assertoric, and captured (at once) in the idea of both existence and hyparxis, so that for \( P \) to exist is explained in terms of its ‘belonging’ to a subject (\( S \)). This is as opposed to the line of interpretation that goes back to Kahn and Owen, which says that, while Aristotle did recognize an existential use of ‘be’, the focal value of the verb for him is to be something.

In the following sections, then, I will present an interpretation of Aristotle’s analysis of the categories of (per se) being and their pros hen structure that finds a connection between these and the notion of existence that we have been discussing in the preceding sections.

5.4 The categories of being

We have already discussed the problem of what the categories are in the preceding chapter. In this section, I focus on the question of whether, and in what way, the categories involve a division of

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid, p. 76
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid, p. 80
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid, p. 28; Cp. Kahn (1973, p. 201), who thinks that the appositional construction (\( Fa \)) in Greek presupposes the copula construction.
\textsuperscript{153} De Rijk thinks the assertoric use is present in all cases; cp. Bäck (2000), p. 107 n 21.
\textsuperscript{154} De Rijk (2002), pp. 34–35. We should note here as well the fundamental ‘ambiguity’ in ancient Greek generally: namely, the lack of a sharp division between not only expressions and their referents or significates, but also between propositions and their contents. In Greek, ‘\( x \) is’ can mean both (at once) ‘\( x \) exists’ and ‘(that) “\( x \)” is true’.
being or of existence (or both), and how this connects with Aristotle’s claim that ‘being’ is predicated pros hen.

Firstly, I take the line that the doctrine of the categories involves two connected claims about the different ways that we can classify something as being: firstly, that qua the kinds of being they are, beings belong to, or may be classified under different, categorial genera (substance, quantity, quality and so on) that are not ‘reducible’ to or subsumed under a single genus (‘being’); and secondly, that different categorial beings will exist in different ‘ways’ depending on the kind of thing that they are; and though we have to be cautious here, given what we have said about the (lack of a) distinction between predicative and existential being in Aristotle (and about the problematic notion of ‘ways’ versus ‘senses’ of being or ‘is’, discussed in the previous chapter), I should say: I am not drawing such a sharp distinction, but simply explaining in terminology that will help us later, what Aristotle means when he says (for example) that certain (non-substance) categorial beings are always ‘predicated of’ or ‘inhere in’ a subject. Nor then should it trouble us to say that whether we are talking about the kind of thing that something is, or the ‘way’ of being (or of existing) that characterizes it—depending, that is, on whether it is a kind of thing that is predicated of or inhere in a subject or not—in both cases, substance will be ‘prior’ (in being or existence, and in definition) to non-substance categorial beings, and this is what it means to say that ‘being’ is always predicated pros hen, or in relation to substance. That is, recalling what Met. Γ.2 has said about the pros hen structure of being: being a substance means being that kind (of being) and being (or existing) in a way that is primary or first in relation to the non-substance kinds of being, because the latter depend for their being—for their existence—on substance, which is the primary kind of being; and that we should characterize their being in this way (that is, their existing in relation to substance) is necessary just because, as we shall see, it is difficult to see what it might mean for a non-substance kind of being to be the kind of thing that it is, or what it is (τί ἐστι), because it stands in this (pros hen) relation to substance. Instead we can say: white (or whiteness), for example, is one of the kinds of things that are; and if we ask what it is, we should say that it is a colour, and that colour is a quality, and that, as a quality, it is always the kind of being that is predicated of or inhere in—exists (pros hen) in relation to substance—because, Aristotle will say, a

155 So once again, I am in broad agreement with Owen (1960), perhaps, in supposing that the categories do correspond to different kinds (or senses?) of existence (or exists?), though as I discussed above, I reject the ‘reducibility’ thesis (which says that the senses of 1-place ‘is’ are ultimately reducible to (because each of them signifies one of) the different senses of (2-place) predicative ‘is’, corresponding to the different figures of predication. Again, my position is perhaps closer to Bostock’s (1994), pp. 67f, who identifies two different accounts of being in Aristotle—what he calls ‘Account A’ and ‘Account B’—in which the latter says that there are so-many ultimate kinds of being (each of them distinct, or irreducible to a single genus), and the former, that being (existence) applies to all kinds of things, but primarily to substance and derivatively to the others. However, Bostock (like Owen) also believes that account A (the pros hen account) belongs to a later stage of Aristotle’s philosophical thought. Whether or not, or to the extent that it does, in formulating it, Aristotle was clearly drawing on ideas that he had already developed in Posterior Analytics, as we shall see.
being that is a quality is not the kind of being that can be—that can exist—apart from a substance; however, it is not the kind of thing that it is, or what it is—that is, white(ness), and a quality—because such qualities (or quality terms) stand in this kind of dependence relation, except in this sense, that, as Aristotle says, the notion of substance will always be included in its own definition, in some sense.

Now about this last point: the idea that substance is (somehow) contained in the definition of other non-substances is usually connected to the idea that substance has a certain ‘logical’ priority in relation to the other categories, as Aristotle himself suggests, saying (in Z.1 for example) that substance is prior “in logos” because “in the definition of each term the notion of the substance must be present”\(^\text{156}\). But we must clarify just what this means (that substance is prior in logos, because it is included in the definition of other categories) in light of the idea that substance is (presumably) ‘prior’ because of the pros hen structure of being; that is, we must determine what is the connexion between these two claims, and for the following reason, that priority in logos (or definition) suggests, and is used by Aristotle to describe, the logical relation between genus and species—the fact that ‘animal’, for example, is logically prior to (and contained in the definition of) ‘man’; that animal is prior because it is more ‘universal’. But of course, this cannot be what Aristotle means here, for that would entail that substance does stand in this sort relation to the remaining categories of being (that is, as genus to species)—a position that he has rejected in stating that ‘being is not a genus’. Rather, substance is prior or first because it is (as Aristotle describes) a term of reference, not because it is common genus; and once again, this is precisely what Aristotle is getting at when he says that a term may be ‘common’ in two ways:

For it is not only in the case of terms which express one common notion that the investigation belongs to one science, but also in the case of terms which relate to one particular characteristic; for the latter too, in a sense, express one common notion.\(^\text{157}\)

So Aristotle is clear that terms such as ‘being’ and ‘health’ and so on are predicated not καθ’ ἑν (in conformity with one thing), but rather πρὸς μιαν... φύσιν (in relation to one thing, or one nature),\(^\text{158}\) and we already find a similar idea rehearsed in (for example) the Eudemian Ethics, where Aristotle wants to deny (in arguing against the Platonic notions of friendship, the good, and being etc.) that such common terms are primary because they are universal (or always predicated or καθ’ ἑν).\(^\text{159}\)

Rather, as we have seen, while ‘being’, ‘health’ and so on do not (each of them) represent a common genus, they do express a common notion in the sense that the different things that are called ‘being’ or ‘good’ or (Aristotle’s usual example) ‘healthy’ stand in a fundamental relation to their primary instances: ‘being’ is predicated primarily of substance, and derivatively of non-

\(^{156}\) Met. Z.1, 1028a35–36; cf. Met. Θ1, 1045b27f

\(^{157}\) Met. 1003b13–15

\(^{158}\) Note, however, that Aristotle says here that such terms are τρόπον τινά—“in some way”—predicated καθ’ ἑν, while in Z.4, 1030b1–14, these two ways of being ‘common’ are sharply held apart.

\(^{159}\) EE. 1.8, 1236a.16–25.
substances (such as qualities and quantities) because the latter are always predicated of or inhere in a substance, such that, to be a quality just is for some substance to be qualified in a certain way, and so on, as we have said.

But now the problem is, it is still not clear how this is supposed to entail that the notion of ‘substance’ will always be included in the definition of non-substance categories; and in fact, it seems not to follow at all, or not if we follow Aristotle’s own procedure of defining using the usual genus-plus-differentia formula;\(^{160}\) for while it may be true that for a quality such as white to be is for it to be predicated of (or to inhere in) a substance, it is not the case that this tells us, strictly speaking, what white is, nor that substance will be included in the essential definition of white (which tells us what white is).\(^{161}\) So, as Yu notes: “when Aristotle asserts that substance is prior in definition, the “formula” (logos) here is not meant to be the definition which reveals essence and is in the form of genus plus differentia, but must be taken to refer to the complete description of a thing”\(^{162}\).

I shall return to discussing what such a “complete description” might be shortly; but it is important to observe first of all that it is this (or a similar) worry that led Owen to detect a ‘tension’ between the multiplicity and pros hen accounts of (categorial) being that Aristotle presents in the Organon (and in EE) and in the Metaphysics, respectively.\(^{163}\) That is, when Aristotle introduces the categories of being in Categories 4 and Topics I 9, there is no mention of their being related pros hen; there, they rather appear as distinct senses of being that are neither reducible to, nor related to a single ‘sense’ or term (Owens’ “focal meaning”)—namely, substance—which is supposed to be logically prior to (because it is contained in the definition of) the remaining ‘senses’ of being. And again, this is perhaps clearest from Topics I 9, where (as Yu notes) the “members of different categories each have [sic] their own essence-stating definition in the genus-differentia mode”.\(^{164}\)

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160 Topics I.8, 103b15f

161 It is crucial to notice that Aristotle acknowledges (in Topics, I 9, 103b27–37) that non-substance categories do have essences, and so, they are capable of definition: “It is clear, too, on the face of it that the man who signifies something’s essence signifies sometimes a substance, sometimes a quality, sometimes some one of the other types of predicate. For when man is set before him and he says that what is set there is ‘a man’ or ‘an animal’, he states its essence and signifies a substance; but when a white colour is set before him and he says that what is set there is ‘white’ or is ‘a colour’, he states its essence and signifies a quality. Likewise, also, if a magnitude of a cubit be set before him and he says that what is set there is a magnitude of a cubit, he will be describing its essence and signifying a quantity. Likewise, also, in the other cases: for each of these kinds of predicate, if either it be asserted of itself, or its genus be asserted of it, signifies an essence”. However, as Z.4–5 will show, only substances have essences in the strict sense, and this difference (between substances and accidents, in respect of the way that each is said to have an essence) becomes crucial in the ensuing argument.

162 Yu (2003), pp. 32–33.


(being) that each of the categories represents a distinct (and ultimate) kind of being. Indeed, the closest thing we find to a ‘reduction’ of the different categories of being to substance when the categories are explicitly discussed just is the familiar claim (from Categories 2a35f) that non-substance categories are all “either said of primary substances as subjects or in them as subjects”—and the ontological claim that “if the primary substances did not exist it would be impossible for any of the other things to exist”.

No doubt, Aristotle is thinking of such an ontological relationship (between the different kinds of categorial being: substance and quality and quantity and so on, the first standing in a relation of ontological priority to the rest) when he employs the pros hen device; but once again, it is not clear how such a relation—the ontological ‘dependence’ of non-substances on categories—entails either that being is not strictly homonomyous, or that ‘substance’ should be contained in the definition of non-substance categories. So we still have to determine how they are connected, and how their connexion entails that the notion of substance is logically contained in the ‘account’ of non-substance categories (which is to say, if not in the usual way that the elements of a logos are included in the definition that states the essence of something, or what it is, then in what way). I will present an answer to this question in the following section.

5.4.1 The categories as senses of per se being

One of the striking facts about Aristotle’s treatment of the categories in the Metaphysics is that they are introduced there as all senses of ‘per se’ being. As we saw above, in Δ.7, Aristotle distinguishes between four ‘senses’ of being: (i) accidental being, (ii) being per se (καθ’ αὐτό ἐξιτω), (iii) being as truth and (iv) potential and actual being; and commenting on the second sense (καθ’ αὐτό being), Aristotle writes:

The senses of essential being (καθ’ αὐτό ἐξιτω) are those which are indicated by the figures of predication (τὰ σχήματα τῆς κατηγορίας); for “being” (τὸ ἐξιτω) has as many senses as there are ways of predication. Now since some predicates indicate what a thing is, and others its quality, quantity, relation, activity or passivity, place, time, to each of these corresponds a sense of “being.”

Recalling the familiar schema from Categories 2 (1a20ff): the fourfold division between what is (not) said of and (not) in a subject.

It is worth noting, too, that this perhaps explains why the pros hen device only comes to the fore in the Metaphysics, and was not earlier discussed in either the Categories or Topics treatment of the categories, since there Aristotle is primarily concerned with different levels of classification and the elements of statement-making, not (straightforwardly) questions about ontology.

Δ.7. 1017a 23–29 Cf. Met. Θ1, 1045b28, where Aristotle refers to these as the “categories of being” (αἱ ἄλλαι κατηγορίαι τοῦ ἄντικος); Met. Γ.2, 1026a36; and Θ10, 1051a33–b2, where being per se is called “being with reference to the figures of predication” (τὰ σχήματα τῶν κατηγοριῶν).
Now, this is surprising, because we might have expected the non-substance categories at least, if not substance (here described as “what a thing is”) to have turned up as senses of (i) accidental being, since they are all either predicated of or inhere in a subject, as we have heard. None of them describes what a subject is (τί ἐστι), revealing the essence of a primary substance, but rather describe what something is ‘like’ (ποιόν), and so on, and are predicated of, or belong to the latter accidentally. But here, in describing the categories as all senses of per se being, Aristotle seems to be suggesting that each of them is itself (or has) an essence, since he usually defines the term καθ’ αὑτό as applying to “the essence of each thing [τὸ τί ἐστι ἔκαστο]” (as at A18, 1022a25–26).

However, there is no tension here, since as we have already seen, in Topics I.9, Aristotle does hold that each of the categories signify the essence of something; and in case this might be thought to conflict with their treatment in the Categories, Aristotle reminds us that:

…for each of these kinds of predicate, if either it be asserted of itself, or its genus be asserted of it, signifies an essence: if, on the other hand, one kind of predicate is asserted of another kind, it does not signify an essence, but a quantity or a quality or one of the other kinds of predicate.169

That is, there are two ways that we can take the categories: (1) in terms of what each of them signifies in itself (each category having a distinct essence, so that to say ‘white is a colour or ‘colour is a quality’ signifies an essential predication, the predicate belonging essentially to the subject); or (2) as predicated of a subject (where ‘Socrates is white’, for example, signifies an accidental predication, while ‘Socrates is a man’ or ‘man is an animal’, an essential one). So much should be familiar already. But now, returning to the question that we raised in the previous section: what we want to know is whether, or how the senses of per se being are related—and more specifically, how they are related to substance.

It is crucial to note too that the distinction between essential and accidental predication (or the things that are said to be καθ’ αὑτό or κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς) that Aristotle is drawing here—and which we examined in close detail in Chapter 3—also mirrors, and in fact explains, a similar distinction between between the things that are essentially (καθ’ αὑτό) ‘one’ or ‘one’ accidentally (κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς), as in Δ.6 (1015b16–17, and ff.). This distinction that becomes centrally important in Metaphysics Z (chs. 4–6, 12) where Aristotle discusses the problem of the ‘unity’ of definition, in connection with the question (examined in Z.4–6 especially) about what things have an essence (recalling, once again, that a definition is an account that signifies the essence of something).170

169 Topics I.9, 103b36–9
170 Topics 1.5, 102a3: “ἐστι δ’ ὅρος μὲν λόγος ὅ τὸ τί ἐστι ἔσται σημαίνει”
Now, I shall not discuss these chapters at length, since their details do not concern us so much as the broader considerations that Aristotle introduces here, except to note that the general line of argument that Aristotle is pursuing in them is broadly about what it means to be an essence (τὸ τί ἐστὶν εἶναι, defined as “what [each thing] is said to be per se [καθ’ αὑτό]”), and about what things have essences; and the central idea is expressed in Aristotle’s claim that “there will be an essence only for those things whose formula is a definition” (1030a6–7), and in Z.4–5 in particular, Aristotle contrasts proper definitions with ‘names’ or complex expressions such as ‘pale-man’ or ‘pale-surface’ that signify, but do not signify what something is or an essence, but rather, a kind of ‘entity’ that is usually referred to in the literature as an ‘accidental unity’.

5.4.2 Metaphysics Z.4 and essence

In Met. Z.4, Aristotle remarks: “we have a definition only where it is of something primary—i.e. of something which is expressed without predicating one thing of another”. So much sounds familiar already. Thus, in explaining why (the accidental unity) “pale man”, for example, does not signify an essence, Aristotle employs the same distinction that we noted in Chapter 3, in commenting on Posterior Analytics I.22. He writes:

But is being for a cloak [a singular term used to name “pale man”] an essence at all? Presumably not, for an essence is just what is a this [ὁπερ γὰρ τί ἐστιν τὸ τί ἐνέσται], but when one thing is predicated of another we do not have just what is some this [οἷς ἐστιν ὁπερ τὸδε τί]. Thus a pale man is not just what is some this, if indeed thisness belongs only to substances.

Once again (and recalling what we said earlier about there being no predication in a definition, strictly speaking), pale-man is said not to be the kind of thing that has an essence because it is not a καθ’ αὑτο item, and this is revealed in its formula: the attribute ‘pale’ belongs to (or is predicated of) ‘man’ accidentally, not to the essence of man, since ‘pale’ (as belonging to the category of ‘quality’) does not indicate ‘what’ man is.

171 These difficult chapters have received much scholarly attention and different interpretations. I shall mention only a few of the most important studies focussing on the issues I discuss: Cohen (1978a, 1978b); Kung (1978); Lewis (1984); Witt (1989); Matthews (1990); Wedin (2000); Burnyeat (2001); Charles (2002)

172 Here already, we run into difficulties, for Aristotle’s argument (or procedure) may well turn out to be circular: in order to discover whether something is (or has) an essence, we must examine the formula or account that signifies the thing in question to see whether it corresponds to a true (essence-stating) definition. If the attributes mentioned in the formula do not belong to the essence per se, then it will not be a definition that signifies the essence of anything. But this presumes that we already know the difference between essential and non-essential attributes—i.e., that we know what things are or have essences. In short: we can define a thing only after we have grasped the essence—this knowledge is prior.

173 Matthews (1982)

174 Met. Z.4, 1030a.10–11.

175 APo I.22, 1030a2–5.
But the important thing to note once again is that here, it is the accidental compound or unity ('pale-man'), and not the ‘accident’ pale, that is said not to be καθ’ ως το, or not to have an essence, and so too then, to lack a proper definition; and this is important in light of the question that we began discussing in this section: as Aristotle indicates in Topics I 9, and in calling the categories senses of ‘per se’ being in Δ.7, such ‘accidental’ predicates do in a sense ‘have’ an essence, and thus a proper definition. And as it turns out, Aristotle acknowledges this here too—in his usual fashion, saying that ‘essence’ and ‘definition’ are ‘said in many ways’. Thus, in Z.4, after saying that only primary substances (such as man) will have an essence, Aristotle writes:

Or is it that we speak of definition too in many ways, like what a thing is [τι ἐστι]? For indeed what a thing is signifies in one way the substance of the thing and the this, and in another way each of the predicates—predicates of quantity, quality, and so on. For just as ‘is’ [τὸ ἔστιν] belongs to everything, but not in the same way [οὐχ ἐμφατος]—to one in a primary way [πρῶτος] and after that [ἐπιμένοις] to the others—so also what a thing is belongs without qualification [ὑπαλός] to a substance, but in a way to other things as well [ποὺς δὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις]. For indeed we can ask what a quality is, and so a quality is something with a what-it-is, but not without qualification.

A few lines later, Aristotle adds:

And so… essence [τὸ τι ἐν ἐναι] too will belong in a similar way primarily and without qualification to substance [πρῶτος μὲν καὶ ἀπλός τῇ ούσιᾷ], and after that to other things [ἐπὶ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις], as does what-it-is [τὸ τι ἔστιν]. In these cases it will not be essence without qualification [ὑπαλός], but what being is for a quality or for a quantity. For it must either be by an equivocation [ἐμφατος] that we say these things are [ἐναι ὅντα], or by adding something and subtracting something [ὡς προστιθέντας καὶ ἄφαιρόντας]...

Now, these passages are both highly significant for one reason that we shall have to explore in closer detail below. Here, Aristotle quite explicitly connects the homonymy of τι ἐστι and τὸ τι ἐναι to that of ‘is’ (τὸ ἔστιν) in the first paragraph and to ‘being’ (ὁν) in the second, and this perhaps sheds the clearest light on the connection between predicative and existential ‘being’ in Aristotle that we have encountered till now. To explain: we have heard at length that non-substance

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176 “…for each of these kinds of predicate, if either it be asserted of itself, or its genus be asserted of it, signifies an essence” (Topics I 9)
177 Met. Z.4, 1030a17–26
178 Met. Z.4, 1030a28–33
179 Recall Δ.7 (1017a23–24) on 'per se being': “for the senses of ‘being’ are just as many as these figures [τὰ σχήματα τῆς κατηγορίας]—ὁποῖος γὰρ λέγεται, τοσοῦτος ὁ ἐναι σημαίνει”
180 Noting too that a thing is called a unity in the same number of ways as (categorial) ‘being’ is predicatted: “It does not follow from this that there will be a definition of anything which means the same as some formula. The formula must be of a certain sort, in fact a formula of a unity… a unity in one of the ways in which we speak of being, and being signifies in one way this, in another of what quantity, in another of what quality. So there will be a formula and a definition even of a pale man, but not in the same way as there is of pallor or of a substance” (Z.4, 1030b7–13).
categories (like qualities, such as white) and accidental compounds (pale-man or pale-surface) do not possess a τι ἐστι or τὸ τί ἐν εἶναι in the primary and truest sense because each of these is always predicated of an underlying thing, and it is this—the underlying subject—that is said to be τι ἐστι and καθ᾿ αὐτό. Now Aristotle acknowledges: while it is true too in a sense that τι ἐστι or τὸ τί ἐν εἶναι belong to such accidental predicates as white or an accidental unity such as pale-man or -surface as well, they will not belong to them without qualification or primarily, and for the same reasons that we have heard: in the logos or account that reveals the essence of each of them, there will be some reference to substance—the underlying subject of which they are predicated. But now Aristotle adds too that it is on account of the latter that each of these things are (or are called being), “for ‘is’ belongs to everything, but not in the same way—to one in a primary way and after that to the others.” That is: only substance ‘is’ without qualification, and this recalls an important passage in Z.4:

Evidently, then, it is on account of this (substance) that each of those [accidents or accidental unities] is also; and therefore what primarily is—not is something but is without qualification [οὐ τι ὁν ἄλλ. ὡν ἄπλακ]—will be substance.183

Coordinating these passages, we learn two crucial things about the ‘mode’ of being of substances and non-substances respectively: in Z.1, Aristotle notes that it is not (as) being something (else) that substance is called ὁν or being, but primarily and without qualification—ὡς τὸ πρῶτος ὁν καὶ οὗ τι ὁν ἄλλ. ὡν ἄπλακ ἢ οὐσία ὁν εἶν—while in the Z.4 passage, quality and quantity and so on are said to be beings [ὄντα] ‘either’ by equivocation (ὁμοιόμοιος) or by addition or subtraction προστιθέντας καὶ ἄφαιροῦντας (1030a33). Furthermore, Aristotle states (in Z.1) that “it is on

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181 It should be noted that the term ἑπομένος (translated here ‘after that’, and in Ross, ‘secondarily’) should be understood as meaning something like ‘derivatively’, and not, as it were, serially. The point in saying that ‘is’ (like ‘essence’ and ‘being’ and so on) is predicated primarily of substance and ἑπομένος of non-substances is that the latter are dependent for their being-essence on the former. The distinction between primary and ‘secondary’ (or derivative) reference corresponds to the distinction between unqualified and qualified being, or being-simply versus being-by-addition or -subtraction, and as we have now learnt, it is crucially related to the focal (pros hen) relation that characterizes the relationship between different modes of being (and other core-dependent homonymous terms). But it is just for this reason that we should be cautious about understanding ‘ἐπομένος’ as referring to a serial order (first x, then y), since ‘seriality’ rather characterizes what Aristotle calls an ‘analogue’, rather than focal connection between terms. We shall examine this in closer detail below.

182 Met. Z.4, 1030a20–21.

183 Met. Z.1, 1028a29–31

184 It is important to note here that when Aristotle argues that non-substances are said to be (or called being) by addition and subtraction [προστιθέντας καὶ ἄφαιροῦντας] (see below), he is arguing that they are not said to be (or called being) homonymously [ὁμοιόμοιος] but rather pros hen (i.e., he means to connect being by addition and subtraction with focal reference) as become clear in the lines that immediately follow: “And in fact we speak neither equivocally nor univocally, but, as with ‘medical’, with reference to one and the same thing—not meaning one and the same thing, nor yet equivocally. For a patient and an operation and
account of [substance] that each of those [accidents, or accidental unities] is (ἐστιν”),¹⁸⁵ and a few lines earlier that “none of them either is of a nature to be in its own right, or is capable of being separated from substance—οὐδὲν γὰρ αὐτὸν ἐστιν οὔτε καθ’ αὐτὸ περιφοράς οὔτε χωρίζονται διόπως τῆς οὐσίας”¹⁸⁶ So being simply (or without qualification: ὑπάρχει) is opposed to being (as) something else, or being by addition and subtraction, and both ‘ways’ of being are held to mirror (or to explain?) the multivocality of ‘is’ or ‘being’. Now the question is, have we to decide whether ἐστιν is being used here predicatively or as indicating existence? The Z.1 passage certainly suggests the latter: substance ‘is’ primarily and without qualification, while accidents are said to be (each of them ‘is’) because of (ὅτι) substance, and none of them ‘is’ καθ’ αὐτὸ or is capable of being-separated from substance. But on the other hand, what might it mean to say that accidents are being or existent—ὅ— or ‘exist’ by addition or subtraction, or (as) being something (else)?

In light of the whole preceding discussion, and recalling what we said above about the meaning of hyparctic ‘be’ in Aristotle, it appears that we should not have to choose, for Aristotle intends his remarks here to ‘cut across’ the distinction between predicative and existential ‘be’, which is to say that the homonymy of τὸ ἐστιν (mirroring the homonymy of τί ἐστι or τὸ τί ἢν εἶναι, insofar as these belong to different categories) applies to both senses or uses of the verb (and, in both 1-place and 2-place contexts), noting that the kind of homonymy in question (that is, as applying to the categories) is not ‘pure’, but involves focal (pros hen) reference, such that (1) for non-substances (say, the quality ‘pale’) or for an accidental compound (such as pale-man or -surface) to be—to exist—always involves an underlying subject: that of which white or pale is predicated, or which being something else (ἐπερῶν τί ὁν—i.e. man or surface) is white or pale; and once again, this underlying thing is said to be or to exist καθ’ αὐτό, meaning that it is both what it is (τί ἐστι, and ὑπερ ἐστί and ὑπερ τόδε τι: just what it is and some this) and exists by itself, not predicated of an underlying subject. Neither accidents nor accidental compounds exist καθ’ αὐτό, though the former (categorial accidents) are said to be and to ‘have’ a τί ἐστι in a derivative way, just because of their being dependent on substance, both for their being what they are and for their existence—and this is revealed both by the facts of predication (to say that ‘white’ or ‘the white thing exists’ is to say that some-thing exists and is white) and in the account that states what each of them is.

¹⁸⁵ Met. Z.1, 1028a30–31. Recall Δ.7 (1017A.19–13) on accidental being: “Thus when one thing is said in an accidental sense to be another, this is either because both belong to the same thing, and this is, or because that to which the attribute belongs is, or because the subject which has as an attribute that of which it is itself predicated, itself is—τὰ μὲν οὖν κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς εἶναι λεγόμενα οὔτω λέγεται, ὡς δέ τοῦ αὐτῶ ὅτι ἢμιφῶ ὑπάρχει, ὥς ὃτι ὅντι ἔκεινο ὑπάρχει, ὥς ὃτι αὐτὸ ἐστιν ὃ ὑπάρχει οὗ αὐτὸ κατηγορεῖται”.

¹⁸⁶ Met. Z.1, 1028a23.
But now we arrive back at the crucial point that we commenced with discussing in the previous section: we have now seen that (and why) no non-substances or accidental compounds exist καθ’ αὐτό—because each of them depends for its being on substance. But as we recall, Aristotle describes the categories as all senses of ‘per se’ being, so we shall have to see what he means here, and how existing καθ’ αὐτό is supposed to be different from being predicated καθ’ αὐτό, and too, how the senses of per se being are related pros hen; and in connection with this point: we should recall as well the puzzle that we noted earlier about in what sense ‘substance’ is supposed to be contained in the definition or account of stating the τί ἐστι of non-substances, which Aristotle mentioned in support of the claim that each of them is said to be pros hen, or in relation to substance, even though ‘white is a colour’, and so on, make no such mention of substance. And finally, we should recall exactly what is at stake here: even if it is acknowledged that τί ἐστι and τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι (along with τὸ ἐστὶν) belong to non-substances too, then—unless ‘being’ is purely homonymous or equivocal—they must be related in some way (whether pros hen, or in another way) that will guarantee the unity of the science of being (qua being). And so far, we have really only seen Aristotle state a case for the ontic dependence of accidents (and accidental compounds) on substance; but as the preceding analysis suggests, Aristotle is thinking of a stronger connection that this—a sort of logical dependence too.

To arrive at a solution to both of these questions, we should now return to Aristotle’s distinction between being simply and being ‘by addition and subtraction’ (προστιθέντας καὶ ἀφαιροῦντας) which was mentioned in Z.4, and whose meaning becomes clear alongside a closer examination of the first two senses of καθ’ αὐτό that Aristotle introduces in Posterior Analytics I 4.

5.4.3 Being simply and being by addition and subtraction

As we have seen, in Z.1 and Z.4, Aristotle explicitly connects the pros hen homonymy of ‘being’ to the idea that only substances (which are said to be without qualification and exist καθ’ αὐτό) possess τί ἐστι and τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι in the proper sense—the latter applying to non-substances (accidents and accidental compounds) by addition (and subtraction); and I have just suggested that this is connected to the first two senses of καθ’ αὐτό ‘belonging’ that Aristotle introduces in APo I.4. My aim in this section, then, is to explain this connection in order to grasp more fully the relationship between the multiplicity and pros hen accounts of being that we began discussing, and also to see how their connection explains in what way Aristotle’s science of being qua being conforms (broadly speaking) to the model of science that Aristotle introduces in Posterior Analytics.

But we should begin with a qualifying remark: just now, I began by saying that the distinction between being simply and possessing τί ἐστι and τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι in the primary sense, on the one hand, and being by addition and subtraction on the other (where the things that are and possess τί ἐστι and τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι are said to be and to possess these in a derivative or secondary way) applies to the distinction between substances and non-substances or accidents (such as ‘white’). However,
in Z.4–5, Aristotle seems to be mostly concerned with discussing the difference between substances and accidental compounds such as pale-man or -surface, not simply substances and accidents. Thus, at Z.4 1029b14–21, Aristotle writes:

But not everything that a thing is in its own right [καθ’ αὐτό] is what being is for it [τό τι ἦν εἶναι]. For in one way pallor applies to a surface in its own right, but it is not this sort of ‘in its own right’ that is relevant here, since being for a pale thing [τὸ λευκὸν εἶναι] is not the same as being for a surface [τὸ ἐπιφανεία ἐκεῖνον]. Nor again is it what being is for the compound [τὸ ἐξ ὕποφθαλμόν], i.e., the pale surface, for here it itself is being added on [πρόσεστιν αὐτῷ]. Wherever, then, the formula expressing a thing does not include that thing itself [ἐν ὃ ὄρα μὴ ἐπέδρασαι λόγον αὐτό, λέγοντι αὐτῷ], this is the formula of what being is for the thing [οὕτως ὁ λόγος τοῦ τι ἦν εἶναι ἔκάστο].

The same point is raised a little further on. Once more, Aristotle is asking whether there is a simple formula of what being is for compounds such as pale-man—i.e. “whether these too have a τὸ τι ἦν εἶναι” (1029b26). He writes:

Suppose ‘cloak’ to be a name for this; what, then, is being for a cloak? It may be said that this is still not one of the things we speak of in its own right. But we may reply that a thing may fail to be expressed in its own right in two ways, one of them being from an addition and the other not. In the one case what is being defined is expressed by being added to something else, as for instance would happen if in defining being for a pale thing one were to give the formula of a pale man; in the other case the reverse occurs, as for instance would happen if ‘cloak’ were to signify a pale man but someone defined it as a pale thing. (In fact a pale man is a pale thing, but what being is for a pale man is not being for a pale thing.)

Aristotle’s point in both of these passages, of course, is that accidental compounds such as pale-man or -surface cannot be καθ’ αὐτό items because, as we discover when we attempt to give an account or formula that (ostensibly) reveals the τὸ τι ἦν εἶναι of each, there will be some reference to the underlying thing that is pale (i.e. the surface), and so a sort of doubling will occur: each of these—pallor and surface—has their own essence of sorts, since ‘being for a pale thing’ and ‘being for a surface’ are not the same, and in the latter case, ‘being for a surface’ is ‘being added on’ (just as if, in stating the formula expressing the τὸ τι ἦν εἶναι of a pale thing we give the formula of a pale-man); and Aristotle notes: the same occurs in reverse—if we attempt to avoid this doubling and say that the τὸ τι ἦν εἶναι for pale-man is being for a pale thing, we have simply eliminated (subtracted) one element, and at the cost of telling us what it is to be a pale man (since, as Aristotle notes, “a pale man is a pale thing, but what being is for a pale man is not being for a pale thing”).

In short, no accidental compound will qualify as having a τὸ τι ἦν εἶναι in the strict sense, as we have now heard at length. But what about simple accidents—say, white or pallor? As we have seen, Aristotle argues too that τὶ ἐστὶ and τὸ τι ἦν εἶναι apply to these not ‘without qualification’. So, speaking about each of the ‘predicates’, ‘quantity, quality, and so on’, Aristotle says: “For indeed, we can ask what a quality is, and so a quality is something with a τὶ ἐστὶ, but not without

187 Met. Z.4, 1029b27–1030a2
qualification”; and similarly for τὸ τί ἦν ἐίναι: this will belong “primarily and without qualification to substance, and after that to other things, as does τὸ τί ἐστιν. In these cases it will not be τί ἦν ἐίναι without qualification, but τί ἦν ἐίναι for a quality or for a quantity” (Z.4, 1030a28–32).

Now we should pause here for a minute to consider the significance (and translation) of these lines: “καὶ τὸ τί ἦν ἐίναι ὀμοίως ὑπάρξει πρώτως μὲν καὶ ἀπλῶς τῇ οὐσίᾳ, ἐντα καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις, ὡσπέρ καὶ τὸ τί ἐστιν οὐχ ἀπλῶς τί ἦν ἐίναι, ἀλλὰ ποιῶ ὡς ποσὸ τί ἦν ἐίναι”. The above translation is Bostock’s, but Tredennick gives: “essence also will belong primarily and simply to substance, and secondarily to other things as well; just as the “what it is” is not essence simply, but the essence of a quality or quantity”; and Ross “essence will belong, just as the ‘what’ does, primarily and in the simple sense to substance, and in a secondary way to the other categories also,—not essence simply, but the essence of a quality or of a quantity”. We note that both in Bostock’s and Ross’s translations, the clause beginning ὡσπέρ καὶ has been interrupted (Bostock: “as does… in these cases”; Ross: “…also,—not…”). Now, there is perhaps little overall difference here, except that it is crucial to note the contrast that Aristotle is drawing in this passage (which Tredennick’s translation brings out better, perhaps): namely, that while both τὸ τί ἐστιν and τί ἦν ἐίναι are said to belong primarily to substance, and secondarily to non-substances (quality, quantity and so on), the comparison (ὡσπέρ καὶ…) is supposed to tell us more strongly why this is so, and the reason (I suggest) is that τί ἦν ἐίναι is in a way a ‘fuller’ concept than τὸ τί ἐστιν, or must be understood as such in this context anyway, and is not strictly equivalent to the latter, as is almost always assumed.

Of course, it is true that Aristotle does use these terms interchangeably much of the time; but if they always meant the same thing, Aristotle would not contrast them as he does so often (including here, in Z.4); and now I suggest, one of the crucial differences between these terms, especially when applied to non-substance categories, is that the account which states the τὸ τί ἦν ἐίναι of the latter should include a reference to the underlying subject of which it is predicated, or to which it belongs, per se, where ‘belonging’ is once again both a logical and distinctly ontological notion, since, to say that white, for example, always belongs to surface (and surface to bodies), just is to say that white cannot exist apart from surface (or surface from bodies), even though we can ask of each of them τὶ ἐστὶν? and consider them separately, or abstractly, and perhaps even conclude that they do have a sort of separate ‘being’—just as Plato did, and for much the same reasons as Aristotle (though each of them arrived at very different conclusions): to wit, because τὸ λευκὸ ἐίναι (being for the white [thing]) and τὸ ἐπιφανείᾳ ἐίναι (being for the surface) and so on, are not the same. But of course, Aristotle wants to say that this line of questioning (asking of each thing τὶ ἐστὶν? in order grasp its οὐσία), though it has its place, must be handled carefully; for if we do not carefully attend to the logical and ontic relations that exist between the things whose τὶ ἐστὶν we are enquiring into, then we overlook something crucial: namely, the fact that their corresponding essences do not ‘exist’ totally separate from each other, but are always bound up with the being of other essences that
belong’ together in ordered hierarchies, such that the notion of ‘surface’, for example, is always contained in the essence of qualities such as colour and its species, like pallor.

So in asking of each thing τί ἐστιν?, Aristotle is of course pursuing a practice that he learned in the Academy, and the preceding account of Aristotle’s τί ἐστι and τὸ τί ἦν ἐίναι as applying homonymously to substances and non-substances respectively must be understood too, of course, as a revision of this originally Platonic insight. But we should add: another way to understand Aristotle’s development of this question lies in the fact that, for Aristotle, the τί ἐστιν question can be understood as leading in two directions, depending on the kind of thing we are asking this question of, or the manner in which we are considering it. To explain: if we take the (abstract) property ‘white’, for example, and ask what is it?, we can answer: ‘a colour’, and ‘a quality’ and so on. But we can also ask, not τί ἐστιν white (or pale), but τί ἐστιν the thing that is white or pale (the pale thing, or pale-surface, or pale-man, and so on), and pursuing this question, once again, we will be led to the underlying substratum, the per se subject of which ‘pallor’ is predicated or to which it belongs; and this underlying thing, the substance, as existing καθ’ αὐτὸ καὶ ἀπεικόνισε and without qualification (not being predicated of an underlying subject itself) that on account of which ‘pallor’ exists.

Once again, Aristotle must be seen as pursuing a slightly different (or expanded) question than Plato did when he enquired into the being of things by asking for the τί ἐστιν of each of them, for Aristotle is seeking an answer not only to the question of what (for example) white is, but also, what is it for white to be—which is to say, to exist. So returning to the point we raised a moment ago: it is essential that we understand Aristotle’s τὸ τί ἦν ἐίναι as containing an additional ‘layer’ that is not obviously contained in the τί ἐστιν question: an existential dimension, to which the ἐίναι clearly points, provided that it is not taken predicatively, but absolutely (so that it should be consistently rendered not ‘the what it was to be a man’, but rather, ‘the what it was for man to be’, or ‘what being was for a man’, and so on). Once again, applied to the categories (both substance and non-substances), τὸ τί ἦν ἐίναι is not simply reducible to the eidetic elements that belong to each thing essentially, in the way that colour is contained in the essence of white. For Aristotle, both the τί ἐστιν and τὸ τί ἦν ἐίναι point beyond this level of ‘purely’ formal or eidetic analysis to the full spectrum of ontic conditions that explain both a thing’s being what it is, and also its being simply—its existence—and this is the crucial point: in the case of non-substance categories, part of their being (ἐίναι) consists in their being in or for a substratum (and not simply their being contained in a genus); none of these is (or has) an essence simply, as Aristotle writes (οὐ γὰρ ἄλογος τῇ ἔκτῳ ἐίναι), and none of them is simply, since the ‘to be’ of pallor is inseparable from the ‘to be’ of surface, and so on, and ultimately, the ‘to be’ of all non-substance categories (or the items that fall under them) will be parasitic on the ‘to be’ of substance, since only this ‘is’ (exists) καθ’ αὐτὸ, not being predicated of and underlying subject.

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189 See Buchanan (1962), esp. pp. 1–2, and chs. 4–5, passim.
But it is important to note here too that the ωὐσίαι on which non-substances depend for their being (their existing) are not, as it were, bare substrata, but rather primary beings that possess their own essences; and this is crucial because, as we earlier indicated, Aristotle wants to explain the being of non-substances in terms of their being in (or for) their per se subjects, and it is this fact—the fact that non-substances do have per se subjects, to which they necessarily and inseparably belong—that ultimately explains the connection between the categories and Aristotle’s treatment of the pros hen homonymy of being in the Metaphysics; and it explains too the question that we began discussing in this section—the question about in what sense the categories are all supposed to represent senses of καθ᾿αὐτό being.

5.5 The two senses of per se ‘belonging’

As we have seen in the previous two sections, in Z.4, Aristotle argues that neither non-substances or accidental compounds are or possess a τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι in the full sense, since the being of such items has to be understood in terms of their underlying subjects, which are in their own right or καθ᾿αὐτό. Again, none of them is τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι without qualification (ἀπλῶς), and so, it is only by addition or subtraction that any of them is said to be (εἶναι); each of them is, or is (a) being only in a qualified sense, that is, and commenting on the latter formula, we said that what this means is something like the following: to say that a quality such as pallor ‘is’ by addition involves some reference to the underlying subject of which ‘pale’ is predicated—the surface or man which is pale—but since ‘being’ for the surface or being for the pale (thing) are not the same, it is clear that their essences do not coincide; and since in all such cases, it is the subject (of predication) that is said to be (to exist) καθ᾿αὐτό, both non-substances and accidental compounds will have a derivative (and secondary) kind of being (so, turning it the other way around, to say that ‘(the) pale’ is ‘by subtraction’ just is to exclude any reference to the underlying subject on which it depends for its being). Furthermore, as Aristotle goes on to say, the sort of dependent or qualified being that characterizes accidental compounds, and which is already clearly reflected in the formula that expresses what each of them is (pale-man or pale-surface), applies to non-substances and simple accidents too; for here as well (that is, in the formula expressing what each of them is), there will be some reference to the underlying (per se) subject to which the latter belongs.

In Z.5, then, Aristotle explores this idea further using the illustrative example ‘snub’ (or snubness: σιµότης, defined as ‘concavity in a nose’) to explore whether, or in what way, a formula constructed from addition counts as a definition expressing the τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι of non-substances. At first sight, however, this seems an odd example—that is, if it is meant to illustrate whether non-substances as such are or have a τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι and corresponding definition; for we should not expect such ‘coupled-accidents’ to be defined in the same manner as simple accidents (such as pallor), precisely because their formula already contains an explicit reference to their underlying (or proximate) matter-substratum. But presumably, Aristotle is using this plainer example to explain the more difficult case of qualities and so on; and this is borne out in Aristotle’s analysis:
If one says that a formula constructed from an addition is not a definition, it will be a problem to say which of the things that are coupled and not simple have definitions. For these must be explained from an addition. I mean that we have, for instance, a nose and concavity, and snubness which is expressed by coupling the two, as the one in the other. And it is not coincidentally that concavity or snubness is an attribute of the nose, but in its own right; it is not in the way that pallor is an attribute of Callias, or of man—i.e. because Callias, who is in fact a man, is pale—but rather in the way that masculinity is an attribute of an animal, and equality of a quantity, and generally in the way in which anything may be said to belong to a thing in its own right.

Aristotle’s main point here, of course, is that it is impossible to express what snubness is without referring to that of which it is an attribute—snubness being by definition not simply concavity, but concavity in a nose. Its formula is necessarily expressed ‘by addition’, and we have already seen (above) that this should rule out its being or having a τὸ τι ἔην ἐἶναι simply, or without qualification. But this passage is highly significant, first of all, in describing concavity or snubness as a per se attribute of nose, and secondly, in the parallel it draws between such ‘coupled-accidents’ and things like odd and even, masculinity, pallor, and so on—in each of these cases too, Aristotle suggests, the formula expressing the (qualified) τὸ τι ἔην ἐѣναι of each will include reference to the subject to which each belongs καθ᾿ αὑτὸ. In the definition of oddness, for example, as Aristotle explains here, and again a few lines later (1031a2–3), there will occur a reference to number, in the definition of masculinity or femininity, a reference to animals, and building on this (using our familiar example), in the definition of pallor, there will occur a reference to surface, and so on, and each of which is said to belong to the latter per se.

Now, this last point is of fundamental importance in our attempt to understand the connection between the pros hen structure of being (which says that the categories, or the items that fall under them, are all at once ontologically and definitionally dependent on substance), and our earlier argument that it is this focal connexion that explains the unity and properly scientific profile (according to the model of science that Aristotle presents in the Posterior Analytics) of the investigation that Aristotle has introduced in Γ.1–2: the enquiry into being qua being. The crucial idea, that is, is reflected in Aristotle’s claim that oddness, equality, pallor and so on are all per se attributes, or belong καθ’ αὑτὸ to their stated subjects (number, surface, etc.); and of course, this clearly recalls, and brings us back to the first paragraph that we quoted from Posterior Analytics 1.4 at the beginning of this chapter, where Aristotle distinguishes two senses of καθ’ αὑτὸ ‘belonging’.

Something holds of an item in itself both (i) if it holds of it in what it is—e.g. line of triangles and points of lines (and their essence comes from these items, which inhere in the account which says what they are)—and also (ii) if what it holds of itself inhere in the account which shows what it is—e.g. straight holds of lines and so does curved, and odd and even numbers, and also prime and composite, and equilateral and oblong: in all these examples, there inhere in the account which says what they are in the former cases line

190 *Met.* Z.5, 1030b14-b23
and in the latter number. Similarly in other cases too it is such things which I say hold of
items in themselves. What holds in neither way I call incidental, e.g. musical or white of
animal. (73a35-b6)\(^{191}\)

Following recent practice,\(^ {192}\) we shall refer to the two kinds of καθ᾽ αὐτὸ predicate or belonging
described here as \(\text{per se}_1\) and \(\text{per se}_2\) respectively.

As Aristotle notes, ‘animal’, for example, belongs \(\text{per se}_1\) to ‘man’, because man is defined as
animal, while odd belongs \(\text{per se}_2\) to number, and straight, \(\text{per se}_2\) to line, because even though
‘number’ and ‘line’ (respectively) will be included in the account that says what odd and straight
are (odd-number, and straight-line), neither of these will be included in the definition of number and
line. Or in terms that should now be familiar, we can also say: while ‘animal’ is part of the τί ἦν
ἐίναι of ‘man’, the τί ἦν ἐίναι for odd is not the τί ἦν ἐίναι for number, and so too for straight and
line,\(^ {193}\) and all of this clearly recalls a passage from Z.4 that we earlier discussed:

But not everything that a thing is in its own right [καθ᾽ αὐτὸ] is what being is for it [τὸ τί ἦν
ἐίναι]. For in one way pallor applies to a surface in its own right, but it is not this sort of ‘in
its own right’ that is relevant here, since being for a pale thing [τὸ λευκὸ ἐίναι] is not the
same as being for a surface [τὸ ἐπιφανείᾳ εἶναι].

Furthermore, the preceding analysis also sheds an additional light on the meaning of the first
sentence in the lines just quoted: the crucial idea that Aristotle is alluding to here is that, in a sense,
surface is pale ‘in its own right’ or \(\text{per se} (καθ᾽ αὐτὸ)\), just not in the sense of \(\text{per se}_1\), but rather \(\text{per se}_2\) belonging, which is to say: ‘pallor’ is a \(\text{per se}_2\) attribute of surface, even though it is not the τί ἦν ἐίναι of surface, for the latter is the proper subject\(^ {194}\) for ‘pale’, and indeed any colour. And it is

\(^{191}\) See also Δ18 (1022A.14–b1) on the senses of ‘\(\text{per se}\)’: ‘That in virtue of which’ [τὸ καθ᾽ ὁ] has several
meanings, (1) the form or substance of each thing, e.g. that in virtue of which a man is good is the good itself,
(2) the proximate subject in which an attribute is naturally found, e.g. colour in a surface. […] Therefore ‘in
virtue of itself’ must have several meanings. It applies to (1) the essence of each thing [τὸ τί ἦν ἐίναι ἐκάστοι],
e.g. Callias is in virtue of himself Callias and the essence of Callias; (2) whatever is present in the ‘what’ [ἐν
ἀεὶ ὑπὸ ὑπὸ τὶ ἐστὶν ἑιρέτης], e.g. Callias is in virtue of himself an animal. For ‘animal’ is present in the
formula that defines him [ἐν γὰρ τὸ λόγος ἑπιφάνεια τῷ ζῆνοι]; Callias is a particular animal.—(3) Whatever
attribute a thing receives in itself directly or in one of its parts, e.g. a surface is white in virtue of itself [ἐκτὶ ἐκ
τῇ ἐν αὐτῷ διδασκαλεῖ πρώτω ἢ τῶν αὐτῶν τινι, ὁδὸν ἐπιφανείᾳ λευκῇ καθ᾽ αὐτήν, καὶ ἡ ἐνθρωπομένος καθ᾽
αὐτόν], and a man is alive in virtue of himself; for the soul, in which life directly resides, is a part of the
man.—(4) That which has no cause other than itself; man has more than one cause—animal, two-footed—but
man is man in virtue of himself.—(5) Whatever attributes belong ‘That in virtue of which’, then, in the
primary sense is the form, and in a secondary sense the matter of each thing and the proximate substratum of
each to a thing alone and \(\text{qua}\) alone; hence also that which exists separately is ‘in virtue of itself’.”

\(^{192}\) See, for example, Wedin (2000), pp. 201–202.

\(^{193}\) Or again, in those terms that we introduced in discussing Posterior Analytics I, 22: number ὀὐκ ἐστὶν
ἀργό to be odd, like the surface or underlying thing that is white ὀὐκ ἐστὶν ἄργο to be white; similarly, it is
ἐπερών τὶ ὁ νὰ that the white-thing is white, and so on.

\(^{194}\) What Aristotle describes in Δ18, 1022a.19–20, as ἡ ὑλὴ ἐκάστου καὶ τὸ ὑποκείμενον ἐκάστῳ πρῶτον.
most important to note here that ‘pallor’ is said to belong per se₂ to surface, and not, for example, to
‘Callias’ or ‘man’ (as above, at Z.5 1030b14), for in neither sense (whether per se₁ or per se₂) is
man said to be ‘pale’ per se. Man is only ever pale per accidens, and is not even the per se₂ subject
of ‘pallor’.

5.5.1 Being per se and being per accidens

Now, I suggest, this should help us to understand finally what Aristotle means when he says that the
categories are all senses of per se being—a point, as I noted earlier, that has caused interpreters
much difficulty, and especially, perhaps, because of the overlap between the examples that Aristotle
gives us (in Δ.7) illustrating being per accidens and being per se respectively. As we saw in the
previous chapter, ‘man is healthy (or recovering)’, along with ‘man is walking’ and ‘man is cutting’
were each given as examples of being per se, and we wondered why these did not turn up as senses
of being per accidens, since each of them expresses an accidental mode of predication. Again, we
might have thought at the very least that the senses of per se being should have to involve intra-
categorial predication, where the predicate belongs to the subject essentially (man is an animal,
white is a colour), and not inter-categorial predication, where the predicate belongs accidentally to
the subject (the man is musical or white).

But again, the whole preceding analysis should help us to clear up these questions; and the first
point to note is that—or so I argue—the distinction between being per se and being per accidens is
not strictly related to the distinction between essential and accidental predication, except in this
sense, that the examples of being per accidens that Aristotle presents represent (for the most part)
examples of what we earlier identified as ‘unnatural’ predications (where the subject is a non-
substance—including intra-categorial predications, such as ‘white is a colour’). But that still leaves
‘the man is musical’ (again, offered as an example of being per accidens); and the suggestion that
Aristotle does simply have in mind the usual distinction between essential and accidental
predication is encouraged as well by his (admittedly, very brief) explanation for why all of the
examples that he has given illustrate being per accidens: “here ‘one thing is another’ means ‘one is
an accident of another’”.

However, in explaining why “the man is musical”, and more familiar examples such as “the
musical is a man”, “the white is musical”... and also “the not-white is” are all examples of being per accidens, Aristotle gives an important clue as to the meaning of this sense of being. In the first case, Aristotle remarks (“when we say the man is musical”), what we are asserting is that “the attribute is
an accident of that which is”; and similarly, “the not-white is said to be, because that of which it is
an accident, is”; and summarising why all of the examples given are said to be examples of being
per accidens, Aristotle writes:

195 Met. Δ.7, 1017a13–14.
Thus when one thing is said in an accidental sense to be another, this is either because both belong to the same thing, and this is, or because that to which the attribute belongs is, or because the subject which has as an attribute that of which it is itself predicated, itself is.\textsuperscript{196}

It is notable that in regard to the examples that he gives, Aristotle seems to be suggesting, first of all, that the ‘is’ attaches primarily to the subject, and that it admits of incomplete (1-place) and complete (2-place) uses (or is, anyway, ammenable to such analysis: (i) “the not-white is(...)”, and (ii) “that two which the attribute belongs is(...)”); and secondly, that ‘is’ is used per accidens when the grammatical subject is not a proper (categorial) subject, but rather an accident or accidental-compound. Furthermore, whether or not we agree that in (i) and (ii) the ‘is’ is being used absolutely, (and is not, rather, implicitly incomplete), I suggest that in no case does it represent a “purely” copulative use of the verb, but always involves an assertion of real being or existence. And now, supposing this is right, we might surmise the difference between being per accidens and being per se to amount to this: that whenever the subject of predication (which is said “to be(...)”) does not exist καθ’ αὐτὸ, then the ‘is’ is being used per accidens.

However, this would mean that “the man is musical” should count as an example of being per se, but Aristotle has included it here as an example of being per accidens, as we have already pointed out; and once again, the reason that Aristotle gave us was simply that “the attribute is an accident of that which is”. But this is okay, and I suggest that Aristotle wants to include under being per accidens both the ‘sophistical’ examples that we have discussed at length (that is, those involving unnatural predication) where the accidental subject (Y) is said to be X, and also where the predicate (Y) is an accident of the subject (X), with the important provisio that the ‘is’ in ‘X is Y’ be taken (as we suggested earlier) as asserting the ‘existence’ of the compound-assertible, XY (in this case, musical-man).\textsuperscript{197}

Turning to being per se in Δ.7, then, it is crucial to notice two things: first of all, that καθ’ αὐτὸ ‘be-ing’ (ἐἶναι) is said in as many ways as τὰ σχῆματα τῆς κατηγορίας—the figures of predication, or categories (“for the senses of ‘being’ are just as many as these [figures]”—ὅσα χρώσ γὰρ λέγεται, τὸ οὐσιαστικό τὸ ἐἶναι σημαίνει”, 1017a23–24). That is: it is not only ὅν (what-is), but ‘be’ and ‘is’\textsuperscript{198} that are said to have multiple ‘senses’, corresponding to the number of the categories; and so presumably, Aristotle is suggesting that the ‘is’ in “X is (some substance)” and “X is (some quality)” and “X is (some quantity)” and so on (and not the subject and predicate terms alone) signifies something different in each case. But the second thing to note is that, in elucidating his examples, Aristotle appears to suggest that the ‘is’ should be taken, in each case, as applying

\textsuperscript{196} Met. Δ.7, 1017a20–23.

\textsuperscript{197} Bäck’s (2000) ‘aspect theory’ can be made to handle this example to: S exists (as) P or S exists and S is P.

\textsuperscript{198} Recall Met. Z.4, 1030a20–22: “For just as ‘is’ [τὸ ἔστιν] belongs to everything, but not in the same way—to one in a primary way and after that to the others—so also what a thing is belongs without qualification to a substance, but in a way to other things as well”
primarily to the predicate (saying that there is no difference between saying “a man recovers” and “a man is-recovering”, and so on), and we should point out that this recalls (and agrees with) Aristotle’s analysis of the con-signifying verb ‘be’ in De Interpretatione, which we discussed at length in the previous chapter. As we saw there, Aristotle seems to hold that in statement-making sentences (of logical form ‘S is P’), the (hyparctic) verb ‘be’ has a primarily thetic function, and asserts that the attribute signified by the nominal part of a ῥῆμα (the ‘predicate’) ‘exists’ in, or holds of the subject; and I suggest that this is how we should take all of Aristotle’s examples of being per se—i.e., in such a way that the ‘is’ or ‘be’ (ἐἶναι) is understood to belong to the predicate, and as asserting its being-in-a-subject.

Now, I shall expand on this interpretation in a minute; but it is important to acknowledge at this point that this still does not tell us, really, why the ‘is’ (in this context) should be thought to signify in so-many-ways as the figures of predication, nor why these multiple significations (that is, as applying to the ‘is’ or ‘to be’, and not simply to the predicate) should all fall under the rubric of being per se. But once again, the analysis that we have presented in this chapter should help us to clarify both points; for I take it that Aristotle is arguing, first of all, that the senses of ‘being’ (τὸ εἶναι) track the different kinds of ὀν, or categorial genera, because the latter (or the items that fall under them) are (or exist) in different ways; and secondly, that their being (or existence) is explained in terms of their being in (or belonging to) their per se subjects, from which they exist inseparably. Thus, it is crucial to understand such examples of per se being as “the man is-healthy” (or “is-recovering”: τὸ ἰνθρώπως ὑγιάνων ἐστίν) or “the surface is pale” and so on as each making a claim about the per se being of the accidents health and pallor—not, that is, about the compounds healthy-man or the pale-surface, nor about their subjects: the man that is healthy, or the surface that is white (since neither of them is per se what it is described as being); and this is why it is possible to read them as both examples of being per se and accidental predication.

5.5.2 Alexander Aphrodisias on being per se

Now this interpretation agrees with that of Alexander, whose commentary on Δ.7 (In Met, 371,17–36) (being per se) is worth quoting:

…essential being has ten senses… For [the verb] ‘to be’ stationed next to each of the things that exist [τῶν ὄντων] signifies the same as that with which it is aligned, since being [τὸ ὄν] which is equivocal, signifies the existence [ὑπάρχειν] appropriate to each thing. But if there are ten differences by reference to the supreme genera, ‘being’ and ‘to be’ [τῷ ὄν καὶ τῷ εἴναι] will also have ten meanings. For when aligned with substance, [the verb] ‘to be’ [εἶναι] signifies substantial [ὑπόσωμον] existence [ὑπάρχειν]; when aligned with quantity or quality, it signifies the existence of something as quantified or qualified, and similarly in the case of the other genera. A further consequence is that whenever any of these genera is predicated of something as a part of its essence because it is either its genus or its differentia or its definition, the ‘is’ attached to such predicates will be predicated essentially [καθ’ αὑτῷ]. To show that ‘is’ signifies the nature of that to which it is attached, Aristotle adds that to say, ‘A man is regaining his health’ signifies nothing other than, ‘A man regains his health’; that is, the ‘is’ which is attached to health signifies only the existence of
health [ἡς ὑγείας]… For as Aristotle said in *On Interpretation*, [the verb ‘to be’] ‘by itself is nothing, but implies some combination’ that cannot be ‘without its components’.

I believe that Alexander’s interpretation is substantially correct, though we might object that, for linguistic reasons at least, his witness to the meaning of this passage is not entirely reliable, since the verb ὑπάρχειν had already acquired by Alexander’s time more emphatically the meaning of ‘to exist’ (with the newly coined term ὑπάρξις coming to mean ‘existence’). As we have heard, Aristotle’s technical use of the verb ὑπάρχειν (‘to belong to’, ‘to inhere in’) is mostly confined to his logic, where the formula ‘B belongs to A’ (τὸ B ὑπάρχει τῷ A) (alongside ‘B is said/predicated of A’) is used to express an attributive relation, instead of the natural ‘S is P’ formula; the noun ὑπάρξιν, then, being used more widely to refer to a thing’s attributes. And it is this situation—that fact Aristotle’s technical use of ὑπάρχειν is confined to such expressions, though it came some time later to be used more generally (as a synonym for εἶναι) to mean ‘to exist’—that led Kahn to complain: “[this] occasionally leads to rather ludicrous confusion, when a late commentator can no longer distinguish between Aristotle’s technical sense and his own ordinary use of ὑπάρχειν. This later use has no special connection with the dative construction which underlies the attributive sense.”

So back to our passage: it is possible that Alexander has erred here by imposing on Aristotle’s εἶναι a new layer of meaning, supposing that ‘to be’, like the verb ὑπάρχειν, which Aristotle does use interchangeably in some contexts, both share the expanded meaning of ‘to exist’ that the latter verb had come to acquire by Alexander’s time.

Be this as it may, there are still independent reasons for supposing that Alexander has basically understood Aristotle’s point; and importantly, Alexander is probably right in thinking that Aristotle is here (and throughout the *Metaphysics*) describing being *per se* in terms of the 1-place being (or existence) of health, and other categorial items, and if so, his remark that ‘the ‘is’ [τὸ ἐστὶν] which is attached to ‘health’ signifies only the existence [ὑπάρξις] of health” is probably an accurate interpretation of Aristotle’s meaning too.

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200 See Kahn (2009), pp. 54ff
201 *APr*. 25a15, et passim; 48b2–4; cf. 49a6–9: “The expressions ‘this belongs to that’ (τὸ δ’ ὑπάρχειν τὸδὲ τῶδε) and ‘this holds true of that’ must be understood in as many ways as there are different categories”.
203 Dooley (1993), p. 144 (n. 165), in his notes on Alexander’s commentary, supposes that this is a “forced interpretation… for in [Aristotle’s] example, ἄνθρωπος ἡγοίαιν ἐστίν, the copula is not attached to ἡγοίαιν (health), but to the participle ἡγοίαιν (regaining his health)”. Dooley also complains that none of Aristotle’s examples are “instances of essential predication, as we would expect. But Alexander attempts to treat them as such by emphasizing the verb ἐστί: (health ἐστι, walking ἐστι’), in the sense that they exist. The text that he next quotes, however, does not support this interpretation, for in it Aristotle treats the verb ‘to be’ as a mere copula, without reference to its existential sense”. We will be able to clear up the latter worry in a minute; but about Dooley’s first point: Aristotle consistently explains that something is called (paronymously) F* (e.g. pale, or healthy) on account of the presence in it of a concrete F (pallor, health), and Alexander is right that
5.6 Predication and existence

Stepping back, we see how the preceding analysis not only explains (more clearly than Owen’s and Brown’s account does) the connection between 1-place (existential) and 2-place (predicative) being in Aristotle, but too, the two questions that we have been pursuing throughout this and the preceding chapter, in connection with the theme of the \textit{pros hen} predication of ‘being’ in Aristotle; namely: (1) our question about how the nature of \textit{per se} being in Aristotle; and (2) our question about whether or how Aristotle’s remarks about the \textit{pros hen} structure of being in Γ.1–2 (and in particular, the claim substance is contained in the ‘account’ of non-substance categorial beings), in determining the subject-matter of the enquiry that it announces, conforms to the general model of science outlined in the \textit{Posterior Analytics}.

About (1), then, in light of the preceding analysis, we can now say that Aristotle’s examples of \textit{per se} being from D.7 such as “the man is-healthy” are instructive, not because they are meant (pace Ross) to represent examples of essential predication, nor of 1-place being \textit{as such} (pace Owen and Kirwan), but because they are meant to illustrate, for the purposes of preliminary analysis (which will be couched in terms of 2-place being), what it means for “health” and other categorial beings to be—and indeed, to exist—which Aristotle will go on to explain in terms of their being predicated of belonging to their proper subjects. So being \textit{per se} cuts across the distinction between 1-place and 2-place being, and must be understood in the context of Aristotle’s wider views (both logical and metaphysical) about predication and explanation, including his analysis of the \textit{pros hen} structure of being and (both) \textit{per se}_1 \textit{per se}_2 predication.

For “health” to exist, then, is in the first place for some man to be healthy; just as for “pallor” to exist is for some surface to be pale, since “man” and “surface” are each \textit{per se} healthy and pale respectively; and just in case either of these claims might be thought to be vacuous, we should note that because of the \textit{pros hen} structure of being, the first claim (for health to exist is, in the first place, for some \textit{man} to be healthy) does express a stronger metaphysical truth than if we held, for example, that health exists because some healthy food exists; and about the second claim (that for pallor to exist is for some surface to be pale or white), we have already seen that this involves a more robust claim than if we were to say, for example, that pallor exists because some pale man exists; for a man is not even \textit{per se}_2 pale. And this last point is crucial too for understanding the difference being being \textit{per se} and being \textit{per accidens}: once again, if we keep in mind that Aristotle’s discussion of the senses of ‘being’ is part of wider enquiry into the causes of being—or of beings—we can now say that one of the major differences between them concerns that fact that the latter—being \textit{per accidens}—is not subject to the same kind of ‘scientific’ analysis as the former. That is, Aristotle’s point is that it is not possible to investigate scientifically the causes of (1-place) being to accidental beings \textit{as such} (like pale-Socrates, or the healthy-man), though we can consider

Aristotle’s treatment of \textit{per se} being is directed at explaining (in a sense) why x is F* in terms of why F is (or exists).
each of these as examples of *per se* being, and investigate scientifically the causes of 1-place being to ‘pallor’ or ‘health’ in terms of their belonging essentially, and inseparably, to their *per se* 2 subjects, in just the way that we discussed above.

Furthermore—and this brings us back to our second question—it is crucial to note that on this interpretation of being *per se*, it is because the being of all non-substance items (such as ‘health’ and ‘pallor’) is explained in terms of *per se* 2 predication that each of them is said to be predicated *pros hen*, or in relation to substance, which is in turn said to be included in the ‘account’ of the former. That is, as we have now seen at length, this ‘dependence’ relation is indeed logical in a way, and not simply ontological; and importantly, the logical priority of substance over non-substances categories is not like the priority of a genus to its species (where the former are predicated *per se* 2 of the latter), but prior in the way that any proper subject stands in relation to its *per se* 2 attributes (so, in the way that surface is *per se* 2, pale or white, and number is *per se* 2 odd or even, and so on).

So again, it is highly significant that Aristotle’s distinction between *per se* 1 and *per se* 2 predication not only coincides with, but also in a way explains the *pros hen* structure of being, because it solves one part of our question about whether, or in what sense, the enquiry announced in I.1–2—the enquiry into being *qua* being, and primarily substance—conforms to the model of science outlined in the *Posterior Analytics*. As we read in Chapter 1, Aristotle argues (in *APo* I 10, 76a34f ) that the ‘domain’ of a given science is fixed by the special genus with which it is concerned, and the proper or essential attributes that belong to it,204 and we wondered how the science of being *qua* being might qualify as a proper science in this respect, since neither being, nor substance as such is a genus.

But it is precisely here that Aristotle’s distinction (from *APo* I.4, 73a37–40) between two kinds of *per se* predication becomes most important; for what it means is that just as the ‘odd’ and ‘even’, for example, enter the study of arithmetic as *per se* attributes of number, the categories too will enter the study of being *qua* being as *per se* 2 attributes of substance. In other words, when he declares in G.2 (1003b13–14) that “it is not only in the case of terms which express one common notion that the investigation belongs to one science, but also in the case of terms which relate to one particular characteristic”, referring here to substance and the *pros hen* structure of being, Aristotle is not revising his views (from *APo* I.7 and I.10) about what constitutes the proper domain and profile of a science at all, but explicitly recalling that model—though by adding a clarification. The enquiry into being *qua* being, Aristotle is saying, is one science, and concerned with investigating one ‘genus’ and its *per se* attributes, just as the science of arithmetic, which studies the odd and even and so on as *per se* attributes of number, is one.

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204 Cf. *APo* I.7, 75a38-b2, and I.28.
Chapter 6:
Ontology and theology

In this chapter we return full circle to re-examine the problem that we began discussing in this thesis in order to tie together several of its main threads. That problem concerns the double-conception of first philosophy (as ontology and as theology) both in Aristotle and in Avicenna and connection between its two objects: being *qua* being and the divine.

Our investigation in this chapter will be much briefer compared to the preceding since we have already examined the problem from several perspectives. But it will be useful to present here rather than in the conclusion some last details about it from one more perspective. Our aim then is to examine Avicenna’s solution to the problem of the connection between the two moments that constitute metaphysics within the wider context of the reception–history and interpretation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Towards this end we shall examine several ancient and modern responses to this problem—interpretations that display the same general attitude as Avicenna’s insofar as they agree about the necessary connection between these two moments—whilst diverging from them in other respects. In doing so we will gain a clearer understanding of how and where the ‘Avicennian moment’ is situated within this history.

6.1 The problem restated in the light of its solution

We began this thesis by observing that one of the fundamental problems that readers of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* must contend with has to do with determining its subject-matter or what the object of its enquiry is. We also discussed that the source of this problem has to do with the fact that, in this text, Aristotle seems to present several different characterizations of the science that it transmits—the science of first philosophy.

On the one hand, Aristotle describes this science as the study of being *qua* being and its *per se* attributes. Thus it appeared to be an abstract enquiry, and a highly general one, in the sense that, unlike the particular sciences, it does not ‘cut off’ a part of being but studies being ‘universally’. Aristotelian first philosophy in this guise, then, looks like *ontology*. But on the other hand, Aristotle describes this science as a *theology*: an enquiry that is focused on studying objects that are *separate*—inmaterial—and immoveable. Already, then, a question emerges as to how these two conceptions are related, or whether they are related at all, and do not point to different ‘stages’ of its development (or that of its author).
The problem here is that while the two designations appear in close proximity the *Metaphysics*, they are not obviously related, and in fact appear at odds in some sense—not least because the ‘universal’ dimension contained in this first formulation is in tension with the notion that the same science, as theology, should study just one special kind of being as opposed to being (or beings) in general. Equally troubling is the fact that in the actual course of argument of the *Metaphysics* there is no clear indication when (or whether) Aristotle is pursuing one or the other line of enquiry, or both at once, or neither.

But in addition to this, we also saw that first philosophy contains an *ousiological* dimension, such that it is concerned with studying both the notion of substance, or *ousia*, as well as the different ‘kinds’ of substance that exist; and indeed much of the *Metaphysics* is focused on this sort of enquiry—especially in the so-called ‘central’ books ZH (which have attracted the most sustained attention in English-language scholarship during the last several decades).

Finally, it was noted that Aristotle consistently describes first philosophy as an enquiry into—indeed a *search* for—the first causes and principles of things; and so it also contains an *aetiological* dimension that is, in a way, primary, both in the sense that this conception is discussed *first* in the order of presentation of the argument of the *Metaphysics*, and also in the sense that the discussion of ‘causes’ appears in connection with *all* of the three preceding characterizations.

In the opening discussion, though, we also noted that the apparent ‘problem’ of reconciling these conceptions (such that we might grasp whether or how they constitute a *single* unified project) was not always recognized as a problem. Rather, we said, the remote origin of this dilemma—and perhaps too of the main ‘solution’ to it that has been taken up in the centuries since—is Avicenna, since his struggle to understand the aim of the *Metaphysics*, and his ‘overcoming’ of this *aporia* (based on what he read in al-Fārābī) led to his grand ‘reform’ of this text and the science that it transmits, as reflected in his monumental work, *al-Shifa’*. That solution, as we saw, involved distinguishing what is studied in this science from what is searched for in it as its subject-matter and its object, respectively—namely ‘the existent qua existent’, and God. This ‘epistemological’ distinction was also complemented by a distinction between the two ways in which the two objects may be considered *inmaterial*: as ‘abstract’, or as really separate from matter.

This (‘Fārābīan’) conception of the relationship between the two ‘moments’ of first philosophy is historically important, then, not only because of its novel way of connecting them (even if the details are ultimately found, in some form, Aristotle), but because it is based on the clear acknowledgement *that* there is a problem here—that the two moments stand *in need* of ‘reconciliation’. However, as we observed in Chapter 1, things were not always so. That is, there is not a strong sense that the commentators of Late Antiquity felt there was a problem here.

To be sure, the Commentators disagree about the details of this science, and about what Aristotle said about it; but this particular problem—the idea that the *Metaphysics* contains two or more (apparently) conflicting argument-threads is not, as such, among their concerns. What they tend to agree about is that the first principle is *Being*, and that by studying being qua being we will
arrive at some sort of knowledge of God. Generally speaking, they imagine that the two moments—being *qua* being and theology—correspond to each other, and perhaps even coincide. And so, given the points of both agreement and disagreement between this conception and Avicenna’s, it will be useful to compare them. This is what we shall do in the following section.

In addition, Avicenna’s own comprehensive notion of *being*, which involves distinguishing the *being of beings* and a first *Being*, which is *Being itself*, both depends on more proximate discussions of this issue, as in al-Kindī and Islamic Neoplatonism, and is also taken up in interesting ways by philosophers after him. We will examine some of them, but only for the sake of illustrating Avicenna’s influence (and influences) with respect to this problem, so as not to exceed the scope of this thesis.

Finally, as we discussed in Chapter 1, modern interpreters too have had much to say about this problem; and as we discussed, many of them, following a developmental interpretation, argue that the two conceptions, though not unrelated perhaps, do belong to two quite different enquiries, whether because Aristotle failed to properly ‘execute’ this program, or because he changed his mind in some way about the aim and details of this science. We will not discuss this line of interpretation any further, since it is beyond the scope of this thesis; but another line of interpretation pursued by modern scholars of Aristotle, however, *does* find a connection between these two conceptions; and like the Ancient conception mentioned above, it even holds that the two conceptions are *one*, or so closely related that, once again, they are like two inseparable moments. This is the interpretation held by (among others) Merlan, Owens, and Frede. We will examine it briefly in a further section.

### 6.2 The Ancient Commentators on being *qua* being and the divine

As is well known, we possess three surviving commentaries on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* from Late Antiquity: those of Alexander, Asclepius, and Syrianus. Moreover, as we have noted above, despite their diverging opinions and arguments about many of the details of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, they do tend to agree about the general conception of metaphysics as first philosophy or wisdom that he presents in this text.  

So, they hold, this science is primarily focused on studying *supersensible* being, or substances that exist apart from matter, and which are immoveable and imperishable. Hence, first philosophy is considered *first* in relation to physics; but it is also considered *theology*, and therefore the highest discipline, because of what it studies: namely, that which is prior to, and exists beyond, the sensible universe. Moreover, it is held that sensible substances are, in some way, ‘dependent’ on the first being for their being; and this is ultimately to say that the first is the primary *cause*. And there are other causes too beyond nature that first philosophy will study. So this science is also *aetiology*. And because these are *universal* causes, first philosophy is also a

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1 Verbeke (1991) presents an excellent summary of the Greek Commentators views on this subject. The Ancient Commentators on Aristotle (CAG) series (general editor Richard Sorabji) includes translations of the Commentaries of Alexander and Syrianus. I cite these translations in what follows.
universal science: we will be led to grasp the causal activity of the highest being by studying its widest effects, or what belongs to all beings in virtue of their being beings. So first philosophy is also ontology, the science of being in general. But it is always implicated in theology. Finally, as the ultimate cause and principle of everything that exists, the highest object of enquiry, supersensible substance, is also being in a different, and more authentic, sense than what is beneath it.

Each of these conceptions is found, in one way or another, in the mentioned authors’ Commentaries on the *Metaphysics*. But in the following, I shall present some evidence from Alexander, first of all, since—as the leading Peripatetic philosopher of Late Antiquity—he is usually considered the most ‘faithful’ interpreter of Aristotle. Thus, we should expect his conception of the ambit of first philosophy to come closest to that of Aristotle.

Perhaps the single most informative passage that records Alexander’s views on the subject-matter of Aristotelian first philosophy is the following comment on the first section of *Metaphysics* B (995a24ff):

The science that is the object of the inquiry and that is proposed here is both wisdom and the theological science which Aristotle entitles metaphysics because it comes after physics in the order relative to us. He also calls it primary wisdom, because it is able to consider the things which are primary and of highest dignity. For this same reason it is also theological, for Aristotle’s discussion in these [books] is concerned first and foremost with the cause, the form, which is on his view an utterly immaterial substance, which he also calls the primary god and mind. (In Met. 171, 5–10)

This is striking in its compact summary of the themes of metaphysics, since it mentions, in just a few sentences, no less than two or three of the conceptions that we have just seen; and it clearly records that these are, for Aristotle, not only connected, but integral to one another. Metaphysics, then, is theology because of the dignity of its object, God, who is both a cause and an immaterial substance.  

We should also compare these lines with the following statement by Syrianus in his own Commentary:

But [this science] is also [divine] because it is knowledge of the first causes and principles, and god is the first principle and cause of the other things. By these considerations Aristotle shows that the present treatise is rightly called ‘theology’. (In Met. 18, 9–10)

The conception of first philosophy as the study of being in general is not lacking in Alexander, either. In the introduction to his Commentary on *Met. Γ*, for instance, Alexander writes: “In this book he shows what things wisdom (which he also terms philosophy and primary philosophy) is concerned with. And first he confirms that it is concerned with being in general…” (In Met. 238,4–6). Shortly after, commenting on *Met. Γ*.3 (which begins the discussion of the axioms studied in this book), Alexander produces a series of remarks about the relationship between this conception and

2 Further on, at *In Met. 251*, 34–7, Alexander writes: “the ingenerated and imperishable, incorporeal and unmoved, substances are primary and first philosophy would be concerned with these”.

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its connection to the study of primary being, or substance. In the immediate context, Alexander begins by chiding the natural philosophers for supposing that “all beings were included among natural things”, or in other words, that “there was nothing outside natural things”, such that their arguments pertained to “all being in general” (In Met., 265, 30–38). Alexander regards this as false, since “being is more extensive than natural things”, saying that, “there are even certain beings distinct from natural things; for incorporeal and unmoved substance is not a natural substance.” (In Met. 265, 38–40). He then comments:

This is why the consideration of the properties of being insofar as it is being does not belong to the natural philosopher but rather to the [primary] philosopher, who is higher than the natural philosopher, and who carries on a consideration of all being insofar as it is being, and most of all and primarily concerning that which is most of all [a being], i.e. is primary among beings, which is indeed substance, but not natural substance. For, while natural philosophy is a kind of wisdom and philosophy, it is not the primary kind. (In Met. 266, 1–6)

It is here that we encounter the greatest difficulty. The basic idea is familiar: metaphysics will study substance, because whatever exists either is a substance, or exists in relation to substance, as we have examined at length in connection with the pros hen structure of being in Aristotle. However, Alexander here insists that object studied in first philosophy—primary substance—is distinguished from the objects studied in physics (natural substance) because they are “distinct” from natural things, and also “incorporeal” and unmoved. This is not quite the picture that we got discussing Aristotle’s account of substance in Met. ZH and in connection with the pros hen structure of being. There we saw that the substances examined in these contexts might well be “natural”, and that the pros hen structure applies to all beings. Here, then, the suggestion that what is considered “primary” in this science is just the kind of substance which is not natural, but rather incorporeal and unmoved.

There seem then to be two possible interpretations of this passage. The first is that Alexander means the formulae “being qua being” and “primary being” to designate being that exists separately, and is immoveable and immaterial, in the way that we earlier and above associated with theology, proper. Or, perhaps Alexander means that the being which is the subject-matter of first philosophy is separate (from natural things) and immaterial and immoveable in the way that Avicenna suggested: abstract, like the objects of mathematics, but more general. It is not entirely

3 Hence, Alexander continues: “The primary wisdom or philosophy would be that which considers the primary substances, which considers in a universal way all substance and the things which are themselves beings by virtue of belonging to substance. The same science turns out to be primary in two ways: [i] as the science which considers primary substances it also considers all other things whose being depends on these; and [ii] as the science which considers in a general way being insofar as it is being it would (since being is among the things spoken of as derived from one thing and with reference to one thing) consider most of all this [highest] nature, to which the other things which it discusses are referred, and that from which they derive their being.” (In Met. 266, 6–13)
clear which interpretation is correct. However, there is strong support for the former view, despite Alexander too holding the same view of separation as *abstraction* that we discussed in connection with both Aristotle and in Avicenna. This support comes from Alexander’s remarks that the first principles and causes studied in this science are *themselves* being, as well as the principles and causes of being, and, as such, *beings of a higher sort or dignity*. They are, in some way, more real, or possess more *truth* than the beings they cause, including natural substances (though, whatever being or truth these latter possess will be due to them). So, for example, Alexander writes at the beginning of his Commentary:

> From the present treatise [i.e. Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*] we must therefore demand knowledge of the first principles and causes. These would be, as it were, principles of being, in virtue of which exists each of the things that are of which we predicate being. 
> Now the first substances, those that are substances in the most proper sense, are principles of this sort, for (as Aristotle will later show) they are the principles of substances, and these latter are the principles of all other things. It is therefore knowledge of these first substances that we must demand from the present treatise, and further of whatever contributes to knowledge of them.⁴

This does not sound at all as though Alexander is here thinking of an “abstract” general notion of being, or substance. Rather—and as we have suggested above—his concern appears to be with really existing separate beings.

But this is not to say that the notion of first philosophy as a *universal* enquiry into being (*qua* being) is not preserved in Alexander. Far from it. Commenting on *Met.* A.2, for example, Alexander writes that, “the knowledge that is in the highest degree universal is knowledge about the things that are *qua* beings, for being is common to all things that are in existence (*huparxis*)” (11, 6–7). Moreover, it is unlikely that Alexander was here simply identifying “being *qua* being” and supersensible being, as Merlan, for example suggests (and whose interpretation of the problem will be discussed below), in the sense that they are supposed to name one and the same object.⁵ (Indeed, Merlan points to Alexander as support for this interpretation.) And the reason that this is unlikely is that the first principles and causes that Alexander tells us Aristotle was seeking are still principles and causes of being *qua* being. If he did think to identify them, then, that would make God the principles and causes of *himself*, which is difficult to fathom.

What emerges from this overview of Alexander’s perspective on the ambit of Aristotelian first philosophy, then, is that while the distinction between being “in general” and supersensible being is, in a way, preserved, this distinction basically corresponds to the distinction between *cause* and *effect*. Thus, metaphysics is primarily concerned with studying supersensible substances (that are immovable, eternal, and really separate from matter), because these are the *causes* of being in general. Thus, being is, as it were, the “effect” to be explained; but it is not the abstract general

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⁴ *In Met.* 9, 8f.  
⁵ Merlan (1957)
being that he has in mind, but rather really existing substances. So then, it is the first principles and
causes of these that must be sought; but since “being” is said primarily of substance (or, pros hen),
which is to say that everything that exists ultimately depends on the being of substance, then, the
first principles and causes that are sought-for will be discovered by studying this primarily.\footnote{Cp. Syrianus: “Being is not predicated univocally of all beings nor are all beings of equal rank; but
neither simply equivocal; said in many ways but still by reference to one thing—one nature and substance”
\textit{In Met. 56}, 13; “Thus this science will also investigate the first and highest cause, the causes not of what
exists in a substrate, but of beings which can exist as being of themselves and in relation to themselves” \textit{In Met. 56}, 4; “It is not because this science considers all beings that it assigns itself equally to all. Rather it will
occupy itself with that which primarily is, that is in particular the substance on which depend the other things
which are deemed worthy of being called beings. Thus… the philosopher wishes to possess the causes of
substance” \textit{In Met. 57}, 21.}

We should add, finally, that the view that the principles and causes studied in first philosophy,
or the \textit{first substance}, is both a cause of being, and being \textit{itself}, though in a superior way, emerges
even more strongly in the more “platonizing” schools, including in their interpretation of Aristotle
too. This is witnessed, for example, in Syrianus, who writes:

All beings depend on one principle—being that which primarily is. What follows (but what
Aristotle does not say) is that … all beings would not desire that which primarily is were it
not the case that they acquired their perfection from it; and that that on which they depend
for all eternity, from this they also receive eternally their being…. A cause of being for all.\footnote{In Met. 11. 9–19.}

This interpretation emerges even more strongly, perhaps, in Islamic Neoplatonism.

\subsection*{6.3 Islamic Neoplatonism}

In Chapter 1 we noted that Avicenna’s struggle to understand the argument of the \textit{Metaphysics} was
due in part, perhaps, to his own philosophical development, or his developing relationship to the
Aristotelian curriculum. As Dimitri Gutas\footnote{Gutas (2000; 2014)} and Amos Bertolacci\footnote{Bertolacci (2006), esp. Ch 2.} have detailed separately, for
example, Avicenna’s introduction to this text, and to philosophy more generally, was initially via
the “al-Kindi” school, whose pattern of reading the \textit{Metaphysics} (and of doing philosophy) involved
connecting books a.1–2 (on truth and causes) and L (on immoveable substances). Thus, their
transmitted approach to reading the \textit{Metaphysics} was “theological” in its orientation, while their
philosophical activity more broadly was shaped by a Neoplatonic—especially “Proclean”—
understanding of the relationship between the First Cause and the universe (as reflected some of
their key texts: the \textit{Arabic Plotinus},\footnote{Adamson (2002)} including the so-called \textit{Theology of Aristotle} and the \textit{Liber de Causis}).
About their pattern of reading the Metaphysics, then, what is most important to note is that the “ontological” conception, focused on being *qua* being, was largely excluded from its ambit; and so, when Avicenna encountered the complete text of the Metaphysics after having been ‘reared’ on this interpretation, he was puzzled, finding little in it that resembled their “theology”. Al-Fārābī, then, provided Avicenna with the ‘key’ to understanding the constitutive relationship between these two parts of Aristotelian first philosophy; but that did not stop Avicenna from preserving much of what he had learned from them in his own “theology”.11 This includes his idea that the First Cause is not only a cause of being, and *Being itself*.

This idea is reflected in many texts produced by the Kindi circle, as well as in the Arabic Plotinus–Proclus. To refer to them all would be impractical, and is unnecessary for our purposes; but two of the most important, and striking, formulations that we find in the the *Liber de Causis*, for example, include the ideas that the Originator is “Being-only” (*anniyya faqat*)12 and “Being beyond perfection” (*jawqa l-tamām*).13

We have already examined, in Chapter 3 (in the context of discussing the eleventh *aporia*), the importance of notion that, for Avicenna, God—the Necessary Existent—is *Being itself*—a conception that runs throughout his Metaphysics, but which comes to fruition in Chapter VIII. We also saw how this is connected to the famous “essence–existence” distinction—the argument that, because quiddity *in itself* does not contain the idea of existence, existence must occur to it from the outside.14 But now to this we can add that for Avicenna, the Necessary Existent, which *causes* existence to “occur” to quiddity, is not only perfect in existence, but precisely Being *beyond perfection*.

The Necessary Existent is thus perfect in existence because nothing belonging to His existence and the perfections of His existence is lacking in Him. Nothing of the genus of His existence is extraneous to His existence, existing in another in the way, for example, it exists extraneously in another in the case of a human being. For, many things belonging to the perfection of his existence are lacking in him; and, moreover, his humanity exists for another. Rather, the Necessary Existent is above perfection because not only does He have

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11 De Haan (2018) has recently examined the “metaphysics of truth” in the *Ilāhiyyāt* of al-Shifā’. This doctrine is one of the main features of the Kindian interpretation of Aristotelian first philosophy, ultimately deriving from *Met*. a.1–2

12 As in the “Sayings of the Greek Sage” I.10–11: “The First Originator does not resemble anything, because all things are from Him, and because He has no shape and no proper form attached to Him. For the First Originator is one by Himself, *I mean that He is only being*, having no attribute suitable to Him, because all the attributes are scattered forth from Him.” In Taylor (1982), pp. 299–300.


14 So, Avicenna writes, “Everything that has a quiddity other than [individual] existence is caused. This is because you have known that, with regard to the quiddity which is extraneous to individual existence, existence and individual existence do not take the place of the thing that renders [another] subsistent. [Individual existence] would, then, have to be a comoncomitant.” *Shifā*: *Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.4.11 (p. 276).
the existence that belongs only to Him, but every [other] existence also is an overflow of His existence and belongs to Him and emanates from Him.\textsuperscript{15}

All this is simply to say, then, that Avicenna clearly \textit{preserved} this conception of theology which he inherited from the Kindi circle, proximately, and from the Arabic Neoplatonic sources on which their programme of philosophy was based, but that this interpretation was integrated into a larger framework, which also included the Fārābīan idea of (Aristotelian) first philosophy as an ‘abstract’ enquiry into being in general. Moreover, since this latter conception is not to be found in the Greek sources, as such, it is fair to say that this represents the more novel, perhaps even \textit{decisive}, contribution of the Islamic philosophers to the reception–history of the \textit{Metaphysics} of Aristotle.

\subsection*{6.4 Modern interpretations}

In this final section we shall discuss briefly where Avicenna’s interpretation of the relationship between ontology and theology in Aristotelian first philosophy in the context of his reception–reform of the \textit{Metaphysics} stands in relation to modern interpretations of this issue. We have already discussed the issue at various points in the preceding chapters, so it is only necessary to present a few remarks.

It should be stressed that we are not here concerned with whether Avicenna presents the \textit{correct} interpretation of the problem we have been examining. Such a task is not only beyond the aims and scope of this thesis, but would have to contend with the apparently \textit{insoluble} nature of the problem: the fact that not only Avicenna, but countless thinkers before and after him, to say nothing of modern scholarship, have presented myriad answers to it, such that it continues to be wrestled with, suggests that no ready answer is available.

However, in the light of the last comment in the preceding section about the contribution of Avicenna and al-Fārābī to this question, it should be observed once more that, leaving aside the question of the \textit{correct} interpretation of Aristotle, theirs was surely decisive in shaping the modern reception–history of the \textit{Metaphysics}. This is for the reason that we have already noted: in posing the problem in their terms, and in presenting one solution to it, they opened a new ‘chapter’ in this history, insofar as they \textit{introduced} the idea of a ‘rupture’ in the original \textit{Metaphysics} that would either have to be healed through \textit{exegesis}, or be left explained by philology. At the same time, it might be said, they also paved the way for a rupture within philosophy itself, leading to the Kantian ‘split’ between general and special metaphysics.

More modestly, we can say that the reverberations produced by the ‘Avicennian moment’ continue to be felt among contemporary interpretations of Aristotelian metaphysics, specifically in regard to the problem of the relationship between ontology and theology, including the notion that what is studied in this science is being in general, and from an ‘abstract’ perspective. If we are right to say that no philosophers before Avicenna and al-Fārābī were of this last view, then their

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Shifā`: Ilāhiyyāt} VIII.6.1 (p. 283).
contribution was indeed momentous; for it is this conception that has tended to hold sway amongst contemporary interpreters of Aristotle, to say nothing of contemporary philosophy more generally. At the same time, there have been many scholars who have attempted to determine the precise relationship between the two conceptions we have been examining, and who share the same fundamental perspective as Avicenna with respect to their interconnection, even if their proposed solutions diverge from his. We shall mention a few in order to situate Avicenna’s among them.

In the last century, the most extreme example of a ‘theologizing’ interpretation of the ambit of Aristotelian first philosophy is that of Philip Merlan. Like the Ancient commentators discussed above, Merlan supposes that there is no tension between ontology and theology in Aristotle as such because its two designations—“being qua being” and “the divine”—in fact name the same object. In this way, the opposition is entirely collapsed. The interpretation of Joseph Owens is along these lines too insofar as it considers equates Being qua Being with the supersensible. More recently, Frede has proposed that the ontological and theological conceptions are united by the ousiological dimension, insofar as God, as primary substance, or pure form, is considered the “paradigmatic” way of being which is reflected in an inferior way in sensible substances. This, too, is a neoplatonizing solution, as Enrico Berti has observed in his own examination of the problem. Finally, we should mention the more recent interpretation of Allan Bäck, whose interpretation of Aristotle on abstraction was central to the analysis presented in Chapter 2 of this thesis. His solution to the problem is presented in the same monograph, and thus seeks to connect the two issues—that of abstraction and of the relationship between being qua being and God. Bäck observes:

‘Being qua being’ is not literally a name of God. If we identify being qua being with the prime unmoved mover or God, we make God into an object like a number: not really a substance or subject in its own right, but rather an aspect of being that is treated thus.’

This interpretation, then, is in agreement with that of Avicenna in treating being qua being as ‘abstract’, in contrast with God, and the separate (immaterial) substances. Bäck also agrees that these separate substances are causes; but as to why theology is included in the science of being qua being (which Bäck, following the ‘popular’ line of interpretation that we discussed in Chapter 1, seems to treat as more dominant in the argument–structure of the Metaphysics) he argues first that:

First philosophy studies the causes for all beings. If there are gods serving as first causes, the hold as principles and causes for all beings. Hence we can talk about them qua being.

But secondly, Bäck argues that the study of being qua being, leading to a grasp of these separate principles and causes, is apiece with his scientific methodology—demonstration. Thus, he writes:

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16 Merlan (1957; 1967)
17 Owens (1978)
18 Berti (2002)
Aristotle’s scientific method and ontology provide different criteria for what is the ultimate subject, for what *is* in the primary sense. When combined, these criteria demand an individual, primary substance that is definable and capable of demonstration. Further, it must be what is permanently, and so must be immobile and unchangeable. … a being or individual substance, which exits always, independently and separately, and whose existence and nature may be defined and demonstrated, would be the one that would pre-eminently exemplify the claim that being *qua* being is substance. A god, an unmoved mover, may be defined and have its characteristics demonstrated. … Because of his criteria for what a being strictly is, Aristotle’s “discovery of metaphysics” culminates in his theology. In ending up with theology, Aristotle has single out the most perfect instance of being.\(^1\)

Significantly, then, Bäck not only arrives at a conception of the relationship between the two moments of Aristotelian first philosophy—between being *qua* being, and being that is separate, and immaterial—that is similar to Avicenna’s, but also explains this connection with reference to Aristotle’s conception of scientific method, or demonstration. Whether this is because Bäck is also a distinguished scholar of Avicenna is unclear. In either case, we might refer to his own opinion about this matter by way of conclusion, since it directly concerns the wider questions about interpretation that we have been considering throughout this thesis:

The interpretation that I offer has a strong resemblance with the Aristotelian philosophy of the ancient and medieval periods. I view this to support it; it is likely that a living philosophical tradition has retained and developed some of the insights of its founder, albeit not in their original, undistorted form.\(^2\)

\(^{21}\) Ibid, pp. 213–214.

\(^{22}\) Ibid, p. 204.
The overarching question that this thesis has sought to examine concerns the fundamental conceptions of first philosophy and its object of enquiry in the Metaphysics of Aristotle and Avicenna and how the two stand in relation to each other. We have also sought to examine what separates and unites these different conceptions, or what the reasons are for their (dis)agreement. In this conclusion chapter I will summarize the main topics and findings of each chapter and briefly discuss how they each answer this question.

In Chapter 1 we examined the fundamental conceptions of the theme and structure of first philosophy in the Metaphysics of Aristotle and Avicenna. We focused on the problem of the relationship between the ontological and theological dimensions of this enquiry, and how Aristotle and Avicenna each solves it. We saw that Avicenna, following al-Fārābī, provides an epistemological solution to the problem (such that the two conceptions stand in relation to each other as subject-matter and searched-for object) which was further explained in terms of the different kinds of separation or immateriality that are associated with each dimension: the ‘absolute existent’ and God. We also provided one interpretation of a possible way of ‘reconciling’ the different determinations of first philosophy in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* so that a unified argument–structure might be found in it. This interpretation emphasized the *aetiological* dimension in this structure and its role in uniting the earlier two conceptions.

In Chapter 2 we examined what role the notions of separation and abstraction play in the metaphysics of Aristotle and Avicenna. After discussing the varieties of separation in Aristotle, it was shown that the main type of separation relevant to understanding Avicenna’s metaphysics is not ontological separation, as in Aristotle, but rather separation from matter (immateriality) and in definition (*eidetic* separation). These notions were discussed in connection with the topic of reduplicative analysis (or the theory of *qua* objects/propositions) in both Aristotle and Avicenna.

In Chapter 3 we examined how the problem of separation arises in the context of Aristotle’s discussion of the *aporiai* of *Metaphysics* B (which he later answers in different chapters of this text). We focussed on the eleventh *aporia* about whether being and unity are substances, and compared Stephen Menn’s and Amos Bertolacci’s discussion of Avicenna’s handling and response to the *aporia*. It was argued that this problem and its *solution* in Aristotle’s and Avicenna’s Metaphysics provide much insight into the two philosophers’ views on the nature and divisions of being.
In Chapter 4 we examined another problem concerning the nature and divisions of being in Aristotle and in Avicenna, namely, the doctrine that being (or ‘being’) is predicated homonymously, which is especially important for Aristotle in determining whether and how being is a suitable object for study in a single science. It was shown that this doctrine is perhaps of less importance to Avicenna, notwithstanding the argument of several recent studies that Avicenna’s doctrine of the ‘ambiguity’ of being is historically significant insofar as it holds that being is predicated unequally across the transcendental divide (between God and created beings). Taking a slightly different approach, we examined this issue in connection with the wider problem of signification in Aristotle and in Avicenna. It was argued that the notion of a notion or ‘meaning’ (maʾnā) is especially important in Aristotle’s scheme.

Pursuing some of the same themes discussed in the previous chapter, but in much closer detail, in Chapter 5 we examined the importance of Aristotle’s doctrine that being (as divided into the categories) is predicated pros hen, both in relation to the question of the ‘scientific’ profile of the enquiry he announces in Met. Γ.1-2 and pursues in Z (drawing on details that Aristotle discusses in the Posterior Analytics), as well as in relation to the question of whether, or in what sense, we find a distinct notion of existence in Aristotle. It was argued that we do find such a notion (though it is not handled in quite the same way as it is in Avicenna) and that this notion reflects Aristotle’s wider view that being can be understood in terms of different patterns of belonging.

Finally, in Chapter 6 we returned to the problem that we began examining in this thesis, namely, the problem concerning the relationship between the so-called ‘ontological’ and ‘theological’ dimensions of first philosophy. It was argued that Avicenna’s solution to this problem has far more in common with the modern approach to understanding it than it does to the Late Ancient commentators’, and that it is, perhaps, the remote source of the modern way of reading Aristotle in regard to this question.

In addition to these specific findings, we should mention some of the more general threads that we uncovered in our quest to understand what separates and unites the different conceptions of first philosophy in Aristotle and in Avicenna.

**General reflections**

 Appropriately, with respect to many of the issues that we have examined in this thesis, the specific difference or ‘middle term’ that both divides and connects Aristotle and Avicenna on different issues related to their concepts of first philosophy is the very notion of separation, as well as the notion of a concept and of meaning, such as we find them in their respective works. Investigating these topics from different perspectives, then, we have traced the complex pattern of continuity and rupture that describes the passage and connection between the thought of Aristotle and Avicenna, as well as the broader philosophical and intellectual past that Avicenna drew on in the context of his reception–reform of the Metaphysics in his al-Shifā’.
This pattern of continuity and rupture is clearly reflected in all of the topics that we examined in this thesis. The includes: the revised model and argument–structure of metaphysics that Avicenna develops in the Metaphysics of *al-Shifāʾ*, including with respect to the onto-theological conception of first philosophy (Chapter 1 and 6); the different treatments of the notions of separation and abstraction that Aristotle and Avicenna give (Chapter 2) and their relevance and application to different philosophical problems ( Chapters 2 and 3); and the different accounts of (*pros hen* or modulated) homonomy that Avicenna and Aristotle develop in their logical and metaphysical works (Chapter 4).

Furthermore, we saw this same pattern emerge in the way that past and contemporary interpretations of the onto-theological conception of first philosophy overlap with that of Avicenna, while (arguably) departing from Aristotle’s own conception (Chapters 1 and 6), and in the way that Aristotle approaches questions about existence and predication—a topic that is often thought to divide Greek and Arabic philosophy—in a specific scientific context (Chapter 5).

From a slightly different perspective, it is also possible and fruitful to consider the connection between the two moments that we have examined in this thesis as one more stage in the history and development of *platonism* from Aristotle to Avicenna, and beyond. This is not to repeat the claim, often rehearsed in different ways, that Avicenna ‘lapsed’ into platonism (as reflected, for instance, in his securing for quiddity itself a kind of ‘neutral’ existence—a problem that we examined in Chapter 2), but simply to point to the persistence and transformation of platonism from Aristotle to Avicenna, specifically with respect to the abovementioned themes.

It is well known, for example, that the problem of the separation of forms represents the chief disagreement between Aristotle and his teacher. But what is often forgotten, or ignored, is that this is only a ‘local’ disagreement; for the criticism that Aristotle develops—despite its seriousness—is advanced within the context of a shared project. Aristotle, no less than Plato, believes that the forms are necessary for knowledge; but precisely in order to fulfil their proper function, he argues, they cannot, as such, exist ‘apart’ from their instances, or separately, except through *abstraction*.

Thus, whilst Avicenna, too, agrees with Aristotle about the error of separating forms, he does not thereby become an *anti*-platonist. He also presents his critique in the context of discussing the real objects of universal knowledge examined in science, and in this sense he is, no less than Aristotle is, a platonist.

On the other hand, there are those moments when Avicenna appears to lean *more* towards Plato than towards Aristotle in his treatment of select topics; and this is usually explained by the fact that the Aristotelianism tha the inherited was not unalloyed, but rather ‘mixed-up’ with neoplatonism. But what is interesting is that—as we saw in Chapter 3 in connection with the *aporia* about being and one—the traces of platonism in Avicenna appear not so much in the doctrine of quiddity (a common accusation), but rather in connection with the one thing that Avicenna wanted to *exclude* from the consideration of quiddity, namely, *existence*. (It is ironic, then, that later commentators, including up to our own day, have found in the doctrine of an ontologically ‘neutral’ quiddity,
which was supposed to avoid the ‘errors’ of platonism, not its overcoming, but rather its revival, albeit in the form of a ghostly apparition.)

Stepping back, we should note the general significance of this doctrine in providing Avicenna with a sort of foundation for scientific enquiry; for in its dual role as both a concept and its foundation, it is the quiddity-in-itself that ensures that the objects of scientific knowledge ‘map onto’ (muṭābīqa) the real extramental-objects that science studies, while, as a mental concept, it provides the basis for the secondary-intelligibles studied in logic. As absolute considerations, moreover, quiddities-in-themselves sit at the centre of a threefold schema of logical-eidetic ‘points-of-view’ and, in that role, are used to explain everything from the so-called problem of universals to the problem of what metaphysics studies. Similarly, in the guise of primary concepts, which are involved in the two basic cognitive acts associated with logic and demonstration, namely conception and assent, the abstract notions ‘thing’ and ‘existent’ provide the very foundations of first philosophy as a science.

It has to be appreciated, then, just how much the ground shifts with Avicenna once he singles-out a place for being and quiddity as purely abstract notions in his philosophy. All these doctrinal developments will have profound reverberations in the history of philosophy for many centuries, including up to the present.

Finally, it might be observed that both the notion of existence in Avicenna, which is so closely tied to his doctrine of quiddity, as well as the notion of a notion, or a meaning, which Avicenna uses so widely, have had a similar impact on the history of philosophy; for in both cases, it is fair to say, they bear a stronger family resemblance to our modern notions of a notion and of existence than their rough equivalents in Aristotle, despite Avicenna developing them, in part, on the basis of what he read in the first teacher. Quite telling in this respect is that we tend to use a language that is closer to Avicenna’s than Aristotle’s when we talk about the latter.

That we stand nearer to Avicenna in time than either of us does to Aristotle is well known. That our thinking is perhaps much closer to his than it is to Aristotle’s, though, is not as well appreciated. We have not sought to demonstrate that conclusion here; but it is our hope that this thesis will contribute to such knowledge, not only by making Avicenna more familiar, but also by showing how, from one perspective, his thought reaches back to Aristotle’s.
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