At the beginning of *Metaphysics* iv, Aristotle says that, “There is a science which investigates being qua being and the things that belong to it per se.” Since a science (an ἐπιστήμη) must be about a “genus” of things [*APo.* i,10,76b12-13] and since “being” is said in many ways,” Aristotle feels obliged to show that being is nonetheless in some sense a genus or naturally identifiable group of things; and so he maintains that the various ways in which ‘being’ is said are all oriented πρὸς ἐν (oriented “towards one thing”) or towards “some single nature [μίαν πνεύματι φύσιν]” [*Metaph.* iv,2,1003a33-34]. He uses a couple of examples to illustrate this relationship, one of which is the word ‘healthy.’ Things—exercise regimes, for instance, and vegetables—are called healthy because they are related to the health of the human body, even though an exercise regime is not at all like a healthy human body and the vegetables called healthy, cut off from their own roots, are in fact dead or dying. Still, there is good reason to call these various things healthy: they all, as we might put it, “look to” the health of the human body.

With good reason, then, when contemporary philosophers, especially those writing in English, have considered being in Aristotle’s writing, especially in his *Metaphysics*, they have tended to use what he says about πρὸς ἐν relationships as the key to understanding it. Using this as key has, however, not entirely positive consequences for how an interpreter understands the structure and general doctrine of that work. In this paper, I discuss what three influential interpreters of Aristotle have said about being and πρὸς ἐν relationships; I then offer what I think is a better way of depicting the organization of being in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.

The three interpreters who make the πρὸς ἐν relationship key are G. E. L. (Gwilym Ellis Lane) Owen, Joseph Owens, and Michael Frede. Owen, who died in 1982, taught at the universities of Oxford, Harvard and Cambridge and was enormously influential, counting among his students Julia Annas, Martha Nussbaum, and Terence Irwin. Fr. Owens, C.Ss.R., who died in 2005 at the age of 97, taught for years at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto, Canada. He considered himself more of a medievalist than an Aristotelian,¹ but his classic work *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics: A study in the Greek background of mediaeval thought* is regularly cited by analytic philosophers writing on Aristotle.² Michael Frede, who died in 2007, was born in Berlin and completed his doctorate at the University of Göttingen in 1966, after spending a year at Oxford, studying under G. E. L. Owen. He taught at the University of California at Berkeley, at Princeton University, and finally at Oxford.

I. G. E. L. Owen

G. E. L. Owen belonged to the generation of Aristotelian scholars that came just after that of Werner Jaeger (1888-1961), who was largely responsible for the “genetic” approach to the Stagirite’s writings. Jaeger was convinced that the early Aristotle was a docile disciple of Plato and for this reason welcomed the introduction of theological concepts into philosophy, but that the later Aristotle rejected such an approach. Accordingly, Jaeger attempted to identify, especially in the *Metaphysics*, passages that belonged either to the earlier period or to the later period of his philosophical career. A difficult passage for Jaeger comes in the sixth book of *Metaph.*, where Aristotle recalls that first philosophy (metaphysics) is about being qua being but also refers to it as theological science [vi,1,1026a19]. Aristotle himself acknowledges that this raises an issue, for theological science is obviously about the divine, a

very limited subject matter, whereas being qua being is quite universal. “One might raise the question whether first philosophy is universal or, rather, deals with a one genus or some single type of thing” [1026a23-25]. His response is that, because theological science is the science of the highest entities, it is first philosophy, and it is “universal in this way: because it is first” [1026a30-31]. Jaeger deals with this passage by arguing that it comes from an intermediate stage in Aristotle’s philosophical development during which he had not yet made a clear break from Plato.3 In passages written during the later period (in particular, in books vii, viii, and ix), there is no talk of theological science—except for sentences that must be considered later insertions.4

Owen, on the other hand, who accepted up to a point Jaeger’s genetic approach, regards Metaph. vi, together with Metaph. iv, as representing the mature metaphysical thought of Aristotle in which he had moved away from his own earlier objection (supposedly expressed in the Eudemian Ethics i,8) that there could not be a general science of being (since there was no one genus of being), to the recognition of a science of being qua being.5 The subject of this science would be single or united in a different manner than is a genus—it would be united, that is, by way of a προς ἐν relationship; this, in turn, implies that Aristotle rejected the youthful thesis that a science must be about a single genus. Metaphysics, therefore, or first philosophy, can be for Aristotle theological science because of this προς ἐν relationship.

To quote Owen:

In sum, then, the argument of Metaphysics iv and vi seems to record a new departure. It proclaims that ‘being’ should never have been assimilated to cases of simple ambiguity, and consequently that the old objection to any general metaphysics of being fails. The new treatment of τὸ ὄν and other cognate expressions as προς ἐν καὶ μίαν τινὰ φύσιν λεγόμενα, ‘said relative to one thing and to a single character’—or, as I shall henceforth say, as having focal meaning—has enabled Aristotle to convert a special science of substance into the universal science of being, ‘universal just inasmuch as it is primary’.

Since the primary science to which Owen refers here is theological science, in his interpretation of Aristotle, metaphysics is theological science identified and organized as such by means of a προς ἐν relationship or one that involves a “focal meaning.” The focal meaning would refer to supersensible and unmoved substances, which are divine.

II. Joseph Owens

With respect to the issue of the uniting genus of metaphysics, Joseph Owens argues for the polar opposite of G. E. L. Owen’s position and yet their respective understandings of the nature of metaphysics are very similar. Whereas Owen (as we have seen) maintains that the mature Aristotle loosened his restrictions upon what might count as a single science and accepted that the subject matter need not be a genus, with the result that metaphysics is conceived of as theological science having as its subject matter being qua being organized according to the προς ἐν model, Owens too insists that metaphysics is properly speaking theological science but that it is this in so far as its proper subject matter is the single genus of supersensible substances. For him, everything in Aristotle’s metaphysics looks to these divine substances, which are “the one thing” or the “single nature” [Metaph. iv,2,1003a33-34] toward which even sensible substances are oriented.

Fr. Owens’s interpretation of the Metaphysics is much more platonistic than G. E. L. Owen’s. Because in a προς ἐν relationship, the first element is the only element truly having the character to which the other elements are linked by way of the relationship—it is only the

4Jaeger, 198–99.
human body that is truly healthy, not the exercise regime or the vegetables—, the things in metaphysics oriented towards the single genus of suprasensible substances tend to fade into metaphysical insignificance. “Being is indeed found in sensible things,” says Owens, “not as their own nature but as an imitation of absolutely immobile Entity” (or substance). He takes account of the fact that Aristotle says at the beginning of Metaph. iv that the first element in the πρὸς ἐν relationship is simply substance (not necessarily suprasensible substance), but he holds that substance itself receives its intelligibility from suprasensible substance, which would be, in the fullest sense, being qua being.

Owens, of course, is aware that what are often called the central books of Metaph. (books vii, viii, and ix) are all about sensible substances, but he is aware too that the primary result of this investigation is a decided emphasis on form. Just as in metaphysics in general, sensible substances are oriented toward and find their original intelligibility in suprasensible substances, so sensible substances find their proper intelligibility in their own forms, which are eternal and divine. Writes Owens:

Ultimately it must be their divinity and their eternity that is shared by sensible things. Sensible things cannot attain this divinity and eternity in the corruptible singular. They attain it only in the perpetual species. It is the species that is divine and eternal. The singular thing does not matter in itself. It is only on account of the species; its every act naturally strives to perpetuate its species. That is the goal of itself and of all its activity. It is divine, as best it may be, by being perpetual in its kind.

In this way, the πρὸς ἐν model serves also as an explanation of the relationship between the singular sensible members of a species and the species—the form—itself: the individual members look toward their own form, which they share with others.

This emphasis on form and the suprasensible is bound up with Owens’s larger historical concerns, which are never far from his mind. There is nothing underhanded about this: the subtitle to the book I have been citing is, as already noted, “A study in the Greek background of mediaeval thought.” And yet it must be acknowledged that a successful argument to the effect that Aristotle is really only interested in form and that “the singular thing does not matter in itself” would bolster his thesis that only with a full-bodied doctrine of creation does a real distinction between essence and existence enter into metaphysics.

Writes Owens:

In a philosophy conditioned by this fundamental [Aristotelian] doctrine of Being, the absence of any treatment of existence is inevitable. But this deficiency becomes apparent only when Aristotelian thought is regarded from a later historical viewpoint.

If he can show that any mention of existence as distinct from essence—and there are quite a few, both explicit and implicit, in the corpus aristotelicum—is incidental to the ancient philosopher’s metaphysical project, Owens will have established a strong case for the much later appearance of a metaphysical doctrine of an actus essendi added to form by a higher self-subsistent being.

III. Michael Frede

Michael Frede’s interpretation of Aristotle’s metaphysics coincides in many ways with that of Joseph Owens. There are, however, notable differences between the two. In the first

---

8 See Owens, 267, 298, 302–04.
9 Owens, 461.
10 Owens, 456.
11 Owens, 466. At this point, Owens cites Etienne Gilson (Le thomisme). The redoubled emphasis in the first sentence here—italics and then boldface—is Owens’s own.
place, he does not follow Owens in attempting to resolve the problem of giving to metaphysics a single subject matter by saying that its genus is being qua being and that this genus is suprasensible substance. In fact, although he makes no mention of Owens in this regard, he provides a strong argument against such a solution. At *Metaph.* vi,1,1026a23-25, Aristotle speaks very clearly of being qua being as distinct from the subject of theological science. 13 This distinction constitutes the very problem that Aristotle solves (to his own satisfaction) by saying that theological science is universal “because it is first” [1026a30-31]. Frede does make a halfhearted attempt to account—or, at least, to argue—for the generic unity of metaphysics by noting (what Aristotle also notes at 1026a25-27) that mathematics too has one subject (numbers) which is studied by general mathematics, even though the same subject matter “is studied by a series of systematically connected disciplines” such as geometry and astronomy. 14 He receives additional backing for this approach from *Metaph.* iv,2,1003b21-22, lines which speak of a single science of being qua being which includes other sciences as a genus does its species. He understands this as Aristotle’s asserting that general metaphysics and special metaphysics (or theological science) are one “only generically.” 15 But Frede acknowledges also a disanalogy between mathematics and theological science. Unlike mathematics, theological science appears to have two subject matters or genera: one “below” (so to speak) and extremely general, another “above” and quite specific.

Another difference from Owens is Frede’s understanding of what Aristotle accomplishes in the central books of the *Metaphysics*, and particularly in book seven. As we have seen, Owens, in an extremely Platonic manner, understands the forms of sensible substances as the suprasensible substances which give the individual sensible substances specific unity by standing over them in a προς εν relationship. For Frede, who, together with his doctoral supervisor Günther Patzig, published a very influential commentary on *Metaph.* vii, the forms of which Aristotle speaks there are particular forms: each dog, for example, and each cat has its own form. This is not to say that Frede thinks that Aristotle’s metaphysics remains at this level. There is something inadequate about individual sensible substances that urges us up to the suprasensible substances, for they suggest to us that there must be higher forms: forms that are not unchanging “only qualifiedly,” forms that are not “separate only qualifiedly, namely in account.” “Moreover,” says Frede, “only in the case of separate substances are the form and the essence straightforwardly identical.” 16

But Frede does share with Owens (and Owen) a strong adherence to the προς εν model as the organizing principle of metaphysics. The “way of being” of separate substances, he says, turns out to be “the one in terms of which all other ways of being have to be explained.” He continues: “Since theology studies this focal way or sense of being, it also provides the natural point to discuss how all other ways of being depend on this primary way of being, especially since this primacy would seem to reflect the very nature of divine substances.” 17

------------------------------------


14 Frede, 85, 93. Frede also holds that for Aristotle physics, like mathematics, includes a general study (natural substances), plus a number of connected disciplines [Frede, 85–86].

15 Frede, 85, 93.


17 Frede, 84.
IV. What is metaphysics about?

Regarding the question of how to make sense of Aristotle’s various statements about the subject matter of metaphysics, I have already expressed my disagreement with Fr. Owens’s contention that the single subject (or genus) of metaphysics is suprasensible substance. As Frede points out, this idea cannot be reconciled with Metaph. vi,1,1026a23-25 where Aristotle acknowledges that metaphysics has two subject matters: one general, one specific. It is also difficult to go along with G. E. L. Owen’s genetic argument that earlier in his career—that is, in the Eudemian Ethics—Aristotle denied the possibility of metaphysics but later reversed himself. In the chapter that Owen points to, EE i,8, Aristotle does indeed deny that there is “one science either of being or of the good” [1217b34-35], but in Metaph. he does not say that first philosophy is the science of being but rather that it is the science of being qua being.\(^\text{18}\) This position is wholly compatible with the statement in EE i,8. It is impossible (in Platonic fashion) to gather all being under one science, but metaphysics presumes to do no such thing. It leaves the other sciences as independent sciences even while studying in another science what it means to be a being.

That leaves the problem of a science having two subject matters. One is permitted to ask, however, whether this might not be a pseudo-problem. Accepting the idea that there are in a sense two subject matters of metaphysics, does not entail accepting that Aristotle contradicted himself on the issue of metaphysics’ subject matter. Metaphysics begins by studying being qua being but it does so as a way of arriving at an understanding of its own principles.\(^\text{19}\) Is it so unreasonable that a science, already defined in terms of its original subject matter, should turn its attention towards some of its own principles in order to achieve clarity about them? The unusual thing about metaphysics is what we might call its self-absorption: Aristotle is constantly asking what the science is in which he is, at that moment, engaged. But this is quite a different issue from the issue, what is the subject matter of metaphysics. It only points to an unusual characteristic of this science: that it is really—and explicitly—more interested in certain of its own principles than in its proper subject matter.

It is not as if this science of metaphysics did not have other principles that it might bring to bear first upon its proper subject matter and then upon the causes of this subject matter. Aristotle goes out of his way to give an account of such a principle—the principle of non-contradiction—before thrusting himself into the investigation of being qua being. Indeed, one notes that Aristotle welcomes this study of the principle of non-contradiction (and of at least one other logical principle: the law of the excluded middle) into metaphysics without any mention of a problem associated with its becoming another subject matter. Are we obliged to say that metaphysics has three—or even four—subject matters? Perhaps so, but that would not entail accepting them all as subject matter in the same sense.

Aristotle acknowledges in Metaph. vi,1 that the causes of being (in its various senses) become a “subject matter” but never in the sense that it supplants the original subject matter that holds the science together as a science. He never loses sight of the fact that he is studying suprasensible substance as the cause (or causes) of sensible substances and the types of being dependent upon them. As we have seen, he asks at one point (1026a23-25) whether the subject matter of first philosophy is universal or limited. His answer is clearly that it is universal: “it would belong to this science to investigate being qua being” [1026a31]. First philosophy has a particular genus only in the secondary sense that it turns its attention to the causes of being qua being. It is true, this science is particularly concerned with the causes of its own subject matter, but this is because it is first. As such, that is, as the science of the highest causes, it has the task of considering genera merely assumed as apparent or hypothesized by the other sciences as their subject matters [1025b11-12]. It considers these


\(^{19}\) Or, to be more precise, metaphysics heads towards the causes of beings, which are considered in this science qua beings, not qua what they are individually. A philosopher engaged in the science of being qua being might consider ducks, for instance: not qua ducks, however, but qua beings.
things, however, as they are connected with being, that is to say, what they are and whether they are [1025b16-18].

V. Focal meaning or succession?

What then about the προς ἐν (focal meaning) relationship which has been so dominant in analytic Aristotelians understanding of being as studied in metaphysics? Do Aristotle’s various remarks in its regard force us down a Platonic path of interpretation? There is reason to believe that they do not. In the first place, although it is true, as we have seen, that at the beginning of Metaph. iv, where Aristotle formally announces that the science at hand is the science that investigates being qua being, he immediately adds that being is said in many ways, all of which are oriented “towards one thing” or towards “some single nature” [Metaph. iv,2,1003a33-34], later in the same chapter he says that ‘substance,’ toward which the other modes of being are oriented, might refer to various types of entity that are themselves ordered, not according to a προς ἐν relationship, but according to some other relationship. Elsewhere in the Metaphysics, he also speaks of types of substance that are related to but higher than sensible substance, which is “the one thing” or “the single nature” toward which other ways of being (such as the categories) are oriented.20 For Aristotle, the type of substance discussed in a science determines its place in the hierarchy of sciences, the highest science, theology, discussing suprasensible substance. It is this, as we have seen, that makes it first philosophy [Metaph. vi,1,1026a21-22].

That the relationship among types of substance is different from the προς ἐν relationship has been obscured for a number of reasons, the primary of which is textual. In the second chapter of Metaph. iv, immediately after remarking that things arranged in a προς ἐν relationship might serve as the subject matter of a single science since they are “in a sense said univocally” (καθ’ ἐν—1003b12-15), Aristotle apparently said that the types of substance are ordered in a different manner—although the pertinent lines have migrated (as sometimes happens in ancient manuscript) to a place (1004a2-9) where they make less sense than they do in their proper place. This migration was noticed in the third century A.D., by Alexander of Aphrodisias; it is noted in the apparatus criticus of the all major modern editions of the Metaphysics.21

The displaced remarks run as follows:

And there are as many parts of philosophy as there are substances, so that there must be one which is first and one among them which follows it. For ‘being’ is such that it has immediately types, and accordingly the sciences will follow these. For ‘philosopher’ is said as ‘mathematician’ is said: for mathematics also has parts, and one science is first, another second and others follow in succession [ἐπεξεύθη] among the mathematical sciences [Metaph. iv,2,1004a2-9].

An implication of this passage is that, since the types of substances corresponds to their respective sciences and since the sciences follow one another “in succession [ἐπεξεύθη],” so also do the types of substance. Had this passage not migrated to where it is found today, it would have been more clear that Aristotle intended a contrast between the relationship in terms of which the subject matter of metaphysics (being qua being) is organized and the relationship among the types of substance—which includes at least two: sensible substance and suprasensible substance.22

This contrast would have been “more clear,” but still not absolutely clear, for the expression ἐπεξεύθη might be applied also to a προς ἐν relationship.23 But the desired clarity can be achieved by attending to a remark that occurs later in the same chapter. Just before the remark, Aristotle argues that even many earlier philosophers in effect acknowledge that there is one science of being qua being, for they speak about reducing the contraries such as cold

20See Metaph. vi,1,1026a27-32 and xii,1,1069a30-b2.
22At Metaph. xii,1,1069a30ff, he speaks of three.
23Aristotle in fact does just this at Metaph. xii,1,1069a20-21, although in this place too he is primarily interested in the ordering that applies to substances.
and hot, love and strife, and also other things [πάντα δὲ καὶ τάλλα—1004b33], either to being and non-being or unity and plurality [πάντα ἰνήγεται εἰς τό οὖ καὶ τό μὴ οὖ, καὶ εἰς ἑν καὶ πληθος—1004b27-28]. Such reduction provides sufficient unity, he says, to give us one science:

These pertain to a single science, whether they are said univocally [καθ’ ἑν] or not—which latter, as it appears, is where the truth stands. But all the same, even if ‘one’ [τό ἑν] is “said in many ways,” with respect to the first the others are said and so also are the contraries. [The same is true] even if, as appears to be the case, ‘being’ or ‘one’ are not universal and the same (or separate) with respect everything but some things are ordered toward one [πρός ἑν], others are ordered successively [τό ἑφεξῆς] [Metaph. iv,2,1005a8-11].

He goes on immediately to explain that it is “because of this” [ὅτι τοῦτο]—presumably, because of the ἑφεξῆς relationship among types of substance—that the geometer does not inquire into what contrariety or completeness or being or unity or the same or the other are but simply presupposes them. As explained more fully at Metaph. vi,1,1025b12-18, these things are left to first philosophy, because it is first; it is the science of being qua being. So, Aristotle makes here a clear distinction, within Metaph. iv,2 itself, between πρός ἑν ordering and ἑφεξῆς ordering, associating the latter with the relationship among the major divisions of science and, by implication, among types of substance.

VI. Analogy

But what type of relationship does Aristotle have in mind when he says that the types of substance are ordered ἑφεξῆς (in succession)? Aristotle makes a broad gesture toward an answer to this question in the first book of the Nicomachean Ethics. Towards the beginning of this chapter, in arguing against the Platonic approach to the good, he suggests that the various senses of the word ‘good’ correspond to the various senses of the word ‘being.’ He then mentions (in effect) the πρός ἑν ordering of the categories toward the first category substance [EN i,6,1096a19-23]—and develops a counter-argument which presupposes this correspondence between ‘good’ and ‘being.’ Later in the same chapter he appears to want to conclude this argument: “And so the good is not something common, univocally said according to one idea [τό ἄγαθον κοινόν τι κατά μίαν ἴδεαν]” [EN i,6,1096b25-26]. But then he adds:

But how, then, is it said? It does not appear to be said as are chance homonyms. So then are all [the meanings of ‘good’] from one thing or do they all head toward one thing [πρός ἑν]—or are they not rather [μὴ ἴδεα] said according to analogy? For, if sight is in a body, so intellect is in the soul, and so another thing is in another thing [EN i,6,1096b26-29].

Aristotle says then that he cannot go into these matters “now,” since “precision regarding them is proper to another part of philosophy” [1096b30-31], but he has already given some important information as to how he understands the ordering of the various senses of the word ‘good’—and, by implication, of the various senses of ‘being.’ Clearly, he would not reject the idea that at least some uses of ‘good’ are ordered according to a πρός ἑν relationship, for that is the relationship of the other categories toward substance. He mentions, for instance, that some things are called good because they are useful for something (or, presumably, someone) else [ἐν τό πρός τι τό χρήσιμον] [1096a26]. But he also says that ‘good’ might be said of substance: “for instance, God and intellect” [ὁ θεός καὶ ὁ νοῦς—1096a24-25]. It is not a wild piece of speculation to suggest that it is because of this category of being (and the corresponding good) that he adds, in the above quotation, that the word ‘good’ might rather be said according to analogy. He makes a similar distinction, as we have seen, at Metaph. iv,2,1005a10-11, where he says that “some things are ordered toward one [πρός ἑν], others are ordered successively [τό ἑφεξῆς].”

Fortunately, before cutting off the discourse, Aristotle also says what he means by “according to analogy”: “as sight is in a body, so intellect is in the soul.” In the later scholastic tradition, this became known as the analogy of proportionality (as opposed to the analogy of proportion, which is not unlike the πρός ἑν relationship). The analogy of proportionality is ideally suited to investigating the way that the “same” predicates might be applied to substances occupying radically diverse spheres of being. Whether in specifying substance as, “for instance, God and intellect,” Aristotle means to suggest that these two occupy diverse
spheres is not a question that need detain us. Even if he is referring to the same thing twice over, that is, to divine intellect, there is no doubt that he considers sensible substances and divine intellect to occupy diverse spheres of being. These types of substance are ordered not according to a προς ἐν relationship but according to an ἐφεξής relationship, which can now be associated with the analogy of proportionality.

That Aristotle means to employ analogy of proportionality in discussing the relationship among types of substance is confirmed in turning to Metaph. xii,4-5. In the first of these chapters, Aristotle stays pretty much within the realm of the sensible, explaining that for some things, the elements—which he specifies as form, privation, and matter—are different, although they are the same analogically [τῷ ἀνάλογον—1070b17-18]:

...so that one could say that there are three principles: form, privation, and matter.

But each of these is different in each genus: for instance, in color, they are white, black, and surface. Then there are light, darkness, and air, and from these come day and night.

This is clearly analogy of proportionality. Aristotle’s point is that to be night is very much like being black—but it is also quite different: night is not literally black. Darkness and blackness are related analogically, as they apply to air (or the sky) and surfaces respectively. In the subsequent chapter (Metaph. xii,5), Aristotle uses these same ideas in the analysis of the causes or principles of substances, such as potency and act. He refers in the chapter to that which is “first with respect to actuality” [1071a36]; similarly, in the last line of Metaph. xii,4, he speaks of that which, “as the first of all things, is the mover of all things”—Metaph. xii,4,1070b34-35). He is preparing himself to speak in subsequent chapters about suprasensible substances and especially the first unmoved mover, who is pure act [Metaph. xii,6,1071b20].

The examples used in Metaph. xii,4 (and also in EN i,6) bring to the fore an important difference between the προς ἐν relationship and analogy of proportionality, and also suggest a reason why, when he speaks of the relationship among types of substance, Aristotle sometimes speaks not of analogy but of ἐφεξής ordering. In fact, the analogy of proportionality represents not so much a way of ordering that might exist among types of things as rather a way of accounting for how predicates representing very diverse qualities—diverse, that is, because applied in very diverse spheres—are different and yet “the same” analogically and so help us to make sense of the various spheres and the entities that occupy them. Each term in such a proportion (ἀνάλογον in Greek) appears in its own right. In the formula ‘black : surface :: darkness : sky,’ for instance, ‘black,’ ‘surface,’ ‘darkness,’ and ‘sky,’ each has its own straightforward sense. None of the terms gets its sense from any other term in the relationship, as happens in προς ἐν relationships, where, as we have seen, ‘healthy,’ as applied to vegetables makes an oblique reference to the health not of the vegetables but of the human body.

So, while a προς ἐν relationship describes the order among the items in the relationship, an analogical relationship does no such thing: it is about the relationship among relationships between “independent” terms. If one wishes to speak about the relationship among substances (or other entities) to which an analogy of proportionality applies, one can say that they are simply “in succession,” but this succession cannot be described as a προς ἐν relationship because a προς ἐν relationship interferes with analogy of proportionality. If the various senses of a word are all oriented toward one sense of (as ‘healthy’ is toward ‘healthy human body’), they are not the terms of an analogy of proportionality—whose sense depends upon the equal status of its terms, as they stand in that relationship.24 It is for this reason that, in Metaph. iv, Aristotle speaks of a relationship of succession (ἐφεξής) as distinct from a προς ἐν relationship. It is true that, strictly speaking, a προς ἐν is a type of succession, but Aristotle is interested in the passages we have examined in indicating that there is also another way of being in succession which is quite incompatible with being a προς ἐν relationship. What the other relationship of succession comes to is best understood by showing how the predicates

24It is true that in (for instance) the proportion ‘substance : quality :: surface : color,’ ‘substance’ and ‘quality’ are in a προς ἐν relationship (see Metaph. iv,2,1003b5-7), but not qua being part of the proportion itself (an analogy of proportionality).
that apply in the diverse spheres are related to each other analogically, that is, by virtue of the analogy of proportionality.

VII. Conclusion

Recognizing that Aristotle had at his disposal these two relationships—the πρὸς ἕν relationship and analogy of proportionality—allows us to avoid interpreting him in a Platonic manner that would go against some of his most strenuously maintained theses, such as that in EN i,6 against a single sense of ‘good’ or that in Metaph. iv,2 against a universal or separate ‘being’ or ‘one.’ It also gives us a better understanding of how he can move from the careful analysis of sensible forms in Metaph. vii-ix to the equally careful analysis of suprasensible forms, without forfeiting—or reducing to pale insignificance—the rich insights of those central books. The understanding gained in the central books regarding sensible substances can be applied to suprasensible substances, which can be understood only by applying to them, in an analogical manner, what we first learn about sensible substances.

Works Cited


