

The Priority of *Ousia* in Aristotle

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In *Metaphysics* Z 1, Aristotle claims that attributes cannot be separable but *ousia* alone can. Interpreters understand the asymmetry between attributes and *ousia* as a characterization of the ontological priority of *ousia* in connection with the natural priority of *ousia* presented in Δ 11. This ontological priority is supposed to be at work also in the *Categories*, but it should be noticed that Aristotle does not say that *ousia* can exist separately from the attributes. In addition, as to the relationship between primary and secondary *ousiai*, the question of whether the asymmetry between these holds can be raised. In *Categories* 5, Aristotle holds that only secondary *ousiai* reveal the primary *ousiai*, and that in this case the primary *ousia* is given in the way in which something peculiar to it is given. This idea is reflected in the fact that primary *ousia* is expressed by using the name of a species, not a proper name, in the *Categories*. In the light of this idea, it seems difficult to believe that primary *ousiai* can exist separately from secondary *ousiai*.

Some recent scholars offer a new interpretation of the ontological priority of *ousia*, which avoids the problems relating to the asymmetry by modifying our understanding of ontological independence. This interpretation describes the asymmetry in a different way from Aristotle's description. By contrast, this paper understands the asymmetry normally and suggests that it would be difficult to accept the asymmetry between primary and secondary *ousiai*. However, since it is obvious that primary *ousiai* are prior to secondary *ousiai* in some way, we need to consider what kind of priority Aristotle has in mind here.

Before considering this question, this paper grasps the notion of *ousia* by closely reading the text of *Categories* 5, and confirms that the significance of the subjecthood of *ousia* is stressed, though *ousia* originally means what a thing is. Then it argues that while Aristotle distinguishes between primary and secondary *ousiai*, he does not argue that primary *ousiai* are ontologically prior to secondary *ousiai* because of the asymmetry between them. In the *Categories*, incidentally, Aristotle still seems interested in the priority of the things that are over the statements of them. However, in the course of developing his metaphysical thinking, he abandons the distinction between primary and secondary *ousiai* while maintaining the existence of species and genera as well as particular *ousiai*. Finally, it is suggested that Aristotle's notion of *kath' hauto* predication found in *Metaphysics* Z 4–6 helps us to explain why he does not speak of the asymmetry between primary and secondary *ousiai*.