



The Activity of Being: An Essay on Aristotle's Ontology

Aryeh Kosman

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Understanding “what something is” is a project that has long occupied philosophers. Perhaps no thinker in the Western tradition has had more influence on how we approach this question than Aristotle, whose *Metaphysics* remains the locus classicus of rigorous examinations into the nature of being. Now, in an elegantly argued new study, Aryeh Kosman reinterprets Aristotle’s ontology and compels us to reexamine some of our most basic assumptions about the great philosopher’s thought.

For Aristotle, to ask “what something is” is to inquire into a specific mode of its being, something ordinarily regarded as its “substance.” But to understand substance, we need the concept of *energeia*?a Greek term usually translated as “actuality.” In a move of far-reaching consequence, Kosman explains that the correct translation of *energeia* is not “actuality” but “activity.” We have subtly misunderstood the *Metaphysics* on this crucial point, says Kosman. Aristotle conceives of substance as a kind of dynamic activity, not some inert quality. Substance is something *actively being what it is*.

Kosman demonstrates how this insight significantly alters our understanding of a number of important concepts in Aristotelian thought, from accounts of motion, consciousness, and essence to explanations of the nature of animal and divine being. Whether it is approached as an in-depth introduction to Aristotle’s metaphysics or as a highly original reassessment sure to spark debate, there can be no argument that *The Activity of Being* is a major contribution to our understanding of one of philosophy’s most important thinkers.

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