

BOOK REVIEW

Doing and Being. An Interpretation of Aristotle's Metaphysics Theta. BY JONATHAN B. BEERE. (Oxford: OUP, 2014, Pp. xv + 367, Price £ 24.99.)

Jonathan Beere's *Doing and Being* is a thorough, well informed and insightful chapter-by-chapter commentary on the bulk of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Θ. Beere frames his engagement with Θ by referring to the Battle of the Gods and Giants in Plato's *Sophist*. He does not come back to this in so many words, however, and I suspect that this frame is not quite strong enough to hold the rest of the book in place. As for Θ itself, Beere emphasizes that it starts a new discussion, rather than continuing *Metaphysics* Η. Θ is about the distinction between being in capacity and being in *energeia*, and this distinction is orthogonal to the distinction among the categories. Beere further argues that the common translations of *energeia*, 'activity' and 'actuality' are both misleading. By arguing that *energeia* is not the same as actuality, Beere suggests that being something in capacity may be a way of actually being this thing (p. 217). This implies, among other things, that if the matter of a thing is this thing in capacity, there is a sense in which it actually is this thing.

Beere leaves *energeia* untranslated. He ultimately suggests that *energeia* might be the same as a kind of goodness (pp. 348–9), and he helpfully compares being in capacity versus in *energeia* with being at lunch versus at work (p. 177). Most importantly, he explains what *energeiai* are by way of analogy. Roughly, Aristotle begins with an account of active powers and their exercise, and then explains what *energeia* is by saying that it is for a capacity what the exercise of an active power is for this power. This is why Θ begins with a discussion of powers and their exercise.

Beere uses the term 'power' for an agent's capacity to bring about a change in a patient. Fire has the power to burn things, and a housebuilder has the power to turn things into houses. There is a sense in which all powers are of opposites. No capacity is necessarily executed, and therefore every capacity may fail to be executed. This implies that no capacity on its own is a cause, so that every exercise of a power must be triggered by something further. In one passage, Aristotle seems to suggest that all powers may be exercised by two different *energeiai* (1051a10–13). Beere goes through some trouble justifying this

(pp. 335–7), but I think it cannot really be what Aristotle means. The passage in question should be taken to say that all capacities are of opposites (being exercised or not), and that in addition, some capacities can be exercised in opposite ways.

Powers that can be exercised in opposite ways are rational powers. They involve an understanding of their object, and to understand something is also to understand its opposite. Beere says that rational powers consist in rational comprehension (p. 70). Assuming that the art of housebuilding is a rational power, this should imply that to comprehend its object is the same as being able to build a house. Now Aristotle says that the art of building a house is, in a way, the form of a house (Λ 4, 1070b33), and Beere worries that one might well comprehend what a house is without being able to build one (p. 81). It seems to me that the obvious thing to say is that the object of housebuilding is not simply a house. Housebuilding is not the art ‘of house’; it is the art of building one.

Aristotle (and Beere with him) has many more things to say about powers, but let us assume that we know enough for understanding, by analogy, what *energeia* is in general. Aristotle writes:

... as something that is building a house is to something that can build a house, so is what is awake to what is asleep, what is seeing to what has its eyes shut, but has vision, what has been separated out of the matter to the matter, what has been worked up to what has not been worked on. Within this distinction, let *energeia* be marked off as one part, what is able as the other. (Θ 6, 1048a37–b6, tr. Beere, p. 178)

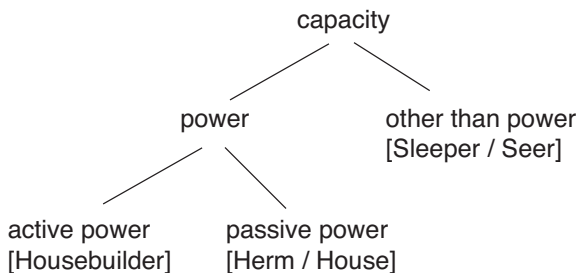
Aristotle lists five *energeiai* in this passage, which I will refer to as the Housebuilder, the Sleeper, the Seer, the Herm (separated out), and the House (worked up). One thing that is striking is that all of these *energeiai* are things: not properties, activities, or states. Beere suggests that one should rather contrast (i) capacities with *energeiai* and (ii) capable things with *energounta*, that is, things that are in *energeia* (p. 190). I am not sure Aristotle should be corrected in this respect. It seems to me, for reasons that I cannot adequately explain in this context, that Aristotle often intentionally blurs the distinction between things and their features.

Beere construes analogy as similarity between two relations: the relation between being a housebuilder at lunch and at work is similar, for instance, to the relation between being asleep and being awake. As a kind of similarity, analogy is reflexive and symmetric but not transitive. Now Beere claims that ‘the cases of *energeia* constitute a loosely analogical kind, in which there are indirect analogies, via a privileged class of cases’ (pp. 188–9). This amounts roughly to the following. Some or all of the four cases other than the Housebuilder are not directly analogous to one another, but only indirectly so, by all being directly analogous to the privileged case, the Housebuilder. Why are not all cases directly analogous? Beere gives two reasons.

First, says Beere, some of the cases involve an *energoun* but no *energeia* (pp. 190–1). This raises many questions. To begin with, it was Beere who distinguished between *energoun* and *energeia* on behalf of Aristotle. Further, it seems odd to include something among ‘cases of *energeia*’ when in fact, there is no *energeia* involved. According to Beere, the Herm is such a case. Herms result from the exercise of a passive power to be made into a Herm. The exercise of this power is an *energeia*, but as Beere notes, ‘it is not in virtue of this *energeia* that [...] the finished herm is in *energeia* a herm’ (p. 201). This sounds like there are two *energeiai* involved rather than none: (a) the exercise of the capacity to *be made into* a herm and (b) the exercise of the capacity to *be* a herm. At any rate, I find it difficult to see how the Housebuilder can mediate between cases with and without *energeia*.

Second, Beere claims that the Housebuilder mediates between ‘the products of change and the subjects of change’ (p. 208). The problem with this is that there are no subjects of change in Aristotle’s list, with the possible exception of the Seer. We will need to add some clear examples, in the hope that Aristotle would approve. Take the materials for building a house. What is it for them to be in *energeia*? There are two options. It might consist in (a) being used for building a house or (b) being a house. Beere says that something is a house in capacity when it has the power to be *made into* a house (p. 206). I think that rather a house in capacity is what has the capacity to *be* a house. This would leave room for the building materials: to exercise the capacity for being a house is to be a house and to exercise the capacity for being housebuilding material is to be made into a house. If this is so, the Housebuilder may well mediate between the House and the building materials. This result, however, depends on several conjectures that go beyond Aristotle and Beere.

In general, Aristotle’s five cases do not seem to be related in the way Beere describes. Judging by Beere’s own lists of points of comparison, the Sleeper and the Seer have more in common than either of them has in common with the Housebuilder, and the same is true of the Herm and the House. On the other hand, the Sleeper is equally unlike the House and the Housebuilder. A brief reflection on the different kinds of capacities involved shows why this must be so. Consider the following division of capacities:



Assuming that the relations between capacities and their exercise are divided in a way similar to the capacities themselves, this division might explain why Sleeper and Seer, as well as Herm and House, are more similar to one another than to the Housebuilder. Note, however, that there is no case that would mediate between any two other cases, and hence no use for the notion of indirect analogy.

Although I am not sure I agree with the way in which Beere works out his analogical account of *energeiai* in detail, I should emphasize that I think he starts out on the right track. Moreover, his book contains many important and helpful insights on several topics that I could not adequately cover, including the Megarics, Aristotle's adjectival conception of matter, the priority and goodness of *energeia*. It is a rich and mostly convincing interpretation of a central book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* that has, in comparison with book Z, been somewhat neglected.

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