

## Cross-category Notions, Representations and Aristotle's Essentialism Jie Chen | Rice University

This paper aims to examine cross-category notions in Aristotle's works: notions that are not confined to a single category. Scholars have identified five or six specific cross-category notions: being (*Metaphysics* Γ, Δ, Z), unity (*Metaphysics* 1016b), actuality (*Metaphysics* 1048a36), matter and form (*Metaphysics* 1070b26), and good (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1096b13).<sup>1</sup> In what sense are they called cross-categorical? Besides, it is widely acknowledged among scholars that Aristotle's categories present not only a linguistic but also a metaphysical and ontological picture. What would be the metaphysical truth of things revealed by these cross-category notions? These are the main questions that will be discussed in the paper.

In the paper, I will examine three particular cross-category notions: being, actuality and good. The underlying assumption is that these notions are cross-categorical in the same sense. I use the term "cross-category" to signify a distinct perspective from the views that consider these notions as transcendental, the meaning of which has been discussed for a long history, as well as from the focal meaning view which regards the notions as primarily referring to one category, to which all other senses refer to. In my interpretation, cross-category notions do not possess a superior status or reside solely in one single category. Instead, they intersect with all categories, allowing things to be described beyond the limit of categories. By addressing these notions, I wish to present the possibility of crossing boundaries in alignment with Aristotle's essentialism.

Aristotle's *Categories* 4, 1b25 reads: "Of things said without combinations, each signifies either substance or quantity or quality or a relative or where or being-in-a-position or having or doing or being affected." The list of the categories has appeared in several works of Aristotle.<sup>2</sup> The processes of arriving at this list, either by posing various questions about a particular subject and receiving answers that align with the categories, or by asking a specific question, namely, "what is it"

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<sup>1</sup> For example: Hesse, M. (1965). *Aristotle's logic of analogy*. *The Philosophical Quarterly* (1950-), 15(61), 328-340. Beere, J. B. (2009). *Doing and Being: An Interpretation of Aristotle's Metaphysics Theta*. Oxford University Press. Ross does not list matter and form in his list.

<sup>2</sup> The only other place where the 10 categories are listed is *Topics* 1.9. The difference is that the first category is *ti esti*, not substance. Other places that list categories include: *Metaphysics* Beta 996b17-18, Delta 1017a22, 1045b29, 1069a21, Zeta. *Physics*. *Topics* 1.9 103b20-104a2. *De Anima* 402a24, 410a14. *APo* 83a21-24 (*ti esti* is a predication). *Politics* 1296b17. There are inconsistency on Aristotle's discussion of substance in the *Categories* and *Metaphysic Z*. For a consistent view, see. About the authenticity of Aristotle's *Categories*, see Frede 1983, 1987.

to everything and anything, encompass the genus-species structure and specify an individual-essence relationship.

Cross-category notions fall outside of this map. They cannot be identified as an ultimate genus, nor belong to a species. Take the notion of actuality as an example. There is no group of individuals called actuality, as a group of men called “men”. Nor are there any inquiries concerning the actuality of an individual. One might expect cross-category notions to be purely linguistic concepts, defined not through the genus and differentia system used for items within categories, but through an account signified by the name or name-like expression, as suggested by Aristotle in *Prior Analytics* (93b29-31). This interpretation aligns with Aristotle’s hesitation to provide a definition of actuality in *Metaphysics* 9.6.<sup>3</sup> Such interpretation excludes cross-category notions from inquiries pertaining to the existence of an object. Aristotle’s way of defining actuality, as I will argue, does not designate actuality as a pure linguistic concept. Instead, similar to the notions of being and good, actuality can be applied to all categorical items and reveal truths about things that exist.

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<sup>3</sup> 1048a36-37: “we need not seek a definition for every term, but must comprehend the analogy”.