Michail Peramatzis
Priority in Aristotle's Metaphysics.
Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2011.
352 pages
$99.00 (cloth ISBN 978–0–19–958835–0)

This is an ambitious book. Peramatzis undertakes the task of providing an original, unified and philosophically appealing account of Aristotle's view of priority. His nuanced examination of priority, moreover, allows him to address many complex issues about natural form, composite substance, and matter which remain the subjects of rigorous debate. Peramatzis provides a sophisticated set of detailed arguments which are clearly expressed and extremely engaging. This book will be of great interest and value to scholars of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* as well as to scholars working in the area of contemporary metaphysics.

Part I of the book treats Aristotle's account of priority in definition [PID] where: "*A* is prior in definition to *B* just in case *A* is (correctly) defined without mentioning *B*, but *B* is not (correctly) defined without mentioning *A*"(6). Peramatzis structures his treatment of [PID] around an (apparent) conflict between two claims:

[A] Natural forms, the essences of natural, perceptible, and changeable compounds, are definitionally prior to (or asymmetrically independent of) matter in the manner of [PID].

[B] Natural forms are essentially enmattered and so must be defined in terms of matter in a way which prevents them from satisfying [PID] (6).

While Peramatzis will argue that 'matter' is being used equivocally in these two claims, he begins, in chapter 2, by exploring an implication that arises from claim A. Aristotle claims that matter is indefinable, yet such a claim is incompatible with claim A; for how can matter be definitionally posterior to natural form, if matter is absolutely indefinable. Peramatzis argues that matter and the compound "are definitionally posterior to form in so far as they are defined in terms of form, while they are indefinable in so far as they cannot be defined strictly in their own terms" (35).

Chapters 3–6 examine the grounds for accepting claim B. In chapter 3, Peramatzis argues for the weak thesis that it is conceptually possible that forms may be essentially enmattered. Much of the chapter is devoted to arguing that this claim is not ruled out by the discussion at *Metaphysics* Z.11, 1037a21–33, which many, including Michael Frede, take straightforwardly to advance the claim that form contains no reference to matter (50). Peramatzis' strategy in examining these texts is to argue that the sort of matter which belongs in a form's essence is not the sort of matter that is ruled out in these passages, although we shall have to wait until chapter 7 for a detailed positive account of the sort of matter that is involved in a form's essence. Chapter 4 considers the implications for B of Aristotle's critique of Plato's Forms and of mathematical abstractions. Peramatzis argues that Aristotle's critique of Plato

shows that natural forms are not merely dependent on matter for their existence, for mathematical entities are likewise so dependent, but are essentially enmattered.

In chapter 5, which is supplemented in chapter 6 with an examination of the essentially change-related features of a form's essence, Peramatzis develops his positive case for natural form's essential enmatterment. While he helpfully begins with Aristotle's critique of Socrates the Younger in *Metaphysics* Z.11, he acknowledges the aporetic nature of this discussion and bases his case also on an examination of *Metaphysics* E.1 and *De Anima* A.1. Peramatzis rejects the merely existential rendering of soul's dependence on matter (105) and argues for the stronger claim of essential enmatterment. In brief, since "psychic functions and affections essentially carry with them material and change-related features" and since 'none of the features of the soul constitutes a successful candidate for being a matter-less or change-free essence of the soul" it follows that "the soul, a central case of natural form, proves to be essentially matter- and – change- involving" (106).

Chapter 7 deals directly with the (apparent) conflict between claims A and B. Peramatzis argues that 'matter' is being used ambiguously between the two claims: "[w]hile form is essentially dependent upon the material features intrinsic to it, yet it is prior to the token - and – type-matter that belongs to particular and universal compounds (respectively)" (179).

In order to support this solution, Peramatzis draws on Aristotle's discussion, in *Posterior Analytics* B.8-10, of the requirements for defining process kinds and their extension to substance-kinds in *Metaphysics* Z.17 and H.2–4. In *Posterior Analytics* B.8–10, Aristotle lays out what Peramatzis calls the 'causal-explanatory' model of essence. Peramatzis uses the following syllogism to illustrate the point (181):

> Noise belongs to fire being quenched
> Fire being quenched belongs to the clouds
> Noise belongs to the clouds.

While the conclusion does not contain the definition of thunder, by rearranging the terms of the proof in a "'cause-revealing' way we can reach the successful explanatory definition of thunder" (181) where the middle term, as cause, enjoys priority. Peramatzis formulates the definition as follows: Thunder $_{[KIND]}$ = $_{def}$ noise in the clouds caused by fire being quenched (182). In this definition, 'fire being quenched' is the cause and is the factor which, as Peramatzis puts it, is 'identity-fixing' (182).

Peramatzis takes Aristotle clearly to be extending this 'causal-explanatory' model to substance-kinds in *Metaphysics* Z.17 and H.2–4. He uses a sample definition: Human $_{[KIND]}$ = $_{def}$ the 'type-with-type-matter' whose essence is (being a human soul) to illustrate the point (190). In this case of a substance-kind, the soul or hylomorphic essence is the cause and, parallel to the thunder case, it is the identity-fixer. Peramatzis sees a solution to the priority question here. He says: "This intra-*definiens* priority of form over the 'type-with-type-matter' also grounds its priority over the *definiendum*. Because the kind human is identical with what is described as 'type-with-type-matter', it follows that it too is made what it is, and is caused by, the form or

essence, being a human soul. The form mentioned in the *definiens*, then, is also essentially prior to the kind defined" (191).

Part 2 examines Aristotle's account of ontological priority and further supports the resolution developed in Part 1. Peramatzis' main concern in this section is to articulate and defend a novel account of ontological priority, an account which "could be labelled the 'ontological counterpart' to definitional priority" (204).

Peramatzis outlines the problem as follows. In the *Metaphysics* Δ.11 discussion of ontological priority, Aristotle articulates, at 1093a3–4, the following independence claim:

> [IC]: *A* is ontologically prior to *B* just in case *A can be* (εἶναι) *without B* (ἄνευ ἄλλων) but *B cannot be without A* (ἄνευ ἐκείνων μή) (204).

Peramatzis claims that since 'to be' (εἶναι) in this formulation can be read existentially or as meaning 'to be what something is' there are two options for interpreting the claim:

> [PIE]: *A* is ontologically prior to *B* if and only if *A can exist* without *B existing* but not the other way about [Priority in Existence].

> [PIB]: *A* is ontologically prior to *B* if and only if *A* can be what it is independently of *B* being what it is, while the converse is not the case [Priority in Being] (204).

While most discussions of ontological priority in the literature rely, either explicitly or implicitly, on [PIE], Peramatzis builds a fine case for favouring [PIB].

Chapter 9 develops the case for [PIB] by arguing that "Aristotle understands Platonist ontological priority as asymmetric existential independence" and thus, given his critical stance toward the Platonic conception "Aristotle cannot be favouring the existential construal of ontological priority" (212). Chapter 10 develops a philosophical and textual defense of [PIB] by arguing that the view developed in *Metaphysics* Δ.11 is compatible with [PIB] but not with [PIE].

In chapter 11, Peramatzis advances the unified notion of priority through an examination of the ontological priority of particular substances. Peramatzis takes up the notoriously difficult task of articulating the ontological priority of particular substances over non-substances. He argues that "the primacy of particular substance consists in an attenuated notion of [PIB] in which it makes non-substance entities the generic types of being that they are, i.e. predicable attributes" (229).

Chapter 12 advances the plausibility of accepting [PIB] by arguing the [PIB] does not collapse the distinction between ontological and definitional priority and chapter 13 provides an extended test of the viability of [PIB] by arguing that [PIB] best captures the sense of priority employed in *Metaphysics* Z.10 and Θ.8.

Peramatzis' fine and accomplished arguments will no doubt provoke a great deal of further debate.

Rebekah Johnston
Wilfrid Laurier University