

Aristotle's view that wisdom is knowledge of being as such might appear to twenty-first century wisdom-seekers as a powerful but radically foreign idea. Jonathan Beere's monograph, *Doing and Being: An Interpretation of Aristotle's Metaphysics Theta* guides us expertly through some of the most formidable of Aristotle's arguments on the nature of being—reconstructing their logic, embedding them within the broader context of Aristotle's thought, and showing their relevance to questions Plato was the first to raise.

Beere's book is most timely: it engages with a core philosophical question in Aristotle which is also of much relevance to us today. A familiar, non-Aristotelian example might help to illustrate the question. Consider an elastic band. What it is to be elastic is to have the capacity to stretch. Whether the band is ever stretched or not, it is elastic, so stretching enters the very definition of its elasticity. Contemporary metaphysicians talk about a relation of "directedness" between the property (elasticity) and its (potential) manifestation (stretching). But the nature of such a relation is a very challenging philosophical problem, much debated at present. Beere helps us make progress with it by examining Aristotle's views on the matter, elucidating them with great ingenuity and excellent scholarship.

Rubber bands

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DOING AND BEING

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The question is: what is the difference between an existing power, such as elasticity, that is not being exercised, and a power that is being exercised? The solution Beere puts forward on behalf of Aristotle is that at least for some properties there are two ways of having them, and thus two ways of being qualified by them: through merely having the power but not exercising it, and through exercising that power. As Beere would like to put it, the rubber band at rest is in capacity elastic, through having the capacity to stretch; when stretching it exercises that capacity, thus it is in "energeia" elastic. ("Energeia" was a word coined by Aristotle, and Beere has reasons for leaving it untranslated.)

Being in capacity elastic and being in energeia elastic are ways in which the band

is elastic. Two sets of questions arise from Beere's reconstruction of Aristotle's view. They point to two aspects of Beere's account that seem to diverge from one another. Firstly: how is the difference between a power in capacity and a power in exercise accounted for by the property belonging in two different ways to the subject? In what way does a property, say being a house-builder (an Aristotelian example), belong to the house-builder in capacity? If there is a single item, house-building, that belongs to someone when he is house-building, how does this item, house-building, belong to him when he is not house-building? Both his states are of course related to house-building, since the power itself is defined in terms of it. But if the potentiality of the house-building power (when not being exercised) is to be understood as a way in which house-building belongs to the house-builder, more needs to be explained than his becoming qualified as a house-builder. How is it that house-building qualifies the house-builder by belonging to him even when it is not occurring? If Aristotle answers this question, we need further explanation to understand him.

Secondly, how do the states of being in capacity and being in energeia relate to each other? The key insight for Beere is that "being in capacity has the energeia as part of its essence: what it is to be in capacity F is partly a matter of what it is to be in energeia F". This seems to be a different approach to the explanation of what a power in potentiality is. The focus now is on the difference in the constitution of the states of being in capacity F and being in energeia F, rather than on the way that F belongs to the subject.

What, furthermore, is the ontological relation between these two states, when being in capacity has the energeia as part of its essence? In the case of a boy, being in capacity a man has being a man as part of its essence; namely, what it is to be a man is part of what it is to be a boy. Is the boy then a man in capacity because he has only part of the essence of man? If so, how does the presence of a part of the essence generate potentiality for the whole essence? Not all these questions are answered in Beere's monograph. But this is not a complaint, given the steepness of the metaphysical difficulties it addresses. This book is an enormously valuable contribution to the field of Aristotelian studies. It brings us closer to attaining Aristotle's wisdom.