## **Preface**

My interest in Z and H goes back more than twenty-five years to my sophomore year in college. I was taking a required course in metaphysics, and the text for the first half of the semester was Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. As it turned out, the teacher spent almost all the allotted time on the first six books, focusing on the great controversy over the subject matter of first philosophy, and we were left with only one class to cover all of Z and H. I made the mistake of putting off the reading assignment until the night before. It was a frustrating struggle. I would read a paragraph, dismayed that I could not understand any sentence in it, depressed that I could not remember a thing from the paragraph I had just completed, and painfully conscious that there were many such paragraphs to go. I went to bed in a state of utter confusion, and our whirlwind survey of the text the next day did little to dispel that confusion.

But however little I understood of Z and H, I must have become convinced by that first experience that this was an important text; two years later I asked the teacher of the required metaphysics course to direct me in a reading course on Z and H and Saint Thomas's commentary on them. My second experience with the text was even more frustrating than the first. On this reading, I had the time to work my way through the text at a more leisurely pace; but, however often I returned to Z.1, I would have the experience of thinking I had a particular body of the text under control only to lose it as I tried to master what followed. Things became worse rather than better as the semester wore on, and I can remember the depressing thought, at semester's end, that I did not understand anything at all of the middle books.

My third experience with Z and H came in my second year in gradu-

ate school when I was preparing to write a dissertation on the *Categories*. In my naivete, I supposed that the corpus constituted a vehicle for expressing a single unchanging body of doctrine, and I approached Z and H to find what they would tell me about Aristotle's "theory of categories." This time, I thought I understood some of what I was reading, but I was anything but comforted by what I was finding there. How can form be primary *ousia* when concrete particulars are supposed to play this role? How can the idea of a basic subject of predication be wanting as a guide to picking out the *ousiai* when that idea just tells us what *ousiai* are? How can a primary *ousiai* be identical with its essence when primary *ousiai* are things like Socrates which share their essences? Unable to make any headway with these and other questions, I dodged them by choosing a "safe" topic for the dissertation, Ockham's interpretation of Aristotle's *Categories*.

I had, however, been bitten by the Z–H bug. Not long after coming to Notre Dame, I began giving a graduate seminar on the middle books on the questionable premise that, if you do not understand something, you should teach it to graduate students. I continued to give that seminar, often on an annual basis, over the next fifteen years. Little that transpired in the course found its way into print, in part because there were other topics on which I wanted to have my say, and in part because I found, paradoxically, that the deeper I went into the text, not just my understanding but also my puzzlement grew.

In 1983, I was appointed Dean of the College of Arts and Letters at Notre Dame. On accepting the appointment, I knew that I would have to put Z, H, and all other things philosophical aside for a time. I assumed, however, that once I mastered the routine of the job I would be able to keep up with philosophy; but after five years as dean, I had the frightening realization that since accepting the appointment I had done no philosophy at all. So, in the spring of 1988, I requested a year's leave to catch up on the discipline. Happily, the leave was granted. My plan was to write nothing at all, but merely to spend the year reading the journals and recent book-length studies on the topics that had been the focus of my published efforts—individuation, abstract entities, modality, and so on. But before I went to the most recent issue of *Philosophical Review*, I decided to spend a week reading through Z and H. The week became a month; the month, a semester; and the semester, an academic year.

This time, however, things were different. The time away from philosophy had evidently been liberating. From the earliest rereading of the text, I realized I had something to say about Z and H as a whole. After going through the body of critical literature that had accumulated

in my years away from philosophy, I had a clear sense of how my views on Z and H related to the work of others. And the business of writing it up seemed easy, easier than any philosophical writing I had done before; when I returned to the dean's office in August of 1989, I had a full draft of a manuscript on Z and H. My retrospective sense of the project was not that I had written it, but that it had written itself.

Although what I wrote over that year is a study of Z and H as a whole, it is only a partial study since there is much in the text I do not yet understand. Having been under the spell of the middle books for more than a quarter of a century, I know I will be unable to resist the temptation to go back; having had at least ten different opinions on virtually every sentence of the text, I am not naive enough to suppose that the views I express here will be my final ideas on Z and H. Perhaps I will see things differently five years from now, and I will be compelled to write a series of retractions. Z and H are like that. In any case, what follows is an account of the middle books as I now understand them.

I said that writing the book was easy. In part it was easy because so many individuals helped. At the beginning of my leave, I asked several people for advice on the secondary literature I needed to read, and many of them gave me their counsel. I was especially helped by an excellent bibliography of recent work on the themes of the middle books that Daniel Devereaux had compiled. Others who were extremely helpful include John Ackrill, Jonathan Barnes, Sheilah Brennan, William Charlton, Alan Code, Marc Cohen, Sheldon Cohen, Montgomery Furth, Jonathan Lear, Frank Lewis, Ernan McMullin, Mohan Matthen, D. K. Modrak, Kenneth Sayre, Michael Wedin and Christopher Williams. Michael Frede, Philip Quinn, and David Burrell all read the first draft of the book and provided the kind of advice that helps transform a half-baked idea into something more, and an anonymous reader for Cornell University Press gave me extremely detailed suggestions for revising the second draft. Albert Wimmer helped me with the German text of the Frede-Patzig commentary. Margaret Jasiewicz and Kay Herrick did yeowomen's work on the typing of the manuscript. While I was on leave, Nathan Hatch and Roger Skurski kept the house in order and made sure that I was never once bothered by the worries of the dean's office. My family gave me more support than they had on any project I had previously undertaken. They realized how important it was for me, at that stage of my career, to get back to the life of the scholar, and they made sure that our house was a place where I could do it. Especially supportive was the tolerance of Ann and Julie, who were forced to endure nightly progress reports at the dinner table. They never once let on that something other than primary *ousia* might be an appropriate topic of mealtime conversation. I thank all of these people and, especially, Edward Malloy, C.S.C., Notre Dame's president, and Timothy O'Meara, our provost, for allowing me the freedom of a leave. When I became dean, Tim assured me that the job would make me a better philosopher. I do not know whether he was right, but I do know that in my years as dean I have learned many things I would never have known had I not accepted the appointment. Since Tim taught me most of these, I have dedicated the book to him.

Parts of my "Form, Species, and Predication in *Metaphysics* Z, H, and Θ," *Mind* (1979), 1–23, appear in the second section of Chapter 4. The final section of Chapter 7 includes several paragraphs from my "*Ousia*: A Prolegomenon to *Metaphysics* Z and H," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* (1984), 241–225. These pieces of text appear here with the permission of the editors of the relevant journals.

Unless otherwise indicated the translations of Aristotle in what follows are my own.

MICHAEL J. LOUX

Notre Dame, Indiana

## Primary Ousia

