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One and Many in Aristotle's Metaphysics: Books Alpha-Delta.

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When the present book, the long-awaited follow-up to Halper's 1989 volume on the central books of the *Metaphysics*, is joined by the concluding volume on books *iota-nu* that we may hope to appear as promised in 2011, the three volumes together will surely constitute the most important and welcome event in Aristotle scholarship since the publication of Joseph Owens' *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics* in 1978. Indeed, Halper's opus may be seen as a manifestation of a certain coming of age in the modern study of ancient philosophy, in which neither historicism nor an uncritical embrace of the interpretive tradition any longer prevent engaging the ancients in philosophical inquiry that both honors the historical context of ancient thought *and* is responsive to contemporary philosophical concerns.

Not that Halper imposes contemporary concerns upon his reading of Aristotle; on the contrary, he finds that efforts to use Aristotle's thought to address contemporary issues have tended to obscure his reasoning, and it is with Aristotle's reasoning—his systematic argumentation—that Halper is most concerned. Halper recounts how the early 20th century projected onto Aristotle a developmental path from idealism to empiricism, whereas in the postwar era he came to be seen as a linguistic philosopher. What these hermeneutical strategies have in common, Halper discerns, is not that they set out to make Aristotle speak to contemporary concerns, but rather simply that the absence of a systematic intentionality accorded to the text leads them to seek an animating dynamic outside the text, 'and it is natural that the connections they think of are those that are most alive and interesting to them' (36).

By contrast, Halper's scrupulous fidelity to Aristotle's text and his exercise of hermeneutic charity allow the text to speak in a manner that makes us feel that metaphysics is in every way a living project. Perhaps this is because, in some way, a system is always alive. Halper's boldest move is to treat the text of the *Metaphysics* as an integral treatise, his nemesis the Heraclitean Aristotle of runaway developmentalism, an author who never steps into the same stream even once, lacking self-identity in the very moment of thought, perversely characterized as a 'philosopher at work' (34), by which we might understand a philosopher accomplishing no *works*.

The clue that offers Halper the somewhat astonishing possibility of a reading of the *Metaphysics* that is at once systematic and novel, without being anachronistic, lies in Aristotle's Platonic roots, but not in the sense in which developmentalists have long depended upon the construct of Aristotle's youthful Platonism, nor in the sense in which Lloyd Gerson offers to return Aristotle to the Platonic fold in *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (2006). For Gerson, rapprochement with Plato lies in taking up again the

Neoplatonic project of discerning the ‘harmony’ of the two philosophers, a project, to be sure, long unjustly dismissed as Procrustean. The ‘Platonism’ the developmentalists attribute to the youthful Aristotle, on the other hand, is usually just a straw man, with the exception of Philip Merlan’s more sensitive account in *From Platonism to Neoplatonism* (1960), and elsewhere. Halper has uncovered something much more profound: Aristotle the *henologist*. For, ‘although metaphysics is intrinsically concerned with both one and being...the former gives it a tractability that the latter does not’ (6). But most scholars, Halper notes, do not recognize a real distinction in Aristotle between unity and being, and so the methodological significance of questions of unity and multiplicity at every stage of Aristotle’s inquiry cannot appear for them; and this in turn makes it difficult for them to grasp just how methodical is Aristotle’s procedure.

There is a common misapprehension regarding henology—my term, let the reader be aware, not Halper’s, who chooses to refer simply to ‘inquiry into one/the one/unity’ or to the ‘one/many problem(s)’—namely, that it is an inquiry into ‘the One’, rather than an inquiry into the modes of unity. The methodological import of unity for Plato has been recognized recently, however, in McCabe’s *Plato’s Individuals*, 1999, and for Parmenides, in Curd’s *The Legacy of Parmenides*, 1998. Halper himself shares in the misunderstanding of Platonic henology, but through his recovery of Aristotle’s own methodological henology he offers a golden opportunity to finally grasp the purpose of Platonic talk about ‘the One’ as well. For what Halper recognizes in Aristotle is also true, *mutatis mutandis*, of Plato, and indeed of most ancient philosophers who ever spoke of ‘the One’: talk about ‘the One’ is actually talk about *ones*, for ‘each way “one” is said should be understood first as a *character of some individual thing*’ (84, my emphasis; cf. Curd’s ‘predicational monism’) and thus ‘there is no nature shared in common by all the things said to be “one”’ (134). In this way, Aristotle’s critique of a ‘One itself’ that would be ‘both an indivisible constituent and the nature of the whole’ (217), carries out the imperative of Plato’s *Parmenides*, which affirmed that ‘the One itself’ cannot *be*, or be *one* (*Parm.* 141e). In so doing, Plato transposed Eleatic talk about *to hen* (always grammatically ambiguous between ‘the One’ and ‘unity’) explicitly into a methodological register in the first place. And just as Plato was not rejecting the Eleatic project, but refining it, this refinement in the concept of unity continues in the Aristotelian critique of Platonism, a critique which Halper recognizes as anything but destructive, since it is from the Platonic assertion of unity as *form* that nearly all the *aporiai* in book B are generated, and it is primarily through these *aporiai*—genuine antinomies according to Harper (284)—that Aristotle forges his science of being *qua* being.

In a review as brief as this, it is impossible to present the entire argument of a book so closely argued; but if I might highlight a single point which might otherwise be overlooked among the riches of Halper’s work, it would be his recovery of the significance of Aristotle’s doctrine of analogy. Halper may not hear the echo of the *Republic*’s characterization of the Idea of the Good as beyond being (*Rep.* 509b) in Aristotle’s assertion (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1096b28-29) that things are called ‘good’ by analogy, but he does recognize in Aristotle’s assertion that ‘(g)ood and one are each one by analogy but not in genus’ (138) something more than a merely deflationary point.

Things are one by analogy, Aristotle explains at *Met.* 1016b34-35, ‘if they stand as something in relation to another,’ and hence analogy is established as a kind of class broader than a genus, and the analogical method the most generic medium of thought, in which one may ‘consider together types of being that have no common character’ (144). Analogy is in this sense proper to henology, for *each* entity ‘is one by analogy because it stands in the same relation to itself’ (137), while *sameness* as such applies only to pluralities, and thus ‘sameness is a type of oneness, the oneness of a plurality’ (147). In a luminous brief discussion (147-9), Halper argues that this subordination of sameness or identity to unity renders it impossible for Aristotle to have held Leibniz’s principle of the identity of indiscernibles. That is, ‘in general, “same” is always said in respect of something else. Two things are not absolutely the same, but the same X’ (*ibid.*). This serves as well to distinguish henology from ontology.

The significance of analogy in Aristotle’s thought has been obscured, however, by the influence of Aquinas’ identification of the key structure of *pros hen*, or relation to a primary nature, as a kind of analogy; but whereas a *pros hen* series is also broader than a categorial genus—Halper characterizes it, *à la* A. C. Lloyd, as a ‘quasi-genus’ (300)—a *pros hen* series can be the object of knowledge, whereas a relational series proceeding no further than analogy can be explored only by the henologist, who for Aristotle is, undoubtedly, not in possession of a science: ‘In contrast, being can be known and be the object of the science of metaphysics *because* it is a *pros hen*’ (145). Thus, ethics is saved from being a science of an analogy by being a science of the *human* good, rather than simply the good, and physics would be a science of an analogy were it the science of motion, rather than nature, i.e., natural motion (303, n. 20).

The transition from analogy, which encompasses the minimum relation of each to itself, to the *pros hen* relation is thus the transition from henology to ontology, from One to Being; and this is the transition Aristotle accomplishes in the *Metaphysics* according to Halper’s reading. If Halper nevertheless perpetuates certain confusions about the horizons of Platonic henology, he recognizes at any rate that Aristotle, in ‘translating’ Platonic talk about unity into ‘more refined terminology...brings out not merely the problems but some of the richness of Plato’s philosophy’ (274).

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