

DIALECTIC IN DIALOGUE: BEING AND HISTORY IN ARISTOTLE'S METAPHYSICS AND PLATO'S SOPHIST

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μῦθόν τινα ἕκαστος φαίνεται μοι διηγέσθαι παισὶν ὡς οὕσιν ἡμῖν
- *Sophist* 243c.

ψελλιζομένη γὰρ ἔοικεν ἡ πρώτη φιλοσοφία περὶ πάντων, ἅτε νέα τε καὶ κατ' ἀρχὰς οὔσα
καὶ τὸ πρῶτον
- *Metaphysics* 993a15-17.

Man muß etwas sein, um etwas zu machen
- Goethe, *Gespräche*. Montag, den 20. Oktober 1828.

It is often held that, in the historical account that constitutes most of the first book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Aristotle demonstrates his lack of imagination and insensitivity to the subtleties of the positions of others, that he intentionally misrepresents his predecessors for his own aims, or that he is presenting a perfunctory survey of no essential importance to his teaching.¹ I argue on the contrary that Aristotle's history of philosophy serves as a dialectical investigation to his philosophy proper, and is necessary to it.² A comparison of Aristotle's history to the dialectical investigation of Plato's *Sophist* reveals not only important similarities in method, but a conscious attempt by Aristotle to succeed where he believes his teacher to have failed.

My argument is as follows. Plato seeks through his history of being to reconcile opposed positions in a principle beyond them and finds an answer in the activity of the thinking soul as it brings being into relation with non-being. Yet Plato's doctrine of principles, as Aristotle criticizes it, cannot achieve its goal of grounding reality on intelligible causes, and so Plato's principle of the movement of his history of philosophy must be determined by something that is indeterminate and unknowable. The result is that Plato's interpretation or portrayal of the ideas of past thinkers cannot be determined without arbitrariness, and the activity of philosophy cannot by its own dialectical activity ascend beyond an indefinite intersubjectivity. Though Aristotle follows Plato in arriving at a conception of the unity of the principles of being through a dialectical inquiry into the theories of his predecessors, his specific conception of first principles implies a conception of knowledge and philosophy that justifies the character of that inquiry. Since philosophy

¹ See Tredennick (1975) xxv, Tricot (1970) xix-xx, and Ross (1924) lxxvi for various expressions of these opinions. See Lowry (1980) for a more thorough criticism of attempts by modern scholarship to evaluate the nature of Aristotle's history.

² In this essay I shall use 'history', 'dialectic', 'philosophical inquiry' and their variants loosely, as they are in the end interchangeable.

is the process of assimilating the thinking soul to the object of investigation, its course is determined by the object itself. When the principles of a thing are known, one can see in other thinkers precisely what is true and what unclear in their arguments and how they have helped us move towards a more complete understanding of being. Aristotle, unlike Plato, can know that the course of dialectic is determined by its essential goal, i.e. wisdom.

Plato's inquiry into the fundamental principles and causes of being is a dialectical history.³ Plato both represents the teachings of his predecessors as partial conceptions of the truth of being and arrives at a conception of the principle that unites those principles by putting them into conversation with one another. Furthermore, Plato's understanding of the principles of being underlie the process and outcome of the inquiry, just as Aristotle's underlie his own.

Plato's principles and his reasons for holding them are generally understood by scholars through a combination of the interpretation of his extant works alongside whatever ancient testimony is credible in the following manner. Plato's reasoning starts from the given fact of becoming, the fact of the temporal movement of contraries into and out of each other in generation and destruction. In order for the stability required by the grasp of thought to be present in our experience, there must be unchanging sources of intelligibility (εἶδη) by the causal force of which (μέθεξις) our experience might have a stable ground. How and in what way the εἶδη specifically relate to the grounded must be determined by the mutual relations of the εἶδη themselves.⁴ Yet this only transfers the problem of the inexplicability of μέθεξις to the εἶδη themselves.⁵ Thus those things that are intelligible require their own proper principle that is beyond them. Their genesis is explained by the psychic movement from the limiting principle of self-identity to an indefinite otherness,⁶ whereby the most general principle, variously signified as the Being, the One or the Good, might be the source of which the indefinite Dyad is the external aspect, the infinite and productive procession of thought, and with which the definite produces all εἶδη and numbers in their order and multiplicity.⁷ It is probable that Plato intentionally left these relations obscure: not only does this doctrine find various forms of

³In this essay, I use 'principle' and 'cause' interchangeably, as in *Metaphysics* Aristotle typically employs both ἀρχή and αἰτία in a hendiadys, uniting them into the one thing that is the object of his inquiry.

⁴Gadamer shows that this doctrine is implicit in *Phaedo* where certain forms, e.g. 'soul' and 'life' are argued to be inseparable.

⁵See the hypothetical deductions of Plato's *Parmenides*.

⁶In what way Plato does this, see my discussion of *Sophist* below.

⁷Aristotle *Metaphysics* 987b19-988a8. The metaphorical term used by Aristotle at 988a1 to refer to Plato's Dyad (ἐκμαγεῖον) is the same as Plato's in his expression of this teaching in *Timaeus* 50c.

expression in his dialogues⁸, but also there is disagreement among his immediate followers about the meaning of this doctrine.⁹

The second part of *Sophist* begins with the recognition of the problem that the intelligible forms of things, though the supposed independent ground and source of the otherwise unintelligible world of things, themselves suffer the difficulties inherent in the theory of participation.¹⁰ This problem underlies the method of eidetic collection and division employed by the Eleatic stranger in the first part of *Sophist*.¹¹ In the portion of the dialogue that is considered here, Plato seeks to ground the Eleatic method on principles beyond the εἶδη through a consideration of the opinions of his predecessors who have considered the most fundamental principles. Plato must question the authority of the past wise men, committing a potential patricide against Parmenides, by which the meaning of being and non-being are put to the test.¹²

The logic of Plato's presentation of the Eleatic stranger's historical inquiry – which we shall see is no different from Aristotle's – takes shape as a presentation of past thinkers as understood through Plato's principles, the one and the dyad, and a movement between them that is motivated by the partiality of their explanatory power and that tends to the unity of their proper relation. The stranger cross-examines those who hold that being is more than one thing, say hot and cold, as though they were present.¹³ From the premise that being is two things, he presses them to admit that they would say that those two things are being and that, since being is one thing, the two things are one and so to contradict themselves. Plato, just as Aristotle, pushes the pluralistic physicists into the necessity of admitting some intelligible unity.

Hence the stranger proceeds to examine the being in its intelligible aspect alone, i.e. separate from all else and so one. First he supposes that being is one.¹⁴ Yet whoever admits that the one *is*, already proceeds beyond the one to two things, the one and being. In trying to think being as one, a multiplicity emerges;¹⁵ in trying to think being as identity,

⁸ Findlay (1978) locates it within the later (stocheiological) dialogues, *Philebus*, *Parmenides*, *Timaeus*, *Sophist* and *Politicus*, while Gadamer argues for its implicit ubiquity in all the dialogues.

⁹ Dillon (1996); Gadamer (1983); Findlay (1978).

¹⁰ 241a3-7. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations of Plato refer to *Sophist* and all citations of Aristotle refer to *Metaphysics*.

¹¹ The problem arrived at in the method of the Eleatic stranger, who follows Parmenides' assertion of the priority and identity of intelligible being is that in the pure relations of thinking, being can always be shown to derive non-being and so not-knowing (cf. the conclusion of Plato's *Parmenides*).

¹² 241d5-8.

¹³ 243d-e.

¹⁴ 244b.

¹⁵ 244b-d.

otherness emerges;¹⁶ in trying to think being as a unity, distinction from itself emerges.¹⁷ In each case, being is reduced to non-being and definiteness to indefiniteness.¹⁸ This dialectical argument returns to the problem with which we began. The relations of the ideas to each other need a solid foundation that is both beyond and source of them.¹⁹ It is implied, furthermore, from the procession of these arguments from determinate being to indeterminate non-being and vice-versa, that this principle must be able to hold such contraries together.

The stranger suggests another way of approaching being that is more explicitly historical and might provide an ‘easier passage’²⁰ to the unity of the two principles of the one and the dyad. The stranger puts his philosophical predecessors in a particular order and relation to each other in the mythological language of the *gigantomachia*. He collects all those – the giants - who would say that being is only that which can be sensed and is corporeal.²¹ On the other side, he collects those – the Olympians - who would say that the real source of being is an incorporeal, non-sensory, intellectual principle, and that all that is other than it must be a boundless flux of becoming lacking intrinsic being.²² He says that between these two sides a boundless battle eternally rages.²³ The particular manner in which thinkers are thus to be categorized is determined by their respective similarity and contrariety in respect to this debate. The wise men themselves are not important, but they are understood to have grasped different and partial principles, i.e. various conceptions of determinate intelligibility and unintelligible indeterminacy, that are to be taken as dialectical starting-points for attaining the truth that lies beyond them and unifies them.²⁴ Plato will show how the shortcomings that emerge from their narrow focus on one part of being leads to a conception of this unity.

As we shall see, it is in the unity of the principles that Plato’s account must differ from Aristotle’s. Both accounts progress from the opinions of others about the principles

¹⁶ 244d.

¹⁷ 244d-245c.

¹⁸ 245c and e.

¹⁹ At 245e Theaetetus points out that this problem has the same source: “For they [these difficulties] are linked together, the one sprung from the other, bringing greater and more grievous wandering in what we kept saying earlier”

²⁰ 245e-246a: “Moreover, we haven’t gone through all those who speak precisely about Being and Non-being; however, let this suffice. But we must turn our gaze to those who speak in a different way, so that we may know from every quarter that there’s no easier passage when we say what Being is than what Non-being is”.

²¹ 246a-b.

²² 246b-c.

²³ 246c: ἐν μέσῳ δὲ περὶ ταῦτα ἄπλετος ἀμφοτέρων μάχη τις, ᾧ Θεαίτητε, ἀεὶ συνέστηκεν.

²⁴ 246d: ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐ τοῦ των φροντίζομεν, ἀλλὰ τάληθες ζητοῦμεν.

to a knowledge of the unity of the principles. While Aristotle locates this unity in the object of knowledge itself, Plato locates this unity in the self-motion of the thinking soul.

The dialectical gigantomachy takes this direction thus. The stranger gets the giants to admit that a mortal animal has a soul.²⁵ This points to the unity of the dyadic principle with the other. Since the soul can admit incorporeal contraries, such as Justice, Wisdom and their opposites, they must admit there must be some incorporeal and intelligible principle in relation to the principle that they grasp.²⁶ The example that Plato uses, that of the soul admitting of contraries, alludes to his solution of the soul as the ground of being and unity of the One and Dyad. Being is suggested to be something having a power, either to make or receive other determinations.²⁷ The language of the interlocutors brings us further still to Plato's conclusion. The soul through its own power mediates principles that are other than each other. With this understanding of being, the Olympians – who grasp the principle of self-identity and have hitherto mistaken it for the whole of being – are brought into the inquiry. The question is posed to them, whether the newly found active power can be the principle of unity between the unchanging identity and the indeterminate flux.²⁸ If their self-identical principles are to be intelligible they must be known; but the soul's knowing, as just established, is an activity and so being known is a passivity.²⁹ An immutable intelligible world cannot be the determinate principle of reality, for being must have some motion by which the soul moves its intelligence into relation with determinacy.³⁰ Nor can we reduce this principle altogether to indeterminate motion, as this would do away with the stability of knowing to which the mind arrives in thinking identity and nature.³¹ The Whole must be a third thing consisting of both principles together.³²

In further seeking how contraries can be held together, the interlocutors of *Sophist* locate the unity of rest and motion within the soul.³³ Yet this can only be understood

²⁵ 246e.

²⁶ 247a-d.

²⁷ 247d-e: ὁ ποῖαν οὖν τινα κεκτημένον δύναμιν εἴτ' εἰς τὸ ποιεῖν ἕτερον ὅτιοῦν πεφυκὸς εἴτ' εἰς τὸ παθεῖν καίσιμκρότατον ὑπὸ τοῦ φαυλοτάτου, κἄν εἰμόνον εἰς ἅπαξ, πάντοῦτο ὄντως εἶναι: τίθεμαι γὰρ ὄρον ὀρίζειν τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν οὐκ ἄλλο τι πλὴν δύναμις.

²⁸ *Sophist* 248b: τὸ δὲ δὴ κοινωνεῖν, ὃ πάντων ἄριστοι, τί τοῦθ' ἡμᾶς ἐπ' ἀμφοῖν λέγειν φῶμεν; ἄρ' οὐτὸ νυνδὴ παρ' ἡμῶν ῥηθέν ... πάθημα ἢ ποίημα ἐκδυνάμεώς τινος ἀπὸ τῶν πρὸς ἄλληλα συνιόντων γιγνόμενον. τάχ' οὖν, ὦ Θεαίτητε, αὐτῶν τὴν πρὸς ταῦτα ἀπόκρισιν σὺ μὲν οὐ κατακούεις, ἐγὼ δὲ ἴσως διάσυνήθειαν.

²⁹ 248e -249a: Mind cannot be without life, neither of them can be but in a soul.

³⁰ 249b: συμβαίνει δ' οὖν, ὦ Θεαίτητε, ἀκινήτων τε ὄντων νοῦν μηδενὶ περὶ μηδενὸς εἶναι μηδαμοῦ.

³¹ 249b-c.

³² 249c-d.

³³ 250b: τρίτον ἄρα τι παρὰ ταῦτα τὸ ὄν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ τιθεῖς, ὡς ὑπ' ἐκείνου τὴν τε στάσιν καὶ τὴν κίνησιν περιεχομένην, συλλαβὸν καὶ ἀπιδὼν αὐτῶν πρὸς τὴν τῆς οὐσίας κοινωνίαν, οὕτως εἶναι προσ εἶπα ἀμφοτέρα.

through a consideration of being and non-being together.³⁴ This consideration leads to the notion that the soul – in its thinking and speaking³⁵ – sets out the form of a determinate structure of mixing between these principles through kinds and differentia and that the ability to distinguish the order of this structure belongs to the philosophical soul.³⁶ This kind of soul has the ability to distinguish the same and the other in the mixing of contraries.³⁷ Otherwise, the soul would not apprehend the one idea throughout the many as well as what sets the thing apart.³⁸ An investigation of this power leads to the conclusion that non-being can be apprehended as an otherness that produces each thing as other than being, without which all would be undifferentiated self-identity.³⁹ Here determinate being is unified with indeterminate non-being through the activity of the soul that in moving between them apprehends the sameness and otherness in the structure of reality.⁴⁰ Thus, through the unity of the principles in the being of the soul, not-being is made intelligible and being is made movable.⁴¹

The preceding has demonstrated both the dialectical character of Plato's inquiry into the unity of the principles of being and its outcome. Now, through an interpretation of the introductory books of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, I shall demonstrate that the character and intention of Aristotle's historical inquiry – literary genres aside – is formally the same as Plato's. Just as Plato in *Sophist*, Aristotle in *Metaphysics* represents the doctrines of past philosophers concerning the principles of being and in putting these views into dialectical relation to one another, arrives at his own. We shall see that the true difference between Plato and Aristotle's respective inquiries resides in their conception of the principles of being and the unity of those principles. Then, with this difference in mind, we shall see how Aristotle's dialectic gives access to knowledge in a way that Plato's dialectic cannot.

The introductory section of *Metaphysics* that I shall discuss may be summarized as follows.⁴² In 1.1-2 Aristotle presents the development of knowing as a teleological activity

³⁴ 250e-251a: τοῦτο μὲν τοίνυν ἐνταῦθα κείσθω διηπορημένον: ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἐξ ἴσου τότε ὄν καὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν ἀπορίας μετειλίφατον, νῦν ἐλπὶς ἢ δὴ καθάπερ ἂν αὐτῶν θάτερον εἶτε ἀμυδρότερον εἶτε σαφέστερον ἀναφαίνεται, καὶ θάτερον οὕτως ἀναφαίνεσθαι.

³⁵ 251aff.

³⁶ 253b-c.

³⁷ 253d.

³⁸ 254d.

³⁹ 256d-e..

⁴⁰ 256e.

⁴¹ 257b.

⁴² For convenience, I use Book '1', '2', and '3' for 'Alpha', 'Small Alpha' and 'Beta', respectively. I do not thereby mean to imply anything about the place of these books, though the course of my argument will imply that their particular order is rational.

with knowledge as its end and efficient cause. In 1.3-6 he asserts that this knowledge consists in knowing the four causes, material, formal, efficient and final. He proceeds to show how these causes are manifest in the teachings of those who have previously sought for knowledge of the highest principles. In chapter seven, Aristotle summarizes how these principles were imperfectly grasped by those thinkers. For the rest of the chapter and of Book 1 he shows what kind of difficulties follow from those imperfect grasps. Book 2 consists of a densely packed reflection of what knowledge is and of what must be the case for it to be known. Book 3 begins by returning to the difficulties that have proceeded from past conceptions of the causes and using them as a starting point for the rest of *Metaphysics*. First, I shall establish the similarity of Aristotle's historical inquiry to Plato's through a consideration of Aristotle's scattered statements about past thinkers in combination with a consideration of his practice in Books 1 and 3. With this similarity in mind, I shall interpret the opening two chapters of Book 1 and the whole of Book 2 in order to appreciate how Aristotle distinguishes his procedure from Plato's.

Although the ostensible intentions in the first and second surveys of history (1.3-6 and 1.7-9) differ in focus, there is no essential difference in procedure between the two surveys. The reason for this is that the two intentions are in fact inseparable. Aristotle begins his historical survey by saying that his intention is either to discover some new kind of cause that has been missed or to gain confidence in what we do know as causes.⁴³ This statement must be understood in light of Aristotle's actual practice and of a comprehensive interpretation of his statements concerning the relation between history and philosophy throughout the opening of *Metaphysics*.⁴⁴

It is clear in Aristotle's historical practice that he examines these partial conceptions in themselves and in conversation with each other in order to understand more clearly the object of knowledge in question. Since it would be unwieldy to show how both of these intentions are manifest or, at the very least, implicit in every one of Aristotle's statements of every philosopher, a few examples must suffice.

In the first historical survey, Aristotle's presentation of Plato's thought shows both that Plato did not acquire a clear conception of the causes and in what direction the difficulties point. He says that Plato adopted the Pythagorean notion of non-sensible substances as principles, as well as their empty explanation of how the sensible and non-sensible relate.⁴⁵ Plato supposed supra-sensible elements and forms to be the causes of all things.⁴⁶ Yet, having no explanation for how the sensible and non-sensible relate, he could not distinguish one sensible thing from the intellectual principle of the one.⁴⁷ He sought to

⁴³ 983b4-7.

⁴⁴ Taking this statement alone as the programmatic articulation of his historical method leads to an imbalanced view of Aristotle's method that can easily cause one to understand Aristotle's scattered statements as aberrations, clumsy or polemical, from his method.

⁴⁵ 987b12

⁴⁶ 987b20.

⁴⁷ 987b23.

explain the generation of the many sensible particulars from the intellectual principles by means of the abstract principles of a determinate One and an indeterminate Dyad.⁴⁸ Yet in trying to explain the relation of the intelligible (formal) and sensible (material) causes, he cannot explain how they relate, without taking recourse to another formal principle. The result is that Plato removes determinacy and unity from particular matter and indeterminacy and possibility from ideas. Thus Plato recognizes the formal and material principles, but only unclearly. If Plato were to grasp the causal role of the final and efficient cause, he would be able to know the true relation of the formal and material principles. Instead, Plato departs from concrete reality with only abstract conceptions of the formal cause and material cause, and with them tries to explain the full being of reality.

In the same way, Aristotle's causes underlie his investigation and criticism of the materialist physicists, whose errors follow from an inadequate attainment of knowledge of these causes. Aristotle argues that in trying to explain everything as though caused by one physical principle, knowledge of all four causes is obscured. In saying that the elements of things are one corporeal principle, they ignore that which is incorporeal in things,⁴⁹ namely the incorporeal causes: the formal cause,⁵⁰ the efficient cause,⁵¹ and the final cause.⁵² Nonetheless, their groping for an immaterial principle is evident from the fact that these thinkers tend to posit the more refined element, fire, as cause of combination and separation, as though it would be a less corporeal though not entirely incorporeal principle – for they would not be willing to admit an entirely incorporeal principle.⁵³

Furthermore, to conceive a part of the whole as the whole is to miss the nature of that very part. For when the material cause is understood as already containing the other causes, the material cause itself is obscured. Empedocles posits the four known kinds of physical bodies as being the only causes. However, this is to do away with any sort of substratum on which the qualitative manifestations of these elements might be replaced by one another and so be the foundation of change.⁵⁴ To be this foundation, however, is the very role of the material cause in substantial being.

Aristotle's historical judgments scattered throughout Book 1 imply these same principles. It is because the goal of knowing has always been the same that it makes sense to say that Anaxagoras' predecessors were speaking beside the point,⁵⁵ that the Italians

⁴⁸ 987b34-988a2.

⁴⁹ 988b25 τῶν δ'ἀσωμάτων οὐ, ὄντων καὶ ἀσωμάτων.

⁵⁰ 988b29 μηδὲ τὸ τί ἐστὶ.

⁵¹ 988b28 τὸ τῆς κινήσεως αἴτιον ἀναιροῦσιν.

⁵² I take 'σύγκρισις to be a vague conception of the final cause. Cf. 989a16: εἰ δ'ἔστι τὸ τῆ γενέσει ὕστερον τῆ φύσει πρότερον.

⁵³ 989a2.

⁵⁴ 989a20-31.

⁵⁵ 984b17.

spoke about it obscurely,⁵⁶ and that the Pythagoreans treated it too simply.⁵⁷ Past thinkers were groping towards knowledge of the four causes.⁵⁸ Thus the unclear conceptions of their aims that we have inherited constitute the beginning of our investigation.⁵⁹ In 1.10, having presented the history of philosophy of principles, Aristotle summarizes his historical approach more generally. The thinkers of the past have all been seeking the same principles.⁶⁰ Yet they have only understood them murkily.⁶¹ All the principles, in one sense, have been said but, in another sense, have not at all been said, for they are all contained in the thing itself, however unclearly understood.⁶² His analogy of the philosophers of old speaking as young children who lisp as they try to articulate their words implies a development in this understanding.⁶³

In Book 3 the problems which Aristotle identifies in his predecessors are more explicitly treated as dialectical starting-points for his metaphysical investigation proper. He introduces the book by saying that it is through studying all the knots of philosophy, i.e. the difficulties developed by incomplete conceptions of the object of knowing, that they may be seen as part of the whole in which the causes of the object can properly relate.⁶⁴ Aristotle does not very explicitly attribute the arguments he employs to one thinker or another in Book 3 because of 1) the fundamental connection between dialectical history and philosophy proper and 2) the general purpose of Book 3, namely to progress further from that dialectic with past thinkers to a closer grasp of the truth; nonetheless, those views have not been left behind. In his examination of the knot of whether the being or the one is substance, a question that manifestly arises from an idealist position, Aristotle tries to answer the question from the Empedoclean and materialist views, as well as what

⁵⁶ 987a11. I follow Ross' interpretation of the *hapax legomenon* 'μορυχώτερον'.

⁵⁷ 987a22.

⁵⁸ 988a23.

⁵⁹ 988b22 τὰς ἐνδεχομένας ἀπορίας.

⁶⁰ 993a11-14.

⁶¹ 993a14.

⁶² 993a14-5.

⁶³ 993a15-17.

⁶⁴ 995a1-b5. Aristotle's statement about the knots being in the things themselves (περὶ τοῦ πράγματος) might seem to fly in the face of my interpretation of Aristotle. If confusion in the soul is also confusion in the object, then the principle of actual being is posterior to the soul itself. Perhaps the reconciliatory view is to look far ahead in *Metaphysics* where the known and the knower become identical and, with knotted knowing being in the operation of the known, whose operation is its essence, then the object itself, since it is knowledge of itself, is in knots. This self-reflexivity is of course not entirely extrinsic to the opening books of *Metaphysics*. For it is the causes, by the knowledge of which a thing is truly known, that are the objects of knowing and whose true being resides in their unity with each other, i.e. in being. This confusion is the necessary Platonic starting point and means. Yet the meeting of these two approaches does not become apparent until later in *Metaphysics*, in the divine knowing through self-knowing.

could just as commonly be either the Pythagorean, the Eleatic or the Platonist view.⁶⁵ Through exposing the inadequacies of all these approaches the inquiry is pushed to its next stage.⁶⁶ The final difficulty of Book 3, whether substance is particular or universal, brings the difference between - and the inadequacy of - the theories of the materialist physicists and the abstract idealists to its greatest conceptual clarity.⁶⁷ The demand that the most fundamental being be both a universal and a particular, that it be both form and a matter, initiates and guides the metaphysical inquiry of Books 7 to 9 and is at last satisfied in the re-articulation of these principles, unified with the final and efficient causes, as the actuality and potentiality of substance. Actuality is the goal having drawn itself as potentiality into itself as form.

As we have seen, Aristotle assumes the unity and inherent teleology of this conception of substance in the historical presentation of *Metaphysics*. That Aristotle is conscious of this assumption is evident from the first two chapters of Book 1, wherein Aristotle applies his conception of substance to the process of knowing itself.⁶⁸ In 1.1 Aristotle teaches that knowing is the end and motive of thinking.⁶⁹ In 1.2 he explains that knowledge of a thing is knowledge of the principles or causes of things.⁷⁰

Assuming that the object of knowing is substantially and temporally prior to the knower allows for the following line of reasoning. Thinking is drawn towards knowing. To know is to know something. To know something is to know its principles in their relation to each other. Yet we do not begin by knowing the principles. Hence we take whatever is immediately at hand as the principles. What is immediately at hand is not the principles in their true relation to each other, but only a part – and an unclearly grasped part – of the whole.⁷¹ Thus the thing is only unclearly and partially known. Yet since we are drawn by nature to a full knowledge of the thing, we are driven to and can only proceed from an incomplete grasp to a more complete grasp; to ‘start over’, would only bring the thinker back to the immediate and unclear grasp. Taking incomplete conceptions together and seeing how they correct one another brings the thinker closer to a complete grasp. Only from the point of view of the complete grasp do we see all the causes in their proper relation to one another. Aristotle can arrive at this complete grasp and from there

⁶⁵ 1001a4ff.

⁶⁶ 1001b27: τούτων δ'εχομένη ἀπορία, ποτερον κτλ.

⁶⁷ 1003a6-18.

⁶⁸ Aristotle's account of the development of knowledge is more fully worked out in *De Anima*. For our purposes 1.1-2 contains a sufficient, though implicit, description of the process of knowing according to Aristotle's understanding of first principles.

⁶⁹ 980a22.

⁷⁰ 983a25.

⁷¹ This is because earlier forms of knowing are sensible, and the intelligible must be abstracted from the thing before it can be conceived of as distinct and seen within its place in the unity of causes. This is broadly the trajectory from physical to platonic and finally to Aristotelian philosophy.

look down on the theories of others and judge conformity of them to his own; for his is the completion they sought.

Now the difference between Plato and Aristotle's conceptions of the principles of being may reveal its consequences for their dialectical methods. Necessary for the possibility of a historical dialectic is its completion. Necessary for the possibility of a completion of knowledge is the assumption that the causes of knowing be definite.

Yet Plato is not able, on his own account of the principles of being, to be drawn by a complete view and reside in and look down from it. Plato makes the indeterminate a knowable principle through an 'othering' movement of the soul. It is an intelligible movement away from, though not residing in, itself; for the otherness of the indefinite is always resolved in the sameness of the definite. Hence it must continue its motion, without ever residing in a definite object. The thinking of the soul will collect together a view of the whole and make distinctions in it, moving thought from one conception to another. But the soul is not drawn by the limitations determined by the object of study, as those determinations are produced by the soul's indefinite activity. Plato cannot justifiably assume – however true it may be and however much he may assume it – that the giants, by clinging to corporeal and tangible things were merely articulating the indeterminate principle of reality and making it the whole. Plato cannot justifiably assert from their statements that what they meant to articulate and that what they erred from in such-and-such a way was this whole, since the whole cannot be finitely conceived. Any finite vantage point of historical judgment must be arbitrated by the soul and so, in its own right, be arbitrary.⁷² Without a unity of principles in the object itself, there is no proper end for thinking and so no final vantage point from which one could objectively discern the principles in the thoughts of others and attain hermeneutical certainty.⁷³ Because Plato recognizes an indeterminate principle in the constitution of being, the soul, as unity of all other principles, is the most actual being. Otherwise, the indefinite would draw the soul ever-onward into multiplicity and the definite would draw it into pure undifferentiated identity. Aristotle, on the other hand, finds the actuality of the unity of the principles in a pre-existing, definite activity of the thinking soul. For Plato, Philosophy can be only a striving towards wisdom but not wisdom itself.⁷⁴

⁷² The arbitrary character of this direction is apparent in the examples of the eidetic method of division and collection, the method of philosophy that is grounded by the second half of Plato's *Sophist*. Aristotle spells out the arbitrary nature of this method in *Parts of Animals* 1.2 and *Posterior Analytics* 2.5.

⁷³ "The interweaving of the highest genera in the *Sophist* and, even more, the dialectical exercise which the young Socrates is put through by the elder Parmenides lead only to the negative insight that it is not possible to define an isolated idea purely by itself, and that very interweaving of the ideas militates against the positive conception of a precise and unequivocal pyramid of ideas." (Gadamer 110)

⁷⁴ 993b20-4. Cf. Gadamer discerns and affirms this aspect of Plato's teaching: "For in spite of its indeterminacy, this Two is the principle of all differentiation and all differing, which is to say that it codetermines reality. The indirect tradition which informs us of the principles in Plato's doctrine is not evidence of some dogma which lies concealed behind Plato's written work and which could possibly undermine our understanding of Plato's dialectic. On the contrary, it articulates and confirms the limitedness of all human knowing and shows why the highest possibility of such knowing must be named not *sophia* but *philosophia*" (Gadamer 155).

Alternatively, if we suppose that the knowledge of the soul can attain a wisdom beyond intersubjectivity, it must have recourse to what is beyond human means. Hence Plato concludes the investigation of *Sophist* with the reflection that wisdom requires that the structure of the soul be an imitation of the thinking structure of the divine.⁷⁵ Since this knowledge is extrinsic to the process of knowing, human wisdom must be imitative or orthodox.⁷⁶ The problem with this orthodoxy is that it assigns truth to a world of determinacy and rest, while the compatibility of this truth to the world of indeterminacy and motion remains unclear. Parmenides' greatest aporia cannot be thus overcome.⁷⁷

Aristotle, conscious of the demands for meaningful and progressive human discourse, interrupts the dialectical course of Books 1 and 3 with some reflections on the nature of knowledge in Book 2. In Book 2, Aristotle both sets out the priority of the object of knowledge in knowing and argues for the necessity of the finite nature of this object. As the former point has already been considered, we may proceed to a consideration of the latter.⁷⁸

Aristotle's doctrine demands that none of the causes proceed indefinitely or are themselves indefinite. He argues for each cause that, if the cause is not determinate, it will not be intelligible.⁷⁹ Since a cause is that by which a thing has being and is known, if a

⁷⁵ Cf. the opening drama of the dialogue, in which the Eleatic stranger is given a position between the divine and the human. This can be taken in two ways: as a representation of the intermediate place of the philosophical soul between the divine world of forms and the human world of flux (cf. *Parmenides* 133b-134e) or as a representation of the intermediate place of the philosophical soul between the divine knowledge of the structure of the whole and the humans who can only 'muck around' in arguments (cf. *Sophist* 268a). Also, cf. Doull (1982) p.142: "The difference of ideas and sensibles being once assumed, what appeared to be a relation of the two dialectic could always show to be illusory, to be rather an endless otherness. Himself unsatisfied with that result, Plato supposes as well as divine thinking whose activity combines the undivided and divided principles, produces an ideal world and a sensible image of it".

⁷⁶ *Sophist* 268b-c: τὸ μὲν που σοφὸν ἀδύνατον, ἐπεὶ οὐκ εἰδὸτα αὐτὸν ἔθεμεν: μιμητὴς δ' ὢν τοῦ σοφοῦ δῆλον ὅτι παρωνύμιον αὐτοῦ τι λήψεται, καὶ σχεδὸν ἢ δὴ μεμάθηκα ὅτι τοῦτον δεῖ προσεῖπειν ἀληθῶς αὐτὸν ἐκεῖνον τὸν παντάπασι ὄντως σοφιστήν. Also, cf. the first two of the three citations that begin this paper. According to Plato, past philosophers were contented with mythological or poetic expressions of their thought and so taught us as though we were children. Aristotle inverts this judgment about previous thinkers, who, as he says, spoke as though they, not us, were children. For Plato, knowing is the assimilation of the thinker to greater thoughts; whether thoughts reside within the limits of our reality is not answered. For an interesting synthesis of the views of Plato and Aristotle in this regard, see Aquinas *Summa Theologica* 1.16.8.

⁷⁷ Plato *Parmenides* 133bff.

⁷⁸ Aristotle's reflections in 2.1 on the nature of knowledge agree with what we have already elaborated and develop it in directions that not be discussed in detail for our purposes. The image of the bat's eyes that cannot see the sunlight because of its cave-dwelling habits emphasizes the consequence of Aristotle's method that lack of knowledge rests in the habit or mode of the potential knower. The logic and force of "ἢ περὶ τῆς ἀληθείας θεωρία τῆ μὲν χαλεπὴ τῆ δὲ ῥαδία" (993a30) is the same as of "καὶ τρόπον μὲν τινα πᾶσαι πρότερον εἴρηται τρόπον δὲ τινα οὐδαμῶς" (993a12-3). Hence the proverbial door that cannot be missed (993b5) should be understood as expressing the collective nature of any successful attempt to grasp the whole. Aristotle's image of the fire causing heat through its own preeminent heat unites intelligibility with causality in a way that anticipates Aristotle's principle that knowing proceeds from what is more knowable immediately to what is in itself more knowable (cf. 1029b3-13).

⁷⁹ 994a3-20.

cause is not intelligible, it is not a cause.⁸⁰ Moreover, these limited causes are at work in a finite way in what is caused. The world of motion consists of definite things with definite causes.⁸¹ Here it is clear that this argument is directed against the Platonic teaching that would take the immediate sensible flux as given, though as unknowable in itself. For Plato, the intelligibility of the sensible and changing rely on the invisible and unchanging εἶδη as separate causes and sources of being. Aristotle is arguing against this indeterminacy in the changing flux of our experience and thereby abolishing the indeterminate. The causes are thus inseparable from the caused, and the intelligible from the moving. To do this, Aristotle distinguishes between two kinds of motion, excluding that which occurs in respect to time only and so is not motion proper, but an incidental conjunction of events.⁸² Proper change proceeds either from one thing into another, such as a boy into a man, or as from water into air. In both cases, a motion is delimited. There is an intrinsic end in the development of a boy into a man and it is in being a man.⁸³ There is an intrinsic limitation in the underlying substance of water by which it can change into air.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the change of water into air is from something into something; this implies the limitation of the formal cause.⁸⁵ When motion is not thought of as a conjunction of abstract events in time, its intelligibility is not contrary to its particularity. Rather, without the limitations of the formal, final, efficient and material causes, the particular changes would not exist.⁸⁶ What follows of 2.2 consists of a series of discrete consequences that follow from Plato's imprecise dichotomy,⁸⁷ and 2.3 argues that the abstract intelligible thinking of mathematics is not a sufficiently holistic method for the understanding of concrete nature.⁸⁸ The dialectical course of *Metaphysics*, which takes off from this point, cannot leave these insights behind.

I have argued that Aristotle's criticism and development of Platonism extends even to the question of the nature and possibility of philosophy itself. In drawing together divine and mortal thinking, Aristotle's philosophy opens the way towards a more self-

⁸⁰ 994a19-20. ὥστ' εἴπερ μηδένεστι πρῶτον, ὅλωσ ἀίτιονοῦδένεστιν.

⁸¹ This is the meaning of the "τὸ κάτω ... εἰς ἄπειρον" (994a20-1).

⁸² 994a24-5.

⁸³ 994a25-31.

⁸⁴ 994a31-b7.

⁸⁵ 994b5-7: ἡ γὰρ θατέρου φθορὰ θατέρου ἐστὶ γένεσις.

⁸⁶ Aristotle draws together the ideal and the material in actual natural processes, while Plato, understanding their relation unclearly, could draw them together only abstractly in the soul.

⁸⁷ With an end to action, there would be no principle of the Good (994b9-17). Without a limit to definition there is no knowledge or understanding (994b17-26). Without the limited form of change discussed, matter cannot be apprehended (994b26-7). That Aristotle adds that there is no infinite in number betokens the fact that he has been concerned with the non-numerical indefinite that is Plato's dyad.

⁸⁸ Especially 995a13ff.

subsistent mode of philosophizing. Whether Aristotle succeeds in this is a question that can be answered only by a detailed interpretation of the whole of his system. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Aristotle's engagement with the difficulties of dialectical philosophy rivals even that of his teacher.

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