

SESSION 3
COMPARISON OF COMMENTATORS ON *METAPHYSICS* Λ.2

Assignment

The following passage is divided into sections to facilitate discussion. Concerning each section we are to consider in what respects the commentaries of ps.-Alexander, Averroes, and Aquinas differ, and, insofar as they differ, determine which commentary sheds the most light. For each section we will ask for a volunteer to lead off discussion.

Aristotle's text 1069b26-32 (Jaeger OCT)

[[ἀπορήσειε δ' ἂν τις ἐκ ποίου μὴ ὄντος ἢ γένεσις· τριχῶς γὰρ τὸ μὴ ὄν.]]¹ εἰ δὴ τι ἔστι δυνάμει, ἀλλ' ὅμως οὐ τοῦ τυχόντος ἀλλ' ἕτερον ἐξ ἑτέρου· οὐδ' ἰκανὸν ὅτι ὁμοῦ πάντα χρήματα· διαφέρει γὰρ τῇ ὕλῃ, ἐπεὶ διὰ τί ἄπειρα ἐγένετο ἀλλ' οὐχ ἕν; ὁ γὰρ νοῦς εἷς, ὥστ' εἰ καὶ ἡ ὕλη μία, ἐκεῖνο ἐγένετο ἐνεργείᾳ ὃς ἡ ὕλη ἦν δυνάμει.

1 26 ἀπορήσειε . . . 28 μὴ ὄν huc non pertinere observat Al_p; cf. 18-20

2 καὶ Π Al_p;· om. A_b

3 ὃ Al_p Schwegler Bonitz: οὗ codd. Al_c

Translation

One might however raise the puzzle: from what sort of not-being is there coming-to-be? For that which is not is threefold. If, then, a thing is in potentiality, nevertheless it is not from any random thing but different things come to be from different things. Nor is the statement that 'all things were together' sufficient; for things differ in their matter, since why else did things without limit, and not one, come to be? For the Intellect is one, so that if matter were also one, that [of] which the matter was in potentiality would have come to be in actuality.

"One might however raise the puzzle: from what sort of not-being is there coming-to-be?"

Ps.-Alexander In a manner that is very confusing and baffling and neither put in order nor consequential, Aristotle brings forth the statements in this book with the same lack of clarity with which he carried on at the beginning. For, after saying above (1069b18-20) that the things that come to be not only come to be from what is but also from what is not, and after inserting many remarks in between, he places here the reason why he mentioned those things earlier, saying in effect: 'I did not mention there those things [merely] in passing but also out of necessity.'

"For that which is not is threefold."

Ps.-Alexander For one might raise the puzzle: since that which is not is spoken in three ways—in one way it is the false (just as that which is is the true), in another as that which is in no respect and in no way, and in another as that which is in potentiality(cf. 11.11,1067b25-30)—from which of these will there be coming-to-be?

Averroes Non-being is said in three senses; by the three senses, he means: absolute non-being, that is absolute nothingness which has neither real, nor conceptual existence; the second is the non-being which is in matter, that is the absence [i.e. privation] of form; the third is potential being; potential being is said to be non-being or being in actuality.

Aquinas . . . non-being is said of three things. First, it is said of what does not exist in any way; and from this kind of non-being nothing is generated, because in reality nothing comes from nothing. Second, it is said of privation, which is considered in a subject; and while something is generated from this kind of non-being, the generation is accidental, i.e., inasmuch as something

is generated from a subject to which some privation occurs. Third, it is said of matter itself, which, taken in itself, is not an actual being but a potential one.

[*Solution to the puzzle*]

Ps.-Alexander And having asked this in the manner of a puzzle, he answers by stating, ‘if then the thing is in potentiality . . .’ (1069b28)—that is, if there is something that is what is not in potentiality, there will be coming-to-be from it. This is stated elliptically, and I believe it is because he spoke clearly about this a little while before. We ought, then, as I think, to infer: what is not in actuality but what is in potentiality. Hence, the whole sentence is as follows: ‘if, then, a thing is what is not in actuality but is what is in potentiality, there will be coming-to-be from it’. Let us make what he is saying clear with an example: the water which is not air in actuality is air in potentiality.

Averroes Having posited these three senses, he proceeds to give a short account of the concept whereby the difficulty can be solved, namely potential being.

Aquinas And from this kind of non-being something is generated essentially; or in his words, if one kind of non-being is potentiality, then from such a principle, i.e., non-being, something is generated essentially.

“If, then, a thing is in potentiality, nevertheless it is not from any random thing but different things come to be from different things.”

Ps.-Alexander Nevertheless, it is not from any random thing that is what is not in actuality but is what is in potentiality, that anything comes to be, but a human comes from human seed and menstrual fluid, and an olive-tree from something else and a vine-plant from yet something else (cf. 1069b28-9).

Averroes [Aristotle means that] every one of the existents is generated from what is potentially this generated thing, i.e. from a potentiality which is proper to it, so that there are as many potentialities as species of generated existents. he says that only because he thinks that prime matter is one as substratum and multiple in dispositions. First of all, the dispositions which it possesses are for receiving the primary contraries, I mean the forms of the four elements; secondly, it contains the potentialities of the homoeomers by the intermediary of the forms of the four elements; these potentialities differ in it according to the difference in the mixture of the four elements, so that the forms of the generated things will differ, on account of that, according to the difference which is in it.

Aquinas For everything capable of being generated has a definite matter from which it comes to be, because there must be a proportion between form and matter. For even though first matter is in potentiality to all forms, it nevertheless receives them in a certain order. For first of all it is in potency to the forms of the elements, and through the intermediary of these, insofar as they are mixed in different proportions, it is in potency to different forms. Hence not everything can come to be directly from everything else unless perhaps by being resolved into first matter.

“Nor is the statement that ‘all things were together’ sufficient; for things differ in their matter . . .”

Ps.-Alexander And since, as we say, different things come to be from different things, Anaxagoras did not speak adequately when he said, ‘all things were together’, that is, there was matter from which all things came to be. Rather, he should have stated what sorts of things come to be from what sorts of matter. For things differ not only in respect of form but also in respect

of matter (cf. 1069b29-32). For example, bits of flesh and bones are matter for human beings, bronze for a statue, water for bronze, and another matter for other another thing.

Averroes . . . Anaxagoras cannot escape this difficulty in his theory of mixture, nor can the other ancient philosophers whose opinions on matter [Aristotle] mentions. The opinion of all of them implies that anything is generated from anything and that there are no proximate matters proper to each individual existent; while is generated from the non-white which is black but from any non-white whatever, for instance from the line or the point, because non-white is true of the line or the point.

Aquinas This view is opposed to that of Anaxagoras, who claimed that anything at all comes to be from anything else. Nor is his assumption that all things were together in the beginning sufficient to support this view. For things differ by reason of matter inasmuch as there are different matters for different things.

“ . . . since why else did things without limit, and not one, come to be? ”

Ps.-Alexander For if the proximate matters [of individual things] were not almost without limit (for nothing comes to be from formless matter except for only the simple things), everything would be one. For since the efficient cause (namely, the Intellect) is one, if the proximate matter for each thing had also (*kai*) been one, what has come to be would have been one (1069b31-2).

Averroes . . . the theory of Anaxagoras in particular is not satisfactory, for the multiplicity of the existents can only result from the multiplicity of the matter, or from the multiplicity of the agent. Otherwise, why should the existents be different and even infinite in difference, according to them, instead of one, since the agent according to them is one, namely the Intellect. He means that if the basic principle is one and the agent one, there must not be any multiplicity at all because multiplicity proceeds either from the multiplicity of matter or from the multiplicity of the agent, if it is possible that different forms have the same matter, or that there is there be a multiplicity proceeding from the multiplicity of the two together.

Aquinas For Anaxagoras claimed that there is one agent, Intellect; and therefore, if matter too were one, only one thing would necessarily come to be, namely, that to which matter is in potentiality. For where there is one agent and one matter there must be one effect, as has been stated in Book 10.

“For the Intellect is one, so that if matter were also one, that of which the matter was in potentiality would have come to be in actuality.”

Ps.-Alexander For ‘that of which (*hou*) the matter was in potentiality came to be in actuality’ (1069b32) means that which (*ho*) the matter was capable of becoming would have come to be one and not many. For instance, just as what is the seed which is an ear of corn in potentiality comes to be only an ear of corn from it, and it is not in addition a vine-plant or olive-tree as well, so also, if the matter were one, what has come to be would have been one, and not any random thing but what it was in potentiality.

Averroes . . . if matter were one, and the thing producing generation were one, and potentiality were one, then the thing would be one; for if the substratum is one, the potentiality in it one and the agent one, then there is no cause for the multiplicity at all.

Aquinas This argument holds good against Anaxagoras inasmuch as he claims that Intellect needs matter in order to produce some effect. And if he claims that the first principle of things is Intellect, which produces matter itself, the first principle of the diversity of things will proceed

from the order apprehended by the above-mentioned Intellect, which, inasmuch as it aims to produce different things, establishes different matters having an aptitude for a diversity of things.