

Metaphysics Λ 3

Generation, Synonymy, Thisness, Causal Constraints

The Character of Λ 3

- Ross (1924 ii, 354): ‘. . .Aristotle is jotting down notes for a treatise (or lecture), not writing a lecture in its finished form. . . Alexander remarks on the “confused and disordered” form of the book.’
- More fully, Ps.-Alexander says: ‘Aristotle brings forth the statements in this book in a jumbled and completely confounding manner, neither well-ordered nor consecutive, due to nothing other than the want of clarity with which he has proceeded from the outset’ (673, 34-36)
- Πάνυ τετραγαμένως καὶ φύρδην καὶ οὐ τεταγμένως οὐδ’ ἀκολουθῶς ἐπάγει τὰ ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ λεγόμενα, δι’ οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἢ δι’ ἣν ἀρχῆθεν ἐπετήδευσεν ἀσάφειαν.

The Structure of $\Lambda 3$

- 1069b35-107a4: Neither proximate matter nor form is generated
- 1070a4-9: Causal synonymy in generation
- 1070a9-13: Types of substance and 'some this' ($\tau\acute{o}\delta\epsilon\ \tau\iota$)
- 1070a13-20: Form and separation; Plato right about one thing
- 1070a21-26: Causal priority and simultaneity
- 1070a26-30: The possibility of separation where souls are concerned; Plato not right about the need for Platonic Forms

1069b35-107a4: Generation

- After these things, [let us show] that neither the matter nor the form comes to be—I mean the proximate ones. For in every case [of change, what] changes [is changed] by something and into something: the one by which [something is changed] is the primary mover, and [what is changed] is the matter, while that into which [it is changed] is the form. These carry on into infinity, if not only the bronze sphere comes to be spherical, but the spherical and the bronze [come to be] as well. It is necessary, then, that this comes to a halt.
- Μετὰ ταῦτα ὅτι οὐ γίγνεται οὔτε ἡ ὕλη οὔτε τὸ εἶδος, λέγω δὲ τὰ ἔσχατα. πᾶν γὰρ μεταβάλλει τὶ καὶ ὑπὸ τίνος καὶ εἰς τι· ὑφ' οὗ μὲν, τοῦ πρώτου κινουῦντος· ὁ δέ, ἡ ὕλη· εἰς ὃ δέ, τὸ εἶδος. εἰς ἄπειρον οὖν εἴσιν, εἰ μὴ μόνον ὁ χαλκὸς γίγνεται στρογγύλος ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ στρογγύλον ἢ ὁ χαλκός· ἀνάγκη δὴ στήναι.

Some First Notes

- ‘the proximate ones’ (τὰ ἔσχατα): There is a well attested notion of ‘proximate matter’, the precise meaning of which is, though, contested (*Met. Z* 8, 1033a29; cf. *Meteor.* 390a5). By contrast, the notion of ‘proximate form’ is harder
- Two questions about proximate matter:
 - First, ἔσχατος means, effectively, something like ‘farthest’ or ‘utmost’ or ‘at the extreme’. This, said of matter, might mean the matter closest to the compound (= bricks of a brick house) or furthest from the compound (= earth and water from which the bricks are made, or even the prime matter, if there is such a thing, beneath the earth and water). Here, unlike Ps-Alex., I am taking the phrase to mean *closest to the compound*, on the strength of the illustration.
 - Second, on the assumption that is correct, there is an uptown and a downtown gloss on ‘closest’ or ‘proximate’:
 - downtown: that matter which is immediately receptive of the form, with no further mixture needed, so, e.g., the bronze in a bronze sphere, as opposed to, say, the copper and tin which are mixed to make bronze.
 - uptown: that matter which is already parasitic for its identity conditions on the form whose matter it is, so, e.g., the body, which is only homonymously a body when it has cast of its soul (see *DA* ii 1, 412b10-413a3)
 - I will be assuming the downtown gloss, partly on the strength of *Met. Λ* 3,1070a20.

Some Second Notes

- The notion of 'the spherical' or 'the spherical thing' is at issue (τὸ στρογγύλον).
 - The might be taken as a substantive (so, e.g., 'the pale one' might refer to Alcibiades) or as picking out an attribute, say an intrinsic accident, 'the pale' or 'pallor' (so, e.g. as when we say that the pallor of Alcibiades when glancing at Socrates was on display for all to see—here we speak of 'Alcibiades' pallor', an intrinsic accident, or non-substance particular, and not Alcibiades).
 - Here I am taking 'the spherical' in the second sense, since 'the spherical thing' (τὸ στρογγύλον) and the 'bronze sphere' (χαλκὸς στρογγύλος) could and perhaps should be taken to be co-referential, and that would threaten the coherence of the argument.

Some Third Notes

- The phrase ‘the primary mover’ (τοῦ πρώτου κινουῦντος) seems pregnant, especially in the context of *Met. Λ*.
 - It means, in more elevated contexts, ‘the prime mover’.
 - Here, though, it means something more in the neighbourhood of ‘the primary mover’, the mover, that is, the mover that is immediately responsible for the change at hand, which is to say, then, the proximate efficient cause (cf. *Phys.* vii 2, 243a30, a14)
- Ross comments, charmingly but unfairly: ‘It is awkward that while ἔσχατον means “last, counting from the original state of things”, πρῶτον means “first, counting from the γιγνόμενον”, but Aristotle is indifferent to such inconsistencies.’

The Argument

- (1) Every change (including every instance of generation) involves three factors: what is changed (*scil.* the matter), what changes_T (*scil.* the primary cause), and that into which it changes (*scil.* the form).
- (2) When what is changed changes into something by the agency of what changes_T, a hylomorphic compound (e.g. a bronze sphere) results.
- (3) Unless it is the case that the hylomorphic compound alone is generated, then the matter and the form, too, are generated.
- (4) If either the matter or the form is generated in addition to the compound, then generation involves an infinite regress.
- (5) Generation does not (cannot) involve an infinite regress.
- (6) So, in generation, the matter and the form are not generated.
- (7) So, in generation, the hylomorphic compound alone is generated.

(4) The Regress in Question

- Premiss (4) holds: If either the matter or the form is generated in addition to the compound, then generation involves an infinite regress.
- Suppose the form is generated.
- Then, since every instance of generation involves three factors (matter, efficient cause, form) interacting so as to engender a new hylomorphic compound, if a form is generated, it too will be a hylomorphic compound, which is to say, a compound of form and matter.
- So, take, e.g. the generation of a bronze sphere: the sphere will comprise its form, sphericity, and its matter, bronze. Call these form_1 and matter_1 .
 - Now suppose form_1 is generated. Then form_1 will comprise its form and its matter, namely, then, form_2 and matter_2 .
 - Assuming—and this needs to be shown and not merely asserted—that form_1 is not identical with form_2 , then form_2 will also be generated as a hylomorphic compound, comprising form_3 and matter_3 .
 - Since each instance of generation generates a new compound, the process will carry on into infinity.
 - Assuming the same on the side of matter, then each new generation of matter will equally involve the generation of a compound, with the result that we have two parallel progressions to infinity.

So Understood

- So understood, the argument seeks to establish one version of the second of two theses, where the second is more restricted than the first:
 - Unrestricted: neither matter nor form ever comes to be: both are ungenerated and sempiternal
 - It is, on this approach, not in the nature of matter or form to suffer generation or destruction.
 - Assuming for a moment Platonism about mathematics, we would not like to say that all the numbers always were, except the number seven, which was generated on the most recent palindromic date, 02 02 2020.
 - Restricted₁: neither matter nor form comes to be at the moment a compound of matter and form comes to be.
 - Restricted₂: neither matter nor form comes to be in the manner in which a compound comes to be, by, for instance, undergoing a *process* of generation.
 - Evidently we should prefer one of the restricted theses. In any event, unless every instance of generation is perforce the generation of a compound, then to infer the stronger thesis from this argument threatens to beg the relevant question, since (2) already seems to presuppose this principle.

A Reason for Preferring Restricted₂

- Since what comes to be comes to be by something (ὑπό τινος) (for this I call the source of the coming to be) and from something (ἐκ τινος) (let this be the matter rather than the privation; for we have already distinguished in which way we are speaking), and something comes to be (this is either a sphere or a circle or whatever it should happen to be), just as <one does> not make the substratum, the bronze, nor does one make the sphere, except co-incidentally (εἰ μὴ κατὰ συμβεβηκός), because the bronze sphere is a sphere and one makes that (i.e. the bronze sphere). For to make some this (τόδε τι) is to make a this out of the general substratum. I mean that to make the bronze round is not to make the round or the sphere, but something else, like this form in something else. For if one makes (i.e., the form), then one makes it from something else, for this was laid down. For example, one makes a bronze sphere, but this in the way that one makes this, the sphere, out of that, the bronze. If then one also makes this <the form> itself, one will make it in the same way (*viz.* out of a substratum), and the comings to be will regress into infinity. It is clear then, that the form, or whatever one ought to call the shape in the perceptible thing, does not come to be, nor is there a coming to be of it, nor of the essence (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι). (*Met. Z 8, 1033a25-b7*)

Another Reason for Preferring Restricted₂

- It is necessary, then, that this [*scil.* the form, as the cause of being] is either sempiternal or destructible without [ever being in the process of being (?)] destroyed and came to be without [ever being in the process of (?)] coming to be. But it has been shown and made clear in other writings that no one makes or engenders the form, but rather a *this* (τόδε) is made, and it comes to be from these [*scil.* form and matter]. (*Met.* H 3, 1043b15-18; cf. *Met.* E 3, 1027a29, Z 8, 1033b5-6)
- ἀνάγκη δὴ ταύτην ἢ αἰδίων εἶναι ἢ φθαρτὴν ἄνευ τοῦ φθίρεισθαι καὶ γεγονέναι ἄνευ τοῦ γίγνεσθαι. δέδεικται δὲ καὶ δεδήλωται ἐν ἄλλοις ὅτι τὸ εἶδος οὐθεὶς ποιεῖ οὐδὲ γεννᾷ, ἀλλὰ ποιεῖται τόδε, γίγνεται δὲ τὸ ἐκ τούτων.

Helpful Parallels?

- Confusing in one way, since the passage may seem to contain three claims at variance with one another:
 - The form is generable co-incidentally (κατὰ συμβεβηκός) (cf. *Phys.* i 8, 192b1-2; *Met.* Z 9, 1034b11-19, 15, H 3, 1039b26-7, 4, 1043b15-16, 5, 1044b21-4, K 2, 1060a21-3).
 - The form is not generated when the compound is generated.
 - The form is not generable.
 - Suitably understood, though, we find a perfectly consistent triad:
 - The form is generable co-incidentally (κατὰ συμβεβηκός)
 - No form is generable in its own right (καθ' αὐτά)
 - So, when (if) the form is generated when the compound of which it is a form is generated, it is generated co-incidentally (κατὰ συμβεβηκός) and not in its own right (καθ' αὐτά).
- It would not follow, however, a form 'comes into being instantaneously; it supervenes in a moment on a change which has taken time.' (Ross (1924) vol. 2, 188).

Applications

- This allows Aristotle to avoid the looming infinite regress.
 - That threatens only on the assumption that every instance of generation involves the generation of a hylomorphic compound
- It equally permits him, however, to allow that, for instance, an individual soul is generated when the living being whose soul it is comes to be:
 - Phaedo's soul was not languishing in the soul shed waiting to be embodied; rather it came to be when Phaedo came to be
 - Still, it came to be only co-incidentally, as some this (τόδε τι), which is just what substance as from is said to be at *Met.* Λ 3, 1070a11.