

\* \* \* \* \*

D. Charles Scaltsas and M.L. Gill (edd.), *Unity, Identity and Explanation in Aristotle's Metaphysics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994. Pp. x + 381. \$55.00. ISBN 0-19-824067-8.

This volume contains revised versions of papers delivered at a conference on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* at Oriel College, Oxford, in 1989. The authors include some of the most distinguished scholars in this field. The five section headings give an indication of the range of topics discussed: I. The Identity of Composite Substance; II. The Unity of Composite Substance; III. The Potential and the Actual; IV. Matter and Form; V. Principles of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Under I are the following papers: "A Puzzle Concerning Matter and Form" by Kit Fine; "Aristotle on Identity" by William Charlton; "Individuals and Individuation in Aristotle" by Mary Louise Gill. Under II: "Matter and Form: Unity, Persistence, and Identity" by David Charles; "Substantial Holism" by Theodore

Scaltsas; "Parts, Compounds, and Substantial Unity" by Sally Haslanger. Under III: "Aristotle's Notion of Potentiality in *Metaphysics*  $\Theta$ " by Michael Frede; "The Activity of Being in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*" by Aryeh Kosman; "The Priority of Actuality in Aristotle" by Charlotte Witt; "Essences, Powers, and Generic Propositions" by Julius Moravcsik. Under IV: "Aristotle on the Relation Between a Thing and its Matter" by Frank A. Lewis; "The Essence of Human Being and the Individual Soul in *Metaphysics* Z and H" by Michael Woods; "The Definition of Generated Composites in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*" by Michael Ferejohn. Under V: "Aristotle's Conception of *Metaphysics* as a Science" by Robert Bolton.

As the editors note in the introduction, work in contemporary metaphysics has inspired intense concentration on the so-called central books of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, books 7-9 or ZH $\Theta$ . More specifically, recent debates about the unity and identity of composite individuals have led many both to bring some of the results of these debates to their interpretation of Aristotle and to ask whether or to what extent Aristotle himself can contribute to them. The papers in this volume record the ongoing efforts of some of the leading proponents of this approach. Indeed, the volume includes contributions by a number of authors of major monographs on the central books of the *Metaphysics*. Including the works of others not in this volume and limiting the list just to works in English, there are at least ten books on this subject in the last five years. Because of the intense focus of the conference and the great complexity of the problems discussed, this is not a book to be recommended to anyone who is not familiar with the terrain. Even the specialist will have to work slowly through the papers, text of the *Metaphysics* close at hand.

The minute concentration on a nexus of problems basically formulated by contemporary analytic philosophers is also the source of the book's weakness. Naturally, authors are free to choose their subjects. In the present, however, the choice is not uncontroversial or unproblematic. For it presumes that the central books can be isolated from the rest of that work and treated virtually as an independent treatise. The point here is not that there is more to the *Metaphysics* than is dealt with here. No doubt all of the authors would accept that mild claim. It is rather that if the *Metaphysics* has an overall unity of purpose, then treating the central books in isolation inevitably leads to distortions of the arguments in these books themselves. For one thing, if, as Aristotle suggests, it is the concern of the science of immovable substance to investigate being just insofar as it is being, then an account of movable substance without reference to the immovable does not seem feasible. What that would mean for the central books at least is that what is said there is dialectical or tentative or exploratory and not definitive. No scientific account of movable or sensible substances can be given apart from theological principles, as Aristotle understands these. For another, the equivocity of being with the immovable as the primary focus undermines the tendency to flatten out the treatment of the movable, as if the principles of the unity and identity of trees and mules and tables and "spontaneously generated" insects are all the same. There is a kind of reductionism in contemporary analytic metaphysics, fueled by the modern scientific

model, that is perhaps eminently defensible. But I doubt that it helps in understanding Aristotle's strangely variegated world.

Some of the papers are less inclined to this reductionist assumption than others. Some, like the papers of Kosman and Bolton, seem to me to be quite free of it. Others are in my view undone by it. It would be unfair and unhelpful to suggest in a sentence or two a refutation of the sophisticated and thoughtful claims of those with whom I disagree. There is much challenging material here for the serious scholar. It occurred to me to say in closing that these papers give eloquent testimony to the relevance of Aristotle's metaphysics today. And yet on reflection, these papers might also be reasonably taken to show that the more faithful one is to the actual text of the *Metaphysics* the clearer it is how divergent are the approaches of Aristotle and contemporary philosophers to the science of being.

Lloyd P. Gerson  
University of Toronto  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

gerson@epas.utoronto.ca  
416-926-1300  
fax: 416 593-1041