

Book Reviews

Michael V. Wedin. *Aristotle's Theory of Substance: The Categories and Metaphysics Zeta*. Oxford Aristotle Studies. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Pp. xiii + 482. Cloth, \$55.00.

Michael Wedin has written the equivalent for Aristotle of what biblical scholars would call a "harmony of the gospels." It is a wonderfully rich and argumentatively dense reconstruction of Aristotle's two most important treatises on substance, the *Categories* and *Metaphysics Zeta*, works that many of our most able Aristotle scholars have declared irreconcilable.

The first chapter, on "the plan" of the *Categories*, includes a sensible account of the role in that work of the "onymies," as Wedin calls homonymy, synonymy, and paronymy. The second chapter, which focuses on "nonsubstantial individuals" in the *Categories*, gives the most philosophically sophisticated reconstruction known to me of how Aristotle might have conceived *this white* in Socrates to be a nonrecurrent particular. Having myself contributed to the glut of recent scholarship on nonsubstantial individuals in the *Categories*, I have personal, as well as professional, reasons to praise the rigor and insight of this chapter.

In Chapter 3 Wedin tries to pin down the ontological commitment of Aristotle's *Categories*. Since, if there were no primary substances there would not be anything else, the fundamental ontological commitment of the *Categories* is a commitment to primary substances. Individual nonsubstances exist just in case there are primary substances in which they inhere. As for species and genera of substances and species and genera of the nonsubstantial individuals that inhere in them, Wedin finds Aristotle curiously indifferent to their existence.

Chapter 4, a transitional chapter, takes up a range of possible views on the relation between the *Categories* and *Metaphysics Zeta*. Incompatibilism is argued against, yet the arguments for compatibilism in recent commentaries are found to be insufficient. In the next chapter Wedin moves on to his own statement of, and justification for, compatibilism.

The key to Wedin's compatibilist interpretation is the distinction he draws between being a substance and being the "substance-of" something. *Zeta* can then be seen to be supplementing, rather than revising, let alone contradicting, the *Categories*, if *Zeta* can be understood to be about the *substance-of* the primary substances of the *Categories* (157–8).

Aristotle proposes in *Z3* three candidates for what the substance of, say, Socrates, is, namely, his matter, his form, and the compound of the two. Aristotle settles on form and discusses form as essence in *Z4* and *Z5*, which discussion Wedin takes up in his own

Chapter 6. Then in Chapter 7 Wedin takes on the enigmatic claim of Z6, "In the case of things that are primary and spoken of *per se*, it is clear that the thing and the essence of the thing are the same" (1032a4–6).

Wedin makes Chapter 8, which is primarily a treatment of Z10 and Z11, a discussion of Aristotle on "compositional plasticity," that is, on whether, say, the form of human being might be realized in something other than flesh and bones. "[O]ne could grant," Wedin writes,

that to be a human being is just to be a member of a determinate biological species and so to have a very specific material nature, and yet insist that the form of such creatures be realizable in quite different sorts of matter. Creatures so constituted would not be human beings but they would be entities with similar functional capacities and states . . . From the point of view of philosophy of mind, for example, what matters are the psychological capacities, functions, and states characteristic of persons. Just what these are is determined by a form—the form that happens to be realized in human matter. (340–41)

In Chapter 9 Wedin turns to Z13, which, as he acknowledges, has often been thought to be the most confounding chapter in *Zeta*. Wedin draws on Z16 to help resolve the *aporia* with which Z13 ends (roughly this: since no substance is composed of universals, none can be defined; yet it is chiefly substances that can be defined). Wedin finds Aristotle to be explaining in Z16 how the substance-of something can be complex in a way that makes definition possible, yet simple in a way that guarantees the needed unity. The trick is to insist that the parts of an animal exist only potentially in the animal and the parts of the animal's soul exist only potentially in the soul (392).

Wedin's harmony of the Aristotelian gospels culminates in a discussion of Z17. After a splendid treatment of that chapter and a triumphant announcement that the fundamental harmony of *Zeta* and the *Categories* has been demonstrated, Wedin asks: why should Aristotle appear, in *Zeta*, to be withdrawing primacy from the substances of the *Categories* and attaching it instead to their forms? His answer is that, whereas the primary substances of the *Categories* retain their ontological primacy, even in the later work, the primacy of their forms is now shown to have a kind of structural and explanatory primacy (452).

Both the magisterial scope of this fine book and its rich detail are worthy of the great treatises it examines. Since Wedin works out his own positions with explicit and detailed reference to some of the most careful recent scholarship on these works, his book will no doubt be subjected to intense scrutiny and thorough debate. It deserves nothing less.

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