

Aristotle *Metaphysics* Δ 6, 1016b17–21

Leonardo Tarán

CHAPTER 6 of *Metaphysics* Δ is devoted to ἓν.¹ It opens with the statement that “one” is used either in an *accidental* sense or *per se* (1015b16f), and then discusses the two: first the former (1015b17–36) and then the latter (1015b36–1016b17). One result of what is said in 1015b16–1016b17 is that “one” has many different meanings. It is therefore intelligible that in the next section (1016b17–1017a2) Aristotle deals with the essence of unity. What is of concern here is the opening lines of this section, 1016b17–21, but the controversial part is the text and interpretation of 1016b17f. It will be useful to transcribe four different versions of these lines:

- (I) τὸ δὲ ἐν εἶναι ἀρχὴ τινὶ ἐστὶν ἀριθμῶ εἶναι.
- (II) τὸ δὲ ἐν εἶναι ἀρχῆ τινὶ ἐστὶν ἀριθμοῦ εἶναι.
- (III) τὸ δὲ ἐν εἶναι ἀρχῆ τινὶ ἐστὶν ἀριθμοῦ εἶναι.
- (IV) τὸ δὲ ἐν εἶναι ἀρχῆ (τοῦ) τινὶ ἐστὶν ἀριθμῶ εἶναι.

(I) is the reading of E (*Codex Parisinus Graecus* 1853) and J (*Codex Vindobonensis phil. gr.* 100), which together constitute one of the two branches into which the primary manuscripts of the *Metaphysics* are divided; Jaeger calls it Π. (II) is the text offered by A^b (*Codex Laurentianus* 87.12), the other branch of the tradition. (III) is the text adopted by Christ and by Ross in their respective editions of the *Metaphysics*. They conflate the readings of the two manuscript traditions by substituting ἐνί for

¹ I shall refer to the following editions, translations, and commentaries by the names of their authors alone: I. BEKKER, *Aristotelis Opera* (Berlin 1831); A. SCHWEGLER, *Die Metaphysik des Aristoteles*, I–IV (Tübingen 1847–48); H. BONITZ, *Aristotelis Mephysica*, I–II (Bonn 1848–49), and *Aristoteles, Metaphysik*, ed. E. Wellmann (Berlin 1890); W. CHRIST, *Aristotelis Metaphysica*² (Leipzig 1895); W. D. ROSS, *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, I–II (Oxford 1924; rev. 1953), and tr., *The Works of Aristotle*, VIII: *Metaphysica*² (Oxford 1928); J. TRICOT, *Aristotle, La Métaphysique*², I–II (Paris 1953); W. JAEGER, *Aristotelis Metaphysica* (Oxford 1957); G. REALE, *Aristotele, Metafisica*², I–III (Milan 1993); C. KIRWAN, *Aristotle, Metaphysics. Books Γ, Δ and E*² (Oxford 1993).

ἐν in the first part of the sentence.² Finally, (IV) is Jaeger's text. He has adopted the version given by E and J but has inserted (τοῦ) after ἀρχή.³

Now (III), the text of Christ and Ross, is grammatically possible but yields a meaning that is impossible. Ross translates it as follows (in the second edition of his translation of the *Metaphysics*): "The *essence* of what is one is to be some kind of beginning of number." For Aristotle, however, "one" is not *an* ἀρχή of number but *the* ἀρχή of number. Thus to cite only two short passages, *Metaphysics* 1021a12f states, τὸ δ' ἐν τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ ἀρχὴ καὶ μέτρον, and similarly 1052b23f, διὸ τὸ ἐν ἀριθμοῦ ἀρχὴ ἢ ἀριθμός.⁴ The rejection of (III) implicitly shows that (II), *i.e.*, the text of A^b, also is impossible, for what was said against (III) applies also to (II) and, moreover, (II) has the (here) impossible reading τὸ δὲ ἐν εἶναι : τὸ δὲ ἐν εἶναι is necessary, as Aristotle is discussing the essence of "one." Also Alexander's paraphrase (*In Metaph.* p.368.15f Hayduck, τὸ ἐν εἶναι τὸ ἀρχὴ ἀριθμοῦ εἶναι ἔστιν) shows that he had access to a text with τὸ ἐν εἶναι, but the second part of the paraphrase cannot be right for reasons similar to those given against Christ and Ross above, and against Jaeger in what follows.⁵

As the ἐν εἶναι of E and J is right, it is reasonable to follow these manuscripts for the rest of the text, too. This is what Jaeger (=IV) has done, but unfortunately he thought it necessary to insert (τοῦ) after ἀρχή. This is not merely unnecessary but in

² Also Bekker, Schwegler, and Bonitz have all adopted a text that is a conflation of readings of A^b and E (J was not known to them), though a different one from that of Christ and Ross: τὸ δὲ ἐν εἶναι ἀρχὴ τινὶ ἔστιν ἀριθμοῦ εἶναι, which Bonitz translates, "Das Eins-sein ist Prinzip der Zahl für etwas sein." But apart from the fact that the constitution of the text is rather arbitrary, it yields no reasonable sense as "für etwas sein" by itself shows; observe also "Prinzip der Zahl" (*cf.* objections against Christ and Ross).

³ The text Jaeger adopted in his edition he had argued for in *Hermes* 52 (1917) 504=*Scripta Minora* (Rome 1960) I 236f. In my comments on Jaeger's text and interpretation I refer without distinction to both his edition and his earlier treatment.

⁴ *Cf.* also Aristotle's argument that one is not a number but the principle of number: *Metaphysics* 1087b33–1088a14 with my *Speusippus of Athens* (Leiden 1981) 35 with n.174, 36, 328. There is no need to discuss further the interpretations of Tricot, Reale, Kirwan, and others, because they have all adopted Ross' text.

⁵ Asclepius, *In Metaph.* p.316.4 Hayduck, gives the following citation or paraphrase: τὸ δὲ ἐν εἶναι ἀρχὴ τινὶ ἔστιν ἀριθμοῦ καὶ τοῦ εἶναι. This is even further removed from the transmitted text than Alexander's paraphrase and yields no reasonable meaning in the context of what Aristotle is saying.

fact gives the wrong sense for the following reasons: Jaeger's text would give τὸ ἐνὶ εἶναι ἔστιν ἀρχή (τοῦ) τινὶ ἀριθμῶ εἶναι, but (i) τὸ τινὶ ἀριθμῶ εἶναι is *not* (pace Jaeger) parallel to τὸ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι, (ii) the "essence of a *particular* number" is in itself questionable, (iii) the essence of one is *not* to be ἀρχή of the "*essence of number*," and (iv) εἶναι is wanted grammatically elsewhere (*i.e.*, *x is to be y*).

We are left then with (I), τὸ δὲ ἐνὶ εἶναι ἀρχή τινὶ ἔστιν ἀριθμῶ εἶναι, which is the correct text and which means: "The essence of one is to be principle (*i.e.*, beginning) for some number." This interpretation is supported by what follows (1016b18–21): τὸ γὰρ πρῶτον μέτρον ἀρχή, ᾧ γὰρ πρῶτῳ γνωρίζομεν, τοῦτο πρῶτον μέτρον ἑκάστου γένους· ἀρχή οὖν τοῦ γνωστοῦ περὶ ἑκάστον τὸ ἔν. οὐ ταῦτὸ δὲ ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς γένεσι τὸ ἔν. κτλ. And so the whole passage (1016b17–21) means: "The essence of one is to be principle (*i.e.*, beginning) for some number, for the first measure is the beginning; for that by which we first know it is the first measure in each class. Therefore, in each class the one is the beginning of what is known; but the one is not the same in all classes, *etc.*"

According to Aristotle, then, the primary meaning of "one" is to be a principle for some number, *i.e.*, for any number, because for him numbers are congeries of abstract monads and "one" is therefore the first measure of such numbers. From this primary meaning of "what to be one is" depend by analogy the meanings of the different "ones" in the classes other than number; and also from the primary meaning as expressed in 1016b17f ultimately depends Aristotle's doctrine that the one is *the* principle of number.⁶ The great importance of the point made in 1016b17f for understanding Aristotle's doctrine of "one" and the presentation in the two standard editions of the *Metaphysics* used today of texts of 1016b17f that cannot be right, as well as the failure of other modern editors to adopt the text of E and J, have prompted the writing of this paper.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
April, 1996

⁶ Cf. the parallel passage *Metaph.* I.1, esp. 1052b1–7, 15–27, and *n.b.* that Book I begins by referring back to the discussion at Δ 6: cf. 1052a15f with Ross' note on 1052a15.