CHAPTER 3

Redefined Inquiry into Movement and Rest

Introduction to Chapter 3

Part A of Ch. 3 (253a22–32) is very brief: Aristotle broadens the inquiry of Chs. 1–2 from whether movement is everlasting, now to ask generally, what kinds of beings there are, in terms of those possibly either sometimes or always in movement, and correspondingly at rest (253a24–30). He first foreshadows a solution to other problems (253a22–24, cf. a30–32), from an explanation why there are beings sometimes in movement and at other times at rest.

The second and third objections and their solutions in the previous chapter presupposed such beings (that is, ordinary natural beings, both lifeless and living), but it was unresolved exactly why they are sometimes in movement and at others not. Part B, taking up most of the present chapter (253a32–254b6), now shows these constitute the first of the three possible kinds of beings. In other words, before explaining why some beings are only intermittently in movement, Aristotle has first to establish that this is so, the main task of the present chapter. Thereafter he will confirm in Ch. 6 both the other two kinds, those everlastingly in movement and those everlastingly at rest, respectively an everlastingly mobile heavenly sphere and its everlasting unmoved mover; thereby Aristotle also offers a cosmological explanation of those with only intermittent movement: see especially 260a14–16, and cf. Lang (1998, pp. 211 and 253), and Waterlow (1982, pp. 223, 226), who points out that Aristotle’s aim is to explain variation in general, not just starting and ceasing to change.

Ch. 3, 253a22–24, a30–32: (A.1) Definition of the Subsequent Inquiry

The beginning of our investigation is just that which also addresses the difficulty previously discussed, why some beings are sometimes in movement and at other times at rest again. For either everything must be always at rest, or everything must be always in movement, or some things in movement and other things at rest; and in the latter case again, either the things in movement must be always in movement, and those at rest always at rest, or everything is of a kind naturally to undergo both movement and rest in a similar way, or there is again also a third possibility left. For it is possible that some beings are always motionless, others always in
movement, and yet others participate in both conditions. And the latter is just what we should say. For this encompasses the solution to all the difficulties involved, and is the goal we have for this project.

Introductory Note
This passage intertwines both (A.1) a specification of the overall goal of Ph. 8’s project (253a22–24 and a30–32), to solve certain problems, and (A.2) a statement of the reformulated guiding question that will solve them (a24–30), foreshadowing the solution to be defended (a30). The second topic will be discussed separately below, but the whole passage is presented here for convenience.

Analysis
In 253a22–24 and a30–32 Aristotle makes or implies three independent related points:

(A.1.1) that the project’s goal involves solving all outstanding problems (253a30–32);
(A.1.2) that the outstanding problems include (supplied):
  (A.1.2.1) why some beings are sometimes in movement and at other times at rest (252a23–24; cf. Ph. 8.2, 253a5–7);
  (A.1.2.2) how there can be everlasting movement (supplied: cf. Ph. 8.2, 252b35–253a1); and
  (A.1.2.3) how animals apparently move themselves (supplied: cf. Ph. 8.2, 253a20–21);
and (A.1.3), that the inquiry’s starting point (see Section A.2 below) is that which solves the first problem (i.e. A.1.2.1; 253a22–23).

Commentary
Aristotle refers to the first of these problems (A.1.2.1) explicitly at 253a23–24, and the second and third are those others left unsolved in Aristotle’s replies to the objections in Ch. 2. At a22–23 he states that the starting point of the inquiry will solve the first: that is, it will explain the causes of intermittent terrestrial movement. Next he introduces this new starting point, the analysis of all possible dispositions of movement and rest in the cosmos (a24–30), in order to establish which is the case, and he foreshadows his answer (a30): for all this see Section A.2 below.

Simplicius (1193.8–9, cf. 3–5) understands “our investigation” in the first line of Ch. 3 (253a22, τῆς σκέψεως, here A.1.3) to refer just to what was promised at the end of Ch. 2 (253a20–21), the explanation of apparent animal self-move-