CHAPTER 7

The Priority of Locomotion

Introduction to Chapter 7

The new start announced in Ch. 7 (Part A, 260a20–26) does not begin Bk 8’s inquiry anew; yet it introduces a different approach (μέθοδος: methodos, 261a30–31, cf. 251a7) to the topic raised in Ph. 8.3, 253a24–30, 254b1–6, and in 8.6 restated (259a22–29) and first answered, whether and what everlastingly moved and everlastingly unmoved things there are in addition to perishable things alternating between movement and rest. Ch. 6 argued for a positive answer to the question whether there are such things, invoking imprecisely a cosmological account of the everlasting movements, but the approach of the present chapter methodologically puts those conclusions in doubt, since it has not yet been established that any particular everlasting movement is physically possible, as the effect of an everlasting unmoved mover (260a21–22); answering this question involves specifying what kind of movement that might be, and then demonstrating that this movement (locomotion), or rather one species of it (rotation), is free of the restrictions which make all other movements incapable of everlasting continuity.

Ch. 7 accordingly first establishes that locomotion is prior to the other forms of movement (Part B, 260a26–261a26), and second that none of those could be everlasting (Part C, 261a27–b26). Then Chs. 8 and 9 respectively show there is a form of locomotion, rotation, that can be continuous, and that rotation is prior to all other forms of locomotion and other kinds of movement generally. That the primary movement in the cosmos is the everlasting diurnal rotation of the sphere of the fixed stars then leads to deduction of further characteristics of its unmoved mover in Ch. 10, implying the latter is not a subject of further physical, but only metaphysical, inquiry (cf. Ph. 8.1, 251a5–8 and Metaph. 12.6–10). Solmsen (1960, p. 235) compares Aristotle’s inquiry here with Plato at Laws 10.897d–e, where having argued that soul is the first mover of the cosmos, the Athenian asks what particular movement its divine intellect causes.

The term ‘locomotion’ is conventional in English, but φορά (phora, e.g., 260a28) means literally ‘transportation’ (< φέρω: pherō, ‘to carry’), corresponding with Aristotle’s assumption that what incites movement continues to act on what is moved while movement continues: consequently being carried is for him a paradigm of locomotion (only really breaking down in the case of an unmoved mover).
Ch. 7, 260a20–26: (A) A New Start, Definition of the Task

In any case, if we make in addition another start, the truth about this will be more evident. For we should investigate whether it is possible for any movement to be continuous or not, and if it is possible, what this movement is, and which is the first kind of movement. For it is clear, if indeed there must be movement always, and this kind is first and continuous, that what first incites movement incites that movement, which must be one and the same and continuous and first.

Analysis

Aristotle announces that a new start will establish the truth about everlastingly moved things (260a20–21), since (a) an investigation is needed to consider three things,

(i) whether it is possible for any movement to be continuous (i.e. everlasting);
(ii) if so, what this movement is; and
(iii) what the first kind of movement is (260a21–23),

since (a.i) clearly the first mover moves a movement that is one and the same, and continuous and first (260a23, 25–26; proven Ph. 8.6, 259a32–260a5), because (a.i.i) there must always be movement (260a23–24; proven Ph. 8.1–2); and (a.i.ii) the everlasting movement must be first and continuous (260a24; proven Ph. 8.6, 259a13–20).

Commentary

Simplicius (1264.24–28) says the first sentence (260a20–21) refers to the truth about both the first mover and moved body, and the result of the new start involves a new proof that both are everlasting (but cf. Commentary below on the first mover in Ch. 10, pp. 342–353). Zekl (p. 288 n. 111) and Ross (p. 709), following Simplicius (1264.30–32), observe that of the questions raised here, the first addressed is the last, (iii) what the first kind of movement is, then from 261a27–265a12 (i.e., to the end of Ch. 8) the former two, (i) whether any can be continuous, and (ii), if so, which (cf. also, less precisely, Philoponus 895.8–11). Alexander (fr. 719 Rashed) thus treats the proof that rotation is the only continuous movement (first mentioned in Ch. 8) as beginning from 261a31 in Ch. 7.

Aquinas (8.1087, cf. 1097) treats the text from this point to Ch. 9, 265b16 as all showing which kind of movement is first, given it must be continuous, which comes to the same thing, except that the last part of Ch. 7 only shows