The Middle Included

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CHAPTER 2

Potentiality

Logos in On Interpretation

We tried to show that “logos of being” means the “standard” of a being at the opening distinction between synonymy and homonymy in the Categories. Yet this does not mean much unless this supposed “standard” is shown to be inherent to the being at hand. How can we make sure that the “logos of being” is not an external imposition on our part? In this chapter we shall thus pursue this question by focusing on the next text in Aristotle’s corpus: On Interpretation. In section 1, we shall first develop the problem and return to Aristotle’s own examples from the previous chapter. This shall lead us, in section 2, to a discussion of his distinction between necessity and possibility or potentiality. From this, we shall conclude that having an inherent standard requires that the being somehow be at once actually and potentially. We close the chapter with the conclusion that the inherent character of logos as the standard of being can be demonstrated either in natural and animal motion, the topic of chapters 3 and 4, and in human action and speech, the topic of chapters 5 and 6. So the rest of this book is the development of this chapter’s conclusion.

1. The Inherence of Logos

“Being is said in many ways”—the leitmotif of Aristotle’s Metaphysics. Before we enter our discussion of On Interpretation, let us make a preliminary reflection on the relevance of the multivocity of being. And let us do this in the form of a reductio ad absurdum, that is, by thinking on what the univocity of being would entail. So what would the world look like, assuming that there are not different and irreducible ways of being, but only being as such? There would be nobody capable of building a house without necessarily building one in actuality, nobody capable of seeing who is not constantly seeing, no sensibles other than the ones actually sensed, no habits, no arts, no education, no memory, in extremis no coming to be. A realm of eternity, necessity, pure actuality, a realm with no shade, nor depth. In a way, this world is a dream.
world, at least a world we humans can logically conceive and aspire to, a world involving no second thoughts, no decision-making, no responsibility.

For Aristotle, however, such a world is not a dream world; there is such a realm of eternity and necessity: the supralunar realm. Our sublunar world, however, is the world of finitude, of limitation, of materiality, of potentialities with all that it entails: precisely a world of growth, decay, natural capacities, fulfilled and unexplored potentials, habits and arts. And yet, despite its sharp distinction from the serene supralunar realm, this world of finitude is not reducible to a world of random events: although being finite and lacking immediate actuality, the world of finitude exhibits forms and events that are neither absolutely necessary nor merely contingent. Much of Aristotle’s work instills a wonder, not only in front of the realm of eternity and transparency which we do not inhabit, but also in front of the humble, hesitant, and yet multifarious beings among which we belong and find ourselves. In other words, the claim that being is said in many ways precludes the collapse of the distinction between actuality and potentiality, and inspires a sense of curiosity in front of the internal logic of sublunar beings, their *logos*—if, indeed, there is such an *inherent* standard, which is the problematic of this chapter.

Trouble

We attempted to develop the philosophical meaning of *logos* in the *Categories*. There it appeared in the phrase “*logos* of being” and was employed to distinguish synonymy from homonymy. We discussed two different versions of the principle of non-contradiction; we developed two corresponding conceptions of “being” operative in homonymy and synonymy; we offered two approaches to Descartes’s wax example; thereby we concluded that *logos* in the *Categories* means “standard”. At the very end of chapter 1, however, we remarked that this conclusion can only be temporary because, being the exposition it is, the *Categories* does not supply us a justification for the fact that this standard is an *inherent* one as it must be. But how can one establish that the standard of being of something is *inherent* to it? How can one find warrant for the claim that the “*logos* of being” is truly *of that being*?

In distinguishing the wax from its homonymous aspects, for instance, we claimed that its “*logos* of being” is to be a substance produced by bees from flowers for the sake of building a honeycomb, that wax itself is not an indeterminate underlying being that is indifferent to its properties, and therefore that it cannot survive all imaginable modifications without giving up the very claim that we said it is. In a word, we claimed that wax was inherently determined and thus was destroyed when it was burnt for the sake of Descartes’s example. In the same line of thought, we treated our other examples
as if they themselves demanded their properties to harmonize with their *logos* of being. We spoke as if a bow itself had its own standard and that a top made a claim for its own being.

Even if we were right that these beings were neither free-floating aspects nor a pure underlying substance nor a conjunction of the two, we were speaking inadequately or only metaphorically in talking about *their* logos of being. For the standard of wax is set not by the wax itself, but precisely by bees, the bow’s standard by a bow-maker, a top’s by the toy-maker. To claim that the piece of wax is *concerned* about whether or not it is hot, white, liquid or solid, is not to attend to *its* logos of being, but precisely to fail to attune oneself to what it is to be *for the piece of wax*. The bees view the wax as material for building the honeycomb, but it is *precisely* them who “build the honeycomb by bringing drops from the flowers and especially from trees” (*HA* IX, 40, 623b27–28). Just like the bees use these drops as *wax* for building their combs, a human being may view the wax as a material for sealing envelopes or as an example in a meditation on the immortality of the soul. Similarly with the examples we imported from Heraclitus, and from Plato’s *Republic*. The top, the bow, and the lyre are *themselves* indifferent to the properties they can and cannot have if they are to be at all. Strictly speaking, it does not make sense to say that a lyre’s existence, production, and quality are an issue for the lyre itself. These are of concern not for the lyre itself, whatever that means, but for the craftsman, for his customers, for lyre-players, for the lyre-players’ audience, for the political community, and even ultimately for humanity as such. Thus, if *logos* is a standard, as we claimed, its inherent character remains metaphorical or figurative, and therefore in need of philosophical rigor.

So, isn’t all addressing ultimately homonymous? Aren’t beings palimpsests, or precisely wax tablets, receptive to all inscription and manipulation? Isn’t all “standard” externally imposed according to the interpretation, imagination, skill, and power of the viewer? If beings have no specific powers already inherent in them, aren’t they potentially anything? What a being can or cannot undergo or do while remaining the very being it is—isn’t this question always settled from without, that is, from the perspective of a human being, a bee, or a flower, and not from within the piece of wax? Aren’t all possibilities mere possibilities of a purely extendable, mutable, and flexible substance devoid of inherent determinacy? Aren’t we thus back to the Cartesian position according to which, on the one hand, there is a minimally determined substance with infinite plasticity, a *res extensa*, and on the other hand a purely active mind, the *res cogitans*? Aren’t we back to the exclusive options of pure potentiality, and a mind fully at work in pure actuality? What warrants for the inheritance of the “*logos* of being”? How are we to establish that there is
something like synonymy, and that logos is not yet one external imposition among others?

Return to Aristotle’s Example: A Matter of Life and Death

Something went wrong. As we read the opening of Aristotle’s Categories, we thought the “logos of being” meant “standard,” and had to be something ontologically determining enough to distinguish synonymy from homonymy. Yet our examples did not live up to this task. The Cartesian example of the piece of wax, the Heraclitean examples of the lyre and the bow, and the Platonic/Socratic example of the spinning top did not reveal any inherent standard of being, but rather perspectival “aspects,” not issuing from the wax, the top, or the lyre, but from anything that had the power to impose external determination of these “things.”

It is time to remember that none of these were Aristotle’s examples, and it is time to return to his own examples. Aristotle’s examples in the opening of the Categories were an ox and a human being. If we return to Aristotle’s examples, we may well find a way to fruitfully pursue our investigation of the meaning of logos as “standard” in the phrase “logos of being.” Is the logos of being of a human and an ox, namely “being an animal,” a contingent, accidental, and arbitrary aspect for them as the color or temperature of the piece of wax is for it?

Take Socrates for example. Socrates can become handsome or cultured without ceasing to be. He is also famous for being able to endure cold weather and to handle much wine (Plato, Symposium, 214A). In these respects, Socrates then resembles the Cartesian substance subtending and surviving changes. However, Socrates is also known to have not survived his drinking of the hemlock. What was Socrates such that, when he drinks the hemlock, he no longer underlies change as a res extensa, but passes away, and becomes a human being “only homonymously”? Plato’s Phaedo offers us an almost forensic account of Socrates’s death, a perfect example of both the incremental progression and the sudden breaking point of his demise:

He walked around and when he said that his legs had gotten heavy, he laid down on his back. For the man told him to do so. And with that, the one who had given him the potion laid hold of him and, after letting some time elapse, examined his feet and legs, and then gave his foot a hard pinch and asked whether he felt it; he said no; and after this, his thighs; and going upward in this way, he showed us that he was growing cold and stiff. And he touched himself and said that when it reached his heart, then he’d be gone. At that time
the chill was around his groin; and uncovering himself—since he had been covered—he said what was his last utterance: “Crito, he said, we owe a cock to Aesclepius. Pay it and don’t be careless.” “That,” said Crito, “will be done; but see if you have anything else to say.” He did not answer this question, but after a little while he moved [εκινέθη] and the man uncovered him and his eyes stood still [ἐστέσεν]. Seeing this, Crito closed his mouth and eyes. (117e–118a)

This passage first describes Socrates performing all sorts of motions and undergoing many changes. As the exclusive principle of non-contradiction would forbid, Socrates cannot be walking around and lying down at once, but he can lie down after walking while remaining the same. Further, as the inclusive version of the principle would allow, he can be at once cold and stiff with respect to his legs and yet still warm and flexible with respect to his upper body. Here he seems as determinable as Cartesian substance. None of these motions and changes really change him. After speaking to Crito, the latter asks him: Do you have anything else to say? Socrates does not respond. If he heard the question, did he have something to say and could not because he passively lost his ability to speak? Or did he actively choose to remain silent and thereby answer the question with the negative—very much like he actively refrained from fleeing prison despite Crito’s insistence in the Crito?

A similar ambiguity shows up in the subsequent phrase: “after a while he moved,” “εκινέθη.” This verb, κινεῖ in the aorist indicative passive, does not clarify whether Socrates is actively moving as a living being (the sense indicated in B.4. in the LSJ article for κινεῖ), being moved emotionally by something (B.2), or being moved passively as an inanimate object by the attendant (B.1.). In short, this ambiguous verb seems to mark a threshold by sharing both in Socrates’s previous deliberate acts and in the subsequent passivity of the corpse. Before εκινέθη, Socrates acts and moves, is called to move and rest, uncovers himself, accepts, refuses, or fails to move, and undergoes changes, is touched and addressed as a living being. After εκινέθη, the attendant covers him and Crito closes his eyes and mouth. Before, he was listened and questioned. After, he was recounted and mourned. In the middle, εκινέθη stands as a boundary stone, a herma.

The reason we are focusing on the text here is because this text provides us something Descartes’s meditations on the same subject, namely the immortality of the soul, passed over: life and therefore death. Despite the “proofs” of the immortality of the soul that occupy the previous discussion, the Platonic text shows that here a threshold has been crossed in Socrates’s case. After burning the wax, Descartes asked: “Does the wax still remain? I must
confess that it does; no one denies it; no one thinks otherwise” (VII, 29.11–18; AT IX, 24). In Socrates’s example, however, the mourners would clearly think otherwise, and deny that Socrates remains intact. Being alive or not for Socrates is fundamentally different from what being cold or not was for the piece of wax. And, as the text shows, being cold or being hot is not unrelated to being alive, it is a condition, a symptom, a manifestation of life and death. No longer being alive, Socrates is fundamentally violated in his “logos of being,” in what it is for him to be, so much so that we cannot really say that Socrates undergoes or underlies the process like the wax. For that is not the kind of underlying being Socrates is (GC I, 4, 319b6ff).

Our argument about the logos of being may then survive, provided we can uphold the fundamental difference between Socrates’s drinking of the hemlock and the burning of the wax. If so, “being alive” may well be an inherent determination of Socrates’s being. In that case, there may be an inherent standard, a logos of being of Socrates, and thus a fundamental difference between homonymy and synonymy. How are we to reformulate our question concerning the inherence of logos?

Return to Logos

Apparently, life is not an external determination or a simple aspect of Socrates, but is part of his logos of being. Cartesian substantia is pure possibility somehow facing a pure mind which is fully and actually at work beyond all interference from imagination and sensation. Socrates, however, is not pure possibility, since there is at least something inherently impossible for him: to exist without being alive. Furthermore, even supposing that the wax is determined externally under the influence of fire, under the manipulation of bees building hives, or under the experimentation of meditating human beings, still the question remains whether the fire itself, the bees, and this experimenter themselves are equally determined from without.

Now that we have left aside non-Aristotelian examples and turned to Aristotle’s own examples, we may have some hope of fruitfully pursuing the inherence of logos. To do so, we must now conceptualize a position between infinite possibility and pure actuality—not a stage indifferently squeezed between the two, but a phenomenon that stretches between them, includes them, holds them together. To take up Heraclitus’s fragment 51, quoted in chapter 1, we must “understand how that which is disrupted has the same logos as itself,” “a back-stretched harmony,” but this time, not exactly “as in the bow and the lyre,” but as in a human being and an ox.

The true mistake, committed here by us and by Descartes, was that we took up beings as individuals of one kind, namely “being,” and thereby
allowed ourselves to reflect on solely one example in order to draw conclud-
sions concerning all beings. And yet, for Aristotle, if being is said in many
ways, this is because not all beings are of one kind, their being does not take
the same form, they do not exhibit a similar logic. Other than kinds or forms
of being, there are ways of being. This is why there is something dramatic
in the story of the ugly duckling: ducks and swans are synonymous with
respect to being “animals” and even “birds.” Yet a baby swan is a duckling
“only homonymously.” And the story would lose the recognition (anagnôrsis)
and the reversal (peripeteia) that give it its dramatic power if the baby swan
were always what it was for her to be in full actuality, and also if she never
fully became what it was for her to be. The story is dramatic, riddle-like, and
ambiguous, precisely to the extent that it is possible to make a fundamentally
false assumption about the swan egg and to come to see this mistake. This
is enabled by the tension between familiarity and ambiguity. No “stuff” is
capable of such fundamental falsity—which is precisely why Descartes takes
“stuff” as his object in his search for certainty.

In short, we were mistaken in assuming that the examples taken for
“being” are neutral. The implications of some examples are incompatible with
those of others. Since there seems to be no way of settling the question of
the “logos of being” from without, it must be filtered through the plurality of
irreducible ways of being.

Return of Logos
What are these ways of being then? We have already seen one way of being
in chapter 1, that of an aspect: of just not being what one is not, of being
determined solely in terms of self-identity, contrariety, and exclusion. To this
seems to correspond in Aristotle the two pairs of contrary properties such as
the hot and the cold, the wet and the dry (GC II, 2, 329b7ff.). These four are
precisely defined according to the exclusive version of the principle of non-
contradiction as two pairs whose terms exclude one another absolutely. Just
as aspects, these properties are unitary and pure. They are precisely not things.
These four properties do differ, however, from aspects in that each aspect is
only at the expense of any other, whereas the hot, while excluding the cold,
is indifferent to the dry and the wet. The relations between these properties
are minimally more specific than those between free-floating, all-excluding
aspects. Thus, these contrary properties exhibit a first way of being that is
slightly but crucially distinct from that of aspects.

The distinction is important precisely because, unlike aspects, the hot,
while excluding the cold, in fact can combine with the dry or the wet. Thereby
a second way of being comes into play, beyond the aspect-like way of being: a
bodily way of being. It is by means of the four possible combinations of these two irreducible pairs of contraries (hot and cold, wet and dry) that Aristotle analyzes the “simple bodies” (GC II, 2, 330a25–29).

No wonder it is at this first level of inclusion, of holding together, of comprehension or combination that the term logos returns:

[These contraries] have attached themselves to the apparently simple bodies, fire, air, water and earth, according to a logos; for fire is hot and dry, air is hot and moist (as vapor is air), water is cold and wet, and earth is cold and dry, so that it is reasonable that the differences be distributed to primary bodies and the amount of these be according to a logos. (GC II, 2, 330b3–8)

A logos then is involved in this way of being which is primary at least in the context of perceptible beings (GC II, 5, 332a27–28). Whereas the way of being of the hot is simply not being cold, fire is according to a logos in that it necessarily holds together one term from both pairs of contraries—the hot and the dry. The simple bodies exhibit a logos of being, an inherent standard: they have a way of being by means of holding onto two aspects together without letting one yield to the other (otherwise, say, fire would turn back into the hot or the dry) and without letting one lay aside the other (otherwise there would be no fire, but the hot right next to or after the dry). Thus, logos reassumes the meaning of a being’s holding on to the spatiotemporal manifold of its aspects without letting one yield to the other: unlike Cartesian substantia, a fire can be extinguished, just as Socrates can die as much an ox.

Whereas at the level of mere aspects the hot merely excluded the cold and was indifferent to the wet and the dry without any common denominator, here fire excludes water but preserves its affinity to earth by means of the dry, and to air by means of the hot. Aspects here no longer exist in isolation from everything else, but serve as media or common denominators between simple bodies: instead of simply being a property abstracted from concrete beings, the hot is the middle term of two bodies, the articulation of fire (dry and hot) and air (wet and hot). Each of these simple bodies also has a place in the cosmos as distinct from the aspects that simply are away from their contrary: “Being four, the simple bodies make up two pairs belonging to two places: for fire and air are carried toward the limit [of the cosmos], while earth and water are so toward the center” (GC II, 3, 330b31–33; Cael. IV, 1, 308a14ff).

The transition from the two basic pairs of contraries to the four simple bodies is developed by more complex formations: just as the hot, while
excluding *the* cold, combined with *the* dry in fire according to a certain *logos*, now it is fire which is combined with air and earth in a certain *logos* in the form of composite bodies (*GC* II, 3, 331a2–4).

As for hardness, softness, toughness, brittleness and the rest of such qualities which belong to the parts that have Soul in them—heat and cold may very well produce these, but they certainly do not produce the *logos* in direct consequence of which one thing is flesh and another bone. (*GA* II, 1, 734b31–34)

This is the point we wish to close this section with: unlike our and Descartes’s assumption that being is an overarching kind with an underlying homogenous structure and superficial modifications, there is a capital asymmetry between the divisibility of composite beings into simple bodies and the possibility of their generation out of them.¹¹ There is something called generation and corruption in a strong sense. Unlike aspects that simply negate their contrary in all senses, and unlike contrary properties (*the* hot, *the* wet, etc.) which negate one another and remain indifferent to other pairs of contraries, composite bodies exhibit a third way of being that is irreducible to the previous two.¹² Their destruction is such a fundamental violation that it is not on a par with the changing of one of their aspects, just like Socrates’s body temperature was not. They are the beings that reveal the inherence of their *logos* of being, the standard of “what it is for them to be.”

2. Potentiality

We are still trying to justify that *logos* means inherent standard. A standard is necessarily distinct from a state of affairs for the latter to meet or not meet the former. There cannot be any standard in a strict monism, as there can be no *logos*.¹³ An *inherent* standard, further, is one that is not imposed on, or externally set before, a state of affairs. If *logos* is to be an inherent standard, then there must be a way of being that is not simply and purely an actuality; there must be a specific way of being in potentiality which is fundamentally different from mere flexibility, malleability, and extendibility. If there are beings that have an inherent standard, they must be neither determined in no way as the Cartesian *res cogitans* is, nor determinable in any way like *res extensa*.

Are there such beings? We saw above that even simple bodies are among them: fire *is* fire at work, but also it *may* be extinguished by water. A more explicit answer is found in *On Interpretation*:
It is clear from what has been said that the necessary is actual, such that if the eternal beings are prior, then actuality also is prior to potentiality; and some are actual without potentiality, such as the first beings, and some are with potentiality; these are prior with respect to nature, but posterior in time; and some are never in actuality, but potentiality only. (*On Int.* 13, 23a21–26)

If the task of proving the existence of an inherent standard necessitates a way in which this standard should be different from, but internally connected to, the state of affairs, then it is neither fully actual beings, nor only potential beings, but beings that are actually at work with some potentiality that will warrant for the inheritance of *logos* as standard.

**A Trivial Concept of Potentiality**

Actuality seems to be experientially the most available way of being of things in everyday life: we seem to feel the hot, we seem to see the fire, we seem to be actually surrounded by present, available, and ready things. Given its relatively obvious character, actuality or being-at-work (*energeia*) takes its explanatory force from its distinction from potentiality (*dynamis*), which is ontologically secondary, but also less obvious to our everyday stance. Thus when Aristotle engages in a discussion of actuality and potentiality, it is the latter that seems to him to be the real topic of debate. But potentiality is said in many ways:\(^{14}\)

Some potentialities are homonymous. For “possible” [*dynaton*] is not said simply; [it is said], on the one hand, due to being true as an actuality, for instance, “it is possible for someone to walk because one is walking,” and in general something is said to be possible because it is already in actuality; on the other hand, [“possible” is said] because it might be actualized, for instance “it is possible for someone to walk because one might walk.” (*On Int.* 13, 23b7–13)

Something already actually at work has a potentiality only in a trivial sense. While walking I may say a fortiori that I can walk; I may say that it is possible for a white door to be white. All these would be, not untrue, but trivially true, and in fact homonymously true. For these trivial statements use the word “can,” but efface its “*logos* of being,” that is, its distinction and relation to actuality. Let us call this meaning of potentiality as simply inferred from an actuality a “trivial potentiality.”\(^{15}\)
A Temporal Concept of Potentiality

Trivial potentiality indeed defers the question of potentiality. Looking at a man who has already recovered from a disease, one would hardly say “it is possible for him to recover.” For this would rather suggest that he has not recovered, that actually he is not healthy. While addressing a present actuality, it is trivial to infer the present possibility and more reasonable to infer a past possibility: “So, it was possible for him to recover after all!” Thus even everyday speech understands the ambiguous character of trivial potentiality and tends to correct it by expressing it in the past tense. Put in another way, a trivial potentiality is discovered retrospectively and analytically without any need for a connection or a logos: if the event is happening now, then by necessity it was possible.

However, this temporal conception of potentiality as a past state of affairs inferred from the present, a conception suggested by Aristotle’s own words, conceals a distinction which will be the object of his next step in the argument: the distinction between the modal concept of potentiality and the temporal concept. Hence, there is a sense of potentiality that is neither trivial nor temporal. It is this modal concept of potentiality that will enable us to construe logos as inherent standard.

If logos is an inherent standard, there must be a certain “distance” between the standard itself and that of which it is the standard. Here we are indeed using the word “distance” metaphorically, since the distinction we are after is not a spatial or positional one. In fact, temporal dimensions are more promising than spatial ones in understanding potentiality. And the very discussion of potentiality arises from Aristotle’s discussion of the principle of non-contradiction in terms of the dimensions of time in On Interpretation: he argues that positive and negative statements concerning the present and the past are necessarily either true or false. This indeed follows from the principle of non-contradiction: if it is impossible for an event to be and not be at the same time in the same respect, and if the truth and falsity of a statement concerning the event depends on the event itself (SE 1, 165a6–14), then by necessity the statement will either hold true or be false. So much for statements about present and past events.

The Modal Concept of Potentiality

Statements concerning particulars in the future, however, are not necessarily true or false according to Aristotle. In order to prove this, he embarks upon a reductio ad absurdum in On Interpretation, 9, where he hypothesizes that statements concerning particulars in the future are now necessarily true or false. This hypothetical position is also known as necessitarianism: if it were
true that contradictory statements concerning a particular future event necessarily excluded each other, until the event we would have to deny both its occurrence and its nonoccurrence, “but it cannot be said that neither is true, for instance that it will neither be nor not be. For, first, while the affirmation is false, the negation is not true; and while the negation is false, the affirmation happens to be not true” (On Int. 9, 18b17–20). So, according to necessitarianism, just as it is now either true or false that it rained yesterday, it is now either true or false that it will rain tomorrow. But then, is it now true that it will rain? No. Is it false? It is not false either. Both horns of the dilemma lead from the present denial of contradictory particular future events to the present assertion of contradictories. We are bound to affirm that it will rain (since it is not true that it will not rain) and that it will not rain (since it is not true that it will rain). This is the contradiction that allows Aristotle to infer the untenability of the necessitarian hypothesis and indeed a formal version of the law of the excluded middle:

If it is true to say that it is white and black, both must be; if both will be tomorrow, both will be tomorrow. If it will neither be nor not be tomorrow, there would be no contingency [to hopoter’ etukhen]; for instance, a sea-battle. For the sea-battle would have to neither happen nor not happen. (On Int. 9, 18b20–25; emphasis is ours)

Under the necessitarian assumption, one cannot affirm the event of a future sea-battle, but one cannot deny it either. Thus, since any middle or third option is excluded, one must respectively deny and affirm its future occurrence in the same respect, which is absurd.

One possible reply to Aristotle’s refutation of necessitarianism is an appeal to a view of events sub specie aeternitatis, an appeal to the standpoint of an eternal spectator. All events are necessary from the point of view of a spectator situated in eternity; indeed, pretty much as the past is irrevocable for us, it is neither true nor false that a sea-battle will happen tomorrow, but simply it is neither true nor false yet, that is, it is true or false in the eyes of a being not confined to temporal distinctions such as past, present, and future. To that being, the sea-battle tomorrow is at least as unalterable, irreversible, and actually accomplished as the sea-battle of yesterday is for us now. Thus necessitarianism, the denial of all possibility and potentiality, may be saved by assuming the point of view of a spectator the day after tomorrow—a point of view of which we never had any firsthand experience.

But besides the problems involved in positing and justifying the point of view of such an eternal spectator, this attempt to save necessitarianism
defers the problem: if one now admits that one does not know whether or not a sea-battle will happen tomorrow, how can one now know whether or not the eternal spectator will be right tomorrow? Instead of asking “Will the sea-battle happen tomorrow?”, necessitarianism simply raises a new question: “Will the eternal spectator be right tomorrow?” Then one might supply yet another omniscient spectator to warrant for the other, and so on. As long as we are confined to the options of mere being and mere nonbeing, to the options of necessary affirmation and negation, to a formal version of the principle of the excluded middle, the denied affirmation will contradict the denied negation, and we will hit upon a contradiction.

As a result, necessitarianism seems less to solve the problem of future contingencies than to defer it. Note further that the contingency of particular future events immediately contaminates the apparent necessity of the past and present state of affairs. For, applied to the past and the present, the very same question takes the following form: “Could a sea-battle have not happened yesterday?” or “Could a sea-battle have not happened today?” Thus, contingency ends up affecting all dimensions of time. Although it appears most clearly in relation to the future, contingency is not a dimension of time. The fact that a sea-battle happened, is happening, or will happen is strictly distinct from the possibility that it may not have happened, may not be happening, or may not happen. In other words, Aristotle’s argument is not intended to clarify a feature of the future as distinct from the past and present. The argument is rather intended to clarify contingency, which as a modality may apply to all three dimensions of time.

It is not necessary that all affirmation and negation of contraries be either true or false; for, the case for those that have the potentiality of being and of not being is not the same as for those that are and are not. (On Int. 9, 19b1–4)

As distinct both from trivial potentiality inferred retrospectively from a present actuality, and from a potentiality which is inferred retrospectively from an actuality seen sub specie aeternitatis, potentiality presents a modal character. If logos is an inherent standard, it must show itself neither in actual being as such, nor in being at a certain time, but in actually being in a certain way. In what way?

Motion
“Then we do not destroy the [principle] that everything either is or is not . . . but one can say these according to potentiality or according to actuality”
(Ph. I, 8, 191b27–29). The beings that exhibit the inherence of logos will then be understandable not in terms of the option of being and nonbeing, but in terms of both being and having a standard. Their actuality will be exactly the actuality of a particular potentiality. In a word, these beings will move.

There is, on the one hand, that which is actual only, and that which is in potential and actual . . . A distinction having been made with respect to each kind between the actuality and the potentiality, motion is the actuality of that which is potentially just as such. (Ph. III, 1, 200b26–28; 201a10–12, 28–30)

Moving beings will exhibit logos as the very articulation of their actuality with their potentiality. Unlike a res extensa, they will be in actuality; but, unlike a res cogitans, their potentiality will be neither trivial nor temporal. They will exhibit their potentiality modally, that is, as potentiality.

Motion then may attest and exhibit the inherence of logos. What kind of motion can do so? In other words, aside from its trivial and temporal versions, what is a potentiality, and what is the specific kind of potentiality whose actuality exhibits the inherence of logos? According to Aristotle’s compact definition, a potentiality is “the source of change in another or [in itself] as another” (Metaph. IX, 1, 1046a11; V, 12). Let us think about the first part—namely potentiality being the source of change in another thing. To use Aristotle’s example, the potentiality of building a house is a source of change in another, in the material: bricks, stones, and so on. Similarly, we already saw how bees had a potentiality for preparing wax—they had a source of change in the “drops from the flowers and especially from the trees” (HA IX, 40, 623b28). But, as we have also seen, being used for building honeycombs is not the inherent standard of being of wax, it is a function externally imposed on a material by bees, just as bricks and stones have the potential of being a house from the viewpoint and initiative of the builder. Thus, a potentiality as a source of change in another cannot help us find anything like an inherent standard.

What about the second half of the definition of potentiality? What about potentiality as a source of change not in another, but in itself as another? Here the mover and the moved are no longer separate as in the case of the builder and the house, or bees and wax. For now they happen to be the same thing. The classical example of this kind of potentiality is the case of the physician who heals himself. He is the source of change as having the art of medicine, and he also happens to be the one who is being cured. Sure enough, this kind of potentiality seems inherent to be being that is undergoing the change,
unlike the piece of wax which was turned into building material by bees or used for a thought experiment by Descartes. And yet, here it is only by coincidence that actuality and potentiality, “fact” and “standard,” are in the same being. In other words, it is not as a patient that the person heals himself, but only as happening to have acquired the art of medicine. There is no inherent connection between this person’s being sick and his medical intervention. Thus, a potentiality as source of change in the changing being itself as another cannot help us either in finding an inherent standard. For, if the inherence of logos is to show itself, it can only be in a potentiality as a source of change in the changing being itself as itself, and not as another, and in a motion as the actuality of this kind of potentiality as such.

Is there such a potentiality? Is there such a source of change in the thing itself as itself? There is a third option:

By “potentiality” I mean not only that which we have defined as “a source of change in another or [in itself] as another,” but all source of motion or rest. Nature too is in the same genus as potentiality, for it is a source of motion, but not in another, but in itself as itself. (Metaph. IX, 8, 1049b5–10)

It is here that actuality and potentiality, “standard” and “fact,” logos and being, finally manifest themselves in one and the same being in a non-accidental way. Here the moving being, being the source of change in itself, will precisely exhibit the inherence of its standard of being. That it has an inherent standard will be apparent by its having an inherent source of motion. It is not the wax that we must focus on for finding the source of the process, for finding the logos of being, but bees. By preparing wax for honeycombs and by building them, it is not the wax, but the bees that exhibit their way of being, what it is for them to be, their “logos of being” as inherent standard. So the logos of being shall exhibit its inherent, non-external and non-coincidental, character in potentialities as sources of motion or change in the moving or changing being itself as itself.

What is this source of change that lies within the changing being as itself? Aristotle already said it. Nature is exactly such a source: “Nature is a source and cause of moving and resting in that which it is primarily by itself and not coincidentally” (Ph. II, 1, 192b21–23). We now know what this latter specification means: a man may happen to be a doctor and heal himself, but the source we are searching does not happen to be inherent, but is inherent. We are looking for a healing that does take place not because the patient happens to have learned the medical art and to operate on himself. Logos will exhibit
its inherence not only by any moving being, but by natural moving beings, because only the latter contain within themselves the source of their motion, and not coincidentally. This is what we mean by saying that the living body heals itself, and not as a physician heals his patient—regardless of whether the patient happens to be himself or not. Further, it is because healing is a natural process exhibiting the logos of the being involved, that Socrates’s drinking of the hemlock is a violation of his logos of being. Thus, if we are seeking concrete manifestations of logos as inherent standard, we must look at natural motions. So this is what we shall do in chapters 3 and 4.

Action
And yet, Socrates does not simply die after drinking the hemlock. His death is not just a motion or a change, a natural occurrence. The debate about immortality is not just strategic ethical consolation as for the young Pythagoreans around him. As he himself emphasizes in the Phaedo (98C–D), his death at the end of that dialogue is the result of a very conscious and sincere decision, whose story is told in the Apology, and of a resoluteness, attested in the Crito.

Similarly, On Interpretation does not simply distinguish the modal concept of potentiality from the trivial and temporal ones. It also draws a crucial distinction within the modal concept of potentiality itself. Potentiality is not only at the basis of Aristotle’s concept of motion, but also of action. Hence, if rhetoric is “concerned with things about which we deliberate,” and if “no one deliberates about things which cannot become, be, or hold otherwise,” and if, as we saw, all dimensions of time are in a way subject to contingency, and therefore some kind of deliberation, then rhetoric is used with respect to all dimensions of time (Rh. I, 2, 1357a). In fact, the kinds of rhetoric map onto the three dimensions of time: “a member of the assembly judges about things to come, the dicast about things past, and the spectator about the ability [of the speaker]; so that necessarily rhetorical logoi will be three in kind: deliberative, forensic and epideictic” (Rh. I, 3, 1358b). Therefore Aristotle’s Rhetoric develops the modal concept of potentiality into all three temporal dimensions.

Our reference to Socrates and rhetoric here is not incidental. For Aristotle himself supplies his reductio ad absurdum argument against necessitarianism with such empirical remarks: if necessitarianism were true, “it would not be necessary either to deliberate [bouleuesthai] or to take pains [pragmateuesthai] by saying that ‘if we will do so and so, then this will be; but if we will not do it, it will not be’” (On Int. 9, 18b31–33). Here Aristotle attacks necessitarianism first by stating that contingency exists by necessity, and secondly by pointing to the empirical existence of “deliberation” and “taking pains”: “We see that a source of that which will be depends also on deliberating and on
some acting \([\text{praxai ti}] \ldots\)" (19a7–9). Aristotle here substitutes the earlier \(\text{pragmateuesthai}\) with \(\text{praxai}\). Although the two are etymologically related, the meanings of \(\text{pragmateuesthai}\) are roughly “to busy oneself,” “to be engaged in business,” “to take in hand,” “to elaborate,” while \(\text{praxai}\) is the aorist infinitive of the broader verb \(\text{prassein}\): to pass over, to accomplish, to effect an object, to make, to have to do, be busy with, to manage state affairs, take part in the government, to transact, to practice. In a word, Aristotle seems to have broadened the scope of what he takes to be a “source of that which will be” so as to include not only natural processes, but also personal business and interpersonal undertakings.\(^{21}\)

True, acts, decisions, and events can always be interpreted sub specie aeternitatis, from the viewpoint of an eternal spectator. Perhaps this was what early ancient Greeks meant by \(\text{anagkê}\) and what we call “fate” or “destiny.” In light of the eternal spectator’s perspective, this interpretation must declare illusory all human processes of projection, anticipation, deliberation, hesitation, and trial and error with regard to things that, “supposedly,” could have been, could be, and can be otherwise than they are. Humans are factually able to degrade their powers as finite and illusory in light of an eternal spectator of which they have no firsthand experience. Yet, in doing this, humans must also be overrating their powers in claiming to know what an eternal spectator knows or would know. If a person claims his ignorance about the event of a sea-battle tomorrow, he must a fortiori claim his ignorance about the existence of an eternal spectator who is right about all future occurrences. In arguing against necessitarianism, Aristotle thus seems to side with Socrates who, in the \text{Apology}, claims to have a wisdom that is on a par neither with any human opinion nor with divine wisdom. Indeed, humans are able to always imagine the future as that which will have happened anyway, or as that about which what is claimed will turn out to be either true or false. And yet this interpretation presupposes what the “source of that which will be,” instead of explaining it. It conceals the distinction between the actual and the possible—whether in the future, past or present. In the introduction of chapter 4, we shall touch upon the human ability to articulate a world where all human freedom, deliberation, decision, and responsibility are deferred; in section 3 of chapter 6, we shall offer an explanation of how humans are even capable of construing such an interpretation of the world.

So far as this chapter of the book is concerned, potentiality is a necessary concept for understanding \text{logos} as inherent standard because standard and fact are neither identical (as assumed in the trivial concept of potentiality) nor simply temporally successive (as assumed by the temporal concept of potentiality in necessitarianism). Potentiality grounds human action and deliberation for
the very same reasons. Socrates’s death is not a simple change. It is an action. It is a performance.

It is curious that potentiality grounds both logos as inherent standard, and action. Is this a coincidence?

We see that a source of that which will be depends also on deliberating and on some acting, and that to be possible and not to be possible are in those that are not always actually at work, which do admit both being and not being, becoming and not becoming. (On Int. 9, 19a7–11)

Aristotle clearly states his previous point about potentiality:

On the one hand, both [contradictories] admit of happening; on the other hand, whenever one of them is, then the other will not be true. For at the same time it has the potentiality of being and not-being. But if it necessarily is or is not, then both will not be possible. (On Int. 13, 22b18–23)

For action, what is needed is the simultaneous, inclusive, or comprehensive availability of both contraries, a relation that holds on to contraries without letting one be reduced or indifferent to the other:

It also appears that not all that has the potentiality of being or walking have the contrary potentiality, but there are some for which this [i.e., not having both potentialities] is not true: first, on the one hand, this applies to those that are possible not with respect to logos, for instance fire has the potentiality of heating, a potentiality without logos; but, then, the potentialities with logos are potentialities of many and of opposites, whereas the ones without logos are not all like this; as we said, fire does not have the potentiality of heating and of not heating; but those that are always actual do not have this either. However some potentialities without logos have the opposite possibilities at the same time. But this is said for the sake of the following: that, even when they are said in accordance with the same meaning [kata to auto eidos], not all potentialities involve opposites. (On Int. 13, 22b36–23a6)

Potentialities with logos are open to opposite outcomes. However, there is something intriguing about Aristotle’s distinctions here: although all
potentialities with *logos* involve opposites, not all potentialities involving opposites are with *logos*. And this is why the two distinctions do not overlap: Aristotle explicitly leaves room for potentialities that, although without *logos*, do involve opposites. In other words, although he does divide beings into those that admit opposite potentialities and those that do not, this divide does not map onto the one between “rational” and “irrational” beings. He does not divide the world into spontaneously acting free rational beings and irrational beings bound up by necessity. Here, in *On Interpretation*, Aristotle simply mentions the existence of this grey area without giving any example.

This grey area also appears in an even more covert way in the famous discussion of potentiality in the *Metaphysics*: “All [potentialities] with *logos* involve opposites, but those without *logos* involve one [of the opposites]” (*Metaph.* IX, 2, 1046b5–6). This quotation and its context consistently generalize the fact that potentialities with *logos* involve opposites by the adjective “all” (*pasa*), but do not do so for the claim that potentialities without *logos* do not involve opposites. Does Aristotle have in mind the grey area more explicitly indicated in *On Interpretation*? We will return to this grey area between *alogos* and *logos* in our discussion of the human soul in our chapter 5 on the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

However, the discussion in the *Metaphysics* does not simply problematize the distinctions in *On Interpretation*, but also sheds light on its context:

> Since some of these sources [i.e., potentialities] are inherent in beings with soul, some in ensouled beings and in the part of the soul that has *logos*, it is clear that some of the potentialities will be without *logos*, and some with *logos*. (*Metaph.* IX, 2, 1046a36–1046b3)

The context of the *Metaphysics* clearly points to something that was implicit in our discussion of *logos* from the beginning. In chapters 3 and 4, we shall see that natural motion exhibits how *logos* is an inherent standard holding on to the spatiotemporal manifold of the aspects of a being without letting one yield to the other. Then, in chapters 5 and 6, we shall see that human action exhibits how *logos* is an inherent openness to opposites in human action as we saw in this section.

### 3. Recapitulation and Reorientation

In this chapter of the book, we saw dialectic at work. We received the conclusion of our previous chapter 1 (“*logos* means standard”) as an *endoxa* or a
“tradition.” Through a discussion of examples, we challenged this conclusion by showing that it must live up to assuming the predicate of inherence. Thus, we asked: how can we claim that a certain logos, understood as “standard,” belongs to a being unless this standard is inherent to it? Returning from the non-Aristotelian example of artifacts to Aristotle’s own examples, natural beings, we gathered an attestation of an inherent standard precisely in its violation: that Socrates dies means that he himself no longer changes or even undergoes change. On Interpretation allowed us to refine our understanding of logos as inherent standard: if a being is to have an inherent logos, it must hold on to potentiality in its very actuality. After distinguishing the modal concept of potentiality from the trivial and temporal concepts of potentiality by refuting necessitarianism, we inferred that this modal concept is nothing but an expression of Aristotle’s concept of motion. So, we concluded, logos will prove itself to be an inherent standard only by means of inherently motivated, that is, natural, motions. This shall be the topic of chapters 3 and 4. Yet, On Interpretation also drew a distinction within the modal concept of potentiality itself: potentialities with logos and those without logos—with an ambiguous grey area in between. The examples of the potentialities with logos were taken from human action and deliberation. Thus logos will prove itself to be inherent if some actions turn out to be inherently motivated. This is the topic of chapters 5 and 6.

As to the overall project of this book, until now we saw logos in the sense of “inherent standard”: an inherent relation between the fully realized, actual existence of a being and its having a claim, a potentiality for its being, without letting one yield to or overtake the other.

So how does logos exhibit its inherence, first, in natural motion, and secondly, in human action?