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Söyleşi: Gianluigi Segalerba ile Antik Yunan Metafiziği Üzerine

Hikmet Ünlü & Gianluigi Segalerba

Hacettepe Üniversitesi
hikmetunlu@hacettepe.edu.tr
ORCID: 0000-0003-1391-8059

Öz

Hikmet Ünlü, Gianluigi Segalerba ile Aristoteles üzerine yaptığı çalışmalarla ilgili bir söyleşi yaptı.

Anahtar sözcükler: Aristoteles, Platon, metafizik, töz, Antik Yunan felsefesi

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Hikmet Ünlü & Gianluigi Segalerba

Hacettepe University
hikmetunlu@hacettepe.edu.tr
ORCID: 0000-0003-1391-8059

Abstract

Hikmet Ünlü interviewed Gianluigi Segalerba about his works on Aristotle.

Keywords: Aristotle, Plato, metaphysics, substance, Ancient Greek philosophy

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Interview: Gianluigi Segalerba on Ancient Greek Metaphysics

Hikmet Ünlü & Gianluigi Segalerba

Born in Genoa, Italy in 1967, Gianluigi Segalerba defended his PhD in philosophy at the University of Pisa in 1998. Having served as a visiting scholar at the University of Tübingen, the University of Berne, and the University of Vienna, Dr. Segalerba now serves as a co-executive director at AP-GC in Vienna. In addition to his numerous journal articles on a diverse range of philosophical topics, Dr. Segalerba is the author of two books (*Note su Ousia* and *Semantik und Ontologie*) that focus more specifically on the philosophy of Aristotle.

Hikmet Ünlü is an assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy at Hacettepe University, focusing on Ancient Greek philosophy and early phenomenology.

Hikmet Ünlü: I would like to open our discussion with a general question about the way that Greek philosophy is taught at the university level in our age. Where do you see room for improvement?

Gianluigi Segalerba: I think that the conditions of teaching vary from one institution to another and from one country to another. I have the impression that Greek philosophy is at least sometimes considered to be relevant only historically but not conceptually, as if the ideas present in Greek philosophy had no value for contemporary thought.

With respect to the question of how the teaching of Greek philosophy can be improved, I usually mention the influence—as well as the awareness of this influence—that Greek philosophy has had on the thought of contemporary thinkers: therewith it can be shown that Greek philosophy is always present in philosophy, in general, and in contemporary philosophy, in particular, despite the fact that these connections tend to be underappreciated and understated.

HÜ: You correctly point out that there are people according to whom Greek philosophy is preoccupied with problems that are no longer relevant. Let us focus more specifically on ancient Greek metaphysics. Is there any sense in which the metaphysics of antiquity can shed light on issues discussed in contemporary ontology?

GS: Yes, ancient Greek metaphysics can, in fact, shed light on contemporary ontology. The analysis of Aristotle's essentialism is relevant to the whole contemporary debate on essentialism and anti-essentialism. For example, passages from *Categories* 2 are directly connected to Edward Jonathan Lowe's project of the four-category ontology. Likewise, aspects of David Wiggins' thought concerning the constitution of the object as a "this such" directly pertain to Aristotle's interpretation of the constitution of the object as a τόδε τοιόνδε in *Metaphysics* VII.8.

Moreover, the whole conception of substance in Aristotle is relevant for the contemporary discussion on substance: Peter Simons' observations "against" substance cannot be correctly interpreted in the absence of a previous meditation on Aristotle's reflections on substance. In general, the discussion on the types of entities in Aristotle, such as the distinction between individuals and universals, can be of interest for the analysis of ontologies, such as the trope ontology of Keith Campbell, in particular, and for the different proposals of ontology, in general.

The inquiry into universals in Aristotle is furthermore indispensable for the analysis of the contemporary investigations of universals such as those of David Malet Armstrong or those of Nicholas Wolterstorff. In the phenomenological tradition, Roman Ingarden's interpretation of objects has strong analogies with Aristotle's conception of substance.

These are only some of the possible examples of the relationships that we encounter between ancient Greek metaphysics and contemporary ontology: the more we analyze questions of contemporary ontology, the more we can find either a direct influence of Greek metaphysics or analogies with Greek metaphysics.

HÜ: Let us proceed now to more "substantial" issues. Some commentators believe Aristotle to have changed his mind over the course of his career. One example often cited in this context is the *Categories*, in which work Aristotle considers individuals such as Socrates to be substances in the truest sense, which is said to conflict with the account given in *Metaphysics* VII, where Aristotle considers forms to be substances in the truest sense. What is your position on the question of developmentalism in Aristotle's thought?

GS: I believe that Aristotle maintains in the *Metaphysics* the meaning of substance as the biological entity of the *Categories*, such as man or horse. I do not endorse, therefore, the position of the *caesura* between Aristotle's interpretation of substance in the *Categories* and his interpretation of substance in the central books of the *Metaphysics*. While there are differences between the two texts, the meaning of substance as biological entity remains a primary meaning of substance.

Granted, a prevalence of interest for "substance as form" is present in the central books of the *Metaphysics* because Aristotle directs his attention in these books to the inquiry into what constitutes the essence of objects. Nevertheless, the meaning of substance as biological entity is in my opinion never given up within the central books of the *Metaphysics*, especially because this meaning, too, can be encountered in several passages of the central books of the *Metaphysics* (even though it does not become Aristotle's primary concern within the scope of those very books).

If I should begin to describe Aristotle's theory of substance, I would probably now begin with *De Anima* II.1—and in fact with the *De Anima* in general—because in this chapter we can see the plurality of meanings for substance, i.e., matter, form, and composite; moreover, we can see in *De Anima* II.1 the equivalence between substance, form, and essence. The function of form and essence as the actualizing factor of the living entity is highlighted in this chapter. I would therefore prefer *De Anima* II.1 to the *Categories* or the *Metaphysics* as a text to be used for the description and explanation of Aristotle's theory of substance, at least as regards the description of the aforementioned aspects of substance.

HÜ: Your answer reminds me of a paper by Hans Jonas called "Biological Foundations of Individuality." This is not an essay on Aristotle per se, but I sometimes assign it to my students in my classes on Aristotle because I believe that it paves the way toward a better understanding of some of the issues discussed in Aristotelian ontology.

GS: I agree; this article is indeed a very good example of the link between biology and ontology.

HÜ: In your paper "Form und Materie bei Aristoteles," you provide an analysis of *Metaphysics* VII.3. This chapter argues that if the criterion of being a substance were simply the capacity to serve as an underlying subject (ὑποκείμενον; *substratum*; substrate), then *matter* would be (the primary) substance, but this is impossible. Does this mean that we should forgo the aforementioned criterion altogether or, alternatively, is there a sense in which substantial form can be considered as a substrate?

GS: I interpret *Metaphysics* VII.3 as a *reform* of the subject criterion: the reform consists in my opinion in putting limits to the use of the criterion. If the criterion were used without conceptual limits, the result would lead to the identification of substance with a matter with no properties at all, i.e., the so-called *materia prima* of the Scholastics.

While matter is, in fact, considered to serve as an underlying subject in *De Anima* II.1, the most important question here is whether this conception of matter as underlying subject corresponds to an effective, i.e., factual ontological constellation or whether the conception of matter as underlying subject exclusively corresponds to a way of analyzing material things—which, as a consequence, is relevant only as a way of inquiring into these entities, without having an authentic ontologically founded basis—whereas actually form should always be regarded as the primary factor because, at least in the case of biological entities, these entities are nothing without the form.
As regards the ways of being an underlying subject, I think that Aristotle considers two ways of being an underlying subject and, correspondingly, two kinds of relationships between the underlying subject, on the one hand, and entities that are attributed to the subject, on the other hand. On the basis, for example, of the initial lines of *Metaphysics* VII.13, we can see that either the concrete object is the underlying subject for the affections, or matter is the underlying subject for actuality, in which case Aristotle is probably interpreting the form as actuality. Similar contents to those expressed in the initial lines of *Metaphysics* VII.13 are expressed in *Metaphysics* IX.7: the function of the subject can be fulfilled either by the concrete object, which is the subject for the affections, or by matter, which is the subject for the form.

The sense in which the criterion of the subject should be limited or reformed is that the use of the subject criterion cannot lead to a result in which the entity having the status of substance has neither the categorial properties nor the negations of the categorial properties; the features of being a "this something" and of being a separated entity must belong to any entity to which the meaning of substance is attributed.

I personally do not think that the form can be the underlying subject of accidents, at least not directly: the object constituted by form—for instance, the concrete man which is steadily actualized by form, i.e., by the soul—is the underlying subject for the accidents, so that the form is indirectly the underlying subject for the accidents.

HÜ: Let me quote Aristotle here: "For those who adopt this point of view, then, it follows that matter is substance. But this is impossible; for both separability and individuality are thought to belong chiefly to substance. And so form and the compound of form and matter would be thought to be substance, rather than matter. The substance compounded of both, i.e. of matter and shape, may be dismissed; for it is posterior and its nature is obvious. And matter also is in a sense manifest. But we must inquire into the third kind of substance; for this is the most difficult" (*Metaphysics* VII.3, 1029a26–33). Now one could argue along the following lines: we must forgo this line of thinking (substance understood as substrate) that leads us to matter or the composite; this line of thinking cannot be incorporated in the inquiry about the "third" and "most difficult" kind of substance, which is substance as form. At least on the face of it, however, we have no reason to assume the impossibility of incorporation, especially because Aristotle himself notes, at the beginning of the chapter, that *form* is one of the three ways of being an underlying subject: "And (i) in one sense matter is said to be of the nature of

substratum, (ii) in another, shape, and (iii) in a third sense, the compound of these" (*Metaphysics* VII.3, 1029a2–3). In light of these, I wonder whether the goal of the chapter is to rethink the substrate criterion to ensure that it takes us on a path that leads us to neither matter in the sense of *materia prima*, nor matter in the sense of proximate matter (e.g., bronze), nor even the matter-form composite (e.g., the statue). It is of course possible that we endorse slightly different interpretations of *Metaphysics* VII.3, but I would like to hear your words on alternative ways of reading this chapter.

GS: Aristotle writes the following: "We have now outlined the nature of substance, showing that it is that which is not predicated of a subject, but of which all else is predicated. But we must not merely state the matter thus; for this is not enough. The statement itself is obscure, and further, on this view, *matter* becomes substance" (*Metaphysics* VII.3, 1029a7–10). In my view, this passage paves the way toward a correct understanding of Aristotle's position.

On the one hand, it seems that Aristotle is not completely satisfied with the criterion represented by the underlying subject because, as he puts it, the criterion is not sufficiently clear. On the other hand, it seems that Aristotle is not ready to accept matter as substance, at least not as the only substance; he seems to be saying that the criterion is not acceptable both because it is not clear and because, by employing it, matter becomes substance.

Thereafter, practically at the end of the argument, Aristotle writes the following: "For those who adopt this point of view, then, it follows that matter is substance. But this is impossible; for both separability and individuality are thought to belong chiefly to substance" (*Metaphysics* VII.3, 1029a26–28). These are grounds against the criterion: matter is not substance—not the chief or only substance—because whatever is substance must have the features of separability and individuality.

We have different possibilities here, as we can for example say: let us employ the subject criterion but keep in mind that the criterion picks out matter as substance, and even if matter can be substance in one way, it cannot be the chief or the only substance. So we must be careful in making use of the subject criterion because it fails to pick out other—and perhaps more important—kinds of substance. To sum up, the subject criterion need not be rejected, but we must not lose sight of the fact that such a criterion is bound to remain insufficient for conducting a complete inquiry into substance.

Another possible interpretation has been proposed, if I am not mistaken, by Mary Louise Gill: Metaphysics VII.3 is meant to delineate the very boundaries we must set to the use of the subject criterion. No matter what entity the criterion picks out, the features of being individual and of being separable must nonetheless belong to this entity, which is another way of saying that if the subject criterion picks out an entity as substance that is neither an individual nor is separable, the criterion has not been employed appropriately.

HÜ: Speaking of *Metaphysics* VII, commentators have had a hard time in trying to explain its main argument. On one interpretation, Aristotle's goal here is to examine—and in so

doing perhaps eliminate—the various candidates for what counts as substance in the truest sense. Because your works examine this book closely, I would like to ask you if you believe there to be a sense in which we can talk about the unity of Book VII?

GS: I think that the unity is secured by the inquiry into substance: the problem is that substance has so many aspects that Aristotle's analysis is, as a consequence, directed to aspects that are very different from each other.

Substance can be analyzed, for example, in relation and in opposition to universals; it can also be inquired into as regards the relationships that prevail between substance in the sense of form and substance in the sense of matter. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that *Metaphysics* VII.12–16, as a whole or partially, deal with problems of definition, of substance, of universals, and of the incompatibility between substance and universal, while *Metaphysics* VII.17 mainly deals with the relationships between form and matter. The very complexity of the concept of substance brings about the diversity of the analyses of substance. The difference between the themes dealt with by Aristotle is due to the plurality of aspects connected to substance: substance can be analyzed in its difference from universals; alternatively, substance can also be inquired into as regards the difference between form and matter. Both kinds of investigation belong to the concept of substance. The unity of *Metaphysics* VII is therefore anchored in the diverse meanings of substance.

HÜ: Let us move on to another topic now. I come from a tradition of teachers who believe that commentators tend to overstate the differences between Plato and Aristotle and that the apparent discrepancies can be understood for the most part as a change in terminology, but this is not the dominant view. I will ask you more specific questions about this in what follows but let me begin with one that is more general. How similar do you think are the ontological frameworks that we encounter in the works of Plato and Aristotle?

GS: The similarity between the ontological frameworks of the two thinkers depends on the strategy of interpretation of Plato adopted by the interpreter. For instance, Gail Fine in her book *On Ideas* seems to me—provided that I have correctly understood the book—to give an interpretation of Plato according to which Plato anticipated various Aristotelian concepts, such as Aristotle's formal cause; within this perspective, Plato expressed or at least anticipated many concepts that Aristotle then further developed. Within this framework, the differences between the two thinkers are actually not so great, and there is a continuity between many of the concepts of Plato and those of Aristotle.

I also think that answering your question is particularly difficult, however, due to the richness of Plato's meditations, as a result of which many interpretations of Plato are possible depending on the aspect of Plato that one chooses as the basis of Platonic inquiry. I think, on the one hand, that important similarities between the two thinkers exist, such as that between ideas and universals. On the other hand, I think that the

similarities existing in the concepts of the two thinkers should be considered vis-à-vis the functions that the entities belonging to the ontology of the two thinkers fulfill; the question then becomes: do ideas, for instance, fulfill the same function as universals?

I have the impression that in spite of the similarities between ideas and universals, ideas represent in Plato a sort of door to an at least partially alternative reality, i.e., a dimension that transcends the average reality represented by sense reality. Individuals coming into contact with ideas by becoming aware of the existence of ideas discover a dimension that provides them with internal stability because the knowledge of ideas and of this very dimension of being enhances the rational part of the soul.

HÜ: Your position is an interesting one, so let me ask the following: where exactly do you see the discrepancy here? If the alternative reality you mention consists simply of whatever lies outside the realm of sensible particulars, isn't it the case that the ontological framework endorsed by Aristotle is similar because this framework, too, compels us to transcend beyond the realm of sensible particulars? In other words, isn't the alternative reality you mention already incorporated in Aristotle's search for the *intelligible essences* that lie behind sensible particulars?

GS: As of late, I tend to see ideas and universals in their relation to anthropology: the knowledge of ideas, i.e., the acquaintance with the existence of ideas, brings the individual to the *awareness* that not all is visible, that there is a realm of stability opposed to the instability of the realm of the body.

This stability is not only a stability of the constitution of the entities that are the objects of knowledge as, for example, ideas are: ideas are stable entities, but what is perhaps even more important is the stability of the *subject* in contact with them. In other words, the subject who is in contact with ideas is in the condition to take notice of the unreliability of what may be called the things of the body. This subject thus becomes detached from them, which in a certain sense can be interpreted as an anticipation of some of the Stoic positions.

This very framework would hardly strike a chord with Aristotle. According to the picture we get from *Posterior Analytics* II.19, the universal arises out of the data of perception; there is no mention of the soul as an entity more akin to the invisible and less to the visible. The point is that, in the *Phaedo*, the awareness that the soul belongs to the realm of invisible entities contains in it a program of life. If I remain on the level where I remain unaware that my soul is more akin to some entities than to others, I am bound to live one particular kind of life—but if, on the contrary, if I become aware of this fact, then the life I lead will be one that is of an entirely different kind.

Aristotle's main concern is therefore different from that of Plato. In the latter case, ideas and universals need to be interpreted in relation to Plato's philosophical anthropology. In Plato, the very awareness of the existence of ideas seems to me to pave the way toward the transformation of the individual.

In a word, ideas can and perhaps must also be considered in terms of their relation to the soul: it is to them and not to the body that the soul is similar, the awareness of which helps the subject in resisting the impulses of the kind of degeneration mentioned in *Republic* VIII and IX.

HÜ: Both near the end of Book VII and in Books XIII and XIV of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle advances a critique of the ontology advanced by the Platonists. As Edward Halper puts it, "Their mistake lies in thinking that the forms are universals and *also* separate" (*One and Many in Aristotle's Metaphysics: The Central Books*, 144; emphasis mine). It is as if Aristotle believes that the Platonists want to have their cake and eat it too. What would you like to say on Aristotle's objection to the Platonists?

GS: The analysis of Aristotle's objections is indispensable to understand which kind of ontology Aristotle aims to endorse and which kinds of ontology he wants to reject. The analysis of the objections is indispensable, for example, for understanding the features belonging to substance qua substance and for understanding the features that cannot belong to substance qua substance. In particular, the interpretation of the notion of separation is fundamental; the interpretation of the entities to which separation can be ascribed, on the one hand, and the interpretation of the entities to which separation cannot be ascribed, on the other hand, is fundamental for understanding the difference between entities that can and cannot exist independently.

Aristotle's distinction between τόδε τι and τοιόνδε in *Metaphysics* VII.13 is drawn in order to avoid the third man regress and, in so doing, the failures of Platonism. However, the question is whether Plato himself is exposed to this kind of criticism; for example, the argument explained in *Republic* X, named by interpreters as the "Third Bed Argument," could serve as a possible answer against the Argument of the Third Largeness featured in the *Parmenides* and, therewith, against all arguments that follow the logic of the Third Man Argument. Aristotle's objections prove to be, therefore, fundamental for understanding Aristotle's ontological maneuver; the question remains open whether Plato is exposed to arguments like the Third Man.

HÜ: Let us switch gears now and move onto another topic. Lately I have been working on Aristotle's concept of ἀλήθεια, and in my view, Aristotle has a conception not only of propositional truth but also of non-proposition truth, the latter of which tends to be overlooked by most commentators. What about Plato? Can we find in Plato's dialogues a conception of non-propositional truth?

GS: Aristotle examines the concept of non-propositional truth in *Metaphysics* IX.10. As for Plato, we can find in his works the concept of non-propositional truth in, for example, *Republic* 585; in this passage, it seems that Plato considers the existence of entities having a lesser or greater degree in being and truth. Entities that always remain the same possess a higher degree in being and in truth. One interesting aspect is that the individual has a different kind of development depending on his contact with entities that have a higher degree of being and truth as well as with those entities that have a

lesser degree of being and truth. The existence of the different levels of being and truth has, therefore, repercussions on the subject in contact with them.

HÜ: I would like to focus a little more on the individual who is, as you put it, in contact with being and truth. In my view, few philosophers have a framework comprehensive enough to provide the array of concepts by means of which we can determine our place in nature, but Plato and Aristotle are among these few philosophers. What can you say about the philosophical anthropology that we encounter in the works of Plato and Aristotle?

GS: I have the impression that the philosophical anthropology in Plato is characterized by the awareness of the instability of the soul, as has been mentioned above, and by the initial condition of the ignorance of the soul. The individual is born in a condition of darkness, metaphorically, and ought to gain knowledge. The initial condition of the individual is, so to speak, negative. Knowledge and education are needed, but the road to knowledge and education is difficult and long.

Without the appropriate knowledge, the individual is exposed to instability and is subject to degeneration. Therefore, Plato's anthropology is, in my opinion, dramatic: this can be seen in the sequence of the degenerations at issue in *Republic* VIII and IX as well as in the allegory of the *Phaedrus*, where the limits of the human condition are pointed out.

In my view, Aristotle's vision is not so dramatic; his conception of the soul is not built on the basis of the danger of instability and of degeneration. Aristotle does not seem to be worried about these to the same extent that Plato is worried about them, and this is because of the composition of the soul and because of the mutual relationships between the parts of the soul in the Aristotelian framework. Unlike in the philosophy of Plato, in the philosophy of Aristotle the parts of the soul do not seem to present ineluctable difficulties of coexistence, especially because in the former case, the rational and the desiderative part seem to be naturally in a condition of struggle against one another.

HÜ: Let me suggest that there may be a deeper reason for the existence—or lack thereof—of the difficulties of coexistence between the parts of the soul in the case of Aristotle. As Frederick Weiss puts it, the Hegelian conception of Aristotle's account of the soul is one according to which "each grade of soul is *aufgehoben* in the grade above it" (Weiss 1969, 15). Hence, the parts of the soul are not "opposed" to one another in any straightforward way; rather, what is at issue here is always an appropriation, i.e., a further development of a suitable structure. Although it would be misleading to overstate the absence of opposition in the context of the Aristotelian conception of the soul, it would nevertheless be difficult to say, while remaining in this framework, that animality (the *locus* of the desires) is necessarily bad because what makes us human beings is not *opposed* to animality in the simple sense; it is *built* on it. Would you like comment further on these alternative ways of understanding the relation between the parts of the soul?

GS: Yes, I believe that this is precisely the point. In a certain sense, it seems that Aristotle is dealing with the parts of the soul with a framework according to which the simpler parts of the soul are completed by those that are more complex.

HÜ: I would like to thank you very much for agreeing to this interview. It was a great pleasure indeed to talk to you about Aristotle's metaphysics and about Greek philosophy in general.

GS: Same here, I would like to thank you very much for the opportunity you gave me to express my ideas and for the interesting questions you raised.