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ARISTOTLE, *Physics*

LCL 228: 226-227

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ARISTOTLE

- 203 b ἀναγκαῖον ἐνδέχεσθαι γὰρ ἢ εἶναι οὐδὲν διαφέρει ἐν τοῖς αἰδίοις.
Ἔχει δ' ἀπορίαν ἡ περὶ τοῦ ἀπείρου θεωρία· καὶ γὰρ μὴ εἶναι τιθεμένοις
πόλλ' ἀδύνατα συμβαίνει, καὶ εἶναι· ἔτι δὲ ποτέρως ἔστι—πότερον ὥς οὐσία, ἢ
ὥς συμβεβηκὸς καθ' αὐτὸ φύσει τινί, ἢ οὐδετέρως, ἀλλ' οὐδὲν ἡττόν ἐστιν
- 204 a ἄπειρον ἢ ἄπειρα τῷ πλήθει. μάλιστα δὲ φυσικοῦ ἐπισκέψασθαι¹ εἰ ἔστι
μέγεθος αἰσθητὸν ἄπειρον.
Πρῶτον οὖν διοριστέον ποσαχῶς λέγεται τὸ ἄπειρον. ἓνα μὲν δὴ τρόπον τὸ
5 ἀδύνατον διελθεῖν τῷ μὴ πεφυκέναι διέναι (ὥσπερ ἡ φωνὴ ἀόρατος)· ἄλλως δὲ
τὸ διέξοδον ἔχον ἀτελεύτητον, ἢ ὁ μόλις, ἢ ὁ πεφυκὸς ἔχει μὴ ἔχει διέξοδον ἢ
πέρας.
Ἔτι ἄπειρον ἅπαν ἢ κατὰ πρόσθεσιν, ἢ κατὰ διαίρεσιν, ἢ ἀμφοτέρως.

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occupying it everywhere, for in things eternal there is no distinction between possibility and actuality.^a

But the consideration of this ‘unlimited’ presents us with a genuine problem; for not only by asserting but also by denying its reality we seem to be landed in a number of untenable positions. And then we have to ask whether it is a substantively existing ‘something’; or an attribute, necessarily pertaining to some substantively existent thing in nature; or neither, though none the less unlimited, whether in its unity or its multiplicity.^b But the physicist’s chief concern is to inquire whether there is such a thing as an unlimited ‘sensible’ magnitude.

Let us begin, then, by inquiring in how many senses we use the term. If by saying that a thing has ‘no limit’ you mean ‘no boundary,’ then you mean that its nature is such that it would be nonsense to speak of ‘passing through it from side to side,’ just in the same way that a sound is ‘invisible.’ But you might also mean that, though it is of such nature that you can traverse it, it does not admit (whether you are speaking absolutely or practically) of your getting ‘through’ it so as to come out beyond it. Or again you may mean that its nature would allow it to have a boundary such as to make it passable-through, but that in this case it has not.^c

Again, the ‘absence of limit’ may mean capacity for being multiplied indefinitely, or for being divided indefinitely, or both.

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