CHAPTER 2

THE CANON: GROUNDWORK

"Whole" in Greek can be translated with either of two words, pan and holon. The distinction between the two is explained by Aristotle in the Metaphysics. Pan is a whole composed of undifferentiated parts: the contents of a water jar, for example (whose individual drops do not significantly differ one from the other) or a pile of sand (wherein the differences between the individual grains is negligible). Holon denotes a different sort of whole, one whose formally differentiated parts make it what it is, an organism or an artefact, and thus make it another type of "whole". The undifferentiated elements of a pan can be rearranged at will; those of a holon cannot. Depriving a pan of one of its elements does not modify its formal internal order; for a holon the consequences are entirely different. A holon is neither definable nor comprehensible as a multiple of its constituent parts; the totality of a holon logically precedes them:

In all things which have a plurality of parts, and which are not a total aggregate [pan] but a whole [holon] of some sort distinct from the parts, there is some cause (Met. 1045 a 7-10).

Aristotle, of course, considers the polis a holon (see infra Section 7.3.1.) and to develop the canon we need we thus begin with an Aristotelian criterion. The problem is that a direct approach to the logical-metaphysical subject of the holon yields little or nothing: typologies sophisticated enough to develop a canon (even the most rudimentary) are lacking. The distinction between pan and holon will not do. We shall therefore have to apply a strategy which is indirect and a bit Byzantine, but effective. Aristotle’s approach can be found where we would least expect to find it, in the first pages of the Physics:
So we must advance from the concrete whole to the several constituents which it embraces [...] by calling the concrete a 'whole' [holon]. I mean that it embraces in a single complex a diversity of constituent elements factors, or properties. The relation of names to definitions will throw some light on this point: for the name gives an unanalysed indication of the thing ('circle', for instance), but the definition analyses out some characteristic property or properties. A variant of the same thing may be noted in children, who begin by calling every man 'father' and every woman 'mother', till they learn to sever out the special relation to which the terms property apply (Phys. 184 a 22 - 184 b 8).

The analogy drawn between the whole and the linguistic universal is potentially invaluable because there exist powerful typologies of universals which are both thoroughgoing and effective. Given our purposes such a typology should equip us to replicate the analogy showing the connection between the different types of universal it identifies and the corresponding conceptions of the political "whole".

That consideration of universals (thus a question of logic) should be joined in this way -- albeit tenuously -- to philosophical-juridical problems need not come as a surprise. Ultimately it is precisely from the Socratic consideration of values such as knowledge, beauty and justice that the problem of universals first arises. In fact numerous discussions of universals have dealt with the idea of justice. When Bertrand Russell wished to present what he called "the world of the universals" in a text for non-specialists he could find no better example to begin his exposition than the notion of justice:

Let us consider, say, such a notion of justice. If we ask ourselves what justice is, it is natural to proceed by considering this, that, and the other just act, with a view to discovering what they have in common. They must all, in some sense partake of a common nature, which will be found in whatever is just and in nothing else. This common nature, in virtue of which they are all just, will be justice itself, the pure essence the admixture of which with facts of ordinary life produces the multiplicity of just acts [...] This pure essence is what Plato calls an 'idea' or 'form' [...] The 'idea' justice is not identical with anything that is just: it is something other than particular things, which particular things partake of (Russell 1976, 52).

In Russell's description the Platonic idea of justice aims at a "pure essence" (conversely, as Mauro Barberis has reminded me, Wittgenstein denied that justice was
some sort of ingredient common to various behaviors): the whiteness of white things (Russell, 1957) the justice of just acts. In other words, Plato develops an intensional conception of the universals. The Platonic idea sees universal meaning not so much "in the objects to which the term can be applied" as in the "shared properties or characteristics which lead us to use the same term to denote them". The reference is, of course, to the well-known distinction between intension and extension already drawn, more or less lucidly, by the ancients and already outlined in the *Logique du Port Royal.* In one sense "the meaning of a term consists of the class of objects to which the term may be applied. This sense of 'meaning', its referential sense, has traditionally been called extensional or denotes the objects to which it may correctly be applied, and the collection or class of these objects constitutes the extension or denotation of the term [...] The collection of properties shared by all and only those objects in a term's extension is called the intension or connotation of that term" (Copi 1961, 125). It is interesting to note that the Aristotelian passage examined above suggests a conception of universals which is to some extent intensional. Despite the well-known objections to considering the Aristotelian form a universal, we can discern in it too an intensional approach to the problem of universals. The form, acting upon matter, defines its qualities; the form of the circle may be applied, for example, to bronze or to stone, that is to matter, making it what it is, a circle of stone or bronze. Aristotelian logic treats individuals as a distributive class but not singular entities, since, in Aristotelian terms, one can give no scientific account of individuals. Like the Platonic idea, the Aristotelian form indicates the specific virtue, the quality, the vis, that shapes and controls the entities to which it refers. Unlike the idea, however, the form does not exist apart from the entity in which it inheres. As is well-known, Aristotle criticized this Platonic detachment of the ideas. The idea, whose existence is separate from the entities it controls, is unique and accounts for these collectively. His is a so-called universal ante rem, so that the unique idea of the circle accounts for the entire class of circles, insomuch as it is distinct from those entities. Not so the Aristotelian form, which acts case by case and indistinctly to characterize distributively the various circles, and thus as a universal in re (Matteuzzi 1981, 108, 107-115). Logic, of course, accustoms us to think in distributive terms, so that when we say "people have rights" or "mankind has rights" we mean more or less consciously that "for every x, if x is a person, then x has rights". On the other hand, the day-to-day use of language also reveals the presence of the other approach, and especially when dealing with entities which are continuous rather than discrete, thus
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