CHAPTER I

THE USE OF THE TERM “ANALOGY” IN GREEK AND MEDIAEVAL PHILOSOPHY

I. GREEK USE OF “ANALOGY”

“Analogy” is a word which has a long and glorious past. Its origin is Greek. In Greek language “analogy” is first used in mathematics. The mathematician Achytas calls “analogy” the middle term of an arithmetical series and the second term of a proportionality which comprises only three terms. The geometer Euclid uses “analogy” to mean both a proportion (i.e. a reciprocal relation between numbers or a direct similarity between them) and a proportionality (i.e. equality of ratios or agreement between two or more numerical relations).

The first philosopher to make use of the word “analogy” is Hippocrates of Chio, but with him “analogy” still retains its mathematical meaning of numerical likeness. It is Plato who introduces the term “analogy” into philosophy to indicate proportions and proportionalities which are not mathematical.

Plato uses the word “analogy” to signify the proportionality (i.e. the similarity of relations) between the four elements (fire/air = air/water = water/earth), between the four forms of knowledge (knowledge/opinion = thinking/imagining), and between two kinds of being and

3 This seems to be the etymological sense of the word ἀναλογία. The word ἀναλογία is made up of the proposition ἀν and the noun ὁλος. ὁλος signifies both a concept and a word expressing a concept. ἄν used as a prefix in composition with another word has several shades of meaning. The meaning which seems most appropriate in its composition with ὁλος is the notion of a backward relation, roughly corresponding to the prefix retro in Latin. Thus in this strictly etymological sense, ἀναλογία signifies a reciprocal relation between ideas. According to some Greek scholars, who take ἀν to mean „according to“, the etymological meaning of ἀναλογία is „according to due relation“. Cf. J. F. Anderson, The Bond of Being (London: Herder, 1954), p. 15, note 37. Actually, when used adverbially, ἀν ὁλος means „according to due ratio“ and, sometimes, „in the same kind of way“.
6 Plato, Timaeus, 32c.
7 Plato, Republic, 334a
two kinds of knowledge (being/becoming = knowledge/opinion). 1 He calls "analogy" also the proportion (i.e. direct similarity) of two things or of two concepts, the proportion between things and ideas, or between knowledge and things known. 2 The things, ideas and concepts which are the terms of this relation are said to be "analogous". 3 With Plato, then, the word "analogy" in both its meanings of proportion and proportionality is extended to the philosophical fields of epistemology and ontology. 4

Aristotle, who has been called by some scholars the "father of analogy," 5 continues to use this word in its already established meanings of numerical, ontological and epistemological likeness both as direct similarity and as similarity of relations. 6 He gives other important meanings to the term "analogy", however, by extending its use to science, ethics and logic. In science, for instance, he calls "analogous" the physical likeness between the birds' wings and the fishes' fins. 7 In ethics he calls "analogous" the relations of friendship between superiors and subordinates, 8 and the relations of distributive justice. 9 But Aristotle's main contribution to the concept of analogy is in logic. In his Organon 10 when he classifies the various forms of signification, he makes the first systematic study of the use of analogy in logic. But, to our great surprise, he does not employ the word "analogy." He divides the terms, according to their modes of signification, into three classes. He calls the terms of the first class, those which have one meaning only, univocal; and he calls the terms of the second class, those which have many meanings, equivocal. We would, then, expect him to call "analogous" the terms of the third class, those which are predicated of different subjects with a meaning partly the same and partly different. But this use of the word "analogy" does not go back to Aristotle, who defines this class of words as terms which do not differ by way of equivocalness.

1 Plato, Republic, 534a
2 Plato, Republic, 508b, Timaeus, 29c.
3 Ibid.
6 For numerical analogy cf. Ethica Nic. 1131a, 30-b, 7; for epistemological analogy cf. De Memoria 452b 16 ff.; for ontological analogy cf. Metaphysica, 1043a 4, 1070a 31-b 35.
7 De Part. Animal. 645b 3 ff.
8 Ethica Nic. 1158a 35; b 23 ff.; 1162b 4.
9 Ethica Nic. 1132a.
10 Aristotle studies the problem of signification in Topica 106a-108a, where he suggests many criteria for distinguishing between univocal and equivocal terms. Cf. also Categoriae 1a.