

Tradition as the Future of Innovation

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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

ELISA GRIMI

Tradition and Innovation are two related terms.

In its etymology, the term 'tradition' derives from the Latin *tradere*, and therefore means to take charge of the past, to pass down what the past leaves as a legacy; tradition is the narrative that constitutes a subject. But tradition also means *transmission*, and therefore includes an operational force that arises from the subject. For this reason, 'tradition' is a term that cannot be easily grasped because it belongs to the past, but at the same time resolves the present and guides the future. From here, one begins to notice the connection that tradition has with innovation, which, in fact, affects that which is new and renews the present culture, highlighting tradition.

The present study consists of four parts. There are four perspectives that address the relationship between tradition and innovation.

In the first part, the relationship between tradition and innovation is approached from the point of view of the history of philosophy. The first contribution to this section is by Enrico Berti, who highlights how the Aristotelian tradition is an opportunity for innovation. The Aristotelian tradition is not only the history of Aristotelianism, but is also made up of a wealth of concepts, distinctions, and definitions. Next is the contribution by Nicoletta Scotti, who proposes an in-depth analysis of the ethics of Aristotle in the light of contemporary interpretations. Anthony Lisska deals with the thought of Thomas Aquinas, outlining a magnificent review of the way in which Thomas is present in more recent studies. On this track, I then ventured to include in this section my contribution, a suggestion regarding the revival of Thomas in the last century in England within the analytical sphere. Riccardo Pozzo's contribution closes this section by helping to emphasize the importance of the work of historians of philosophy in an innovative perspective for an enrichment of the field.

In the light of this first reflection, which shows the relationship that tradition has had with innovation in philosophical studies through several examples, the second section is a reflection of concerns about the current

studies in research and debate. If the concept of tradition has its origins in the past, it is necessary to investigate also the current status of research to understand not only how a tradition is structured, but also how innovation comes into being. In this section, through the studies of Rémi Brague, John O'Callaghan, Angelo Campodonico, and Giovanni Turco, what stands at the center of reflection is identifying what the dynamics of tradition are in relation to innovation, while demonstrating some suggestions for future studies. While the past acts as a guide, a plan for the future is also necessary.

In the third section, the relationship between tradition and innovation is examined from a legal perspective. Salvatore Amato discusses the importance of tradition in the Constitution, unlike its importance in a conception of legal positivism, elaborating his analysis in the multicultural society. Also valuable in this part is the contribution of Stamatios Tzitzis, who analyses how the conception of law has changed with respect to the prevailing politics in a society.

Characterizing the fourth and final part is an analysis of the relationship between tradition and innovation in a theological context. There are two contributions: the first by Peter Casarella, in which he presents the work of Maurice Blondel, Charles Taylor, Livio Melina, and Pope John Paul II, highlighting how tradition constitutes a gift; while the second is by John Milbank, who, starting from the writing of Alasdair MacIntyre, presents an analysis of the value of tradition, showing that tradition is a tool for the understanding of culture, as well as recalling the Christian perspective.

In this introduction I just wish to recall the importance that this study holds. It must be observed that there are few studies and little research still underway on the issue of tradition and innovation. The present research has its origins in a preliminary study, the outcome of the International Workshop of Philosophy held in 2012 in Milan, sponsored by the Philosophical News Cultural Association, and published in the fifth volume of the review *Philosophical News* on the theme of tradition and innovation. The most important texts presented during the conference were published in the review *Philosophical News*.

Therefore, it was decided to continue this research to obtain an organic text in which the theme was approached from several points of view in order to highlight the importance of the scope of the theme of tradition and innovation and current research. So I thank all of our contributors who wanted to present one of their studies on this subject, aware of the enrichment that results from the meeting between scholars either for

research purposes, or for the reader who is interested in understanding the importance of tradition and generating innovation, namely, a living tradition. I hope that this study will be a useful tool in the humanities, the area that best tells of the generativity that preserves the human being and in which he finds himself, therefore, an expression of both tradition and innovation.

PART ONE

**TRADITION:
AN HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

CHAPTER ONE

THE ARISTOTELIAN TRADITION AS OCCASION FOR INNOVATION

ENRICO BERTI

The Aristotelian tradition in a sense is constituted by the history of Aristotelianism, i.e. by the philosophies of those who declared themselves Aristotle's followers, even if in fact they hardly ever have been completely so. However, in another sense the Aristotelian tradition is formed by the patrimony of concepts, distinctions, definitions, which not only philosophy, but also culture in general and even the common language have used for millennia and which are still now in use: category, subject-predicate, square of oppositions, syllogism, induction, refutation, contradiction, matter-form, potency-act, essence, substance-accident, types of cause, types of change, nature-art, time, place, infinite, chance, luck, soul-body, sensation, memory, fantasy, experience, intellect, desire, analogy, means-end, action-production, choice, deliberation, virtue, happiness, justice, friendship, city, family, slavery, constitution, revolution, persuasion, character, passion, poetry, tragedy, myth, catharsis, etc.

I. Introduction

By “Aristotelian tradition”, we normally mean the history of Aristotelianism, which is a long story, because it began in the Hellenistic period with Theophrastus and Eudemus, it continued into late antiquity with Alexander of Aphrodisias and the Neoplatonic commentators on Aristotle (Syrianus, Ammonius, Asclepius, Simplicius, Philoponus, and others), and developed in the Middle Ages, starting in the Muslim era (al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Avicenna, Averroes) and later in the Christian era (Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus). It was present in the Renaissance (Pomponazzi, Zabarella), but it survived into modern times too (Suárez), in the *Schulmetaphysik* of German universities at least until

Kant, to revive in the XIX century with Trendelenburg and Brentano and to arrive to the XX century, as I have tried to show in a book¹, without even stopping in the new century, as indicated in the volume *Contemporary Aristotelian Metaphysics*, published three years ago by Cambridge University Press².

The study of this subject is the task of the Inter university Centre for the History of the Aristotelian Tradition, with its seat in Padua. The Inter university Centre includes seven other Italian and foreign universities (Université de Bourgogne, Università della Calabria, Università “Federico II” di Napoli, Università di Palermo, Aristotle’s University of Salonika, Università del Salento, Università di Verona). I have been the director of the Centre for some years now, and it has published more than 50 volumes.

Here, however, I cannot deal with such a tradition, as too long a speech would be required. Instead, I would like to draw attention to another type of Aristotelian tradition, that is to the presence not only in the history of philosophy, but also in the history of culture in general (scientific, literary) and even in the common language, of terms, concepts, definitions, distinctions, and connexions, whose origin is in Aristotle’s works and which form a patrimony of thought and culture perhaps unique in the whole of western civilisation. (I do not have the competence to consider eastern civilisation, even if Aristotle’s presence in it, for instance in China, goes back even to the XVII century³). I shall refer consequently to the transmission (this is one of the meanings of “tradition”) of the content of Aristotle’s works in contexts which cannot be brought back directly to Aristotelianism, i.e. to authors who are not clearly nor implicitly Aristotelian. For convenience, I will follow the “traditional” partition of the *corpus aristotelicum*, including, in sequence, the works of logic, of physics (with what we call psychology, biology, or zoology), of metaphysics, of ethics, of politics, of rhetoric, of aesthetics. I apologise in advance for the vagueness of my exposition, which treats such a wide theme and which therefore cannot be too technical in character⁴.

¹ E. Berti, *Aristotele nel Novecento*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2008 (I ed. 1992).

² T.E. Tahko (ed.), *Contemporary Aristotelian Metaphysics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012.

³ R. Wardy, *Aristotle in China. Language, Categories and Translation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000.

⁴ I presented a lecture like this to the World Congress of Philosophy held in Moscow, 1993, which was published with the title *Aristotle’s Renaissance as an Example of the Essential Tension between Tradition and Innovation*, «Philosophical Inquiry», 16, 1994, pp. 26-37 (reprinted in my *Nuovi studi*

II. Logic

In the preface to the second edition of his *Critique of pure reason* (1787) Immanuel Kant, who cannot be considered an Aristotelian philosopher, speaking of logic wrote «since the time of Aristotle [...] until now it has been unable to take a single step forward, and therefore seems, to all appearances to be finished and complete»⁵. This is obviously false – Kant was not as competent in the history of philosophy as he was in theoretical and moral philosophy – because after Aristotle logic made important progress in Antiquity with the Stoics, in the Middle Ages with the *calculatores*, in modern times with the Port Royal logicians and with Leibniz. Besides, there is no need to speak of the progress that logic made thanks to Kant himself and after Kant, with transcendental logic, dialectic logic, mathematical logic, symbolic logic and the “paraconsistent” logics. However, Kant’s declaration is meaningful, because it reveals how, in spite of its progress, the basis of logic, which is used in various sciences and in common language, is still formed for the most part by Aristotelian logic.

Let us consider the short treatise with which the *corpus* begins, *Categories*, which is also the first of the works of logic included in the collection called *Organon*. There is a “material” history of this treatise, i.e. of the work as such, which is rich mainly in Antiquity and the Middle Ages⁶, but there is also a history of its contents, which continues afterwards and arrives at our days. First of all the term “category”, with the meaning – attributed to it by Aristotle, because earlier it meant “accuse” – of a class or a group of objects, has become part of the common language, even of sports language (for instance of football). Besides, many among the most important western philosophers, for instance Kant or Hegel, elaborated their own doctrine of categories, so that in the middle of the XIX century F.A. Trendelenburg could write a *History of the Doctrine of Categories*⁷. In the XX century, G. Ryle, in a famous article entitled *Categories*, explained what “category mistakes” are, i.e. the attribution to subjects belonging to a category, in the Aristotelian sense, of predicates which are appropriate to other categories, as for instance in the sentence “Saturday is in bed”⁸.

aristotelici, IV/2, *L'influenza di Aristotele – Età moderna e contemporanea*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2010, pp. 217-228).

⁵ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated and edited by P. Guyer, A.W. Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, p. 106.

⁶ Cfr. O. Brun et L. Corti (éd.), *Les Catégories et leur histoire*, Vrin, Paris 2005.

⁷ F.A. Trendelenburg, *Geschichte der Kategorienlehre*, 2 vols., Berlin 1846.

⁸ For this and other quotations I have to refer to my book *Aristotele nel Novecento*

When W. van Orman Quine, in his famous article *On what there is* (1953), began one of the favourite activities of analytic philosophy in XX century, that of making a catalogue of all existent objects, it became immediately clear that it was necessary to distribute the various objects into types, or classes, or “categories”, because of the impossibility of counting in the same series, among the objects contained for instance in a room, persons, tables and chairs, with colours, sounds, thoughts and emotions⁹. Therefore, it came about that at the beginning of the XXI century some of the major contemporary philosophers (Vuillemin, Bouveresse, Hacking, Granger, Searle) published a collection of essays, each one devoted to one of Aristotle’s ten categories, to show the utility that they still have¹⁰. Moreover, Jonathan Lowe, one of the best renowned English philosophers, has just proposed a new ontology, where the ten categories of Aristotle are reduced to four, but these four are obtained by the combination of the two criteria exposed by Aristotle in chapter 2 of the *Categories*, i.e. the distinction between substances (objects) and accidents (attributes and modes), and the distinction between primary substances (individual objects) and secondary substances (universal kinds)¹¹.

This last distinction, although refused and sometimes quite vituperated by modern philosophy (see Hume’s criticism of the idea of substance and Cassirer’s thesis on the substitution of “substance” by “function” in modern science), has been the basis for the first objections addressed to Hegel, around the middle of the XIX century, by non-Aristotelian philosophers like Feuerbach, Marx and Kierkegaard. In fact, Feuerbach accused Hegel of having inverted the predication relationship, putting the predicate (the thought) in the place of the subject (the man). In his early *Criticism of Hegelian Philosophy of Public Right*, Marx addressed the same criticism to the relationship between State and civil society, using the quite Aristotelian term of *hypokeimenon* to indicate the subject, written with Greek characters, and in his stressing of the importance of the individual, Kierkegaard referred explicitly to the “primary substance” of Aristotle’s *Categories*¹². Moreover, the Oxonian philosopher, David

(in this case, p. 137).

⁹ Cfr. E. Berti, *Sono ancora utili oggi le categorie di Aristotele?*, «Rivista di estetica», n. s. 39, 2008, pp. 57-72.

¹⁰ J. Benoist et al., *Quelle philosophie pour le XXI^e siècle? L’Organon du nouveau siècle*, Gallimard, Paris 2001.

¹¹ E. J. Lowe, *The Four-Category Ontology*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2006.

¹² For the documentation of these observations see E. Berti, *Aristote dans les premières critiques de la philosophie hégélienne chez Feuerbach, Marx et Kierkegaard*, in D. Thouard (éd.), *Aristote au XIX^e siècle*, Presses Universitaires du

Wiggins has recently indicated the Aristotelian concept of “substance” as the unique criterion, which permits recognition of the identity of objects, and therefore of persons, in the change of space-temporal conditions where they are situated, in this way satisfying the classic request of analytic philosophy “no entity without identity”¹³.

The second treatise of the *Organon* is the *De interpretatione*, where there is the distinction between the statement-making sentences and sentences of the type which Austin would have called “performing”, such as the prayer or the order, or where there is the famous “square of the oppositions”, which distinguishes between affirmative and negative sentences, particular and universal sentences, contrary and contradictory sentences, with the precision that the contrary ones cannot be both true, but can both be false, whereas the contradictory ones can neither be both true nor both false, but necessarily one of the two is true and the other is false. It seems to me that these rules have not been questioned by anybody, except those who deny the law of non-contradiction or the law of excluded middle, who nevertheless are very rare. On the contrary, they have been invoked, for instance by Trendelenburg, and more recently by Popper, in order to show that the oppositions used by the Hegelian dialectic are not authentic logical contradictions, but they are real oppositions, that is contraries or correlative oppositions¹⁴. The so-called “logical laws”, i.e. the law of non-contradiction and the law of the excluded middle, formulated by Aristotle, have been denied respectively by the paraconsistent logics and by the logic which derives from the intuitionistic mathematics of Brouwer, but in both cases for very particular spheres, as the limit-cases, the situations of transition, the paradoxes, or the infinite wholes¹⁵. But the paraconsistent logics, in particular the “dialetheism” of Graham Priest, according to which two opposite sentences can be both true, are not able to explain why in all other cases, which are the majority, these laws have to be respected¹⁶.

Septentrion, Villeneuve d’Ascq 2004, pp. 23-35.

¹³ D. Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance renewed*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001.

¹⁴ F.A. Trendelenburg, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Berlin 1878 (1840); K.R. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, Routledge, London 1969.

¹⁵ At this regard too I have to refer to my book *Contraddizione e dialettica negli antichi e nei moderni*, L’epos, Palermo 1987.

¹⁶ About the “dialetheism” there has been a conference in the Technische Universität Berlin, June 2011, with the participation of Priest himself, whose proceedings are edited by E. Ficara, *Contradictions: Logic, History, Actuality*, W. de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston, 2014.

I will not consider the theory of syllogism exposed in the *Prior and Posterior Analytics*, which is one of the major glories of Aristotle, because, although vituperated, the syllogism has a logical value that nobody could question, and which was drawn on again by the XX century logic, for instance by Jan Lukasiewicz, who showed how it can be expressed by the formal logic¹⁷. Neither will I consider the theory of refutation, exposed by Aristotle in the *Topics*, because Popper has made of the refutation, i.e. of falsification, the main method of science¹⁸. Likewise, I will not consider the theory of fallacies, exposed by Aristotle in the *Sophistical Refutations*, which has been recognised as an unsurpassed model by the experts in this field of contemporary logic¹⁹, because such subjects would require research that is more technical.

III. Physics

Physics was often considered the weak point of Aristotle's philosophy, because it was considered surpassed by the modern physics of Galileo and Newton. As Sir Anthony Kenny wrote, «many mediaeval Aristotelians took Aristotle's writings as the last as well as the first word on scientific matters, instead of following his own example of close examination of nature. His authority kept fundamental science static for much of the Middle Ages, and since the era of Bacon, Galileo and Newton the Aristotelian tradition in natural philosophy has been effectively dead»²⁰. But a great historian of science, Thomas S. Kuhn, wrote that for many years he was not able to understand why Aristotle, who in other disciplines revealed himself a genius, said so many absurd things about physics, and why his physics for many centuries was taken seriously. When he read Aristotle's *Physics*, Kuhn at last understood that for Aristotle, movement, which is the object of physics, was something completely different from what it was for Galilei and Newton, i.e. it was a phenomenon which included not only the fall of a stone, but also complex processes such as the passage of a man from infancy to maturity. From that moment, Aristotle's statements no longer appeared so absurd to him and he understood why they had been so successful throughout the centuries²¹.

¹⁷ J. Lukasiewicz, *Aristotle's Syllogistic from the Standpoint of Modern Formal Logic*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1957.

¹⁸ K.R. Popper, *Logik der Forschung*, Wien 1935.

¹⁹ C.L. Hamblin, *Fallacies*, Methuen, London 1970.

²⁰ A. Kenny, *Essays on the Aristotelian Tradition*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2001, p. 3.

²¹ T.S. Kuhn, *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and*

If we take the most important doctrine exposed by Aristotle in *Physics*, following which all the bodies in movement are composed by matter and form (the famous “hylomorphism”), and we try to understand it in its most authentic meaning, without reducing matter to a *substratum obscurum* or form to an “occult quality”, as many modern philosophers believed, we can see that it indicates precisely the direction taken by research in all modern sciences of nature, whether it is physics, chemistry or biology. In fact, what else do physics and chemistry look for when they reduce bodies to elements, elements to molecules and atoms, atoms to subatomic particles, if not what Aristotle called “material cause”, or rather, that of which bodies are constituted? Even now, scientists speak of matter and anti-matter, of “obscure matter”, of “black holes”, to indicate the last constituents of bodies, that is what Aristotle called “prime matter”.

Form seems to have been less fortunate than matter, perhaps because no scientist denied the existence of matter – only the idealists did this, but they were philosophers, not scientists – while it seemed much easier to deny the existence of form. However, what are the *formulae* used by physicists and chemists? *Formula* in Latin means “little form” because the *formula* indicates the way in which matter is structured and behaves. For instance the chemical *formula* of water, H_2O , means that the molecule, i.e. the smallest quantity, of water is composed of two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen. Its material components are therefore these three atoms, and nothing else. The formula H_2O is not a further component that is, it is not itself matter, but if it were not just so, i.e. if the three atoms were not combined in this proportion, there would be no water. The *formula* is what Aristotle called the form, or the formal cause, of water. Physics uses equations, which express the relationships between mass, energy, space, time, etc., i.e. they express these relationships in algebraic terms, that is in numbers. Well, the first example of form given by Aristotle in *Physics* (book 2, ch. 3) is the number, or the relation between two quantities. Besides, as Kenny says, «the doctrine of matter and form is a philosophical account of certain concepts we employ in our everyday description or manipulation of material substances»²².

Let us however pay attention to the part of physics that was the most interesting for Aristotle, i.e. the science of living beings, which we call biology. With regard to this, it is important to remember that, after having read the English version of the *De partibus animalium*, the greatest modern biologist Charles Darwin, author of the theory of the evolution,

Change, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1977.

²² *Op. cit.*

wrote a letter to the translator of the work, William Ogle, saying: «Linnaeus and Cuvier have been my two gods, though in very different ways, but they were mere schoolboys to old Aristotle»²³. And Max Delbrück, 1969 Nobel prize for medicine, wrote that, if it was possible to give a Nobel prize in remembrance, we ought to give it to Aristotle for having discovered the implicit principle in DNA, i.e. in the acid contained in the nucleus of the cells of every living being. This principle, following Delbrück, is just the form, which acts as a “programme”, or a “plan of development”, guiding the embryo from its conception up to the complete development of the mature individual, plant or animal²⁴. In fact Aristotle in his *De generatione animalium* explains animal reproduction admitting that the male parent transmits to the matter, given by the female parent, a series of impulses which confer to it a certain form. This form then determines the following formation of the various organs until the fulfilment of the whole organism (a process that the Aristotelian William Harvey, the discoverer of blood circulation, called “epigenesis”). Regarding this, contemporary genetic speaks of “information”, a term which precisely means transmission of forms²⁵.

Hylomorphism is also at the basis of Aristotelian psychology, i.e. of the science of the soul (*psychê*). This for Aristotle, is the form of all living beings, plants, animals and human beings, and is not a daemon which enters the body at the moment of birth, and leaves it at the moment of death, as the Orphists and the Pythagoreans believed (and sometimes also the great Plato), but it is “an actuality of the first kind”, i.e. the effective presence of a capacity, precisely the capacity of living, “of a natural body having life potentially in it” (*De anima* II 1). When one of the major English philosophers, Gilbert Ryle, the editor of “Mind”, published his best known book, *The Concept of Mind* (London 1949), he proposed a conception of the mind as a bundle of “dispositions”, or capacities, retaking tacitly (i.e. without quoting him, because in his book Ryle quotes only Descartes, but to refute him) the concept of intellectual soul formulated by Aristotle. Ryle in fact was like the other representative of the Oxford School, John L. Austin, an Aristotelian incognito, which nobody realized, and consequently he was believed to be a behaviourist²⁶.

²³ A. Gotthelf, *Darwin on Aristotle*, «Journal of the History of Biology», 32, 1999, pp. 3-30.

²⁴ M. Delbrück, *Aristotle-totle-totle*, in J. Monod and E. Borek (eds.), *Of Microbes and Life*, Columbia University Press, New York 1971, pp. 50-55.

²⁵ Cfr. E. Berti, *Aristotele e la genetica contemporanea*, «Fenomenologia e società», 29, 2006, pp. 5-11 (reprinted in Id., *Nuovi studi aristotelici*, pp. 437-443).

²⁶ His book was translated into Italian with the title *Lo spirito come*

If that book were kept in mind, perhaps the so-called “Mind-Body Problem” – which created a lot of distress, because of the development of neurosciences and cognitive sciences, the contemporary philosophy of mind – would never have been formulated. This is at least the opinion of two well-known representatives of American analytic philosophy, Hilary Putnam and Martha C. Nussbaum, who, with regard to the relationship between mind and body, proposed a “Return to Aristotle” or an “Aristotle after Wittgenstein”²⁷.

However, this is also the opinion of Anthony Kenny, who says: «philosophy of mind is the area in which the Aristotelian tradition is most relevant and vital. I have argued in my book *Aquinas on Mind* (Routledge 1993) that the account of the human mind developed by Aquinas on an Aristotelian basis is as good a basis for a philosophical understanding of its nature as any other account currently on offer»²⁸. Speaking still of the problem of mind, Kenny adds: «the fundamental incoherence of the Cartesian system has been exposed by Kant, and in more recent times by Wittgenstein. Many of those who have been convinced by the Kantian and Wittgensteinian refutations of Descartes have realized that the best worked out systematic alternative to Cartesianism is to be found in the Aristotelian tradition»²⁹. We may say that for this reason in the field of psychology the Aristotelian tradition is an example of how a tradition can transform itself in an occasion for innovation. In addition, another famous book of the Oxford School, *Intention*, by Gertrud Elisabeth M. Anscombe, can be brought back to the Aristotelian tradition in the field of the theory of action (choice, deliberation, practical inference).

IV. Metaphysics

Metaphysics is perhaps the part of Aristotle’s thought which has been most discussed in the history of this discipline, which not by chance received its name from the title that the editors attributed to the work where Aristotle exposed his “first philosophy”. In my opinion it is also the part which has been most misunderstood, hence regarding this, the term “tradition” runs the risk of assuming the meaning of “treason”. The

comportamento (Ghost as behaviour), Einaudi, Torino 1955.

²⁷ Cfr. H. Putnam, *Words and Life*, ed. by J. Conant, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1994, and my article *Aristotele e il “Mind-Body Problem”*, «Iride», 11, 1998, pp. 43-62 (reprinted in Berti, *Nuovi studi aristotelici*, pp. 309-328).

²⁸ Kenny, p. 9.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

Metaphysics is a work which was probably put together by Andronicus of Rhodes at the end of the I century B.C. It had a strange destiny, because it began to circulate in the Greek cultural area at the time when the Roman Empire came into contact with the great monotheistic religions, Judaism and Christianity. The “pagan” (a term used by Christians) culture reacted to them by developing a philosophy like Neoplatonism which, without repudiating the polytheism of the official Greek and Roman religions, deduced the whole reality from only one Principle, the One of Plotinus or the Being of Porphyrius, in competition with Judaic-Christian creationism.

In this climate, Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* was interpreted essentially as a rational theology, i.e. as a philosophy fit to give a rational basis for a theology of strongly religious character, founded on a divine revelation for the Judaists and the Christians, or on the word of Plato for the Neoplatonists. This tendency already appeared in the first great commentator on Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias (II-III century A.C.), who, even chronologically preceding the Neoplatonism, was influenced by the so called “Middle-Platonism”, which was an attempt to reconcile Aristotle with Plato in view of a substantially monotheistic system. Nevertheless Alexander did not reduce Aristotle’s metaphysics to philosophical theology, but stressed the presence in it of an essentially ontological element, the science of being as being, which is exposed in the IV book of the homonymous work, interpreting rightly the “God” of Aristotle i.e. the unmoved mover, as one of the first causes which explains being as being. His Platonism revealed itself in interpreting the causality of the unmoved mover as a causality of exemplar kind, i.e. in claiming that heaven rotates on itself in order to imitate the immobility of the unmoved mover³⁰.

Unfortunately, only the first five books of Alexander’s commentary on *Metaphysics* have been preserved, therefore we do not know exactly what interpretation he gave, in comparison with the rest of the work, to the book XII, the famous *Lambda* book, where the theory of the unmoved mover is exposed. From the commentary by Averroes, who knows and quotes the lost commentary by Alexander, it is possible to deduce that also the Greek commentator considered this book as the peak of the whole *Metaphysics*³¹. *Metaphysics* was certainly reduced to a theology by the Neoplatonic commentators on the work, Syrianus, Asclepius and the Byzantine

³⁰ Cfr. M. Rashed, *Essentialisme. Alexandre d’Aphrodise entre logique, physique et cosmologie*, de Gruyter, Berlin-New York 2007.

³¹ Ibn Rushd’s *Metaphysics*, a Translation with Introduction of Ibn Rushd’s *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics, Book Lam*, by C. Genequand, Brill, Leiden 1984.

Michael of Ephesus (XII century), who rewrote the lost books of Alexander's commentary, transmitting them to posterity as though they were the work of Alexander³².

The behaviour held by the Muslim commentators in this regard is also interesting. They too, as followers of the third great monotheistic religion, looked for a rational basis in Greek philosophy for the revealed theology. As the Christians in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages, i.e. before the XIII century preferred Plato's philosophy to Aristotle's, because it was easier to reconcile it with the creation of the world and the immortality of the soul, Muslims – in competition with the Christians of the Byzantine Empire – chose Aristotle as their philosopher. However, they did not find a true theology in Aristotle, because even the XII book of *Metaphysics* offers very little in this regard. Hence they themselves made up two works of philosophic theology in Arabic, which they attributed to Aristotle: the so called *Theologia Aristotelis*, composed in the circle of Al-Kindi with excerpts from Plotinus's works, and the book *On the pure Good*, translated into Latin as *Liber de causis*, made up of excerpts from Proclus's *Elementatio theologica*³³. Therefore, the major Muslim philosophers, inspired by Neoplatonism, interpreted Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in a theological way, with Al-Kindi, even if they stressed the ontological aspect of it, with Al-Farabi and Avicenna, for whom metaphysics is a science of being which includes even God. On the other hand, Averroes stressed its connection with physics, considering nevertheless, under the influence of Alexander's commentary, the XII book as the best part of the whole *Metaphysics*.

In Christian Scholastic tradition, Thomas Aquinas skilfully reconciled the ontological moment of Aristotle's metaphysics, i.e. the study of being as being (*ens commune*), with its theological moment, i.e. the demonstration of the necessity of an unmoved mover, showing how the last one is the first cause of being. He too, however, shared the theological tendency of his predecessors, developing his commentary up to the XII book and refraining from commenting on the last two books of *Metaphysics* (XIII-XIV), devoted to criticism of the Platonic-Academic doctrines of ideas-numbers and of their principles. A true turning-point was introduced by John Duns Scotus, who reduced Aristotle's metaphysics to its ontological moment, already stressed by Avicenna, making of it exclusively the science of being as being, i.e. the study of the

³² Cfr. R. Salis, *Il commento di pseudo-Alessandro al libro Lambda della Metafisica di Aristotele*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2005.

³³ Cfr. C. D'Ancona Costa, *La casa della Sapienza: la trasmissione della metafisica greca e la formazione della filosofia araba*, Guerini, Milano 1996.

transcendental proprieties of the last one, conceived even as univocal and including God too as part of it. A similar interpretation was given some centuries afterwards by Francisco Suárez, who conceived metaphysics as the science of being, including even the science of God as part of it, and preparing in this way the road to the German *Schulmetaphysik*, where the modern concept of “ontology” was born (with Lohrard, Göckel, Clauberg).

Therefore, in the heart of the modern age, the metaphysics of Aristotelian origin articulated itself, with Christian Wolff, in general metaphysics, or ontology, and special metaphysics, i.e. rational theology, rational cosmology and rational psychology, offering itself in this way to the criticism of Kant. By following the *Schulmetaphysik*, Kant saved general metaphysics, transforming it into transcendental analytic metaphysics, and rejected the special metaphysics, considering them mere dialectic, in the worse sense of the term. Hegel continued in the same direction, identifying metaphysics with logic, the science of the Idea, the first category of which is the total indeterminate being (because univocal) and hence resolving itself in nothing. Nevertheless, Hegel appreciated Aristotle’s metaphysics, and in the conclusion of his *Encyclopaedia of philosophical sciences*, he referred to Aristotle’s description of the unmoved mover as the act of thought, as the description of the absolute Spirit.

Franz Brentano reacted against the univocal interpretation of Hegel, vindicating the multiplicity of the meanings of being affirmed by Aristotle, but he too, following Thomas Aquinas, reduced being to substance and substance to unmoved substance, i.e. to God³⁴. On the contrary, the Neokantian Paul Natorp re-proposed the distinction, made by Kant under the influence of Wolff, between metaphysics as the universal science of being as being and rational theology, appreciating the first and quite rejecting the second as non-Aristotelian³⁵. Heidegger, combining Brentano’s interpretation with Natorp’s, distinguished two sciences in Aristotle’s metaphysics: ontology, the science of being, and theology, science of the Supreme Being. In this way, he introduced into the philosophy of the XX century the idea, which afterwards became commonplace, that metaphysics would be an “onto-theology”, which reduces the universal being to a particular being and in this way definitively forgets the true being³⁶. Notwithstanding the total refusal by

³⁴ F. Brentano, *Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles*, Freiburg i. B., 1862.

³⁵ P. Natorp, “Thema und Disposition der aristotelischen Metaphysik”, «Philosophische Monatshefte», 24, 1888, pp. 37-65 and 540-574.

³⁶ M. Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz. Die onto-theo-logische Verfassung der*

Heidegger of Aristotle's metaphysics as oblivion of being, the fact remained that for him metaphysics was still Aristotle's metaphysics and that the object of philosophy was fundamentally the being, as it was for Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Pierre Aubenque, one of the major specialists of Aristotle, with a Heideggerian tendency, after having declared 50 years ago the failure of Aristotle's metaphysics³⁷, has more recently come back to the subject, declaring that metaphysics «surmonte les confinements, déconstruit les enfermements, ouvre toujours de nouveau des possibilités prématurément closes dans la pensée. Elle est, pour le dire avec Kant, la respiration même de la pensée»³⁸.

If, by his interpretation of Aristotle's metaphysics, Heidegger has influenced the whole "continental" philosophy of the XX century, the presence of Aristotle has not been less important, even if with a completely opposed sign, in the "analytic" philosophy, as it is attested not only by the linguistic analyses of Austin and Ryle (already quoted) but also by the so called "descriptive metaphysics" of P.F. Strawson, by the theory of substance of Wiggins and by the *Contemporary Aristotelian Metaphysics* which forms the title of the collection of studies in honour of Jonathan Lowe. Here, about fifteen philosophers, for the most part from North-Europe (England, Ireland, Finland) and from North-America (United States and Canada), all rigorously English-speaking and all, I would say, of analytic extraction, not only admit the possibility of metaphysics, but they explicitly defend Aristotle's metaphysics, as the title suggests, without taking into consideration not only the criticisms of metaphysics advanced by Kant, by Heidegger and by "post-modern" philosophers, but also not even those criticisms advanced by neo-positivistic philosophers such as Carnap and Ayer. The conception of metaphysics that they propose is interesting, because on that basis, on the one hand metaphysics precedes particular sciences (physics, biology), discussing the meaning of the terms used by them, and on the other hand it follows them, in the sense that it takes into account their results. In fact, K. Fine stresses not only the general character, but also the "eidetic" of metaphysics, which analyses just the "essences" (*eidê*), i.e. the final nature, of the objects which are the concern of the sciences. T.E. Tahko, the editor of the collection, recovers the concept of metaphysics proposed some years ago by the "neo-Aristotelian" E.J. Lowe as a preliminary inquiry regarding the categories in which the objects of the sciences are included, and on the principles that are common to them (for instance the

Metaphysik, Neske, Pfullingen 1957.

³⁷ P. Aubenque, *Le problème de l'être chez Aristote*, Paris 1962.

³⁸ P. Aubenque, *Faut-il déconstruire la métaphysique?*, Paris 2009, p. 76.

law of non-contradiction). Furthermore, in the collection there are also criticisms made by Russell and Quine about the reduction of the existence of a quantifier (T. Crane, E.T. Olson), and above all there are discussions of the new classification of categories proposed by Lowe. Some authors propose an alternative classification (G. Rosenkranz), others a reduction of categories from four to two (A. Bird), others the elimination of the universals (J. Heil), others again an integration of the categories with the dependence relationships (P. Simons). In the collection one can find actualisations of the Aristotelian concept of substance (J. Hoffman), of potency (I.M. Guenin), of life (S. McCall, who refers to it in relation to the discovery of DNA), of demonstration as explanation (K. Koslicki), and a defence of the priority of action with respect to potency (D.S. Oderberg).

The most neglected aspect of Aristotle's metaphysics, in the field of analytic philosophy, is certainly the "theological" moment, not because analytic philosophy does not cultivate rational theology, but because, in general, the lovers of this discipline do not refer to Aristotle³⁹. The Christian specialists on Aristotle rightly stress the theological aspect of Aristotle's metaphysics⁴⁰, but there is no doubt that they consider it completely insufficient in comparison to the natural theology of Thomas Aquinas. A re-proposition of Aristotle's metaphysics conceived as "classical metaphysics" has been made by the School of Padua thanks to Marino Gentile, who has seen in it that integral questioning of experience which is requested by authentic metaphysics and the indication of a transcendent Absolute as Intelligence, which is the only one capable of satisfying the problematic character of experience⁴¹. Inspired by this concept, I too have tried to propose a problematic and dialectic metaphysics, fundamentally of Aristotelian character, which is weak from the epistemological point of view, i.e. poor in information, but strong from the logical point of view, because very difficult to refute⁴².

³⁹ Cf. M. Micheletti, *La teologia razionale nella filosofia analitica*, Carocci, Roma 2010; M. Damonte, *Una nuova teologia naturale*, Carocci, Roma 2011.

⁴⁰ J. Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1978 (I ed. 1951); V. Décarie, *L'objet de la métaphysique selon Aristote*, Montréal-Paris, Institut d'études médiévales-Vrin, 1961; G. Reale, *Il concetto di filosofia prima e l'unità della Metafisica di Aristotele*, Vita e pensiero, Milano 1993 (I ed. 1961).

⁴¹ M. Gentile, *Trattato di filosofia*, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Napoli 1987.

⁴² Cf. E. Berti, *Incontri con la filosofia contemporanea*, Petite Plaisance, Pistoia 2006; Id., *Aristotele e la metafisica classica*, Il ramo, Rapallo 2012.

V. Practical philosophy

Concerning the so-called practical philosophy, i.e. the ethics-economics-politics complex, it is not necessary to remember the well-known “renaissance” (or “rehabilitation” for its detractors) of practical philosophy, which took place in Europe in the second half of the XX century and which then spread to North-America. The disenchantment of public opinion with respect to the social sciences, from which many people had expected the solution to all the problems concerning man and society, which became evident when, as predicted by Max Weber since their birth, they revealed their incapacity to evaluate, i.e. their inability to distinguish good and evil, just and unjust, and therefore to guide praxis, had as a consequence the rediscovery of a form of philosophical rationality, not dependent on a political ideology nor on a religious faith, but “practical”, i.e. capable of resolving practical problems, and consequently a return to the two philosophers who had stressed it, respectively in antiquity and in modern times, i.e. Aristotle and Kant. The former was the author of the expression “practical philosophy” (*Metaph.* II 1, 993 b 21), which then he developed in his *Ethics* and *Politics*, while the latter was the author of the *Critique of practical reason* and of an ethics completely founded on reason.

The return to Aristotle was nevertheless still stronger than the return to Kant, thanks above all to the re-proposal of his practical philosophy as the model of hermeneutics by Hans-Georg Gadamer and to the convergence of his philosophy and his school (R. Bubner) with the philosophy of Hannah Arendt and of her school (E. Vollrath), and of the Hegelian Joachim Ritter and of his school (G. Bien). As Franco Volpi recently wrote, Gadamer has rehabilitated the *phronêsis*, Ritter has rehabilitated the *êthos* and Arendt has rehabilitated the *praxis*, i.e. the communicative acting, all the concepts going back to Aristotle⁴³. However, the reference to the *phronêsis* has led to the rediscovery of the Aristotelian concept of virtue, which happened in America thanks to Alasdair MacIntyre⁴⁴, and in England thanks to G.E.M. Anscombe, G.H. von Wright and Philippa Foot, who founded the tendency of moral philosophy today known as “ethics of virtues”⁴⁵. At the same

⁴³ F. Volpi, *Heidegger und der Neoaristotelismus*, in A. Denker, G. Figal, F. Volpi (Hrsgg.), *Heidegger und Aristoteles*, Alber, Freiburg-München 2007 (“Heidegger-Jahrbuch”), pp. 221-236.

⁴⁴ A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana 1981.

⁴⁵ Cf. M. Mangini, *Etica delle virtù: appunti di viaggio*, «Philosophical News», 4, 2012, pp. 82-94. The whole issue of this review is devoted to the virtues.

time, in the field of the ethics, there has been a re-evaluation of concepts of Aristotelian origin, such as happiness, justice, pleasure, relational virtues (friendship), and the perception of the precariousness of the human condition has been stressed, which Aristotle shared with the great Greek tragedians, thanks to Martha Nussbaum⁴⁶.

A part of practical philosophy, meant in the Aristotelian sense, is what we call political philosophy, and Aristotle included ethics in this too, thus forming the whole practical philosophy called “political science”. The treatise in which it is exposed, i.e. *Politics*, nearly unknown in antiquity, was widely successful in the Middle Ages (not only with Thomas Aquinas, but also with Dante Alighieri and Marsilius of Padua) and in the Renaissance (with the so-called “republican” thought). Even Niccolò Machiavelli, who certainly cannot be considered an Aristotelian, was considered as such by his contemporaries, because in Florence, then dominated by Neoplatonism, he made use of the central books of Aristotle’s *Politics* in order to realistically describe the revolutions, that is, the ways in which power can be conquered or lost. However, precisely with Machiavelli a new political institution entered history, and consequently philosophy, that of the modern State, completely unknown to Aristotle, which was destined to dominate modern political thought too, with Bodin, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel.

The political philosophy of Aristotle was recovered in the XX century, both by the supporters of the renaissance of Aristotelian practical philosophy (in particular by Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin) and by Jacques Maritain, a thinker, who considered himself more a Thomist than an Aristotelian. Arendt was among the first to discover the category of “the political” as a public space reserved for the exercise of praxis, i.e. acting not with the aim of production, but above all consisting in communication, that is to say free discussion, while Strauss and Voegelin insisted above all on the connection between politics and ethics, affirmed by Plato and Aristotle, against the autonomy of politics claimed by modern political thought. In his masterpiece of political philosophy, *Man and the State* (Chicago 1951), Maritain criticised the modern State, which through the idea of sovereignty claims to be self-sufficient, opposing it with another form of political organisation, the political body, or “political society”, which re-proposes on a larger scale the *civitas* of Thomas Aquinas, i.e. the *polis* defined by Aristotle, conceived as the community which is sufficient for the achievement of the common good,

⁴⁶ M.C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness. Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986.

i.e. of “living well” (*eu zên*), or a good life. After 50 years, contemporary history has confirmed the correctness of Maritain’s theory, and therefore of Aristotle’s too, demonstrating that national and sovereign States were incapable not only of achieving “living well”, but also of achieving simple “living”, and the consequent necessity of creating larger political organisations, of supra-national character, which can fulfil in a different way the essence of the *polis*, i.e. the “common good”⁴⁷.

Moreover, further particular aspects of Aristotelian politics, such as the criticism of “unnatural chrematistic”, aiming for the infinite growth of richness, and the necessity of an ethical inspiration for politics, was confirmed by Amartya K. Sen, one of the most reputed economists of the XX century, the 1998 Nobel Prize winner for economics, whose conception of the distribution of wealth on the basis of the “capabilities” of people to enjoy it was rightly compared by Martha Nussbaum, with its author’s approval, to the Aristotelian concept, according to which the right measure of wealth is that which makes happiness possible, intended as the complete fulfilment of human capabilities⁴⁸. It is not by chance that today there is a Centre for Contemporary Aristotelian Studies in Ethics and Politics (CASEP) in the London Metropolitan University, which aims to promote research informed by, and into, Aristotelian principles, i.e. a teleological conception of the human good and human capabilities, an ethics of virtues, and a politics of the common good. This is another example of how the Aristotelian tradition can become an occasion for innovation.

VI. Rhetoric and Poetic

After centuries of contempt and oblivion, even Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, decreed in the name of a rationality of a geometrical kind, has been rediscovered, as the theory of an argumentation which cannot be reduced to formal models, by the “new rhetoric” of Chaïm Perelman (Bruxelles), and continued in Germany by T. Viehweg, in France by M. Villey and in the USA by H. Johnstone Jr with the review “Philosophy and Rhetoric”. It has proved itself of great utility in the fields of law, ethics and politics, permitting a discussion in rational form in spheres of practical life which

⁴⁷ Cf. E. Berti, *Soggetti di responsabilità. Questioni di filosofia pratica*, Diabasis, Reggio Emilia, 1993.

⁴⁸ M.C. Nussbaum, *Nature, Function, and Capability: Aristotle and Political Distribution*, in G. Patzig (Hrsg.), *Aristoteles’ “Politik”. Akten des XI. Symposium Aristotelicum*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1990, pp. 152-186.

do not lend themselves to the formalisation of the logical calculus⁴⁹. A new ethics has been founded concerning this kind of argumentation, and the argumentations which Aristotle considered of dialectic competence, such as the refutation, by K.O. Apel and J. Habermas, known as “discourse ethics”, according to which rational discussion is not merely a formal activity, but also implies some moral values, like acknowledgment of the equal dignity of the interlocutors, freedom to criticise, and the duty of replying to objections.

The Aristotelian theory of argumentation, recaptured by the “new rhetoric”, is exposed in the first book of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, while the second book contains the so-called Aristotelian theory of passions, knowledge of which, according to Aristotle, is fundamental for those who want to persuade an audience. This theory was taken up in the XX century even by Heidegger, who, referring to the II book of *Rhetoric*, not only wrote that the ontological-fundamental interpretation of the principles of emotions did not make a single remarkable step forward after Aristotle⁵⁰, but devoted a whole course to commentary on this book⁵¹. Unfortunately, Heidegger reduced all the Aristotelian analysis of passions, which also concerns anger, friendship, shame, kindness, pity, envy, emulation, to the analysis of fear alone. Aristotle’s discourse was developed by Hannah Arendt in a quite different direction, in the book that she declares totally inspired by Heidegger, *The Human Condition*, which in European editions has the title of *Vita activa* (Aristotle’s *praxis*), although the author would have wanted to entitle it *Amor mundi*⁵².

Lastly, what can be said of *Poetics*? The word itself has entered the common language to indicate the theory of poetry, as has the word “catharsis” to indicate the purification of passions by poetry, which Aristotle theorised in his *Poetics*, and references to “myth”, i.e. the plot, “peripetia”, i.e. the reversal of fortune, and “recognition”, i.e. discovery, as the essential and typical moments of tragedy. Diego Lanza, an Italian editor of the work, wrote: “Few treatises boast the authority and the prestige of Aristotle’s *Poetics*. A book that, for nearly 23 centuries, has been an almost obligatory point of reference in every discourse on poetry.

⁴⁹ Cfr. S. Thomas (ed.), *What is the New Rhetoric?*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle 2007.

⁵⁰ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, Blackwell, Oxford 1967, § 29.

⁵¹ M. Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie*, Klostermann, Frankfurt a. M. 2002 (GA II 18).

⁵² E. Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt, for Love of the World*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London 1982.

Idolized by classicism, detested by romanticism and rediscovered in more recent years by structuralism, the *Poetics* preserves an incalculable historical importance. For the first time in the history of western culture, poetry is separated from morals and from the religious sphere and it is referred to as a true technique, regulated by norms and laws, which can be studied and taught. The *Poetics*, in short, is still today the basis for every theory of literature⁵³.

All this illustrates, in a way that seems eloquent to me, what “tradition” means: that is, the transmission of ideas, values, experiences which have become a common patrimony of humanity, and how tradition can be an occasion for innovation.

⁵³ Aristotele, *Poetica*, a cura di D. Lanza, RCS Libri, Milano 1997 (my translation).