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Vai al contenuto multimediale

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**Synthesis and Comment
of Aristotle's Metaphysics (A)**

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Introduction

The series of Books which constitutes the *corpus* of Aristotelian *Metaphysics* open with the identification of wisdom as the first philosophy, the original and determinative source — that is detached — of all subsequent and consequent knowledge, towards which the human intellect tends with necessity, organizing then any related discursive knowledge. In this research the intellect entangles fatally in the network constituted by the squaring of the causes (efficient, final, formal, material), already glimpsed and (ill)treated by thinkers preceding the Stagirite in the Greek philosophical panorama (from Thales to the Pythagoreans, the Eleatics to his master Plato). Aristotle then proposes in Book A to interpret the previous speculative positions, to demonstrate its limitation and intrinsic contradiction. In this attempt he will proceed with evident distortions and forcing, aimed at constructing that distinction and contraposition with his own master Plato, which will occupy the whole space of legitimization of the subsequent Western speculative tradition (idealism vs realism), but which precisely for this reason — as it was in fact the same intentions of both philosophers, Plato and Aristotle — will conceal the solution to the ontological problems represented by the hot current of the Presocratics. But let us now enter directly into the body of the text to admire

the remarkable dialectical capacities shown by Aristotle in an attempt to overthrow the positions of his antagonists.

Synthesis and Comment of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (A)

In Book A, chap. 1 of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle, after having first debated the distinction between τέχνη, the specific application of judgement referred to the universal (τὸ καθόλου) and ἐμπειρία, becoming skilled thanks to the individual triumph of the applications (καθ' ἕκαστον), aims to enhance the stability and the value of the first term throughout the notion of cause (αἰτία). Is indeed wise he who knows the causes and, when knowing the causes, is able to teach them¹. Is even wiser he who has knowledge of the causes related to the free reality of the being, wiser than the one who knows the causes regarding prosperity in life (πρὸς ἡδονήν), or than the one who only knows the causes able to satisfy the mere necessities (πρὸς τὰναγκαῖα). Supremely and really wise is he who eventually gets to know the first causes and principles (τὰ [πρῶτα] αἰτία καὶ τὰς ἀρχὰς [...] πάντες).

In chap. 2, Aristotle manages thereby to present and define the conceptual framework of the primary causes, which are the object of the philosophical research. If the wise man has the knowledge of the entirety of the being, and if this knowledge

1. *Metaphysics*, A, 1, 981b 7–10.

is a superior form of knowledge which regards the causes and has a free and unselfish end, then the wise man cannot but enjoy a position of hegemony, from which to govern the evolution and the discrimination of additional, subsequent knowledges, however still subordinated to knowledge itself. (σοψία)². With this pyramid-shaped image, the philosopher of Stagira defines the traits of the very knowledge: it must concern the universal (τὴν καθόλου ἐπιστήμην), since each particular has to refer to the universal. But the universal is, indeed, distant from the sense and the opinion commonly reached; for it is understandable thanks to a frame or to a particularly narrow set of principles — perhaps here the reference is to the supreme genus of the being in Plato's *Sophist*³ — highly elevated and abstract. Hence this principles define the perimeter, the limit and the boundary within which the rational imagination of the causes can ensure effective and concrete hegemony of knowledge over all the other sciences and techniques. So the matter, which will form the imaginative and rational making of the causes, will be the same matter from which the the free spirit of the wise man will materialize, following the prevailing and implicit orientation, defined contextually by his own teacher, Plato: the diagonalization of the necessary and orderly One⁴. This diago-

2. *Metaphysics*, A, 2, 982a 4–19.

3. Stability and movement, identity e diversity, can both originate a separation which, on one side, shall provide the supremacy of a stable and identical being, on the other side shall lead to the dependency of the being always in movement and always different (the sky is the sensitive, the becoming being).

4. Grasp the meaning and the intellectual orientation settled by the gap and by the dependency set up by the frame shaped in the previous note.

nalization is due to keep together, obliquely, the sought causes and principles by building, in a transversal manner, all that will represent the domination and hegemony of *metaphysics* over all the other sciences (physics, grammatical logic, ethics, politics, rhetoric, mathematics) and techniques (manufacturing crafts). Again, this diagonalization is the one to indicate within the necessary and orderly One, the good and the end of any natural development and also of any human action⁵. And lastly, this diagonalization is the one to assign God — the necessary and orderly One — as a cause⁶. Cause which is the object of a theoretical science, not of a practical or in some way productive one. From the tangible, to the stars and to the universe — this way the sapient gradually elevated himself along this diagonal, abandoning one by one the territories of necessity and the land of enjoyable comfort, eventually reaching the contemplation of what is nearer to God and hence has greater value. So knowledge is science of God, both in a subjective and in an objective sense⁷.

Therefore, Aristotle's last statements are confirming this diagonal framework, established by an absolute subject, who renders a unique world (sky, stars and Earth) dependent on him, a framework which will represent the landmark of the intellectual and volition movements at the end of the classical age, and which will emerge again with unrivalled strength when the imperial traditional pagan vision will penetrate with

5. *Metaphysics*, A, 2, 982a 20–982b 7.

6. *Metaphysics*, A, 2, 982b 7–10.

7. *Metaphysics*, A, 2, 983a 5–11.

its ideology in the new born institutional Christian world, replacing its spirit and original nature — so close to the creative and double dialectical principle of the pre-Socratic thought — with a dogmatic and rigid artefact, intended to stabilize the general necessitation with the opposite liberty of an imaginary unworldly universe. Once the dangerous gap developed against equity was cut off, this freedom was becoming the criterium of any submission, while waiting for the power of the rising Capital to accomplish the reinforcement of its substance and practice during its transition to the modern era, prolonging its life up to the the present day.

In this scenery of development of the history and the Occidental ideological tradition, the Aristotelian reflection is, originally, essential: when, in chaps. 3, 4 and 5, Aristotle is concerned about conforming the previous pre-Socratic thought to his own ontological squaring of the principles and the causes, he initiates the very eradication of the perspective of an alternative, represented by the speculation which anticipates the reflections of Plato's Socrates. He removes and cancels the star of equity in order to preserve the star of freedom, reduced and, after all, subjugated: subjugated by the image of God, and which will prevail over the occidental ideology to this days.

Aristotle succeeds to accomplish this extreme reaction by using that same diagonalization of the intellectual disposition and of the power of will formerly indicated, proceeding with a further vertical straightening. Thus, subsequently to this diagonalization, Aristotle lists, disposes and organizes the series of the first four primary causes, placing them in a twofold series: the Form which, openly and superiorly, includes and identifies

(τὴν οὐσίαν καὶ τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι), the Matter which succumbs to the Form and bears its determination (τὴν ὕλην καὶ τὸ ὑποκείμενον) by the effect of a movement which has a beginning and an opposite ending (ἡ ἀπὸ τῆς κινήσεως [...]) τὴν ἀντικειμένην αἰτίαν [...]) τὸ οὐ ἕνεκα καὶ τὰγαθόν). Or, as they say using an abstract traditional terminology: a productive cause of the movement and a final cause of that same movement⁸.

It is not difficult to imagine the dislocation of the four Aristotelian causes within the imaginative and rational space, developing a rhombus arranged horizontally, the vertices of which identify these same causes.

As we can easily see, Aristotle takes over the imaginative and rational spaces initiated by the pre-Socratic thought, in order to conduct his own imaginative and rational evolution — maybe also under the influence of the recovery that Plato himself encouraged regarding the previous philosophical tradition in the final stage of his speculation. And it's only after having concluded this sort of misappropriation, that the philosopher from Stagira introduces his own historical processing of the philosophies that preceded him. Starting from the first philosophers. But to those, Aristotle concedes only an imaginative and rational space designated to embrace the material species. They don't seem to have ever had any dialectical dimension and, much less, a creative one. Their substance remained always identical and not-becoming, while any further unique-rendering determination was restricted to affections,

8. *Metaphysics*, A, 3, 983a 24–32.

namely, tolerated changes of that same substance, as if it could have kept on shape–shifting throughout a proteiform body⁹.

THALES¹⁰ would have considered this material substance the *aqueous element* (ὕδωρ), considering that its life–sustaining virtues are correlated to the heat. Regarding the aqueous element, each generative power of the beings were participating as well, so that the element itself could guarantee the potential dynamism of every development and tendency. But the notion and the very practice settled by the force of the development and tendency, draw attention on that divergent orientation and on that equity term which Aristotle already tries to hide, disguise or deny, completely cancelling — for what concerns the first naturalist ever (ψυσιολόγοι) — the space–time dimension, the method by which the “how much” becomes “which one” thanks to a special concept of extension with variation. We’ll see, when discussing the reflection of G.W.F. Hegel, how this concept can be themed and issued and which practice it can lead to. After all, this same concept shall represent a difficult argument for Aristotle himself, at the time when the philosopher of Stagira will try to solve the induction issue (ἐπαγωγή).

After Thales, the historiographical Aristotelian discussion will focus on the figure and reflection of ANAXIMENES, of whom he recalls the choice of the “material” principle of *air* (ἀέρα). In a quick succession, Aristotle reminds next HERACLITUS OF EPHEBUS, with his choice of the *fire* principle (πῦρ)

9. *Metaphysics*, A, 3, 983b 6–18.

10. *Metaphysics*, A, 3, 983b 18–984a 5.

and EMPEDOCLES, who will add the *earth* principle (γῆ) to the three previous elements, establishing thereby a complex of four substances with a purely quantitative mutual combination. Here, Aristotle removes any dialectical or creative movement from the Empedoclean nature, almost sterilising its dynamic power. A power which shall be fully reopened and multiplied, recalling the effective reality of the *omeomeries* (ὁμοιομερῶν) the “seeds” of ANAXAGORAS OF CLAZOMENAE, which in fact will be included by the very Stagirite in the group of the infinite principles (ἀπείσους εἶναι). Multiplied power and infinite do represent, in fact, the matter and the form or the reason of its dynamic being, which can thus maintain both the eternal dimension and aspect and also — throughout the variation and mutual combination — that reciprocal co-determination to the procreation and deterioration which provides the sense of the temporal becoming¹¹.

Once Anaxagoras' achievement is hidden — let us recall his activity during the Periclean period and his removal from the city precisely for being considered dangerous to the traditional politics — Aristotle has it easy when covering Anaxagoras' imaginative space with his own deliberate simplification, based on a linear concept of becoming (by mere procreation and by an equally simple and trivial deterioration). For this reason, Aristotle, after having reduced and cancelled any dialectical

11. Here, it must be strongly underlined how the apparent confusion with which Aristotle quotes Anaxagoras' doctrine is actually the propagation of an inscrutable smokescreen on the notion of infinite and on how it can induce the variation movement. Giordano Bruno will approach again this concept, leaving a clean slate after the Aristotelian finitism.

and creative space in the competing speculations, will introduce the notion and the practice of the *heteronomous cause* which manages to impose on the substrate from the outside and gets it to change and move (in a broad sense)¹².

Then, the “principle of movement” (ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κινήσεως) will consist of a para-human subject, which only Aristotle claims to see, after having borrowed the alternative from the previous thinkers. With this rather cheater sleight of hand, Aristotle affords to develop further his conscious deception, including almost the whole preceding speculative tradition — except Parmenides — among those who deny not only (as indeed is commonly accepted) that the being may vanish, but also that it can in no way change¹³. Not only that: he also coopted Parmenides in the circle of the few thinkers capable of distinguishing — after the identification of the being with the One — two different separate floors, maybe precisely that of the reason (sensitive to the internal treatment, according to Aristotle) and that of matter (sensitive to external treatment, according to Aristotle)¹⁴. Here, then, we cannot postpone to a subsequent correct interpretation of the few remaining fragments of ΠΕΡΙ ΦΥΣΕΩΣ, in order to dismantle the axiological assumption which sees the structure of the diversity’s evolution as dictated by the identical.

The power and the action of this “movement” are leading Aristotle to evaluate positively the possibility offered by

12. *Metaphysics*, A, 3, 984a 21–22, 22–27.

13. *Metaphysics*, A, 3, 984a 27–984b 1.

14. *Metaphysics*, A, 3, 984b 1–4.

naturalists: to combine, regarding opposing elements, the gradual emerging of becoming real, while at the same time he criticizes its supposed incapacity — or rather, downright, its impossibility — to justify the ameliorative purpose of the existing, present anyway within nature. ANAXAGORAS OF CLAZOMENAE — according to Aristotle — will be the first one to introduce the concept of *Intelligence* (Νοῦς) for explaining this purpose, one with a trend and organizational order, that Aristotle himself defines as a movement towards the good and the beautiful¹⁵.

In chapter 4, Aristotle recalls in this regard the thought of HESIOD and, again, of PARMENIDES, in order to report a possible conception prior to the theory of the necessary active presence of a principle which moves and orients toward the good and the beautiful: here, love and desire (ἔρως–ἐπιθυμία) are somehow redirected from their virtue and their revolutionary power, consisting in the creative ability and superior dialectic, in order to have them, somehow, declassified and neutralized to mere channelling factors of the many natural and human finalities¹⁶. In opposition to this channelling, Aristotle diminishes, afterwards, a deceiving dialectic, through which he originates the lower term of the recalcitrant and disordered matter, almost ugly due to its divarication from τέλος of order and perfection¹⁷. Here he manages to deflect EMPEDOCLES' speculation, giving to

15. *Metaphysics*, A, 3, 984b 20–22.

16. *Metaphysics*, A, 3, 984b 23–32.

17. *Metaphysics*, A, 3, 984b 32–985a 10.

this space so built, the functional practicability of his two principles: *Friendship* (Φιλία) and *Discord* (Νεχῖος). Aristotle manages thus to transpose the sense of two Empedoclean principles, respectively towards the unitarian functions — coordinators and organizers of a sensible ultimate intelligence, and towards the diabolic function of a disruptive and adversarial activity¹⁸. Separating on two different floors the two Empedoclean principles — themselves in opposition — Aristotle removes their equal complementarity, able both to unite and to differentiate within the rational horizon, and builds the dualistic pattern among principles of good and evil, which will reappear with great value and evidence in medieval religious tradition.

Yet, *matter* and *motion* do not meet the expectations of Aristotle, who consequently insists on indicating and defining two additional causes: an intelligent *shape* — inherently present in every natural event — and a *finality* which is able to elongate a linear and consistent process, free of Empe-

18. The Friendship which separates and Discord which brings together — *Metaphysics* A 4, 985a 24–25 — are the evidence either of Aristotle’s inability to understand, for he doesn’t see the mutual and reciprocal active presence of two principles, within the exact and open rational horizon (Friendship indeed differentiates by homeomerics horizontally wide apart, while Discord reunites all these homeomerics to the common rational horizon), or his desire to hide and mystify further this vision, perhaps influenced by a Pythagorean–Platonic approach, which pretends from him that form of misleading dialectic already indicated. Moreover, the same subsequent Aristotelian “misunderstandings”, relating to the mode of action of the two Empedoclean principles, confirm *backwards* the actual subsistence and reality of an open rational horizon, consisting of a plurality — itself open — of determinations (the *Sphere*).

doclean “confusions”, but which knows how to distinguish between a beginning and an opposite purpose or end. The deviated dialectic of Empedocles becomes, therefore — in the Aristotelian imagination the first form (still sketched) of his dialectic — true and real, standing between the productive cause and the final cause. The dialectic of *contraries*.

Continuing along the road previously drawn and which had allowed him to place the speculations of Anaxagoras and Empedocles into a distinct and separate space which was not at all their own, Aristotle trivializes and diminishes the reflections originating within the school of the atomists LEUCIPPUS and DEMOCRITUS. Here, after having recalled their use of the two principles of *fullness* (τὸ πλήρες) and *emptiness* (τὸ χενόν), he abhors their equal juxtaposition, once traditionally troubled by the equality of being and non-being. In the same manner in which he did not understand, or even mystified the horizon of those two reflections, he now makes unintelligible the *differences* of the atomists (τὰς διαφορὰς αἰτίας) — figure (σχῆμα), order (τάξις) and position (θέσις) — finalizing them according to operational principles — according to proportion (ρυσμῶς), to contact (διαθιγῆ) and direction (τροπῆ) — linear and deterministic, which break down into myriad of fragments impossible to organize (chaotic) the individual movements of the beings.

If intelligent and subtle forms manage to compose the “contraries” — productive cause and final cause — then Aristotle has good play in chap. 5 to conceal the fact that the Pythagoreans had been anticipators, in a reductive (math-

emational) form, of his arguments. In fact, for the thinker of Stagira, the disciples of Pythagoras considered and consider *the elements* to be *numbers* (τὰ τῶν ἀριθμῶν στοιχεῖα) elements of all realities, thus immobilizing, with a series abstract relations, the determining relationships between the beings of the world. In these determining relationships, they made use of the combination of the concepts of matter and form, since they stabilized and identified the beings thanks to the composition of the two prime categories of numbers, the *even* (ὀιτινοτᾶρ) and the *odd* (ὀπιτεττόινρ). The first allowed to flow without any limit or end of the numerical and geometrical determination (unlimited: νοᾶπιρε), while the second provided a stopping point to this flow, a term which closed and rendered accomplished and perfect the being who was determined (limited: πιεεμυνοέρσα). The first being to be composed from the combined application of these two categories was the One (τὸ ἕν), while all the other numbers were alternately designated by either one of them. Thus the One itself could represent, in an ordered figure and scheme, according to the application of the two opposing categories, a sort of original interweaving and a superior term linking to the successive and subordinate series of numbers, images projected onto the whole reality¹⁹.

The general scheme, proposed by some Pythagoreans and mentioned by Aristotle, can then perhaps be interpreted according to the following conceptual map.

19. *Metaphysics*, A 5, 986a 20–21.