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BEGINNINGS OF MODERN CHRISTIAN ARISTOTELIANISM*

I

All historians of mediaeval thought are familiar with the evolution of the attitude of church circles to the rapidly growing popularity (from the late 12th century) of Aristotle's writings, pseudo-Aristotelian works and Arabic commentaries to such texts in Latin Europe. It is well known that at different stages of this evolution people in charge of theological instruction were both distrustful and increasingly aware of the importance of the new doctrines. One needs to keep in mind this complexity and fluctuation when beginning to study and assess the history of Church's reaction to the Aristotelian world penetrating Christendom from all directions, mostly throughout the 13th century. Various warnings, interventions of censors, bans and condemnations culminated in the great Paris Condemnation of 1277. Its verdicts, known as *Articuli parisienses*, have a special and complex history. Their echoes have spread far and wide in space and time. As late as in the 16th century references would be made to the late 13th-century articles whereby the Bishop of Paris voiced the broad Christian opposition to various forms of Aristotelianism.

Today, we are probably insufficiently aware of the historic importance of the Articles and the fact that the condemnation was issued in Paris, the intellectual capital of Christian theology. The Articles emboldened all those who regarded the diverse forms of Aristotelianism simply as a manifestation of paganism, in particular necessitarianism, which threatened freedom and Providence. The condemnation was aimed chiefly against the thought of Averroes, but also Thomism, or rather Thomas Aquinas himself and his views because

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one can hardly speak of Thomism in the late 13th century. This attack was meant to support and affirm many traditional Christian orientations.

As a result, the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius and St. Bonaventura increased. Ockham's philosophy also benefitted from the intellectual climate created by the 1277 act. Duhem rightly emphasizes¹ that it was *Articuli parisienses* that encouraged theologians and philosophers of nature to oppose Aristotelianism in the 14th and 15th centuries.

The history of ideas and science has underestimated the role of the conscious reaction against Aristotelianism, especially with respect to philosophy of nature as practiced by so-called *via moderna*. A special place is held in this respect by Buridanism owing to Buridanus' unique interpretation of several issues in philosophy and physics, which he and his school settled differently than ancient and mediaeval Aristotelians. In the 15th century it was undoubtedly made clear on numerous occasions that the "physical" views of Buridanists are incompatible with Aristotelianism. For example, Lambert de Mote directly argues that the theory of impetus is "contra Aristotelem."²

Moreover, the intellectual climate that was unfavourable to Aristotle due to the 1277 condemnation was further aggravated in the 14th and 15th centuries by the emergence of Wycliff and Hus, whose heretical views were closely connected with numerous varieties of philosophical realism. This state of affairs created a unique opportunity for theology to engage with Ockham and Buridan, or the *via moderna*, whose nominalism and conceptualism contrasted with realistically interpreted Aristotelianism. Accordingly, both the lasting authority of the Articles and the theological-nominalist coalition facilitated the consolidation (in certain late medieval circles of Europe) of philosophical and physicalist concepts rooted in a more or less radical and conscious departure from the veneration shown for Aristotle and the classical interpretation of his works.

However, the situation changed completely around 1450 for several reasons. At this time, Rome sent directives to various centres of Christian thought marking a clear turn towards Aristotle and Aristotelianism in education and encouraging the interpretation of Aristotle in the spirit of orthodoxy. In 1447, Tommaso Parentucelli (de Sarzana), son of a physician and a great patron of science, became Pope (until 1455). The grounds and condi-

¹ Pierre DUHEM, *Le système du monde. Histoire des doctrines cosmologiques de Platon à Copernic*, vol. 10, *La cosmologie du XVe siècle. Écoles et universités du XVe siècle* (Paris: Hermann, 1959), 71.

² *Ibid.*, 164–71.

tioning of his intellectual formation as Nicolas V would require a separate, voluminous study. Let us confine ourselves to several facts firmly corroborating his pro-Aristotelian stance. He encouraged Bessarion to translate anew Aristotle's *Metaphysics* along with passages from Theophrastus' *Metaphysics*.³ With his support, Gregory Trifernate translated *Great Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics*.⁴ Also, through Cardinal d'Estoutville, Nicolas V ordered the reform of the Paris University — a school of paramount importance for Christian thought — which gave it clearly an Aristotelian touch (in 1452 the University of Paris received new statutes, which provided for a broad application and popularization of Aristotle's writings, preparation of abbreviated versions of his texts, and compilation of handbooks that would make it easier to embrace Aristotelian philosophy along the lines of the creed⁵).

We are here touching upon the main reason for the slow decline of the *via moderna* and the renaissance of the *via antiqua* in the 1460s. It may thus become clearer why Paris intellectuals condemned nominalism in 1474, and why other Central European academic centres (where the *via moderna* was in vogue), in a uniform “strategic operation,” as it were, began to give way to the *via antiqua* after 1460, which began to take root despite resistance. Although *Articuli parisienses*, as mentioned above, retained their authority for a long time, especially at German universities, they were becoming an increasingly negative theological norm, losing over time their original, confrontational, anti-Aristotelian character.

It is clear that in this new situation in Christian Europe of the second half of the 15th century, Aristotle was turning into an author of immense authority and splendour, who was now studied with renewed seriousness. This is testified by Nicholas of Cusa, who in *Apologia Doctae ignorantiae* refers to those wishing to practice philosophical Platonism in the following way: “cum nunc Aristotelica secta praevaleat ... sit miraculo similesicuti sectae mutatio—reiecto Aristotele eos altius transilire.”⁶ Now, it comes as no surprise that certain philosophical traditions condemned in 1277,—namely Thomism and Averroism, also gained in significance. One also needs to keep in mind that along with the rejection of nominalism in Paris in 1474, Averro-

³ Henri VAST, *Le cardinal Bessarion, 1403-1472: Étude sur la chrétienté et la renaissance vers le milieu du XV^e siècle* (Paris, 1878), 170ff.

⁴ Eugenio GARIN, “Le traduzioni umanistiche di Aristotele nel secolo XV,” *Atti dell'Accademia Fiorentina di Scienze Morali “La Colombaria”* 16 (1950): 57–92.

⁵ DUHEM, *Le système du monde*, 45.

⁶ Nicolaus von KUES, *Philosophisch-theologische Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. Leo Gabriel (Vienna: Herder, 1964), 530.

ism enjoyed complete freedom because it would be naturally included in the *via antiqua*.⁷ Historians are increasingly highlighting the fact that during the period in question the Inquisition would not persecute Averroists in northern Italy, allowing them to teach and publish.⁸ However, Averroism must have had a strong presence there since towards the end of the 16th century in Padua one would come across a portrait of Averroes depicted as one of the protectors of the Friars Minor.⁹ Of course, Thomas Aquinas, too, would enjoy growing authority, praised and recommended not only as a saint and grand theologian but also—notably—increasingly as the proper and sometimes the only and inimitable commentator of Aristotle.

It would be far from objective to ignore two important factors that were operative at the time: Platonic studies, which were growing in importance, and the activity of the humanists. Crucially, the enthusiastic reinstatement of Aristotle went hand in hand with increased awareness of Plato, his philosophy and the whole Platonic and neo-Platonic tradition. 15th-century Platonism was heterogeneous—besides its radically anti-Aristotelian face (Gemistos Pleton), the epoch is nonetheless influenced by irenic Platonisms proposing a unique harmony and a division of roles of the Academy and the Peripat. The *concordia* of both philosophers would become more and more often the official line, with the caveat of “Divine Plato” being superior to the “physicalist and logicist” Aristotle; the former entitled merely to *sermo sapientiae*, while the latter to *sermo scientiae*. The conviction about the almost religious and prophetic character of Platonism would influence the 16th century and the anthropological decisions made by the Fifth Council of the Lateran. (It would be meaningful and instructive to compare these decisions with the analogous ones made two hundred years earlier at the Council in Vienne.)

Beyond doubt, just like Raphael’s guidelines so clearly expounded in *The School of Athens* suggest, the greatest of the 15th-century Platonists would emphasize and justify the compatibility of both philosophers. For example, Pico della Mirandola argues in *De ente et uno* that there is a deep affinity between Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas in regard to the metaphysical thesis of

⁷ Pierre FERET, *La faculté de théologie de Paris et ses docteurs les plus célèbres. Moyen Age* (Paris, 1897), 4:127.

⁸ Bruno NARDI, “Averroismo,” in *Enciclopedia Cattolica* (Vatican City, 1949), vol. 2, col. 530; IDEM, “Letteratura e cultura veneziana del Quattrocento,” in *La civiltà veneziana del Quattrocento*, ed. Guido Piovene (Venice: Sansoni, 1957), 124.

⁹ NARDI, “Averroismo,” col. 528.

*ens et enim convertuntur.*¹⁰ Bessarion had a decisive impact on Ficino and the entire Florentine Academy, where the conviction was developed that the only proper apology of Christianity is to defend it based on a prior reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle in the spirit of Plotinus.¹¹ Dominic of Flanders expresses a radically conceived division of roles among philosophers when he writes: “Philosophus fuerit optimus physicus, fuit tamen pessimus metaphysicus, quia nescivit abstrahere, ideo pessime metaphysicam suam composuit.”¹²

The activity of the humanists, ever more pervasive in Europe and creating a true and international *respublica litterarum*, bears heavily on the character of both Aristotelic and Platonic studies. Importantly, these activities are much better known than the much more abundant explorations pursued in the scholastic spirit! Humanists revived philology on a grand scale, giving rise to the historical-philological method of critical textual study. It applies to all writings across the board, including those by Aristotle and the Bible. Eminent humanists pursued research programmes that we know today. Hermolaus Barbaro consciously strove to study Aristotle’s historical views by turning to Greek originals and Greek commentators of his writings.¹³ Erasmus of Rotterdam, using similar premises, contributed to the birth of a whole school of biblical studies, whose significance is still felt today.

Now, we are concerned with the studies on Aristotle pursued at the time and the revolutionary change that the method promoted by humanists brought to them. M. H. Laurent contributed amply in this regard by drawing attention to the “progressive” views of Thomas Cajetan. In a commentary to *De anima* he argues: “Neque ut verum, neque ut consonum, neque ut probabile philosophiae haec scripserim, sed tantum ut exponens opinionem istius Graeci, quam conabor ostendere esse falsam secundum philosophiae principia.”¹⁴ In the course of our considerations, it will become clear how immensely important each element of this statement is. It will become clear that in the ears of an average conservative scholar from the early 16th-century the

¹⁰ Avery DULLES, *Princeps Concordiae. Pico della Mirandola and the Scholastic Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941), 66.

¹¹ Eugenio GARIN, *L’Umanesimo Italiano. Filosofia e vita civile nel Rinascimento* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1964), 100; IDEM, *Storia dei generi letterari italiani*, vol. 2, *La filosofia*, pt. 1, *Dal medio evo all’umanesimo* (Milan: Francesco Vallardi, 1947), 284.

¹² *In I Met.* 12, 2, c., s. 68b as cited in Mieczysław MARKOWSKI, “Definicje substancji w komentarzu do ‘Metafizyki’ Dominika z Flandrii,” *Studia Mediewistyczne* 6, no. 45 (1964): note 188.

¹³ M. H. LAURENT, “Introductio: Le Commentaire de Cajetan sur le ‘De Anima’,” in *Thomas de Vio Cardinalis Caietanus (1469–1534). Scripta philosophica: Commentaria In “De Anima” Aristotelis*, vol. 1, ed. P. J. Coquelle OP (Rome: Angelicum, 1938), xxff.

¹⁴ *De Anima* III, 2; see LAURENT, “Introductio,” xxiii.

contention that Aristotle's views are "falsa secundum philosophiae principia" sounded like a heresy worthy of an inquisition trial!

In order to understand a mindset like this, it has to be understood that shortly after the painful blows dealt by the Western schism and with the Turkish threat looming on the horizon, the Church needed a very coherent and staunch ideology. As we have seen, in the mid-15th century the obvious choice was Aristotelianism, but—let's face it—a very unique Aristotelianism: aligned with Platonism (or Neo-Platonism, to be more precise), but above all in line with the dogmas of faith. Given such a choice, it became clear that anyone who shatters the unity and cohesion of the Aristotelian-Christian worldview in fact undermines the very foundation of the faith. It becomes one of the overarching imperatives for the greatly endangered *Christianitas* to demonstrate congruity between Aristotle and the faith as well as harmony between Aristotelianism and the great spiritualist tradition of Neo-Platonism. Therefore, after 1450, the most conservative and integralist factions within the Church would become hostile towards both the "new physics" and the numerous manifestations of the novel philosophical-historical research method supported by the humanists. These radically conservative church circles paved the way for modern Christian Aristotelianism.

II

The hypothesis outlined above regarding the origins of modern Christian Aristotelianism can be explicated more closely and justified on the basis of facts and texts grouped around four topics: the increased theological standing of Aristotle in the 15th century; critical concerns over the Christian character of Aristotle's philosophy and its interpretation by Averroes; search for the "historical Aristotle" and an objective assessment of his various interpretations; and identification of Thomism with Christian Aristotelianism.

1

The principal late-mediaeval stronghold safeguarding the philosophical import of Aristotelianism was Cologne, and its *Colegium Montanum* in particular. In the period in question Lambert de Monte not only considered Aristotle as a man of divine intellect and the greatest of all philosophers¹⁵ but

¹⁵ Franz J. von BIANCO, *Die alte Universität Köln*, vol. 1, *Die alte Universität Köln und die spätern Gelehrten-Schulen dieser Stadt* (Cologne, 1856), 265.

also, crucially, settled his *Quaestio magistralis de salvatione Aristotelis* (Hain 11586) thus: “Aristotelem summum et philosophorum principem esse de numero salvandorum.”¹⁶ Herman Mesdorpheus (d. 1389), a Carmelite who worked in Tübingen, outside the Cologne circle, refers to Aristotle in his *Flores aristotelici* almost as a father and spiritual guide.¹⁷ Some of these views in fact extend far beyond Cologne and Germany. Reginald Pecock, for example, regarded Aristotle as inspired and did not hesitate to call him a witness to truths of faith who studied the natural world and can be thus included among Church Doctors.¹⁸ George of Trebizond argued that Aristotle should be regarded as a Christian because God revealed to him the greatest mystery of faith: the truth about Holy Trinity.¹⁹

However, Aristotle’s works need to be interpreted in the proper, that is, Christian way, lest the lofty words of extreme adulation and almost cultic appreciation for him should turn into meaningless clichés. Antoni Flaminus underscores the need for such a Christian reading of Aristotle and provides concrete model examples thereof in works of Pico della Mirandola and Casper Contarini.²⁰ Moreover, many were convinced that a Christian interpretation of Aristotelianism had been already done and the results are satisfactory. Both Contarini and Bartholomew Spina strove to demonstrate that Aristotle proved beyond any doubt the immortality of individual human souls.²¹ Reginald Pecock emphasized that in Aristotelian anthropology the human is not only divine but also eternal,²² while Lambert de Monte embraced the idea that Aristotle must not be in the least suspected of being incompatible with the Christian dogma (as aptly expressed by Duhem: “ecarter d’Aristote tout soupçon d’hétérodoxie”!) and argues in his commentary to Book Eight

¹⁶ DUHEM, *Le système du monde*, 154; Carl PRANTL, *Geschichte der Logik im Abendlande*, vol. 4 (Leipzig, 1870), 24; Robert HEISS, “Der Aristotelismus in der Artisten-Fakultät der alten Universität Köln,” *Festschrift zur Erinnerung an die Gründung der alten Universität Köln im Jahre 1388* (Cologne, 1938), 310.

¹⁷ Victor P. GUMPOSCH, *Die philosophische und theologische Literatur der Deutschen von 1400 bis auf unsere Tage*, vol. 1, *Die philosophische Literatur* (Regensburg, 1851), 21ff.

¹⁸ V. H. H. GREEN, *Bishop Reginald Pecock. A Study in Ecclesiastical History and Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 1945), 84.

¹⁹ VAST, *Le cardinal Bessarion*, 355.

²⁰ Georg HEIDINGSFELDER, “Zur Aristotelesdeutung in der Renaissance,” *Philosophisches Jahrbuch der Görresgesellschaft* 53 (1940): 388.

²¹ Contarini writes in *De immortalitate animae adversus Petrum Pomponatium* (Paris, 1571), 208: “meo iudicio colligitur Aristotelem de immortalitate animae dubium non fuisse”; as cited in Georg HEIDINGSFELDER, *Zum Unsterblichkeitsstreit in der Renaissance...*, supplementary vol. 3 (Munich: Aschendorff, 1935), 1284.

²² GREEN, *Bishop Reginald Pecock*, 85.

of *Physics* that Aristotle did not assume that the world was eternal.²³ Added to that, along with the return to the *via antiqua* in the 1460s, the philosophy of Duns Scotus was also gaining solid ground, one of the fundamental tenets of which is that Aristotle had already said basically everything there was to say in philosophy, thus making Aristotelianism synonymous with philosophical truth; let us not forget it was through Trombetta that Scotus' approach to Aristotle and his philosophy influenced, not insignificantly, the Paduan circles and Cajetan.²⁴

In light of the above views and many other similar claims it becomes clear that a conviction was developing at the time that Aristotelianism—and only Aristotelianism—was naturally Christian (“naturaliter christiana”). It is in this spirit that Alfons de Madrigal OFM (b. 1401), known as El Tostado, reconciled Aristotle (whom he calls “Aristoteles noster”) with the Christian dogmas. He worked in Salamanca, where Christian Aristotelianism soon began to flourish, initiated by Pedro Martinez de Osma.²⁵ Naturally, this was not limited to Spain, covering entire Europe, and reaching beyond the 16th century. In fact, Christian Aristotelianism is still practiced. Some eminent thinkers of the 19th century ascribed various views to Aristotle, for example those on the genesis of the human soul.²⁶ Among more contemporary writers are metaphysicians who argue that Aristotle not only fully justified individual immortality but also embraced in his ontology the thesis that beings are composed of essence and existence! We know that close study of texts by Aristotle and their meticulous historical-philosophical scrutiny do not warrant such conclusions.

With the intensifying tendencies to reassert Christian Aristotelianism, which were gaining momentum throughout the 15th century (supported by authorities), it becomes clear that a number of Aristotle's purely philosophical theses, especially ones on cosmology (e.g., the theory of motion, geocentrism, or the division of the world into sublunar and supralunar) were now treated as truths of faith, and rejecting them would be a sign of heresy and an assault on the integrity of faith. In this context we can better understand

²³ DUHEM, *Le système du monde*, 154ff.

²⁴ Etienne GILSON, “Cajetan et l'humanisme théologique,” *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale Et Littéraire du Moyen Âge* 22 (1955): 132.

²⁵ Tomás CARRERAS Y ARTAU and Joaquín CARRERAS Y ARTAU, *Historia de la filosofía Española. Filosofía cristiana de los siglos XIII al XV* (Madrid: Real academia de ciencias exactas, físicas y naturales, 1943), 2:550, 569.

²⁶ See, for example, Franz BRENTANO, *Aristoteles' Lehre vom Ursprung des menschlichen Geistes* (Leipzig, 1611).

Duhem's highly pertinent remark about the conflict between faith and science during the analysed period: "... les esprits peu clairvoyants en venaient à ne plus bien distinguer ce qui était enseignement de la foi de ce qui était seulement système scientifique propre à l'auter ou à son Ecole."²⁷

2

Parallel to the euphoric and almost cultic reception of Aristotle as the "precursor of Christianity," there were also critical voices emphasizing the chasm between dogmas of faith and Aristotle's ideas. Among the main centres where such critical tendencies emerged were Augustine circles. Already in the 14th century, Hugolin Malabranca of Orvieto, despite believing that philosophical truth identifies itself with the philosophy of Aristotle, believed that he was not a Christian thinker—this assessment of philosophy and Aristotelianism led Hugolin into scepticism. In the first half of the 15th century, an Augustine Favorini OSA went one step further, rejecting the thesis that philosophy is on a par with Aristotelianism.²⁸ The great Paul of Venice went even further, arguing that one cannot be a consistent peripatetic without rejecting a number of religious truths at the same time.²⁹ It therefore becomes clear that despite the Church-approved turn towards Aristotelianism, a conviction was taking root that his philosophy was substantially different from religion. For this reason, in the late 15th century, Offredi of Cremona was able to contrast Aristotle with the doctrine of faith, enumerating four principal orientations in contemporary controversies regarding the soul: Alexandrites, Averroists, views of Aristotle himself, and "positio fidei".³⁰

Philological-historical analysis of texts by Aristotle and his ancient commentators, pursued increasingly by the humanists, caused some of the greatest minds at the turn of the 16th century to be ever more aware of discrepancies between Christianity and Aristotelianism. In the field that was devotedly scrutinized at the time, the individual immortality of the soul, in particular, a belief was growing that Aristotle does not represent what we call *positio fidei*. Of particular relevance here are the views of Cajetan and Pomponazzi.

Nowadays, we can assume that Cajetan changed his views, or at least evolved his approach to Aristotle's teaching on the immortality of the soul.

²⁷ DUHEM, *Le système du monde*, 190.

²⁸ Salesius FRIEMEL, "Die theologische Prinzipienlehre des Augustinus Favorini von Rom OESA († 1443)," in *Cassiciacum*, vol. 12/2 (1950), 4:152, 187.

²⁹ DUHEM, *Le système du monde*, 385.

³⁰ Apollinaris OFFREDUS, *Quaestiones in libros Aristotelis "De anima"* (Venice, 1496), III, 4, 2 ad 3.

Initially, in his commentary to Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* he argued that Aristotle's proof is satisfactory, but later, in a commentary to *De anima* (1509), Cajetan modified his position considerably, reaching the conclusion that among the Philosopher's writings one can find texts justifying the immortality of active intellect only: "Aristoteles ... intulit immortalitatem intellectus agentis solius."³¹ Cajetan did not find any textual support for accepting *operatio propria* for potential intellect.³² In this way, an impartial and rigorous analysis of Aristotle's texts would lead to the conclusion that Averroes' interpretation of Aristotle's teachings on intellect and human immortality is the most compliant with the works of Aristotle.

A similar argumentation is developed by Pomponazzi, who ultimately favoured the interpretation of Alexander of Aphrodisia. In *De immortalitate animae* (9), Pomponazzi writes: "anima humana ... vera simul incipiens et desinans cum corpore, neque aliquo pacto potest operari vel esse sine eo." This would be the ultimate conclusion that can be inferred from Aristotle's teaching on the soul and its immortality. However, this being the case, the immortality of the soul can only be a truth of faith,³³ which—Pomponazzi argues—must be grounded in reason, which provides a rock-solid foundation, unlike philosophical premises that may prove superficial upon closer inspection: "merae nugae et in scandalum fidei; magisque sunt detrimentum fidei quam in adminiculum" (*De immortalitate animae* I 3, 3).³⁴ Very importantly, Pomponazzi claimed that it was high time Aristotle were no longer treated as an infallible authority in philosophy. Aristotle did not know everything and could be in error: "Dico Aristotelem errasse, et tu plus erras dicendo Aristotelem omnia scivisse" (Pomponazzi, *In VII Physicorum*).³⁵ If we came to believe that philosophical truth is synonymous with Aristotelianism, then anyone (still) devoted to the pursuit of truth would be necessarily regarded as a heretic. This might be the message conveyed by the following powerful statement of Pomponazzi: "oportet ... in philosophia haereticum esse qui veritatem invenire cupit."³⁶

However, conclusions like the ones arrived at by Cajetan and Pomponazzi were starkly at odds with official tendencies that sought in the revived and properly interpreted Aristotelianism the right ideology for the *christianitas*

³¹ HEIDINGSFELDER, *Zur Aristotelesdeutung*, 395.

³² *Ibid.*, 392.

³³ HEIDINGSFELDER, *Zum Unsterblichkeitsstreit*, 1268.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1274.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1268.

³⁶ GARIN, *L'umanesimo italiano*, 158.

in peril. This must have sparked sharp conflicts, leading shallow minds to launch assaults and accusations regarding the use of the so-called “double truth” doctrine. Such thinkers were unable to embrace the idea that Aristotle might have erred and that Aristotelianism is but one of many possible philosophies. This was also one of the reasons for the condemning of Alexandrism by the Fifth Council of Lateran, especially of Averroism, which was seen as the main culprit and the origin of distortions affecting the proper Aristotelianism that is compatible with the dogmas of the faith.

A broad and sometimes quite tight opposition was formed against the Averroists, mainly by the humanists, Scotists and Platonists. Humanists regarded Averroism as embodying the mediaeval barbarism of language and terminology, which they vehemently opposed. For Scotists, the doctrine of monopsychism not only contradicted faith but was also philosophically inadmissible. Notably, toward the end of the 15th century, the leading Paduan Scotist Antoni Trombetta published a special treatise on the multiplicity of souls, directed against the Averroists.³⁷ Ficino regarded only Platonism as an adequate response to the errors of Averroists and Alexandrites. He repeats this diagnosis many times, and in a letter to Matthias Corvinus he clearly argued that Platonism “properly refutes Alexander and Averroes, at the same time fully revealing the divinity of the human soul.”³⁸

Little wonder, then, that it is in this intellectual climate that the former Averroist Nicoletto Vernia (d. 1499) could yield to pressure, writing before his death a piece retracting his views, titled *Contra perversam Averrois opinionem*, where he embraces Christian Aristotelianism, calling the views of Averroists “aliena ab intellectu Aristotelis.”³⁹ It also comes as no surprise that the bull *Apostolici regiminis*, delivered on 19 December 1513 by Primate Jan Łaski during the eighth session of the Fifth Council of the Lateran, condemned the views of not only Averroists and Alexandrites but also those of Pomponazzi.⁴⁰

3

If the aforementioned condemnation affected Pomponazzi but not Cajetan, it was probably because the latter was a cardinal and the general of

³⁷ Antonio TROMBETTA, *Quaestio de animarum pluralitate contra Averroym et sequaces in studio Patavino determinata* (Venice, 1498); GARIN, *La filosofia*, 346; HEIDINGSFELDER, *Zum Unsterblichkeitsstreit*, 1267.

³⁸ GARIN, *La filosofia*, 298.

³⁹ Bruno NARDI, *Saggi sull'aristotelismo padovano dal secolo XIV al XVI* (Florence, 1958), 119; LAURENT, “Introductio,” xi.

⁴⁰ LAURENT, “Introductio,” xxxvi.

the Dominican order, occupying too high a position in Church hierarchy. Still, Cajetan's attitude displayed during the Council's sessions demonstrates that his views and methodology differed substantially from those of most other Council Fathers. It was the deep-seated conviction about the incompatibility of the "historical Aristotle" with faith as well as the conviction about philosophy's independence of theology that were behind his famous "non placet" manifested at the Council's eight session. With this, he opposed none other but the very rule and fact of condemning non-theological disciplines.⁴¹

Essentially, this struggle was about autonomy in scientific research. Apart from the tendencies to Christianize Aristotle or Plato, usually for ideological and apologetic purposes, we speak of the formidable and arduous research pursued by scholars seeking the "real, historical Aristotle." Drawing on Hellenistic traditions, the Platonists of that time tried to limit the impact of Aristotle and Aristotelianism to "physics" alone. In this spirit Marsilio Ficino highlighted that Plato was the one and only theologian among philosophers.⁴² Proponents of Plato tried to demonstrate the detrimental effect of Aristotelianism on the religious sphere. According to Ficino, Aristotle's philosophy interpreted by Averroists or Alexandrites not only imperils religion but also erodes its very core;⁴³ therefore, the famous words of Cardinal Giles of Viterbo carry much import for the official endorsement of ecclesiastical circles of Aristotle. This illustrious protector and coryphaeus of Platonism said in the early 16th century: "propono platónicas quaestiones contra Peripatéticos."⁴⁴

However, there appeared more and more fully-fledged scholars who were passionate about searching for, or getting closer to the "authentic Aristotle," completely unmindful of the rivalry between various schools of thought. Consider the degree of vitality and scholarly passion in the well-known and beautiful statement of Hermolaus Barbaro about Aristotle: "ut cum ipso vivo et praesente loqui videamur."⁴⁵ Slowly and painfully, the idea was ripening that scholars' chief goal was to study texts of Aristotle so that they might discover what the historical Aristotle actually thought, and study him like any other ancient author.

⁴¹ Ibid., xxxvi–xxxix.

⁴² Eugenio GARIN, "La 'Teologia' Ficiniana," in *Umanesimo e Machiavellismo*, Archivio di filosofia (Padova, 1949), 21–33.

⁴³ GARIN, *L'umanesimo*, 109.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 131.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 21.

It is in this vein—reading the traces of meticulous research work—and not in the spirit of “double truth” that we should understand Paul of Venice, who argued that in Aristotelianism the human intellect is separate from the body and immaterial, hence eternal and indestructible, but one and the same for all people.⁴⁶ Similarly, he went far beyond the question of intellect—he regarded philosophy merely as a set of Aristotle’s philosophical theses, but commented in the way Averroes and the Averroists did.⁴⁷ One can quote many scholars from the period in question, who consciously sought the views of the “historical Aristotle,” for example—besides Marcus Antonius Flaminius—Francisco a Vicomercato, who discusses this subject in a dedication letter in his commentary to Book Three of Aristotle’s *De anima*.⁴⁸

Although Gilson superbly captures Cajetan’s philosophical views, he unnecessarily weaves him into the web of “double truth” and seems to overlook the fact that Cajetan also cared for the historical truth about Aristotle.⁴⁹ Apparently, it is in this spirit that Cajetan—as a scholar venturing boldly to “meet the genuine Aristotle”—seems to be making this important claim, quoted in the first part of this article (p. 11). In many of his writings, Thomas de Vio highlights the unique historical character of textual studies.⁵⁰ This kind of critical approach to Aristotle’s texts is found in a number of Cajetan’s interpretations of Aristotle’s philosophy. As it turns out, Cajetan held that Aristotle did not assume the immortality of the individual human soul. On the one hand, intellect cannot be treated as a form of human body, as Thomas Aquinas does⁵¹ with the thesis “nihil est in intellectu...,” treated by Cajetan as a forgivable error of Aristotle’s.⁵² On the other hand, it must be accepted that in accordance with Aristotle’s authentic teachings, the potential intellect is mortal.⁵³ Crucial for the history of metaphysics is the fact revealed and underscored by Gilson—namely, that Cajetan was aware that Aristotle did not address existential questions concerning existence in the “esse” sense given to it by Aquinas: “licet ab Aristotele nihil manifesti in mus.”⁵⁴

⁴⁶ DUHEM, *Le système du monde*, 384.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 391.

⁴⁸ FRANCISCO a VICOMERCATO, *In III librum “De anima”* (Paris, 1543).

⁴⁹ GILSON, “Cajetan et l’humanisme théologique,” 121, 131ff; LAURENT, “Introductio.”

⁵⁰ LAURENT, “Introductio,” xxix–xxxiii.

⁵¹ GILSON, “Cajetan et l’humanisme théologique,” 129.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 125.

⁵³ HEIDINGSFELDER, *Zum Unsterblichkeitsstreit*, 1283.

⁵⁴ Étienne GILSON, “Cajétan et l’existence,” *Tijdschrift voor filosofie* 15 (1953): 268.

Very similar views can be found in Pomponazzi, although obviously supplemented and modified. In *De nutritione*, he claims that Aristotle was not familiar with the concept of indivisibility of the soul.⁵⁵ It would be instructive to cite the opinion on Pomponazzi and his understanding of Aristotle formulated already in the 16th century by Giacomo Zabarella: “Petrus Pomponatius meo quidem iudicio proxime omnium ad Aristotelis mentem et ad veram solutionem accessit ... inquit Aristotelem asserere non ipsam mentis substantiam extrinsecus accedere, se solum principium effectivum.”⁵⁶

The conclusion from these brief and necessarily superficial comparisons is as follows: scholarly research developing in the 15th century and afterwards, which aimed to reach the “real” Aristotle, shows ever more clearly and consistently that of all existing interpretations of Aristotle’s philosophy the one closest to the historical Aristotle is actually that of Averroes, manifest, as we know, in many versions and variants. By and large, this was the opinion of not only Pomponazzi but also Cajetan. Around 1505, Pomponazzi held that, in the hotly debated problem of intellect and soul, it is Averroes’ interpretation that closely follows Aristotle. Later, he gradually moved to a position approximating Alexandrism, regarding the ideas of Alexander of Aphrodisia to faithfully render Aristotle’s views.⁵⁷

Cajetan was of the opinion that, in the spirit of authentic Aristotelianism, it needs to be assumed that the active intellect is not a faculty of the soul, as Thomas Aquinas claims, but *substantia separata*;⁵⁸ moreover, as regards question 10 in his commentary to *Summa*, devoted to the creation of pure spirits, Cajetan does not provide his own evaluation of Paduan Averroists, but talks about them in a way that today we can have the impression that those concepts were marked by “pure Aristotelianism.”⁵⁹ Based on just a few premises, we see that the atmosphere prevalent among genuine scholars and the erudite, which favoured reading Averroism, and partly Alexandrism, as the proper (the most faithful) interpretation of authentic views held by the historical Aristotle, was becoming increasingly alarming for the Church, which was intent on developing and promoting Christian Aristotelianism.

⁵⁵ GARIN, *L’umanesimo*, 161.

⁵⁶ ZABARELLA, *De anima*, II, 29.

⁵⁷ Bruno NARDI, *Studi su Pietro Pomponazzi* (Florence: F. le Monier, 1965), 168, 185–88, 376.

⁵⁸ HEIDINGSFELDER, *Zur Aristotelesdeutung*, 393.

⁵⁹ Karl FECKES, “Das Opusculum des hl. Thomas von Aquin ‘De ente et essentia’ im Lichte seiner Kommentare”, in *Aus der Geisteswelt des Mittelalters. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters*, supplementary vol. 3 (Münster, 1935), 765.

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Given the circumstances, after the official course was set on Aristotle from the mid-15th century, Church authorities were faced with two paths. The first was liberal, leading to a clear separation between philosophy and theology, leaving aside the question of their compatibility and providing for the autonomy of every scientific discipline, thus encouraging deeper study. The other option was to follow a hard-line strategy envisaging forceful reconciliation of faith with philosophy, particularly to bring Aristotle and the religious truths together at any cost. The methodological distinctions used at that time were far removed from the ones we use today (and we know that our situation today is far from perfect!), and Christian Europe was at that time suffering from many wounds and under external threats, thus in great need of ideological cohesion and, at least outwardly, robust backbone. It is little wonder, then, that the integrist path was chosen.

However, scholarly achievements were leaked and views of thinkers like Pomponazzi or Cajetan had to be counterbalanced not only with polemics and administrative repressions but also with commentary to Aristotle, matched intellectually yet orthodox. Proponents of the “Christian Aristotle” looked to Thomas Aquinas. However, they would not really care if his teaching corresponds to historical Aristotelianism, or if it was digested and absorbed by Aquinas to such an extent that not much was left from the teaching of the founder of the Peripatos. Today, we know how Aquinas dealt with ideas of his predecessors, which he included in his philosophical vision and synthesis, without any concern for a historically accurate rendering of Pseudo-Dionysius, Augustine or Aristotle, but used them as elements or impulses helping to articulate his own vision. The promoters of “Christian Aristotelianism” would do everything in their power to perpetuate the view that Aristotle was best understood by Thomas Aquinas and that thanks to his interpretation the harmony of philosophy (identified with Aristotelianism) and faith is given once and for all.

In such context, when the Averroists, Alexandrites or the humanists demonstrated (not always convincingly, though) that Aquinas’ philosophical ideas were radically different from those of Aristotle, and that in such circumstances one cannot be consistently both a Thomist and an Aristotelian⁶⁰, and that Pomponazzi had the courage to openly declare that one cannot find Aristotle through Aquinas (for example, he thought Aristotle’s *De coelo* was interpreted by Aquinas contrary to the author’s intentions⁶¹), today, we are

⁶⁰ GILSON, *Cajetan et l’humanisme théologique*, 131ff.

⁶¹ HEIDINGSFELDER, *Zum Unsterblichkeitsstreit*, 1268.

more inclined to view such claims positively, seeing them as important steps toward clearing up the intellectual atmosphere. However, back then they were regarded by the integrist majority of the Church as tearing at the very heart of programmatic Christian Aristotelianism. What offended the leaders and advocates of this orientation was not that Cajetan was far from a proper understanding of the principal tenets of Aquinas' philosophy (especially his concept of existence "esse"⁶²), but that this hurts the unity, consistency and inviolable harmony between Aristotle and Aquinas.

No wonder, then, that after Thomas de Vio stepped down as general of the Order, some Dominicans mounted an alliance against him and Pomponazzi. This head-on attack was led by Bartholomew Spina, who openly accused Cajetan of practising hypocrisy and promoting the doctrine of "double truth." In his *Flagellum*, he refers to Pomponazzi as a disciple of Cajetan⁶³ whom he in turn regards as the rival of Aristotle and opponent of Aquinas.⁶⁴ Predictably, when Pomponazzi wrote *De immortalitate animae*, Pope Leo X demanded that Pomponazzi renounce his views. As already noted, Spina was not alone, leading an entire group of like-minded authors, including Ambrogio Fiandino, Bartolomeo Fiera, Hieronym Amidei, Vincenzo Calzado, Augustine Nifo and Casper Contarini (only the last two were considered highly by Pomponazzi as opponents).⁶⁵

This integrist and ideologically consolidated front had many sources of inspiration, but it drew mainly on the scholars of Cologne. It was mainly there that the conviction about the identity between Thomism and Aristotelianism was deeply embedded, the latter naturally equated with philosophy as such. As early as in the first half of the 15th century, Henry of Gorkum was convinced that to be a Thomist is to explicate Aristotle like Aquinas did.⁶⁶ Johannes Tinctoris (d. 1469) saw the greatness of Aquinas in what he achieved as a lecturer on Aristotle, calling Aquinas "praecipuus librorum Aristotelis commentator."⁶⁷ Of course, in an atmosphere like this, easily embraced and perpetuated are the typically "Aristotelian" elements of the superior philosophical vision of Aquinas (chiefly hylemorphism and the related teaching on the unity of substantial form), whereas his own, most creative and central

⁶² GILSON, *Cajetan et l'humanisme théologique*, 134.

⁶³ HEIDINGSFELDER, *Zum Unsterblichkeitsstreit*, 1280.

⁶⁴ LAURENT, "Introductio," xliii–xlix.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, xxxixff.

⁶⁶ HEISS, "Der Aristotelismus," 309.

⁶⁷ Martin GRABMANN, "Der Belgische Thomist Johannes Tinctoris († 1469) und die Entstehung des Kommentars zur 'Summa theologiae' des Hl. Thomas v. Aquin," in *Studia Mediaevalia: In honorem ... Raymundi Josephi Martin* (Brussels: Societatem Editricem "De Tempel," 1948), 419.

concepts (the theory of existence as an act of “compositum” and form) were hardly endorsed, but frequently distorted, or even fell into oblivion.⁶⁸

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Thus, the “waning of the Middle Ages” bequeathed to modernity the heritage of Thomism as the finest expression of “Christian Aristotelianism.” Spina’s genuine conviction that Aristotle equals philosophical truth and that Aquinas’ interpretation of Aristotle is the most faithful and robust, was continued by major commentators of Thomas such as Francesco Silvestro di Ferrara or Chrysostom Javelli.⁶⁹ They communicated a powerful message to future generations of Thomists: that as a commentator of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas is unfailing, that Aristotle so interpreted must be inviolable in the Christian world, and that Aristotle’s philosophy thus expounded shall forever remain “the official and programmatic philosophy of the Church.”

The ramifications of this view proved lamentable. Not only would Sorbonne reverberate with the dreaded “anathema sit” in the 17th century, with the possibility of sentencing to death anyone failing to teach philosophy in line with the (“Christian”!) Aristotle⁷⁰, but also the idea would take root that Thomas’ greatest achievement was to “Christen” Aristotle, or model his own philosophy so that it would harmonize with the thought of the Stagirite or the dogmas of faith. To this day Christian philosophy is referred to in such terms, both in the technical and historical sense, as “Christian Aristotelianism” or “Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy.”⁷¹ This increasingly acceptable set of beliefs, overshadowing and writing off a significant portion of Aquinas’ philosophical and theological work, was instrumental in hibernating, alienating and incapacitating Thomism in the modern era.

Apparently, our understanding of a number of issues would not be possible in the late 19th and early 20th century had it not been for a period of long evolution and many trials, as well as detailed philological-historical studies and advanced methodological and philosophical reflection. Therefore, it is essential that we realise three things in this context:

- the historical Aristotle is not the one embraced by Thomas Aquinas;

⁶⁸ GILSON, “Cajétan et l’existence,” 284.

⁶⁹ LAURENT, “Introductio,” xlix, li.

⁷⁰ See Ingemar DÜRING, “Von Aristoteles bis Leibniz. Einige Hauptlinien in der Geschichte des Aristotelismus,” *Antike und Abendland* 4 (1954): 118–54.

⁷¹ See, e.g., DULLES, *Princeps Concordiae*, 120; Rudolf HAUBST, “Johannes Wenck aus Herrenberg als Albertist,” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 18 (1951): 322.

– as a 13th-century scholar, Aquinas could not and would not apply the philological-critical method in relation to the authors he examined, Aristotle included; and

– the true philosophical greatness of Aquinas lies in his own philosophical and theological ideas, not in his work as a commentator of Aristotle, helping to integrate Aristotelian philosophy with the edifice of Catholic theology.

Translated by Grzegorz Czemieli and Tomasz Palkowski

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BEGINNINGS OF MODERN CHRISTIAN ARISTOTELIANISM

Summary

The paper focuses on four main topics: (a) increased theological standing of Aristotle in the 15th century; (b) critical concerns over the compatibility of Aristotle's philosophy with Christianity, as well as over its interpretation by Averroes; (c) search for the "historical Aristotle" and an objective assessment of the resultant interpretations of Aristotle's philosophy; (d) identification of Thomism with Christian Aristotelianism.

Keywords: Aristotle; Averroism; Christian Aristotelianism.

POCZĄTKI NOWOŻYTNEGO ARYSTOTELIZMU CHRZEŚCIJAŃSKIEGO

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia cztery główne zagadnienia: (a) wzrost teologicznej powagi Arystotelesa w XV wieku; (b) pojawiające się w tym okresie głosy krytyczne, dotyczące chrystianizmu Arystotelesa i awerroistycznej interpretacji jego poglądów; (c) dążenie do odszukania „historycznego Arystotelesa” i do obiektywnej oceny jego różnych interpretacji; (d) utożsamienie tomizmu z chrześcijańskim arystotelizmem.

Słowa kluczowe: Arystoteles; awerroizm; arystotelizm chrześcijański.