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Aristotle's "Self-Portrayal"

Some of the ancient *Vitae Aristotelis*, attempting to portray Aristotle, touch upon his character, outlook on life, prominent virtues (and vices), scholarly attitude and the like. How reliable these reports are is difficult to assess, especially since most of the extant biographies are enthusiastically laudatory.¹ On the other hand, a number of more casual references to the Stagirite in Hellenistic and Patristic literature are often blatantly prejudiced and even deliberately hostile. Thus, the general impression we gain of Aristotle's character seems to depend to a large extent on the source or sources we consult. There is, however, a third, ample and, it appears, reliable source which offers almost unlimited possibilities to "reconstruct" Aristotle's main traits of character — a source which has hardly been tapped: his own writings as they have been preserved either in the extant *Corpus Aristotelicum* or in some of the fragments from his "lost" works. It is reasonable to assume that Aristotle should divulge something of himself in his many writings. Authors, especially prolific authors, frequently project their own personality into their compositions, a fact which is known to all who are familiar with literary criticism.

Judging from a variety of passages found in the *Corpus Aristotelicum*, Aristotle must have had an abiding passion for truth and truthfulness: "All men have an adequate natural instinct or desire for what is true and, as a rule, do arrive at the truth."² Hence, "we must honor truth above friends,"³ because "whatever is true . . .

1. See A.-H. CHROUST, "A Brief Account of the Traditional *Vitae Aristotelis*," *Revue des Études grecques*, vol. 77, nos. 364-365 (1964), pp. 50-69; A.-H. CHROUST, "A Brief Analysis of the *Vita Aristotelis* of Diogenes Laertius (DL V. 1-16)," to be published in *Antiquité classique*, vol. XXXIV, in the fall of 1965; A.-H. CHROUST, "A Brief Survey of the Syriac and Arabic *Vitae Aristotelis*," to be published in the near future in *Acta Orientalia* (Denmark); A.-H. CHROUST, "The *Vita Aristotelis* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus" to be published in the near future. To cite just a few examples: the *Vita Marciana* 15-16, the *Vita Vulgata* 15-16, the *Vita Latina* 15-16, and the Arabic *Vita* of Ibn Abi Usaibia 16 (and *ibid.* at 24) report that Aristotle "practiced goodness with zest," and that he devoted himself to the promotion of universal happiness among men; the *Vita Marciana* 16, the *Vita Vulgata* 16, the *Vita Latina* 16-17, the Arabic *Vita* of Al-Mubashir 26, the Arabic *Vita* of An-Nadim 12, and Usaibia 24, that he had an abiding interest in promoting the public welfare as well as the common weal; and Al-Mubashir 26, Ibn Abi Usaibia 24, and An-Nadim 12, that he supported the feeble, helped maidens to get married, protected orphans, assisted those who were eager to learn, and obtained alms for the poor. This last statement indicates that the Arabic biographers imputed to Aristotle the practice of the typical "duties of mercy" demanded of a faithful Mohammedan.

2. *Rhet.*, 1355 a 16.

3. *Nic. Eth.*, 1096 a 16.

has a natural tendency to prevail over its opposite."¹ This passion for truth, which also testifies to his openmindedness, is probably best expressed in his statement that full credence must be given "rather to empirical observation than to theories, and to theories only if what they allege agrees with the empirical facts."² This being so, "we may not reasonably attribute to anything any characteristics but those which observation detects in many or all instances."³ In other words, we should take for our hypotheses only what we know through experience to be generally or universally true. Theses or hypotheses, which fly into the face of scientifically observed facts, are "next door to madness."⁴

It also appears that Aristotle was a tolerant man, full of understanding for the frailties of human nature and the inadequacies of existential reality: "We must as a second best . . . take the least of evils,"⁵ for true "goodness is both rare and laudable as well as noble."⁶ One must always forgive those "who do something that ought not to be done, especially when they act under pressure which overstrains human nature and which no average human being could withstand."⁷ Nowhere, perhaps, does Aristotle's tolerance become more apparent than in a remark found in the *Protrepticus* :

Just as in the case of material goods where the same kind of possession is, as regards men, not conducive to both life and the good as well as happy life, so it is with philosophic knowledge or wisdom. For in my opinion we do not need the same kind of philosophic knowledge or wisdom as regards plain ordinary life that we need for living the perfect (philosophic) life. The majority of men may wholly be excused and justified for doing this — for being satisfied with that sort of knowledge which is sufficient to lead a normal average life. These people, to be sure, wish for a higher form of happiness, but on the whole they are content if they can simply stay alive.⁸

The *De Virtutibus et Vitiis* 1250 b 18 ff., testifies to Aristotle's piety and reverence: "First among the acts of justice come those toward the gods . . . which is called piety." But even more significant is his statement that "also the heavenly bodies contributed to man's

1. *Rhet.*, 1355 a 21. *Ibid.* at 1356 a 1 ff., Aristotle insists that truth itself is the most persuasive force.

2. *De Gen. Animal.*, 760 a 30.

3. *De Caelo*, 279 b 18.

4. *De Gen. et Corr.*, 325 a 18.

5. *Nic. Eth.*, 1109 a 35.

6. *Ibid.*, at 1109 a 29.

7. *Ibid.*, at 1110 a 24.

8. IAMBlichus, *Protrepticus* (edit. Pistelli), 46, 8 ff.; frag. 55 Rose; frag. 9 Walzer; frag. 9 Ross; frag. 103 Düring; frag. 99 Chroust. See here also *Magna Moralia*, 1201 a 1 ff.; *Pol.*, 1252 b 30 ff., and *ibid.* at 1342 a 19 ff.

belief [in the existence of God]. Seeing by day the sun moving in its circular course, and by night the well-ordered movements of the other stars, men have come to think that there is a God Who is the cause of such movement and order."¹ And again: "Some men, when they realize the unswerving and well-ordered movement of the heavenly bodies, say that in this realization the thought of gods had its origin . . . Those who first looked up to the heavens and saw the sun running its race from its rising to its setting, and the orderly dances of the stars, looked for the [divine] Craftsman of this perfect design, and surmised that it came about not by chance, but through the agency of some mightier and imperishable nature, which was God."² Hence, Philo of Alexandria could maintain that "Aristotle was surely speaking piously and devotedly when he insisted that the [divine] universe is ungenerated and imperishable; and convicted of serious godlessness those who proclaimed the opposite — who thought that the visible God, Who contains in truth the sun and the moon and the remaining pantheon of planets and fixed stars, is no better than the work done by man's hands."³ It is in keeping with Aristotle's attitude towards religion and piety that he is credited with having said that "we should nowhere be more modest than in matters of religion. If we compose ourselves before we enter temples . . . how much more should we do this when we are discussing the nature of the gods."⁴ In his early work *On Prayer*,⁵ Aristotle declares that God is "pure intellect" or "something above the pure intellect."⁶ Hence, we must approach God and pray to Him only through the intellect, that is, on the highest possible level of communication, befitting the sublimity of the supreme being.

1. SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, *Adversus Mathematicos*, I, 23; frag. 10 Rose; frag. 12a Walzer; frag. 12a Ross; frag. 14 Untersteiner.

2. SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, *Adversus Mathematicos*, IX, 26-27 (*Adversus Physicas*, I, 26-27); frag. 11 Rose; frag. 12b Walzer; frag. 12b Ross; frag. 26 Untersteiner. See Also CICERO, *De Natura Deorum*, II, 37. 95-96 (frag. 12 Rose; frag. 13 Walzer; frag. 13 Ross; frag. 18 Untersteiner); PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, *De Legum Allegoriarum Libri*, III, 32. 97-99 (frag. 13 Walzer; frag. 13b Ross; frag. 15 Untersteiner); PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, *De Praemiis et Poenis*, VII, 40-46. See also A.-H. CHROUST, "A Cosmological Proof for the Existence of God in Aristotle's Lost Dialogue *On Philosophy*," *The New Scholasticism*, vol. XXX (1965).

3. PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, *De Aeternitate Mundi*, III, 10; frag. 18 Rose; frag. 18 Walzer; frag. 18 Ross; frag. 21 Untersteiner.

4. SENECA, *Quaestiones Naturales*, VII, 30; frag. 14 Rose; frag. 14 Walzer; frag. 14 Ross; frag. 19 Untersteiner.

5. DIOGENES LAERTIUS V, 22 (no. 14); *Vita Hesychii (Vita Menagiana, Vita Menagii)* 10 (no. 9); SIMPLICIUS, *Comment. in Arist. De Caelo*, in: *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, vol. VII (edit. J. Heiberg, 1894), p. 485, lines 19-22; frag. 49 Rose; frag. 1 Walzer; frag. 1 Ross.

6. SIMPLICIUS, *loc. cit.* — See also ST. JOHN IV, 24: "God is Spirit (*πνεῦμα*); and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

The prodigious scholarly output of Aristotle is in itself the most eloquent proof of the fact that he was an indefatigable as well as painstaking worker ; and that he saw in intellectual work the profound meaning of life itself : the life of the "doer" is the best life.¹ For "happiness is activity."² "We certainly should not spare any labor or expense in the pursuit of philosophic wisdom."³ Achievements, for which we work hard and persistently, are the most pleasant of experiences.⁴ "Learning things and wondering at them, as a rule, are also pleasant. But wondering implies the desire of learning [and working] . . . In learning [working] man is brought into his natural condition."⁵ "The work connected with philosophic wisdom is admittedly the most delightful of all virtuous activities. In any event, the pursuit of philosophic wisdom is believed to offer pleasures outstanding for their purity and enduringness ; and it is expected that those who know [and work for the acquisition of knowledge] will pass their time . . . pleasantly . . ."⁶ To learn is in itself superior to all physical pleasures.⁷ For it is better for a man "to exercise his soul (intellect) than merely to possess a soul."⁸ "The practice of anything, therefore, is the following : if something can be done only in one way, it is done when one does just that thing. But if it can be done in more than one way, it is done when one does it the best possible way."⁹ "Now, if living as such is for every animal its true being, then it should become evident that the thinking or rational animal has being in the highest degree and in the most compelling sense, and most of all if it uses this faculty or power in the contemplation of what is most knowable."¹⁰ "It is for this reason that we declare the man who is awake [that is, who is doing something] . . . to be truly living and to be alive — the man who thinks, rather than the man who is without thought. And we also insist that the delight of [active] living is that kind of pleasure we derive from the activities of the soul. For this is true life."¹¹ "A

1. This is the meaning of *Pol.*, 1325 a 21.

2. *Ibid.* at 1325 a 32.

3. IAMBlichus, *Protrepticus* 40, 6 ; frag. 52 Rose ; frag. 5 Walzer ; frag. 5 Ross ; frag. 53 Düring ; frag. 50 Chroust.

4. *Rhet.*, 1370 a 30 ff.

5. *Ibid.* at 1371 a 31 ff.

6. *Nic. Eth.*, 1177 a 24 ff.

7. *Poetics*, 1410 b 10.

8. IAMBlichus, *Protrepticus* 59, 13-23 ; frag. 14 Walzer ; frag. 14 Ross ; frag. 83 Düring ; frag. 79 Chroust.

9. *Ibid.*, 57, 23-58, 3 ; frag. 14 Walzer ; frag. 14 Ross ; frag. 84 Düring ; frag. 80 Chroust.

10. *Ibid.*, 58, 10-14 ; frag. 14 Walzer ; frag. 14 Ross ; frag. 86 Düring ; frag. 82 Chroust.

11. *Ibid.*, 59, 3-7 ; frag. 14 Walzer ; frag. 14 Ross ; 90 Düring ; frag. 86 Chroust.

pleasant life and the capacity for true enjoyment, therefore, belong only, or most of all, to intellectual men who are thinking,"¹ that is, who work intellectually. "The doing of justice is pleasant to the lover of justice, and acts that are in general virtuous are pleasant to the lover of justice . . . Their life, therefore, has no further need of pleasure as a sort of ornamental charm, but contains its own pleasure."² But "true happiness, perchance, even if it is not god-sent, is the result of virtue, of some process of learning and effort . . ."³ "It is for the sake of practicing and learning [wisdom] that we have come into being and, hence, we also exist for that purpose."⁴ In brief, Aristotle, himself a prodigious worker, believes that sustained work gives life a more profound meaning. The record indicates that he fully practiced what he preached.

Aristotle's approach to scholarship and scientific research is well illustrated in what appears to be an autobiographical sketch, as well as a justification of his scholarly work :

Of the things constituted by nature some are ungenerated, imperishable and eternal, while others are subject to generation and corruption. The former are most excellent . . . but less accessible to knowledge. The evidence, which might throw light upon them . . . is furnished but sparingly by the senses, whereas in the case of perishable plants and animals we have abundant information, living as we do in their midst, if only we are willing to take adequate pains. Both departments, however, have their unique charm. The scanty conceptions to which we can attain of celestial things give us . . . more pleasure than all our knowledge of the world in which we live ; just as half a glimpse of persons we love is more delightful than the leisurely view of other things, whatever their number or dimensions. On the other hand, in certitude and completeness our knowledge of terrestrial things has the advantage. Moreover, their greater nearness and affinity to us balances somewhat the loftier interest in the heavenly things which are the objects of the higher philosophy.⁵

And again : " We should select also from the written text books on argumentation, and we should draw up outlines of them . . . organizing them under separate headings, to wit, ' On the Good,' or ' On Life.' And the ' On the Good' should deal with every form of good, beginning with the category of essence. On the margin, too, one should indicate also the respective opinions of individual thinkers . . . For any one might assent to the saying of some widely accepted authority."⁶

1. *Ibid.*, 59, 10-12 ; frag. 14 Walzer ; frag. 14 Ross ; frag. 91 Düring ; frag. 87 Chroust.

2. *Nic. Eth.*, 1099 a 10-17.

3. *Ibid.* at 1099 b 15-16.

4. IAMBlichus, *Protrepticus* 52, 1-5 ; frag. 11 Walzer ; frag. 11 Ross ; frag. 17 Düring ; frag. 18 Chroust.

5. *De Part. Animal.*, 644 b 22-645 a 4.

6. *Top.*, 105 b 12-19.

In the passage just quoted from the *De Partibus Animalium*, Aristotle proclaims that the human intellect has an innate desire to comprehend the world by knowing the first principles and causes : *anima naturaliter philosophica*. He frequently recounts the joys and pleasures inherent in philosophic and scientific inquiry, and he insists that man is destined to philosophize and engage in scientific investigations from the moment " he casts his eyes upon the discernible world." The passage from the *Topics*, on the other hand, is a reminder that in order to properly philosophize and pursue scientific studies we must work in an orderly and systematic fashion — that we must master the facts and be familiar with the findings and hypotheses of others. In short, science and philosophy presuppose a certain method, a definite approach and a consistent procedure, supported by a vast amount of historical knowledge. We must know and understand what preceding philosophers and scientists have held, in order to build upon their evidence and ideas, and also in order to refute them effectively wherever necessary.¹

Aristotle's views on scientific method and scientific knowledge are also stated in the *Posterior Analytics*. Scientific knowledge by demonstration presupposes a knowledge of the primary premises. This, in turn, raises a number of problems : whether the apprehension of these primary premises is the same as the apprehension of the conclusions ; whether there is, or is not, a scientific knowledge of primary premises and of the conclusions ; whether there is a scientific knowledge of the conclusions, but a different kind of knowledge of the primary premises ; and whether the developed states of knowledge are acquired in some way or are, perhaps, innate but at first unnoticed. If they are innate, we would actually possess apprehensions which are more accurate than demonstrations, but we would be unaware of this. If we acquire the primary premises, then the question arises as to how we may apprehend them without primary premises. From all this it would follow that the primary premises are neither innate nor are they simply acquired. Hence, we must possess a capacity of some kind, but not of the sort that in accuracy ranks higher than conclusions.

Animals possess a congenital discriminative capacity called sense perception. Out of repeated sense perceptions comes memory, and from frequently repeated recollection of the same things develops experience. From experience, again, originates the skill of the craftsman and the knowledge of the man of science. Thus, when a number of logically indiscriminable particulars " has made a stand," the

1. The passage from the *Topics* should also explain why Aristotle became a " collector of historical facts " — why, in other words, he compiled and organized data as well as the opinions of others. This is the starting point of the doxographical and biographical tradition, which contains the seeds of the later (Hellenistic) " histories of philosophy," encyclopaedias, *florilegia* and plain " text books " or " introductions " to a specific science.

earliest universal is present in the soul as "memory." Although the act of sense perception is of the particular, its content is universal. A "fresh stand" is made among these rudimentary universals, and this process is continued until the indivisible concepts, the true universals, are established. Hence,

we must get to know the primary premises by induction. For the method by which sense perception implants the universal is inductive. Now of the thinking states by which we grasp truth, some are unfailingly true, while others admit of error . . . But scientific knowledge and intuition are always true . . . No other kind of thought, except intuition, is more accurate than scientific knowledge, but primary premises are more knowable than demonstrations, and all scientific knowledge is discursive. From all this it follows that there cannot be a scientific knowledge of primary premises. This also follows from the fact that demonstration cannot be the originative source of demonstration nor, concomitantly, scientific knowledge the originative source of scientific knowledge. Hence . . . intuition is the originative source of scientific knowledge. This originative source of scientific knowledge grasps the original basic premise, while science as a whole is similarly related . . . to the whole body of facts.¹

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle restates once more his basic views on the scientific method :

Scientific knowledge is judgment about things that are universal and necessary ; and the conclusions of demonstration — and for that matter all scientific knowledge — follow from first principles (for scientific knowledge involves apprehension of a rational ground). This being so, the first principle, which follows from what is scientifically known, cannot be an object of scientific knowledge . . . For that which can scientifically be known can also be demonstrated . . . Nor are these first principles the object of philosophic wisdom, for it is the mark of the philosopher to have demonstration about some things. If, therefore, the states of mind by which we possess truth and are never deceived about things invariable or even variable are either scientific knowledge or practical wisdom, or philosophic (theoretic) wisdom or intuitive reason — and it cannot possibly be any of the first three (to wit, scientific knowledge, practical wisdom or philosophic wisdom) — then the remaining alternative is that it must be intuitive reason which grasps the first principles.²

The striking similarity between the passage from the *Posterior Analytics* and that taken from the *Nicomachean Ethics* should make it abundantly clear that throughout his creative life — book II of the *Posterior Analytics* was composed prior to the year 350 B.C., while book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* was written during the 'twenties — Aristotle consistently adhered to a single conception of the scientific method and scientific knowledge.

1. *Post. Anal.*, 99 b 20 ff.

2. *Nic. Eth.*, 1140 b 31-1141 a 8.

Though Aristotle sometimes evinces a strain of pessimism — a man who knew the world as Aristotle knew it had some cause to be at times pessimistic — he generally professed his abiding confidence in the irresistible progress of science : “ It would seem that any one is capable of carrying on and articulating what has once been properly outlined ; and that time is a good discoverer or partner in such an undertaking. To this fact the advances in the arts and sciences are due. For any one can implement what is lacking.”¹ And again :

The investigation of the truth is in one way hard and difficult, in another way easy. An indication of this is to be found in the fact that no single man is capable of attaining the whole truth adequately, while, on the other hand, we do not fail collectively. For every one says something about the nature of things that is true. Thus, while individually we contribute little or nothing to truth, by the collaboration of all we are able to collect a considerable amount of factual truth.²

In these two passages Aristotle re-affirms his fundamental belief that patient and systematic work, based on the achievements of past efforts and discoveries, will inevitably lead to improved results and, thus, promote human understanding and human progress. These remarks affirm that scientific progress is a joint human endeavor. While an isolated individual effort might miss “the target” either completely or in part, the combined efforts of many as a rule proves more successful. This is also an eloquent appeal to “scientific team work,” a practice which Aristotle himself initiated in the Lyceum and which in modern times has contributed so much to the advancement of science and human knowledge.

Aristotle contends that the inexorable development of science promises a brighter future and a nobler hope for mankind :

In the case of all discoveries, the results of previous efforts, which have been handed down from others, have been advanced bit by bit by those who have taken them on. And whereas the original discoveries generally constitute an advance which is small at first, it is often much more useful and significant than the subsequent development which later follows these original discoveries. For it may be that in everything, as the saying goes, ‘the first start is the main part.’ And for this reason the first beginning is also the most difficult.³

But “the change or progress is only gradual and lasts a long time.”⁴

Aristotle manifests his modesty and humility, in respect of the achievements of his predecessors, by acknowledging that he is simply building upon the foundations laid by others : “Let us always keep

1. *Ibid.*, 1198 a 23-25.

2. *Metaph.*, 993 a 30 ff.

3. *De Soph. Elenchis*, 183 b 17-23.

4. *Meteor.*, 351 b 25-26.

in mind that we should never discount the experience of the ages. In the course of many years these things . . . most certainly did not remain unknown. Almost everything has been found out, although in some instances these things were not put together. In other cases men do not make use of the knowledge they have."¹ For "the same ideas, one must believe, occur and re-occur in the minds of men, not just once, but again and again."² "The same opinions appear in cycles among men, not once nor twice, but infinitely many times."³ It was "necessity which may be supposed to have taught men the inventions which were absolutely necessary. When these had been taken care of, it was natural that other things, which would adorn and enrich life, should be devised by degrees."⁴ For one must always bear in mind that "probably every art and every science has often been developed as far as this is possible, and again has disappeared."⁵ Hence, "for our study . . ." Aristotle avers, "it is necessary, while formulating the problems, if we are to discover the solutions in our further investigations, that we consult the views of those of our predecessors who have uttered opinions on this particular subject, in order that we may profit by whatever is sound in their suggestions . . ."⁶ This being so, "it is only proper that we should be grateful, not only to those whose opinion we may share, but also to those who have expressed more superficial views. For the latter also contributed something . . . From the better thinkers we have inherited certain opinions, while the others have been responsible for the appearance of better thinkers."⁷ For "he who can observe things in their first growth and origin . . . will obtain the clearest and most perfect view of them."⁸ In the field of rhetoric Aristotle concedes that much good work had previously been done. But since "the ordinary authors of text books [on rhetoric] treat of non-essentials . . . and are more inclined towards forensic oratory,"⁹ he proposes a novel approach which, however, still takes account of past achievements. Hence, "let us start with a review of the theories of other thinkers; for the proofs of a theory are difficulties for the contrary theory. Besides, those who have first heard the pleas and arguments of our adversaries will be more likely to give credit to the assertions which we are going to make. We shall be less open to the charge of securing judgment by default. To give a satisfactory decision as to the truth it will be

1. *Pol.*, 1264 a 1-4.

2. *De Caelo*, 270 b 19-21.

3. *Meteor.*, 339 b 28.

4. *Pol.*, 1329 a 25-27.

5. *Metaph.*, 1074 b 10. See also *De Soph. Elenchis*, 183 b 17, quoted *supra*.

6. *De Anima*, 403 b 20 ff.

7. *Metaph.*, 993 b 11 ff.

8. *Pol.*, 1252 a 24-25.

9. *Rhet.* 1355 a 18 ff.

necessary to be rather an arbitrator than a party to the dispute.”¹ In this latter passage Aristotle suggests that truth ought to be argued before the tribunal of reason where all parties to the discussion should be properly heard : *audiatur et altera pars*.

Realizing the importance of factual or historical knowledge, Aristotle became a great collector of information culled from history. The *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *Politics*, *Rhetoric*, *Poetics* and the works on *Ethics*, to mention only the most important Aristotelian writings, are treasure troves of historical materials. As a rule, Aristotle's systematic discussions are prefaced by historical discussions. This fact is in itself indicative not only of his high regard for the intellectual achievements of his predecessors and for history in general — one might almost call him an “antiquarian” — but also testifies to his firm belief that history is not only the repository of past achievements but also an inspiration to further progress.² In keeping with his penchant for methodical work, however, he is never a mere compiler of facts. He is, rather, a systematizer of information.³ He does not write as a historian, but he does try to relate the philosophers he quotes to philosophic, that is, systematic truth. And his pursuit of truth is not motivated by utilitarian considerations.⁴ Neither does he merely report on the views held by the older philosophers. He invariably makes every effort to explain their teachings and give reasons why they did arrive at their particular conclusions. Frequently he organizes his historical materials in terms of scientific discovery and scientific progress rather than along purely chronological lines.⁵

In *Metaphysics* 984 a 11 ff., for instance, when discussing Empedocles' four basic elements, Aristotle points out that “Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, though older than Empedocles, was later in his philosophical activities.” And in *Metaphysics* 984 b 15 ff., he maintains that “when one man [namely, Anaxagoras] said that ‘reason’ was present . . . as the cause of all order and arrangement, he seemed like a sober man in contrast to the wild talk of his predecessors. We know

1. *De Caelo*, 279 b 5 ff.

2. It has been suggested that in his later works Aristotle abandoned the form of the dialogue and resorted to “acroamatic reports” because he was less interested in moral edification, as was the case with Plato, than in intellectual training. Scientific instruction must include the experiences of the past. It must be systematic as well as inductive. This might explain why Aristotle's doctrinal treatises are composed in the form of “prosaic lectures”: they are lengthy “monologues” of the philosopher Aristotle, uninterrupted by the objections of other discussants. The discussion of earlier philosophers, to be sure, is for Aristotle still a dialectical debate — in this sense he is always Plato's disciple — but this debate is merely preliminary to the “prosaic work” of philosophy and, hence, no longer the whole or even the main issue.

3. See, for instance, *Phys.*, 187 a 12 ff.; *De Anima*, 409 b 18 ff.

4. See *Metaph.*, 980 a 26, and *ibid.* at 981 b 13.

5. See, for instance, *Metaph.*, 983 b 20 ff.; *De Anima*, 404 a 18 ff., and *ibid.* at 405 a 19; 405 a 27; *Phys.*, 203 b 15 ff.

that Anaxagoras certainly adopted these views, but Hermotimus of Clazomenae is credited with expressing them earlier." When discussing the problems of Being or of the One, Aristotle insists that the opinions of Xenophanes (*floruit* about 540-536 B.C.) were somewhat naive and, hence, should be ignored, while Parmenides (*floruit* about 480-475) "in places appears to speak with more insight."¹ These few examples, which could be augmented *ad nauseam*, illustrate Aristotle's conviction that a mastery of historical facts as well as a thorough understanding of the history of philosophy is an indispensable prerequisite for all philosophic endeavor and all philosophic progress. Nowhere does he express this notion more succinctly than in *Politics* 1260 b 27 ff. :

It is our aim to consider what political community is the best for all those who are most able to realize their ideal life. We must therefore examine not only the [ideal] constitutions, but also other constitutions, both those which actually exist . . . and any theoretic form which are held in esteem. We shall do this in order that that which is good and useful may be brought to light . . . We shall engage in this inquiry only because all the constitutions with which we are acquainted are faulty.

Hence, "the reason why I speak of this [namely, the opinions of older philosophers] is that we want to learn from them the principles which they advocated . . . Such a presentation is germane to our inquiry."²

Constant reference to the views advanced by the older philosophers not only assists us in understanding the difficulties inherent in all philosophic speculation, but is also constructive in giving us valuable hints as to what the real problems and issues are : "Let us call for aid on those who have tackled the investigations about Being and have philosophized about reality long before us . . . To go over their views, then, will be of advantage to our present inquiry, for we shall either find another kind of principle (cause), or be more convinced of the correctness of those principles (causes) which we are now about to propose."³

Although Aristotle most certainly disagrees with some of the philosophic tenets of his friends, teachers, associates and benefactors — the statement, *amicus quidam Socrates, sed magis amica veritas*, has been ascribed to the Stagirite⁴ — his admiration and reverence for Plato becomes manifest in his Elegy :

"Coming to the famed plain of Cecropia
He [*scil.*, Aristotle] piously set up an altar of sacred friendship

1. *Metaph.*, 986 b 27 ff.

2. *Ibid.* at 986 b 13 ff.

3. *Ibid.* at 893 b 4 ff.

4. *Vita Latina*, 28; *Vita Vulgata*, 9.

For the man [*scil.*, Plato] whom to praise is not lawful for bad men,
 Who alone or first of all mortals clearly revealed
 By his own life and by the methods of his teachings
 That a man becomes good and happy at the same time.
 Now no one can ever attain to these things again."¹

For his disagreement with certain aspects of Plato's philosophy he almost apologizes: "It would perhaps be thought to be better and, indeed, to be our duty, for the sake of upholding the truth, even to deny what touches us most closely, especially since we are philosophers and lovers of wisdom (truth). For, while both (friends and truth) are dear to us, piety requires us to honor truth above our friends."² Aristotle's deep attachment to his teachers and to the friends he made while studying at the Academy is expressed in his statement that "one should return to those with whom one has studied philosophy. For their worth cannot be measured against money, and they can get no honor which will repay them for their services. But it might be enough, as it is the case with the gods, or with one's own parents, to give them whatever one can."³ For Eudoxus of Rhodes, Aristotle has some very kind words: "His [*scil.*, Eudoxus'] arguments [namely, that pleasure was the ultimate good] gained eminence more on account of the excellence of his character than for their own sake."⁴ Objecting to Plato's suggestion (*Laws* 737e) that there should be 5,000 warriors in the ideal city, Aristotle remarks that Plato's dialogues or discourses "are never commonplace. For they always exhibit grace, originality and profound thought."⁵ How strongly he remained attached to his friends and benefactors is also evident in his Hymn to Hermias,⁶ as well as in the honorific inscription he dedicated to Hermias at Delphi.⁷ In 348/47 B.C., Hermias had given Aristotle not only shelter, but also friendship. Thus, a great and humble man not only acknowledges his everlasting indebtedness to his friends, teachers and benefactors, but also eloquently praises friendship.

And finally, like all great men, Aristotle must have been a terrifyingly lonely man — a loneliness which he expressed in his moving confession, in all likelihood contained in a letter written by him during his last years: "The more lonely and isolated I am, the more I have

1. OLYMPIODORUS, *In Platonis Gorgiam* (edit. W. Norvin) 197. A fragment of this Elegy, which was probably composed at the time of Aristotle's return to Athens in 335/34 B.C., can be found in *Vita Marciana* 26.

2. *Nic. Eth.*, 1096 a 12-17.

3. *Ibid.*, at 1164 b 2-6.

4. *Ibid.* at 1172 b 15-16.

5. *Pol.*, 1265 a 10-12.

6. This Hymn can be found in Diogenes Laertius V, 7-8.

7. *Ibid.* at V. 6.

come to love myths."¹ These are the words of a reserved, austere and solitary man, withdrawn into himself and hidden from the world by the impenetrable ramparts of his awesome learning. Somewhere behind these ramparts dwells the true Aristotle — the man who anchored his concept of the philosophic life in a second life, wholly personal, almost unknown, and essentially "other-world-directed." Only a superficial and ill-informed observer could maintain that Aristotle's whole life was uncompromisingly committed to scholarly or scientific work.²

These fragmentary references, chosen at random, could be considerably augmented. They encompass the whole span of Aristotle's productive life, from the time he was still a member of the Academy to the last years of his literary activity. They bespeak an astonishing consistency which he maintained even in the face of changing philosophic and scientific interest or emphasis, as well as in the face of changing fortune and circumstance. In short, while Aristotle's fundamental philosophic outlook underwent some notable changes in the evolution of his thought and in the direction of his scholarly concerns, Aristotle the man remained essentially the same throughout his mature life. Judging from his own writings, in which he reveals the dominant traits of his character, we might conclude the following: in all his intellectual endeavors he was motivated by a passion for truth — truth in its moral as well as scientific meaning. Concomitant with his passion for truth — his honest and almost humble effort to understand the actual conditions of the existential world — is his sense of toleration and tolerance which at times borders on gentle compassion. His piety and deep religious convictions, his reverence for the sublime and divine, always edifies the reader who seeks in Aristotle's works more than mere attempts at systematizing human knowledge or categorizing empirical evidence. Like so many believers he sincerely tries, through incessant intellectual work, to reach beyond the world of the senses, sense perceptions and empirical reality. In a very real sense he lived the motto, *orare est laborare*. His approach to the problem of knowledge or understanding is not "metaphoric" or "mythical" or "mystical," as with Plato, but scholarly and scientific. He firmly believes that all decent men have an innate desire to know and to understand. But this craving for knowledge and understanding can only be satisfied by disciplined scholarly effort and unremitting work. In a spirit of noble and humanistic optimism he professes his deeply rooted faith in the

1. DEMETRIUS, *Περὶ Ἐρμηνείας* 144; frag. 668 Rose. There exists an undeniable affinity between this statement and Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982b 17: "A man who is puzzled and wonders, most certainly thinks himself ignorant. Hence, the lover of myths is in a sense a lover of wisdom (philosopher), for the myth contains wonders."

2. See W. JAEGER, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development* (Oxford, 1948), p. 321.

gradual scientific progress of mankind, a progress which will be paralleled by a similar moral evolution. Like all decent and learned men, he manifests a genuine reverence and a generous respect for the past as well as for past scientific performances. He is fully aware of the fact that the past constitutes the firm footing of the present and the bright hope for the future. And finally, he is always the loyal friend, whose genuine veneration of, and undying gratitude toward, his teachers, benefactors and associates marks him as a truly noble man.

Anton-Hermann CHROUST.

