OTFRIED HÖFFE

ARISTOTLE

Translated by Christine Salazar

A R I S T O T L E

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ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHY

Anthony Preus, editor

OTFRIED HÖFFE

ARISTOTLE

Translated by Christine Salazar

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IT BEGAN WITH ARISTOTLE . . .

For Evelyn

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Abbreviations and Method of Citation

Ath.	*Athênaiôn Politeia: The State of the Athenians*
APo.	*Analytica Posteriora (Analytika hystera): Posterior Analytics*
APr	*Analytica Priora (Analytika protera): Prior Analytics*
Cael.	*de Caelo (Peri ouranou): On the Heaven*
Cat.	*Categoriae (Katêgoriai): Categories*
de An.	*de Anima (Peri psychês): On the Soul*
EE	*Ethica Eudemia (Ethika Eudêmeia): Eudemian Ethics*
EN	*Ethica Nicomachea (Ethika Nikomacheia): Nicomachean Ethics*
GA	*de Generatione Animalium (Peri zôôn geneseôs): On the Generation of Animals*
GC	*de Generatione et Corruptione (Peri geneseôs kai phthoras): On Coming to Be and Passing Away*
HA	*Historia Animalium (Peri tôn zôôn historiai): On the History of Animals*
Int.	*de Interpretatione (Peri hermêneias): Hermeneutics*
MA	*de Motu Animalium (Peri zôôn kinêseôs): On the Movement of Animals*
Metaph.	*Metaphysica (Ta meta ta physika): Metaphysics*
Mete.	*Meteorologica (Meteôrologika): Meteorology*
MM	*Magna Moralia (Ethikôn Megalôn): Magna Moralia*
PA	*de Partibus Animalium (Peri zôôn moriôn): On the Parts of Animals*
Ph.	*Physica (Physikê akroasis): Physics*
Po.	*Poetica (Peri poietikês): Poetics*
Pol.	*Politica (Politika): Politics*
Prot.	*Protrepticus (Protreptikos): Protrepticus*
Rh.	*Rhetorica (Rhêtorikê technê): Rhetoric*
SE	*Sophistici Elenchi (Peri sophistikôn elenchôn): Sophistical Refutations (= Topics IX)*
Top.	*Topica (Topika): Topics*

Where they are available, the text is translated from the *Oxford Classical Texts* editions. Passages are cited as follows: *Metaph*. I 1, 981a15 = *Metaphysics* book I, chapter 1, page 981a (of the respective Bekker edition), line 15.

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Preface

This book introduces a philosopher who is in a class by himself, even within the small circle of great thinkers. In late antiquity he was called "divine Aristotle" (by Proclus). For the Middle Ages, from al-Farabi to Thomas Aquinas by way of Albertus Magnus, he was quite simply "the Philosopher." Even Leibniz said that Aristotle's utterances about the basic concepts of natural philosophy were "for the most part entirely true."

Rather than within a few decades, a serious attack on Aristotle's authority did not occur until two millennia later, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but when it did happen, it came on a wide front. The attack began in physics (cue: Galileo); it continued in fundamental (Descartes) and political (Hobbes) philosophy, was reinforced by transcendental philosophy (Kant), embraced ethics and aesthetics and, at the end of the nineteenth century, finally reached logic. However, even then Aristotle was not simply *passé*. It is well known that Hegel treated him with great respect; similarly Brentano and Heidegger, as well as Lukasiewicz and the analytical philosophers. Even among biologists, none less than Darwin himself held him in great regard. While until recently criticism of Aristotelian positions—from essentialism through teleology to the principle of happiness—has prevailed, these days there are pro-Aristotelians in the fields of the philosophical theory of action, in ethics, topics and rhetoric, political philosophy, social theory, and even ontology.

Given that, despite all this, knowledge of Aristotle cannot be expected even from students of philosophy, this volume is an attempt to provide a comprehensive introduction to Aristotle with the intent of making him more popular. There is also the added interest of a philosophical dialogue that bridges the centuries, for it would be sterile to bar practical questions while merely repeating his tenets. With Aristotle in particular, one is always faced with the objects of his philosophizing. Thus, we are interested in what the philosopher says, how he conducts his argumentation, and what remains of the intuitions, the concepts and arguments, or at least his style of philosophizing. Also, a confrontation with Aristotle is helpful for gaining a clearer view both of antiquity and of our own times. Occasionally this may open up a viable alternative to current thought.

No one should be deterred by the boundless wealth of commentaries on an author such as Aristotle: a considerable number of texts allow for unprepared reading.

Frequently his thoughts are expressed with such freshness that one only needs a bit of curiosity and patience to understand them. Some texts can even be read "in one go" like a novel, but one should not "devour" Aristotle chapter by chapter, like a murder mystery. Beginners should start with the first book of *Metaphysics* (esp. chs. I 1–2) and the *Nicomachean Ethics* (esp. chs. I 1–6), and then turn to the initial chapter of the *Zoology* (*HA* I 1), the first chapters of the work on categories and perhaps also the opening of the *Physics*. It is—almost—self-evident that there are more difficult texts as well (e.g., *de An*. III 5, *Metaph.* VII–IX, *Int*. 12-14, *EN* VII 1–11), that others can only be decoded if one has certain preliminary knowledge (e.g., *Metaph.* XIII–XIV), and that here and there one encounters obscure, and even contradictory, passages.

The result of a series of lectures, this book owes much to the various suggestions given by my students, in particular Dr. Christoph Horn, Dr. Christof Rapp, and Rolf Geiger.

Part I

"THE PHILOSOPHER"?

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1

The Man and His Work

Pantes anthrôpoi tou eidenai oregontai physei: "all humans strive for knowledge by nature." The opening sentence of one of the most famous books in Western civilization, Aristotle's *Metaphysics,* explicitly speaks about man and knowledge and implicitly about its author as well. As far as the anthropological claim—a natural craving for knowledge—applies, Aristotle is not only an exceptional thinker, but also a great human being.

1.1 THE MAN

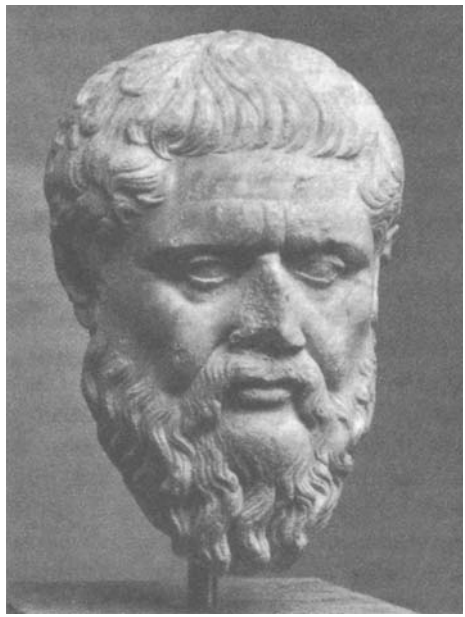
It is surprising that we have only a very general idea of Aristotle's personality and biography. The scarce evidence consists of the *Testament,* various letters and poems, as well as honorary decrees of Stagira, Delphi, and Athens. Ancient biographies, on the other hand, can only be trusted to a limited extent. Compiled generations after his lifetime, some have pro-Aristotelian, others anti-Aristotelian bias. The best-known text—in Diogenes Laertius's *Lives and Opinions of Famous Philosophers* (220 C.E. ch. VI)—combines fact and, not always benevolent, fiction (cf. Düring 1957). Thus, he says about Aristotle's physical appearance: "He spoke with a lisp and he also had weak legs and small eyes, but he dressed elegantly and was conspicuous by his use of rings and his hair-style."

It cannot be ascertained whether Aristotle really was a bit of a dandy, but the following is more or less certain: his lifetime coincided with the period in which a form of society common to many Greeks, the free city-state, lost its freedom. Aristotle experienced the Athenian and Theban defeat against Philip II at Chaeronea (338 B.C.E.). He was also a contemporary of Philip's son, Alexander the Great. However, a long time had passed since the Periclean age (443–429), the years when Athens was both politically and culturally in a position of hegemony, when artists such as Ictinus or Phidias created the buildings on the Acropolis, when Sophocles wrote his tragedies, for example *Antigone* and *Oedipus the King,* and philosophers such as Anaxagoras and Protagoras were active in Athens.

Aristotle was born in 384 B.C.E. in Stagira (Starro), a small city-state in northeastern Greece. Since, unlike Plato, he was not a scion of the Athenian high aristocracy and not even an Athenian citizen, his status in Athens was that

of a *metoikos* (alien resident), a foreigner with a "permit of residence," but without any political rights. Nevertheless, he was not a nobody. Born to a renowned family—his father Nicomachus was royal physician at the Macedonian court—Aristotle was given an excellent education, which was supervised by his warden after his father's early death. In 367 B.C.E., possibly because of tensions at the royal court, the seventeen-year-old Aristotle took himself to Athens, the center of Greek culture, in order to study with Plato. Plato's school, the Academy, was much more than just a public "gymnasium"; it was the intellectual Mecca for the scientists and philosophers of the time, an international meeting point and a model of the unity of teaching and research, in a way in which it has hardly ever been achieved again.

During a period of twenty years, his "first sojourn in Athens" (367–347), Aristotle familiarized himself with the questions we know from Plato's dialogues,



PLATO. Roman copy (from the reign of Tiberius) of a portrait statue made in the middle of the fourth century B.C.E. (Munich, Glyptothek)

including the late ones. At the same time he studied with members of the Academy such as Speusippus, Xenocrates, and Eudoxus of Cnidus. However, he did not remain a "disciple" for long: through confrontation with Plato and his colleagues he soon developed his own position. We do not know of any road-to-Damascus experience, any sudden enlightenment that turned the follower of Plato into his critic. Nor do we hear of a philosophical turning point by means of which one could contrast a late Aristotle, or Aristotle II, with an early Aristotle, or Aristotle I. In these aspects, Aristotle's intellectual biography appears remarkably straightforward and downright matter-of-fact.

During his first stay in Athens, the philosopher began to give lectures in a lecture hall provided with a blackboard, various scientific instruments, and two wall paintings, as well as astronomical tables (*Int.* 13, 22a22; *EN* II 7, 1107a33; *EE* II 3, 1220b37; *APr.* I 27, 43a35; cf. Jackson 1920). It was during this period that he produced copious collections of data, especially the first drafts on natural philosophy ("physics"), fundamental philosophy ("metaphysics"), ethics, politics, and rhetoric. It is a matter of controversy whether the writings on logic and scientific theory later combined in the *Organon,* as well as the *Poetics,* were also written during that time.

Plato, the founder and head of the Academy, was forty-five years Aristotle's senior, roughly the same age difference as that between Socrates and Plato. We have no reliable information about the relationship between "student" and "teacher," but presumably Aristotle's feelings toward Plato were similar to the latter's toward Homer. Thus, his criticism of Plato in the *Ethics* (I 4, 1096a11–17) opens almost like Plato's criticism of Homer and the poets in the *Republic* (X, 595b; cf. *Phaidon* 91b f., concerning Socrates): "Of course such an examination is contrary to us, given that those who introduced those ideas were [our] friends. However, . . . for the preservation of truth, we would seem to be obliged not to spare our own sentiments, since we are philosophers . . ." This is the basis of the later dictum *amicus Plato, magis amica veritas,* which means, loosely translated: "I love Plato, but I love truth even more." Socrates is treated with a similar combination of respect and criticism (e.g., *Metaph.* XIII 4, 1078b17–31; *Pol.* II 6, 1265b10–13). We may consider ourselves lucky that Plato was Socrates' pupil and Aristotle was Plato's, that is, that twice in a row an outstanding philosopher studied with another outstanding philosopher, developing his own views against the background of the other's well-considered views.

Aristotle did not interfere in matters of the *polis,* not least because he was a *metoikos,* but he is the founder of politics as an autonomous science. Nevertheless, he cannot avoid political practice entirely: he acted as a mediator between Macedon and various Greek cities, a task for which the "citizens of Athens" thanked him in an inscription (see Düring 1957, 215). However, sceptical about the—finally unsuccessful—political vocation of the philosopher proclaimed by Plato, he did not consider such missions the "natural"extension of political philosophy.

Most of the time, Aristotle concentrated on his studies, his own research, and independent teaching. If one is to believe the evidence on the subject, he was

a speaker endowed with incisive wit and gave clear and captivating lectures. A diligent reader, but also a collector and analytic, he is the prototype of the learned professor—not, however, in his impractical guise, but one who is open toward the world, even versed in its ways. His urbanity extended to intellectual matters: Aristotle familiarized himself not only with the views of his own "school," that is, Plato's and the Academy's, but also with the works of the Sophists, the Pre-Socratics, and the medical writers, as well as with Greek lyric, epic, and drama, and not least with the constitutions known at the time.

After Plato's death in 347, Plato's nephew and heir Speusippus (410–339) was made head of the Academy. It was not vexation, though, that made the now thirty-eight-year-old philosopher leave Athens, but political danger, given that Aristotle was considered a friend of the Macedonians, who were threatening the freedom of Greece. Since the political situation required further displacements, his life did not run as quietly as one would expect given the size of his œuvre. Aristotle's ability to keep to his lifework, that is, research, even under adverse circumstances, is astonishing.

Together with other members of the Academy, he spent the beginning of the following twelve "years of travel" (347–335/4) with a former fellow-student, Hermias of Atarneus. Generously provided with all the necessities by this ruler of the city of Assus in Asia Minor, Aristotle was free to devote himself to philosophy and the sciences. It was presumably in Assus that he met his later collaborator and friend, Theophrastus of Eresus (*c.* 370–288). The philosopher married Pythias, Hermias's sister (or niece), with whom he had a daughter of the same name, followed by a son, Nicomachus. It was probably in the years spent away from Athens that Aristotle collected the wealth of zoological material that, together with the research related to it, would make his reputation as an outstanding zoologist.

After Hermias's death in 345, he moved on to Mytilene on Lesbos. Two years later, upon the request of King Philip, he took charge of the education of the thirteen-year-old Alexander. It is an extraordinary situation that one of the greatest philosophers should take on the responsibility for one who was to become one of the greatest rulers. Nevertheless, Aristotle does not mention his unusual student anywhere in his works, although he is said to have written a text with the title *Alexander, or On the Colonies,* and, more importantly, to have opened an access to Greek culture for his student. For example, he had a copy made of Homer's *Iliad,* which Alexander, an admirer of its protagonist, Achilles, took with him on his campaigns. Aristotle also seems to be partly responsible for the fact that Alexander took Greek scientists along in order to pursue cultural and scientific interests as well as military aims. It would seem, however, that a letter to Alexander, preserved only in Arabic, is spurious (Stein 1968): it is one of the oldest princes' codes, containing advice to Alexander on his behavior toward his subjects, the foundation of Greek cities, and the question whether the Persian nobility should be relocated by force. It culminates in the vision of a world state, a *kosmo-polis* (see ch. 15. 3).

Detail (Alexander) of a battle between Alexander the Great and Darius. Pompei, House of the Faun; probably based on an original by Philoxenus of Eritrea

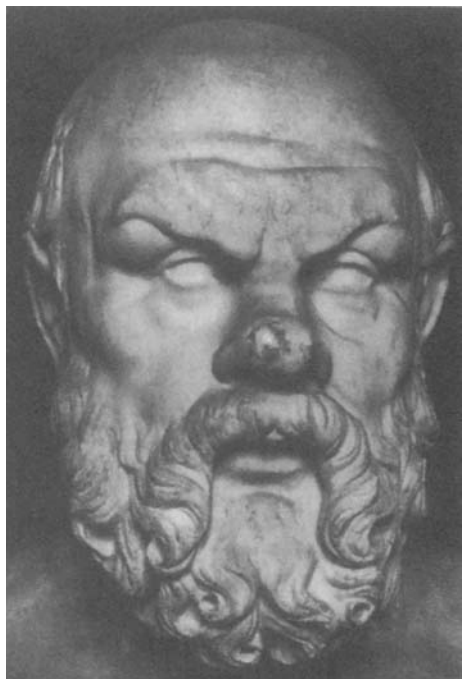
Toward the end of his "years of travel," Aristotle accepted a commission for Delphi to compile a list of victors of the Pythian Games. The fact that he was given this honorable commission demonstrates his scientific renown—and his acceptance of it documents once again his far-reaching intellectual curiosity in adding historiography to his other lines of research. He was awarded a decree of honor for his achievement which was, however, revoked in the anti-Macedonian rebellion of 323.

After Greek resistance against Macedonia had been broken by the destruction of Thebes (335), Aristotle, by then almost fifty, returned to the place of his earlier studies. This was the beginning of the "second sojourn in Athens" (335/4–322). Three or four years earlier Xenocrates—a philosopher far inferior to Aristotle in knowledge, acumen, and intellectual flexibility—had been elected leader of the Academy. It cannot be proved that this election led to the split from the Academy, but it is not implausible. In any case, during the following twelve years Aristotle worked at the Lyceum *(Lykeion)* near Mount Lycabettus, a gymnasium open to everyone. Because of its architecture it is also called *Peripatos,* which originally meant "walk," but later came to mean "roofed gallery" or "hall for strolls and discussions."

It remains uncertain whether the circle that formed around Aristotle there consolidated into a firm unit for teaching and research, into a working team. What certainly did not develop is something like a university with a fixed curriculum,

exams, and academic degrees. Not even a formal foundation of the school took place, since, as an alien, Aristotle was not entitled to acquire property. In "nationalist"Athens he always remained a suspect stranger, and just one foreign scientist among many as far as Athenian intellectual life is concerned. Aristotle brought his library, which was of extraordinary size for his times, to the Lyceum, as well as a considerable amount of scientific instruments. In the course of public lectures—the philosopher kept up the unity of teaching and research familiar from the Academy—he revised earlier drafts of his thoughts and elaborated a mature version of his didactic writings. He also evaluated his collections of data. Not least, he organized his research by delegating certain areas of research to friends and colleagues, such as Theophrastus, Eudemus of Rhodes, and Meno.

After Alexander's death in June 323, Aristotle left Athens again. Although his political philosophy was, if anything, contrary to Macedonian interests, he was nevertheless afraid of becoming a victim of anti-Macedonian intrigue. He had also been charged with impiety *(asebeia),* the same accusation that had brought about Socrates' death. Hinting at the fate of that "best, wisest and most just man among those alive at the time"(Plato, *Phaidon* 118a), he is said to have justified his

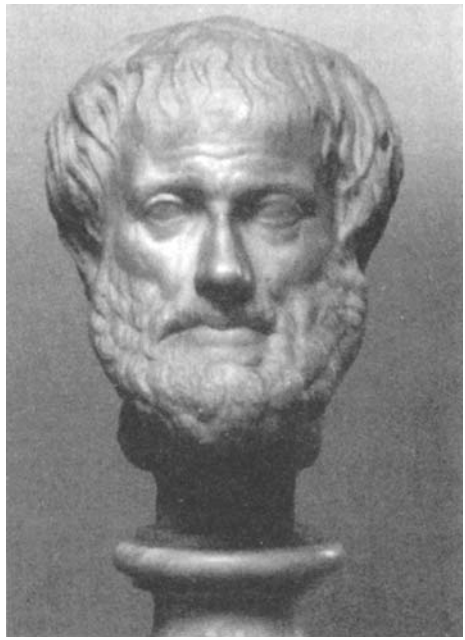


SOCRATES. Copy of a Hellenestic bust (Rome, Villa Albani)

departure from the city by saying that he would not allow the Athenians to sin against philosophy for a second time (Aelian, *Varia historia* III 36). Aristotle retreated to his mother's house in Chalcis on Euboea and shortly thereafter, in October 322, died of an unspecified illness at the age of sixty-two.

In the *Testament* (Diogenes Laertius, ch. V 1, 11–16) we encounter a considerate man who cares for the well-being of his family. The Macedonian general Antipater, Alexander's governor in Greece, is appointed as executor, Theophrastus as Aristotle's successor at the Lyceum. Aristotle expresses his wish to be buried next to his wife Pythias, and makes arrangements for relatives and servants.

We have portrait busts of Aristotle made at the time of the Roman Empire but based on a Greek original, presumably one made by Lysippus, court sculptor to Alexander the Great, at his master's command. They show Aristotle, aged about sixty, with a beard, wide mouth, strong lower lip and—as the iconographic expression of his outstanding intelligence and powers of concentration—a conspicuously protruding forehead. In the biographical tradition of antiquity one finds the epithets "the reader"(*anagnôstês*: Vita Marciana 6) and "the spirit of (scholarly) discussion"(*nous têsdiatribês*: Philoponus, *De aeternitate mundi* VI 27).



ARISTOTLE. Roman copy based on a fourth-century B.C.E. statue (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum)