Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme

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Volume 43, Number 3, Summer 2020

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1075283ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i3.35301

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Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)
2293-7374 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Herreros, A. (2020). A Case Study of the Reception of Aristotle in Early Protestantism: The Platonic Idea of the Good in the Commentaries on the Nicomachean Ethics. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, *43*(3), 41–69. https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i3.35301

Article abstract

The present article examines the philosophical ethics of Protestants teaching in higher education during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and their reception of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, 1.6. Two theses are illustrated. First, the survey of fourteen commentaries shows clear parallels with the medieval interpretation of the Ethics, which the Protestant authors creatively expanded. Thus, the continuity of Protestantism with the earlier tradition of Christian philosophy is substantiated in this specific case for a representative group of authors. Second, over against the prejudices according to which Protestantism simply censured ethics and subsumed it into moral theology, this article shows that, in truth, Aristotle was still the fundamental philosophical reference in a topic as central as the definition of happiness, and that the Platonic "theological" alternative was not considered appropriate for a philosophical discipline.

A Case Study of the Reception of Aristotle in Early Protestantism: The Platonic Idea of the Good in the Commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*[*]

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The present article examines the philosophical ethics of Protestants teaching in higher education during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and their reception of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, *1.6. Two theses are illustrated. First, the survey of fourteen commentaries shows clear parallels with the medieval interpretation of the* Ethics, *which the Protestant authors creatively expanded. Thus, the continuity of Protestantism with the earlier tradition of Christian philosophy is substantiated in this specific case for a representative group of authors. Second, over against the prejudices according to which Protestantism simply censured ethics and subsumed it into moral theology, this article shows that, in truth, Aristotle was still the fundamental philosophical reference in a topic as central as the definition of happiness, and that the Platonic "theological" alternative was not considered appropriate for a philosophical discipline.*

Le présent article examine quelle éthique philosophique et quelle réception au chapitre 1.6 de l'Éthique à Nicomaque *d'Aristote, les Protestants ont élaborées dans les universités aux XVI^e^ et XVII^e^ siècle. Deux arguments sont ici proposés. Premièrement, l'étude de quatorze commentaires témoigne de parallèles évidents avec l'interprétation médiévale de* l'Éthique, *que les auteurs protestants ont élargie de manière significative. On établit ainsi, dans ce cas précis, sur un groupe représentatif d'auteurs, la continuité du protestantisme avec la tradition antérieure de la philosophie chrétienne. Deuxièmement, cet article réfute l'idée reçue selon laquelle le protestantisme aurait tout simplement censuré l'éthique et l'auraient réduite à une branche de la théologie morale ; il démontre qu'en fait, le corpus aristotélicien demeurait la référence philosophique fondamentale sur une question aussi centrale que la définition du bonheur, et que l'alternative « théologique » platonicienne n'était pas considérée comme appropriée à une discipline philosophique.*

Introduction

Within the specialized literature, there's a general agreement on the continuity of Protestantism with its intellectual past, including

[*] This article was written within the context of the FONDECYT project 1170628, "De Felipe Melanchthon a Johannes Eisenhart. La distinción entre lo justo legal y lo justo natural en los tempranos comentarios protestantes a Ética a Nicómaco V, 7 1134b18–1135a5," led by Manfred Svensson. I am also grateful for the resources provided by the CONICYT scholarship CONICYT- PFCHA/Magíster Nacional/2017 – 22171623. Many thanks to Manfred Svensson, Sebastián Contreras, José Antonio Giménez, and Joaquín García-Huidobro for their remarks.

https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i3.35301

Aristotelianism[1]—although that's far from obvious when consulting general surveys, which commonly describe the Reformation as anti-peripatetic.[2] Aristotle was read, commented on, and discussed within faculties of arts at Protestant universities. Philosophy was effectively equivalent to interpreting the texts of the Stagirite.[3] Thus, it is legitimate to speak of a Protestant Aristotelianism that inherits and develops the complex medieval Christian Aristotelianism.[4]

In this article, I intend to focus on ethics. What traits are found in the moral philosophy of early Protestantism when compared to their medieval Latin precedents? Much of the research on early modern Aristotelianism focuses on Italy, not Protestant territories. A few authors have done fine work in analyzing the Protestant Aristotelian moral philosophy as a general

1. See W. J. van Asselt and E. Dekker, eds., *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); Manfred Svensson, *Reforma protestante y tradición intelectual cristiana* (Barcelona: Clie, 2016); Luca Baschera, "Aristotle and Scholasticism," in *A Companion to Peter Martyr Vermigli*, ed. Torrance Kirby, Emidio Campi, and Frank A. James III, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 16 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 133–59. For a general consideration of Aristotelianism during the Renaissance, see Charles B. Schmitt and Brian Copenhaver, *Renaissance Philosophy*, A History of Western Philosophy 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1–126, esp. 51–55 and 73–76.

2. A classic Catholic account is found in Jacques Maritain, *Trois Réformateurs: Luther—Descartes—Rousseau* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cia, 1925), 39–64, esp. 42–49. More recently, an account was formulated by another Catholic, Leonardo Polo, in *Lo Radical y la libertad*, ed. Rafael Corazón, Cuadernos de anuario filosófico 179 (Pamplona: EUNSA, 2005), 51. In 2016, Carlos M. N. Eire fleetingly comments that "curiously" the Lutheran scholastics were Aristotelian; see Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450–1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 568. Works on the history of philosophy frequently describe Protestant philosophy exclusively through Luther's anti-Aristotelianism; see, for instance, Dario Antiseri and Giovanni Reale, *Umanesimo, Rinascimento e Rivoluzione Scientifica,* Storia della filosofia dalle origini a oggi 4 (Milano: Bompiano, 2008), 273–89. This point of view is also sustained among Protestants themselves. Ronald N. Frost, in "Aristotle's 'Ethics': The 'Real' Reason for Luther's Reformation?," *Trinity Journal* 18.2 (1997): 223–41, argues for the radical opposition between Protestantism (especially Lutheran) and Aristotelian ethics.

3. See David A. Lines, "Moral Philosophy in the Universities of Medieval and Renaissance Europe," *History of Universities* 20.1 (2005): 38–80; Joseph S. Freedman, "Aristotle and the Content of Philosophy Instruction at Central European Schools and Universities during the Reformation Era (1500–1650)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 137.2 (1993): 213–53.

4. See Richard A. Muller, "Reformation, Orthodoxy, 'Christian Aristotelianism,' and the Eclecticism of Early Modern Philosophy," *Nederlands Archief Voor Kerkgeschiedenis / Dutch Review of Church History* 81.3 (2001): 306–25, doi.org/10.1163/002820301X00040. See also Freedman, "Aristotle and the Content of Philosophy Instruction," esp. 231–36.

phenomenon.[5] Hence, although the *Aristotelianism* of Protestant authors may be quite uncontroversial, their writings and methods of transforming medieval Aristotelianism have received scant attention. Moreover, even within the specialized literature, commonplaces about Protestantism and its pessimist anthropology are repeated, giving a false picture of their authors' views on moral philosophy.[6]

In order to give a more accurate picture of Protestant moral philosophy, I will focus on the reception of the Aristotelian refutation of the Platonic Idea of the Good, a discussion found in *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 1, chapter 6 (*NE* 1.6).[7] In that text, Aristotle examines and rejects the existence of Plato's Idea of the Good and its bearing on ethics. Although the topic involves metaphysical questions, it is fundamentally an ethical issue, since the commentators wish to

5. See, for example, the works of Horst Dreitzel, Luca Baschera, Manfred Svensson, and Peter Petersen cited along this article. For related texts, focused on theological elements, see Luca Baschera, "Ethics in Reformed Orthodoxy," in *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, ed. Herman Selderhuis, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 40 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), doi.org/10.1163/9789004248915_018, and Christoph Strohm, "Ethics in Early Calvinism," in *Moral Philosophy on the Threshold of Modernity,* ed. Jill Kraye and Risto Saarinen, The New Synthese Historical Library 57 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 255–81, dx.doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-3001-0_13. And, of course, there are many other outstanding monographs that touch upon ethical theories of this time, like Schmitt's on Case, Freedman's on Timpler, Klauber's on Turretin, and Kirby's on Hooker, to name a few.

6. For instance, Jill Kraye's review of Vermigli overemphasizes Vermigli's polarity between philosophical ethics and the Gospel, giving no space to his thoughts about moral philosophy's usefulness; see Kraye, "Renaissance Commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*," in *Classical Traditions in Renaissance Philosophy*, Variorum 743 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2002), 106–08. See also Luca Bianchi, "Renaissance Readings of the Nicomachean Ethics," in *Rethinking Virtue, Reforming Society: New Directions in Renaissance Ethics, c. 1350–1650*, ed. David A. Lines and Sabrina Ebbersmeyer, Cursor Mundi 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 131–67, doi.org/10.1484/M.CURSOR-EB.4.00042; here, Bianchi takes Walaeus's position as if it were representative of the whole Protestant tradition. Frequently this reading arises from studying only the most prominent reformers (Luther and Calvin), as in Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study. Volume I: From Socrates to the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 744–74, dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198242673.001.0001, or Risto Saarinen, "Renaissance Ethics and the European Reformations," in *Rethinking Virtue, Reforming Society*, ed. Lines and Ebbersmeyer, 81–104, doi.org/10.1484/M.CURSOR-EB.4.00040, which is a mistake when intending to evaluate Protestantism as a totality. See Svensson, *Reforma Protestante y Tradición Intelectual Cristiana*, 99–106.

7. For this article, I am using the English translation found in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2014).

answer the following question: How is the highest good, i.e., happiness, best defined philosophically?

I have chosen the reception of *NE* 1.6 for several reasons. First, it has held onto its notoriety since the Middle Ages.[8] In view of how convenient the theory of Ideas was for Christianity—a philosophically satisfying solution to explain the relationship between God and the created world—Christian authors inevitably had to deal with Aristotle's attack on the most important Idea. Second, unlike in other passages of Aristotle's work, in which the comments merely clarify the text, here more freedom is granted to the commentators, since they must take a stance for or against Plato. Third, a "tempting" solution for Christian authors was to resolve this philosophical discussion by adducing theological arguments. Thus, the commentaries on Aristotle's refutation of Plato also serve as a test of the autonomy of philosophical ethics with respect to moral theology.

I will reconstruct the reception of the Idea of the Good in Protestant philosophers in two stages. First, I will briefly analyze the text and context of *NE* 1.6. The medieval interpretations of the text shall provide the blueprint for studying its Protestant reception. Second, I will present the positions of certain authors belonging to the magisterial Protestant intellectual tradition (seven Reformed and seven Lutherans), all of them from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Finally, in the conclusion, I will return to the questions posed in this introduction.

1. Text and context

1.1 The refutation of the Idea of the Good in *Ethics*

In book 1 of *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle investigates what the good is. His conceptual framework leads him to identify happiness with the most perfect and ultimate good. In 1.4, he cites the various answers given to this question

8. The paradigmatic example is Bonaventure's reproach to the "followers of darkness," i.e., those who deny the ideas, especially the idea of the Good. See Bonaventura, "Collationes in Hexaëmeron," in *Opera Omnia Iussu et Auctoritate R. P. Aloysii a Parma*, vol. 5 (Quaracchi: Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1891), collatio 6, 2; see also paragraphs 3–9. On the medieval debate concerning the Platonic ideas, see Jan A. Aertsen, "Platonism," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy,* ed. Robert Pasnau and Christina van Dyke, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1:76–85, and Svensson, *Reforma Protestante y Tradición Intelectual Cristiana*, 169–87.

by "ordinary and noble people" (those who propose "pleasure, or wealth, or honor") and "wise men" (who think "that, beyond these many good things, there is another intrinsically good one that causes all of them to be good"). After examining the first proposals in 1.5, Aristotle evaluates the solution of the "wise," i.e., the Platonists, in 1.6. They "introduced the forms" and think that the highest good is the universal good (τὸ καθόλου βέλτιον), that is, the Idea of the Good. Thus, according to Aristotle's conceptualization, the Platonists think that happiness is the Idea of the Good.

Aristotle rejects this opinion because there is no Idea of the Good and even if it existed it would be useless for ethics. In one section, he denies the existence of the Idea of the Good, since Ideas are predicated univocally from particular things, but the good is predicated analogously (*NE* 1096a18–30; 1096b26–32). Ideas in general are unwarranted hypotheses used to justify our knowledge of universals (*NE* 1096a30–b5). Finally, if things are good because of the presence of a "separate" Good, an absurd dilemma ensues, i.e., either there is nothing good in itself (except the Idea of the Good) or all things are univocally good (for in each of them the same good is present, that is, the Idea of the Good). In a second section, Aristotle objects that, in any case, the Platonic Idea of the Good is irrelevant to ethics. The Idea of the Good is not a good that can be achieved or acquired by humans (*NE* 1096b32–34), nor does it play any role in human action aimed at obtaining particular goods (*NE* 1096b35–1097a14).

Without a pretense to systematization, four hermeneutical problems can be identified:

> 1) Is the Aristotelian identification between "the supreme good" and "happiness" a valid approximation to Plato? In other words, did Plato really think that "the Idea of the Good" is "happiness"? Some Platonic texts on happiness simply ignore the Idea of the Good.[9]

9. See, for example, *Theaetetus*, trans. John McDowell, Clarendon Plato (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 172c5–177c4, where Socrates affirms that "to become just and religious, with intelligence," which is tantamount to the good life, consists in "avoiding wickedness and pursuing virtue." See also *Philebus*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson, trans. Dorothea Frede (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 20b5–23b10 and 59d9–67b10, where he holds that the good life consists in wisdom mixed with pleasure.

2) Did Aristotle correctly interpret Plato's thought about "the Idea of the Good"? Only scarcely does Plato himself expound on it.[10]

3) Are Aristotle's arguments coherent and convincing? His refutation depends to a great extent on the fact that the connection between the Ideas and the sensible beings can only be univocal. Hence, he denies that participation could be analogical[11]—a much disputed assertion.

4) From a Christian perspective, is there any reason to prefer Plato over Aristotle? The Aristotelian account of the happiness according to Plato could be easily read as a pagan proof of a Christian tenet. For if the Idea of the Good is identified with God, then both Christians and Platonists would agree that happiness is, in some sense, in God.

1.2 The medieval interpretation of *NE* 1.6

The Latin Christian intellectual tradition discovered the *Nichomachean Ethics* at the end of the twelfth century, with the appearance of the first Latin translations.[12] Although many factors influenced their interpretations of 1.6, probably the most decisive one was their understanding of the Idea of the Good in consideration of the variegated sources of Platonism. Indeed, well before and after the reception of Aristotle, medieval Christianity remained deeply Platonic.[13] However, that doesn't mean they read Plato's *Dialogues*, given its scarce presence in Latin translations. "Platonism" was frequently known through late-antiquity authors who allegedly followed in Plato's footsteps,

10. Only in *Republic*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson, trans. G. M. A. Grube and C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 5.475e–480a and 6.504e–7.517c, does Plato expressly discuss the idea of Good.

11. Aristotle, in fact, denies any intelligibility to the notion of participation. See *Metaphysics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2016), 1.9.991a18–23 and 992a26–28.

12. See José Antonio Poblete, "Itinerario de las traducciones latinas de *Ethica Nicomachea* en el siglo XIII," in *Anales del Seminario de Historia de la Filosofía* 31 (2013): 43–68.

13. See Aertsen, "Platonism"; John Marenbon, "Platonismus Im 12. Jahrhundert: Alte und neue Zugangsweisen," in *Platon in der abendländischen Geistesgeschichte. Neue Forschungen zum Platonismus*, ed. Theo Kobusch and Burkhard Mojsisch (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997), 101–19.

without necessarily being unanimous among themselves.[14] Because of the influence of these varieties of Platonism—which we could denominate "late Platonism," "Aristotelian Platonism," and "the *Dialogues* Platonism"—three medieval interpretations of *NE* 1.6 can be identified.

First, the Idea of the Good is the source of all being. This reading was inspired by the theories of middle Platonism and Neoplatonism,[15] which variously identified the metaphysical principle "One" with the "Good."[16] It was expressly introduced in the Middle Ages through Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Proclus[17]—and indirectly through the Platonism of the church fathers—who identified the philosophical "Idea of the Good" with the source of all existence, i.e., for Christians, with God the Creator. In this chain, Augustine and Boethius were especially influential for proposing that happiness was properly found in God.[18] So strong was the inertia of this background that the majority of the first commentators of the *Ethics* read Aristotle as if he advocated the same view, even against his refutation of the Idea of the Good.[19] When looking at more influential commentators, we can find this stance in Eustratius

14. See Stephen Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition*, 2 vols. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1986), esp. 1:1–50.

15. See for instance Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Lloyd P. Gerson et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 5.5, 6.5, 7. Another example of an indirect source of this thesis (available only in Latin in the Renaissance) was Alcinous, *The Handbook of Platonism*, trans. John Dillon, Clarendon Later Ancient Philosophers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 10.3–7, 27.1–2, and 28.

16. Sara Ahbel-Rappe, "Metaphysics: The Origin of Becoming and the Resolution of Ignorance," in *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, ed. Pauliina Remes and Svetla Slaveva-Griffin, Routledge Handbooks in Philosophy (London: Routledge, 2014), 166–81.

17. See Proclus, *Elementatio Theologica*, ed. H. Boese, trans. Guilelmus Moerbeke (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1987), bk. 8; Pseudo Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names*, trans. Clarence Edwin Rolt (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 4.1–18.

18. As found, for instance, in Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. William Babcock, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century 1.6 (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2012), 20.xxix–xxx; Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Henry Rosher James (London: Elliot Stock, 1987), bk. 3, esp. ch. 10.

19. See Georg Wieland, *Ethica—Scientia Practica. Die Anfänge Der Philosophischen Ethik Im 13. Jahrhundert,* Beiträge Zur Geschichte Der Philosophie Und Theologie Des Mittelalters. Neue Folge 21 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1981), 130–97, esp. 143ff.

of Nicaea (known in the West thanks to Grosseteste's translation), Albert the Great (thirteenth century) and Gerard Odonis (fourteenth century).[20]

These authors rejected that goodness is solely immanent in the individually existing goods; instead, they argued that the Idea of the Good is the transcendent source of all participating goodness, including the other forms, and in the Good every perfection exists flawlessly and sublimely. Human beings also derive their goodness from it, hence making it an important element to explain what happiness is, since happiness is the highest good. Then, with regard to the questions posed at the end of section 1.1, Aristotle 1) correctly set out the identification between highest good and happiness. However, he 2) wrongly understood Plato, especially because of 3) his own poor concept of participation, which was incompatible with an analogy among beings and their goodness. Even more, 4) Plato's thought is more easily compatible with the Christian notion of happiness as found solely in God.

Second, there is the literal Aristotelian interpretation. Considering the lack of access to Plato's texts, it is not surprising that a most important source of Platonism was Aristotle himself, especially in passages where he discusses and criticizes the theory of Ideas.[21] Thomas Aquinas, Peter of Auvergne (thirteenth century), and Jean Buridan (fourteenth century), for example, took for granted Aristotle's interpretation and criticism of the Idea of the Good.[22] These authors

20. See Eustratius, "Enarratio in Primum Aristotelis Moralium Ad Nicomachum," in *The Greek Commentaries on the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle in the Latin Translation of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln (†1253)*, ed. H. Paul F. Mercken, vol. 1, Corpus Latinum Commentariourum in Aristotelem Graecorum 6.1 (Leiden: Brill, 1973), bk. 1, ch. 7, pp. 68–97 (on Grosseteste's translation, see Mercken's introduction, esp. 38, as well as Poblete, 51–55; Geraldus Odonis, *Expositio in Aristotelis Ethicam* (Venetia: Simon de Luere, 1500), bk. 1, q. xviii, pp. 11–12; Albertus Magnus, *Super ethica commentum et quaestiones*, ed. Wilhelm Kübel, vol. 14, Alberti Magni opera omnia (Aschendorff: Münster, 1968), bk. 1, lectio 5–6, pp. 23–31 (esp. 24–27). In his latter commentary, Albert follows more closely Aristotle's criticism. Nonetheless, it is to be noted that this second complete commentary was merely a paraphrasis of the *Ethics*; some sections of the text seem in line with his first commentary. See Albertus Magnus, *Ethica*, ed. Augustus Borgnet, Editio Parisiensis, Opera Omnia 7 (Paris: Vivés, 1891), bk. 1, tract. 5, ch. 11–18, pp. 71–83; bk. 1, tract. 2, ch. 3, pp. 20–21.

21. Aside from *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.6 and its parallels in the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Magna Moralia,* see esp. *Metaphysics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2016), 1.6.987a29–988a17, 9.990a33–993a10, 7.13.1038b1–14.1039b19, and 13.6.1080a11–b35.

22. See Thoma de Aquino, *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita 47 (Rome: Ad Sanctae Sabinae, 1969), bk. 1, line 6; Petrus de Avernia, "Questiones supra librum Ethicorum," ed. Anthony Celano, *Medieval Studies* 48 (1986): qq. 24–25, 62–65; Johannes Buridan, *Quaestiones in decem*

think that the Idea of the Good is a (logical and ontological) subsistent universal. The Idea of the Good is absolutely transcendent to the individual goods, from which it is *univocally* predicated. They add that the Idea of the Good must not be confused with the Creator. Finally, they accept Aristotle's approach, that is, that happiness according to Plato is identified with the Idea of Good. Hence, 1) they accept Aristotle's happiness-as-the-highest-good scheme, and 2) he correctly presented Plato's position, which naturally 3) falls down by Aristotle's arguments. Moreover, 4) although these authors see the resemblances between Plato and Christianity, they think it is in reality only a misunderstanding.

The third medieval interpretation is ontological simplification. Some excerpts of Plato's *Dialogues* available in the Middle Ages seem to acknowledge the immanence of the forms in individual sensible beings.[23] Such sections nurtured the impression that the Platonic theory of Ideas in general—and the Idea of the Good in particular—might actually be a poetic expression for a philosophy very similar to Aristotle's. The concept of a fundamental agreement between Platonism and Aristotelianism already existed within ancient Platonism,[24] and this idea influenced the Middle Ages thanks to Boethius and Augustine,[25] among others. A clear case is that of Henry Bate (thirteenth century), who maintained that Plato never thought that Ideas existed separately from the particular sensible individuals. In fact, he asserts, the real Plato closely resembles Aristotle, since Aristotle speaks of certain universal notions existing in the particular beings. To affirm that something participates from a universal, such as goodness, implies not that there is a subsisting Idea of the Good, but that there is a common reason predicated from the participants of this universal.[26] Hence, 1) the Idea of the Good is not Platonic happiness (they are

libros ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum (Oxoniæ: Hen. Cripps, Ed. Forrest, Hen. Curtayne & ioh. Wilmot, 1637), bk. 1, q. xii, pp. 42–44.

23. See, for example, Plato, "Timaeus," in *Plato Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson, trans. Donald J. Zeyl (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 27d8–b3, where Plato says that the craftsman makes with beauty "what becomes."

24. See Han Baltussen, "Aristotelian Commentary Tradition," in *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, ed. Pauliina Remes and Svetla Slaveva-Griffin (London: Routledge, 2014), 106–14.

25. Boethius, "In De Interpretatione Editio Secundae," in *Manlii Severini Boetii Opera Omnia*, ed. Jacques Paul Migne, Patrologia Latina 64 (Paris: Migne, 1847), PL 433; Augustinus, *Contra academicos,* Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 29 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1970), 3.19.42.

26. See Henricus Bate, *Speculum Divinorum et Quorundam Naturalium*, ed. Helmut Boese, Ancient and Medieval Philosophy: De Wulf-Mansion Centre 12 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990), esp. part

two parallel concepts); 2) nor did Aristotle rightly understand Plato (or at least, his arguments against Plato's metaphors are unwarranted). Simultaneously, 3) Aristotle's stance is fundamentally correct; in fact, his arguments are similar to Plato's, who is not disturbed by his disciple's attacks. Obviously, then, 4) there is no reason to prefer one to the other when the tenets of Christian faith are taken into consideration.

This schematization simplifies each position and ignores the nuances. Moreover, the distinctions are never so clearly discovered, considering the complexity of Platonism in medieval thought. However, its hermeneutical usefulness will be verified when we approach the Protestant authors. Indeed, I propose that they fundamentally adopt these same approaches, with some notable improvements, especially as regards the third position.

2. The interpretation of *NE* 1.6 within Protestant institutions

During early modernity, Aristotle's *Ethics* served as the basis for many texts on ethics, be they compendiums, paraphrases, courses, or dialogues, owing to different educational contexts and rhetorical purposes. In that way, the medieval tradition of Aristotle commentaries lived on.[27] Philology and historical criticism gained ground thanks to the humanist movement, but the philosophical and theological disputes of medieval origin did not lose ground. The crossing between humanistic and scholastic approaches was thus rich and varied.[28] Moreover, the Renaissance benefited from the recovery of the Platonic

11, ch. 18, pp. 57–60. His Platonism is more closely examined in Carlos Steel, "Das neue Interesse für den Platonismus am Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts," in *Platon in der abendländischen Geistesgeschichte. Neue Forschungen zum Platonismus*, ed. Theo Kobusch and Burkhard Mojsisch (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997), 120–33.

27. See David A. Lines, "Aristotle's Ethics in the Renaissance," in *The Reception of Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Jon Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 171–93, doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511979873.010. A fundamental (but not exhaustive) catalogue of these texts can be found in Charles H. Lohr, *Latin Aristotle Commentaries II: Renaissance Authors* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1988), cited hereafter as *LAC:RA*.

28. Bianchi, "Renaissance Readings of the *Nicomachean Ethics*"; Brian Copenhaver, "Philosophy as Descartes Found It: Humanists v. Scholastics?," in *The Routledge Companion to Sixteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund and Benjamin Hill (New York: Routledge, 2017), 7–53; Horst Dreitzel, "Von Melanchthon zu Pufendorf. Versuch über Typen und Entwicklung der philosophischen Ethik im protestantischen Deutschland zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung," in S*pätrenaissance-Philosophie*

corpus in the West, thanks especially to the translations of Marsilio Ficino, and of many other middle-Platonic and Neoplatonic authors who stimulated the debate.[29] Hence, the discussion on happiness was central during this period, just as it was in antiquity.[30] The availability of these ancient and medieval sources meant that different arguments and theses wove an interpretative background in which the Scholastic authors where still notoriously present,[31] which also affected the Protestant authors.[32]

There were three criteria for choosing the Protestant authors: First, I selected fourteen of the thirty-seven preserved commentaries written during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[33] The chosen number aims for an equilibrium that both justifiably represents the early Protestant authors and does not exceed the length of an overview. I chose authors from universities and academies, given their central influence in the Reformation and because the university was the natural place for philosophical research.[34] Many of these authors have been ignored in the history of the ideas, yet they are definitely an

in Deutschland 1570–1650. Entwürfe zwischen Humanismus und Konfessionalisierung, okkulten Traditionen und Schulmetaphysik, ed. Martin Mulsow, Frühe Neuzeit 124 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2009), 321–98, here 321–43, doi.org/10.1515/9783484970748.

29. See Jill Kraye and David A. Lines, "Sources for Ethics in the Renaissance: The Expanding Canon," in *Rethinking Virtue, Reforming Society*, ed. Lines and Ebbersmeyer, 81–104.

30. See Antonino Poppi, "Happiness," in *Rethinking Virtue, Reforming Society*, ed. Lines and Ebbersmeyer, esp. 257–71 where he examines some Renaissance positions inspired by Aristotle and Plato on happiness. He also makes a (very partial) mention of the Protestant camp.

31. See Luca Bianchi, "Continuity and Change in the Aristotelian Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), esp. 59–66, doi.org/10.1017/CCOL052184648X.004; David A. Lines, *Aristotle's* Ethics *in the Italian Renaissance (ca. 1300–1650): The Universities and the Problem of Moral Education*, Education and Society in the Middle Ages and Renaissance 13 (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Luca Bianchi, "Un commento 'umanistico' ad Aristotele: L'*Expositio super libros Ethicorum* di Donato Acciaiuoli," in *Studi sull'Aristotelismo del Rinascimento* (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2003), 11–40.

32. See Denis R. Janz, "Late Medieval Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed. David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5–14, doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521772249.002, as well as the bibliography indicated in notes 30, 37, 55, and 56.

33. Manfred Svensson, "Aristotelian Practical Philosophy from Melanchthon to Eisenhart: Protestant Commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics* 1529–1682," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 21.3 (2 September 2019): 218–38, doi.org/10.1080/14622459.2019.1653539.

34. Paul F. Grendler, "The Universities of the Renaissance and Reformation," *Renaissance Quarterly* 57.1 (2004): esp. 14–23 and 29–37.

essential link between medieval and modern philosophy. Second, I preferred commentaries on *NE* 1.6 of special philosophical interest, either because of the importance of the authors themselves or because their readings were representative of the categories I have already detected in the medieval authors. Third, I chose a sample to illustrate both the timescale and the geography of the period. Hence, the oldest text in its first edition is from 1529 and the latest is from 1645; the authors are distributed across the British islands and central Europe (namely Scotland, Oxford, Leiden, Sedan, Tübingen, Zürich, Marburg, Wittenberg, Helmstedt, Danzig, and Frankfurt at the Oder). A direct mutual influence is hardly noticeable among them; even where the commentaries are connected, interpretations vary, and geographical or confessional distributions play a minor role in their positions. I have grouped them under the same headings I have identified in the medieval texts.[35]

2.1 The Platonic-theological interpretation[36]

During the Renaissance, many authors thought that in Plato's philosophy a kind of *prisca theologia* could be found, which in its fundamentals was absolutely congenial to Christianity.[37] Platonic ethics and metaphysics were especially praised. Although this positive assimilation of Plato received much impetus from Renaissance authors, "Christian Platonism" was already rooted in medieval philosophy. Authors like Eustratius and Albert the Great were still very influential.[38] This background justified some commentators in identifying

35. The translations of the primary bibliography cited in the following pages are all my own. Not all the authors are equally eloquent or insightful. Frequently (especially in the second group), they simply refer to Aristotle's arguments. That is why the article does not treat them to the same extent.

36. Although bearing in mind the high complexity of Platonism, I call this group "Platonizing," following Dreitzel, 369–80, in the sense therein explained, namely, ethics that highly emphasize the "hereafter" as the place for happiness, which is defined primarily as a union with God. These authors found in Plato the quintessential "Christian philosophy."

37. See Schmitt and Copenhaver, *Renaissance Philosophy*, 127–95; Christopher S. Celenza, "The Revival of Platonic Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy,* ed. Hankins, 72–96, doi.org/10.1017/CCOL052184648X.005.

38. See David A. Lines, "Giovanni Bernardo Feliciano and the Edition of Eustratius," in *Eustratius, Aspasius, Michael Ephesius et Al.: Aristotelis Stagiritae Moralia Nicomachia. Übersetzt von Johannes Bernardus Felicianus* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2006), v–xviii; Denis R. Janz,

the happiness-in-the-Idea-of-the-Good with happiness-in-God and were thus highly critical of Aristotle's opposition to it.

Pierre Du Moulin (1568–1658), for instance, approached moral philosophy with a critical outlook. After studying at Sedan and Cambridge, he taught in Leiden and Paris, ending up later as a teacher back at Sedan.[39] He wrote a compendium of morals that, unlike the other texts studied in this article, is proposed not as a commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* but as an independent treatise. In any case, the text gives evidence of the enormous influence of Aristotle (whom he often discusses) and Stoicism in the choice of his subject matters.[40]

Just like Aristotle, he identifies the highest good with happiness and defines it as the good "that is sought for itself,"[41] towards which all the other goods that "come from God to men"[42] are ordered. Happiness is an attainable good, he says, for the simple reason that, if it were impossible, it would imply that nature, and its author, God, would have introduced an absurd desire in man, which is impossible. Now, to reach happiness, "means are not learned from philosophers, but by a doctrine more sublime and revealed from heaven, which is contained in the Gospel."[43] He explains that happiness itself consists in the union with God, which is inferred from considering that all evil is born of sin, and that sin is a separation from God. Following the etymology of Lactantius, Du Moulin believes that religion plays the fundamental role, for religion is a *re-ligatio*, a tying back together (with God).

The union with God is achieved through knowing and loving Him. Surprisingly, Du Moulin deems these two accidents of the soul as absolutely passive: "God is seen by the soul, because God looks at it."[44] God fills the soul

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"Luther and Late Medieval Albertism," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 72.4 (1996): 338–48, dx.doi.org/10.2143/ETL.72.4.504841.

39. See Friedrich Wilhelm Bautz, "Du Moulin (Molinaeus), Pierre," ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Bautz, *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* (Hamm: Traugott Bautz, 1990); Lohr, 268.

40. Which is reason enough to justify its inclusion here, considering that, had he so wanted, he could have organized his text rather around the decalogue or *loci theologici*. See Baschera, "Ethics in Reformed Orthodoxy."

41. Petrus Molinaeus, *Ethicorum seu doctrinae moralis libri undecim* (Amsterdam: Apud Iohannem Blaev, 1645), bk. 1, ch. 3.

42. Molinaeus, bk. 1, ch. 4.

43. Molinaeus, bk. 1, ch. 5.

44. Molinaeus, bk. 1, ch. 6.

with His light, to transform the receptor into the image of God himself, in the manner of a mirror that imitates the sun by reflecting it. At the same time, the will must "be brought to God" in order to love Him.[45] Du Moulin thus categorizes (in the Aristotelian sense) happiness not as an action but as one of "the passions that perfect."[46] Hence, he rejects the Aristotelian notion of happiness, which defines it as an operation according to the virtue of a human being. Moreover, he adds, an operation cannot be an end in itself, because it is always a means towards an object; happiness, on the contrary, is the ultimate end in itself. He does not mention Plato's position here, so it would be premature to venture whether the Idea of the Good coincides with his position. In any case, his argument is a total rejection of Aristotle's ethically based disproof of the Idea of the Good.

A second author of this group is Wilhelm Hilden (1551–87), who taught at a gymnasium in Leipzig and later in Frankfurt on the Oder.[47] In his brief and obscure commentary, he praises Plato for having spoken magnificently about happiness. However, neither he nor Aristotle could "establish" the Trinity (as he puts it) or speak of the Son of God, not even with human or philosophical terms. Within that limitation, Plato came closer, because he put happiness in God, the source of all good, and thus the real source of happiness. At the same time, Hilden argues, Aristotle's rebuttal has the advantage of proposing a happiness attainable in this world, for the union with God is reserved for the afterlife.[48] In short, he seems simply to assert in his compact commentary that both theories present pros and cons.

Antonius Walaeus (1573–1639), professor at Leiden and participant at the Synod of Dordrecht, wrote a textbook designed for the teaching of ethics, whose title announces its driving motivation: *Compendium ethicae aristotelicae ad normam veritatis christianae revocatum* (Compendium of Aristotelian ethics brought to the norm of Christian truth).[49] In his dedicatory letter, Walaeus

45. Molinaeus, bk. 1, ch. 6.

46. Molinaeus, bk. 1, ch. 6.

47. See Rudolf Schwarze, "Hilden: Wilhelm," *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1880); Lohr, 190.

48. See Guilielmus Hildenius, *Succinctae et breves e textu Aristotelis desumptae quaestiones ethicae* (Berlin, 1585), bk. 1, ch. 6, B2–3.

49. See G. P. van Itterzon, "Walaeus, Antonius," *Biografisch Lexicon voor de Geschiedenis van Het Nederlands Protestantisme* (Utrecht: J. H. Kok-Kampen, 1983); Lohr, 489.

affirms that Plato surpassed Aristotle in his moral doctrine. However, Walaeus sticks to Aristotle, in view of the longer commentary tradition on the latter's work and because of its good influence over young people. Yet, he affirms in the same dedicatory letter that he will correct him wherever Plato has spoken better, and that he will modify him according to the teachings of sacred scripture.

The commentary on *NE* 1.6 evidently reflects those principles. It seems to Walaeus that "Plato, who established that the supreme good consists in the vision and enjoyment of God, ascended here higher."[50] The virtues pave the way for that activity, since they purge the intelligence and will, so that "more easily and better is God seen by us and united with us."[51] That is why Plato highlighted the virtues of religion and piety, which Aristotle, on the contrary, omitted. Walaeus identifies the Platonic Idea of the Good with God, which is called an "Idea" insofar as it is contemplated by our mind to achieve happiness. The Aristotelian interpretation errs, then, in believing that Plato was thinking of the contemplation of abstract forms. That this is a mistake, says Walaeus, "becomes readily apparent from the reading of Plato's books."[52]

Walaeus justifies his Platonism by arguing that Plato's doctrine optimally corresponds to theological truth. According to revelation, the supreme good consists in the vision and enjoyment of God, which is preceded by the illustration of the mind and the purgation of the will, as evident from the Beatitude "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8)—essentially what Plato had said. However, Walaeus rapidly points out the deficiency in Platonism, since Plato ignored the true purification of the soul, which is "the grace of Christ acquired by faith."[53] Through faith the Christian virtues ("or, as the Scriptures call them, good works"[54]) are acquired, which are far superior to the ethical virtues.

Du Moulin, Hilden, and Walaeus display an interesting tension with Aristotelianism. Although they are quite critical in their readings of the *Nichomachean Ethics*, we should not too hastily label them as anti-Aristotelians. In their world we already find the radical anti-Aristotelianism of authors like

50. Antonius Walaeus, *Compendium Ethicae Aristotelicae ad normam veritatis christianae revocatum* (Leiden: Asinga Ahardus Frisy, 1625), first part, 47–48.

51. Walaeus, 48.

52. Walaeus, 49.

53. Walaeus, 49.

54. Walaeus, 50.

Hobbes, Descartes, and Montaigne. Read in that context, the authors here build their criticism on an undeniable debt to the Aristotelian philosophy, be it conscious or unconscious. Rather than describe their position as anti-Aristotelian, we can see them as a critical wing within the traditionally Christian philosophy. In addition, unlike the modern philosophers just mentioned, Du Moulin, Hilden, and Walaeus base their opposition to Aristotle in theological theses.[55] On the one hand, this theological influence inclined Walaeus and Hilden towards Plato, where they found a philosophical clarification of happiness concordant with faith; on the other, Molinaeus simply rejects Aristotelianism as far as happiness is concerned.

2.2 The literalist Aristotelian reading

Aquinas's and Buridan's interpretations of the *Nicomachean Ethics* were still influential at least during the fifteenth century, and even beyond.[56] Hence, it is natural to find a second group of commentators who, like them, follow Aristotle's presentation and refutation of Plato as found in the text. Even if most do not quote their scholastic precedents (some do[57]), they share a background that contributed to their ideas.

55. Without anything especially Protestant in their positions, unless the passivity of Du Moulin is read as a particularly Protestant trait.

56. See David A. Lines, "Sources and Authorities for Moral Philosophy in the Italian Renaissance: Thomas Aquinas and Jean Buridan on Aristotle's Ethics," in *Moral Philosophy on the Threshold of Modernity*, ed. Jill Kraye and Risto Saarinen, The New Synthese Historical Library 57 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 7–29; Daniel Westberg, "The Influence of Aquinas on Protestant Ethics," in *Aquinas among the Protestants*, ed. David VanDrunen and Manfred Svensson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 267–74; Ferdinand Edward Cranz, "The Publishing History of the Aristotle Commentaries of Thomas Aquinas," *Traditio* 34 (1978): 157–92, doi.org/10.1017/S0362152900016111. Studies on individual Protestant authors—such as Timpler (1563/64–1624), who lists the Thomist as one the three major Aristotelian schools—increase the evidence; see Freedman, "Aristotle and the Content of Philosophy Instruction," 251, or, for Case and his English context, see Charles B. Schmitt, *John Case and Aristotelianism in Renaissance England*, McGill–Queen's Studies in the History of Ideas 5 (Kingston and Montreal: McGill–Queen's University Press, 1983), 61–68, 149–59.

57. Like Horneius, who in his "disputation on the good" quotes Aquinas, Javelli, and Cajetan. Another example is Burgersdijck, who discusses Aquinas's passions theory. As regards Vermigli, Baschera identifies a partial influence of Aquinas. See Luca Baschera, *Tugend und Rechtfertigung. Peter Martyr Vermiglis Kommentar zur Nikomachischen Ethik im Spannungsfeld von Philosophie und Theologie*, Zürcher Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte 26 (Zürich: TVZ, 2008), 76–80.

Given their faithfulness to Aristotle's text, many commentaries in this group are rather uninspiring. We may group four similar interpretations: namely, those of Johannes Magirus (d. 1596, professor of natural philosophy and medicine in Marburg, better known in Germany and England for his writings on physiology[58]); Conrad Horneius (1590–1649, professor of philosophy and later of theology at the University of Helmstedt[59]); Bartholomeus Keckermann (ca. 1571/73–1609, studied in Wittenberg, Leipzig, and Heidelberg and ended up as a teacher at the gymnasium in Danzig[60]); and Walter Donaldson (b. 1574, Scottish philosopher, trained in Aberdeen and Heidelberg, taught in Sedan and La Rochelle[61]).[62] These four explain that when Plato posited happiness in the Idea of the Good, he meant that happiness was the *vision and contemplation* of the highest Good—something seemingly astray from Aristotle's text.

Two explanations may be given to this interpretative turn. On the one hand, it seems as the most natural way of making sense of Aristotle's portrayal of Plato. Indeed, it is quite obscure to say that happiness *is* an Idea. The connection with the contemplative life makes it more plausible as an intelligent proposal of happiness. On the other hand, a philological (although more difficult to

58. Franz Gundlach, *Catalogus professorum Academiae Marburgensis : Die Akademischen Lehrer der Philipps-Universität in Marburg von 1527 Bis 1910*, Historische Kommission für Hessen und Waldeck, XV (Marburg: N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, G. Braun, 1927), 388; Lohr, 235–36.

59. See Walter Sparn, "Horn (Hornejus)," *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); Lohr, 192–93.

60. Joseph S. Freedman, "The Career and Writings of Bartholomew Keckermann (d. 1609)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 141.3 (1997): 305–64; Harm Klueting, "Keckermann," in Religion in Geschichte *Und Gegenwart*, 4th edition, ed. Hans Dieter Betz et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001); Lohr, 209–10.

61. John Durkan, "Donaldson, Walter," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Lohr, 126–27; Roger P. H. Green et al., eds., *Scottish Latin Authors in Print up to 1700: A Short Title List,* Supplementa Humanistica Lovaniensia 30 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), 114–15, doi.org/10.11116/9789461660763.

62. Joannes Magirius, *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomacheia Commentationes,* ed. Ricardus Walker (Oxonii: J. Vincent., 1842), bk. 1, ch. 6, pp. 26–32; Conradus Horneius, *Disputationes ethicae X depromptae ex Ethica Aristotelis ad Nicomachum* (Frankfurt: Conradus Eifridus, 1629), disp. 1, ch. 6, pp. xxvii–xxxvii, 17–20; Bartholomaeus Keckermannus, *Systema Ethicae* (Hannover: Apud Petrum Antonium, 1619), *praecognita generalia*, 9–24; Gualterus Donaldsonus, *Synopseos Philosophiae Moralis* (Sedan: Apud Antonium de Lamring, 1621), bk. 1, ch. 2, ax. 6, pp. 27–31.

ascertain) reason may be advanced. According to some common translations,[63] that is to say, Moerbeke's, Bruni's, Aegrypolous's, or Peronis's, *NE* 1.6 reads that Plato proposed "the universal good," which is an accurate rendering of the original Greek text.[64] However, Lambinus's translation, as corrected by Berg, says at the start of 1.6 that they should turn to "examine that sentence, that makes the good we are looking for *an Idea*."[65] Of course, *NE* 1.6 does speak of "Ideas" later on, but it is not in the opening line. This rendering makes the identification of happiness and "Idea" (and not simply "highest good," "universal good," etc.) more conspicuous. It is highly plausible that these authors read that translation, for it was the only one edited in Germany.[66] Given that "idea" in the original Greek meant the object of the act of thinking, it would be natural to understand that Plato meant the contemplation and vision of the Idea of the Good, whether they read Lambini's translation or the Greek text.[67]

This interpretation of Plato will prove momentous. If Aristotle is against Plato in this point, and Plato proposes the contemplative life as the highest happiness, then it would seem that Aristotle criticizes his master for advancing an unreal final end such as contemplation—at least, it is unreal for philosophical ethics. A kind of "practical turn" in Aristotle ensues, distancing him from the lofty Plato, who wrongly mixed theology with philosophy, especially if read as the authors of the previous group did. In Horneius's own words, the Idea of the Good "adds nothing to civil happiness" because it "cannot be something realized or acquired by man, but only contemplated. But what [is there] in common between contemplation and to act happily in life and perform the

63. Ferdinand Edward Cranz and Charles B. Schmitt, *A Bibliography of Aristotle Editions, 1501–1600,* 2nd edition with addenda and revisions (Baden-Baden: Valentin Koener, 1984), 172–75.

64. Aristoteles, "Ethica Nicomachea," trans. Leonardus Brunus (mid-fifteenth century), Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Bibliotheca Palatina), fol. 8v; Aristoteles, *Ethica Nicomachea (Editio Recognita)*, ed. René Antoine Gauthier, trans. Robert Grosseteste and Guilelmus Moerbeke, Aristoteles Latinus 26.4 (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 379; Aristoteles, *Ethicorum Aristotelis Stagiritae ad Nicomachum Libri Decem*, trans. Iohannes Argyropylus (Coloniae Agrippinae: Maternum Cholinum, 1579), 9; Aristoteles, *Ethicorum, Sive de Moribus, ad Nicomachum Filium Libri X*, trans. Joachim Perionius (Basilea, 1545), 10.

65. Aristoteles, *Ethicorum ad Nicomachum Libri Decem*, trans. Lambinus Dionysius and Matthias Berg (Helmstedt: Henningus Mullerus, 1560), 9.

66. Peter Petersen, *Geschichte der Aristotelischen Philosophie im protestantischen Deutschland* (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1921), 181–82.

67. Aidy's and Vermigli's commentaries explicitly share this understanding of the word "idea."

best actions?"[68] That is not to say that contemplation is entirely bad; rather, as Keckerman says, the mistake arises because "they did not say what immediately belongs to practical philosophy, since the goal [of practical philosophy] is not contemplation, but *praxis*."[69]

Other authors also support the Aristotelian refutation of the Ideas, through arguments of greater metaphysical weight: for example, Jacob Schegk (1511–87), a professor of medicine and philosophy at the University of Tübingen, who influenced theological debates thanks to his knowledge of logic.[70] In his commentary on the *Ethics*, Schegk follows Aristotle's arguments with great fidelity in a style influenced by humanism. Perhaps in contention with the authors grouped in section 2.1 (or with their medieval roots mentioned in 1.2), Schegk contrasts the Platonic Idea of the Good with the Aristotelian understanding of God and goodness. He explains that, "if there is a supreme good (as there certainly is)," the relationship of particular goods to the supreme good should be understood not in the manner of a participation of an Idea "but as a measure for those that fall under the measure [i.e., the measured]."[71] Thus, he seconds Aristotle in criticizing participation as a hollow concept that explains nothing. Analogical participation is not only an empty notion, but even contradictory with the rest of Platonism, since the commonality between an Idea and its corresponding particular, Schegk explains, demands a certain univocity between the participated and the participant. However, it is obvious that God is not univocally predicated from the sensible beings. Consequently, the Idea of the Good differs from God. Moreover, the Pythagoreans correctly related the good to the one, because, just as the one is found in the multiple individuals as their measure, so God is the measure of good things. That, he thinks, is the opinion of Aristotle, thus defending his compatibility with Christianity.

68. Conradus Horneius, *Disputationes ethicae X depromptae ex Ethica Aristotelis ad Nicomachum* (Frankfurt: Conradus Eifridus, 1629), disp. 1, ch. 6, pp. xxxiii–xxxvi, 19–20.

69. Keckermannus, 22.

70. James A. Hinz, "Schegk, Jacob," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Sachiko Kusukawa, "Lutheran Uses of Aristotle: A Comparison between Jacob Schegk and Philip Melanchthon," in *Philosophy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Conversations with Aristotle*, ed. Constance Blackwell and Sachiko Kusukawa (Aldershot and Brookfield: Ashgate, 1999), 169–88; Lohr, 410–12.

71. Iacobus Schegkius, *In X. Libros Ethicorum Annotationes* (Basilea: Per Ioannem Hervagium, 1550), bk. 1, ch. 6, p. 433.

Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562), professor at Strasbourg, Oxford, and finally Zurich, is one of the most outstanding figures of the reformed tradition.[72] In his very detailed commentary on *NE* 1.6, Vermigli begins by describing in great detail Plato's thought. Plato "knew very splendid things about God";[73] in fact, he said that God was one and ineffable, that He surrounds and exceeds everything, and is infinite and omnipresent. According to Plato, Vermigli adds, God has created everything out of goodness, without the need for external things. He is good, and communicates His goodness to everything, "as the sun illuminates everything with its light, which [light] He has not received, but [he has it] genuinely and innately."[74] God not only created everything out of His goodness, but everything tends towards Him as its ultimate goal.

Vermigli adduces here Eustratius's categorization of the universals. Accordingly, the Ideas refuted by Aristotle are separate Ideas that the divine Architect looks at to inform the matter, in a way similar to the Demiurge's operation in the *Timaeus*. In the opinion of Vermigli, Plato, in consideration of the multiplicity of goods, deemed that they all should refer to a common Idea of the Good whence they come. This Idea, in the Christianized version of the theory of Ideas, is in God, in Whom humans find their maximum good.[75] Indeed, he adds, Aristotle "could not have rightly rebuked" Plato if the latter had placed the Ideas in the very essence of God.[76] However, Plato erred by postulating them as separate substances.[77]

72. See Marvin W. Anderson, "Vermigli, Peter Martyr," ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Lohr, 477–78.

73. Petrus Martyris Vermiglii, *In Aristotelis Ethicorum Ad Nicomachum Librum Primum, Secundum Ac Initium Tertii* (Zurich: Apud Christophorum Froschoverum, 1582), bk. 1, ch. 6, p. 122. I've translated the texts from the Latin, although an English translation of Vermigli's commentary was edited in 2006 by Emidio Campi and Joseph C. McLelland. For a closer analysis of his commentary on *NE* 1.6, see Baschera, *Peter Martyr Vermiglis Kommentar Zur Nikomachischen Ethik*, 100–10.

74. Vermiglii, bk. 1, ch. 6, p. 123.

75. Vermiglii, bk. 1, ch. 6, p. 125.

76. Vermiglii, bk. 1, ch. 6, p. 133.

77. Vermigli suggests immediately after that maybe Plato is wrongly portrayed by Aristotle and that, actually, their doctrines are quite similar (just like the commentators in section 2.3, *infra*). Nonetheless, he does not further explore this possibility. I am grateful to Dan Kemp for the remark in our personal correspondence.

Afterwards, Vermigli faithfully reproduces Aristotle's rebuttal, and adds arguments taken from other Aristotelian texts, such as the infinite regress of the Ideas described in *Metaphysics*. Vermigli is aware that Plato is not the only proponent of the Ideas, but that this theory finds a whole tradition in its favour, naming for instance Albert the Great and Hermes Trismegistus. Vermigli especially discusses Eustratius, whose commentary he criticizes at length. Vermigli mainly argues that Eustratius's mistakes arise from confusing the Platonic Idea of the Good with God. Vermigli replies that such identification would hold up if the Idea of the Good were an efficient cause—as the cause from which all things derive, i.e., the Creator. However, the Platonic theory rather assimilates the form of the Good to a formal cause, as is clear from the theory of knowledge as reminiscence. Likewise, Vermigli adds, the identification would imply a kind of ontologism he disapproves of, since, according to Platonism, knowledge of sensible beings requires knowledge of the eternal forms. Hence, we would have to know God prior to the sensible beings. However, it is a fact that we know individual goods well, while the knowledge of God is obscure and difficult. Therefore, in Plato's own system, the identification between the Idea of the Good and God is invalid.[78] Because of this—besides the fact that Aristotle clearly thinks that Ideas are separate, hypostasized forms—Vermigli rejects that Aristotle's arguments seek to deny the existence of a Creator. Eustratius's remaining arguments in favour of the Idea of the Good, he thinks, stem from the same confusion.

This second interpretative line, in conclusion, closely reproduces Aristotle's exposition of the theory of ideas, emphasizing the absurd separation of the Idea of the Good from the sensible world and their unclear relationship, aside from its unsuitability for a philosophical ethics. At the same time, their interpretation tends to read Aristotle as a practical, down-to-earth philosopher, who looked for a happiness possible within the social and political realm in a kind of "pragmatic turn" that rejects the theoretical life, which their interpretations conflate with afterlife happiness.[79] Although, at first, it seems like a deviation from their medieval precedents (neither Aquinas, Avernius, nor Buridan denies that theoretical happiness belongs to ethics) and in line

78. See Vermiglii, bk. 1, ch. 6, pp. 141–42.

79. All of this demands a careful study of their commentaries on book 10, which is obviously beyond the scope of this article.

with the practical emphasis characteristic of some strands of the Renaissance,[80] there is in another sense a deep bond. Indeed, it deepens the separation between theology and philosophy, whose principal roots are to be found in the Middle Ages (over against, for example, the Patristic period). The "theoretical happiness" is tantamount to the vision of God, which is Christian salvation. However, if ethics does not redeem man—which is an effect of grace—then necessarily ethics must merely guide this worldly life[81] and it must reflect the condition of humanity after the fall.[82]

2.3 The de-ontologizing interpretation

The third group of authors maintained a profound coherence between Plato and Aristotle despite the latter's criticism. Bates had advanced this interpretation, but the newly available *Dialogues* of Plato greatly substantiated this posture. These authors confront Aristotle's account with texts like the *Theaetetus* and *Filebus*, finding in them a theory of happiness similar to Aristotle's. Although this approach is usually labelled "eclecticism" in modern literature,[83] this is not how it was understood by its proponents. They did not consider themselves to be mixing different philosophical strands, but rather contended that the teachings of Plato and Aristotle, when rightly understood, reflect common points of view proper to a perennial philosophy.

I will start with two authors who show some strong similarities in their positions with the previous group. Franco Burgersdijck (1590–1635) was professor of logic, ethics, and the philosophy of nature at the University of Leiden,

80. As illustrated in Sabrina Ebbersmeyer, *Homo Agens. Studien Zur Genese Und Struktur Frühhumanistischer Moralphilosophie*, Quellen Und Studien Zur Philosophie 95 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010).

81. This is not, it must be added, a negative vision of philosophical morals, but simply a limitation of its scope. Dreitzel, 343–60.

82. Torrance Kirby, "Cognition and Action: Conversion and 'Virtue Ethics' in the *Loci Communes* of Peter Martyr Vermigli," in *From Rome to Zurich, between Ignatius and Vermigli: Essays in Honor of John Patrick Donnelly, SJ,* ed. Kathleen M. Comerford, Gary W. Jenkins, and Torrance Kirby, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 184 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 163–79, doi.org/10.1163/9789004331778_012.

83. As Andreas Blank does in "Justice and the Eclecticism of Protestant Ethics, 1580–1610," *Studia Leibnitiana* 40.2 (2008): 223–38.

where he was rector.[84] In his commentary to *NE* 1.6, he presents the Aristotelian refutation. He claims that Aristotle's arguments are accurate only under the assumption that Plato understood "ideas" to mean "the natures of things subsisting by themselves."[85] These, as Aristotle shows, do not exist, and if they existed, they would be useless for happiness. However, adds Burgersdijck, other texts of Plato imply that the Ideas are eternal and perfect notions within the mind of God. As a matter of fact, Burgersdijck does not cite any text of Plato himself; his source is Alcinous's *Handbook of Platonism*. In that same text, Burgersdijck says, we see that happiness according to Plato consists "in the science and contemplation of the first good, which some rightly called God and first mind."[86] The Platonic opinion is then the most beautiful. However, the topic under discussion is the happiness of humans within this life, which cannot be separated from what grants comfort to life. Hence, the Platonic theory, even if correctly understood, errs, for contemplation is unreachable in this life from the point of view of philosophical ethics.

The second author, John Case (1540?–1600), is the only exponent of Anglicanism treated here. Case was a fellow of St. John's, Oxford; in 1574, he had to resign his post but kept publishing and giving lessons at home until shortly before his death.[87] His commentary on the text of Aristotle is accompanied by diagrams that synthetize his argumentation, as well as counterarguments ("oppono," somewhat like a short *quaestio*) and their solutions. Case, in his commentary to *NE* 1.6,[88] denounces with lofty language the fact that Aristotle "changes a word, modifies a sentence or devises something new"[89] when

84. See Cornelis de Waard, "Burgersdijck (Franco)," in *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek*, ed. P. C. Molhuysen, P. J. Blok, and K. H. Kossmann (N. Israel and Amsterdam: A. W. Sijthoff, 1927/1974); Lohr, 66–67.

85. Franco Burgersdicius, *Idea philosophiae moralis, ex Aristotele , maxima parte excerpta, & methodice disposita* (Leiden: Ex officina Elzeviriana, 1623), ch. 3, paragraph xxiii, 37–38.

86. Burgersdicius, ch. 3, paragraph xxiv, 39.

87. Edward A. Malone, "Case, John," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Schmitt, *John Case and Aristotelianism in Renaissance England*, 77–105; Lohr, 81–82.

88. Iohannes Casus, *Speculum moralium quaestionum in universam Ethicen Aristotelis* (Oxoniæ: Ex officina typographica Iosephi Barnesii, 1585), bk. 1, ch. 6, pp. 17–21. On his Aristotelianism, specially his debt to humanism that contextualizes his interpretation, see Schmitt, *John Case and Aristotelianism in Renaissance England*, 139–90.

89. Casus, 17.

discussing the opinions of other authors. That's how he always "reaches triumph before victory."[90] For nowhere did Plato write that happiness consists in some Idea "wallowing in the air, staggering in the mind, floating in eternity."[91] Indeed, Case says, it is quite clear that Plato affirmed there were two kinds of *idea*. One is "united [to the mind?], the first [proximate?] cause of contemplation," and it is happiness as found in this life. The second kind of idea is the first cause, called Mind and divine, and it is the source of happiness in the afterlife. Both are called "divine [kinds] of happiness" in the diagram included at the end of the chapter.[92] In the view of Plato's real thought, then, Case complains about the unnecessary and verbose discussions carried on by Aristotle about the supposedly Platonic theory of the Ideas, through which Aristotle unwarrantedly aggravates his master. The protest notwithstanding, Case concedes in the last *oppongo* of this section that Aristotle's refutation is correct, if granted that the happiness looked for here is "political happiness" (an equivalent to the "civil happiness" we've already found in other authors) and not a divine happiness as advanced by Plato. Therefore, like the authors in the previous section, Burgersdijk and Case reject the belief that contemplation could be the happiness of moral philosophy. Even so, contrary to the literalist commentators, they thought that Aristotle misunderstood Plato, who, in reality, agreed with him—which justifies their inclusion in this section.

Still another de-ontologizing writer is Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560). Educated in Heidelberg and Tübingen, he would later settle in Wittenberg to second Luther's reforms.[93] His influence in the Lutheran readings of the *Ethics* was immense. In his commentary on *EN* 1.6, he proposes two principles for understanding Plato and dissolving his apparent incompatibility with Aristotle. First, he claims that Plato saw that "every soul desires a certain ultimate good," but that no one can "understand it sufficiently, nor firmly cleave to it." Plato "ignored the cause of this darkness,"[94] which for Melanchthon is original sin.

90. Casus, 18.

91. Casus, 18.

92. Casus, 19.

93. See Heinz Scheible, "Melanchthon, Philipp," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. Gerhard Müller (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992); Lohr, 254–58.

94. Philipp Melanchthon, *Enarrationes aliquot librorum Ethicorum Aristotelis*, ed. Henricus Ernestus Bindseil, Philipp Melanchthon, Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia 16 (Halle: C. A. Schwetschke et filium, 1850), bk. 1, ch. 6, p. 292.

Plato called the knowledge of that perfect good the "Idea of the Good." Only through comprehending this idea can one act morally well, since it affords unerring ethical knowledge and is a spur to acquire virtue. Hence, the idea of the Good primarily means our concept of the supreme good (in the sense of the "conception" of the mind), and it means secondarily also the referent of this concept. We'll call this principle [A]. The second principle [B] asserts that the perfect Platonic Good (that is, the referent of the idea of the Good) consists in the mixture of virtue and pleasure. It is called an idea insofar as it is an "abstract and perfect image," not mixed with the excesses or defects normally occurring in the individuals that exemplify that abstract idea (for example, the idea of courage with respect to the particular courage of Cato or Caesar).

Melanchthon argues that Aristotle's refutation opposes those two Platonic principles. Regarding [B], Aristotle "despises the affectation of inane subtlety,"[95] considering that the concept of the Good itself clarifies nothing of the happy life. On [A], he explains that, whereas Plato perceived the supreme good, and "required in man a firmer assent of virtue and a more vigorous motion," Aristotle "required nothing more than what this mediocre nature can give."[96] If these disputes are left aside, Melanchthon thinks, both coincide in the fundamentals. Indeed, Plato emphasized with [A] the intellectual component, so that men "are governed with true and solid virtue," just like Aristotle, for whom virtue "must be governed by right doctrine."[97] In short, we find in Melanchthon a confluence of motifs driving his interpretation. On the one hand, the *Philebus*, which he quotes several times, allows him to find in Plato many parallels with Aristotle's theory of happiness. Thus, it is not necessary to identify the Idea of the Good with God, and, anyway, he believes that Plato never thought of separate ideas. On the other hand, Melanchthon aims at expounding the virtuous life from a philosophical viewpoint, even if philosophy cannot offer any saving knowledge of God.[98] Hence, theoretical subtleties ineffective for the acquisition of virtue may be left aside.

We may turn now to Andreas Hyperius (1511–64). He was trained in the humanist trends in Belgium and Paris and subsequently settled at the University

95. Melanchthon, 293.

96. Melanchthon, 297.

97. Melanchthon, 291.

98. See Günther Frank, "Melanchthon – Der „Ethiker Der Reformation"," in *Der Philosoph Melanchthon*, ed. Günther Frank and Felix Mundt (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 45–75, doi.org/10.1515/97831102609 91.45.

of Marburg.[99] His text on the *Nichomachean Ethics* was evidently influenced by Melanchthon's commentary in the approach and even the wording of some sentences, naturally owing to Melanchthon's influence. Moreover, the interpretation fits perfectly with the figure of Hyperius, who has made history mainly as the first Protestant who wrote a treatise on homiletics. Indeed, Hyperius interprets Aristotle's and Plato's ethical writings by emphasizing their exhortative nature over any theoretical question, because he thought that they primarily intended to formulate a theory apt to lead men to virtue, and not necessarily an adequate description of the reality.

Hyperius introduces some nuances to Melanchthon's reading. In his opinion, the apparent dissonance between Plato and Aristotle is due to their different approaches to moral philosophy. On the one hand, Plato, considering the weakness of the human mind—we cannot rightly judge the highest good, let alone achieve it—postulated the existence of the highest good "for whose beauty and great dignity the souls be vehemently animated to the virtues and actions of virtue."[100] When the idea of the Good is grasped, we are moved to imitate it. On the other hand, Aristotle, trusting more in our natural ability, placed the highest good in the action of virtue, so that we "can achieve what belongs to absolute virtue."[101] Hence, from an Aristotelian consideration, the highest good is something attainable for us. Hyperius does not think Aristotle's criticism was motivated by metaphysics or theory of action; actually, the Stagirite thought that, through his own approach to ethics, "men are much more animatedly encouraged to act well."[102]

To illustrate his position, Hyperius proposes an analogy between Aristotle and Plato on the one hand and some theological theses on the other. This comparison is made, according to his own words, *crasse et ruditer*, coarsely and rudely. Some think (correctly, he adds) that humans are justified by faith, without works, since our human weakness can never act well without the goodness and mercy of God. Others, in turn, maintain that good works are an efficient cause that must accompany justification, and thus humans are encouraged to act well. The proponents of this second theological thesis emphasize the importance of

99. See Gerhard Rau, "Hyperius, Andreas," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. Müller; Lohr, 194–95.

100. Andrea Hyperius, *In Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachica annotationes* (Basilea: Ex officina oporiniana, 1586), bk. 1, ch. 6, p. 41.

101. Hyperius, bk. 1, ch. 6, p. 52.

102. Hyperius, bk. 1, ch. 6, p. 52.

good works, because otherwise a comfortable passivity is stimulated, and hence faith is not reflected in just actions. These two theses, Hyperius thinks, can be reconciled by saying that "men are justified by faith, without works, but once justified they always live justly."[103] Hyperius suggests a similar dichotomy is found with respect to Plato's and Aristotle's theories: Plato emphasized the influence of the idea, which is the initiator and end of illustrious actions. Thus, the idea is not idle, for it excites good works. Aristotle, for his part, exalted the action of virtue, "but such that needs to look at some [leading] idea"[104] Idea and action are correlative: "the idea requires and excites actions, actions look at and are directed to the idea."[105] Unlike Melanchthon, then, Hyperius does not argue that Plato proposed a goal superior to the forces of fallen nature, nor that Aristotle was content with a more mediocre realization. Quite simply, they propose two different approaches to the same philosophical ethic. It is most interesting to note here, then, that both Melanchthon and Hyperius assert that natural ethics are useless for salvation; nonetheless, philosophical morals are beneficial for the political life, according to the classical Protestant law-gospel scheme.

Lastly, we may examine an author of the reformed tradition who also arrives at conciliatory solutions. Andrew Aidy (fl. 1610–16[106]), in his second *dubium* after *EN* 1.6, asks whether Aristotle denies God when rejecting the Platonic idea of the Good. In a desperate move to save Aristotle from impiety, Aidy replies that the Stagirite "did not blame Plato for establishing the idea of the highest good" but reproaches him only for postulating the idea as a practical good.[107]

In his fourth *dubium*, Aidy ponders what Aristotle means when he affirms that the arts are not concerned with universals, but only with the individual, so that the Idea of the Good would be idle.[108] To solve it, Aidy proposes three ways of understanding the term "idea": First, idea as eminence, which is for him identical to God, because He is called the "idea of everything" insofar

103. Hyperius, bk. 1, ch. 6, p. 53.

104. Hyperius, bk. 1, ch. 6, p. 54.

105. Hyperius, bk. 1, ch. 6, p. 54.

106. See Green et al., eds., 38, 290–92; Lohr, 7.

107. Andrea Aidi, *Clavis Philosophiae Moralis, sive in Aristotelis Nicomacheia Commentarius* (Oppenheim: Hieronymus Gallerus, 1614), bk. 1, ch. 4, dub. 2, pp. 39–40.

108. For the following, see Aidi, bk. 1, ch. 4, dub. 4, pp. 41–42. On Aristotle's argument, see the end of the second paragraph in section 1.1, above.

as He contains all that He originates. Second, idea is the form of something inasmuch as it is considered in the mind. Third, in a metaphorical derivation of the second, idea is all that is conceived in the soul. Aidy thinks that Plato signifies under "idea of the Good" both the first and third meaning of the word "idea." Thus, the idea of the Good refers to the final end of all (God), as well as the disposition towards the best, which consists of "wisdom, accompanied by prudence and followed by action, from which derives the highest joy." Thus, "throughout book I [of the *Nichomachean Ethics*] there will be no great discrepancy" between both philosophers. Aidy explains that Aristotle missed that, in some sense, the Platonic ideas were in the mind (and not separate) and didn't agree that the soul was elevated to the highest good by intervention of the mind or ideas (instead of by the action of virtue?). However, "Plato and Aristotle agreed that the highest good is the end of good deeds, and that it comes from virtue and that everyone should strive to achieve it with full power and every capability."[109]

This last group, then, enriches the perspectives of an interpretation already found in Bates. A conciliation is achieved by bringing Plato's thought closer to that of Aristotle, thanks to a simplified interpretation of Platonic metaphysical presuppositions. Thus, the Aristotelian arguments are just a philosophical expression of what Plato metaphorically asserted. Indeed, Hyperius and Aidy reduce the "separation" between the Idea of the Good and the world of human praxis, the central point of Aristotelian criticism. Hence, they have no problem (as seen in Aidy and Melanchthon) in identifying the supreme good with God, as long as the good of human life is not left aside. Finally, they emphasize Aristotle's conception of happiness achievable in this life, leaving aside his theoretical considerations in book 10 of the *Nichomachean Ethics*.

Conclusion

Every philosopher lives within a tradition. Despite the obviousness of this claim, the principle seems to be often forgotten when studying the Reformation. The desire to find in the Reformation the origins of a "modernity" that "breaks" with the "Middle Ages" sometimes blinds us. Instead, I have already argued in the introduction that it is much more profitable to approach the philosophical

109. Aidi, bk. 1, ch. iv, dub. 4, pp. 40–41.

ethical theories held by Protestants if we emphasize their continuity with the past. Living in a tradition is a source of precision and fruitfulness and does not entail a lack of originality; the early modern Protestant tradition displays an immense inner variety of positions.

Concerning the reception of *NE* 1.6, we've seen that there are striking resemblances in the interpretation of medieval authors with those of their Protestant heirs. Although I have given contextual information that points to a direct influence of these medieval predecessors, the principal aim was to substantiate the continuity between the philosophical ethics in Protestant universities and their medieval precedents. That is to say, the same questions were posed, always with critical-historical rigour (What positions did Aristotle and Plato really support?) and systematic concern (Is happiness identified with the Idea of the Good? In what sense?). Exactly because they spoke and wrote on a common ground, the different perspectives, even within each of the three groups presented in the article, could be developed within a rich and complex discussion. The pragmatic turn of Aristotle was a paradigmatic case of this elaboration.

The article has examined some authors (Du Moulin, Hilden, and Walaeus) who seem to confirm the myth of an anti-Aristotelian, anti-philosophical Protestantism. However, when read within the context of the other authors studied, their position is shown to be a minority. In Protestantism, philosophical ethics retains its own natural character, independent of revelation. Just as it was during the Middle Ages, every author is genuinely concerned with bringing about a philosophical theory, as evident, for example, in the talk of a *civil* (not theological) happiness. Every one of them was to some extent an "Aristotelian" and a "Platonist" (these two categories not being radically distinct). Moreover, of the authors studied, the two who refer to quintessential Protestant theological points (Melanchthon and Hyperius) do not rely on these considerations to establish their position, but use them only as reflexive principles of interpretation or as an external context that does not interfere with the philosophical argumentation itself.