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# ARISTOTLE'S ON PHILOSOPHY

A Brief Comment on Fragment 12 Rose, 13 Walzer, 13 Ross,  
18 Untersteiner (Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* II. 37. 95-96)

Anton-Hermann CHROUST

ACCORDING to Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* II. 37. 95-96, a passage which many scholars consider a fragment of Book III of Aristotle's *On Philosophy*<sup>1</sup> the Stagirite stated: "Let us assume there were human beings who had lived always beneath the ground, in comfortable and well-lit dwellings, adorned with statues and pictures, and furnished with everything in which those who are considered happy abound. Suppose, however, that they had never ascended above ground, but had learned by report or hearsay that there exist a divine authority and power. And suppose, then, that at some time the jaws of the earth should open and that they would be able to escape from these hidden abodes and make their way into the regions which we inhabit. When thus they suddenly would gain sight of the earth, seas and the sky; when they should come to know the grandeur of the clouds and the might of the winds; when they should behold the sun and should learn its grandeur and beauty as well as its power to cause the day by shedding light over the sky; and, again, when night had darkened the lands and they should behold the whole of the sky spangled and adorned with stars; and when they should see the changing lights of the moon as it waxes and wanes, and the risings and settings of all these celestial bodies, their courses fixed and changeless throughout all eternity — when they should behold all these things, most certainly they would have judged both that there exist gods and that all these marvelous works are the handiwork of these gods. [Thus far Aristotle.]"<sup>2</sup>

Some scholars are of the opinion that in his report Cicero probably attempted to enlarge, corrupt or perhaps "improve" on the original Aristotelian account. Cicero did so, it has been argued, in order to bring this account "up to date" and thus make it

1. Frag. 14, Rose<sup>2</sup>; frag. 12, Rose<sup>1</sup>; frag. 13, Walzer; frag. 13, Ross; frag. 18, Untersteiner.

2. Similar notions, which likewise are considered fragments of Aristotle's *On Philosophy*, can be found in Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* III. 20-23 (*Adversus Physicos* I. 20-23 — frag. 12, Rose<sup>2</sup>; frag. 10, Rose<sup>1</sup>; frag. 12a, Walzer; frag. 12a, Ross; frag. 14, Untersteiner); SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, *ibid.*, IX, 26-27 (I. 26-27 — frag. 13, Rose<sup>2</sup>; frag. 11, Rose<sup>1</sup>; frag. 12b, Walzer; frag. 12b, Ross; frag. 26, Untersteiner); PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, *Legum Allegoriarum Libri Tres* III. 32. 97-99 (frag. 13, Walzer; frag. 13, Ross; frag. 15, Untersteiner); IDEM, *De Praemiis et Poenis* VII. 41-43 (frag. 13, Ross; frag. 16, Untersteiner); IDEM, *De Specialibus Legibus* III. 34. 185 — 36. 194 (frag. 13, Ross; frag. 16, Untersteiner). See also ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* 982 b 11 ff.

more attractive to his Roman readers: The subterranean dwellings are well-constructed and well-furnished buildings, adorned with statues and pictures. They are in fact Roman villas rather than Greek houses.<sup>3</sup> Cicero's descriptive account of the "cave people," it has been maintained, also implies an important element probably not to be found in the original Aristotelian text: His "Romanized cave dwellers" lived in a well-ordered and comfortable environment. Such a high state of material comfort and order in turn suggests that even beneath the earth and deprived of the "vision of heavenly orderliness," these "cave dwellers" must have possessed a highly developed (Roman?) sense of order as well as a thorough notion of an "orderer" — the proper attitude of a society which, like the (idealized) Roman society, was fully dedicated to the concept of law and order. These are some of the observations made by certain scholars who insist that Cicero "Romanized" and probably somewhat altered Aristotle's original account.

In *Metaphysics* 982 b 11 ff., Aristotle points out that men began to philosophize only after they had succeeded in securing the essential necessities of life, that is, after they had attained a certain level of material comfort. On his part, Cicero points out that the "cave people" lived in well-built, well-lit and luxuriously adorned dwellings, "furnished with everything in which those who are considered happy abound." In other words, Cicero's "cave people" had achieved a high level of material comfort. This being so, they had reached a state of relative leisure which permitted them to indulge in philosophic speculation or theory. They were able to engage in activities which did not directly produce material advantages. On this point Cicero's account and Aristotle's views seem to be in full accord.

According to Cicero, Aristotle suggests that the "cave people" lived in splendidly constructed dwellings furnished with all imaginable products of art and technique, that is, of architecture, sculpture and painting. This suggestion has a definite significance. It is not, as W. Jaeger insists, a reference to "modern, cultivated, satiated, miseducated persons, who bury themselves like moles in the sunless and comfortless splendor in which they are seeking their dubious happiness."<sup>4</sup> Rather, it implies that these "cave people" were wholly familiar with the basic "products" or manifestations of the arts (*τέχναι*), namely, architecture, sculpture and painting. This, in turn, is indicative of the fact that they were conversant with the disciplined arts and their respective products — that they were able to understand order and beauty of the universe.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, they were capable of realizing and judging that this orderliness and beauty is not perchance the result of mere accident or "nature" but rather the deliberate product or manifestation of intelligent, deliberate and rational design or art — the manifestation of an intellect. This being so, we are entitled to assume that in his *On Philosophy* Aristotle, too, referred to "cave people" who were depicted as having lived in resplendent surroundings graced by the arts (architecture,

3. See J.W. GRAHAM, "Origins and Interrelations of the Greek and Roman House", *Phoenix*, vol. 20 (1966), pp. 3-31. M. ZEPF, *op. cit. infra*, note 7, pp. 361-362.

4. W. JAEGER, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development* (Oxford, 1948), p. 164. See also J. BERNAYS, *Die Dialoge des Aristoteles in Ihrem Verhältnis zu Seinen Übrigen Werken* (Berlin, 1863), p. 107.

5. *Epinomis* 984A, relates that "the stars are the 'ornaments' of the heavens," that is, are to the heavens what, according to Cicero, statues and pictures are to the subterranean dwellings.

sculpture and painting).<sup>6</sup> On this point, too, Cicero's report and Aristotle's argument seem to be in full accord. Hence, we may also assume that Aristotle ultimately based his whole "cosmological argument" in support of the existence of God or the gods — his argument for a Supreme Artificer and Orderer — on the contrast between φύσις and τέχνη. In the original *On Philosophy*, it may be presumed, Aristotle probably argued along the following lines: If a (rational) man is sufficiently conversant with the arts, and if he understands and appreciates the fact that the products of these arts, in the final analysis, are the results of deliberate rational action, he will also have to admit that if man understandingly looks upon the greatest and most magnificent product of all the arts, namely, the most orderly, most perfect, most harmonious and most beautiful universe, he must realize that this universe is the most perfect and most splendid product of τέχνη, in other words, the most perfect handiwork of the most perfect Artificer — the most eloquent manifestation of the creativeness of a Creator.<sup>7</sup>

Viewed in its broader implications, it may be contended that Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* II. 37. 95-96, rather faithfully and accurately restates what Aristotle originally had said in his *On Philosophy*.<sup>8</sup> This would defeat the insistence of some scholars that Cicero's particular report in some respects deviates from the Aristotelian original. Cicero's account of the "cave people" as living "in comfortable and well-lit dwellings," as being surrounded by "statues and paintings," and as possessing "everything in which those who are considered happy abound" is definitely an Aristotelian notion. It recasts Aristotle's insistence that only when men "had almost all of the necessities of life — and the things that are conducive to comfort and relaxation had been secured" — when they had attained a certain level of material culture and, hence, were able to enjoy a modicum of leisure — did they turn to philosophy.<sup>9</sup> Cicero's report that the "cave people" lived "in well-constructed and well-

6. K. REINHARDT, *Kosmos und Sympathie: Neue Untersuchungen über Poseidonios* (Munich, 1926), p. 97, note 2.

7. See M. ZEPF, "Der Mensch in der Höhle und das Pantheon," *Gymnasium*, vol. 65 (1958), pp. 355-382, especially, pp. 361-362, and p. 366, note 77; M. UNTERSTEINER, *Aristotele: Della Filosofia* (Rome, 1963), pp. 176 ff.; P. AUBENQUE, *Le Problème de l'Être chez Aristote* (Paris, 1962), pp. 344 ff.; I. BYWATER, "Aristotle's Dialogue 'On Philosophy,'" *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 7 (1877), pp. 83 ff.; G. LAZZATI, "L'Aristotele Perduto e gli Scrittori Christiani," *Vita e Pensiero*, Pubblicazioni dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Milan, 1938), pp. 59 ff. For a different view, see B. EFFE, *Studien zur Kosmologie und Theologie in der Aristotelischen Schrift 'Über die Philosophie'*, Zetemata, Heft 50 (Munich, 1970), pp. 91-94. Cicero's reference to "gods," it will be noted, appears to be a concession to the popular religious beliefs of the Romans (and Greeks). Aristotle, we know, did not outright reject the popular religious beliefs of the Greeks. See, for instance, ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1101 b 19, and *ibid.*, 1122 b 20; 1123 b 19; 1134 b 28; 1137 a 28; 1160 a 5; 1164 b 6; 1179 a 25-32; *Eudemian Ethics* 1185 b 25; *Politics* 1336 b 16; *Poetics* 1454 b 5, and *ibid.*, 1460 b 37; 1461 a 30; etc.

8. See also O. GIGON, "Cicero und Aristoteles," *Hermes*, vol. 87 (1959), pp. 143-162, especially, pp. 144-145, and *ibid.*, p. 148; p. 153; E. HEITZ, *Die Verlorenen Schriften des Aristoteles* (Leipzig, 1865), p. 184, and *ibid.*, pp. 187-188.

9. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* 982 b 11 ff. The "cave analogy," which might have been borrowed from or be under the influence of Plato's justly famous "cave analogy" (Plato, *Republic* 514A ff., and *ibid.*, 532A ff.), it may be contended, also contains a metaphor: The "cave people" are the prisoners of their struggle for material survival. But when they have succeeded in living "in comfortable and well-lit dwellings, adorned with statues and pictures, and furnished with everything in which those who are considered happy abound" — when, in other words, they have attained a degree of prosperity which permits them to enjoy some leisure, that is, to engage in philosophic speculation — they "break out" of their "cave prison" and, by visualizing the profounder and more remote issues of thoughtful existence,

lit dwellings, adorned with statues and pictures," likewise relates an Aristotelian thought. It reflects Aristotle's view that in order to understand the orderliness and beauty of the universe, and in order to appreciate the "ordering function" (τέχνη) of the ultimate architect of this orderliness and beauty, man himself must be acquainted with and understand τέχνη or art, that is, realize that the artifacts which he himself has produced are the result of deliberate design and disciplined technique rather than mere "nature" (φύσις).<sup>10</sup> Such an understanding and appreciation, it may be concluded, ultimately will lead to the conclusion that there is, and must be, a Creator of the orderly and beautiful universe which cannot possibly be the result of mere chance.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, Aristotle may also be credited with having devised, formulated and philosophically articulated the first cosmological proof of the existence of God.<sup>12</sup>

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they begin to philosophize. In the Aristotelian "cave analogy," it will be noted, the Platonic "shadows" are replaced by "reports and hearsay." For the post-Platonic history of the "cave analogy," see also P.-M. SCHUHL, *La Fabulation Platonicienne* (Paris, 1947), pp. 60 ff. The "cave analogy" can already be found in Empedocles (frag. 31 B 120-121, Diels-Kranz). See also W. KRANZ, *Empedokles* (Zürich, 1949), p. 77; P.-M. SCHUHL, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

10. See, in general, ARISTOTLE, *Physics* 194 a 22-27, and *ibid.*, 199 b 29; *De Partibus Animalium* 640 a 27-33, and *ibid.*, 641 b 12 ff.; *De Generatione Animalium* 735 a 2; *Metaphysics* 981 a 1-12, and *ibid.*, 981 b 13-19; 1025 b 23; 1032 a 12 ff.; 1070 a 6; 1070 a 17; 1094 a 1; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1140 a 1-22, and *ibid.*, 1197 a 12; *Politics* 1281 a 12-14, and *ibid.*, 1282 b 15; etc.
11. In *Metaphysics* 1074 b 36 ff., Aristotle maintains that "Our forefathers in the most remote ages have handed down to posterity a tradition, in the form of a myth, that these [heavenly] bodies are gods..." In this they "anticipated" philosophy in that they, too, wondered about the phenomena of the heavens.
12. See A.-H. CHROUST, "A Cosmological Proof for the Existence of God in Aristotle's Lost Dialogue *On Philosophy*," *The New Scholasticism*, vol. 40 (1966), pp. 447-463. B. Effe, *op. cit. supra*, note 7, pp. 93-94, maintains that it is not permissible to see in Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* II. 37. 95-96, a logical inference *a minore ad maius* (which by way of analogy ultimately leads to the realization or proof of God's existence), as M. Zepf (see note 7, *supra*, p. 366, note 77), I. Bywater (see note 7, *supra*), W. Jaeger (see note 4, *supra*) or M. Untersteiner had done. Effe, who is of the opinion that the passage from Cicero in fact refers to Aristotle's polemics against the atomists, also believes that this passage is not necessarily related to the Aristotelian *On Philosophy*, a view which was also advanced by A. Kail, *De Aristotelis Dialogis, Qui Inscribuntur "De Philosophia" et "Eudemos"*, (Doctorial Dissertation, Univ. of Vienna, Vienna-Leipzig, 1913), pp. 79 ff.