



Aristotle and Modern Historical Criticism

James M.P. Lowry

Volume 36, numéro 1, 1980

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/705772ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/705772ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)

1703-8804 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Lowry, J. M. (1980). Aristotle and Modern Historical Criticism. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 36(1), 17–27. <https://doi.org/10.7202/705772ar>

ARISTOTLE AND MODERN HISTORICAL CRITICISM

J.M.P. LOWRY

I

Aristotle is not generally revered as an historian of philosophy by modern historians of philosophy. Such historians tend to make a definite distinction between philosophy and the history of philosophy — a distinction which they do not find in Aristotle — and which they criticize him for not making. As Aristotle is a major source for the history of the Greek philosophical speculation which preceded him — especially that of the Presocratics — the question of how far his reporting and understanding of his predecessors is valid is of no mean importance for our own historical and philosophical understanding. But then the pursuit of such a question is already the begging of the question because the validity of Aristotle's procedures and views is only of importance for *us* in so far as what he says can be said to transcend the purely historical confines of his time. But again such a transcendence *assumes* a distinction between the history of philosophy and philosophy. Yet Aristotle does not make such a distinction. Is this a failure or part of the very nature of philosophical truth? It is in an effort to answer this question that I shall in the following attempt to argue for Aristotle against some of his recent historical critics.

II

The most extensive and thoroughgoing work on the nature of Aristotle's references to and critiques of his predecessors has been that of Harold Cherniss. Cherniss' views are chiefly contained in two works: one entitled *Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy*,¹ and the other *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*.² I will deal with his first book and then with some views on its contents by Werner Jaeger and W.K.C. Guthrie, both of whom have carefully considered Aristotle's relation to his predecessors.

-
1. Harold CHERNISS, *Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1935.
 2. Harold, CHERNISS, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, New York, Russell and Russell, 1962.

Cherniss, in his work on *Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy*, is generally critical of Aristotle as an historian. He accuses Aristotle of a multitude of sins, the underlying basis of which is an almost congenital lack of so-called "objectivity". In fact, Cherniss' whole attempt centres on the idea of objectivity as being a kind of Xerox print in which the pristine words of the Presocratics are preserved exactly as they were uttered, with even the exact motivation of their authors intact. Fundamental in all of Aristotle's crimes is his attitude that all his predecessors are lisping Aristotelians. According to Cherniss this was impossible because Aristotle's predecessors did not have Aristotelian concepts (e.g., fourfold causality) in mind. Literally, they came before such concepts were conceived. Says Cherniss: "It can be shown that Aristotle was so consumed with the ideology of Platonism and the new concepts he had himself discovered or developed that it was impossible for him to imagine a time when thinking men did not see the problems of philosophy in the same terms as did he."³ The two general classes of the Aristotelian sins based on anachronism are verbal misinterpretations and conflicting testimonies on a single point which lead to self-contradictions, clear misinterpretations, and omissions of particular doctrines of a philosopher which might impinge on an Aristotelian interpretation. Cherniss fills his book with references and data to back up his assertions, but perhaps one example will suffice. It is an example of a willful misinterpretation for the particular purpose of Aristotle's own argument:

In *De Generatione* 333b 20–22 Aristotle insists that the elements were prior to the Sphere because he wants to show that "Love" is really a segregating force. In *De Generatione* 315a 19–21, however, where he seeks to show that Empedocles admitted the generation of the elements from a common material and so should have allowed them to arise from one another, he argues that the Sphere was an homogeneous material and complains that Empedocles does not allow one to decide whether the Sphere or the elements were prior, inasmuch as the elements arise from "alteration" of the Sphere and the Sphere from combination of the elements. In *Metaphysics* 1091b 4–12, nevertheless, desiring to find authority against Speusippus concerning the priority of the final cause, Aristotle argues that "Love", which he identifies with the Good, was the "generating" cause, which implies that the organic world is due to the force of "Love" alone.⁴

Werner Jaeger wrote a review⁵ of Cherniss' book in 1937 (two years after its publication) in which he criticizes Cherniss on a number of points, while agreeing with the basic contention that the philosophy of the Presocratics is only understandable "historically" when pruned of Aristotelian interpretation. What Jaeger chiefly laments is not so much Cherniss' failure to be fair to Aristotle as his failure to recognize the work of earlier scholars. According to Jaeger nineteenth century scholarship based its research on the idea that Aristotle had only limited worth with

3. Harold CHERNISS, *Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy*, Baltimore, 1935, p. x.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 196, note 211.

5. Werner JAEGER, Rezension, "Cherniss: Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy," in *Aristoteles in der Neueren Forschung*, hrsg. von Paul Moraux, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968, from the American Journal of Philosophy, LXIII, 1937, pp. 350–356.

respect to the Presocratics — one result being Karl Reinhardt's *Parmenides* (Bonn 1916) which attempts to overthrow the Aristotelian view of Parmenides — a result which Cherniss does not apparently even relegate to a footnote! Jaeger then goes on to discuss Aristotle's relation to the Presocratics on the basis of his own form criticism of the Aristotelian corpus. He makes three major points. The first is that *Metaphysics A* belongs to the oldest part of the work and, since it is written under the influence of the Platonic Academy, the critic must realize that there are two main ideas discernible which have their roots in Plato and which Aristotle took over for himself. Firstly, there is a consciousness that the Platonic philosophy is the one true one; and, secondly, there is a tendency in the later dialogues for Plato to comprehend or encompass the earlier philosophies. Jaeger's second point is that Aristotle undertook many historical endeavours (e.g., the chronical of musical and gymnastic games, and the work on the constitutions), and that his school produced pupils notable in such work (e.g., Theophrastus: *History of Philosophy* in 18 books; Eudemus: *History of Geometry and Astronomy*, and *History of Theology*; and Menon: *History of Medicine*). Thus, to say that Aristotle has no historical sense is, in Jaeger's view, too extreme. Jaeger's third point against Cherniss is that the work of Aristotle's pupils is indispensable to an understanding of Aristotle's own views because he passed on his most matured views to his school in later life when he was no longer under Academic influence. The development of his views would, for example, account for finding different Aristotelian interpretations of the same point. Nevertheless, Jaeger's differences with Cherniss tend to be more one of degree than of kind.

The same sort of difference can be in general attributed to W.K.C. Guthrie's discussion of Cherniss' views.⁶ Guthrie thinks that Aristotle was not too bad an historian because he often points out when he is interpreting a philosopher's view. One example that Guthrie gives is *Metaphysics A* 983 b 21 where Aristotle distinguishes clearly between Thales' reason for his statement, and the statement of Thales itself. Guthrie also notes that Aristotle at least occasionally slips. For example, in regard to the eighth fragment of Empedocles Aristotle, according to Guthrie, gives two senses to *φύσις*: one in *De Generatione* 314 b 5 (substratum), and another in *Metaphysics Δ* 1014 b 35 (by nature). Guthrie wishes to take a kind of middle stand on the question of Aristotle's worth as an historian, but it is a view that is not essentially different from that of either Cherniss or Jaeger: "... if we use the evidence which he [Aristotle] is a good enough historian to give us, we may succeed in overcoming both our own preconceptions and his and getting nearer the mind of a pre-Platonic thinker... As an historian Aristotle has serious failings, but he deserves less wholesale condemnation than he is at the moment in danger of receiving."⁷

6. W.K.C. GUTHRIE, "Aristotle as a Historian of Philosophy: Some Preliminaries," *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, LXXVII (Part I), 1957, pp. 35-41.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

III

For Cherniss, Jaeger, and Guthrie Aristotle is a kind of half-way house. For them Aristotle began to develop various tools of thought — logical instruments which could secure clarity of thinking and help men to free themselves in empirical endeavours from the illusory delusion of appearances. Unfortunately, Aristotle himself did not, according to such an account, keep from falling into the trap of delusion, but, not having proceeded far enough along the straight and narrow path of finite logic, tried to bring the divided finite into a metaphysical unity, which, had he developed farther logically, he would have realized was impossible. In other words the Presocratics represent philosophical perspectives that are not fully taken up into Aristotle's metaphysics and hence invalidate any claim that it is, as Aristotle himself claims, a complete systematic totality. What we are left with is not an Aristotelian synthesis that transcends time and place, but a purely *historical* relation to Aristotle's metaphysical overview. This historical relation is, at the same time, an *eclectic* relation to that part of Aristotle's philosophy which seems to be able to be a basis for further development; namely, his initial efforts in elucidating logical principles and laws⁸ and in attending to the different meanings of basic philosophical terms both in themselves and in relation to ordinary language.⁹ The root of such an historical and eclectic relation to Aristotle's philosophy is the assumption that the history of philosophy and philosophy are separable. It is precisely concerning this assumption that Aristotle could, I think, find a ground for defense. The notion of the kind of answer in which he would reply to his historical critics would need to entail an explanation of how their notion of the history of their subject assumes an improper and inadequate understanding of its content. For Aristotle there can be, properly speaking, no history of philosophy. Neither Cherniss, Jaeger, nor Guthrie could accept such a view because they all conceive of Aristotle as having a definite position in relation to such an history. But from Aristotle's standpoint it would be a great error to give him the position which such modern historians of philosophy would like to bestow. Such a bestowal by a modern historian of philosophy only belies, from Aristotle's point of view, that his philosophy is so misunderstood by the modern historian that he is entirely innocent of its structure and content. He literally does not know on what it is that he is bestowing a judgement.

For Aristotle would not allow that his philosophy bears an historical relation to those of his predecessors and, as we shall see, successors in any modern sense. First of all Aristotle does not write histories in the sense of narrative of any subject. He writes prefaces to his various treatises. He writes histories in the sense of inquiry¹⁰, but this is not the meaning behind any judgement of Aristotle's view of his philosophy *vis-à-vis* those of his predecessors. What is an history? Aristotle clearly defines it in the *Poetics*¹¹ as that which has as the content of its statements singulars which are

8. For example: the law of non-contradiction (*Meta.*, Γ, 3); the syllogism (*Prior Anal.*, I, 4, 25 b 32–35); the concept of analogy (*Meta.*, Λ 4 and 5).

9. For example see the various definitions of philosophical terms in *Meta.*, Δ.

10. For example: ΤΩΝ ΠΕΡΙ ΤΑ ΖΩΙΑ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑΝ (Concerning the History of Animals).

11. *Poetics*, 1451 b 6.

indifferent in their connections. Poetry deals with universal statements and therefore with necessity or possible necessity. The best poetry, be it narrative or dramatic, is for Aristotle like a living being (*ζῶον*). Aristotle makes this view evident when he advocates that the construction of stories told or portrayed poetically should be “about one action, a complete whole, having a beginning, middle, and end, in order that it, just as a living being (*ζῶον*) which is one whole, might produce its own appropriate pleasure.”¹² Because poetry deals with universals and because it does so in an organically and therefore wholly unified way, it is for Aristotle more philosophical than history. The trouble with history is that it does not in itself have such a unity. As an inquiry which deals with past singulars history has the defect of getting caught up in phenomena by taking them as the definite, as the measure of truth; but what history takes as true is no more than the indefinite infinitude of empirical experience and its attendant *ἀπορίαι*. Even the style of history belies its indeterminate content. It is, says Aristotle, commenting on Herodotus in the *Rhetorica*, a style of inquiring in which there is no internal end.¹³ It is not like the compact style of the ancient poets who used antistrophes. The indefinite style of history and its endless content of particularity cannot be for Aristotle a medium capable of philosophic content. For him philosophy is a theoretical inquiry.¹⁴ It has neither the indeterminate finitude of the practical, nor the ambiguous becoming of the productive for its content. There are three theoretical inquiries: mathematics, physics, and theology.¹⁵ The first is insubstantial, the second deals with sensible substance as perishable and imperishable, and the third deals with immovable substance.¹⁶ Philosophy is as first and second theology and physics. It has for its object substance and for its goal truth. It is, in Aristotle’s words, the “science of truth”¹⁷ (*ἐπιστήμη τῆς ἀληθείας*), and as such the science whose content is knowledge. So high is its demand that a philosopher must honour truth above his own friends.¹⁸ This is because he is neither a sophist nor a dialectician. The former deals in sophistic or the apparent, the latter with dialectic or opinion¹⁹ as the endless process of division. “The dialectic,” says Aristotle, “is able to divide into pieces that which philosophy makes known, and sophistic is what appears to be philosophy but is not.”²⁰ The philosopher deals with the changing and with the unchanging. He is both physicist and theologian. And he makes known because he knows the triadic substantial objects of his science.

Such knowledge is not historical knowledge, because knowledge *qua* knowledge does not take mere historical form. Its form as philosophic includes historic content but not as historic. To understand Aristotle’s claims for his philosophical science it is

12. *Ibid.*, 1459 a 20. All translations of passages from Aristotle are my own.

13. *Rhetorica*, 1409 a 23.

14. *Nicomachean Ethics*, book VI, esp. 1141 a 34–1141 b 8; and *Meta.*, 982 b 28–983 a 11.

15. *Meta.*, 1064 a 28ff.

16. *Ibid.*, 1069 a 30ff.

17. *Ibid.*, 993 b 19–20.

18. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1096 b 15.

19. *Topica*, 105 b 30.

20. *Meta.*, 1004 b 25–26.

necessary to consider the order in which seeming historic content appears in the *Metaphysics*. Aristotle does not begin with Thales. He begins with the phenomenology of knowledge as knowledge of cause. This knowledge as content is the Wisdom (*σοφία*) of the *Nicomachean Ethics*²¹ wherein Aristotle argues that it is nothing less than the combination of *ἐπιστήμη* and *νοῦς*, of scientific knowledge wherein *αἰσθήσεις* is the starting-point and of intuitive reason wherein the ground of that starting-point is grasped as undogmatic. Wisdom is the knowledge wherein the Wise Man knows that Physics and Theology are ultimately one. This is why Aristotle goes on to argue that "the firsts and the causes are most knowable; for through these and out of these everything else is known, but not these through the subordinate things."²² Yet men delight in their senses.²³ The wonder caused thereby is the beginning of knowledge.²⁴ The beginning of knowledge is knowledge of first principles. Aristotle makes both statements because the Wise Man is both physicist and theologian.

It is only after a consideration of the nature of knowledge and the characteristics of wisdom that Aristotle begins to discuss other philosophers; and this discussion takes place within a definite context: not the context of the endless disconnectedness of history, but the context of cause. The physicist knows four causes. Can there be more? Or are they, no more and no less, the pure content of physics? Let us see if anyone has any others. So Aristotle begins his account of cause as fourfold.²⁵ He does not even take up all the Presocratics. He does not even here in Book A of the *Metaphysics* mention Anaximander. Why? Because the *ἄπειρον* (non-limited) is more transparently material cause than any of the four. It is indefiniteness itself. It makes no other claim. Aristotle is not concerned with the indefinite ramblings of early inquiry. He is interested in its philosophical content. He is not a narrator of the free-running historical style. He looks for the universal, for the unity of beginning, middle, and end. And so, like Homer,²⁶ he selects what is germane and grounds the indefinite in its principle. Aristotle moves through the causes in a particular order: material, efficient, formal, and final cause.²⁷ Matter as indefinite must move. As moved it is form. The first three are found by his predecessors, the last by himself. The last is that which unites them, that for the sake of which they all move. Aristotle ends Book A with the assertion that there are indeed only the four causes of the *Physics*:

21. *Nicomachean Ethics*, book VI.

22. *Meta.*, 982 b 1-3.

23. *Ibid.*, 980 a 2.

24. *Ibid.*, 982 b 8.

25. *Ibid.*, 983 a 24ff.

26. *Poetics*, 1451 a ff.

27. At the beginning of *Meta.*, A, chapter 3, Aristotle considers the four causes in the order of material, formal, efficient, and final. This is because he is thinking of their logical relations as total oppositions which are self-contained. In the body of the argument the order is material, efficient, formal, and final because he is considering how one moves from physics, from the finite world of nature, to theology or metaphysics. This is the historical as opposed to the phenomenological order. For the distinction of these two terms cf. below section IV.

That everyone seems to seek the causes spoken of in the *Physics* and that we have not been able to name any beyond these, is clear from what has already been stated above. But these causes were dimly sought, and in one way all have been spoken of before, and in another way all have been spoken of not at all. For the first philosophy seems to lisp concerning everything, inasmuch as it, being the first, is both young and beginning.²⁸

The opening statement,²⁹ that men take delight in their senses, is vindicated. It is vindicated because it is the unconscious signpost (*σημείον*) of man's inner nature (*φύσις*) which has yet to grow (*φύεω*) into knowing (*τὸ εἶδέναι*). For, in knowing, man's nature is not in a state of growth but has grown. The desire for knowledge is satisfied. The senses awaken what is hidden and open the way for their own completion. They as divided are at first immediate. But as mediated by memory (*μνήμη*), experience (*ἐμπειρία*), art (*τέχνη*), and reasoning (*λογισμός*) they are taken up into their source or cause. Their end or *τέλος* is knowledge — but not knowledge as object but as the content of a knowing subject. Thus man's nature is not *ἐπιστήμη* (knowledge, science) as such, but *τὸ εἶδέναι* (to know). The phenomenality of this knowing is fourfold. It has content in matter and form as undivided. But it also has movement in combining and separating and uniting — in reflection and judgement. Yet all this is for an end. For knowing is the end of inquiry. Knowledge is the inquiry as perfected. It is the inquiring as no longer discursively present. Rather it is *having* inquired — the inquiry as present in *all* its moments at once. Thus the dividedness of the causes in the *Physics* is in *Metaphysics* seen to be also undivided. For metaphysics is first philosophy (*πρώτη φιλοσοφία*) or theology. And in its way, it, like sensation, is first. Book small *a* considers how *νοῦς* is the prior knowledge of the necessity of a bound infinite, of the impossibility of an infinite regress — the dividedness of the causes as simple unity — unity as ended. For it is only the binding of the infinite which makes possible truth, the Good, practical activity, reason, science, and thinking.³⁰ Hence, in Aristotle's view, allow an infinite regress and there can be no world. For in eliminating causal activity the effects are also annihilated. The conceiving of this logical necessity is both the foundation of logic and of the world. It is as such the first step in recognizing that causes are finite in number. In a way they are one as we learn in Book *Λ*. They are *νοῦς* as the *ὁ Θεός* which is also Life in the fullest sense.³¹ And in a way they are fourfold as the unfolding and enfolding of that divine activity.

How does one criticize Aristotle? He did not write an history. He commented on the older philosophers in so far as they were physicists or theologians. He found them to be in general both, but without the concepts to make it possible for them to clearly distinguish between the two aspects of philosophy and to see at the same time their

28. *Meta.*, 993 a 11–17.

29. *Ibid.*, 980 a 1–2.

30. Cf., *ibid.*, 994 b 9–24.

31. *Meta.*, 1072 b 26–30. "And Life belongs (to God). For the actuality of Mind is Life, and that one (God) is actuality. And actuality, the actuality of that one (God) according to itself, is Life best and eternal. Thus we say that God is an Animal eternal and best, so that life and age continuous and eternal belong to God. For this is (the) God."

absolute simple congruity. Thus Book B begins the laborious task of explicating how the unity of physical and theological knowledge, of the dogmatism of Books A and small *a* can be shown undogmatically and absolutely. So it is that in Book B Aristotle does not begin this task in any ordinary way, but by indicating in the clearest language that the ἀπορίαι (road blocks — a no-way-through) to the divine science, the theology of cause which enfolds physics as well as metaphysics, are a totality which can be known as such. Thus he says in the opening lines :

Firstly, it is necessary in relation to the science being sought that we first go through those things which block its path. And those are as many as anyone has left remaining, and any besides those which happen to have been overlooked. For it is profitable to those wishing a clear passage to go through (the blockages) well. For the later clear passage is the loosing of the previous blockages. But not to loose (them) is the imprisonment of being ignorant.³²

The problems that block the path of knowledge must *all* be considered ; not some of the problems, but *all*. None must be allowed to be *future*. They must *all* be present *now*. Thus he continues :

But the blockage of thought is evidently that of the thing. For to the one to whom it is a blockage there is a resemblance to those who are imprisoned. For in both cases it is impossible to proceed into what lies ahead. Therefore it is necessary to have looked at all the difficulties beforehand, both for the sake of these things and because those seeking without first passing through (the blockage) are like those who walk being ignorant of where (they are going) ; and in such a situation one does not know whether or not he has found what is being sought. For the end is not clear to such a person, while to the one who has the blockages before it is clear. And further, it is necessarily better to have looked at all the difficulties with a view to judging (all the arguments) as if having heard all the arguments of disputing plaintiffs and defendants.³³

Here in Book B as in Book A Aristotle is concerned to have a completeness to his inquiry so that it cannot be in relation to philosophy in the same position as that of his predecessors. For Aristotle's standpoint is that if one philosophizes long enough and deeply enough he will inevitably come up with the same causes and the same problems — no more, no less. And they will lead to the same development and solution, and thereby conclude. And in concluding the ignorance of the earlier philosophers can be fairly and honourably transformed into Wisdom. Yet Aristotle's historically oriented critics insist that Aristotle wronged his predecessors by reading his own speculations into theirs' and by adjusting their ideas to fit his own. But in what ways can Aristotle be said to have done so? Did he fail to give an history of the speculations of his predecessors? He did so fail, but only in that as far as their philosophy was merely history it was ignorance. Did he misrepresent them? If he did so it was only in the sense of a transformation within necessary limits ; that is, the four causes. Any misrepresentation of another's thought would, from an Aristotelian vantage point, occur only if it could be shown either that a predecessor had more causes than the four or that Aristotle had attributed to a predecessor one or more of

32. *Meta.*, 995 a 34–30.

33. *Ibid.*, 995 a 30–995 b 3.

the four causes wrongly according to his own system. Then is not Aristotle's system itself too confining? This is the crux of the issue. Aristotle would, I think, argue that the four causes are a totality; that any discussion of phenomena must absolutely come under them because they are the ground, the life of phenomena. It is impossible from an Aristotelian point of view to speak *philosophically* without speaking in some way of the causes. Aristotle's line of defense would, I think, have to ultimately be to put the onus squarely on his critics. For in order to prove that Aristotle is confining the arguments of his predecessors within a simply Aristotelian framework it would be necessary to demonstrate that the four causes are not a totality, are not the ground and life of phenomena. It would be necessary to show that someone could *actually* speak *philosophically* without any of the four causes being somehow in the content of what is said. No doubt an Aristotelian critic might reject this defense on the ground that Aristotle's definition of philosophy is unacceptable. But such assertion on grounds of definition is not unattended by Aristotle if one consider only that he juxtaposes philosophy with sophistic and dialectic.³⁴ The critic will have to show that there is actually a science or inquiry which is neither sophistry nor dialectic (that is, which has as content neither simply indeterminate appearance nor indeterminate divided finitude) and which yet deals with the same subject matter as philosophy. Failure to *actually* come up with an alternative, rather than to posit mere possibility, will result in the critic being either a sophist or dialectician and so having no claim to wisdom. He will, unlike Aristotle, be unable to say that he knows. What is then really at stake in an Aristotelian defense of the totality of fourfold causality is whether Aristotle's position is true or, finally, just Aristotelian.

IV

The basic assumption which is shared alike by modern historians of philosophy like Cherniss, Jaeger, and Guthrie is that there is an essential division between history of philosophy and philosophy itself. This assumption is in direct opposition to Aristotle's view: namely, that in so far as one can speak of an history of philosophy one must speak of it as no more, no less than philosophy itself. This is why Aristotle maintains that the subject matter of philosophy, namely truth (*ἀλήθεια*), is also the principle of philosophic development. Thus Aristotle says in Book A, chapter 3, of the *Metaphysics*, after having considered earlier views which confined cause to matter:

But after these (men) and such first principles, as they were not sufficient to generate the nature of the beings, being compelled by the truth itself, just as we said, they sought for the next cause.³⁵

Cherniss, Jaeger, and Guthrie clearly enough recognize that Aristotle considered his predecessors' views as only half-truths within a wider framework of complete truth. But they question whether Aristotle *could* so consider his relation to the earlier philosophers. From their historical point of view there can be no total complete

34. *Ibid.*, 1004 b 25-26. Cf. above page 21.

35. *Ibid.*, 984 b 8-11.

view; there can only be views among which there is Aristotle's *as well as* those of his predecessors and successors. If some views are more true than others it is because they recognize the essential incomprehensibility of any would-be comprehension. Truth in this sense is really more the absence of truth. It is a kind of dogmatism which can make room for any number of views, while at the same time it is a scepticism which cannot accept that any one view can be absolute. It follows quite naturally that, in the absence of any more than relative truth, the objective is temporalized as occurrences or historical facts. Factual accuracy takes the place of judgement instead of being that which is judged. The temporalization of objectivity becomes only the collection of historical facts.

From an Aristotelian perspective the notion that truth is only historical, because it is temporally relative, has an implicit difficulty; namely, that such an understanding is itself a position which is not outside of a metaphysical comprehension. Cherniss, Jaeger, and Guthrie cannot develop their views metaphysically because their position is implicitly that philosophy is simply history; or, in other words, that there is simply an history which is endless movement of time. Such a position does not recognize any definitive relation between historical moments and must finally be forced to consider them in themselves as indifferent to one another. How there can be a transition between them is not something that can be asked or answered within an historical non-teleological perspective. Philosophy must be for it always an immersion into particular or momentary problems. Philosophy is thus caught in a web of temporality which is always oriented toward an open-ended future. The historian himself is oriented toward the past, but in such a way that, although he might prefer one past thinker or philosophy over another, he can never think to have arrived at a final position which future historical development could not disturb.

Aristotle's position is quite different. It is grounded in his teaching that the very subject matter of philosophy necessitates a particular development; that the movement of the concepts is their own and not the imposition of a merely external standpoint. The movement of philosophy is thus not only so many historically bound positions which may or may not be isolated, but an integrally woven pattern in which all one-sided positions are included, but not on their own exclusive terms. Such a position has a different sort of objectivity than a so-called historical objectivity, but it is not an objectivity that neglects history; on the contrary, it cannot neglect either what was said by others or how it was said, because, in addition, it must not neglect what *can* be said. It is this transcendental perspective which distinguishes Aristotle's position from a purely historical one. History must, as temporal occurrence, be put into an eternal or logical perspective, if it is to be intelligible; otherwise it will be a temporality which has no *τέλος* and so no principle of causation. One will not be able to speak of development but only of occurrence. This is why Aristotle's whole philosophical effort to ground the beings of physics, of temporality, in an eternal principle³⁶ is oriented toward the overcoming of such a finite open-ended historical standpoint. Rather than being bound by one historical position or another, he seeks to bind them. Failure to do so would lead philosophically either to an historical

36. Cf., *Meta.*, A, 7; esp. 1072 b 13-30, and *De Anima*, 415 b 7-26.

dogmatism which must arbitrarily prefer one position over another or to an historical scepticism which suspends judgement on any position, even its own. Aristotle's remarks about earlier philosophers and about his relation to them only seem arbitrary and hubristic if it is forgotten that they are made with a view to overcoming the arbitrariness and hubris of a dogmatism and scepticism which, in not being able to limit their own contingency, absolutize themselves.

Aristotle's view of historical philosophic development is grounded in the idea that phenomena are neither a falling away from their source nor an indifferent series. He does not see them either as their own ends or as undeveloped, but as being various ends which have a common end and, therefore, a necessary relation which manifests itself finitely as a definite development. Aristotle views phenomena in just this way precisely because he sees phenomena as contingent and dependent. They are as temporal occurrences historical and finite. But they are also grounded in the finality of a divine being in which the unity of the four causes converge. By enveloping the relation of the beings of temporal occurrence and the divine eternal being within the common framework of fourfold causality Aristotle can absorb an historical perspective within a transcendental one. He can do this because he can be systematic. From a simply historical perspective it does not seem as if system is possible, because it would entail seeing the finite as logically one with the infinite, or seeing the endless particularity of the historical as transcendental. But for Aristotle such a relation of finite and infinite is possible because for him the *κόσμος* is philosophically known as infinite *and* finite, as infinitely divided *and* infinitely one. It is both a living animal, a *φύσις*, and a living mind, a *λόγος*. It is logical and alive.³⁷

37. Cf., *ibid.*, esp. 1072 b 13-30.