

ARISTOTLE AND HIS INFLUENCE

FALCON (A.) *Aristotelismo*. (Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi. Mappa 65.) Pp. x + 150. Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 2017. Paper, €18. ISBN: 978-88-06-23112-5.

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‘Aristotelismo’ (‘Aristotelianism’) in the title of the volume refers, broadly speaking, to the presence and fortune of elements of Aristotle’s thought in the ancient world, independently

of whether such elements were taken over and developed by philosophers or intellectuals who explicitly saw themselves as exponents of a Peripatetic tradition. Of the five chapters into which the book is divided, Chapter 1 deals with the Hellenistic age; Chapters 2 and 3 with the post-Hellenistic age (Chapter 2 with the Peripatetic tradition from the first century BC to Alexander of Aphrodisias, and Chapter 3 with the Platonic tradition through Antiochus of Ascalon, Eudoros of Alexandria, Plutarch of Cheroinea, Alcinoos and Apuleius, with the pseudo-Pythagorean treatises, and with the Stoic tradition represented by Panaetius of Rhodes and Posidonius of Apamea); Chapter 4 with Late Antiquity (Porphyry, Iamblichus, the two schools of Athens and Alexandria). Finally, Chapter 5 focuses on the difficulties in identifying a genuine Aristotle independently of the developments of Aristotelianism.

The book does not aim at providing a fully systematic account of the history of Aristotelianism from the Hellenistic age to Late Antiquity. It rather aims, in the spirit of the series in which it appears, at providing a 'map' through the enormous amount of often puzzling and untidy data and problems one has to deal with in reconstructing the fortune of Aristotle's thought through the centuries. One of the most valuable aspects of the book is that, through the discussion of specific examples, it manages to give a map not only of the main actors moving on the scene, but also of some of the main problems facing the historian of philosophy in dealing with these materials. Three of these problems are, I think, particularly worth emphasising.

The first problem consists in the difficulty of drawing a neat boundary between cases in which direct acquaintance with Aristotle's texts can be ascertained and cases in which a rather indirect and more general familiarity with themes or arguments characteristic of Aristotelian philosophy resounds in the debates among philosophers or intellectuals of a certain milieu. The distinction is important for at least two reasons. First, it introduces a further element of complexity in the history of Aristotelianism, which, as F. emphasises, does not correspond with the history of the Peripatos, nor, one may add, with the history of the fortune of Aristotle's writings. Second and perhaps more radically, there is an issue of the extent to which it is legitimate to speak of a direct influence of Aristotle and his philosophy on certain philosophical debates when it is not possible to identify a textual source for the theses or arguments that are supposed to be regarded as 'Aristotelian'. This problem is a well-known issue at least as far the nature and limits of Aristotle's influence on Hellenistic philosophers go.

In Chapter 1 F. discusses some examples and emphasises the presence of summaries and epitomes of Aristotle's biological writings (in particular, the epitome of Aristophanes of Byzantium, end of third century BC), which, in addition to the sources about the activity of the Peripatos immediately after Aristotle's death, suggests that the issue of the presence of Aristotle's writings in the Hellenistic age is at least more complex than often assumed. However, the problem of the relation between the circulation of Aristotle's writings (and, possibly, of a canonical edition of such writings) and the assessment of general interest in Aristotle's philosophy emerges, in different forms, through different phases of the history of Aristotelianism. For example, in Chapter 2 F. discusses the problems linked to the precise chronology of Andronicus' edition and rightly stresses the difficulties in establishing a clear causal link between the general return of interest in Aristotle's philosophy and the appearance of the edition. Again, in Chapter 3, post-Hellenistic Platonic philosophers such as Antiochus of Ascalon, Eudoros of Alexandria, Plutarch of Cheroinea, Alcinoos and Apuleius testify to very different situations as to the direct use of and acquaintance with Aristotle's texts.

One further problem concerns the assessment of the philosophical commitment of the different types of texts in which we can find traces of the fortune of Aristotle's thought.

Even if we confine attention to the production of technical philosophical literature within the Peripatetic tradition, we find, next to commentaries and independent treatises, writings such as paraphrases, questions, problems, *aporiai* and solutions. The latter range from the discussion of general philosophical issues to the discussion of very specific exegetical points. While this whole production clearly testifies to an interest in Aristotle's philosophy, it is not always clear what version of Aristotelianism (if any) is portrayed in the single sources.

A third general problem, on which F. insists throughout the book, is the difficulty of identifying a genuine Aristotle against which one can assess the different images of Aristotle emerging throughout the centuries. This is, I think, particularly true for the authors who directly engage with Aristotle's texts with the aim of giving an account of Aristotle's philosophy as such rather than for authors who confront themselves with Aristotle in a looser and more general way. On this point F. is certainly right in emphasising in Chapter 2 that each of the various Peripatetic scholars (e.g. Boethus of Sidon, Xenarchus of Seleucia, Alexander of Aphrodisias) tried to elaborate a relatively coherent picture of Aristotle's philosophy (or part of it) starting from Aristotle's text and from the problems emerging from it. Their exegetical work and their philosophical activity cannot be genuinely disentangled. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same applies to the later Neoplatonic commentators. The result of this inextricable combination of exegetical work and creative attempts at solving philosophical problems emerging from Aristotle's texts is the appearance of a plurality of pictures of Aristotle's philosophy. The nature and origin of this plurality speak against the idea of a general tendency to strive towards one orthodox interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy. The full appreciation of this plurality requires attention to the details of the exegetical activity of the single authors and awareness of the more general different philosophical options emerging through philosophically informed exegetical work in a dialogue among the different philosophical schools as well as within the Peripatetic tradition.

F.'s book provides a clear and competent picture of these general problems. As for the data covered, one challenge for this type of publication is choosing the materials to put on the map. This inevitably involves a certain degree of arbitrariness, but F. manages to select a representative sample of figures and cases. His choices allow him to draw an accessible and, at the same time, rich picture of the vast period he intends to cover. In addition to the classical P. Moraux, *Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen* (1973–2002), a recent and more systematic account of the presence of Aristotle's philosophy in antiquity can be found in A. Falcon (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aristotle in Antiquity* (2016).

As for the method of the exposition, the book proceeds through the analysis of examples that illustrate the complexity of the debates and the difficulties involved in writing the history this book is about. This method is valuable in that it avoids the dangers of excessive abstraction and simplification. At the same time, direct acquaintance with Aristotle's texts on the part of the reader is often presupposed and the overall narrative loses a bit in continuity. Both these latter features may (but need not) discourage the inexperienced reader (as far as the history of Peripatetic philosophy goes, a recent thematic account can be found in H. Baltussen, *The Peripatetics: Aristotle's Heirs* [2016]). However, the book certainly offers a reliable and interesting survey of materials clearly informed by the most recent developments of research in this field of study.

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