

ARISTOTLE *REDIVIVUS* AND HIS ALTER-EGOS

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Francesco Tecchini, Abbot of Santa Justina, was studying a beautifully made copy of Aristotle's *Organon*. It was, of course, the translation of Boethius, not that Moorish edition with the footnotes of Averroes that of late had become so popular in certain clerical circles – that mixture of Aristotelian truth and Averroist heresy that one fine day would ruin the good name of the Stagirite. If only someone would come to clean that stable of Augeas – someone who would prove to those glib, self-assured Moslem philosophers that Aristotle, if he were alive today, would laugh at their fatalistic interpretations...

Louis de Wohl, *The Quiet Light. A Novel about Saint Thomas Aquinas*.

In the information age, you don't teach philosophy as they did after feudalism. You perform it. If Aristotle were alive today he'd have a talk show.

Timothy Leary, as quoted in Charles McGuire and Diana Abitz (eds.), *The Best Advice Ever for Teachers*.

I. Introduction

Early Modern Aristotle. On the Making and Unmaking of Authority, recently published by Eva Del Soldato,¹ is a major contribution to the history of Renaissance and early modern philosophy. Presenting from a new angle well-known authors and works but also examining little known or unedited sources, Del Soldato highlights the

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¹ EVA DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle. On the Making and Unmaking of Authority*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2020.

different strategies adopted in this period to establish or undermine the authority of Aristotle, to confront it with that of other religious or philosophical authorities (first of all, Plato), and to distinguish his doctrines and attitudes from those of his true or alleged disciples.

Brilliantly written, Del Soldato's book is organized into five chapters. The first three offer a rich analysis of the *comparationes* between Plato and Aristotle.² The practice of comparing their philosophies was notoriously widespread in late antiquity and was developed in the Middle Ages,³ but it only gave rise to a specific genre of philosophical literature in the Italian Quattrocento, when Plato's works were passionately studied, translated and edited, and the idea that Aristotle should be considered the Philosopher par excellence was openly challenged.⁴ Although several works have been devoted to specific texts belonging to this genre, Del Soldato remarks that « *comparationes* have never been studied as a whole, save for the first chapter of the regrettably unpublished Ph.D. dissertation by Frederick

² Ibid., p. 11–82.

³ Del Soldato opportunely outlines the background of the practice of comparing Plato and Aristotle in Greek, Arabic, Byzantine, and Latin culture (ibid., p. 11–16), before the 'Greek Affair' started with Gemistio Pletho's *De differentiis*. It is useful to recall that from the thirteenth century onwards – in the footsteps of Eustratius of Nicaea, who in his commentary on the first Book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* criticised Aristotle's attack on the theory of ideas – several Latin theologians presented Plato as a better metaphysician than Aristotle. Some even claimed that he was 'the worst metaphysician': see EDWARD P. MAHONEY, « Aristotle as 'The Worst Natural Philosopher' (*pessimus naturalis*) and 'The Worst Metaphysician' (*pessimus metaphysicus*): His Reputation among some Franciscan Philosophers (Bonaventure, Francis of Mayronnes, Antonius Andreas, and Joannes Canonicus) and Later Reactions », in OLAF PLUTA (ed.), *Die Philosophie im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert. In memoriam K. Michalski (1879–1947)*, Grüner, Amsterdam 1988 (Bochumer Studien zur Philosophie, 10), p. 261–273. So, when Gemistio Pletho in his *De differentiis*, c. 18 (PG 160, c. 911–912 C) wrote that « in metaphysics, Aristotle spoke worse than anyone else », he reaffirmed an idea that already circulated in the Latin world.

⁴ This point was not unprecedented, as one can see, e.g. in a treatise of logic redacted between 1324 and 1334 and erroneously ascribed to Richard of Campsall. The author of this treatise, while presenting the different types of *suppositio impropria*, refuted the assumption that the term 'philosopher' necessarily supposits for Aristotle, « according to the habit of the moderns who consider him the most important and the greatest among the philosophers, although some maintained that Plato was greater and more excellent ». Having quoted Cicero and Augustine to support this view, Pseudo-Campsall openly endorsed it: « Suppositio, autem 'antonomastica' est quando terminus supponit pro aliquo individuo cui maxime et principaliter competit. Verbi gracia: 'philosophus dicit hoc', 'philosophus negat hoc'. In istis, enim, propositionibus, subiectum supponit pro aristotile et hoc secundum usum modernorum, qui ipsum inter philosophos reputant principalem et maiorem licet, secundum aliquos, plato pro maiori et excellenciori habeatur. Unde de platone dicit tullius in libro *de natura deorum*, plato 'deus philosophorum', et augustinus: 'plato', inquit, 'omnium philosophorum prelati', et ego credo platonem excellenciorum aristotile; ipse, enim, nunquam cogitavit illas abusiones quas sibi aristotiles inponit ». See *Logica Campsall Anglici*, in EDWARD A. SYNAN (ed.), *The Works of Richard of Campsall*, vol. II, Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1982, p. 402. All italics in quotations are mine unless otherwise stated.

Purnell Jr. ».⁵ Therefore, Del Soldato has the great merit of filling this remarkable gap, as she attentively scrutinises a large number of significant texts written between 1439 (when Gemistius Pletho's *De differentiis* appeared in Greek) and 1697 (date of composition of the *Discorso della filosofia* by Giovanbattista Vico's friend, Giuseppe Valletta). The complete list of texts that she examines includes those authored by major figures such as Cardinal Bessarion, George of Trebizond, Francesco Vimercato, Francesco Patrizi and Jacopo Mazzoni, but she also pays attention to less-known booklets by Livio Galante, Alfonso Pandolfi, Vincent Raffar, and Antonio Montecatini.⁶ Moreover, Del Soldato supplements this substantial part of her book with four appendices, containing the transcription and English translation of the preface by Alfonso Pandolfi to his comparison between Plato and Aristotle; an unedited lecture by Federico Pendasio on the same topic; a note on some sceptical reactions against the concord between Aristotelianism and Platonism; and another note on the attribution to Vimercato of an anonymous *comparatio* preserved in a manuscript of the Ambrosiana Library of Milan.⁷

Chapter 4 is also highly original. It deals with anecdotes and legends concerning Aristotle circulating in Europe between the fifteenth and the seventeenth century, when some affirmed that the Stagirite was a Spaniard, others depicted him as a Jew, some blamed him as a detractor of Moses, and others presented him as a good Christian or even a Papist.⁸ This chapter confirms the main theses of *Early Modern Aristotle*: first, that Aristotle's authority was used and abused throughout the centuries in a flexible and often opportunistic way; second, that « the diffraction of Aristotle's authority » provides evidence to Charles Schmitt's ground-breaking assumption that there were multiple 'Aristotelianisms' during the Renaissance and that in this period the Aristotelian tradition displayed an extraordinary vitality and adaptive spirit.⁹

Even more valuable in this perspective is chapter 5, devoted to the history of a « mental [or thought] experiment »¹⁰ applied to different figures such as Plato, Cicero and Petrarch,¹¹ but generally associated to the Stagirite: according to this

⁵ DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 7–8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11–82, in particular p. 50–52, 61, 67.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 155–181.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 83–108.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5–6, 150. On Renaissance 'Aristotelianisms', see CHARLES B. SCHMITT, *Aristotle and the Renaissance*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1983. I argued that this 'pluralistic' approach should be extended to the medieval Aristotelian tradition in LUCA BIANCHI, EUGENIO RANDI, *Le verità dissonanti. Aristotele alla fine del medioevo*, Laterza, Roma–Bari 1990, p. 3–31.

¹⁰ DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 9, 120, 142.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 115–117, 141. One might add to the list other ancient and medieval authors, including Seneca and Dante. On Seneca see e.g. GIAN VITTORIO ROSSI (JANUS NICIUS ERYTHRAEUS), *Eudemiae libri*

experiment, « if Aristotle were alive, he would say/do this ».¹² Del Soldato presents the different formulations of this motif; she keenly investigates its relationship with the ‘principle of authority’ and its rhetorical and polemical functions in a large number of significant works composed not only by anti-Aristotelian thinkers (Juan Luis Vives, Petrus Ramus, Gerolamo Cardano, Tommaso Campanella, and Pierre Gassendi) but also by some Renaissance and early modern Aristotelians; she skilfully shows how this motif was used, for various purposes, in religious debates and in several fields of research, notably logic, astronomy, natural philosophy, ethics, textual criticism; she reconstructs its role in eighteenth-century debates on the *Poetics* and the adequacy of its precepts in the age of the *commedia dell’arte*.¹³

One cannot but admire the erudition of Del Soldato, who detects the presence of this motif in texts redacted in different periods by the most different authors: particularly striking are quotations from fourteenth-century works trying to

decem, Iodocum Kalcovivum, Coloniae 1645, *ep. ded.*, fol. *rv: « Quid? Putasne quod Seneca, si revivisceret, hanc ab isti confessionem terroribus vel minis exprimeret? ». On Dante Alighieri see Benvenuto da Imola’s commentary on *Paradiso* XXI, vv. 133–135 (<https://dante.dartmouth.edu/search_view.php?doc=137553211300&cmd=gotoresult&arg1=4>; last accessed 16 March 2021): « Hic Petrus Damianus aperte infamat pastores modernos [...]; unde dicit: ‘sì che due bestie van sotto una pelle’, scilicet, bestia portans, et ipse portatus, qui verius est bestia et bestialior ipsa bestia. Et certe si autor revivisceret hodie posset mutare literam istam et dicere: ‘sì che tre bestie van sotto una pelle’, scilicet, cardinalis, meretrix et equus; sicut audivi de uno quem bene novi, qui portabat concubinam suam ad venationem post se in clune equi vel muli; et ipse vere erat sicut equus et mulus sine ratione ». It is moreover noteworthy that the adjective ‘redivivus’ was often used in the title of books devoted to different authors and subjects: one has only think of Marino Ghetaldi’s *Apollonius Redivivus*, published in 1607; of the *Hypocrates redivivus sive theses medicae inaugurales* published at Prague in 1684; and of the two seventeenth-century books that share the title *Theophrastus redivivus*.

¹² DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 9.

¹³ Ibid. p. 109–149: on different formulations of the expression see *ibid.*, p. 110–111. DEL SOLDATO, *ibid.*, p. 112–113, remarks that the ‘if Aristotle were alive’ motif is rarely associated with the argument ‘Aristotle was a man and could therefore err’, whose extraordinary success from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment is examined in LUCA BIANCHI, « ‘Aristotele fu un uomo e poté errare’: sulle origini medievali della critica al ‘principio di autorità’ », now in LUCA BIANCHI, *Studi sull’aristotelismo del Rinascimento*, Il Poligrafo, Padova 2003 (Subsidia Mediaevalia Patavina, 5), p. 101–132. It is worth noting that at the beginning of the fourteenth century, John of Pouilly minimised the gravity of Aristotle’s mistakes and, extolling his authority *in pure speculativis*, complained that some of his masters not only declared that Aristotle erred in a very bad way, but went as far as saying that if he came back to life they would be able to convince him of their intellectual superiority: « Cum vero dicunt, quod in hiis, que sciri possunt per naturam, pessime erravit, quero: ubi, nec possent dicere. Cum dicunt, quod illi doctores Aristotelem convincerent, si ambo viverent, quod magis fuerunt regula in natura quam Aristoteles istud probatione indiget aut per rationem aut per testimonium autenticum, que tunc plura induxi pro Aristotele ». The passage is quoted by MARTIN GRABMANN, *Mittelalterliches Geistesleben. Abhandlungen zur Geschichte der Scholastik und Mystik*, Hueber, München 1926–1956, vol. II, p. 101.

adapt Aristotelian logic to Trinitarian theology,¹⁴ from medieval vernacular poems by Thomasin von Zirclaria and Christine de Pizan, from Carlo Goldoni's comedy *Il teatro comico*.¹⁵ More importantly, Del Soldato analyses how Aristotle « was opportunistically called back to life » in a « paradoxical use of the principle of authority ». In fact, the resurrected philosopher was often invoked « to correct himself and to admit his own errors » and, at the same time, to distinguish himself – a true philosopher, ready to change his views and accept recent discoveries and new ideas – from his narrow-minded disciples, supposedly attached to his words in a dogmatic way. So he collaborated « to his own dethronement », to the emergence of a world view totally different from his own and to the triumph of rival traditions of thought.¹⁶

Presenting this chapter in her Introduction, Del Soldato remarks that « following the transformations of an expression can offer unexpected and insightful perspectives on the history of ideas over the *longue durée* ». ¹⁷ I fully concur and would simply add that whoever practiced this kind of enquiry¹⁸ is well aware that this is a captivating, yet somewhat frustrating task, because research is potentially infinite and one has to renounce any pretension to exhaustiveness from the offset. Consequently, although Del Soldato provides her readers with an extraordinarily rich selection of passages employing the 'if Aristotle were alive' argument, other occurrences could be added. My purpose, however, is not to supplement her list, but to call attention to those occurrences which may be useful to discuss a few points that, I think, deserve further investigation.

¹⁴ Besides the texts mentioned by DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 117 and n. 33, p. 212–213, see WALTER CHATTON, *Reportatio super Sententias*, I, q. 4, a. 2, ed. JOSEPH C. WEY, GIRARD J. ETZKORN, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto 2002, p. 78–79: « Et quod obstas de modo arguendi, verum est quod non est modus secundum doctrinam Aristotelis, quia ipse non tradidit artem quae sufficeret in his quae sunt fidei; sed si vidisset quae sunt fidei, tradidisset regulas multas quas non tradidit ».

¹⁵ DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 114, 145–146.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9, 126, 147, 151.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁸ As far as I am concerned, besides the paper mentioned above, n. 13, see LUCA BIANCHI, « 'Vae vobis homines': una massima di 'Avenzoreth' e le sue metamorfosi fra XIII e XVI secolo », in ANNA RODOLFI (ed.), *'Ratio practica' e 'ratio civilis'. Studi di etica e politica medievali per Giancarlo Garfagnini*, ETS, Pisa 2016 (*Philosophica*, 172), p. 225–248; *Id.*, « Ubi desinit physicus, ibi medicus incipit », in GABRIELLA ZUCCOLIN (ed.), *'Summa doctrina et certa experientia'. Studi su medicina e filosofia per Chiara Crisciani*, SISMELE–Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze 2017 (*Micrologus' Library*, 79), p. 5–28.

II. Different Ways of Encountering Aristotle

I will start with two preliminary remarks. First, there are widely present in the Aristotelian tradition speculations about what the Stagirite might think, about his possible answers to certain questions, and about his capability or incapability to look at a variety of issues. For instance, expressions such as ‘if one would ask Aristotle...’ were already used by late medieval thinkers: a leading Parisian master of Arts of this period such as Siger of Brabant repeatedly resorted to this formula and went as far as considering what the Philosopher would likely respond, in agreement with his Commentator.¹⁹ Siger also imagined how Aristotle might react « if he had grasped [*si vidisset*] » the correct meaning of a term – and similar hypotheses were also introduced by some fourteenth-century theologians.²⁰ Moreover, in the exegetical tradition of the *Nicomachean Ethics* fictional debates with him are rather common which follow the pattern: ‘you, Aristotle, say that ...; and I say...’. One can find them in the authoritative Greek commentary by Eustratius of Nicaea, likely composed between 1120 and 1130; in the well-received Latin *Expositio* by Donato Acciaiuoli, first printed in 1478;²¹ in Francesco Pona’s

¹⁹ See e.g. SIGER OF BRABANT, *Quaestiones in tertium de anima*, q. 12, ed. BERNARDO BAZÁN, p. 34: « Forte, si quaereretur ab Aristotele utrum anima intellectiva esset passibilis, ipse responderet quod ipsa intellectiva separata impassibilis est, et forte ipse cum Commentatore eius diceret quod ipsa inseparabilis est ». See also q. 2, *ibid.*, p. 6: « Unde, si quaereretur ab Aristotele utrum intellectus sit factum novum vel sit factum aeternum, ipse iudicaret intellectum esse factum aeternum sicut mundum ».

²⁰ SIGER OF BRABANT, *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam*, Vienna reportation, ed. WILLIAM DUNPHY, Éditions de l’Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, Louvain-la-Neuve 1981, p. 346: « Et praeterea, si Aristoteles vidisset quod scientia non secundum se diceretur ad aliquid, sed per aliud, iam non numerasset scientiam inter numerum relatorum secundum se, sed inter numerum relatorum per aliud ». As to fourteenth-century theologians, besides the passage quoted above, n. 14, see e.g. DUNS SCOTUS, *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, q. 15, in *Johannis Duns Scoti [...] Opera Omnia*, ed. LUKE WADDING, Vivès, Paris 1895, p. 121: « Istud autem, quod dicitur ex Philosopho, videtur facere ad propositum nostrum, quia si Philosophus vidisset aliquam intellectionem novam posse competere Angelo, dixisset ipsum aliquando esse in potentia accidentali ad intellectionem, quia haec est dispositio perfectior eius quod aliquando est in potentia ad intelligendum; igitur ille qui tenet, sive per rationem sive per fidem, aliquam esse intellectionem novam in angelo, consequenter dicat angelum quandoque ad illam esse in potentia accidentali, sicut Philosophus consequenter diceret ad illud quod ipse tenet; magis autem concordat cum Philosopho qui tenens aliquod antecedens, concedit consequens quod Philosophus etiam concederet, si illud antecedens teneret, quam ille, qui tenendo illud antecedens negat illud consequens, quia Aristoteles illud non negaret, concedendo illud antecedens »; HUGH OF NEWCASTLE, *Scriptum in librum Sententiarum, prol.*, in FRANCESCO FIORENTINO (ed.), « Le questioni prologali di Ugo di Novocastro », *Rivista di Filosofia Neoscolastica*, 4 (2014), p. 889–940: p. 931: « Ad aliam dico quod, si Philosophus vidisset istam operationem, posuisset felicitatem practicam; sed ista non fuit ei nota ».

²¹ See LUCA BIANCHI, « Un commento ‘umanistico’ ad Aristotele: l’*Expositio super libros Ethicorum* di Donato Acciaiuoli », now in LUCA BIANCHI, *Studi sull’aristotelismo del Rinascimento*, p. 23–24. The

vernacular *Discorsi sopra le Morali di Aristotele a Nicomaco*, a text published in 1627 which derives from lectures on the first Book given at the *Accademia dei Filarmonici* of Verona,²² where the counterfactual hypothesis that Aristotle « came back alive » is also introduced.²³

Second, in their polemics against the Scholastic approach to philosophy, the humanists refused to consider Aristotle as the interpreter of ‘pure reason’, as a timeless thinker to whom one could pose contemporary problems, and started seeing him as a ‘classic’, as an author to be situated in his cultural context. As a result, humanist Aristotelians wished to draw – to use Bruni’s and Lefèvre d’Étaples’s eloquent metaphor – the waters of Aristotelianism ‘at their source’, to re-establish a direct contact with his texts conceived as documents of a historically-determined worldview that needed to be understood in its original meaning. Yet Renaissance culture was also permeated with the myth of the ‘rebirth of the Ancients’ and the ideal of a conversation with the great figures of the past – a conversation that, as Petrarch had shown, need not necessarily be located in the netherworld as in Homer, Virgil, Cicero and Dante. This naturally led to envisage a *plurality* of situations that allowed to examine the Philosopher’s ideas without following the Scholastic ‘timeless’ method of disputed questions – which the humanists abhorred – but by listening, so to speak, to his own voice: Ludovico Beccadelli’s declared purpose to understand the controversial third book of the treatise *On the soul* « quasi cum Aristotele colloquentes » is emblematic in this respect.²⁴

technique of addressing Aristotle directly was still used by Galileo. See e.g. the *Frammenti attenenti al Dialogo*, in *Le Opere di Galileo Galilei*, Barbèra, Firenze 1890–1909, vol. VII, p. 546: « Tu, Aristotile, determini i moti semplici esser quelli che si fanno per linee semplici [...] tuttavia poi tu dirai [...]; e non vorrai più che il medesimo moto che tu chiami semplice [...] ».

²² *Discorsi sopra le Morali di Aristotele a Nicomaco di Francesco Pona Dottor Medico Filosofo L’Insatiabile Academico Filarmonico*, Giacomo Sarcina, Venezia 1627, p. 38. On this neglected commentary, see LUCA BIANCHI, « Uses of Latin Sources in Renaissance Vernacularizations of Aristotle: The Cases of Galeazzo Florimonte, Francesco Venier and Francesco Pona », in LUCA BIANCHI, SIMON GILSON, JILL KRAYE (eds.), *Vernacular Aristotelianism in Italy from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Century*, The Warburg Institute, London 2016, p. 31–55: p. 34–38.

²³ In explaining I.5, 1095b15–22 Pona takes the opportunity to denounce the moral degeneration of his times, arguing that « if Aristotele came back alive » he might give many other examples of people sharing the way of life of the « dirty Sardanapalus »: « Mà che se Aristotele adesso tornasse vivo, egli scioglierebbe [sic] altro esempio, e il sozzo Sardanapalo gli parrebbe persona tollerabile, per non dir lodevole frà le sceleraggini c’hoggi si costumano: poiche altri vitij molto più enormi vanno hora non solo castigati, ma protetti, premiati, lodati », *Discorsi sopra le Morali di Aristotele a Nicomaco*, p. 28–29.

²⁴ See the *De immortalitate animae* studied and edited by PIETRO B. ROSSI, « ‘Sempre alla pietà et buoni costumi ha exortato le genti’: Aristotle in the milieu of Cardinal Contarini », in LUCA BIANCHI (ed.),

So the fiction of bringing Aristotle back to life was *one* of the strategies adopted to encounter him, to let him express his views, to qualify, change or recant them, to comment on events and doctrines that he did not, and often could not, know. As Del Soldato admirably shows, many authors « between the late Middle Ages and the eighteenth century » indeed obliged Aristotle to travel to the future,²⁵ to live – in a much stronger way than Oliver Sacks’s patients in *Awakenings* – the shocking experience of a totally changed world, to meet and interact with people that spoke a different language, accepted different religious beliefs and moral values, had acquired new technological capabilities and new knowledge.²⁶ Yet *other* narrative frameworks could also be successfully developed.

Christian Readings of Aristotle from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, Brepols, Turnhout 2011 (Studia artistarum, 29), p. 317–395: p. 364.

- ²⁵ DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 110: « Whereas in the previous chapters I considered Aristotle (and Plato) in comparationes, fictions and legends, the present one deals instead with the European trajectory of the single motif ‘if Aristotle were alive’ between the late Middle Ages and the eighteenth century ». This was undoubtedly the ‘golden age’ of the motif, but one might perhaps extend the chronological boundaries of the inquiry to cover the period from the ninth century (date of Al-Ma’mūn’s dream examined below) to our times. A remarkable example of nineteenth-century speculations on Aristotle’s reactions to his modern followers is provided by ALESSANDRO MANZONI, *Lettre à monsieur Chauvet sur l’unité de temps et de lieu dans la tragédie*, in *Opere scelte del conte Alessandro Manzoni*, Passigli e Soci, Firenze 1832, p. 481: « Et par respect pour qui supporterait-on à perpétuité cette gêne? Par respect pour quelques commentateurs d’Aristote? Ah! Si Aristote le savait! ». As to the twentieth and twenty-first century, different and at times bizarre versions of the motif can be found in novels and collections of quotes (see the passages quoted *in exergo*); in books meant for a general audience (see e.g. TOM MORRIS, *If Aristotle ran General Motors. The new Soul of Business*, Holt & C., New York 1998; DAVID BAGGET, SHAWN E. KLEIN (eds.), *Harry Potter and Philosophy. If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, Open Court, Chicago-La Salle 2004); in articles published in scientific journals (see e.g. JAMES H. MOOR, « If Aristotle were a Computing Professional », *Computers and Society*, 98 (1998), p. 13–16). However the most sophisticated witness of the enduring success of the *topos* of Aristotle coming back to earth in our times and discussing new theories is the German philosopher and diplomat Kurt Rietzeler, who wrote an entire book conceived as the record of lectures given by the Stagirite to a group of twentieth-century physicists: see KURT RIETZELER, *Physics and Reality: Lectures of Aristotle on Modern Physics at an International Congress of Science 679 Olympiad, Cambridge, 1940 A.D.*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1940. DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, ends Chapter 5 by claiming that when in the second half of the seventeenth century « new philosophies, new visions of nature, new paradigms prevailed, also at the institutional level, there was no longer any need to resurrect him in order to defend his tradition or to invoke him in order to demolish his doctrines and his school and endorse novel ones. At that point, Aristotle could finally be allowed to rest in peace » (p. 149). This is as brilliant as it is correct: yet the Philosopher’s eternal sleep at times was, and still is, interrupted.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 113: « Aristotle’s fixed place in history precluded him from obtaining knowledge of the many things discovered, or revealed, after his death. Yet by virtue of an imaginary return to the world of the living he can overcome the temporal boundaries of his existence, thus filling in the gaps in his learning, correcting his own doctrines, and, crucially, providing support for modern tenets ».

First of all, for Christian thinkers, meeting Aristotle or other authors of the past could not only be a « mental [or thought] experiment », a « counterfactual imagining », ²⁷ but also a possibility that could be *actually realised* by God. This is clear, for instance, in the commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* first published in 1550 by the French humanist Omer Talon. Influenced by Pierre de la Ramée (Peter Ramus) – who, as Del Soldato highlights, alluded to Aristotle’s rebirth in order to make him a supporter of the *libertas philosophandi*²⁸ – Talon strongly criticized the assumption that Christian theology should be grounded on Peripatetic doctrines and censored those who stubbornly worshipped a fallible, pagan thinker who, if he were raised from the dead and instructed in the Christian faith, would reject his teachings.²⁹ Later on, Talon repeats this scolding against the Aristotelianising theology of Late Scholasticism, adding that if Aristotle, « like many others », were resurrected by God, he « would condemn and burn his books » and, acknowledging the limits of his rational wisdom, he would call « awfully stupid and brainless [*stultissimos et amentissimos*] » the advocates of his « impious and perverse » opinions.³⁰

Moreover, Christian thinkers – as well as those who followed other monotheistic religions – believed not only in an Omnipotent God who could miraculously resuscitate the Philosopher as he did with Lazarus. They also believed in the afterlife of individual souls, and this allowed them to imagine that they could confer with Aristotle without assuming that he would return to *this* world. Thanks to divine supernatural intervention or human imagination, one could also come across him and his new opinions in *another* world: in dreamland,

²⁷ For these formulae see *ibid.*, p. 9, 110, 115, 120, 142.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123–124.

²⁹ *Primus Aristotelis Liber ad Nicomachum, de beatitudine hominis, ab Audomaro Talaeo explicatus, in Audomari Talei ... Opera, ex officina Pernaee, Basileae 1575*, p. 652: « *Si Aristoteles hoc tempore a mortuis excitaretur, eaque opinione, quam de Deo et Christo habemus imbueretur, confestim decreta sua tolleret, penitusque damnaret, quae inepti quidam Christiani stultissime probant, et pertinacissime sequuntur* ».

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 706: « *Quamobrem si Aristoteles ab illo ipso Deo, ut multi alij quondam, excitari posset lumenque Evangelicae veritatis intueri, libros suos damnaret atque incenderet; seque miserrima et infoelicissima caligine mentis occaecatum fuisse praedicaret nosque servos tam impiae et perversae opinionis stultissimos et amentissimos appellaret. Minime igitur decet nos, qui verae lucis possessores videri volumus, ab authore suo damnatas tenebras improbatosque errores tam arcte tamque pertinaciter defendere, et gigantum more cum Deo et veritatem bellum impium et nefarium pro homine ethnico gerere. Quamobrem valde mirandum est hominis huius auctoritatem tam sanctam gravemque esse, ut quae ruinam et exitium verae pietatis adfert, pro unico religionis fundamento a Christianis hominibus habeatur* ». Talo’s passages must be read in the light of Del Soldato’s discussion of the use of the motif in order to postulate Aristotle’s conversion to Christianity: see DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 113, 117–120.

the netherworld, Hell or even – according to the classicising tastes of the time – in mythological places such as Parnassus.

Dream narratives have been repeatedly used to introduce a leading figure of the past and make him reveal important truths. An early witness to the application of this technique to Aristotle is provided by the celebrated dream of the ‘Abbāsīd caliph al-Ma’mūn, who reigned in Baghdad from 813 to 833 A.D. This dream is transmitted in two independent versions, the first of which is of great interest to us:

‘Abdallā ibn-Ṭhāir relates that al-Ma’mūn said: « I saw in my dream a man seated in the assembly of the philosophers, and said to him, ‘Who are you?’. He replied: ‘Aristotle the philosopher’. I said: ‘O philosopher, what is the best speech?’. He replied: ‘Whatever is correct according to personal judgment’. I said: ‘Then what?’. He replied: ‘Whatever the person who hears it finds to be good’. I said: ‘Then what?’. He replied: ‘That about whose consequences one would have no fears’. I said: ‘Then what?’. He replied: ‘Everything else is the same as a donkey’s bray’ ». Al-Ma’mūn said: « Had Aristotle been alive, he would not have added anything else to what he said here, since in this statement he collected everything that needed to be said and refrained from saying anything superfluous ». ³¹

Dimitri Gutas has argued that this dream, « in all probability fabricated within circles closest to the caliph », reflects his religious and political project: the primacy accorded to the ‘personal judgement’ of an individual, first of all al-Ma’mūn himself, was indeed functional to his attempt « to consolidate and centralize power ». According to Gutas, the choice of Aristotle as the authority confirming the principles of the caliph’s policy is also significant: it shows the high reputation already acquired by the Greek philosopher, and more generally speaking by non-Arab thinkers, in intellectual circles in Baghdād – and therefore might bear witness to the fact that the translation movement had already developed.³² However one interprets its ideological and historical significance, what now needs to be fully appreciated is the literary structure of this tale: we first find the record of a dialogue where Aristotle, in a dream, briefly answers a few elementary questions, raised by al-Ma’mūn, which deal with practical behaviour (« what is the best speech? »); then the reliability of the teachings imparted by Aristotle is confirmed by the dreamer himself who remarks that « had Aristotle been alive, he would not have added anything else to what he said here ».

³¹ I quote the translation provided by DIMITRI GUTAS, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture. The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbāsīd Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)*, Routledge, London–New York 1998, p. 97.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 97–104.

Therefore, Al-Ma'mūn's dream offers not only one of the first occurrences (to the best of my knowledge) of the 'if Aristotle were alive' motif but, in a certain sense, also one of the first samples of its « philological-exegetical application ».³³ The reborn philosopher, indeed, is evoked by the caliph in order to certify the full accuracy of the report of what he told him. But the dialogue between them did not take place in the real world: however powerful and open-minded, the Muslim caliph did not dare to call the pagan thinker back to life to be instructed by him and was happy with receiving his teachings in a dream.

Del Soldato devotes an entire paragraph to different applications of the 'if Aristotle were alive' motif in discussions on the translations and interpretations of the Aristotelian corpus.³⁴ She finely notes that if in other cases – as we will see with Galileo and his contemporaries – Aristotle « is transported to the modern world and placed before its novelties, so that he can say that the best way to honour his teaching is to abandon blind devotion to his writings », in « the philological-exegetical application of the motif, by contrast, he is called on, not to admit that his doctrines need to be corrected in light of new discoveries, but rather to verify the fidelity of the translations and the interpretations of his works, from the standpoint of his own original context and times »: the cases of Galeotto Marzio and Juan Luis Vives that she examines are emblematic in this respect.³⁵ Del Soldato also recalls Leonardo Bruni, who was one of the first humanists who complained that the original meaning of Aristotle's supposedly refined writings could not be understood because of flawed Latin translations and, in his *Dialogues*, wrote that these writings « have suffered such a great transformation that, were anyone to bring them to Aristotle himself, he would not recognize them as his own any more than his own dogs recognized Actaeon ».³⁶ But where could one bring

³³ Ibid., p. 142.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 139–142. A beautiful example of this use of the *topos*, generally applied to the texts that he was going to edit and publish (among whom Aristotle and his commentators played a decisive role), can be found in Aldus Manutius's preface to a volume of Greek authors (Theocritus, Hesiodus, Theognides etc.), printed in 1496: « Non enim recipio me emendaturum libros – nam in quibus Oedipo coniectore opus esset: ita enim mutilati quidam sunt et inversi, ut *ne ille quidem qui composuit, si revivisceret, emendare posset...* ». See GIOVANNI ORLANDI (ed.), *Aldo Manuzio editore. Dediche, prefazioni, note ai testi*, Il Poligrafo, Milano 1975 (Documenti sulle arti del libro ; 11), vol. I, p. 9.

³⁵ DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 140, 142.

³⁶ *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum*, in LEONARDO BRUNI, *Opere letterarie e politiche*, ed. PAOLO VITI, UTET, Torino 1996, p. 96: « Fieri non potest, mihi crede, Coluci, ut illi quicquam recte teneant, presertim cum hi libri, quos Aristotelis esse dicunt, tam magnam transformationem passi sunt, ut si quis eos ad Aristotelem ipsum deferat, non magis ille suos esse cognoscat quam Acteonem illum, qui ex homine in cervum conversus est, canes sue cognoverint »; I use the English translation by David Thompson in GORDON GRIFFITS, JAMES HANKINS, DAVID THOMPSON, *The Humanism of Leonardo*

the Philosopher a copy of the Latin versions produced by ‘barbarous’ translators such as Robert Grosseteste and William of Moerbeke?

Bruni’s later treatise *De interpretatione recta*, written around 1420, allows a tentative answer to this question: *apud inferos*. This – it should be said – is not Bruni’s last word on this subject. As a matter of fact, about ten years later, in his *Vita Aristotelis* the Florentine chancellor repeated his scolding against those who deny the grace of the Stagirite’s style, adding that « if he were alive, he would himself repudiate » the medieval Latin translations of the Aristotelian corpus as his own works.³⁷ It remains that in his previous treatise on the correct way to translate, after quoting passages from the current Latin versions of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*, Bruni describes how Aristotle would react if he were informed in the netherworld of the bad rendering of his elegant prose:

*If there be among those below [apud inferos] any knowledge of our doings, Aristotle is surely pained and angry that his books have been so mangled by the ignorant, he is surely eager to deny his authorship, he is surely infuriated that they have used his name*³⁸.

Apud inferos: using this vague term, Bruni carefully avoided to take a stance on the issue of the ultimate fate of Aristotle’s soul, which was passionately debated from the Middle Ages onwards. In the seventeenth century, the problem of the salvation or damnation of the Stagirite was still hot, as Del Soldato recalls in chapter 4 of her

Bruni. Selected Texts, The Renaissance Society of America, Binghamton, New York 1987 (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 46), p. 69. This passage is quoted and discussed by DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 139 and n. 103, p. 219.

³⁷ *Vita Aristotelis*, in BRUNI, *Opere letterarie e politiche*, p. 522: « Quippe adulterinas huius philosophi translationes lectitare soliti, intricatum quendam et obscurum et inconcinnum arbitrantur. Sed non sunt illi Aristotelis libri nec si vivat ipse suos dici velit, sed mere translatorum ineptie. Ille enim politissimus scriptor esse voluit, et quod voluit curavit et quod curavit assecutus est »; English translation by James Hankins in GRIFFITS, HANKINS, THOMPSON, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, p. 290.

³⁸ *De interpretatione recta*, in BRUNI, *Opere letterarie e politiche*, p. 192: « ... ut, si quis apud inferos sensus sit rerum nostrarum, indignetur et doleat Aristoteles libros suos ab imperitis hominibus ita lacerari, ac suos esse neget, quos isti transtulerunt, ac suum illis nomen inscribi molestissime ferat »; English translation by James Hankins, in GRIFFITS, HANKINS, THOMPSON, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, p. 229. Bruni expands here on what he had written in 1416 in the preface to his new translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. See the text edited in LEONARDO BRUNI, *Sulla perfetta traduzione*, ed. PAOLO VITI, Liguori, Napoli, p. 256: « ... si quis illi nunc sensus est rerum nostrarum, iampridem credendum est eum huic absurditati et inconcinuitati traductionis infensum et tantam barbariem indignatum hos suos libros esse negare, cum talis, apud Latinos videri cupiat, qualem apud Grecos sese ipse exhibuit ». As such, the description of the sentiments that an outstanding figure of the past might have in the underworld is hardly new. See e.g. Titus Livius’s *History of Rome*, Book 39, ch. 37: « si existat hodie ab inferis Lycurgus, gaudeat ruinis eorum ».

fine book, examining first the treatise *De pietate Aristotelis* by the Italian philosopher Fortunio Liceti, printed in 1645, then the pamphlets published by the Jesuit Melchior Cornaeus in the 1650s, notably the question *An Papista, an non Christianus* and the series of dialogues entitled *Aristoteles redivivus*. Cornaeus argues that, if a pagan thinker who ignored the Christian revelation came to know it, he would convert to Catholicism but could not embrace Lutheranism or Calvinism. To confirm this belief, Cornaeus presents the Stagirite as ready to appreciate the unique balance of natural reason and Scriptural faith that – he claims – is offered only by the Roman Church. The Aristotle imagined by the German Jesuit, however, could become a fervent Catholic only when, « getting out of the netherworld [*ab inferis reducem*] », was sent back to live on Earth and had the opportunity to meet faithful Catholics. This hypothesis sparked the reaction of some Lutherans, such as Conrad Dannhauer and Goffried Zapf. For them, the Philosopher was indeed unable to leave Hell, where he served his sentence, but Zapf « pretended to be the editor of a resentful letter written by Aristotle himself », who had obtained a special permission from the devil to answer the Jesuits and demonstrate, quoting the Bible, that Lutherans had a better understanding than Catholics of his thought!³⁹

A few decades before the amazing exchanges between the German Jesuits and Lutherans which Del Soldato has rediscovered and reconstructed, a different attitude was adopted by an Italian nobleman, Cesare Crivellati. Author of several works on medicine, music and philosophy, Crivellati published Italian paraphrases of Aristotle's *Physics*, *De generatione et corruptione* and *Meteorologica*.⁴⁰ Giving a 'Christianised' reading of these texts, Crivellati particularly insisted on the idea that Aristotle deemed that the heavens have « received being » and never intended to prove that the world is eternal. To clarify this point, Crivellati appended to his paraphrase of the second book of the *Physics*, published in 1616, a *Dialogo fra Platone, e Aristotile circa l'origine, e duratione del Mondo*⁴¹. This « feigned

³⁹ See DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 87-89 (on Liceti), 101-108 (on Cornaeus and his critics). As a book title, the expression 'Aristoteles redivivus' was later used by Barbarino de Angelis: see his *Aristoteles Redivivus in entis, et naturae systemate apologia vindicata contra universalem Veterum Philosophorum Hypothesin a Recentioribus Atomistis renovatam, ex typographia Simonis Trento, Cataniae 1741*.

⁴⁰ On Crivellati see LUCA BIANCHI, « 'Reducing Aristotle's Doctrine to Simple Truth': Cesare Crivellati and his Struggle against the 'Averroists' », in BIANCHI, *Christian Readings of Aristotle from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, p. 397-424; on the *Dialogue* see in particular p. 407-412.

⁴¹ *Il secondo libro della Fisica. Tradotto per modo di Parafrase in lingua volgare. Con un Dialogo fra Platone, e Aristotile circa l'origine, e duratione del Mondo. Nel quale si sciogliono tutti gli apparenti argomenti fatti da esso Aristotile intorno à questa materia. Di Cesare Criuellati Fisico Viterbese, Con licenza de' Superiori [s. ed.], Viterbo 1616*.

[*finto*] dialogue »⁴² was conceived as the record of a real conversation between the old master and his disciple and, therefore, to a certain extent, avoided the deliberate anachronism of the ‘if Aristotle were alive’ argument. Yet, what is at stake in Crivellati’s fiction is not only Aristotle’s endorsement of Christian religion, but also his attitude towards recent developments in philosophy. Plato indeed first explains to a too submissive Aristotle that, moving from the rational principles that the latter accepted, philosophy can demonstrate (or at least show the plausibility of) fundamental tenets of Christian faith: the existence of an immutable, omnipotent, omniscient and free God; the immortality of the human soul; the creation of the world *de novo*.⁴³ Then, though giving an indulgent reading of his arguments for the eternity of the world, reduced to mere dialectical tools, Plato complains that his disciple is accountable for secular controversies about the origin of the universe and that, willy-nilly, he paved the way to Averroes and the ‘Averroists’. The latter, which include the fourteenth-century Arts master John of Jandun, are precisely the main target of Plato, who violently attacks them and condemns their way of distinguishing philosophical and religious doctrines « as if there were two truths »⁴⁴ – an expression echoing Stephen Tempier’s prefatory

⁴² *Il secondo libro della Fisica*, « A’ lettori », p. 5: « Eccovi benignissimi Lettori, [...] il secondo Libro della Fisica, nell’istesso modo che il primo tradotto in questa nostra lingua, nel quale, se non m’inganno, col mezzo d’alcune digressioni si verrà confermando quanto si è detto nel primo dell’origine del mondo; sciogliendosi di più da Platone nel *finto Dialogo tutte le ragioni, che da Aristotile sono state fatte intorno all’eternità di quello*; con dimostrare, che non è stata sua intentione ferma d’haver ciò dimostrato, e che non conclude la maggior parte di quelle, se non per cagion di supposto ».

⁴³ With regard to this point, Plato is proud of having taken a position which corresponds verbatim to the teachings of « Moses’s law »: « Io sò ben questo, che la mia opinione è verissima, e toglie via ogni difficoltà, e è stata seguita, e sarà sempre, fin che durerà il mondo, *per esser tanto conforme alla legge di Mosè, che par ch’io habbia cavato de verbo, à verbo, le sue parole*, della qual cosa tanto mi compiaccio, che niente più » (*Dialogo fra Platone, e Aristotile circa l’origine, e duratione del Mondo*, p. 86). For a general survey on early-modern debates concerning Plato and Aristotle as followers of Moses, see DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 93–100.

⁴⁴ *Il primo libro della Fisica Volgarizzato per modo di Parafrase [...] Di Cesare Criuellati Fisico Viterbese*, Discepoli, Viterbo 1615, p. 89–90: « Nè anco bisogna dire, *per ritornare al Iandone*, [...] che questo è articolo di fede, e che il disputarlo toglie il merito: perche se bene è di fede non per questo si vieta, che non si disputi; e poi se così è, perche lo si disputa lui, si come fa; tanto più che tanti filosofi e antichi e moderni l’hanno disputato, e lo disputano. Ma è ben da maravigliarsi di quei tali, che con la creatione, e con la fede vogliono difendere l’eternità del mondo semplicemente, *quasi che siano due verità*, di maniera, che se la fede è vera, come è verissima, non è vera l’eternità, nel modo che la difendono, e se l’eternità fosse vera, non saria vera la fede; si che volendo salvar l’eternità, semplicemente parlando, e la fede, è cosa impossibile, tanto più, che come vuol S. Tomaso, la fede non distrugge la ragione, e però si può disputar anco con ragione, e in somma bisogna ridursi, che unica est veritas; si che se è verità questa, è falsità l’opposta, se l’havessero detto cento Aristotili non che uno Auerroe ».

letter to the articles censured in 1277, the first document of the ecclesiastical reaction towards the so-called ‘theory of double truth’ denounced again in the bull *Apostolici regiminis* promulgated by pope Leo X in 1513.⁴⁵

According to Crivellati, the bizarre ‘question-and-answer session’ between the two greatest ancient philosophers started when Aristotle, coming « from the immense abysses of Hell [*da gli immensi abissi dell’Inferno*] », suddenly appeared in the « sulphurous and boiling land of Bollicame », ⁴⁶ i.e. in the healing springs near Viterbo that Dante Alighieri had described in the fourteenth canto of the first part of his *Divine Comedy* while illustrating the eternal punishment of those guilty of violence against God. Choosing a similar setting, Crivellati suggested the image of a damned Aristotle who, although relegated to an infernal space, is ready to recognise his faults thanks to the providential intervention of his former master Plato, and disapproves that impious misinterpretations of his teachings still circulate many centuries after his death.

Four years earlier, another Italian writer had presented Aristotle conversing in a totally different milieu. In his *Ragguagli di Parnaso*, first published in 1612 and soon translated in several languages, Traiano Boccalini describes the daily life of a separate world governed by Apollo, who receives the complaints of learned men and political figures living in the classical antiquity, the Middle Ages and modern times.⁴⁷ In one of his reports, Boccalini states that, when Torquato Tasso submitted

⁴⁵ *Dialogo fra Platone, e Aristotile circa l’origine, e duratione del Mondo*, p. 105: « Ar. Tu mi dici cose che mi paiono impossibili; dunque si trovano studiosi di Filosofia, cioè di verità, che fanno più conto de’ miei apparenti detti, che dell’istessa verità? non lo posso in un certo modo credere. Pl. Stanne certo Aristotile, e per hora ti fo mentione solo d’Averroe, il quale non solo in questo, che pure vi è qualche apparenza, ma in quelle cose ancora, che pur sono espressamente di tuo volere, per cagion di questa eternità, ha havuto ardire di opportisi, e di dire il falso; ma tal sia di lui, e di chi pospone la verità a te, e al tuo Averroe. Ar. Io mi maraviglio grandemente di questo, e fanno male a voler difendere il falso, ancorche l’havessero detto mille miei pari, e doveriano, secondo il mio parere, cercar di rispondere alli miei argomenti, si come hai fatto tu, e lasciar la verità nel suo luogo, e amar quella sopra qualsivoglia ragione, ò detto di Filosofo, massime havendo [ed.: hanendo] io accennato il contrario in tanti luoghi. Pl. Talche non doveriano fare come ha fatto un’Auerroista detto il Iandone, e altri [...] ». On the *Apostolici regiminis* and its impact see LUCA BIANCHI, *Pour une histoire de la ‘double vérité’*, Vrin, Paris 2008, p. 119–156.

⁴⁶ *Dialogo fra Platone, e Aristotile circa l’origine, e duratione del Mondo*, p. 47: « Pl. E chi sei tù, che da gli immensi abissi dell’Inferno vieni in queste solitudini, e in questa solfurea, e bollente, campagna del Bollicame così prontamente, e così improvvemente [*sic*] ad incontrarmi? ». After reminding his disciple that he previously did not have the opportunity to meet him because he was « confined in the abysses » (« Così anco, se tu stavi sempre rinchiuso ne gli abissi, era impossibile, che tu m’incontrassi [...] », *ibid.*, p. 76), Plato ends the *Dialogue* expressing the wish to be allowed to see him again (« à rivederci, pur che ci sia permesso il poterlo conseguire », *ibid.* p. 106).

⁴⁷ On Boccalini’s life and works see the entry by LUIGI FIRPO in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. XI, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, Roma 1969, p. 10–19. Literature on his *Ragguagli* is large: see

his *Gerusalemme liberata* as a patent for literary immortality, Ludovico Castelvetro – the author of a remarkable Italian translation of the *Poetics* who, in Apollo's imaginary kingdom, served as a *censore bibliotecario* – refused it, arguing that Tasso did not respect « the rules of Poetry published by Aristotle ». Claiming that he simply followed his inspiration, Tasso appealed to Apollo, who asked the guards to bring the Stagirite before him, defended the poets' « absolute liberty of writing and inventing », praised Tasso and rebuked the Philosopher for his presumption in establishing rules that curbed the writers' creativity. The poor, trembling Aristotle denied the charge, arguing that he simply gave a few general rules derived from the poetic practice of his time; that he never stated that only following these rules one can compose perfect literary works; that some ignorant men had turned them into universal laws; and that his only fault was his ambition, which encouraged him to accept this situation instead of denouncing the distortion of his authentic thought. In Henry Carey's seventeenth-century English translation the main passage reads as follows:

Poor Aristotle trembled at the hearing of these words, and humbly beseeched his Majestie that he would commiserate his old age, and *that such a Philosopher as he might not suffer for another's ignorance, saying, that he had writ the rules of Poetry, not in that sense in which it was afterwards understood by the ignorant, as if without observing his Rules and Precepts, no Poem could possibly arrive at perfection; but that, only to facilitate the Art of Poetry, he had shewed the way wherein the best Poets had walked.* That the only fault which he had committed, and for which he humbly craved his Majestie's pardon, was, that having found long before, that the ignorant took those his [sic] Observations for Laws, and peremptory Precepts, blinded with that Ambition which robs all men of their eye-sight; for that that error had encreased his Honour and Reputation, he had given his Majestie thereby so high a displeasure. And that he confest that the brains of high-strained Poets might write Poems so absolutely perfect, as they might serve others for Rules and Laws to be observed, without keeping his Laws and Precepts. And that the truth of this that he had said was clearly proved by the *Politicks* which he had published, which in comparison to the madly-wrested Reason of State which was now practised by many, was meer foppery.⁴⁸

at least NICOLA BONAZZI, *Dire il vero scherzando: moralismo, satira e utopia nei Ragguagli di Parnaso di Traiano Boccalini*, Angeli, Milano 2017.

⁴⁸ *Ragguagli di Parnaso, Centuria prima, XXVIII*, ed. LUIGI FIRPO, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1948, vol. I, p. 86–88: p. 87–88: « Tremava il misero Aristotile a queste parole, e umilissimamente supplicava Sua Maestà che avesse per raccomandata la sua vecchiaia, e che per l'altrui ignoranza non dovesse pericolare un filosofo suo pari; e ch'egli non avea scritte le regole dell'arte poetica col senso che dagl'ignoranti gli era stato dato poi, che senza osservar i precetti e le regole pubblicate da lui non fosse possibile che poema alcuno avesse la sua perfezione: ma che solo per altrui facilitar l'arte del poetare avea mostrata la strada che lodevolmente avevano camminata i più famosi poeti; ch'egli solo aveva commesso

While in this case the fearful Aristotle hastens to qualify his position, distinguishing it from that of his followers, in the seventy-sixth 'news-letter' from Parnassus he displays a higher level of self-criticism. Aristotle was indeed « besieged » in his « Country-house » by many princes who complained that he gave a definition of the tyrant that was so large and « malignant [*maligna*] » as to include « every good Prince ». After the intervention of Federico Feltrio, duke of Urbino, Aristotle was obliged to acknowledge that he was « grossly ignorant [*grasso ingorantone*] » in political matters and, scared to death, he « suddenly recanted » his definition admitting that it was totally outdated:

By these words, Duke Federico found that the Princes had just reason to be incensed; wherefore *he easily prevailed with Aristotle to revoke his former definition of a Tyrant, and to make a new one, which might satisfy those so highly offended Princes. Then Aristotle suddenly recanted, and said, that Tyrants were a certain sort of men in the old time, the Race whereof was wholly lost now.* The Princes having received such satisfaction as they desired, presently quitted their quarters: and being gone towards their own States, Aristotle, being half dead with fear, returned to Parnassus, assuring all the Vertuosi, that his Philosophical Precepts failed him very much against the fear of death; and bade the Litterati attend their Studies, and let alone the Reason of State, which it

l'errore, del quale a Sua Maestà chiedeva umilmente perdono, che molto tempo prima essendosi avveduto che gl'ignoranti quelle sue osservazioni interpretavano regole e precetti irrefragabili, perché quell'errore gli accresceva onore e riputazione, accecato da quell'ambizione che ad ognuno toglie il vedere, era caduto nel disordine di dar così grave disgusto a Sua Maestà; e che confessava che senza osservar que' suoi precetti e il modo ch'egli aveva mostrato, gl'ingegni elevati dei poeti potevano compor poemi di tanta assoluta perfezione, ch'altrui avrebbero potuto servir poi per regole e leggi degne di essere osservate: e che delle cose ch'egli aveva detto, chiarissimo testimonio ne rendeva al mondo tutto la *Politica* pubblicata da lui, la quale, in comparazione dell'arrabbiata e stirata ragion di stato che ne' tempi presenti usavano molti, era una mera buffoneria ». For the English translation see *I Ragguagli di Parnasso or, Advertisements from Parnassus: in two Centuries [...] written originally in Italian by the famous Roman Trajano Boccalini, and now put into English [...] Second Edition*, Starkey and Basset, London 1669, p. 37–38: p. 38. In 1639 also Paganino Gaudenzi, who taught Greek, rhetoric, history and politics in Rome and Pisa, wrote a *comparatio* of Plato and Origenes (mentioned by DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 194, n. 77) and was an admirer of Galileo, defended the writers' freedom using the 'if Aristotle were alive' motif: « Qualora ammettano che i Latini si siano dedicati alla riprensione degli errori umani col favore di Apollo è necessario che, sconfitti, ci concedano anche che è possibile e legittimo dare vita ad un carne anche se esso non si conforma ai precetti di Aristotele. Che *se lo Stagirita fosse vivo forse non espungerebbe e ritratterebbe ciò che scrisse sulla poesia, ma accrescerebbe ed emenderebbe il suo volume in base a quello che, dopo la sua morte, è stato prodotto* dalla felice audacia dei grandi ingegni ». I quote from FRANCESCO GUARDIANI, ANTONIO ROSSINI, « Un'apologia del Marino *ex cathedra*: l'orazione di Paganino Gaudenzi (1595–1649) », *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, 19 (1998), p. 101–131: p. 122.

was impossible to treat of, without running evident danger of being esteemed Criminal by Princes.⁴⁹

III. 'If Aristotle Had Seen': Galileo and His Friends

On June 22, 1613 Girolamo Magagnati – a poet, active in Venice in the mirror and glass industry – sent a letter to Galileo informing him, among other things, that he had drunk to his health together with Traiano Boccalini.⁵⁰ Magagnati was indeed a good friend to both Boccalini and Galileo, and had recently honoured the latter's discovery of Jupiter's 'planets' announced in the *Sidereus Nuncius* in a short poem, dedicated to Cosimo II de' Medici.⁵¹ There is no need to recall that this and the other telescopic discoveries, as well as Tycho Brahe's observations of the new star that appeared in 1572 and of the comet of 1577, caused great excitement and challenged the most basic concepts of Aristotelian cosmology.⁵² In this context, Galileo started systematically using the 'if Aristotle were alive' motif, and Eva Del Soldato has the great merit of calling attention to the pivotal role that it played in

⁴⁹ *Ragguagli di Parnaso, Centuria prima*, LXXVI, ed. LUIGI FIRPO, Laterza, Bari 1948, vol. I, p. 255–257: p. 256–257: « Da queste parole il duca Federico chiaramente conobbe esser giusto lo sdegno de' principi: onde facilmente ottenne da Aristotile che rivocasse l'antica diffinizione del tiranno e che ne facesse una nuova, che di soddisfazione fosse a quei principi tanto adirati. Allora si ritrattò subito Aristotile, e disse che i tiranni furono certi uomini del tempo antico, de' quali oggi giorno affatto si era perduta la razza. Avuta che ebbono i principi la soddisfazione che tanto desideravano, disloggiarono subito; ed essendosi partiti per gli Stati loro, Aristotile, mezzo morto dalla paura, ritornò in Parnaso, facendo pienissima fede a' virtuosi tutti, che i precetti della sua filosofia, molto scarsi gli erano riusciti contro la paura della morte; e pubblicamente disse che i letterati attendessero agli studi loro e che lasciassero andare la ragion di Stato, della quale non era possibile trattare senza correre evidente pericolo di entrar co' principi ne' criminali »; English translation, p. 118–119. On this passage see MAURIZIO VIROLI, « Il significato storico della nascita del concetto di ragion di stato », in A. ENZO BALDINI (ed.), *Aristotelismo politico e ragion di stato*, Olschki, Firenze 1995 (Fondazione Luigi Firpo. Centro di studi sul pensiero politico, Studi e testi, 4), p. 67–81: p. 76. See also a remarkable passage of the *Centuria seconda*, XC, vol. II, p. 298–310: p. 298–299 (English translation, p. 309): in this advertisement ancient cosmographers have the opportunity to meet Columbus and other « discoverers of the new world ». Aristotle, in particular, understands « how many falsehoods he and other Philosophers had published of the Torrid Zone », giving an inaccurate picture of the world « miraculously fabricated » by the Omnipotent God.

⁵⁰ See *Le Opere di Galileo Galilei*, vol. XI, p. 527.

⁵¹ On Magagnati's friendship with Boccalini and Galileo see CARLO CARABBA, GIULIANO GASPARRI, « La vita e le opere di Girolamo Magagnati », *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, 2 (2005), p. 61–85: p. 64–65, 73–74. See also MASSIMO BUCCIANINI, MICHELE CAMEROTA, FRANCO GIUDICE, *Il telescopio di Galileo. Una storia europea*, Einaudi, Torino 2012, p. 208–209.

⁵² For a general survey see PAOLO GALLUZZI (ed.), *Novità celesti e crisi del sapere. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi galileiani*, Giunti-Barbera, Firenze 1984 (Istituto e Museo di storia della scienza di Firenze. Monografie, 7); MIGUEL ANGEL GRANADA (ed.), *Novas y cometas entre 1572 y 1618. Revolución cosmológica y renovación política y religiosa*, Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona 2012; DARIO TESSICINI, PATRICK J. BONER (eds), *Celestial Novelties in the Eve of the Scientific Revolution (1540-1630)*, Olschki, Firenze 2013 (Biblioteca di Galilaeana, 3).

his argumentative strategy for destroying two fundamental doctrines of Peripatetic cosmology: the distinction between the sublunary and the superlunary world and the existence of hard celestial orbs, made of an incorruptible and unchanging element, namely the ether.⁵³

As Del Soldato remarks, from Rheticus and Kepler onwards, the idea that a reincarnated Aristotle would change his view of the heavenly world « became almost a matter of course » among the astronomers.⁵⁴ One might add that the ‘if Aristotle were alive’ motif circulated among them even before, as witnessed by the great German mathematician and astronomer Johannes Müller, better known as Regiomontanus. In 1464, he lectured on the Arabic astronomer al-Farghānī at the University of Padua, and in his inaugural oration, which offers a history of the arts of the *quadrivium* and related disciplines from antiquity to his own time, he emphasised the continuity of the mathematical tradition; he praised not only ancient authorities such as Euclid, Archimedes, Apollonius and Ptolemy, but also more recent mathematicians such as Jordanus Nemorarius, Jean de Murs, and his master and friend Peurbach; he stressed the practical utility of mathematics, which he considered necessary for the study of philosophy, Aristotle’s works included. According to Regiomontanus, the advancement of learning in mathematics – whose theorems are « as certain today as they were a thousand years ago » – has no equivalent in philosophy, as witnessed by the cultural situation of his age; while different sects, first of all the Thomists and the Scotists, contrast each other, « the prince of philosophers is completely abandoned, and he who is better than others in *sophismata* usurps his name, so that if Aristotle himself were revived, he would not, I believe, even understand his followers and disciples ».⁵⁵

Neither the polemics against the growing importance of *sophismata*-literature nor the appreciation for the Aristotelian corpus are surprising in a humanist such

⁵³ DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 127–137.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁵⁵ *Oratio ... habita Patavij in praelectione Alfragani*, in *Johannis Regiomontani Opera Collectanea*, ed. FELIX SCHMEIDLER, Zeller, Osnabrück 1972, p. 43–53: p. 50–51: « Pars Ioannem Scotum imitatur; alij sanctum Thomam; nonnulli autem ingenio promiscuo haec atque illac defluunt. Scotistas se pronunciant victos, ubi vero liberam dicendi sententiam locus datur ad Thomam revertuntur. Igitur quo plures philosophia duces habet, eo minus hac nostra tempestate addiscitur. Princeps interea philosophorum prorsus destituitur, nomenque suum is sibi usurpat, qui in sophismatibus plus caeteris valet, neque Aristoteles ipse si revivisceret discipulos suos atque sequaces satis intelligere crederetur. Quod de nostris disciplinis nemo nisi insanus praedicare ausit, quandoquidem neque aetas neque hominum mores sibi quicquam detrahare possunt. Theoremata Euclidis eandem hodie quam ante mille annos habent certitudinem. Inventa Archimedis post mille secula venturis hominibus non minorem inducent admirationem quam legentibus nobis iucunditatem ». On this oration see JAMES S. BYRNE, « A Humanist History of Mathematics? Regiomontanus’s Padua Oration in Context », *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67 (2006), p. 41–61 (I borrow from p. 59 the English translation of this remarkable passage).

as Regimontanus, linked to Bessarion's circle. Yet his picture of Paduan masters neglecting or distorting the Stagirite to the point that he would not be able to comprehend their jargon is striking, both in itself and as a document of the early reception of the *topos* of the *Aristoteles redivivus* at the university where Galileo would work one and a half centuries later⁵⁶. Still, Del Soldato rightly points out that the latter did not content himself with saying that, if Aristotle came back to life, he would accept new astronomical theories. It is, of course, significant that he made frequent recourse to this argument during his polemics on the sunspots in the 1610s, then in his *Dialogo sopra i massimi sistemi del mondo*, published in 1632, and later in his correspondence and in his personal notes. But the originality of his approach, as Del Soldato explains, depends first of all on the fact that, far from reducing it to a mere rhetorical tool, Galileo gave this argument a strong theoretical foundation: he indeed made reference to Aristotle's own claim, in the first book of his *De caelo* (I.3, 270b13-17), that the assumption that the heavenly world is eternal, not subject to increase or diminution and unalterable, is confirmed by « mere evidence of the senses », since « in the whole range of time past, so far as our inherited records reach, no change appears to have taken place in it ».⁵⁷ For this reason, Del Soldato emphasises, Galileo employed the 'if Aristotle were alive' motif only while discussing the problem of celestial immutability, at times significantly preferring the variant 'if Aristotle saw'.⁵⁸ After discovering

⁵⁶ The idea that Aristotle himself, « if he came back », would not be able to solve abstruse questions supposedly deriving from his texts can be found also in the satirical comedy *Le nubi*, written between 1603 and 1611 by Cesare Cremonini, an Aristotelian who notoriously was at the same time a personal friend and a philosophical opponent of Galileo: « CARINO: Vedi, povero me, ch'io mi credevo / Che 'l più di queste, tanto / Da te magnificate questioni, / Non fosse altro, ch'invogli, e' fosser nate / Dal non aver in fronte / Le materie vedute, non vedute, / O se forse vedute, non vedute, / Se non così à barlume, / E aver udito dire, / Che 'l testo d'Aristotele è la scure, / E chi l'intende bene tronca e recide / La molteplicità di queste ciancie. PROBO: Ciancie? che ciancie: Vi sono argomenti / Che mi dice il Maestro / Se venisse Aristotile non saprebbe / Disciorli ». The text is edited and studied by UGO MONTANARI, « L'opera letteraria di Cesare Cremonini », in *Cesare Cremonini (1550-1631). Il suo pensiero e il suo tempo*, Centro studi Girolamo Baruffaldi, Cento 1990, p. 125-247; p. 171-172.

⁵⁷ DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 9, 127-130, 134-135, 147.

⁵⁸ DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 134, calls attention to Galileo's use of the verb 'to see' in the *Dialogue* and related texts. I will examine below a treatise written in 1605 where this version of the argument is already used. No less interesting is a passage of the *Lettera [...] sopra l'opinione de' Pittagorici e del Copernico della mobilità della terra e stabilità del sole*, where Father Antonio Foscarini praises the superiority of the Moderns in these terms: « Lascerò qui per brevità i molti sogni d'Aristotele, e di altri Filosofi antichi, che si sono modernamente scoperti per quello che sono, e dirò solamente che se essi havessero visto, e osservato quello che han visto, e osservato i Moderni; e havessero le loro ragioni intese, senza dubbio havrebbero anco essi mutato parere, e creduto alla evidentissima verità di questi, onde non bisogna attribuire tanto a gli antichi, che tutto quello che essi affermarono si habbia come per pregiudicato a credere, e tenere per certissimo, quasi fusse rivelato, e disceso da cielo »: see ANTONIO FOSCARINI, *Lettera [...] sopra l'opinione de' Pittagorici e del Copernico della mobilità della terra e stabilità del sole*, Lazzaro Scoriggio, Napoli 1615, p. 7.

lunar peaks and valleys, Jupiter's 'planets', the innumerable stars of the Milky Way and later the sunspots through his telescopic observations, he was indeed in a position to claim that sensory experience provided indisputable evidence for the mutability of the heavens; that Aristotle denied it because he saw « no new thing », but « if he had seen any such events he would have reversed his opinion »; that the dogmatic supporters of his cosmological doctrines should not be considered as his genuine followers because, adhering blindly to every proposition written in his books, they forgot his scientific method, and notably his 'empirical' approach to natural philosophy. As Salviati says in the first day of the *Dialogue*:

I declare that we do have in our age new events and observations such that *if Aristotle were now alive, I have no doubt that he would change his opinion*. This is easily inferred [*si raccoglie*] from his own manner of philosophizing, for when he writes of considering the heavens inalterable etc., because no new thing is seen to be generated there or any old one dissolved, he seems implicitly to let us understand [*viene implicitamente a lasciarsi intendere*] that *if he had seen any such events he would have reversed his opinion*, and properly preferred the sensible experience to natural reason. Unless he had taken the senses into account, he would not have argued immutability from sensible mutations not being seen.⁵⁹

Things, however, were a little more complicated because one might wonder what 'seeing' means, and whether the current association of this term to visual perception through the eyes might be extended to what could be 'seen' only thanks to Galileo's *occhiale*. It is indeed well known that while a few Aristotelians –

⁵⁹ *Dialogo, giornata prima*, in *Le Opere di Galileo Galilei*, vol. VII, p. 75: « SALVIATI: Ma per dar soprabbondante soddisfazione al signor Simplicio e torlo, se è possibile, di errore, dico che noi aviamo nel nostro secolo accidenti ed osservazioni nuove e tali, ch'io non dubito punto che se Aristotile fusse all'età nostra, muterebbe opinione. Il che manifestamente si raccoglie dal suo stesso modo di filosofare: imperocchè mentre egli scrive di stimare i cieli inalterabili etc., perché nissuna cosa nuova si è veduta generarsi o dissolversi delle vecchie, viene implicitamente a lasciarsi intendere che quando egli avesse veduto uno di tali accidenti, averebbe stimato il contrario ed anteposto, come conviene, la sensata esperienza al natural discorso, perché quando e' non avesse voluto fare stima de' sensi, non avrebbe, almeno dal non si vedere sensatamente mutazione alcuna, argumentata l'immutabilità ». See also *Dialogo, giornata seconda*, *ibid.*, p. 136: « SALVIATI: [...] Avete voi forse dubbio che quando Aristotile vedesse le novità scoperte in cielo, e' non fusse per mutar opinione e per emendar i suoi libri e per accostarsi alle più sensate dottrine, discacciando da sè quei così poveretti di cervello che troppo pusillanamente s'inducono a voler sostenere ogni suo detto, senza intendere che quando Aristotile fusse tale quale essi se lo figurano, sarebbe un cervello indocile, una mente ostinata, un animo pieno di barbarie, un voler tirannico, che, reputando tutti gli altri come pecore stolide, volesse che i suoi decreti fossero anteposti a i sensi, alle esperienze, alla natura istessa? ». Both passages are examined by DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 131–132. As she does, I quote the English translation by STILLMAN DRAKE, *Dialogue concerning the two chief World Systems*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1953, p. 50.

Cremonini included, at least in a first phase⁶⁰ – even refused to look through the telescope, many of them wondered whether it reinforced vision and allowed to observe natural phenomena never seen before or whether it was instead *the cause* of these phenomena, producing optical illusions and dubious images.⁶¹ It is also well known that controversies on this point lasted for decades. Del Soldato calls attention to Galileo's reaction to Antonio Rocco's *Esercitazioni filosofiche*, a refutation of the *Dialogue* dedicated to pope Urban VIII and published in Venice in 1633.⁶² Though not answering publicly, Galileo covered his copy of Rocco's text with annotations which have been published by Favaro in his celebrated edition of Galileo's works. Del Soldato emphasises that, in one of these annotations, the great scientist assumes that « Aristotle, had he seen the celestial alterations, would have preferred to have him as a disciple than Rocco, since Galileo relied on 'sensate esperienze', and the self-proclaimed Aristotelian only on questionable conjectures ».⁶³ This is undoubtedly a significant development of what Salviati had said in the above-cited passage of the first day of the *Dialogue*, but as the wording of his note makes clear, Galileo here is simply replying to Rocco's account of the 'if Aristotle had seen' argument. Rocco indeed had been impressed by Salviati's claim,⁶⁴ and had declared that he was ready to accept it, but in a qualified version:

⁶⁰ New evidence on Cremonini's controversial attitude is provided in LUCA BIANCHI, « 'Hauendo lui publicato sette fogli di carta': Leandro Pizzoni e la reputazione scientifica di Galileo », *Rivista di storia della filosofia*, 71 (2016), p. 153–174; p. 164–171.

⁶¹ In this regard a letter by Ottavio Brenzoni (*Le Opere di Galileo Galilei*, vol. X, p. 309) is emblematic: « dicono che l'occhiale è caggione di quelle apparenze nella luna et di quelle stelle et pianeti non più veduti: prima, con qualche inaequalità del vetro; poi, che vedendosi alcun grosso vapore da vista affaticata per mezzo di lucido vetro, puo facilmente apparer corpo lucido ». On negative reactions toward Galileo's telescopic discoveries, see ISABELLE PANTIN's introduction to KEPLER, *Discussion avec le messenger celeste*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1993, p. xviii–xxvii; MASSIMO BUCCIANTINI, *Galileo e Keplero. Filosofia, cosmologia e teologia nell'Età della Controriforma*, Einaudi, Torino 2003, p. 181–189; BUCCIANTINI, CAMEROTA, GIUDICE, *Il telescopio di Galileo*, passim.

⁶² This work is published in *Le Opere di Galileo Galilei*, vol. VII, p. 569–750. On its genesis and significance see LUIGI GUERRINI, *Galileo e gli aristotelici. Storia di una disputa*, Carocci, Roma 2010 (Biblioteca di testi e studi, 542), p. 123–137.

⁶³ DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 133. Galileo's note reads as follow: « Ma da vero filosofo, e filosofo peripatetico, confessate, che se Aristotele vedesse queste e le altre mutazioni che si fanno in cielo, le quali ad esso furono ignote e inimaginabili, riceverebbe assai più volentieri me per suo scolare e seguace che voi, poiché io antepongo i suoi dogmi certissimi alle sue proposizioni opinabili, e voi per mantenere queste rifiutate quelli, cioè posponete le sensate esperienze alle opinabili conietture ». See *Le Opere di Galileo Galilei*, vol. VII, p. 714.

⁶⁴ Rocco, *Esercitazioni*, ibid., p. 617: « Di più dite, che abbiamo nel nostro secolo accidenti e osservazioni nove e tali, circa il cielo, che se Aristotele fusse all'età nostra, mutarebbe [sic] opinione: sia che il suo filosofare ha per base la cognizione sensitiva o sperimentale, la quale se ora gli si mostrasse l'opposito di quel che egli stimava, senza dubbio anch'ei l'opposito concluderia, cioè che i cieli fossero corruttibili etc. ».

a reborn Aristotle would surely « change his opinion », abandoning his doctrine of the ether, if Galileo gave an « infallible demonstration » that changes occurred *in the heaven*.⁶⁵ This, according to Rocco, was still lacking, because when looking at remote objects one's sight may err, measuring the distance of the heavenly bodies is difficult, not to say impossible, and the telescope is not unfailing.⁶⁶

In his personal notes, Galileo did not answer these objections. It goes without saying that – with all due respect to Paul K. Feyerabend – he had good reasons to consider his instrument fully reliable, especially as late as 1633 when his observations had been confirmed by numerous astronomers, natural philosophers, practitioners and amateurs.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, some Aristotelians continued to insist on the « illusions of the lenses [*de' cristalli*] » and argued that it is « foolish » to assume that it is shown « by the sense » what in fact seen through a telescope.⁶⁸ It is therefore noteworthy to recall that the 'if Aristotle had seen' argument had been used also *before* telescopic discoveries, with reference to

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 624: « Quanto a gli accidenti ed osservazioni che avemo nel nostro secolo circa il cielo, se voi realmente con dimostrazione infallibile proverete che siano successi nell'interno de' corpi celesti, non ha dubbio alcun che Aristotele mutarebbe [sic] opinione: già esso non intende ricercar altro che il vero, e quello specialmente che ha per fondamento la cognizione del senso; egli stesso in molti luoghi lo dice, come sapete benissimo. Anzi non solo bisognerebbe mutar opinione circa l'incorruttibilità de' corpi celesti, ma rivolger sossopra i primi principi delle cose naturali, e dire (all'opposito di quel che a piena bocca diciamo, cioè che operi la natura ordinatamente sempre nell'istessa maniera) che sia essa natura più variabile, più incostante, più cieca, più capricciosa della fortuna medesima: già fa corpi vastissimi celesti (dico delle nuove stelle), e poi di lì a poco tempo gli distrugge; il che non ha fatto mai per il passato. Voi però durerete fatica a dimostrarlo; dalle istanze lo conoscerete; già le dimostrazioni sono insolubili, né patiscono istanze ».

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 627: « E quanti errori commetta la nostra vista nel risguardar gli oggetti lontani per venir al nostro punto, ne siano testimoni mille continue esperienze. [...] E per venir al nostro punto, il vostro telescopio è quello che vi mostra queste novelle cose in cielo, queste macchie nel Sole; però voi per stabilir saldamente la vostra dottrina avrete da far tre cose: la prima, mandar per il mondo il vostro libro insieme col telescopio, acciò si abbi la medicina e la ricetta, perché molti non credono queste vostre visioni, il che vi apporta pregiudizio e discapito non mediocre [...]: la seconda, dovete provare che questo instrumento non possa errare, e suderete a farlo: la terza, che l'arte di misurar distanze in spazii immensi sia certa ed infallibile; e qui troverete non il difficile solo, ma l'impossibile istesso ». Rocco often insists on the limits of human knowledge of the superlunar world: see e.g. *ibid.*, p. 629, 696–697.

⁶⁷ As a matter of fact, as early as 1610 Galileo wrote that « l'occhiale è arciveridico, et i Pianeti Medicei sono pianeti, et saranno sempre, come gli altri »: *Le Opere di Galileo Galilei*, vol. X, p. 357.

⁶⁸ The formula is taken from Galileo's *Dialogue*, in *Le Opere di Galileo Galilei*, vol. VII, p. 380. Still in 1638, in another reply to the *Dialogue*, Giovanni Barenghi would write: « [...] perché i Fenomeni scoperti nouellamente in Cielo, non sono noti al senso, al meno ottimamente disposto, e dalla maggior parte degl'huomini non si sanno, e dalla migliore si negano, e quei vetri possono ingannare in tante maniere, che è stoltizia dire, che il senso mostra le cose vedute per loro [...] », *Considerazioni del Signor Giovanni Barenghi Sopra il Dialogo de dua massimi Sistemi Tolemaico, e Copernicano...*, Francesco delle Dote, Pisa 1638, p. 96.

naked-eye observations of the 1604 *nova*, which gave origin to controversies that were particularly lively at Padua and personally involved Galileo and his friends.⁶⁹

One of them is Ilario Altobelli, a Franciscan mathematician and astronomer who was among the first to observe the new star that appeared in the constellation of Ophiucus and is now generally known as Kepler's *nova*. On November 25, 1604, Altobelli wrote to Galileo attacking « these Peripatetics or, better to say, semi-philosophers » who obtusely repeated their rooted opinions, denied the celestial location of the new star and, in doing so, contradicted « manifest experience » whose « force » would be acknowledged by Aristotle himself:

But if these Peripatetics or, better to say, semi-philosophers, do not understand the irrefutable demonstration of the diversity of the aspect, in order to feel tangibly that it is located up there, in the starry sky, and therefore exceeds in size about three hundred times the earth and the sea, how could one overcome their pertinacity? Galen claims in the third book of his *Critical days* that refusing to experiment and refusing to believe those who experiment or the like, is unfair, and denying manifest experience is sophistic. After all, education is always too powerful, since we see that being fed on an assumed opinion causes such obstinacy that the shiny truth cannot remove it. I believe that *if the author himself were alive he would surrender to so great a force*. Anyway, the star itself, emulating Jupiter, and opposed to Mercury's temple, double in size as well as in nature, will destroy falsity and will give birth to the truth, and finally one will walk in the light and not in the dark.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ See at least MASSIMO BUCCIANTINI, « Galileo e la nova del 1604 », in MASSIMO BUCCIANTINI, MAURIZIO TORRINI (eds.), *La diffusione del copernicanesimo in Italia: 1543-1610*, Olschki, Firenze 1997 (Biblioteca di Nuncius, 21), p. 237-248; BUCCIANTINI, *Galileo e Keplero*, p. 123-138; MICHELE CAMEROTA, PATRIZIA RUFFO, « Le lezioni di Galileo sulla nuova stella del 1604 nel resoconto di Antonio Alberti (17 Dicembre 1604) », *Galilaeana*, 12 (2015), p. 193-201; MATTEO COSCI, « Le fonti di Galileo Galilei per le *Lezioni e studi sulla stella nuova del 1604* », *Archives Internationales d'Histoires des Sciences*, 68 (2018), p. 6-70.

⁷⁰ Letter to Galileo, November 25, 1604, in *Le Opere di Galileo Galilei*, vol. X, p. 118: « Ma se questi Peripatetici, o, per dir meglio, semifilosofi, non intendono la dimostrazione insuperabile della diversità dell'aspetto, per toccar con mano ch'ella risiede insin lasù [*sic*] nel ciel stellato, e che perciò eccede intorno a trecento volte di grandezza la terra e 'l mare, come si potrà convincere la pertinacia loro? E' cosa improba o simile, dice Galeno nel 3° *De Diebus decretoriis*, il non voler far esperienza et non voler credere a chi la fa, et che è cosa sofisticata [*sic*] il voler negar la manifesta esperienza. In fine, l'educatione è troppo potente in tutte le cose, poi che vediamo che l'esser nodrito in una imaginata opinione cagiona tal ostinatione, che la verità lucente non può rimuoverla. *Io credo certo, che se l'istesso Autor vivesse, si renderebe [*sic*] a tanta forza*. Ma, in ogni modo, l'istessa stella, emula di Giove, et opposta al tempio di Mercurio, doppio non men di figura che di natura, distruggerà [*sic*] il falso e parturirà il vero, e finalmente si caminerà [*sic*] per la luce e non per le tenebre »; the English translation is my own. On Altobelli see BUCCIANTINI, *Galileo e Keplero*, p. 123-124; ALESSANDRO GIOSTRA, FRANCESCO MERLETTI, WILLIAM M. SHEA, *Ilario Altobelli: scienziato, teologo, corrispondente di Galileo Galilei*, Empatiabooks, Camerano 2011; FLAVIA MARCACCI, « La rivoluzione scientifica di un francescano: Ilario Altobelli tra astronomia e astrologia »,

The opposition between what men are accustomed to believing and the « shiny truth » produced by « manifest experience » which will allow men to « walk in the light and not in the dark » is rhetorically effective: it is nonetheless remarkable that, in extolling sense experience, Altobelli did not invoke Aristotle, but another ancient authority, i.e. Galen. The idea that « Aristotle formed his arguments guided by the senses, as he himself confesses » was however introduced in the *nova* controversies in the first months of 1605, when a *Discorso sopra la Stella nuova* was published at Padua under the name of the otherwise unknown Astolfo Arnerio Marchiano, who according to some scholars could even be identified with Galileo himself, writing under a pseudonym. Whoever he might be, the author first recalls the views of the philosophers who, in the footsteps of Aristotle, maintain that the generation of new stars in the heaven is impossible and affirm that the new phenomenon observed is not a superlunary body; he then rebukes them because, in doing so, they forget the supernatural power of God, who can produce or annihilate new stars, as he can « create infinite other bodies unseen and unknown »; he adds that even when Aristotle described « the parts of the animals, which are after all the object of the senses [*che pure sono sensate*] » he affirmed « much foolishness [*molte pazzie*] ». And he eventually concludes:

What? Can one not say that Aristotle formed his arguments guided by the senses, as he himself confesses, so that, if such novelty had been seen in his time, or rather if *he happened to see it in our time, he would undoubtedly change his mind* so as to leave no room to arguments against sense experience that would contradict his rule? Since the thing is as clear and evident as mathematical sciences are true and certain, and the methods of measuring and determining the height of heavenly bodies, totally unknown to many modern philosophers, and badly understood and applied by others.⁷¹

Franciscan Studies, 72 (2015), p. 199–211. On his correspondence with Galileo concerning the new star, see also Cosci, « Le fonti di Galileo Galilei », p. 21–23.

⁷¹ *Discorso sopra la Stella nuova comparsa l'Ottobre prossimo passato, dell'eccellentissimo Atrologo et Medico, Astolfo Arnerio Marchiano, s.e.*, Padova 1605, f. A2v: « Ma che? Non si può dire che Aristotele ha formato le sue ragioni guidato dai sensi, come esso confessa; si che, se overo à tempi suoi fosse stata vista simil novità, ò pur'egli à nostri tempi si ritrovasse a vederla, senza fallo mutarebbe parere, per non dar loco contra la sua regola agli argomenti fatti contra il senso; posciache la cosa è tanto chiara, e tanto manifesta, quanto sono vere, et certe le scienze Matematiche, et le vie di pigliar le misure et l'altezze dei corpi celesti, a molti moderni Filosofi in tutto ignote, et da altri malamente intese et applicate? »; the English translation is my own. Already suggested by a few scholars, the hypothesis of Galileo's authorship of this text has been recently upheld by MATTEO COSCI, « Galileo alias Astolfo Arnerio Marchiano e la disputa padovana sulla Stella Nuova », *Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia Galileiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti in Padova, già dei Ricoverati, Memorie della Classe di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 131 (2018–2019), p. 35–83 (p. 58 on the above mentioned passage).

In her remarkable analysis of Galileo's « special treatment »⁷² of the 'if Aristotle were alive' motif, Del Soldato observes that « it would be reasonable to assume » that it was inspired by Rheticus and Kepler, but she prudently adds that Galileo was « an avid reader of a variety of texts » and therefore « it is impossible to attribute his appropriation of it to any one author ».⁷³ I totally agree that in this, as well as in other cases, it is difficult to identify Galileo's sources. Still, it seems to me significant that speculations about the reaction of a reborn Aristotle after seeing celestial novelties circulated among his correspondents and friends as early as 1604, when one could simply think of the Philosopher observing the heavens with unaided eyes, not looking through a telescope; and it is equally significant that at the beginning of 1605 one of Galileo's disciples – or maybe himself – wrote that, if Aristotle « happened to see » the new star, « he would undoubtedly change his mind ».⁷⁴

⁷² DEL SOLDATO, *Early Modern Aristotle*, p. 147.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁷⁴ Another early occurrence of the *topos* in the writings of Galileo's correspondents is in the treatise *Della penetrazione e incorruttibilità del cielo* by Giovanbattista Agucchi (1611): « Et di vero se Aristotele avesse o ricercate le prove de' matematici, o prestata fede a Democrito et Anassagora, che forse per le medesime prove non si erano dilungati dal vero, non avrebbe riposti tra le meteori [sic] le comete, e molto meno la via lattea; e sarebbe stato costretto di riconoscere qualche sorte di alteratione nel cielo. Et se parimente si fosse persuaso quel che noi per fede crediamo, cioè che'l cielo e'l mondo habbiano avuto principio e siino per haver qualche sorte di fine, sì come non si sarebbe potuta imaginare l'eternità dell'istesso mondo, così non avrebbe proposta, né stabilita la quinta essenza celeste. Onde, s'egli tornasse a vivere, si meraviglierebbe forse de' teologi, che sono forzati a credere le cose che la distruggono, e la pur vogliono sostenere ». I quote from the edition provided by MASSIMO BUCCIANTINI, « Teologia e nuova filosofia. Galileo, Federico Cesi, Giovambattista Agucchi e la discussione sulla fluidità e corruttibilità del cielo », in *Sciences et religions de Copernic à Galilée (1540-1610)*, École française de Rome, Roma 1999 (Collection de l'École française de Rome, 260), p. 411–442: p. 441.