

SOME COMMENTS TO CICERO, *DE NATURA DEORUM* II 37,
95-96: A FRAGMENT OF ARISTOTLE'S *ON PHILOSOPHY*

A reconstruction of a likely theme in Aristotle's *On Philosophy* with the help of its echo in Seneca, Dio Chrysostomus, Synesius and Psellus. Cicero's, *De Natura Deorum* II 37, 95-96, might well be considered an authentic fragment of the Aristotelian *On Philosophy*.

In *De Natura Deorum* II. 37. 95-96¹, which has been declared a fragment of the Aristotelian *On Philosophy*, Cicero states: «Great was the saying of Aristotle: 'Suppose there were men who always had lived

¹ Frag. 14, Rose₂; frag. 12, Rose₃; frag. 13, Walzer; frag. 13, Ross; frag. 18, Untersteiner. Similar notions can be found in Philo of Alexandria, *Legum Allegoriarum Libri Tres* III 32, 97-99 (frag. 13, Walzer; frag. 13, Ross; frag. 15, Untersteiner): «The earliest thinkers inquired how we came to recognize the divine. Later, the most highly esteemed philosophers said that it was from the universe and its parts and the powers inherent in these that we came to understand their cause. If one perceived a house carefully furnished with entrances, colonnades, men's quarters, women's quarters, and all the other buildings, he would gain some idea about the architect, since he would reflect that they could not have been completed without the art of a craftsman. And the same holds true as regards a city, a ship, or any structure small or large. And the same also holds true if one comes into this world as into a vast house or city, and sees the heavens revolving in a circle and containing all things within them, plants and fixed stars moving uniformly in an orderly and harmonious fashion for the good of the whole, the earth occupying the central region —and if one sees the streams of water and air in between, and the living things also, both mortal and immortal, and the variety of plants and crops— if one looks at all this one will surely reason that all these things could not have been framed without perfect skill, but that there both was and still is a framer of this universe, namely, God. Those, then, who reason in this fashion grasp God [and His existence] by way of His shadow, apprehending the craftsman through his craft.» See also Philo, *De Praemiis et Poenis* VII 41-43 (frag. 13, Ross; frag. 16, Untersteiner): «If some people, by way of their philosophic knowledge, were capable of gaining a conception of the author and governor of the universe, they proceeded, as the saying goes, from the inferior or lowly to the superior (or most high) as the popular saying goes. Indeed, when they enter this world as if they were entering a city governed by good laws,

underground, in well-constructed and well-lighted dwellings, decorated with statues and pictures, and furnished with everything in which those who are considered to be happy abound. Suppose, however, that they had never gone above ground, but had learned from reports and hearsay that there exists a divine authority and power. Suppose, then, that at some time the jaws of the earth opened and they were able to escape and make their way from these hidden dwellings into the regions which we inhabit. When they suddenly saw the earth, the sea and the sky -- when they learned about the grandeur of the clouds and the power of the winds; when they perceived the sun and learned about its grandeur and beauty and about its power displayed when it filled the sky with light and made the day; when, again, night darkened the lands and they saw the whole sky spangled and adorned with stars; when they perceived the varying lights of the moon now waxing now waning; and when they perceived the risings and settings of all these celestial bodies, their courses settled and unchanged throughout all eternity -- when they saw all those things, most certainly they would have come to the conclusion both that there are gods and that these great works are the handiworks of gods.' Thus far Aristotle¹.

and when they contemplate the earth so exquisitely girdled with its mountain ranges and far-flung plains, strewn with shrubs and trees and fruit-bearing plants and also animals of all sorts, beholding in different places the oceans and the lakes and the many quiet streams and rushing torrents as well as the gentleness of the air and of the winds and the orderly annual changes of the seasons, and above them all the sun and the moon, the planets and the fixed stars and the heavens in their orderly and disciplined array (a contained world in itself which girates within the universe) - when they behold all this they marvel greatly and are struck with awe, and they come to the conclusion which is fully consonant with these grandiose manifestations, namely, that such wondrous beauty and such a sublime order could not possibly be the result of a mere accident, but must be the deliberate handiwork of an artificer, the creator of this universe; and that of necessity there must be a providence. For it is a principle of nature that creative power cares about what he has created.' See further Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* III 34, 185-194 (frag. 13, Ross; frag. 15, Untersteiner). Essentially the same or, at least, similar notions are expressed in Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* IX 20-23 (*Adversus Physicos* I 20-23 --- frag. 12, Rose₂; frag. 10, Rose₃; frag. 12a, Walzer; frag. 12a, Ross; frag. 14, Untersteiner); *ibid.*, IX 26-27 (*Adversus Physicos* I 26-27 --- frag. 13, Rose₂; frag. 11, Rose₃; frag. 12b, Walzer; frag. 12b, Ross; frag. 26, Untersteiner).

¹ *Ibid.*, II 3, 96-97, Cicero adds his own remarks: 'Let us for our part imagine a darkness as complete as that which is said to have once covered the neighboring districts on the occasion of an eruption of the volcano Aetna, so that for two days no man could recognize his fellow man. When on the third day the

In brief, according to Cicero (and Philo of Alexandria) the thoughtful and sensitive observer of the beautiful and orderly universe, provided he possesses some philosophic inclination or talent and provided he properly uses his intellect, ultimately reaches the conclusion that this beautiful and orderly universe is the artifact of the most perfect artificer. That in his *On Philosophy* Aristotle discussed in some detail this mode of man's realization of God and of His existence may be assumed with a high degree of certainty. Seneca, *Quaestiones Naturales* VII. 30. 1¹, for instance, insists that «Aristotle spoke in a most excellent manner when he states that we should nowhere be more modest than in matters pertaining to the gods. If we compose ourselves before entering temples, and if we lower our head when we approach a sacrifice [to the gods] and pull up our toga — when in this fashion we display our general modesty and reverence — how much more should we do this when we discuss the orderly constellations, the stars and the nature of the gods. In this we should guard against saying anything rashly and imprudently, either not knowing it to be true or knowing it to be false»².

sun shone upon them, they felt as if they had come to life again. Suppose, then, that after darkness had prevailed from the beginning of time, it similarly happened to ourselves suddenly to behold the light of day, what should we think of the splendor of the heavens?... Who would not deny the name of human being to a man who, on seeing the regular motions of the heavens and the fixed order of the stars and precise interconnection and interrelation of all things, is capable of denying that these things possess any rational design, and should maintain that these phenomena, the wisdom of whose ordering transcends the reach of our wisdom to understand it, take place by mere chance?... When, therefore, we behold the whole compass of the heaven moving with revolutions of marvellous velocity and executing with perfect regularity the annual changes of the seasons with absolute safety and security for all things, how can we possibly doubt that all this is effected not merely by reason, but by a reason that is both perfect and divine?» This passage should make it amply clear that Cicero is in full accord with Aristotle's «cosmological proof» for the existence of God, and with Aristotle's theory as to how men came to realize the existence of God.

¹ Frag. 44, Rose₂; frag. 14, Rose₃; frag. 14, Walzer; frag. 14, Ross; frag. 19, Untersteiner. It will be noted that M. Untersteiner, *Della Filosofia*, Rome, 1963, pp. 26-29, and *ibid.*, pp. 186-187, considers Seneca, *Quaestiones Naturales* VII. 30. 3-30. 1, a fragment of Aristotle's *On Philosophy*.

² See here also Aristotle, *De Caelo* 291 b 21-28. «There are two difficulties which may very reasonably be raised here, and of which we must attempt to state the probable solution. For we regard the zeal of one of those who long after philosophy, as leading him to accept even slight indications where it is very difficult to see one's way, as a proof of modesty rather than as over-confidence. A similar notion is expressed *ibid.*, 288 a 2.

The statement of Seneca, it will be noted, stresses that we must exercise much restraint whenever we are discussing the divine. It is quite possible that he relates, or alludes to, something Aristotle had said in the *On Philosophy*, especially when he rejected the exaggerated claims of the mystics and mystagogues, that is, of those who claim to possess an adequate knowledge of God or the gods without any intellectual effort whatever. We might also assume that Seneca had here in mind the Aristotelian statement that «[o]ur forefathers in the most remote ages have handed down to their posterity a tradition, in the form of a myth, that these bodies [to wit, the stars] are gods and that the divine encloses the whole of nature. The rest of the tradition has been added later in mystical form with a view to the persuasion of the multitude and its legal and utilitarian expediency. They say that these gods are in the form of men or some of the other animals, and they assert other things consistent with, and similar to, those we have mentioned. But if one were to separate the first point from these additions and take it alone — that they thought the first substances to be gods, one must regard this an inspired utterance, and reflect that, while probably each art and each science had often been developed as far as this is possible and has again perished, these opinions, together with others, have been preserved until the present like relics of an ancient treasure. Only thus far, then, is the opinion of our ancestors and of our earliest predecessors clear to us»¹.

In his *Oratio XII (Olympicus or Concerning the First Notion about God)* 27 ff., Dio Chrysostomus (of Prusa) insists that the belief in a god who governs the universe is a common as well as innate certainty among all men. Such a certainty does not require a mortal teacher or a mystagogue. For how is it possible that mortal man, whenever he meditates about this most beautiful and most purposeful universe, should not realize the workings of a divine power? How could he possibly fail to wonder about the divine providence which has arranged everything for the survival of the human species? How could he fail to love and worship the divine? *Ibid.*, 33 ff., Dio illustrates his views by pointing out that this sublime experience, to wit, the vision of the beautiful and orderly universe, by thoughtful man is similar to an introduction to, or initiation into, the mysteries, that is, to the entering a mysterious temple of wondrous beauty — when he sees the mystical ceremonies and hears many voices and sees the changes of light and darkness, and when he observes the dances of the mysteries². How

¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1074 a 38-1074 b 14.

² See also Dio Chrysostomus, *Oratio XII* 28, and *ibid.*, 34.

could man, no matter how ignorant he might be otherwise, avoid being profoundly affected in his soul? How could he fail to realize that all this is the result of a wise resolve and governance? Such a realization does not require a detailed and rationalized explanation, provided man possesses a soul. How much more must this be the case when he enters not a small sanctuary erected by the Athenians¹, but rather the universe. When entering the universe he experiences the true initiation into the abiding truth in that he visualizes numberless wonders. All this will compel him to conclude that there exists and must exist a supreme governor who guides and commands all this.

According to Dio Chrysostomus, man can realize the existence of a supreme being or that of God (or the gods) without formal education and without the assistance of a human teacher. This realization is the direct result of an immediate and spontaneous experience. It would be safe to assume that Dio is here under the influence of Aristotle's *On Philosophy*, a thesis which finds some support in the fact that he refers not to the mysteries in general, but also to the Eleusian mystery rites in particular. Like Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* II. 37. 95-96, Dio maintains that the orderly behavior of the universe, no less than its wondrous beauty, simply compels the thoughtful and unprejudiced observer to admit the existence of a supreme or ultimate governor who directs all this. And finally, Dio's account of the mystery rites together with the initiation into the mysteries in a way resembles Cicero's report about the subterranean cave in which men live in a certain splendor, and about the overwhelming impressions these men experience when they see the wondrous universe for the first time. This experience in itself is akin to an initiation into the mysteries of the universe with the one important difference: the vision of the wondrous, beautiful and orderly universe teaches thoughtful man that there exists and must exist a perfect and divine artificer of this perfect and divine artifact, which is the perfect, orderly and divine universe. In brief, in the passage from Dio Chrysostomus, as in the fragments preserved by Synesius and Psellus², man realizes the existence of a supreme being or God (or gods) without formal education and without a human teacher. This realization is the direct result of an immediate and spontaneous experience. It would be fairly safe to assume that Dio is here under the influence of Aristotle's *On Philosophy*, a thesis which finds

¹ The reference is here to the temple in Eleusis and to the Eleusian mysteries.

² See *infra*.

some additional support in the fact that Dio refers not merely to the mysteries (Psellus).

The assumption that in his *On Philosophy* Aristotle discussed man's realization of the existence of God whenever he visualizes the beautiful and orderly universe, finds additional support in Synesius, *Dio of Prusa* 7 (ed. K. Treu)¹. Synesius, who displays distinct Neo-Platonic tendencies, refers here to some «barbarians»² who believe they could attain to an immediate or «inspired» perfect knowledge of God without any intellectual effort whatever. Such an approach to truth and knowledge, Synesius observes, is akin to emotional raving and ranting and, hence, sooner or later leads to total mental collapse. For no human being can forever remain in such a state of mental frenzy without collapsing. In *Dio of Prusa* 8, Synesius continues by contrasting the attitude of the «barbarians» (the «raving monks»)³ with the Greek ideal of the true intellectual *paideia* which does not encourage a «sudden» or «inspired» vision of God, but rather insists on a methodological, disciplined and scientific progression from the finite and imperfect to the infinite and perfect, thus ultimately arriving at the all-highest. This is exactly what distinguishes the true philosopher from the raving barbarian⁴. Synesius states this in the following manner: «Those who are being initiated into the mysteries are expected not to learn anything, but to suffer some change, to wit, to be put into a certain (mental) condition, in other words, to be fitted for some purpose»⁵. This pas-

¹ See K. Treu, *Synesios von Kyrene, Dion Chrysostomos, oder: Vom Leben nach seinem Vorbild*, Berlin, 1959.

² Synesius may refer here to some of the «wild» or fanatic Egyptian (Christian) monks who in their fanaticism and anti-intellectualism were totally opposed to any scientific philosophy or disciplined reasoning. This attitude they expressed, among other shocking deeds, in the wanton murder of Hypathia, a very learned woman philosopher (Neo-Platonist) in 415 A. D. in Alexandria.

³ See preceding note.

⁴ This is a reference, also used by Aristotle, at least by implication, to the distinction between $\pi\alpha\theta\epsilon\iota\nu$ and $\mu\alpha\theta\epsilon\iota\nu$. The raving or ecstatic barbarian is an example of the $\pi\alpha\theta\epsilon\iota\nu$ in that he receives, or believes that he had received, some mystical revelation, while the true Greek philosopher arrives at a notion of truth exclusively through rational procedures ($\mu\alpha\theta\epsilon\iota\nu$). See A.-H. Chiroust, «Mystical Revelation» and «Rational Theology» in Aristotle's *On Philosophy*, *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, vol. 34, no. 3, 1972, pp. 500-512.

⁵ See Synesius, *op. cit.*, 8 (frag. 45, Rose₂; frag. 15, Rose₃; frag. 15, Walzer; frag. 15, Ross; frag. 20, Untersteiner). See also Aristotle, *De Anima* 414 a 11 ff., where we are told that «the soul must be something that rationalizes and formulates on the basis of reason, not just a simple matter or subject.» It will be noted that M. Untersteiner, *op. cit. supra*, pp. 28-29, and *ibid.*, pp. 189-195,

sage should make it sufficiently clear that the raving or ecstatic man, whenever he is in a state of complete receptivity, perceives certain truth without intellectual effort or rational procedure. This method of perceiving the truth, however, is essentially irrational, or better, «meta-rational» — a process in which the passive perceiver actually receives something, namely, an alleged truth, rather than work for this truth intellectually. It is quite possible that in his *On Philosophy*, in some form or other, Aristotle rejected the notion that any true knowledge, including a knowledge of God, can successfully be attained through, or based upon, «ecstatic raving» or plain «inspiration».

Similar notions can be found in Michael Psellus, *Scholion ad Johannem Climacum* (*Catalogue des Manuscrits Alchimistes Grecs*, ed. J.

also adds the preceding account of Synesius to the list of authentic fragments of the *On Philosophy*: «Those, however, who have chosen the other road [to wit, the road of direct inspiration]..., at least in my opinion, have actually chosen no road at all. For how could this be possible, the more so, since in this case [the road of direct inspiration] there is no step-by-step gradual ascension, that is, no first step, no second step and accordingly no progression at all. Their mode of deportment is similar to that of a bacchian exaltation, to a leap... In this fashion they arrive at the ultimate goal without walking. When they reach the meta-rational domain, they do so without having made use of reason...» Similar notions can be found in Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* (*Moralia* 382 D-E): «... the robes of Isis are varied in their colors, for her power is concerned with matter which becomes everything and receives everything... But the robe of Osiris has no shading or variety in its colors, but has only one single color like the light. For the beginning is combined with nothing else, and that which is primary and purely conceptual is without admixture. Therefore, when they have once taken off the robe of Osiris, they lay it away and guard it, unseen and untouched. But the robes of Isis they use many times over. For when used those things which are perceptible and ready at hand afford many disclosures of themselves and many opportunities to view them as they are changed in various ways. But the apprehension of the conceptual, the pure and the simple, shining through the soul like a flash of lightening, affords an opportunity to touch and see it but once. For this reason Plato and Aristotélis call this part of philosophy the most mysterious or mystic part: a sort of mystic vision, in as much as those who have passed beyond these conjectural and confused matters of all sorts by means of reason proceed by leaps and bounds to that primary, simple and immaterial object; and, gaining true contact with pure truth about it, think that, as though by initiation into the mysteries, they have attained the end of philosophy.» W. D. Ross includes this passage, beginning with «But the apprehension,» among the fragments of Aristotle's (lost) *Eudemus* (frag. 10). See also O. Gigon, «Prolegomena to an Edition of the Eudemus», *Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century* Göteborg, 1960, p. 28, A. Grilli, «Cicerone e l'Eudemo», *La Parola del Passato*, vol. 17, 1962, pp. 102 ff. It is quite likely, however, that this passage is a fragment of the *On Philosophy*. It is also possible that Plutarch is here under the influence of Plato, *Symposium* 209 E ff., and Plato, *Phaedrus* 249 C, and *ibid.*, 250 B ff.

Bidez, 1928) 6. 171, a passage which has been regarded as a fragment of the *On Philosophy*¹: «I undertook to teach you what I myself have learned, not what I have personally experienced.... [Every form of literature, that which has been inspired by God as well as that which is concerned with profane matters, becomes manifest in two different ways.] One is a matter for teaching, the other a matter for mystical experience in the form of a spiritual initiation. The first one comes to men when they hear the living word, the second when the soul itself has experienced illumination. The latter, that is, the emotional experience, Aristotle has described as mysterious and akin to the Eleusian rites. For in these he who has been initiated into the mysteries has been molded rather than taught...»² In brief, Psellus confronts here the

¹ Frag. 15, Walzer; frag. 15, Ross; frag. 20, Untersteiner. For Michael (Constantine) Psellus, see K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der Byzantinischen Literatur*, 2nd edit., Munich, 1897, pp. 433-434.

² Psellus, *loc. cit.*, continues by illustrating this theory of a dual way of acquiring knowledge as follows: «He who by virtue of the self-moving power of the soul concludes that the soul is immortal, proceeds along the road of teaching, not that of spontaneous initiation. But he who arrives at this truth through the immediate vision of the spirit visualizes the soul in its true essence, if he, even without contemplation, concludes directly and without intermediary rationalization but by proceeding by the direct road, that the soul is immortal. Such a man manifests an 'impression' and is an initiate.» It will be noted that neither Ross nor Walzer include this passage in their collection of fragments of Aristotle's *On Philosophy*, while M. Untersteiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31, and *ibid.*, pp. 195-197, cites this passage as an authentic fragment. R. Bignone, *L'Aristotele Perduto e la Formazione Filosofica di Epicuro*, vol. I, Florence, 1936, pp. 255 ff., and J. Croissant, *Aristote et les Mystères*, Paris-Liège, 1932, p. 171 ff., believe that this passage ultimately goes back to Aristotle. Bignone's and Croissant's views, however, are questionable. Closer analysis seems to indicate that Psellus refers here to Plato's proof for the immortality of the soul as it can be found in *Phaedrus* 245 C-245 E: «The soul through all its being is immortal. For that which is forever in motion is immortal. But that which moves another or is moved by another, in ceasing to move also ceases to live. Only the self-moving, never-leaving self, never ceases to move, and is the source and beginning of motion for all that moves. Now, the beginning is unbegotten, for that which is begotten has a beginning. But the beginning is begotten of nothing. For if it were begotten of something, then the begotten would not come from a beginning. But if unbegotten, it must also be indestructible. For if beginning were destroyed, there could be no beginning out of anything, nor anything out of a beginning. And all things must have a beginning. Therefore the self-moving is the beginning of motion. And this can neither be destroyed nor can it be begotten, otherwise the whole heaven and all creation would collapse and stand still, and never again have motion or birth. But if the self-moving is shown to be immortal, he who maintains that self-motion is the very notion and essence of the soul will not be the victim of confusion.

process of progressive learning and sudden inspiration. This «confrontation» of progressive learning and personal as well as sudden inspiration or illumination might well have been discussed in Aristotle's *On Philosophy*, although certainly not in the particular manner reported by Psellus who adds some of his own views.

In conclusion, it may be maintained that Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* II 37, 95-96, despite some possible modifications, alterations and expansions, can safely be called a fragment of Aristotle's *On Philosophy*. The same might be said about Seneca, *Quaestiones Naturales* VII 30, 1, Dio Chrysostomus, *Oratio XII* 27 ff., Synesius, *Dio of Prusa* 7, and Michael Psellus, *Scholion ad Johannem Climacum* 6, 171. They, too, contain some remote references to Aristotle's *On Philosophy*. In this sense, and with certain qualifications, they too may be referred to as fragments of the Aristotelian *On Philosophy*.

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For the body which is moved from without is soul-less. But that which is moved from within has a soul, for such is the nature of the soul. But if this should be true, must not the soul be the self-moving force and, hence, of necessity be unbegotten and immortal?»