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Title

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Abstract

Jacopo Mazzoni was an Italian philosopher, humanist, and astronomer. He held the chair of philosophy in Macerata, Pisa, Rome, Ferrara, and Venice. He is mostly remembered for his defence of Dante Alighieri (*Difesa della Commedia di Dante*, Bologna, 1572), which was the occasion to expound his reflection on poetics and aesthetics. Mainly inspired by Aristotle and Plato, his philosophy is motivated by a conciliatory project. He also authored a comparative study on the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, defending Aristotelian geocentrism (*In universam Platonis et Aristotelis philosophiam preludia*, Venice, 1597). Upon the publication of this work, he exchanged letters with Galileo Galilei, whom he had met during his appointment in Pisa. Galileo's letter to Mazzoni of May 30, 1597 represents the earliest attestation of Galileo's engagement with Copernicanism.

Biography

Mazzoni was born on November 17, 1548, in Cesena, from Battista, senator, and Innocenza Masini. He carried his studies in Padua (1563) with the Aristotelian philosopher Federico Pendasio. Having come back to Cesena after the death of his father to take care of the interests of the family (1637), he frequented the Accademia dei Riformati. In 1672, he published in Cesena his first work, *Discorso de' dittonghi*, responding to a polemic on the pronounce of ancient diphthong. In the same year, he published, under pseudonym, and the year after, under his own name, the *Discorso in difesa della Comedia del divino poeta Dante*. This work was a response to a criticism of Dante Alighieri's *Comedy* (*Discorso di M. Ridolfo Castravilla nel quale si mostra l'imperfettione della "Commedia" di Dante contro al "Dialogo delle lingue" del Varchi*), written by a Ridolfo Castravilla, probably the pseudonym of a yet unidentified author, whose manuscript was handed to Mazzoni by Tranquillo Venturelli, to be then published only in 1608. In 1574, Mazzoni was invited at Urbino by Bourbon Del Monte, where he met Torquato Tasso, who then mentioned the conversation he had with Mazzoni in his *Apologia in difesa della sua Gierusalemme liberata* (Ferrara, 1585). Come back to Cesena in 1574, Mazzoni started to give substance to his all-encompassing and conciliatory philosophical program with the publication of *De triplici hominum vita, activa nempè, contemplativa, et religiosa methodi tres, quaestionibus quinque millibus, centum et nonagintaseptem distinctae. In quibus omnes Platonis, et Aristotelis, multae vero aliorum Graecorum, Arabum et Latinorum in universo scientiarum orbe discordiae componuntur* (Cesena, 1576), where he addressed 5197 philosophical questions. For the discussion of the theses, which took place in Bologna in 1577, Mazzoni had to take a degree in theology (1577). In the following years, Mazzoni engaged in a project of commentary of Plato's *Republic* and became member of Congregazione dell'Indice. As his previous *Dialogo* in defense of Dante was triggering a debate, especially with the writings of Alessandro Cariero and Bellisario Bulgarini, Mazzoni composed, starting from 1583, a defense of Dante (*Della difesa della Comedia di Dante. Distinta in sette libri. Nella quale si risponde alle opposizioni fatte al Discorso di m. Iacopo M., e si tratta pienamente dell'arte poetica e di molt'altre cose pertinenti alla philosophia, et alle belle lettere*), which also witness his more general engagement with poetics and aesthetic theory. Mazzoni managed to

publish only three of the seven volumes he had planned in 1587 in Cesena. He then taught philosophy in Macerata (1587), and then Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy in Pisa (1588-97), where he was invited by the grand duke Ferdinando de' Medici. His studies on Aristotle and Plato brought to the publication of *In universam Platonis et Aristotelis philosophiam praeludia, sive de comparatione Platonis, et Aristotelis liber primus* (Venezia, 1597). This work triggered the interest of a young Galileo, student then professor in Pisa, who wrote him a letter (May 30 1597) in defense of the Copernican system. Appointed professor in Rome at *La Sapienza* by Clement VIII, he was then appointed by the Pope as ambassador in the attempt, carried on by the Papal States, to reconquer Ferrara and gaining the neutrality of the Venice Republic in the conflict. He was then appointed reformer of the University of Ferrara. Stroke by a disease, Mazzoni died in Cesena on April 10 1598.

Heritage and rupture with the tradition

Though containing elements of originality, Mazzoni's thought was well grounded in the themes and controversies of his time. His *De triplici hominum* reveals his engagement with a conciliatory vision of the philosophical endeavor, which finds reference in thinkers such as Pico della Mirandola and Nicolas of Cusa. It is innovative his approach to the comparison of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle in *In universam Platonis et Aristotelis philosophiam praeludia*, where, on philological bases, Mazzoni argued for a Platonic phase in the development of Aristotle's philosophy, and theorized the application of mathematical tools to the study of physics—which arguably triggered the interest of Galileo.

Innovative and original aspects

Particularly originals are also his works on Dante's poetic. In the *Dialogo*, Mazzoni defended poetry as a topic for philosophical discussion. He also endeavored to show, against Castravilla, that Dante's *Commedia* could be framed within the prescriptions of Aristotle's aesthetics. On this basis, he described Dante as a comic poet, and not, contra Castravilla, as a satyrist. In the *Della difesa della Comedia di Dante*, in addition of defending Dante, Mazzoni developed his own view on aesthetics and poetics, drawing not only from Plato and Aristotle, but also from ancient rhetoric. He claimed that arts distinguished in three kinds, according to the objects they refer to: "ideas", proper of "commanding arts"; "works", characterizing craft, and "idols", proper of "imitating arts". Mazzoni individuated the subject of arts not in the truth, but in what is "believable", thus arguing that poetry, insofar as it fabricates its own subject shall be understood as part of sophistic, whereas, if it judges its subject without inventing it, it is poetry properly said, and, as such, part of the "commanding arts". On these bases, he argued that Aristotle's *Poetics* is to be understood as the last book of his *Politics*.

Impact and legacy

The interest of the young Galileo for Mazzoni's approach to the mathematization of physics (along with his disagreement with geocentrism) has been already mentioned. *In universam Platonis et Aristotelis philosophiam praeludia* shall probably be accounted as an important source for the formation of Galileo's later thoughts. But it is surely Mazzoni's poetics and aesthetics, as well as his interpretation and defense of Dante's work, that exerted a lasting influence, as evidenced by the number of editions and reprints of his *Dialogo* and *Della difesa della Comedia di Dante* up to the nineteenth century.

Cross-References

Galileo Galilei; Cariero; Bulgarini; Federico Pendasio; Ridolfo Castravilla; Torquato Tasso;

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