

# Bryn Mawr Classical Review

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**Jörn Henrich (trans.), *Die Metaphysik Theophrasts*. München-Leipzig: K.G. Saur, 2000. Pp. 352. ISBN 3-598-77688-8. DM 138.00.**

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*Die Metaphysik Theophrasts* is the first German translation of the short (fragmentary?) work by Aristotle's pupil, Theophrastus. It is a strange destiny for the scholars of classical German philology: the main edition of the original--*Metaphysica*, herausgegeben von Hermann Usener, Bonn 1890--is due to their care, but only now they arrive at a translation in modern language, after W.D. Ross and F.H. Fobes (Oxford 1929, in English); J. Tricot (Paris 1948, in French); G. Reale (Brescia 1964, in Italian); A. Laks and G.W. Most (Paris 1993, in French); M. van Raalte (Leiden-New York-Köln, 1993, in English); S. Romani (Milan, 1994, in Italian).

Certainly H. uses the previous works with intelligence, particularly, Laks-Most and Van Raalte's critical enquiry and commentaries, but his purpose is to be exhaustive in every point of view: philological, historical-philosophical, theoretical-interpretative. The introduction (I) which defines the *status quaestionis* of research on this work of Theophrastus, about the fixing of the text, about its character and structure, it is followed by (II) the German translation with a critically revised Greek text (III) grammatical-syntactical comment to every single chapter, a (IV) precise philosophical commentary that seeks to define both the method and the theory of Theophrastus' knowledge (pp. 164-223), and also his Weltanschauung (pp. 223-287). Then we find (V) an appendix concerning fragments and testimonies of ancient authors that are extrapolated from the text of *Metaphysics*. Finally there is a bibliography and an analytical index of Greek terms.

But, what is Theophrastus' *Metaphysics* and what is it concerned with? There are 19 pages that can be divided into 9 short chapters, and so we could think they are a fragment of a larger work (πραγμάτεια): this would explain also the τῶν of the title: Θεοφράστου τῶν μετὰ τὰ φυσικά, which must be interpreted as "part extracted from Theophrastus' books about Metaphysics". Something unfinished? Ross-Fobes explained it as a "complete essay preliminary to a fuller metaphysical work". In van Raalte's opinion it is a complete work. Laks-Most are inclined to consider it as a "preliminary fragment". Sharples (*Theophrastus of Eresus, Sources of his Life, Writings, Thought and Influence*, Leiden 1998) does not agree with those who define it a "fragment". Agreeing with Burnikel (1974), H. rather considers it a "lesson", Vorlesung, similar to what Aristotle's lessons had probably been. The great closeness to book Lambda of Aristotle--who is never mentioned, nevertheless--should be proved by the closeness to Lambda's book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and by the fact that the composition of *De motu animalium* seems

to be presupposed. Yet the problem is not solved and, with regards to van Raalte and especially to Laks-Most, H. does not bring new information: he rather gives a careful account of what we already know or suppose. Even with reference to work's paternity, H. just carefully reviews (pp. 13-14) the information we have and declares Laks-Most's argumentation convincing. Hence, the pamphlet is attributed to Theophrastus by Nikolaus from Damascus (acting round 64 b. C.).

In this "preliminary little treatise", Theophrastus proposes to study nature and the principles on the grounds of which it can be studied. Is it plausible to suspect a connection (συναφή, (chap. 1) between the objects of intellect (νοητά) and the objects of sense (τά τῆς φύσεως) then what kind of things are the first principles that assure such a connection? Mathematical objects? Perhaps number (ὁ ἀριθμός)? What are the characteristics of a previous and undoubtedly more powerful "being" (Wessen = οὐσία)? First of all, it must be the cause of movement and multiplicity (SS 5a 6). (Chap. II-III). Now, the problem is how to explain the concept of ἔφεσις (Begehrens, desire, tendency). What is its nature? Where is the goal of movement? If it is a single principle, the diversity of movement is left unaccounted for; if there is a plurality of principles, the reality of an all-pervading tendency to the best is not evident (5a 17-20). Another question regards the system of spheres that constitutes the universe, their plurality and again, number: why should the theory of numbers and One go together with the theory of imitation? A good answer consists in referring to the soul and its prerogatives. Well, if the soul is presupposed, must the origin of movement (tendency/desire towards things) and of identity be referred to that soul?

(Chap. IV) The decisive problem is understanding the plurality of differences and opposites. (Chap. V) Another problem is the matter of "rest" (ἠρεμία) that might be ascribed to the first principle. Rest might be replaced by activity (ἐνέργεια). The axiom that there must be a first mover which is not in movement itself seems to be questionable: observation confirms that movers and moved may coincide. (Chap. VI) Next problem: should matter be conceived as potential being or rather as indeterminate being? (Chap. VII) And one more: what is the rule of opposites? (Chap. VIII) The process of acquiring knowledge testifies to the importance of differences in being. The task of a science is to distinguish what is the same in a plurality of things. There are several kinds of sameness through which we may know something. Analogical sameness is most fertile since it produces knowledge of what is beyond immediate acquaintance. (Chap. IX) We must determine how far one should go in maintaining that an entity is such and such for some reason. Is nothing in vain? If this is not clearly explained, then the hypothesis of a mechanistic explanation (τῷ ἀντοματῷ) becomes acceptable. From here arises the matter of responsibility and irresponsibility. Even in the case of God's rule, the situation has interesting developments: God is considered to be capable of loading everything towards what is the best (11b 8-9). But, which entities show the highest degree of order? Among the objects of sense, the heavenly bodies; among the non-sensible objects the mathematical. However the problem remains still open. It is necessary first to determine the constituent parts of reality and the relations between them.

It is plain that this is a "little treatise" full of open matters, of working hypotheses. Probably we can speak of λόγος ἀπορητικός. Rightly H. starts from focalizing the theoretical and philosophical unity of the pamphlet itself, not only connecting it with that philosophical tradition (i.e. with Aristotle). The precise grammatical and syntactical research and the careful reconsideration of philosophical key concepts allow H. to arrive at the best hermeneutical set up of Greek text. Each crucial passage is carefully

illuminated just because every reader is able not only to have the basic material H. started from at hand, but also because he can commit himself to a broad interpretation of the work on historical-philosophical and, most of all, theoretical level. This is the major result that allows H.'s work to add to the recent editions by Laks-Most and van Raalte. Especially in 'Stellenkommentar'(pp. 78-159) the different interpretations are confronted so that H.'s choices appear the strongly justified, for instance, 6a 7-10, where the scholar explores Theophrastus's obscure argumentation even exploiting combinatorial analysis. The final result fully justifies the German translation suggested by H. Also the philosophic commentary presents really precise and stimulating pages. H. follows the classical interpretative principles in 'History of Philosophy': what's in the text? (*causa formalis*); what influenced the development of Theophrastus's thought? (*causa efficiens*); what does the author propose to himself? what does he wish to convey? (*causa finalis*). H. pays attention particularly to the first two principles and in so doing propounds a theory of knowledge, science and method in Theophrastus. The section on the theory of perception, linked with the techniques of knowledge, is extremely convincing; there H. explicitly underlines how Theophrastus diverges from Aristotle while avoiding the conclusions of the Epicureans.

The ameliorations of the Greek text are more limited. H.'s text can be considered a kind of critically revised edition. He keeps as basic reference Usener's text (1890). The apparatus criticus is that of Laks-Most adapted to Usener's text; the variants by Usener himself, Ross-Fobes, Laks-Most and, for the first time, by van Raalte are collected here. Because of copyright, important Latin translations by Bartholomaeus from Messina (1255-1266) and by Gregorius Tiphernas (1447-1455) are not quoted and so they have been used in an indirect way. In fact, the text can't be considered Usener's, because H. continually distances himself from it, following Laks-Most or van Raalte without an explicit philological principle. So, the Greek reference text would rather seem to have been Laks-Most's one, save the punctuation. H.'s interventions are performed by relying sometimes on Usener, other times on van Raalte, or on manuscripts or on variants by different scholars. Indeed the apparatus is a compilation from Laks-Most, van Raalte, and Ross-Fobes. The Arabian translation by Isháúq ibn Hunain is considered also, which came before 910 (and so is the most ancient witness of the work), not Bartholomaeus's and Tiphernas's one.

However this apparatus is not always correctly adapted to the adopted text. Some conspicuous examples: 5b 10-26: 17 lines cancelled by Usener; are confidently kept. 6b 19: the apparatus is Laks-Most's one, but it should have been organized according to the edited text. In fact H. does not adopt *ἐκείνοις* as conveyed by manuscripts, but Camotius' conjecture *ἐκείναις*. 7a 14: in the text there is Bernay's conjecture, *σάρον*, but according to the apparatus there should be Laks-Most's *σωρών*. Usener had *σώρος*!!! 7b 21: *ποιεῖν* is introduced with reference to Laks-Most's edition; Usener had *ποιούν*. 9a 1: *ἔνια ὧν μὲν* is by Laks-Most; Usener's text is not cited. 9b 15: here is adopted, according to Laks-Most, Brandis' conjecture: *θιγόντι*, but it is not possible to know what Usener had in his text. 10b 4: the apparatus is by Laks-Most and offers the conjecture proposed by Bignone, Laks-Most, van Raalte: *ἦ*; but H. adopts *ἦ* of manuscripts rejected by Usener. 10b 19: first Usener's *του* is proposed, but *τούτων* is adopted, the text of manuscripts and van Raalte. 11a 19: *πλήθει* is what Laks-Most write. Usener had *πλήθος εἰ*. 11b 1: the reading *ἐπεὶ μμείσθαι* by Allan and Laks-Most is adopted; two conjectural proposals by Usener are cited in the apparatus but they are refused without any comment.

Let's come to the translation: probably that is the main target of H. In crucial points, H. is

closer to Laks-Most's interpretation than to van Raalte's one. The trick is to render the new Aristotelian vocabulary resumed by Theophrastus: new words (e.g. ἡ ἐνέργεια), new combinations (e.g. τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, the essence), substantives derived from adjectives (e.g. τὸ νοητόν), from adverbs (e.g. τὰ καθόλου), from participles (e.g. τὸ ὄν), and new interpretations (e.g. ἡ ὕλη). H. declares that his translation looks for compromise: but it seems to be more suitable for a reader of IV century B.C. than for a contemporary. Among others: ἡ ἄτομος is not translated with the usual 'das Atom' but with 'das Unteilbare'; ἡ ἀρχή not with 'das Prinzip', but with 'der Anfang'; τὰ καθόλου not with 'die Universalien', but with 'die Allgemeinen'; for τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι instead of the usual 'das Sosein' or 'die Wesenheit' we find an Heideggerian 'das was-war-Sein'.

For many of these translations we can find a reason even if it means dismissing an age-old custom that, for example, uses 'die Universalien' or 'die Analogie', not 'die Allgemeinen' or 'die Verhältnigleichheit'. But why do we have to translate ἡ σφαῖρα with 'die Kugel' instead of 'die Sphäre', or ὁμόνυμος with 'gleichnamig' instead of 'homonym'? It is good to exploit as much as possible the tracing the Greek but a particular case disconcerts: ἡ ὕλη is not translated with 'die Materie' but with 'das Holz'; and, for ὑλικός we find 'hölzern', not 'materiell'. It is not credible that today's reader can easily understand the Greek metaphor hidden behind 'das Holz' (the wood). Therefore the translation of 8a 9 (and then of 11a 21) is inadequate where certainly the subject is ὕλη καὶ μορφή, i.e. "matter and shape / 'Materie und Form' ", not "wood and shape / 'Holz und Form' ". And in fact, in the philosophical comment about this passage on p. 281-83, H. uses 'Materie', not 'Holz'; moreover on p. 211 he entitles a paragraph "materielle ἀρχαί" on p. 283 and he entitles another paragraph "materielle Prinzipien". Still, H. skilfully exploits the possibility of German language of pointing out substantives with a capital letter, so avoiding integrating adjectives or adverbs with 'Ding' or with 'Entität' if we have something to do with forms of conceptualization.

Finally, we have a certainly reliable Greek text that avails itself intelligently of preceding editorial works. We also have a brilliant but sometimes cryptic translation; with an exhaustive and efficacious linguistic commentary; with a punctual and analytic philosophical commentary, which rightly aims at reconstructing the historical-cultural tissue of the time and Theophrastus's conception in relation to Aristotle's, but which still can't propose us a reading of Theophrastus's *Metaphysica* that is in a some way definitive.

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