

LA DOTTRINA DELL'ANALOGIA DELL'ESSERE  
NELLA «METAFISICA» DI ARISTOTELE  
E I SUOI SVILUPPI NEL PENSIERO  
TARDO-ANTICO E MEDIEVALE

a cura di  
RITA SALIS

IL  L I G R A F O

## INTRODUCTION

### THE DOCTRINE OF THE ANALOGY OF BEING AND ITS ARISTOTELIAN ROOTS

*Rita Salis*

Among the many topics relating to the history of metaphysics, the analogy of being still retains its centrality. It is even the object of a strong, renewed academic interest. This volume discusses Aristotle's texts and the tradition of thinking that developed from his works, and subsequently led to Aristotle being attributed the theory of the analogy of being. Much has been written about the analogy of being. Although Aristotle did not theorize this doctrine, the initial reason why it was attributed to him can be found in chapter 2 of Book  $\Gamma$  of his *Metaphysics*, in which (as we all know) he expounded his theory of the many meanings of being.

In an important contribution on the birth of the doctrine of the analogy of being, Pierre Aubenque made the point that the ancient commentators brought about a series of transformations in Aristotelianism. From Porphyry onwards, Aristotle's commentators pointed out what they saw as a profound harmony between Plato and Aristotle, and the outcome of their efforts was a Platonization or re-Platonization of Aristotle that is difficult to dissociate from the authentic thought of the Stagirite<sup>1</sup>.

1. Cf. P. Aubenque, *Sur la naissance de la doctrine pseudo-aristotelicienne de l'analogie de l'être*, « Les Études philosophiques », 3-4 (1989), 291-304: 291.

Various authoritative modern interpreters have explicitly attributed the doctrine of the analogy of being to Aristotle<sup>2</sup>, but the centrality of this doctrine in the history of metaphysics is not really due to Aristotle, but rather to mediaeval thought, and to Thomas Aquinas in particular. According to Aubenque, the form of analogy that would remain the most faithful to the meaning of the Greek term would be the one contained in *De Ente et Essentia* (where the term ‘analogy’ is never actually used), in which Aquinas claims that God is pure being, and that creatures do not naturally possess being, but have being in the sense that they receive being from God. They do not randomly receive being, however. Every creature receives being in virtue of its essence. In Plato’s terms, we could say that the more the essence of the creature is perfect, the greater its participation in being. So the analogy of being would indicate the proportional distribution of being (*esse*) between beings (*entia*) according to the degree of perfection of their essence. This form of analogy would correspond to what commentators on Aquinas such as Cajetan called *analogia proportionalitatis*.

There is also another form of analogy, that Aquinas calls *analogia proportionis*, and his commentators call *analogia attributionis*, which would mean that all beings, however different, have something in common in that they are related to the unique principle on which they depend. It is specifically because of their diversity that each of these beings depends differently on this principle. So the *analogia proportionis* would not entitle us to use proportionality (or ‘proportion’ in the modern sense of the word) to mean an equality of different relations. This is the meaning of ‘analogy’ that we would find in Aristotle, which would therefore have nothing to do with the mediaeval doctrine of the *analogia entis*<sup>3</sup>.

Now that it is clear that the doctrine of the analogy of being is nowhere to be found in Aristotle, this poses the problem of how this doctrine came to be attributed to him, and why this erroneous

2. See, for example, G. Reale, *Guida alla lettura della Metafisica di Aristotele*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1997, 119-121; Aristotele, *La Métaphysique*, nouvelle ed. entièrement refondue, avec commentaire par J. Tricot, J. Vrin, Paris 1970, 176 note 2.

3. Cf. Aubenque, *Sur la naissance*, 292.

claim has continued to find support despite the important remarks done by Cajetan, for instance, on Aristotle's texts<sup>4</sup>. Even Franz Brentano believed that we could distinguish between two types of analogy in Aristotle: the analogy of proportionality, such that  $a : b = c : d$ , and the analogy  $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma \acute{\epsilon}\nu$ <sup>5</sup>. Brentano's theory was fundamental to the stance taken by Matthew Wood, who recently claimed that Aristotle's concept of 'analogy' in his *Metaphysics* would seek a middle ground between ontological univocity in the strict sense (which collapses any distinction between the different ways to being) and a radical equivocity in which these ways lack any relation to one another<sup>6</sup>. If we were able to claim that Aristotle conceived the  $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma \acute{\epsilon}\nu$  as a certain type of analogy, then we would be unable to rule out the possibility of the relationship  $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma \acute{\epsilon}\nu$  explained in *Metaph. Γ* having laid the foundations for what was to be fully developed in the Middle Ages as the theory of the *analogia entis*.

At a conference held in Padua in 1967 (the proceedings of which were published in 1970), Paul Grenet claimed that Thomas Aquinas did not find the *analogia entis* in Aristotle for the simple reason that there is no such doctrine in Aristotle. Aquinas would nonetheless have found in Aristotle all that he needed to identify an *analogia entis*<sup>7</sup>. Jean-François Courtine was of the opinion not only that the doctrine of the analogy of being does not exist in Aristotle, but also that there are no elements that might lead to the construction of this doctrine starting from his texts<sup>8</sup>. Aubenque<sup>9</sup>,

4. Cf. Thomas De Vio Cardinalis Caietanus, *Scripta Philosophica: De Nominum Analogia. De Conceptu Entis*, P.N. Zammit, O.P. - P.H. Hering, O.P. (cur.), Angelicum, Roma 1952, III 28; cf. II, 20.

5. Cf. F. Brentano, *On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle*, ed. and transl. R. George, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1981, 58-66.

6. Cf. M. Wood, *Aristotelian Ontology and its Contemporary Appropriation: Some Thoughts on the Concept of Analogy*, «Dionysius», 31 (2013), 25-40: 25.

7. Cf. P. Grenet, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin a-t-il trouvé dans Aristote l'analogia entis?*, in *L'attualità della problematica aristotelica. Atti del convegno franco-italiano su Aristotele (Padova 6-8 apr. 1967)*, Antenore, Padova 1970, 153-175: 153-154.

8. Cf. J.-F. Courtine, *Inventio analogiae. Métaphysique et ontothéologie*, J. Vrin, Paris 2005, 157-166.

9. Cf. P. Aubenque, *Les origines de la doctrine de l'analogie de l'être. Sur l'histoire du contresens*, «Les Études philosophiques», 1 (1978), 3-12: 7.

on the other hand, says that an almost mechanical projection of the Latin comment on Aristotle's text and Augustin Mansion's mention of the Aristotelian doctrine of the analogical unity of being already in 1956<sup>10</sup> seem to suggest that the philosophical interests at stake are so strong that they can survive the deconstruction of their textual justification already begun by Cajetan<sup>11</sup>.

As for the modern interpreters, Joseph Owens includes Aristotle's analogy among the homonyms or equivocal terms: Aristotle considered three classes of equivocals: equivocals by chance, by reference, and equivocals by analogy. The second type would be discussed in *Metaph.* Γ 2, 1003 a 34 - b 4, where Aristotle says that a certain type of relation exists between categories and substance, such that categories would belong to the class of things said to be homonymous – not in a general sense of homonymy, but through reference to something one. Things that are said to be *πρὸς ἓν* would therefore belong to one of the three classes of things that are said to be homonymous<sup>12</sup>.

In a very famous article, Gwilym Ellis Lane Owen translated the expression *πρὸς ἓν* as '*focal meaning*' and suggested that what Aristotle was saying in *Metaph.* Γ 2 is that all the meanings of being have one element in common or a central sense so that its meanings can be explained in terms of 'substance', and of the meaning of 'being' appropriate to the substance. According to Owen, this '*focal meaning*' would be a new, revolutionary element, and would introduce a new discussion of being (*τὸ ὄν*), and other such expressions. This new discussion of *τὸ ὄν* would consist in contradicting what Aristotle had claimed in previous works on being and the relationship between categories, i.e. that a universal science is impossible because of the diversity of being. The doctrine of *focal meaning* would

10. Cf. A. Mansion, *L'objet de la science philosophique suprême d'après Aristote*, *Metaphysique E 1, Mélanges de la philosophie grecque offerts à Mgr. Diès*, J. Vrin, Paris 1976, 171-168: 165.

11. Cf. Aubenque, *Les origines*, 7.

12. Cf. J. Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics. A Study in the Greek Background of Mediaeval Thought*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1951, 118.

make it possible to establish the existence of a universal science of being *qua* being, as Aristotle would proceed to do in *Metaph.* Γ 2<sup>13</sup>.

More recently, Alexander Edwards attributed to Aristotle two forms of non-incidentality homonymy, one analogical, the other focal. Being would be predicated by analogy insofar as all instances of being are related to their own categorial genera in the same way: human would be in relation to substance, just as color would be in relation to quality, and so on. According to Edwards, a more thorough examination would enable us to see that being shows the same species of homonymy as ‘the healthy’ ‘the medical’. The scholar also considers the paronymy of being, such that being (τὸ ὄν) would literally derive from ‘substance-being’ (οὐσία), just as ‘the healthy’ (ὕγιεινόν) and ‘the medical’ (ιατρικόν) derive from ‘health’ (ὑγίεια) and ‘medicine’ (ἡ ἱατρική)<sup>14</sup>.

A conference on analogy was held in Rome in 2016, and the proceedings were published in the journal « Archivio di filosofia »<sup>15</sup>. In an introduction to the volume, Francesco Valerio Tommasi acknowledges the importance of analogy as a core issue in the question of the possibility of metaphysics, making the point that the expression ‘analogy of being’ paradoxically emerges when our faith in the possibility of metaphysics begins to fade<sup>16</sup>.

With papers by Oliver Primavesi and Marwan Rashed, Rita Salis, Gabriele Galluzzo, Paolo Fait, Kevin Flannery, S.J., Nicoletta Di Vita, Enrico Moro, Cecilia Martini Bonadeo, Andrea Porcarelli, Giovanni Mandolino, Sara Abram, Pasquale Porro, Giovanni Catapano, the present volume adds to this very rich line of research,

13. G.E.L. Owen, *Logic and Metaphysics in Some Earlier Works of Aristotle*, in I. Düring - G.E.L. Owen (cur.), *Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century. Papers of the Symposium Aristotelicum held at Oxford, in August 1957*, Humanities Press, Göteborg 1960, 163-190: 168-169; 189 (repr. in G.E.L. Owen, *Logic, Science. Collected Papers in Greek Philosophy*, ed. M.C. Nussbaum, Cornell University Press, Ithaca (NY) 1986, 180-199: 183-184; 199).

14. Cf. A. Edwards, *Aristotle's Concepts of Analogy*, « Dionysius », 34 (2016), 62-87.

15. Cf. F.V. Tommasi (cur.), *Lanalogia*, « Archivio di Filosofia », 3 (2016).

16. Cf. F.V. Tommasi, *Lanalogie se dit de plusieurs façons. Un problème d'histoire de la Métaphysique, entre termes et concepts*, in Id. (cur.), *Lanalogia*, 9-13: 9.

concentrating on the study of Aristotle's texts and late-ancient and mediaeval Aristotelian tradition.

Warm thanks go to all the contributors to this publication, to Padua University's Department of Philosophy, Pedagogy, Sociology and Applied Psychology, and to the research group involved in the departmental project SID 2017 of the University of Padua (Giovanni Catapano, Maria Grazia Crepaldi, Cecilia Martini Bonadeo, Andrea Porcarelli, Rita Salis, Enrico Moro, Nicoletta Di Vita, Sara Abram and Giovanni Mandolino).