

Giovanni Gellera: 'A modern interpretation of Aristotle in the debate on transubstantiation'.

The interpretation of the Aristotelian theory of the relation between substance and accidents plays a central role in the philosophical debate on transubstantiation in the Scottish universities during the late seventeenth century. The analysis of the philosophy taught in the curriculum of the Scottish universities shows that the reception and interpretation of Aristotle on this matter are modern in spirit and contents, and that the regents read in Aristotle the theory of the actual inherence of the accidents in their subjects.

The graduation theses (texts written by the regents for the class graduation ceremony at the end of the four-year curriculum) exploit this modern interpretation of Aristotle in the debate on transubstantiation, originally a theological debate which nonetheless bears profound consequences in philosophy. The analysis of this theory is central for two reasons: 1) the history of this theory in the debate on transubstantiation exemplifies well the more general point of the reception and interpretation of Aristotle in the graduation theses; and 2) this theory is fundamental for the understanding of the philosophical analysis of transubstantiation and of the rejection of transubstantiation by Scottish scholastics.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, it is possible to identify three main influences in the debate: 1) Aristotelianism; 2) Scholasticism; and 3) Cartesianism. The regents develop Aristotelian and scholastic theories in the light of Cartesianism, which heavily shaped Scottish academic philosophy from the 1660s onwards. By the 1680s, there is agreement on a Cartesian theory of substance: a physical body is composed of an underlying subject (extended matter) and various modes, which qualify matter and take the place of the scholastic notions of material form, accident, proprium. Regarding the human body, soul is regarded as the only example of immaterial form: that is, soul is not a mode of the material subject. The regents find evidence for this theory in the texts of Aristotle.

The philosophical analysis of transubstantiation in its scholastic form prompts the question of the status of 'separable accidents', those accidents which can exist without their natural substance (viz. the bread) and subsequently inhere in another substance (viz. the body of Christ). The dogma of transubstantiation is rejected by Scottish regents on philosophical ground in virtue of the contradiction between the notion of a separate accident and the definition of accident as 'inhering in a substance'. The regents read in Aristotle the theory of the *actual* inherence of the accident in its substance, and they include actual inherence in the definition of accident: the accident is thus defined in terms of *inesse*, and not in terms of the traditional formula *adesse et abesse*.

An accident which is not separable from its substance is also understood by the regents to be the same as a Cartesian mode: according to the regents, there is then a deep agreement between Aristotle, Descartes and their own scholasticism, influenced by a Reformed confession of faith inspired by Calvinism.

This reading of Aristotle is modern in spirit because the regents are influenced by the humanist approach to the Classics: they read Aristotle in Greek and perceive a

difference between the Greek text and the medieval reception by the Scholastics. It is modern in contents, because the regents develop, on the ground of their interpretation of Aristotle, a theory of the relation between substance and accident different from the Catholic scholastic ones, both medieval and modern.

It seems that the general approach of the Scottish universities to Aristotle is twofold: Aristotle is regarded as an ancient source of inspiration and 'good philosophy', yet, a source always understood in the light of contemporary debates. An ancient *and* modern Aristotle.