

## In Search of Aristotle's Project

## I. DIFFICULTIES PECULIAR TO THE INTERPRETATION OF ARISTOTLE

"It is without doubt the fate of great persons who have put their mark on the ages: commentary very soon comes between their work and posterity. It does not hesitate to go—at least quantitatively—beyond the works upon which it is commentary. More seriously yet: it becomes autonomous and generates a superimposed tradition which, driven by its own logic, obliterates the work from which it has issued, masks it, distorts it and makes it disappear." This observation by G. F. Duvernoy<sup>1</sup> concerning Machiavelli could be applied almost without qualification to the work of Aristotle. But among the philosophers of great intellectual vision whose original message historical exegesis strives to recover, Aristotle is a strange case—and for two reasons at least. First, because of the preeminent role that he plays in the intellectual adventure of the West. As J. Voss<sup>2</sup> recently noted, "for about twenty-three centuries, the West has been enveloped in an almost uninterrupted dialogue with the man whom the scholastics called 'the philosopher.'" The difficulty of piercing the screen, sometimes very opaque, which is the Aristotelianism of so many centuries, based substantially on the thinking of a thousand and one more or less faithful "disciples," is doubled by a difficulty probably unique in its kind: the impossibility of always being able to determine exactly the sort of things the writings of the authentic Aristotelian *Corpus* are.<sup>3</sup> For we suspect that scholars often have to deal with texts whose definitive form owes something to the work of Aristotle's disciples. We remain, on the other hand, powerless to determine always with precision the extent to which the products of their work continue to conform to the master's thinking or proceed, on the contrary, from a new idea. At least I can state very generally that the organization of the *Corpus Aristotelicum*, such as scholars after Andronicus of Rhodes have understood it, depends for them on the firmer and firmer conviction that Aristotle elaborated a philosophical system whose constituent parts are reflected in the arrangement of the different preserved treatises, as if their author had effectively "programmed" them from the perspective of systematic expression. Now, this is the one intention that we may hardly attribute to our philosopher. The project of expounding a genuine system is in fact, as I. Düring has written,<sup>4</sup> "typically Hellenistic but very un-Aristotelian." Such a claim will perhaps seem today the unavoidable result of Jaeger's explicit

attempt to combat "scholastic idolatry,"<sup>5</sup> which regarded the work of the "master of those who know" as a genuine "summa," firmly articulated. But, independently of Jaeger, K. Praechter, for example, assures us that "a secure division of the philosophical disciplines according to a determinate principle does not occur in Aristotle!"<sup>6</sup> And it is obvious that Aristotle was not as concerned as his disciples were to propose a rigid system of sciences and to organize his writings systematically according to it.

This indeterminateness is obviously quite irksome for the interpreter who asks about the occasion for the project of Aristotle to which the texts catalogued under the titles *Ethics* and *Politics* correspond, and who finds himself dealing with a *Corpus* established by people who indeed thought that they could abolish such indeterminateness by recourse to the hypothesis that the philosopher conceived his project as formally expounding a genuine system.<sup>7</sup> Moreover—and this is a prime consideration whose significance I shall examine at great length—the originality of Aristotle's project risks being masked by the interpretation or the importance given since antiquity to certain interpretive categories (human philosophy, practical science, ethics, etc.) in accounting for the approach of a series of texts integrated in the *Corpus*, itself conceived as a philosophical summa. The danger will appear considerable especially as these categories make reference to Aristotelian vocabulary.

To restore to the philosopher that which properly belongs to him is thus an extremely perilous task. Without hiding from ourselves either the difficulty of the undertaking or the limits beyond which everything is no more than a tissue of gratuitous hypotheses, it is important to state in the clearest way the particulars of the problem.

## II.1. THE *CORPUS* IN THE CATALOG OF ANDRONICUS OF RHODES

We know that Aristotle's death in 322 B.C. left in the hands of his immediate disciples an impressive series of texts unedited and without determinate classification.<sup>1</sup> As F. Wehrli has suggested,<sup>2</sup> the very nature of the texts (joined to the difficulty of the message which they contain) was perhaps the principal cause of what one must call the decadence of the *Peripatos* during the Hellenistic period. Still the fact remains that the rebirth of Aristotelianism in the first century before our era coincides with the labors of Andronicus of Rhodes, who obtained a first-rate edition of the principal so-called "acroamatic" texts [writings thought to have served as the basis for oral presentations] of Aristotle, of which Andronicus drew up a new catalog.<sup>3</sup> Its arrangement supposes an organizing principle about which we should inquire.<sup>4</sup> The historian who desires to measure the originality of Andronicus' contribution is forced to study the early lists of Aristotle's works preserved by Diogenes Laërtius and the anonymous author of the *Vita Menagiana*, which permit us to ascertain the condition of the *Corpus* a good century at least before the cata-

logs of Andronicus were drawn up.<sup>5</sup> But the comparison of these earlier materials with the catalogs of Andronicus is not without difficulties. For no Greek text has preserved the latter for us. Perfectly known in Plutarch's time<sup>6</sup> and probably still used by Porphyry and the Neoplatonists,<sup>7</sup> these catalogs, if one believes the tradition, were integrated (in an abridged form?) into a general work on Aristotle's life and writings composed by a certain Ptolemy.<sup>8</sup> Thanks to Ptolemy, at first translated into Syriac,<sup>9</sup> they then penetrated the Arab world and it is there that we can make our acquaintance with them in the parallel editions of Ibn al Qifti (twelfth–thirteenth centuries) and Ibn Abi Usaibia (thirteenth century).<sup>10</sup> A section of the lists which these authors offer us has every chance of reproducing the work of Andronicus; it indexes the principal titles of the modern *Corpus* as it is edited, for example, by I. Bekker.<sup>11</sup> It is a section which has no parallels in the earlier lists and thus constitutes an exceptional document.

Seen against this background, the titles of the Andronican *Corpus* provoked many questions. But I do not need to dwell here on the problems raised by the formation of Aristotle's "works" before the Christian era.<sup>12</sup> It seems, after all, that Andronicus was largely influenced in this regard by prior efforts.<sup>13</sup> To take just one example which concerns us especially, everything supports the belief that from the time of Theophrastus' leadership of Aristotle's school, if not from the time of Aristotle himself, the eight books of the *Politics* have never formed anything except a whole.<sup>14</sup> In any case, before the work of Andronicus, there existed much more than a mosaic of independent βιβλία. As P. Moraux noted,<sup>15</sup> "the Rhodian did not have to deal with a pile of orderless notes which he would have been the first to sort and classify systematically." In short, collections into "treatises" had already been for the most part performed.

## II.2. CONCEPTIONS INHERENT IN THE PRINCIPLES OF DIVISION

But what will especially bear looking at in the section of the Andronican catalog transmitted by the Arabs is the fact that the list of different "treatises" bears witness to a desire for classification,<sup>1</sup> that is, that it distributes Aristotle's works according to certain well-defined categories. Moreover, perhaps we have here a reflection of the order followed by Andronicus in his edition of the *Corpus Aristotelicum*,<sup>2</sup> an edition which we know served as Porphyry's model for his edition of Plotinus' works.<sup>3</sup> Be that as it may, the above-mentioned catalog—which, as I. Düring liked to put it,<sup>4</sup> was a "catalogue raisonné," since it offered information other than the mere titles of the works (*incipit* [first words or lines of the text], stylometric indications, notes on the question of authenticity)<sup>5</sup>—tries to divide up the various titles still, for the most part, included in our *Corpus* in accordance with a principle of division. Andronicus thus had the very clear sense that the group of the (two) *Ethics* and the *Politics*

(arranged alongside the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric*)<sup>6</sup> conveyed the same kind of philosophical preoccupation and that this part of philosophical inquiry could be located along with other parts (to which there would usually correspond one or more collections of Aristotelian texts), in a rationally organized system of writings. So, was Andronicus the first to pose the question which became classical for the neo-Platonic commentators of Ammonius' school, "where should one begin the study of Aristotle?"<sup>7</sup> Now, a question of this type clearly expresses the conviction that Aristotle's principal writings, collected for this reason in a *Corpus*, are, each in its place, the component parts of a systematic enterprise, solidly articulated by teleological principle, and that one should approach them as a program of study.

The internal organization of the system suggested by Andronicus' classification of the works he listed may be guessed without difficulty.

### a. The Tripartite Division

A clear-enough tripartite division appears in the section of the catalog corresponding to the *Corpus*:<sup>8</sup> 1 Κατηγορίαι α [Categories, 1 (book)], etc.; 2 Ἠθικῶν μεγάλων β [Great Ethics, 2 (books)], etc.; 3 φυσικῆς ἀκροάσεως γ [Lectures on Physics, 8 (books)], and so forth. One can hardly doubt that this division bears traces of Stoic influence; for logic, ethics and physics make up the three parts of philosophy for the Stoa.<sup>9</sup> Obviously, Andronicus' classification of the Aristotelian works does not necessarily, in itself alone, imply that the Rhodian attributed to Aristotle a tripartite conception of philosophy. For the catalog's author, the point was mainly to divide up the philosopher's writings in the most convenient manner. Now, the distinction "logical-ethical-physical" already appears in the *Topics*<sup>10</sup> as a principle of classification of propositions (προτάσεις) and problems (προβλήματα). Andronicus may thus have wanted only to group Aristotle's principal "treatises" according to the type of questions which they address. One might think, however, that such a division of the writings likewise reflects Andronicus' view that Aristotle divided philosophy in this way, just as Diogenes Laërtius' summary of Aristotle's doctrines according to the three categories "logic," "ethics," and "physics"<sup>11</sup> probably reflects Diogenes' view that Aristotle subdivided philosophy in this way.<sup>12</sup> Besides, Andronicus, who includes the "logical" writings in the first division of writings in the *Corpus*, also recommends beginning the study of Aristotle with logic (ἀπὸ τῆς λογικῆς);<sup>13</sup> this fact clearly demonstrates that for him the "treatises" contained systematized knowledge and were coordinated with one another.

### b. The Bipartite Division

But a qualification should be made here. For, in fact, like the majority of later Greek interpreters<sup>14</sup> and unlike the Stoics,<sup>15</sup> Andronicus held that logic was not a part of philosophy at all and was only its instrument (ὄργανον).<sup>16</sup> Therefore

restricting philosophy properly so-called to a twofold scheme, Andronicus himself understood, and invited his successors to understand, that the two series of writings which he put after the logical writings were the expression of this twofold philosophy. Now, if the categories "ethical" and "physical" seemed appropriate for cataloguing these works (as the category "logical" was for designating the works which contain philosophy's instrument), then, on the other hand, one had recourse to the seemingly more adequate categories "practical" and "theoretical" to describe the two approaches of philosophy as such. This was already done in the doxographical document preserved by Diogenes Laërtius: "There are two types of philosophical discourse, the practical and the theoretical."<sup>17</sup> This document deserves our attention. It alludes to two notions which, considered separately, can pass without much difficulty as authentically Aristotelian (in the sense that they find a direct echo in Aristotle's texts): the contrast of the categories "practical" (πρακτικός) and "theoretical" (θεωρητικός)<sup>18</sup> and the idea of a "philosophical discourse."<sup>19</sup> But what falsifies Aristotle's thought or, at least, violates the most constant rules of the language which expresses it, is the use of the terms "practical" and "theoretical" to distinguish two types of philosophical discourse; the basic idea is therefore that Aristotle's written work is distributed by content into two divisions of a philosophical system. We are in the presence of a remarkable phenomenon. On the one hand, the categories "practical" and "theoretical," which Aristotle uses to distinguish two types of reason (λόγος), thought (διάνοια), or scientific disposition (ἐπιστήμη),<sup>20</sup> are used by the doxographers to distinguish two series of philosophical discourses (λόγοι).<sup>21</sup> And, on the other hand, the categories "logical," "ethical" and "physical," which Aristotle uses to classify different types of problems,<sup>22</sup> are adopted by the commentators to designate three scientific disciplines as well. One discovers here the traces of an attitude which grows more and more pronounced among the ancient Aristotle commentators and whose most notable trait seems to be the effort to state strict correspondences between a division of Aristotle's written works (διαίρεσις τῶν συγγραμμάτων Ἀριστοτέλους) in a *Corpus* solidly constructed and a division of the sciences according to Aristotle (διαίρεσις τῶν ἐπιστημῶν κατὰ Ἀριστοτέλην) in a perfectly organized philosophical system. It will be important to consider exactly to what extent exegesis prompted by this attitude distorts or conceals the philosopher's real purposes.

### II.3. THE SUPPOSED FOUNDATIONS OF THE SYSTEMATIZING INTERPRETATION

Let us first note the reasons which convinced the ancients that there were correspondences between the division of the written works and the division of the sciences.

1. First, there is a certain anthropological or philosophical duality. At the beginning of his *Commentary on the NE*, Aspasius tries to establish that practical philosophy, including "the inquiry concerning character traits" (ἡ περὶ τὰ ἠθῆ πραγματεία) and "politics" (ἡ πολιτική), is made necessary by our possession of a soul and a body:<sup>1</sup> "if we did not have a body," he writes, "our nature would have no task other than contemplation." This interpretation still prevails in the Byzantine epoch and Eustratius, for example, declares straight out:<sup>2</sup> "Given that philosophy is divided into two parts, that is, theoretical and practical, Aristotle is engaged in both. He also published, in the two domains, scientific treatises instructing the souls of his disciples in conformity with each subject-matter." Once this philosophical care for souls—this wish to teach a "practical happiness" and a "theoretical happiness," to adopt Stephanus' expression<sup>3</sup>—is attributed to Aristotle, it suggests that anthropological or psychological doctrine has a basic importance for the bipartite division of philosophy. It is split in two, because the human being or the human soul can sometimes be regarded as pure intelligence, sometimes not. The fact that the Neoplatonists understood the matter in this way is well known. For example, John Philoponus, in his *Commentary on the Categories*, distinguishes between Aristotle's "practical" and "theoretical" writings;<sup>4</sup> then, in his *Commentary on the Meteorologica*, Philoponus explains that the two corresponding parts of philosophy, practical and theoretical philosophy, should be correlated with the two "faculties" (δυνάμεις) of the soul, which he calls respectively "living" (ζωτική) and "contemplative" (θεωρητική).<sup>5</sup> These are the faculties, Philoponus tells us, "that philosophy wishes to cultivate and perfect, the one by virtue, the other by knowledge of beings."<sup>6</sup> Psychological theory can certainly influence how one distinguishes forms of activity and the ways they are improved.

To convince ourselves of this it suffices to consider the quarrel which, in the first generation of the Peripatetic school, set Theophrastus and Dicaearchus at odds on the question whether one should opt for a life of the intellect or a life engaged in the *polis*. Dicaearchus, champion of the practical life (βίος πρακτικός),<sup>7</sup> defended a view strictly in accord with his account of mind, seeing that, as F. Wehrli has rightly stated,<sup>8</sup> this philosopher challenged Aristotle's theory of the separable mind (νοῦς χωριστός).<sup>9</sup> Theophrastus' adherence to this theory explains his stand in favor of the contemplative life.<sup>10</sup>

As for Aristotle, he suggests at several points that very close relations obtain not only between the different parts of the soul (animal, human and divine) and the three types of life (apolaustical [devoted to enjoyment], political or practical, and philosophical or theoretical)<sup>11</sup> but also between different forms of discursive intelligence (διάνοια)—theoretical, practical and productive—and the three types of scientific disposition of the same name.<sup>12</sup> But this does not imply either that these dispositions form a (systematic) whole or that they are expressed equally in three series of discourses. And the correspon-



dences between parts of the *Corpus* and scientific dispositions or forms of intelligence always seem quite rough, if not lame. So the reasons which, for example, J. Marietan<sup>13</sup> gives for defending the view, similar to that of the Neoplatonists, that Aristotle makes a twofold classification of the sciences (namely, that such a classification reflects the distinction between the practical and theoretical intellects made by the treatise *On the Soul*<sup>14</sup> and corresponds to the two types of life praised by the *NE*'s tenth book)<sup>15</sup> seem entirely superficial.

2. The attempt by the ancients to confer on philosophy in general and Aristotelian philosophy in particular the allure of a formal system, all of whose parts are perfectly arranged and expressed in the *Corpus*, must be understood by the indirect route of yet another distinction, which is based on the dual nature of knowable reality. As an example here, consider Ammonius' testimony in the introduction to his *Commentary on the Isagogē* (of Porphyry) where he wishes to respond to the question "What is philosophy?"<sup>16</sup> For the most part the definitions which Ammonius considers in response to this question are not of his invention; they are borrowings, either from the tradition, or, in an explicit way, from the most famous thinkers, Aristotle and Plato. In confronting them with each other, Ammonius tries to establish the unity of all these conceptions. Now, the account brings to light two primary definitions. The first, in the words of Ammonius himself, is drawn from the object to be known (ἐκ τοῦ ὑποκειμένου). We read: "Philosophy is the knowledge of things divine and human" (φιλοσοφία ἐστὶ θεῶν τε καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων γνῶσις).<sup>17</sup> As one sees, such a division supposes that philosophy, although a unity, is divided into two parts, according as the object to be known, Ammonius tells us, is eternal (labeled "divine") or subject to generation and corruption (labeled "human").<sup>18</sup> Now the old pair of antitheses—the divine and the human—which dominates the Platonic reality picture<sup>19</sup> leaves several traces in Aristotle, and this fact seems to legitimate also the division of his philosophy using these categories. I shall come back to this issue.<sup>20</sup> My interest in Ammonius' definition, however, derives less from its relation to Aristotle's view than from its connections with the other definition of philosophy put forth in the same context, the one borrowed from Plato's *Theaetetus*:<sup>21</sup> "philosophy is assimilation to God so far as humanly possible" (φιλοσοφία ἐστὶ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν ἀνθρώπῳ).<sup>22</sup> Ammonius actually explains that the assimilation to God must be understood as two specific activities,<sup>23</sup> themselves expressions of the human soul's dual capacity—theoretical and practical.<sup>24</sup> Thus justifying the twofold division of philosophy by appealing to a psychological principle now familiar to us, Ammonius can henceforth align the definition from the *Theaetetus*, "taken from the end" (ἀπὸ τοῦ τέλους), with the definition "taken from the subject-matter" (ἀπὸ τοῦ ὑποκειμένου): if one should refer to the "theoretical" end, philosophy is able to reach only "divine" subject-matter; but if one should refer to the "practical" end, one is able to reach only "human" subject-matter.<sup>25</sup> The double assimila-

tion to God in which philosophy consists therefore appears, in Ammonius' resolutely syncretistic mind, to be respectively "a knowledge of beings as beings" (γνώσις τῶν ὄντων ἢ ὄντα ἐστίν)—the phrase plagiarizes a passage from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*<sup>26</sup>—and "an apprenticeship with death" (μελετὴ θανάτου)—the phrase is drawn from Plato's *Phaedo*.<sup>27</sup>

3. Considered collectively, the reflections of the ancient Aristotle commentators therefore produced the following result: three pairs of categories were superimposed upon each other. Each pair bears witness to a twofold conception of philosophy, which is itself based ultimately on the twofold nature of the mental faculties, corresponding, respectively, to two levels of knowable reality:

ἠθικὴ ἐπιστήμη — φυσικὴ ἐπιστήμη  
πρακτικὴ ἐπιστήμη — θεωρητικὴ ἐπιστήμη  
περὶ τὰ ἀνθρώπινα πράγματα γνῶσις — περὶ τὰ θεῖα γνῶσις  
"ethical" science — "physical" science  
"practical" science — "theoretical" science  
knowledge about human affairs — knowledge about divine things

A more or less clear conviction accompanies this view, namely, that the *Corpus Aristotelicum*, reflecting the twofold division of philosophy, contains two basic groups of treatises, which pursue truth in two realms of knowledge and whose totality makes up a philosophical system that should be studied in a precise order if the student is adequately to progress towards philosophy's ultimate goal.

I have suggested the distance which separates Aristotle's concerns from the concerns which his commentators tend to attribute to him or which they themselves proclaim while taking him as an authority. However, directly or indirectly, the ancients were often inspired by his texts. I must therefore give them credit for having brought to light the principal Aristotelian categories without the comprehension of which we cannot claim to describe correctly our philosopher's project. Knowing the privileged charm which posterity casts over such categories and recognizing, moreover, the fragility of both syncretistic and systematizing interpretations of Aristotle, we are now ready to question Aristotle himself. Recovering the genuine meaning and significance of his terminology is a sure means to clarify his philosophical project.

### III.1. THE FIRST SET OF INTERPRETIVE CATEGORIES

1. Let us begin by examining the categories "logical," "ethical" and "physical." In the *Topics*, as I said, they serve to distinguish summarily (ὡς τύπῳ περιλαβεῖν) different species of propositions or of problems.<sup>1</sup> There is no question here of three philosophical disciplines or sciences but, simply, three



points of view permitting classification, so to speak, of all types of propositions and problems. Do these viewpoints correspond to "sciences" in the sense of formal objects recognized and distinguished elsewhere in Aristotle? One is tempted to grant this in light of a passage of the *Posterior Analytics* where, after having established the difference between having an opinion (δοξάζειν) and knowing (ἐπιστάσθαι),<sup>2</sup> he writes: "As for how the rest should be distributed among discursive thought and intellect and science and art and prudence and wisdom—some of these questions belong rather to physical study, others to ethical study" (τὰ μὲν φυσικῆς, τὰ δὲ ἠθικῆς θεωρίας μᾶλλον ἐστίν).<sup>3</sup> As for the *Analytics*, they exhibit the perspective of "logical" study. The fact that the Stoics happened to divide philosophy systematically into three parts described as "logical," "ethical" and "physical"<sup>4</sup> might suggest that such a system of sciences was previously drawn up by Aristotle himself. But the texts do not really authorize our being so affirmative.

2. In the first place, the classification proposed by the philosopher in the *Topics* is not at all rigorous; it is presented as approximate (ὡς τύπῳ περιλαβεῖν). Therefore it does not have as much weight for the interpreter as would a categorical declaration regarding the organization of a philosophical system.<sup>5</sup> Besides, the passage from the *Posterior Analytics* does not imply that for Aristotle "logical" study" (θεωρία λογική) exists on the same level as "physical study" and "ethical study." Aristotle, who reproaches the Platonists for their argumentation λογικῶς,<sup>6</sup> that is, their dialectical method, can describe as λογικός only a very general, purely formal, if not verbal, perspective for discussing problems, thus a perspective which, according to him, has no true scientific significance. For, in contrast to dialectic, science, for Aristotle, always supposes a particular object. So it clearly follows that the distinction of viewpoints of which I am speaking does not correspond to a distinction between sciences in the strict sense. The fact that the physical investigator's viewpoint is narrower than the dialectician's does not imply that the physical perspective is scientific.<sup>7</sup> Nor does the fact that Aristotle makes an even narrower contrast between the viewpoint that studies "ethical problems" and that which studies "physical problems"<sup>8</sup> imply that he wishes to correlate the former with a special science.

3. To the extent that references in the texts of the *Corpus* to certain "ethical" or "physical discourses" (ἐν τοῖς ἠθικοῖς/φυσικοῖς λόγοις)<sup>9</sup> allude to the works of Aristotle which we call by the titles *Ethics* or *Physics*, these references would seem to restrict to those works the application of the two viewpoints of which I am speaking. But the only conclusion that one can draw from this is that the works for which we today reserve these labels certainly and more obviously exemplify the respective viewpoints to which their traditional descriptions correspond. Still it is important to observe that (1) the physical study (φυσικὴ θεωρία) of which the *Posterior Analytics* speaks obviously stands for the viewpoint exhibited by the physical science (φυσικὴ ἐπιστήμη)

which Aristotle elsewhere assigns to the "theoretical sciences"<sup>10</sup> and whose results he expounds in some of his discourses, but (2) the ethical study (ἠθικὴ θεωρία) of which the same passage of the *Posterior Analytics* speaks and which probably stands for the viewpoint assigned to the accounts of the *Ethics* cannot be considered as implying any science (ἐπιστήμη) recognized in express terms by Aristotle. For not only does he nowhere explicitly recognize an "ethical science," but what he calls a "practical science" (ἐπιστήμη πρακτική), as we shall see, does not coincide with studies expounded in a discourse.

4. Finally, one may recall that the terms "physical" and "ethical," essentially used by Aristotle for purposes of classification of problems,<sup>11</sup> refer to the two basic concerns of philosophy which successively occupied the center of attention in the history of Greek thought, first with the early natural philosophers, then with Socrates, for whom, in contrast with Aristotle, virtue was science!<sup>12</sup>

### III.2. A SECOND SET OF INTERPRETIVE CATEGORIES

1. The distinction between ethical and physical perspectives of which I have just spoken does not seem alien to another distinction, indicated by the contrary terms "divine" and "human" (θεῖα and ἀνθρώπινα [πράγματα]). As W. L. Newman<sup>1</sup> has rightly observed, the phrase τὰ ἀνθρώπινα or τὰ ἀνθρώπεια, used to name a field of philosophical investigation, probably derives from a Socratic usage. In any case, this is what Xenophon's *Memorabilia* seem to indicate:<sup>2</sup> "conversation (with Socrates)," we read, "did not turn on the nature of things as a whole (περὶ τῆς τῶν πάντων φύσεως), as was the case with most of the others. . . . With him, conversation was always about human affairs" (περὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπείων). The terms used here to express the peculiar nature of Socratic inquiries in the context of the movements of contemporary thought, therefore, duplicate, so to speak, the phrase τὰ ἠθικά (ethical problems) by which Aristotle names or describes the concerns of the same Socrates.<sup>3</sup> At the beginning, the expression τὰ ἀνθρώπινα (πράγματα) vaguely refers to a totality of phenomena defined only by their relation to human beings considered as something specific. "Is there anyone," asks Socrates in the *Apology*,<sup>4</sup> "who believes in the reality of human things without believing in the reality of human beings?" ("Ἔστιν ὅστις . . . ἀνθρώπινα μὲν νομίζει πρᾶγματ' εἶναι ἀνθρώπους δὲ οὐ νομίζει;"). In this respect, the human condition—mortal (θνητός)—possesses a certain depreciative tone (a tone that, according to R. A. Gauthier,<sup>5</sup> the adjective ἀνθρωπικός receives in the *NE*), at least insofar as it is opposed to the "divine" condition. But it is precisely this antithesis that interests me. In Plato it becomes a philosophical contrast of the greatest importance. For to those things which can be defined only in relation to the human being, Plato usually opposes "divine things," which have status only in relation to the gods.<sup>6</sup> Beyond the terms

employed, we must understand that the order of the eternal and immutable makes possible the order of "becoming where we dwell"<sup>7</sup> and that Socrates' interlocutor, in the *Republic*,<sup>8</sup> feared that a guardian, seduced by contemplation, would no longer devote any care to the latter (ἀπὸ θεῶν . . . θεωρῶν ἐπὶ τὰ ἀνθρώπειά τις ἐλθών). Thus Plato described in a handy way the respective domains of true wisdom and the political art.<sup>9</sup> The Seventh Letter of the *Corpus Platonium*,<sup>10</sup> like the *Epinomis*,<sup>11</sup> states the above point in the same terms. There is no doubt, consequently, that we find in Aristotle's terminology an echo of a usage in vogue in Academic milieux.

2. The contrast between the "divine" and "human" in Aristotle's texts still indicates the antithesis between the order of the incorruptible (eternal) and the order of the corruptible (mortal).<sup>12</sup> The *NE* notes<sup>13</sup> that, unlike divine things, "nothing human can be continuously in act" (πάντα . . . τὰ ἀνθρώπεια ἀδυνατεῖ συνεχῶς ἐνεργεῖν). But we know that for Aristotle incorruptible things are contrasted not only with human phenomena but also with some natural things, which likewise suffer corruption.<sup>14</sup> Now, if Plato could not consider the latter as objects of any scientific proceeding—after all, according to him,<sup>15</sup> they are beyond the range of philosophy—Aristotle, we know, tried to give them their due; they were henceforth objects of scientific study. This circumstance should make interpreters cautious. Of course, one can draw attention, as some have done,<sup>16</sup> to two phrases appearing, although fleetingly, in Aristotle's texts: ἡ περὶ τὰ ἀνθρώπεια φιλοσοφία<sup>17</sup> ("philosophy" concerning human affairs) and ἡ περὶ τὰ θεῖα φιλοσοφία<sup>18</sup> ("philosophy" concerning divine things). But the existence of these phrases does not permit us to suppose that Aristotle thought, as the Academicians did, that philosophy was divided into two parts. In fact, in the treatise *On the Parts of Animals*, when he mentioned a "philosophy" bearing on divine beings, he undoubtedly meant an inquiry devoted to the totality of incorruptible celestial realities, governed by perfect necessity; but, as the context makes clear,<sup>19</sup> he meant this in contrast to an inquiry into corruptible beings where chance and accident occur (in a word, the ζῶϊκή φύσις [living nature]), not in contrast to what he elsewhere, in the *NE*, calls "philosophy concerning human affairs."<sup>20</sup> Supposing that this latter expression applies to a part of the doctrines expounded by Aristotle—a supposition which has not been proven—it would thus seem to refer, not to one of two but to one of three types of philosophical study.

3. Moreover, since philosophy no longer has for Aristotle the unity which it had for Plato, this phrase cannot refer to a study tightly linked to other philosophical studies similar to the study of human things required of philosophers by Plato. Kinship of vocabulary masks profound differences here. And if Aristotle employs such an expression, it is most probably, we should conclude, because he still believes that it can express this "concern for human affairs" which the author of the *Republic* made a duty for human beings "in search of wisdom"; it therefore applies less to a part of speculative inquiry undertaken

by Aristotle himself than to a study analogous to the study which human becoming, according to Plato, requires of all those who aspire to know. That being said, the expression "philosophy concerning human affairs," included in the *NE*'s final chapter in a context which introduces a type of inquiry such as that expounded by the *Politics*, cannot avoid posing grave problems for interpreters.<sup>21</sup> One can henceforth suspect that Aristotle's teaching contained in the discourses collected under the title *Ethics* and his teaching contained in the discourses collected under the title *Politics* are both related to what he calls "philosophy concerning human affairs"; but it would at least be premature to think that the latter, as Aristotle conceives it, contains the sum of two sets of studies expounded by him. For when it concerns "human things," "philosophy" is no more a matter of mere contemplation than "science" is when called "practical." Examination of a third set of interpretive categories used in the division of the sciences will allow us to understand this point.

### III.3. A THIRD SET OF INTERPRETIVE CATEGORIES

1. Aristotle, we know, distinguished three types of "science," which he describes respectively with the help of the terms "theoretical," "practical" and "productive."<sup>1</sup> This distinction is famous; too much so perhaps insofar as it has traditionally licensed the classification of Aristotle's texts into three groups of doctrines.<sup>2</sup> Now, where it appears, this division of the genus "science" (ἐπιστήμη) never alludes to any list of scientific doctrines and still less to a program of inquiries which Aristotle would have wished to carry out. It limits itself to distinguishing different kinds of intellectual disposition in terms of the activities which are performed by each of them. This fact implies that nontheoretical science has a special status.

In Aristotle's language, the term "science" (ἐπιστήμη) does not refer to an organic whole of known or knowable objects (ἐπιστάμενα/ἐπιστητά) but to a perfection of the knowing subject;<sup>3</sup> science, as a firm disposition (ἔξις), belongs to the category quality; corresponding to it in the category of substance is discursive understanding (διάνοια). Thus Aristotle's view that every science is theoretical, productive or practical is explained by the view that every intellectual excellence is oriented "to the contemplation of something" (θεωρητική τινος), "to the production of something" (ποιητική τινος), or "to the determination of some action" (πρακτική τινος).<sup>4</sup> The distinction established here does not refer directly to things scientifically known even if it presupposes a basic difference at the level of the known or knowable; for practical understanding or science, unlike theoretical understanding or science, but like productive understanding or science, does not deal "with a genus of being" (περὶ γένους τι τοῦ ὄντος), with realities which possess in themselves their origin of movement and rest and which cannot be otherwise than they are, but with realities which can be otherwise than they are and whose ori-

gin is in the knowing subject, that is, in the one who acts or produces (ἐν πράττοντι/ποιοῦντι).<sup>5</sup> "Practical science," especially, has action as its object, not action past and done, but action to be done (πρακτόν), action to come (ἐσόμενον),<sup>6</sup> not another person's action, but action which is to be performed by the knowing subject.<sup>7</sup> "Practical science" thus appears to be a cognitive quality of persons immersed in action and deciding to act.<sup>8</sup> More precisely, it is an habitual disposition to *act* scientifically, not to *study* action scientifically.

3. As a result, it seems difficult to assimilate practical science, without other precautions, to a group of scientific or philosophical reflections (of practical interest) consigned to a set of discourses used for teaching; for this would make it the expression of a speculative operation which could be performed by someone outside every particular situation which requires his action and, occasionally, on issues which either were already decided thanks to practical science or which, given that they can be decided, will call for practical science. The fact, one may say, that Aristotle understood "practical science" in this way, while he also undertook and expounded a scientific inquiry into the human good, "realizable in and through action" (πρακτόν: *EE* 1218b5), implies that he meant to present his study (primarily) to help others acquire practical science. But this would suppose that for him the cognitive qualities of the acting subject as acting could be acquired or at least reinforced by teaching by means of discourses (ἐν λόγῳ). Is this the case? It will be important to examine this question.

4. Let us note, moreover, that the division of the "sciences" into three species, as some of Aristotle's texts state it, appears historically to be the result of a subdivision (ὑποδιαίρεσις) performed on one of the terms of a dichotomy which was established earlier and is still used in other texts: that which contrasts purely "theoretical (or knowing) science," on the one hand, with "productive sciences," on the other hand,<sup>9</sup> or, as Plato, from whom the dichotomy derives (*Statesman* 258e–260e), says more frequently, the "practical sciences."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Aristotle, who condemns the Platonists' method of division by two,<sup>11</sup> probably substituted a tripartition for the dichotomy rather than subdivided a member of the latter. As the *Topics* attests, the three-way division of science could have been fixed relatively early in his career.<sup>12</sup> It is not thereby excluded that the two-way contrast (on the one hand, theoretical [θεωρητική], on the other hand, productive and practical [ποιητική/πρακτική]) continues to be used subsequently to mark the distinction between purely speculative science and the science of subjects engaged in an activity other than speculation (leaving aside the different forms which this activity may take). It would not necessarily follow from this that these texts remain faithful in spirit to a dichotomy of the Platonic type.<sup>13</sup> Thus, for example, when he considers the improvement of the human being, as he does in the ethical writings, Aristotle is led naturally to neglect the human being's "productive science," that is, the

intellectual virtue related to making things; and so the *NE*'s sixth book, which mentions three forms of discursive thought (διάνοια)<sup>14</sup> and rigorously distinguishes practical disposition (ἐξίς πρακτική) and productive disposition (ἐξίς ποιητική),<sup>15</sup> tends in spite of everything to reduce to two virtues—wisdom (σοφία) and prudence (φρόνησις)—the intellectual virtues of the rational soul.<sup>16</sup>

### III.4. PROVISIONAL BALANCE SHEET

My analyses so far let me draw conclusions only with extreme caution. Aristotle's description of "practical science" as the quality of human understanding which performs action suggests that such a "science," in his eyes, cannot be assimilated to any speculative study which is expressed in a discourse. A study of this type which would take character as its viewpoint (ἡθικὴ θεωρία)—as did the inquiries of Socrates (who dealt with ethical problems [περὶ . . . τὰ ἡθικὰ πραγματευομένου])<sup>1</sup>—escapes the division of the genus "science" into the species "theoretical" and "practical"; Aristotle never gives it the label of science (ἐπιστήμη). One could not apply this label to a study on the Socratic model which took "human things" (τὰ ἀνθρώπεια) as its object. Moreover, it is probably not this type of Socratic inquiry to which Aristotle was directly referring when he used the expression "philosophy concerning human affairs," but, as we have seen, the concern for human becoming which, according to Plato, must turn all those who aspire to know away from pure contemplation and lead them to take the destiny of cities into their hands.

All this helps to make more uncertain than ever the exact epistemological status of Aristotle's studies the results of which constitute the discourses of the *Ethics* and *Politics* of the *Corpus*. Moreover, were these studies, which are not presented as ends in themselves, conceived as a means to help those addressed by the philosopher to acquire "practical science"? Does the philosopher expect in that way to play his part in the improvement of human becoming, on the assumption that it requires the aid of those who know?

None of these questions is easy to resolve. Before formulating any hypothesis in this connection, I must examine how far I am justified in taking into consideration the *Ethics* and the *Politics* jointly, that is, whether I am entitled to assume that they both ultimately express a single plan. Here too I touch on a delicate issue.

### IV.1. THE COMMON PLAN OF THE *ETHICS* AND THE *POLITICS*: ANCIENT TESTIMONIES

It is especially significant that, from very ancient times, commentators and doxographers have always grouped the *Ethics* (in the singular) (or both *Ethics*)



together with the *Politics* in the same set of works as so many contributions to a single and unique general plan. Moreover, they are always mentioned in the same order.<sup>1</sup> According to the testimony preserved by Diogenes Laërtius,<sup>2</sup> "practical philosophical discourse" of which I have already spoken, would be subdivided into two parts, the ethical and the political (τὸν τε ἠθικὸν καὶ πολιτικόν), and this latter part, according to the same source, would sketch two types of reflection, the one pertaining to the city, the other to the household. By listing the parts of the second subdivision in this order, the doxographer probably meant only to suggest that the essay on problems concerning household management (περὶ οἰκονομίας) contained in *Politics* i was of less importance than other materials treated in the *Politics*.<sup>3</sup> Inclusion of the apocryphal *Economics*<sup>4</sup> in the *Corpus* will later lead interpreters to list for Aristotle not two but three "practical sciences."<sup>5</sup> For its part Andronicus' catalog, reconstructed with the help of Arabic documents, classifies the two *Ethics*, followed by the *Politics*, in the same section.<sup>6</sup> This order of classification is natural, especially as Andronicus here describes in detail the "ethical" category of writings in the *Corpus*. The secondary place which the *Politics* thus occupies in this list could also be explained by historical factors, namely, the ever diminishing general interest in that work during the Hellenistic era, when the city-state was no more than a shadow of the πόλις of classical Greece.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as products of their times, the Stoic and Epicurean philosophies, the one relatively, the other radically, turned the minds of their initiates from civic preoccupations to the pursuit of an ideal of self-sufficient wisdom, that is, wisdom independent of political contingencies.<sup>8</sup> As valuable evidence for this, one notes that the *Compendium* of Arius Didymus, preserved by Stobaeus, which depends upon sources from the time before Andronicus, dwells infinitely less on the doctrines contained in Aristotle's *Politics* than on doctrines borrowed from various ethical discourses (ἠθικὸν λόγον) attributed to him.<sup>9</sup> But all that does not exclude the hypothesis that the ancient doxographers or commentators wished to respect the purpose of Aristotle himself who, in the *NE*, on completing an inquiry about happiness, pleasure and the principal virtues, explicitly recommends an inquiry about constitutions.<sup>10</sup> To verify this hypothesis among the ancients is a difficult business; for we lack information about the interpretation of the *Politics* in antiquity.<sup>11</sup> This gap cannot be remedied by the mere incidental notes of commentators who classify this "work" as part of Aristotle's written works (συγγράμματα τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους) or within a division of philosophy.<sup>12</sup> But at least we know that they did not dissociate the *Ethics* from the *Politics* in principle; and even if in a general way the exact nature of the connections which they recognized between the two "works" ultimately escapes us, we must regard as conveying the prevailing interpretation the opinion of Alexander of Aphrodisias for whom the *NE*—despite its prestige—was but a preliminary to the *Politics*.<sup>13</sup> Trusting—too much perhaps—in the letter of the prologue, which announces "an approach which is

political in some way" (μέθοδος πολιτική τις οὔσα),<sup>14</sup> and considering that the subject-matter of the *NE*'s ten books (i.e., human character traits [τὰ ἥθη τὰ ἀνθρώπινα]) would make up in fact "the primary parts of the City" (πρῶτα πόλεως μέρη), Alexander intended to vindicate the received sequence of the two treatises.<sup>15</sup> Whatever one thinks of the summary arguments which Alexander uses to support his interpretation, it doubtlessly has the merit of not concealing that, in the ancients' view, the (logically prior) inquiry concerning character traits (περὶ τὰ ἥθη) and the (logically posterior) inquiry concerning constitutions (περὶ πολιτειῶν) formed a unity. The hypothesis that this unity was defended by Aristotle himself must obviously be considered, however problematic it should appear to us.<sup>16</sup> For, neither misinterpreting nor of course denying the significance possessed by the mere material existence of two separate "writings," we must refrain from overstressing this distinction of subject-matters at the expense of the unity of intention which governed the two groups of investigations.

## IV.2. MODERN EXEGESIS

1. This is an essential basis for understanding the attitude of modern interpretation. Unable to find a rigorous correspondence between the "works" of the *Corpus* and the Aristotelian notions of "philosophy of human things," "practical science," and so on (which I examined above), contemporary interpreters, for the most part, have had to be satisfied with the convenient unity represented by each "treatise" of the *Corpus*. Thus interpretation of the *Ethics* and the *Politics* was often attempted by different specialists who rarely occupied themselves with the details of the *Politics* concerning the *Ethics* and vice versa. For to say that each of the two treatises could be considered as parts of a whole which explain Aristotle's "human philosophy" does not tend to draw any tighter connection between the two, as long as the nature of this generic unity of "human philosophy" does not seem clear; it makes no difference if one baptizes this ensemble "practical philosophy" or "practical science," in a way which one thinks more in accord with Aristotelian vocabulary.<sup>1</sup> Besides, let us note in passing, modern epistemology, even in its most "classical" form, tends to avoid, if not to reject, the notion of "practical science";<sup>2</sup> consequently, the notion seems very difficult to define, even to understand, in Aristotle. As for the expression "practical philosophy"—for which one searches in vain in the *Corpus*<sup>3</sup>—some have thought that Aristotle avoided it because he deemed it self-contradictory.<sup>4</sup> The tradition which made use of it surely defended the real unity of ethics (and of economics) and of politics, as answering to a single philosophical discipline; but if one can trace this living tradition up to C. Wolff, as J. Ritter<sup>5</sup> has done, it is indisputably interrupted in the post-Hegelian era. And one can understand how, in these conditions, the

exegete might neglect the profound meaning which the categories I examined above possessed for Aristotle and make up his mind to rely upon the significance assumed by the autonomy of the so-called Aristotelian "treatises."

2. A sound method recommends rather adopting the inverse attitude and forgetting for a moment the prestige of the "works" of the *Corpus*, each existing as a whole, in order to rely more on the notions, defined in the "works," which are likely to reveal more exactly Aristotle's concerns. This is the attitude which J. Burnet adopted<sup>6</sup> at the beginning of the century. In his commentary on the *NE*, J. Burnet maintained that the philosopher's terms "practical science" (ἐπιστήμη πρακτική) and "politics" (πολιτική) both correspond adequately to the single science with which both the *NE* and the *Politics* deal.<sup>7</sup> F. Susemihl criticized such a viewpoint from the start, asserting "that, for Aristotle, politics is applied ethics (*die angewandte Ethik*)."<sup>8</sup> But one cannot grasp the thinking of Aristotle, who does not speak of "ethical science,"<sup>9</sup> by subordinating politics to such a science. J. Burnet was more faithful to the letter and to the spirit of the philosopher when he defended the idea of a "practical science" also called "politics." Yet the expression "practical science," as we have seen, does not seem to refer to a body of speculative theory, expressed in a philosophical discourse, any more than the expression "political (art, capacity, science)" (πολιτική [τέχνη, δύναμις, ἐπιστήμη]),<sup>10</sup> which may be a synonymous expression. It is therefore in our interest to acknowledge two distinct levels: the level of practical knowledge (knowledge of the acting subject), at work, for example, in the political art, capacity or science, and the level of speculative or philosophical knowledge (knowledge of the subject studying issues related to action or to politics),<sup>11</sup> worked up by Aristotle himself. Indeed, clearly there are two roles here, on the one side, that of the political leader (ὁ πολιτικός), who governs in the sphere of action, and, on the other side, that of the philosopher who reflects upon politics (ὁ περὶ τὴν πολιτικὴν φιλοσοφῶν) and about whom the *NE* states, for example, that he must study pleasure.<sup>12</sup> For one cannot overstress that the idea of "science" which Aristotle conceives under the expression "practical science" (πρακτική ἐπιστήμη) "apprehended in terms of competencies of the knowing subject"<sup>13</sup> refers, as H. H. Joachim noted,<sup>14</sup> to a science "immersed" in action; which science, according to the *Topics*,<sup>15</sup> is not fundamentally knowledge of something (ἐπιστήμη τινός) but a disposition to act in some way (πρακτική τινός), as I have observed. Its operation, in other words, does not conclude with the utterance of a proposition, whatever it might be, but in action. It is a "savoir-faire," a knowledge of how to act, in accord with truth. As G. E. M. Anscombe has written,<sup>16</sup> "there is practical truth when judgments involved in the formation of the 'choice' leading to action are all true; but the practical truth is not the truth of those judgments." Now although all those arguments of which, for example, the ethical discourses (ἠθικὸι λόγοι) and the political discourses (πολιτικὸι λόγοι)<sup>17</sup> consist ultimately pursue a useful end, they

express a person's reflection, independent of his action, upon objects which, otherwise and in another person, are objects of such *savoir-faire*.

3. Moreover, the interpreter is naturally led to describe in different terms what Aristotle calls a "practical science" (in contrast to "theoretical science") and what I shall call, for convenience, but in another sense, the "practical writings" of the philosopher (in contrast to the "theoretical writings"). As Joseph Owens has noted,<sup>18</sup> the first and immediate purpose of "practical science" is action (not contemplation) which has its origin in the knowing subject. As for the writings called "practical," as G. Bien liked to say,<sup>19</sup> their ultimate purpose also is action; but their immediate purpose can only be knowledge. And if the occasion requires—but only if it does—such writings involve what G. Bien calls<sup>20</sup> "an instrumental aspect" [*ein technologisches Moment*] with respect to their ultimate purpose. That is, they often furnish advice useful in the exercise of virtue, in the practice of affairs, etc. Otherwise, they are expressions of nothing but speculative knowledge. Besides, the objects of the "practical writings," to once again follow G. Bien,<sup>21</sup> are "human affairs" (pertaining to the city and not to the cosmos) which of course (as future objects [ἐσόμενον]<sup>22</sup> for "practical science") do not have their origin in the subject who analyses them or clarifies their rationality once they have occurred. For example, the constitution of Sparta, examined in the second book of the *Politics*,<sup>23</sup> was the object of the "practical science" of the Spartan lawgiver; it had its origin (ἀρχή) in the understanding of this lawgiver. Aristotle himself studies it as a reality whose present existence and contingent occurrence do not depend upon him. Here we see the vast difference that separates knowledge realized in the study expounded in what may be called Aristotle's own "practical" writings from what he really means by "practical science" or (according to Burnet) "politics."

4. In spite of everything, an extremely thorny problem remains. For although the two levels of knowledge just mentioned might be *de facto* clearly distinct for the contemporary interpreter, it could be that Aristotle did not intend or know how to make such a distinction and clung to the idea that one and the same cognitive excellence is exercised both in action and in speculative inquiry into action. This is an hypothesis which will be advanced by some scholars, who regard Aristotle's discussion of φρόνησις—I shall translate this term by "prudence"—in the sixth book of the *NE* as supporting the view that, for him, this "prudence" simultaneously involves an intelligent inquiry into the particular good to be realized *hic et nunc* and a speculative inquiry about action or the good (like that set forth by the *Ethics* and the *Politics*). Can we draw this conclusion? To get to the bottom of this issue I must now open up a special inquiry.<sup>24</sup>

5. Let us first keep as provisional what in the preceding remarks seems able to secure a sort of unity to the discourses collected in the *Ethics* and *Politics*. There is, in the first place, the idea preserved by the ancient commenta-

tors, that the human affairs discussed in the ethical discourses form the "primary parts of the city." To this vague idea must be added the statements of Aristotle himself that (1) "the concern about character can justifiably be called political" (*R* 1356a26), that (2) the inquiry to which the *NE* prologue is an introduction is "a sort of political inquiry" (1094b11) and that (3) the study "of the philosopher who reflects upon politics" (*NE* 1152b1–2) must also deal with pleasure. These statements, the grounds of which are not obvious, nevertheless suffice to connect the studies set forth in the *Ethics* with a reflection which Aristotle elsewhere calls "political philosophy" (φιλοσοφία πολιτική: *P* iii 12.1282b23) and of which he says that it raises questions about equality. Thus it follows that for him "ethical" problems, far from representing the inquiry of an independent science, belong, on the contrary, to the philosophical study which Aristotle describes as "political," like the problems which are specifically called "political," because they bear on the laws and constitutions (*R* i 8.1366a22).

From the fact that, wherever Aristotle mentions it, the "political philosophy" which studies, for example, questions concerning equality turns out to be clearly distinguished from "the political capacity" (ἡ πολιτικὴ δύναμις), which represents the most sovereign of the "sciences" (or "arts") that have the good as their end (*P* 1282b14–16), one may ask whether it is not the latter, rather than the former, which corresponds to the notion of "practical science."

An examination of the concept of "prudence" (φρόνησις) should shed some light on this point.

#### V.1. A KEY CONCEPT: φρόνησις — THE IRRITATING QUARREL OF THE INTERPRETERS

Scholarly discussion of the topic of φρόνησις, as P. Aubenque has noted,<sup>1</sup> originated in the works of a disciple of K. Fischer. While refuting an anti-Kantian essay on Aristotle's practical reason (an essay published in 1855 by F. A. Trendelenburg<sup>2</sup> and supported by his pupil G. Teichmüller), J. Walter tried to establish, in the course of a critique nearly 600 pages in length, that since the Aristotelian prudence of the *NE*'s sixth book is not assisted, like Thomistic prudence, by *synderesis*, it is reduced to knowledge of the means of moral action, knowledge which provides no illuminating intuition of first principles.<sup>3</sup> Since Walter held that for Aristotle the determination of ends (i.e., of values), moreover, was given over to virtue (i.e., in the last analysis, to desire), without the aid of reason, he concluded that the philosopher's ethics was basically empiricist and rejected the claim by other scholars that Aristotle's "practical intelligence" (νοῦς πρακτικός) had anticipated Kant's "practical reason."<sup>4</sup> Although E. Zeller, in the third edition of his *Philosophie der Griechen*,<sup>5</sup> does not assume Walter's essentially polemical conclusions, he nevertheless

accepts the view that Aristotelian prudence is understanding of the means of moral action only and not of the end. But in the same year, G. Teichmüller<sup>6</sup> replied and his viewpoint would be supported in 1903 by R. Loening's original study.<sup>7</sup> This quarrel, whose vicissitudes have been recounted by E. Kress,<sup>8</sup> includes many issues which go beyond the scope of my work and whose significance depends on the opposition between two philosophical schools at the end of the nineteenth century. But the debates about the concept connoted by the Greek term *φρόνησις* which fed this quarrel were to recur in the course of the twentieth century; and, despite what R. A. Gauthier thinks or rather desires,<sup>9</sup> they are not yet definitively finished today. The fact is that the texts of the *NE* (even the most explicit, in the final chapter of book six)<sup>10</sup> can easily give rise to controversy and M. Wittmann<sup>11</sup> formulated the quite seductive hypothesis that the word *φρόνησις* in these texts constitutes "an ambiguous term," which sometimes designates the instrumental wisdom of the Greek tradition, sometimes the properly Aristotelian virtue of the same name. Very lucky in that it introduced an historical criterion of interpretation two years before W. Jaeger's *Aristotle*, M. Wittmann's suggestion nevertheless runs exactly counter to the view of Jaeger himself, for whom *φρόνησις* in the *NE* regains its ordinary pre-Platonic meaning:<sup>12</sup> "a practical faculty concerned both with the choice of the ethically desirable and with the prudent perception of one's own advantage." (English translation, p. 83) H. G. Gadamer<sup>13</sup> criticizes Jaeger's hypotheses concerning *φρόνησις* in the writings which Jaeger takes to be prior to the *NE*, but seems to admit, at least implicitly, that, in the *NE* itself, *φρόνησις* can be understood in Jaeger's manner and is not set aside for discursive investigation of general norms of action. This is also the position defended by F. Wagner<sup>14</sup> in the same year, 1928. But this view was to be attacked vehemently and influentially by D. J. Allan in a series of studies whose arguments appeared in his general work on Aristotle's philosophy published in 1952.<sup>15</sup> Allan defines *φρόνησις* for us as "practical wisdom,"<sup>16</sup> whose task is "the discipline of the emotions according to a rule or purpose formulated by reason,"<sup>17</sup> as an intellectual virtue which can be "produced by teaching," concerns "[general] rules," and involves "skill in applying such rules intuitively to given situations."<sup>18</sup> Therefore, according to Allan, we should distinguish, within *φρόνησις* conceived as "practical wisdom," between intelligent inquiry into the means of action (corresponding to the minor premise of the practical syllogism) and intelligent inquiry into the ends of action (corresponding to the major premise of the practical syllogism).<sup>19</sup> According to Allan, this interpretation coincides, or, in any case, could coincide with the course taken by Aristotle himself in the *Ethics* and the *Politics*. And Allan tells us precisely concerning the "practically wise person" (*φρόνιμος*)<sup>20</sup> that he possesses "a philosophical view of man's place in the universe" and "can best define the end for which all human society exists." To argue for this position,<sup>21</sup> Allan refers to a number of passages from the *NE*,<sup>22</sup> whose most explicit is a