Danilo Facca, *Early Modern Aristotelianism and the Making of Philosophical Disciplines Metaphysics, Ethics and Politics*, London, Bloomsbury Academic 2020, 272 pp.

Danilo Facca's book on "Early Modern Aristotelianism and the Making of Philosophical Disciplines" is a deep dive into the intricacies of late Renaissance philosophy and its transformation into modern *Schulphilosophie* at the turn from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century. As Facca argues, in the space of barely more than one generation, the Aristotelian thought of the time underwent thorough revision by the philosophers involved in the organisation and teaching activities of early modern schools and universities. He maintains that "the need to disciplinize philosophy triggered a profound and extensive reflection on the manner of conceiving the legacy of Aristotle, now seen as a master of method and of the arrangement of knowledge in specific branches" (p. vii). Facca discusses his argument in three parts on "Methodus", "Theoria", and "Praxis", reflecting the classical division of philosophy into three parts.

Part one, "Methodus", sets the scene with a chapter on "The Origins and Development of the 'Acroamatic–Exoteric' Distinction in the Late Renaissance". As Facca explains, the distinction between two forms of teaching, one 'exoteric' and the other 'acroamatic', became an important part of discussions on teaching philosophy in early modern schools and universities. The discussion concerning this distinction had its origin in Aristotle, who in several works referred to his *logoi exoterikoi*, his 'external discourses'. The exact meaning of the expression was unclear even in antiquity and gave rise to different models of explanation. Based on these models, early modern debates soon dismissed any attempts to read the *logoi exoterikoi* simply as a reference to other works (*extra id opus*). Starting with Francesco Patrizi (1529–1597), there is a tendency to "clearly formulate […] the opposition between exoteric and esoteric as deriving from two types of *ratiocinatio*" (p. 10).

In the wake of Giacomo Zabarella (1533–1589) and his works on logic, Italian thinkers such as Carlo Sigonio (1524–1584) and Ottaviano Ferrari (1518–1586) began to link exoteric discourse to dialectics, whereas the esoteric discourse was connected to the theory of demonstration; in doing so, they established an arrangement of two tiers, one popular and the other specialised. This two-tier system had reverberations on the teaching of Aristotle, formulated most clearly by Ferrari. In his *De sermonibus exotericis* (1575), the two different approaches translate into a series of reflections on the relationship between humanist-inspired general education (the classical *enkuklos paideia*) and specialised, in-depth teaching of single disciplines (p. 23).

In the German lands, the discussion on exoteric and acroamatic discourse took still another turn. Ferrari's work ended up in the hands of Philipp Scherb (1553–1605). Scherb, professor at the University of Altdorf, employed the distinction between exoteric and acroamatic teaching to defend Aristotelian learning from Ramism. Scherb and his pupils, among them Michael Piccart (1574–1620), rejected the Ramist method, berating it as an 'exoteric' discourse using second-rate logic and producing empty discourse, while they firmly established the demonstrative method as the basis of their own 'acroamatic' approach (p. 29). Moreover, they eschewed the neo-Hermetic tendency to re-define the acroamatic approach in terms of *prisca philosophia*, an idea promoted by Melchior Goldast (1578–1635) in Marburg.

Part Two, "Theoria", consists of two chapters, both concerned with the role of metaphysics in early modern schools and universities. Chapter two discusses the "The Historical Significance of the Ramist Critique of Metaphysics". Again, the challenge to traditional Aristotelian teaching structures originated in the Ramist's attacks, in this case on the status of metaphysics. However, Ramism was not the only challenger to metaphysics in transalpine Europe. Protestant schools and universities had to come to terms with "Luther's rejection of metaphysics" and "Melanchthon's suspicion of a universal science of being superior to or different from the art of dialectic" (p. 53). Ramism added to the picture by denouncing Aristotelian metaphysics as violating the fundamental laws of method de La Ramée had established based on Aristotle's remarks in *Posterior Analytics* 1.4.

Facca discusses in detail how three distinct scholars reacted to the Ramism's dismissal of metaphysics. The first is again Philipp Scherb in Altdorf. Scherb rejects the notion that Aristotle's metaphysics does not conform to de La Ramée's laws. For Scherb, the Ramist contentions derive from a misreading of Aristotle. Most importantly, he discards the Ramist claim that logic can take the place of metaphysics. Based on Zabarella's distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' notions, Scherb distinguishes between 'real science' as "true knowledge, calibrated on things themselves and restricted to a specific genre". At the same time, he views the 'topical' universal art of Ramism mainly as "common opinion", as "logical schemes originating in our minds" (p. 41), a strong echo of his thoughts on the acroamatic and exoteric approaches. The second scholar is Bartholomäus Keckermann (1572–1609) in Gdańsk (Danzig). An adherent to the Ramist method in his younger years, Keckermann used Ramist arguments to insist on the elevated status of metaphysics as a theory of being in general, preceding all other theories, while excluding any reflections on God or immaterial substances from it. Like Scherb, Keckermann contributed to overcoming the Ramist deconstruction of metaphysics but failed to present a viable alternative (p. 45). Facca finds such an alternative in a third scholar, Cornelius Martini (1568–1621), at Helmstedt. Facca reads the 1610 edition of

his *Metaphysica* as "the expression of a victory", albeit a victory that built on the issues raised by the Ramists as "catalysts in the process of formation of a neo-scholastic metaphysics" (p. 48).

Chapter three, "Ernst Soner's Commentary on the *Metaphysics* and the scholastic Tradition", discusses the work of Ernst Soner (1572–1612), another pupil of Scherb, one of the most prominent figures at the University of Altdorf. Today, Soner is known, first of all, as a propagator of the Socinian creed. Reflecting on the historiography, Facca seeks to avoid a strictly confessional reading of Soner's works on metaphysics. Instead, he proposes to read Soner in the tradition of Tommaso Pellegrini, professor of metaphysics in Padua and one of Scherb's teachers during his stay in Italy. Pellegrini made heavy use of Alexander of Aphrodisias, shifting metaphysics towards a discourse on substance. Facca situates Soner within the intricate discussions on the subject of metaphysics. For Pellegrini and Soner, metaphysics is not about a common nature of being but about the first being (p. 71). Soner sets out to resolve how the conception of metaphysics as the science of the first substance reconnects to the claim of universality. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* contains both aspects in books IV and XII, respectively, and Soner attempts to keep intact that classic structure. Therefore, he does not exclude theology from metaphysics. On the contrary, he struggles with the problem of how creatures are, on the one hand, dependent on God in their essence and existence, and, on the other hand, distinct in their being. Likewise, he is confronted with the conundrum of how God as the first mover and first cause, is at the same time immobile and creator of the world. Facca's detailed discussion shows that Soner's metaphysics is not so much 'Socinian' as it lays bare the fundamental problems connected to the reformulation of Aristotelian metaphysics at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

The book's final part, "Praxis", turns from the exegetical metaphysics tradition to practical philosophy. Chapter four, "The Aristotelians and the New Science of Politics", examines how schools and universities reacted to the rise of a new 'political science' concerned with questions of sovereignty and the management of political power. Again, Facca argues that what he describes as "the encounter of modern thought and academic Aristotelianism" (p. 94) is not solely a matter of simple succession or substitution. His chapter starts with a sample study of three authors from the beginning of the seventeenth century, concentrating on the concept of *prudentia civilis* and the figure of the political adviser before turning to the 'political Aristotelianism' of Hermann Conring.

The first of the three sample authors is Clemens Timpler (1563–1624), professor at the *Gymnasium Academicum* in Steinfurt. Timpler stands for a form of academic Aristotelianism that tries to assimilate early modern political theory. He concentrates on the magistrate's function and firmly grounds the evolution of *prudentia* in the Aristotelian tradition and his praxeology, based on moral approval and disapproval. The second thinker is Johann

Althusius (1557–1638), professor at Herborn, Siegen, and Emden. Althusius sees political advice first and foremost in terms of civil exchange, following a more communicative model of politics. For him, prudence expresses "the distinctive trait of the righteous, competent, and efficacious magistrate" (p. 102). Interestingly, in Althusius' political-constitutional thought, the counsellor is not just an expert but holds a constitutional rank. Although innovative in this aspect, Althusius sticks with the classical notion of prudence as practical rationality founded on experience. The third author, Bartholomäus Keckermann (1572–1609), professor in Gdańsk, underlines the status of *prudentia* as an intellectual virtue and views it primarily in terms of topological analysis. Regarding the figure of the counsellor, Keckermann's pupil Andrzej Rej (1584–1641) further develops this point, investigating the role of *consilium* as *iudicium*.

The last part of the chapter turns to Hermann Conring (1602–1681) at Helmstedt. Unlike other figures, Conring is known as one of the protagonists of seventeenth-century Aristotelianism, especially of 'political Aristotelianism'. With him, Facca returns once more to the distinction between acroamatic and exoteric teaching, as Conring ascribes an acroamatic character to Aristotle's *Politics*, reserving it for a selected audience. Political knowledge, argues the Helmstedt professor, must be 'scientific' (*epistêmonikê*) and not 'opinionative' (*doxastikê*) (p. 114). Based on this observation, it seemed plausible to Conring to apply a neo-Aristotelian scientific method to politics, with civil prudence at its centre. Like his other contemporaries, though, Conring overestimated the scope of Aristotle's text, misinterpreting the Stagirite's work as a treatise on political science in the modern sense, triggering a series of speculations and hypotheses about its presumed original structure. Facca thinks it legitimate to consider Conring's political science as a metamorphosis of political Aristotelianism, despite these difficulties. Thus, Conring maintains the "epistemological alterity" of politics vis-à-vis the 'exact' sciences. Likewise, he insists on the link between prudence and righteousness, binding together ethics, anthropology, and politics. Conring's loyalty to Aristotelian principles is not unlimited, however. The Aristotelian dogma of the political nature of human beings, for example, gets toned down to a generic propensity to a form of social life (131).

Chapter five, "Franz Tidike's *Disputatio de fato* and the Teaching of Moral Philosophy at the Toruń Gymnasium at the Turn of the Seventeenth Century", adds still another nuance to the discussion. Facca argues that the teaching of ethics in Toruń (Thorn) navigated a path between Ramism and the most modern forms of Aristotelianism, taking Cicero and Melanchthon as their main points of reference, exemplifying this tendency with Franz Tidike (1554–1617). Tidike is a proponent of arguments typical for Aristotelian moral philosophy. His ethic centres around the concept of virtue and sees the task of practical philosophy less in terms of theory than in education; the aim of teaching ethics is to instil virtue in the

students. As a consequence, his short treatise on fate does not address the intricacies of learned discussion but intends to counter any kind of "fatalistic sentiment" and its "negative moral consequences" (p. 146). Underlying the treatise is a Melanchthonian spirit of "the positivity of natural reason" (p. 150), probably stemming from Joachim Camerarius the Elder (1500––1574), one of Tidike's teachers. His argument distinguishes between two kinds of fate, one 'astrological and physical', the other 'providential', creating "the image of a personal God who guides the world but without tyrannising it" (p. 152). As Facca remarks, both the content and ideological force of the treatise seem to lag behind more recent developments; the concordist natural philosophy it adheres to had been substantially revised during the second half of the sixteenth century.

In line with recent scholarship, Facca's book describes how the legacy of the Stagirite was not simply dismissed but reconfigured in the fields of metaphysics, politics, and ethics. This is not an easy task. First of all, it is messy. One of the reasons that most histories of philosophy scarcely consider the period between William of Ockham and Descartes is that they serve as clear markers for the beginning and ending of a long transition process in which tradition and innovation coexist and intermingle in sometimes unforeseeable ways. To understand the transition process, one has to descend into detailed studies of circumscribed areas, which Facca does. As he writes himself, his book treats primarily authors that are considered minor, with the possible exception of Hermann Conring; moreover, he concentrates on medium-sized cities such as Altdorf, Leipzig, Toruń, Gdańsk and Helmstedt, and not important centres such as Paris, Padua, or Wittenberg (p. 171).

The danger of such an approach is to get bogged down in idiosyncrasies. Facca walks the line between fine points of discussion and unnecessary details almost without stumble; only sometimes, he seems to struggle with the amount of information his discussion presupposes. However, this is not so much on him as it is on the general outlook of early modern philosophy. The thinkers Facca examines do not profess any break with tradition; to the contrary, they are deeply engaged in a conversation with the past, and this conversation involves many different participants: Plato, Aristotle, Aristotle's commentators in late antiquity, Cicero, Thomas Aquinas, Melanchthon, Italian Renaissance philosophers, philologists, and translators. Writing about early modern philosophy resembles much more entering a crowded tavern than visiting a hermit sage, and it takes time to get introduced to all the participants in the discussion. Of course, this is not a problem specialists will have to deal with. Still, the challenge remains how to construct the argument in the clearest manner possible. Chapter one, four, and five do so brilliantly; chapters two and three, instead, show a tendency to provide readers with information on an *ad hoc* basis when it comes to some of their underlying themes, such as Ramism or the structure of the *Metaphysics*.

Such minor criticism cannot detract from the great merits of the book, however. As keen an eye Facca has for details, he never loses sight of his main argument: that Aristotle was deemed irreplaceable in the education of young people, and thinkers of the time were committed to building a modern *paideia* (pp. 172–173). This argument is important for two reasons – the first concerns matters of historiography. Facca shows a pronounced tendency to undermine the dichotomies that have long characterised studies on early modern Aristotelianism, among them the contrast between a 'secular' Italian variant and its Iberian counterpart, and between Catholic 'rationalism' and Protestant 'fideism'. At the same time, he points out the limits of readings that concentrate first and foremost on the "confessional factor" (p. 173). He is certainly not alone in doing so; his approach reflects a revisionist position that is widespread in specialist studies and that is inherent in the contextualist approach. Still, his insistence on close reading of the texts in question is an important reminder of the necessity to rethink our historiographic categories.

He tackles these issues throughout the book, even though two passages stand out, both in chapter three, on Soner's commentary on the *Metaphysics*. Regarding the 'secularism' of Italian Aristotelian thought, he takes aim at Matthew Gaetano's assertion that Pellegrini excluded theology from the ambit of metaphysics, insisting on Aristotelian philosophy guaranteed "the minimal contents […] without which the theological discourse could not even be broached" (p. 64). Concerning the confessional interpretation, instead, he contends that a 'Socinian' reading of Soner, mostly interested in his digressions on demons and personal immortality, obstructs the view on the salient parts of his commentary (pp. 85–88). Facca's contextualist reading identifies Soner's core issue neither in a heterodox stance nor as the precursor of deistic or pantheistic ideas, but in the question of how to deal with the aporias resulting from a conception of God as both absolutely immanent and absolutely transcendent (p. 87). This analysis underlines Facca's conviction that a confessionalist point of view has only limited value for studying early modern philosophy.

Facca's book is important for a second reason. While the chapters often focus on specific topics in specific fields, say the role of the counsellor in early modern politics, the author never isolates these topics, but reconnects them to the wider discussion about education and the making of disciplines. As he shows, these discussions are much broader in scope as a present-minded reader would think. The question of how to bring metaphysics back into the curriculum involves a whole range of questions on method, on the limits and possibilities of teaching in schools and universities, and – most importantly – on the definition of metaphysics itself. The last point is not self-evident. Robert Pasnau, for one, has managed to write an 800-pages book on *Metaphysical Themes, 1274–1671*, renouncing any definition of his topic: "I will not attempt […] to grapple with the question of what

metaphysics is or was taken to be".[1] The philosophers in Facca's book might be minor, but none of them tried to elude the question of what metaphysics is. They simply could not avoid taking a stand in current debates.

Facca is very good at conveying the sense of urgency that suffused the debates he examines. As abstract and far away these debates seem to us, as palpable and impending they were at the turn from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century. Although the author does not attempt to reconnect his historical study with today's situation in schools and universities, the argument certainly lends itself for further exploration. New digital technologies pose important methodological questions for the humanities and their role in the science-dominated world. Where do we draw the line between acroamatic and exoteric teaching in an age of ever-evolving expertise, on the one hand, and impoverishment of general learning, on the other? Which metaphysical principles underlie ecological thinking that does no longer place human beings at its centre?[2]

These are some of the urgent questions of today. Facca examines the questions of another time, but he does so with much philosophical and historical acumen, laying bare the nerves of an academe in a situation of radical change. The carefully detailed discussions in "Early Modern Aristotelianism and the Making of Philosophical Disciplines" might not escape the conundrum that comes with such a detailed study; on a macrolevel, the grand narrative of dismissal of Aristotle, and traditional philosophy in general, will always seem more plausible and catchy. No single book will change this situation single-handedly. But what books such as Facca's can do – and what this one brilliantly does – is to rediscover the intricacies of past debates as well as the tension, the liveliness, and the acrimoniousness that characterised them, breaking the monotony of an all too often simplistic and trite opinion about Renaissance philosophy and early modern *Schulphilosophie*.

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[1] R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes, 1274–1671* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), p. 5.

[2] On this point, see Timothy Morton, *Being Ecological* (London: Pelican, 2018).