

ADDRESS

OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE HELLENIC REPUBLIC Mr. PROKOPIOS PAVLOPOULOS DURING THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE WORLD CONFERENCE “ARISTOTLE 2400 YEARS”

Thessaloniki, May 23, 2016

It is with great pleasure that I address the World Congress "Aristotle 2400 years", meticulously organized by the "Interdisciplinary Centre for Aristotle Studies" of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Aristotle was the greatest of philosophers and a truly universal scientist. In particular, the breadth of Aristotle's scientific interests remains unparalleled in the universal history of thought.

We often praise the unique breadth of Aristotle's interest in a range of disciplines. Yet, perhaps we do not emphasize enough the fact that essentially he established the majority of these disciplines. Indeed, Aristotle virtually laid the foundations of ethics, sociology, political science, aesthetics, literary and rhetorical studies, logic, philosophy of mathematics, ontology, psychology, biology, meteorology, and astronomy, among others.

His distinctive virtue of being the founder of such a large number of disciplines gives rise to the question of how we should approach Aristotle's work today. Is his work of mere historical importance? Should we approach him with the respect owed to a pioneer? Or perhaps is Aristotle a thinker whose work remains relevant even at the present time? Can we perhaps nowadays, being citizens of the 21st century, enter into a dialogue with Aristotle's thought and challenge it? Could Aristotle teach us something even this present age?

The answer is explicitly and unequivocally "yes". In an impressive host of scientific disciplines, Aristotle remains an absolutely contemporary thinker, an intellectual landmark that no serious scholar in the respective fields can afford to ignore, without first having to challenge both his work and the scientific truth itself in terms of its intended end. This intended end consists in the endorsement of falsification as the lever for seeking the final scientific truth.

I'll start with my own scientific discipline, Law. We know that Aristotle did not write a treatise specifically focused on law. However, in his monumental work on moral philosophy, the "Nicomachean Ethics", he devotes a whole book, namely Book V, to the analysis of justice. The conceptual distinctions introduced in this book remain unsurpassed. Thus, the fundamental distinctions between distributive and corrective justice retain their timeliness intact, and an entire

branch of political philosophy is dedicated to the theoretical elaboration of these concepts. In the same Book, Aristotle develops his famous theory about "equity", i.e. the virtue that allows the judge to correct the gaps, which the Law necessarily admits due to its unavoidable generality. This generality ensures the commitment of the Law to the implementation of the equality principle *per se*, since this principle is not compatible with an *ad hoc* regulation of individual actions. Equally timely are Aristotle's analyses, both in the "Nicomachean Ethics" and in his "Politics", of the role of the judge, whom he understands as the "animate Law" (*lex animata*).

Since I referred to "moral philosophy", it should be stressed that in this particular discipline Aristotle is to date the leading light. His contribution could be compared only with that of Kant's. However, since the second half of the 20th century to date, moral philosophy has made a comeback, with an increasingly strong interest in Aristotelian ethics as an alternative solution to the apparent or real dead ends of modern thought. This is because in contrast to modern ethics that focus primarily - by definition - to the concepts of individuality and duty, Aristotelian thought is built on the concepts of happiness and practicable good, bringing to the fore intellectual potentialities that had been obscured for centuries.

We must not forget, when seeking after the roots of Aristotelian thought, that the Aristotelian writings began with the famous "Organon", i.e. his theory of logic. Upon realizing that Aristotle virtually establishes and completes the propositional logic *ex nihilo*, we start feeling the physical symptoms of dizziness. Although modern logic includes disciplines that the works of Aristotle did not comprise - I refer to Frege's predicate logic as well as to the contemporary connection between logic and mathematics - the hard core of Aristotelian logic remains unchanged up to date "and is compiled rather for an everlasting possession, than to be rehearsed for a prize" (Thucydides in the translation of Thomas Hobbes).

It would be impossible to conclude this extremely brief account of the timeliness of Aristotelian thought without mentioning the science that Aristotle called "first philosophy (*prōtē philosophia*)" or simply "wisdom (*sophia*)." I obviously refer to Aristotle's treatise "Metaphysics", which has defined, more than any other piece of work, Western thought: "Metaphysics" is the work where he expounds his ontology and the substance theory. We could say that the philosophy of the 20th Century is "haunted" by the effort to understand this unrivalled book.

I would love to continue this discussion on the timeliness of Aristotle's thinking in the context of contemporary sciences and, more broadly, of theoretical discourse. I will not do so not only because I am fully aware of my limited potential to highlight the range of Aristotle's intellect, but also because I am sure that this will be accomplished in depth in the context of the presentations to be held at this Congress, which I wholeheartedly welcome.