

〈書評〉

Marco Sgarbi

Kant and Aristotle. Epistemology, Logic and Method.

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By Wolfgang Ertl

Most of Kant's more historically-minded readers have probably first encountered his thoughts in university courses such as "modern philosophy from Descartes to Kant" or "Kant and German Idealism", and in these approaches Kant is usually discussed as one of the outstanding classics in his relationship to philosophers of a similar caliber who are historically reasonably close to him. True, sometimes the historical distance gets extended, either further into the depths of the past or closer to contemporary thought, nevertheless a widespread assumption is that we should ultimately be concerned with how these giants of the discipline engaged in some sort of timeless dialogue about the core questions of philosophy.

In his most impressive book, Marco Sgarbi chooses an entirely different way of reading Kant historically, namely by re-constructing and considering a very local context of philosophical activity, i.e. that of Königsberg, in particular Königsberg University, the *Albertina*. For Sgarbi, what matters most is the ongoing influence of Aristotelian doctrines there – detectable mainly in some of the school philosophers active in this city in the 17th and early 18th century. In short, it is not so much Aristotle himself who we need to consider when it comes to Kant, but what was made of his philosophical ideas by thinkers of relatively minor standing, and in this regard the title of Sgarbi's book might even be slightly off the mark. For Sgarbi, this local context provides the key to large parts of Kant's theoretical philosophy, as developed mainly in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Sgarbi here takes inspiration from earlier approaches by his great countryman, Giorgio Tonelli,¹ but whom he does not simply follow uncritically.

What Sgarbi brings to light are still almost completely unknown or – once again – forgotten names whose works clearly served as source and inspiration of Kant's critical project. Sgarbi intends to present a different Kant whose strength is less that of the revolutionary, but instead lies in combining and reshaping existing lines of tradition, very much like Aquinas and Leibniz before him.

As Sgarbi maintains, two of the main traditions or strands in Königsberg philosophy before and around Kant were particularly indebted to Aristotle, and Sgarbi even claims – what for many must sound truly surprising, if not challenging given Kant's rather disparaging remarks regarding Aristotle's own pertinent efforts – that the enterprise of Kant's transcen-

¹ See, for example, Tonelli, Giorgio, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason within the Tradition of Modern Logic. A Commentary on Its History*. Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Olms 1994.

dental philosophy properly got under way only after coming into contact, in the early 1770s, with a particular reading, brought forward in Königsberg, of the Aristotelian doctrine of categories. Moreover, for Sgarbi, following Tonelli's lead, the first *Critique* is essentially a methodological, or in the pertinent and wider sense of the term, a "logical" treatise preparing the ground for metaphysics as a science (i.e. very much along the lines suggested in the subtitle of the *Prolegomena*) and needs to be understood against the background of ongoing discussions among the local Königsberg followers and non-followers of Aristotle alike.

With regard to philosophy in Königsberg at the time in question, Sgarbi distinguishes six major strands. Apart from Aristotelianism proper, these are Protestant Scholasticism, Wolffianism, Eclecticism, followers of Crusius, and adherents of Lockean doctrines. One topic of interest which united them, and which is again a central idea in Kant, is indeed that of an adequate methodology in philosophy, in particular metaphysics. For lack of space, I shall focus on Aristotelianism and Protestant Scholasticism for whom Aristotle is of course the major author of reference.

As for Protestant Scholasticism, Sgarbi rightly regards Abraham Calov as its most important local representative. For many readers, the term *Protestant Scholasticism* may still sound contradictory, but it correctly describes the facts on the ground. One even needs to distinguish a Lutheran and a Calvinist or Reformed subtype, and while Königsberg was a Lutheran university, substantial interconfessional interaction took place there, and this also involved Catholic scholastics. Calov in particular must be credited for having introduced Francisco Suárez's metaphysics, as laid out mainly in his *Disputationes metaphysicae* of 1597, in Königsberg, which may look rather improbable from our point of view, since Suárez is the most important representative of Jesuit early modern scholasticism, and Protestantism and Jesuitism do not seem to go together well in the mind of many a reader. Moreover, as Sgarbi shows in great detail, Calov played a major part in developing two important novel philosophical disciplines, namely *gnostology* and *noology*, corresponding to Aristotle's doctrine of the first and second operation of the intellect, in turn relating to concepts and principles respectively. These disciplines, according to Sgarbi, are the prefiguration of the analytic of concepts and the analytic of principles respectively within the transcendental analytic of the first *Critique*.

As Sgarbi points out, Protestant scholasticism is often difficult to distinguish from Aristotelianism proper, since – as scholasticism – the prevalence of Aristotelian doctrines or, at any rate, what was taken to be or presented as Aristotelian doctrines in it was enormous, and, conversely, *gnostology* and *noology* were discussed in depth by Sgarbi's non-scholastic Aristotelians as well. A different approach from the one taken by Sgarbi could be to simply regard scholasticism as a variant of Aristotelianism along with Renaissance Aristotelianism as another. As Sgarbi shows, at any rate, there had been something like an Aristotelian bias at Königsberg University from its very foundation in 1544, with Aristotle being something like its house philosopher, mainly due to the substantial influence Philipp Melanchthon exerted.

Sgarbi emphasizes the so-called *Philippistic* reading of Aristotle interpretation as being dominant, without elucidating what it is precisely.

The Aristotelianism as different from Protestant scholasticism Sgarbi has in mind is the Aristotelianism emerging from Padua from the 16th century onwards with Jacopo Zabarella and Giulio Pace being the key players there. The characteristics of Paduan Aristotelianism, apart from being a Renaissance effort to return to the Greek sources and ‘cleanse’ Aristotle from scholastic distortions (which perhaps often involved more rhetoric than substance anyway), is precisely a focus on the theory of science and the logical and epistemological dimensions this involves as laid out mainly in Aristotle’s *Analytica posteriora*. The Königsberg Aristotelians of particular interest for Sgarbi are Melchior Zeidler and Paul Rabe.

According to Sgarbi (pp. 147-150), Paul Rabe is the man to watch with regard to the crucial impact indicated above concerning a true corner stone of Kant’s theoretical philosophy as a whole, and this is Kant’s doctrine of categories. In his commentary on Aristotle’s treatise *Categories*,² Rabe pursues what Sgarbi describes as a “formal” reading of the categories, which is indebted to Zabarella and Pace. This “formal” reading of the categories contrasts with a material reading favoured by scholastic authors, according to which categories must be regarded as the highest genera of being. Moreover, in Sgarbi’s opinion, this formal reading accords well with the subjectivised conception of form as *modus considerandi*. This means that the focus is not primarily on the structure of a mind-independent reality, but on the way the cognitive subject is working in its conception of objects.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that Sgarbi succeeds in portraying Kant in a way which is poles apart from the mainstream conception of him. Perhaps one obvious question a reader might wish to ask after reading Sgarbi’s book is whether his approach favours a certain reading of Kant’s philosophical project. What does Kant’s indebtedness to the focus on the “cognizable” in Calov’s *gnostology*, the subjectivized reading of form as *modus considerandi rem* in the Aristotelians and the formal reading of the categories suggest with regard to an overall interpretation of, for example, Kant’s transcendental idealism? Are we perhaps supposed to take these considerations as speaking in favour of an anti-realist interpretation of it, and how are other standard interpretations to be assessed in the light of these contextual investigations? Although Sgarbi does not address questions like these himself, one might say that Sgarbi has successfully and most convincingly provided material for further investigations which can now draw on his invaluable results for fine-tuning our understanding of Kant even further.

A book as rich in material as Sgarbi’s cannot be summarised in its entirety in such a short space as this. The purpose of this review has rather been to provide an account of the main features of his approach and to pick out some topics which are of particular relevance. Sgarbi

2 Rabe, Paul, *Primitiae professionis logico-metaphysicae, sive commentarii in librum categoriarum Aristotelis*. Königsberg 1704.

has many more important things to say, for example about what he calls “facultative logic” and its role in an attempt to uncover basic operational principles of the mind, the connection of Kant’s theory of categories to the project of an *ars combinatoria*, the background of the division of transcendental logic into analytic and dialectic, the sources of the rejection of mathematics as the methodological standard of philosophy, and a number of other key topics in Kant scholarship.³

3 These topics will be explored in more detail in a second review of Sgarbi’s book.