PHILOSOPHICAL USAGE OF THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY – A PROPOSAL FOR A FUNCTIONAL TYPOLOGY

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Abstract. The article deals with the question of the value of the history of philosophy for philosophical research. In the first part, it proposes a classification of possible functions realized by references to the philosophical tradition in a philosophical treatise. The proposed typology is meant as a practical tool for identifying and comparing the usage of the past in philosophical texts of any historical period. The second part of the paper illustrates how the classification can be employed by applying it to determine the functions of Aristotle's discussions of the pre-Socratic doctrines in *Metaphysics* A.

Keywords: history of philosophy, philosophical reception of philosophy, Aristotle, Metaphysics A, Aristotle's reception of pre-Socratic philosophy.

A great majority of philosophical treatises from antiquity to modern times include more or less extensive references to earlier philosophical concepts. As long as we are interested mainly in the philosophical ideas of the author of a given treatise, these references may appear to be of secondary importance; if we read the treatise as historians of philosophy, however, they are of much greater significance, providing material either for an examination of the doctrines referred to (especially for their reconstruction in the case of an absence or scarcity of primary sources) or for the analysis of the author's text from the methodological perspective (more precisely, for the analysis of his usage of the past in pursuing his own interest and establishing his own conception). It is definitely the first of these two approaches that has been most commonly adopted by the historians of philosophy, but for the last few decades an interest in the other, methodological, perspective has been constantly growing too, as it constitutes an important aspect of the more and more popular reception studies.[1] Considering the extensive references to pre-Socratic doctrines in Aristotle's treatises, for instance, we not only treat them

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[1] Cf., e.g., the series *Traditio Praesocratica* (de Gruyter) and the parallel commentaries of the series *Studia Praesocratica* which focus not on the reconstruction of the pre-Socratic doctrines but on the transmission of the pre-Socratic ideas and on the functional aspects of the references to them in later texts; see the methodological remarks in Wöhrle [2009] p. 1–3 and Schwab [2012] p. 21–26.

as a source of our knowledge about these doctrines, but we also, setting the question of their historical accuracy aside, want to find out what the sense is of Aristotle's dedicating so much space and energy to the discussions of the concepts of his more or less remote predecessors: is this a means for developing his own theory (e.g. by revising the concepts of the predecessors), or a way of confirming it (e.g. by demonstrating that it solves the earlier problems), or perhaps merely an instrument for introducing and explaining it (e.g. by revealing its historical background)? To answer this question satisfactorily, we would have to identify the particular functions of the references to the philosophical past in the texts of Aristotle (or any other philosophical writer), and the easiest way to identify these functions in an objective way, i.e. in a way allowing comparison between the usage of the philosophical tradition in one text or author and in another text or author, would be to specify them by referring to some general – and so generally applicable – notions.[2] In this paper, I shall tentatively propose a set of notions that could be used for this purpose, namely a classification of possible functions realized by references to the philosophical tradition in a philosophical treatise. In the second part of the paper, I will briefly illustrate how the classification can be used, applying it to determine the functions of the references to the history of philosophy in a concrete philosophical text, namely Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 1.

1. A functional typology of the references to the history of philosophy in a philosophical treatise

Of great help in developing this kind of classification can be in a rather little known paper by Hans Krämer [1985], who distinguished nineteen possible functions performed by the history of philosophy in philosophical research, and subsumed them under five broader groups corresponding to an ideal course of the formation of a philosophical theory.[3] The typology I will present below is genetically an adaptation of Krämer's proposal to a somewhat different project which consists in the examination of the functional value of the references to the past in

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[2] In the following, I will focus only on this approach, thus leaving aside the possibility of describing these functions by using a discourse specific (only) to a given philosopher and thus arriving at results that would be possibly correct and informative but (probably) not comparable with the results of the analogical examination of a different philosopher. For instance, it is perfectly correct to say that Aristotle adduces Socrates' view on acrasia in EN 7.2, 1145b21-27 in the course of διαπορεῖν, i.e. to discuss the difficulties of the generally accepted views (ἔνδοξα), which is part of his philosophical method (cf. EN 7.1, 1145b2-7); however, it might be very difficult to use this information in a comparison with the functional value of references to the pre-Platonic philosophers in the treatises of other authors.

[3] These five groups are: Primary Information [I], Hermeneutics [II], Heuristics [III], Genetic Reflection [IV], and Validity Tests [V].

a constituted philosophical *text* – as opposed to the abstract *process of the formation of a theory*.[4] The revised typology presents itself as follows:

I. Informative functions

1. Introducing, presenting and informing about the theories belonging to the history of philosophy.

II. Explicative and propaedeutic functions

2. Illustrating (with a possible aesthetic effect), exemplifying and explaining terms, concepts and theories; introducing a philosophical problem (esp. by displaying earlier approaches to it) or into a philosophical theory (esp. by pointing to its genesis and development).

III. Heuristic functions

3. Adopting terms, arguments, theories, methods, etc. from the history of philosophy.

4. Formulating questions and problems on the basis of the historiographical material.

5. Advancing philosophical reflection and developing theories on the basis of the historiographical material (esp. through analysis, exegesis or criticism of the earlier philosophy, adopting its perspective, modifying its achievements or avoiding its errors).

IV. Evaluative functions

6. Determining or suggesting the importance of questions and problems.

7. Evaluating, confirming or weakening a (later) theory [T] by referring to the theories belonging to the history of philosophy [THF], where THF can be seen:

   – *in the synchronic perspective:*

   7.1. Evaluating T by demonstrating its superiority over or inferiority to THF

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[4] This difference of perspective (the process of building a theory *versus* a constituted text presenting the results of this process) necessarily leads to substantial modifications in the classifying schema. Some of Krämer's functions (e.g. modifying one's own theory after comparing it with the earlier theories) are not likely to be reflected in a completed treatise; on the other hand, some functions of textual references to the past (e.g. illustration or explication by pointing to the earlier theories) are not, or not sufficiently, represented in Krämer's list. Besides, if Krämer's group II ("Hermeneutics", within which the historiography of philosophy functions as a field for practising philosophy) should be applied to texts, those texts would be primarily historiographical and exegetical works, and not treatises of systematic philosophy, with which alone we are concerned here. And finally, since the synchronic analysis we are aiming at concentrates solely on the actual role of a relevant text passage, there is little justification for group IV ("Genetic Reflection") which gathers different functions realized by looking at the roots and development of a theory; rather, each of the functions brought together there should be subsumed under a relevant functional group.

       7.2. Evaluating T by assessing THF perceived as variants or concretisations of T

   – in the perspective of the genesis and development of T:

       7.3. Evaluating T by considering THF as the genesis of T

       7.4. Evaluating T by considering THF as the result of the past discussions

   – as legacy with which T is confronted as its successor:

       7.5. Confirming T by pointing to its congruence with THF

       7.6. Questioning T by pointing to its incongruity with THF

       7.7. Confirming T by pointing to its originality in relation to THP

       7.8. Questioning T by pointing to its lack of originality in relation to THP

V. Emancipative and therapeutic functions

8. Emancipation, self-identification and self-confirmation through dissociation from the past, its criticism and rejection.

9. Therapeutic influencing of the present by means of referring to the past.

VI. Metaphilosophical functions

10. Reflecting on the notion, unity, object, method and purpose of philosophy on the basis of the historiographical material.

11. Reflecting on the development of philosophy and making predictions on its future development on the basis of the historiographical material.

Let me now briefly explain each of the enumerated points.[5]

Although the informative function of references to the history of philosophy (No. 1) is fulfilled mainly by specialist texts written within the realm and paradigm of the historiography of philosophy, in a broader sense we can also speak about it in the case of systematic philosophical treatises (which are the only object of our interest here), provided that they include passages which are conceived principally as reports of earlier philosophical theories. Of course, delivering such information in those texts is not the final goal, but only preparation for its specific usage. The different modes of that usage are described in points 2 to 11.

First, a philosopher can employ the immense explicative potential of the history of philosophy and adduce the earlier theories to illustrate and explain philosophical problems, terms, concepts and theories (No. 2). Adopting a dia-

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[5] Needless to say, a particular reference to the history of philosophy in a philosophical treatise can have more than one function at the same time. In addition, all references realize, usually only implicitly and sometimes even unintentionally, a function which is too general to be included in the classification: namely, they serve, in a sense, to integrate a new reflection into the philosophical tradition, even if this tradition is refuted and rejected by the author.

chronic perspective, i.e. presenting the origins and the development of a theory or the earlier solutions to a problem, can be of great help in introducing a given topic, especially since philosophical theories tend to get more and more refined and complex, and thereby less accessible, in the course of time.

Secondly, the history of philosophy provides a rich and manifold reservoir of conceptual material that can be re-employed in new philosophical research. A philosopher can draw from it terminology, arguments, elements of theory and research methods (No. 3). He can also take over unsolved philosophical questions, re-formulate them, or use the earlier investigations to formulate a new problem (No. 4). Besides, he can employ it as a support and prop for solving a problem and developing his own theories and reflections, i.e., he can present his philosophizing as positively advanced through analysis, exegesis or criticism of the earlier philosophy, through adopting its perspective, modifying its achievements, avoiding its errors etc. (No. 5).

Further, the earlier theories can be used to evaluate philosophical ideas: either to assess the importance of questions and problems (No. 6), or to confirm and strengthen or question and weaken philosophical theories and concepts (No. 7). Assessing the importance of problems (No. 6) is often accompanied by function No. 4: taking up a problem inherited from the past (No. 4) is justified by its significance, which is proved by pointing to the intensity of the earlier attempts to solve it (No. 6); or, on the contrary, a question is formulated (No. 4) and proved significant (No. 6) by examining the earlier theories and indicating that they did not pay due attention to it.

Evaluating a later, especially a modern (either one's own or someone else's) theory (T) on the basis of historiographical material (No. 7) can be carried out in a variety of ways, depending on the perspective from which theories belonging to the history of philosophy (THP) are viewed: synchronically (7.1–2), genetically (7.3–4) or as tradition (7.5–8).

By the 'synchronic perspective' let us understand a point of view which principally abstracts from the time relations (esp. temporal distance) between THP and T. The value or the truth claim of T is determined here either *via* a comparison with THP (by demonstrating its superiority over THP or its inferiority to THF) (7.1) or through an assessment of THP, which are in this case seen as representative variants or concretizations of T (7.2). The first option (7.1) occurs in many different forms, e.g. in a form of a proof that T does not face the problems of THP. The second option (7.2) can be very persuasive but is not really conclusive unless the evaluation includes not only all historical concretizations but all possible variants of T.

Seen as irrelevant in 7.1–7.2, time relations are constitutive of the evaluation of T in the next two points (7.3–7.4). Here, a modern theory (or just a theory later than THP) can be weakened or strengthened by adopting a diachronic perspective and pointing to its origins (7.3). For example, it can be shown that its original version arose as a result of external (religious, social, economical, etc.) circumstances that are no longer valid, or that it has been burdened with essential problems 'genetically', i.e. from its original form on; or, to reinforce a theory, we can adduce some plausible, but forgotten arguments, which were originally used for its justification. What must be assumed in all those cases is a continuous tradition extending from THP to T. This condition is not necessary in the next point (7.4), where we refer to the past in order to show that T does not answer or take into account some important results of the earlier discussions. In this case, it is possible that the results relevant to the criticism of T were achieved while debating about a theory which is not a continuous predecessor of T (or even incidentally while debating about a theory quite different from T and its earlier versions).

Finally, T can be evaluated by confronting it with THP seen as the tradition or the legacy of the past. Depending on the methodological assumptions, the agreement between T and THP and the lack of agreement between them can be both interpreted either *pro* or *contra* T: the agreement either as a confirmation of the trueness of T (7.5) or as an indication of its unoriginality and derivativeness (7.8), the lack of agreement either as an aberration from the understanding acquired by the previous generations (7.6) or as a sign of originality and innovativeness of the new theory (7.7).

Apart from this rather positive (even though sometimes critical) usage of the earlier philosophical theories, we can identify a principally negative approach: a refutation or even deconstruction of the past can be employed to demarcate one's own position, to define it in contrast with the past and to acquire free space for it (**No. 8**). Additionally, the author can attribute to this refutation some beneficially corrective and healing effects upon the reader's mind (by way of freeing it from harmful errors inherited from the past), i.e. a 'therapeutic' function (No. 9). Of course, such curative effects can be ascribed not only to the negation of the past, but also to the consideration and appropriation of an older wisdom.[6]

At the very bottom of the classification, we find two points concerning references to the history of philosophy in a metaphilosophical inquiry. Firstly, the

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[6] Obviously, it is not sensible to identify this function unless the author explicitly attributes it to his engagement with the past. For an example of this strategy, see Richard Rorty's statements on the goal of his discussion of the earlier doctrines in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

past doctrines can provide material for reflection about the notion, unity, methods and goals of philosophy (No. 10). Secondly, they can serve as the object and the basis of the theories describing and predicting the development of philosophy in the course of time (No. 11).

2. Illustration: Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1

Let us now put the presented typology to use, examining as an example Chapters 3–10 of the first book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* – a text which is particularly suitable for illustration purposes since it is very rich in references to the earlier philosophical theories[7] and at the same time very well known.[8] Besides, it is a text whose author openly states the aim of his referring to the past, a circumstance that allows us to check if the method advocated above can satisfactorily express the author's declared intention and to compare the overall results of using this method with the content of his declaration.

Aristotle's intention is stated directly before his historical survey beginning in *Metaph.* 1.3. Having worked out the definition of wisdom (or philosophy) as a theoretical science of the first principles and causes (*Metaph.* 1.1-2; esp. 1.2, 982b7), Aristotle briefly recalls the four types of causes as distinguished in his *Physics* (*Metaph.* 1.3, 983a24-32) and announces an examination of the doctrines of the earlier philosophers with regard to the principles and causes they have postulated, justifying it as follows: 'to go over their views, then, will be of profit to the present inquiry, for we shall either find another kind of cause, or be more convinced of the correctness of those which we now maintain' (*Metaph.* 1.3, 983b5-6, trans. D. Ross).

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[7] For this reason, *Metaph.* 1.3-10 is sometimes considered as a piece of historiography of philosophy. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that it is a piece of systematic philosophy as well, and as such it will be an object of our analysis.

[8] Of course, the functions of references to the history of philosophy in *Metaph.* 1.3-10 have already been examined by other scholars. See, e.g., the analyses of Cherniss [1935] p. 218–227, 348–350 and Mansion [1961] p. 39–41, and the remarks in Palmer [2008] p. 543f., Hussey [2012] p. 32, and Frede [2004] p. 33–36. According to Mansion, Palmer and Hussey, the goal of the historical survey in *Metaph.* 1.3-10 is to confirm Aristotle's theory of the four causes, esp. its completness. Cherniss argues that Aristotle (generally and also in *Metaph.* 1) discusses the earlier doctrines not only to confirm his own theories but also to demonstrate their superiority (he achieves both of these goals by presenting the earlier doctrines as '"stammering" attempts to express his own system', p. 348). Frede goes further and points to the connection between *Metaph.* 1.1-2 and 1.3-10: Aristotle's analysis of the earlier doctrines serves also as a confirmation of the definition of philosophy given in *Metaph.* 1.1-2 and as an introduction into philosophy as defined there. Comparing the accounts of these researchers with the results of the brief analysis conducted below can be instructive since it shows, as I believe, how the usage of the classification I present here widens the perspective and facilitates the analysis. What should be kept in mind, however, is not only the difference of methods but also of the goals and the scope of each of the studies.

Thus, the announced examination is supposed to fulfil one of two tasks, the first of which (*sc.* adopting further types of causes from the earlier sources) can be subsumed under **function type No. 3**, and the second (*sc.* confirming Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes in case no further types of causes have been found in the earlier doctrines) under **function type No. 7**.

As it turns out in the following chapters, it is the latter option that is eventually realized; at the early stage of *Metaph.* 1.3, however, it is not evident how the supposed confirmation should actually be imagined. Only later does it become clear that the confirmation results not only from the fact that no further types of causes have been found (which confirms only the exhaustiveness of Aristotle's doctrine) but also positively from the fact that all the individual causes postulated by philosophers so far can be successfully subsumed under the four types of causes as envisaged by Aristotle. Accordingly, it is also the content of Aristotle's doctrine that is being confirmed, and the basis of the confirmation is the agreement between his theory and the results of the earlier philosophical inquiries. This kind of usage of the history of philosophy falls, taking it more precisely, under **subtype 7.5** in our classification ('Confirming a theory by pointing to its congruence with the theories of the history of philosophy'); consequently, we can ascribe this function to all the numerous passages in which the subsumption is carried out, i.e. to the texts from chapters three to seven which include interpretations of the doctrines of the material monists and pluralists, the Pythagoreans and the Eleatics.[9]

So far, we have used the proposed classification to identify the function of the historical survey in *Metaph.* 1 on the basis of Aristotle's own statement from 983b5-6. Using the same classification, however, we can easily discover that this result does not exhaust the functional value of Aristotle's examination of the philosophical tradition. In the remainder of this article, I will present the results of going through the text of *Metaph.* 1.3-10 with the proposed classification in mind. For the sake of clarity, I will follow the order of the classification.

I. Informative functions

The previously mentioned subsumption of the earlier concepts under the four causes is based on Aristotle's interpretation of those concepts that can be fully comprehended by the reader only if he is in possession of sufficient knowledge of the interpreted matter. But, interestingly, Aristotle does not simply assume that he

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[9] I do not mention Plato here since in my analysis I treat his theory (discussed in *Metaph.* 1.6) as belonging, from Aristotle's perspective, not to the history of philosophy, but to the contemporary philosophy.

will possess this knowledge and have it always at hand; rather, he prefixes or complements each interpretation with a concise, instructive presentation of (and sometimes even a relevant quotation from) the historical concept being the object of interpretation (e.g. 1.3, 983b18-27: Thales; 1.3, 984a11-16: Anaxagoras; 1.4, 985a23-29: Empedocles; 1.4, 985b13-19: the atomists; 1.5, 985b23-986a12: the Pythagoreans; 1.5, 986b27-987a2: Parmenides). Let us here put aside the controversial question of whether those passages suffice to consider Aristotle a historian of philosophy[10] – the answer to that question depends mainly on the definition of this discipline. In any case, the passages undoubtedly provide information relevant to the following interpretation and thereby fulfil a specific task, which can be identified as **function No. 1** from our classification[11] (this does not imply, of course, that they themselves are entirely free from any Aristotelian interpretation).

II. Explicative and propaedeutic functions

The most common way of taking advantage of the explicative potential of the history of philosophy in *Metaph.* 1.3-10 is using one historical concept to explain another: Aristotle points to analogies and differences between the pre-Platonic doctrines to reveal their deeper meaning and hidden implications (= **function No. 2**). A good example for this strategy is his usage of the theory of the material monists, which serves as an object of comparison in interpreting the concepts of the atomists, the Eleatics and Plato. As to the atomists (*Metaph.* 1.4, 985b10-13), the reference to the monistic concept of the rare and the dense ('τὸ μανὸν καὶ τὸ πυκνόν') shows that shape, order and position, which differentiate individual atoms according to the atomists, are to be understood merely as modifying qualities of the substrate and not as formal or efficient causes. The same monistic theory helps interpret Plato's doctrine properly (*Metaph.* 1.9, 992b4-7), demonstrating that his concept of the great and the small ('τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρόν'), although postulated as matter, is analogous to the rare and the dense and thereby

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[10] For a negative answer, see esp. Cherniss [1935] 347f., for a positive one, e.g. Guthrie [1957] and Barney [2012] 103f.; see also Stevenson [1977] and Berti [1986] for interesting comments on this discussion.

[11] Aristotle's comments, subsequent to the above-mentioned passage concerning the Pythagorean doctrine of number (*Metaph.* 1.5, 985b23-986a12), can illustrate and support this point. After presenting at length the Pythagorean theory, Aristotle refers the reader for more information about the subject to his other writings – apparently his nonextant works about the Pythagoreans – and recalls that his actual aim was to learn what ἀρχαί these philosophers posited and under which of the four kinds of causes their principles can be subsumed (*Metaph.* 1.5, 986a12-15). Obviously, he ascribes to the preceding passage a primarily informative function and only subsequently wants to subject the Pythagorean theory to an interpretation serving his own purposes.

more suitable to play the role of the differentiating qualities of the matter rather than of the matter itself. In the case of the Eleatics (*Metaph*. 1.5, 986b14-17), the reference to the material monists makes the specific character and the implications of the Eleatic monism more manifest: since the Eleatic One, in contrast to the One of the material monists, does not function as the source of any generation, it cannot be conceived as a material principle.

At the same time, the process of analysing the earlier doctrines and subsuming them under the Aristotelian four causes teaches the reader not only about these doctrines, but also about the concept of the four causes itself; in fact, it is an excellent way to gain a deepened understanding of the four causes since it shows how this concept is practically put to use. What's more, since research into the first causes of being is the core of philosophy for Aristotle, the historical survey provides a very instructive introduction into this very discipline. Both of these effects also fall under function No. 2 from our classification.

III. Heuristic functions

As we saw above, Aristotle declares adopting new types of causes (function No. 3) as the main goal of the historical survey in *Metaph*. 1.3-10, but, since his examination leads to the result that no new types of causes were introduced by the earlier thinkers, this goal cannot be achieved. Generally, in *Metaph*. 1.3-10 Aristotle does not take over any other elements of their theories either. The only exception seems to appear in the course of his criticism of Plato's theory of forms in *Metaph*. 9. Here, Aristotle argues that the forms do not contribute anything to sensible things and adduces an argument according to which a cause of a thing must be inherent to that thing, just as whiteness makes an object white by being admixed to it (991a9-19). Although it is clear that it was probably Eudoxos who first employed this argument within the discussion of the theory of forms, Aristotle ascribes it originally to Anaxagoras, whereas Eudoxos is mentioned as its later advocate ('Ἀναξαγόρας μὲν πρῶτος Εὔδοξος δ'ὕστερον'). Aristotle states immediately that the argument is problematic, but anyway he uses it, and this usage delivers an example of **function type No. 3** from our classification.

The historical survey in Metaphysics 1.3-10 focuses on the notion of the first principles and causes and does not work out any further philosophical questions (cf. function No. 4).[12] The historical examination does not serve to develop new

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[12] However, Aristotle seems to be aware that it could perform this task and announces that it will be helpful in working out some *aporiai* later (*Metaph*. 1.10, 993a24-27). The passage is not entirely clear (see Berti, Rossito [1993] p. 139 n. 109), but usually it is interpreted as a reference to the *aporiai* in *Metaph*. 2, see Cooper [2012] p. 351–354 and Ross [1924] p. 213 and 222.

philosophical theories either (cf. function No. 5); in fact, the main theory of the text, the concept of the four causes, had been developed already in *Physics.* However, the examination of the earlier doctrines is definitely more than a merely historical account; rather, it itself can be seen as a piece of philosophical reflection on the basis of the historiographical material[13] and as such can be considered a weak version of **function No. 5**.

IV. Evaluative functions

Aristotle's analysis of the earlier theories, suggesting that practically all philosophers have been concerned with the problem of the first causes and principles, has apparent implications for the perception of the rank of this problem: it essentially raises its significance. This effect falls under **function type No. 6** and is undoubtedly intended by Aristotle.

As we have already seen, the subsumption of all the earlier concepts of the first causes under the Aristotelian theory of the four causes provides a confirmation of this theory and an example for the strategy figuring as **No. 7.5** in our classification. But closer examination reveals that 7.5 is not the only subtype of function No. 7 realised in *Metaph.* 1.3-10.

It is striking (especially when we bear in mind the goal of the historical survey as declared by Aristotle) that in *Metaph.* 1.3-10 the earlier concepts are not only affirmatively integrated into Aristotle's theory, but also scrupulously tested for their theoretical foundation, consistency and implications, and for the most part heavily criticized. This negative assessment shows that Aristotle does not want to carry the thesis as to the agreement between the earlier concepts and his own theory too far; rather, he tries to restrict its scope to the necessary minimum and employs the comparison base (which has been established by the proof of the partial congruence between his theory and the doctrines of his predecessors) to demonstrate the principal superiority of his own position over the earlier ones – a strategy that can be matched to **function No. 7.1** in our classification. Its core is the attempt to show that the earlier philosophers anticipated the theory of the four causes in an unsatisfactory way only; speaking more precisely, their accounts of causes are accused of being incomplete (and as such, possibly leading to serious errors[14]), vague, inconsistent, and primitive.[15] This criticism is supposed to en-

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[13] This is particularly manifest in the critical passages such as *Metaph.* 1.8, 989a30-b29, where Aristotle intentionally subjects Anaxagoras' statements to a strictly philosophical, unhistorical interpretation revealing implications similar to some theories of Aristotle's own time.

[14] See, e.g., *Metaph.* 1.3, 984a29-b1, which confirms Aristotle's theory of causes not only by pointing to the incompleteness of the Eleatic grasp of causes, but also by presenting the Eleatic negation of

hance indirectly the value of Aristotle's own doctrine as the first complete, clear, coherent and fully-developed account of causality.

In addition, we find one passage where an earlier theory, namely the Pythagorean theory of number, is used to criticize a later (let us say: a modern) theory, namely the Platonic theory of forms. In the presentation of the latter at the beginning of chapter six (987b7-14), Aristotle criticizes the Platonic concept of μέθεξις (the participation of things in the forms) as unclear, and points to the Pythagorean concept of μίμησις (the imitation of the numbers by the things) as its origin. With this reference, he reveals the source of the unclearness of the Platonic notion: either it had been vague already in the Pythagorean doctrine (this interpretation is suggested especially by the plural 'ἀφεῖσαν' in 987b14 and by the fact that Aristotle seems to think of μίμησις and μέθεξις as of two designations of one and the same idea) or at least it has not been sufficiently clarified in its new application to the Platonic forms. In any case, the Pythagorean doctrine is adduced in the context of the origins of Plato's theory and used not only to elucidate it, but also to criticize it – a rather rare manoeuvre which falls under **function type No. 7.3.**

V. Emancipative and therapeutic functions

As mentioned previously, in *Metaph*. 1.3-10 Aristotle thoroughly tests and severely criticizes the earlier doctrines as to their accounts of the first principles to demonstrate the essential superiority of his own theory of the four causes. His criticism follows almost all presentations of the doctrines; it also figures in the summaries in chapters 4, 5, 7, and 10, and it builds the substance of chapters 8 and 9, which are devoted specifically to all possible problems of the previously presented

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change as an absurd consequence of neglecting the efficient cause (a consequence from which the Aristotelian doctrine is, of course, free).

[15] As to the incompleteness of the earlier accounts of causes: apart from the summaries in *Metaph*. 1.5, 987a2-13 and 1.7., 988a17-b16, which contain a rather implicit criticism by way of specifying the kinds of causes postulated by the earlier thinkers, there are passages stating explicitly that Aristotle's predecessors failed to grasp one or more types of cause: e.g., the atomists (1.3, 985b19-20) and the Eleatics (*Metaph*. 1.3, 984a29-b1; cf. 984b1-4) missed the efficient cause, the monists missed both the efficient (1.3, 984a27-29) and the formal (1.8, 988b28-29) cause, and none of Aristotle's predecessors possessed the notion of the final cause (1.7, 988b6-8). As to the vagueness: they grasped the causes only ἀμυδρῶς (obscurely, faintly) or οὐ σαφῶς (not clearly): so, e.g., Empedocles and Anaxagoras as to the material and especially efficient cause (*Metaph*. 1.4, 985a10-985b3) and all philosophers as to the formal cause (*Metaph*. 1.7, 988a34-35); in some places, this criticism is directed against all the earlier attempts to speak about the causes (*Metaph*. 1.7, 988a23 and 1.10, 993a13--15). Thirdly, the earlier concepts of causes are inconsistent: so, e.g., Anaxagoras' theory of the efficient cause (*Metaph*. 1.4, 985a18-21) and Empedocles' theory of both the efficient (*Metaph*. 1.4, 985a21-29) and of the formal cause (*Metaph*. 1.10, 993a15-24). Finally, they are too simple and primitive, as stated explicitly e.g. in case of the Pythagorean attempts to grasp the formal cause (*Metaph*. 1.5, 987a19-22) or Xenophanes' and Melissos' reflections in general (*Metaph*. 1.5, 986b21-27).

theories. In fact, the scope of this criticism significantly exceeds the extent required to prove the superiority of Aristotle's theory of the four causes; besides, a great part of the critical discussions cannot contribute to the reinforcement of this theory because it does not concern the concept of the causes as such, but rather the particular identification and description of the entities which were postulated by the earlier thinkers as the first causes. For instance, whereas Aristotle's observation that the material cause as conceived by the first monists leads to the abolition of genesis (*Metaph*. 1.3, 983b11-12) does imply the inferiority of this early notion to Aristotle's concept of this cause, his remark that the first monists identified the material cause with one of the elements arbitrarily and randomly (*Metaph*. 1.8, 988b29-32) does not imply that, since it does not concern the notion of the material cause as such. Similarly, he finds fault with the Pythagorean identification of the material causes with entities which cannot, in his view, explain the physical qualities of things such as, e.g., weight (*Metaph*. 1.8, 990a12-14), and he disapproves of Empedocles' description of the four elements as implying that they cannot change into one another (*Metaph*. 1.8, 989a22-24). What all these remarks could demonstrate is rather the inferiority of the pre-Socratic theories to Aristotle's own identification and description of the stuff serving as a material cause; however, *Metaphysics* 1 does not reveal Aristotle's view on that question. Consequently, we can assume that the function of this kind of criticism consists rather in showing that the question of the identification of the material cause remains still open and thus creates free space for the future development of Aristotle's theory – a strategy that can be seen as a weak form of **function 8** from our classification. *Nota bene*, no therapeutic purpose (cf. function 9) is attached to this process by Aristotle.

VI. Metaphilosophical functions

Finally, there are two further positive effects of the historical survey in *Metaph*. 1.3-10. The first one falls clearly under **function No. 10** in our classification. In *Metaph*. 1.1-2, Aristotle develops a new and possibly controversial[16] concept of philosophy as the science of the first principles and causes; the following demonstration that all the earlier thinkers searched for first principles and causes obviously confirms not only his concept of the four causes, but at the same time also his conception of philosophy as presented at the beginning of the book. It becomes apparent that philosophy is, in a sense, one, and that all the theories which deserve to be considered philosophy result from the common effort to identify the first principles of being. The description of how it emerged and developed until

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[16] See Frede [2004] p. 15–27.

Aristotle's own time enables the reader to grasp the scope and the inner character of the 'first philosophy' as conceived by Aristotle.

In fact, in *Metaph.* 1.3-10 Aristotle does not confine himself to presenting and testing the earlier theories in a chronological way: he also interprets them metaphilosophically as stages of a process which complement each other and add up to a continuous development. His discussions of the earlier theories transmit a specific view on the history of philosophy as a complex, cumulative progress oriented towards the truth and gradually approaching it. For example, in a famous text from the last chapter of the book (*Metaph.* 1.10, 993a13-18), Aristotle compares philosophy at the early stage to a child who is able to speak only in an indistinct and unclear way ('ψελλίζεσθαι'). Another well-known passage compares the innovative statements of early thinkers (especially Empedocles and Anaxagoras) concerning the causes to only randomly successful strokes of untrained fighters (*Metaph.* 1.4, 985a10-18). It shows that the development of philosophy is comparable not to the biological, but rather to the intellectual development of a human being, leading to the truth through confusion and failed attempts. Thus, we can accept that these and similar passages fulfil **function No. 11** from our classification.

3. Conclusions

Let us now assess the results of the above application of our classification to the analysis of the functional value of the references to the earlier philosophical theories in *Metaph.* 1.3-10. Did it prove useful to employ it in this analysis at all? I am inclined to a positive answer and I hope it was at least partially apparent (even if we could not analyse the whole text passage by passage) that using the typology does facilitate the identification of the function of a given text. The most important advantage of this usage, however, consists in providing a basis for a general functional characterisation of references to the history of philosophy in a given text as well as for a comparison with references in other texts and authors. Since we have examined only one text and so cannot conduct a full comparison of *Metaph.* 1.3-10 with another text, let me finish this short study by illustrating the first point, i.e. by giving a general characterisation of Aristotle's usage of the history of philosophy in *Metaph.* 1.3-10 with only a few comparative comments.

Looking at the results of our analysis, we can easily notice that the functional value of the references to the history of philosophy in *Metaph.* 1.3-10 is far more differentiated than is suggested by Aristotle's own declaration from *Metaph.* 1.3, 983b5-6. These references inform about the earlier doctrines (= group I), serve as an explanation of other historical concepts and as an introduction into Aristotle's theory of causes and the first philosophy in general (= II), provide, to some

degree, material for philosophical reflection (= III), confirm the importance of the question of the first principles and the correctness of Aristotle's idea of four causality types (= IV), help (sporadically) in evaluating other, more contemporary theories (= IV), prepare, by means of criticism and refutation of the previous theories, free space for Aristotle's future identification of the first principles of being (= V), confirm and illustrate Aristotle's definition of philosophy (= VI) and back up his reflection about the way in which philosophy develops in time (= VI).

Thus, *Metaphysics* 1.3-10 provides examples for all six general groups of our typology and for nine (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11) of the eleven specific tasks distinguished in it (and also for three of the eight specific evaluative strategies: 7.1, 7.3 and 7.5) – this is probably more than usual in Aristotle (the most common functional types in Aristotle's other texts being No. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, esp. 7.1 and 7.5, and 8). Two rare functions that are realized in *Metaph.* 1.3-10 are No. 10 and 11: as we saw above, Aristotle uses there the history of philosophy to confirm his vision of philosophy as a unified discipline having a common object and directed towards the same purpose, and the genetic perspective adopted there brings him to reflect also on the historical development of philosophy.[17] To the adoption of this genetic perspective, we also owe a unique example of function 7.3: evaluating a theory (here: Plato's concept of μέθεξις) by referring to an earlier doctrine from which it is supposed to have originated (here: the Pythagorean concept of μίμησις).

Using our classification, we can state not only which functions are fulfilled by references to the past in *Metaph.* 1.3-10, but also which functions are either weakly represented (No. 3, 5, 8) or not at all realized in this text (No. 4 and 9, as well as the evaluative subtypes 7.2, 7.4, 7.6, 7.7 and 7.8).

The absence of function 9 ('Therapeutic influencing of the present by means of referring to the past') is common to Aristotle's treatises and suggests that he does not attribute to his reconsideration or refutation of the false theories of the past any healing effects on the reader's mind. On the contrary, the absence of examples for function type 4 ('Formulating questions and problems on the basis of the historiographical material') is rather surprising and suggests that the structure of *Metaph.* 1.3-10 is more rigorous and goal-oriented than it seems at first: in fact, the whole historical survey focuses strictly on the previously formulated issue of the types of causes and does not allow developing and engaging in other, even closely related, questions.

While the evaluative subtype 7.4 is a very special and rare function (so that its absence in *Metaph.* 1 does not warrant any special conclusions) and the absence

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[17] For the rare function 11 cf. also *De part. anim.* 1.1.

of 7.2 results from the simple fact that the aim of *Metaph.* 1.3-10 is not the refutation of any broader theories which the ancient doctrines would be variants of, Aristotle's usage of the evaluative functions of the subgroups 7.5-7.8 in *Metaph.* 1.3-10 (i.e. his disinterest in subtypes 7.6-7.8 and employment of type 7.5 only) converges with his practice in the other texts of the *Corpus* and throws some light on his general attitude to the philosophical legacy of the past. The absence of 7.7 and 7.8 shows that originality as such is not recognized as a desired quality of philosophical research. Since human beings are in principle able to discover the truth and the progress of philosophy takes place by way of a cumulation of individual contributions,[18] it is rather the agreement with at least some of the previous results that suggests that we are on the right path (7.5). But because of the constant progress of philosophy, the lack of agreement between a new theory and the former doctrines on a particular question cannot be treated as an argument against the new theory (as in 7.6).

Lastly, let us briefly look at the functions which are realized in *Metaph.* 1.3-10 to a lesser degree (No. 3, 5, 8). As to function 8 ('Emancipation, self-identification and self-confirmation through dissociation from the past, its criticism and rejection'), we found in this text its weaker version only, since Aristotle's criticism of the earlier theories is not directly represented as a method of emancipation and self-identification; rather, he tries to make room for his own identification of the four causes and assure that despite all the previous investigations it is still needed (cf. also function No. 6). This strategy is common to *Metaph.* 1.3-10 and to many other texts of Aristotle.

The weak representation of function No. 3 ('Adopting terms, arguments, theories, methods, etc. from the history of philosophy') can surprise us at first, but in fact Aristotle usually does not simply adopt the earlier concepts (or, at least, does not admit to having simply adopted them). Apart from the cases where he points to the agreement of the experts or subscribes to a general opinion, he usually tends to set in bold relief the differences between his own position and the earlier ones (cf. function 7.1). As to the adoption of arguments, he may adduce and employ them if they are relevant to his investigation, but, just as in our case, he usually immediately criticizes them as not really cogent or otherwise deficient.

Finally, a weak realization of the heuristic function 5 in *Metaph.* 1.3-10 is striking since it is very frequent in other treatises of Aristotle (think of his familiar method of developing his own solution to a problem by means of criticism of the previous theories). But in *Metaph.* 1.3-10, Aristotle approaches the earlier views

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[18] *Metaph.* 2.1, 993a30-b19. For a brief commentary see Oehler [1961] 106f.

with an already formulated, detailed theory that could be at most completed by the cognition acquired from the discussion of the earlier concepts. Principally, no other cognitive gain is sought and expected in that discussion. Although his examination of the earlier doctrines in *Metaph*. 1.3-10 can itself be seen as a kind of philosophical reflection, the previous thinkers still figure there far more as archaic predecessors than as actual partners of investigation or sources of inspiration: *de facto*, their role in this area is limited to the confirmation of Aristotle's own view. This, of course, does not mean that self-confirmation is the only or even the main function of Aristotle's references to the older theories in *Metaph*. 1.3-10 – as I have argued in this short examination, their functional value is actually much more complex and intriguing than that.

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