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Plato and Aristotle in the light of research on Indo-European culture

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Today we're used to measure the value of works of culture through the lens of originality and their creators' innovation. Against this background appears an outlying standpoint of Giovanni Reale, an Italian historian and Ancient philosophy scholar, who appreciated Aristotle's greatness and, first of all, believed he was a faithful continuer of Plato's teachings. Even though Reale gives multiple accounts proving his own thesis, his point of view is contrary to most readers' impressions of the two philosophers. His thesis doesn't stand a chance against a critique from a different point of view. Polemicizing with Reale's thesis, I'm going to prove that the difference between Plato and Aristotle is rooted deep down in the quintessence of their ontological views. Faithful to the tradition of the early Indo-European culture, Plato acknowledged ternary structures as the primal principle of his philosophical system, meanwhile Aristotelian metaphysics is binary. The reason for this paradigmatical incoherence may be the cultural differences between both philosophers. Nowadays this issue is a subject of academic research, especially on the grounds of transculturalism.

Keywords: Plato, ternary system, Aristotle, binary system, Giovanni Reale, traditionalism, originality, early Indo-European culture, transculturalism

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Introduction

We live in a time when, above all, the originality of all creation is appreciated. Progress and change have become the most desirable components of culture. It is perhaps most clearly seen in the contemporary political scene, where even conservatives are constantly introducing reforms, and the traditionalist right-wing, conservative by definition, has been completely obliterated. Politicians, artists and even scientists today should evangelize the idea of progressivity, and practice innovation. *Novum* has become a key concept in the evaluation of culture as such. This criterion is also applied to philosophers and, thus, to those thinkers, who develop conceptual theoretical constructions, serving not only a deeper understanding of the world and people, but above all opening the possibility of mental reference to the universe and shaping human values, beliefs and attitudes. We are now applying this perspective not only to contemporary philosophers, but also to the classics who lived and created at all times, even in ancient Greece, regarded as the cornerstone of the Western civilization. And this is how all outstanding thinkers are presented in all sorts of textbooks and compendia on the history of philosophy. For many generations, students have been learning that the two giants of the Greek world, Plato and Aristotle, owed their reputation and fame among their descendants to the innovative solutions they used within their own original visions of philosophy. Both were therefore thought to be unique innovators, and the ideas of each of them became in this way the basis for further transformations, and even if it was noticed that certain aspects of their thoughts were still returning in the philosophical culture of the West, this was only possible in the area of already modified, re-worked concepts of other original philosophers. Such assessment of the work of the founding fathers of Western philosophy is now widespread to such an extent that it can be considered almost natural and undisputed. Nobody notices that this is a certain world view, no one asks about its limitations and time-frame.

Before attempting to deal with this issue, I will present a hypothesis that apparently contradicts what was said above. It negates the now universally recognized innovation of Aristotle's philosophy as compared to Platonism. This is Giovanni Reale's view presented in his monumental work *A History of Ancient Philosophy*. In the second part of the second volume, in the first section, the author emphasizes precisely what was supposed to be the Stagirite's faithful continuation of Plato's teachings, contrary to its distortion in the latter's

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Academy.[1] This position cannot simply be downplayed, as it is taken up by a scholar of great knowledge and humanistic culture. Furthermore, he does not claim that there are no differences between Plato and Aristotle. In his monograph, he attempts to extract these differences and discusses them thoroughly. He considers Aristotle's criticism of the Platonic teaching of the first principles and ideas to be the most important one.[2] Immediately, however, he draws the attention of his readers to the fact that this criticism never went as far as to deny the existence of a supersensory reality.[3] Its result was only the rejection of the highest principle as Good in the role of the primordial cause of all things. In return, the highest principle is understood by Aristotle as the ultimate goal and the highest Intellect.[4] A change in the key place of the general conceptual construction does not mean, at least according to Reale, that the inspired, visionary and religious philosophy of Plato was dragged down to ground level by his student, ordered and better systematized, as the experts of the subject have argued for centuries, and as Raphael suggestively showed in the very centre of his famous fresco, *The School of Athens*. Reale also admits that there was a clear difference in the non-philosophical interests of both thinkers. It is impossible to argue with the fact that Aristotle was more attracted by natural science, and Plato by mathematics. However, and we should again agree with Reale's interpretation, this difference is not very significant from the metaphysical point of view.[5] The judgment that Plato was spiritual and emotional, while Aristotle was down-to-earth and dry is a philosophically unjustified generalization of the assessment of how they expressed themselves in writing. Plato's religiosity, exaggerated by critics and commentators, can merely be a trace of his orphic inspiration.[6] And the fact that he wrote vivid texts – "leading to the logos through the power of poetry[7]" – while Aristotle only left dispassionately factual writings, does not mean that the former was always chaotic and undisciplined in his thinking, while the latter – always precise and specific. Such stylistic difference does not in all cases mean a difference in views, much often meaning a difference in personalities between the authors –

[1] Giovanni Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy. II: Plato and Aristotle*, trans. John R. Catan (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 249 passim.

[2] Ibidem, 253.

[3] Ibidem, 254.

[4] Ibidem, 254–255.

[5] Ibidem, 260.

[6] Ibidem.

[7] Ibidem, 261.

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a secondary trait in philosophy. In what is most important for the philosophical doctrines of both thinkers, as Artistole's exoteric writings would confirm, supposes Reale, there is fundamental agreement, with the main differences mainly seen in the color and mood of their literary devices.[8] We can now fully express the research hypothesis outlined above, claiming that Aristotle was, ultimately, an orthodox Platonist, which Reale confirms without any doubt:

> […] the differences between Plato and Aristotle have been exaggerated because of an optical illusion: the very different way in which the two philosophers express their thought is not always taken into account ... frequently it cannot but appear (or be made to appear) that these thinkers are more different than they are, or simply different when they are not.[9]

Such a pointed position, preceded by previously summarized comparative analyses, has a considerable argumentative power. And yet... For anyone who has come across the writings of these two philosophers, the instinct suggests that there is a difference more serious than just the color of their speech or the mood of their thoughts. At the same time, Reale's judgment obscures even further the mystery of Plato's decision to make Speusippus, and not Aristotle, his successor at the Academy. By trusting Reale, we would have to admit that Plato was gravely wrong in judging Aristotle or, even worse, he actually was a petty nepotist. Perhaps, however, we do not have to draw such unpleasant conclusions in this matter. Their strength is weakened when we perceive in Plato's philosophy the still living heritage of early Indo-European culture, whose influence on Platonism was not taken into account by Reale at all.

Indo-European cultural heritage

Although research on Indo-European culture had already been initiated in the late 18th century, and had its renaissance in the 19th century, the knowledge of its results is still small, not only among non-specialists, but also among people of science. The reasons for such a situation can be seen in the religious and ideological context accompanying this research. However, none of these reasons

[8] Ibidem, 259.
[9] Ibidem, 261.

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is enough to completely forego objective research on the culture that underlies the modern world. Without understanding it, we will also fail to comprehend important elements shaping the ancient civilization, both Greek and Roman, of which we are heirs. For obvious reasons, we cannot discuss here all the findings of various scientists (philologists, linguists, archaeologists, historians and geneticists), who are trying to reproduce, often with great effort, a comprehensive picture of early Indo-European culture. From the richness of this picture, I will choose only one important component, namely the structural, almost fractal nature of key products of this culture, to which the Indo-European always attributed the form of a three-element whole, or a tripartite monad. This path was followed largely by the studies of a French philologist, cultural anthropologist and religious scholar, Georges Dumézil, the creator of the concept of a trifunctional ideology. His research project is still dynamically continued in the French comparative school, which enjoys an excellent reputation in the world. Owing to Dumézil and his students, we can conclude with maximum probability that can be attained in humanities that for the early Indo-Europeans, all significant matters worthy of reflection were tripartite. We can hear it perfectly reflected in the Roman adage: *omne trinum perfectum est*. It is difficult to say, however, whether this conviction arose from magical and religious associations or astronomical observations. We know, however, that both these spheres were strongly connected for Indo-Europeans. Their confusion, it seems, resulted in the creation of the original form of this knowledge, which today we call philosophy. The birth of philosophy was therefore far earlier than the Greek thought. We may consider that the unknown authors of the hymns to the gods, collected in three volumes of the masterpiece of Old Indo-Aryan literature, *The Vedas*, were "philosophers." At a time when Indo-Europeans entered the lands of today's Pakistan and northern India, they enriched their holy books with the fourth volume, bearing noticeable signs of borrowings from indigenous cultures. Since those times, the four *Vedas* are patrons of the Indian culture in the same way that the four *Gospels* are of the Western culture.

In the oldest of *Vedas*, the *Rigveda*, we find the astronomical and religious motive of the "three steps of Vishnu" that is crucial for the considerations discussed here. Vishnu does not yet belong to the most important representatives of the Vedic pantheon. He often accompanies the god Mitra, because both are equipped with a legible solar aspect. Vishnu is not the sun, but appears with it in the sky, designating its three cardinal positions (sunrise, noon, sunset). They

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are at the same time the domains of Vishnu and the limits of his kingdom, which the god traverses daily in three steps ("thrice setting down his footstep, widely striding").[10] In another place, we read: "Three times strode forth this God in all his grandeur over this earth bright with a hundred splendours."[11]

The authors of the *Vedas* gave the regions of the sky defined by Vishnu's steps three colors (white, red, black), held and distributed by Agni, one of the most prominent Vedic gods, rising above the individual domains of the other deities. If, then, we apply Dumézil's functional rules, Agni would become a meta-functional god, a divine Triunity, combining all functions and the corresponding symbolic colors of the Indo-Europeans: "The path he treads is black and white and red."[12]

Vishnu's positions and Agni's colors gave the French scholar of the Indo-Europeans Jean Haudry the idea that they could be a literary expression of the observation of the sky in the daily cycle: white sky in the day, black in the night, and red at dawn.[13] It is not known whether Haudry's hypothesis is correct, but it seems highly probable, all the more so because no other concept has yet been created that could compete with it.

Although the *Vedas* are works that do not fulfill the rigors applied nowadays to science in the Western culture, it is hard to deny them the *par excellence* philosophical character, which reaches its peak in the famous *Nasadiya Sukta*,[14] which tells the story of the creation of the world. Its first manifestation was the One (*Tad Ekam*), whose monolithic nature immediately raises doubts, as it is inextricably accompanied by "diversity in the depths": water, air and fire, which today we would call the material building blocks of the world. In addition, maybe above all, the One of *Nasadiya Sukta* breathes and does not breathe simultaneously,[15] putting at the root of things an elemental contradiction, untangling this primal unity with the multiplicity given to it at the very beginning. This is the first wording of the concept of *hen kai panta* (*hen panta*), which will become one of the most important philosophical concepts in ancient Greece.

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[10] "Rigveda," in *The Hymns of the Rigveda*, transl. Ralph Th. H. Griffith (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1973), I, 154, 1, 103.

[11] "Rigveda," VII, 100, 3, 383.

[12] "Rigveda," X, 20, 9, 544.

[13] Jean Haudry, *La religion cosmique des Indo-Européens* (Milano – Paris: Archè, 1987), 9–10.

[14] "Rigveda," X, 129, 633–634.

[15] "Rigveda," X, 129, 2, 633.

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The texts known as the *Upanishads*, younger than the *Vedas* by several centuries (8th-3rd century BCE) are even more philosophical, in our understanding of the term. While the *Vedas* were lofty religious songs, the *Upanishads* are more prosaic dialogues, usually moderated by one person, not always a Brahmin knowledgeable in matters of religion, but often a prince or leader from the varna of warriors. The thought of the *Vedas*, projecting high into the extra-terrestrial, is not fully abandoned, but slightly toned down, moved from the centre, occupied in the *Upanishads* by what is important to humans: their experiences, doubts and cognitive aspirations. Thus, the difference between the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* resembles the difference between the inspired pronouncements of the pre-Socratics and Plato's dialogues, with the role of a moderator of a philosophical conversation usually taken by Socrates, not a priest, by a soldier, and a thinker particularly sensitive to the purely human matters.[16]

It does not mean that the *Upanishads* never go beyond the anthropological dimension, their message could not be understood without the consideration of the metaphysical backdrop of the human condition. Metaphysics and anthropology are like two sides of a sheet of paper: separated from each other and inseparable, different and the same. By definition, the first principles of all things cannot be countable, but at the early stage of philosophical work, we could summarize them as the triad: Brahman (1), Atman (2) and what distinguishes them from each other (3), although so many scenes in the *Upanishads* end with a statement: Brahman and Atman are one and the same ("All this is verily Brahman. This Atman is Brahman").[17] The two names, suggesting dissimilarity through the hiatus separating them, are only a human way of thinking about what is singular in its triplicity. What a man thinks and says is only a clumsy means of illustrating the struggle that unity leads with itself in the form of a multitude: from

[16] Aristoxenus of Tarentum even recounts that Socrates once met an Indian sage who asked him how the Greeks understood philosophy. Socrates replied that he himself reflects on the problems of human life. This aroused the immediate opposition of the Hindu, as, in his opinion, one cannot understand human matters without penetrating into the divine. See: Fritz Wehrli, *Die Schule des Aristoteles*, vol. 2 (Basel: Schwabe, 1960), fr. 51–60, 24–27. It should be noted, however, that Plato and his Socrates do not disregard the higher affairs and that is why they are so close to the climate of the *Upanishads*.

[17] "Mandukya Upanishad," in *The Mandukya Upanishad with Gaudapada's Karika and Sankara's Commentary*, ed. and transl. Swami Nikhilananda (Bangalore: Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Mysore/The Bangalore Press, 1949), 2, 11, 12.

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one everything rises and to one returns. This is happening simultaneously and regardless of the contradictions generated by this struggle.

Ternarity of Plato's philosophical system

Was Plato aware of the requirement for the triunity of conceptual structures in the philosophical view of all things consecrated in Indo-European culture? We have to wait for a while to answer this question. Let us begin with a simpler and less controversial statement, namely that he certainly had at least a feeling, if not a full awareness, of the shape of the Indo-European cultural tradition. In his dialogues, one can find many pictures, scenes, descriptions of people and objects evoking the cultural legacy of Indo-Europeans already established by contemporary researchers. These include descriptions or mentions of chariots,[18] weaponry,[19] marches with torches,[20] references to figurative,[21] and color symbolism.[22] Collecting these examples would be very time-consuming (though certainly not meaningless), and their description would require more space than is given to us by the framework of a single paper. The more so that the comparative descriptions of specific elements often become the source of long debates, and even disputes about the legitimacy of their choice: what for one researcher is undoubted testimony of cultural kinship and inheritance, for other can only be a matter of mutual influence of neighboring cultures. The search for accuracy often results in texts, whose pedantry verges on tedious. In order to avoid getting too deep into details, I will propose a look at the philosophy of Plato from the structural side, looking closely at the way in which he builds his entire system. By taking such a synoptic view, we will remain in harmony with the Platonic maxim:

[18] For example: Plato, "Phaedrus," in Plato, *Plato. With an English Translation*, vol. 1, ed. And transl. Harold N. Fowler (New York City: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1913), 246b, 472–473; Plato, "The Republic," in Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 566c–d, 245; Plato, "Timaeus," in Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), 41e, 461. References to Plato's dialogues according to Stephanus pagination. All translations indicated in the bibliography.

[19] Plato, "Critias," in Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), 119a, 541.

[20] Plato, "The Republic," 328a, 4.

[21] Plato, "Timaeus," 36b–c, 454–455.

[22] When describing the buildings of the Atlantis, Plato says that they were made of white, red and black stone. See: Plato, "Critias," 116 a, 537.

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"For the man who is capable of an overview is dialectical while the one who isn't, is not" (*ho men gar synoptikos dialektikos, ho de me ou*).[23] What then becomes noticeable, is Platonism's characteristic trait of three-element systems repeating on different systemic levels in its construction. By analogy with numerical systems, one could say that Plato is ternary: from the very top of the system, a gradual pyramid as we remember, to the very bottom, we encounter numerous triple elements. Let's recall what it looks like:

There are three distinct centers of reflection in Plato's philosophy, which could be called the theory of principles, the theory of ideas and the science of the Demiurge's actions.[24] Each of them takes as a subject another dimension of all things, respectively: the first principles, ideas and things that can be learned by senses. These are hierarchical: the source principles rise above being, which builds the second, lower floor of the systemic pyramid in the form of ideas, beneath them there is finally a world that results from the Demiurge's mixing of being and non-being.

We know the least about the first principles, since most probably, Reale considers it to be certain, they were the subject of considerations from the unrecorded teachings of Plato. We find proof of that in indirect tradition, namely the testimonies of ancient thinkers, who knew these teachings (Aristotle, Theophrastus, Sextus Empiricus and others).[25] But it is also substantiated by the comments by Plato himself, made somewhere on the margins of the main course of his writings. We find one of such significant hints in *The Seventh Letter*, where they are clearly referred to as "the highest matters and the first principles of things" (*ta peri physeos akra kai prota*)[26], which should not be mentioned in writing at all. These are the Monad and the Dyad. Their action manifests itself in the unification of the separate. They themselves constitute the expression of equated unity and multiplicity in what can be reduced to the concept of One-

[23] Plato, "The Republic," VII 537c; 216.

[24] Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy*, 43.

[25] The existence of esoteric Platonic science is contradicted by such authors as John Burnet, Julius Stenzel, Alfred Edward Taylor, Léon Robin, Paul Wilpert i Heinrich Gomperz, and above all Harold Cherniss and Gregory Vlastos, the most important antagonists of "Tübingen School" (*Tübinger Platonschule*). Reale apparently is located close to Tubingians. However the question of Plato's unwritten doctrines is not the subject of our reflection at the moment, because it is a widely commented problem that has its own literature.

[26] Plato, *The Seventh Letter*, in *The Platonic epistles*, ed. and trans. John Harward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 344d, 139. See also: Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy*, 13 *passim.*

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Many. Such equation means here that none of them can exist or act alone. Reale expresses it briefly: "the Principles require each other structurally or necessarily."[27] Their operation involves the determination of what is undetermined (constituting a boundary), diametrical splitting towards "two" extremely opposite limits (constituting boundlessness) and the mixing of boundlessness with boundaries. We are putting the "two limits" in inverted commas, because neither the rules nor their actions can be counted with ordinary arithmetic numbers. However, if we used such simplified counting for didactic and illustrative purposes, then we would see in that *hen panta* hidden three structural elements: one would diametrically split up into two (1 + 2 = 3), with the important caveat that unity is the basis for the multiplicity to be synthesized. Therefore, these are not – let's emphasize once again – three separate entities, but the triplicate revealing itself only through its unity (the triplicity has one nature, not three).

It is worth recalling here that the Greeks had a more complex approach to the concept of number. Because they distinguished pure numbers from arithmetic numbers: for Plato, they will of course be ideal numbers,[28] defining the relationship between the size and its parts and reflecting the essence of a structure built of elements on which arithmetic operations cannot be carried out, because triplicity as an essence of a triad cannot be added or subtracted. Pure, ideal numbers are metaphysical entities. Arithmetic operations are only possible where we are dealing with visible and countable things (there are many twos, threes, etc.), which in turn can be treated as subjects of science or specific quantities that can be counted, for example, during purchase or sale. In the first case, mathematics applies, in the second – logistics. Such a tripartition of numbers was not invented by Plato, but found and incorporated into his systemic, pyramidal view of all things. In this pyramid, pure numbers act as intermediaries between the world of the first principles (they are later from them) and the world of being, that is, ideas. Arithmetic numbers, on the other hand, are patterns for lower beings, locating themselves on the border of the ideal and sensually perceptible world. Therefore, although ideas are known to be numerous, they cannot be counted, while the object of the sensual world can. Arithmetic numbers, however, do not have the ontological power of ideal numbers, and therefore Plato probably did not give

[27] Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy*, 43.

[28] Plato, "Charmides," in Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), 168b–d, 28.

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them the rank of intermediary on the border of the two lower worlds, reserving this role for souls, as I will mention later.

Below the first principles, there is a being which derives from the synthesizing operation of the principles. It consists of numerous ideas, also hierarchically ordered. In this world, we find again three structural levels: (1) entities in themselves (ideas of man, horse, etc.); (2) entities that are in the relation of opposites to others (ideas of equality-inequality, immobility-movement, etc.); (3) entities that are in a relationship of interdependence with others (ideas of greatness-smallness, height-lowness, etc.). Each of these levels can be divided into three: (1) very general ideas, called meta-ideas by some commentators; (2) the ideas of types and species; (3) specific ideas.[29]

Below the world of ideas, the world opens in the sense we give it today, the physical world. However, before we look at it more closely, we should devote some attention to the issue of soul. For the Greeks, the soul is simply the principle of life, and because Plato recognized the world as a living being, he provided it with a soul which, as I mentioned above, mediated between it and higher ideas, constituting the boundaries of the rational and the bodily:

> For which reason, when he was framing the universe, he put intelligence in soul, and soul in body, that he might be the creator of a work which was by nature fairest and best. Wherefore, using the language of probability, we may say that the world became a living creature truly endowed with soul and intelligence by the providence of God.[30]

At this stage of the argument no one will be surprised at the fact that the soul of the world consists of three parts: (1) the unchanging part which Plato called The Same; (2) the variable part, divisible, which he called the Other; (3) the part mediating for both mentioned, which he called the Third Substance:

> And he made her out of the following elements and on this wise: Out of the indivisible and unchangeable, and also out of that which is divisible and has to do with material bodies, he compounded a third and intermediate kind of essence, partaking of the nature of the same and of the other, and this compound he placed accordingly in a mean between the indivisible, and the divisible and

[29] I have modified Reale's diagram to highlight the ternary structure supporting it. See: Reale, *A History of Ancient Philosophy*, 95.

[30] Plato, "Timaeus," 30b–c, 450.

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> material. He took the three elements of the same, the other, and the essence, and mingled them into one form, compressing by force the reluctant and unsociable nature of the other into the same. When he had mingled them with the essence and out of three made one, he again divided this whole into as many portions as was fitting, each portion being a compound of the same, the other, and the essence. [31]

The remnants of the creation of the soul of the world served God to create the souls of the stars, equipped with the ability to give birth to the living beings, populating the earth and having their own souls. The soul of the world (1) is therefore accompanied by the souls of the stars (2), and this in turn – the earthly souls (3).

Beings living on earth cannot be grouped in a clear manner consistent with the ternary systems applicable in the higher realms. This is because the area of the world is marked by movement, changeability, birth and death. The numeral discipline is not so strong here that it can be easily pointed, although it still makes itself felt (e.g. three species of bodies in *Timaeus*).[32] The loosening of numerical rigor is the most probable cause of Plato's descriptions of the earthly world including structures other than ternary, such as quaternary (4 elements constituting the matter of the world, 4 races of living beings inhabiting it, etc.). Their appearance is not at all inexplicable from the perspective of the evolution of Indo-European culture (after all, the three cardinal *Vedas* were ultimately supplemented with the fourth volume), but wanting to remain clear in my current argument, I will explain this phenomenon elsewhere.

Coming back to beings that populate the earth, they include individuals such as a single oak, dog or human. Each of them, being alive, is endowed with a soul. But only the human soul refers to the higher models and about it Plato tells us broadly that it consists of three elementary components, namely (1) the lustful part, i.e. the vegetative soul; (2) the emotional part, or the animalistic soul; (3) the rational part, or the divine element in a human. We will not dwell for too long on the construction of the human soul, because its discussions are widely available. We will only remind ourselves, which will turn out to be important later, that Plato compares it to a speeding chariot drawn by two horses with contrasting temperaments.

[31] Ibidem, 35a–b, 454.
[32] Ibidem, 54e – 55a–b, 475.

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Perhaps the most famous of Plato's texts, *The Republic* captures the political and legal links between citizens as a living creature and therefore *politeia* is endowed with a soul that structurally resembles the soul of an individual. And so in the Platonic republic we find: 1) producers who functionally correspond to the human vegetative soul; 2) guards in the function of the animalistic soul; 3) philosophers who exercise authority in the state by the power of a rational function.

From the highest registers of Plato's philosophy, we thus descended to matters that were much more mundane, but everywhere we found three-dimensional systems that made the Platonic system look like a mathematical object with an invariant structure at scale changes, immediately reminiscent of fractal forms. The basic ternary structure for the entire ontology of the author of *The Republic* has been vividly depicted by him in the famous fragment of this dialogue known under a separate title as the "myth of the cave." We all know this text very well, but we used to see in it an alleged division of reality into two worlds or two spheres of all-reality. Meanwhile, it is an illustration of the division into three and in such a way that it can be used in various ontic (and not only) regions of Plato's philosophy. Let us recall the beginning of this extraordinary story:

> See human beings as though they were in an underground cave like dwelling with its entrance, a long one, open to the light across the whole width of the cave. They are in it from childhood with their legs and necks in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them, unable because of the bond to turn their heads all the way around. Their light is from a fire burning far above and behind them. Between the fire and the prisoners there is a road above, along which see a wall, built like the partitions puppet-handlers set in front of the human beings and over which they show the puppets.
>
> I see, he said.
>
> Then also see along this wall human beings carrying all sorts of artifacts, which project above the wall, and statues of men and other animals wrought from stone, wood, and every kind of material; as is to be expected, some of the carriers utter sounds while others are silent.
>
> It's a strange image, he said, and strange prisoners you're telling of.
>
> They're like us.[33]

Let us carefully count again: the interior of the cave (1), the outside (2) and the border of both spheres presented as a wall between them (3). Objects

[33] Plato, "The Republic," 514 b, 193.

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carried along the wall apparently have a mixed truth status: they are more real than shadows in a cave, but less real than things in the outside world.

This incredibly cleverly constructed scene is like the prism of the ternarity of the entire philosophy of Plato: One on top, Multiplicity below, and between them a mixing of both, or better: mixing as the L i m i t .

Such a clear reference to the triunity of conceptual structures in the philosophical view of the universe cannot be accidental. Plato must have been aware of the role played by the three-element monads in Indo-European culture, appearing in Old Indo-Aryan texts, especially in *Upanishads*. We do not know if these dialogues were known to him directly, but even if he knew only their duplicated "second-hand" versions, he still recreated their structural model faithfully in his work, although the content filling it only partially refers to the original stories and thematic motifs contained in them. But here we also find clear relations. Let us quote, therefore, one of the oldest thematic motifs that show that Plato knew at least some of these old stories. We will find it in several dialogues discussing the issue of the human soul. Like the "myth of the cave," the comparison of the soul to a chariot is a well-known Platonic tale, which I have already mentioned above in the aspect of its three-element structure. Now, however, we will focus on the content presented in it: here we see a military vehicle being drawn by two horses, whose distinct temperaments must be mastered by the driver. It is now believed that chariots with two spoked wheels were an invention of Indo-Europeans. We can see their images on the extremely old artifacts found by archaeologists. This military innovation, however, was soon taken over by other cultures, and therefore the appearance of chariots in literary monuments from before the common era may not be a clear testimony of their authors belonging to the Indo-European ethnos. However, when the description of a chariot is associated with the threefold unity of the soul, we gain the certainty that it derives from this and not another cultural circle. And so, it is in the case of one of the oldest epics of the world, created in the Vedic period (the second and irst millenniums BCE), *Mahabharata* (gnomic verses in books XII and XIII) and a bit younger, and already mentioned *Upanishads* :

> Know the Self to be sitting in the chariot, the body to be the chariot, the intellect (*buddhi*) the charioteer, and the mind the reins.
>
> The senses they call the horses, the objects of the senses their roads. When he (the Highest Self) is in union with the body, the senses, and the mind, then wise people call him the Enjoyer.

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> He who has no understanding and whose mind (the reins) is never firmly held, his senses (horses) are unmanageable, like vicious horses of a charioteer.
>
> But he who has understanding and whose mind is always firmly held, his senses are under control, like good horses of a charioteer.[34]

Is it still reasonable to maintain that Plato's "myth of a chariot" is his original idea? Let's think carefully about his words and the meaning they carry. We do not have to discuss this theme in detail because of the widespread knowledge of it, not only among philosophers:

> Concerning the immortality of the soul this is enough; but about its form we must speak in the following manner. To tell what it really is would be a matter for utterly superhuman and long discourse, but it is within human power to describe it briefly in a figure; let us therefore speak in that way. We will liken the soul to the composite nature of a pair of winged horses and a charioteer. Now the horses and charioteers of the gods are all good and of good descent, but those of other races are mixed; and first the charioteer of the human soul drives a pair, and secondly one of the horses is noble and of noble breed, but the other quite the opposite in breed and character. Therefore, in our case the driving is necessarily difficult and troublesome.[35]

An example of the substantial relationship of the theme of chariot between the old Indo-Aryan texts and Plato's dialogues had only been recalled here to strengthen the argument for the thesis that Plato deliberately borrowed the triunity structure from Indo-European tradition and incorporated it into his philosophical system. Moreover, I claim that he was also aware of the consequences of such procedure. One that at the same time is not one is a paradox, leading to contradictions in its development. As we know, Plato had extensive mathematical knowledge. He already knew the requirements of axiomatics, popularized by Euclid's famous *Elements*. However, not everyone knows that the axiomatic theory had previously been worked on in the Academy – perhaps inspired by Plato. Thus, the Athenian philosopher was aware of the non-contradictory nature of the theory that wants to pass as a scientific one. However, at one point the Athenian philosopher understood that by eliminating the contradictions appearing in his philosophy, he would betray tradition. And he

[34] "Katha Upanishad," in *The Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 15, ed. and trans. Friedrich Max Müller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884), III 3–5, 12–13.

[35] Plato, "Phaedrus," 246 a–b, 471, 473.

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takes a step back. In this way, one should look at his late dialogues, rife with contradictions, which often puzzles Plato's commentators. In short, I would put it like this: in his last dialogues, Plato (probably with regret) departs from the mathematical model based on the axiomatic system he developed in *The Republic* and, with deep understanding and respect, he returns to the philosophy of the Indo-European period. This choice shows that Plato does not focus on originality, but on faithfulness. This decision was fully conscious and related to the expectations of the philosopher towards his successor at the Academy. Reale did not understand (despite the contemporary way of evaluating scientific achievements), why the unoriginal ideas of Speusippus and the less revealing triads of Xenocrates enjoyed such long-lasting success and respect among their recipients. It was because they constituted musical variations on one unchangeable thematic motif in the melodic line of philosophy. Their harmonic consonance was more important that individual talents, no one drowned out the orchestra. Meanwhile, Aristotle's note sounded false in this unison. And Plato heard that. He thus could not make his most talented student the head of the Academy, knowing that everything under his leadership would change. The ternary systems would disappear, along with the method of philosophizing developed for thousands of years. Not only would the new age begin, but the new philosophical era, and with it the world of individual thinking and, above all, ambition.

Binarity of Aristotle's philosophical system

In my opinion, "Ambition" is the key to understanding Aristotle, it is enough to pay attention to the significance of his seemingly marginal statements: "At first he who invented any art whatever that went beyond the common perceptions of man was naturally admired by men, not only because there was something useful in the inventions, but because he was thought wise and superior to the rest."[36]

Aristotle later instilled this ambition, based on the desire to distinguish himself from others, in his pupil Alexander. Over the centuries, it has spread to many of their followers, definitely including Hegel and Napoleon Bonaparte,

[36] Aristotle, "Metaphysics," in Aristotle, *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 8, ed. and trans. William D. Ross (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1928), A 981b, 22. References to the text of Aristotle are as in the Bekker's edition. All translations indicated in the bibliography.

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whom he admired. In the chapter dedicated to Aristotle in his famous *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* Hegel noted – and how significant are these words – "Alexander's education utterly refuted the common talk of the practical uselessness of speculative philosophy."[37] The practical usefulness in the context of the German philosopher's ambitions certainly is difficult to challenge: he achieved everything he wanted. We will ask again about the practical effects of Aristotle's philosophy at the end of this paper.

And so, as I have already mentioned, the first huge change introduced to philosophy by Aristotle consisted in the appreciation of the creative individual, in the belief that an individual can break out of the route delineated by tradition and decide for himself where he wants to reach and how. Aristotle's ambition was expressed in the conviction that an individual could create something equally valuable and even better than what he found as a shared cultural heritage. And it is not about changes to individual concepts, philosophical themes or methods for interpreting inherited certainties. Aristotle built his system on a construction previously unknown in the Indo-European tradition, giving it a binary character. In general terms, it is presented as follows:

At the very top of his system, the philosopher placed Being, pointing to it with his famous formula "being as being" (*to on hêi on*).[38] Such a doubling in the expression of being no longer refers to the Indo-European triad: it is not a fundamental trichotomy. The spread of the structural connection of the monad and the dyad has been reduced. There is the Supreme Being, which is reflected in itself as in a mirror, and in the eyes of Aristotle gains the attribute of divinity, which is manifested in thinking of itself. This is another explanation by doubling: "a thinking on thinking."[39]

The primary binarity of being clearly affects the construction of the entire Aristotelian ontological system. The Platonic pyramid of beings (recognized by Reale as a sign of Aristotle's faithfulness to Plato) remains in power only partially, incorporated as only one of two parts of the whole system. To put it differently, in the Stagirite's works, the whole may be pictured by developing the Platonic diagram to two pyramids touching at one side. Let's compare:

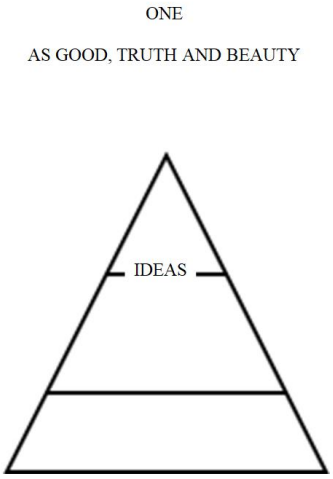
[37] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Lectures on the History of Philosophy," in *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1955), 121.

[38] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Γ 1003a, 78.

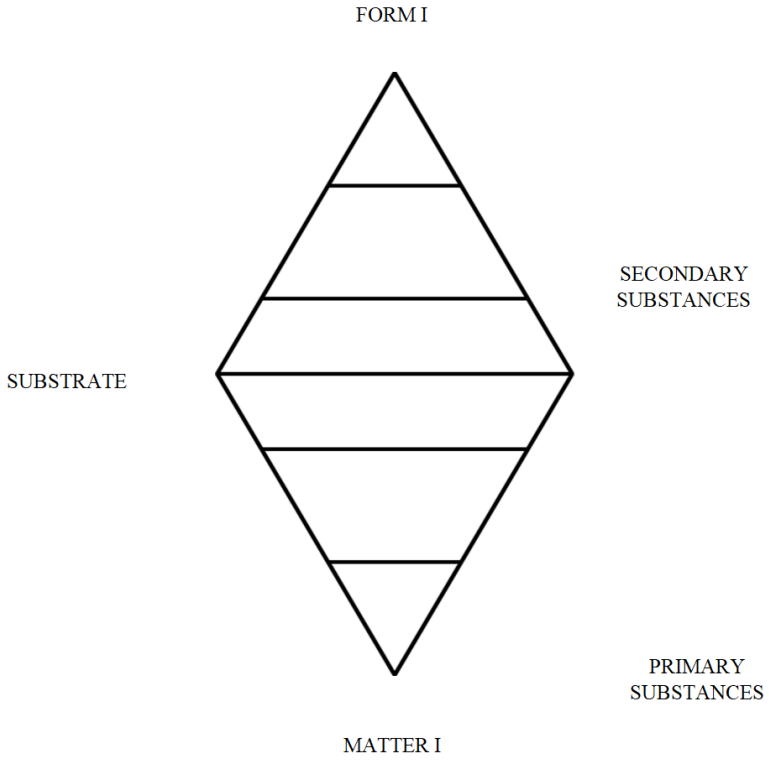
[39] Ibidem, Λ 1074b, 278.

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PLATO



ARISTOTLE



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In the diagram showing the structure of Aristotle's system, the substrate level (and thus the level of individual beings existing at a specific point in time and a specific spatial position, known example: Socrates) marks the boundary between more concrete substances, as we would call them today, and the substances more generalized as species and types. The lower floors of the bottom, inverted pyramid determine the qualitative changes of forms (these forms are qualitatively different), and not the portions of matter that can be calculated (that is why Aristotle's physics will take the qualitative, and not quantitative, form). This is known, but it is worth recalling here in brief for the sake of clarity: let us consider a certain table (e.g. the one at which we usually work). It is, of course, a substrate and a substance. As a sensory substance (subject to the creation and disappearance) it consists of matter and form.[40] The form of this table is its "tableness" (i.e. the fact, that it is a table), and its matter is wood. Wood is also a substance: its form is "woodness," but its matter is not a quantitatively smaller portion of wood (tree trunk or board), but a qualitatively more elemental substance, which we can identify as cellulose. Cellulose is a substance – its form is its "celluloseness," and its matter the chemical elements mixed in appropriate proportions. For simplicity, let us choose carbon (C). The current chemical knowledge makes us see in it a substance that cannot be broken down into more elementary ingredients, so when we mentally take away its "carbonness," we are left with nothing. Aristotle called this "nothing" the First Matter which, not being a composite of matter and form, is also not a substance, and thus *de facto* does not really exist. It is something that our cognitive apparatus may come to know of through mental abstraction.

Meanwhile, going from the level of the substrate (our table) upwards, we actually encounter few changes to the Platonic scheme, for we find there a concept of a table, the species of furniture, the type of inanimate being, as opposed to animate being which we would reach if we started not with a table by, let's say, with the person of Socrates. An inanimate being and animate being have this in common, that they are both a being, which Aristotle called the First Form and, like First Matter, First Form is not a substantial combination of matter and form, Aristotle had to regard it as being, as otherwise the pinnacle of his system would

[40] For the sake of simplicity, I am not discussing Aristotle's many definitions of substance here, most of them have tactical aporetic meanings in my understanding, and this remains the most appropriate description of sensual substance; see: Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Z 1033b, 160. Substance as form is indestructible, without parts and indivisible – Form I remains its emblematic personification.

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include a contradiction: First Form would be and not be at the same time, which was obviously unacceptable for Aristotle. The complexity of Form I would also make it subject to change. Other substances populating the top pyramid in our diagram have a somewhat unclear ontic status: if they are not ideas (as Aristotle assures in many places of his arguments), how to explain their substantiality? Every substance should have form and matter: the matter of the idea of a table could thus be a collection of objects falling into the concept of a table. But how does form participate in this collection? This is what the outstanding thinkers of the West have been thinking about throughout the Middle Ages. Even today, it is difficult to consider this issue unambiguously solved.

Let's look again at the diagram above: according to it, the universe is contained between its two poles. Therefore, it resembles a huge electric battery, i.e. a device that allows operation (the flow of current) only when we connect its poles: positive (form) and negative (matter). In addition, the circuit must connect both spheres of the substance: the first and the secondary. By the way, the latter ones are discovered using the intellect, which in its intelligent part consists of the active (1) and the passive intellect (2).

Each substance (it was already mentioned, now we are only summarizing), with a strong understanding of substance as a *synolon*, consists of two elements: formal and material. Only Form I does not have its own material element (in a sense, its matter is everything that is below it), but it cannot be supplemented by Matter I, because it does not exist in the proper (substantive) sense.

It is worth emphasizing here an extremely important and, for many, probably surprising thing: in some sense, Aristotle is more mathematical than Plato, who applied an axiomatic model to the ontological structure of the universe in the more mature period of his work, but then withdrew from it. Meanwhile, Aristotle not only values mathematics highly, putting it right next to philosophy and theology,[41] but – more importantly – without regard to the existing tradition of philosophy, he models his system on the same pattern, as if it were not about the world around us, but about mathematical objects that demanded axiomatics.

[41] Many of Aristotle's contemporary commentators were well aware of this, among which the famous work of Thomas Heath, which discusses the notions of infinity, angularity, parallelisms and other mathematical problems in Aristotle's reflections, deserves particular attention; see: Thomas Heath, *Mathematics in Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949). It is also worth consulting: Hippocrates George Apostle, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Mathematics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), Jonathan Barnes, *Aristotle's Posterior Analytics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) and numerous articles in renowned scientific journals.

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In the shortest terms, Aristotle's philosophical system is more strongly imitating the axiomatic paradigm. Thus, it fulfills the conditions of coherence and indisputability. Plato's hesitations, of whether to make philosophy axiomatic or to remain the last soldier defending the existing cultural tradition are alien to Aristotle. Not the opinion of others, but his own conviction is his guide. His idea of philosophy is more important than the thousand years of tradition. This is called ambition. It is also a new opening: the doors have been cracker for the positive evaluation of individuality, originality and innovation. Aristotle inaugurated a new world, our world, not through his astronomical, biological or literary findings, but through the courage to order his philosophy in a binary system. Because where binarity prevails, it will entail mechanization, automation, digitization, computerization and globalization.

Compared to Plato, Aristotle is an engineer who constructs his philosophy as a machine – not steam, but in the form of an electric apparatus and even an electronic device to process digital signals. Meanwhile, Plato remained a craftsman: his otherwise impressive system resembles at most a mixer, a mixing tank that can be set in motion manually, even without the knowledge of the theoretical laws of mechanics.

Transculture

Does this mean that Plato was a worse philosopher than Aristotle? Absolutely not. The philosophies of both is not distinguished by a difference in degree, but a difference in nature. Each of them also creates in a different c u l t u r a l climate, which could be concisely expressed in the formula that Plato is the last philosophizing Indo-European, while Aristotle is the first philosophizing representative of Western culture. The latter comes from the former and therefore still has many of its features, but it is a different culture: more open, easier to assimilate elements of foreign cultures, especially Semitic (Christianity), but also African (design, jazz music), Far Eastern or South American (literature, food) and even approaching a new cultural form of transculture. Research on it is currently being conducted mainly at the Centre for Humanities Innovation at the University of Durham and at the Center for Transcultural Studies in New York, and the studies are especially inspired by the

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works of a literary theorist and cultural anthropologist. Mikhail Epstein (1950-), according to whom:

> Transculture is a way to transcend our "given" culture and to apply cultural transformative forces to culture itself. Transculture is the second order of "culturality" of culture, its capacity for self-cultivation and self-transcendence. If culturology is self-awareness of culture, then transculture is self-transformation of culture, the totality of theories and practices that liberate culture from its own repressive mechanisms.[42]

The Polish representative of transcultural studies from the University of Warsaw, Ewa Niedziałek, explains in her paper devoted largely to the thoughts of Epstein (but also other representatives of this direction of thinking), that transculturalism is associated with the risky experience of wandering at the borders of one's own culture and its intersections with other cultures. The transcultural view is therefore reinforced by travel, migration, or expatriation, which often force contact with Otherness, which forces us to redefine ourselves. The essence, however, is not so much the transgression from one cultural order to another, but a change in the way of perception and thinking. The displacement in question is above all a change in the perspective of looking at culture, so her own attempt to define transculturalizm remains close to this Epsteinian one:

> Transcultural experience is therefore primarily a unitary experience. A physical or mental journey that takes place not between but outside the ordering categories of culture. Wandering at the borders of culture would be a kind of realisation of one's own, "proprietary" project of culture, one of many possibilities of cultural existence. The experience of migration, sense of uprooting or alienation are each time fulfilled in a specific individual experience, gaining new content and meaning.[43]

Do not these words set before our eyes Aristotle, a metic in Athens, a suspicious immigrant constantly seeking his own place outside Stagira in Atarneus, Assos, Mytilene, Macedonian Mieza, up to Chalcis and Euboea. Meanwhile, Plato, despite several educational journeys, remained an Athenian,

[42] Mikhail Epstein, *Transcultural Experiments. Russian and American Models of Creative Communication* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 28–30.

[43] Ewa Niedziałek, "O teorii transkulturowej i jej implikacjach dla badań humanistycznych," *Przestrzenie teorii* 2016, no. 25: 235–236. Translation mine.

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deeply rooted in his cultural territory. Without falling into easy biographism, it must be recognized that such different living conditions had to influence the perception of the world and the place occupied by man.

Conclusions

Summing up the above analysis, it can be said that despite the similarities between Plato the teacher and his student Aristotle, the philosophical thoughts of both differ significantly on the grounds of acknowledged principles and therefore cannot be reconciled. Reale claims it is the difference "because of an optical illusion", however I think this difference is much more thorough than that. As we have seen, even in the philosophy itself, it is not a difference of degree, but of nature, involving a valiant shift of paradigms, from ternary to binary and, at least that's how I see and understand it, it is also the cultural difference that separates both philosophers, which contributes significantly to this shift.

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Streszczenie

Platon i Arystoteles w świetle badań nad kulturą indoeuropejską

Współcześnie zwykliśmy mierzyć wartość wytworów kultury oryginalnością i innowacyjnością ich twórców. Na tym tle jako odosobniony przypadek jawi się stanowisko włoskiego badacza filozofii antycznej, Giovanniego Realego, który doceniając wielkość Arystotelesa, dostrzega w nim przede wszystkim wiernego kontynuatora filozoficznego dzieła Platona. Chociaż Reale przywołuje liczne i ważne argumenty na rzecz swojej tezy, jego punkt widzenia koliduje z odczuciami większości czytelników obydwu filozofów i nie wytrzymuje krytyki z perspektywy, której Reale wcale nie wziął pod uwagę w swojej pracy badawczej. Polemizując z tezą włoskiego historyka, wykażę, że różnica pomiędzy Platonem a Arystotelesem sięga meritum ich poglądów ontologicznych. Wierny tradycji wczesnej kultury indoeuropejskiej Platon przyjmował układ ternarny za naczelną zasadę konstrukcji systemu filozoficznego, tymczasem metafizyka Arystotelesa jest binarna. Powodem tej paradygmatycznej niezgodności może być różnica kulturowa dzieląca obu filozofów.

Słowa kluczowe: Platon, system ternarny, Arystoteles, system binarny, Giovanni Reale, tradycjonalizm, oryginalność, wczesna kultura Indoeuropejska, transkulturalizm

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Zusammenfassung

Platon und Aristoteles im Licht der Forschung der indoeuropäischen Kultur

Gegenwärtig sind wir daran gewöhnt, den Wert der Kulturerzeugnisse nach der Originalität und Innovation ihrer Schöpfer zu messen. Vor diesem Hintergrund erscheint der Standpunkt des italienischen Forschers der antiken Philosophie, Giovanni Reale, als ein Einzelfall. Indem er die Größe von Aristoteles hochschätzt, sieht er in ihm vor allem einen Philosophen, der das Werk Platons treu fortsetzt. Obwohl Reale zahlreiche wichtige Argumente für seine These anführt, verstößt sein Standpunkt gegen die Eindrücke der meisten Leser der beiden Philosophen und hält nicht der Kritik stand, insbesondere was die Perspektive betrifft, die Reale in seiner Forschungsarbeit nicht berücksichtigte. Meine Polemik mit der These des italienischen Historikers zielt darauf, nachzuweisen, dass der Unterschied zwischen Platon und Aristoteles auf das Meritum, den Kern ihrer ontologischen Anschauungen zurückgreift. Platon war der Tradition der frühen indoeuropäischen Kultur treu und hielt das ternäre System für das Hauptprinzip der Konstruktion des philosophischen Systems, unterdessen war die Metaphysik von Aristoteles binär. Der Grund für diese paradigmatische Nichtübereinstimmung liegt womöglich in dem kulturellen Unterschied, der beide Philosophen trennte.

Schlüsselworte: Platon, das ternäre System, Aristoteles, das binäre System, Giovanni Reale, Traditionalismus, Originalität, frühe indoeuropäische Kultur, Transkulturalismus

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