

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NOTION «PRESENT TIME» IN ARISTOTLE'S PHILOSOPHY¹

Introduction. The factual processes regard all individuals: an unlimited succession of growing and decaying, the changes in proportions of combining of the four elements based on the objective common laws of each proper meeting-ground of matter and consciousness. The object is perceived as effect; this is sensation. The common sense and the synthetic sense regard the function of our psychic superstructure (the brain): we can find the sufficient continuity of associated sensible qualities of objects that correspond to the basic causal chains of succession, one physical and one psychic; these are reacting both ways upon each other: we can change our positions, we can adapt our actions, we can look for the permanent truths with respect to things. Each individual motion implies the proper time «unbrokenly one and not intermittent». «Part» means the content which the whole is composed of (habits, natural forces towards a substantial mutual influence of the parts contributed to the meaning of a concrete content in unbroken consequence). The «part» carries with it the moment of a chance meeting as condition of existence or absence. Any existence and non-existence is the outcome of necessity. The present qualities must necessarily (though not always) belong to an existent, to a thing. Both deliberation and action are causative with regard to the possibilities of being. The «present time» regards the actual truth, or the actual falsehood, not at the same time or with reference to the same subject, and not by potentiality. The present possibilities are powers, capacities, feelings, habits, regularized simultaneous conditions of the effect of the limited actions: the «present time» is the «same time» with respect to the actually realization of the powers predicated. We must explain the ambiguity of the «present time».

1. The Factual Process and the Arrest of a Stretch of Time. In order to provide a more concrete foundation for Aristotle's conception of the «present time» we uphold (a) the *a priori* necessity independently of the indi-

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vidual finitude; (b) some potentialities combined as a *single actuality* in our psychic experience, which is realized within consciousness; and (c) the association of the matter-in-motion with the mysterious divine activity and the mental activity, by which we can interpret the unlimited succession of growing and decaying, in virtue of principles intrinsic to beings by assimilation and dissimulation.

The common sense² through the senses (and without adding anything to them) distinguishes at once the common sensibles and reports their coexistence in associated combination of different orders of sensations. It objectifies the modes of existence: we trace the direct and inevitable impression of objectivity just now. We face up to things; we perceive the qualities of something that common sense spontaneously objectifies as ultimate truths about this. The proper senses never err. We can discriminate the changes of sensations, but we can also trace changes and developments of a thing itself. We can discover the sufficient continuity in the sensible qualities, because the thing preserves its identity, while changing, at once or successively, one or more of its qualities. The ultimate matter of a thing has still a continuous existence. The object perceived as effect confirms at the same time what we traced and described as passions, affections, associated physical and psychic events and as its materiality, the same or different forms and species, human actions, reactions and desires. The common objective world is typified by regularized movements, figures, positions, arrangement of parts, and by the sights of special sensibles. Our conceptual process regards our limited plain conception of the proper distinct powers and faculties of beings that refine ontological and cognitive processes in good time, in order to grapple with a «given now» beyond the suspense of a next «possible now». We must learn to isolate in the mental world what is never isolated in fact: the intelligence can draw the abstract from the concrete that exists only in the intelligence³.

There are ready-made abstractions or concepts for the use of language (reservoir of thought) in the immediate future, in order to adopt the permanent truths as principles of life and to distinguish the special qualities of something-in-motion. The primacy of existence in Aristotle's philosophy belongs to concrete things-in-motion and to animated beings.

The natural changes of the beings are purposeful⁴; beyond the tyranny of the visual sense, the visual memory and the visual images, desires and

2. Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, transl. by P. H. Wicksteed and F. M. Cornford, Loeb Classical Library, 1996⁷, Introduction, pp. xxxiv-xlix.

3. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. lv-lx.

4. Cf. IDEM, *Phys.*, II. ii, 194 b 1-5; II. ix, 200 a 32 - 200 b 9.



thoughts are stirred by the changes and they are directed by intelligence (the immaterial intelligence is free from movement) towards actual truths of different species of circular movements⁵ always present in the universal order of beings. Each motion implies its proper time⁶; that means the time of accomplishment of energy (motion with an end). Each individual being, as substance predicated, is at the same time quality, quantity, having, e.t.c., and it cannot be in one form always. It is in what is made of in the present time, or in what is-in-motion (moving or moved) in the present time that means the period of a full-grown existent being. Indeed, it originates and exercises its proper movement occasionally (as substance in independence), but also in participation in the eternal fruition, in the eternal joy.

2. The Actual Realization and the Practical and Predicable Conditions of an Existent. The term «man» is an isolated term that symbolizes by convention a linguistic term not yet either true or false, not yet either being or participating in a process of accomplishment of its energy. The term «verb» symbolizes the additions or combinations or distinctions of thoughts, habits, natural forces towards a substantial mutual influence of the parts contributed to the meaning of the whole in definite time and place. «Part» means content, phase, stage, period⁷. The mention of «parts» in Aristotle signifies that an existent has not developed and accomplished the aims of its energy as yet⁸. The «part» carries with it the moment/time of a chance meeting as an additional convention/condition (occasionally) of a concrete mode of existence (positive or negative).

The «whole» means the «same» for a species, the «same» for all, in the sense of an actual form of existence considered as the entirety of relations, divisions, different and analogous types of motions that concern *mutatis mutandis* their conjunction and connotation which presents or denies something in definite time and place. The «whole» is a concrete content of parts in unbroken consequence and not equivocal. Before making out those propositions, which assert or deny something, Aristotle treats the subject of present conditions or opportunities to be in effect the type: $\exists f \forall x [f(x) \leftrightarrow \text{Man}(x)]$ in the present (*onomatopoeia* of predicates – the presence of something in a subject or its absence). Thus the present conditions of an actual/effective truth are the following: a) Our propositions necessarily sometimes concern a universal subject, sometimes an individual. «Sometimes»

5. Cf. *Phys.*, IV. v, 212 a-212 b; IV. xiv, 223 b 20-35; VII. iv, 248 a - 248 b; VIII. viii, 262 a.

6. Cf. *ibid.*, VI. vi, 236 b 19-33.

7. Cf. ARISTOTLE, *De Interpretatione*, 16 a-17 b (ed. by L. Minio-Paluello, Oxford, 1989⁹).

8. Cf. *ibid.*, 16 b 6-7.



means that, as often as we state a proposition, we express it «under circumstances», namely either with regard to a universal or with regard to individuals. The reference to a universal does not signify that the presence of an actual truth has a universal character. The «present» signifies the initiative, the utterance of one's feelings, the habits, free will, the proper action, the appearance of distinct species with regard to the intrinsic nature of the subjects. b) The development of a process of existence or knowledge, the additional occasions and the present qualities must necessarily (not always) belong to a thing, that «which was truly predicated at a moment in the past will by necessity take place in the fullness of time»⁹. Both deliberation and action regard the possibility of being: any existence and non-existence is the end of necessity¹⁰. Everything must either be or not be in the present time and in times which lie outside the present. Aristotle examines time as a criterion of the actual truth of the process of the existence of beings: besides the specific meaning of the verbs he conveys the notion of time as criterion of the logical consequences. The present time regards true or false statements with reference to the «sameness» (the same or the different for all that take place «now»)¹¹. The actual truth and the actual falsehood regard the being by actuality, not by potentiality (the potentiality involves the contrary), and not at the same time with reference to the same subject, or to ambiguous effects¹². «At the same time» signifies that the universal is consequent necessarily upon the particular in the process of possible or actual realization of powers and energies predicated¹³. The «same time» gives the sign of a special coexistence and logical consequence (links), in the past, the present or in the future.

The meaning of the existence regards the implication of «sameness» and physical and psychical analogies in the process of the actual truth of beings. This implication, as we have indicated above, is based necessarily on this natural consequence: the prior in nature (necessary motion, energy) becomes posterior in the development of being (proper changes, *kinesis*, ἐντελέχεια, swerves) and «at the same time» the posterior in nature (capacities, possibilities) become prior in the development of being (the «present now» of a being, the present possibility of transition from privation or imperfection to perfect forms of life, τὰ συντελούμενα, a connotation).

9. Cf. *ibid.*, 19 a 5.

10. Cf. *ibid.*, 18 a - 19 a.

11. Cf. *ibid.*, 20 a.

12. Cf. *ibid.*, 20 a 16 ff.

13. Cf. *ibid.*, 23 a 2 ff.



3. The Simultaneous Conditions of the Successive Presence/Absence of Beings. In opposition to Melissus¹⁴, Aristotle supports that a) the Universe cannot really be a homogeneous *continuum*, and b) the conceptual identity and the conceptual distinction that regard the plurality and the beginnings of mental actions do not correspond with temporality and modality (subjectivity) of individual or particular beings. An individual being exists as substantive existent, as distinct individuality, but it has not only one form of life because it co-exists into or among other beings. Nothing can save the primarily (in time) existent¹⁵. Everything implies always the duad (the arrangement of materials and formative dispositions) that is essential to natural changes¹⁶. The persistent principles of the objective world are in evidence in every case and we cannot isolate form or matter in our actions. Thus, the subject that undergoes the changes, additions and subtractions (occasionally), combinations and modifications are involved in the process of becoming from or out of. All the processes regard the presence or absence (privation) of new forms of life, common and special characteristics. The beings effect their changes by successive absence and presence of formal and material principles, causes and elements. The «present time», from this point of view, is considered as periods, intermediate steps, which are brought about through the action of something as means towards an end: activities, instruments, causes prior and posterior actually at work, rulers. The actual energizing agent exists as experiencing its energy¹⁷ that at the same time is analogous: a) to the mental actions, b) to the arising changes, c) to chance, d) to causal chain consequences, and e) to actual choices (actual selection process)¹⁸. After the experience of the movements or changes as the passage from potential or accidental (antecedent conditions) to actual existence, the moving or the moved beings are bringing their potentiality into act; the «present time» is the time of actually functioning (complete reality of being) in all particular ways (materials suitably formed)¹⁹. Every movement is incomplete because the potentiality is incomplete. The actual reality of being (passive and active) is complete at every moment of its duration²⁰. The «current events» are produced as a series of formal analogies: from modifications in such and such a place, sense-perception, memories, experience,

14. Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, loc. cit., I.iii, 186 a 10-17 (see note b, p. 28).

15. Cf. *ibid.*

16. Cf. *ibid.*, I. v, 188 b 25.

17. Cf. *ibid.*, II. iii-iv, 195 b 15 - 201 b.

18. Cf. *ibid.*, II. v, 197 a 8-24.

19. Cf. *ibid.*, III. i, 201 b 8: «ὅταν ἡ ἐντελέχεια ᾗ αὕτη». Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, transl. by Hugh Tredennick, Loeb Classical Library, 2003¹¹, Θ 3, 1047 a 30 and Θ 6, 1048 b 29.

20. Cf. *Phys.*, III. iii, 202 a 14 - 202 b 30.

knowledge, to abilities: the case in point necessarily implies the conditions of existence and the presence of intelligent beings that follow up the process of their development in proper time. Time is neither identical with movement nor capable of being separated from it; it cannot be disconnected from two successive «nows» and from change; time is the numerical scale (not the numbers), the estimation and appreciation of the movements²¹. «Now» itself is identical in its essence, because «now» implies: a) the «sense» of the different things, different movements, divisions, sequences; the differentiation is always present²² in order to conceive the primary sense, the spirit of «whole», the common elements; b) the meaning of its existence: «now» «exists» as the highest degree of density of experienced events and of consensus to the coordination of two opposite things, namely the concrete moving/moved numerable and the «abstract» (intelligence, numbers, the counting); c) the essential function of the numerical monad (every moment) the units (static «nows», objective) as parts of a whole numerable and comparable world. The «nows», as the «after» and the «before», follow the objects, record and impress their different «position» (objective and subjective). Thus, we speak of time as consisting of «many or few» of the units in which it is counted, or as «long and short»; time-branching in and time-branching off, in respect with their relation to qualities and quantities²³. Indeed, the meaning of the «present time»²⁴ is ambiguous: a) the «present extended time» is divisible²⁵, because it separates the past and the future; b) the «present now» is itself indivisible as limit of past and future (two «nows» are separated and they are not necessarily in succession), but a portion of this «now» is past and another future²⁶. Aristotle examines²⁷ the presence of a mobile with regard to a period of time; we speak of «now» in many senses: in the sense of a «now» determined as common limit of two periods (past and future)²⁸. A mobile is not in motion «all along», but can be at rest in the first or in the second period. The change belongs to a limited «now», but it is not identified with limitation. Every «now» embraces the proper movement of each part of a mobile (in accidental sense), a *quantum*, a *quale* by concomitance only: every «now» determines that «somewhere», in «some

21. Cf. *ibid.*, IV. xi, 219 a 1 - 219 b 34.

22. Cf. *Metaph.*, Δ 3, 1014 b 13.

23. Cf. *Phys.*, IV. xii, 220 b 1-5 and 221 a 26-b3.

24. Cf. *ibid.*, VI. iii, 234 a 1-35.

25. Cf. *ibid.*, VI. ii, 233 a 16-17 (see notes a and b, p. 108).

26. Cf. *ibid.*, VI. iii, 234 a 17.

27. Cf. *ibid.*, IV. xiii, 222 a 26; VI. i, 231 b 10; VI. iii, 234 a 26; VI. iii, 234 b 1-5.

28. Cf. *ibid.*, VI. iii, 234 b1-10; VII. V, 250 b 5-7.

state», or in «some other place» a thing exists²⁹. In nature there is the *continuum* of different «nows». At any particular instant (indivisible) the mobile is situated, but there is neither rest nor motion in the sense of reducible first or earliest situation, in which a change has been effected³⁰. Aristotle interprets the existence of something during a period of time as natural energy reduced to defined natural touches, affinities, habits, actual sensations³¹ that have no continuity, but which cause growth or consumption, must be continuous with that upon which it acts, and all-embracing³². The interpretation of an actual motion and of an actual being is found 1) in the question of the innate potencies and acquired potencies by practices; 2) in the question of analogies (analogy of substance to matter, etc.); 3) in the question of conscious choice; 4) in the question of coordination of measures, common criteria, different inclinations.

«That which is moved, while it is moved, is intermediate»; «intermediate» means «it exists among others», namely that the changes proceed from opposites or intermediates³³.

The moved has something that exists in two different ways: as first substance and as desirable measure self-stabilized in mind («οὐ ἐνεκα») ³⁴. It can be counted as criterion of qualitative assimilation³⁵, and it can be applied to time and in contact on several occasions, in course of generation or destruction³⁶, as actual unifying form: nothing should hinder the actual form of the process that always exists. Its primary locomotion gives us the best which we temporarily enjoy on condition that human mind actually functions when it possesses this divine measure: «ἡμεῖς ποτὲ ὁ θεὸς αἰεί»³⁷.

4. The Effect of the Limited Actions of a Being. The moved things have³⁸ within themselves a principle of movement and rest which persists continuously. A thing has the actual form of its nature in the «present now»; it contains an internal tendency to move³⁹. In the «present now» something ad-

29. Cf. *ibid.*, VI. iv, 235 a 10-15; VI. v, 235 b 21-22.

30. Cf. *ibid.*, VI. v, 236 a 36-38; VI. v-vi, 236 b 1 - 237 a 15-18; VI. viii, 239 b 1-5.

31. Cf. *ibid.*, VII. ii, 244 b 5-15.

32. Cf. *ibid.*, VII. ii, 245 a 15-17.

33. Cf. *Metaph.*, Λ 1, 1069 b 6-7; Λ 7, 1072 a 25ff.

34. Cf. *ibid.*, 1072 a 30-35.

35. Cf. *Phys.*, VIII. vii, 260 a 30-35.

36. Cf. *Metaph.*, H 1, 1042 b 1-5.

37. Cf. *ibid.*, Λ 7, 1072 b 25-26.

38. Cf. ARISTOTLE, *On the Soul*, ed. by W. S. Hett, Loeb Classical Library, 1936, B 1-4, 412 a1 - 415 b 30; (see the use of the words «have», «has», «offer/give», «support/contain», «use»).

39. Cf. *Phys.*, II. i, 192 b 8-14.

vances towards something else that does not reproduce the relations of nature to nature (material relations or formal relations), but it must present its best actual and final state of its existence⁴⁰. The passive and the active nature, the passive intellect and the agent intellect imply the anticipated causes that harmonize the essential natural motions with accidental motions through the same stage (real time), and they can create objects of thought, content of thoughts that can be numbered and reduced to mental uniformity. Its presence causes one thing: the parts are causes of a whole form of existence⁴¹.

The thing can be in itself⁴²; the things exist in respect of natural laws of their existence and so they are in respect of truth, namely they can be perfect in virtue of having attained the end⁴³.

The things can «have», «receive» or «possess» affections of substance (composite substance), accident attributes and qualities in virtue of which alterations are realized and they are found⁴⁴. The qualities themselves do not change⁴⁵. Natural affections, habits⁴⁶, appetite, sufficient causes⁴⁷ to be or become, human choices and dispositions use up⁴⁸ naturally the first moving cause and the first principles in their activity. The goal of an active capacity (internal, psychic or external, physical or artificial) regards the identity of the composite function of an organism *in due time*⁴⁹ and it is proper to its potentiality-actuality model of existence. The mental activity, the hope and the memory are divine⁵⁰. The *kairos* is the estimation, the conscience and the appreciation of the fruits of actions⁵¹. The «now» indicates that which is escaping: it is the sensation of rising and of falling.

We cannot conceive the effect of the limited actions as «made up of a fixed now-content».

40. Cf. *ibid.*, II. i, 193 b 1-7.

41. Cf. *ibid.*, II. iii, 195 a1 ff; II.vi, 197 b 13-15; III. v, 204 b 9; *Metaph.*, Z 12, 1037 b 8-27.

42. Cf. *Phys.*, IV. iii, 210 a 28.

43. Cf. *Metaph.*, B 1, 993 b 31-32.

44. Cf. *Metaph.*, Δ 21, 1022 b 15-22; Δ 23, 1023 a 8ff; Δ 29, 1025 a 14; Z 4, 1029 b; Z 7, 1032 b; Z 11, 1037 a 29-30.

45. Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, K 7, 1177 a 16-32, «ἐνέργεια συνεχεστάτη» (ed. by I. Bywater, 1894, Oxford).

46. Cf. *Ibid.*, B 3, 1105 a 30-1105 b 35; B 7, 1107 b 28-35.

47. Cf. *Metaph.*, A 4-6, 985 a 1-987 b 35.

48. Cf. *Metaph.*, A 8, 990 a 1-10.

49. Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, Γ 1, 1110 a 15-16.

50. Cf. *ibid.*, I 7, 1168 a 14-16.

51. Cf. E. MOUTSOPOULOS, *Variations sur le thème de kairos de Socrate à Denys*, Paris, Vrin, 2002, pp. 46-64: Les dimensions kairiques de la structure de l'être. Réflexions à partir d'Aristote; IDEM, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-84: Kairos et comportement chez Aristote.



5. Conclusion. Any existence is the outcome of necessity (imposed by goal). Each chance meeting as condition of existence (it is worked-up by the parts of a being). The present qualities and the present limited actions regard the actually realization of powers and active capacities predicated. The actions are ongoing and the beings exist for change and for alterations, but not at the same time (we cannot conceive the effect of the limited actions as «made-up of a fixed now-content»). The temporary presence gives substantial generation or alteration without depriving the permanent truths. The irreversible «now» is a unique place of time-oriented movement in any temporal dimension, where the particular can be enumerated, or measured, or moderated.

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ΤΟ ΠΡΟΒΛΗΜΑ ΤΟΥ «ΠΑΡΟΝΤΟΣ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ»
ΣΤΗΝ ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΑΡΙΣΤΟΤΕΛΟΥΣ

ΑΚΑΔΗΜΙΑ

Περίληψη

ΑΘΗΝΩΝ

Ἡ ἐξέλιξη τῶν εἰδῶν ἀφορᾷ σὲ μίαν ἀκατάπαυστη διαδοχὴ γενέσεων καὶ θανάτων, ἀκμῆς καὶ παρακμῆς ποὺ λαμβάνει χώραν συμφώνως πρὸς κοινούς γιὰ ὅλα τὰ εἶδη νόμους, ὅπως τοὺς ἀντιλαμβάνεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος. Τόσο ἡ φυσικὴ, ὅσο καὶ ἡ ψυχικὴ ἀλυσίδα τῶν αἰτίων τῶν ἀλλαγῶν καὶ μεταπτώσεων στὴν ζωὴ τῶν φυσικῶν ὄντων καὶ τῶν ψυχικῶν λειτουργιῶν ποὺ ἀλληλοεξαρτῶνται, ἀφοροῦν στὴν ἀνάδειξη ἐκάστου μέρους ἐνὸς ὅλου καὶ κατ' ἐπέκταση τῆς οὐσιώδους ἀμοιβαίας ἐπιδράσεως εἴτε ἐνὸς μέρους πρὸς ἄλλο τῆς ἰδίας ἀλυσίδας, εἴτε μεταξὺ τῶν μερῶν τῆς φυσικῆς πρὸς αὐτὰ τῆς ψυχικῆς ἀλυσίδας. Τὰ μέρη προσδιορίζουν τὴν «τύχη» μιᾶς συναντήσεως ποὺ κατ' ἀνάγκην ἔχει διάρκεια, χαρακτηριστικὰ καὶ ἐξέλιξη ἀναλόγως πρὸς τὶς ιδιότητες τῶν ἐπιμέρους στοιχείων ποὺ μετέχουν/ἐνεργοποιοῦνται στὸ πλαίσιο αὐτῆς. Ὁ «παρὼν χρόνος» δὲν ἀφορᾷ στὴν πραγματικὴ ἀλήθεια ἐνὸς μερικοῦ στοιχείου, συνεπῶς δὲν εἶναι ὑποκειμενικός, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ὁ πραγματικὸς χρόνος τῆς ἐνεργοποιήσεως τῶν μερῶν κατὰ τὴν συνάντησιν ποὺ προαναφέρθηκε, δηλαδὴ ὁ χρόνος τῆς συμπαρουσίας κατηγοριοποιημένων ἐνεργειῶν (μορφῶν ζωῆς καὶ ἀντιλήψεως αὐτῶν ἐκ μέρους τοῦ ἀνθρώπου). Ὁ «παρὼν χρόνος» δὲν εἶναι ἐπίσης ταυτόσημος μὲ τὰ διάφορα «τώρα» τῶν ποικίλων φυσικῶν ὑποστάσεων. Ὁ «παρὼν χρόνος» ἀφορᾷ στὴν ἐπιβεβαιωμένη καὶ ἀφομοιωμένη ἀπὸ τὸν ἀνθρώπινον νοῦ ἐνέργεια ἐνὸς ὁργανισμοῦ συμφώνως πρὸς τὸν σκοπὸ τῆς ὑπάρξεώς του. Ὁ «καιρὸς» σημαίνει τὴν πλήρωση τῆς ἐνεργείας ἐνὸς ὄντος καὶ τὴν παραγωγὴ ἀποτελεσμάτων ἀπ' αὐτήν.

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