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Aspasian Infidelities. On Aspasius' Philosophical Background (EN I)

DOI 10.1515/apeiron-2015-0028

Abstract: The discussion on Aspasius' philosophical background has benefited in recent years from a wide consensus. According to this consensus, Aspasius should be regarded as a Peripatetic, or even as an “orthodox Peripatetic” (Barnes' phrase). It is true that Aspasius' commentary is generally in tune with Aristotle. It is true that he shows an extensive knowledge of Aristotelian research pertinent for the discussions and that he uses Aristotelian concepts, principles, and doctrines with ease as if they were his own, thus denoting an old assimilation of those materials and a long accommodation to them. In a word, it is true that Aspasius is an Aristotelian. He is, however, as I will try to show in this paper, an Aristotelian strongly influenced by Stoicism. I will do so by selecting those points from Aspasius' commentary on book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics* where the Stoic influence is most flagrantly evident, namely in his interpretation of art (τέχνη), his conception of continence and incontinence and, especially, his interpretation of the relation between happiness, virtue, and external goods in Aristotle.

Keywords: Aspasius, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, happiness, virtue, external goods

The Consensus

The discussion on Aspasius' philosophical background has benefited in recent years from a wide consensus.

A good example of this consensus is the position Barnes sustains on the matter in his excellent “Introduction to Aspasius”, where he states the following¹:

Next, Aspasius' philosophical position. Galen calls him a Peripatetic, and it is plain that his pupil taught Galen Peripatetic philosophy. Porphyry strongly implies that he was a Peripatetic. The commentary on the *Ethics* regularly presents Aristotle's views as though

1 Barnes (1999, 5).

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they were true – that is to say, it gives the impression of having been written by a Peripatetic. Nor is this in the least surprising: if you wrote commentaries on Aristotle's works in the second century AD, then the chances are that you were of the Peripatetic persuasion.

And, after a page of possible objections, he declares²:

Such general considerations make it plain that, whatever nuances and shadows might be added by a detailed scrutiny, the "Platonist" passages *provide no reason to think that Aspasius was anything other than an orthodox Peripatetic – orthodox, that is to say, for his time and in the eyes of his contemporaries.*

Later, he concludes his remarks on the subject by saying³:

The commentary itself, on every page, shows a dutiful and orthodox Peripatetic. We should [therefore] continue to believe that the commentary on the *Ethics* was written by a Peripatetic – by the Peripatetic Aspasius who taught Galen's teacher.

In fact, it is true that Aspasius' commentary is generally in tune with Aristotle.

It is true that he shows an extensive knowledge of Aristotelian research pertinent for the discussions found especially in *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, *On the Soul* and *Metaphysics*. He uses Aristotelian concepts, principles, and doctrines with ease as if they were his own, thus denoting an old assimilation of those materials and a long accommodation to them.⁴

In a word, it is true that Aspasius is an Aristotelian.

He is, however, as Barnes himself acknowledges, an Aristotelian of the first to second centuries A.D. And on several points he is – as I will try to show, *contra* Barnes and the consensus that has been put in place regarding this matter – *an Aristotelian strongly influenced by Stoicism.*

² Barnes (1999, 6) (the emphasis is mine).

³ Barnes (1999, 8).

⁴ One of the signs of the extensive knowledge Aspasius has of Aristotle's works is the probable use of the *Protrepticus* in 1.15-24. In fact, the argument offered in that passage to support the statement that political science, although inferior "in respect to value" (κατὰ τὸ τίμιον) to contemplative philosophy, is superior to it "in respect to necessity" (κατὰ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον), strikingly resembles the one that occurred in a lost exhortative writing by Cicero, the *Hortensius* (that we know through Augustine), and in the *Protrepticus* of Iamblichus, two texts that Aristotelian scholarship believe to have their common origin in Aristotle's *Protrepticus* and which the first modern editor of the fragments of Aristotle's lost works, Valentin Rose, has, consequently, included in his reconstruction of this book: see Augustine, *De trinitate* XIV ix 12, and Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* 9, 52.16-54.5 Pistelli (Rose³ 58 = Ross 12).

Of course, in order to do this, I would probably need to begin by clarifying what, in my view, it meant to be an “orthodox Peripatetic” in practical philosophy back in the first to second centuries A.D. (even if only “for his time and in the eyes of his contemporaries”), since it is this qualification that, in the end, I am challenging with respect to its suitability to describe Aspasius’ stance.

Otherwise – some could say – chances are that I will be confronting Aspasius with a pure, unpolluted, unhistorical idea of Aristotelianism that never existed, not even in Aristotle’s times nor for Aristotle himself. Indeed, like a modern Aristotelian necessarily builds her peculiar Aristotelianism within the framework of modern philosophical problems and concepts – which inevitably condition her reading and affect her degree of proximity with the letter of Aristotle’s texts in this or that regard – so Aspasius, in the first to second centuries A.D., also complied, even if he was not aware of it, with the philosophical underpinnings of his age and, for this reason, a considerable amount of integration of Peripatetic, Platonic and Stoic ingredients, in variable dosages and proportions, should be expected to be found in his thought.

All of this is true. However, it will be consensually conceded, I trust, that *at no time* would an *orthodox* Peripatetic cross those doctrinal “red lines” that are drawn by Aristotle’s texts themselves.

Hence, in order to discuss the alleged orthodoxy of Aspasius’ commentary, I am not actually compelled to speculate about what an orthodox Peripatetic back in the first to second centuries A.D. would be like, but only to put forward some doctrinal boundaries within Aristotelian moral theory that no orthodox Peripatetic would *ever* cross, particularly those that this commentary was inevitably bound to stumble upon sooner or later, because they form part of the philosophical backbone of the *Ethics*.

These are some basic, and, I think, quite unequivocal boundaries of the sort: (1) happiness is the highest human good and, as such, the ultimate goal of human life; (2) happiness involves virtue in an essential way and, therefore, is not possible without virtue; (3) being virtuous is, however, not sufficient to be happy; (4) moral virtue consists in a mean between excess and deficiency; (5) some moral qualities and attitudes, like honor (τιμή), continence (ἐγκράτεια), modesty (αἰδώς), and shame (αἰσχύνη) are not technically virtues.

Accordingly, the following would be unmistakable heterodox Peripatetic theses *at any point in time*: (1) happiness is not, or is not the only, ultimate goal of human life; (2) happiness is possible without virtue; (3) happiness depends ultimately only on virtue; (4) moral virtue does not consist in a mean; (5) honor, continence, or shame are virtues.

We could proceed further, but it would be pointless since these theses provide the theoretical framework we will be dealing with.

However, there is an objection that could be raised here. Indeed – one could reply – at no time would what *we now consider* an orthodox Peripatetic cross the abovementioned doctrinal red lines. But does this imply that, if at a given time someone actually crossed one of these red lines, she could not *be considered* an orthodox Peripatetic *at that time*? As a matter of fact, Barnes cautiously qualified his assertion, by adding: “orthodox, that is to say, for his time and in the eyes of his contemporaries”.

Well, neither I nor anybody really can exactly estimate what could have been seen as orthodox or heterodox in Aspasius’ time, let alone in the eyes of his contemporaries. Historical evidence is seriously missing here and this is also why some more digging into the philosophy of the early imperial times is most welcome. Nevertheless, I think we can all agree on this: if during someone’s own time, and in the eyes of her contemporaries, everything and anything whatsoever can be seen as orthodox – even crossing the red lines that define the very core of orthodoxy – then it becomes altogether meaningless to speak of orthodoxy. Therefore, if Aspasius was not really an orthodox Peripatetic in this sense albeit he was regarded as one in his time “and in the eyes of his contemporaries”, this only shows that no true Peripatetic orthodoxy existed during that time (which, incidentally, is very likely, since he lived during the golden age of eclecticism) and, therefore, the testimony of his contemporaries can hardly count for the establishment of anyone’s orthodoxy in any legitimate sense of the word.

Besides, the fact remains that the principle that presides over the notion of doctrinal boundaries, or “red lines,” as we have introduced above, is that they are drawn by Aristotle’s texts themselves. From this point of view, the moment in time at which we consider the orthodoxy or heterodoxy of Aspasius, or any other figure of the past, is of no consequence. And such are the red lines in Aristotelian ethics that we have put forward above.

Now, we should assess Aspasius’ “orthodoxy” in his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* against this background. And it is therefore against this background that I will develop my allegations of Stoic influence in Aspasius’ work.

The conclusion will be not that Aspasius was not an Aristotelian, for he definitively was one, but that his peculiar Aristotelianism was so deeply and severely tainted by Stoicism that it would be seriously misleading to call him an “orthodox Peripatetic,” even if he was thought to be one during “his time and in the eyes of his contemporaries”.

The Dissensus

It is beyond doubt that Aspasius knows Stoicism well, that he mentions it and even criticizes it in the name of sound Aristotelian principles.⁵ This is especially the case in his discussion of emotions, where Aspasius definitely takes Aristotle's side against the Stoics.⁶ The question is if such an opposition remains *when he does not mention it explicitly*.

Let me explain this point.

Without trying to put Aspasius' commentary on the psychoanalytic couch, it seems defensible to say that he "Stoicizes," if not every time – as that would be an exaggeration –,⁷ at least several times when he seems not to be aware of doing so, that is to say, when, commenting on Aristotle, he seems oblivious to how close to Stoicism his commentary comes and how much in opposition to Aristotle both Stoicism and his commentary really are.

In this sense, Aspasius' Peripatetic "infidelities," if any, are mostly unwanted and apparently unwittingly done.

There are, of course, also those cases in which Aspasius is simply breathing the air of the times.

For instance, in his translation of the commentary on book I of the *Ethics*, David Konstan has registered some cases where Aspasius uses logical vocabulary of Stoic origin,⁸ but there is no reason to assume that the contamination is more than simply linguistic.⁹

5 Throughout the text, I will always speak of Stoicism in general, without distinction between authors, even when it is possible to make one, and according to the later form taken up by their doctrines, since that form is, presumably, the one familiar to Aspasius.

6 42.27-47.2. On this matter, see Sorabji (1999, 96–106).

7 It would be an exaggeration to say "every time" because Katerina Ierodiakonou, for instance, has clearly shown, in her study "Aspasius on Perfect and Imperfect Virtues", that Aspasius would have been led to reject fundamental aspects of the Stoic theory of virtue, on behalf of the Aristotelian theory, in coherence with the principles he is committed to in his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, without, however, entering into direct and explicit polemic against the Stoics.

8 Namely, the use of the expression "hypothetically" (ὑποθετικῶς) in 12.8 and 12.20-21 and the expression "categorically" (κατηγορικῶς) in 12.10: see nn. 31–32, p. 190.

9 David Sedley mentions another case of linguistic contamination in Sedley (1999, 169, n. 12): "Aristotle's words at 1152a14-15 are *ho eidōs kai theōrōn*, 'one who knows and is thinking about it'. Significantly, Aspasius fails to recognise Aristotle's standard term, *theōrein*, for actively using or 'contemplating' some knowledge that one has, and instead sees an allusion to 'theorems' of practical reasoning – an un-Aristotelian notion, although one which by his day had been put fully on the map by the intellectualist ethics of the Stoics."

And Jonathan Barnes himself accurately notes that the process of dissemination of the philosophical idiolects of the different schools throughout Antiquity, especially the most influential ones such as the Stoic and the Platonic, was produced with such assimilations and intersections that, in most cases, it is impossible to determine a philosophical influence solely on the basis of the language used by an author.¹⁰

This occurs, for example, with the presentation of the Aristotelian doctrine in Diogenes Laertius' book V. Contrary to what many authors sustain,¹¹ I find that Diogenes is remarkably rigorous in this presentation, despite his use of some elements of the Stoic philosophical language and the adoption of a Stoic scheme of approach, which can be explained by the broad diffusion of the Portico's conceptual lexicon throughout Antiquity.¹²

This is not, however, what occurs in Aspasius' commentary.

The contamination is present in a sometimes-deeper way and its effects are philosophically more dramatic.

To begin with, a great deal of this contamination has nothing to do with the terminology Aspasius uses, but solely with the interpretations he makes of Aristotle's text and the doctrines he ascribes to Aristotle by means of these interpretations.

Further, even in those instances where it is indeed the terminology that seems to indicate some amount of Stoic contamination, the use of the terminology cannot, in those instances, be simply attributed to the common philosophical lexicon at hand during the commentator's lifetime. This is obviously the case when it can be proved that the Stoic locutions Aspasius used had not fell into the "public domain," so to speak, of his times (admittedly, not so many instances would pass such a test); but this is particularly the case (we will see at least one example in what follows) where the notions themselves expressed by the Stoic or Stoic-inspired expressions Aspasius used find no correspondence in Aristotle's conceptual stock and therefore the commentator cannot be seen as merely resorting to the philosophical *koine* of his time in order to illuminate some difficult Aristotelian ideation.

In fact, if Aspasius was indeed nothing more than a "dutiful and orthodox Peripatetic", then those cases where he used an idiom other than the Aristotelian one should be cases when he did not possess the latter, or decided not to use it, but the former nonetheless fit the bill, at least in his view, to express some underlying Aristotelian notion he was trying to construe; and all

¹⁰ See Barnes (1999, 5).

¹¹ See, for instance, Moraux (1949, 1986), Bodéus (1986, 1995), Dorandi (2007).

¹² See Mesquita (2013, 262–3).

the more so if in these peculiar occurrences he formally purported to be introducing a Peripatetic concept or thought. Yet, as we shall see, this is not always what happens in Aspasius' commentary.

It is true that some points of contact between Aspasius and Stoicism have already been mentioned in previous literature.¹³ These references, however, are rare and episodic, and have never resulted in an exhaustive inquiry.

Without carrying out such an exhaustive inquiry in this paper, I would like to go a little further than what I have been able to find in literature up to this point, by selecting those points where the Stoic influence on the commentator is most flagrantly evident, in order to contribute to a new appraisal of Aspasius' philosophical affiliation.

I will restrict myself to the commentary on book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I will start with references of a more marginal character and then focus on the aspects where the influence of Stoicism can be detected as philosophically more serious and profound.

Art

In the context of the presentation of the different meanings of art in 2.16-2.26 (the commentary refers to the first sentence of *EN*, 1094a1-2: *πᾶσα τέχνη καὶ πᾶσα μέθοδος, ὁμοίως δὲ πράξις τε καὶ προαίρεσις, ἀγαθοῦ τινὸς ἐφίεσθαι δοκεῖ*) the first two meanings are stated by Aspasius, oddly enough, not in canonical and recognizable Aristotelian terminology, but by making use of the enigmatic notion of a “system of propositions.”

This is the complete passage¹⁴:

Among them [i.e. the Peripatetics], “art” is spoken of in three senses. For example, the genus of all the arts is called “art”: for they distinguish the arts, calling some productive, some theoretical. One might define an art in this sense [the genus of all the arts] as *a system of propositions* (σύστημα ἐκ θεωρημάτων) *leading to a single end*. In another sense, they call an “art” the common genus of active art and productive art: for here they distinguish by calling the one “art” and the other “science”, labelling all theoretical art

13 For example, Antonina Alberti, in “Il volontário e la scelta in Aspasio”, shows that opposition to Stoic determinism by Aspasius coexists with – and, actually, is served by – what the author calls a “stoicizing conception of choice” (Alberti 1999, 141). And Gauthier, in his introduction to the translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, acknowledges that Aspasius “a profondément subi l’influence de la morale stoïcienne” (Gauthier and Jolif 1970, I 1, 100).

14 2.16-2.26 (the emphasis is mine). Translations of Aspasius' *Commentary* are all by David Konstan.

“science”. One might describe such an [active and productive] art as a *system of propositions* (σύστημα ἐκ θεωρημάτων) *leading to actions or productions*. They are also accustomed to call productive art in particular “art”. Aristotle provides a definition of it, when he says “an art is a productive state (ἔξις) accompanied by reason” (VI 4, 1140a7-8); he means neither inductive nor syllogistic reason, but rather simple, artistic reason, such as craftsmen in the arts employ.

It is quite clear that the vocabulary Aspasius uses in this passage to characterize the first two meanings of “art” is not Aristotelian.

If we cross-refer the surveys made by Bonitz, regarding the Aristotelian treatises, and by Liddell-Scott, regarding the use of the word in Greek literature, we may conclude that, in Aristotle, σύστημα – a relatively rare term in his works (there are only about five occurrences in the whole *corpus*) – usually appears in the biological treatises, particularly in the *Generation of Animals*, with the meaning of compound or composite whole¹⁵ and once with the meaning of animal organism.¹⁶ However, it also occurs once with the meaning of literary composition (in the *Poetics*)¹⁷ and once with the meaning of political regime or organized government (in the *Nicomachean Ethics* itself).¹⁸ No occurrence of the word can be found, however, in the sense that the Stoics will come to attribute to it and that will progressively become, from then on, its primary meaning, that is, the sense of *system*. This is to say that the concept is completely unknown to Aristotle, since no other word with this meaning can be found in his lexicon.

On the other hand, θεωρήματα is normally used by Aristotle to refer to objects of research or “contemplation”, that is, the objective counterpart of θεωρία,¹⁹ or to designate the research itself, whether it is of dialectical,²⁰ scientific,²¹ or undetermined nature.²² What never occurs in Aristotle is the expression used to refer to propositions, as is the case in Aspasius’ commentary. The closest to this usage that we can find in Aristotle is, in the context of the discussion of the status of mathematical objects, in *Metaphysics* M-N, the use of the expression to refer to mathematical theorems.²³ However, the expression is

15 In *GA* III 1, 752a7, and III 9, 758b3.

16 *GA* II 4, 740a20.

17 *Po.* 18, 1456a12.

18 *EN* IX 8, 1168b32.

19 For example, in *Mem.* 1, 450b25, *EN* IX 4, 1166a26-27, and *Rh.* I 4, 1359b8.

20 *Top.* I 11, 104b1.

21 *Mete.* I 3, 339b9; I 3, 339b37; I 8, 345b2; *Insomn.* 2, 455a25.

22 *Po.* 19, 1456b19, and, perhaps, *EE* I 1, 1214a9. θεωρημα also occurs at least once in the original sense of sight: see *DivSomn* 2, 463b19 (and cf. *MA* 7, 701a10, with the meaning of contemplation).

23 See *Metaph.* M 8, 1083b18; N 2, 1090a13; N 3, 1093b28; N 6, 1093b15.

always used there in the sense of the demonstrable propositions of *mathematics* and never in the general sense of a proposition. There is nothing, therefore, in Aristotelian nomenclature that provides the grounds for or justifies the sense in which Aspasius uses the term in those passages.

It is true that *θεώρημα* is not the standard Stoic term for “proposition”, in its logical sense, that is, in the sense of the content expressed by a declarative sentence. For this sense of the term “proposition” the standard Stoic term is *ἀξιωμα*, which designates one of the subclasses of the *λεκτά*, the incorporeal “sayables”. Instead, *θεώρημα* usually means, in the Stoic texts, principle or general rule.²⁴

Nevertheless, the relevant point here, as was marginally pointed out by David Sedley,²⁵ is that Aspasius uses the expression *θεώρημα* in a sense that has no correspondence in the Aristotelian lexicon, a sense which clearly can only be translated as proposed by David Konstan, that is, as “proposition”, and that the entire notion of a “system of propositions” is undeniably Stoic. The use of the term in this sense is, thus, indicative of the occurrence of a Stoic concept, regardless of whether the Stoics themselves used it in that sense or not.

Furthermore, the concept of a “system of propositions” is critical for the Stoic conception of science and for its conception of the different scientific branches, disciplines, and activities.

In his inventory of the meanings attributed by the Stoics to *ἐπιστήμη*, Joannes Stobaeus states²⁶:

Scientific knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη*) is [firstly] a cognition (*κατάληψις*) which is secure and unchangeable by reason. It is secondly a system of such *epistemai* (*σύστημα ἐξ ἐπιστημῶν τοιούτων*), like the rational cognition of particulars which exists in the virtuous man. It is thirdly a system of expert *epistemai* (*σύστημα ἐξ ἐπιστημῶν τεχνικῶν*), which has intrinsic stability, as the virtues do. Fourthly, it is a tenor (*ἔξις*) for the reception of impressions which is unchangeable by reason, and consisting, they say, in tension and power.

Looking past the dense conceptual grid that permeates this text, which we will not deal with for the time being, what ensues from this is that the fundamental character of scientific knowledge, for the Stoics, is stability and immutability. This, consequently, is the first and most basic sense of *ἐπιστήμη*: a cognitive apprehension that is “ensured and immutable through reason” (*κατάληψιν*

²⁴ See: Plutarch, *De Stoicorum repugnantiis* 1035A (= SVF II 42 = LS 26C); Cicero, *De fato* 12–15 (= LS 38E); Diogenes Laertius VII 125 (= SVF III 295); Stobaeus, *Eclogae* II 63.6–24 (= SVF II 280 = LS 61D).

²⁵ Who, as mentioned above, finds this selfsame contamination in another step of Aspasius’ commentary: see *supra*, n. 9.

²⁶ *Eclogae* II 73.16–74.3 = SVF III 112 = LS 41H (translated by Long-Sedley; the emphasis is mine).

ἀσφαλή καὶ ἀμετάπτωτον ὑπὸ λόγου). To know something scientifically is to apprehend it through an adequate representation – but this must be a representation that does not change, nor is it altered, nor does it disappear.

However, these predicates, if not bestowed upon it, are at least guaranteed by the systematic character that reason provides to the concatenation of cognitive representations that primarily constitute scientific knowledge.²⁷ And, in this sense, the systematic character of science ends up being the main ingredient of its nature as science. In other words, science as science *is a system*; and, since cognitions or cognitive representations can only be organized by science when formulated in a declarative form, one can even add to this that science is necessarily a *system of propositions*.

The same thing can be said about a different, albeit kindred, notion from the Stoic epistemological lexicon and one that is particularly relevant for our discussion – the notion of τέχνη.

Here is what Olympiodorus tells us about this notion in his commentary on Plato's *Gorgias*²⁸:

Cleanthes says that “expertise (τέχνη) is a tenor (ἔξις) which *achieves everything methodically* (ὁδῶ πάντα ἀνούουσα)”. This definition is incomplete. After all, nature also is a tenor which does everything methodically. That is why Chrysippus added “with impressions”, and say that “expertise is a tenor which *advances methodically* with impressions” (τέχνη ἐστὶν ἔξις ὁδῶ προϊούσα μετὰ φαντασιῶν)... Zeno says that “an expertise is a *systematic collection of cognitions* (σύστημα ἐκ καταλήψεων) unified by practice for some goal advantageous in life”.

Once more, now in regard to τέχνη, the systematic or “methodical” character of science for Stoicism is apparent.

In this context, the occurrence of the notion of a “system of propositions” (σύστημα ἐκ θεωρημάτων) in the Aspasian discussion on the meaning of τέχνη becomes very suggestive – suggestive, namely, of a distinctive proximity to Stoicism.

Now, what is particularly interesting – and significant – is that Aspasius resorts to the Stoic notion of *technê* when he tentatively puts forward *his own definition* of the term.²⁹ When, instead, he is in possession of Aristotle's definition,³⁰ the Stoic vocabulary is no longer present, and, naturally, he uses Aristotelian vocabulary.

²⁷ Even if submitted to a deep revision, the Platonic ancestry of this notion is pretty evident here, as in many other elements of Stoic philosophy: see *Men* 98a and *Tht.* 201d.

²⁸ *In Platonis Gorgiam commentaria* 12.1.09-19=LS 42 A (translated by Long-Sedley; the emphasis is mine).

²⁹ 2.18-19: “one might define an art in this sense as...” (ὀρίσαιο δ' ἂν τις τὴν οὕτω λεγομένην τέχνην...); 2.22: “one might describe such an art as...” (τὴν δὲ τοιαύτην ὑπογράψειεν ἂν τις...).

³⁰ In the case of the third sense, in 2.24: “Aristotle provides a definition of it...” (ἀποδίδωσι δὲ αὐτῷ λόγον ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης...).

This seems to suggest that, more than just a proximity, there is a *real Stoic influence* at the foundation of Aspasius' philosophical position, an influence that erupts and manifests itself when he lacks Aristotelian references. (In this context, the fact that Aspasius calls the Peripatetics “them” at the beginning of the excerpt, which is downplayed by Barnes,³¹ may prove itself meaningful in this case.)³²

Of course, it could be said that this is one of those lapses in vocabulary, common in the late Hellenistic and Imperial periods, which Barnes alerts us to, that are of no use to identify or denounce the philosophical allegiance of an author.

The problem is that, in order for this to be the case, one would have to envisage it as a non-Aristotelian way of saying something that Aristotle did say or, at least, could have said, that is, as a way to translate an Aristotelian thesis into a non-Aristotelian idiom (and note that Aspasius is explicitly trying to spell out here the definitions of a *Peripatetic concept*).

It is not at all clear, however, what could correspond, in Aristotle, to this conception of τέχνη as a “system of propositions”, because from the outset *there is nothing in his work that could correspond to such a notion*.

In Aristotle's analyses of τέχνη, as they are expounded in the *Metaphysics* and in *Nicomachean Ethics*,³³ nothing substantiates such a conception. And the fact is that a kind of hyper-rationalist reductionism shines through this conception as having very little to do with Aristotle.

Further, it is surely significant that, when Aspasius puts forward the first two Peripatetic senses of “art”, he chooses not to use the model conveniently provided by Aristotle's definition of τέχνη in its third sense, but prefers instead to resort to a conceptual grid (σύστημα ἐκ θεωρημάτων) that, as we have seen, is not present and has no equivalent whatsoever in the Stagirite's thought.

Virtue

Another sign of Stoic influence occurs shortly before, when, at the beginning of the commentary, Aspasius confronts theoretical and practical philosophy.

³¹ See Barnes (1999, 6–8).

³² Moreover, the similarity between Aspasius' definition of τέχνη and the one Olympiodorus attributes to Zeno of Citium is noteworthy. In the first case, we have: σύστημα ἐκ θεωρημάτων εἰς ἓν τέλος φερόντων (2.19); and in the second: σύστημα ἐκ καταλήψεων συγγεγυμνασμένον πρὸς τι τέλος εὐχρηστον τῶν ἐν τῷ βίῳ. It is difficult to conceive of such a similarity as a mere coincidence.

³³ Respectively: *Metaph.* A 1, 981a5-b7; *EN* VI 4, 1140a1-23.

In fact, going almost unnoticed, continence (ἐγκράτεια) appears listed there as one of the virtues: καὶ σωφροσύνης καὶ ἐγκρατείας καὶ πολλῶν ἄλλων τοιούτων ἀρετῶν.³⁴

Now, as is well known, Aristotle does not regard continence as a virtue, as he does not regard incontinence as a vice.

In the *Ethics*, this is perhaps most clearly stated in the following passage³⁵:

In general incontinence and vice are of different kinds. For the vicious person does not notice that he is vicious, while the incontinent person notices that he is incontinent (...). Evidently, then, incontinence is not a vice, though presumably it is one in a way. For incontinence conflicts with decision, while vice expresses decision. All the same, it is similar to vice in its actions. Thus Demodocus attacks the Milesians: “the Milesians are not stupid, but they do what the stupid people would do”; and in the same way incontinentals are not unjust, but will do injustice.

The Stoics, on the contrary, included ἐγκράτεια among the virtues and ἀκρασία among the vices.

This is explicitly stated by Diogenes Laertius when he mentions the Stoic classification of the virtues³⁶:

Amongst the virtues, some are primary, some are subordinate to these. The following are the primary: wisdom (φρόνησις), courage, justice, temperance. Particular virtues are magnanimity (μεγαλοψυχία), continence (ἐγκράτεια), endurance (καρτερία), presence of mind (ἀγχίνοια), good counsel (εὐβουλία). (...) Similarly, of vices some are primary, others subordinate: e.g. folly, cowardice, injustice, profligacy are accounted primary; but *incontinence*, stupidity, ill-advisedness subordinate. Further, they hold that the vices are forms of ignorance of those things whereof the corresponding virtues are the knowledge.

The same lesson is preserved by Joannes Stobaeus,³⁷ who presents it in a more developed and complex way, namely by subsuming subordinated virtues and vices under each of the primary virtues and vices: thus εὐβουλία and ἀγχίνοια under prudence; καρτερία and μεγαλοψυχία under courage; αἰδημοσύνη and ἐγκράτεια under temperance; etc. (Notice that, although Stobaeus adds several virtues to the classification, the core of virtues mentioned both by Diogenes Laertius and Stobaeus is the same, hence suggesting that both testimonies come from a common source.)

³⁴ 1.17-18.

³⁵ EN VII 8, 1150b35-1151a10 (here, as in all other citations of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I cite the translation by Terence Irwin).

³⁶ VII 92.5-93 = SVF III 265 (translation by Hicks; the emphasis is mine).

³⁷ See *Eclogae* II 7, 60.9 = SVF III 264.

That is also what can be drawn from Epictetus' words, according to the anecdote attributed to him by Aulus Gellius³⁸:

The same Epictetus, moreover, as we have heard from Favorinus, was in the habit of saying that there were *two vices* which are far more severe and atrocious than all others, want of endurance *and want of self-control* (et incontinentiam), when we do not endure or bear the wrongs which we have to bear, *or do not abstain from, or forbear, those matters and pleasures which we ought to forbear*. "And so," he says, "if a man should take to heart these two words and observe them in controlling and keeping watch over himself, he will, for the most part, be free from wrongdoing, and will live a highly peaceful life." These two words, he used to say, were ἀνέχου and ἀπέχου (bear and forbear).

It is therefore clear that Aspasius yields here to a thesis that is Stoic and not Aristotelian. The fact that this thesis was already recognized as Stoic in Aspasius' time (even if for no better reason than the motto "bear and forbear" immediately became a classic of Stoicism), and the fact that he, as a commentator of book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, was bound to know that this was not an Aristotelian thesis, only deepens the enigma.

External Goods

If up to this point we have only touched upon ancillary and isolated aspects in Aspasius' commentary, a much stronger case can be built, unsurprisingly enough, from his interpretation of the relation between virtue and happiness in Aristotle and, in particular, in his interpretation of the role played by "external goods" in happiness.

At this point, it is as if Aspasius knew Aristotle's position on the subject well enough to understand that Aristotle's position was incompatible with any other, namely the Stoic view, that reduces happiness to virtue, but, at the same time, was inclined to harmonize the former with the latter, or read the former in light of the latter, in such a manner that he was usually led to put forward interpretations of the Aristotelian doctrine that, in practice, assimilate Aristotle's doctrine to the standpoint of the Stoics.

Let us look at this issue with the attention it deserves.

To begin, a schematic reminder of Aristotle's position on this topic might be helpful.

³⁸ XVII 19.5-6 = Epictetus fr. 10 (translation by Oldfather; the emphasis is mine).

As is known, Aristotle defines happiness as an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue.³⁹ At the same time, however, Aristotle also believes that no one can be happy, no matter how virtuous he is, if he lacks a set of concurring factors, which he calls “external goods” (ἐκτὸς ἀγαθά).⁴⁰ Among these external goods are good birth, offspring, friends, wealth, power, and honor (which he calls, in a different context, “the greater of the external goods”).⁴¹

Aristotle presents two reasons for this.⁴²

The first is instrumental and concerns the fact that the practice of virtue itself requires certain material conditions. In his terms, “we cannot, or cannot easily, do fine actions if we lack the resources”.⁴³

The second reason is that the lack of certain external goods, such as good birth, good offspring, and beauty, simply “mars our blessedness” (ῥυπαίνουσι τὸ μακάριον).⁴⁴

As he himself puts it⁴⁵:

We do not altogether have the character of happiness if we look utterly repulsive or are ill-born, solitary or childless, and have it even less, presumably, if our children or friends are totally bad, or were good but have died.

In brief, for Aristotle, virtue is an essential part of happiness and its necessary condition. It is not, however, its sufficient condition, because there will be no happiness, or no complete happiness, in the absence of certain external goods.

For the Stoics, on the contrary, virtue is not only a necessary condition, but also a sufficient condition for happiness.⁴⁶

³⁹ See *EN* I 7, 1098a16-17: ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια κατ’ ἀρετὴν; *EN* I 8, 1098b31: ταύτης [ἀρετῆς] γὰρ ἐστὶν ἢ κατ’ αὐτὴν ἐνέργεια; *EN* I 8, 1099b26: ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια κατ’ ἀρετὴν ποιά τις; *EN* I 13, 1102a5-6: ἐστὶν ἢ εὐδαιμονία ψυχῆς ἐνέργειά τις κατ’ ἀρετὴν τελείαν); etc.

⁴⁰ *EN* I 8, 1099a31-b8; I 8, 1099b26-28; I 9, 1100a4-9; I 10, 1100b22-1101a21; VII 13, 1153b17-19; X 8, 1078a23-b7; X 8, 1078b33-1079a17; cf. I 8, 1098b12-20.

⁴¹ *EN* IV 3, 1123b20-21.

⁴² See *EN* I 8, 1099a31-b8.

⁴³ *EN* I 8, 1099a32-33. Cf. X 8, 1078a23-b7 and 1078b33-1079a17.

⁴⁴ *EN* I 8, 1099b2.

⁴⁵ *EN* I 8, 1099b3-6; see I 9, 1100a8-9.

⁴⁶ See particularly: Diogenes Laertius VII 89 = *SVF* III 39 = LS 61A; VII 127 = LS 61I; Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* 85.1, 17–19. It could be said that to speak of virtue as a sufficient condition for happiness is too weak of a statement for Stoic ethics, where the relation between virtue and happiness is rather one of identity. The point is controversial (note, for instance, that the texts referred to in this footnote affords both interpretations), but I do not want, nor need, to engage in such a controversy here. In fact, I do not purport to be presenting here the best possible interpretation of the Stoic position on the relation between happiness and virtue (or the best possible interpretation of the Aristotelian position, for that matter). My aim is rather to find

Epictetus expresses this suggestively when he says⁴⁷:

Who then is a Stoic? Show me a man moulded to the pattern of the judgements that he utters, in the same way as we call a statue Phidian that is moulded according to the art of Phidias. Show me one who is sick and yet happy, in peril and yet happy, dying and yet happy, in exile and happy, in disgrace and happy. Show him me. By the gods I would fain see a Stoic.

This is the second of the six *paradoxa stoicorum* that Cicero lists and discusses in the essay by the same name and that he effectively sums up, in Greek, in the following way: ὅτι αὐτάρκης ἢ ἀρετὴ πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν.

The paradox's rationale can be tentatively reconstructed as follows.

The basic thesis of Stoic ethics is that only virtues are unconditionally good and only vices are unconditionally bad.⁴⁸ In fact, everything else (health, beauty, strength, wealth, power, honor, etc.) can be rightly or wrongly used, that is, virtuously used, for good, or viciously used, for bad, and, therefore, from a moral point of view, it is neither good nor bad, but indifferent. Hence, aside from the class of goods and the class of evils, the Stoics acknowledged the class of things morally indifferent (αδιάφορα).⁴⁹

However, things morally indifferent are not all equal, nor indifferent, from other points of view. Namely, they can be distinguished from the point of view of their appropriateness (οἰκείωσις) to human nature. According to this criterion, the Stoics put forward a new triadic division, a division of indifferent things this time, between: preferential indifferent things (προηγμένα), which, although neither good nor bad, are valuable things (ἄξια) because they are fitting to our nature, inasmuch as they preserve or support it (for example, health, wealth, power, etc.); non-preferential indifferent things (ἀπροηγμένα), which are the opposite of the former (illness, poverty, frailty, etc.); and the indifferent indifferent things, so to speak, that is, those things that are doubly indifferent, both from the point of view of morality and from the point of view of their value for the preservation of our nature.⁵⁰

a common conceptual ground for both Aristotle and the Stoics' respective positions in this regard, a ground that permits us to set them apart effectively and by doing so to locate Aspasia's reading in between the two. The vocabulary of conditions, as unsatisfactory as it may be to impeccably capture the Stoic thesis, provides, I think, such a ground.

47 *Dissertationes* II xix 23.1-25.1 (translation by Matheson).

48 See: Diogenes Laertius VII 101-103 = LS 58A; Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos* XI 22-26 = SVF III 75 = LS 60G; Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De fato* 199.14-22 = SVF III 658 = LS 61N.

49 See: Diogenes Laertius VII 101-103 = LS 58A; VII 104-105 = SVF III 119 = LS 58B; VII 160 = SVF I 351 = LS 58G.

50 See: Stobaeus, *Eclogae* II 79.18-80.13 = LS 58C; II 83.10-84.2 = SVF III 124 = LS 58D; 84.18-85.11 = SVF III 128 = LS 58E; Cicero, *De finibus* III 17, 20-22 = LS 59D; Epictetus, *Dissertationes* II

Now, happiness is, for the Stoics, “the rational selection of things according to nature”⁵¹ and this definition must be read literally, in the sense that happiness already consists of the adequate *selection* of the (indifferent) things that, at each moment and for each circumstance, are convenient to the nature of the agent, and, therefore, should be preferred by him, whether they are attained or not.

However, for Stoicism, only the wise man knows how to rationally select what is appropriate to nature. And since to be wise and to be virtuous are one and the same thing,⁵² we may conclude that virtue is sufficient for happiness, because conversion to virtue is a sufficient condition to rationally select what is proper to each one’s nature and, thus, to be happy.

This thesis is noticeably consistent with the idea that, once the causal chain of events is recognized, and recognized *in its necessity*, that is, once “fate” (εἰσπραμένη) is acknowledged, the only rational attitude consists in accepting it in such a way that the wise man, who is the incarnation of reason on a human level, spontaneously and voluntarily accepts it and is, in this sense, happy. One is happy, therefore, in the terms of the definition, only by rationally selecting things according to nature – which can be done precisely by being wise, which is to say virtuous.

Diogenes Laertius seizes this connection rather well when he says⁵³:

This very thing [the end] constitutes the virtue of the happy man and the smooth current of life, when all actions promote the harmony of the spirit dwelling in the individual man with the will of him who orders the universe.

Given this, one may ask: does Aspasius’ commentary present us with unmistakable signs that the commentator knows each one of the philosophical positions we have summed up and, furthermore, that he is conscious of the difference between them?

I believe this is the case.

At several different times, Aspasius shows that he recognizes Aristotle’s thesis that virtue is not sufficient for happiness and that happiness requires

6, 9 = SVF III 191 = LS 58J; Plutarch, *De Stoicorum repugnantibus* 1048a = SVF III 137 = LS 58H; Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicus* XI 64–67 = SVF I 361 = LS 58F.

51 The definition is attributed to the Portico’s fifth scholar, Diogenes of Babylon (c. 230–140 a.C.): “to act rationally by selecting things in accordance to nature” (τὸ εὐλογιστεῖν ἐν τῇ τῶν κατὰ φύσιν ἐκλογῆ) (Diogenes Laertius VII 88.9-10 = SVF III DB 45). See: Stobaeus, *Eclogae* II 76.9-15 = SVF III DB 44 = LS 58K; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* II xxi 179 Sylburg = SVF III DB 46; II xxi 129 Sylburg = SVF I 552.

52 See: Plutarch, *De virtute morali* 440e-441d = LS 61B; *De Stoicorum repugnantibus* 1034ce = LS 61C; Stobaeus, *Eclogae* II 63.6-24 = SVF III 280 = LS 61D; II 66.14-67.4 = SVF III 560 = LS 61G; II 59.4-60.2, 60.9-24 = SVF III 262 e 264 = LS 61H.

53 VII 88.6-9 (translation by Hicks).

the concurrence of certain external goods,⁵⁴ irrespective of how he interprets the “externality” of those goods and the nature of their contribution to happiness.⁵⁵

At the same time, Aspasius seems to also recognize the difference between these theses and the ones of “others”, whom he never names, but who coincide with the Stoics in the affirmation of the coextensivity of virtue and happiness. This is what occurs, for example, when he invokes, against Aristotle’s thesis and in “dispute” (ἀμφοιβήτησις) with it, those for whom the external goods “contribute nothing to happiness”⁵⁶; or when he mentions those who would object to Aristotle by saying that someone ill-born, hideous, or without children can also be active and, “if he is active, it is necessary that he be happy”⁵⁷; or again when he mentions those who say that “virtue is the same thing as happiness”.⁵⁸

However, the truly pertinent question is not whether Aspasius knows the Aristotelian and Stoic positions regarding the relation between virtue and

54 See, for instance, 10.26-29, 30.31-33 and 34.10-13. These passages are, however, little more than paraphrases of the commented text (in the first case, I 5, 1095b33-6a2; in the second, I 10, 1101a14-16). Furthermore, it is curious to notice, in the latter case, the difference in the presentation of the external goods: Aristotle requires the happy man to be in possession of “an adequate supply of external goods” (καὶ τοῖς ἐκτός ἀγαθοῖς ἰκανῶς κεχορηγημένον), while Aspasius is content with the fact that nothing external disrupts or hinders virtuous activities (καὶ ἀνεμπόδιοιτο ὑπὸ τῶν ἐκτός). As we shall see in the following pages, this difference is not neutral from a theoretical point of view.

55 In fact, and oddly enough, Aspasius insists several times that external goods are said to be so because they are corporeal and, in that sense, external to the soul (23.32-24.1: ἐκτός δὲ ἀγαθῶν ἦτοι τῶν περὶ τὸ σῶμα· ἐκτός αὐτὰ λέγει ὡς πρὸς τὴν ψυχὴν πάντα ἐκτός; cf. 32.14-15), apparently disregarding Aristotle’s classification, where goods of the soul, goods of the body and external goods are clearly distinguished: νενεμημένων δὴ τῶν ἀγαθῶν τριχῆ, καὶ τῶν μὲν ἐκτός λεγομένων τῶν δὲ περὶ ψυχὴν καὶ σῶμα (EN I 8, 1098b12-13). Since it is not my purpose to explore this matter, I shall not come back to it. However, I suggest that this can be related to the notion that the soul “uses the body”, in particular “as a tool for actions”, precisely in the commentary on this passage of EN I 8, 1098b12-20, and consider that both points create a clear schism between Aspasius and “orthodox” Aristotelianism. As for Aspasius’ interpretation of the role of external goods in happiness, I will later have the opportunity to make some substantial comments on this.

56 See 23.32-24.2.

57 See 24.25-27.

58 See 25–20.26. In the latter case, the concepts used in the description suggest that Aspasius would have had the Cynics in mind (the first to second centuries AD witnessed a strong reviviscence of Cynicism, with an impressive number of followers of the school after some centuries of obscurity: Demetrius of Corinth, Demonax of Cyprus, Agathobulus of Alexandria, Peregrinus Proteus, Theagenes of Patras, Oenomaus of Gadara, Panocrates of Athens, Crescens of Megalopolis, perhaps Secundus, the Silent...), or the Stoics heavily influenced by Cynicism, such as Epictetus.

happiness and whether he recognizes them in their differences, as we have already seen that he does, but *what he will do with such knowledge*.

Now what he seemingly does, in the concrete circumstance of the commentary, is acting as though he were akratic, by not mobilizing this knowledge when he needs to identify and explain the contents of certain passages where the Aristotelian theses under consideration occur, and, on the contrary, by always disposing himself to weakening those theses and drawing them closer to Stoic theses even to the extent of reducing them to the latter.

There are numerous examples of this attitude in Aspasius' commentary.

They can be organized by an ascending order of gravity as follows: cases of mere interference, in which the interpretation of Aristotle is disturbed, and sometimes equivocated, through the interposition of motifs of Stoic origin; cases of interlacement or overlapping, in which Aspasius' interpretation denounces the mixture, or even the confusion, between Peripatetic and Stoic doctrines; and cases of pure and simple contamination, where the interpretation put forward for Aristotle's passage is a Stoic or Stoic-influenced interpretation.

Let us begin with the cases of simple interference.

One particularly interesting instance takes place when Aspasius tries to understand the variations that, according to Aristotle, affect goods.

In the passage in question, Aristotle states⁵⁹:

Moreover, what is fine (τὰ καλὰ) and what is just, the topics of inquiry in political science, differ and vary so much that they seem to rest on convention only, not on nature. Goods, however, also vary in the same sort of way, since they cause harm to many people (διὰ τὸ πολλοῖς συμβαίνειν βλάβας ἀπ' αὐτῶν); for it has happened that some people have been destroyed because of their wealth, others because of their bravery (ἕτεροι δὲ δι' ἀνδρείαν).

Aspasius comments on the passage as follows⁶⁰:

There are also, in regard to other goods, those that are not noble but are merely called good (ἃ καλὰ μὲν οὐ, καλεῖται ἀγαθὰ δὲ μόνον), for instance wealth and health; Aristotle adds courage as well, which is indeed a noble thing (ἥτις ἦδη καλόν).

The interest of this instance is that we see Aspasius blatantly unsettled by Aristotle's text, particularly by its presentation of courage as something that, along with wealth, can also destroy people.

The reason for this difficulty is that he reads the difference between goods mentioned by Aristotle through a distinction of those that are *morally good* (the

⁵⁹ EN I 3, 1094b15-19.

⁶⁰ 7.14-16.

“noble ones”, τὰ καλὰ) and those that are good in an *extra-moral sense*, a distinction that is not Aristotelian but Stoic.

Hence, it is inconceivable to him that wealth and courage are coupled in the same lesson. “Mere goods”, that is, goods without moral content such as wealth, he would say, certainly can lead an agent to disgrace if they are used without moral criterion. Virtues, on the contrary, are unconditionally good and, therefore, since they cannot be wrongly used, they also could never harm anyone.

This instance reveals, therefore, an implicit conflict between the commented text and the commentator’s theoretical assumptions, a conflict displayed in the polite strangeness shown by Aspasius in the face of Aristotle’s examples.

Another good example of interference would be Aspasius’ interpretation of the passage where Aristotle talks about the virtuous man’s behavior when facing major misfortunes.⁶¹ Its analysis would force us, however, into an excursus that would be disproportionate when compared to the relevance of its result. I will therefore refrain from commenting on the passage for now.

Let us now address the cases of overlap between Stoic and Aristotelian doctrines.

We will start with an admittedly minor example, which is almost a *lapsus linguae*.

Each time he makes reference to external goods such as health or wealth, that is, to the preferential things of the Stoics, Aspasius uses an intriguing formula: “goods that one can use well or not well”.⁶²

This formula is suggestive because it literally involves an interlacing of Aristotelian and Stoic doctrines: Aspasius recognizes that health and wealth are goods, just as Aristotle does; but he distinguishes them as a Stoic would, which is to say as something that can be used well or not well. The result is a mixed wording, partly Aristotelian (τὰ ἀγαθὰ) and partly of Stoic inspiration (οἷς ἔστιν εὖ καὶ μὴ εὖ χρῆσασθαι).⁶³

61 30.18-25, commentary on *EN* I 10, 1100b28-1101a13.

62 Thus in 5.27-28: “they [the Peripatetics] also call capacities those goods that it is possible to use well or not well, for example wealth and health” (ὀνομάζει δὲ δυνάμεις καὶ τὰ ἀγαθὰ ἐκεῖνα, οἷς ἔστιν εὖ καὶ μὴ εὖ χρῆσασθαι, οἷον πλοῦτον καὶ ὑγίειαν). Again in 32.12-14: “some things are potentials: these are such things among the goods that one can use well or not well, for example wealth and health” (τὰ δὲ εἶσι δυνάμεις, τοιαῦτα δὲ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἔστιν, οἷς ἔστιν εὖ καὶ μὴ εὖ χρῆσθαι).

63 One could think of Pausanias’ speech in Plato’s *Symposium* (181a) as a precedent to this. However, the originality of Aspasius’ formula does not consist in saying that things are only good or bad as long as they are used well (rightly and virtuously) or not well (wrongly and viciously), which is an idea that has, in fact, its roots in Plato (see also *Lg.* II 661a-662a, and cf. *R. X.*, 613a and *Lg.* III 697a). The originality of Aspasius’ formula lies, on the contrary, in saying

The following situation is much more serious.

In the context of the critique of Plato's theory of the idea of good, which he develops in chapter 6, Aristotle introduces a distinction between goods "in themselves" and goods "because of these".⁶⁴ He gives no examples of the latter, but he does give the following examples of the former: "thinking, seeing, some types of pleasures, and honors".⁶⁵

Aspasius comments on the distinction in the following way⁶⁶:

There are differences among goods: some are goods in themselves, whereas others are so on account of other things. These latter are called good because they are productive of goods in themselves or "are preservative of them or preventative of their contraries" (1096b11-12). These are not among the goods in themselves, but only those are that are choiceworthy on their own account, for example virtues and honours (οἷον αἱ τε ἀρεταὶ καὶ τιμαί). But medicine and all such things are good on account of other things. *Perhaps they would say that health and wealth and all such things are goods on account of other things (for they are instruments of virtue)*. Of these [i.e. goods on account of other things], all those that are productive of goods in themselves are productive goods, for example what is pleasant is productive of pleasure and gymnastics of health, *if indeed health is among things that are good in themselves* (εἴπερ ἔστιν ὑγεία τῶν καθ' αὐτὰ ἀγαθῶν), while learning and training (ἄσκησις) and hard work (πόνος) are productive of virtue.

The signs of fusion with Stoicism are evident in this passage.

On the one hand, in his presentation of the goods in themselves, Aspasius chooses to ignore all the examples given by Aristotle (thinking, seeing, certain pleasures, honors) with the significant exception of the last one; no less significantly, Aspasius also adds virtue to the examples, which does not occur in the commented segment.⁶⁷

that *goods themselves* can be used well or not well, thus implying an implicit disbelief or mistrust in the very criterion that led to acknowledge them as goods in the first place. The difference between the two theses is still more visible in the way middle Platonists, like Alcinous and Apuleius, who were more or less contemporary to Aspasius, presented Plato's doctrine on 'exterior goods'. They are both very emphatic in saying that things like health, beauty or wealth are *not* goods strictly speaking (μηδὲν εἶναι καθάπαξ ἀγαθόν... *ea non simpliciter bona nuncupanda sunt...*), but are only goods when used virtuously: see Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* XXVII ii 8–10; Apuleius, *De Platone* II I 221, II x 235, II xii 237.

64 EN I 6, 1096b13-14: δηλον οὖν ὅτι διττῶς λέγοιτ' ἂν τὰγαθὰ, καὶ τὰ μὲν καθ' αὐτὰ, θάτερα δὲ διὰ ταῦτα.

65 Τὸ φρονεῖν καὶ ὁρᾶν καὶ ἡδοναί τινες καὶ τιμαί (EN I 6, 1096b17-18). I slightly changed Irwin's translation here.

66 13.24-14.2 (the emphasis is mine).

67 It is also interesting to notice that Aspasius describes both as "choiceworthy on their own account" (ὄσα δι' αὐτὰ αἰρετὰ), which would be undoubtedly accepted by Aristotle in the context of the current discussion, but contributes to obscure the fact that the only thing in

On the other hand, the passages we have highlighted ⁶⁸ show the difficulty Aspasius has in dealing with health and wealth, that is, with two of the more relevant Stoic προηγμένα, as being goods, or, at least, as being goods in themselves. However, the excerpt by Aristotle seems to leave no doubt that he would gladly add such goods to his list of ἀγαθὰ καθ' αὐτά, alongside pleasures (“some types of pleasures”) and honors, for example.

Lastly, the terms ἄσκησις and πόνος are used by Aspasius in this passage in the philosophical sense lent to them by Cynicism, and later adopted by Stoicism, especially during the Imperial period, a sense that is utterly absent in Aristotle. For Cynicism – in the same way as afterward for recent Stoicism, in a reformulated way –, “ascetic” training of the body and soul, as well as the voluntary adoption of an austere and toilsome life, constitute the path to virtue.⁶⁹ But such concepts never occur with this meaning in Aristotle, who, nevertheless, as a contemporary of Diogenes of Sinope, certainly knew the Cynic ideals.⁷⁰

Moreover, it is important to emphasize that we find here the first of several occurrences of a typically Aspasian interpretation of external goods. This is, namely, the interpretation of those goods (more precisely, of the goods “on account of other things”) as “instruments of virtue”,⁷¹ that is to say, as goods

Aristotelian ethics that is unconditionally chosen for itself is the one for the sake of which all others are chosen, that is to say, happiness, thus turning virtue itself into an instrumental good.
68 13.29-30: ἴσως δ' εἶποιεν καὶ ὑγίειαν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα δι' ἕτερα ἀγαθὰ εἶναι, ὄργανα γὰρ τῆς ἀρετῆς; 14.1: εἴπερ ἔστιν ὑγίεια τῶν καθ' αὐτὰ ἀγαθῶν.

69 In regard to the Cynic school, see, for Antisthenes of Athens: Diogenes Laertius VI 2, 10–12 (= fr. 19 Declava-Caizzi); Stobaeus, *Florilegium* II, 31, 68 (= fr. 64 Declava-Caizzi); *Gnomologium Vaticanum* 1 (= fr. 96 Declava-Caizzi); Diogenes Laertius VI 3.2 (= fr. 108a Declava-Caizzi); Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.* 73.1-3 (= fr. 108b Declava-Caizzi); Aulus Gellius IX 5 3–4 (= fr. 108c Declava-Caizzi); Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* II 20, 121.1 (= fr. 108d Declava-Caizzi); Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* XV 13, 7.1-8.1 (= fr. 108e Declava-Caizzi); and for Diogenes of Sinope: Diogenes Laertius VI 70, 1–12; Stobaeus, *Florilegium* IV, 32a, 11; Stobaeus, *Florilegium* IV, 32a, 12. In regard to the Stoics, see, for example, Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* 78.13-16, and Epictetus, *Dissertationes*, *passim*.

70 Moreover, Aristotle always uses both terms only in their current meanings and without any philosophical commitment. Hence, πόνος for physical pain (*HA* VII 4, 584a4; IX 9, 586b28 and 30), suffering (*HA* II 4, 501b27; *GA* III 2, 752a34; IV 4, 773a17) or toil (*Long.* 5, 466b14; *GA* IV 6, 775a35; *Pol.* VIII 4, 1338b41; see VII 15, 1336a25); and ἄσκησις for training, usually military training (*Pol.* II 6, 1271b6; VII 13, 1333b39; VIII 6, 1141a8), but also gymnastic training (*Pol.* IV 1, 1288b13) or habituation to cold (*Pol.* VII 15, 1136a21). “Training of virtue” occurs once (ἄσκησις τις τῆς ἀρετῆς), in *EN* IX 9, 1170a11-12, but with the sense of cultivation of virtue, as Irwin correctly translates; furthermore, Cynics do not *train* virtue: they train themselves, body and soul, *for* virtue.

71 See 13.29-30: ἴσως δ' εἶποιεν καὶ ὑγίειαν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα δι' ἕτερα ἀγαθὰ εἶναι, ὄργανα γὰρ τῆς ἀρετῆς.

that only become such when virtue uses them for the practice of good deeds. The same interpretation occurs repeatedly in Aspasius' text and is particularly apparent when he comments on the passage where Aristotle argues for the first time in favor of the need of external goods to achieve happiness.⁷² However, Bob Sharples has already shown that this interpretation goes back to Arius Didymus, a Stoic (or Eclectic?) philosopher of the late first century BC, and there is no need, therefore, to address it here.⁷³

Let us, then, look at the more serious cases, the cases of pure and simple contamination.

These cases are those where Aspasius really tends to assimilate happiness and virtue, or, against clear statements made by Aristotle on this matter, to minimize or practically annul the intervention of external goods on happiness.

I shall mention three passages that contain these circumstances.

The first is, once again, essentially of a caricatural nature.

It is the passage where Aspasius comments on Aristotle's reflections on the importance of knowing the supreme good, and thus on the importance of ethics, in the following terms⁷⁴:

But since there is an end of all things that are practicable, which we choose for itself, it is obvious that this would be the good and the best one: for the other ends are for the sake of this. A knowledge of it also has enormous importance for living nobly. For those who choose different actions at different times and do not look to one thing live at random and never attain the good. But if one observes happiness and the human good, setting this as one's target like an archer, and directs all one's actions toward it, *then it is entirely necessary that one become happy and live one's whole life nobly* (ἀνάγκη πᾶσα αὐτὸν εὐδαίμονα γενέσθαι καὶ καλῶς διαβιῶναι).

⁷² See 23.32-24.9. The interpretation returns, although in a way that is more syntonic with the Aristotelian position, in 26.14-24 and again in 32.12-15.

⁷³ However, Sharples does not conclude in favor of a Stoicizing character of the interpretation itself, but rather the opposite. I recall here the relevant passage: "Diogenes Laertius (5.30) reports it as Aristotle's view that happiness is a *sumplêrōma* from the three classes of goods, goods of the body, goods of the soul and external goods. This was the view of the second-century B.C. Peripatetic Critolaus, according to Arius Didymus; Arius himself rejects it, arguing that only the goods of the soul are parts of the end, and that virtue *employs* the other classes of goods. And at 24,3 Aspasius himself asserts that external goods are needed, not as parts of happiness or as completing it, but as instruments for noble actions. However, while the view of Arius and Aspasius may give a lesser role to external goods than did Critolaus, it still regards them as necessary in a way the Stoic view does not. Becchi is right to regard Aspasius' treatment of this issue as anti-Stoic." (Sharples 1999: 87)

⁷⁴ 5.10-17 (the emphasis is mine).

Now compare this to what Aristotle actually says in the passage Aspasius is commenting on⁷⁵:

Then surely knowledge of this good [the best good (τὸ ἄριστον)] is also of great importance for the conduct of our lives, and if, like archers, we have a target to aim at, we *are more likely to hit the right mark* (μᾶλλον ἂν τυγχάνομεν τοῦ δέοντος).

Rather significantly, where Aristotle deems knowledge of the good as something that can help us attain the good, without allowing the latter to be automatically expected from the former, Aspasius deems knowledge of the good a sufficient condition from where the good is “necessarily” derived.

Both the intellectualist deviation of Aspasius’ reading and the temptation to make happiness rest on principles that are entirely dependent on man (on his choices and his responsibility – here with respect to knowledge, later on, as we will see, with respect to virtue) are undeniable.

If this were a single isolated case, the irrelevance of the deviation could be conceded.

However, as it so happens, this is not an isolated case, which makes it an early example of the interpretative rule we will witness in what follows.

The second occurrence of contamination regarding the Aristotelian doctrine of external goods can be found in the commentary on the passage in which Aristotle points out the convergence of the results of his own analysis with generally accepted opinions (τὰ λεγόμενα) on the good,⁷⁶ namely in regard to the relation between virtue and happiness and the relation between happiness and pleasure.

In his commentary, Aspasius states the following⁷⁷:

In accord with what has been said, then, Aristotle has associated his own definition with those who say that *only* virtue is happiness (συνφκείωσε τὸν οὐτοῦ λόγον τοῖς μόνην τὴν ἀρετὴν εἰποῦσι τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν). And he reconciles his own view with those who say that happiness accompanied by pleasure or not without pleasure is these things, that is, is all the virtues or one of them, whether philosophy or practical intelligence, by the following: there is a certain difference between “accompanied by pleasure” and “not without pleasure”. Those who say “accompanied by pleasure” make pleasure a part of happiness, whereas those who say “not without pleasure” do not say that pleasure is a part but rather that it is one of the things without which there cannot be happiness. His definition fits these latter: for even if it was not posited in advance that happiness is an activity in accord with complete virtue accompanied by pleasure or not without pleasure, it is nevertheless clear that pleasure *invariably* accompanies noble actions (ἀλλὰ δὴλόν γέ ἐστι ὅτι πάντως

⁷⁵ EN I 2, 1094a22-24 (the emphasis is mine).

⁷⁶ See EN I 8, 1098b20-1099b8.

⁷⁷ 22.15-26 (the emphasis is mine).

συνέπεται ταῖς ἑνεργείαις ἢ ἡδονή). That is why he says that a life of activities in important matters in accord with virtue is in itself pleasant.

To name a first point: there is nothing in the passage which Aspasius comments on that justifies his affirmation that Aristotle “has associated his own definition with those who say that *only* virtue is happiness”.

In fact, what Aristotle states is⁷⁸:

Our account agrees with those who say happiness is virtue [in general] or some [particular] virtue (τὴν ἀρετὴν ἢ ἀρετὴν τινα); for activity expressing virtue is proper to virtue (ταύτης γὰρ ἔστιν ἡ κατ' αὐτὴν ἐνέργεια).

It is clear that, in this statement, Aristotle is just recalling the previous definition of happiness as “the activity of the soul in accordance with virtue”⁷⁹ in order to compare it with some accepted opinions. It does not ensue from it in any way that only virtue is happiness, as Aspasius attributes to him. On the contrary, what Aristotle’s definition implies is that there is no happiness without virtue, not that happiness and virtue are the same (or that virtue is enough for happiness, which seem to be the only alternative way to interpret the statement τοῖς μόνῃν τὴν ἀρετὴν εἰποῦσι τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν).

It is true that Aristotle, in the passage in question, puts forward several arguments to prove that noble actions are pleasurable for those who perform them and, therefore, virtuous practice is accompanied by pleasure.⁸⁰ But there is a dangerous ambiguity in the way Aspasius understands this (“pleasure *invariably* accompanies noble actions”: πάντως συνέπεται ταῖς καλαῖς ἐνεργείαις ἢ ἡδονή). Actually, put in this way, it could be concluded that the virtuous man experiences pleasure whenever he performs a virtuous action *no matter what the circumstances might be* – for instance, he would experience pleasure even when, under torture, he chose to do “the right thing” by not giving away a companion, which is a consequence Aristotle would hardly be willing to admit.⁸¹ Perhaps for that reason, Aristotle is always careful to say that noble actions are pleasurable “in themselves” (καθ' αὐτά),⁸² without adding

78 EN I 8, 1098b30-31.

79 Τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ἀγαθὸν ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια γίνεται κατ' ἀρετὴν (EN I 7, 1098a16-17). I dissent here from Irwin’s translation.

80 See EN I 8, 1099a7-21.

81 The fact is that Aristotle explicitly rejects that a man can be happy in such conditions: “Some maintain, on the contrary, that we are happy when we are broken on the wheel, or fall into terrible misfortunes, provided that we are good. Willingly or unwillingly, these people are talking nonsense.” (EN VII 13, 1153b19-21)

82 See EN I 8, 1099a7, 1099a15, 1099a21.

that, in consequence, the virtuous man invariably *feels pleasure* in virtuous practice, as Aspasius does.

In both cases, the *forma mentis* that inspires Aspasius' interpretation of Aristotle is, again, rather evident.

However, the moment where the commentator most flagrantly demonstrates his inability to overcome the limitations of the theoretical framework with which he addresses the issue of external goods in Aristotle is precisely when he has to comment on the passage where Aristotle, in his own name and for the first time, claims external goods are indispensable to happiness.⁸³

After commenting on the first argument Aristotle puts forward to prove that external goods are necessary for happiness (according to which the practice of good actions implies certain material conditions),⁸⁴ an argument he clearly agrees with,⁸⁵ Aspasius shows his embarrassment with the second argument, according to which “deprivation of certain [external goods] – e. g. good birth, good children, beauty – mars (ῥυπαίνουσι) our blessedness”.⁸⁶

The passage speaks for itself⁸⁷:

Some believe that what follows is said too loosely (μολακωτέρως εἰρησθαί). For he says that when people are deprived of some things they taint (ῥυπαίνειν) their success, “for example [when they are deprived of] good birth, abundant offspring, beauty” (1099b3). For some would say that it is possible even for someone who is of low birth and not handsome and has no children to be active in important matters, and if he is active, it is necessary that he be happy. Against these, one must say that Aristotle too praises such people, inasmuch as they make good the lack of lineage or looks or any other such of which they are in need, but nevertheless there inheres in them a kind of blemish by virtue of their excessively low birth, for example if one should be the son of a man who has prostituted himself. *For how would this not be a taint, which perhaps a noble person might indeed wash away, but nevertheless it would be an obstacle sometimes in regard to noble activities. For cities do not authorize such people to carry out their greatest affairs.* [Further,] he is calling “ugly” not a person who is moderately deprived of beauty but rather, as he says, *someone who is wholly hideous and monstrous in form, for whom it is perhaps impossible to become sagacious. For such people, for the most part, turn out monstrous [in character] as well.* But neither can one who is “solitary” or “childless” be happy. Perhaps a solitary person is *not even worthy* (σπουδαῖος), and not just not happy: *for to live alone for a human being is*

83 EN I 8, 1099a31-b8.

84 EN I 8, 1099a32-b2 (commented in 23.32-24.9).

85 The statement made by Aristotle that “in many actions, we use friends, wealth and political power just as we use instruments” (πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ πράττεται, καθάπερ δι’ ὀργάνων, διὰ φίλων καὶ πλούτου καὶ πολιτικῆς δυνάμεως; EN I 8, 1099a33-b2) gives him the opportunity to enthusiastically defend the instrumental interpretation of external goods that was originally put forward by Arius Didymus, as referred to above.

86 EN I 8, 1099b2-3.

87 24.24-25.12 (the emphasis is mine).

contrary to nature. Still less will someone be happy if he “has thoroughly bad children”, for example, children who prostitute themselves, or who, “although they are good, have died” (1099b5-6). One must be aware, concerning all that has been said, that magnitude of virtue transcends these things, *so that a virtuous person is not unhappy*. But if *all* the above-mentioned misfortunes should be present, they become an obstacle to happiness.

Aspasius’ uneasiness with this passage of the *Ethics* is evident. And the way he devises to deal with the difficulties it poses for him consists in interpreting the second argument in light of the first, as a simple reinforcement of it. However, it is clear that, for Aristotle, this is a *different* argument, with which he wants to add that, besides the external goods we use as “instruments”, there are also those external goods without which no one can be happy, no matter how virtuous he may be.⁸⁸ For Aristotle, someone hideous can really be virtuous; but, in spite of that, he is unlikely to be happy because the physical deformity itself will act upon him as a permanent disturbance, or as a factor of dissatisfaction that is incompatible with happiness. Even in a more evident way – at least for us, who are not Stoics – someone whose children all have died may be virtuous; but it is highly doubtful that person can be happy.

Furthermore, Aspasius not only misses the point of Aristotle’s second argument, he misses it on behalf of an interpretation of the examples used in the argument that Stoicize it – an interpretation which is indebted to a Stoicizing understanding of the relation between happiness and virtue. Why is it that the ill-born cannot be happy? Because the realization of a relevant part of the virtuous actions a free man should perform is barred to them, namely all actions that are fulfilled in the public sphere. Why is it that the hideous cannot be happy? Because physical deformity is indicative of moral deformity. Why is it that the lonely cannot be happy? Because, the lonely are “not even worthy (*σπουδαῖος*)”. That is to say, for Aspasius, the one who lacks external goods is, after all, unhappy, because *without them he is not even virtuous*. It never occurs to him that, when invoking the external goods necessary for happiness, Aristotle is simply saying that, without such goods, the ill-born, the hideous, the lonely, or, perhaps above all, individuals whose children all have died (an example that

88 Besides Aristotle’s own words in the passage Aspasius is commenting on (*EN* I 8, 1099a31-b8), the example of Priam that is given twice in the first book (9, 1100a4-9, and 10, 1100b28-1101a13) shows that it is not the case that external goods are, for the Stagirite, only indirect means to happiness, namely by being ‘instruments of virtue’. In fact, even though his virtue remained untouched, the want of external goods “marred Priam’s blessedness”, to paraphrase Aristotle’s expression in 1099b2, and therefore “no one counts him happy” (I 9, 1100a9). The want of external goods, therefore, *directly* affects human happiness and certain external goods, at least, are by themselves factors of a happy life and not only as “instruments of virtue”. (I owe this argument to a remark by the anonymous reviewer for *Apeiron*.)

oddly Aspasius does not attempt to interpret), cannot attain that balanced life which, although not possible without virtue, is not exclusively dependent on it.

Aspasius' interpretation of Aristotle's argument induces, therefore, a decrease in the dependence of happiness on external goods in favor of an increase in its dependence on virtue – and in this lies, precisely, the Stoicization of the argument. The only opening Aspasius leaves consists in expanding the dependence of happiness also in relation to those external goods that virtue uses “as instruments”, a move which is, no doubt, too bold for a Stoic, but nevertheless too shy for an “orthodox” Aristotelian.

It is more interesting at this point, however, to remark how the Stoic influence operates and is insinuated in Aspasius' interpretation. It does not operate from the outside, by imposing itself on his commentary, or by opposing itself to Aristotle as an alternative theory. It operates *as if it were a legitimate reading of Aristotelian theory*. What Aspasius does is ask himself, for instance: what *can Aristotle mean* by stating that no hideous person can be happy? And the only answer that occurs to him is that Aristotle *probably means* that someone with a monstrous body also has a monstrous character. This is to say that Aspasius' motivation is really to understand Aristotle and maybe even to be a good Aristotelian. But it only occurs to him to do so and to be that by interpreting Aristotle through the lens of Stoicism.

Yet, in the final part of his commentary on this passage, Aspasius goes further and his confession of philo-Stoicism becomes almost official⁸⁹:

Magnitude of virtue transcends these things, *so that a virtuous person is not unhappy* (ὥστε μὴ εἰναι δυσδαίμονα μὲν ἔνἀρετον). But if *all* the above-mentioned misfortunes should be present, they become an obstacle to happiness.

The Stoicizing interpretation does not seem to leave any room for doubt in this case: in the thesis it points to (“a virtuous person is not unhappy”); in the weakening of the “positive” doctrine according to which external goods are a condition for happiness into the “negative” doctrine according to which exterior evils are an “obstacle” (ἐμποδῶν) to happiness⁹⁰; in the obvious over-restriction of the Aristotelian position (only in the circumstance of *all* misfortunes coming together in one person can they work as an obstacle to happiness); and even in the language itself (ἐνἀρετος, which is a Stoic term for the one who possesses virtue, a term which does not even occur in Aristotle).⁹¹

⁸⁹ 25.9-11 (the emphasis is mine).

⁹⁰ This weakening occurs several times in the commentary on book I: for example, in 30.31-33, which comments *EN* I 10, 1101a14-16; in 34.10-13, which comments *EN* I 13, 1102a5-6; etc.

⁹¹ It is a relatively late term, although already used by Chrysippus (*SVF* 295.6 and 330.2). Aspasius uses it very often (we find 16 occurrences along the whole extant commentary).

In short: to admit that, *in extremis*, the sum of all misfortunes can prevent the happiness of the virtuous man is the furthest level of Aristotelianism that Aspasius allows himself to reach regarding this issue.

This is, admittedly, a kind of Aristotelianism and not a kind of Stoicism; but it is unarguably, as stated at the beginning, a kind of Aristotelianism that is strongly influenced by Stoicism.

A Dutiful and Orthodox Peripatetic?

At this point, one may legitimately ask: is Aspasius “a dutiful and orthodox Peripatetic”, as Barnes claims?

The question, although legitimate, is obviously rhetorical.

First of all, what could an *orthodox* Peripatetic be during the first to second centuries AD, in the midst of such a period of philosophical eclecticism? Would there be orthodox Peripatetics during an era of intense syncretism, such as occurred during the era of Aspasius?

In any case, whether there were orthodox Peripatetics in his time or not, it is pretty certain – as I hope this journey has made clear – that Aspasius was not one of them. At the very least – and I will choose my words very carefully here –, he should be reckoned with as a borderline heterodox Peripatetic or, if you will, as a kind-of orthodox Peripatetic, an orthodox Peripatetic “as it were”. The massive and systematic presence of Stoic influence that we have witnessed in his commentary on the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* would allow nothing else to be a fair description.

Dutiful Peripatetic, maybe, in the sense of a serious, diligent and hardworking interpreter of the Master, since, as we saw, it is always with the purpose of understanding Aristotle that Aspasius falls into the arms of Stoicism. However, his effort and his willingness are conditioned by a factor that is out of his control: the theoretical parameters he uses to read Aristotle.

The impression this gives is that a previous philosophical background is somehow automatically triggered in Aspasius when he faces “blank spaces”. At the same time, this background resists and superimposes itself whenever it stumbles upon a thesis with which it is theoretically incompatible.

The result of this unstable balance, or silent conflict, is something like a “fusion” Aristotelianism, a syncretic philosophy of formal Peripatetic obedience, but with a strong Stoic influence.

Without wanting to risk a hypothesis on the intellectual evolution of Aspasius, it seems as though he were initially a Stoic who eventually joined

Aristotelianism, but whose original philosophical upbringing stayed behind and functioned as a structure for apprehension and interpretation.

Or should one rather suspect that an eclectic school of Aristotelian-Stoic commentary existed during the first to second centuries AD, which perhaps went back to Arius Didymus and to which Aspasius belonged? More so than the previous one, this hypothesis, although tempting, rests on historical elements that are unavailable to us.

Thus doubt remains regarding the history behind Aspasius' commentary.

Aspasian Infidelities

The result of this exercise is admittedly far from astounding.

I did not prove, nor did I intend to prove, that Aspasius is not a dutiful Aristotelian – if by “dutiful Aristotelian” one understands what I have just suggested.

What I meant to show is that to understand Aspasius' peculiar Aristotelianism a fruitful method is to suppose that, before turning into a “dutiful” Aristotelian, Aspasius started out as being a (probably also dutiful) follower of Stoicism and that his previous affiliation left indelible marks on his thought which appear consistently and regularly – a good number of which we have pointed out in his commentary on book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

As in a once painted – very well painted – wall, now and then we can see where the previous painting residually lurks.

As with someone who has learned to proficiently master a foreign language, the native language sometimes lets itself be seen, even if only through intonation.

Something like this seems to be the case with Aspasius. Behind the impeccable Aristotelianism he adopted with manifest honesty and fervor, signs of a previous enchantment sometimes break out.

These are, *malgré lui*, the infidelities of his zealous Aristotelianism.

Acknowledgements: A first draft of this paper was presented at the symposium *Aspasio y el primer comentário a la Ética a Nicómaco*, organized by the Pontifical University of Salamanca. I would like to warmly thank Jesús Conderana Cerrillo for having invited me to this event and all the participants and attendants for their stimulating questions. I also wish to thank David Konstan and Marco Zingano for their most valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper. Finally I want to thank the anonymous reviewer who wrote

the report on this manuscript for *Apeiron*, for their remarks and criticisms, which helped me to improve and clarify some of the sections of this text.

Abbreviations

- LS Long, A. Sedley, D. N. 1987. *The Hellenistic Philosophers*. I-II. Cambridge.
 Rose³ Rose, V. 1886. *Aristotelis qui ferebantur librorum fragmenta*. Leipzig.
 Ross Ross, W. D. 1952. *Aristotle. Selected fragments*. Oxford.
 SVF Von Arnim, I. 1964. *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*. I-III. Stuttgart.

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