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A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE FOUNDING OF THE HISTORY OF THE CANADIAN ARISTOTLE SOCIETY (CAS)

Character of the Canadian Aristotle Society (CAS)

In the history of ideas, Aristotle's works have too often been taken as ancillary or as a propaedeutic to a further study, whether Religion, Theology, Politics, Economy, etc. This has undermined our ability to benefit from his approach to the most profound and pressing questions in philosophy. The purpose of this bilingual Society is to create a convivial, friendly, intellectually rigorous environment in which we can study the philosophical themes of Aristotle proper (e.g., *Metaphysics*, *Beta*). As Socrates says to Theaetetus, after having listened to the silence of his question, What is Knowledge?, "Come now, we are all first friends. Let us begin our investigation as such." Our goal, as far as possible, is to understand the philosophical problems highlighted by Aristotle and explore his methods and attempt to bring clarity to these philosophical problems. We try as much to understand Aristotle, his world, his presuppositions in order to appreciate his philosophical contribution and his general understanding of philosophy. In this sense, it is classical and speculative in nature. Our project should reflect an ambience of Eleutheria, the freedom of thought, unfettered by an exterior agenda. Of course, this Society does not deny the powerful trends in philosophy today. We will, in fact, do them a service by indicating and highlighting the demarcations between Aristotle and other schools of thought. The Canadian Aristotle Society (CAS) plays an important

role in maintaining a scholarly up-to-date Aristotelian research environment in Canada and allows graduate students the opportunity to expose their work and to benefit from a strong research community.

History

In 1994, Dr. Yvon Lafrance, tall and lanky, strolled into a full class of 60 students to teach us *Philosophie grecque* at the University of Ottawa. As a young and impressionable student, I developed a love for Greek Philosophy, thanks to Dr. Lafrance. Every class was a delightful intellectual adventure. His course was a seminal moment in my philosophical formation, which, eventually, led to my decision to found CAS. I was also very fortunate to have studied Aristotle under Drs. Antoine Côté and Catherine Collobert. The existence of the Canadian Aristotle Society in 2017 has its roots deep in the Francophone intellectual ethos of Ottawa, Montréal, and Québec.

Having pursued my PhD at Boston University (1999-2004), thanks to the suggestions made by Drs. Leslie Armour, Theodore Geraets, and Thomas De Koninck, I studied under Klaus Brinkmann, David Roochnik, and John Cleary (Boston College). My exposure to the wonderful minds at Boston University was transformative. I am very grateful to the following professors at Boston University: S. Rosen, D. Roochnik, R. Brague, C. Griswold, J. Floyd, A. Speight, J. Hintikka, D. Dahlstrom, H. Allison, and K. Brinkmann. The untimely death of Klaus Brinkmann was tragic. It is difficult to find words to express my gratitude to Klaus for his unlimited generosity and his unfailing support of CAS as we transitioned from a small, local movement to an incorporated Canadian academic society. It was only fitting that he inaugurated the birth of CAS with a keynote address. We will always raise our glasses for Klaus.

The once very rich philosophical tradition at le Collège dominicain, Ottawa, created the ideal environment in which to found and create CAS. During my undergraduate studies at le Collège dominicain (1990s) and then my eventual 16-year tenure teaching there (2007-2023), I learnt one fundamental truth: intellectual honesty is the only condition that opens the mind of a student. Like the philosophers of the Lyceum, we strove to develop in our students the ability to think through ideas and arguments by a sustained reflection and exhaustive investigation of arguments. As a Faculty, we were proud of our programmes and our students. Teaching and the Philosophical oral tradition remained a very strong practice at le Collège dominicain.

In 2017, I strove to realise this goal of founding CAS at le Collège dominicain with the invaluable support of President Dr. Gabor Csepregi, the Dean of Philosophy, Dr. Eduardo Andújar, le père Michel Gourgues in Theology, Dr. Jim Lowry, with whom I had very insightful conversations about Aristotle, and Dr. Yves Bouchard, whose support and friendship showed no limit. In the beautiful Dominican Hall, with a few colleagues and a handful of students, and with wonderful soon-to-be friends, like John Thorp, who has been a true champion in his support of CAS, we celebrated this festive occasion. We regaled each other with wonderful stories and enjoyed each other's company over wine and cheese. Dr. Jean-Marc Narbonne soon became part of our gatherings a

couple of years later. I cannot say enough about John and Jean-Marc – their support and *joie de vivre* are greatly appreciated. Their intellectual integrity and magnanimous souls have formed much of the character of CAS and I am *very* grateful to them for their mentorship.

After the closure of le Collège dominicain, the CAS conferences of 2022 and 2023 were held at Saint Paul University, Ottawa, which housed CAS for two years. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Gregory Bloomquist for his exceptional assistance in organizing these meetings. During those years, I enjoyed our conversations about Aristotle, Plato, and Medieval Thinkers. I also appreciate the hard work by the Chief Librarian, Jérémie LeBlanc, who welcomed us so warmly at the famous Jean-Léon Allie Library. Jérémie and I worked together to catalogue the Philosophy books in the Rare Books Collection. We cannot forget the invaluable help of Alexandra Mongrain and Shawn Quinn.

In 2024, CAS transitioned to another prominent home for its activities: The University of Ottawa. I am honoured and thankful to the Department of Philosophy at the University of Ottawa for providing a home for CAS. It is an ideal home for the Society now, and I am delighted by its reception by my exceptional colleagues and students. Chair Dr. Mitia Rioux-Beaulne has been a tireless supporter of CAS and its engagement with faculty and students. His help in organizing the conferences was indispensable, and he continues to help with our activities. I have had the great pleasure of working with Mitia over the years and have seen his sincere commitment to Philosophy and to students. Finally, we are very grateful to Chair Dr. Dominique Coté of the Department of Classics and Religious Studies for his constant support.

Acknowledgements

Dr. Robert Berchman has been a formidable supporter of CAS since its inception. As the founder of the *Foro di studi avanzati Gaetano Massa* (FSA, http://fsa-fas.org/), he provided masterful guidance to me as the CAS navigated through rough waters. I am indebted to Robert for his support and greatly appreciate his friendship. Thanks to Robert, I met Dr. Frederick Schroeder, whose support for CAS was greatly appreciated. Frederick received his Phd at University of Toronto and studied with Hilary Armstrong at Dalhousie University, and then completed his career at Queen's University, focusing on Alexander of Aphrodisias and Plotinus. His death in 2022 was a great loss to the CAS family. Both Robert and Fred also spoke very highly of an exceptional man and scholar, Dr. Patrick Atherton (King's College, Halifax). Patrick received his Phd from the University of Liverpool and invited Hilary Armstrong to King's College, Dalhousie University. He was also instrumental with Henry Blumenthal, University of Liverpool, to help establish the Institute for Aristotelian Studies/ Roma, associated with the Instituto Italo-Latino Americano. His death in 2012 sadly cut this project from developing. It is regrettable that we never met and that he could not participate in CAS. He would have been a kindred spirit.

I owe my gratitude to certain people over the years:

Klaus Brinkmann – Eduardo Andújar – Gabor Cspregi – Yves Bouchard – Fr. Michel Gourgues – Fr. Lawrence Dewan – Fr. Louis Roy – Leslie Armour

– Francis K. Peddle – Jean-François Méthot – Iva Apostolova – Andrew Brook – Jim Lowry – Robert Berchman – Luigi Miraglia – Kevin Corrigan – Thomas De Koninck – Jean-Marc Narbonne – Paulo Biondi – Bernard Collette – Ksenija Maricki Gadjanski – Marc-Antoine Gavray – Laurence Lauzon – Thomas Slabon – Antoine Pageau-St-Hilaire – John Thorp – Gregory Bloomquist – Jérémie LeBlanc – Alexandra Mongrain – Shawn Quinn – Chantal Beauvais – Fr. Jacques Croteau – Fr. Dale Schlitt – Mitia Rioux-Beaulne – Francisco Gonzalez – Antoine Côté – Sebastian Charles – Catherine Collobert – Daniel Tanguay – Danièle Letocha – Syliane Malinowski-Charles – Graeme Hunter – Léa Derome – Vincent Bergeron – Patrice Philie – Paul Rusnock – Jeffrey Reid – Valérie Daoust – Dominique Côté – Greg MacIsaac – Eli Diamond – William Sweet – Tom Darby – Joseph Khoury – Louis Groarke – Christopher Byrne – Steven Baldner – Michael Szlachta – Doug Al-Maini – John Finamore – Fr. Gary Gurtler – Bryan Reece – Robert Roreitner – Tony Horne – Robaire Nadeau – Gaëlle Fiasse – Richard Bodeüs – Louis-André Dorion – Laetitia Monteils-Laeng – Louise Rodrigue – Tomáš Nejeschleba – Pavol Labuda – Pavel Hobza. A very special thanks to my colleague and excellent friend, Dr. Daniel Regnier, who sits on the executive committee of CAS, along with Thomas De Koninck. Daniel is an exceptional Canadian scholar, insightful, and an extremely generous and erudite soul. It has been a pleasure to work with Daniel as we build CAS and contribute to the general philosophical ethos of Canadian scholarship.

Conferences

Our next conference (2025) will be held at the Department of Philosophy, University of Ottawa. We will host the 5th annual Aristotle Conference with Dr. Eli Diamond (Dalhousie University) as our keynote speaker. The title of his paper is the following: "The Soul-Mind Relation in Aristotle's *De Anima*."

- Our keynote speakers thus far:
- 2014: **Klaus Brinkmann** (Boston University) – "Can Aristotle Help Thomas Nagel?"
- 2018: **Thomas De Koninck** (Université Laval) – "The Idea of the Good"
- 2022: **John Thorp** (Western University) – "Aristotle and Natural Law"
- 2023: **Jean-Marc Narbonne** (Université Laval) – « 'Partir à la chasse au bonheur' : Les peuples entre particularisme et universalisme chez Aristote »
- 2024: **Francisco Gonzalez** (University of Ottawa) – "Aristotle's Distinction Between 'Activity' (Energeia) and 'Motion' (Kinêsis) in Metaphysics Θ6 and its Reception by Plotinus and Iamblichus"
- 2025: **Eli Diamond** (Dalhousie University) – "The Soul-Mind Relation in Aristotle's *De Anima*"

Should you wish to learn more about the Canadian Aristotle Society, please contact Dr. Mark J. Nyvlt at the following: protrepticuseide@gmail.com or mnyvlt@uottawa.ca.

I thank all the participants who have congregated over the years in Ottawa to make this a thriving Society. Here's to many more years together.

We raise a glasses to our fallen comrades of the Canadian Aristotle Society:
Yvon Lafrance – Theodore Geraets – Klaus Brinkmann – John Cleary – Fr. Lawrence Dewan – Eduardo Andújar – Leslie Armour – Patrick Atherton – Frederick Schroeder – Joe Novak

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