

# Review

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## REVIEWED BOOK

Blum, Paul Richard. 2016. *Giordano Bruno Teaches Aristotle*. Translated by Peter Hennefeld. *Studia Classica et Mediaevalia*, Band 12. Nordhausen: Verlag Traugott Bautz. ISBN 978-3-95948-124-3

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— The English translation of *Aristoteles bei Giordano Bruno, Studien zur philosophischen Rezeption* (1980), written by Professor Paul Richard Blum, a distinguished scholar of Renaissance philosophy, makes a significant contribution to the study of pivotal moments in the history of modern philosophy, particularly in illustrating how Bruno “teaches us to read” Aristotle’s work. For Blum, it is crucial to recognise that our general understanding of philosophy hinges on comprehending how Giordano Bruno intentionally engaged with past philosophers to develop his highly original ideas. This study explores the relationship between Giordano Bruno and Aristotle, focusing on Bruno’s deep understanding and precise interpretation of Aristotle’s works. It demonstrates that

Bruno not only comprehends Aristotle’s philosophical intentions but also revitalises them to address his own philosophical questions. The research positions Bruno’s philosophy as an attempt to overcome the aporetic challenges of Aristotelian thought, particularly by addressing the epistemological problem in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Bruno’s approach, which involves dissolving the distinction between subject and object in intellectual reflection, highlights his unique engagement with Aristotelian ideas and forms the basis for the study’s analysis of his philosophical reception and methodology. The book does not merely seek to highlight Bruno’s stance on Aristotelianism as a whole but instead focuses on his engagement with Aristotle’s teachings specifically. The central

question, therefore, is what Bruno accepted and understood from Aristotle, what aspects he adopted, and what he criticised. The author asserts that conclusions about Bruno's philosophical method are valid only if they stem from Bruno's own critical perspective on Aristotle. Bruno's critiques are consistently examined against the primary sources to uncover the differences between the two thinkers. It is important to note that Bruno did not have access to Aristotle's original Greek texts and relied on medieval Latin translations.

The author organises the book into thematic groups to elucidate the philosophical context of Bruno's engagement with Aristotle, aiming to uncover a cohesive thought pattern that underlies all aspects of Bruno's critique. The introduction offers a comprehensive overview of Bruno's approach to Aristotle, carefully explaining the general principles that guide Bruno's critical analysis of his sources. Through a study focused on the four main areas of philosophy (logic, cosmology, natural philosophy, metaphysics) it becomes evident that Bruno, although not a historian of philosophy, was acutely aware that every philosophical problem has its own history and that without this history the problem would not even exist. In his anti-Aristotelian campaign, Bruno demonstrated that many philosophical problems, particularly the concepts of being and knowledge, are inherent in Aristotle's method. According to Blum, as Bruno's case shows, a successful approach to resolving philosophical problems involves uncovering, reformulating, and deriving

new conclusions from them. It could be argued that the fascination with Bruno lies in his approach and method, which support the view that the study of the history of philosophy gives rise to philosophy itself. This approach undoubtedly represents a form of rehabilitation for the study of the history of philosophy, which is often relegated to the background and considered merely as a propaedeutic preparation for systematic philosophising.

The author systematically addresses Bruno's paraphrase of the *Topics*, followed by an exploration of fundamental cosmological issues, a critique of the principles of nature, and, ultimately, the relationship between uniformity and pluriformity. In the first part, the author explores Bruno's engagement with Aristotle's logic. Bruno's compendium of the *Topics* prompts an inquiry into the type of logic that serves as the foundation for scientific inquiry. Since Bruno does not engage thoroughly with the remaining sections of Aristotle's *Organon*, this issue can be examined through his deliberate placement of the *Lampas venatoria* within the framework of his Lullian and mnemonic treatises. This strategy highlights Bruno's distinct focus on the subjective construction of scientific systems, wherein the coherence with scientific objects is secured by the a priori pre-structure of the human intellect. In the subsequent section, the author clarifies Bruno's position on Aristotelian ontology. In order to do that, the author begins with an examination of cosmology, focusing on the concept of "space", which provides a foundation

for discussing one of Bruno's most renowned doctrines: the doctrine of the infinity of worlds. Attention is given to the concepts of location and space, abstraction and extrapolation, the doctrine of the multitude of worlds, the infinite, natural and relative location, the minimum, time, and the atom of time. Blum meticulously demonstrates that Bruno's doctrine of space, natural location, and time emerged from his direct engagement with Aristotle's teachings. In Bruno's view, location becomes the structural reference for every bodily form of being, independently of its movement. Given the infinity of space implied by this perspective, natural location can no longer be determined externally by observing a body's movement; instead, it is defined solely by the inner necessity of the body itself. The third part is dedicated to natural philosophy, focusing primarily on teleology and reason in nature, the concept of nature in Bruno's philosophy, matter as the substratum of forms, the mode of being of matter (substratum, substance, subject), the principles of matter and form, matter in the dialectic oneness of being, and the natural principles within the context of the method of reception. Bruno's criticism of Aristotelian cosmology is closely aligned with key Aristotelian texts, particularly *Physics*. Bruno's philosophy is not confined to the elements of cosmology or the principles of natural philosophy themselves; rather, they are part of the philosophical tradition inherited by Bruno, particularly the Aristotelian tradition. However, as Blum demonstrates, Bruno is persistent

in his approach to demonstrating the philosophical truth inherent in these principles, thereby establishing them as philosophical principles in their own right. Bruno's philosophical approach incorporates elements from the Greek atomists and Aristotle's physics. However, he neither strictly adheres to atomism or hylozoism nor advocates a pure form of hylomorphism. Instead, Bruno views these perspectives through an Aristotelian lens and integrates them into his own unique philosophical framework.

In the last section of the book, the author focuses on metaphysics; the list of topics includes unity as substance, the unmoved mover, physical and metaphysical motion, immanence and transcendence in the unity of God and nature, absolute immanence, verification, and thought as motion. Blum demonstrates how Bruno's philosophy of the One and the relationship between unity and multiplicity delves into the tension between immanence and transcendence, thus moving beyond a straightforward examination of his reception of Aristotle. While Bruno draws inspiration from Aristotelian concepts, particularly concerning unity, his interpretation of the One marks a distinct departure from Aristotle's framework. Blum demonstrates effectively that when we analyse Giordano Bruno's work through concepts such as subjectivity, reflection, and transcendence, we are, in effect, applying modern criteria to his ideas. While Bruno's writings do not explicitly employ contemporary terminology, they reflect philosophical motivations that resonate with present-day concerns.

Blum's work remains a significant source of inspiration, offering scholars of Renaissance philosophy not only a wealth of stimulating questions but also a valuable example of how a modern philosopher engages with a figure as complex and captivating as Giordano Bruno. The book is challenging and demands a deep familiarity with Bruno's oeuvre to fully appreciate the author's insights, extensive erudition, and the passion that underpins the study. It is noteworthy that this work has now been made available in English (following its Italian translation in 2016),<sup>1</sup> thereby broadening its reach and fostering further academic discourse. It is highly beneficial that, after many years, this work is finally available in English, allowing it to be supplemented and revised on the basis of the author's extensive study of Bruno's works. However, as the author rightly notes in the introduction, there is no need to update the book's details, as its core message lies in the paradigm of philosophy as a process, which does not require revision. Blum's profound and insightful insight into Giordano Bruno's thought encourages readers to distinguish carefully between the various facets of Bruno's work, namely biographical, historical, and systematic aspects. The study focuses on Bruno's

engagement with Aristotle's philosophy rather than delving into the details of Bruno's personal life or the historical context in which he lived. While Bruno was undoubtedly a product of his time, influenced by the diverse intellectual currents of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the study highlights his unique approach to philosophical problems and his creative reinterpretation of classical concepts. Blum acknowledges that Bruno's critique and transformations of Aristotelian philosophy reflect a thoughtful and deliberate engagement with the intellectual currents of his time rather than a mere repetition or imitation of earlier thinkers. In conclusion, Blum's work, which dates back more than four decades, remains inspiring in both its content and methodology. The primary reason for the book's release is the surprising fact that there are few subsequent studies on its key theme. The author is also fully aware of the challenges involved in translating the text into English, given the richness and complexity of the German philosophical language and style. It is essential to express gratitude to the author for this remarkable work, to the translator for his meticulous efforts, and to the publisher, Verlag T. Bautz, for making this publication possible within the *Studia Classica et Mediaevalia* series under the guidance of Paolo Fedeli and Hans Christian Günther. This book is not merely another contribution to the history of Bruno's thought but a vibrant text by the author himself, whose other works are marked by a similar spirit – the spirit of a philosopher born from dialogue with others.

1 The Italian translation of the book was published in the same year as the English version. Blum, Paul Richard. 2016. *Giordano Bruno lettore di Aristotele: ricezione e critica*. Translated by Giovanna D'Aniello. *Novae insulae* 3. Lugano: Agorà & Co.