

STUDI E RICERCHE

Natural and Unnatural Chrematistics in Aristotle's *Politics*. A Problematic Dichotomy

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Introduction: Reading Aristotle today

Reading a classic such as Aristotle today presupposes the construction of a hermeneutical relationship between past and present. Being aware of this is the first condition to read classics in a productive way, which aims at the improvement of our perspective through the dialectical polarities of historical contextualization, on the one hand, and of its “relevance”, on the other. As Ellen Meiksins Wood has stated:

There is no inverse relation between historical contextualization and “relevance”. On the contrary, historical contextualization is an essential for learning from the ‘classics’, not simply because it allows a better understanding of a thinker’s meaning and intention, but also because it is in the context of history that theory emerges from the realm of pure abstraction and enters the world of human practice¹.

Following this path also means to avoid, as far as possible, the risk of historicism, on the one side, and of anachronism, on the other.

This very brief methodological premise will be clear as soon as we take into consideration the main topic of this paper: Aristotle’s presentation of *oikonomia* in the first book of *Politics*.

During the last three centuries, debates focused on the relationship between Aristotle’s *oikonomia* and modern economic thought (and, of course, economics) often came up. They mainly concerned questions such as «How much Aristotle can still teach us about economic issues?»; «May he be considered a sort of founding father of eco-

¹ E. Meiksins Wood, *Citizen to Lords: A Social History of Western Political Thought from Antiquity to Middle Ages*, Verso, London-New York 2011, pp. 13-14.

conomic thought?»). Such questions are clearly anachronistic; moreover, they presuppose a sort of idealistic eternisation of current mainstream definitions of notions such as “economy”, “science”, “method”, etc.

As an example we could take Joseph Schumpeter, who, in his *History of economic analysis*, praised Aristotle's presentation only for its intention, but not for its theoretical foundation, since it was still embedded in a «decorous, pedestrian, slightly mediocre, and more than slightly pompous common sense»². Therefore, according to Schumpeter, Aristotelian *oikonomia* does not satisfy the modern criteria of what he calls economic analysis, whose history is to be identified with «the intellectual efforts that men have made in order to understand economic phenomenon or, which comes to the same thing, the history of the analytic or scientific aspects of economic thought»³. Aristotle is at the margins of this history.

In this case, not only Schumpeter presupposes and naturalizes the definition of economy, but he also identifies the knowledge of economic phenomena with economic analysis. Following this thread, Schumpeter gives a definition of economic science which is, at the same time, historically too broad (since it is considered as a touchstone, which is potentially valid for every epoch of the history of science) and too narrow (since it is exclusively observable within the frame of the quantitative paradigm presupposed by the model of economic analysis).

Schumpeter undeniably assumes a modern and one-sided definition of economic analysis, turns it into a paradigm and simply attests that Aristotelian inquiry is not in compliant with such a paradigm⁴.

This interpretation is anachronistic and systematically founded on the abuse of the present over the past⁵. It could be a perfect example

² J. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*, Routledge, London 2006, p. 54.

³ Ivi, p. 3.

⁴ According to Scott Meikle, the Humean critique to Aristotelian ontological categories have influenced the theoretical framework of classical and neo-classical economic thought. As Meikle writes, «economists have shown a marked predilection for Humean metaphysics» (S. Meikle, *Aristotle's economic thought*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1995, p. 18). This could explain why the background of modern economic thought is so incapable of comprehending Aristotle's perspective.

⁵ This metaphor is used by M. I. Finley, *The Use and Abuse of History*, Chatto & Windus Ltd, London 1971, to criticize anachronistic approaches to ancient societ-

of what Carlo Ginzburg has labelled as «ventriloquism», «a professional illness many historians succumb to»⁶. In this paper, I will try to follow another path, grounded on the inner interconnection between historical contextualization and relevance.

Satisfying need through exchange

At the very beginning of *Politics*, Aristotle describes the *polis* as a living organism that is able to satisfy human needs in the most perfect way. In this part he mainly focuses on the *oikos*, the simplest form of natural association, in which it is possible to underline the essential conditions of existence and reproduction of the human being. According to Aristotle, these conditions rely on three kinds of relationship: a) the husband-wife relationship, whose end is the biological reproduction of the humankind; b) the educational relationship between father and children; c) the division of labour expressed by the master-slave relationship – in this context, the slave is a «technological necessity»⁷, whose manual labour provides all the necessary goods⁸.

Oikonomia, then, consists of the administration of the household in all its plural relationships. For Aristotle, the *oikos* is a fundamental

ies. So it is very surprising to see Finley, in contradiction with his anti-anachronistic standpoint, sharing Schumpeter's definition of economic analysis in an article entitled *Aristotle and economic analysis*, see: M. I. Finley, *Aristotle and economic analysis*, «Past & Present», 19/1970, pp. 3-25. In the last few decades, there has been an attempt to restore anachronism as a feature essential to historical inquiry; see: N. Loraux, Éloge de l'anachronisme en histoire, «Clio», 87-88/2004, pp. 127-139; J. Rancière, *Le mots de l'histoire*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1992.

⁶ C. Ginzburg, *Our words and theirs*, in S. Fellman, M. Rahikainen, *Historical knowledge. In quest of Theory, Method and Evidence*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2012, pp. 97-119, in part. p. 109.

⁷ B. Williams, *Shame and necessity*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1993, p. 112.

⁸ In the *polis* the productive process was much more articulated and complicated than in the *oikos* and was not completely dependent on slavery. See by E. Meiksins Wood: *Peasant-Citizen & Slave: the foundations of Athenian democracy*, Verso, London – New York 1989, and *Labour and democracy, ancient and modern*, in E. Meiksins Wood, *Democracy against capitalism. Renewing historical materialism*, Verso, London – New York 2016, pp. 181-203.

institution because it constitutes the background for the genesis of the individual as a citizen and a political and economic subject⁹. But, *oikonomia* also evokes a set of economic issues related to the conditions of possibility of commercial transactions and trades in the vital centres of the physiology of the *polis*, i.e. the agora and ports¹⁰.

Chrematistics

As already pointed out, three different relationships compose *oikonomia*: marriage, parenthood, mastership; but, as Aristotle states,

Besides the three factors which thus present themselves for examination there is also a fourth, which some regard as identical with the whole of household management, and others as its principal part. This is the element called 'the art of acquisition'; and we shall have to consider its nature¹¹.

Here Aristotle begins to address the problem of chrematistics. He asks himself which is the relationship between *oikonomia* and chrematistics: is chrematistics identical to *oikonomia* or simply a part of it? According to Aristotle, they must be different because they have different ends: chrematistics is the technique of acquiring goods; *oikonomia* regards the use, management, and consumption of goods. And yet the question still remains: does chrematistics provide the necessary means to satisfy natural needs (and therefore it is still within the domain of *oikonomia*), or does it aim at a potentially limitless accumulation of goods? This issue forces us to take into consideration the ambiguity implicit in the word "chrematistics": on the one side, it recalls

⁹ See: M. Vegetti, *L'io, l'anima, il soggetto*, in S. Settis, *I Greci*, vol. I, Einaudi, Torino 1996, pp. 431-467.

¹⁰ See: M. Vegetti, *Polis ed economia nella Grecia antica*, Zanichelli, Bologna 1976; S. Campese, *Polis ed economia in Aristotele*, in M. Vegetti, D. Lanza, *Aristotele e la crisi della politica*, Liguori, Napoli 1977, pp. 13-60; S. Meikle, *Aristotle and the political economy of the polis*, «Journal of Hellenic Studies», 99/1979, pp. 57-73; M. Venturi Ferriolo, *Aristotele e la chrematistica. La storia di un problema e le sue fonti*. La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1983.

¹¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. by E. Barker, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998, 1253b, 12-14.

the word “*chrema*”, i.e. the thing that can satisfy the *chreia*, the natural need; on the other side, it means the art of accumulating *chremata* and money-making. This semantic duplicity reveals its own effectiveness if it is seen within the conceptual framework *oikonomia* evokes and defines.

The end of *oikonomia* is the self-sufficiency of the household through the consumption of those goods that are needed. In accordance with real and natural wealth, need represents the natural (*kata physin*) limit, that can't be crossed by the acquisition of goods. So-as Aristotle states following this thread-there are two different kinds of chremastics: a natural one, which is a part of household management, is embedded with the natural limits of *chreia*, and procures the necessary goods through natural means; and an unnatural one, which aims at a limitless acquisition of monetary wealth.

Later, Aristotle develops this original dichotomy between natural and unnatural chremastics into a series of further dichotomies, that it is possible to sum up in the following way:

Natural Chremastics	<i>vs.</i>	Unnatural Chremastics
Community/Citizenship	<i>vs.</i>	Merchants/Retailers/Usurers (Metics)
Oikos	<i>vs.</i>	Agora and Ports
Autarkeia	<i>vs.</i>	Commerce
Need	<i>vs.</i>	Desire/Monetary Wealth
Limited	<i>vs.</i>	Limitless
Quality	<i>vs.</i>	Quantity

In the background of these socio-political oppositions, there is an economic one, which is immanent to the exchange of goods in itself: the contrast between use and exchange value¹².

¹² For a similar presentation of Aristotelian economic dichotomies see: R. Seaford, *Aristotelian economics and Athenian tragedy*, «New Literature History», 31/2000, pp. 271-276.

Use and exchange value¹³

In *Politics*, I, 9 Aristotle says:

All articles of property have two possible uses. Both of these uses belong to the article as such, but they do not belong to it in the same manner, or to the same extent. The one use is proper and peculiar to the article concerned; the other is not. A shoe, for example, can be used both for wearing and for exchange. Both of these uses are uses of the shoe as such. Even the man who exchanges a shoe, in return for money or food, with someone who needs the article, is using the shoe as a shoe; but since the shoe has not been made for the purpose of being exchanged, the use which he is making of it is not its proper and peculiar use. The same is true of all other articles of property¹⁴.

Every product can be used for its quality or be exchanged. In the context of the *polis*, a community which, according to Aristotle, is composed by a plurality of households and villages, no household can be completely self-sufficient; hence, exchange becomes a necessity. The problem is now to identify the different kinds of exchange according to their own specific goals¹⁵. Aristotle, then, presents a sort of phenomenology of exchange through which he is able to clarify different kinds of exchange in an evolutionary succession, from barter to usury.

Barter is the simplest form of exchange for which a good is exchanged with another one. It is deep-rooted into human being's need and strictly linked to the quality (use value) of the exchanged goods. According to Aristotle, barter is a natural kind of exchange because it is an immediate manifestation of the specific nature of need and of its satisfaction.

Not every need, though, can be satisfied within a single community. For example, a *polis*, according to its own specific geographical position, climatic conditions, productive apparatus, could not have the

¹³ I believe that modern economic concepts such as "use value" and "exchange value" are inextricably connected to the commodity-form assumed by the products of labour in the capitalist mode of production. It is possible to speak about use and exchange value, as well as about commodity, profit, etc. for pre-capitalistic societies only *cum grano salis*, i.e. with the awareness of the specific differences existing between capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, cit., 1257a, 6-14.

¹⁵ See: S. Meikle, *Aristotle on business*, «Classical Quarterly», 46/1996, pp. 138-151.

necessary means to satisfy every need. This is why trade is born. Moreover, in order to make long-distance transactions easier, trade employs money. But, as Aristotle promptly highlights, money is not simply an instrument, since it introduces a new conceptual determination with its genesis: assuming the money-form, exchange value becomes autonomous. Now exchange can be measurable within the mere quantitative frame introduced by money. Aristotle stresses out that money is embodied in particular kinds of commodities which turned out to be useful means to the fluidity of exchanges.

Such commodities were iron, silver, and other similar metals. At first their value was simply determined by their size and weight; but finally a stamp was imposed on the metal which, serving as a definite indication of the quantity, would save people the trouble of determining the value on each occasion¹⁶.

For Aristotle, in the Commodity-Money-Commodity (C-M-C) circuit, money still plays the role of means of exchange; the end of this kind of exchange still remains use value, i.e. the specific quality of the commodity that is needed. And this is why Aristotle considers this form of exchange necessary and commended.

It is now worth mentioning that money allows the chronological separation between sale (C-M) and purchase (M-C). Therefore, in C-M-C all the conditions of possibility of a form of exchange that aims at the unlimited accumulation of wealth are already posed. The seed of unnatural chrematistics is here: once the sale becomes autonomous and socially prominent, it is sufficient a simple inversion of sale and purchase to explain the passage from C-M-C to M-C-M', that is from selling a singular product in order to buy another one, to buying one's commodity in order to sell it dearer and make a profit. The M-C-M' pushes us into the dominium of chrematistics, whose particular goal is the endless accumulation of wealth. Following the logic immanent to it, we can see how commodity-product can become superfluous and M-C-M' can evolve into an even more unnatural economic process: usury (M-M'), a kind of exchange that allows to make

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, cit., 1257a, 39-41.

profit only through money. Monetary loan separates money from the purpose according to which it was originally coined:

Currency came into existence merely as a means of exchange; usury tries to make it increase. This is the reason why it got its name; for as the offspring resembles its parent, so the interest bred by money is like the principal which breeds it, and it may be called 'currency the son of currency'. Hence we can understand why, of all modes of acquisition, usury is the most unnatural¹⁷.

So, there are two different kinds of chrematistics: natural and unnatural chrematistics. While for the first the object of need represents the beginning and the end of its process of exchange (being money its medium (C-M-C) or not (C-C)), for the latter it is money to play a pivotal role, both as the origin and the end of exchange (M-C-M', M-M').

It is possible to summarize Aristotle's distinction in the following way:

ACTIVITY	GOAL	FORMS OF EXCHANGE
Natural Chrematistics	Reproduction of the oikos	C-C C-M-C
Unnatural Chrematistics	Limitless accumulation	M-C-M' M-M'

The difference between *oikonomia* and unnatural chrematistics finds its origin in the genesis of money, which is an autonomous form of existence of exchange value strictly connected to the social relevance undertaken by trade. According to Aristotle, in its earliest stage trade plays a necessary role for the natural (*kata physin*) reproduction of the whole body politic, but then it ends up endorsing those dynamics that represent a risk for the survival of the *polis* itself.

In fact, while reading these Aristotelian passages, it is impossible not to imagine that specific social background of the fourth Century Athens populated by retailers, merchants, usurers. Aristotle's analysis presupposes this background, but, at the same time, represents it

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Politics*, cit., 1258b, 4-8.

through a specific theoretical framework, whose main feature is the nature of money¹⁸.

The dichotomous nature of money and its dialectics

As we have already seen, in his presentation Aristotle outlines the dichotomy between natural and unnatural chrematistics, and develops a series of further contrasts: quality vs. quantity, use value vs. exchange value, need vs. desire, etc. But all these fixed dichotomies seem to vanish as Aristotle looks at them from the perspective of money.

For Aristotle money has a double nature: it is a useful means and, at the same time, can also be an end. This duplicity represents the condition of possibility of a logical (*kata logon*) passage from natural to unnatural chrematistics:

When used in this way [i.e. for satisfying natural needs], the art of exchange is not contrary to nature, now in any way a form of the art of acquisition. Exchange simply serves to satisfy natural requirements of sufficiency. None the less it was from exchange, as thus practised, that the art of acquisition developed, in the sort of way we might reasonably [*kata logon*] expect¹⁹.

In this way, from the horizon opened with the introduction of money, the initial dichotomy between natural and unnatural chrematistics results more arguable and problematic. Moreover, it is now possible to see money as the embodiment of the new social relations and practices introduced by retailers, merchants, and usurers: their monetary profit is unnatural (or, as Aristotle sometimes explicitly says, against nature), but it is also a consequent (*kata logon*) development of natural exchange. In this case, it is clear that the logical development does

¹⁸ As Eric Weil wrote: «Seul le vivant a raison, et c'est nous les vivants. On ne comprendrait Aristote qu'en comprenant son époque. Ce qui gêne, c'est que nous comprenons l'époque d'Aristote surtout par Aristote. Sans lui, l'esprit d'Athènes dans la deuxième moitié du III^e siècle serait pour nous un X, et quand bien même nous aurions les données nécessaires pour le déterminer, nous ne nous intéresserions à ce problème» (E. Weil, *L'anthropologie d'Aristote*, «Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale», 51/1946, pp. 7-36, p. 35).

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Politics*, cit., 1257a, 28-31.

not merely reflect the natural (and political) development. Money reflects in itself the ambiguities we have highlighted about trade. The passage of money from means to end happens *kata logon*, i.e. on the basis of possibilities immanent to its notion. For Aristotle a real conceptual difficulty hides behind this dichotomy: money gives a quantitative dimension to the exchangeability of products; which is such a dimension that makes two heterogeneous objects commensurable?

This is the critical question posed by Aristotle. According to it, money bears with itself an ontological contradiction reified in the ontological gap that separates quality and quantity. Such a contradiction let us see the impossible and paradoxical logic of economic exchange: money, this Janus-faced thing, is, on the one side, associated with the specific quality of its metallic consistency, but, on the other side, it has the universal capacity to express the value everything²⁰. The fact that these contrasts are tangible, but then tend to vanish as soon as Aristotle changes his perspective, raises further problematic issues concerning economic exchange in itself.

Questioning the fundamentals of exchange: Nicomachean Ethics V.5

In order to find an answer (even though a problematic one) to these questions, we have to move to *Nicomachean Ethics V.5*. Here Aristotle, while addressing the fundamentals of exchange, tries to find a dimension that can found the ontological commensurability of the exchanged goods, and thus the justice of exchange; but, according to him, there is not such a dimension. It is exactly what he means when, in conclusion of his analysis, he writes that «it is impossible that things differing to such a degree should become truly commensurable»²¹.

²⁰ As Scott Meikle writes: «Aristotle is in two minds about money. His official view of its nature is that of a means, but this is a stipulation rather than a conclusion, because he does not argue for it. The view that money is an end is just as integral to his analysis, and his attempt to exclude it as a perversion is inconsistent with his account of the development of exchange where both views of money are integrated» (S. Meikle, *Aristotle on Money*, «*Phronesis*», 39/1994, pp. 26-44, in part. pp. 38-39).

²¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by R. Crisp, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, 1133b, 19-20.

In this theoretical context, the possibility of unequal exchange (especially in the form of what economic literature calls profit upon alienation, i.e. buying cheap to sell dearer) becomes real. Historically speaking, this theoretical difficulty sheds a light on an existing and ever increasing contradiction between production and circulation processes in the fourth-Century Athens. Here, the production aimed at producing use values according to the qualities of social needs, while circulation was independent and directed to a limitless accumulation of exchange values.

From this standpoint, Aristotle is a shrewd interpreter of his epoch: on the one hand, he underlines the conceptual categories to frame the essential conditions of reproduction of the *polis*; on the other, he faces, more or less consciously, the factors of the crisis of fourth-Century Athens.

Anyway, in this context it is also possible to highlight some aspects that unveil the modern relevance of the Aristotelian investigation.

Conclusion: Aristotle beyond Aristotle

After having differentiated use and exchange value in *Politics*, in *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle look for that specific *quid* that could ground the commensurability of two heterogeneous articles and, hence, the conditions of possibility of exchange itself. The classical and neo-classical economic thought has never taken into consideration such a problem²². Classical and neo-classical economy have never felt the theoretical need of an earlier and common substance beyond use and exchange value²³. For these currents the why of economic exchange is solved with a simple empiricist tautology: exchange happens because

²² Michael Heinrich ha stated that this void is a manifestation of the empiricism, anthropological essentialism, and naturalizing historicism, that characterizes the theoretical field of classical and neo-classical economic thought. See: M. Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert. Die Marxsche Kritik der politischen Ökonomie zwischen wissenschaftlicher Revolution und klassischer Tradition*, Westfälische Dampfboot, Münster 2014.

²³ See: S. Meikle, *Quality and quantity in Economics: The Metaphysical construction of the Economic Realm*, «New Literary History», 31/2000, pp. 247-268.

it happens. For them, commensurability is not a problem at all. Aristotle, instead, tries to unravel the essentials of exchange when he asks himself the crucial questions: «Why there's commensurability? Why two articles should be commensurable?». Questions like these help us understanding why Aristotelian reflections, with their critical and philosophical attitude, are still relevant to us today.

In a crucial point of *Capital*, Volume One, Karl Marx writes: «Aristotle's genius is displayed precisely by his discovery of a relation of equality in the value-expression of commodities»²⁴. According to Marx, this discovery has been ignored for much long time. In my opinion, this example should be a fruitful input for trying to discover in Aristotle's socio-economic inquiries unanswered questions that could still teach us something today, well beyond those interpretations that want to see in them only a moralistic defence of archaic and aristocratic Athenian ideology²⁵.

Following the Marxian approach²⁶, we shall acknowledge that sometimes Aristotle can't solve the problems he poses because he

²⁴ K. Marx, *Capital. A critique of political economy. Volume One*, trans. by B. Fowkes, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1976, p. 152. Aristotle is a pivotal inspiration for Marx's elaboration of his critique of political economy, especially from 1859 onwards. Marx was the first author, who, while dealing with the questions posed by modern economic thought, highlighted the importance and originality of Aristotle's economic writings (*Politics*, I, 8-10 and *Nicomachean Ethics*, V, 5-8). See, among the others, the following papers by G. Lotito: *Aristotele su moneta, scambio, bisogni*, «Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici», 4/1980, pp. 125-180; *Aristotele su moneta, scambio, bisogni*, «Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici», 5/1980, pp. 27-85; *Aristotele su moneta, scambio, bisogni*, «Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici», 6/1981, pp. 9-69.

²⁵ Among the others, see: E. Will, *De l'aspecte éthique des origines grecques de la monnaie*, «Revue Historique», 212/1054, pp. 209-231; K. Polanyi, *Aristotle discovers the economy*, in K. Polanyi, C. M. Arensberg, A. Pearson, *Trade and market in the early empires: economies in history and theory*, The Free Press, Glencoe, pp. 64-97; M. I. Finley, *Aristotle and economic analysis*, cit.

²⁶ A well-known example of this hermeneutical approach is the following passage: «Aristotle [...] himself tells us what prevented any further analysis: the lack of a concept of value. What is the homogeneous element, i.e. the common substance, which the house represents from the point of view of the bed, in the value expression for the bed? Such a thing, in truth, cannot exist, says Aristotle. But why not? Towards the bed, the house represents something equal, in so far as it represents

lacks the adequate theoretical field to develop the problematic he has previously defined²⁷. From this perspective we could face the Aristotelian problematics within the theoretical field opened by contemporary critical theory – last but not least, for example, a crucial question of our times: the socially mediated (and hence, historically determined) ways to satisfy, produce, and reproduce natural needs²⁸.

Problems are often defined not by their apparent extent, but by their specific weight. This is also the case of the Aristotelian problematic we have examined in this paper: the dichotomy between natural and unnatural chrematistics. A problematic that can find its solution not only through a reading of Aristotle *with* Aristotle, but also of Aristotle *beyond* Aristotle.

what is really equal, both in the bed and the house. And that is – human labour. However, Aristotle himself was unable to extract this fact, that, in the form of commodity-values, all labour is expressed as equal and therefore as labour of equal quality, by inspection from the form of value, because Greek society was founded on the labour of slaves, hence has as its natural basis the inequality of men and of their labour-powers» (K. Marx, *Capital...*, cit., pp. 151-152).

²⁷ For this epistemological dialectics between problematic and theoretical field see: M. Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert...*, cit., pp. 19-26.

²⁸ «The thing that is said to be nature in the primary and full way is the substance of things that have a starting-point of movement within themselves, insofar as they are themselves. For the matter is said to be nature because it is receptive of this, and comings to be and growing because they are movements arising from it. The starting-point of change for the beings that are by nature, which is in some way a component of them, either potentially or actually, is also this» (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. by C. D. C. Reeve, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1015b, 14-18). So, if human beings are social animals by nature, and if the *polis* is the perfect community by nature because it enables humans to satisfy their needs in the most perfect way, then setting the boundaries of the natural is not so easy as Aristotle suggests in *Politics*. And, as a matter of fact, Aristotle himself seems to force us to consider the socially mediated (and potentially infinite) ways to satisfy human natural needs. In this sense, the loss of immediacy deepens the Aristotelian configuration of the limits immanent to naturally conditioned social practices. «Far from being the sign of an inherent finitude of the human being, the loss of immediacy at the centre of its being is rather a sign of its *infinity* in the sense that it enables humans to socially mediate their relation to the rest of nature in an infinite numbers of ways» (S. Mau, *Mute Compulsion: A Marxist Theory of the Economic Power of Capital*, Verso, London – New York 2023, p. 103).