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TIME, KAIPOS AND CHOICE
A CONTRIBUTION TO THE QUESTION OF «PRESENTISM» IN ETHICS

The characteristic sign of our age seems to be the predominance of a present with no past and no future. It is a long-lasting phenomenon, rooted in the tendency to reduce history to a point in the present, rather than to place the present within the flow of history. I will refer to this phenomenon as Presentism¹. This paper will only consider the ethical and political meaning of «presentism» and not the physical one², and it will aim to provide a hermeneutical perspective on human action. As the political philosopher Giacomo Marramao pointed out, «presentism» is the *temporal syndrome* that characterises our age, presenting itself as a laceration between «life time» and «world time». We will try to understand whether kairós as the right time, as a «point of intersection between a plan and existing reality», could be seen as a solution to the problem of our obsessive concentration on the present³. Time experienced as an eternal *praesentatio*, devoid of *ritensio* or *protensio*, becomes a «“negative” eternity of the present» which functions «according to the Freud-

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¹ On the more recent discussion of «Presentism» in the political debate in Italy, cf. C. GALLI, *Contingenza e necessità nella ragione politica moderna*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2009; G. MARRAMAIO, *La passione del presente. Breve lessico della modernità-mondo*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2008; G. BRUNI, *Il tempo della vita. Studio sulla dimensione del presente nella filosofia contemporanea*, ETS, Pisa 2001, and R. ESPOSITO, *L’eterno presente del Belpaese dove tutto dura solo un attimo*, «La Repubblica», 11 July 2012.

² The concept of presentism has been much debated, and we will not consider it here from the point of view of physical theory. For the concept of «presentism» more in general, see the entry *Time* by N. Markosian, in E.N. ZALTA (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), online: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/time>: «Presentism is the view that only present objects exist. More precisely, it is the view that, necessarily, it is always true that only present objects exist. (At least, that is how the name “Presentism” will be used here. Some writers have used the name differently. Note that, unless otherwise indicated, what is meant here by “present” is temporally present, as opposed to spatially present.) According to Presentism, if we were to make an accurate list of all the things that exist — i.e., a list of all the things that our most unrestricted quantifiers range over — there would be not a single non-present object on the list».

³ MARRAMAIO, *La passione del presente*, p. 96. This idea of a point of intersection will be the basis of our analysis of Aristotle’s concept of time (see § 1.3.).

ian mechanism of denial and repetition compulsion»⁴. Here, practical choices and decisions seem to depend increasingly on the arbitrary nature of the moment or the irresistible flow that further destabilizes change⁵. Hence the need to find an alternative to a pathological (melancholy or even maniacal) relationship with time and to rediscover the relationship between time and praxis, which today appears to be profoundly disconnected. We will attempt to investigate whether the «kairological» dimension of time can help us heal this laceration, this temporal illness.

In what follows, we will try to show how Aristotle's reflections can be used to rethink the relationship between time and practical choice. It will not be possible to address all of the many thorough and detailed studies on Aristotle's concept of time, some of which have recently appeared, and which, together with the centuries-old debate, have made this one of the principal themes of Western philosophical reflection⁶.

We will start from Aristotle's *ontology of becoming* to show the potential of his reflection in a categorical analysis of perceiving and acting time. This categorical analysis is based on the modern reception of Aristotle's concept of time, and the phenomenological interpretation in particular⁷. Our reflection will be divided into three parts: 1. an outline of the principal questions relating to time in the fourth book of the *Physics*; 2. an analysis of the Aristotelian concept of time applied to human beings; and 3. the ethical implications that ensue.

1. *The nature of time in Physics IV*

Like the principal themes that run through Aristotle's thought, his analysis of time involves several important questions of a general nature. The problem in this case goes back to the question of the existence or not of what we could define as «regional ontologies»⁸, built on different theoretical presuppositions, or whether Aristotle's

⁴ *Ibi*, pp. 102-103.

⁵ As Aldo Masullo writes, «la tecnica, straordinariamente accelerando tutte le velocità, e nell'informazione utilizzando addirittura la velocità della luce, esaspera l'effetto di destabilizzazione del cambiamento»; cf. A. MASULLO, *Il tempo e la grazia. Per un'etica della salvezza*, Donzelli, Roma 1995.

⁶ As is known, Martin Heidegger placed the question of time in Aristotle back at the centre of the philosophical debate. Cf. M. HEIDEGGER, *Der Begriff der Zeit* (1924), in *Id.*, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 64, Klostermann, Frankfurt a. M. 2004; F. VOLPI, *Chronos und Psyche. Die aristotelische Aporie von Physik IV, 223 a 16-29*, in E. RUDOLPH (hrsg.), *Zeit, Bewegung, Handlung. Studien zur Zeitabhandlung des Aristoteles*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1988, pp. 26-62.

⁷ My reading is based on a Hegel's interpretation of Aristotle's vision, cf. G.W.F. HEGEL, *Enzyklopädie der Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, in *Id.*, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 20, hrsg. von W. Bonsiepen, Meiner, Hamburg 1992, § 261 Anm. On the relationship between Hegel and Aristotle, cf. A. FERRARIN, *Hegel and Aristotle*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, p. 229 ff. In Italy, much importance has been given recently to Aristotle's *Physics*: several translations have in fact been published, all paying great attention to the philological aspect: cf. ARISTOTELE, *Fisica*, a cura di R. Radice, Bompiani, Milano 2011; *Id.*, *Fisica*, a cura di L. Ruggiu, Mimesis, Milano - Udine 2008; *Id.*, *Fisica. Libro IV*, a cura di L.M. Castelli, Carocci, Roma 2012.

⁸ The reference is to Husserl's distinction between formal ontology as the study of the categories that qualify the «form» of a being, considered as distinct from its material realization, understood as an Aristotelian «science of being qua being», and material ontology, a study of reality from the point of view of its specific material constitution, which unfolds in «regional ontologies» investigating the ontological structure of circumscribed domains of beings. Cf. E. HUSSERL, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und*

analysis can be reduced to a single vision which unites science and experience⁹. This means understanding whether the subjective time that moves human action is totally unconnected to that which regulates the becoming of natural bodies. If, that is, there exists in Aristotle a clear distinction between a «common», disputable vision of the time of lived experience¹⁰ and a metaphysical analysis of the becoming of the beings of nature, or, better, if there is an attempt to «dialecticize» these two concepts within the Aristotelian *corpus* itself.

We will show here how the meeting of a subjective and an objective dimension of time allows us to view Aristotle's concept as one that can restore value to the present¹¹. As we will discuss later, the outcome of this analysis is relevant for our discussion on an ethical level too.

Aristotle's entire analysis from chapter 10 of the fourth book onwards concerns the very existence of time. How indeed is it possible for something made up of non-existing parts, such as the past and the future, to exist? Aristotle writes: «First, it is well to go through the problems about it, using the untechnical arguments as well [as technical ones]: whether it is among things that are or things that are not, and then what its nature is. That it either is not at all or [only] scarcely and dimly is, might be suspected from the following considerations. 1) Some of it has been and is not, some of it is to be and is not yet. From these both infinite time and any arbitrary time are composed. But it would seem to be impossible that what is composed of things that are not should participate in being»¹². To the modern reader, the first part of Aristotle's treatment unavoidably brings to mind Augustine¹³. Indeed, for Aristotle as for Augustine, the experience of time immediately presents itself as an *aporia* between being and nothing¹⁴.

phänomenologischen Philosophie. Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in der Phänomenologie (1913), *Husserliana*, Bd. III/1, Nijhoff, Den Haag 1976, pp. 337-348.

⁹ V. Goldschmidt dwells on the continuity between the concept of time in Aristotle's *Physics* and his *Poetics*, cf. V. GOLDSCHMIDT, *Temps physique et temps tragique chez Aristote: commentaire sur le quatrième livre de la Physique (10-14) et sur la Poétique*, Vrin, Paris 1982. In Italy, these themes sparked an intense debate as from the early 1950s, well described by N. SCOTTI MUTH, *Linee interpretative su Aristotele negli ultimi cinquant'anni della «Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica»*, «Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica», C (2009), 1-3, pp. 71-105.

¹⁰ At the beginning of the 20th century, this discussion led to McTaggart's distinction between an A-series: past, present and future; and a B-series: previous, simultaneous, and subsequent. Since statements based on the terminology of the former are not always true, while those based on the terminology of the latter are always true, many theorists have maintained that, even though the terminology of the first series cannot be eliminated from our description of the world, it is in fact completely devoid of reality and refers only to our subjectivity. Cf. J.M.E. McTAGGART, *The Unreality of Time*, «Mind» 17 (1908), pp. 457-474.

¹¹ There is an interesting reflection on this theme in A. GIORDANI, *Tempo e struttura dell'essere*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1995. Giordani maintains in fact that «il principio della numerazione non è dato dall'anima, ma dall'unità di cui il numero è composto; nel caso particolare del tempo, è dato dall'unità che è il *nyn*» (*ibi*, p. 191). «Per cui, data l'identità del tempo e dell'essere del divenire, si ottiene che l'*ousia* che diviene è il fondamento del *nyn* e del tempo in quanto predicati, e che il tempo è il fondamento dell'*ousia* che diviene in quanto diveniente» (*ibi*, p. 202).

¹² Aristotle, *Physics. Books III and IV*, trans. by E. Hussey, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1993, IV.10, 217 b 30 - 218 a 4: «ὅτι μὲν οὖν ἡ ὄλως οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ μόλις καὶ ἀμυδρῶς, ἐκ τῶνδὲ τις ἂν ὑποπεύσειεν. τὸ δὲ μέλλει καὶ οὐπῶ ἔστιν. [...] τὸ δ' ἐκ μὴ ὄντων συγκείμενον ἀδύνατον ἂν εἶναι δόξειε μετέιν οὐσίας».

¹³ AUGUSTINE, *Confessions* XI, 14.17.

¹⁴ Besides this first *aporia*, relating to the contradictoriness between time as a set of hours, some of which, like those in the past and those in the future, no longer or do not yet exist, the second *aporia* concerns the divisibility of time which is made up of parts that its very nature prevents us from recognising

The first question that introduces us to reflect on time, therefore, is: how is it possible to identify the existence of something that is made up of parts that do not exist¹⁵?

1.1. *Time and number*

In the course of his discussion of time, Aristotle transforms the question of the *existence* of time into the question of its *nature*. Although here he seems to affirm the need to analyse the existence of time before its nature – «πότερον τῶν ὄντων ἐστὶν ἢ τῶν μὴ ὄντων, εἴτα τίς ἢ φύδις αὐτοῦ» (217 b, 31-32) – in the discussion that ensues, more than engaging in a demonstration of the existence of time, Aristotle goes on to describe its nature, moving from the *aporias* concerning its existence to those concerning its nature. The perspective shifts from an ontological approach to one which we could call phenomenological. Aristotle then moves on to the question to the nature of νῦν (now). Here¹⁶, he reframes the question: «As to what time is and what its nature is, this is left equally unclear by the recorded opinions [of earlier thinkers] and by our

(218 a 6); the third *aporia* shows that even though now is the constituent part of time, time cannot be thought of as being made up of nows (218 a 6-8); and the fourth *aporia* concerns the now that is both identical and different (218 a 6-30).

¹⁵ Here too Aristotle starts with a discussion of the opinions on time, using non-demonstrative arguments (*exoterikoi logoi*) that underline the dialectic and non-apodictic nature of the theme. There are references to the concept of time in Platos' *Timaeus* (39 C - D2), time as the motion of everything, and presumably the position of the Pythagoreans, and that of Archytas in particular, for whom time is the celestial sphere itself. Here Aristotle criticises the confusion between time and the movement of celestial rotation, between time and unit of measurement. Roark observes here that: «For first of all, Aristotle cannot subscribe to Plato's view as offered, because he rejects Plato's claim that orderly celestial motion is the result of a creative act of divine intelligence. Aristotle regards the heavenly bodies as ungenerated objects composed of pure and incorruptible aether. Given that the natural motion of aether is circular, he believes that the stars and planets have always moved in their orbits with perfect regularity. More importantly, he offers in iv.10 what he takes to be decisive arguments against strictly identifying time with motion. So time is not any particular variety of motion, much less motion brought into being by a divine craftsman. But time is not unrelated to motion, either» (T. ROARK, *Aristotle on Time. A Study of the Physics*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2011, p. 217).

¹⁶ On the much debated question of the interpretation of *nyn*, Massimo Cacciari writes: «L'istante non è parte, ma *misura* del tempo: l'istante, *nyn*, *orizei* il tempo, non nel senso che costituisce limiti, confini obiettivi, ma nel senso che ha la funzione di orizzonte, discrimina principio e fine, e insieme li tiene uniti» (M. CACCIARI, *Chronos e Aion*, «Il Centauro», 17-18 [1986], pp. 3-17, here p. 9). Disputing Zeller, Wieland writes «Daraus daß, man durch das Jetzt die verschiedenen Abschnitte der Bewegung voneinander abgrenzt, hatte man schon schließen zu können geglaubt, daß es das Einheitsmaß der Zeit ist. Doch das ist deswegen falsch, weil die Zeit gar nicht aus Jetztten besteht, sondern immer nur wieder aus Zeiten. Das Jetzt ist dabei lediglich die Grenze (*péras*, 218 a 24) der Zeit und als solche punktual und ohne Erstreckung. Das Einheitsmaß der Zeit ist also zwar nicht ohne das Grenzen setzende Jetzt möglich, aber es fällt mit ihm nicht zusammen. Zwar ist Zeit nur vergangen, wenn wir an der Bewegung ein Früher und ein Später abgrenzen. Doch durch bloße Abgrenzung von Bewegungsabschnitten entsteht noch keine Zeit. Dazu außerdem noch nötig, daß die Grenzen gezählt werden [...]. Von Zeit kann man also erst dann sprechen, wenn man zwei verschiedene und auch als verschieden angesprochene "Jetzt" hat und das eine als später, das andere als früher ansetzt. Zeit ist aber nur das, was zwischen beiden liegt» (W. WIELAND, *Die aristotelische Physik. Untersuchungen über die Grundlegung der Naturwissenschaft und die sprachlichen Bedingungen der Prinzipienforschung bei Aristoteles*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1970, p. 323. The reference is to Zeller, who writes: «Die Einheit dieser Zahl ist das Jetzt» (E. ZELLER, *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, vol. II, 2, *Aristoteles und die alten Peripatetiker* [1879], Olms, Hildesheim 1963, p. 399).

own previous discussions»¹⁷. The well-known definition Aristotle reaches is that time is the number of motion in respect of before and after: «so whenever we perceive the now as one, and not either as before and after in the change, or as the same but pertaining to something which is before and after, no time seems to have passed, because no change [seems to have occurred] either. But whenever [we do perceive] the before and after, then we speak of time. For that is what time is: a number of change in respect of the before and after (τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν ὁ χρόνος, ἀριθμὸς κινήσεως κατὰ τὸ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον)»¹⁸. But, as he immediately makes it clear, it is number understood not only as that by which we count, but also that which is counted or countable: “But number is [so called] in two ways: we call number both a) that which is counted and countable, and b) that by which we count. (That by which we count is different from that which is counted.)»¹⁹.

Going beyond the Orphic vision which personalized *Χρόνος*²⁰, for Aristotle time is not a subject which acts, and therefore counts, but «*time is a kind of number*»²¹. It is a very delicate question in Aristotle, which also involves a break with the Platonic concept. By number, in fact, Aristotle does not mean an abstract mathematical entity, number as an idea, or number as substance, but rather a concept that holds together generalization and content, a set of multiple distinct moments, which exist, however, in a continuum²². Aristotle gives us a clear example of this in the *Metaphysics*, when he examines the concept of «One». If the things measured are horses, he states, then

¹⁷ *Phys.* IV 10, 218 a 31.

¹⁸ *Phys.* IV 11, 219 a 30 - 219 b 2.

¹⁹ *Phys.* IV 11, 219 b 6-8. Aristotle criticises the problem of the nature of number and the doctrine of number as ideas both in Plato and his followers in the Academy, from Eudoxus of Cnidus to Speusippus. On this, cf. E. BERTI, *Aristotele: dalla dialettica alla filosofia prima*, Cedam, Padova 1977, in particular pp. 96-172. As Berti writes: «Nel trattato *Sulle idee* Aristotele osserva infatti che, se il numero, in quanto predicato della diade indefinita, è anteriore a questa, e quindi, essendo anteriore ad un principio di tutto, è anteriore a tutto, si avrà la conseguenza che un relativo (*pros ti*) sarà anteriore alle stesse realtà per sé (*kat' autò*). Ma questo è assurdo, poiché il relativo è sempre posteriore al per sé, in quanto significa una proprietà di una natura ad essa presoggiacente (*skesis proupokeimenes physeos*), la quale è anteriore alla proprietà ad essa concomitante» (*ibi*, p. 221). And further on: «Aristotele non ammette che vi possano essere altri numeri che quelli matematici e pertanto si rifiuta di ammettere dei numeri ideali, o idee-numeri. In tal modo Aristotele anticipa la critica che farà in seguito, quando, al preteso carattere qualitativo delle idee-numeri, obietterà che i numeri non possono essere che quantità, e pertanto ammettere dei numeri qualitativi è pressoché una contraddizione in termini. L'avversione di Aristotele non è diretta, dunque, contro la matematica in quanto tale, bensì contro il tentativo di matematizzare la filosofia, pretendendo di conservarle un carattere qualitativo» (*ibi*, p. 244).

²⁰ See A. ZACCARIA RUGGIU, *Aion Chronos Kairos. L'immagine del tempo nel mondo greco e romano*, in L. RUGGIU (a cura di), *Filosofie del tempo*, Mondadori, Milano 1998, pp. 293-318.

²¹ *Phys.* IV 11, 219 b 6.

²² Ursula Coope explains why she believes there is a continuous vision in Aristotle. She distinguishes between the numbers by which we count and numbers that are only countable. It is a distinction between two kinds of numbers: number as a discrete plurality and number that is continuous. This distinction is related to her understanding of Aristotelian time as continuous, because only a continuous thing can be countable. She writes: «If I am right, the Aristotelian solution to this puzzle depends on the view that nows, like other indivisibles, only exist if they are in some way marked out from a continuum. This brings out something important about the relation between this third puzzle and the earlier two. The assumption that the now is an essentially dependent entity, an assumption I have appealed to in solving this third puzzle, was precisely what made the initial two puzzles seem insoluble» (U. COOPE, *Time for Aristotle. Physics IV. 10-14*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005, p. 29).

the unit of measurement is «the horse», if we want to measure human beings, horses and gods, then the unit of measurement is the «living being», and the number will be the number of «living beings» because we can only count in a homogeneous environment²³. This concept is central because it means that we do not have to make number a mere element that derives from the soul, a mere means, but at the same time neither does it have to be something that exists in so far as it is a separate substance²⁴. Number is, rather, an attribute by which we predicate bodies and physical quantity and to which, through an abstractive process of thought, we attribute immobility and an existence separate from beings. We could say that, for Aristotle, number is the measure of an existing reality, that is to say, movement, and therefore it is just as real as the reality it measures, but, as it does not have its own existence, it is not real in the proper sense of the term. Hence its double nature: it is a generalization, but it cannot exist in the temporal dimension without referring to concrete objects. It is therefore abstract and concrete, universal and particular. In fact, if we simply apply a number as a mathematical number to objects in space, it does not mean that these objects are necessarily in succession because the numbers could also indicate objects that coexist. It is, instead, the concrete application of a number, by virtue of the content that it counts, which takes on the sense of succession. For Aristotle, therefore, in order to determine the nature of number we must start from numbered things. There is no time, therefore, without reference to the reality which it predicates²⁵. Number needs a substance to which to refer, and in this sense it is an accident which can in no case be defined as substance, but at the same time it is something that adds sense to reality. Number is the synthesis of the measure and the content to which the measure is applied²⁶. In this first definition, therefore, we could say that the question of the existence of time is connected to its being the measure of movement²⁷. If there is movement there is time.

²³ ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, transl. by W.D. Ross, revised text in *The Work of Aristotle*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1948, XIV (N), 1, 1087 b 34 - 1088 a 14: «“The One” evidently means a measure. And in every case there is some underlying thing with a distinct nature of its own, e.g. in the scale a quarter-tone, in spatial magnitude a finger or a foot or something of the sort, in rhythms a beat or a syllable; and similarly in gravity it is a definite weight; and in the same way in all cases, in qualities a quality, in quantities a quantity (and the measure is indivisible, in the former case in kind, and in the latter to the sense); which implies that the one is not in itself the substance of anything. And this is reasonable; for “the one” means the measure of some plurality, and “number” means a measured plurality and a plurality of measures. (Thus it is natural that one is not a number; for the measure is not measures, but both the measure and the one are starting-points). The measure must always be some identical thing predicable of all the things it measures, e.g. if the things are horses, the measure is “horse”, and if they are men, “man”. If they are a man, a horse, and a god, the measure is perhaps “living being”, and the number of them will be a number of living beings. If the things are “man” and “pale” and “walking”, these will scarcely have a number, because all belong to a subject which is one and the same in number, yet the number of these will be a number of “kinds”, or of some such term». On the predicative nature of number, cf. J. ANNAS, *Aristotle, Number and Time*, «Philosophical Quarterly», 25 (1975), 99, pp. 97-113, and WIELAND, *Die aristotelische Physik*, p. 319, who also defines it as a predicative concept (*Prädikatsbegriff*).

²⁴ The hypothesis that Aristotle unites both the Pythagorean concept, in which numbers are constitutive of things, and Platonism, in which numbers are identified with ideas, or are a bridge connecting sensible and intelligible realities.

²⁵ Cfr. L. RUGGIU, *Tempo coscienza e essere nella filosofia di Aristotele. Saggio sulle origini del nichilismo*, Paideia, Brescia 1970, p. 148.

²⁶ *Ibi*, p. 131.

²⁷ On the subjective as well as the objective nature of time and the difference between Plato and Aris-

Time is a quality of movement, which, however, in so far as it is connected to the things that move, becomes a quantitative quality. It is precisely this qualitative-quantitative meaning of time which, as we shall see, allows us to grasp its characterization in an ethical context.

1.2. *Time and Soul*

In so far as it is an attribute of a substance, time is not independent. What is more, time is not independent because it also exists in relation to the soul. Indeed, a number needs to be counted. The question therefore arises of who is it that counts. This is the origin of the question concerning the relationship between time and soul, or as it could be phrased in the terms of the modern tradition, between time and consciousness²⁸.

At this point, Aristotle continues, the following problem could be raised: if the soul did not exist, would time exist or not²⁹? If that which can count does not exist, it is impossible for there to be something that can be counted; hence it is clear that number cannot exist, «for number is either that which has been counted or that which can be. But if there is nothing that has it in its nature to count except soul, and of soul [that part which is] intellect, then it is impossible that there should be time if there is no soul, except that there could be that X which time is, whatever X makes it what it is; as for example if it is possible for there to be change without soul. The before and after are in change, and time is these *qua* countable»³⁰. This dependence is stressed again, slightly earlier in the text, where Aristotle points out that «when we ourselves do not alter in our mind or do not notice that we alter, then it does not seem to us that any time has passed»³¹.

The composite nature of the human soul, which, as nous, is what counts, but which is also itself movement, makes it, on one hand, the mental space in which movement

tote's concepts Roark writes: «Plato believed that motion actually existed prior to time. Aristotle rejects this position but does endorse the weaker view that motion could exist without time if there were no counting souls. He reasons that, as a perceptible feature of motion, time would not exist if there were no perceivers, even if motion remained in existence. Being perceptible is a modal relational property conferred upon motion by the existence of perceivers – as he believes, relational properties do not exist independently of their *relata*. The pair <time, motion> is included in the extension of the evident perceptible feature relation because time is the measurability (or a measure) of motion. This view is consistent with the common beliefs and calendric conventions of Aristotle's day, and provides an opportunity to elaborate upon Plato's view of time as the product of imposing form onto motion as matter». He continues, «Motion stands as the matter of time, indeterminate with respect to quantity. Perception provides the form of time by conferring upon motion the relational property of determinability and sometimes actually making movements determinate with respect to quantity» (ROARK, *Aristotle on Time*, pp. 217-218).

²⁸ It is interesting here to consider the position of Sorabji, who maintains that countability is a property which does not depend on being counted. Hence the relationship of dependence between time and the soul as posited by Aristotle is not as obvious as it might appear, since countability is a quality of time, which is that of a numerical structure. Cf. R. SORABJI, *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, Duckworth, London 1983, pp. 93-94.

²⁹ Against the traditional interpretation whereby Aristotle believes that there can be change and time in a world without souls, U. Coope claims that Aristotle endorses the conclusion that time exists because there is at least one ensouled being which has the ability to count it. See COOPE, *Time for Aristotle*, ch. 10, *Time and Soul*, pp. 159-164.

³⁰ *Phys.* IV 14, 223 a 25-28.

³¹ *Phys.* IV 11, 218 b 21-23.

takes place, but, on the other, in so far as it does not change, it is also able to grasp its being changed, and hence to count³². Time, therefore, has to do with movement, but this is not all: it needs the soul³³. As Aristotle himself writes: «So, just as, if the now were not different but one and the same, there would be no time, in the same way, even when the now is different but is not noticed to be different, what is in between does not seem to be any time. If, then, when we do not mark off any alteration, but the soul seems to remain in one indivisible, it happens as a consequence that we do not think there was any time, and if when we do perceive and mark off [in alteration], then we do say that some time has passed, then it is manifest that there is no time apart from change and alteration [...] So that time is either change or some aspect of change; and since it is not change, it must be some aspect of change»³⁴. From this Aristotle concludes that: «It is manifest, then, that time neither is change nor is apart from change ("Ὅτι μὲν οὖν οὔτε κινήσεις οὔτ' ἄνευ κινήσεως ὁ χρόνος ἐστὶ, φανερόν)»³⁵. We can say, therefore, that time is the perception the soul has of change. It is not necessary for the body to be affected. Even if our body were immobile and we were not affected by it in any way, any movement of our soul would be enough to give us the sense of the passing of time. But number also includes the object of movement, whether it be an object in the space outside us or within our consciousness. The soul is not enough on its own, there must also be movement which is independent of the soul. And so we can paraphrase Aristotle's statement that «time neither is change nor is apart from change», by saying that time is not in the soul, but neither is it possible without the soul. As Wieland puts it, «time is not *for* or *in* the soul, but only *not without* the activity of the soul»³⁶. Indeed the soul cannot perceive now (*vũn*) without movement or change with respect to before and after³⁷. Every present is therefore always connected as movement within a continuum. Without this before and after, it would not be possible for the soul to grasp the now.

³² Ruggiu writes, «La coscienza si pone come il piano della presenza indiveniente, al cui interno si pongono come tre differenti aspetti e modalità dell'unica presenza le diverse parti del tempo» (RUGGIU, *Tempo coscienza e essere*, p. 18).

³³ T. Roark states here that: «Aristotle's motive for developing a hylomorphic account of time seems to have been twofold. First, he no doubt wished to retain to the greatest extent possible the well-established conception of time as being somehow intimately related to the movement of celestial bodies and as involving numbering in some way. Second, he must have felt compelled to account for time's existence in the way that he thought the existence of all nonsubstances is to be accounted for: by tracing its existence to that of substances and their features. But to complicate matters, Aristotle recognized that the business of keeping time is largely conventional, and that our experience of time is deeply subjective. For these reasons he devised an account of time according to which its existence is partly dependent upon the activities of percipient agents» (ROARK, *Aristotle on Time*, p. 219).

³⁴ *Phys.* 218 b 28-33, 219 a 8-9.

³⁵ *Phys.* 219 a 1-2.

³⁶ «Die Seele ist vielmehr nur eine notwendige, aber noch lange keine hinreichende Bedingung dafür, daß es so etwas wie Zeit in der Welt gibt: Zeit ist nicht *durch* die oder *in* der Seele, sondern lediglich *nicht ohne* die Tätigkeit der Seele» (WIELAND, *Die aristotelische Physik*, p. 316). Wieland's vision leads to the statement that time is an operative concept of experience (*ein operativer Erfahrungsbegriff*), whereby it is not understood as a determination of being that becomes, but the way in which the consciousness relates to this becoming (*ibi*, p. 326).

³⁷ See *Phys.* 219 a 30-33: «ὅταν μὲν οὖν ὡς ἓν τῶν αισθᾶώμεθα, καὶ μὴ ἦτοι ὡς πρότερον καὶ ὑστερον ἐν τῇ κινήσει ἢ ὡς τὸ αὐτὸ μὲν προτέρου δὲ καὶ ὑστέρου τινός, οὐ δοκεῖ χρόνος γεγόνει οὐδεὶς, ὅτι οὐδὲ κινήσεις. τὰν δὲ τὸ πρότερον καὶ τὸ ὑστερον, τότε λέγομεν χρόνον».

1.3. *Time as a threshold*

The concept of time which emerges from the *Physics* takes into account both the objective nature of time, understood as becoming, which the living being *suffers* in so far as it is one of the beings of nature, and the subjective dimension as the result of the soul's activity in counting. Aristotle, that is, shows time's independence of the soul on one hand, in so far as it is the expression of becoming, but he also accepts the strong dependence of time on the soul, thus maintaining its experiential and phenomenological dimension without reducing it to a merely subjective phenomenon.

This concept of time would appear to be, therefore, neither a fully realistic hypothesis, which would establish the objectivity of time as independent from the soul, nor a fully idealistic hypothesis of the subjective nature of time as a function constituted by the soul; rather, it is a half-way position, in which time is considered as a reality which cannot exist without both the soul and becoming³⁸. We can agree here, therefore, with the idea that «time only exists as a meeting point between the determining activity of the consciousness and the determined content, which depends on the consciousness not for its existence, but in so far as it is “determined”, that is to say, counted»³⁹. The present dimension of time can be considered, therefore, as a «threshold», a *point of intersection*⁴⁰ between the soul and becoming⁴¹. As it is the point of this encounter, the present gains strength and meaning.

Thus time is both the background against which succession takes place, and the way in which the consciousness places itself with respect to the world of becoming, by which the soul predisposes itself in the expectation of an event, for example, or in remembering one.

2. *Human time*

We come now to the second question: how does this Aristotelian account of time relate to the perception that human beings have of time? Is it possible, that is, to make a clear distinction between the treatment of time in the *Physics* and time in the natural

³⁸ Cf. GIORDANI, *Tempo e struttura dell'essere*, p. 173, n. 101. For Dubois time is precisely the meeting of two realities, time and soul: «Lorsqu'il s'agit du temps, l'objectivité inclut la considération du sujet. L'esprit intervenant dans la consistance même du temps» (M.-J. DUBOIS, *Le temps et l'instant selon Aristote*, Éd. Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1967, p. 159).

³⁹ Cf. L. RUGGIU, *Tempo della fisica e tempo dell'uomo*, Libreria Editrice Cafoscarina, Venezia 2007, p. 118.

⁴⁰ On the interpretation of Aristotle's time as a limit in Hegel, cf. FERRARIN, *Hegel and Aristotle*, p. 229: «In the Philosophy of Nature, Hegel treats time along the same lines. Space and time are continua; this continuity is interrupted or broken by the point and the “now,” which introduce discreteness into continuity. For Hegel space and time are as little composed of points and “nows” as they are for Aristotle; taking them as continua means that they are potentially infinitely divisible, and that points and “nows” are not parts of wholes but limits of continua. Further, in Hegel's terms, they are idealities: they are identical to themselves while referring to something that is each time different».

⁴¹ For Dherbey, the phenomenological dimension of Aristotle's analysis of memory can be seen in the «costituzione di un ricordo mediante uno sguardo dell'anima, che Husserl chiamerà l'intenzionalità della coscienza» (G. ROMEYER DHERBEY, *Aristotele fenomenologo della coscienza?*, in RUGGIU, *Filosofia del Tempo*, pp. 27-35, here p. 35).

works, and hence between a natural time and human experience of time, as described, for example, in the *Parva naturalia*? We will start by rapidly reviewing some of the central points of the psychological perception of time: the relationship with memories and anticipation, and the problem of the «now». Our aim is to understand whether, for Aristotle, present psychological time is restricted to a subjective vision or whether it too is characterised as a *liminal* condition between subjectivity and objectivity.

As Aristotle writes in *On memory*: «All memory involves time. So only animals which perceive time remember, and they do so by means of that with which they perceive»⁴². In the case of both memory of the past and anticipation of the future the reference is to the soul's activity in counting, and animals' ability to perceive the passing of time, which leads us back to the external movement of things. There is, therefore, a becoming of beings that has an effect on the soul, which turns this becoming into a memory, an expectation, a hope or a fear. As we have seen in the *Physics*, so in the experience that the human being has of time, this is not only a subjective perception of events, but a placing them within an objective background, that of becoming.

The soul temporalizes itself in the present, it brings everything back to the present, and like the now (*vūv*) of the *Physics*, so in the *Parva naturalia* the present constitutes the limit that separates and at the same time unites the past and the future⁴³. We could say that, for Aristotle, the present instant, the now, does not constitute a substance, but a limit, a *virtual pause*, a determination that exists only in potency⁴⁴ and that only the soul's act of determination can actualize⁴⁵. The perception of the present now does not arbitrarily interrupt the flow of becoming, but it places the now within a complete context. By identifying its own limits, the soul recognises the continuity of reality. In this way, this multiplicity does not deny the fundamental unity of the *continuum*⁴⁶. This means that the common perception of time as past, present and future does not constitute an interruption of time, but is one of the soul's ways of placing itself in the continuity of becoming, so it can orient itself, we could say, in this continuity and act. The continuous⁴⁷ and not discrete vision of time has an important ethical implication, precisely because it does not cut temporal dimensions into definitively concluded moments, but it lets the past and the future interact with the present.

⁴² ARISTOTLE, *On Memory*, trans. by R. Sorabji, Duckworth, London 1972, 449 b 28-29.

⁴³ From the point of view of generation and corruption, the time that passes will be understood in a substantialistic way, while alterity «non è altro che il prodotto dell'attività determinante dell'anima, che, ponendo l'ora nel continuo temporale, perciò stesso lo pone come principio del futuro e fine del passato» (RUGGIU, *Tempo della fisica e tempo dell'uomo*, p. 79).

⁴⁴ On the potentiality of the now, Coope states: «In what sense does the now divide the past from the future? Aristotle says that it "divides potentially" (222 a 13-14). It divides potentially because it can mark a boundary in change, and hence in time, even though it cannot make this boundary into a beginning and an end. As I said in the Introduction, Aristotle must be relying here on the analogy between the now and a point. A point that has been marked on a line but at which nothing has stopped is a potential division on the line. It marks the line into two parts but does not actually divide the parts from one another. Similarly, a now is a potential division in time since it marks the time into two parts, though it does not (and in fact cannot) actually divide the parts from one another» (COOPE, *Time for Aristotle*, p. 132).

⁴⁵ Here we could go back to McTaggart's definitions and say that in this case, for Aristotle, there is a sort of overlapping between the A-series and the B-series. Cf. MCTAGGART, *The Unreality of Time*.

⁴⁶ Cf. RUGGIU, *Tempo della fisica e tempo dell'uomo*, p. 86.

⁴⁷ On the concept of continuity (*das Kontinuum*) in Aristotle see § 17 of WIELAND, *Die aristotelische Physik*, pp. 278-316.

When Aristotle distinguishes between memory (*μνήμη*) and recollection (*ἀνάμνησις*) in *On memory*, he starts from a dynamic temporal analysis of memory as sense-perception and as the possibility of going over a past perception again, understood as «change» (*κίνησις*; 449 b 15-24;) recalled from a mnemonic image. Aristotle continues: «One might be puzzled how, when the affection is present but the thing is absent, what is not present is ever remembered. For it is clear that one must think of the affection, which is produced by means of perception in the soul and in that part of the body which contains the soul, as being a sort of picture, the having of which we say is memory. For the change that occurs marks in a sort of imprint, as it were, of the sense-image, as people do who seal things with signet rings»⁴⁸. With respect to sense-perception, this image is like the image of a painted animal, which is, together, both the animal itself and its representation, and it makes it «present» by means of memory, as happens when we remember something that is not currently present⁴⁹. In this way, the dynamic of recalling to memory and recollection is resolved in the present and in past experiences, without any reference to pre-existing anamnestics.

In Aristotle's treatment in *On memory*, he not only distinguishes between memory and recollection, but also focuses his attention on the involuntary or voluntary act at the basis of recollection. Recollection is the practical act of recalling a past which for various reasons is removed and which the consciousness allows to re-emerge from the darkness into which it had fallen, through acts which are more or less voluntary. As Aristotle explains: «Recollecting differs from remembering not only in respect of the time, but in that many other animals share in remembering, while of the known animals one may say that none other than man shares in recollecting. The explanation is that recollecting is, as it were, a sort of reasoning. For in recollecting, a man reasons that he formally saw, or heard, or had some such experience, and recollecting is, as it were, a sort of search. And this kind of search is an attribute only of those animals which also have the deliberating part. For indeed deliberation is a sort of reasoning»⁵⁰. In recalling something to memory we do not follow the order of succession, but the structure of association, which denotes the difference between human remembering and the remembering of animals. In fact, recollection, which is proper to human beings, is an expression of reasoning, deliberation, and inference. Recollecting therefore is also a practical faculty which intervenes by deviating the straight path of memory⁵¹. Memory, in so far as it is recollection, is therefore always «memory for» as it is the product of a memory with a view to needs, desires, or hopes, in sum, of action. It is therefore clear that in these terms the past is not *past*, but it remains and acts and conditions our choices, influencing our future, starting from the impulses of the present. The past, that is, does not have the dimension of something that is static and closed off once and for all. Memory is not a dark well into which our history disappears, but it is, rather, the place in which something takes place that can act and transform our

⁴⁸ ARISTOTLE, *On memory*, 450 a 25-31.

⁴⁹ *Ibi*, 450 b 20-451 a 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibi*, 453 a 5-13.

⁵¹ A. RICCARDO, *Immaginazione e reminiscenza. (Qualche considerazione sul De memoria et reminiscencia di Aristotele)*, in L. FORMIGARI - G. CASERTANO - I. CUBEDDU (a cura di), *Imago in phantasia depicta. Studi sulla teoria dell'immaginazione*, Carocci, Roma 1999, p. 127.

meaning of the present⁵². Memory, therefore, acquires a practical, orienting meaning and it has a projective function⁵³.

We have thus moved into the dimension of the future. The future also exerts its force on the present, albeit in a weaker way than the past. Indeed our present action is conditioned by needs, fears and hopes, all mental states that are related to the future, but which act on the present. The object which we anticipate, just like the one we remember, interacts with our present time. But, like memory, anticipation also needs an objective time: it is therefore not only linked to the soul, but also to the becoming of beings. And here too the human being is involved in its practical deliberation. Even a future that is feared preserves the hope that it will not come true; it brings into play, therefore, all the possibilities of making what it desires come true and avoiding what it fears. As we read in the *Rhetoric*, in order for us to fear, we have to preserve some hope of safety in our field of action. «And there is a sign of this: fear makes people inclined to deliberation, while no one deliberates about hopeless things»⁵⁴. In a concept of time understood as merely unidirectional, if we interrupt this relationship between times, in a non-necessary order, any space for practical choice disappears. This vision of the living being brings us to a reading of time which is open to practical choice.

3. *The time of choice*

Living is the movement which projects us outwards into another temporal dimension: the human being in fact is not only affected by time at his origin and his end, but at every moment of his life. It is the subject's necessary movement towards an object, that *τέλος* that Aristotle claims as the principle of causality, which always constitutes the possibility of coming out of oneself, of acting. This action is situated in the present. Hopes and fears determine our action just as much as memory and *habitus* do, they meet, like the «now» of the *Physics*, at a threshold in which both the subjective and the objective dimension play a central role.

But how can we understand this threshold of the present? In Aristotle we seem to come across different considerations of this dimension of time. If indeed we follow the theory of the moral *habitus*, which once formed are no longer liable to change and which determine the stable dispositions to act in the same way in similar situations, forging the «character» of an individual⁵⁵, it would seem as if the present were nothing but the acceptance of a unidirectional process which comes from the past and invests us without leaving us any freedom: a cage which conditions us, in which the value of choice seems to lie merely in the confirmation, the acceptance of a tradition.

On the other hand, however, through *καίρως*, Aristotle introduces us to the possibility of the arrival of something new. It is precisely the meaning of this opportunity which leads us to the «presentism» which seems to characterise our time: seizing the

⁵² RUGGIU, *Tempo della fisica e tempo dell'uomo*, p. 142.

⁵³ RICCARDO, *Immaginazione e reminiscenza*, p. 126.

⁵⁴ ARISTOTLE, *On Rhetoric. A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. by G.A Kennedy, Oxford University Press, New York - Oxford 1991, II 5, 1383 a 13-15. As regards this point, cf. *Phys.* VII, 3, 247 a 10.

⁵⁵ This concept is undoubtedly related to the concept of freedom typical of the ancients, for whom to be free meant not letting oneself be conditioned by the external world, and hence self-determination.

moment⁵⁶, a break in the *continuum*, which creates an opening to the possible. By choosing, one can essentially determine the course of events. But in the time of *καῖρός*, even though we act by choosing and deciding what to do, we also give ourselves over to a time that proceeds independently of our mere subjectivity. It is precisely from Aristotle's analysis of time in the *Physics* that it is possible to better understand this other interpretation of *καῖρός*. If, on the basis of the concept of *νῦν*, we also consider the present as the virtual pause of a meeting between the subjective and the objective dimension, between soul and becoming, then this occasional present will no longer consist in indistinctly seizing an opportunity, but in joining the subjective dimension to objective facts. We also find this interpretation in the *Rhetoric* where Aristotle shows the characteristic of a good speech, which must always take into account the objective conditions in which it is pronounced⁵⁷.

How can we also understand the words that Aristotle uses to refer to *καῖρός* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*? Here he writes: «there are no fixed data in matters concerning action and questions of what is beneficial, any more than there are in matters of health. And if this is true of our general discussion, our treatment of particular problems will be even less precise, since these do not come under the head of any art which can be transmitted by precept, but the agent must consider on each different occasion (*καῖρός*) what the situation demands, just as in medicine and in navigation»⁵⁸. But the person who seizes the opportunity is always an expert: a doctor or an experienced sailor. When I am presented with an opportunity in the present, experience as well as expectation plays an equal role, placing choice in a historical dimension that does not condemn, nor does it abandon, but contributes to the decision. Although it takes place in its necessity, this time, unlike birth and death etc., is resolved by an action that modifies what had come before in an effective way.

This aspect emerges in the time of the *Ethics*, as the time of the right moment⁵⁹, which converts pain into hope and frees us from the need for the past⁶⁰, without, how-

⁵⁶ As Marramao observes, the identification of *kairos* with the Latin *occasio* removes the symbolic and semantic complexity from the series of words deriving from *kairos*, and restricts its meaning to a sense of *caducitas*, «di una tempestività volta a fronteggiare l'inesorabile accelerazione di un Tempo *edax rerum*, "divoratore" di ogni cosa, di un tempo che *fugit irremabile*», hence the need «di ripensare radicalmente l'equazione di *Kairòs e tempus* a partire da una angolazione prospettica in grado di farci risalire fino all'enigmatica scaturigine del lemma latino» (MARRAMAIO, *La passione del presente*, pp. 90-91):

⁵⁷ F.D. CORRALES CORDON, *Tempo fisico e Kairos nella Retorica di Aristotele*, «Studi di Filosofia Aristotelica» 3 (2010), pp. 9-38.

⁵⁸ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. by M. Ostwald, Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, Indianapolis 1962, II, 2, 1104 a.

⁵⁹ At this point it is possible to «saldare i due grandi principi dell'etica novecentesca non reattiva, il principio-speranza e il principio-responsabilità, i quali, separati, sono inevitabilmente inefficaci» (MASULLO, *Il tempo e la grazia*, p. 130).

⁶⁰ On the original spatial dimension of time, which in Homer's *Iliad* indicated the fatal place, the gap in the armour that constituted the vulnerable part, but was at the same time the right place for the attacker, «"un lieu, une partie du corps particulièrement vulnérable, vitale, que vise l'ennemi avec une arme de jet afin d'entraîner la mort". Au Vème Siècle avant notre ère s'opère un passage du "lieu où tout peut se décider" (*topos kairios*, dans le corpus hippocratique ou chez Hérodote) au "moment où tout peut se décider", avec notamment l'expression *kairos chronou* (le point décisif du temps) que l'on trouve dans l'*Electre* de Sophocle. On est passé de "l'endroit" au "moment" décisif. Le *kairos* se pose alors comme présent instantifié au croisement, à la jonction des catégories du pas-encore et du jamais-plus» (cf. R.

ever, losing sight of what comes before us and what is awaiting us, that is, the realization of the good. It is possible to talk of the good in many ways, Aristotle points out: with respect to time it is *καιρός*, «time, e.g., the right moment is good», «ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἐν χρόνῳ καιρός»⁶¹. *Καιρός* is therefore the good of time precisely because acting grasps time which becomes opportune⁶² and mature, and therefore decides what action to carry out. In this time, the space of *praxis* is freed. It is at this moment that the quantitative and the qualitative vision of time are joined together: there is no longer a «time in which» – the neutral horizon in which the event simply appears – but a «time for»⁶³. The character of time, determined by the past which constitutes necessity, meets the intellect which introduces freedom of choice. «Choice is the starting point of action: it is the source of motion but not the end for the sake of which we act (i.e., the final cause). The starting point of choice, however, is desire and reasoning directed toward some end. That is why there cannot be choice either without intelligence and thought or without some moral characteristic; for good and bad action in human conduct are not possible without thought and character. Now thought alone moves nothing; only thought which is directed to some end and concerned with action can do so. And it is this kind of thought which also initiates production. For whoever produces something produces it for an end. The product he makes is not an end in an unqualified sense, but an end only in a particular relation and of a particular operation. Only the goal of action is an end in the unqualified sense: for the good life is an end, and desire is directed toward this»⁶⁴. In this sense *καιρός* is the opportunity which we must manage to seize by exercising our attention and our sensitivity to circumstances; if we let this opportunity escape us it will not return again⁶⁵. Living consciously aware in the present, therefore, is another lesson that we can learn by analyzing *καιρός*. In this time the human being finds the opportunity to act by opening up a gap in the cloth⁶⁶ woven by the objective conditions, which condition him to necessity. At this moment, the indistinct and impersonal flow of time is interrupted by a decision, joining good time to subjective expectations, in a coincidence between *χρόνος* and *τέλος*, both understood as the process which leads to its fulfilment⁶⁷.

JALABERT, *Kairòs: un concept opportun puoi l'education et la formation?*, Actes du congrès de l'Actualité de la recherche en éducation et en formation (AREF), Université de Genève, septembre 2010. The references within the quotation are to: J.M. GABAUDE, *Evangelos Moutsopoulos, philosophe du kairos*, in E. MOUTSOPOULOS [éd.], *Chronos et Kairos. Entretiens d'Athènes. Institut international de philosophie, 1986*, J. Vrin, Paris 1988, pp. 84-87).

⁶¹ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 6, 1096 a 27.

⁶² On the etymological complexity of the term *kairos*, cf. R.B. ONIANS, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1951; M. TRÉDÉ, *Kairos. L'à-propos et l'occasion. Le mot et la notion d'Homère à la fin du IVème siècle avant J.-C.*, Klincksieck, Paris 1992.

⁶³ RUGGIU, *Tempo della fisica e tempo dell'uomo*, p. 192.

⁶⁴ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, 2, 1139 a 32 - 1139 b 4.

⁶⁵ On *kairos* as balance and agreement, cf. G. MARRAMAO, *Kairòs. Apologia del tempo debito*, Laterza, Roma - Bari 1993.

⁶⁶ In his etymological reconstruction, Richard Broxton Onians links *καιρός* to *καῖρος*, where the reference is to the parting in the warp threads, for a limited period of time, which allowed the woof to pass. (ONIANS, *The Origins of European Thought*, pp. 345-346).

⁶⁷ *Chronos* here is not understood in the sense of its origin from the verb *kèiro*, meaning «divide»,

In this time man can again find his present of choice⁶⁸, by introducing into that infinite and inexorable χρόνος a single *καῖρός*, which, if understood, makes us capable of grasping that time by which we are always grasped⁶⁹.

Conclusion

Aristotle's approach to time is neither subjective nor objective. From this point of view, the present is not subjected to the objective flow of a time in which the human being cannot act through his or her own choice; but neither is it a subjective conception of time, which denies the existence of an external happening independent of the subject. The present becomes therefore the space of moral action and ethical choice, in which the human being can elude the present dimension alone (*presentism*) and bring together time of the soul and time of nature. In this context, the concept of *καῖρός* is not an opportunity that happens to a human being, regardless of his or her choices, but the possibility of combining external events, independent of us, with individual responsibility for our actions. In the context of practical action, *καῖρός* acts, then, as a general prescription to be applied to the individual, which paradoxically calls into question the general validity of prescriptions. The invitation in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to act respecting *καῖρός*⁷⁰ refers to it as that categorical dimension in which general prescriptions are insufficient and impotent. The good, that is, is not reached through prescriptions, but by orienting oneself to a time that conforms to action: not «when?», but «what is the right time for...». *Καῖρός*, therefore, allows Aristotle to accept a condition of continual change, without denying change, but looking for a good life in and through change. In this sense, in *καῖρός* we can see a formal dimension of the good, with the particularity of *praxis* at the same time. Where everything is in change and no general prescription is possible then *καῖρός* can provide refuge⁷¹.

«separate», «mark» (like the Latin *tempus*, from the Greek *tèmnō*, «divide»), as has been hypothesised, but from *chràino*, which properly means «achieve» or «realize».

⁶⁸ It is clear that for Aristotle this is the sphere of *praxis* and not *poiesis*, as indeed it clearly distinguished in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 2, 1139 a 21-31: «What affirmation and negation are in the realm of thought, pursuit and avoidance are in the realm of desire. Therefore, since moral virtue is a characteristic involving choice, and since choice is a deliberate desire, it follows that, if the choice is to be good, the reasoning must be true and the desire correct; that is, reasoning must affirm what desire pursues. This then is the kind of thought and the kind of truth that is practical and concerned with action. On the other hand, in the kind of thought involved in theoretical knowledge and not in action or production, the good and the bad state are, respectively, truth and falsehood; in fact, the attainment of truth is the function of the intellectual faculty as a whole. But in intellectual activity concerned with action, the good state is truth in harmony with correct desire».

⁶⁹ The importance of the temporal category of *καῖρός* is seen in the ethical dimension, as Thanassas writes: «Der moralisch relevante *chronos* ist der gute *chronos*, also der *kairos* – eine Form der *situativer Zeitlichkeit*, die sich nicht quantitativ, sondern allein *qualitativ* bestimmen last» (P. THANASSAS, *Sollen und Zeit*, in W. MESCH (hrsg.), *Glück - Tugend - Zeit: Aristoteles über die Zeitstruktur des guten Lebens*, Metzler, Stuttgart 2013, pp. 79-93, here p. 84).

⁷⁰ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics* II, 1104 a 8.

⁷¹ On this theme, unlike Vigo, who claimed that Aristotle did not formulate a formal imperative, Thanassas argues that, with *kairos*, Aristotle overcame the formalism of the good, without falling into pure subjectivism or relativism, and this made it possible to create an ethics of the good life, saving the logos of ethics.

Καιρός is a happy union of given and situation, past and future. This meeting between past and future takes place in a present that does not constitute a third temporal dimension, but rather the moment in which the given and the acted take place⁷². This invitation to a temporality that does not deny change, but does not subject itself to change either, can perhaps offer us today an interesting and fruitful contribution to the question of *presentism* in the ethical and political debate, a different way of living out time.

Abstract

The paper will attempt to show how Aristotle's reflections can be used in rethinking the relationship between time and practical choice. The analysis will be divided into three parts: 1. an outline of the principal questions relating to time in *Physics* IV; 2. an analysis of the Aristotelian concept of time applied to human beings; and 3. the ethical implications that ensue. By looking at the Aristotelian interpretation of time in the *Physics*, we can formulate a new reflection on the present that can be a guide in practical choice and help us create a less alienating relationship with the present.

Keywords: Time, Presentism, *Kairos*, Practical Choice, Physics, Aristotle

See THANASSAS, *Sollen und Zeit*, p. 88; A.G. VIGO, *Zeit und Praxis bei Aristoteles. Die Nikomachische Ethik und die zeit-ontologischen Voraussetzungen des vernunftgesteuerten Handelns*, Alber, Freiburg - München 1996.

⁷² THANASSAS, *Sollen und Zeit*, p. 93.