



The Conimbricenses.

Introductory note to the *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Iesu**

António Manuel Martins (Universidade de Coimbra)

In the History of Philosophy we use the term “conimbricenses” to designate the authors of the *Curso Conimbricense* published at the end of the 16th Century under the general title *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Iesu*¹...whose volumes, which came out between 1592 and 1606 were destined to serve as support in the Philosophy course offered by the Coimbra College of Arts and at the University of

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¹ **Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Jesu in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis Stagiritae** (Coimbra, A. Mariz, 1592; Lyon, 1594; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1984);
Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Iesu in quatuor libros De Coelo Aristotelis Stagiritae (Lisboa: S.Lopes, 1593);
Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis S. I. in libros Metereorum Aristotelis Stagiritae (Lisboa: S. Lopes, 1593);
Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis S. I. in libros Aristotelis qui Parva Naturalia appellantur (Lisboa: S. Lopes, 1593);
In libros Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum aliquot Conimbricensis Cursus disputationes, in quibus praecipua quaedam Ethicae disciplinae capita continentur (Lisboa: S. Lopes, 1593);
Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis S. I. in duos libros de generatione et corruptione Aristotelis Stagiritae (Coimbra: A. Mariz, 1597);
Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis S. I. in tres libros De anima Aristotelis Stagiritae (Coimbra: A. Mariz, 1598);
Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis S. I. in universam Dialecticam Aristotelis (Coimbra: D. G. Loureiro, 1606; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1976, 1984).



Évora. The term was sometimes used more loosely to designate the Jesuit professors of philosophy at Coimbra and Évora during the second half of the 16th Century and the first decades of the 17th. The *Curso Conimbricense* was primarily developed through the teaching institutions connected to the Jesuits in Europe, the Americas and Asia (India, China and Japan). But it was also known and read in academic centers connected to the Reformation.

Among Jesuits the course in philosophy lasted for only three years. Coimbra and Évora followed the statutes approved by the King of Portugal that established four years for the study of philosophy. There, the curriculum in force, from 1552, was designed—with slight alterations—to structure the study of philosophy around the texts of the *Corpus Aristotelicum* that were considered to be the most significant and which were supplemented by Porphyry's introductory texts. During the four years of the course, the student had to read and attend the lectures on the interpretation of the whole of the *Organon*, *Physica*, *De coelo*, *De anima*, *Metaphysica*, *Parva Naturalia*, *De generatione et corruptione* as well as a synthesis of the material broached in *The Nicomachean Ethics* and in the *Meteorologica*. In 1565 the College of Arts received new statutes which arranged the materials of the Course in Philosophy in the following fashion: 1st year: Dialectics; 2nd year: Physics and Ethics; 3rd year: Metaphysics and *Parva Naturalia*; 4th year: 1st semester: *De anima*; 2nd semester: review and preparation for the degree exam.

According to the most current version of the genesis of these texts, everything would have begun with the instructions given by Jerónimo Nadal in 1561 with the purpose of printing a text that would free the professors and the students from the task of writing everything that the professor dictated in the classes. It was intended in this way that two principal strategic goals would be reached: 1) to significantly



alter the teaching and learning process by putting the emphasis on assimilation of contents through the more active methods of interpretation and the discussion of themes; 2) to guarantee with more efficacy the doctrinal unity in the sense of excluding preliminarily that which was judged incompatible with church doctrine. It was thought of, therefore, as a text to serve as a base for the Course in Philosophy in which the commentaries of the Aristotelian texts and connected questions prescribed by statutes of the University of Coimbra would be adequately treated. A commission was then nominated, and presided over by Pedro da Fonseca, and of which Marcos Jorge, Cipriano Suárez and Pedro Gómez were part. Pedro da Fonseca, with his demand for rigor, immediately proposed that the composition of the course should not begin without first making a detailed and up-to-date study of the most relevant works, as well as the most important difficulties effectively felt by the students and teachers in their pedagogic practice. With this in mind, Fonseca underlines in the celebrated letter to Jerónimo Nadal of the 14th of January, 1562, the importance of this Memorandum of “doubts and of all which in the process of their studies occurs to them and which might serve as some part of the course..”(MHSL, *Ep.H.Nadal*, I, 599ss). The methodology that Fonseca suggests implied that doubts raised by the students of Coimbra and Évora be clarified, as well as that a systematic look be taken at “two or three serious interpreters” either of the old school of Aristotelian commentary, or of the more recent scholars. Fonseca did not intend to be exhaustive in his enumeration, but it is still interesting that in the letter he expressly mentions the following authors to be studied in this project: Alexander of Aphrodisias, Seneca (Natural Questions), Cicero (especially for the philosophical terminology), and John Duns Scotus. Thomas Aquinas is not mentioned because it is unnecessary to do so as he was considered to be a benchmark author in this context, just as were his 16th century interpreters. In



addition to this, the study of Pliny was recommended in order to elucidate certain questions about winds and meteors. Cipriano Soares must have taken on the responsibility of dealing with questions which concerned mathematics and astronomy that were found in Aristotelian texts, namely in *De caelo*. Marcos Jorge occupied himself with the study of John Duns Scotus, Seneca, and Alexander of Aphrodisias. Pedro da Fonseca thought that this method of teamwork would provide excellent results such that the desired Course could be published within “two or three years”, that is, around 1565. The facts, however, will come to show that Fonseca was overly optimistic. We can conclude that he fulfilled a part of this commitment within the prescribed time limit by publishing, in 1564, the *Dialectical Institutions*, an introduction to Logic that would be hugely successful in many European university centers until the middle of the 17th century. As a matter of fact, the *Dialectical Institutions*, would serve as a compendium for the introduction of Logic in Jesuitical schools². Even the author of the volume of the *Curso Conimbricense on Dialectics*, published in 1606, recognizes the complementary function of *Dialectical Institutions*³. The truth is that the promised Course did not come to be published by this initial team. This means that the work was not completed within the time frame established by Fonseca. Documents of the epoch suggest that there would have existed a master text for the *Curso Conimbricense*

² This is apparent in what is said in the *Rules of the Professor of Philosophy*: “Explicitet anno primo Logicam; sed primo bimestri Summulam P. Fonsecae” (Ratio Studiorum 1591; MP V, Romae, 1986, 279). But already in the 1586 document on the Study of Philosophy it was recommended that Fonseca’s text would be the preferred one because “...*Summula* quidem P. Fonsecae esset forte magis ad rem, quia latior, clarior, accommodatior Aristoteli et sine tricis, quae et inutiles sunt et deterrent tirones.” (MP V, Romae, 1986, 100).

³ The end of the text relative to the *Topics* (1, 3) justifies the omission of the remainder of the Aristotelian text as well as its interpretation by the fact that this material had already been magisterially summarized by Pedro da Fonseca in his *Dialectical Institutions*. For this reason, he sent the interested reader there underlining the fact that those who were particularly interested in the practice of argumentation should not neglect books VII and VIII : “quare ad illum praeceptores remittimus, monemusque, ut si auditores Dialécticos uolunt, septimum et octauum introductionum libros in fine primi anni non omittant”. *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis e Societate Jesu In universam dialecticam Aristotelis* (Cologne: 1607; Reprinted. Olms, 1976): 749/750.



that was being worked on by various authors connected to the teaching of Philosophy at The College of Arts and The University of Évora. Having been conceived from the beginning as a collaborative project and not as the work of a single author, the Course would as well have to suffer the consequences of breakdowns in communication and coordination between the array of collaborators gathered together for the task.

Of the initial group, the only one that published philosophical texts was Pedro da Fonseca. The results, in this particular collaboration, of the labors of Marcos Jorge and Cipriano Soares can not be readily determined. It would be necessary to reconstruct the whole history of the manuscripts, analyze them, and narrow down the question of authorship, always a delicate issue. Of Marcos Jorge we know that he taught Philosophy at Coimbra (1556-1559), theology at Évora (1559-1564) and in Lisbon (1564-1571). Charles Lohr indicates in his bibliography of the Renaissance Commentaries of Aristotle that a series of manuscripts exists at the Escorial Library (Madrid) which cover the whole program of the course of Philosophy, and which, were their authenticity to be confirmed, would constitute an important part of Marcos Jorge's contribution to the collective program of the Conimbricenses⁴.

As to Cipriano Suárez (1524-1593), author of a vast work in the field of Rhetoric and the Holy Bible, he composed *De Arte Rhetorica Libri tres ex Aristotele, Cicerone et Quintiliano, praecipue deprompti*, (Conimbricae, apud Ioannem Barrerium, 1562) which constituted the official manual for the discipline of Rhetoric in Jesuit Colleges. When Fonseca established the work schedule which is mentioned in the letter to Jerónimo Nadal, Cipriano Suárez must have already had his manual of rhetoric ready. He taught in the Santo Antão College in Lisbon, and in Coimbra,

⁴ Charles LOHR, "Renaissance Latin Aristotle Commentaries: Authors G-K » in *Renaissance Quarterly* XXX (1977) :697-698.



Évora and Braga as well, directing the colleges in Braga and Évora. We lack sufficient evidence to properly evaluate his possible contribution to the Course. Probably he would not have been directly involved with the editorial activities, but perhaps he was consulted by Pedro da Fonseca over the revision of the text. It should not be forgotten that Fonseca always had something to say, even after having disassociated himself from the obligation of directing the project.

As to Pedro Gomes (1535-1600), we know that he taught philosophy in Coimbra (1555-1559; 1559-1563) and that still in 1569 he was linked to the work of preparation of the Course (letter of the 1st of May, 1569 to Francisco de Borja). In 1579 he leaves for Japan, completely severing ties with the editing of the Course.

From 1570 on, Fonseca devoted himself to the intense work of revising the material assembled in the meantime. Absorbed by the establishment of the critical edition and the interpretation of Aristotle's *Metaphysica*, he was increasingly coming to conviction that an introduction to Metaphysics should come first in the course of Philosophy, which was contrary, as such, to the traditional order of exposition. Supported in his opinion by some of his closest confreres, he finally came to think about writing a compendium of metaphysics to serve as the first part and the base for everything that remained of the philosophical edifice articulated by the Course. In the interim, though he breaks off his affiliation with the *Curso Conimbricense* project, the first two volumes of the *Commentaries on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* are published in Rome (I, 1577; II, 1589). The reasons for Fonseca's lack of success in coordinating the work leading up to the materialization of the 1561 project remain to be suitably clarified. We don't even know for sure exactly when he gave up the writing of the text on metaphysics for the Course.



It seems that around 1580 Everardo Mercuriano, of Rome, concurred with the desire that the Coimbra texts should be printed, eliminating, definitively, Pedro da Fonseca from the task of redactor/coordinator of the *Curso Conimbricense*. In the same year, Cláudio Aquaviva replaced Mercuriano, ordaining that a careful revision of the texts should take place before their final publication. It is in this context that Manuel de Góis ends up being chosen to perform the task of the final editing of the *Curso Conimbricense*, after the idea of nominating Luís de Molina for the same job had been sidelined.⁵ Manuel de Góis had taught philosophy at Coimbra from 1574 to 1582. In just three years, Góis had already prepared the volumes of the Course concerning *Physics*, and the books *On the Heavens*. Manuel de Góis intended that the texts be printed while he was preparing the final editing. However, indications were coming from Rome suggesting that he proceed with greater care in the revision of the texts. From extant correspondence in the historical archive of the Society of Jesus, we know that Manuel de Góis lamented over the plodding pace of the entire process and over the obstacles to its swift realization. In a letter of the 1st of February 1592, the year of the printing of the first volumes of the Course, he says that they have already been put to use in the present school year not only in his College of Arts, but as well in other colleges of other religious orders. He says that, beyond this, he has been informed that the University of Alcalá intends to use the texts. As to the state of the editing of the Course, he affirms:

“I have brought the composition of everything to terms in which it would be possible to print all of the course *continue*, but I would still inform You [V.P,

⁵ Molina clearly expressed his desire in a letter written on the 29th of August 1582. Cf. F. Stegmüller, *Geschichte des Molinismus* I, 548-550.



Jesuit General] that with such a lack of expediency in this process not even ten years would suffice for the final printing of this work.”⁶

This and other documents indicate that Manuel de Góis had involved himself profoundly in the work of editing the *Curso Conimbricense* and had directed the work with relative efficiency. He wanted to oversee all of the course materials and even that the texts be published in his name, and not as a collaborative work. Pedro da Fonseca was one of the people who most influenced the fact that the Course be published as a collaborative work and not as a work of a single author. He supported as well the necessity of a more careful revision of the texts, a revision that could and should reformulate significant parts of the text as Manuel de Góis had already prepared. Perhaps this explains, along with some of the adverse circumstances that Góis alludes to, the fact that the third and fourth volumes were published only in 1597/98.

In addition to whatever personal rivalry that could have existed, a lamentable yet trivial fact, we believe that disagreements of a methodological nature, as well as the diversity of opinions relative to certain central theses, played a decisive role in this process. Perhaps it was not by mere chance that Fonseca’s name goes practically unmentioned in the commentaries of Manuel de Góis, which constitute the first volumes of the *Curso Conimbricense*. On the other hand, the prestige and the influence of Fonseca, at the institutional level, would make clear and direct opposition difficult. We have certain indications that there were those who did not appreciate *Dialectical Institutions* as an introductory text for the students of the College of Arts. This was not, in fact, the common way of presenting Logic outside circles influenced by Petrus Ramus (1517-1572) and by the humanist critique of

⁶ AHSJ, *Lus.*71, 67.



scholastic Logic. The program of studies at the College of Arts aimed for an approach to Logic that would follow close upon the texts of the *Organon*, attempting a compromise between the exigencies of the more recent Aristotelianism and the scholastic lines of Parisian inspiration. However, Fonseca's text was officially recommended for all Jesuit schools.

What is certain is that, as strange as it may seem, those responsible for the publication of the *Curso Conimbricense* only published *The Commentary on the Complete Dialectics of Aristotle* in 1606, two years after a text based on lessons of professors of the College of Arts had been published in Frankfurt, Hamburg, Cologne, and Venice. The edition authorized by the institution was prepared by Sebastião do Couto (Coimbra, 1606).

The appearance of this unauthorized version of the Logic of the *Curso Conimbricense* remains to be explained. It involved a large-scale editorial operation: the simultaneous publication in Germany (Hamburg, Cologne, and Frankfurt), Switzerland (Basel) and in the principal center for philosophical publications in Europe: Venice. Or, at least, the publication by a rich and very important Publishing House (Froebiana) well represented in those cities. A quick inspection of the copies reveals that the text is not the same. Yet, an exhaustive comparison of the two texts in order to uncover divergences in content and/or in form remains to be accomplished.

Leaving to the side this and other details relative to the genesis of the *Curso Conimbricense* as we await further elucidation, we should fix our attention on the texts published by the College of Coimbra. In the first instance, the fact that they are published under the collective title of *Commentaries of the College Conimbricense of the Society of Jesus* should be underlined. In spite of the affinities with texts by other professors of the College of Arts and at the University of Évora, the



publication of the text printed after 1592 occurs, for the most part, according to what we can suppose, under the direction of Manuel de Góis, with the exception of the treatise *De anima separata*, by Baltasar Álvares, and a volume on the Logic of Aristotle published in 1606, which was undertaken by Sebastião de Couto.

The *Curso Conimbricense* texts, such as those of Zabarella and others, clearly betray, whether in the form and structure of the exposition, whether in the calculated choice itself of the texts, the decisive influence of the plan of studies prescribed by the university statutes. In fact, the method of explication of the Aristotelian text utilized by the Conimbricenses, by Nifo, Pomponazi or Zabarella, does not substantially differ from the hermeneutical processes used by Thomas Aquinas, Buridano and others. It's clear that this affinity does not eliminate, in any way whatsoever, the diversity of the theses each of these authors defends. The great innovation introduced by the new method divulged by classically rooted humanism appeared in the annotations, in the *explanatio*. It was here that the consciousness of the importance of the reading of sources, in the original, crystallized. The rigorous philological analysis of words and sentences, the recourse to parallels in other classical authors in order to explain and justify the Latin version presented was intended to, as a fundamental objective, to overcome the inevitable incommensurability between the Latin and the Greek text of the same work. In this context, it is significant that the volumes of the *Curso Conimbricense* only supply the Greek original in foreign editions. It could be due to merely economic questions (costs of printing) and/or a problem of audiences. It is probable that a decision on this point was more editorial than it was authorial. On the other hand, it is also probable that the teaching of Aristotle in the original language was not as common as we have been lead to believe, not only among ourselves, but as well at the principal universities of Europe. The overwhelming



majority of “scholars”, of the Renaissance, studies Aristotle through Latin versions. In this way, the tendency to put bilingual versions to use only took root during the second half of the 16th century, and corresponded to a notable period of expansion in Aristotelianism in the universities following what was, during the first decades of the same century, definitely a period of retrocession. The Latin version fulfilled the task of mediating between the original Greek and the Latin in which the commentary (annotations and questions) was composed, and in which was proffered the lesson. Although Manuel de Góis and Sebastião do Couto did not take as great care as Fonseca took in the establishment of a critical edition and interpretation of the Aristotelian text, there is not doubt that the edition of the *Conimbricenses* represents a high point in the Renaissance editing of texts. It should be noted, however, that the *Curso Conimbricense* only included complete texts of the following works by Aristotle: *Physica*, *De caelo*, *De anima*, and *De generatione et corruptione*. The commentary by Couto on Aristotelian logic presents only a selection of texts. The *Conimbricense* followed the traditional order of the *Organon*. The texts of *Categoriae* and *De interpretatione* appear in complete versions. Of the *Analytica Priora*, only the first 14 chapters and chapter 28 are included. As to the *Analytica Posteriora*, the *Conimbricense* is limited to some chapters from book I, excluding book II completely, unquestionably one of the most representative texts of the *Organon*. To this we must add the initial three chapters of the *Topica*. The *Conimbricense* justifies, in the prologue, the suppression of the texts of the *Topica* and of the *Sophistici Elenchi*, because they thought it was necessary to save the reader from a labyrinthine experience that would not be profitable. The prologue sends the more curious to Fonseca’s introduction to the themes of these two works in *Dialectic Institutions*(*Institutiones Dialecticae*). It’s a shame that the volume of the *Logic* contains these textual lacunas as Couto is revealed as a man of uncommon



capacity for analysis. In its turn, the *Meteorologica*, *Parva naturalia* and *Ethica Nicomachea* are only the object of a summary treatment, which does not include the Aristotelian text. In the case of the central works of the Aristotelian Physics, which constitute the nucleus of the *Curso Conimbricense* (*Physica*, *De coelo*, *De generatione et corruptione*, *De anima*), the same method of exposition is used. The text of each of these works is subdivided into small units which appear in the Latin version (with, in the foreign editions, the original Greek to the side) and accompanied by a commentary (*explanatio*) that paraphrases the Aristotelian text in order to make it more accessible. This paraphrase often included long citations by ancient and medieval authors and commentators. In many cases the commentary was reduced to an explication of the Aristotelian text. In other cases, we still do not completely understand the distribution of topics, and why the *Conimbricense* inserts one or various *quaestiones*. The *quaestio* was no longer structured according to the arrangement of the Aristotelian text, as it was with the *explanatio*, but based on a dynamic order of discovering the most acceptable thesis relative to the proposed question while keeping in mind the most representative positions. In this context, we draw attention simply to the fact that the argument frequently included material of an un-Aristotelian, or even anti-Aristotelian, nature. They incorporate, frequently, current discussions not only from the domain of Philosophy but also from Mathematics and Medicine, for instance. A case in point is the text *On the Soul* (*De Anima*). For this reason, and others, is an anachronism totally unjustified to label these texts as “medieval” as still happens today.

These texts can be approached from a double perspective: a) as interpretation of Aristotelian text; and b) as works which were representative of an effort, more or less successful, to systematize philosophy. In the first case we have to attend especially to the treatment of the Aristotelian text beginning with the translation



used by the Conimbricense. In this sphere it would be necessary to collate the translation of the *Physica* with the version of Francesco Vimercato of Milan (1512-1571), and that of *De generatione et corruptione* with the version of François Vatable (1493-1547).

According to the most widely held opinion, the Conimbricense would have used the translations of others, in particular those of the Greek, J. Argiropulos (1415-1487). We are working in a field in which it will only be possible to produce a reliable study after a critical edition of the texts of the *Curso Conimbricense* is available. The study would be made particularly complex because, among other reasons, the Latin versions from the Renaissance frequently relied upon other versions of the epoch and even the much criticized but still utilized medieval versions. A first step in this direction is already made with the edition and translation of the volume of the commentary on *De Anima* by Mario Santiago de Carvalho (to be published in 2009).

As to the systematic dimension of the Course, this can be approached from many different perspectives. We will limit ourselves to certain observations meant to call attention to the necessity for a closer study of the *Curso Conimbricense*. In terms of areas of discipline we can say that questions of Physics, Logic, and Ethics are covered, with particular attention given to the first. According to the Conimbricense,

“it is triple the order of things which fall to the consideration of philosophy: first is that reason does not produce but only examines and ponders; this type is of the order of physical things. Second, is that reason manifest itself when it systematically dedicates itself to its own notions and affirmations. Third, is that reason prescribe at will so that, highly educated, it procure what is just



and honest. The first demands natural science, the second rational, and the third moral." (*Comm. in lib. Phys.*, prol., p. 4).

Despite the clear affirmation of this tripartition and of the references to metaphysics as a dominant discipline with greater or lesser autonomy, what is certain is that the *Curso Conimbricense* concentrates on almost exclusively the order of things (Physics) and the order of concepts and statements (Logic/Dialectics) relegating the order of will and of liberty (Ethics) to a second plain and reducing Metaphysics to the order of things (Physics). Indeed, it would not have been by chance that the first volumes of the Course were occupied with writings on Physics. On the other hand, the references made by the Conimbricense to questions which he intended to broach the *Metaphysica* of Aristotle in some specific context indicate that Manuel de Góis had already planned to write a text on Metaphysics. If he finally wrote something or not, and why it is that it was not published in these volumes, is a subject that remains unexplained. Current opinion that the *Curso Conimbricense* did not include a volume on Metaphysics because a similar work by Pedro da Fonseca had already been published is not acceptable because it is clearly irreconcilable with the intention manifested by the Conimbricense (cf. Disp. I, introd.; Disp. IV, q. 2, a. 1). If it were not so, the only thing that would have to be done would be to cite Fonseca's already published text, something the Conimbricense does not do. Ethics, it is said in the proem of the Disputes on the Books of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*,

"is commonly, and should be, taught at least in part. So that this be easily made possible, we believe it our duty to compose certain disputes in which we would bring together, briefly and in order, some of the best questions that



were treated in a dispersed fashion by Aristotle in the books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*”.

It continues, justifying the complete absence of the Aristotelian text:

“we omit, however, as in the books of *Meteorologica* and *Parua Naturalia*, an interpretation of the Aristotelian context, not because we would imagine that it should be despised but because we attend, not to what was written by others or that might be by ourselves, but *that which is possible to explain to students of philosophy in the determined space of the years prescribed*” (Ibid., our italics).

In spite of recognizing that Ethics includes not only individual morality but as well a familiar and political component, the Conimbricense does not justify the exclusion of Politics. On the other hand, the parallel invoked with the text of *Meteorologica* is not convincing.

This small treatise is organized around nine *Disputationes* that take up summarily some of the primary notions of Ethics. The first three turn around notions of the good, ends and happiness. Since the object of Ethics is to regulate human actions, the four questions that make up Disp. IV are occupied precisely with the three principles of human acts: will, intellect, and sensitive appetite. Disp. V analyses, in general terms, the question of goodness and evil in human actions. On this level the Conimbricense establishes a dichotomy between objective goodness (evil) and formal goodness (evil). The first consists in conformity (or lack of conformity) with just reason and divine law, and the second resides in the will. It rejects, as such, the possibility of indifferent human acts. There is not, in this text, any indication of an awareness of the dichotomy that resulted in these aporias. Therefore, the Conimbricense continues without further delay to summarily discuss the passions



(Disp. VI) and the virtues in general (Disp. VII), concluding its summary of Ethics with an analysis of prudence (Disp.VIII), of justice, temperance, and courage (Disp.IX). In spite of the Conimbricense affirming the fact that it is from the *Nichomachean Ethics* “which most of what we have assembled in these disputes is taken” (*In lib. eth.*, Lisbon, 1593, proem), there is no doubt that the principle behind the arrangement steers far clear of the Aristotelian matrix. It is a treatise that merits study not only for what it says, apparently without originality, but above all for what it does not say. The dominant interest of the Conimbricense was, undeniably, Physics or Philosophy of nature.

The first published volume of the Course is precisely the commentary on Aristotle’s *Physica*. The *Physica I* text to which the largest volume of interpretive commentary is devoted is Phys. I, 9. It is treated, in fact, as a key text for the determination of *hylomorphism*, as well as representing a point of departure differing from the text of *Met.* VII, 3. The reflection around the concept of matter as the ultimate subject of the whole of the natural process dominant in R. Bacon and Duns Scotus, among others, finds a clearer and more precise formulation in the Conimbricense. In conceiving matter as a positive reality, it says the following:

“If the existence of matter were dependant upon form, it would follow that matter would perish when it lost a previous form and would only be created once it had obtained a new form, something which nobody would admit to. This is so, because a thing perishes when it loses its existence and is produced when it obtains it. If someone objects that matter does not perish in losing its previous existence since in the same instant it recuperates another existence, let them not think that they are escaping the force of the argument. In effect, the new form does not bring with it, numerically, the same matter; that



individual matter will have suffered a process of destruction." (*Comm. in lib. Physic.*, I, c. 9, q. 6, a. 2).

This thesis is defended by neo-Scholastics of the twentieth century such as J. Donat (*Cosmology*, 1929) and K. Frank (*Philosophia naturalis*, 1949). It is precisely this conception of matter that explains some of the questions asked by the Conimbricense in line with authors such as Antonius Andreas.

Another important nucleus of 23 *quaestiones* inserted into the commentary of *Phys.*, II, 7 forms a treatise on causality. This becomes the most important theme of the Philosophy (of nature) for the Conimbricense once the central theses of *hylomorphism* and of the three principles of explaining natural processes are established.

In the rest of the work, in addition to the explanation of the Aristotelian text, a diversity of classical questions are taken up (the definition of movement, infinity, space, vacuum, place, time, continuum, and the last explanation of movement), as well as other random questions on things such as, for example, the movement of the heart, and the instincts of animals.

The commentary on *De coelo*, in which Aristotle studies natural elementary or simple bodies that form the multiplicity of stratum of the Universe, has today a predominantly historical interest, which, for this, is not minor. Therein, questions central to the *Weltanschauung* shared by the Conimbricense are broached. The division of the world into two dominions with entirely different characteristics—the supra-lunar and the sub-lunar—creates problems about the question of the unity of the Universe and validity of *hylomorphism*. Questions such as the number of natural elements and geocentrism are disclosed in this volume. In addition, it gives us interesting information on innumerable questions that run from Astrology and its importance in the prediction of human destinies to the intricate questions



posed by Celestial Mechanics passing on to a series of interrogations on the origin and the nature of light. The Commentary on *De cello* has a small treatise as an appendix in which certain questions relative to each of the elements are raised (*Comm. in De cello*, Lisbon, 1593, pp. 405-420). Together with this commentary a compendium of materials taken up in Aristotle's *Meteorological* is published. Once more, the necessity to reconcile the text with the brevity imposed by the curriculum is invoked. The Conimbricense omits the Aristotelian text, structuring the material in a series of small treatises. Its option is justified in the following fashion:

"We have decided, however (for the purposes of brevity which is manifestly necessary for the students of philosophy to finish the course in the arts within the time limit preestablished) we have decided, as we have said, in this work, as well as in the *Parva naturalia*, to omit the explanation of the Aristotelian context and the debatable questions that we, customarily, present, and to join together under the same title that which Aristotle presents in a dispersed fashion, and to collect that which is more important and belongs to the same subject, presenting it summarily to the readers distributed by chapters so that these things, *which are in themselves agreeable*, be a *still more agreeable and synthetical explanation*. We will also omit some things on the influx of stars, the dependency of the sublunar world of the sky which are customarily treated by some here since we have already explained them with sufficient elaboration in the books On The Heavens."

(*Comm. in lib. Meteor.*, Lisbon, 1593, p. 4).

If the *Meteorologica* complete the *De coelo*, the *Parva naturalia* prolong the *De anima*. So, in the text published in 1593, the Conimbricense limits itself to a brief thematic



synthesis of the *Parva naturalia* in the course of a small treatise which hardly amounts to a hundred pages.

It could be asked why this text was published five years before the commentary on *De Anima*. The order of publication of the volumes of the *Curso Conimbricense* does not follow any organizing principle specific to the plan of studies at the College of Arts. Even if we acknowledge that it could coincide with the order in which Manuel de Góis wrote them, it remains still to explain why it followed this order and not that of the plan of studies, or any other order.

The Course was published in three stages. In 1592/1593 the commentaries on *Physica*, *De caelo*, *Metereologica*, *Parva naturalia e Eth. Nic.* were published. A second stage saw the appearance of the commentaries on *De generatione et corruptione* (1597), and on *De anima* (1598), and a third stage constituted by the late publication of a commentary on *In universam Dialecticam* (1606).

The extensive commentary on *De generatione et corruptione* gravitates around the thirty *quaestiones* inserted into *De gen. et corr.* I, 4. The question which primarily occupies the Aristotelian text is one of the generation and corruption of the homoiomerics and only very indirectly that of living organisms. The *Conimbricense* treats not only the questions connected with essentials of the catholic theology with particular attention (Eucharist, p. ex.) but those inspired by the medical tradition of commentary on Aristotle. This tradition has such importance for the *Conimbricense* that they do not hesitate to reject stipulated theses from the Aristotelian texts because they are not in conformity with the opinions held by the doctors (cf. v. g., *Comm. in De gen. et corr.*, Coimbra, 1957, p. 190; *Comm. in De anima*, Coimbra, 1598, p. 293). Of the principal commentaries, perhaps it would be this one which has received the least attention, perhaps because of the fact that it brings up questions that, in spite of being central, do not



fall easily within the disciplinary organization of modern philosophy. The commentary on *De anima* develops more, as would be expected, the questions linked to the text of *De an.*, III. In addition to the theoretical and historical interest of the questions broached, we would underline the importance of theses related to the problematic of the nature of human knowledge in order to gain an adequate understanding of the position held by the Conimbricense in the debate on the method and the theory of science. The *Tractatus de anima separata* with which this volume terminates was authored by Baltazar Alvares and constitutes a supplement dictated, perhaps, by imperatives of a theological order, even though the motives for the inclusion of this treatise in the *Curso Conimbricense* are not clear. Finally, if the text of the commentary *In universam dialecticam Aristotelis* can not rival that of J. Pacius in philological rigor, it does surpass it in terms of analysis of logical and philosophical problems. The weight, apparently excessive, that *logica vetus* has in this volume (*Isagoge, Categoriae, De interpretatione*) should not lead us to forget that what characterizes this text is that it draws selectively on the past while announcing already the modern period, especially by underlining the pragmatic component of Logic. There are actually those who see in the Logic of the Conimbricense the tendency towards a certain functionalism of a more or less psychologizing character.

John Doyle has published the *Treatise On Signs* (60 pages) that is part of the Conimbricenses's commentary on Logic. This is the first major seventeenth century treatise on signs. As John Doyle points out there is a similarity between some doctrines in this treatise and the more well-known and widely read *Tractatus de Signis* by John of St Thomas (1589-1644) who happens to have studied Philosophy in Coimbra where he received his Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1605.



John Deely points out the importance of this edition of the *Conimbricenses De signis* edited by Doyle:

“In the development of the doctrine of signs the *Conimbricenses* work is doubly significant: First, (...) is a missing link to the work of Poincaré and other later Latins.... Second, this treatise is also a missing link in understanding the postmodern development of semiotics after C. S. Peirce who took from the later Latins in general and from the *Conimbricenses* specifically his celebrated central doctrine of sign consisting in a irreducibly triadic relation.” (...)“This work marks a major contribution both in semiotics and in the general history of philosophy.”⁷

With all of their limitations, they are texts that mark out an area of Portuguese culture toward the end of the 16th century and the beginnings of the 17th, and which had a certain foreign projection, especially in Germany. In addition to the place that the *Curso Conimbricense* occupied in many colleges of the Society of Jesus (not only in Europe, but also in Latin America and in Asia where it was partially translated into Chinese)—it is known that Descartes came upon the *Curso Conimbricense* in La Flèche—it had as well penetrated even vaster circles, especially certain centers of study among the diverse confessions of the Reformation. In this way, the authors of the course participated, as far as they could, in a vast and complex process that was at the origin of a significant part of modern rationalism

⁷ John Deely, “Foreword” in *The Conimbricenses.: some questions on signs*. Translated with introduction and notes by John P. Doyle (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), p. 12.



and the tradition characteristic of German philosophy. On the other hand, it can not be denied that a lack of open-mindedness that characterized a great part of Scholasticism of the time, affected the Conimbricenses as well becoming responsible for a certain conservative rigidity that impeded them from adopting, in a timely fashion, important elements of innovation, above all in the area of the philosophy of knowledge and the philosophy of nature. The unreflecting confidence in the senses crystallized in a certain philosophy of common sense and a lack of thematization of the elements of a philosophy of consciousness already present in the tradition of Christian thinking impeded them from taking a more active role in the modern debate on the origin and the nature of human knowledge.

But it is clear that it was not from this fact that the first negative reaction to the Conimbricenses (and other Scholastics) arose. The principal accusation was that they defended an approach to Physics that had already been eclipsed by modern science, which had taken its first important steps in certain decisive chapters. The excessively conservative attitude of all of these authors contributed as well to the development of a reaction which is at the origin of a certain positivist and anti-metaphysical mentality. These texts however are no less important for these reasons. It is certain that these questions linked to innovation in the scientific field must be taken up with great rigor in order that we avoid falling into falsifying generalizations of historical reality. Among other things, it is necessary not to forget that the much heralded creating of modern Physics by Galileo still developed out of a milieu marked by some fundamental presuppositions of Aristotelian Physics (just remember the continuum hypothesis). To be exact, if one keeps that in mind, a radical change in the paradigm came about only with Quantum Physics. It's clear that there are ruptures with the ancient Physics



conveyed by the Aristotelian text, but we are facing an extremely complex process which unfolded over centuries. The use of the telescope by Galileo permitted him to see how it was that movements on earth and on other stars could be explained by the same principles.

Confronting the problems of gravity began with Galileo and culminated in Newton's *Principia*. But the discovery of oxygen and hydrogen, as well as their process of combustion, occurred only in the 18th century, allowing for the satisfactory resolution of questions posed by fire, air and water. We would have to wait for the 19th and 20th centuries before the details relative to the "element" earth were verified through the study of atomic and molecular structures. If it is correct that the *Conimbricenses* wrote before this process had become defined—the pioneering discoveries that Galileo made with the telescope occurred in 1609/10—it is not less true that their posture could be considered, in general, quite reserved before the innovation shared by an array of theses defended equally by other authors at European university centers. The *Conimbricenses* were not an isolated case. Besides, the formal multifariousness of philosophical tendencies at work in the principal European universities during the last half of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th is better understood today than it was twenty or thirty years ago. But there is still much work to be done.

The study of the volumes of the *Curso Conimbricense*, as well as of the manuscripts of the lessons which are linked to its genesis, are a part of this work of analysis. The more detailed and rigorous it is the more exact and fitting will be the synthesis derived from it.

