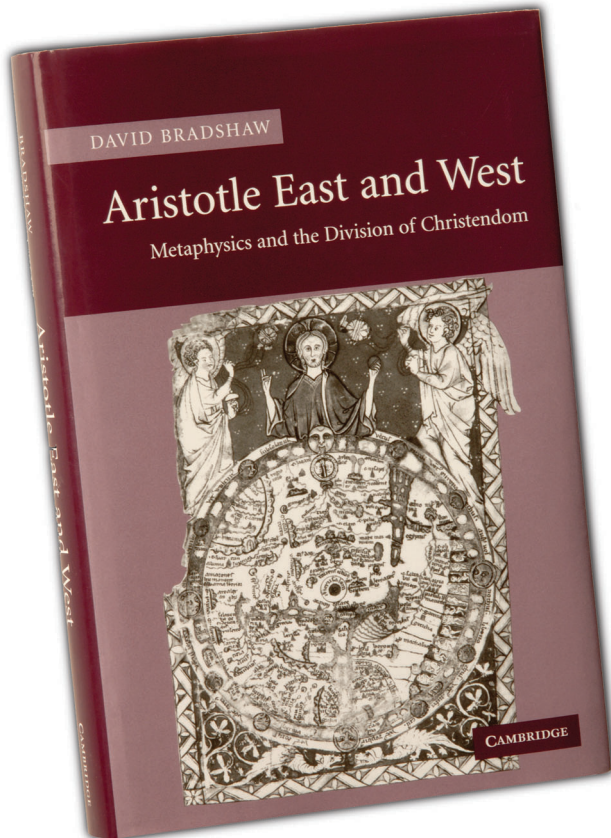


Bringing Some Ancient Philosophy Up to Date

Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom
by David Bradshaw
Cambridge University Press, 2004



Could decisions made by philosophers over a thousand years ago still affect us today? David Bradshaw, a professor of philosophy at UK, thinks that the answer is yes.

Bradshaw's field of research is ancient philosophy and its role in the formation of Christian thought. He believes that roughly between 300 and 500 A.D. a chasm opened between the eastern and western branches of Christendom. The western half, comprising what today is Western Europe, spoke and read Latin. The eastern half, comprising what today is Greece, Turkey, Syria, and Egypt, spoke and read Greek. Because of this language difference, the two sides largely stopped reading one another's theological literature or participating in one another's debates. Each developed along its own path.

Why should that matter today? "We're all the inheritors of western culture," says Bradshaw. "And western culture was shaped, for better or worse,

by western Christianity. That means that if western Christianity developed any imbalances or distortions, then they still affect us today." Much of the way Christianity shaped our culture, says Bradshaw, was due to what he calls "local features" of the western church.

"For example, western theologians like Augustine and Aquinas taught that the goal of human life is an intellectual vision of the divine essence. That stance led to an emphasis on the mind as the essential aspect of the human being, an emphasis you don't find in the East. Instead, for the East the goal was for the whole person to be deified, the body as well as the soul."

Bradshaw's book, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*, is a study of how the division occurred. "People ask me why I start as far back as Aristotle," Bradshaw remarks. "But you can't understand medieval Christian thought without Aristotle. In fact, my thesis is that the differences between the two branches of Christendom go back to the different ways they appropriated the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle—that is, their basic thought about what's real."

The book focuses especially on a term coined by Aristotle, *energeia*. Although it is the source of our term "energy," its meaning in Greek philosophy was fluid. "*Energeia* came to mean energy during the first few centuries A.D.," Bradshaw explains. "This was important because it opened up a new way of thinking about the relationship between God and man. The easterners, both pagan philosophers who were also developing the thought of Plato and Aristotle, as well as Christian philosophers, thought of God as having an energy that can be shared with human beings. They thought of this as a way of knowing God that's different from intellectual knowledge. In the West, because of differences in language, this meaning of the word never developed. So in the West there was a more exclusive emphasis on knowing God through intellectual means."

Bradshaw's early interest in philosophy was overshadowed by his interest in science. An Alabama native, Bradshaw majored in physics at Auburn University, where he had a life-changing encounter. "I met an English professor who was a convert to the Eastern Orthodox Church. I joined both his church and his family," says Bradshaw, who converted and married the professor's daughter, Mary. After graduation, he studied philosophy of science for a year at Notre Dame, taught high school, and worked in private industry for several years before returning to graduate school at age 31.

Aristotle East and West won the 2005 Forkosch Prize from the *Journal of the History of Ideas*.

—Jeff Worley and Liz Hansen