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# A New Fragment of Verse in Iambic Trimeters (Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1096a14)

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*Abstract:* Aristote, *Éthique à Nicomaque* 1096a14, contient une citation (auparavant inaperçue) d'un adespoton poétique.

*Keywords:* Aristote, la critique textuelle, fragments poétiques, la philologie, l'ecdotique

One of the most famous sentences in the writings of Aristotle and in ancient philosophy more generally is found at *Eth. Nic.* 1096a14: δόξειε δ' ἂν ἴσως βέλτιον εἶναι καὶ δεῖν ἐπὶ σωτηρία γε τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τὰ οἰκεῖα ἀναιρεῖν, ἄλλως τε καὶ φιλοσόφους ὄντας· ἀμφοῖν γὰρ ὄντοι φίλοι ὅσιον προτιμᾶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν, "it would perhaps be thought to be better, indeed to be our duty, for the sake of maintaining the truth even to destroy what touches us closely, especially as we are philosophers; for, while both are dear, piety requires us to honour truth above our friends".<sup>1</sup> The words ἀμφοῖν γὰρ ὄντοι φίλοι ὅσιον προτιμᾶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν gave rise to various imitative proverbial sayings, among them the young Isaac Newton's *amicus Plato, amicus Aristoteles, magis amica ueritas* ("Plato is a friend, Aristotle is a friend, but truth is more of a friend").<sup>2</sup>

Although this line has been much read and much quoted, something still remains to be said about it, for an important fact about the line has been overlooked. This is that ὅσιον προτιμᾶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν is clearly not prose but verse, being an almost complete iambic trimeter:

ὅσιον προτιμᾶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν < υ - >  
υ υ - υ - | - || - υ - | - - < υ - >

The line has resolution in the first anceps; there is a correct penthemimeral caesura and Porson's Law is observed. It would be remarkable if these collected facts were mere coincidence. Rather, one is inclined to think that Aristotle is citing some memorable bit of verse which has not been transmitted to us in any other place. Drama seems a likely source, because among verse authors the construction ὅσιον with an infinitive is often used by dramatic poets, especially Euripides.<sup>3</sup> If the suggestion that this line is not prose but verse comes to be accepted by scholars, then

<sup>1</sup> Translated by W.D. Ross, in J. Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 2* (Princeton, 1984) 1732.

<sup>2</sup> On the history of the derivative proverbial sayings, see L. Tarán, "Amicus Plato, sed magis amica ueritas: From Plato and Aristotle to Cervantes", *Antike und Abendland* 30 (1984), 93–124; repr. in id., *Collected Papers (1962–1999)* (Leiden, 2001) 1–46.

<sup>3</sup> See LSJ s.v. 2, citing e.g. Eur. *IT* 1045. Euripides is quoted several other times in *Eth. Nic.*, sometimes without being mentioned by name (e.g. 1169b8).

it seems best to print the words in quotation marks in a future edition of the text:  
ἀμφοῖν γὰρ ὄντοιιν φίλοιιν “ὄσιον προτιμᾶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν”.

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