

# **Gordon A. Wilson notes and papers relating to the works of William Romaine Newbold**

**Ms. Coll. 1395**

**Finding aid prepared by Holly Mengel.**

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Last updated on April 24, 2019.

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2019 April 15

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
<b>Creator</b>	Gordon, Wilson A., 1906-1974
<b>Creator</b>	Newbold, William Romaine, 1865-1926
<b>Title</b>	Gordon A. Wilson notes and papers relating to the works of William Romaine Newbold
<b>Call number</b>	Ms. Coll. 1395
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1929-1973
<b>Extent</b>	1.5 linear feet (2 boxes)
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>William Romaine Newbold (1865-1926) was a professor at the University of Pennsylvania who lectured on philosophy and worked extensively to translate Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i>, which remained unfinished at the time of his death. His work was continued by Hartley Burr Alexander, one of his students; and then by a number of Alexander's students, including Gordon A. Wilson (1906-1974), who appears to have completed the translation, just before his own death in 1974. This collection documents the work of Gordon A. Wilson and others in completing William Romaine Newbold's translation of Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i>. While the basis of almost all the work was the creation of Newbold, it appears that only a few items are in his original hand.</p>

**Cite as:**

Gordon A. Wilson notes and papers relating to the works of William Romaine Newbold, 1929-1973, Ms. Coll. 1395, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

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## **Biography/History**

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William Romaine Newbold (1865-1926) was a professor at the University of Pennsylvania who lectured on philosophy and was best known for his work deciphering a famous coded text, commonly referred to as the Voynich Manuscript, which he believed had been written by Roger Bacon, a thirteenth century English monk, scientist, astrologer, and inventor. In addition to his work with the Voynich Manuscript, Newbold was interested in ancient Greek philosophy and translated many works by Aristotle and Plotinus, but, for unknown reasons, never submitted them for publication. He did however publish a well-received paper on the philosopher Philolaus in 1905. At the time of his death, he had worked extensively with Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, but it remained unfinished.

He gave the manuscripts of the translations to one of his students, Hartley Burr Alexander, hoping that Alexander would publish his work. Dr. Alexander worked on the manuscript with one of his students, Gordon A. Wilson (1906-1974), until his death in 1940.

Following Alexander's death, the manuscripts were passed to Wilson, who continued to work with the manuscripts until his death in 1974. In a letter dated October 20, 1965, Wilson states that, over the years, he worked with Dr. John Goheen, chairman of Stanford's Department of Philosophy; Dr. Hubert Alexander (son of Hartley Burr Alexander), professor at the University of New Mexico's Department of Philosophy; and Frances McCombs Colley. Wilson states that he "guarded these [manuscripts] carefully through the years and ... worked on them from time to time, but the task of transliterating the notes is tedious and requires two people one to read and one to check," (box 2, folder 11). Originally, Newbold's work on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* consisted of sixteen notebooks, written in a particular shorthand, which Newbold invented, but was not hard to decipher. From 1930 to 1931, as part of a seminar led by Dr. Alexander at Claremont, John Goheen, Frances McCombs, and Wilson studied and transcribed the Newbold manuscripts. Wilson and Alexander continued working on the project, typing and editing for publication. Wilson, a teacher of English, the Classics, and ancient history at the Webb School of California, worked on the project in his spare time, and finished the translation (Newbold had completed only Alpha, Gamma, Epsilon, Zeta, Theta, Iota, and Lambda), "using the vocabulary and interpretation with Newbold had ingeniously applied to the task," ("Proposed Graduate Seminar in Aristotelian Studies," 1969, box 2, folder 12).

In 1970, Wilson appears to have considered the work completed and sent the manuscript to Charles H. Kahn, professor of Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania. Kahn stated that the manuscript could not be published, and that "no amount of editing would really succeed" in making it publishable. Newbold's work, however, was sought after by scholars. Following Wilson's death in 1974, the manuscript was returned to Hubert Alexander.

## Scope and Contents

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This collection documents the work of Gordon A. Wilson and others in completing William Romaine Newbold's translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. It is not always clear what was originally created by Newbold versus what was edited and transliterated by the numerous people who continued the work after Newbold's death (although box 1, folder 13 appears to be in Newbold's hand). The collection is arranged in three series: I. William Romaine Newbold works: abstracts, texts, notes, and printed articles; II. William Romaine Newbold lectures; and III. Gordon A. Wilson material.

Series I. William Romaine Newbold works: abstracts, texts, notes, and printed articles focuses largely on Newbold's efforts to translate Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. It is this effort that was continued by Wilson and Alexander following Newbold's death. Newbold divided *Metaphysics* into groupings designated by the Greek alphabet: for example, Alpha covered "knowledge and the Greek love of pure wisdom" and the "philosophy of predecessors investigated;" Alpha minor covered "all accept the doctrine of four causes;" etc. (the designations can be found within box 1, folder 22). There are often numerous copies of notes and a nearly finished product, but it seems that most of this work was done by Wilson, based entirely on Newbold's work. The material is arranged alphabetically by the original creator of the work being translated (when known) and is largely assumed to be Wilson's work on Newbold's work.

Series II. contains two lectures given by Newbold in 1907 and 1914-1915. These were clearly done as part of his position of Adam Seybert Professor of Intellectual and Moral Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania. The first was given during a graduate-level course; the second was given as part of a free lecture course.

Series III. contains information that Gordon A. Wilson created during his work on Newbold's translation. For the most part, this consists of correspondence relating to gathering research, his attempts to complete the translation, his request for grant funding for help with the translation from the National Translation Center, his proposed graduate seminar in Aristotelian studies, and his attempts to have the "finished" version printed. Correspondents include booksellers, librarians, and typists; Hartley Burr Alexander, Hubert Alexander; John Goheen; Frances McCombs; Ethel Rowley, former wife of William Romaine Newbold; Charles Kahn; Patrick T. Quinn; and Gordon H. Clark. There is also one paper by Wilson on his work on *Metaphysics*. Finally this series contains the memorial meeting description for Newbold which was held at Penn following Newbold's death in 1926.

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## Administrative Information

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University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2019 April 15

Finding aid prepared by Holly Mengel.

## **Access Restrictions**

This collection is open for research use.

## **Use Restrictions**

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## **Source of Acquisition**

Gift of Thomas Alexander, 2018

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## **Related Materials**

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### **Related Archival Materials note**

At the University of Pennsylvania, Archives and Records Center: William Romaine Newbold papers, 1894-1926, UPT 50 N533

At the University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts: William Romaine Newbold papers, 1865-1926, Ms. Coll. 1076

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## **Controlled Access Headings**

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### **CORPORATE NAME(S)**

- University of Pennsylvania. Department of Philosophy.

### **FORM/GENRE(S)**

- Correspondence
- Lectures
- Manuscripts (documents)
- Translations (documents)

**PERSONAL NAME(S)**

- Aristotle

**SUBJECT(S)**

- Education
- Philosophy--Study and teaching

## Collection Inventory

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### SERIES I. WILLIAM ROMAINE NEWBOLD WORKS: ABSTRACTS, TEXTS, AND NOTES.

	Box	Folder
Aristotle's <i>De Anima</i> , notes, 1954-1955, undated.	1	1-2
Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> , Alpha, abstract, notes, and text, undated.	1	3-5
Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> , Alpha minor and Beta, notebook, undated.	1	6
Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> , Gamma, abstract, notes and text, circa 1930s-1960s.	1	7-8
Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> , Delta, abstract, notes and text, circa 1945-1948.	1	9-11
Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> , Epsilon, abstract, notes and text, circa 1902-1941.	1	12-13
Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> , Zeta, abstract, notes and text.	1	14-16
Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> , Eta, abstract, notes and text, undated.	1	17
Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> , Theta, abstract, notes and text, circa 1930s-1960s.	1	18
Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> , Iota, abstract, notes and text, 1930s-1960s.	1	19
Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> , Kappa, notebook, 1948-1950.	1	20
Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> , Mu and Nu, notebook, 1950-1952.	1	21
Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> , bibliography and synopsis, circa 1930s-1960s.	1	22
Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> , editorial notes, circa 1930s-1960s.	1	23



Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> , summary as transcribed by St. Hilaire, undated.	1	24
Aristotle's <i>Politics</i> , synopsis, undated.	1	25
Aristotle's Theory of Dianoia, notes, drafts, and final paper (edited by Gordon A. Wilson), undated.	1	26-27
Faudentis' "De Mentium origine" (Valerii Faudentis), summary of the argument, undated.	2	1
"Idea of beauty" and soul, notes, undated.	2	2
"On Memory and Recall," manuscript and typescript article, 1907 March 24.	2	3
"Philolaus," article reprinted in <i>Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie</i> , XIX Band, Heft 2. 1905, 1926.	2	4
"Qualia as Ratios," manuscript and typescript notes, undated.	2	5-6
Schiller's "Mind," (F.C.S. Schiller), notes on Aristotle's ideal of "being" presented by Schiller, undated.	2	7

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**SERIES II. WILLIAM ROMAINE NEWBOLD LECTURES.**

	Box	Folder
Analysis of Experience (lectures to graduates), 1898-1899.	2	8
The Spell of Aristotle, University of Pennsylvania Lectures, delivered by members of the faculty in the Free Public Lecture Course, 1914-1915.	2	9

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**SERIES III. GORDON A. WILSON MATERIAL.**

	Box	Folder
Correspondence to and from Gordon A. Wilson relating to work on Newbold's manuscript, 1929-1949.	2	10
Correspondence to and from Gordon A. Wilson relating to grant application with the National Translation Center, 1965-1966.	2	11
Correspondence to and from Gordon A. Wilson relating to a proposed graduate seminar in Aristotelian studies and completing and printing Newbold's manuscript, 1969-1973.	2	12
Article by Wilson: "The Metaphysics of Aristotle," submitted at the close of seminar under Dr. H.B. Alexander, look at bio.	2	13
University of Pennsylvania, "Newbold Memorial Meeting," held on December 1, 1926, Baltimore: Waverly Press, Inc., 1927.	2	14