

Jonathan Barnes

Method and Metaphysics: Essays in Ancient Philosophy I.

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Jonathan Barnes is among the prime movers in ancient philosophy in the last forty years. His first publications came out in the early 1970s, and have continued through his careers at Oxford, Geneva and now at the Sorbonne. The most recent of the pieces in this collection (the first of four collections in the series) was from 2010 (ch. 20).

Barnes's 28 article collection is notable for its breadth and its depth. Articles cover ancient philosophy in relation to the analytic tradition, and figures from the Presocratics to the Hellenists, to the late Aristotelian and Platonic commentators and Neoplatonists. He probes issues from Parmenides, Plato's *Phaedo*, late interpretations of Plato's theory Forms, to issues in Aristotelian modality and fate according to the Aristotelians. He also examines more recent interpretations of ancient philosophy from Brentano (ch. 6) and Heidegger (ch. 6) to Kenny (ch.4), Osborne (ch. 8) and Irwin (ch.10). Barnes divides his text into four main sections. In the first, ch. 1-8, he covers topics regarding the scope of ancient philosophy, its methodology, and interestingly how it is pursued in francophone universities (ch. 4). (Notable is part 2 of the chapter, written as a dialogue.) Chapters 9-13 are classed as about the methods of the ancient authors, focusing particularly on Aristotle and his commentators. The third group (chapters 14-21) concerns metaphysical issues from the Presocratics through the Aristotelian commentators, and the fourth (ch. 22-26) covers issues from the Stoics and late Platonists on issues in mereology (ch. 23-4), astronomy and causation (see below).

Included in the collection are several papers originally released in versions other than English, for which Barnes has supplied his own translations. In "Anglophone Attitudes" (ch. 4, Part I), Barnes supplies an invited (1977) talk to a French audience on "the fortunes of Aristotle in the anglophone world today", (p. 42) describing how the work of R. G. Collingwood, Ingram Bywater and John Cook Wilson continues with H.H. Joachim and David Ross to John Austin, to whose work he gives particular attention. Austin initiated the *Clarendon Aristotle* series, an apparent continuation of Austin's 'Saturday morning' discussions of the details of Aristotelian texts. Emphasized is the focus on language, especially Aristotle's attention to phrases which "may be neither unambiguous nor completely ambiguous" (p. 47) in texts from the *Categories* to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Barnes draws out important implications which such expressions have in inference (p. 55). Part II is a delightful conversation in dialogue form (again translated from the French) between characters Philalethes and Philonous about Anthony Kenny's work on *Aristotle's Theory of the Will*.

In Ch. 10, "Philosophy and Dialectic" (1991; translated from French), Barnes tackles interpretations like that of Terence Irwin, who sees a rift between Aristotle's 'apodeictic' logic and the 'dialectic', Irwin even going so far as to argue for a strong and weak dialectic. The initial

contrast is that apodeictic is two premise categorical syllogistic, whereas dialectic "collects general formal principles or *topoi* and subsumes general cases under them" (p. 164). The problem is that "relatively few of Aristotle's arguments in his philosophical works are deductive" (p. 165). Yet in models from the *Topics*, dialectic deals with *endoxa*, respectable or common-sense beliefs .. but then even apodeictic syllogisms will be dialectical (p. 167) if involving e.g. axioms (p. 166). Barnes comments that "Aristotle usually speaks as though dialectical and apodeictic syllogisms formed mutually exclusive classes. That is not so" (p. 167). This is because dialectic is "a path to the principles of all disciplines" (*Topics* A 101b2-4). The justification is that in dialectic, one starts from *endoxa* and using syllogisms proves that one's dialectical opponent is wrong (p. 168). Concerning *Topics* A 101a34-b4, Barnes notes that the axioms of a science "cannot be proved within" that science, but they can be corroborated by *endoxa* (appropriate to dialectic to produce syllogisms) (p. 169-70). He then examines Irwin's claim that in later works Aristotle uses a 'strong dialectic', by which one uses fundamental *endoxa* to establish first principles (p. 172) but argues that when Aristotle distinguishes philosophy from dialectic and sophistic in *Metaphysics* G, he doesn't distinguish two dialectics, but rather seems to present a picture of dialectic which is familiar from the *Topics*, and shows how philosophy and dialectic have different capacities because "dialectic probes where philosophy knows" (1004b22-26).

Barnes particularly shows the depth of his capacity for analysis in an essay about Nemesius's passage from *On the Nature of Man*, in an article "The same again: the Stoics and eternal recurrence" (chapter 22; translated from the French original, of 1978). Nemesius was a 4th century Christian philosopher, whose text provides insight into the work of others which otherwise have been lost. Breaking down a passage of only sixteen lines in English translation, Barnes finds five main points on Stoic eternal recurrence and offers compelling interpretations of each:

- A *Conflagration*, the consuming of everything by fire (p. 413): of this he offers the interesting point that "If that matter [which gets arranged into a world] is finite it is reasonable to suppose that the number of ways in which it may be arranged is also finite, and hence that the number of possible events in a world is finite" (p. 418).
- B *Reconstitution* of everything from the fire: Barnes interprets this as a view of causation (facilitated from Chrysippus via Plutarch) that "Every event, without exception, is determined by antecedent causes, and nothing can escape their constraints". Also, this can be documented through the work of Alexander of Aphrodisias (*de Fato*) seen through the counterfactual that if this were not so, it would destroy the unity of the cosmos (p. 419).
- C *Infinity*, that A and B are continuously repeated: this is interpreted *via* the commonplace that given the same causes, the same effects will follow, i.e. if A is sufficient for B then when A, "there cannot fail to be a" B (p. 420).
- D *Periodicity*, that there is a regular time cycle to the eternal recurrence for which Barnes offers an impressive symbolic reconstruction of the cycle of *kosmoi* (p. 421) which he believes the Stoics were capable of (p. 422).

E Identity, the thesis that with each reconstitution of the universe, the constituents are the same (p. 414): Barnes interprets this in light of "if x and y are undifferentiated, they are identical" (p. 425, with references to Cicero) i.e. Leibniz's law, for which he finds corroboration regarding the Stoics in Alexander of Aphrodisias (p. 424-5).

But if this is so, there is a reduction to absurdity of Stoic recurrence because if e.g. Chrysippus dies at a particular time, which is identical with its occurrence in any other cosmic time sequence, it is the same event, not eternal recurrence.

Another penetrating analysis is offered of the astronomical work of Syrianus, a 4th century Neoplatonist and bishop (and apparent successor to Plutarch and mentor to Proclus) who wrote a commentary on the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle. In a chapter (25) originally in German, "Drei Sonnen sah ich ...": Syrianus and Astronomy", Barnes addresses the conflict between perceptible and intelligible approaches to astronomy i.e. treating it as natural as opposed to mathematical science. Syrianus "recognizes a single science of astronomy" (p. 518) of both mathematical and natural sources, which Barnes applauds. A big issue surrounds the reference of the word 'sun', of which Syrianus (and Proclus) insist that there are five. Barnes provocatively responds to this by saying that Syrianus is here speaking 'nonsense': "Platonist texts are full of nonsense, they contain lots of sentences which mean nothing at all" (p. 528). Barnes explains the five versions of the word 'sun' as follows: the first is the solid body 'sun' of our experience; the second, third and fourth are intermediate "formulas" (each a "*logos*", not a "form" or "*eidos*") because "they lie between the 'natural' formulas which are in the natures of the things themselves and the 'intellectual' formulas, which are in the souls of superior beings" (p. 535), and the fifth is the common "forms in the intellect .. 'perfectly partless and intellectual'" (535). Barnes notes that in Syrianus's view, the forms are beyond things "grasped in a discursive and analytical manner" (from the *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 115.21-22), which Barnes interprets to mean that they are "unarticulated concepts" (p. 535). Barnes explains a variety of ways which Syrianus could have presented a less complicated theory, but also shows how that would be difficult for Platonists.

Barnes's book offers great satisfaction for the classical scholar, especially if they haven't been following his work for many years. Its breadth and depth are impressive. The entire volume contains full quotations of the original sources translated in the English text. Barnes preserves the footnotes to the original publication but in a uniform style. He has added his more recent reflections in notes marked by an asterisk: many of these are very interesting and read as great suggestions for thesis topics, in some cases dissertation topics. He has provided a full bibliography (19 pages), an "Index of passages" locating all of the ancient sources (24 pages), and a "General Index" tracing subjects both in the original Greek and English (15 pages). The subjects covered would make it an appropriate secondary source for many essay assignments given to undergraduate or graduate students, both for the author's eloquence and because the articles contain a lot of

intriguing and provocative interpretations, with documented provenance when possible. Barnes's book would be a welcome addition to academic libraries, and the libraries of classical scholars.

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