

Brad Inwood, ed. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Volume 44. Oxford University Press 2013. 328 pp. \$99.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780199677887); \$44.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9780199677894).

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Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy has an established reputation for original high quality work in ancient philosophy, and these two volumes live up to expectations. The majority of the content concerns the works of Plato and Aristotle, but it is particularly noteworthy to see no less than three articles that deal at length with the commentary tradition pertaining to Aristotle. Articles on the commentary tradition have not been present in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* for a number of years, but these showcase well the ways in which serious philosophical engagement with this material can lead to unexpected insights into a range of philosophical questions and developments. The growing prominence of this type of work is something to look out for in the future. I now provide brief critical synopses of the articles in each volume (omitting the discussion pieces).

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In ‘Drama, Dogmatism, and the “Equals” Argument in Plato’s *Phaedo*’, David C. Lee evaluates two well-established interpretations of the *Phaedo*: ‘the traditional’, in which Plato is taken to be presuming the theory of Forms in the dialogue, and ‘the transitional’, in which he is seen to be arguing for the existence of Forms as a solution to various philosophical problems. Lee suggests that scholars have inflated the significance of the Forms, which has led to misguided assumptions about the questions the dialogue seeks to answer. He argues that, rather than developing a metaphysical theory of Forms, Plato’s main interest in the dialogue is exploring what is required for adequate explanations. He demonstrates that once the emphasis is placed on the nature of explanation rather than on the nature of Forms, many of the problems that have vexed both the traditional and transitional interpretations fade away. The case is persuasive and well made with engaging close readings and sensitivity to the dramatic structure of the dialogue.

In ‘Why Spirit is the Natural Ally of Reason: Spirit, Reason, and the Fine in Plato’s *Republic*’, Rachel Singpurwalla offers an account of the spirited part of the soul that explains its characterization as an independent source of motivation while also being the natural ally of reason. She argues that spirit is not motivated by socially conditioned norms about honor, for ‘what it is to be fine and honorable is to engage in rational activity’. Thus, spirit seeks action in accordance with our rational beliefs about the fine and the honorable, and in this way spirit is aligned with reason. The argument accords well with the text of the *Republic*.

In ‘Aristotle and the Normativity of Belief’, Ian C. McCready-Flora seeks to explain how Aristotle distinguishes belief from both imagination and knowledge. The most important distinction is that between belief and imagination, for both can be true or false and both can give rise to behaviors that accord with their content. So what is the difference between belief and imagination? McCready-Flora argues that, for Aristotle, belief is characterized by a normative constraint that imagination lacks: ‘the truth’ imposes a normative constraint on belief in so far as belief is a form of rational cognition. Indeed, being subject to constraint is constitutive of rational cognition in the sense that it

is not ‘up to us’ what to believe: that is, we ought to believe what is true and ‘to believe as we ought, we must pay attention to the truth’. For Aristotle, imagination is not a form of rational cognition and as such it is not subject to the normative constraint of truth. The discussion is dense but the overarching idea that Aristotle identifies subjection to norms as the key characteristic of belief will be of wide interest.

Aristotle identifies three factors in moral development: nature, habit, and reason. In “‘Becoming good starts with nature’”: Aristotle on the Moral Advantages and the Heritability of Good Natural Character’, Mariska Leunissen focuses on the role of nature, especially the role it plays in the confines of the ideal city. She illuminates Aristotle’s reasoning: some natures are better than others, meaning that becoming good is easier for some than others; good natural character is a hereditary trait and controlled selective breeding is a well-established practice with regard to hereditary traits; thus, there is an incentive for lawgivers in the ideal city to encourage the birth of such good natures through a program of eugenics—the benefits are substantial, are not morally arbitrary, and are not beyond our control. Clearly these are contentious claims, but, leaving that to one side, Leunissen helpfully draws attention to the surprisingly strong links between Aristotle’s biology and his political thought.

In ‘A Rediscovered *Categories* Commentary’, Riccardo Chiaradonna, Marwan Rashed, and David Sedley (with Natalie Tchernetska) offer a brief account of the nature of the recent discovery of a commentary on Aristotle’s *Categories* 1a20-b29 in the Archimedes Palimpsest and make a strong case that it is a remnant of Porphyry’s lost commentary *Ad Gedalium*. A Greek text, English translation, and commentary are then provided, which make this find more readily accessible to a philosophical audience than it has been previously.

In ‘The Account of the Voluntariness of Virtue in the Anonymous Peripatetic Commentary on *Nicomachean Ethics* 2-5’, Erik Eliasson highlights a significant development in the Peripatetic tradition regarding the defense of the voluntariness of virtue. The anonymous commentator is concerned with the objection that our actions as adults are not really up to us since they have been determined by the moral education and habituation of our childhood. He makes the novel claim that our character is subject to moral degeneration over time and so we must seek to maintain our virtuous characters as adults, something that is up to us. Eliasson argues that this is the first time we see in the Peripatetic tradition the notions of character degeneration and the need for an ongoing process of self-habituation for the maintenance of virtue. From the evidence we have it appears that neither Alexander of Aphrodisias nor Aspasius raised the issue, although one wonders whether we might detect an Epicurean influence here—for Epicurus is notable for stressing the need for ongoing reaffirmation and self-habituation in order to develop and maintain a virtuous character.

In ‘Plotinus’ Unaffected Matter’, Christopher Isaac Noble seeks to explain why Plotinus maintains that prime matter is unaffected by the sensible properties it underlies. He offers a two-fold account: first, Plotinus has a distinctive view of hylomorphism whereby change affects only form and not matter; second, Plotinus defends Platonic matter (the substratum of the four elements) so that ‘prime matter takes on sensible properties in such a way that they do not become properties of the matter itself’. Noble orientates Plotinus in ongoing Stoic, Peripatetic, and Platonist debates and argues that, in a new development among Platonists, Plotinus holds that prime matter is essentially non-corporeal and formless, unqualifiedly bad, and unaffected by change. The case is well made and depends most of all on a proposed reconstruction of how Plotinus read Plato. In particular, Noble

argues that Plotinus' claim that matter is unaffected by the sensible properties it underlies rests on a sophisticated exegesis of the account of the receptacle in the *Timaeus*, to the effect that Plato himself holds that when matter receives form matter does not change.

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In 'Plato on the Importance of "This" and "That": The Theory of Flux and its Refutation in the *Theaetetus*', Naly Thaler offers a new interpretation of the theory of flux and its refutation. The theory of flux deprives particular objects of determinate properties while at the same maintains a set of general concepts that are stable and determinate (without which we would have no coherent language to talk about things). However, Thaler argues, in the dialogue Socrates shows that determinate general concepts require determinate properties in experience (e.g., the judgement that 'X is white'), which in turn require stable non-empirical concepts such as 'being', 'sameness', 'difference', and so forth. According to the flux theory there are no determinate properties in experience; but that then implies that we can have no explanatory theories—no set of scientific concepts at all—with which to make the world of experience intelligible, including the flux theory itself. This engaging paper clarifies the nature of Socrates' argument in the *Theaetetus* and how the flux theory relates to the 'knowledge is perception' thesis.

In 'The Greatest Difficulty at *Parmenides* 133C-134E and Plato's Relative Terms', Matthew Duncombe offers a reassessment of the objection to the theory of Forms that is presented as 'the greatest difficulty', namely that if the Forms are as Socrates says they are then human beings cannot know them and nor can the gods know anything about human affairs. Duncombe suggests that the current state of scholarly debate is hamstrung since the role played by Plato's notion of relative terms has been neglected. Plato holds that relative terms such as 'master' gain their 'relativeness' not by virtue of their relationship to the Form Master but rather to their correlative (in this case 'slave'), another thing in the sensible realm and not a Form (in this case the Form Slave, for if we are a master we are not thereby master of the Form Slave). As such, it would appear that relatives only relate to things in their own realm and that there is an incommensurable gap between Forms and sensible things, between the divine and the human. With this in hand, 'the greatest difficulty' in the *Parmenides* can be understood as a legitimate *reductio* showing certain assumptions about the nature of relative terms leading to unacceptable consequences concerning the relationship of the divine to the human and vice versa. The argument is very well made and offers a clear advance over previous views in the scholarly literature.

In 'Moral Education and the Spirited Part of the Soul in Plato's *Laws*', Joshua Wilburn argues that the model of the tripartite soul remains in the *Laws* and that, much like in the *Republic*, moral education in the *Laws* is directed primarily towards the spirited part of the soul. He demonstrates that, in addition to music and gymnastics, the educational role of the laws is directed at spirit, so that spirit becomes not only an ally of reason but also an ally of law. The case is well supported by the textual evidence and highlights further degrees of continuity between the *Republic* and the *Laws*.

In 'Found in Translation: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.5, 1113b7-8 and its Reception', Susanne Bobzien focuses on a key piece of text in which Aristotle suggests that something is up to us if we are able both to do and not to do it, and she makes an impressive case for how its original sense has been much distorted by around a thousand years of (mis)translation and commentary. She argues that the text does not indicate that Aristotle held a libertarian view on free-will, as is often

asserted. He is not condoning an undetermined choice between alternatives, but is rather making a logical point: something is up to us if and only if not doing it is up to us too; in other words, a key part of the logical structure of ‘what is up to us’ is that it has two-sidedness. The Greek shows that plainly. So, how did this common view about libertarianism take hold? Bobzien shows that an influential Arabic translation by Ibn Rushd in the tenth century gave the sense of ‘free choice’, and in a fascinating ‘genetic history’ she then traces the path of this reading through the scholarly tradition until the present day. The pervasive (and in this case pernicious) influence of ‘authoritative’ work, and the chance happenings and historical accidents that entrenched the libertarian reading, is quite remarkable.

In ‘Aristotle on Primary Time in *Physics* 6’, Benjamin Morison tackles a notoriously difficult part of the Aristotelian corpus and succeeds in shedding much light on it. His main focus is Aristotle’s startling claim that a change has no beginning but it does in fact have an end. He provides an exhaustive analysis of Aristotle’s reasoning through a close reading of the text and arrives at a clear conclusion: Aristotle’s concept of primary time concerns the most precise specification of time that we can give when we are students of nature and seeking to explain change. In the case of the beginning of change, we cannot pinpoint the time precisely: for an instant of time cannot bear change and so cannot be the primary time; and a stretch of time that can bear change can be divided, and so we will never have pinpointed precisely the primary time; so a change has no beginning in terms of primary time for we cannot pinpoint it on either option. But once we are aware that a change has taken place things are easier: pinpointing precisely the end of a change poses no problems and so primary time applies to the whole change only. This idea of primary time as the most precise specification has important implications for the student of nature: in particular, we do not have to confuse ourselves with talk of something ‘starting to change’ but can instead focus on the change as a whole. This paper is a must-read for anyone wishing to understand Aristotle’s argument in book 6 of the *Physics*.

In ‘Elemental Structure and the Transformation of the Elements in *On Generation and Corruption* 2.4’, Mary Krizan rejects current theories of elemental structure as being inconsistent with Aristotle’s account of elemental transformations and as being unable to explain the substantial unity of the elements. Instead she posits a hylomorphic model of the elements in which each contrary in the pair of contraries performs a different function: one defines the substantial form of the element and the other provides its matter. The four elements are defined by the four contraries that provide the substantial form: fire by hot, air by wet, water by cold, earth by dry. The other contrary provides the matter, and under that there is prime matter. In elemental transformation prime matter survives the change but, more importantly, the functional role that is played by the contraries changes, with the result that the change of one contrary heralds a new element in so far as the shared contrary shifts from the role of matter to form. The solution is elegant and harmonizes well with the key texts.

In ‘Optimality Reasoning in Aristotle’s Natural Teleology’, Devin Henry examines the use of the idea of optimal design in Aristotle’s natural teleology with particular regard to natural substances. He shows that the idea is a central explanatory principle for Aristotle and that he uses it in a different fashion than Plato. Henry emphasizes that Aristotle limits the idea of optimal design to natural substances, in other words to the realm of biology: Aristotle does not posit a divine craftsman and nor does he entertain a cosmic teleology. In making the claims against cosmic teleology Henry challenges some influential arguments put forward by David Sedley but, as the author acknowledges, one feels that further work is needed for the case to be fully persuasive.

In 'Aristotelian Responsibility', John M. Cooper stresses the ways in which Aristotle's theory of responsibility does not contain a moral element, in contrast to dominant contemporary views. Aristotle focuses on causal responsibility and develops a theory that explains how agents are causes or sources of what they do, and how actions are voluntary or involuntary, that does not contain a moral or evaluative element. Accordingly, Aristotle can readily deal with morally problematic cases such as coerced behaviour without having to deny that such actions are in fact voluntary. Indeed, his causal model allows us to bring into focus relevant circumstances and conditions before making normative moral judgements, which, Cooper shows us, can be much more nuanced and intuitive than on other models that conflate the moral and the causal. Cooper makes a compelling case for the benefits of accepting Aristotle's model of responsibility.

In 'Making Sense of Arcesilaus', Casey Perin argues that our current understanding of Arcesilaus' scepticism is inadequate since all scholarly renderings of it involve philosophically untenable implications. The criticism of existing views is robust, but it remains unclear just what a new account of Arcesilaus' scepticism or overall view of philosophy would look like. The available evidence is sketchy and problematic, but one wonders to what extent his sceptical claims are derived from Stoic premises, and so are intended as challenges to the Stoics, rather than being independently substantive views of his own.

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