Marguerite Deslauriers, *Aristotle on Definition in Philosophia Antiqua: A Series of Studies on Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 109. Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2007.

This engaging and interesting study not only argues a clear (if complex) thesis, it also sustains a systematic theme. Deslauriers identifies three “extended discussions of definition, in Book 6 of the *Topics*, Book 2 of the *Posterior Analytics*, and Books 7 and 8 of the *Metaphysics*” (p. 1). The first goal of the book is to establish the claim that consistent philosophical commitments appear across these texts, despite their different contexts and motivations: “In making this argument I set out what amounts to Aristotle’s theory of definition” (p. 2). A second goal is to resolve a number of problems that arise from these different discussions of definition; these problems include Aristotle’s relation to Plato’s procedure of establishing definition by division (pp. 3, 11-42), the distinction between different kinds of definition, particularly those that Deslauriers calls “syllogistic definitions” and those that she calls “immediate definitions” (pp. 5, 43-80), the claim that the distinction between these two kinds of definition is grounded in the relation between definitions and *aitia* (pp. 6, 81-85), and to argue that “Aristotle believes immediate definition to be the primary form of definition precisely because it is immediate (pp. 6, 85-111), and, finally, that immediacy is a function of the relation between the parts of the definition, which is in turn a function of the structure of the object of immediate definition” (pp. 6, 113-177) .

The heart of the matter is the difference between syllogistic and immediate definitions. Deslauriers’s extended argument ultimately concludes that in syllogistic definitions the cause is something different than that of which it is the cause and so the definition traces a line of causality beyond the formal cause to an efficient cause (p. 81); this “tracing a line of causality to something outside the thing itself” produces the syllogistic character of the definition. (pp. 51-65) Immediate definitions are of the form “X is Y” when the cause is the predicate and, indeed, this is precisely the reason why such definitions are immediate (p. 81). The difference between these two types of definition, i.e. “the difference between syllogistic and immediate definitions is the difference between definitions that include only formal *aitia* (these are immediate definitions) and definitions that include efficient *aitia* external to the object as well as formal *aitia* (these are syllogistic definitions)” (p. 82) , takes her in turn to the conclusion that immediate definitions must be primary because they must bear on simple items: “definitions of simple items . . . are among the first principles of demonstrative science, because they have the requisite certainty [to found a demonstration]” (pp. 6, 177).

Simple and complex objects, which are themselves immediately entailed by immediate and syllogistic definitions, provide Deslauriers with the connection between the *Posterior Analytics* and the *Metaphysics* 7.4-5. In regard to this latter text, she examines the relation between definitions and essences in terms of the relation between the parts of the definitions and the parts of the essence. The book ends with a chapter entitled “Stating the Essence in the *Topics*” (followed by an extremely brief conclusion of just over a page); before taking up objections to her argument, Deslauriers concludes her analysis of the problem of definitions in the *Topics* with a strikingly clear summary: definitions must be formulated in terms of genus and differentiae not only in order to make sure that they are statements of essence, but also in order to make sure that they have the structure necessary to function as first principles in demonstrative science (p. 207). Thus her account of definition finally argues that definitions at once yield the essence itself (and so have ontological implications) and at the same time serve as the foundation of demonstrative science.

Underlying Deslauriers’s argument is her wider theme, an overarching view without which her complex argument would not be sustainable; and she drives home this theme throughout her account of Aristotle’s notion of definition. “The structure of division is precisely intended to reflect certain ontological relations” (p. 21). This is to say, the distinction between logic and metaphysics, or ontology, should not be thought of as absolute; rather, the two are deeply linked and in a strong sense this link is at the very heart of Aristotle’s account of definition. The importance of this theme to Deslauriers’ book can hardly be overemphasized. Responding to an article concerning Aristotle’s explanation of the eclipse in the *Posterior Analytics*, Deslauriers remarks: “This way of describing the questions, while clear, might imply that Aristotle is concerned exclusively with subjects and predications in the grammatical sense, and so with linguistic formulae; I do not think that can be right, so I do not adopt this categorization” (p. 49, n. 5). This view, i.e., that Aristotle’s view of definitions cannot be “merely” linguistic but is ultimately ontological, is quite powerfully displayed; nonetheless, it is sometimes problematic in so far as it underlies the reading of texts that support the thesis of consistent philosophical commitments across the *Posterior Analytics*, *Metaphysics*, and *Topics*.

The link between definitions and metaphysics is established in a number of ways. Deslauriers’s argues, for example, that “Aristotle, then, like Plato, understands the purpose of definition through division to be to make clear the nature of kinds (and not to be the conventional or arbitrary designation of classes or kinds) (p. 26). In effect, definitions produced by division should be “natural”, i.e., “reflect the natural division of kinds as they occur” (p. 33). And

in this project Deslauriers finds complete agreement between Plato and Aristotle (whatever their differences in other regards). Another clear sense of the force of this theme appears in Deslauriers's account of Aristotle's notion of nominal definitions. A nominal definition may be generally thought of as indicating "what a word (or some other account in words) signifies" and so nominal definitions differ from those that give some indication of the causes of a thing (p. 44). So do we have in a nominal definition a candidate for a logical entity that does not (or does not necessarily) "say something of what a thing is" (p. 70)? After a careful consideration of the key texts from the *Posterior Analytics*, Deslauriers concludes that nominal definitions "do not *assume* or *state* that the object of definition exists, but that nominal definitions do nonetheless give us some knowledge of the existence of that object" (p. 70). Since she makes the case (*passim*) that both syllogistic definitions, along with their conclusions considered as such, and immediate definitions bear upon the causes and/or essences of things, then it follows that there are no definitions that are merely linguistic. If this point is conceded, then the larger project, reading Aristotle's account of definition in terms of the different causes, formal, material, final and moving, is also granted. And Deslauriers's examination of the *Metaphysics* can be seen as "natural" in the sense in which she defines Aristotle's definitions as natural. In this sense, *Aristotle on Definition* is as much a book about ontology and how we know it through definition as it is about definition. And as such, it is valuable, indeed exciting.

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