
If there is a dark ages in the study of ancient philosophy, it is the period between 100 BCE and 200 CE when Epicureanism, Stoicism, Peripateticism, and other philosophical schools started losing ground to Platonism. Although we possess whole works by philosophers such as Epictetus, Philo, Plutarch, Apuleius, Galen, and Alcinous, most of our knowledge of the period comes from fragments. It is notoriously difficult to extract a clear understanding of the various philosophies and of individual variations within the same schools. Nonetheless, the period is crucially important for understanding the Neoplatonic period, whose authors would have known the works of the philosophers lost to us. Thus, this new two-volume anthology fulfills a commendable purpose in undertaking to describe and unfold these obscure centuries of philosophy to the modern reader.

The anthology is a readable and informative collection of articles by some of the best scholars of ancient philosophy. The two volumes cover a good deal of territory, subdivided by philosophical schools: eight chapters on Stoics and Cynics, four on Epicureans, thirteen on Platonists, Academics, and Pythagoreans, and ten on Peripatetics. There are also lists of major philosophers in each of these categories before each section and a better annotated list in an appendix to volume 2, an excellent 41-page bibliography, and a helpful set of indices. The two volumes open with an introduction by Sorabji, which provides a good overview of the anthology. In any wide-ranging discussion of philosophers and philosophies in a three-hundred year period, some philosophers will fall through the cracks. In his introduction, Sorabji explains that Alexander of Aphrodisias and Sextus Empiricus are left out because other discussions of them are readily available, Ptolemy because he has had little impact on later philosophy, and Galen because the doctor deserves a volume to himself. Although one is sympathetic to the reasons given, it is nonetheless sad that in such an all-inclusive group of essays, four more short chapters could not have been commissioned on these four important figures, especially Galen, whose influence is so crucial to understanding the conflicts among the schools in late antiquity. The chapters would have made this useful anthology more so.

It is impossible to do a complete review of all the individual papers contained in these two volumes. In my review, I will discuss the papers under the four philosophical headings in the anthology, saying more about some chapters than others.
Stoics and Cynics

The section opens with Stephen White’s chapter, which covers at various physical theories of Posidonius (including god, time, the size of the earth and sun, and divination, among others). Posidonius is seen as an independent scholar who is willing to alter Stoicism in order to defend it.

George Boys-Stones provides an interesting and (I think) compelling case for the pedagogical methodology of Cornutus’ Introduction to the Traditions of Greek Theology. Cornutus encourages young learners to observe the mythology not only for the truths it contains but also for its misconceptions, for it is by such errors that we may orient ourselves to faults in our own times and in ourselves. Although Boys-Stones does not raise the issue, one cannot help but wonder if Epicurus’ view of contemporary religious practices is not similar: one participates in it not only for the ataraxia it affords but also because learning from its mistakes makes us better Epicureans.

Miriam Griffin traces Seneca’s methodology in the Epistulae and De Beneficiis, in both of which the addressee progresses closer to proficiens status, leaving behind false (and often Epicurean) notions and coming to grasp Stoicism better. John Sellars follows up Boys-Stones’ and Griffin’s articles on pedagogy by arguing that Stoics divided philosophy into theoretical and practical varieties, with the former preceding the latter pedagogically. He tests this theory by looking at various “practical” texts, including Epictetus’ Encheiridion and Marcus Aurelius’ Meditation.

Richard Sorabji writes two insightful chapters on the later Stoics. In the first, he examines the Stoic view of self, locating it in their notion of prohaeresis, which Sorabji carefully distinguishes from Aristotle’s and from early Stoics’ as an activity of practical deliberation involving future actions. His discussions of the self and its relation to Stoic ideas of the periodic destruction and exact renewal, of memory, and of the inner self all deserve close reading. The second chapter concerns changing ideas about the emotions in the later Stoa, and here Sorabji rightly defends Galen as a source for Posidonius.

Epicureans

Diskin Clay presents a brief but enlightening chapter on Demetrius of Laconia (the teacher of Philodemus), who wrote on many Epicurean topics defending Epicurus from detractors. We read of Demetrius’ research into Euclid and minimae partes, attempts to clarify Epicurus’ doctrine of the gods as anthropomorphic entities, and miscellaneous philological topics. Voula Tsouna’s chapter on Philodemus on emotions opens with an overview of Philodemus’ work (including parrhésia and its role in Epicurean schools) and his version of the therapy of the soul.
She presents a persuasive case for the differences between Stoic and Epicurean doctrines about “bites” or “pangs,” which Stoics consider preliminaries to emotion but Philodemus argues are emotions themselves.

In a fascinating but speculative chapter, Simon Trépanier examines the relationship between Empedocles’ and Lucretius’ poems and concludes that Lucretius makes intentional use of Empedocles’ to highlight the reasoning behind his (allegedly un-Epicurean) use of poetry combined with philosophy. In a complex argument, starting with a claim that Empedocles wrote a single poem himself, Trépanier makes a good case, using the new Empedoclean fragment—which certainly involves both the cosmology of the Peri Physeôs and the reincarnation/apotheosis of the Katharmoi—and the traditional fragments as well. If Empedocles combines poetry, philosophy, and religion in a single poem (Trépanier argues), Lucretius could have used a similar triad in his work. Further, since Lucretius could count on his learned audience to recognize the allusions to Empedocles’ poem, the De Rerum Natura could work on two levels: (1) a poetic one, through which a neophyte Epicurean could learn about the philosophy pleasantly and (2) a philosophical one in which Epicurean adepts would recognize the poetic work as a prolegomenon to Epicureanism. Thus, the argument concludes, the poem does not breach the divide between poetry and philosophy. There is much to admire in this long chapter, not least the useful background information on later Epicureanism. Nonetheless, I find much unconvincing. I cannot agree that Empedocles’ belief that mortals could become gods requires (on his physical principles) that the gods will die when the current cosmological cycle ends. Transmigration is a complex business, and it is possible (as it seemed to Plato in the Phaedo, at least) that a soul could escape permanently from the cycle of rebirth. Empedocles may have held the same view. I remain skeptical that poetry is antithetical to Epicurean philosophy. Diogenes Laertius’ quotation in 10.121 that a wise person would note create a poem may envision a very narrow definition of a poiêma. It is also debatable (as Trépanier sees) that Lucretius confined himself to Epicurus’ Peri Physeôs for the DRN or that Lucretius’ lavish praise of Epicurus was intended to signal to his advanced readers that Lucretius was less than honest in his portrayal of Epicurus’ philosophy. Still, this fine chapter deserves careful reading.

In the final chapter on the Epicureans, Diskin Clay provides a useful survey of the incised wall of Epicureanism that Diogenes of Oenoanda erected in his old age. There are translations and good discussion of some of the most recently discovered fragments. Oddly, Clay’s bibliography leaves out Pamela Gordon’s excellent Epicurus in Lycia: The Second-Century World of Diogenes of Oenoanda (University of Michigan Press, 1997).
Platonists, Academics, and Pythagoreans

The role of the so-called Middle Platonists (along with their intellectual cousins the Neo-Pythagoreans) is crucial in the understanding of Neoplatonic philosophy. The anthology covers most of the major figures of this period: Antiochus, Cicero, Eudorus, Plutarch, Numenius, Apuleius, and Philo. It is surprising, however, that the *Chaldaean Oracles*, which were so influential from Iamblichus onwards, are missing from these pages.

Charles Brittain examines how Middle Platonists (especially Plutarch, Galen, and Numenius) criticized earlier Academic skepticism. He cites the use of two-world Platonism (intelligible and visible) as a likely foundation for their criticisms. Numenius is taken up by two other authors. John Dillon revisits some of the positions that he had taken on Numenius’ philosophy. Angelos Kritikos argues that Origen re-defined the passage in Plato’s *Second Epistle* so that the three rulers therein no longer would refer to the Christian trinity. Origen, Kritikos claims, made use of Numenius’ doctrine that the two lower moments of the Demiurge were unified but split by matter into two. Origen then claimed that the first ruler was God the Father and that the second two were different aspects of Christ and (much as Numenius had done with his lower demiurgic moments) had the higher aspire to the Father and the lower to the material world. This (Kritikos concludes) effectively removes the Holy Spirit from the rulers and from a demiurgic role in the cosmos, giving the Spirit an independent role.

Jonathan Powell offers a useful overview of Cicero’s philosophical writings, Michael Trapp of the Neo-Pythagoreans Eudorus, Moderatus, Nicomachus, and Numenius. Mauro Bonazzi argues for the importance of Aristotle’s philosophy in the eclectic Pythagorean/Platonic mixture of Eudorus.

Harold Tarrant provides three excellent chapters on the Platonists. In the first, he investigates the possible “middle period” of Antiochus’ philosophical journey (the period pre-*Sosus*), and argues that *De Legibus* I provides crucial evidence for this period. Tarrant rightly concludes that Antiochus’ main legacy for the Middle Platonists is his careful use of the texts of Plato. In his second chapter, Tarrant builds on work by Baltzley, Dillon, and Brisson and connects the doctrines of several Platonists (including Antiochus, Plutarch, Alcinous, and Apuleius) on three kinds of virtue: inborn, developed, and perfected by reason. He shows the importance not only of Plato’s doctrines on virtues and “becoming similar to god” but also of the role of Aristotle’s texts in the development of the Middle-Platonic tripartite view of virtue. In his third chapter on Middle Platonism, Tarrant unfolds the doctrines of Gaius and Albinus, Taurus, and Alcinous, highlighting differences in their Platonism.
Peripatetics

The Peripatetic philosophers are probably the least well served by history in our period. The philosophers we know by name exist mainly as references in other people's works and the references are few, usually short, and not always clear. It is therefore, very difficult to obtain a grasp of their arguments. See, for example, the excellent comments of Jonathan Barnes in the beginning of his chapter on Peripatetic epistemology. Indeed Robert Sharples' overview of various problems in the Aristotelianism of this era raises many good cautionary points about the limits of our knowledge of Peripatetics in this period, including what we can conclude or not conclude about Andronicus' edition of Aristotle's works. In spite of the problems involved in saying anything definitive about Peripateticism in this period, the four scholars contributing to this section have done a remarkable job.

Tobias Rheinhardt examines some of the opinions of Andronicus and Boethus on the Categories, as they are preserved by Simplicius. Jonathan Barnes has chapters on logic and epistemology. His discussion of the remains of Aristocles of Messene, preserved by Eusebius, is a paradigm of what can be done with little, although I would rank Aristocles as a better thinker than Barnes has done. After a depressing introduction, in which we learn that of Aristocles' ten books only about 20 pages remain and of those pages the passage on Aristotle "is exclusively dedicated to cataloguing and criticizing the various slanders which had been made against Aristotle's personal life and habits" (548), Barnes proceeds to extract some interesting doctrines, including Aristocles' spirited defense of the possibility of human knowledge through the twin pillars of the senses and reason. Although Barnes does not comment on it, the doctrine that Aristocles adopts is also acceptable to Platonists. His arguments for the two pillars, then, may be seen as evidence of the forging of a closer bond between Peripatetics and Platonists that was carried on in this period and would eventually develop into the tenet of Iamblichean and later Neoplatonism that doctrines of Plato and Aristotle were in harmony.

Richard Sorabji offers three chapters on the Peripatetics. In the first, he discusses time, place, and extracosmic space in the remains of Andronicus and Boethus, in the fragments of the Pythagoreanizing Pseudo-Archytas, and in the Stoic Cleomedes. All of these writers accept, defend, or criticize Aristotelian views, and what they write helps put the history of the study of physics into perspective. Sorabji's delight in the ingenuity of these writers is transparent on the page, especially when they argue against the Aristotelian notion that what has the capacity to do something must fulfill that capacity, as when Cleomedes argues that an empty water jar in the desert has the capacity to receive water but may never do so and yet is still an existing water jar. Sorabji also most helpfully for future scholars of these topics collects the relevant translations of the ancient texts at the end of
the chapter for easy consultation. In his second chapter, Sorabji examines various corrections made to Aristotle’s theories in physics and astronomy, viz., spheres, eccentrics and epicycles, spiral movements, and the wandering of planetary bodies. His third chapter considers about five pages from the commentary on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* by Aspasius (2nd-Century C.E.), in which Aspasius investigates the kinds of emotion and what feeling an emotion entails. Aspasius, as Sorabji tells us, makes no allusions to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and at times seems unaware of some of Aristotle’s statements in the *De Anima*. The philosopher critiques Andronicus and Boethus, and of course is grappling with the Stoics as well, as he tries to define a Peripatetic concept of the emotions. There are two main points of interest here. First, Aspasius while attacking the Stoics seems also to accept some of their doctrines that one would have thought in conflict with Aristotle’s, such as that the soul contracts and expands. Since the soul is immaterial, such physical/corporeal activities seem odd and (as Sorabji interprets them) metaphorical at best. Aspasius, however, also accepts the Platonic concept of an irrational part of the soul, something that Aristotle argues against in the *De Anima*, preferring soul powers or capacities. This is interesting because already in Galen we find evidence for a Platonic argument that the soul really has parts, defined as capacities in a separate bodily organ. This idea that parts require a bodily substrate appears again later in Alexander. It is possible that Aspasius is presenting a transitional moment in Aristotelianism, in which the soul might have “parts” in the sense that the irrational part inhabits a place in the body and from it influences motions in the body, here imagined as soul contractions. If this is correct, then the soul qua soul does not expand or contract, but its “motion” (perhaps in Aristotle’s sense of the change from first to second entelechy) switches on the activity within the bodily part associated with it. Aspasius’ use of Stoic, Platonic, and Aristotelian doctrine would then be intentional, creating a new Peripatetic stance that is (like theories in Neoplatonism) eclectic.

Robert Sharples has three further chapters on the Peripatetics. In the first he examines the meager evidence for writings on both fate and providence in this period. Much of interest in this chapter concerns Alexander (who is beyond the period under consideration), but Sharples presents good evidence for a continuous body of Peripatetic doctrines (themselves caused by reaction to Stoic theories) to which Alexander is responding. In the second chapter Sharples investigates doctrines on the soul by Peripatetics before Alexander, including Andronicus and Boethus, and the doctrine on intellect preserved in Alexander’s *De Intellectu*. Along the way, the reader is kept apprised of modern controversies about what these Peripatetics may or may not have meant. Of special interest here is Sharples’ inclusion of the Pseudo-Galen’s *De Spermate*, which exists only in a Medieval Latin translation but provides intriguing new material for scholars. In the final
chapter, Sharples looks at Peripatetic ethical views. With regard to whether virtue is sufficient for happiness, he finds different positions in our time period. After a brief discussion of Stoic *oikeiōsis*, which also exercised the Peripatetics to some degree, Sharples examines their views on the best kind of life to follow, showing that Peripatetic writers of our period preferred the mixed life (contemplative and practical) but with some slight tilt toward the contemplative side.

The success or failure of any anthology is dependent upon the value of the papers included in it. This anthology was especially ambitious, covering four major schools and some minor ones over a 300-year period. It is to Sharples’ and Sorabji’s credit that they have assembled so many talented scholars to write about so many facets of the philosophies of the period. The result is a successful anthology that helps unfold for scholars and students alike the important writings, doctrines, and debates of this period. It will be of use to both scholars and students of late antiquity, and I can easily see adopting this source of readings for a graduate seminar. This is a work that deserves a special place on the shelves of scholars of ancient philosophy.

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