Book Reviews

Thomas Bénatouïl, Emanuele Maffi, Franco Trabattoni (eds.), *Plato, Aristotle, or Both? Dialogues Between Platonism and Aristotelianism in Antiquity*. Europaea memoria. Reihe I. Studien, Bd. 85. Diatribai 4. Hildesheim/Zürich/New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2011. Pp. ix+278. ISBN 9783487145457. €42.80 (pb).

The present volume is the result of a conference in 2008 focusing on the dialogue between Platonism and Aristotelianism from the early imperial age to the end of antiquity. This conference is the fourth in a series, the first three of which dealt with Platonism from the Hellenistic period to late antiquity in relation to Pythagoreanism and to Stoicism.

The authors and paper titles are: Franco Trabattoni, 'Boeto di Sidone e l'immortalità dell'anima nel *Fedone*'; Carlos Lévy, 'L'aristotélisme, parent pauvre de la pensée philonienne?'; Geert Roskam, 'Aristotle in Middle Platonism. The case of Plutarch of Chaeronea'; Pierre-Marie Morel, 'Cardiocentrisme et antiplatonisme chez Aristote et Alexandre d'Aphrodise'; Marwan Rashad, 'Un corpus de logique anti-platonicienne d'Alexandre d'Aphrodise'; Valérie Cordonier, 'Du moyen-platonisme au néo-platonisme: sources et postériorité des arguments d'Alexandre d'Aphrodise contre la doctrine stoicienne des mélanges'; Riccardo Chairadonna, 'Plotino e la scienza dell'essere'; Daniela Taormina, 'Dalla potenzialità all'attualità. Un'introduzione al problema della memoria in Plotino'; Pieter d'Hoine, 'Forms of *sumbebēkota* in the Neoplatonic Commentaries on Plato and Aristotle'; Gerd van Riel, 'Damascius on Matter'; Frans A.J. De Haas, 'Principles, Conversion, and Circular Proof. The Reception of an Academic Debate in Proclus and Philoponus'.

A comprehensive summary of the contents of the papers by George Karamanolis can be easily found online at the *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2011/2011-11-46.html) so I shall not repeat this information here. Instead, I hope readers will agree that it will be more useful to engage the authors of these mostly very able essays in discussion of the question raised in the title of the volume.

The editors state in the introduction that they wish to 'explore the relations between Platonism and Aristotelianism' from a perspective broader than that of those who have recently written about the 'harmonizing' tendency of Platonists

in late antiquity. What this 'broader perspective' is exactly is somewhat elusive, though it is glossed as focusing on the 'dialogue' between Platonism and Aristotelianism 'from the early imperial age to the end of antiquity, in the different fields of philosophy (epistemology, metaphysics, physics and cosmology, psychology, ethics)'. From the Platonic 'side', it is fairly clear that the dialogue will amount to either (a) responses to Aristotle's criticisms of Plato such as we find in, say, Syrianus or Proclus or (b) the appropriation of Aristotelian distinctions and arguments in behalf of bolstering or clarifying the Platonic system, especially in its defence against Stoicism. This sort of dialogue is found, for example, in Plotinus, Simplicius, and Philoponus. In Roskam's illuminating paper, evidence is supplied for Plutarch of Chaeronea's recourse to both (a) and (b). The generally Middle Platonic provenance of this creative engagement with Aristotle is also evident in Alcinous, briefly mentioned in Chiaradonna's paper. Indeed, the vast and vastly documented Platonic engagement with Aristotle in these ways is the basis for the project of late Platonic commentaries on his works.

From the Aristotelian 'side', it is a bit more difficult to understand what dialogue would have been taken to be. There were Peripatetics, like Boethus of Sidon, who seem to have focused critically on specific Platonic claims, such as the immortality of the soul. Trabattoni's paper on Boethus is helpful in seeing one of the early efforts to come to grips with the arguments in Plato's *Phaedo*, though we do not know enough about Boethus to appreciate fully his understanding of the systematic context of these arguments. Alexander of Aphrodisias is, of course, the Peripatetic about whom we have the most information. His encounter with Platonism is, I believe, not yet well understood. The papers by Morel, Rashed, Cordonier all focus on specific Peripatetic doctrines advanced evidently in opposition to Platonism but also, significantly, in opposition to Stoicism. Most of Alexander's works, the fragments of works, and the lost works, judging by their titles, deal with particular problems current in late 2nd century debates. We do not possess, however, an account of what Alexander took Platonism to be. This makes it difficult for us to see how his criticisms compare with those of Platonists who themselves criticized what they took to be inadequate accounts of Platonic doctrine. This lack of clarity arises, for example, in the various evaluations of the nature of Platonic Forms in the light of an Aristotelianizing account of universals. It also arises in the delicate matter of the analysis of modes of cognition.

Beginning with Plotinus, the dialogue is pretty one sided for there are no prominent Peripatetics we know of on the Aristotelian side after Alexander. This one sided engagement was exceedingly fruitful as indicated above by the voluminous commentary tradition on Aristotle's works within Platonism. The papers by Chiaradonna, Taormina, d'Hoine, van Riel, and De Haas witness to the fact that the Neoplatonic hypothesis of the harmony of Plato and Aristotle meant that

doctrine in the latter could be exploited to articulate and advance the application of the system of the former, at first in the face of Stoic attacks and then later in response to Christians, for example, in the matter of the eternity of the world. The very demise of Peripatetic philosophy is, I think, accountable by the fact that at least after Plotinus there was a clearly developed Platonic system whereas there never was anything like a distinct Peripatetic counterpart. That is, there was no systematic framework other than Platonism within which to situate particular Aristotelian doctrine especially in physics, cosmology, and logic. Consequently, the results of work in these areas could be, more or less, safely internalized by Platonists. Galen and Simplicius provide stellar examples of this strategic use of Aristotle.

The dialogues with which this book is concerned are not like dialogues between a theist and an atheist but rather more like dialogues between a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim. The differences found between Plato and Aristotle are expressed against a shared background of principles. These principles are not difficult to document or to list. Nor is there any doubt that Aristotle shared them with Plato. Negatively, they are a rejection of materialism, mechanism, nominalism, scepticism, and relativism. The positive shared principle is that there must be a unified metaphysical framework connecting the opposites of the negative elements. That is, a framework within which immaterial being is recognized, causality is conceived as being broader than the mechanistic principle of causal closure would have it, universality is a feature of the world not merely of language or thought, knowledge is acknowledged to be possible and superior to other modes of cognition, and goodness is a property of being. What all the various positive constructs within the Platonic tradition share is a claim that this framework is irreducibly hierarchical and reductivist. So, the fundamental hypothesis is that there is a unique, absolutely simple first principle of all. All philosophical and scientific problems—at least insofar as their solution aims at explanation—must have their ultimate termination in this first principle, with subordinate principles playing some sort of instrumental explanatory role. What for Plato and all Platonists is the Good or One, is evidently for Aristotle the Unmoved Mover, although Simplicius' tantalizing reference to Aristotle's *On Prayer* does give one pause.

Owing to the hierarchical nature of the metaphysical framework, the further one is removed from the first principle of all, the more it is the case that the first principle is explanatorily underdetermining. Even if we accept the three hypostases of One, Intellect, and Soul, as well as principles regarding their logical relations, alternative answers to countless questions are possible or not inconsistent with those principles. Especially when concerned with issues in physics, broadly conceived, it is not clear that the positive principles alone will yield a correct answer or explanation. Thus, for example, though Aristotelians share with

Platonists the recognition of intellect as the locus of the highest form of cognition, the separability of intellect from the embodied living being, and the identity of the person with it, issues surrounding the subject of embodied psychical states and the relation of this subject to the intellect are intensely disputed. The articles by Trabattoni and Morel both reveal what can only be called the puzzlement of Peripatetics regarding the correct account of such matters. And it must be added in this regard that the puzzlement is shared by Aristotle and, significantly, by the great Platonic exegete and systematizer, Plotinus. But this puzzlement and the alternative accounts on offer should not be taken as indicative of deep divisions or as evidence for the supposed dichotomy 'Plato or Aristotle' as opposed to the correct alternative, namely, 'both'. To take a different sort of example, what for Platonists was an unresolved issue regarding the range of separate Forms was for Peripatetics an issue about the correct and irreducible division of the categories of sensible reality. D'Hoine's essay ably brings out the difficulties Platonists had, especially in late antiquity, in a non-arbitrary articulation of the intelligible world. But this is just the Peripatetic difficulty, expressed differently, in giving a metaphysical account of the differences between essential predicates on the one hand, and accidental predicates on the other. What unites the differing accounts is the principles that sameness and differences in nature are not arbitrary and that nature could not be unqualifiedly self-sufficient in its explanatory role.

The role of matter in a Platonic system is a particularly fruitful area for witnessing both Platonic-Aristotelian tensions as well as the shared principle of a unified metaphysical framework. When Platonists discussed the nature of matter, their starting point was as much Aristotelian as Platonic, recognizing that Aristotle was correct in identifying the receptacle in Plato's *Timaeus* with a material principle. But matter cannot be ultimately explained by a first principle of all unless that principle is properly conceived. Platonists struggled to situate utterly unintelligible, formless matter within a universal metaphysical framework. Yet even if that framework can explain what causes matter to exist, it has a hard time also explaining what the Aristotelian hylomorphic account of nature is supposed to explain, namely, how sensible reality has an absolutely unintelligible component. As Van Riel shows, Damascius' effort to bring to bear Peripatetic insights into a fully articulated Platonic account of the universe generated immense complexity, not the least part of which was the recognition that the intelligible world must itself contain a principle of unintelligibility if the unity of the system is to be retained.

Reflection on the dialogues between Platonists and Aristotelians can be enriched by considering any of Proclus' intensely partisan commentaries on Plato's works. Luckily for us, Proclus is often exhaustively and exhaustingly scrupulous about his doxography, setting forth the differing Platonic positions on the

problems bequeathed by Plato. He does not, I think, treat Aristotle as an outsider, but more like a formidable, dissident Platonist. This is certainly how Proclus' successors treated him, especially Ammonius and his school. The aim was never to reveal Aristotle as a heretic, but rather to incorporate his insights into the grand Platonic construct. This was never taken to be a quixotic or perverse aim, since Aristotle most definitely shared the fundamental principles of the Platonic system, even if his version of their expression was deficient.

This volume deserves a place in the growing collection of works effectively contributing to the project of expanding the canon of ancient Greek philosophy into late antiquity. It does this by eschewing in the history of ancient Greek philosophy the error that Aristotle attributes to a bad tragedy, namely, being a series of episodes strung together. What links late antiquity with its ancient past is the project of constructing Platonism, a project which scholars are increasingly aware was not alien to Aristotle's conception of philosophy.

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