

RESEÑAS DE LIBROS/*BOOK REVIEWS*

BÖRJE BYDÉN and CHRISTINA THOMSEN THÖRNQVIST (eds.), *The Aristotelian Tradition: Aristotle's Works on Logic and Metaphysics and Their Reception in the Middle Ages*, Papers in Medieval Studies 28, Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2017, 395 pp., ISBN: 9780888448286

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This book brings together twelve articles on the topic of the interpretation and reception of Aristotle's works on logic and metaphysics in the Middle Ages. After outlining a brief history of Aristotelian transmission and commentary from Aristotle's successor, Theophrastus, up through to the 19th century, the introduction makes precise the scope of the volume. The primary focus is from the early 12th century up through the first half of the 15th century, in the Latin, Arabic, and Greek traditions. In the Latin tradition, emphasis is placed on the pre-Thomistic/Albertine reception of Aristotle, with chapters by Julie Brumberg-Chaumont, Sten Ebbesen, Heine Hansen, Simo Knuuttila, Ana María Mora-Márquez, and Christina Thomsen Thörnqvist, demonstrating the rich textual and conceptual developments that went on in that period, though Aquinas and his successors are not neglected, being discussed in chapters by Fabrizio Amerini and Jakob Leth Fink. Unsurprisingly, the forerunner in the discussion of the Arabic tradition, in Amerini's chapter, is Averroes (ibn Rušd); somewhat surprisingly, there is no chapter devoted to Avicenna. The Greek tradition is discussed through the lens of the works of George Gemistos (Plethon), the focus of chapters by Börje Bydén, and Bydén, Ebbesen, Fink, Hansen, Katerina Ierodiakonou, Mora-Márquez, and Miira Tuominen. Finally, there are two chapters, by David Bloch and Michail Peramatzis, which focus directly on Aristotle interpretation, rather than reception and which do not fit neatly into any of the three main traditions.

Rather than discussing the chapters as they are ordered in the book, I'll bring them all together under each of these three distinct traditions, after first covering Bloch's and Peramatzis's, which fit into none of the traditions.

Modern Aristotelian exegesis

Two chapters are concerned predominantly with the interpretation of Aristotle, rather than its transmission or reception. In his chapter, «Aristotle on the Exactness or Certainty of Knowledge in *Posterior Analytics* I.27» (pp. 151-161), Bloch attempts to elucidate one of the «most enigmatic passages in the *Corpus Aristotelicum*» (p. 151) which attempts to relate analyses of facts and causes to the relative exactness of sciences, 87a31-33. Appealing to the medieval tradition in which James of Venice translated ακριβέστερα as *certior*, Bloch argues that centuries of modern commentators have missed the mark, and that Aristotle is not talking about the exactness of the sciences but of their certainty.

Peramatzis also takes up a topic of Aristotle interpretation in his chapter, «Aristotle's 'Logical' Level of Metaphysical Investigation» (pp. 81-130), focusing on the translation of

λογικως in *Metaphysics Z*. The narrow goal of this rather long chapter is «to specify the salient features of a particular type of case, the metaphysical ‘logical’ inquiry carried out in *Metaphysics Z*», starting with Z4, without «characterizing the sense of λογικως quite generally or even offering its meaning within the limited context of this book» (p. 85). One consequence of this specification is the important recognition that «what is λογικως in the *Metaphysics*, then, may differ significantly from what is λογικως in the *Analytics*» (p. 96).

The Latin tradition

Opening the book is Hanson’s chapter «Accounting for Aristotle’s Categories: Some Notes on the Medieval *Sufficiantiae Praedicamentorum* before Albert the Great» (pp. 16-48). Hanson tackles a perennial question in Aristotle interpretation: Why *these* ten categories? Post-medieval scholars such as Kant and Mill denigrated Aristotle’s choice of categories as being unmotivated or incomplete (pp. 16-17). However, many medieval Aristotelian commentators, especially those before Albert the Great, attempted to show «that the list is neither redundant nor defective, but exactly as it should be» (p. 17) via the method of the «sufficiency of the predicaments».

One of the most influential Aristotelian texts, after its re-dissemination in the 12th century, was the *Sophistical Refutations*. Ebbesen in his chapter «Demonstrative Disputation – A contradiction in adiecto? Medieval and Recent Commentators on Aristotle’s *Sophistical Refutations*, Chapter 2» (pp. 162-187) attends to a close reading of this text, and categorises different ways in which medieval and modern commentators attempted to understand the notion of a «demonstrative disputation» – a seemingly contradictory combination which Aristotle himself explicitly excludes in the *Prior Analytics* (p. 165). The responses to the worry that a demonstrative deduction is not a disputation included not only solutions but also further problems, such as «a worry whether there is any way at all that the four types [of disputation] can be made into species of the same genus» (p. 181).

One common topic for commentary, whether ancient, medieval, or modern, is Aristotle’s modal syllogistic as presented in the *Prior Analytics*, its seeming inconsistency and unsystematicity making it ripe for revision. This is the subject of Knuuttila’s chapter, «Early Medieval Discussions of Modal Syllogistic» (pp. 214-227), where he takes us on a tour of reactions to the topic from Alexander of Aphrodisias and John Philoponus all the way up to Campsall, Ockham, and Buridan, with a brief (one paragraph only) digression on Avicenna and Averroes along the way. From the point of view of textual transmission, it is interesting to note that Knuuttila thinks that if Kilwardby did not have access to the *Anonymus Aurelianiensis III* (the oldest known Latin commentary on the *Prior Analytics*), then both he and the anonymous author had access to another text, perhaps «a Latin translation of a lost sixth-century Greek commentary or a later Byzantine compilation of scholia» (p. 223).

Both the late antique commentary tradition and the syllogistic are taken up in Thörnqvist’s chapter, «Bridging the Beginner’s Gap: Apuleius, Boethius, and Porphyry on the Categorical Syllogism» (pp. 228-248). Thörnqvist questions the traditional story, in

which Boethius drew upon Apuleius's *Peri hermeneias* when writing his *De syllogismo categorico*, and «propose a different explanation and discuss its implications for previous theories on the possible sources and overall aim of Apuleius's work» (p. 228). While Boethius's and Apuleius's works share many similarities, it is more likely that they were ultimately drawing from a common source than that Boethius was directly working with Apuleius (p. 245). Furthermore, she identifies Boethius's model as «Porphyry's lost introduction to the categorical syllogism» (p. 247), and the similarities between Porphyry and Apuleius are due to the two of them sharing a source (p. 246).

The final chapter devoted to the syllogism is Brumberg-Chaumont's, «Form and Matter of the Syllogism in *Anonymus Cantabrigiensis*» (pp. 188-213). The *Anonymus Cantabrigiensis* text, written at the turn of the thirteenth century, is closely associated with two slightly earlier texts, the *Anonymi Aurelianenses I* and *II*. Brumberg-Chaumont argues that taken together, these three texts and their discussions of the form-matter distinction with respect to syllogisms represent «a decisive turning point in the tradition of commentaries on the *Sophistical Refutations*» (p. 189), as it is in these texts, and most especially in *AnCant*, the most well-developed and coherent of the three, that «the form-matter distinction becomes for the first time actually instrumental in the analysis and classification of the thirteen fallacies in the *Sophistical Refutations*» (p. 189).

Aristotle's importance in the Latin philosophical tradition can be found not only in the texts that comment directly upon the corpus, but also by the ways in which Aristotelian views were incorporated into distinctly medieval developments. Such can be found in Mora-Márquez's chapter «Aristotle's *On Interpretation* I, 16a3-9: A New Perspective on the Origin of the Debate on Signification at the End of the Thirteenth Century» (pp. 249-266), an earlier version of her 2015 book *The Thirteenth-Century Notion of Signification: The Discussions and Their Origin and Development*.

Though the primary focus of this anthology is the Middle Ages, Fink in his chapter «Coming to terms with Wisdom: Suárez on Aristotelian Wisdom» (pp. 131-150) brings us up to after the Renaissance and into the early modern era. Here his goal is not to engage «primarily with the philosophy of Suárez» (p. 131) but instead to offer a Suárezian reply to a worry that modern interpreters have concerning how the term 'wisdom' or σοφία is used in *Metaphysics* A1-2. We can solve the apparent discrepancy in how 'wisdom' is used in these two chapters by applying a «psychological, developmental account of the coming about of wisdom» (p. 134).

The Arabic tradition

Our one peek into the reception of Aristotle in the Arabic tradition comes in Amerini's chapter, «Averroes and Aquinas on the Primary Substantiality of Form» (pp. 49-80). The central question of this chapter is whether Aristotle «change[s] his mind on what primary substance is when he moves from the *Categories* to the *Metaphysics*» (p. 49), in light of the seeming incompatibility of the two accounts. Amerini argues that rather than trying to decide for one or the other account, medieval commentators were «generally more inclined to reconcile possibly conflicting claims found in [Aristotle's] writings than to

decide for one or the other» (p. 51), and, for Amerini, Averroes and Aquinas both represent two distinct approaches to this reconciliation. Nevertheless, Amerini is careful to stress that «the question here is not what the *Arabic* Averroes really said or thought, but what the *Latin* Averroes says» (p. 52), which places further limits on the extent to which the reception of Aristotle in the Arabic tradition is treated.

The Greek tradition

Two chapters make up the collection's contribution to our understanding of the reception in the later medieval Greek tradition. The first is Bydén's new partial edition of the Greek text of George Gemistos (Plethon)'s «*On Aristotle's Departure from Plato 0-19*» (pp. 270-282), along with a literal English translation (pp. 283-296). The *Departure* was written in 1439 (p. 267), and in it, Plethon diagnoses Averroes as the reason why Aristotle is held in higher esteem than Plato. Ultimately, Plethon comes down firmly on the side of #TeamPlato, showing that «Aristotle is ignorant» (p. 296). The companion piece is a commentary by Bydén, Ebbesen, Fink, Hansen, Ierodiakonou, Mora-Márquez, and Tuominen (pp. 297-344), intended to «elucidate and evaluate Plethon's arguments in each of sections 0-19» (p. 297). The notes were indeed immensely helpful, but one thing I was missing was a discussion of the wider context in which Plethon was writing and working; in the end, the picture of the Greek tradition isn't even a snapshot; it's a *camera obscura* through a window slit.

This was a wonderfully interesting book, both philosophically and historically, and philosophers and historians alike will find reading it a valuable enterprise. It is made more accessible to those who are not necessarily trained in medieval philosophy with primary sources in Latin and Greek quoted both in the original language and in English translation; unfortunately, primary sources in other languages (e.g., French, German) are not translated. This makes up one of the three complaints that I have about the book. The next, and most significant, complaint is that the tradition is not treated evenhandedly; as is clear from the foregoing, substantial emphasis was placed on the Latin tradition, to the detriment of both the Greek and Arabic traditions. As a result, the volume fails to be a comprehensive addition to the study of Aristotelian reception, and leaves a large gap to be filled. The final complaint is that there is not separate bibliography, only in-footnote references in each chapter, and the *index nominorum* does not index those footnotes. Notwithstanding these issues, the book provides a rich plethora of material, greatly supplementing our understanding of Aristotle in late antiquity and the Middle Ages.