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Georgios Anagnostopoulos, ed.
A Companion to Aristotle.
Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell 2009.
672 pages
US$219.95 (cloth ISBN 978-1-4051-2223-8)

The philosophical study of Aristotle entered an incredibly fertile phase several decades ago and still shows few signs of abating. What is perhaps most impressive about this latest—now the fifth? sixth?—Aristotle renaissance is how it has grown to encompass all the fields of study that were in Aristotle's sights as well, all those known to us anyway (Aristotle was a man of astonishing intellectual appetites, and the titles of his lost works indicate that we don't know half of what he did). Yet for all this frenzied activity, scholarly overviews and attempts at panoptic synthesis are surprisingly hard to come by, particularly in the English language. Even monographs are by no means plentiful, and as for edited collections, the twenty-year old Cambridge Companion has remained unsurpassed. Until now: though a different beast in many ways, *A Companion to Aristotle* is a formidable challenger to the crown.

First things first: this is a uniformly excellent collection of essays, and also quite the heaviest concentration of Aristotelian erudition that I have come across. (Coming from someone who reads people like Simplicius and Averroes for a living, that is saying something.) Each 20-page entry feels much weightier than it ought to, somehow; there is a distillation of learning on these pages, and an intense quality to the writing, that takes on an almost sensory quality. At the risk of sounding frivolous, the closest equivalent I can think of is something on the lines of 85% dark chocolate: a little at a time may be enough, but then that feels entirely right and does not take anything away from the pleasure; rather, it adds to it.

Most of the delights that the book has in store come from the dedication with which the individual contributors have approached their assignments. Every corner of *A Companion* practically brims with an ambition to present in undiluted form the sophistication and state of the art not only in present-day Aristotelian studies, but (more importantly) in Aristotle himself. It is exhilarating to witness David Keyt, for instance, lay into Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* with a ferocity that makes his allotted 20 pages a dense, exhausting, but ultimately satisfying read.

Which is not to say that such extreme condensation doesn't bring with it its own share of problems. Largely these have to do with the sheer volume of ongoing conversations around practically every aspect of Aristotle's thought. With so many questions once thought resolved emphatically back in play—yes, Aristotle was a Platonist, according to some—it is sometimes hard to know exactly what to say or what to focus on, especially in the context of a concise introduction where endless philological

distinctions and philosophical swashbuckling can prove counterproductive. Jonathan Barnes in his miniature introductory monographs has resolved the problem altogether admirably by simply saying what he thinks is right; the many contributors to *A Companion* have had to plot different courses through the thicket. Nearly all provide the reader with at least a map of the major interpretive controversies surrounding the issues they cover: some do this explicitly through evoking the names of the scholars who hold particularly prominent positions in these controversies, while others present the discussions in more veiled and cursory terms. Even if they can see the necessity of making hard choices, specialists are likely to find fault either with one or more of these overall strategies or else with their implementation—I know I identified some shortcuts which I thought were unacceptable, while growing impatient with the amount of attention given to other matters.

A more fundamental issue has to do with coverage of topics. Anagnostopoulos claims that selections other than his own 'would not be radically different from this. The overwhelming majority of the topics discussed...would be on every list that was aiming to achieve the objectives of this volume' (xvi), with the objectives in question being that one should cover those topics that are given serious consideration by Aristotle and those that reveal something about his philosophical approaches and preoccupations—really, what one would expect from a one-stop solution to one's Aristotle problems. This characterization of course is irresistible bait to any would-be Aristotelian. And though playing the 'what-if' game is generally less than helpful, I believe in this instance that offering some observations on the structure of the volume can serve to highlight some of its distinctive strengths as well as its weaknesses.

A first observation is that the overall framework of *A Companion,* with its sequencing logic-metaphysics-physics-psychology-biology-ethics-politics-rhetoric-poetics, departs from Andronicus' and Bekker's ordering of the extant treatises in one crucial aspect. In Anagnostopoulos' grouping, issues collected under the rubric of metaphysics follow directly on the heels of Aristotle's logic and 'tools of inquiry', that is to say, his theory of argumentation and scientific methodology. The treatment of nature and the special sciences follows only after these metaphysical issues have been settled (causation, immaterial principles of cosmology, ontology). This is a plain reversal of Andronicus' scheme and the traditional order of study for seventeen centuries at least. It also looks more like an early modern way of framing matters; frankly, I surmise that either unwittingly anachronistic or else deliberately modern intuitions guide this reorganization of the Aristotelian materials. In the Aristotelian tradition I know of only one branch in which the sequence logic-metaphysics-physics became the norm, and that is later Islamic philosophy in the wake of Avicenna's *Dânishnâmah* (including for Latin Europe al-Ghazâlî's *Intentions of the Philosophers*). The historical parallels are enlightening inasmuch as they tell us something about the ambitions of Anagnostopoulos & co.

The sequencing logic-metaphysics-physics makes sense if one believes that the general principles of being and reality can indeed be grasped firmly, so that one can present on their basis a smooth progression from general principles to specific applications. This was the conviction of some Aristotelians historically and it remains a vivid dream for some today, either in terms of an Aristotelian system to be reconstructed systematically or (somewhat more modestly) in terms of an explanatory framework to be applied across domains when analyzing the Philosopher's works. Yet this organizational framework does not really represent the way Aristotle's own extant treatises are arranged, or the way his thought seems to have flowed. Even if first principles do ground things as they really are and are also inherently more knowable, we still become acquainted with them first through their particular application. This allows us to understand the way that the concepts of form, matter, and the principles of causal explanation are all encountered in the first two books of the *Physics*, even though their broader applicability comes up for re-examination in the *Metaphysics*. (Myles Burnyeat's *A Map of Metaphysics Zeta* illustrates this beautifully.)

If nothing else, this helps to explain for the uninitiated why Frank Lewis and Sarah Broadie's respective chapters on form and matter and on the heavenly movers, though situated in the metaphysics section of the book, heavily lean on *Phys.* 1.7-9 and *Phys.* 8 for their sources. One may add that Jim Hankinson's chapter on the four causes and on the explanatory function of *aition,* though taking its start from Aristotle's introductory account in *Met.* A, likewise mines *Phys.* 2 for deeper insights regarding Aristotle's understanding of causal explanations. It also relies heavily on the biological treatises, *Parts of Animals* in particular. As well it should! These are the contexts in which Aristotle's understanding of causality is most prominently on display, and also where many recent scholars have found fresh incentive to try to connect Aristotle's natural investigations with his ontology and philosophy of science. But it makes all the more regrettable the way that the *Companion's* structure breaks up the flow of these exciting new avenues of exploration (one could argue that chapters 5, 7, 10, 13, and 21-23 are all of a piece).

Then again, recognizing the peculiar way in which Anagnastopoulos groups certain Aristotelian treatises on nature under the rubric of metaphysics helps to alleviate a separate and distinct concern about balance and fair representation. Ostensibly, *A Companion* has eight chapters on Aristotle's ethics and five on the *Politics;* Aristotle's philosophy of nature, meanwhile, gets a grand total of three. If this tally were right, the book would grossly distort our picture of Aristotle's concerns, even allowing for some added emphasis on Aristotle's practical philosophy thanks to its continuing to inspire contemporary philosophers. But if Hankinson, Lewis and Broadie's chapters are recognized as borderline cases, and if both the biology and psychology chapters are understood as falling under the umbrella term 'natural philosophy' (as indeed traditionally they were), then the problem largely disappears on the factual level and becomes more a matter of labeling. Still, as I have tried to show, labels can be important too, not least in

guiding the reader's impressions and intuitions.

On the level of individual topics one can always regret some omissions if not quite commissions: the latter would be churlish (though the inclusion of a chapter on valor in lieu of one on modal logic rubs this reviewer the wrong way something fierce). Aristotle's *Meteorology* barely gets a mention, despite its finally beginning to receive its due in recent literature as a major Aristotelian treatise. Here is a more serious complaint: Aristotle's exploration of the continuum hypothesis does not receive so much as a mention, neither in its most famous incarnation in *Phys.* 6, nor in the way that the corpuscular-atomist view of physical reality is skewered in the later books of *On the Heavens* and, more briefly, elsewhere. Consequently, no-one in this *Companion* does much with the point, surely quite central to understanding Aristotle's works on nature, that it is the atomists Leucippus and Democritus who are the primary targets of much of his fundamental physics and cosmology. In fact, from this collection you might not get much of an idea that Aristotle was engaged in a continuous (pardon the pun) dialogue with his Greek predecessors at all. The editor's catch-all methodological chapter does not mention Owen's thesis, further developed by Martha Nussbaum, according to which the sorting and critical analysis of *endoxa,* or reputable opinions, forms a cornerstone in Aristotle's dialectical practice. Even if one disapproves of Nussbaum's strong interpretation of the program of saving the appearances (I do), her thesis is important and worthy of consideration, since it influences the very way we parse Aristotle's way of structuring his own texts.

There are other curiosities. It seems that the editor, or else the publisher, has decided that keeping the book accessible to non-Greek readers should mean excising Greek sentences from the exposition altogether. For the main part this has resulted in perfectly readable text (we do get transliterations of many of the most important technical terms), but in a couple of instances the discussion ends up looking very odd indeed, as in Gareth Matthews' otherwise very fine treatment of the ten categories, where a lengthy discussion hinges on the way to translate a single clause (149-54). Not to have that clause visible in the original Greek is, frankly, maddening, and results in some unnecessarily opaque prose. Other examples can be found in the chapters on ontology (hardly coincidental).

Picking apart hard-fought editorial decisions hardly seems fair, and is only made slightly more tolerable when one considers the odious alternative of picking apart certain individual contributions to the exclusion of others. Let me therefore end by lauding Agnastopoulos' efforts as an editor. This is, as has already been indicated, a work of unusually uniform quality and scope: its chapters work well individually as well as collectively, building up to a heightened appreciation for the thought of Aristotle not only as a historical marvel, but as a continued philosophical resource. Anagnostopoulos has done a magnificent job in contracting his esteemed contributors, then holding them to the only standard that really matters, *viz.* academic excellence. I know I will return to consult

this *Companion* for pleasure and profit for years to come, which is about the highest compliment I can pay to a single-volume collection in a marketplace where ever more specialized treatments grow more numerous and bountiful by the day.

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