

Review of Christopher Shields, "Aristotle"

Gregorić, Pavel

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For readers new to the debate, Richardson covers the basic theories, arguments, concepts, and some valuable background material. One may quibble over the details, but the book is interesting and unlikely to lead anyone seriously astray. I agree with Richardson that some psychologists need to clean up their methodology. Maybe many do. But that presumably holds for scientists of all fields, and for the reasons just sketched, I do not think it shows that evolutionary psychology is irrevocably flawed. Evolutionary psychologists may be able to make up for their weaknesses concerning the typical evolutionary evidence by offering a plausible overall package of biological, psychological, and perhaps anthropological considerations that is empirically testable—if not biologically, then psychologically.

Institute of Cognitive Science
University of Osnabrück
Albrechtstraße 28
49076 Osnabrück
Germany
 doi:10.1093/mind/fzp045

SVEN WALTER

Aristotle, by Christopher Shields. London: Routledge, 2007. Pp. xvi + 456. H/b £55.00, P/b £14.99.

This book is one of the recent entries in the *Routledge Philosophers* series which is advertised as aiming to ‘place a major philosopher or thinker in historical context, explain and assess their key arguments, and consider their legacy’. When it comes to Aristotle, these three tasks are executed unevenly. The bulk of Shields’s book is dedicated to explaining and assessing Aristotle’s key arguments; the historical context is outlined in the opening chapter (‘Life and Works’), and indicated occasionally through earlier doctrines that form the backdrop against which Aristotle’s views are introduced; and his legacy is relegated to the six and a half pages of the last chapter. The targeted readers of the book—students of philosophy committed to expanding their basic knowledge of Aristotle, and philosophers who teach introductory courses in which Aristotle looms large—are likely to applaud such distribution of emphasis.

In the opening chapter Shields engagingly contrasts two opposed ancient portraits of Aristotle, states the basic biographic facts, explains the structure of the Aristotelian corpus, and makes some remarks that aim to prepare the reader for coping with Aristotle’s texts. The following two chapters set out the fundamentals of Aristotelian philosophy. The second and longest chapter in the book (‘Explaining Nature and the Nature of Explanation’) presents Aristotle’s four-cause conception of explanation. The pair matter and form, that is, the material and the formal cause, is soundly presented as a reply to the Eleatic arguments against change; and it is extended into a discussion of the corresponding pair of familiar Aristotelian terms, potentiality and actuality. The

efficient cause receives a brief but helpful discussion in which Shields indicates the difficulties in identifying Aristotelian efficient cause with our notion of cause. The final cause gets most attention. Aristotelian teleology is explained by being situated between the view that nature is not at all purposive ('teleological eliminativism'), and the view that nature is purposive to the extent that it is created by an intelligent designer ('teleological intentionalism'). Shields succeeds in showing how Aristotle's position differs from eliminativism, whereas the contrast with intentionalism is drawn less satisfactorily. Shields does not attempt to explain why Aristotle finds intentionalism unacceptable. The answer to this question, I think, should be sought in Aristotle's metaphysical commitments, notably in his conception of the divine and its relation to the world, which is opposed to the conception of the divine artificer (Demiurge) who creates the world according to a pre-existent paradigm, as formulated in Plato's *Timaeus*. Perhaps it is not surprising that Shields refrains from tackling this question in an early chapter of the book, but it is astonishing that he fails to mention Plato among the advocates of teleological intentionalism (p. 74).

The third chapter ('Thinking: Scientifically, Logically, Philosophically') and the fourth ('Aristotle's Early Ontology') provide a discussion of various topics in Aristotelian logic. The third chapter is organized around the contrast between the ideal of a polished body of scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*), which proceeds deductively from premisses that are necessary and explanatorily more basic than their conclusions, and the more realistic practice of dialectic, which proceeds by testing premisses that are merely probable. Chapter four deals mainly with Aristotle's doctrine of the categories. Shields goes to some length to outline four different answers to the question of how Aristotle arrived at the specific number of ten categories, and then he raises problems for Aristotle's entrenched view that individual substances are more fundamental than the other categories of being.

In the introduction to chapter five ('Puzzles of Nature'), Shields tells us that 'Aristotle deploys his framework in an effort to resolve puzzles ranging from Zeno's paradoxes of motion to problems of time, number, and the infinite, all of which are, he contends, ultimately puzzles of change' (p. 196). Shields explains Aristotle's view of change, and then discusses each one of the listed problems except for 'number', which is plainly an intruder in this list. A helpful section on the unmoved mover is added, forming a bridge to the sixth chapter ('Substance and the Science of Being *qua* Being') which touches upon some thorny issues from the *Metaphysics*, such as the principle of non-contradiction and the doctrine of form as primary substance. Regrettably, the questions of philosophical as much as historical interest, such as whether Aristotelian forms are particulars or universals, or what Aristotle's principle of individuation is, are not addressed.

In chapter seven ('Living Beings') Shields explains Aristotle's theory of the soul by placing it between the extremes of reductive materialism advocated by

the atomists, and of substance dualism championed by Plato. Shields reviews Aristotle's application of hylomorphic analysis on the soul-body relation, perception and thought, and points out some difficulties surrounding such effort. There is very little on Aristotle's meticulous account of the body of animals, which naturally complements his account of the soul of living beings in the *De Anima*.

Standard topics in Aristotelian ethics are covered in chapter eight ('Living Well'): Aristotle's objectivist conception of happiness, theory of virtues, *akrasia*, and friendship. In a similar vein, chapter nine ('Political Association') gives an overview of the central issues in Aristotle's political theory, such as the relation between the citizen and the polis, or between various kinds of constitution. In addition, Aristotle's theory of natural slavery is persuasively criticized within his own theoretical framework. Chapter eleven ('Rhetoric and the Arts') deals very briefly with rhetoric and more expansively with Aristotle's take on poetic production, his theory of tragedy, catharsis, and *mimēsis*.

Each chapter is followed by a short list of suggestions for further reading from primary and secondary sources, indicating items especially suited for beginners. The lists of suggested readings rely on the bibliography of some 150 items which is somewhat haphazardly compiled, for it unduly excludes a number of absolutely seminal publications, older and recent. A bibliography of this sort ought to make note, for instance, of the ground-breaking papers on Aristotle's epistemology and philosophy of mind by M. F. Burnyeat, on metaphysics by M. Frede, or on ethics by J. M. Cooper. On the other hand, Shields's bibliography includes a significant number of items dated 2007, frequently listed as suggestions for further reading, which have not actually appeared, at least not by late 2008 when this review was written. However, the book also contains an informative glossary and notes with many cross-references which will be helpful to those who read this book piecemeal.

Shields's translations of the many Aristotelian passages incorporated in the book are generally reliable and they will give the reader a sense for Aristotle's way of doing philosophy. However, there are dozens of incorrect or misprinted references to the works of Aristotle and other ancient authors which will confuse tyros and irritate specialists reading this book. For example, following a citation which illustrates the claim that the function of a thing determines what this thing is, we find the following reference: '*Met.* 390a10–15; cf. *GA* 734b24–21; *PA* 640b18–23; *Met.* 1029b23–1030a17; *EN* 1098a7–8; *Pol.* 12253a19–25' (p. 92). The first '*Met.*' refers to Aristotle's *Meteorology*, the second to *Metaphysics*, although the list of abbreviations announces that the former work will be abbreviated as *Metr.*, and the latter as *Met.* And despite this announcement, *Metaphysics* is mostly abbreviated as *Meta.* in the first half of the book. Moreover, the intended *GA* passage is in fact 734b24–31, the reason for including the *Metaphysics* passage eludes me, and the Bekker page of the *Politics* passage is 1253, not 12253. There are a significant number of typos in the book, apart from those plaguing the references, and errors which

would have been easily eliminated by careful editing, especially if entrusted to a specialist in ancient philosophy. Such errors include wrong transcriptions of Greek terms (e.g. ‘*megalapsuchos*’ instead of ‘*megalopsuchos*’ four times on p. 10), infelicitous formulations (e.g. ‘Being *qua* being is, let us say, a form of *general ontology*’, p. 239), or factual mistakes (e.g. calling Andronicus of Rhodes ‘Asclepius’ three times on p. 233).

The greatest merit of this book lies in the procedure Shields follows throughout the book. He summarizes Aristotle’s position on a particular issue in a valid argument articulated in a semi-formal fashion, clears up some likely misunderstandings, examines all or more perspicuous premisses one by one, and then charitably assesses the conclusion. Of course, specialists might prefer a different approach to Aristotle, quibble with Shields’s choice of issues to discuss, or question his summaries of Aristotle’s arguments. However, they have to admit that the issues selected for discussion are representative of Aristotle’s thought, that the summarizing arguments manage to encapsulate Aristotle’s view, and that the didactic quality of Shields’s procedure recommends the book to the audience identified at the beginning of this review.

Department of Philosophy
Faculty of Humanities
University of Zagreb
Ivana Lucica 3
HR-10000 Zagreb
Croatia
 doi:10.1093/mind/fzpo47

PAVEL GREGORIC

Philosophers on Music: Experience, Meaning, and Work, edited by Kathleen Stock. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. xii + 260. H/b £35.00.

This collection originated in a conference entitled ‘Aesthetics from an Analytic Point of View’ held at the University of Manchester in 2003. In assembling it Kathleen Stock, an organizer of the conference, includes three papers presented there along with six commissioned specially for the volume and one translated from a French original. The results have about the degree of unity that is claimed in the title—the papers are by philosophers and on music; some are about musical experience, some about musical meaning, some about the ontology of the musical work, and the last two about ‘other issues’. Several of them, however, speak to one another in dialogues that genuinely advance the discussion; and none is less than interesting.

Musical Ontology. In ‘Sounds, Instruments, and Works of Music’ Julian Dodd defends what he calls the ‘simple view’ of the ontology of (traditionally notated, relatively recent, Western) musical works. This is first of all a kind of ‘Platonism’, according to which works are abstract structures, types or kinds,