

# Aristotle and His Commentators: Studies in Memory of Paraskevi Kotzia edited by Pantelis Golitsis and Katerina Ierodiakonou

Nicholas Allan Aubin

Volume 2, Number 1, 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087168ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/aestimatio.v2i1.37712>

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Publisher(s)

Institute for Research in Classical Philosophy and Science

ISSN

1549-4470 (print)

1549-4497 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Aubin, N. (2021). Review of [Aristotle and His Commentators: Studies in Memory of Paraskevi Kotzia edited by Pantelis Golitsis and Katerina Ierodiakonou]. *Aestimatio*, 2(1), 113–118.  
<https://doi.org/10.33137/aestimatio.v2i1.37712>

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*Aristotle and His Commentators: Studies in Memory of Paraskevi Kotzia* edited by Pantelis Golitsis and Katerina Ierodiakonou

Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca et Byzantina 7. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019. ISBN 978-3-11-060183-1. Cloth US\$107.99

*Reviewed by*

Nicholas Allan Aubin\*

Humboldt University, Berlin

[nicholasallanaubin@gmail.com](mailto:nicholasallanaubin@gmail.com)

This commemorative volume, dedicated to the late scholar of Greek antiquity and one-time scientific coordinator of the Center of Aristotelian Studies at the University of Thessaloniki, Paraskevi Kotzia, draws together 12 important essays on various aspects of Aristotle's thought and the late ancient and Byzantine tradition of commentary, nine of which were presented at an international and interdisciplinary conference held in her memory in September 2014.

The contents of the volume are unevenly split into two topical parts, with four articles grouped under the heading "Aristotle" and eight contributions under the heading "Commentators," though certainly some of the articles in the former part (especially Stavros Kouloumentas' penetrating exploration of Aristotle's remarks on Alcmaeon in the *Metaphysics*) make heavy use of the later commentary tradition, and many of the essays in the latter section take on issues central to the understanding of Aristotle's own philosophical project (see in particular the contribution from Katerina Ierodiakonou and Nikos Agiotis on the signification of the title of Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*). This interdependence of the two sections of the volume reaffirms the need to consider the late-ancient and Byzantine commentators when investigating problems in Aristotle's thought, a theme which was central to Kotzia's own work on the purpose (σκοπός) of Aristotle's *Categories* [1992].

The individual articles cover a wide range of themes, and with the exception of two articles on Aristotle's politics (by Fransisco Lisi and Chloe Balla),

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\* NICHOLAS AUBIN is a post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Warwick, a member of the research group Streamlining Galen that is focused on the transformation of Galenic medicine in the medieval Arabic tradition. He earned his PhD in Philosophy from Humboldt University in 2019, with a thesis on the development of the arguments utilizing the Aristotelian principle of finite-power from John Philoponus to Avicenna.

they are only loosely connected to one another. Some contributors to the volume (Stavros Kouloumentas and Dimitrios Nikitas) treat specific textual and philosophical issues in works of Aristotle and his philosophical successors, while others (Rapp<sup>1</sup> and Wildberg) offer more general meditations on the contemporary study of Aristotle and late antiquity, as well as recommendations and directions for future scholarship in these fields. In what follows I hope to draw attention to those pieces which challenge and otherwise inform the more universal aspects of the study of Aristotle and the late-ancient world.

The volume begins with an English translation of Christof Rapp's thoughtful reflections on the problem of hypotheses of "development" in the history of philosophy broadly speaking, and in the history of the study of Aristotle in particular. While tracing the history of such hypotheses as applied in the study of Aristotle (focusing on Werner Jaeger's influential work [1923] and the subsequent controversy it engendered), Rapp stresses the real risk that such hypotheses become self-affirming in their circularity, and draws attention to more promising alternative approaches to resolving or explaining inconsistencies across Aristotle's work.

The section on Aristotle continues with two separate examinations of different aspects of Aristotle's political thought, as well as an essay on the significance of an obscure reference to the Presocratic thinker Alcmaeon. Francisco L. Lisi explores a fundamental difference in approach to political relationships between Aristotle and Plato. Lisi is convincing in his argument that, for Aristotle, the "master-slave" relationship which dominates so many political images across Plato's works is simply not a political relationship. This claim offers a promising avenue for future studies of the nuanced accounts of the politics of Aristotle and Plato alike.

Chloe Balla makes the case for what she calls a "sophistic" background to the "empirical" accounts of different political systems that one can find in certain passages of Aristotle, particularly the *Rhetoric*. There is, however, the enduring problem (acknowledged by Balla) of determining what exactly is to be understood by many of these terms ("sophistic", "empirical", and so on).

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<sup>1</sup> Christof Rapp's contribution, "The Explanatory Value of Developmental Hypotheses as Exemplified by the Interpretation of Aristotle", is an English translation of his earlier article "Der Erklärungswert von Entwicklungshypothesen. Das Beispiel der Aristoteles-Interpretation", which was published in 2006.

Stavros Kouloumentas offers a comprehensive investigation into the much-disputed passage of *Metaphysics* A5 where Aristotle says mysterious things about the relationship between Alcmaeon and Pythagoras. In this article, Kouloumentas provides a convincing reading of the text that avoids earlier, unnecessary emendations, and makes the case for this passage's being an authentic element of Aristotle's text, and not a later scribal addition.

Christian Wildberg introduces the section on the late-ancient commentary tradition by promoting the following two theses in a delightfully crafted essay:

Of all the historical periods into which antiquity is traditionally divided...Late Antiquity...was in fact the most formative and influential in the subsequent course of the history of western culture, not only for the middle ages but in certain respects also for modernity, indeed for us now.

Late Antiquity is actually of prime importance in terms of understanding the fundamental tenets and beliefs of our intellectual history. [73]

Wildberg terms the first thesis as “prima facie plausible” but leaves its defense to others, and concentrates instead on defending the second. His arguments are aimed primarily at those who see Plato and Aristotle as the truly significant thinkers in the history of western thought, and at those who discount much of Late Ancient thought on the grounds of a dubious distinction between theology and philosophy. Wildberg argues persuasively that

the facile separation of what is supposed to be religious thought from what is philosophical thought is one of the greatest obstacles that stand in the way of understanding [late antiquity]. [75]

This is indeed an obstacle to the study of the intellectual history not only of late antiquity, but also of later periods including the medieval Islamic and Latin traditions. Wildberg concludes his essay with an appeal for “a larger dose of critical distance, and less wide-eyed adulation” in our approach to the study of the western canon, picking up on his earlier observation that the “age of the commentary” begins in late antiquity and continues until today. Pantelis Golitsis’ groundbreaking piece on the method, style, and relative chronology of Philoponus’ commentaries is, in a sense, an affirmation of the validity of several of Rapp’s recommendations for alternative approaches to the developmental hypothesis, transferred from the study of Aristotle to the study of Philoponus. Like Aristotle, Philoponus has been the victim of a problematic attempt to periodize his works on the basis of a supposed spiritual “development” [Verrycken 1990, 233–243]. The perceived need to

periodize his writings (reaching in Verrycken's work the uncomfortable result that we ought to speak not of a single Philoponus but of a "Philoponus 1" followed by a "Philoponus 2") arose because of the presence of a number of points of inconsistency and tension in and across commentaries and other writings ascribed to Philoponus. Through a holistic and multi-directional approach to Philoponus' career, Golitsis has shown that, for certain of the commentaries under Philoponus' name, there is a need to disentangle Philoponus' thought (critical or otherwise) from the teachings of his late master Ammonius Hermeiou.

More importantly, Golitsis has provided, through careful philological study of Philoponus' commentaries, the techniques for how this disentangling is to be performed. Applying these techniques, Golitsis is able to argue persuasively that Philoponus commented on different books of Aristotle's *Physics* at different times in his career, and in accordance with different editorial practices. In the final sections of the article, Golitsis provides a helpful new chronology of Philoponus' major works. This more nuanced approach to the study of Philoponus' writings will surely allow for more exacting study of Philoponus' thought in the future and will contribute to the ongoing scholarly effort to understand the practice of philosophical education at the end of late antiquity. It also offers important reflections on the role of the commentary in philosophical development, which will be of interest to scholars working in any number of areas in the history of philosophy.

In full harmony with the findings of Golitsis, Ioannis Papachristou is able to use the prolegomenon of the commentary on the *De anima* that was edited by Philoponus to reconstruct Ammonius Hermeiou's teachings on the soul, and in particular its connection with various corporeal "vehicles". Papachristou delves into the intricacies of Ammonius' broadly Proclean psychology, drawing attention to the continuity of the teachings found in the prolegomenon to those expounded by Proclus but also pointing out the subtle divergencies that mark as unique Ammonius' theory of ghostly apparitions. This careful and thorough exposition brings out an important aspect of Ammonius' attempt to synthesize the theories of soul put forth by Plato and Aristotle, a part of the increasingly well-documented "Ammonian synthesis".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> To use a term introduced by Robert Wisnovsky [2003] in his study of the background of Avicenna's metaphysics.

Katerina Ieordiakonou and Nikos Agiotis bring a number of major and minor figures from the late-ancient and Byzantine commentary tradition to bear on the problem of interpreting the title of Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*. Their systematic presentation of the problem of how to understand «ἀνάλυσις» in the work's traditional epigraph, and their comprehensive survey of the solutions to this problem proposed by centuries of commentators from Alexander of Aphrodisias and Ammonius Hermeiou to Eustratius and John Peditasimus, set the stage for a thoughtful consideration of three major philosophical, historical, and philological problems associated with the title of the *Prior Analytics*.

Much more could be said about the remaining articles, but the following comments ought to allow the interested specialist to identify the article matching their more specific research interests:

Paul Kalligas provides a rich and exacting study of the nature of Plotinus' criticisms of Aristotle's theory of (prime) substance. After situating and contextualizing Plotinus' approach to the *Categories* and *Metaphysics* by giving a helpful survey of criticisms and interpretations from Stoics (Athenodorus), Peripatetics (Andronicus of Rhodes), and Platonists (Lucius and Nicotratrus), Kalligas then seeks to provide clarity on exactly which aspects of Aristotle's theory of substance Plotinus was keen to preserve, albeit "limiting its application to the sensible world" [88].

Maria Chriti focuses our attention on the way in which three thinkers (Ammonius, Simplicius, and Philoponus) handled the issue of the emergence of human language, exposing the ways in which they interweave Neoplatonic emanationist cosmology and Aristotelian logic into surprisingly negative theories explaining the emergence and variety of spoken language.

Dimitrios Nikitas offers a compelling analysis of the literary style in Boethius' first commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, in which Nikitas underscores Boethius' debt to the traditional distinction, promulgated by the Aristotelians at Alexandria, between Aristotle's exoteric and esoteric works. He also brings out the Ciceronian elements of the same work.

Finally, Sten Ebbesen offers an excellent edition, translation, and analysis of two "untraditional" though delightful sophisms by an unknown Byzantine author.

Due to its eclectic and diverse nature, the articles in this important volume (which also includes a full bibliography of Kotzia's many published works, as well as crucial indices of names and passages cited) are sure to excite the interests of scholars working on many diverse areas of the history of

philosophy, not simply on Aristotle and his commentators but also on earlier traditions (including Pythagoreans like Alcmaeon) and later developments in Latin and Arabic thought. To its editors, we owe great thanks for collecting these valuable contributions, a testament to the breadth and depth of the professional life of Kotzia.

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