

BOOK NOTES

HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN PHILOSOPHY

James Warren

Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, CB2 1RH

jjw1001@cam.ac.uk

Let us start with some books that are likely to be classed as ‘introductory’ or at least are aimed at a readership broader than the enlightened subscribers of *Phronesis*. First, *Philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* is the second spin-off volume from Peter Adamson’s successful podcast series: *A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps* (<https://historyofphilosophy.net/>).¹ This volume contains more than fifty chapters that take the reader from the early Hellenistic Socratics all the way through to Boethius and applies the series’ methodology by giving plenty of room to discussions of Neoplatonist and ancient Christian philosophy as well as the more usual Hellenistic schools. The style is engaging and direct without compromising philosophical interest and includes some magnificent/awful puns (e.g. the chapter introducing philosophy in the Roman Empire is titled: ‘Caesarian section’). The tone never gets in the way of the serious content and the result is a volume that is both a perfect introductory work and will also help to plug some of the gaps that most of us have in our knowledge of the long span of ancient philosophical history. The book also contains a useful timeline, some maps, and suggestions for further reading.

By contrast, John Sellars’ *Hellenistic Philosophy* opts for a thematic approach.² It takes on all of the expected areas of philosophical inquiry and also includes some extended discussions of the topic of ‘finitude’ (rather: ‘a handful of topics’, p. 143) which includes accounts of the limits of human life, our ability to attain knowledge, and Cleanthes’ account of fate. It is unclear precisely how these various topics relate to one another besides the very general notion of various kinds of ‘limits’, and perhaps each might have better been integrated into the earlier chapters on knowledge, the good, free will and the like. Comparing Sellars’ book with A. A. Long’s 1974 *The Hellenistic Philosophers* is an interesting exercise and might provoke some reflection on how this

¹ P. Adamson, *Philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds. A History of Philosophy Without any Gaps Volume 2*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015 (Hardback) 2018 (Paperback). Pp. xxv + 428. £20/£10.99. 9780198728023 / 9780198818601.

² J. Sellars, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. x + 260. £50/£19.99 (Hardback/Paperback). 9780199674114 / 9780199674121.

subject has altered in the last forty-five years. Perhaps the move to a thematic rather than school-by-school treatment, as well as being a matter of individual taste and editorial judgement, suggests an emphasis on the ways in which these schools were engaged in an ongoing debate with one another. Further, Sellars includes discussions of the Hellenistic Peripatos alongside the standard Stoics, Epicureans, and sceptics and perhaps that is a sign of an ever-increasing awareness of the diversity of philosophies in this period as well as continuities with the Classical period that came before. (It is a shame in that case that there is relatively little discussion of the Cyrenaics and their distinctive perspective on both epistemological and ethical questions.) Sellars also includes a chapter dedicated to political philosophy, 'Community', which is much less prominent in Long's book, and here he offers an account of Cicero's contribution in this area: a sign of how more recent attention to Cicero's works as philosophical contributions in their own right has made a difference to our understanding of the philosophical landscape of the very end of the Hellenistic period.

Sellars ends his book with a chapter entitled 'What was Hellenistic philosophy?' in which, with various appropriate *caveats* (pp. 181–3), he focusses on the notion that these philosophical movements were each attempting to recommend 'a way of life'. He is inclined to think that, with the exception of the Peripatetics, it is broadly correct to describe the general aims of this period in 'therapeutic' terms and sketches the ways in which a growing sense of disciplinary specialisation, for example in mathematics and natural science, may have contributed to a sense of philosophy 'shrinking' in scope. But he is careful not to push this therapeutic model too far: there remained a constant interest in the power of philosophical argument and inquiry which should not be overlooked.

Brad Inwood's *Very Short Introduction* to Stoicism tackles a challenging brief and, in only just over a hundred small pages, offers a confident and comprehensive way into Stoic philosophy.³ The central chapters set out the history and philosophical outlook of Stoicism, tracing it back to its break from Platonist metaphysics, before setting out their distinctive views on physics, ethics, and logic. Along the way, Inwood is careful to point out examples in the long history of the school of it embracing different views. Following the style of this series, there are occasional 'boxes', separated from the main text, that present sections of primary texts; there are also some helpful diagrams and timelines.

Perhaps most interestingly, the book begins and ends by acknowledging and trying to explain the remarkable modern interest in Stoicism, particularly the Stoicism of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, as a way of life fit for our own times. That interest is also what lies behind

³ B. Inwood, *Stoicism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xviii+118. £7.99 (Paperback). 9780198786665

Princeton's series of 'Ancient wisdom for Modern Readers'. Two new volumes are pitched precisely at this appetite for finding assistance in ancient texts. A. A. Long presents a translation of Epictetus' *Encheiridion* and selections from the *Discourses* under the heading *How to be Free* and Philip Freeman offers a translation of Cicero's *De Amicitia* under the heading *How to be a Friend*.⁴ The volumes include the original ancient texts with facing translations together with an introduction—more extensive in the Epictetus volume and quite brief for Cicero—notes, and suggestions for further reading. The series as a whole is pitched at a non-specialist audience and presents these ancient texts as offering general good advice transferable to a modern reader (or, indeed, listener: some of the volumes are also available as an audio book).⁵ It is hard for me to be sure whether they can in fact serve that purpose but, at the very least, perhaps the series will also make a wider range of people interested in the ancient writers and want to read and think more about them not just as a comfort or a guide to life nowadays.

While Sellars is keen to accommodate the notion that these Hellenistic philosophies—particularly Stoicism, including its interest in less obviously practical questions—are practically engaged forms of therapy, Inwood is perhaps imagining a different audience and therefore makes a strong case for engaging with Stoic philosophy as a whole. As Inwood notes, 'there is a striking gap between the current understanding of Stoicism as a therapeutic psychological endeavour, and what you would meet if you plunged into contemporary academic writing about the school' (10). Although we might not expect readers of *dailystoic.com* or *modernstoicism.com* to rush out to read works dedicated to Stoic modal logic, there is a good chance that this book will encourage a wider perspective on Stoic philosophy and show how the ethical part stands alongside and relates to the other parts of the system. Indeed, Inwood often chooses passages from Marcus or Epictetus to illustrate aspects of Stoic physics or logic, a gentle reminder that they were not entirely dedicated to managing the emotions. If you are reading these Book Notes, then you are likely someone who loves plunging into modern academic writing about Stoicism and are therefore not one of Inwood's expected audience. But it is also, of course, worth professional academic philosophers taking the time to think more about how and why Stoicism does have this broad

⁴ A. A. Long, *How to Be Free. An Ancient Guide to the Stoic Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. Pp. liv+173. £13.99 (Hardback). 978069177717; P. Freeman, *How to Be a Friend. An Ancient Guide to True Friendship*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. Pp. xv + 188. £13.99 (Hardback). 978069177199.

⁵ See, for example, J. Romm, *How to Die. An Ancient Guide to the End of Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. Pp. xx + 256. £13.99 (Hardback). 978069175577. Extract from the audiobook: <https://soundcloud.com/user-578062379/how-to-die>.

current appeal and considering how best to engage with it. Inwood's book offers a very useful model.

A variant of Sellars' question, 'What is Hellenistic philosophy?', also came to mind as I read through a new and detailed presentation of the fragments and testimonies of Aeschines of Sphettus, the seventh in the new Brepols series 'Philosophie hellénistique et romaine'.⁶ The volume itself offers an extremely detailed and lengthy introduction setting out the evidence for Aeschines' life, philosophical production, and what we can know about the content of some of his *logoi Sōkratikoī* (particularly the *Alcibiades* and *Aspasia*), followed by the texts with translation into Italian, commentary, and an appendix detailing the history of editions of this philosopher. Pentassuglio is extremely thorough and this volume will no doubt prove useful for anyone interested in thinking more broadly about what was going on in the philosophy of the generation or so after Socrates and about the wider Socratic movement of the time. It is worth pausing to note, however, that Aeschines, whose death was more or less contemporaneous with Plato's, surely predates the Hellenistic (let alone Roman) period that this series ostensibly covers. Which particular volumes appear in which particular series may sometimes be a matter of publishing convenience, but these chronological divisions and labels are hard to escape and may generate unnecessary and unhelpful interpretative prejudices.

Also aimed at a more general reader is a fine new translation into English of Diogenes Laertius, with notes and accompanying essays.⁷ Pamela Mensch's translation is based on Tiziano Dorandi's 2013 text and James Miller, the editor of the volume in which it appears, has provided an introductory essay and commissioned sixteen essays from familiar authorities that cover the textual tradition and reception of the work, together with accounts of Diogenes' poetry, humour, and presentation of various individual philosophers and philosophical schools. Jay R. Elliott offers a guide to further reading that covers both matter particular to Diogenes and his work and also accounts of the philosophers he discusses. There is also a helpful index and a Glossary, compiled by Joseph M. Lemelin, of the various characters and sources who appear in the text. The production is lavish: the essays and translation are punctuated by full-cover illustrations that range from the expected pots, mosaics, and busts to later and even modern and more abstract artworks. Clearly, this is the product of significant teamwork, but the most important contribution is Pamela Mensch's translation. It is a significant challenge to translate Diogenes as a

⁶ Pentassuglio, F., *Eschine di Sfetto. Tutte le testimonianze*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2017. Pp. 672. €110 (Paperback). 9782503577746.

⁷ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, translated by P. Mensch and edited by J. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018 Pp. xxi + 676. £32.99 (Hardback). 9780190862176.

solo effort given the variety of styles, sources, and the frequent obscurity of the material and this is, I think, the first translation into English of the whole work since R. D. Hicks' Loeb volumes.⁸ It is to be hoped that this will give Diogenes a bit of a boost; the design and reasonable pricing show that the Press is aiming this book at a market beyond specialist academics, although it will doubtless prove useful to them too. (There is a downside, however, to the luxurious production. It has resulted in a large and heavy volume so, even if it is not consigned to the coffee table, students will not thank anyone who sets it as a text to bring to a class.)

Georgia Tsouni's *Antiochus and Peripatetic Ethics* offers a detailed account of Antiochus' ethical philosophy with particular reference to its adaptation of Peripatetic views to a contemporary philosophical agenda dictated to a large extent by Stoicism.⁹ She devotes much of the book to considering the evidence in Cicero *De Finibus* 5 for Antiochean accounts of *oikeiōsis* and the good life, but the first part of the book concerns the broader themes of Antiochus' view of philosophical history and the construction of the broad coalition he cast as the 'Old' Academy. This book is therefore a helpful contribution to our understanding of ancient histories of philosophy and ancient notions of philosophical allegiance and authority, which do not always correspond as closely as we might imagine with our histories of ancient philosophy. As Tsouni remarks (205): 'Antiochus is one of the first figures in the history of philosophy who, by their very activity, put at centre stage such hermeneutical questions on the interpretation of the texts of ancient authorities, even though the methodology he pursues with regard to such questions is never made transparent'.

Claudius Ptolemy is the subject of an important new book by Jacqueline Feke.¹⁰ She offers a reading of his philosophical outlook as a whole that puts his emphasis on mathematics and mathematical sciences at the heart of not only his epistemology but also his ethics. The picture that emerges is a compelling one, revealing a Ptolemy who is certainly well-versed in Aristotelian and Hellenistic philosophy but who uses his engagement with those previous philosophers to produce something novel and distinctive. Feke compares and contrasts Ptolemy's approach with that of Antiochus: while Antiochus tried hard to show a general harmony among the relevant philosophical authorities of the past, Ptolemy is a more subversive thinker who blends elements

⁸ Compare the 1999 Livre de Poche volume, edited by M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, in which translations of the various books and their accompanying notes were written by different authors.

⁹ G. Tsouni, *Antiochus and Peripatetic Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. xi + 233. £75 (Hardback). 9781108420587.

¹⁰ J. Feke, *Ptolemy's Philosophy: Mathematics as a Way of Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. Pp. xiv + 235. £30 (Hardback). 9780691179582.

from Plato, Aristotle, and other philosophers in order to bolster his own novel outlook. Feke devotes a lot of attention to the programmatic material in *Almagest* 1.1 ('an epitome of Ptolemy's general philosophical system' (8)) but then looks elsewhere, including to the *Harmonics* and *On the criterion* (which she argues is an early work composed 'before he had mandated the application of mathematics to physics' (6)), to show that there is a consistent philosophical stance throughout the corpus.

Richard Bett brings to completion his translation into English of Sextus Empiricus' *Aversus Mathematicos* with his version, with introduction and notes, of *M* 1–6.¹¹ This is the first translation into English of all six books since Bury's Loeb volumes and the extensive and helpful footnotes should go some way to making more accessible what is perhaps the least well-known part of Sextus' output. Bett explains clearly the principles of his method of translation (pp. 25–9) and, as in his previous translations of *M* 7–8 (Cambridge, 2005), *M* 9–10 (Cambridge, 2012) includes two very useful additional items: a glossary of Greek terms with the usual English equivalent he has used and a list of parallels between these books and *PH* and other parts of *M*. The introduction draws attention to some important characteristics of *M* 1–6 in particular. For example, the majority of Sextus' arguments are negative and he very rarely offers any positive argument to provide the balance for the overall *isostheneia* his official method requires. Usually, it is said that this is because the various disciplines themselves provide those positive arguments and Sextus' task is therefore exclusively to add weight to the other side of the scales. Bett is happy to say that this is 'ultimately the correct answer' (p. 12) but does note that, unlike elsewhere in *M*, Sextus makes no effort to say explicitly that he is presenting arguments without endorsing them in order to balance the opposing side. Here, Bett reminds us of the possibility that there are different phases of Pyrrhonism to be found across the eleven books, a position he has argued for particularly in the case of *M* 11 (translation and commentary: Oxford, 1997), but here leaves that developmental claim merely as a suggestion. Perhaps Sextus was relying in *M* 1–6 on earlier Pyrrhonist material that was more inclined to negative dogmatism. In any event, the overall presentation in *M* 1–6 does not itself provide further independent evidence of such an earlier phase, even though 'we may wish that he had reminded us a little more often (as he does in other works) that suspension of judgement is the actual goal' (p. 15).

¹¹ R. Bett, *Sextus Empiricus. Against those in the Disciplines*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. ix + 270. £50 (Hardback). 9780198712701.

Richard Bett has also brought together a dozen of his essays on Pyrrhonism in one helpful volume: *How to Be a Pyrrhonist*.¹² As the title suggests, the focus of the collection is not on the historical development of Pyrrhonist philosophy, a topic about which he has also written a considerable amount, but on the practice of Pyrrhonism, the nature of a Pyrrhonist life, and whether it might ‘make a difference to people today’ (x). One of the essays (‘The modes in Sextus: theory and practice’) is new for this volume, two will appear elsewhere soon, and three more appear in English for the first time. Most of the essays come from other edited collections, some of which are not so easy to find. They are not arranged in chronological order of first publication but Bett includes in the Preface some brief remarks on how his thinking on various aspects of Sextus’ scepticism has altered over time (pp. x–xi).

Returning to new translations, the second volume of the Cambridge Galen Translations series contains Galen’s *Mixtures* (*De temperamentis*) in a new version by P. N. Singer and an introduction by P. J. van der Eijk which sets out the overall topic and background to the work as well as its place in the Galenic corpus.¹³ Following the format introduced in the first volume (*Psychological Writings*, 2013), copious explanatory footnotes to the translation, here written by both contributors, cover textual questions and difficulties of translation, as well as pointing to parallel passages in Galen and elsewhere. This is the first volume of a projected set of translations of Galen’s works on human nature, with a second volume to follow including *In Hipp. de nat. hominis*, *In Plat. Timaeum*, and *Plat. Tim. Compendium*. The English–Greek glossary and Greek word index help to keep track of important medical and philosophical terminology, but a quick comparison reveals that there is a general but not perfect fit between the equivalents chosen in this volume and those listed in *Psychological Writings*. There are good reasons for not insisting on a universal set of one-to-one equivalences and sometimes the explanatory notes, especially those referred to in bold in the Greek word index, indicate the specific Greek word used in the text.

Galen’s *On avoiding distress* appeared in the first of those Cambridge Galen volumes, with an introduction, translation, and notes by Vivian Nutton. Given that the complete Greek text was rediscovered only in 2005, this is a rare example of a relatively fresh text for people to get to grips with and it is no surprise that it is generating considerable interest. Now we have a volume of

¹² R. Bett, *How to Be a Pyrrhonist. The Practice and Significance of Pyrrhonian Scepticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. xvi + 263. £75 (Hardback). 9781108471077.

¹³ P. N. Singer and P. J. van der Eijk with P. Tassinari, *Galen. Works on Human Nature, volume 1: Mixtures (De temperamentis)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. xvii + 269. £90 (Hardback). 9781107023147. The translation is a significant reworking of Singer’s earlier version in his 1997 Oxford World’s Classics volume, *Galen: Selected Works*.

essays on that work from a conference held at Warwick University in 2014.¹⁴ Peter Singer contributes three substantial pieces but he is joined by a fine set of fellow contributors who between them discuss the place of *Peri alupias* among Galen's works, as part of a tradition of philosophical therapy, and for what light it can shed on the history of the 'Antonine plague' and the reign of Commodus. A final essay looks ahead to the reception of the work in Arabic texts. In *Peri alupias* Galen famously describes the loss of his books in a fire, along with those held in the libraries on the Palatine. He would likely be pleased to discover that this volume is part of Brill's Open Access Collection.

The volume of essays from the thirteenth Symposium Hellenisticum is entitled *Dialectic after Plato and Aristotle*.¹⁵ As one of the editors, Thomas Bénatouïl, explains in the Introduction, it might be thought that the 'dialogical' elements of dialectic so prominent in Plato and Aristotle fade away in the Hellenistic period, perhaps encouraged by the Stoics' classification of dialectic as one of the two branches of logic concerned with the science of truth. The ten chapters consider aspects of dialectic across a wide chronological span, from the Megarics to Galen, and present a much richer and more complex picture than is often assumed. The term '*dialektikē*' is itself used in a wide variety of ways and often seems to cover 'the art of argument' understood quite generally; it is not easy to find ways in which those who came after (après) Plato and Aristotle practised dialectic 'after' (d'après) them. Still, as Bénatouïl rightly notes, the broader philosophical and methodological questions that Platonic and Aristotelian dialectic embraced did not themselves go away and so a number of the chapters in the volume take a wider view and consider the role and nature of techniques of argument in the philosophy of the period. It is good to see alongside accounts of dialectic in Epicureanism (Sedley), the Academy (Castagnoli, Reinhardt), Stoicism (Ierodiakonou, Gourinat), and Pyrrhonism (Morison), also chapters focussed on the Megarics (Allen), Hellenistic Peripatos (Crivelli), Cicero (Aubert-Baillet), and Galen (Chiaradonna).¹⁶

¹⁴ C. Petit, *Galen's Treatise ΠΕΡΙ ΑΛΥΠΙΑΣ (De indolentia) in Context: A Tale of Resilience*, Leiden: Brill, 2018. Pp. vi + 296. £64 (Hardback). (Open Access PDF download: <https://brill.com/view/title/39226>). 9789004383289.

¹⁵ T. Bénatouïl and K. Ierodiakonou (eds.), *Dialectic after Plato and Aristotle*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. xii + 391. £75 (Hardback). 9781108471909.

¹⁶ Full disclosure: I was a participant in the conference from which the volume arose and am a member of the organising committee of the Symposium Hellenisticum.

Politics and Philosophy at Rome collects fifty articles and more occasional pieces, some previously unpublished, from across the long and distinguished career of Miriam Griffin.¹⁷ They include studies of Republican and Imperial history and half of them—most likely the ones more familiar to most readers of this journal—are collected in ‘Part III: Philosophy and politics’. The range of those studies, dedicated to particular writers like Cicero, Seneca, and Pliny as well as to more general themes concerning the interplay between these Roman thinkers and statesman—that is to say, for the most part, Romans writing in Latin—and their political milieu, is of course no surprise. But the collection of them together here is not merely a convenience. The volume was completed before her death in 2018, and Griffin contributes a brief but illuminating prologue that presents this range of interests in the context of her own intellectual biography. She also offers something of a summing-up of her view of the period that is the result of her insistence on combining philosophical and historical perspectives: ‘It will be obvious that the overlap between philosophy and politics has been the principal focus of academic interest throughout my career. That is not to say that I do not credit Roman philosophers writing in Latin with any intellectual originality, but that I write as an historian, interested in how their thinking relates to their historical circumstances and to their actions. Long study of the subject has convinced me that philosophical doctrines did not dictate their actions, but rather provided the vocabulary and argumentative skill to make and justify the decisions that gave rise to them’ (p. viii). That last provocative conclusion, in particular, is something to be kept in mind as we revisit this impressive body of work.

Aëtiana IV is the latest instalment in the series of publications devoted to the *Placita* and has plenty for doxographologists to chew over once they have recovered from seeing the price of the volume.¹⁸ There are 13 papers (by 11 men—Jaap Mansfeld provides 2—and 1 woman) stemming mostly from a conference in Melbourne. They cover textual matters, source criticism, and more, including contributions on Arius Didymus on Stoicism (Keimpe Algra), Epicurus and the *Placita* (David Runia), Aëtius and Stoic Physics (A. A. Long) and Galen and doxography (Teun Tieleman). The editors themselves highlight the long contribution by Edward Jeremiah which submits the current reconstruction of the *Placita* to various kinds of statistical analysis and comes up with some interesting results. For example, it is proposed that in the Mansfeld–Runia reconstruction of the *Placita* we are likely to have some 89% of the original work. Other results

¹⁷ M. Griffin, *Politics and Philosophy at Rome. Collected Papers*, edited by C. Balmadea, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xvi + 775. £120 (Hardback). 9780198793120.

¹⁸ J. Mansfeld and D. T. Runia (eds.), *Aëtiana IV. Papers of the Melbourne Colloquium on Ancient Doxography*, *Philosophia Antiqua* 148. Leiden: Brill, 2018. Pp. xii + 527. €230. (Hardback.) 9789004361455

include: a lower-band estimate suggests that the text mentions 86 of a total population of 266 'philosophers with dialectically mentionable views' on natural philosophy over the relevant period of 7th-1st centuries BCE; the *Placita* presents a view of natural philosophy that is skewed towards thinkers active some three or four centuries before its likely composition; and Metrodorus (of Chios) perhaps surprisingly turns out to be the top cited philosopher in book 3. (He seems to have stood out as making a prominent, or at least idiosyncratic, contribution to meteorology.) The analysis also confirms that the ordering of the *doxai* tends to be according to the chronological order of the philosophers concerned. However, the books of the *Placita* vary: book three is the most historical in its ordering while book two is the least. The variation suggests that the books were composed according to various factors. Some are perhaps more reliant on earlier sources which themselves offered opinions in a more or less chronological order, while others were perhaps influenced more by a concern for taxonomy according to the content of the opinion and this diaeretic format perhaps reflects the influence of sceptical or aporetic approaches keen to identify *diaphōniai*. There is a lot here for the statistically-minded and this kind of work will certainly help in thinking about the various choices and preferences that shaped the *Placita* as a whole.

Finally, let me briefly mention a collection of essays entitled *Authors and Authorities in Ancient Philosophy*, which includes studies of Lucretius, Epicurus, Ps.-Archytas, Numenius, Zeno of Citium, Antiochus, Cicero and others.¹⁹ Since I am one of the editors of the volume and wrote one of the chapters, I shall say no more about it other than to note that it is dedicated to my colleague and former supervisor, David Sedley, and to hope that it is an appropriate indication of our appreciation of his enormous contribution to our understanding of ancient philosophy in general and the philosophy of the Hellenistic and Roman world in particular.

¹⁹ J. Bryan, R. B. B. Wardy, and J. Warren eds. *Authors and Authorities in Ancient Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. xii+370. £90 (Hardback). 9781316510049.