

**R.W. Sharples, *Peripatetic Philosophy, 200 BC to AD 200: An Introduction and Collection of Sources in Translation*.** Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xix + 309. Hardback 978-0-521-88480-8, \$99.00; paperback 978-0-521-71185-2, \$ 36.99

The roughly four centuries of Peripatetic tradition covered by Sharples' recent book have been somewhat of a blank spot on the map of ancient philosophy (not unlike Middle Platonism was, for instance, until the publication of several seminal works, most notably John Dillon's *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*). While a considerable number of articles have dealt with particular figures pertaining to late Peripatetic philosophy, there have been few attempts at providing a comprehensive view of this complicated landscape, and Sharples' contribution may just be the most helpful and substantial outline of this kind. His collection of sources is not intended to be exhaustive, though, as it deliberately omits, e.g., Alexander of Aphrodisias, due to the massive amount of his extant works. Besides, as we are told in the preface, this collection is not meant to present every aspect of the reception of Aristotle from about 200 BC until AD 200 or so, but emphasizes the themes that appear to have captured the interest of some or most Aristotelian thinkers of the time.

Admittedly, this anthology and the accompanying comments focus on figures that are relatively obscure and are interesting to us today primarily for shedding light on the avatars of Aristotle's doctrines. Yet, this remains a vibrant episode—or set of episodes—in the history of ancient thought and, among other things, it gives the measure of the dynamic interactions between competing philosophical schools at the time. What also makes this study and anthology worthwhile is that, as the author points out, this period marked a significant shift from discussions about Aristotelian theories that were filtered through and inevitably distorted by a number of intermediary witnesses to a careful scrutiny of Aristotle's very writings. Thinkers who avowedly or tacitly adhered to the Peripatetic tradition were able now to assume the task of interpreting this newly published corpus of works as a largely coherent doctrine. That, however, did not immediately result in a consistent framework for the interpretation of Aristotle's oeuvre; still, the multiplicity of approaches displayed by those various Peripatetics constitute an important preamble to the gradual crystallization of the chief lines of interpretation in later commentators. One should add that our knowledge about such Aristotelians is often drastically limited by the nature of our sources; some philosophers were named more or less frequently (among them Critolaus, Xenarchus, Ariston), although their portraits remain rather sketchy, but often the Peripatetics are invoked collectively or are alluded to rather diffusely.

All the passages were translated by Sharples, some of these translations from Greek and Latin having been published previously. They are grouped in four main sections—'Individuals', 'Logic and Ontology', 'Ethics', and 'Physics'—subdivided into twenty-seven shorter thematic segments; the one on 'Physics', for example, includes subsections on the nature of time and place, the eternity of the world, fate, soul, etc. The ratio and distribution of these subsections do not correspond faithfully to the length and order of

the Stagirite's works in modern editions. Thus, one might be surprised by the hefty amount of testimonia regarding late Peripatetic interpretations of the *Categories* (which, for a number of reasons explored by Sharples, exerted a unique fascination on the Peripatetics and not only them) and by the scarcity of the material dealing with biology (Although Aristotle's zoological treatises were an integral part of his philosophical agenda, the thinkers who were active during this period betrayed comparatively little interest in grasping the potential philosophical implications of his zoological inquiries.).

In addition to a vast number of rather short passages in this collection, the reader will also find two texts translated in their entirety: Diogenes Laertius' survey of Aristotelian philosophy and a synopsis of Peripatetic ethics generally assigned to Arius Didymus and conveyed by Stobaeus. Sharples succeeds in taming, as it were, the intimidatingly esoteric nature of many of his sources by making these texts so conveniently accessible, both through his reliable, precise and clear translations, and through his illuminating analyses.

As Sharples readily admits, he followed the overall structure of the first volume of Long and Sedley's *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, each of the twenty-seven sets of translations being followed by a discussion which provides some essential background, explicates the central arguments in each passage, and places those texts in a larger context that helps us to make connections between cognate philosophical topics or to follow the history of some exegesis. His discussions, which vary considerably in length, often define Peripatetic positions and concepts in contrast to Stoic and Platonist doctrines. These careful comparisons sometimes cast new light on the polemic responses offered by self-styled followers of Aristotle to competing schools (e.g., with respect to the nature of emotions), but also reveal Stoic influences on late Peripatetic theories (e.g., in ethics) and terminology. The challenges faced by Sharples in those admirably clear and generally succinct explanatory notes are as numerous as they are daunting: analyzing and solving textual problems, determining the probable degree of accuracy in interpretations of Aristotelian works, tracing the lineage of philosophical ideas and approaches through successive authors or schools, and determining the relevance of spurious texts. The whole *Peripatetic Philosophy* relies on a sort of delicate archaeological investigation as Sharples tries to mark out the various semantic and philosophical strata of formulas or ideas assigned to Peripatetics, reported by representatives of other schools and betraying a textual interplay and a spectrum of influences that is as perplexing at first as it then becomes fascinating and revelatory thanks to the author's discussions.

Sharples' book assumes that its readers are fairly well acquainted with Aristotle. This being said, anyone interested in ancient philosophy and particularly in the Aristotelian tradition, in the impact of ancient interpretations on our own understanding of Aristotle and in the intellectual history between roughly 200 BC and AD 200 will find this to be an extremely helpful guide.