

## BOOK REVIEW

*Aristotelianism in the First Century bc: Xenarchus of Seleucia.* By ANDREA FALCON. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xi + 227. Hardcover, \$95.00. ISBN 978-0-521-87650-6.

This is an engaging and scholarly study which illustrates that fragmentary texts can be studied coherently and profitably. Falcon manages to bring to light the importance of Xenarchus, a neglected philosopher active in the first century bc when Aristotelian thought made a come-back. As with the other evidence for Peripatetics from Theophrastus (d. 287 BC) down to Aspasius (fl. 100 ad) the evidence is mostly fragmentary, extant in much later sources.

Recent decades have seen a lively debate on what constitutes a “fragment” in ancient philosophy (and other areas). Many standard editions produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by, e.g., Diels (*Vorsokratiker*) and von Arnim (*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*), operated with a cut-and-paste method, ignoring the philosophical entanglement of quoted and paraphrased passages, often leaving out the context when it came to identifying “quotations.” Falcon offers an interpretation fully sensitive to the historical, philological and conceptual context. For this to be possible, he makes good use of other recent scholarship: the increased study of the Neoplatonists (sources for Xenarchus’ thought), and his own wider study of Aristotle and his interpreters.

The three separate parts of the book do justice to the material and its particular problems: Part 1 is an introduction on Xenarchus’ life and work, conveniently collecting together for the first time what we know about him in one place. (I note that this Xenarchus is not mentioned in the OCD.) Part 2 presents the fragmentary texts with translation and brief commentary, a meticulous and important undertaking which requires knowledge of much of the tradition from Aristotle’s successors down to the Neoplatonists. Lastly, Part 3 offers three short essays on the reception of Xenarchus. This arrangement—biography, texts and translation, and reception—creates a stimulating example for others to interpret the fragmentary remains of an ancient author. Its clear argument, balanced judgment and original structure make this an invaluable study for Aristotelianism.

Interestingly, Xenarchus is a very vocal critic of Aristotle, but Falcon aptly explains that this does not necessarily mean that his loyalty as a Peripatetic is at stake (2). To understand the historical and philosophical significance of Xenarchus we need to be aware that the study of Aristotle's works had waned and ongoing debates between schools had led to syncretistic tendencies. The renewed interest now focused on exegesis of written materials, leading to canonization (a precondition for evaluative commentary). Falcon argues forcefully for the literary diversity of works that engaged with Aristotle.

Xenarchus, it emerges, is not a commentator in the strict sense. His evaluation of Aristotle is critical and philosophical rather than purely explanatory and philological. Falcon suggests at the outset that Xenarchus is called "Peripatetic" as "an indication of his commitment to a careful study of Aristotle's works" (2–3). But later he adds, "critical engagement with Aristotle's works ... did not imply a commitment to his doctrines" (40). Thus the criticism of Aristotle cannot be fully understood "unless we dissociate fidelity to Aristotle's ideas from critical engagement with his works" (2).

Falcon also raises some important issues with regard to the modern approach to this period. The disruption to philosophy resulting from the Mithradatic wars must have been considerable. The capture of Athens and Sulla's transportation of Aristotle's library to Rome (Plut. Sulla 26; cf. Cic. Att. 4.10.1) also changed the approach to philosophy. For the analysis of the renewed study of Aristotle, Falcon warns that we should adopt a perspective "that does not project what we know about Alexander of Aphrodisias back onto the first century bce" (21). Falcon points out that we need to be sensitive to the differences in exegetical style among those who studied Aristotle and to the fact that "Xenarchus is a counterexample to any monolithic account of the origins of philosophical exegesis" (*ibid.*).

The most significant point of criticism concerns the fifth substance, which Aristotle allocated to the heavens to account for celestial motion, thus adding one to the standard set of four substances. These criticisms resemble those by other Peripatetics (Theophrastus, Strato). Simplicius provides six assumptions on which the argument in Aristotle may be based (the framework is neither Simplicius' nor Philoponus', but probably also not Xenarchus': 27–32). The material is complex and cannot be repeated here, but Falcon's conclusion is significant: "the long and tortuous discussion that Simplicius offers in his commentary on the *De caelo* indicates that the ancient debate on these arguments never stopped in antiquity" (31). Xenarchus seems to have offered a positive alternative as well, arguing

that there is no need to introduce a fifth simple body that naturally performs circular motion.

Falcon is right to highlight Xenarchus' importance for the development of Aristotelianism in the post-Hellenistic era (though his title should not be taken to suggest that Xenarchus was the most important Peripatetic in the first century bc). The overall significance of this original study lies in the rigorous method, the well-thought out structure and the tightly argued and insightful discussion of the fragments for Xenarchus. It not only fits well into current scholarship to analyze the complex evidence for Peripatetic thought after Aristotle on the basis of fragments, but also creates a new format which goes beyond a standard edition (text and translation). The book sets a new standard for contextualized scholarly analysis of philosophical fragments.

HAN BALTUSSEN

*The University of Adelaide*, [han.baltussen@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:han.baltussen@adelaide.edu.au).