

BOOK REVIEW

Luogo, vuoto e movimento a distanza in Giovanni Filopono. By RITA SALIS. Lecce: Edizioni Millela, 2014. Pp. 304. Paperback, €30.00. ISBN 978-88-7048-559-2.

In this volume, Rita Salis focuses on the *corollaries* of John Philoponus (AD 490-570),¹ emphasizing in particular this author's philosophical and scientific ideas in comparison with Aristotle's *Physics*. These topics include the problems of long-distance movement, place and void, and are illustrated in the movement of a projectile. For Philoponus, once projectile motion was understood in terms of an *impetus* (impulse), it became possible to reassess the importance of the medium, as regards the natural motion of bodies falling through it. On this basis he concludes, against Aristotle, that there is in fact nothing to prevent one from imagining motion taking place through a void.

The works of current scholars that focus on the *corollaries*² also investigate the topics mentioned in Salis' title and demonstrate strong interest in this material. The main intention of the author with this volume is not to resolve the debate, but to refine it by trying to be as faithful as possible to the works of both Aristotle and Philoponus. In this effort, the book provides an introduction; three parts that clearly analyze the text of Philoponus: *Corollario sul luogo* (corollary about the place); *Corollario sul vuoto* (corollary about the void) and *il problema del moto a distanza* (the problem of long-distance movement); and final conclusions.

To open the introduction, Salis describes Philoponus' education and his characteristics as a writer and emphasizes the influence that the Alexandrian school had on his work—foremost how he started revisiting Aristotle and introduced a new theology and Christian philosophy. Subsequent comments anticipate the contents of the book.

¹ John Philoponus' *Corollaries*, AD 517.

² Ed. H. Vitelli *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca XVI–XVII*, Berlin, Reimer, 1887. trans. A. R. Lacey, *Philoponus On Aristotle's Physics*, London, Duckworth, 1993. trans. M. Edwards, *Philoponus, On Aristotle's Physics*, London, Duckworth 1994. P. Lettinck, *Philoponus, On Aristotle's Physics*, London, Duckworth, 1993. D. Furley, C. Widberg, *Philoponus, Corollaries on Place and Void*, London Duckworth, 1991.

First, concerning the problem of movement in the distance in Aristotle, Philoponus develops a critique of the Aristotelian idea of place as an extension (implying the corporeality of place and the incorporeality of the void). The second component is the problem of the three-dimensionality of place in Aristotle's theory (length, width and depth). In this segment, Salis identifies Philoponus' main criticisms of Aristotle's physics. Through this, Salis offers the reader a preview of the arguments developed in the following chapters.

Plato³ started examining the relationship of the object moved to the impulse that moves it. Aristotle, in turn, studied (and criticized) this, dismissing the existence of space despite the fact that he deeply studied the concept of places (*Phys* IV 4, 212a20-21).⁴ Philoponus developed this last Aristotelian idea, indicating that substances by themselves require some materiality for their being. Aristotle rejected immaterial things, in contrast with Plato whose metaphysics accepted immaterial substances; but Philoponus' concept of substance concerns material objects. Concerning the discussion of space, Philoponus claims that from every point of space it may be possible to draw identical figures. This sort of assertion marked him as an innovative thinker who influenced later Renaissance scholars. For example, Philoponus disproved Aristotle's verdict that speed is proportional to the weight of the moving bodies and indirectly proportional to the density of the medium by appealing to the same kind of experiment that Galileo carried out centuries later (In *Phys.* 682–84). This sort of thinking help to settle the basis for the impetus theory of the 13th and 14th centuries.⁵

One of the main points that Salis makes in this book is to underline the marginality of long-distance movement in the work of Aristotle. The author advances the theory of inertia, indicating that the first impulse that moves the object puts it in motion until a major force stop it.⁶ Thus, he thinks that to the aims of movement, place and void would be the same. Philoponus criticizes such an analogy of place and void, by instead attributing causality to the body that is in movement. Place and void will just be the spaces that host the body in movement. As Salis

³ *Laws* book X; *Phaedrus*; *Phaedo*.

⁴ For further information, Benjamin Morison, *On Location: Aristotle's Concept of Place*, Oxford 2002

⁵ Buridan's position was that a moving object would only be arrested by the resistance of the air and the weight of the body which would oppose its impetus, *Vid. Questions on the Eight Books of the Physics of Aristotle: Book VIII Question 12*

⁶ See also Salis, La causalità naturale in Aristotele, *Fisica* II 7, in C. Rossitto (a cura), *Studies on Aristotle and the Aristotelian Tradition - Studi su Aristotele e la tradizione aristotelica*. Lecce 2011, 81–101

correctly asserts, although Philoponus' theory is based on Aristotle, the author has actually based his theory on principles totally divergent from the ones of Aristotle.

This last assertion best exemplifies Salis' contribution to the Aristotelian-Philoponus debate, a topic that has been wisely and vigorously argued.⁷ This book is not an easy read for anyone with little expertise on this field, but it may be an essential work for anyone interested in the later development of Aristotelian physics.

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⁷ For entries in this debate see 283-284.