

BOOK REVIEW

Rereading Ancient Philosophy: Old Chestnuts and Sacred Cows. Edited by VERITY HARTE and RAPHAEL WOOLF. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp.xi + 307. Hardback, \$99.00. ISBN: 978-1-107-19497-7.

This volume strikes an original tone, nicely blending the personal and professional registers. The fruit of the Figeac Festschrift (July 2014) in honor of Mary Margaret McCabe, the monograph reads as both intellectual tribute and philosophical *tour de force*. The thirteen contributors—former students and colleagues alike—anchor their work in McCabe’s *oeuvre* and influence. They proceed to take on “old chestnuts” (i.e., well-worn philosophical passages) and “sacred cows” (i.e., entrenched scholarly positions) in the hope of “stimulating, by example, new thinking about texts and ideas” (4). The collection succeeds in doing just that, giving us an impressive *exemplum* of the philosophical craft—*tam antiqua et tam nova*.

An introduction by the volume’s editors succinctly frames the project’s origins and objectives. Shaul Tor’s opening chapter on Heraclitean *physis* then sets the methodological and interpretative stage. Bucking recent orthodoxy, Tor argues for the personalizing and volitional force of nature in B123 (φύσις κρύπτεισθαι φιλεῖ). His reading also reveals how the interpretative tradition can distort our textual lens. In this way, Tor definitively seals the reciprocal bond between “old chestnuts” and “sacred cows.”

The next two chapters pair well together in their shared focus on Socratic hermeneutics. First, Charles Brittain offers a dialectical (not doctrinal) interpretation of the poetic interlude in the *Protagoras* (339a-348e). The ambiguous, even fallacious, ways in which Socrates plays the hermeneutical game invite us to reconsider the Socratic figure and the Platonic dialogue. This revisionist reading continues in Chapter 3, where Amber Carpenter uses a chestnut from the *Gorgias* (461-81) to challenge the sacred cow of Socratic eudaimonism.

Chapters 4 and 5 turn to Diotima’s speech on love, a contentious passage in the “post-Vlastos literature” (80). Instead of trying to resolve the debate, Raphael Woolf contents himself with a more modest—and interesting—goal: reframing

the problem of Platonic love and knowledge in terms of human mutability (not individuality). Along the way, Woolf gives solid metaphysical grounding for the volume's sustained attention to textual detail. Since "the smallest difference may make all the difference" (95), the most subtle shift in perspective can disclose new hermeneutical horizons. Angela Hobbs illustrates this kind of interpretative move in Chapter 5, drawing our attention to an overlooked aspect of Diotima's speech: the unsettling characterization of *Erōs* as both philosopher and magician (*goēs*, 203d7-8). Hobbs takes this pairing seriously and uncovers the transformative powers of the erotic, the magical and the philosophical realms—a *mélange* strangely embodied in Socrates himself.

The volume's central chapters crack some difficult chestnuts from the *Republic*. Tad Brennan contests the recent tendency to dismiss the psychological import of the dialogue's middle books. He topples this sacred cow by showing how the inclusion of women in the Guardian class advances the city-soul analogy. Verity Harte goes on to tackle a chestnut that needs no introduction: the distinction between knowledge and belief in Book Five (476c7-480a13). Leveraging evidence from Book 1, she contends that the domains of knowledge and belief are, indeed, distinct—but not exclusive (161). Dominic Scott then comes to the critique of poetry in Book 10. After carefully peeling apart the different layers of this argument, he highlights the harmony between its metaphysical and empirical approaches (177).

As the Introduction makes clear, entire texts can sometimes grow into large chestnuts (6). The enigmatic *Cratylus* doubtless falls in this category. Malcolm Schofield breaks open the dialogue in Chapter 9, taking Cratylus himself—his literary portrait and historical figure—as an interpretative key. In this way, Schofield underscores with McCabe the importance of reading Plato in light of the "Greek philosophical tradition" (194). Naturally, Aristotle enjoys pride of place—but not without his own rereading. Joachim Aufderheide takes up this work in Chapter 10, calling into question Aristotle's status as the virtue ethicist *par excellence*. Aufderheide's approach models the volume's consistent attitude toward sacred cows: never flippant and always marked by a real regard for both primary sources and contemporary scholarship.

The final chapters explore the reception of certain chestnuts in the later philosophical tradition. Ricardo Salles makes the compelling case that Stoic pneumatic theory parallels—and possibly derives from—Simmias' attunement (*harmonia*) argument in the *Phaedo* (85e-86d). In Chapter 12, Richard Sorabji rehabilitates the Aristotelian Alexander on freedom and necessity. In so doing, he nips

a sacred cow in the bud. Finally, Peter Adamson unpacks Plotinus' sophisticated reading of the Platonic *daimōn*. In re-casting Plotinus as a close and creative "reader of Plato," Adamson provides fresh historical context for our contemporary *relecture* (271). The chapter thus eloquently sums up and concludes the entire project.

As for the *mise en forme*, the monograph shines with an appreciable polish. Textual infelicities are scarce and small (Plato's Socrates, *sic*, 5); footnotes are germane and concise, while bibliographies (for McCabe and the volume) and indices (subject and *locorum*) are comprehensive. The reader might regret the lack of consistency where primary sources are concerned, as translations and citations follow various conventions. In a volume of such personal touch and scholarly scope, however, this diversity seems somehow fitting. It certainly reflects the work's consistent tone, which is dialogical and not dogmatic.

In substance and in style, then, this collection does McCabe justice. It will stand as a lasting testament to her legacy. The greatest tribute to McCabe will ultimately lie in the volume's rich pedagogical value. Indeed, *Rereading Ancient Philosophy* will serve as an important *vademecum* for students and scholars alike.

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