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Articles

The Natural Theology of Xenophon's Socrates

Nathan Powers

In two passages of his *Memorabilia*, Xenophon represents Socrates as encouraging virtue in his companions by persuading them to accept novel claims about the gods and their relationship to human beings. In *Mem.* i 4, Socrates argues for claims about the intelligence, benevolence, and power of the gods based on the evidence of apparent design in the world—the earliest surviving version of this sort of argument. In *Mem.* iv 3, Socrates describes the world as anthropocentric, arranged at the cosmic level by a human-loving deity or deities so as to be an environment in which humans can thrive; again, Xenophon's is the earliest report we have of such a view.

These texts have received relatively little analysis, despite the interest they hold as the initial steps in a long-lived tradition of 'natural' theology and their demonstrable influence on later Greek philosophers in that tradition (particularly the Stoics).¹ Furthermore, very little attention has been paid to the question of how these passages fit into the broader context of the *Memorabilia*: why does Xenophon find it important to present Socrates as a theological innovator in the first place, and what do these innovations contribute to his overall portrayal of Socrates? I examine these two passages closely, looking both at the arguments that Xenophon attributes to Socrates and at the literary agenda that these arguments subserve.

I. Apology and Theology in the *Memorabilia*

Like his contemporary Plato, Xenophon wrote an *Apology of Socrates* in which Socrates is represented confronting his accusers at the notorious trial that ended with his death sentence. But while Plato was content to let his engagement (at least, his *direct* engagement) with Socrates' accusers end there, Xenophon also wrote an ambitious defense of Socrates in four books, the *Memorabilia*. In this work Xenophon sets out to defend Socrates comprehensively against both the charges of his indictment and, especially, other accusations that had been leveled against him after his death.² Xenophon responds directly to both sets of charges

¹ For some recent discussion of *Mem.* i 4 and iv 3, see McPherran 1996, 273-285; Viano 2001, 109-113; Dorion 2003, on i 4 ad loc.; and especially Sedley 2007, 78-86 and 210-225. For the connections between these passages and Stoic views, see section 4 below.

² We know that there were anti-Socratic pamphlets circulating in Athens in the early decades of the fourth century. The most notorious of these was the sophist Polycrates' inflammatory *Accusation of Socrates*, to which *Mem.* i 2 appears to be responding. Evidently the *Accusation* portrayed Socrates as an enemy of Athenian democracy responsible for the (mis)education of prominent anti-democrats

Aristotle on the Common Sense. By Pavel Gregoric. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. xiv + 252. \$60.00 (cloth). ISBN 978-0-19-027737-7.

Sean D. Kirkland

In the first part of the *Theaetetus*, Plato's Socrates leads his eponymous interlocutor to an admission that knowledge cannot be equated with perception. In so doing, Socrates distinguishes (1) the process by which the individual sense organs are used by the soul in the passive reception of sensible qualities from (2a) the process by which the soul 'holds all these together (πάντα ταῦτα ζυγνείναι)' (*Tht.* 184d), which cannot be accomplished by any one of the individual senses itself (*Tht.* 185a), and (2b) that by which the soul independently 'views' (ἐπισκοπεῖν) or 'grasps' (ἐπορέγεσθαι) 'what is common to all (τό τ' ἐπὶ πᾶσι κοινόν)' of these, and indeed to all things (e.g., 'it is'/'it is not', likeness/unlikeness, sameness/difference, and unity/plurality, *Tht.* 185b-d), as well as the being (οὐσία) of whatever is perceived (*Tht.* 186a-c). In this discussion, perception (αἴσθησις) is limited to the former process, while the latter two functions are performed at the level of cognition or thinking (διανοεῖν, *Tht.* 185a ff.).

Pavel Gregoric's *Aristotle on the Common Sense* deals with Aristotle's attempt to resolve this basic issue, identified first by Plato, with his conception of the 'common sense' or *sensus communis* (κοινὴ αἴσθησις). Gregoric sums up the difference in the Platonic and Aristotelian approaches: Whereas Plato 'expands thought at the expense of perception' (5), Aristotle attempts 'to expand the scope of perception at the expense of thought' (6).

Aristotle on the Common Sense is a learned, lucidly written, and compellingly argued treatment of its subject, one that surveys and helpfully synthesizes the immense ancient and modern literature on the topic. It also proposes some novel solutions to a number of long-standing textual and interpretive problems.

Gregoric begins the book with a brief and accessible introduction to the theme, presenting the basic problem that Aristotle's notion of the common sense is intended to resolve and laying out the major scholarly positions on the issue, indicating the currently still fraught state of the question. The book is then divided into three parts. In part 1, Gregoric discusses the larger conceptual 'framework' that he will employ in his interpretation, touching on Aristotle's hylomorphic and teleological view of nature in the service of a detailed and strategic discussion of *De anima*. The standard passages treated in scholarship on the common sense in Aristotle are then scrutinized in part 2 (*DA* iii 1.425a27, *DM* 1.450a10, *PA* iv 10.686a31, and *DA* iii 7.431b5), and to these are added others that have received little or no attention in this context (*HA* i 3.489a17, *Meta.* i 1.981b14, and *EN* iii 10.1118b1). The latter are only obliquely related to Gregoric's central concern, but do illuminate Aristotle's usage of relevant vocabu-

lary and thus aid in the interpretation of the central texts. In part 3, the four functions legitimately attributable to the common sense, according to Gregoric, are treated in depth and individually.

Part 1 puts forward a perhaps not wholly uncontroversial reading of *De anima*. Gregoric first strongly emphasizes the peculiar sense in which the soul is both itself a unity and unifies the body, while it nonetheless itself has 'parts'. That is, the soul's different capacities are not to be understood as discrete things gathered into an aggregate, but rather as aspects separable only conceptually. And this then extends to each capacity itself for Gregoric, with the consequence that the perceptual capacity of the soul is only conceptually divisible into the capacity of the common sense and the lower order capacities of the individual senses. Indeed, in the framework the author arrives at here and to which he refers throughout, there is a 'sensory capacity of the soul' (confusingly labeled, in my opinion) that encompasses two (only conceptually) divisible parts—(1) the 'perceptual capacity of the soul', which is the capacity to perceive what is present before us under the right conditions, and (2) the 'imaginative capacity of the soul', which is the capacity to synthesize sensory elements into an image and to imagine images of that which is not present before us (57). At another level of (only conceptual) division, we find the five individual senses operating under (1), the 'perceptual capacity of the soul'. For Gregoric, the central meaning of the phrase 'common sense' is that perceptual capacity of the soul viewed not at the level of the individual senses, but as 'the higher-order perceptual power emerging from the unity of the perceptual capacity of the soul' (59), and this is his focus for the rest of the book. One small reservation does present itself at this stage: the thoroughgoing integration of the Aristotelian soul, its real unification and merely conceptual divisions, seems to be respected in all of Gregoric's distinctions except one: that between the perceptual capacity and the imaginative capacity of the soul. The rest of the volume then seems to follow the diagram in treating these as more or less separate, non-coincident operations, which by Gregoric's own account is problematic (see 54, 108).

In part 2, Gregoric begins with a section entitled 'Overlooked Occurrences of the Phrase "Common Sense"'. The analysis of these passages yields no real substantive results, although it does give Gregoric grounds for arguing against a standard interpretation of one central passage (*DA* iii 1.425a27), reading it as containing a descriptive phrase referring to the operation of the individual senses, rather than the technical term (ἡ κοινὴ αἴσθησις, 79). In *De partibus animalium* iv 10, Aristotle links the erect posture of human beings to intelligence, speculating that the lack of mobility of the common sense and thought (διάνοια) in non-erect animals results from too great a weight pressing down on the responsible organs. Here Gregoric sees the term common sense as referring to what he calls the 'sensory capacity of the soul', encompassing both the perceptual and imaginative capacities, a result that is echoed in his interpretation of *De memoria et remiscencia* 1. Finally, the author attempts to avoid recourse to textual emendation in interpreting a problematic passage in *De anima* iii 7. Citing contemporary

practice as indicated by Thucydides (among others), Gregoric interprets Aristotle's claim that we perceive a moving beacon as a signal of danger 'by the common (κοινῆ)'. Here, the author suggests that the elliptical reference, if it is not deleted from the text, might refer to the 'sensory capacity of the soul', again comprising both the perceptual and the imaginative capacities.

Part 2, in sum, presents three textually attested uses of the vocabulary of 'common sense' in Aristotle: (1) a description of a specific individual sense common to all animals, touch, or an unspecified reference to the operation carried out by all five senses. (2) The sensitivity within the individual senses themselves to common perceptibles (supported through the integration of the higher-order perceptual capacity of the soul, but not referring strictly speaking to this power itself). And, (3) the sensory capacity of the soul that operates through both its perceptual and imaginative capacities.

Somewhat strangely, Gregoric turns in part 3 toward what he considers the most important meaning of common sense in Aristotle, the higher-order perceptual capacity of the soul that operates through the individual senses, which is a meaning not in evidence in any of the passages treated in part 2, as he interprets them. The four different functions of this capacity, which cannot be accomplished by any of the individual senses themselves, are the following: First, Gregoric focuses on the simultaneous perception of homogeneous special perceptibles (two different colors) and heterogeneous special perceptibles (a color and a flavor). Second, offering an original but perhaps questionable resolution of the interpretive dilemma represented by the analogy Aristotle draws at *DA* iii 1 between the discriminating faculty (identified by Gregoric as the common sense, in the specific sense here in play) and a point, Gregoric argues that the function of discriminating between both homogeneous and heterogeneous perceptibles is also denied to the individual senses and made the purview of the common sense. Third and fourth, according to Gregoric, the control of the senses, identical to the waking state, and the monitoring of same are the unique work of the common sense.

In a move that will surprise many readers (although one that remains consistent with his own earlier discussions), the author departs from most standard interpretations and denies the following two functions to the common sense: (1) the perception of common perceptibles, and (2) the perception of accidental perceptibles. As to (1), Gregoric has already interpreted the central text on the issue, *De anima* iii 1, as indicating that common perceptibles are perceived by the individual senses themselves. Gregoric here introduces a helpful distinction between the perception of common perceptibles (which is the work of the individual senses) and the recognition of the difference between common and special perceptibles (which is the work of the common sense). And with regard to (2), the exclusion of this function is a more or less semantic issue. Because of the limitations Gregoric has placed on the scope of the term 'common sense' to be treated in part 3 of his book, the perception of accidental perceptibles (such as seeing the white thing as Socrates or seeing the apple as sweet) simply cannot be

understood as the function of common sense because it involves both the perceptual and imaginative capacities of the soul and is therefore the function of the overarching 'sensory capacity', not the perceptual capacity on which Gregoric is focused.

As has been indicated, there is a conflict between the book's basic tendencies toward both the exhaustive treatment of its subject matter and toward the narrowing of the technical meaning of the common sense, and some of the more original interpretive claims will surely be contested. However, *Aristotle on the Common Sense* is a painstakingly researched and carefully argued work. Students should begin their work on this issue here and experts should attend to it, as an undeniably original and important contribution to the scholarly conversation on this subject.

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Aristotle's De Anima: A Critical Commentary. By Ronald Polansky.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. xv + 580. \$100.00
(cloth). ISBN-13: 978-0521862745.

Deborah K.W. Modrak

A comprehensive, chapter by chapter, section by section commentary on the *De Anima*, Polansky's work fills a gap in the literature on the *De Anima*. There has not been a commentary on the entire *De Anima* published in a number of years. This is somewhat surprising in light of the importance of the work and the large amount of secondary literature that has appeared over the last thirty years.¹ Not only are the topics raised in the *De Anima* discussed in the body of the commentary but also the copious footnotes accompanying the text provide extensive references to the secondary literature. The notes, *inter alia*, take up rival interpretations and address questions that have exercised recent commentators on Aristotle's thought.

This is a free-standing commentary published without a translation or text of the *De Anima*. The scope and approach of Polansky's work are reminiscent of a much earlier commentary tradition in which a commentator might make a brief reference to the text, perhaps quoting a line or two, and then expand upon its themes. In this respect, the style is distinctly different from the Greek texts of the

¹ Since the list of secondary literature is enormous, I will only mention a few recent books: Everson 1997, Gregoric 2007, Johansen 1997, Modrak 1987, Nussbaum and Rorty edd. 1995, and Wedin 1988.