REVIEWS OF BOOKS

‘combat a mindset which [he] sees as mistaking the place of man in the universe’ (295).

Overall, Roskam and Van der Stockt’s volume is a very welcome addition to the flourishing Plutarchean scholarship of recent years and one that provides an excellent springboard for further rehabilitation of Plutarch’s ‘popular philosophy’.

ELENI KECHAGIA-OVSEIKO
University of Oxford
eleni.kechagia@admin.ox.ac.uk


This fascinating study of a little-studied philosopher not only provides a thorough and illuminating account of Xenarchus’ work and engagement with Aristotelian philosophy, but also an excellent example of how to approach a philosopher about whom so little is known. As well as giving us a scholarly and meticulous resource on Xenarchus, Falcon uses his study as the basis for a persuasive reappraisal of certain assumptions concerning the historical development and reception of Aristotelian physics.

Traditionally, Xenarchus has been viewed as an adversary of Aristotle, who contested the De Caelo’s arguments for a fifth, celestial, substance. Falcon paints a very different picture, of Xenarchus as a fully-fledged Peripatetic, who used an intense and detailed critical reading of Aristotle to try to make Aristotelian physics compatible with the dominant philosophical ideas of the early post-Hellenistic period. It is only when viewed anachronistically, in terms of the Aristotelian orthodoxy represented by Alexander of Aphrodisias (and his followers), that Xenarchus appears to rebel against the Peripatetic tradition. As Falcon argues, Peripatetic thought in the first century BC was characterized by a return to Aristotle, through detailed and scholarly, but by no means uncritical, engagement with his written work. As a parallel, Falcon mentions Strato, who managed to become Head of the Peripatetic school, even though he regarded the heavens as fiery contra Aristotle (14–15).

The book is divided into three sections: Xenarchus’ life and work; the texts, translations and notes; and three essays on ‘reception’, both Xenarchus’ own reception of Aristotle and the later reception/influence of Xenarchus. Generally, this framework works well (although at times direct combination of fragments with points being made in the first section might have helped to aid textual continuity and to avoid a small degree of repetition).

In terms of historical details, Falcon offers convincing challenges to various ideas and conjectures. For example, the view that Xenarchus was responsible for Ariston and Cratippus becoming Peripatetics would place Xenarchus’ philosophical activity earlier than evidence suggests (12) or Falcon’s challenge of Donini’s view that post-Hellenistic Aristotelian exegesis is purely made up of attempts to systematize and justify Aristotle’s views.

Falcon suggests that Xenarchus’ own views were based on an actual reading of De Caelo (28) and that Xenarchus was a creative philosopher in his own right, not simply an astute and knowledgeable reader of Aristotle. Through his suggestion that the helix is a simple line, Xenarchus questions the Aristotelian thesis that the existence of only two simple lines, straight and circular, means that we can posit two simple motions. Far from being a systematic demolition, Xenarchus’ critique is selective, so that he actually defends the appropriateness of Aristotle considering simple lines within a work of physics (31). For Falcon, a key point of Xenarchus’ critique is that we should not necessarily posit a fifth substance to explain celestial circular motion, since fire has circular movement, when fully realized. However, this would still leave Xenarchus with the problem of explaining the eternity of the world and how fire escapes generation and destruction; and there is simply insufficient evidence to say that Xenarchus definitely reduced ‘celestial motion to the circular motion of perfected fire’ (36). Falcon also points out differences between Xenarchus and Stoic physics, but also how Xenarchus adapted Aristotelian ethics, in a way which was compatible with Stoic influences.

Falcon concludes with three short essays on reception. In the first, which looks more closely at Xenarchus in the broader context of Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic reception of Aristotle, Falcon uses his view of Xenarchus as a Peripatetic to show just how radical and controversial Aristotle’s physics was in the ancient world. Aristotle departed from Academic/Presocratic interest in generation of the world and suggested a view of unity without uniformity. Seen in this context, Xenarchus’ rejection of the fifth substance was an attempt to hold on to Aristotelian physics, but...
make it compatible with the idea of the physical world as constituting the totality of existence. In Falcon’s second piece, on Xenarchus and Plotinus, he argues that the view that fire moves in a circle, once in its natural place, which is a key element of Platonist critiques of Aristotle in late antiquity, in fact goes back to Xenarchus. The final essay focuses on the orthodox acceptance of Aristotle’s fifth substance in the middle ages. While the 1271 translation of Simplicius may have allowed Thomas Aquinas to engage with Xenarchus’ difficulties, he never considered rejecting the fifth substance. Later exegesis may have questioned certain supporting doctrines, but never the Aristotelian division, dependent on a fifth substance, of the world into celestial and sublunar regions.

Falcon presents a clear picture of a return to Aristotle, following Hellenistic indifference, and how this Aristotelian reception subsequently developed. However, it is a picture which uses Xenarchus to refine conventional views of this development, by showing, for example: how first-century BC Peripatetics were not characterized by the uncritical exegesis of later Aristotelian commentators; just how radical Aristotelian doctrine was in its contemporary context, even though it later became the widely accepted orthodoxy; and how the most unusual thing about Xenarchus as a Peripatetic of his time might not have been that he read Aristotle critically, but that his questions centred around De Caelo, rather than the Categories. Above all, Falcon brings us a good argument for reading Xenarchus, not simply for his own ideas, but also for what the attempt to place them within their broad context can show about the historical development of philosophical thought.

TANIA L. GERGEL
King’s College London
tania.l.gergel@kcl.ac.uk

doi:10.1017/S0075426913001250

Recent scholarship on Epicurean theology has been dominated by the debate between idealists and realists. While realists argue that the Epicurean gods have a real physical existence, for idealists, they are mere thought-constructs. Later Epicureans such as Lucretius and Philodemus evidently considered Epicurus to be a realist, but, according to the idealists, they simply misunderstood Epicurus’ own perhaps deliberately ambiguous treatment of the gods. The idealist view has achieved some success, especially in the English-speaking world, not least through the advocacy of A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley (The Hellenistic Philosophers, Cambridge, 1987, 1.139–49), but the realist interpretation still has supporters.

Essler’s book, a revised version of a Würzburg dissertation, represents a milestone in this area. By means of a thorough and acute study of the ancient sources and modern interpretations, Essler is able to provide a full and convincing realist account of Epicurean theology. Cicero and Philodemus are naturally prominent, as the title indicates, but other relevant texts receive equally illuminating treatment.

The first chapter is concerned with Cicero, ND 1.43–46, where a theory is apparently ascribed to Epicurus according to which the existence of gods is proven by our having inborn notions of them and by the universal agreement on the point. This has been important evidence for the idealists (see now D. Sedley, ‘Epicurus’ theological innatism’, in J. Fish and K.R. Sanders (eds), Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition, Cambridge, 2011, 29–52), but Essler offers powerful arguments for the view that not only the un-Epicurean appeal to universal agreement but also the reference to inborn notions are due to Cicero’s own elaboration, while authentically Epicurean material is confined to the places where Epicurus is cited by name. Further confusion has resulted from Cicero’s misuse, in the argument against Epicurean theology (ND 1.105–14), of phrases belonging to an account of our perception of the gods (ND 1.49–50) as though they came instead from an account of their bodily existence. The difficult scholium to Epicur. KD 1 (D.L. 10.139) is shown to be compatible with Cicero’s account in offering a description of the gods as existing as individuals but being perceived only as a species.

The next chapter is concerned with the idea (prolepsis) of the gods, its form and function, content, and formation: concerning the last, Lucretius 5.1169–82 (on dream visions) is shown to give the correct explanation, S.E. M. 9.45–46 being non-Epicurean. In the third chapter, Essler studies