

Book Review

George E. Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006. Pp. x, 419. ISBN 0-19-926456-2. \$90.00.

Karamanolis (hereafter K.)'s book, which grew out of his 2001 Oxford D. Phil. thesis, is a work of some scope and ambition. It endeavors to tell the story of the reception of Aristotle among Platonists over more than four centuries, from Antiochus (c. 130-68 BC) to Porphyry (c. 234-305 AD). K. approaches this story through two broad questions: how could committed Platonists accept Aristotle as an authority, and what did studying Aristotle offer such Platonists? (5) K.'s general answer to the latter question is that Aristotle offered "a recapitulation of the doctrines of Plato harmonious with their own thinking" and that consequently Aristotle became for them "an instrument in the reconstruction of Plato's alleged philosophical system" (23). While this general answer also contains an implicit pragmatic answer to the other question concerning the justification of Aristotle's authority for Platonists (viz. that the latter felt they needed Aristotle in order to interpret Plato's philosophy), K.'s later treatment makes clear that no blanket answer to both of these questions can be offered which will adequately represent the viewpoint of each of the Platonists under consideration. While there are certainly trends to be found within Platonism concerning these matters, one must generally accept to work piecemeal: the real answers to K's initial interrogations must consequently be sought in the extended treatments given to individual philosophers.

In each case, K. endeavors to characterize precisely the nature of that thinker's viewpoint towards Aristotle and (in cases where these Platonists do rely on Aristotle in interpreting Plato) to point us towards the Aristotelian material which either plausibly has (on the reliable grounds of linguistic parallels) or could have (on the more hazardous basis of conceptual parallels) inspired the Platonists in question. The bulk of the book thus features chapters on Antiochus (44-84), Plutarch (85-126), Numenius (127-149), Atticus (150-190), Ammonius (191-215), Plotinus (216-242) and Porphyry

(243-330). Each of these chapters is usually sub-divided into the various parts of philosophy in which the philosopher's position can be usefully related to the Aristotelian material. K. concludes his monograph with two appendices (one which briefly sketches the converse question of the Platonism of Aristotle and the Early Peripatos (331-336) and a list of Platonist works, most of which have not survived, dealing explicitly with Aristotelian philosophy (337-339)), a bibliography (340-361), a general index (363-377) and an index locorum (379-419). I shall first assess the virtues and vices of K.'s treatment of the individual figures before coming back to discuss the general argument.

The chapter on Antiochus takes as its point of departure a synthetic account of the debate which opposed him to Philo of Larissa concerning the possibility of apprehension (κατὰληψις, a Stoic borrowing), an account which is then broadened into the consideration of Antiochus' thesis to the effect that Platonism, Aristotelianism and Stoicism, properly understood, were the expression of a single doctrine. In this vein, K. rightly emphasizes Antiochus' belief that agreement on ethical matters betrays agreement in terms of general philosophical outlook (59), a way of relating to the tradition which will be influential in later Platonism. After an interesting argument against attributing to Antiochus the notion that Forms exist as thoughts in some divine mind (62 ff.), K. spends some time considering the harmony thesis insofar as it relates to Antiochus' ideas about epistemology and ethics. The presentation of Antiochus' stoicizing epistemology is lucid, but not enough time is spent comparing it to the Aristotelian position, a task required by the book's main argument. Of special interest in the ethics section is K.'s leveraging of the Aristotelian distinction between the 'fortunate' (εὐδαίμων) and the 'blessed' (μακάριος) life in order to illuminate Antiochus' view on the relationship between Stoic and Aristotelian ethics and Plato's (74-75), as well as Antiochus' defense of μετριοπικθεια as a position shared by both Plato and Aristotle (against Stoic πικθεια) in spite of views about the nature of emotions that are closer to that of Stoicism (79 ff.).

K. presents us a Plutarch who is also sympathetic to much of Aristotle, but for radically different reasons than Antiochus: the latter viewed both Plato and his student as dogmatists, while Plutarch (surely no skeptic) rather valued the aporetic spirit which can be found operating in both Platonic dialogues and Aristotelian treatises. K. rightly argues that we cannot infer Plutarch's lack of

knowledge of Aristotelian material from his lack of inclination to quote directly from that material (90) and gives us good evidence that Plutarch must have been quite familiar with that material. While Plutarch surely criticizes Aristotle, certain particularities of these criticisms lead K. to conclude that Plutarch criticizes the Stagirite to construct rather than to destroy. K. suggests that some of the latter's problematic opinions (insofar as Plutarch is concerned) might stem from a mistaken understanding of Plato rather than out of a polemical spirit-- this could be the source, for instance, of the apparent denial of some strong providence Plutarch takes to follow from the self-centered activity of the Aristotelian intellect.

In this context, I find it strange that K. can suggest that Aristotle's view (as understood by Plutarch) "may be formed on the basis of a particular understanding of Plato's God, such as that God is not in any kind of contact with the sensible realm" (107) without mentioning the first part of Plato's *Parmenides* (esp. 134c-e), where such a 'particular understanding' might be grounded without much difficulty. A more glaring omission is that within a discussion of Plutarch's psychology K. serially presents Plutarch's criticism of Aristotle on the question of the separability of the soul, Plutarch's agreement with Aristotle that there is no intellect without soul and Plutarch's agreement with Aristotle about the 'role and status' of the intellect without raising the issue of the separability of the intellect as it arises in the Aristotelian corpus. (113-115) K.'s critique of Düring's thesis that *De virt. mor.* 442b-c delimits two phases (one Platonic, one "Aristotelian") in Aristotle's moral psychology according to Plutarch is spot on (117-118).

The discussion on ethics in this chapter is very rich. K. argues that Plutarch's ethics suggests and presupposes distinctions between different kinds or levels of virtue (122-123), distinctions which will become increasingly popular in later Platonism. In another omission in terms of background, K. discusses Plutarch's thesis that Plato and Aristotle share the idea that there can be no courage without fear (118-119) without mentioning Nicias' comment in the *Laches* (197a-c) where this idea most obviously originates. The Aristotelian view according to which the temperate man (ἡγκράτης) is less virtuous than the φρόνιμος does not seem to me straightforwardly "entailed by the doctrine of the unity of virtues, which we do find in Plato" (121) -- it may be, but this needs clarification and argument which unfortunately K. does not

provide. The topics of natural philosophy and logic are also briefly considered. For some reason, this section is disproportionately affected by typographical errors ('Eythyphro' (88 n. 13), unnecessary comma: "accepts that these are, Plato's transcendent Forms" (99), 'Philipp of Opus' (104 n. 54)) in a book which is otherwise very good on that front.

The chapter on Numenius is appropriately short, given the scantiness of the evidence.¹ This basic fact drives K. to much speculation: we are treated to a "reconstruction" of a Numenian critique of Aristotle (142 ff.) which is itself based on an earlier "reconstruction" of a Numenian metaphysics. (136 ff.) While the picture provided by the latter reconstruction is plausible enough and the critique itself plausible in light of the first "reconstruction", such a degree of speculativeness, especially in the case of the critique, will not be to everyone's tastes. Nevertheless, K.'s basic angle on the Numenius-Aristotle relationship is obviously right: Numenius understands Plato as some sort of Pythagorean and consequently finds Aristotle's philosophy hard to reconcile with that of his teacher (129). "Consequently", that is, for Numenius and for moderns; as K. lucidly argues in a separate section on the compatibility of Aristotelianism and Pythagoreanism, Pythagoreans would not have universally drawn this inference (135). The section on psychology is likewise very speculative, and assumes too much. For instance, K's version of the Numenian critique of Aristotle rests on the claim that "in the *De Anima* [Aristotle] does consider the intellect *to be only a faculty of the soul* and not its essence, as Numenius holds" (147, my emphasis). This reading of the *De Anima* is far from obvious, and that Numenius would have adopted it even less so.

The chapter on Atticus brings us back on firmer textual ground. This polemical figure, as K. rightly points out, took upon himself to radicalize Numenius' critical stance against Aristotle so as to systematically argue against using Aristotle in reconstructing Platonic philosophy. Naturally there follows, in ten very dense pages (179-189), an extended argument for taking two lesser known Platonist philosophers (Taurus and Severus) as possible targets of Atticus' criticism. Significantly, Atticus combats attempts to harmonize the Platonic doctrine of the immortality of the soul with the Aristotelian doctrine of the immortal intellect (167) and thinks that this incompatibility is the symptom of a fundamental difference in philosophical outlook. This difference significantly

manifests itself in ethical matters, which for Atticus rest on the knowledge of the Form of the Good (163 ff.), as well as concerning the question of divine providence (165). On the latter topic, K. curiously neglects to refer us to his own earlier treatment of the Plutarchan view of this difference (107), which obviously invites comparison. K.'s analysis of Atticus' particular understanding of immanent forms as $\delta\upsilon\nu\mu\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ of the transcendent (171 ff.) is important, if only for the posterity of this idea in the metaphysics and psychology of Plotinus and Porphyry. Likewise, the very rich section on Taurus' discrimination between diverse senses of $\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\tau\epsilon\varsigma$ (181 ff.) will be of special interest to those studying the long history of the debate within Platonism concerning whether Plato's account of the creation of the world in the *Timaeus* contradicted its eternity.

K.'s treatment of Ammonius begins with a thorough assessment of the evidence that he explicitly maintained the position that Platonism and Aristotelianism agree as far as their essential doctrines are concerned. K. concludes that there is no compelling reason to reject this evidence, even if Hierocles (our main source on this matter) has obtained some or all of his material second-hand from Porphyry (195, n. 9 in particular). This position led Ammonius to criticize both Platonists and Aristotelians who postulated disharmony between the founders of their respective schools. In this regard, K. unsurprisingly singles out Numenius and Atticus on the side of the Platonists and Alexander and Eudorus on the side of the Peripatetics as Ammonius' possible targets (197-99). Ammonius' position was doubtless, as K. points out, the result of his inclination to focus on the "spirit" ($\nu\omicron\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\varsigma$) rather than on the "letter" ($\lambda\omicron\gamma\iota\sigma\mu\omicron\varsigma$) of the texts in question, a practice which Porphyry will later, with some reason, ascribe to his teacher Plotinus. (201)

K. enters more troubled waters when he derives from Ammonius' alleged 'purification' of the Ancients a higher philosophical independence from his tradition than that of earlier Platonists. Ammonius was, of course, a rather independent thinker, but then one may feel the same way about these 'earlier Platonist' (ironically, especially in light of what K. has written so far about them). Moreover, Ammonius' 'purifying' might simply or primarily involve the refutation of mistaken interpretations of Plato and Aristotle. At any rate, to derive from this independence that Ammonius has a "weak commitment to Plato" (206) is off the mark: Ammonius' stance is more likely the result of a strong

commitment to what Ammonius considered essential in the common philosophy which he understood both Plato and Aristotle as sharing, a position which need not entail any 'weak commitment' towards either.

The chapter ends with a short discussion of Ammonius' possible stance towards the exegesis of the *Timaeus* (212-14), possible insofar as all of it is admittedly derived from Hierocles' own position (213). K. successfully argues that Ammonius' position is compatible with that of Hierocles, but, as the class of propositions which could be 'compatible' with the position of an author is at least as large as our ignorance about that position, this might not tell us much about what Ammonius actually thought.

The chapter on Plotinus is, by all standards, pretty slim. This is less of a criticism than it might seem at first glance: the fact of the matter is that Plotinus' engagement with Aristotle is both pervasive and (as K. recognizes (217)) a very complex affair. It is complex enough that, by my lights, it cannot be adequately and globally assessed within a single chapter of a book which also deals with six other thinkers. Given these constraints, K. nonetheless provides compelling sketches that focus on passages where Plotinus seems to explicitly address basic Aristotelian doctrines about psychology, ethics, metaphysics and "physics" (i.e., about the nature of time). What is mostly lost, therefore, is a study of the extensive use of Aristotelian vocabulary by Plotinus, and of the related dependence of significant parts of his system on Aristotelian conceptuality.

I have reservations about K.'s treatment of Plotinus' critique of Aristotelian psychology, which rides on the simple contrast between the Platonist transcendent soul (defended by Plotinus) and the Aristotelian immanent soul. This is not the place to argue this out at length, but there are several pointers to the effect that what Plotinus rejects in both IV.1 and IV.7 is a particular understanding of the notion of $\nu\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\chi\epsilon\alpha$ and Plotinus' highlighting in the latter treatise of the Peripatetics' continued reliance on "another soul or intelligence" which is transcendent suggests that Plotinus could have read Aristotle in a more favourable light than is presented by K.²

I'm even more puzzled by K.'s account of the divergence in matters of ethics: I see no grounds whatsoever for the "sharp distinction" (230) he sees Plotinus making between $\epsilon\zeta\omega\alpha$ and $\epsilon\delta\alpha\iota\mu\omicron\nu\alpha$ ³, and when he states that Plotinus argues that the latter is not a state subject to improvement (230, 232- which is not

surprising, given that it is not a state at all) this is surely not, as K. claims (232), to the exclusion of a hierarchy of virtues.⁴ K.'s suggestion that Plotinus fails to acknowledge Aristotle's "belief (...) that man's real self consists in reason" (231, referring to book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*) is baffling when a significant portion of what Plotinus has to say about human nature (and consequently ethics) is predicated on this very idea, common to both Platonism and Aristotelianism.⁵ K. provides no evidence (and as far as I know there is none) for his claim that Plotinus holds the belief "that Aristotle's accounts of happiness in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1 and 10 are contradictory" (232). Lastly, on metaphysical matters, when K. argues that Plotinus, on account of his doctrine of the One, "overtly rejects Aristotle's doctrine according to which the first entity by nature of which all else depends is an intellect, the unmoved mover" (236-7), I should like to point out a) that for Plotinus to subordinate the Aristotelian Intellect to the One is hardly to "overtly reject" it and b) that the Intellect *is* the first entity for Plotinus, as the One is not at all an 'entity', but is beyond being.⁶ All in all, I have found that K.'s treatment significantly understates both the complexity of Plotinus' system and that of its relationship to the Aristotelian material, and this especially in ethical matters.⁷ The chapter on Porphyry, which concludes the book, brings us back into safer waters. It is the longest of the volume and covers more areas (and those areas in more detail) than earlier. K. presents a compelling argument for maintaining the separate existence of two Porphyrian treatises on the question of the relationship of Plato's philosophy to that of Aristotle (Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ἀνελθεῖν τὸν Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλους ἀρεσῶν and Περὶ διαστοσεως Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλους) as well as against presuming that the positions of the latter treatise contradicted those of the earlier (245-57). K.'s general view is that Porphyry "sought to show their [viz. Plato and Aristotle's] essential agreement, despite Aristotle's occasional mistakes" (329). In this light, he brings forward an interesting passage from Porphyry's *Commentary on the Harmonics of Ptolemy* [45.21-49.4 Düring] which demonstrates well how Porphyry could consider the positions of Plato and Aristotle to be divergent yet complementary (257-66). K.'s surprisingly strong and sweeping condemnation of Porphyry's harmonizing exegesis (267), even if it turned out to be ultimately warranted, surely does not belong right after the consideration of a single instance of its application. K.'s account of the relationship

between the positions of Porphyry and Aristotle in matters of physics and metaphysics is rich and enlightening, as is the chapter on ethics outside of the problematic contrasts made between Porphyry's position (which in the main I find accurately portrayed) and Plotinus' (which, it should be clear by now, I do not). In matters of psychology, K's evidence (289-291; 295) does not warrant the claim that Porphyry radicalizes the distinction between transcendent and immanent soul (288) or that he is "more committed than Plotinus" to the definition of the soul as $\square\nu\tau\epsilon\lambda\chi\epsilon\iota\alpha$ of the body: nothing, as far as I know, indicates that Porphyry's position on this account differs significantly from that of Plotinus.

I would like to conclude with a general assessment of the kind of enterprise K. engages in, and of the place of K's book in it. The question of the Platonists' attitude to Aristotelianism, as everyone even remotely familiar with the topic knows, is fraught with peril. Most of the evidence is either fragmentary or allusive (when it is not both at once) and all of the evidence which has received some scholarly consideration is controversial. This should come as no surprise, considering the nature of the endeavor: how you position yourself about the relationship, say, of Plotinus (*qua* Platonist) to 'Aristotelianism' minimally depends on what you think Platonism is, what you think Aristotelianism is, what you think Plotinism is and (because Plotinus also relies on and/or criticizes the Peripatetic tradition) what you think about Peripateticism, especially insofar as it relates to Aristotle's original philosophy. It would be difficult to overstate the potential for errors and disagreements this situation creates. Perhaps the greatest virtue of K's treatment of these issues is his keen understanding of the fact that as we disagree today about what any of those school classifications means, so did our ancient counterparts, such that being a Platonist, for instance, meant different things for different Platonists.⁸ This might generate conclusions which are too indefinite for the tastes of some; however, given the difficulty of avoiding arbitrariness and/or circularity in determining ourselves what constitutes a 'real Platonist' and a 'real Aristotelian', I can only applaud K.'s desire to reveal these traditions for the complex and continuously evolving spiritual communities they in fact were. K.'s exposition is fluid and unpedantic, and at its best gives us a tangible sense of the intensity and richness of the debates in which these thinkers were engaged. Even though it is not systematically enforced, I applaud his

decision to usually include both the full Greek text and the translations (which I understand are mostly K.'s, and are very good) of each passage at issue, making it all the more useful to both specialists and the general public. I finish by hoping that Oxford University Press will decide to release a reasonably priced paperback edition, as the breadth of interests displayed in the volume makes it an ideal candidate for use alongside, say, Dillon's *The Middle Platonists* in any course which might focus on this period in the history of Platonism, or Gerson's *Aristotle and Other Platonists* in any course which might deal with the relationship of Platonism to Aristotelianism.

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Notes:

1. Some will perhaps find the chapter not short enough, on the understanding that Numenius is a platonizing Pythagorean rather than a pythagoreanizing Platonist, a debate in which I have no inclination to partake. I suspect that K. thinks it does not matter that much, and he might be right, although I would have liked to hear more about his position on this issue. At any rate, Numenius' undeniable influence on later Platonism warrants, as far as *this* reader is concerned, his inclusion in a book on the history of Platonism.

2. Thus in IV.1 Plotinus maintains that the concept of $\square\nu\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\chi\epsilon\square\alpha$ is unclear and not true "in the sense in which it is stated" [$\square\varsigma$ $\lambda\square\gamma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$, IV.1.1.4], and in IV.7 Plotinus' investigation of the way in which the term "could be applied to the soul" [$\pi\square\varsigma$ $\pi\epsilon\rho\square$ $\psi\upsilon\chi\square\varsigma$ $\lambda\square\gamma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$, IV.7.8(5).2] yields, as far as I'm concerned, the following conclusions: a) the term $\square\nu\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\chi\epsilon\square\alpha$ itself is unclear (as in IV.1) and b) a *specific* understanding of this term, viz. as "inseparable entelechy" [$\square\chi\square\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$ $\square\nu\tau\epsilon\lambda\square\chi\epsilon\iota\alpha$, IV.7.8(5).26, 28, 33] must be rejected.

3. Indeed, a latter passage of the same treatise (I.4.14.5-6) equates them. Later developments (such as in I.1) seem to further integrate the Aristotelian conception into Plotinus' philosophical anthropology. K. sees this (229), but the general stance he has been establishing previously prohibits him from drawing this conclusion. On this aspect of Plotinus, cf. Gwenaëlle Aubry, *Traité* 53, Paris, Cerf, 2004, pp. 137-148. On a related note, K. mentions (227 n. 31)

the Platonic origin of συναμφοτερον to denote the composite of soul and body which forms the ζων but fails to point out the Aristotelian origin of σινθετον, a term which Plotinus is just as fond of using. (Indeed, 288 n. 149 suggests K.'s lack of awareness of this use.) There is some risk of confusion when K. writes that "Plotinus believes that immanent Forms are qualities", clearly meaning to state that Plotinus believes that *Aristotle's* immanent Forms are qualities. Now I think it rather unlikely that Plotinus (or anyone besides perhaps Alexander) could have believed *that*, and K.'s suggestion that Plotinus "presumably had (Alexander) in mind when criticizing Aristotle" (218) seems more aligned with the evidence and revealing of the actual target of Plotinus' criticisms.

4. On this topic cf. Brisson, L. (Chase, M., trans.), "The doctrine of the degrees of virtues in the Neoplatonists: An analysis of Porphyry's Sentence 32, its antecedents, and its heritage" in Tarrant, H and Baltzly, D. (eds.), *Reading Plato in Antiquity* (London, Duckworth, 2006), p. 92 ff. and, in more detail, Baltzly's own contribution to the same volume (pp. 169-184).

5. For instance, Plotinus clearly states in I.4 that "it is obvious from what has been said that man has perfect life by having not only sense-perception but reasoning and true intelligence [λογισμὸν καὶ νοῦν ἀληθινόν]".

6..E.g. "It [viz., the One] is not therefore Intellect, but before Intellect. For Intellect is one of the beings, but that is not anything, but before each and every thing, and is not being" (VI.9.3.36-38).

7. Some of the considerations which prohibit me from subscribing to K.'s understanding of these matters, especially insofar as the exegesis of the beginning of I.4 is concerned, are sketched in Villeneuve, J., *Bonheur et vie chez Plotin, Ennéade I.4.1-4*, forthcoming in *Dionysius* 2006.

8. Lloyd Gerson usefully compares this state of affairs to the case of religious affiliation (he uses Christianity, but others groups would do just as well) in his *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (Ithaca, Cornell UP, 2005), p. 25 ff.