

Oxford Handbooks Online

Aristotle's Philosophical Life and Writings

Christopher Shields

The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle

Edited by Christopher Shields

Print Publication Date: Aug 2012 Subject: Philosophy, Classical Philosophy

Online Publication Date: Nov 2012 DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195187489.013.0001

Abstract and Keywords

Despite a paucity of contemporary information about Aristotle's life and affairs, our ancient sources are only too happy to supply missing details and additional colour, much of it centred on his relationship with his teacher, Plato. Aristotle left Athens at around the time of Plato's death, for Assos, on the northwest coast of present-day Turkey, where he carried on his philosophical activity, augmented by intensive marine biological research. He returned to Athens for his second and final stay in 335. Once there, Aristotle established his own school in the Lyceum. This second period of residency in Athens was an astonishingly productive one for Aristotle. His works range widely across an astonishing number of fields, from aesthetic theory and argumentation theory to epistemology, ethics, logic, metaphysics, music, medicine, meteorology, pedagogy, philosophy of science, theology, and zoology. All these areas Aristotle pursued with genuine, unselfconscious zeal, under a general rubric of his own invention.

Keywords: Aristotle, Plato, Athens, philosophy, Lyceum, ethics, metaphysics, theology, logic, aesthetic theory

IF restricted in its appeal to widely attested facts only, Aristotle's biography would be pleasingly brief: he was born in Stagira, in Macedon, in 384 BC; at some point as a young man he came to Athens and associated himself with Plato's Academy; around the time that Plato died in 347 BC, he left Athens for Assos, in Asia Minor, settling there for three years, followed by another two in nearby Lesbos; he returned to Macedon in 343 BC, perhaps at the behest of Philip, the father of Alexander the Great; thereafter he returned to Athens in 335 BC to head his own school, the Lyceum; and finally he left Athens for a second time in 323 BC, upon the death of Alexander, a year or so before his death, which befell him of natural causes in Chalcis in 322 BC at the age of 62. Beyond that, speculation creeps in, some grounded and plausible, some flighty and fanciful. Indeed, even prior to the onset of speculation, what is 'widely attested' is not universally affirmed: several of

the contentions even in this skeletal summary are strenuously denied by credible sources.¹

Despite a paucity of contemporary information about Aristotle's life and affairs, our ancient sources are only too happy to supply missing details and additional colour, much of it centred on his relationship with his teacher, Plato.² Aristotle left Athens when Plato died. Why? As we have them, the probable facts are that Plato died, Plato's nephew Speusippus became the head of the school he had founded, the Academy, and Aristotle left Athens for Assos, on the coast of Asia Minor. Later historians connected these events by contending that the second happened after the first with the result that the third happened because of the second. With a bit of added colour, this becomes: Aristotle left Athens after Plato's (p. 4) death in a snit brought on by his having been passed over for the headship of the Academy in favour of Plato's nepotistically selected nephew. Maybe this is so. Or maybe Aristotle was lured away by a handsome invitation to engage in marine biological research, since animal studies were never far from his heart. These he might have conducted in Assos even as a continuing member of the Academy, since a letter ascribed to Plato treats the researchers in Assos as forming a sort of satellite campus of the Academy.³ This suggestion gains further credence from the authoritative source who reports that Aristotle left Athens even before Plato's death.⁴ So, maybe he was pulled to Assos rather than pushed from Athens. Maybe, but, again, we do not know. Still less do we know what Aristotle held in his heart when he left Athens, not even to the point of informed conjecture. Neither Aristotle himself nor any acquaintance of his, friend or foe, reports anything at all about his motives pertaining to this move. In the end, then, such conjectures mainly tell us something about the explanatory practices of those who offer them.

Of similar worth are the reports of Aristotle's appearance and manner. Writing a half millennium after his death, Diogenes Laertius retails a second-hand portrait of him this way:

He had a lisping voice, as is asserted by Timotheus the Athenian, in his *Lives*. He had also very thin legs, they say, and small eyes; but he used to indulge in very conspicuous garments and rings, and he used to dress his hair carefully.⁵

So, Aristotle was a dapper chap—if, that is, Timotheus of Athens is to be our guide. He seems to have written in the second or third century AD and is preserved only in Diogenes Laertius; we do not know his sources. So, it is unclear what to make of his characterisation.

Still less is it clear what value it should be accorded if true. Many of the speculations about Aristotle's character and motives, however rooted in a natural curiosity to come to know the man and his ways, stem from an understandable but misplaced motive: to understand his thought more fully. In fact, though, many of the speculations we have tend

to run in the wrong direction. Finding something significant on display in Aristotle's voluminous output, something distinctive or oddly brilliant, biographers project back onto the man those features they suppose will help explain the genius on display in his writings. A remarkable instance of this tendency owes to Werner Jaeger, easily one of the greatest Aristotelian scholars of the last two centuries. Jaeger discerns in Aristotle's will, which was preserved by Diogenes Laertius,⁶ a deeply humane but sadly alienated man. Pulsing below the surface of the formulaic language of the will, Jaeger detects 'the warm tone of true humanity, and at the same time an almost terrifying gulf between him and the persons by whom he was surrounded. These words were written by a lonely man.'⁷ While it is true that Jaeger had an impressively intimate familiarity with Aristotle's writings—their tone, their nuance, their idiosyncrasies—it is hard to escape the conclusion that when he travels beneath the words of Aristotle's will he spies lurking there only the man whose character he projects into that space.

This is not to say that biographical speculation about Aristotle is as a matter of course jejune, but rather that we will learn more about Aristotle from reading (p. 5) Aristotle than from studying the conjectures of those who wrote about his dress or demeanour in late antiquity and beyond. So, after a brief recapitulation of the main facts of his life as they pertain to his intellectual endeavours, we will characterize Aristotle's writings briefly as an aid to their study, primarily by illustrating the delicate difficulties involved in contemporary Aristotelian scholarship.

Aristotle's philosophical life began in Athens, when he came to be associated with Plato's Academy. In all likelihood, he went to Athens as a young man of about 18 in 367 BC, having been raised in Macedon, in what is now northeastern Greece. He was born to Nicomachus, a physician in the court of King Amyntas II, and Phaistis, a woman with family origins in Euboea, an island in the Aegean Sea, where Aristotle's own life was to end in 332. Because his parents died when he was still a boy, Aristotle was raised by a family relation, perhaps his uncle, Proxenus, who came from Atarneus, near Assos, the town to which Aristotle travelled after the death of Plato.

Not much is known of Aristotle's childhood, though two features of his birth likely proved consequential. First, his lifelong interest in biology presumably found its formative influences in the practices of the medical guild to which his father belonged, the Asclepiadae, who carried out detailed anatomical inquiries, including dissections, and who reportedly trained their sons in these same practices.⁸ Second, his connections to the Macedonian court, which he would have visited at Pella as a boy, followed him throughout his life. They explain his being recalled there to tutor Alexander the Great, and they may be responsible for his decision, taken a year before the end of his life, to leave Athens, which was just then experiencing one of its periodic surges of anti-Macedonian sentiment, this one brought on by the death of Alexander in 323.

In any event, at the end of his childhood, Plato's Academy brought Aristotle to Athens. In all likelihood he was sent there, since he was only about 17 or 18 when he arrived in 367, at a time when Plato himself would have been absent (he was in Sicily until 365). He remained in the Academy for nineteen years, until around the time of Plato's death in 347 BC, by which time, of course, Aristotle had grown into a fully mature man. Aristotle's relationship to Plato is the source of endless debate and controversy. Plainly Aristotle found much of value in the Academy and in Plato's headship of it, else he would not have remained there for nearly two decades. Many of his works must have been written there, including some early, lost dialogues, which were described by Cicero, who was certainly in a position to judge, as beautifully composed and executed: he called them 'flowing rivers of gold.'⁹ These dialogues stand in stark contrast to other works written at the same period and beyond, which read more like crabbed, terse sets of lecture notes and records of ongoing investigations, written, re-worked, unpolished, and not produced for general consumption. These are the works we possess today.

Aristotle's relationship to Plato during this period and beyond is at least obliquely on display in some of these writings. Sometimes Aristotle describes himself as a member of Plato's circle, even when criticizing Plato's views; other times, in equally critical veins, he disassociates himself from Plato and his teachings, (p. 6) writing as if from an opposing camp. Although the views of those working in Plato's Academy were hardly monolithic, Aristotle's varying attitudes seem at times presented as from a member of the Academy and at other times as someone writing from the outside. These different attitudes may be the result of editorial interpolations, or they may derive from different periods of Aristotle's life. Perhaps, though, Aristotle simply maintained a deep respect for the teachings of Plato and other Academicians even while seeking to undermine them. Indeed, that he regards Plato's views as worthy of discussion already reflects some indication of his attitude towards their worth. Probably the single best passage capturing Aristotle's bi-modal attitude towards Plato occurs in a digression in the first book of his *Nicomachean Ethics*:

We had perhaps better consider the universal good and run through the puzzles concerning what is meant by it, even though this sort of investigation is unwelcome to us, because those who introduced the Forms are friends of ours. Yet presumably it would be the better course to destroy even what is close to us, as something necessary for preserving the truth—and all the more so, given that we are philosophers. For although we love them both, piety bids us to honour the truth before our friends (*EN* 1096a11–16).

Aristotle evinces both genuine affection and critical distance, presumably because he reveres and respects Plato, even while concluding that one of his signature theses is unsustainable. We do not, then, need to regard Aristotle as 'the foal who kicked its mother,' an ingrate too ill mannered and truculent to revere his magnanimous teacher.¹⁰ It is true that he can be at times

rather caustic, as once when he mocks Plato's theory of Forms,¹¹ but in the main his time in the Academy left him honouring Plato as 'a man whom the wicked have no place to praise: he alone, unsurpassed among mortals, has shown clearly by his own life and by the pursuits of his writings that a man becomes happy and good simultaneously.'¹²

Whatever his relationship to Plato, which was doubtless rich and variegated, Aristotle, whether pushed or pulled, left Athens at around the time of Plato's death for Assos, on the northwest coast of present-day Turkey. There he carried on his philosophical activity augmented by intensive marine biological research.¹³ He had been invited to Assos by Hermias, reportedly a friend from the Academy who had subsequently become the ruler of the region incorporating Assos and Atarneus, the birthplace of Aristotle's guardian, Proxenus. When Hermias died, Aristotle relocated to Lesbos, an island off the coast and sufficiently close to Assos that one acropolis could be seen from the other. He remained working in Lesbos for an additional two years. There, again by at least some reports, he was joined by his long-term colleague and fellow ex-Academician Theophrastus. During his two years in Lesbos, Aristotle married Pythias, the niece of Hermias, with whom he had a daughter, also named Pythias.

The period of Aristotle's life following his time in Asia Minor has been a source of rich speculation for historians, though, again, we have little determinate or reliable data upon which we may rely. Aristotle was called or invited by Philip, king (p. 7) of Macedon, in 342, to return to Pella, the seat of Macedonian power where he had presumably visited as a boy. Almost all historians accept that during this period Aristotle offered tuition to Philip's son Alexander, later the Great. There was a private school at Mieza, the royal estate near Pella, and Aristotle might well have taught Alexander there. The tuition began when Alexander was 13, and probably lasted only two or three years. It is possible that it carried on for a longer period, though this seems unlikely since Alexander was already serving as a deputy military commander for his father by the age of 15. Aristotle did, however, remain in Macedon for another five or so years, perhaps back in Stagira, the city of his birth, until the death of Philip by assassination in 336.

Again, while the exact motives for his relocation are unclear, Aristotle returned to Athens for his second and final stay in 335. Once there, he established his own school in the Lyceum, a location outside of the centre of Athens in an area dedicated to the god Apollo Lykeios. This second period of residency in Athens was an astonishingly productive one for Aristotle. Together with his associates, who included Theophrastus, Eudemus, and Aristoxenus, Aristotle built a great library and pursued a very wide range of research programmes, leading well beyond philosophy as we conceive of that discipline today but in keeping with the more comprehensive courses of study in Aristotle's intellectual orientation. That allowed, many of the philosophical works of Aristotle that we possess today probably derive from this period. It seems that research in the Lyceum carried

forward at a feverish pace into a variety of distinct areas, up to the time of Aristotle's final departure from Athens in the year prior to his death.

During his second sojourn in Athens, Aristotle's wife Pythias died, and he formed a new relationship, whether into formal marriage or not remains unclear, with Herpyllis, who was also a native of Stagira. They had a child, Nicomachus, after whom his *Nicomachean Ethics* is named.

Aristotle withdrew to Chalcis on the island of Euboia, in 323, likely because of a resurgence of anti-Macedonian feeling in Athens, always present in an undercurrent there and flooding forth after the death of Alexander the Great. Aristotle's real and perceived associations with Macedon would have made life in Athens just then unpleasant if not precarious for him.¹⁴ As a metic, or resident alien, Aristotle would have been extended fewer protections than citizens of Athens received and would also have been more likely to be regarded with suspicion than a native Athenian. Diogenes Laertius reports that Aristotle was charged with actionable impiety by Eurymedon,¹⁵ which charge, like the similar accusation laid against Socrates before him, was no doubt spurious. No matter: a spurious charge against a man in Aristotle's marginal position could well have proven deleterious to his well-being.

A year after his departure from Athens, Aristotle died in Chalcis on the island of Euboia, presumably of natural causes. That presumption notwithstanding, a charming aetiology of Aristotle's death helps bring into sharp relief the credibility of many of the sources relied upon in constructing even this minimal biography. According to a story preferred by the Church Fathers,¹⁶ Aristotle died in a revealing sort of way: maniacally devoted to the pursuit of explaining natural phenomena (p. 8) and deeply frustrated by his inability to explain the tidal currents he observed in the straight of Euripus, the channel separating Euboia from mainland Greece, he grew morose and moribund. Aristotle died of terminal curiosity.

Stories such as this capture something authentically Aristotelian: his writings are broadly cast, arrestingly deep, and coursing with curiosity. The works we possess today range widely across an astonishing number of fields, including aesthetic theory, argumentation theory, astronomy, botany, biology, category theory, cosmology, epistemology, ethics, government, history of thought, literary theory, logic, mathematics, metaphysics, music, medicine, meteorology, pedagogy, philosophy of science, political theory, psychology, physics, rhetoric, semantic theory, political history, theology, and zoology. All these areas Aristotle pursued with genuine, unselfconscious zeal, under a general rubric of his own invention. He distinguishes three broad categories of inquiry. The first class is *theoretical*, comprising disciplines pursuing knowledge for its own sake; the second is *practical*, including ethics, politics, and all study concerned with conduct and goodness in

action, whether individual or societal; and the third is *productive*, covering those sciences and crafts which aim at the creation of beautiful or useful objects, broadly conceived so as to include drama and dance (on Aristotle's characterisations of the sciences, see *Top.* 145a15–16; *Phys.* 192b8–12; *DC* 298a27–32, *DA* 403a27–b2; *Met.* 1025b25, 1026a18–19, 1064a16–19, b1–3; *EN* 1139a26–28, 1141b29–32).

With one glaring exception, Aristotle's extant works slot reasonably well into this classificatory schema. Thus, among the theoretical works are the *Metaphysics*, the *Physics*, and *De Anima*; among the practical works are the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Eudemian Ethics*, and the *Politics*; and among the productive works are the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*. The glaring exception is the family of works which came to be known as Aristotle's *Organon*, roughly the tools for study rather than the objects of study (*organon* = tool, in Greek): logic, dialectic, argument theory, philosophy of science, and the doctrines of propositions and terms. These include *The Categories*, *De Interpretatione*, *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, and *Sophistical Refutations*. The relation of these works to the rest of Aristotle's writings gave rise to a series of lively controversies in later Aristotelianism, though Aristotle himself shows no reflexive awareness of the wellsprings of these controversies. Instead, he simply treats the subjects pursued in his *Organon* as matters worthy of concern in their own right and then puts his tools to work in his practical, productive, and theoretical sciences.

As these controversies about the relation between the *Organon* and the discipline-specific treatises attest, later Aristotelian philosophers and scholars have investigated Aristotle's works minutely from a number of complementary angles. There remain in the first instance unsettled questions about transmissions of Aristotle's texts from antiquity to the present day,¹⁷ as well as related questions about the internal constitutions of the works as we now possess them. Some of our works, including notably the *Metaphysics* and the *Politics*, show signs of being editorial compilations rather than continuous treatises conceived and executed as such by Aristotle. Other questions pertain to the relation between the works we (p. 9) possess and the three main lists of Aristotle's works from late antiquity, owing to Diogenes Laertius (third century AD, who lists 143 titles), Ptolemy (fourth century AD, who catalogues 99 titles),¹⁸ and Hesychius (sixth century AD, who reports 187 titles). Although these lists do not cohere completely, the numbers of titles reported in them are not as nearly as disparate as they first appear, because the different lists report the titles differently, so that, for instance, Hesychius mentions as separate titles works treated as books or chapters by Ptolemy.¹⁹ Still, many of the works included in the ancient lists are not, by current scholarly consensus, by Aristotle at all, while other works which we accept as genuine make no appearance in the ancient catalogues of Aristotle's works. Today, although the matter is not without lingering controversy,

scholars accept thirty-one surviving works, those contained in the *Corpus Aristotelicum* of our medieval manuscripts judged to be authentic.

That said, as we read Aristotle today, it is salutary to bear in mind that judgements about the authenticity of his works have varied with the times.²⁰ Some works today accepted as canonical were as recently as the nineteenth century regarded as spurious. Thus, in the nineteenth century, even so centrally canonical a work as the *Categories* was able to be regarded as spurious by no less eminent an authority than Jaeger, who was convinced that it was the work of a later compiler.²¹ Several of Aristotle's works would benefit from new critical editions, and all of them should be read with an awareness that the texts constituted and translated in our modern editions bear the marks of editorial judgement in a host of different ways: decisions about the relative priority of our existing manuscripts relative to one another; appraisals concerning the authenticity of individual words and sentences in our texts, many of which show signs of being interpolations by scribes and scholars seeking to explicate or amplify Aristotle's own words rather than merely to reproduce them; arrangements of individual sentences and paragraphs, which sometimes, from the standpoint of sense or argumentative progression, seem to have been transposed; and the status of doublets, or passages which are repeated, or largely repeated, in different parts of the corpus as we have it.

To take just one especially useful illustration: a doublet in *Metaphysics* I and XIII repeats a series of criticisms of Platonic Forms in virtually identical language, though in one case putting the case against Plato using the first person (*Met.* I 990b8: 'of the ways in which *we prove* that the Forms exist, none is convincing') and in the other using an impersonal third person (*Met.* XIII 1079a4: 'of the ways in which *it is proven* that the Forms exist, none is convincing'). These passages intertwine a series of editorial difficulties, all consequential for our thinking about the proper constitution of the text of the *Metaphysics*. Should we say that one is authentic and the other corrected? Was the original passage written by Aristotle when he was still a member of the Academy—hence the use of the first person? If so, was it later revised by him after leaving the Academy, or by some later scholar seeking to 'correct' the impression that Aristotle was once a critical Platonist? The matter is further complicated by the fact that some of these divergent readings come down to us under two different branches in the family of manuscripts of the *Metaphysics*.²² If one family shows a tendency of offering late editorial corrections (p. 10) and interpolations in passages where direct comparisons are possible because of the existence of doublets, then that result might be cautiously generalized, so that other editorial decisions about the relative strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript families can be favourably exploited in the constitution of our texts.

This is but one small, if significant example of the sort of work that needs to be undertaken before we come to the point where we can read and appraise the philosophical content of a text of Aristotle. We possess no manuscript of Aristotle's works written by him or even in his own time. Our earliest useable manuscripts date to the ninth century, and the vast majority of them come from the centuries following. So, there is a long line of transmission between the words composed by Aristotle and a translation of Aristotle read today—if his works were composed by him rather than by a compiler or by members of his school charged with keeping notes.

Standing behind each modern publication is thus a series of decisions, most proximately by the translator, determining how to wrestle Aristotle's often wiry Greek into some suitably faithful but still readable modern language syntax, and before the translator, by an editor constituting the text from the various manuscripts available to us, and often enough, before the editor, by a paleographer determining the readings of the manuscripts, and then also, even before the paleographer, by a scribe, or series of scribes, who also needed to determine what a manuscript being copied had written on it, since styles of writing altered through the centuries. (Sometimes, but rarely, the paleographer, the editor, and the translator may be one and the same person, discharging different roles in the constitution of the text in a co-ordinated way.) Many of these intersecting editorial decisions are delicate and mutually implicating, with the result that by the time we pick up a translation of a given text of Aristotle, we have already benefited from the critical acumen of a full range of philosophical and philological scholars—but then we also to some extent remain hostage to the critical judgements and determinations of those scholars. Accordingly, when contemporary philosophers go to work on a text of Aristotle, they should be mindful that what they are reading bears some resemblance to a committee report composed incrementally, in slow motion over two millennia. Happily, this awareness can also be liberating: Aristotle's philosophically suggestive texts bear repeated study not least because they remain open to surprising developments, both interpretative and philosophical.

Of special interest to philosophical scholarship over the last century has been the question of the relative dates of the treatises now mainly accepted as genuine.²³ Because we do not have secure information concerning the dates of composition for Aristotle's works, scholars, assuming that such knowledge will assist in the twin projects of interpretation and assessment, rely on a series of mutually reinforcing considerations to determine their relative order. These include stylometric data, involving features of Aristotle's diction and syntax;²⁴ doctrinal matters, including some permanently disputed issues regarding Aristotle's philosophical development, especially as regards his relationship to Plato; some less tendentious matters involving his use of place names and

historical allusions; and finally, intertextual (p. 11) references, which provide *prima facie* support for the thesis that the referring work is later than the work to which it refers.

Each of these criteria introduces controversies and small surprises of various sorts. Thus, to take just one example, intertextual references often enough have the feel of editorial interpolations; this, then, tends to undercut the *prima facie* plausible judgement that a referring text is later than the text to which it refers. In the same vein, as previously suggested, many of Aristotle's works bear the marks of being revisited and revised, each occasion of which provides the opportunity for cross-referencing by Aristotle himself, rather than by an editor. One especially stark instance of this sort of worry concerning internal cross-referencing occurs in *De Interpretatione*, regarded almost universally as an early work from the *Organon*, and presumably composed during Aristotle's first period in Athens when he was a member of the Academy. In this work, Aristotle—or some editor on his behalf—refers to his *De Anima*, almost certainly, judged in terms of doctrine and diction, one of his very last productions (*DI* 16a9). Another is the simple observation of Jaeger pertinent to his attitude towards the authorship of the *Categories*, which is also thought by most scholars to be a production of Aristotle's time in the Academy. As Jaeger observes, Aristotle illustrates the category of place with the example of 'being in the Lyceum' (*Cat.* 2a1).²⁵ To Jaeger this suggests a date of composition much later than Aristotle's time in the Academy, relying as it does on a place name which is associated with Aristotle's second stay in Athens rather than his first. Other scholars respond that if the *Categories* is in fact early, the example might merely have been interpolated later, by Aristotle or by someone else, so that the presumed early date of its composition is not threatened. That is certainly fair enough, but Jaeger's simple observation serves to introduce some instability into our easy preconceptions about the relative sophistication of Aristotle's works and their relation to one another. In general, scholars must tread lightly when making arguments about the dating of Aristotle's works. No one criterion seems terribly decisive on its own. Still, to the degree that the different sorts of criteria coalesce, a reasonably clear picture regarding the order of composition begins to emerge.

One might wonder, of course, whether the composition order of Aristotle's works is of any significance to our understanding his philosophy. In one way, it is not. After all, some of the greatest and most incisive philosophical commentaries on Aristotle were written in Late Antiquity and in the Arabic and Latin Middle Ages, long before techniques of stylometry were even invented. Thus, for instance, using a characteristically medieval hermeneutic technique of the sort practiced by biblical exegetes bent on reconciling apparently inconsistent verses of the bible, various Aristotelians of these earlier periods were able to prise out striking forms of intertextual consistency which would likely have eluded later scholars altogether, especially if those scholars were attacking their texts secure in the knowledge that, for example, the *Politics* was written later than the

Nicomachean Ethics, or that the theory of substance developed in the *Metaphysics* revises and replaces the coarser theory of the *Categories*. On this latter point, it is striking that many sophisticated medieval commentators actually attempt to derive the doctrine of *Categories* from the hylomorphic principles (p. 12) of the *Metaphysics*, completely reversing the almost universal judgement of presentday scholars that the *Metaphysics* post-dates the *Categories*. According to the currently received view, far from grounding Aristotle's categorialism, the *Metaphysics* in fact proves positively incompatible with some of the central contentions of the *Categories*.²⁶ So, one might reasonably observe that something of value is lost in the modern drive to read Aristotle's works in the supposed order of their composition.

Still, heading in the other direction, a great deal turns on questions of relative dating. We may consider as one illustration the question of whether we should think of Aristotle's *De Anima* as early or late. The hylomorphic theory of body and soul adumbrated in this work seems plainly incompatible with Platonism, and, more to the point, with the Platonic doctrine of soul embraced in Aristotle's early, lost dialogues (sufficient numbers of quotations and fragments exist that reasonably secure ascriptions can be made to the lost works).²⁷ If the appearance of conflict is genuine, then some philosophically fecund questions come to the fore. What in Aristotle's subsequent development led him to abandon his earlier views? Is, for example, the hylomorphism of his *Physics* and *Metaphysics* genuinely inconsistent with Platonism? What—in fact or in Aristotle's eyes—commends hylomorphism over Platonism? When we pursue these sorts of questions, we move swiftly into the style of philosophical scholarship engaged by nearly all the papers in the current volume: all agree that simple, non-critical exegesis of Aristotle's works is hardly possible. Rather, exegesis is inevitably also a critical enterprise, just as any critical assessment of a philosopher's thought (of any era) presupposes some form of fair-minded exegesis. Thus, the cross-fertilizing intersection of exegesis and critical assessment emerges in developmentally driven scholarship no less—if in a different guise—than in the unitarian frameworks assumed in the Middle Ages and Late Antiquity. We may let each approach be judged by its fruits and adapt our own hermeneutical methodologies accordingly.

However one is disposed to approach the corpus in terms of Aristotle's development, the canonical list of generally accepted works can be informed by his own division of the sciences to yield a list as follows (an asterisk indicates a continuing controversy about authenticity):

- Organon
 - *Categories* (Cat.)

- *De Interpretatione (DI)* [*On Interpretation*]
- *Prior Analytics (APr)*
- *Posterior Analytics (APo)*
- *Sophistical Refutations (SE)*
- *Topics (Top.)*

- Theoretical Sciences
 - *De Anima (DA)* [*On the Soul*]
 - *De Caelo (DC)* [*On the Heavens*]
 - *Generation and Corruption (Gen. et Corr.)*
 - *Generation of Animals (GA)*
 - (p. 13) • *History of Animals (HA)*
 - *Metaphysics (Met.)*
 - *Parva Naturalia (PN)* [*Brief Natural Treatises*]
 - *Meteorology (Meteor.)*
 - *Movement of Animals (MA)*
 - *Parts of Animals (PA)*
 - *Physics (Phys.)*
 - **Problems (Prob)*
 - *Progression of Animals (IA)*

- Practical Sciences
 - *Eudemian Ethics (EE)*
 - *Nicomachean Ethics (EN)*
 - **Magna Moralia (MM)* [*Great Ethics*]
 - *Politics (Pol.)*

- Productive Science
 - *Poetics (Poet.)*
 - *Rhetoric (Rhet.)*

One may reasonably doubt whether any system of classifying Aristotle's works supersedes his own.²⁸

Bibliography

Barnes, J. ed. (1984) *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation* vols. I and II (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press).

——— (1997) 'Roman Aristotle', in *Philosophia Togata II*, ed. J. Barnes and M. Griffith (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press), 1-69.

Bury, R.G. (1949) 'Introduction to the Epistles', in *Plato: Timaeus. Critias. Cleitophon. Menexenus. Epistles* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press).

Chroust, A.-H. (1973) *Aristotle: new light on his life and on some of his lost works*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge).

Düring, I. (1957) *Aristotle in the Ancient Biographical Tradition* (Göteborg: Amqvist & Wiksell).

Düring, I. and Owen, G.E.L, eds. (1960) *Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century* (Göteborg: Almqvist & Wiksell).

Ford, A. (2011) *Aristotle as Poet: The Song for Hermias and its Context* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press).

Graham, D. (1990) *Aristotle's Two Systems* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press).

(p. 16) Grote, G. (1880) *Aristotle* (London: Thoemmes Continuum).

Harlfinger, D. (1979) 'Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der Metaphysik', in *Études sur la Métaphysique d'Aristote. Actes du VIe Symposium Aristotelicum*, P. Aubenque, ed. (Paris: J. Vrin), 7-33.

Hein, C. (1985) *Definition und Einteilung der Philosophie. Von der spätantiken Einleitungsliteratur zur arabischen Enzyklopädie* (New York: Peter Lang).

Hutchinson, D.S. and M.R. Johnston (2005) 'Authenticating Aristotle's *Protrepticus*', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 193-294.

Jaeger, W. (1934) *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of his Development*, trans. R. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press).

Jowett, B., trans. and ed. (1964) *The Dialogues of Plato*, 4th ed., corr. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press).

Kenny, A. (2001) *Essays on the Aristotelian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press).

Lee, H.D.P. (1948) 'Place-names and the Dates of Aristotle's Biological Works', *Classical Quarterly* 42, 61-67.

Morau, P. (1951) *Les listes anciennes des ouvrages d'Aristote* (Louvain: Éditions universitaires).

Owen, G.E.L. (1966) 'The Platonism of Aristotle', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 51, 125-50; reprinted in *Logic, Science, and Dialectic*, M. Nussbaum, ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), 200-21.

Primavesi, O. (2007) 'Ein Blick in den Stollen von Skepsis: Vier Kapitel zur frühen Überlieferung des Corpus Aristotelicum', *Philologus* 151, 51-77.

——— (forthcoming) 'A Revised Text of *Metaphysics I*'.

Ross, W.D. (1960) 'The Development of Aristotle's Thought', in *Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century*, I. Düring and G.E.L. Owen, eds. (Göteborg: Almqvist & Wiksell), 1-18.

Shields, C. (2008) 'Plato and Aristotle in the Academy: an Aristotelian Criticism of Platonic Forms', in *The Oxford Handbook on Plato*, G. Fine, ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press), 504-26.

——— (2007) *Aristotle* (London: Routledge).

Shute, R. (1888) *On the History of the Process by which the Aristotelian Writings Arrived at Their Present Form* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

Thompson, D'A. (1913) *On Aristotle as a Biologist* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press).

Wedin, M. (2000) *Aristotle's Theory of Substance* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press).

Wians, W., ed. (1996) *Aristotle's Philosophical Development* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield).

Notes:

(1.) Düring (1957) collects the ancient sources concerning Aristotle's life. We have twelve surviving *Lives of Aristotle*, the earliest of which is the *Epistola ad Ammaeum* by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who lived in Rome three centuries after Aristotle's death (c.

60 BC to after 7 AD). The remaining *Lives* range from that date to several Arabic *Lives* from the period AD 950–1270. Especially important is a work written three centuries after Dionysius, by Diogenes Laertius, who has an entry on Aristotle in his *Lives of the Philosophers*. Many of Diogenes' contentions are suspect, but he does seem to have relied on some very ancient sources, including Hermippus, who was possibly even a member of Aristotle's own school. Diogenes also reproduces Aristotle's will, an important document for his life, though also one open to interpretive controversy. Later lives are mainly of Neoplatonic or Byzantine pedigree, including the *Vita Marciana*, the *Vulgata*, and the *Latina*. A still useful overview and assessment of the biographical traditions surrounding Aristotle is Grote (1880, 1–26). A more recent set of papers pertaining to Aristotle's life and political activities is Chroust (1973, vols. 1 and 2). These are informed but also energetically conjectural. For a fuller presentation of the two main ancient traditions surrounding Aristotle's life, see Shields (2007), Chapter One.

(2.) Jaeger's (1934, 15) attitude is apposite: 'He had accepted Plato's doctrines with his whole soul, and the effort to discover his own relation to them occupied all his life, and is the clue to his development. It is possible to discern a gradual progress, in the various stages of which we can clearly recognize the unfolding of his own essential nature . . . Just as tragedy attains its own special nature . . . "out of the dithyramb" by leading the latter through various forms, so Aristotle made himself out of the Platonic philosophy.' Compare Owen (1966, 150): 'It seems now possible to trace [Aristotle's] progress from sharp and rather schematic criticism of Plato to an avowed sympathy with Plato's general metaphysical programme.'

(3.) This is the Sixth Letter, putatively written from Plato to Hermias of Atarneus, an Academic who ruled over the region from Atarneus to Assos. This letter is, however, very probably spurious. Aristotle also had an independent family connection to Atarneus, since Proxenus, perhaps Aristotle's uncle and his guardian after the death of Aristotle's father, had been born there. See Bury (1949, 454–5).

(4.) Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* v 2.

(5.) Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* v 2.

(6.) Diogenes Laertius v 11–16, translated in the *Revised Oxford Aristotle*, pp. 264–5.

(7.) Jaeger (1962, 321).

(8.) Galen, *On Anatomical Procedures* ii 1.

(9.) Cicero, *Ac. Pr.* 38.119, cf. *Top.* 1 3, *De or.* 1.2.49.

(10.) Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* v 2.

(11.) 'Farewell to the Forms: they are but ding-a-lings and even if they do exist they are wholly irrelevant' (*APo.* 83a32–34).

(12.) *Frag.* 650 R3; Olympiodorus, *Commentarius in Gorgiam* 41.9.

(13.) Detailed study of Aristotle's biological treatises, including especially the *Historia Animalium*, certify that much of his research in marine biology was conducted in this region. See Thompson (1913) and Lee (1948).

(14.) The anti-Macedonian sentiment in Athens had an understandable basis. In 335 Alexander had repressed a revolt by the Thebans and then handed them a vicious reprisal, effectively obliterating the city. He then demanded that Athens, in view of its pro-Theban sympathies, surrender its anti-Macedonian politicians for execution. The implicit suggestion was that any refusal would earn the Athenians the fate of the Thebans. Although he eventually relented, permitting Athens to signify its fealty by exiling two of its citizens, Alexander's entirely credible threat remained hanging over the city. The result was galling: hostile sentiment directed against Alexander and Macedon ran deep and broad in Athens.

(15.) Diogenes Laertius v 7. Diogenes also reports a conflicting account, which he says owes to Favorinus, who reports Aristotle's prosecutor as Demophilus. The pretext offered in Aristotle's case was his composition of a paean or hymn praising the character of Hermias, his sponsor in Assos. Aristotle had also erected a statue in his honour at Delphi, along with an inscription praising his virtue. The inscriptions compare Hermias, reportedly a eunuch and former slave, to several Greek heroes, a coupling likely to rankle Athenians of a better class. See Ford (2011) for a discussion of the character of Aristotle's inscription at Delphi and some of the controversies surrounding it.

(16.) Collected in Düring (1957, 347).

(17.) Somewhat outdated, but still engaging is Shute (1888). For more up-to-date discussions, see Moraux (1951), Barnes (1997), Primavesi (2007).

(18.) Ptolemy's text has been printed in Arabic, and translated into German, by Hein (1985).

(19.) Düring (1957) discusses the evidence thoroughly.

(20.) The Victorian translator of Plato, Benjamin Jowett (1964, 27), characterizes Aristotle's works in this way: 'There is of course no doubt of the great influence exercised upon Greece and upon the world by Aristotle and his philosophy. But on the other hand almost everyone who is capable of understanding the subject acknowledges that his writings have not come down to us in an authentic form like most of the dialogues of

Plato. How much of them is to be ascribed to Aristotle's own hand, how much is due to his successors in the Peripatetic School, is a question which has never been determined and probably never can be, because the solution depends upon internal evidence only.' Although unduly pessimistic due to the sorts of techniques for authenticating and dating mentioned in the text, Jowett's cautionary note is none the less worth recalling.

(21.) See Jaeger (1962, 46 n. 3).

(22.) This small example, which could easily be multiplied, derives from Primavesi (forthcoming), who, continuing the work of Harlfinger (1979), has assembled an impressive set of considerations, no less philosophically than philologically adroit, for the compelling conclusion that the *Metaphysics* stands in need of an entirely new edition. His work provides an exciting illustration of the ways in which Aristotelian textual criticism continues unabated down to the present day: as unlikely as it sounds, we are probably now closer to the texts that Aristotle actually wrote than we have been at any time in the history of their transmission.

(23.) Graham (1990) offers an incisive overview of the controversy. See also the papers collected in Wians (1996) for a variety of approaches and perspectives.

(24.) Kenny (2001) provides several unusually rich and sophisticated instances of this approach to the dating of Aristotle's works, with a special emphasis on his ethical writings.

(25.) Jaeger (1962, 39).

(26.) For a preliminary account of this supposed incompatibility, see Shields (2007, §§4.5 and 5.1). One well-developed dissenter is Wedin (2000).

(27.) Fragments of Aristotle's lost dialogues are translated in the *Revised Oxford Aristotle* (Barnes, 1984: 2389–2426). See Hutchinson and Johnson (2005) on the status of one early work, the *Protrepticus*. They also attempt a provisional reconstruction of the *Protrepticus*, accessible here: <http://www.protreptic.info/>.

(28.) I am grateful to Stephen Menn for his helpful and astute comments and corrections.

Christopher Shields

Christopher Shields is Professor of Classical Philosophy in the University of Oxford and a Fellow of Lady Margaret Hall. His books include *Order in Multiplicity* (Clarendon, 1999), *Classical Philosophy* (2003), and *Aristotle* (2007). He also edited

the *Blackwell Guide to Ancient Philosophy* (2002) and is editing the *Oxford Handbook of Aristotle* (Oxford University Press).

