

Johan C. Thom, (ed.), *Cosmic Order and Divine Power. Pseudo-Aristotle, On the Cosmos. Introduction, Text, Translation and Interpretive Essays*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014. Pp. 230. ISBN 978-3-16-152809-5. €49.

This carefully edited publication is devoted to a splendid classical text and deserves attention for many reasons, one of which is given by the editor: 'this volume on *De mundo* is explicitly interdisciplinary by nature, bringing together contributions from scholars from a broad spectrum of disciplines and specialisations which focus on specific topics, each from its own disciplinary perspective' (p. vii). Five of the eight essays deal with the reception of the work, which had a remarkable impact in later times.

However, none of the authors is a specialist in the field of Aristotle's philosophy. Hence the volume contains no fundamental debate on the question whether *On the Cosmos* may have been written by Aristotle. The authors assume that it was not.¹ As a result, they talk about an author with great didactic qualities, who was influential but regrettably unknown and impossible to date, and who conceived a grand world view of unclear origins. This author was not accidentally identified with Aristotle in later times, but was a writer intent on writing a work in the style of Aristotle,² deliberately avoiding any reference to a later period (p. 8). The authors are not entirely in agreement on the character of the philosophy proposed in *On the Cosmos* and on the work's date.³

The Greek text is that of W.L. Lorimer (Paris, 1933) and the English translation with notes is by Thom (pp. 19-66). The new translation is a fine addition to scholarship. I note only a few minor points of discussion. (1) δαυμόνιον ὄντως (1, 391a1), pp. 21; 75; 108: not 'truly god-like', but 'truly suprahuman', in order to maintain the difference between θεῖον and δαυμόνιον, which for Aristotle corresponds to the difference between mind and soul and between transcendent / supratemporal and everlasting (*pace* Chandler p. 79 n. 31) – likewise in 6, 400b1 (pp. 53 and 118). (2) τὴν τῶν μεγίστων ἱστορίαν μετιέναι (1, 391b6), pp. 10; 13; 15: not 'to pursue the study of the greatest things' (see also p. 76), but rather 'to gain information about the greatest things'. The great world leader Alexander is not urged to study philosophy himself, but to become acquainted with its results.⁴ This is probably how Philodemus understands it as well (see p. 7 n. 34). Cf. Arist. *De Regno* fr. 2 Ross. (3) πνεῦμα (4, 394b10), p. 31, should not be translated as 'breath' but as 'life-bearing spirit' or '*pneuma*', since it is also present in plants.⁵ (4) διὰ πάντων διήκουσα (394b10), p. 30, should not be translated as 'which pervades all things', but as 'which permeates them totally'. Cf. *Gen. An.* 3.11, 762a19-21; *De Spiritu* 2, 481b18: τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα δι' ὅλου τὸ σύμφυτον and 3, 482a33. See also below. *Pneuma* is not present in the ethereal sphere, but is the analogue of ether in the sublunary sphere.

In his Introduction (pp. 3-17) Thom runs through the points of discussion regarding *On the Cosmos* in the past hundred years. This treatment mainly covers familiar positions, without any new contribution. Thom restates the curious view that Apuleius' words in his Latin treatise *De mundo – nos Aristotelen prudentissimum et doctissimum philosophorum et Theophrastum auctorem secuti ... dicemus de omni hac caelesti ratione* (p. 4; Kraye p. 181) – should be taken to indicate that Apuleius regarded the Greek text as non-Aristotelian.

Another unconvincing position is that the title Περὶ τοῦ κόσμου must derive from Stoic examples (p. 7 n. 35; 58 n. 1). The title may well have been drawn from the work itself (6, 397b11: περὶ κόσμου λέγοντας. Cf. Thom, p. 112).

¹ P. 5: 'Most modern scholars, however, agree, that the treatise was not written by the Stagirite'; C. Chandler p. 73; R. Burri p. 89; H. Daiber p. 169; J. Kraye, p. 187 'finally resolved'.

² Cf. J.C. Thom, p. 108: 'he published this work in Aristotle's name'. According to Chandler (p. 71), it may seem that the author showed little interest in adopting Aristotle's usual way of expressing himself.

³ A. Tzvetkova (pp. 136-7) seriously considers that Aristobulus already knew the work around 150 BCE. Thom notes that 'a date around the turn of the era seems reasonable, although an earlier date cannot be ruled out' (p. 7); see also Chandler p. 72. Thom sees clear Platonic influence; A. Tzvetkova demonstrates an anti-Platonist conception.

⁴ Cf. Chandler p. 73: 'the text is consciously designed for an educated, but non-specialist audience'.

⁵ Cf. A.L. Peck (1942) Appendix B pp. 586-93.

Chandler's thorough analysis of the 'Didactic Purpose and Discursive Strategies in *On the Cosmos*' (pp. 69-87) shows that the author of *On the Cosmos* was rhetorically schooled and a competent teacher. Cicero's judgement of Aristotle was just as positive.

Burri discusses 'The Geography of *De mundo*' as found in chapter 3 of the treatise (pp. 89-106). At the end of her richly documented argument she rightly concludes: 'the treatise is a thoughtfully constructed and original text, and far from being a simple pastiche' (p. 105).

In his essay on 'The Cosmotheology of *De mundo*' (pp. 107-20) Thom emphasizes that the entire work shows great coherence and is focused on the theological perspective developed in chapters 6-7. Yet it is also true, he believes, that 'several different philosophical traditions – including Platonism, Stoicism, and perhaps Neopythagoreanism – left their mark in this work' (p. 107). His interpretation of *On the Cosmos* entails that 'God is directly responsible for acting on and maintaining this world, but without giving up his transcendence' (p. 110). In this view, God together with his power is comparable with the Demiurge in Plato's *Timaeus*, though in fact the author takes great pains to distinguish God's essence and his power (pp. 113-4).

However, in the brief scope of this review I think it is better to leave further details aside.⁶ Rather I would like to devote a digression to the modern scientific view of Aristotle and to an important change within it. Since 1987, scholars have opted for a different translation of Aristotle's definition of 'the soul' than that advanced in the last 1800 years. For centuries, starting with Alexander of Aphrodisias in 200 CE, the words *sōma organikon* in Aristotle's definition were translated and explained as 'a body equipped with organs'. Today this combination of words is *always* translated as 'instrumental body'.⁷ For many scholars, this is an improvement to which they attach no further consequences. They continue to assume that Aristotle regarded the soul as the entelechy of the (visible) body, which the soul uses as the instrument for all psychic functions. But the new explanation gives room for an entirely different understanding of Aristotle's intention. Alexander of Aphrodisias had a reason for giving his unhistorical explanation of the word *organikon*. By doing so he introduced a Platonizing psychology into Aristotle's philosophy. In this way he obscured the view of what Aristotle really meant: the soul, from the moment of generation, is inextricably linked to the life-bearing *pneuma*, the fine-material body that the soul uses as the instrument (*organon*) for producing and maintaining the visible body and all its parts, for perception and for the motion of the visible body and for storing and processing memory images and mental images.

This understanding of Aristotle's true intention leads us to realize that Alexander of Aphrodisias obstructed a view of Aristotle's philosophy in which there is room for *On the Cosmos* too.⁸ For it now also becomes clear that Aristotle's definition of 'the soul' in *On the Soul* follows the line of his principal work *Generation of Animals*, where *pneuma* is the crucial constituent of male semen and female menstrual fluid, and is the vehicle of the vital force (*dynamis*) which the begetter transfers to the menstrual fluid of his partner. A very important statement about *pneuma* is found in *On the Cosmos* 4, 394b9-11, which says that it is used in the sense of 'the ensouled and generative substance which is found in plants and living creatures and permeates them totally' (my translation).

If we see that in *On the Cosmos* ether is also an 'instrumental body' for God as entelechy of the cosmos, and if we agree with the authors of the book reviewed here that *On the Cosmos* is all about 'Divine Power', we are suddenly able to understand that the one, all-pervasive Power of God is transferred by ether in the supralunary sphere and by *pneuma* in the sublunary sphere, and that the 'Divine Power' is the vitalizing Power of God as 'Begetter'.⁹

For in *Gen. An.* 2.3, 736b29-7a9 Aristotle states emphatically that the nature of *pneuma* is an analogue of the nature of the astral element. That is why *pneuma* is different from and more divine

⁶ So I can only mention here the Essays by: A. Smith, 'The Reception of *On the Cosmos* in Ancient Pagan Philosophy' (pp. 121-31); A. Tzvetkova-Glaser, 'The Concepts of οὐσία and δύναμις in *De mundo*' (pp.133-52); H. Takahashi, 'Syriac and Arabic Transmission of *On the Cosmos*' (pp. 153-67); H. Daiber, 'Possible Echoes of *De mundo* in the Arabic-Islamic World: Christian, Islamic and Jewish Thinkers' (pp. 169-80); J. Kraye, 'Dispute over the Authorship of *De mundo* between Humanism and *Altertumswissenschaft*' (pp. 181-97).

⁷ Cf. A.P. Bos, *The Soul and its Instrumental Body. A Reinterpretation of Aristotle's Philosophy of Living Nature* (Leiden 2003) 85-92; T.K. Johansen, *The Powers of Aristotle's Soul* (Oxford 2012) pp. 11, 12 and 120.

⁸ The same applies to *De Spiritu*. See, however, now again the paper by P. Gregoric; O. Lewis, 'Pseudo-Aristotelian *De Spiritu*: a New Case against Authenticity', *Classical Philology* (2015) forthcoming.

⁹ Cf. Bos, 'Aristotle on God as Principle of Genesis', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 18 (2010) 363-77; 'Pneuma as Quintessence of Aristotle's Philosophy', *Hermes* 141 (2013) 417-34.

than the four ordinary sublunary elements. That is why it is also present in those other elements. Consequently, for Aristotle, there is a certain sense in which 'everything is full of soul' (3.11, 762a21: ὥστε τρόπον τινα πάντα ψυχῆς εἶναι πλήρη). Aristotle refers obliquely here to Thales' proposition 'Everything is full of gods' (πάντα πλήρη θεῶν εἶναι), which also plays a crucial role in *On the Cosmos* 6, 397b16-20. There the author considers this dictum to be incorrect as regards the essence of God, but correct for his Power. The notion of *pneuma* as vehicle of the soul and vital force in *On the Cosmos* is therefore not Stoic, but essentially Aristotelian.

We can now understand why the author of *On the Cosmos* has split the notion of 'Demiurge' into the two notions of 'the Begetter'¹⁰ and his power. In *On the Cosmos* God is not 'Father' or 'Creator'.¹¹ God is exclusively the (transcendent) Source of all the Power that proceeds from him.¹² Just so, the Begetter is not the producer of the child, but of the vital force operative in the embryo,¹³ like the force of a winding mechanism or automaton that has been set in motion. All heaven and nature 'depend' on God's Power, as Aristotle put it in his theological explanation of the motif of the 'Golden Chain' in Homer, *Iliad* 8 (cf. *Motu anim.* 4, 699b35-700b6). It is the Power that 'works' in the cosmos and in all that lives.¹⁴ This is a unique position, clearly targeted at Plato's *Timaeus* and incompatible with the Stoa's conception. It is a view that can only have been developed by the author who also wrote *Generation of Animals*.

The Bibliography (pp. 209-16) is very extensive, but does not include: D. Holwerda, 'Textkritisches und Exegetisches zur pseudo-Aristotelischen Schrift Περὶ τοῦ κόσμου', *Mnemosyne* 46 (1993) 46-55; A.P. Bos, 'The Divine 'Monarchia' and the System of World-Government in Aristotle's *De Mundo*', in K. Boudouris (ed.), *Polis and Cosmopolis: Problems of a Global Era* (Athens 2003) 51-68.

This book confirms the great importance of the treatise *On the Cosmos*. It underlines the need for an open-minded review of all aspects relating to the problems of the work, its author and its date in a broad forum of experts on Aristotle's philosophy. An ideal location for this discussion would be Mieza, in northern Greece, where the young Alexander studied under Aristotle.

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¹⁰ See Thom p. 14 n. 52.

¹¹ Contra Thom, p. 120: 'the notion of god as father, creator, and preserver of the world is more Platonic than Aristotelian' and vii: 'god interacts with the cosmos'; p. 5: 'god's involvement in the cosmos which conflicts with Aristotle's view elsewhere of god as the Unmoved Mover'. This position fails to recognize that the theology of *On the Cosmos* hinges on the use of the term 'Begetter' (γενέτωρ) instead of the terms 'Father and Maker'. For Aristotle, life does not start at the moment of birth but at the moment of generation. The word 'Father' does not occur in *On the Cosmos*. The verbal form δημιουργήσασα (5, 396b31; cf. p. 111) relates to God's Power and to nothing else.

¹² A better title would therefore have been: Cosmic Order and the Power Originating in God.

¹³ Contra Thom p. 119: 'The exact relationship between god and his power is not made clear.'

¹⁴ This is well underlined by Tzvetkova in her essay 'The Concepts of οὐσία and δύναμις in *De mundo*', pp. 134-5; Smith p. 124.