



Assumption  
University

## Digital Commons @ Assumption University

---

Philosophy Department Faculty Works

Philosophy Department

---

2008

### **Review of *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, vol. xxii by John J. Cleary and Gary M. Gurtler**

Daniel P. Maher  
Assumption College, [dmaher@assumption.edu](mailto:dmaher@assumption.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.assumption.edu/philosophy-faculty>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

---

#### **Recommended Citation**

Maher, D. P. (2008). Review of *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, vol. xxii by John J. Cleary and Gary M. Gurtler. *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*. <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2008/2008-01-51.html>.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Philosophy Department at Digital Commons @ Assumption University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophy Department Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Assumption University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@assumption.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@assumption.edu).

# Bryn Mawr Classical Review

Bryn Mawr Classical Review 2008.01.51

**John J. Cleary, Gary M. Gurtler S.J., *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy, vol. xxii, 2006.* Leiden: Brill, 2007. Pp. 263. ISBN 978-90-04-16048-4. \$167.00.**

**Reviewed by Daniel P. Maher, Ave Maria University ([dan.maher@avemaria.edu](mailto:dan.maher@avemaria.edu))**

Word count: 2251 words

Volume 22 of The Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy (BACAP) continues the tradition of matching high-quality philosophical essays with critical commentaries. With one exception (more on this below), the seven colloquia were held in the 2005-2006 academic year at participating institutions near Boston. These seven essays, treating Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Plotinus, deserve the attention of graduate students and of those writing on the issues or texts addressed. Additionally, teachers of ancient philosophy will likely find these essays helpful for freshening their approach the next time they cover familiar texts. No single theme or topic unites the essays, which concentrate on exegesis of ancient texts, but also shed light on contemporary philosophical issues. While some essays range broadly (Edward Halper addresses the entire Aristotelian corpus) and others focus narrowly (Eric Brown deals primarily with only a few chapters of *Nicomachean Ethics*), each of the essays treats substantive philosophical issues and admirably devotes careful attention to texts. They reward consideration whether or not one finds the interpretations finally compelling. Volume 22 is an excellent addition to the series.

The series aims in each volume to preserve the dialogical character of the colloquia by allowing each author to adjust the print versions of their remarks in light of comments made on the occasion of the colloquium and subsequently by reviewers. The proceedings, then, yield a polished presentation that more fruitfully rewards study. The authors have had time to tighten and clarify their arguments. The increased precision and sharpening of points of disagreement must elevate rather than diminish the dialogical dimension.

In a departure from past practice in the series, each essay and commentary is preceded by an abstract. These abstracts collectively substitute for an editor's introduction. A bibliography is attached to each essay-commentary pair, which is helpful, although these bibliographies are not always complete (see note 10 on page 151).

Two editorial difficulties deserve mention. First, several commentaries make various references to specific pages of the articles on which they comment. Unfortunately, the pagination the commentators rely upon is not the pagination of the printed text. E.g., Mark McPherran refers to 219-220 of C.D.C. Reeve's paper, but that paper ends on 209. Thus, the internal page references are almost useless. The second difficulty is the decision to print Eric Brown's paper without a commentary. The preface states that Brown's paper was given in 2004-2005 and published (2006) in volume 21 of this series. Nevertheless, due to an error, Brown's paper was printed without footnotes. It is reprinted in volume 22 with footnotes, but without Gary Gurtler's commentary, which may be found in volume 21. Thus, we have two incomplete publications of

the Brown colloquium. Finally, I noted more than a dozen typographical errors, but none of these causes any confusion.

*First Colloquium: Eric Perl, "The Togetherness of Thought and Being: a Phenomenological Reading of Plotinus' Doctrine 'That the Intelligibles are Not Outside the Intellect'"*

Perl argues that Plotinus' doctrine concerning the fundamental togetherness of intellectual consciousness and intelligible being can "accurately be described as phenomenological, and indeed is closely paralleled by Husserl's overcoming of modern subject-object dualism" (1-2). He advances a realist interpretation of Husserl to show that "consciousness and being cannot be conceived as two spheres which are only extrinsically related. Rather, they are necessarily together, two inseparable moments of one reality" (6-7). "Plotinus, then, not only rejects subject-object dualism for the same reasons as Husserl, but reaches the same alternative position and expresses it in virtually the same terms" (14). Plotinus says, "every intellection is from something and is of something" (VI.7.40.6), which is, Perl says, "as pure a statement of intentionality as could be found in Husserl or any other phenomenologist" (16). In a brief concluding section, Perl explains the power of this phenomenological reading to illuminate many aspects of Plotinus' thought and to address the challenge of contemporary nihilism by recovering the togetherness of thought and being.

Robert M. Berchman's commentary constitutes a kind of root-and-branch rejection. He argues that Perl's phenomenological reading operates with an essentially modern understanding of "self" or "consciousness." He argues that Plotinus is neither an idealist nor a phenomenologist, but a realist, which entails adherence to a mind-independent reality.

*Second Colloquium: Kevin L. Flannery, S.J., "Force and Compulsion in Aristotle's Ethics"*

Flannery offers an analysis of Aristotelian casuistry with respect to brute force, when the agent contributes nothing, and less strict forms of force, when the agent may still retain the ability to act. For example, when a ship is blown off course, the pilot retains some ability to direct the ship, but the force exonerates him for failing to arrive at the proper destination. Flannery offers close textual analysis and careful parsing of Aristotle's Greek to elucidate troublesome passages and to support his argument that these "forced acts" do not render the agent wholly passive and are not instances of "mixed acts" (such as throwing goods overboard during a storm). His thesis seems to be that in the presence of this non-debilitating "force that comes from human nature" (57) one is led to act for something good (e.g., putting into port). "Mixed acts," by contrast, involve choosing voluntarily something that is "*per se* not a good thing to do" (57). The difference between the good things and the not-good things is established by "a particular conception of human nature and what it puts forward as to be pursued and avoided" (57).

Thornton C. Lockwood's commentary helpfully draws attention to the incompleteness of Flannery's treatment of the *per se* goods and the account of human nature he says Aristotle deploys. Lockwood questions whether Flannery's view is consistent with Aristotle's account of gentleness and of the voluntariness of "character states."

*Third Colloquium: Edward C. Halper, "Metaphysics I and the Difference It Makes"*

Halper's ambitious essay calls for a program of research that will refine, if not replace, "some of what is widely assumed to be firm Aristotelian doctrine," especially the understanding of genera (71). Drawing especially upon the biology and a difficult passage in *Metaphysics Iota*, Halper argues that the object of each science is a genus and that each genus is understood through a paradigm species that orders the multiplicity of the several species of the genus. "Aristotle practices a kind of paradigmaticism" (69), which means that "features of imperfect species are intelligible in reference to the one species that serves as the qualitative unity of the genus" (82). The primary species in each genus is independently intelligible, but no other species in the

genus is intelligible independently. Halper proceeds to consider examples from the corpus in which Aristotle's practice shows adherence to this view. Halper argues that paradigmatism enables us to reconcile certain contradictions in Aristotle's writings (principally the contradiction between the doctrine of spontaneous generation and the denial that form is generated). He tries to set familiar Aristotelian doctrines, especially from the biology, but also from politics, within the context of paradigmatism (102).

Arthur Madigan's comments question the relation of the paradigmatism thesis to other Aristotelian teachings. Madigan draws attention in a variety of ways to what is surely the greatest obstacle to the paradigmatism thesis: "the paradigmatic account of substances says that the paradigm species in each genus has a contrary, its privation, and that all the other species in the genus arise from various mixtures or combinations of these contraries" (107).

*Fourth Colloquium: Deborah K. W. Modrak, "Form and Function"*

Modrak presents a fresh look at familiar terrain in the Aristotelian literature: the relation between the Aristotle's ontology of substance and his account of knowledge and definition. Modrak helpfully displays the "shift" within *Metaphysics Zeta* from "essence as the object of definition to essence as the immanent cause of the nature of the perceptible substance" (115). She offers many interesting observations relating the account of substance as actuality in *Metaphysics Theta* 6 to the accounts of actuality in *Physics* and *De anima*. She takes form to be *logos*; this "structural principle" may be expressed in matter as the "functional organization" of particular matter and may be expressed in thought to capture the functional organization characteristic of the species (119). Because *logos* or essence "is the same" whether individualized in matter or conceived alone by itself, she holds that form is not made particular when it actualizes matter (131). The name of the species ("human") is predicated in one way of matter and in another way of individual human beings. Only the latter, Modrak argues, is the sort of universal Aristotle means to exclude from the category of substance with his anti-Platonist arguments in *Zeta* 13.

Mary Louise Gill presents a clear and strong criticism of Modrak, centered on the interpretation of *Zeta* 13 as justification for her own thesis that the whole of *Zeta* is aporetic. Several decades of extensive critical discussion have left the competing lines of interpretation so well-defined that it is unlikely anyone's view will be altered by this exchange. Nevertheless, the arguments are well-stated and Gill's commentary provides an illuminating contrast.

*Fifth Colloquium: Suzanne Stern-Gillet, "Consciousness and Introspection in Plotinus and Augustine"*

Stern-Gillet examines introspection as an exegetical category utilized by interpreters of Plotinus and Augustine. She argues that Plotinus makes use of a distinctively un-modern concept of consciousness (156) that is "inherently inimical to the practice of introspection" (146). She argues that Augustine's *De Trinitate* presents consciousness as self-transparent, such that introspection becomes unnecessary, while his *Confessions* permits us to distinguish "confessional" from "contemplative" introspection. The moral and spiritual obstacles to confessional introspection disclose the mind as an abyss (166-69). Confessional introspection prepares for contemplative introspection, which is the joyful contemplation of the inner presence of the divine (169-70). These explications are worth examining closely, but the larger strategy Stern-Gillet employs is less compelling and might be handled better in a separate essay. This larger strategy frames the investigations into Plotinus and Augustine by reference to various contemporary understandings of introspection. It is never quite clear whether she means to deliver Plotinus and Augustine from exegetical anachronisms or means to trace the development of introspection from Plotinus' anti-introspection to Augustine's proto-introspection (173) and then to various modern and contemporary transformations.

John Peter Kenney's commentary helpfully expands the discussion by focusing on how Plotinus and Augustine account for the soul's "cursiveness," its capacity to locate itself morally and metaphysically at different levels. The difference between the pagan and the Christian appropriation of this theme is illuminating, and Kenney argues that Augustine's contemplative introspection precedes his confessional introspection.

*Sixth Colloquium: C. D. C. Reeve, "Goat-Stags, Philosopher-Kings, and Eudaimonism in the Republic"*

Reeve addresses the tension between happiness and justice for the philosophers obliged to rule in Kallipolis. Reeve takes the ship-of-state simile to show that the relation between philosophers and the city in Kallipolis differs from that relation in every other city. Reeve argues that the image presents not the political structure of Athens or democracy but the corrosive influence of public opinion on philosophical natures in any city (187, 193). The image resembles a goat-stag (488a2-7) because it combines features that do not cohere together. It depicts the experiences of different types of philosopher in relation to cities (189). Reeve also uses this interpretation, in conjunction with other evidence, to defend the claim that compelling philosophers to rule for the benefit of others is both just and compatible with their ruling voluntarily (i.e., in keeping with their own happiness). It is inevitable that an essay touching so many central issues in the *Republic* should present many facets one might find controversial. To mention just one, Reeve depends on the assumption that the aim of the *Republic* as a whole is "to show that justice as a state of the soul (psychic justice) pays higher *eudaimonistic* dividends than psychic injustice" (194). It seems reasonable to suppose, however, that this demand, made by Glaucon and Adeimantus on Socrates (see 185), may not exhaust Plato's aims in writing the book.

Mark McPherran's commentary questions especially the identification of the ship owner with the immature philosophical nature, and he offers interesting, but also very questionable evidence in support. Additionally, and reasonably, McPherran raises significant difficulties for Reeve's harmonization of the compulsory and the voluntary dimensions of the rule of the philosopher-kings.

*Seventh Colloquium: Eric Brown, "Wishing for Fortune, Choosing Activity: Aristotle on External Goods and Happiness"*

Brown brings an innovative approach to a traditional dispute: the breadth or narrowness of Aristotle's account of happiness. Brown holds that happiness is identified properly with virtuous activity. He attends closely to the structural transitions in *Nicomachean Ethics* I, ch. 8-12, and devotes approximately half the essay to analysis of "the central argument" (1099a31-b8). He is eager to construe this argument to mean not that happiness includes external goods as constituents but that those goods are necessary for virtuous activity. In this view, Aristotle is accommodating the ordinary conception of happiness as "optimally fulfilled wishes" (249) to his narrow identification of happiness with virtuous activity (245-46). "When we fail to enjoy the objects of our wishes, our capacity for virtuous activity is diminished, by psychological and social mechanisms" (249). By wishing for (rather than choosing) certain external goods that are not virtue, the virtuous human being maintains the proper attitudes necessary for virtuous activity (251-52). One dissatisfying feature of this last portion of Brown's essay is the near total absence of explicit textual support for the view of wishes he imputes to Aristotle. That is a departure from the rest of his essay and from the character of the essays in this volume.

[Read Latest](#)

[Index for 2008](#)

[Change Greek Display](#)

[Archives](#)

[Books Available for Review](#)

[BMCR Home](#)