Abstracts: Southern Association for Ancient Philosophy, 2019

9th September 14.30 to 10th September 16.00

James Warren: 'Plato on sharing and privatisation'

Plutarch's Quaestiones Convivales 2.10 is devoted to the question whether people in the past did better when they dined each with their own portion served individually (pros meridas) or people in the present when they all share from a common supply (ek koinou). Which of these is the better means of producing koinōnia (sharing, solidarity)? Plutarch seems to be thinking about Socrates' comments at Republic 462a-e on making sure that the ideal city is unified by the sharing of pleasures and pains. But what does Socrates mean here by koinōnia and its opposite: idiōsis (privatisation)? And how should we understand his illustration of the relationship between a person and an injured finger?

Sophia Connell 'Aristotle on the intelligence of women'

According to Aristotle's biology, females are more capable of intelligence than males. This is evident in his account of the consistency of their blood and flesh and their relative lack of dwarfishness. Furthermore, Aristotle notes that female animals have better memories and are quicker to learn. The obvious question then is why he thinks that female humans are subordinate to male ones. In this paper, I will argue that there is for Aristotle a natural basis for women's role in the polis, but that this does not make them incapable of intelligence or virtue; instead they lack the physical strength and spirit required for rule. Their intellectual capacities actually make women more easily ruled over, like intelligent tameable and trainable animals. Furthermore, a well-run polis requires the complementarity of the sexes. More spirited and active men must be balanced out by less spirited and thoughtful women. The intelligence of women is to be employed for the successful management of the household and the raising of young children. However, Aristotle suggests that the slight 'imbalance' in female physiology which makes them more able to be intelligent while less able to resist subordination must be carefully handled in order to avoid sedition.

Alex Bown 'Evidence and revelation in Stoic accounts of sign and proof'

Proofs or demonstrations (apodeixeis) have an important role in Stoic epistemology: they provide access to non-evident matters, those that are beyond the reach of perception. In order to qualify as a demonstration, an argument must not only be valid and have true premises, but also satisfy certain conditions concerning the evidential statuses of its premises and conclusion. Various Stoic accounts are reported; these accounts typically agree that the premises must be more evident than and somehow 'revelatory' of the conclusion, but differ in important details. Similar appeal to concepts of evidence and of revelation is made in the context of the Stoic accounts of signs and of inference from signs. My aim in this paper is to investigate the concept or concepts of revelation that are involved in these accounts: what is it for something to be revelatory of something else in the way or ways required by demonstration and sign-inference?

Laura Castelli: 'Establishing the universal through the particular: dialectic, logic and mathematics'

In the Topics Aristotle refers to an argumentative procedure aiming at establishing a universal conclusion by producing an argument about a particular case and resorting to some former explicit agreement between the interlocutors of the dialectical exchange. I shall present and review this procedure with reference to other in certain respects similar procedures such as the use of examples to establish a general claim, the use of ecthesis and the use of the rule for the introduction of the universal quantifier. In particular, I shall focus on some genuine difficulties involved in these procedures and link this discussion to some of Plato's remarks about the differences between mathematical reasoning and dialectic.

Jamie Dow 'Dialectic, Persuasion and Science in Aristotle'

What is dialectic and what is it for, in Aristotle? Aristotle's answer in Topics 1.2 seems surprisingly lacking in unity. The implication is that insofar as dialectic is an expertise (τέχνη), it is a disposition to three (possibly four) different kinds of productive achievement. Insofar as dialectic is a method, it is one whose use is seemingly subject to multiple, differing standards of evaluation. And these have the problematic implication that Aristotle, in the Topics, lacks a unified account of what dialectic is. The goal of the paper is to resist this problematic "multi-tool" view of Aristotelian dialectic, by explaining how dialectic's contributions to training, encounters, the philosophical sciences (and to discussion of scientific first principles) are of the same kind. What unifies them, I shall argue, is the kind of reasoning that improves the epistemic position of the person that engages with it. Put simply, the kind of reasoning-based practices in which dialectic is the expertise might be characterised as, at heart, tools of inquiry, tools for improving people's understanding. For this reason, dialectic is beneficial for certain kinds of persuasive "encounters": it is an expertise that enables its possessor to engage in persuasive encounters that persuade by improving the understanding of their participants. Overall, the paper is part of a larger exploration (building from my 2015 book) of the normative contours of the Aristotelian disciplines of argument, rhetoric and dialectic, seeking to uncover their implications not just for esoteric questions about the conduct of science and philosophy, but for the conduct of everyday persuasive interactions between humans.

Katharine O'Reilly 'Epicurus on Pain and the Recollection of Pleasure'

Epicurus' deathbed letter famously describes his last day as both maximally painful, and maximally happy: while suffering from kidney stones, he reports that the recollection of past philosophical discussions with a friend served to counterbalance the pain. What would it mean for the memory of a past pleasure to produce a joy of the soul and 'offset' occurrent physical pain? I argue for an understanding of the epicurean psychology of memory which makes this 'off-setting' model plausible. By distinguishing between the intentional object, the process, and the affective tone of the recollection, I sketch an alternative to the 'distraction' model which has so far dominated. This new reading turns an otherwise problematically unsatisfactory aspect of epicurean therapy – how to deal with pain that leads to death – into yet another source of anxiety which epicureans need not suffer. I conclude that, for the epicureans, training to recollect certain types of memories vividly is their most important tool for pain management. It is a technique which has much to reveal about the content of epicurean therapy, but which is so far under-appreciated in modern scholarship.

Alessio Santoro: 'Aristotle and Plato on the power of being'

In Topics 6.7 Aristotle enumerates a list of ways in which we can test whether or not a definition has been correctly attributed to its subject. At 146a21-31 he states that, when a definition is given in relation to two things (πρὸς δύο), we ought to check whether our interlocutor has correctly assigned it to each of them separately. Interestingly, the two examples Aristotle uses to illustrate this point are borrowed from Plato: 'the beautiful is what is pleasant to the sight or to the hearing' (Hippias Major, 298a); 'being is what has the power (δύναμις) to act or to be affected' (Sophist 247d-e). However, while in the Hippias Socrates clearly rejects this definition of the beautiful, the so-called 'dunamis proposal' (Brown) plays a much less clear role in the economy of the Sophist. Thus, in my paper I shall use Aristotle's topos as a tool for interpreting this key passage in Plato's gigantomachy. I shall begin by reconstructing Aristotle's discussion of the dunamis proposal in the Topics, showing that it constitutes not a correct definition (6.7, 146a21-31), but rather a proprium of being (5.9, 139a1-8). I shall then briefly compare this reconstruction with Socrates' discussion of the definition of the beautiful in the Hippias Major. Finally, I shall apply Aristotle's topos to Plato's Sophist. This reading will allow me to claim that, in the gigantomachy, the Stranger from Elea (i) offers a definition—not simply a mark—of being, and that (ii), however, he endorses it only for the sake of argument.