
New Perspectives on Aristotle's De caelo edited by Alan C. Bowen
and Christian Wildberg

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The preface of this volume states clearly its purpose and origins:

This volume is the first collection of scholarly articles in any modern language devoted to Aristotle's *De caelo*. . . It grew out of [a] series of workshops on this text and involved an international collaboration of scholars, giving it a diversity and sophistication unattainable by a single scholar [vii].

Beyond the introduction [1–7], the volume presents 10 essays [9–281], an extensive bibliography of both primary and secondary sources for the *De caelo* [283–298], and four indices [299–321]. In the introduction, Bowen and Wildberg point out that in ‘the last decades. . . there are only a few probing studies of, or commentaries on, the *De caelo* itself’ [2]. Indeed, Aristotle's *Physics* has received much more attention in the literature than has the *De caelo*. But the present volume is not conceived as a systematic study of, or a comprehensive commentary on, the work as a whole; rather, this volume provides

a collection [of] essays on the *De caelo* that address challenging issues . . . by acquainting the reader with some of the latest and most exciting aspects of current scholarship on Aristotle's natural philosophy. . . to provide useful in-depth discussion of some important ideas, or of difficult passages and chapters in the *De caelo*, and thereby to deepen the reader's understanding and critical appreciation of Aristotle's cosmology. [2]

As a result of its conception, the essays comprising this volume cover a range of problems, methodological, substantive, and historical. There are several essays that examine particular arguments

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while keeping an eye on Aristotle's criticisms of Plato's *Timaeus*. 'From Plato's *Timaeus* to Aristotle's *De caelo*: The Case of the Missing World Soul' [9–28] by T. K. Johansen finds commonality between Plato and Aristotle in the view that the heavens must be animate [26] and difference in the presence of ethics in the *Timaeus* and its absence in the *De caelo*. In 'The Possibilities of Being and Not-Being in *De caelo* 1.11–12' [29–50], S. Broadie reads Aristotle as formulating two arguments that do not clearly form a single coherent argument [30] against Plato's view in the *Timaeus* that the cosmos came into being and will never cease to be. R. Bolton identifies 'Two Standards for Inquiry in Aristotle's *De caelo*' and concludes by setting Aristotle's distinction between εὐλόγως and φυσικῶς in the historical context of Aristotle's relation to Plato [51–82].

Several essays focus on a particular argument found in the *De caelo*. R. J. Hankinson writes on 'Natural, Unnatural, and Preternatural Motions: Contrariety and the Argument for The Elements in *De caelo* 1.2–4' [83–118]; 'Why Does Earth Move to the Center? An Examination of Some Explanatory Strategies in Aristotle's Cosmology' is a question raised and examined by Mohan Matthen [119–138]. M. L. Gill considers 'The Theory of the Elements in *De caelo* 3 and 4' and locates the account here, as she interprets it, within the larger context of Aristotle's account of elemental motion [139–161]. P. Pellegrin examines 'The Argument for the Sphericity of the Universe in Aristotle's *De caelo*: Astronomy and Physics' in an essay that not only takes up a specific problem and text but also returns to more general questions concerning the 'standards' of inquiry in the *De caelo* [163–185].

Two essays relate the *De caelo* to Aristotle's biological works and in so doing also raise methodological questions. In '*De caelo* 2.2 and Its Debt to the *De incessu animalium*' [187–214], J. G. Lennox characterizes Aristotle as 'a committed empiricist' [210] and concludes that he

is providing an object lesson in empirical cosmology, countering the approach found in Plato's *Timaeus* and in Pythagorean doctrine. [212]

M. Leunissen's 'Why Stars Have No Feet: Explanation and Teleology in Aristotle's Cosmology' [215–237, esp. 234–235] argues that the *De*

caelo does in fact utilize the teleological principles found in the biology but with some differences.

As the opening essays look back to Plato, the concluding essay, ‘The Astrologization of the Aristotelian Cosmos: Celestial Influences on the Sublunary World in Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and Averroes’ [239–281] by Gad Freudenthal, looks forward to the late Greek and Medieval traditions. Although not mentioned in the title, this essay includes references to the Jewish philosophers Gersonides and Maimonides [cf. 241, 244–45, 274]. The final paragraph of Freudenthal’s essay is the final paragraph of this volume and it opens with a grand sweep:

The totality of medieval natural philosophy in the Aristotelian tradition posited the existence of celestial influences on the sublunary world. [274]

Thus, while these essays are diverse in their particular interests and claims, they are in a sense united: they share interests in issues of methodology, in the historical origins and reach of Aristotle’s *De caelo*, and in their close and careful readings of the text.

The extensive bibliography that follows the 10 essays in this volume is divided into four sections:

- A. Medieval and early modern manuscripts [283–285]
- B. Modern critical editions of Aristotle’s *De caelo* [285–287]
- C. Commentaries and translations, which is in its turn subdivided into four sections [287–291], and
- D. Modern monographs, collected studies, and articles on Aristotle’s *De caelo* [291–298].

This bibliography constitutes a special gift to scholars above and beyond the interest of the essays. It makes this volume of value not only to those interested in the *De caelo* but to anyone interested in Aristotle’s philosophy of nature more generally. Four indices—an index of passages cited [299–311], an index of subjects [313–317], an index of modern authors [319–320], and an index of ancient and medieval authors [321]—complete the volume and also enhance its value.