Philosophy

In How to Talk About Love,[1] Armand D'Angour offers an eloquent introduction to Plato's *Symposium*, which includes a brief but enjoyable look at love in ancient Greek literature and a translation of selections from Plato's dialogue, accompanied by the original Greek text. The book is part of Princeton University Press' series on Ancient Wisdom for Modern Readers, which, as the name suggests, aims to repackage ancient texts for the self-help section of bookstores.

Readers will first fall in love with the physical appearance of this affordable, hardbound little book, covered with a stereotypical pink jacket featuring an image of Amor and Psyche credited to Peter Horree, and with cream paper and a luxuriously large font size. More importantly, D'Angour's clear and accessible prose will seduce even the most inexperienced reader with an introduction and seven chapters that contain a brief presentation and translation of the main sections of the speeches in the *Symposium*. The compelling introduction has sections on epic, lyric, and tragic love, followed by a description of the dialogue's background and an outline of its contents.

The translator's choices are also optimized to prioritize beauty. D'Angour wants to 'translate passages from the dialogue into English so that they remain as alive and natural as possible' (p. xxxv), and, after acknowledging the difficult task he has set to himself, confesses: 'I have occasionally preferred to offer an accessible paraphrase in place of a word-by-word translation' (p. xxxvi). Although readers will judge for themselves, I think he offers a balanced and faithful rendering of the text and its meaning.

Worth noting is a brief excursus in chapter six, where D'Angour summarizes his argument that Plato's character Diotima of Mantinea is unmistakably linked and partially based on Aspasia of Miletus. I am sympathetic to this idea. The author, however, fails to notice a tension between his initial description of the role of women in Athenian society and Aspasia's role. First, he tells us that: 'Women were peripheral to the social hierarchy of Athens; the only women present in a symposium would have been female slave entertainers (*aulētrides*) or elite sex workers (*hetairai*)' (p. xxvi). No exceptions or qualifications are mentioned. But later, D'Angour argues that Aspasia, 'conducted a salon frequented by elite Athenians including Socrates' (102), discoursed on love, and was some sort of marital coach and adviser, while probably writing speeches for her famous *de facto* husband, Pericles. Then D'Angour adds that although the poets label Aspasia a 'prostitute' and 'some have succumbed to designating her a *hetaira*, 'courtesan'", that is at odds with the respect shown by Plato and Xenophon. But if D'Angour is correct about Aspasia, his initial description of women in Athenian society, although true for the most part, would have needed to be qualified to properly recognize the role of Aspasia in the intellectual circles of the Athenian elite.

Overall, I liked D'Angour's emphasis and insistence that each speech in the dialogue is interwoven and recuperates aspects of the previous ones. However, as a meticulous reader of Plato, I grieved for the passages that were edited down (it is not explained why the whole dialogue was not translated). As a philosopher, I longed for a more in-depth discussion of Socrates' speech and Plato's Forms, which are deemed far too abstract for the liking of the 'Modern Reader'. The book closes with a brief list of further reading and

[1] H*ow to Talk about Love: An Ancient Guide for Modern Lovers*. By Armand D'Angour. Princeton. Princeton University Press, 2025. Pp. xxxvii + 166. 1 black and white illustration. Hardback. £14.99, ISBN: 978-0-69-126871-2.

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a table of concordances between the selected passages and the standard Stephanus pagination of the Greek text. Anyone interested in initiating the study of love and desire in Plato would benefit from this book.

María-Elena García-Peláez and David Lévystone edited and compiled *Voices and Echoes of Early Greek Philosophy*,[2] a volume in honour of their colleague at Universidad Panamericana in Mexico City, André Laks. The book appears as volume 419 in the *Beiträge zur Altertumskunde* ('Contributions to the Study of Antiquity') series. It comprises 17 papers divided into two main parts, one dedicated to the reconstruction and interpretation of early Greek thinkers, and the second focused on the reception of archaic Greek thought in different times and places. Contributors include renowned scholars, Laks' former collaborators and former and current colleagues, including Glenn W. Most, David Lévystone, Alberto Ross, Livio Rossetti, Pierre Destrée, Silvia Fazzo, Marco Zingano, Luis Xavier López-Farjeat, and Henrik Lorenz, among others. The papers offer a kaleidoscope of philosophical, philological, and reception studies in English, French, and Italian.

After a mercifully short introduction, where García-Peláez highlights the most salient contributions in each chapter, Glenn W. Most opens the first section with 'The "Sentence" of Anaximander'. This is perhaps one of the most interesting chapters in the whole book. In it, Most details the editorial difficulties and reflections around the famous and only sentence that is considered to be directly derived from Anaximander and was preserved by Simplicius, who probably took it from Theophrastus' Φυσικῶν Δόξαι (*The Opinions of the Natural Philosophers*). The text, edited and included by Most and Laks in their *Early Greek Philosophy II*, was offered at variance with previous editions. The text and translation they offer, which marks in bold what they take to be Anaximander's sentence, reads as follows:

ἐξ ὧν δὲ ἡ γένεσίς ἐστι τοῖς οὖσι, καὶ τὴν φθορὰν εἰς ταῦτα γίνεσθαι **κατὰ τὸ χρεών. διδόναι γὰρ αὐτὰ δίκην καὶ τίσιν ἀλλήλοις τῆς ἀδικίας** κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν, ποιητικωτέροις οὕτως ὀνόμασιν αὐτὰ λέγων·

And the things out of which birth comes about for beings, into these too their destruction happens, **according to obligation: for they pay penalty (*dikê*) and retribution (*tisis*) to each other for their injustice (*adikia*)** according to the order of time – this is how he says these things, with rather poetic words (Simpl. *In Phys.* p. 24.13–25; DK 12B1; LM D6; <Theoph. Frag. 226A FHS&G).

In his chapter, Most discloses their original reasoning and choices for their edition, and explains why he now proposes a different version. Most's main interlocutor is Charles Kahn (*Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology,* 1960), who defended the authenticity of the preceding and subsequent words of what Laks and Most attribute to Anaximander. Regarding the preceding words, Most concludes:

[2] *Voices and Echoes of Early Greek Philosophy.* Edited by María-Elena García-Peláez and David Lévystone. Berlin. De Gruyter. 2025. Pp. viii + 393. 4 illustrations. Hardback. £119.95, ISBN: 978-3-11-914993-8.

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ἐξ ὧν δὲ ἡ γένεσίς ἐστι τοῖς οὖσι, καὶ τὴν φθορὰν εἰς ταῦτα γίγνεσθαι, 'And the things out of which birth comes about for beings, into these too their destruction happens' derive not from Anaximander but from Simplicius as inspired by Aristotle (and probably not mediated by Theophrastus) seems to me about as close to being certain as we can hope to arrive in this life (24).

Concerning the last words, κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν ('according to the order of time'), Most gives little weight to Kahn's arguments, and instead defends that 'there is every reason to regard' them 'as being a prosaic exegetical gloss on the poetic phrase κατὰ τὸ χρεών, "according to obligation", and hence as belonging to Theophrastus/Simplicius' (25). Although it is persuasive, I wonder if others will find Most's argument dependent on a false dichotomy between Kahn's view and his own alternative.

But that is not all. In a section that makes the piece feel almost like Descartes' first meditation, Most makes us now doubt another part of the fragment:

the 'sentence' of Anaximander might well be not a complete sentence at all, but nothing more than either a single prepositional phrase (κατὰ τὸ χρεών) together with a possibly disconnected verbal phrase (διδόναι αὐτὰ τίσιν ἀλλήλοις τῆς ἀδικίας), or else even less: a single propositional phrase (κατὰ τὸ χρεών) and a couple of substantives and pronouns (τίσιν ἀλλήλοις τῆς ἀδικίας) (29).

The first part of the book also covers a chapter on Thales, two on Pherecides, Parmenides, and Diogenes of Apollonia, and discussions on passages in Hesiod and Aeschylus. From this lot, I especially appreciated Silvia Fazzo's open-ended revalorization of Diogenes of Apollonia, which highlights how Aristotle cites him at length. The second part, in turn, stretches from Aristotle's reception of Parmenides and Simplicius' interpretation of Anaxagoras to the much more recent references to Greek antiquity in Cavafy's poetry and two poems by Paul Celan. But there is also a chapter exploring the Greek origins of Islamic atomism, and one on Greco-Roman echoes in the work of sixteenth-century Franciscan friar, Bernardino de Sahagún.

Readers and admirers of Cicero are in luck, because there is now a paperback edition of *Cicero and the People's Will* by Lex Paulson.[3] First published in 2023, this book started as a PhD dissertation. Although it still preserves some traces of that origin (I couldn't avoid noting, 'This thesis' on p. xi), the book offers a lucid, wide-ranging study of Cicero's use of the multifaceted notion of *voluntas* (will), skillfully sensitive to the historical and biographical context, and making Cicero's philosophical genius and sophistication shine. Written to be accessible not only to scholars of Cicero and specialized philosophers but to a broader, well-educated elite, the book aims to show that 'the will is an original Latin contribution to the Western mind' (3).

There is much to be praised in Paulson's approach and methodology. However, two early starting points might not be shared by all. One is his decision to see *voluntas* as a

[3] *Cicero and the People's Will: Philosophy and Power at the End of the Roman Republic*. By Lex Paulson. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp. xvi + 269. Paperback £22.99, ISBN: 978-1-009-07738-5.

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notion and not a concept. The distinction comes from Carlos Lévy, Paulson's PhD supervisor, who considers the latter as enclosing reality in a unity of meaning, and understands the former as something that 'accepts approximation, a multitude of elements, preferring suggestions to the imposition of one framework, at the risk of offering contradictory signs' (Paulson's translation on p. 3 of Lévy).[4]

The author puts the second starting point, thus: 'I resist the tendency to detach Cicero's ideas from his *vita activa*, and I do not view his political and philosophical projects as non-overlapping pursuits' (11). At this level of generality, this seems the right approach. However, Paulson occasionally goes even further, seeing Cicero's political and biographical circumstances as the primary explanation for his intellectual development. The most prominent example of this is at the heart of the book. Paulson sees the fall of the Roman Republic and the ascension of Caesar as the event that catalyzes Cicero into turning *voluntas* from the will of the people to an inalienable force of the soul and the locus of individual responsibility (see, e.g., 7, 12).

Paulson divides the book into two parts. The first part, called 'The practice of *voluntas*', encompasses five chapters that focus on Cicero's writings and speeches before his exile, and a second part dedicated to Cicero's philosophical works, with a chapter on willpower, one on free will, and one on the fourfold self. The book closes with a brief conclusion and an epilogue on the afterlife of Cicero's *voluntas*. It successfully navigates Cicero's rich and complex legacy, emphasizing both the originality and continuity with the Greeks. Of note are chapters on what the author calls the 'economy of goodwill' (Ch. 4), and *voluntas populi* ('the will of the people') (Ch. 5), although specialists in Greek philosophy will be drawn especially towards chapter 6, and the discussion of Cicero's reception of Platonic and Hellenistic philosophy.

A perfect yet prohibitive companion to Paulson's monograph is *Cicero as Philosopher*, a fascinating volume edited by Andree Hahmann and Michael Vazquez and published by De Gruyter.[5] The book follows recent attempts to revalorize Cicero's philosophy. It puts together an international team (all writing in English) to offer an introduction and eighteen contributions divided into two main parts: one dedicated to revisiting Cicero's philosophy, especially his approaches to writing it, and exegetical questions faced by his readers; and another section on Cicero's legacy and influence as a philosopher in his own right. The overall aim is to 'take seriously the idea that one should view Cicero as a philosopher whose abilities and subsequent influence should not be underestimated' (4).

All the contributions in this volume are bold and innovative. The book's first part offers a mixture of deep dives into specific works and chapters dealing with transversal topics, themes, and methods. Examples of the former include chapter 2, dedicated to rereading *De Republica*, written by Matthew Fox; Christelle Veillard's chapter 8, focuses on *De officiis*; Jed W. Atkins and Leo Trotz-Liboff write chapter 5, which offers a careful

[4] Lévy, C. 'De la rhétorique à la philosophie: le rôle de la temeritas dans le pensée et l'œuvre de Cicéro' in G. M. Muller & F. M. Zini, eds., *Philosophie in Rom*. Berlin, de Gruyter. 2018, p. 1.

[5] *Cicero as Philosopher: New Perspectives on His Philosophy and Its Legacy.* Edited by Andree Hahmann and Michael Vazquez. Berlin. De Gruyter, 2025. Pp. vi + 412. Hardback £117.50, ISBN: 978-3-11-159117-9.

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and close reading of *De oratore* and its parallel with Plato's *Phaedrus*; chapter 7, by Jörn Müller, dedicated to *Tusculanae disputationes* 5, and Sean McConnell interesting chapter (10) on *De Amicitia* and the question over whether 'it is sometimes or to some extent acceptable to breach one's duty to the state or to transgress from what is morally right on account of *amicitia*' (223). Of the latter type, I especially liked chapter one by Walter Nicgorski, who persuasively argues that understanding Cicero as a Socratic can help us see his love of wisdom, methodology, practical orientation, and moderate scepticism as a unified philosophical project. Clara Auvray-Assayas, in turn, writes an insightful chapter (4) on Cicero's use of the Carneadean practice of *contra dicere* (refutation).

The book's second part offers a wide range of explorations of Ciceronian influence over the centuries, especially where research has been limited. Chapter 11 by Veronica Roberts Ogle, for instance, investigates Cicero's legacy in Augustine's *De civitate Dei*. The following chapter (12) by Laura Corso de Estrada, vindicates Cicero as an important intellectual influence in the scholastic period, on authors such as William of Auxerre, Philip the Chancellor, and Thomas Aquinas' natural theology and philosophical anthropology. This is complemented by Gideon Stiening's chapter (13) on the influence of Cicero's *De legibus* on Francisco Suárez. Other chapters explore, for instance, Cicero's influence in eighteenth-century England (Katherine A. East's ch. 15), John Lock's doctrine of natural law (Tim Stuart-Buttle's ch. 17), and a contribution by the editors on Cicero's influence on two figures of the German Enlightenment, Johann Joachim Spalding and Christian Garve.

Readers whose special interest is the intersection between Stoicism, Quine, and contemporary metaphysics will enjoy the impressive monograph *The Unity of Stoic Metaphysics* by Vanessa de Harven.[6] The book started as a doctoral dissertation at UC Berkeley and incorporates material previously published as book chapters and articles in *Ancient Philosophy*, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, *Apeiron*, and *Rhizomata*. The resulting book is coherently put together, offering a sophisticated, up-to-date, and insightful reconstruction and interpretation of Stoic metaphysics. It includes a comprehensive introduction and sixteen chapters divided into five main sections: I. Something, II. Bodies, III. Incorporeals, IV. Neither Corporeal Nor Incorporeal, V. Everything. The book's main claim is that the Stoics not only count things in and out of their ontology with parsimonious ontological criteria but also with metaphysical principles that ground the ontology on bodies. Its rhetoric contrasts this project with the widespread interpretation of Plato as a two-world metaphysician. This, however, seems to me a slight caricature of Plato, and one that permeates de Harven's understanding of the Stoics' engagement with Plato's works.

Nevertheless, I am mostly impressed (if not always persuaded) by de Harven's attempt at understanding and reconstructing Stoic ontology and physics. A word of warning, however, is appropriate, especially for those considering spending a small fortune on a corporeal copy of this book: de Harven's starting point is not a close reading of the Stoic texts, but analytic philosophy and the assumption that the reader is an

[6] *The Unity of Stoic Metaphysics: Everything is Something*. By Vanessa de Harven. New York. Oxford University Press, 2025. Pp. xvi + 536. Hardback £134.00, ISBN: 978-0-19-893016-7.

analytic philosopher, too, or at least well acquainted with its style and quirks. The book insists on using distinctions borrowed by modern authors to describe and understand Stoic material. Though usually done with care and successfully, it sometimes feels forced, diminishes clarity and accuracy rather than improving it, and misses the opportunity to use distinctions found in the Greek tradition.

There is, of course, a close reading of the texts. Still, the reader must be patient and trusting for a while, confident in de Harven's capacity to be the spokesperson for the Stoics, a role that reminds us of Theaetetus speaking for the absent Giants in Plato's *Sophist*. Finally, de Harven often seems interested in a prospective interpretation, indulging in guesses and hunches about what the Stoics would have said – no doubt an attempt to bring Stoic philosophy to the attention of analytic philosophers. Overall, however, there are also many innovations and fresh takes on critical exegetical details dear to scholars of Stoicism. I cannot possibly cover them here, but the book offers a treasure for anyone interested in understanding Stoic corporealism.

For anyone reading Plato's ethics in a systematic light inspired and informed by Neoplatonism, who puts all faith in Aristotle's reports on Platonic principles (especially the identification of the Good with the One), and reads the *Republic*'s claim that the Good is 'beyond essence (οὐσία)' as saying that the Idea of the Good is an essence-less first principle of all – not to be confused with the Form of the Good, nor strictly speaking having intelligible content – and is the Archimedean point of Platonic metaphysics and ethics, Lloyd P. Gerson's *Plato's Moral Realism* is the perfect read.[7] But even readers who strongly disagree with these starting points will find an extremely well-argued and knowledgeable monographic study on Plato's commitment to a sophisticated and robust moral realism that escapes common objections and classifications. Moreover, Gerson is well aware and quick to anticipate objections to his interpretation of Plato, even if his answers will not fully satisfy all.

Although based on unfashionable readings of crucial passages, the book cannot be accused of not being a close reading of the text. Moreover, at a coarse-grain level, Gerson offers an undeniably erudite and forceful defence of the Platonic meta-ethics. The book is divided into eight chapters, including an introduction and some concluding remarks. Chapter 2 is dedicated to explaining Gerson's understanding of the Idea of the Good. Chapter 3 tackles the distinction and relation between virtue, knowledge, and the good. Chapter 4 examines whether, in Plato's dialogues, we can really distinguish between Socratic and Platonic ethics. Chapter 5 focuses on moral responsibility, chapter 6 on moral realism in *Philebus* and *Statesman*, while chapter 7 deals with the connection between morality, religion, and politics in Plato. Overall, this book overflows with goods for anyone interested in challenging their preconceptions of Plato and is interested in meta-ethics.

Despite the cacophonous yet accurate title, *Conceptualising Concepts in Greek Philosophy*, edited by Gábor Betegh and Voula Tsouna, offers a dream team of senior contributors.[8] The book aims to fill the gap in our understanding of the different Greek

[7] *Plato's Moral Realism*. By Lloyd P. Gerson. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. viii + 264. Hardback £85.00, ISBN: 978-1-009-32998-9.

[8] *Conceptualising Concepts in Greek Philosophy*. Edited by Gábor Betegh and Voula Tsouna. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 2024. Pp. xx + 484. Hardback £115.00, ISBN: 978-1-009-36957-2.

concepts of concept, concept formation and possession. As the editors are quick to admit, however, the task is not straightforward, since 'it is questionable whether the early Greek philosophers had any notion or notions corresponding to what we might call concept(s), and it can even be debated whether such items can be found in Plato or Aristotle' (1). Any development is not linear. However, the contributions in the volume do not impose but explore different ancient approaches. After a short introduction, the volume offers nineteen chapters ordered in roughly chronological order and spanning from early Greek philosophy to the early Christian philosophers. There is, however, only one chapter dedicated to early Greek philosophy, written by André Laks. Terrence Irwin, in turn, offers the only chapter on the place of concepts in Socratic inquiry. Plato, in contrast, gets three excellent contributions by James Warren (on early learning in *Republic* 7), David Sedley (on whether Forms are concepts), and Lesley Brown (on whether Forms play the role of concepts in late Plato).

This is followed by a trio of chapters dedicated to Aristotle, which begins with a chapter on concept formation in Aristotle's *Organon* by Richard McKirahan, followed by an insightful discussion of concepts and universals in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* by Christof Rapp, and closes with a contribution on the stages of cognitive development by Thomas Kjeller Johansen. The next three chapters focus on Hellenistic philosophy, with a study on the Epicureans written by the editors, a lucid study of Stoic conceptions and concepts by Katerina Ierodiakonou, and one on Sextus Empiricus by Richard Bett.

Two thematic chapters disrupt the strict chronological order. One is Matthew Duncombe's 'Relative Concepts', and the other is 'Concepts in Greek Mathematics' by Reviel Netz. The next natural group of chapters is the longest, and includes a chapter on systematic Platonists by Mauro Bonazzi, one focused on Plutarch's *On Common Conceptions* by Thomas Bénatouïl, Frans A. J. de Haas' contribution on Alexander of Aphrodisias, Sara Magrin's chapter on Plotinus, and Péter Lautner's 'Concepts in the Neoplatonist Tradition'. The book closes with George Karamanolis' chapter on early Christian philosophers. As can be seen, the book covers an impressive period and a range of authors. The best part is that the entire book is accessible through Open Access and the Cambridge Core website.

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