

PHILOSOPHY

HARTE (V.) and WOOLF (R.) (eds) **Rereading Ancient Philosophy: Old Chestnuts and Sacred Cows**. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. xiv + 308, £79.99. 9781107194977. doi:[10.1017/S0075426922000866](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426922000866)

Verity Harte and Raphael Woolf's new volume is a Festschrift for that doyen of ancient philosophy, Mary Margaret McCabe. In its conception, the volume is to be situated among the finest instances of its genre, possessing a purposive unity and timeliness often absent from projects of this kind. The editors identify and clearly articulate what they take as McCabe's defining scholarly virtue: her dedication to the idea that great texts of ancient philosophy are of indissoluble interest, perpetually rewarding careful examination. From this, the overriding issue of the volume emerges naturally: the question of whether interpretative innovation can indeed be *reliably* forthcoming concerning texts the meticulous interpretation of which has persisted for over two millennia. To this, the volume represents a strong declaration that '[even] the most well-worn texts can yield new insights, and the hoariest received opinions about them can prove to be less of a solid edifice than may appear' (1). This is a Festschrift, then, that does not merely acknowledge the influence of McCabe, both on the discipline and other scholars, but moreover works to cement her defining commitment as a foundational pillar of the discipline of ancient philosophy into the future.

The contents of this volume are the 'old chestnuts' and 'sacred cows' of the title; in turn, philosophical texts or passages concerning which debates have stagnated, and readings of figures that have settled into orthodoxy. The format of the volume is that each contributor selects for her or his chapter either a nut to crack or a cow to slaughter. Contributors include an impressive array of ancient philosophers, including both early and mid-career scholars (Tor, Aufderheide and Carpenter), but mainly comprise scholars who represent leaders of the field in their own right (Sorabji, Hobbs, Schofield, as well as the editors, to present a partial list). The skew towards well-established scholars is particularly apt; not only have the contributors set up more than a few sacred cows themselves, the thesis of the volume is proved all the more powerfully when these texts speak afresh to those who have built long careers on their careful examination. Given that these studies begin 'neck-deep' in established debates, the primary audience for this volume is those familiar both with the texts considered and debates in their interpretation, core addressees being those whose own commitments are perhaps long-fixed. But while the volume is not ideally suited for introductory (undergraduate) audiences, the clear, considered approach of the contributors ensures that it will be a rewarding read even for intelligent non-specialists.

The ambition of the project sets unusually high standards for the success of the studies, placing conspicuous demands, not merely on innovation of interpretation, but on insights of genuine import regarding topics bulwarked by painstaking scholarship of exceptional pedigree. Indeed, the most impressive studies in the volume are those that take aim at the hardest nuts and most reverend cows. Brittain (chapter 2) offers a magnificent reassessment of the function of the poetic interlude of *Protagoras* 334–48, arguing that Socrates' parody of techniques of literary criticism raise pressing formal questions regarding issues with Socrates' argumentative techniques. And Carpenter (chapter 3) looks to the *Gorgias* to tear down the hallowed cow of Platonic eudaimonism. She offers a convincing case that Socrates' disagreement with Polus and Callicles is grounded in his rejection of their conventional eudaimonism, in favour of his own eccentric 'agathism'. Other highlights are the studies of Harte (chapter 7) and Aufderheide (chapter 10). Although the volume is methodologically agnostic, a telling shared feature of the best contributions is a commitment to painstaking, close reading of the text, buttressed by the integration of keen linguistic analysis. If some contributions

are not so successful, it is less because of sloppy analysis, and more due to a failure clearly to articulate the import of their examinations (which is not to say that such import is lacking).

One issue with the volume regards a certain uniformity of subject matter. The editors acknowledge that the spread of topics is uneven: eight of the 13 chapters concern Plato, with one variously concerning the Presocratics (Heraclitus), Aristotle, Stoicism, Aristotelianism (Alexander of Aphrodisias) and Neoplatonism (Plotinus). Given the aims of the volume, an emphasis on Plato is perhaps expected; Plato is *the* sacred cow of ancient philosophy, for ancient and contemporary commentators alike. If Plato rewards fresh reading, then any ancient figure of substance can, but this is something the volume establishes more by inference than demonstration. While this concentration does not undermine the aims of the volume, it assumes the character of ‘essential reading’ only in Plato scholarship.

Despite these (relatively minor) issues, I rate this volume to be a genuine and tremendous success. It makes a powerful case that ancient philosophy will always be a *living* discipline.

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GREGORY (A.) **Early Greek Philosophies of Nature**. London, Bloomsbury, 2020. Pp. vii + 241. £90. 9781350080973.

doi:[10.1017/S0075426922000878](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075426922000878)

Andrew Gregory has completed a long journey as an historian of science, from his book on Harvey (*Harvey's Heart: The Discovery of Blood Circulation* (London 2000)) to his several important books on ancient philosophy and science. The present volume somehow circles back by claiming that it is wrong, when we study ancient science, to seek for seventeenth-century-style mechanist clockwork analogies. As Gregory puts it, in his view, ‘we cannot “retrofit” a mechanics’ (188) on ancient science, any more than we should on Harvey. This general claim opens the way for a fruitful approach to early Greek philosophies of nature, that is, to all sorts of endeavours aiming ‘to understand order and regularity in this period’, from Homer and Hesiod down to the Hippocratic authors (1). Turning his back to the ‘Greek Enlightenment’ or ‘myth to reason’ models, Gregory develops a ‘transfer thesis’ (38), based on an intuition from Werner Jaeger (32), according to which qualities and actions attributed to the gods by early poetry were transferred to the principles of Ionian philosophy, to act as key concepts of the new immanent world order, directly accessible to human research and enquiry. This general epistemological shift is the specific focus of two independent chapters. How and when was the necessity to appeal to gods and Muses for knowledge challenged by a new ideal of thorough examination, namely of *historia* (‘enquiry’, chapter 3)? Chapter 5 introduces the ‘targeting thesis’ (94), according to which Ionian philosophy aimed at providing new explanations for the phenomena that were especially known as a field of gods’ intervention, typically meteorological phenomena.

In chapter 2, Gregory explores the way in which Homer and Hesiod express how gods ‘guide’ (*ithunein*) the stuff they control, or how the world is ruled by a ‘powerful fate’ (*krataiē moira*), that sets everything *kata moiran*, *kata aisan* and *kata kosmon* (‘according to what is proper’, ‘in good order’). He offers a balanced discussion of the type of ‘law’ that *moira* imposes on the gods themselves while allowing them to somehow play with it. How then did the *kata moiran* order turns into a *kata phusin* (‘according to nature’) one, with an intermediate stage in Anaximander’s *kata to chreon* (‘according to necessity’)? Gregory sees this ‘transfer’ taking shape through two traditions, sometimes intertwined in some authors, nevertheless distinct in the type of analogies they support: the *kubernan* tradition of ‘steered’ cosmic order develops from Anaximander down to Heraclitus, Parmenides, Diogenes of