
With this publication the Centro di Ricerche di Metafisica in Milan continues its series of Italian translations of important philosophical studies in ancient philosophy. The main goal of the series is to render these studies more accessible to Italian students.

This translation is based on the 1988 reprint of Julia Annas’ commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics M-N, enlarged with material
from other sources. Consequently, the book has a rather complex structure. The translation is prefaced with a general introduction by Reale and a full bibliography of Julia Annas. The main body of the book is divided into three parts. Part One contains 'introductory material' and consists of Annas' Introduction as well as her important 1987 paper on the ontology of mathematical objects¹). Part Two contains the translation of the commentary on Metaph. M-N with appendices. Part Three provides the Greek text of Metaph. M-N (following Jaeger’s OCT edition with corrections by Annas) facing an Italian translation by Reale. A bibliography with special attention for Italian translations and articles, an index nominum, a glossary of Greek words, and a detailed table of contents conclude the book.

In his introduction Reale positions Annas’ work squarely within the Anglo-Saxon analytical ‘paradigm’ of interpretation. For Reale, this means that she plays down the metaphysical import of Aristotle’s discussions of mathematics to an unacceptable extent. For instance, he emphasizes that the One and the Indefinite Dyad are not to be reduced to a non-technical type of one(ness) and two(ness). This reduction obscures the role which we know these principles played in the metaphysics of the Academy (p. 20, against Annas p. 78 n. 1).

One of Reale’s critical remarks is less fortunate. According to Annas, Aristotle’s reports on Plato suggest that Plato introduced the Intermediates in order to solve the so-called Uniqueness Problem (cf. Metaph. 987 b 14-18). She reconstructs the line of thought as follows. Forms are ‘one of a kind’. Because there is, e.g., only one Form number 2, the statement ‘2 + 2 = 4’ is not true of Forms. Hence mathematical numbers, a kind of Intermediates, are needed to explain such statements. Annas argues that there is no passage in Plato’s dialogues which confirms Aristotle’s suggestion. So, Annas suggests, either Aristotle merely alluded to this problem to be able to make sense of Plato, or Plato acknowledged the Uniqueness Problem only after writing the dialogues (p. 52-54). Reale objects that there can be no doubt that Plato believed in Intermediates while writing the Republic. For in Rep. 511 d 2-5 Plato refers to διάξονα as being ‘between’ δόξα and νοῦς. The objects of διάξονα are not discussed because of the ‘doctrinal economy’ which, according to Reale, characterizes all dialogues (cf. Rep. 533 e 7-534 a 8). Nevertheless, these objects must be ‘intermediate’ between the Forms (the objects of νοῦς) and the sensible world (the objects of δόξα).
The story of the cave provides Reale with a further clue. When the prisoner who has been freed is first led out of the cave into the light of the sun, he can perceive only shadows, and then images in water (Rep. 516 a 6-8). These shadows and images must be distinguished both from the reality outside the cave and from the shadows which are produced by the fire inside the cave. Therefore, Reale concludes, they are ‘between’ the Forms and the world we commonly perceive and can truly be called ontological intermediates (p. 14-15).

However, if we leave aside the vexed problem which objects are to be attributed to each of the four segments of the Divided Line, Reale’s interpretation of Plato does not at all invalidate Annas’ claim that the Uniqueness Problem is not mentioned in the dialogues.

On the other hand, Reale is right that Annas is too reluctant to admit allusions to Intermediates in the dialogues. Even if her reconstruction of the Uniqueness Problem is historically correct, it was surely not the only reason why the Platonists posited Intermediates. For instance, in the context of his critique of Platonic philosophy of mathematics Aristotle argues at length against the famous ‘argument from the sciences’ (cf. Arist. Metaph. M2 1076 b 11 ff.) which is also exemplified in Plato’s Divided Line.

To conclude, I fully concur with Reale when he emphasizes the importance of Annas’ work which has kindled renewed interest in the complicated argument of Metaph. M-N. The book here reviewed is a comprehensive guide for Italian readers into this fascinating area of ancient philosophy.

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1) Die Gegenstände der Mathematik bei Aristoteles, in: A. Graeser (ed.), Mathematik und Metaphysik in Aristoteles. Akten des 10. Symposium Aristotelicum (Bern-Stuttgart 1966), 131-147. Although the paper received the title ‘Precisazioni sugli oggetti della matematica in Aristotele’ it should be noted that it contains an interpretation of Metaph. M3 which differs widely from the one given in the commentary. Surprisingly, Graeser’s important collection of articles is not listed in the Bibliografia.