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Language and Logos

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Preface

These studies are offered to Gwil Owen on the occasion of his 60th birthday with respect, gratitude and affection. Their writers are all either pupils of his or younger scholars who, while not formally his pupils, would wish to acknowledge the stimulus of his talk and thought at a formative stage in their own philosophical histories. The volume contains fifteen chapters, all concerned in one way or another with aspects of the role played by reflection upon language in the thought of Plato, Aristotle, and other ancient Greek philosophers. It would have been as easy and as appropriate to persuade a quite different team of authors to write essays in Gwil Owen's honour on some quite different subject – say, Greek science and philosophy of science – no less close to his heart. So this book is dedicated to him with the good wishes, expressed by many to the editors, of a much greater number of pupils and others, on both sides of the Atlantic, than are assembled between these covers. Our thanks go to all who have helped us by their co-operation or advice, particularly our publisher Jeremy Mynott, who has made the project possible.

M. S.
M. C. N.

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Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War, the academic study of Greek philosophy in Britain and North America has changed almost out of recognition. One fairly crude index of the change is the huge growth in the numbers of scholars active in the subject, the volume of their publications, and the variety of their interests. Harder to characterise is the way in which scholarly study of the ancient texts has, without losing in historical scrupulousness or historical imagination, become much more a first-order philosophical activity than it was in the first half of the century. Such changes require moving causes. This volume salutes the work of a scholar and philosopher whose influence on the development of study of Greek philosophy in the last 30 years is second to none.

There have been three major channels through which G. E. L. Owen has made his influence felt. Pride of place must go to the series of masterly essays which he has given us since the early fifties, transforming the state of the art. In Parmenides and Zeno he has shown us, in place of the dogmatic monist and the sophist of the textbooks, the inventors of philosophy as we now understand it, or more specifically of a tradition of profound and subtle metaphysical argument. He has demonstrated how Plato in the theory of Forms gave classic expression to a seductively simple picture of the relations between language and the world, but then in his later dialogues fought his way self-critically to a more penetrating understanding of their complexities. G. E. L. Owen's first venture in this field was made in a celebrated paper on the *Timaeus*; subsequently he has explored it in essays devoted to the *Parmenides*, the *Sophist* and the *Politicus* and to Aristotle's *On the Ideas*. Aristotle, indeed, has been as central to his thought as Plato.

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He has interpreted in many richly detailed and far-ranging studies first Aristotle's rejection of the theory of Forms and the theory of the relationship between science and philosophy of which it forms a part; and then Aristotle's construction of a more sophisticated and congenial account of the workings of language, and of a rival philosophy of science and scientific method. These now classic essays have persuaded many philosophers that Greek philosophy holds greater rewards than they had ever conceived. What has attracted the working philosopher in G. E. L. Owen's work is its satisfying match of style to subject matter. By his own searching and versatile attention, sympathetic but not reverent, to arguments and the philosophical impulses which generate them, he has made his readers aware, as few other scholars do nearly so well, of the depths, subtleties and complexities of the great Greek philosophers. In the space of an article the whole range and unity of a thinker's concerns are illuminated.

Many others have found the same illumination by their attendance as graduate students at Professor Owen's weekly seminars in Oxford, then Harvard, now Cambridge, or in his supervision of their first researches. Those seminars have generated an electric sense of intellectual exhilaration and discovery among their participants. They and he have helped one generation of graduates after another to assimilate the principles of their craft and to discover their own philosophical gifts.

It is not only graduate students who have benefited from Professor Owen's conception of research as a collaborative enterprise. In 1957 he initiated with Ingemar Düring the celebrated series of triennial international Symposia Aristotelica, which continue as they began to bring together the leading workers in the field and to foster progress in many areas of Aristotelian scholarship. After he had left Oxford for Harvard in 1966 he founded in New York an ancient philosophy group that was designed to draw together some of the widely scattered workers in the subject for monthly discussion. This flourishing body was replicated by a British counterpart in 1975, upon his return to England: the junior group meets in London to read the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle, and has recently published its own commentary on Book Z.

The contributors to this volume have addressed themselves to topics in Greek philosophy close to the centre of G. E. L. Owen's

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preoccupation with the place of language in philosophy. Some take up themes which he has made the subject of published writings; others subjects on which he has lectured or discoursed in seminars, but not published; others again topics more remotely connected with his teaching. Taken as a whole, the book gives a fair indication not only of how and where his impact upon the study of Greek philosophy is felt most today, but of the general character and direction of research in the field at present.

Although G. E. L. Owen has often lectured on Heraclitus, he has never devoted a published essay to his thought. Chapters 1 and 2 of our book provide original and much-needed accounts of his epistemology and of the place of language, and the metaphor of language, within that epistemology. Wiggins' Heraclitus is an exponent of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, Hussey's of a Rule of Intrinsic Meaning: the one leads to a realist, the other to an idealist interpretation of Heraclitus' cosmology. Heraclitus' idea that language is a main source of insight into reality was apparently endorsed in cruder form by the obscure figure of Cratylus. And it is Cratylus' version of the theory (as presented by Plato) which is discussed in chapters 3 and 4 by Schofield and Williams. Readers will notice agreement between them on the general drift of the dialogue – i.e. on its devastating scepticism – reinforced by diversity of approach and by a different selection of points of focus.

In chapter 5 Annas considers at greater length a topic in the *Cratylus* on which Williams touches briefly: its theory that knowledge requires a *logos* consisting in analysis into elements. Her main object is to cast light on the appearance of this theory in 'Socrates' dream' in the *Theaetetus*, which, as she shows, yields up a powerfully attractive notion of a hierarchical structure for knowledge, not (as Ryle thought) the beginnings of a syntactic conception of the proposition. This latter conception, and its connection with the problems of falsehood, are taken up in chapter 6. Here McDowell pushes further forward lines of interpretation of the *Sophist* first opened up by G. E. L. Owen, and offers new solutions to some of the toughest problems in that difficult dialogue.

Chapters 7 and 8 are devoted to the debate in Plato's Academy about the theory of Forms. Moravcsik argues that in the second

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part of the *Parmenides* Plato himself paves the way for a transcendental argument for the existence of Forms, construed not as paradigms or subjects of predication but as entities *sui generis*. Fine reconsiders the critical arguments of Aristotle's fragmentary treatise *On the Ideas*, which like Part II of the *Parmenides* has been the subject of a powerful essay by G. E. L. Owen. She posits a dilemmatic structure, hitherto unnoticed, for the strategy of the work, and discerns two subtly distinct 'one over many' arguments in Alexander's reports of its contents.

Aristotle's own thought is the concern of chapters 9 to 14. These chapters are organised by theme rather than by treatise. They deal with a variety of issues in metaphysics and philosophy of explanation: Aristotle devotes less consideration than Plato to specific questions of language, but accords to certain general ideas about language a pervasive role, sometimes explicitly enunciated, in all his philosophising; and he does not sharply distinguish talk of definition from talk of essence, talk of explanation from talk of principles of reality, or in general talk about what we say from talk about what there is.

In chapter 9 Bostock scrutinises the relationship between Aristotle's theory of the logical form of change and his criticisms of his predecessor's substantive physical enquiries. He suggests that Aristotle is not altogether clear on the character of the relationship, and that this unclarity has a significant bearing on some of the fundamental difficulties with which Aristotle wrestles in his theory of predication. Natural change, and in particular the reproduction of species, is the topic of chapter 10. Cooper there argues that the idea of teleological explanation which Aristotle introduces to account for such processes is not, as some scholars have held, one which we project on to reality and justify in terms of the illumination it brings us: ends are embodied in the very structure of nature and are not themselves to be explained, reductively or otherwise, by any external principle.

Matthews takes up Aristotle's distinctive notion of accidental unity in chapter 11. He provides a subtle account of Aristotle's grasp of the concept of identity proper, and interprets the doctrine of accidental identity as a resourceful response to still unresolved problems of referential opacity and the like. Much here turns on our understanding of Aristotle's object in distinguishing uses or senses of 'the same' – or indeed of any other expression. And in

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chapter 12 Irwin attacks the general question of whether Aristotle has a theory or concept of meaning at all. He argues against G. E. L. Owen for a negative answer: but he relates Aristotle's concept of signification to his theory of scientific method, so memorably expounded by Owen in his essay *'Tithenai ta phainomena'*. The interpretations of that essay are pushed further in chapter 13 by Nussbaum, who ascribes to Aristotle a conception of science as operating within the limits of language and thought contained in our shared human experience, and without reliance on unconditionally guaranteed foundations. The limits of language and thought are also the topic of chapter 14, in which Sorabji argues for the superiority of Plotinus' treatment of thinking and its propositional structure to Aristotle's, and touches incidentally on Nussbaum's theme of Aristotle's valuation of scientific enquiry.

Sorabji's paper testifies to the interest which philosophical scholars in the analytic tradition are now taking in later periods of Greek philosophy. So too does the final chapter of the book. In it Burnyeat expounds and assesses the debate between the Stoics and their sceptical opponents about sorites arguments. He contends that while contemporary philosophers see the sorites as problematical mostly for philosophy of language, the ancients thought the lessons it taught were mostly epistemological. His essay sheds light at once on his philosophical topic and its history, and thus fittingly concludes our tribute to G. E. L. Owen.

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