

together much illuminating material. His text and especially his translation have to be used with some caution, however. The latter contains a significant number of errors, occasioned in part by failure to take into account Fortunatus's distinctive poetic idiom, but also by misunderstandings or misjudgments of the possible meanings of the text. For those with some French Quesnel's Budé version of the *VSM* is still the most reliable translation.

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→ *Geoffrey of Aspall: Questions on Aristotle's Physics*, ed. Silvia Donati and Cecilia Trifogli, trans. E. Jennifer Ashworth and Cecilia Trifogli, 2 vols. *Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi* 26. Oxford: Oxford University Press, for the British Academy, 2017. Pp. cii, 1307.

Geoffrey of Aspall was a prolific commentator on Aristotle who flourished in about the mid-thirteenth century, probably at Oxford. Recent scholarship has attributed to Aspall a significant number of previously anonymous texts, primarily on philological grounds. At present, there are three editions of Aspall's commentaries on Aristotle: his *Quaestiones* on the *De Anima*, edited by Vlatka Čizmić (2010), his *Quaestiones* on the *De Somno et Vigilia*, edited by Sten Ebbesen (2014), and this welcome addition, the *Quaestiones super Physicam*, edited by Silvia Donati and Cecilia Trifogli (2017).

In addition to the Latin text, this two-volume edition includes a facing English translation of the *Quaestiones*, prepared by E. Jennifer Ashworth and Cecilia Trifogli. Aspall's text is present in four manuscripts, none of which is complete. The isolated readings in the different witnesses are so manifold that it is reasonable to conclude, as the editors do, that they are variants of the text, rather than copies of a single model. These variants probably represent multiple *reportationes* – that is, more than one edition of notes on Aspall's lectures taken by a student, rather than by Aspall himself – albeit of a single series of lectures. To further complicate matters, none of the manuscripts seem to correspond to a discrete *reportatio*; rather, the versions are apparently conflated.

On the basis of these facts, the editors infer that the manuscripts' divergences are the product not of errors in transmission, but of *ex post facto* editorial intervention. With this in mind, the editors have opted to present the version that seems to have been subject to the least heavy-handed editing (Oxford, Merton College, MS 272/304), as the most reliable means of recovering Aspall's original lectures. The editors use the other manuscripts to correct this one, but they adhere to the text of the Oxford manuscript even when the other, more heavily edited manuscripts are stylistically superior. This makes for a relatively streamlined *apparatus criticus*.

Book VI of Aspall's *Quaestiones* is absent from the Oxford manuscript. For this book, which appears in Volume II of the edition, the editors follow the manuscript Todi, Biblioteca Comunale, MS 23 (163), selected for much the same reasons as its

Oxford counterpart. Volume II also contains an appendix, which comprises isolated readings and divergent texts of the *Quaestiones* from the other manuscripts, along with anonymous questions from the Todi manuscript on Book V which cannot be attributed to Aspill with certainty.

Thus this edition displays a *codex optimus* approach, comprising Books I–IV and VIII of the *Quaestiones* preserved in the Oxford manuscript, along with the Todi manuscript version of Book VI and with an anonymous set of questions on Book V. None of the manuscripts contains the questions of Book VII, which (as of this writing, at least) seems to be lost.

To render the Latin (and English) more readable and easier to cite, the editors have supplied their own numbered breaks in the text, which do not as a rule follow breaks in the manuscripts. Arguments *pro* and *contra*, along with *solutiones*, are not distinguished, either by numbers or by headings, but are simply numbered in the order they appear. To give an example: in Book II, question 13, the objections appear in the paragraphs numbered 1–7; the *ad oppositum* and its elaboration in paragraphs 8–12; the *solutio* in paragraphs 13–14; and the responses to the objections in paragraphs 15–18. This system breaks up the paragraphs nicely, but does not provide any further information about how they are interrelated. This is less than ideal. Frequently in Aspill's *Quaestiones*, as with other scholastic texts, a first (second, third, etc.) response responds to a first (second, third, etc.) objection that was set out much earlier. Accordingly, a more conventional numbering system, like the ones employed in most editions of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, would have been much more useful.

There is much to praise about the accompanying English translation: it is lucid and consistent, and does not shy away from changing the structure of the Latin sentences to render them in smooth, unstilted English. The result is an eminently readable translation. The text also strikes a balance between the two extremes of giving only English terms, on one hand, and peppering the text with untranslated technical terms, on the other – contrary vices of many philosophical translations. Thus the English translation retains the (notoriously difficult to translate) *ratio* when it is used to mean a way of understanding something, though this is never done when *ratio* is used to mean “argument,” in which cases it is straightforwardly translated.

Much of what makes reading Aspill difficult is the brief and cursory way in which he presents his views: typically, he states them in passing in his responses to objections rather than in full responses, in the style of a thinker like Aquinas or Scotus. This mode of presentation can make it difficult to figure out what Aspill's doctrines actually *are*. It is therefore all the more helpful that the present edition contains an extensive philosophical introduction, which expounds point by point the main doctrines of Aspill's *Quaestiones*.

The scope of Aspill's discussions in the *Quaestiones* is vast: in addition to questions on traditional subjects in Aristotelian physics (such as the movement of the celestial

bodies, and the definition of nature, causation, and chance), Aspall discusses subjects in metaphysics (e.g. the ontological status of prime matter, and its potencies), epistemology (e.g. the knowability of prime matter and of the continuum), and even biology (e.g. the generation of animals and of monsters like olive-sprouting grapevines and man-headed oxen). A review like this can scarcely present it all, even *obiter*. Therefore, I will limit myself here to two subjects: Aspall's case for the diminished active potency of prime matter and his discussion of monsters. I have selected the former because it is Aspall's most distinctive and novel doctrine; and the latter because it is fun.

To begin with the former: in Aristotelian physics, perceptible things like spoons, snowflakes and statues are made up of matter and form. Form can change without any loss of underlying matter. This allows us to account for physical change without positing new substances created *ex nihilo*. When, for instance, we pour molten iron into a mold, melt a snowflake or break a sculpture, the form or structure of the thing changes, though the underlying stuff remains quantitatively the same. This is the basic claim of Aristotelian hylomorphism. Simplicius and Augustine, building on Aristotle, describe the underlying stuff as prime matter (*materia prima*), and the medieval Aristotelians take this ball and run with it.

The later Aristotelians usually describe prime matter in privative terms. It is matter at its simplest, devoid of form altogether. Since form is active and actual, matter devoid of form is purely passive and potential. It therefore has no essential properties of its own. Nor does it ever exist without form; rather, it is naturally inclined toward (*inclinatur ad*) or has an appetite for (*appetit*) form.

In Aspall's view, there is an explanatory gap in the Aristotelians' accounts of prime matter. We can see it in the final two sentences of the preceding paragraph: how can prime matter be at once purely passive and receptive, but also actively inclined toward or desirous of form? No one thing can be both purely passive, and also active. Therefore, Aspall thinks, prime matter is not up to the job the Aristotelians assign to it. Still, we need something to serve as the material principle of nature. But anything else drawn from Aristotelian physics – the elements, for instance – will already be a non-simple composite of matter and form. The elements are accordingly disqualified as candidates for the basic stuff of the material world. Aspall's novel solution is that formless matter has a diminished active potency for receiving form.

Matter minus form thus has two diminished potencies: a passive potency for receiving form, analogous to the passive potency a bowl has for receiving liquid; and an active potency, by virtue of which prime matter seeks out and takes on form. These two potencies are distinguished in *ratio*: they are logically distinct aspects of the concept of prime matter. The passive potency is essential to matter, as substance devoid of form; therefore it is indistinguishable from it in *ratio*. But the active potency is not

straightforwardly essential to matter, since it can be distinguished from matter itself. This is a strikingly novel doctrine.

Monsters, for their part, are relevant to Aristotelian physics because of the problems they seem to pose for a teleological account of nature. Aristotle himself discusses monsters in passing in *Physics* 2.8, in the course of a discussion of ends (*tele*): since nature acts for an end, whatever happens always, or for the most part, happens for that end (199b25–26). Therefore, errors such as mutants should be rare and mutually inconsistent, as are errors in art. If this is the case, monsters pose no greater problem for a teleological account of nature than typos do for a teleological account of writing: Aristotelian physics predicts that monsters, like typos, will be occasional one-offs.

With this in mind, Aspoll provides a considerable discussion on monsters, devoting roughly a quarter of Book II (questions 31–43) to them and related questions on animal generation. No one would doubt the monstrosity and rarity of such bizarre specimens as man-headed oxen; but Aspoll notes that Aristotle also classes mules as monsters in his *De generatione animalium* 2.8. This poses a problem. The regularity and consistency of mules *qua* monsters looks like a counterexample to the Aristotelian doctrine of final causation: if nature is teleologically ordered, how can these monsters come about so consistently?

To solve this problem, Aspoll introduces a distinction between monsters in a broad sense, and monsters in a proper sense. Monsters in the broad sense are brought about by natural processes of generation, but they are monstrous in the sense that they, as offspring, do not have a resemblance (*assimilatio*) to their progenitors. And such are mules, which are generated in accordance with nature, but do not follow the general law of resemblance between parents and offspring. Monsters in the proper sense, on the other hand, are not brought about regularly by nature, or are not brought about by nature at all. Into the former category go one-offs like man-headed oxen. And into the latter go monstrosities like grafted plants, where for example a stalk capable of sprouting grapes is nourished by the roots of an olive tree. These are not generated naturally, since their two parts (an olive tree top and a grapevine bottom) come from different seeds, and thus from different processes of generation. They are combined not by nature, but by art. Therefore, Aristotelian teleology is safe from mules and other monsters.

In sum, Aspoll's *Quaestiones* on the *Physics* of Aristotle is a rich and interesting book. And this edition and translation by Silvia Donati, Cecilia Trifogli, and E. Jennifer Ashworth presents it clearly and elegantly. There is much research to be done on Geoffrey of Aspoll, and much to be learned about his philosophical views and the scope of his influence. This excellent Latin edition and lucid accompanying English translation will undoubtedly serve researchers for generations to come.

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