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The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter

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### SAGP Newsletter 1987/8.2 (November)

Anthony Preus

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# Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy

Founded 1953

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Princeton University  
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## NEWSLETTER 1987/8.2 (November)

Since both the Eastern Division and the American Philological Association are meeting in New York, it is again possible for us to have plenary sessions of the SAGP:

The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy invites you to attend our meeting with the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association in Ballroom B of the Sheraton Centre, New York at 7:30 p.m., Monday, December 28, 1987:

### *Aristotle's Ethics*

Chair: Anthony Preus, *SUNY Binghamton*

Daniel Devereux, *Virginia*, "Ethical Method in Aristotle: Setting Out the *Phainomena*"

Robert Bolton, *Rutgers*, "Aristotle on the Objectivity of Ethics"

We also invite you to attend our meeting with the American Philological Association at 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, December 30, 1987, in Sullivan/Kern of the Marriott Marquis, New York:

### *Gold and Dust*

Chair: David Furley, *Princeton*

David Blank, *UCLA*, "Good as Gold: Socrates On The Parts Of Virtue"

Mary Louise Gill, *Pittsburgh*, "Dust Unto Dust: Aristotle's Account of Generation and Destruction"

Versions of these four papers are included in this packet, if you have paid your dues for the 1987/8 academic year.

Papers for the Pacific and Central Division meetings will be distributed in February, again to dues-payers. The Pacific Division meeting in Portland will be chaired by Julius Moravcsik; the papers will be: Richard McKirahan, "Some Problems in the *Posterior Analytics*," and Michael Wedin, "Aristotle on the Mechanics of Thought." The Central Division meeting in Cincinnati will be chaired by Robert Turnbull; the papers will be Theodore Scaltsas, "Aristotle on Particularity," and Alfonso Gomez-Lobo, "A New Look at the Ergon Argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics*."

## DUES

Dues are \$5 per year (\$7.50 Canadian), payable by check made out to SAGP (or Foundation 386). If you are not now a member, you are hereby invited to join.

If you have recently been a member, the last year for which you have paid dues is (should be) written on the mailing label of the envelope in which this notice arrives; if the number is lower than 87, and you plan to pay dues for the 87/88 academic year, we urge you to send your check now in order to receive the December papers in a timely fashion. We would also like to send you your Pacific and Central Division papers in the bulk mailing, rather than later, since we would then send them at a much reduced postal rate.

**J. B. Meyer, *Aristoteles Thierkunde***

The Institute for Research in Classical Philosophy and Science is still looking for someone who would be willing to translate Meyer (Berlin, 1855), for publication under their auspices. If you're interested, or can recommend someone who might be interested, contact Allan Gotthelf, Philosophy, Trenton State, Trenton, NJ 08625.

NEH has conditionally agreed to fund a 6-week Summer Institute on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, *Biology*, and *Ethics*, for 1988. Directed by John Cooper, Michael Frede, and Allan Gotthelf, the Institute is sponsored by the Council for Philosophical Studies, and will take place at the U. of New Hampshire. Further details will be sent to department chairs soon, or write to Gotthelf.

**Los Angeles Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy**

1/29 Julia Annas at Pomona; 3/12 Richard Kraut at UCLA; 4/9 Richard Sorabji at USC; 5/4 David Charles at USC; 5/21 Gisela Striker at Cal State LA.

The Tenth Annual Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy includes, next semester, Julia Annas, 2/11 at Brown; Mary Louis Gill, 3/10 at BC; Kent Moors, 3/24 at Holy Cross; David Gallop, 4/7 at BC; Phillip Mitsis, 4/21 at Harvard. For additional information write to John Cleary at BC.

**"Methodological Approaches to Plato and His Dialogues"**

Conference at Virginia Tech, April 21-24, 1988. Contact James Klagge and Nicholas Smith, Philosophy Virginia Tech, Blacksburg VA 24061.

**"Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought"**

11/30-12/3, 1987. Contact L. E. Goodman, Philosophy, University of Hawaii, 2530 Dole Street, Honolulu HA 96822.

The American Association of Philosophy Teachers announces the 7th International Workshop-Conference on Teaching Philosophy, and calls for Workshop Proposals. Place: Hampshire College, Amherst MA; Date: August 11-14, 1988. Write to H. P. Hamlin, Philosophy, U. of Tennessee, Knoxville TN 37996-0480 or R. Wright, Philosophy, U. of Toledo, Toledo OH 43606.

ILLINOIS CLASSICAL STUDIES, Volume XI, 1986, includes papers by: Leonardo Taran, Brad Inwood, John Dillon, J. K. Newman, David B. Robinson, T. H. Irwin, Richard D. Mohr, James A. Arieti, T. M. Robinson, Elizabeth Asmis, Gareth B. Matthews, C.J.F. Williams, L. G. Westerink, Gerald M. Browne, Theodore Tracy, and Miroslav Marcovich. It can be ordered from Scholars Press, Box 6525, Ithaca, NY 14851.

Aristotle on the Objectivity of Ethics  
[ABSTRACT]

Robert Bolton  
Rutgers University

1. Two sources for the objectivity of ethical truths have been attributed to Aristotle. On one, Aristotle is a naturalist who thinks that basic ethical truths about e.g., the good, can be derived from biological and psychological truths about the nature of man. On the other, Aristotle is an intuitionist who thinks that ethical truths are to be justified by dialectical method where justification proceeds by appeal to our standing moral convictions, with no need for, or possibility of, justification beyond that. Sometimes writers ascribe both approaches to Aristotle at once without noticing their apparent incompatibility.
2. The possible incompatibility might be removed if, as some have argued, the method for establishing scientific truths is itself dialectic and ethical truths are justified in the context of an overall dialectical procedure by which scientific and ethical truths are established. But this will not work. Dialectic is not in fact sufficient to establish truths in science and even if it were the procedure of deriving ethical truths from previously established scientific truths would not be dialectical. So if the method of ethics is is dialectic for Aristotle then the source of objectivity in ethics cannot (also) be the naturalist one.
3. But is the method of ethics dialectic? This standard view is most commonly defended by reference to EN VII. 1-4 where Aristotle describes his method and proceeds to apply it in a highly self-conscious way. But no thorough attempt has been made to show that all of the main stages in this method conform strictly to dialectical procedure as defined in the Topics and elsewhere, or to answer significant objections in the literature to this claim. This can, however, be done. The three stages in Aristotle's method--(1) setting out the phainomena, (2) raising the problems and, (3) establishing the endoxa by a proper resolution of the problems--are all in fact strictly dialectical. The phainomena constitute a special class of propositions designated in the Topics by the technical term dialectical premise. The problems raised all conform strictly to the technical requirements for a dialectical problem as laid out in the Topics. And the resolutions of the problems all conform to the technical requirements for a dialectical resolution (lusis) given in the Topics. As some have pointed out, there is a non-dialectical section of Aristotle's discussion in EN VII.3, at 1147a24ff, but the argument of this section, which is carefully distinguished by Aristotle from the rest of the discussion, does not conform to the requirements which Aristotle lists in VII.1 as necessary and sufficient for justification in ethics. So the argument of this section, though useful, is strictly inessential for the justification of Aristotle's results.
4. This strongly supports the standard view that Aristotle's method in ethics is dialectic. Does this show, then, that the method is intuitionist, that justification by reference to our standing convictions, at least when they are properly refined, is ultimate in ethics? This would only follow if the appeal to standing convictions is ultimate in justification in dialectic. But this is not the case. The appeal to our (refined) standing convictions in dialectic is the appeal to what is "most intelligible (gnōrimōtaton) to us." For Aristotle, this is the same as the appeal to what is "closest to perception." So dialectical justification is justification by reference to what is now most well-confirmed for us on the basis of perceptual experience. Thus, Aristotle's procedure for justification in ethics is not intuitionist but, in a broad sense, empiricist.
5. This result fits well with and helps to account for certain features of Aristotle's doctrine that ethics is a practical rather than a theoretical subject.