



CORCORAN DEPARTMENT of PHILOSOPHY

Dear Prof. Zingano,

I am writing to apply for the Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship in Aristotle's Philosophy. I am presently completing the requirements for a PhD on Aristotle this semester, and I anticipate an oral dissertation defense this December. Below is a research proposal.

### Research Proposal

#### First Year

My recent research has been focused on the psychological and epistemological views of Aristotle and, to a lesser degree, Plato. I plan to continue this focus for the near future, and I have plans for several journal articles.

In my first year of the fellowship I plan to work on three articles originating from my dissertation. I argue in my dissertation that Aristotle believes a surprisingly large number of his predecessors held views which committed them to a form of scepticism. Much of the later debate between Hellenistic sceptics and dogmatists is prefigured in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, book IV, including several of the Modes of Aenesidemus. In this article I discuss the nature of this scepticism and how it relates to the later scepticism found in the work of Sextus Empiricus. I also develop a reading of Aristotle's response to this form of scepticism, a reading that crucially involves Aristotle's theory of *phantasia*, or appearing. I closely analyze parts of the *Posterior Analytics*, particularly book II, chapter 19—the culmination of the work—and I argue that one can discern here in very brief sketch a response to the form of scepticism Aristotle describes in *Metaphysics IV*.

In a second article I discuss what might be considered a conceptually prior issue: the nature and function of *phantasia*. I believe Aristotle's theory of *phantasia* has often been mis-understood as a theory of active imagination, whereas in fact Aristotle holds a theory of appearing. Here I argue that Aristotle's theory is primarily a view on appearing, where appearing is understood to have a perception-like quality. I argue against Victor Caston's mechanistic understanding of *phantasia* and also against Robert Bolton's reading that *phantasia* is the 'perceptual look' included in all perception. I hold that Aristotle intended his theory to account for perceptual errors and so *phantasia* is not included in all veridical perceptions.

In a third article, I discuss the most prominent of these proto-skeptical philosophers in Aristotle: Protagoras. I argue, against Myles Burnyeat and Gail Fine, that Aristotle does not understand Protagoras as an 'infallibilist' but rather as what we can call a relativist about fact. (Infallibilism is understood as the view that all opinions and appearances are true simpliciter, whereas relativism about facts is the view that all facts are true in virtue of being relativised to thinkers of



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those facts.) This I believe is consistent with Plato's portrayal of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* and the *Cratylus*. But I go further than this and argue Protagoras can also be understood as holding relativism about truth (or, rather, *alētheia*), given that he did not distinguish between truth and reality.

### Second Year

The plan for the first year just sketched is probably over-ambitious. If it is, I will continue working on one or more of the articles discussed above. But I also have plans for two more articles: one on Aristotle's metaphysical views and one on Plato's *Theaetetus*. In the former article I have plans to continue some of my earlier work on books VII and VIII of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, specifically his conception of matter in those books. Aristotle has a notion of matter wide enough to include the matter of non-perceptible objects, such as mathematical objects, which he calls 'intelligible matter'. Our understanding of this notion has important implications for his general analysis of objects into matter and form but it has not been much discussed in the literature. I argue that Aristotle's conception of intelligible matter applies to all intelligible objects and not just mathematical objects, as some have maintained. Thus, substantial forms, such as *man*, include intelligible matter.

I do not yet have a clear plan for the *Theaetetus* article, only some ideas and arguments. One important argument is with Gail Fine. She argues that any interpretation of the *Theaetetus* must be bound by a 'connection criterion', meaning that one's understanding of Protagoras must be bound by the assumption that Plato brings in the Heraclitean flux doctrine because this is the best way to support Protagoras' claim that "man is the measure of all things". Fine thereby argues that Myles Burnyeat is wrong to understand Protagoras' view as relativism about truth, since on that reading no flux doctrine is needed. She even argues, incorrectly in my view, that flux is inconsistent with relativism about truth. My own view is that the connection criterion is correct when interpreted properly but that at least two points must be kept in mind. First, Plato ultimately argues that Protagoras' claim (along with some additional uncontroversial premises) commits him to both the truth and the falsity of this very claim. Second, Plato's self-refutation argument is crucially dependent on second-order beliefs and more specifically on beliefs about *another person's* belief. Plato originally provided Protagoras with a Heraclitean view in which perceptual properties are private and relative. This initially allows Protagoras to avoid conflicts in beliefs. But by bringing in interpersonal beliefs, Plato makes conflict unavoidable and thus forces Protagoras into a contradiction. My conclusion is that Fine is wrong to think the connection criterion supports 'infallibilism' (the view that all beliefs and appearances are true simpliciter) but can be used to support a sort of relativism.

### List of Expected Publications with Brief Bibliography

120 Cocke Hall • P.O. Box 400780 • Charlottesville, VA 22904-4780  
434-924-7701 • Fax: 434-924-6927  
E-mail: crms5h@virginia.edu



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**"An Aristotelian Response to Scepticism"**

- J. Barnes, 1976, *Aristotle: Posterior Analytics, trans. with a commentary* (2<sup>nd</sup>. edn. 2002), Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- J. Barnes, 1976, "Aristotle, Menaechmus, and Circular Proof", *Classical Quarterly* 70: 278-92.
- J. Barnes, 1987, "An Aristotelian Way with Scepticism", in Matthen (ed.), *Aristotle Today*, Edmonton: Academic, 51-76.
- J. Barnes, 1988, "Scepticism and Relativity", *Philosophical Studies* (Dublin) 32: 1-31.
- A.A. Long, "Aristotle and the History of Greek Scepticism", in O'Meara (ed.), *Studies in Aristotle*, Washington: Catholic University Press, 79-106.

**"The Function of Phantasia in Aristotle"**

- R. Bolton, 2004, "Perception Naturalized in Aristotle's *De Anima*", in Ricardo Salles (ed.), *Metaphysics, Soul, and Ethics: Themes from the work of Richard Sorabji*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 209-244.
- V. Caston, 1996, "Why Aristotle Needs Imagination", *Phronesis*, 41: 20-55.
- V. Caston, 1998, "Aristotle and the Problem of Intentionality", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58: 249-98.
- V. Caston, 2004, "The Spirit and the Letter: Aristotle on Perception" in Ricardo Salles (ed.), *Metaphysics, Soul, and Ethics: Themes from the work of Richard Sorabji*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 245-320.
- M.K. Lee, 2005, *Epistemology After Protagoras: Responses to Relativism in Plato, Aristotle, and Democritus*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- M.C. Nussbaum, 1978, *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- M. Schofield, 1992, "Aristotle on the Imagination" in Nussbaum and Rorty (eds.), *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 249-277.

**"Aristotle's Treatment of Protagoras"**

- M.F. Burnyeat, 1976, Protagoras and Self-refutation in Later Greek Philosophy, *Philosophical Review* 85: 44-69.
- D. Bostock, 1994, *Aristotle Metaphysics Books Z and H, translated with a commentary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- M.K. Lee, 2005, *Epistemology After Protagoras: Responses to Relativism in Plato, Aristotle, and Democritus*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- C. Kirwan, 1971, *Aristotle: Metaphysics Books Γ, Δ, Ε, trans. with notes*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.



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W.D. Ross, 1924, *Aristotle: Metaphysics, a revised text with introduction and commentary*, 2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press.

**"Aristotle on Intelligible Matter"**

D. Bostock, 1994, *Aristotle Metaphysics Books Z and H, translated with a commentary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

V. Harte, 1996, "Aristotle *Metaphysics* H6: A Dialectic with Platonism", *Phronesis* 41(3): 276-304.

R. Rorty, 1973, "Genus as Matter: A Reading of *Metaph. Z-H*", in Lee, et al. (eds.), *Exegesis and Argument, Phronesis suppl. vol. 1*, 393-420

W.D. Ross, 1924, *Aristotle: Metaphysics, a revised text with introduction and commentary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

**"Protagoras and Flux in Plato's *Theaetetus*"**

G. Fine, 1996, "Protagorean Relativisms", in Cleary and Wians (eds.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 19: 211-43.

G. Fine, 1996, "Conflicting Appearances: *Theaetetus* 153d-154b in Gill and McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 105-33.

G. Fine, 1998, "Plato's Refutation of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*", *Apeiron* 31/3: 201-34.

G. Fine, 1998, "Relativism and Self-Refutation: Plato, Protagoras and Burnyeat", in Gentzler (ed.), *Method in Ancient Philosophy*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 138-63.

M.F. Burnyeat, 1976, "Protagoras and Self-refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*", *Philosophical Review* 85: 172-95.

M.K. Lee, 2005, *Epistemology After Protagoras: Responses to Relativism in Plato, Aristotle, and Democritus*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

I can be reached at any time by e-mail at [keeling@virginia.edu](mailto:keeling@virginia.edu), or by cell-phone at +1 (434) 806-1792. Thank you for considering my application.

Sincerely,

Evan Keeling

Corcoran Department of Philosophy