

In this episode, John Wynne (Classics, University of Utah) interviews Matthew Walker on Matthew's article, "Aristotle's *Eudemus* and the Propaedeutic Use of the Dialogue Form," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 59.3 (July 2021): 399–427. The article won the *JHP*'s Prize for best article published in 2021. The interview was recorded in October 2022. Transcription by Calum Jopling, University of Alberta.

DR. JOHN WYNNE: Hello everyone and welcome to Episode 3 of the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* Podcast. My name is John Wynne and I'm an associate professor of Classics in the Department of World Languages and Cultures here at the great University of Utah. But I'm on the podcast today to interview Matthew Walker about his excellent article "Aristotle's *Eudemus* and the Propaedeutic Use of the Dialogue Form." The article's excellence is objective and publicly knowable because it won the *Journal*'s article prize for 2021. So, Matthew, could I ask you to introduce yourself?

DR. MATTHEW D. WALKER: Thank you. I am currently an associate professor in the Humanities Division in the philosophy major at Yale-NUS College in sunny Singapore, where I've been living and working for the last decade. I work principally in ancient Greek philosophy. For the most part I've been working on Aristotle, but more recently I've been working in Plato. I also maintain secondary research interests in comparative philosophy, particularly ancient Greek philosophy and Confucian philosophy. My *JHP* article that you mentioned covers Aristotle's use of the dialogue form in his lost work the *Eudemus*. I would say that researching and teaching all these topics stirred my interest in different styles of philosophizing and the different literary forms that philosophers use.

JW: Excellent, thank you. The question before us in your article is whether Aristotle believed in the unqualified immortality of the human soul, or as I might put it really quite crudely: its about whether you and I will live forever after our bodies have died. That's no small potatoes. Whether we live forever is something all of us care about, and over millennia many of the thinkers, both religious and secular, who've argued for our immortality have recruited totemic Greek figures like Plato, or sometimes Aristotle too, as allies in the immortalist cause. Were they right to do that? Matthew, your article is about two kinds of evidence, or what seems to be evidence, about Aristotle's views on immortality. One kind of evidence would seem to suggest that he believed in it, and the other might seem to suggest that he didn't. And you have a very telling new way to reconcile the two kinds of evidence. So, we're going to start by setting two kinds of evidence side by side before the listeners' minds. I'm guessing that most people who listen to something called *The Journal of the History of Philosophy* Podcast will have a bit of a clue who Aristotle was, at least of his position on most peoples' top five, and I should think everybody's top ten, most influential philosophers in the world ever. Aristotle is famous for such ideas as an ethics based on intellectual and emotional virtues, that there are not one but four kinds of cause, that the universe is a great sphere in which the heavens move around the Earth, that natural objects are composed of matter and form, and so on. If you've ever been in the habit of reading some philosophy you've probably read some bits of Aristotle's notoriously

gnarly treatises, like the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Physics*, or the *Metaphysics*, or what we call *De Anima*, meaning On the Soul. In fact, Aristotle left us enough of those writings to fill two huge bible-style volumes in English today. Matthew, perhaps you could first go into more detail for us about the one of Aristotle's surviving treatises most relevant for us on the podcast today: *De Anima*, On the Soul. First, I'll ask you a question you don't often hear about *De Anima*, the reason for that will become apparent soon. What kind of book is it from the literary point of view? What's it like to read, who's voice is it written in, who is it written for? That kind of thing.

MW: Sure, the *De Anima* is a treatise on the nature of the soul, and there's a bit to say about that simple statement. As a treatise it's a so-called esoteric work meant principally for Aristotle's students, that is, people inside his school. It's not meant principally for a general audience of non-philosophers. That's one thing I think we would have to say about the *De Anima* as a literary work. As a treatise, also, the *De Anima* specifies a topic, namely the soul or the *psyche*. It considers what other philosophers have said about the soul and psychological phenomena. It considers objections that those accounts face. It also offers Aristotle's own considered accounts of the phenomena, accounts that try to avoid problems that other accounts raise. The *De Anima* is vintage Aristotle. Sometimes the writing is a little crabbed. Some have described the experience of reading Aristotle's treatises as akin to eating chopped hay. Others, including a bartender from a 1990s Noah Baumbach comedy (I think), described reading Aristotle's treatises as 'like drinking a very dry martini,' and that's probably a fair description. Aristotle writes in his own voice. He presents his own view, but he is writing in a more technical style in the *De Anima*. Yet, I would say the *De Anima* isn't too bad as far as a treatise goes from Aristotle. It has some rough spots and some confusing points, but the main ideas I would say overall are clear enough, and philosophically they're pretty exciting.

JW: I agree. So, now onto our main question about *De Anima*. How would you summarize what Aristotle says there about the soul? Does he entertain any questions about our topic, immortality, and which side does he come down on there?

MW: Sure, key to Aristotle's account of the soul in *De Anima* is a thesis that you referred to earlier, this is the idea that material bodies are composites of form and matter. This is Aristotle's *hylomorphism*. 'Hylō' derives from *hyle* or matter, 'morphism' comes from *morphe* or form. On this view, material bodies are composites of form and matter, and when we consider living material bodies we can think about the soul as the form of a living body just as, say, sphericity is the form of a bronze sphere or the capacity to chop is the form of an axe. Just as possessing the capacity to chop is that in virtue of which a given axe is really an axe, so too a living body is really a living body in virtue of possessing its soul, which Aristotle construes as a system of capacities in virtue of which that living body is alive. This picture strikes many contemporary philosophers as important and viable. In particular, its offering different ways of thinking about the soul-body relationship and thinking about the realm of the psychological in ways that avoid some of the assumptions of various kinds of modern dualism, on the one hand, and reductive or eliminative materialism, on the other hand. Perhaps Aristotle's hylomorphism

about the soul offers a kind of middle way in thinking about how soul and body could be related. Yet, that hylomorphic picture of how the soul-body relationship might seem to be at odds with certain kinds of immortality, in particular the kind of immortality that you just mentioned, what I call in my article 'unqualified immortality' by which again I mean – you had a very nice succinct version, the more boring technical version I think would be – the soul's capacity to exist as a numerically identical subject in existential separation from the body and its capacity to do so eternally. It's not clear how that kind of unqualified immortality is going to be possible for a hylomorphist. It would be a bit like saying that some particular axe's capacity to chop is somehow existentially separable from the wood and the metal that constitute that very axe. It would be a bit of a mystery to see how that existential separation of the capacity would be possible. Thus, in *De Anima* 1.3 Aristotle says that strong versions of soul-body dualism really leave unexplained why a separable soul ever resides in a body in the first place. Still, there are some passages in the *De Anima* where Aristotle seems to allow for at least certain kinds of immortality and separability. There are two famous passages. One of those passages appears in *De Anima* 3.4, where Aristotle says that the intellect lacks a dedicated bodily organ, but is in a way unmixed and separable from the body. Another passage appears in *De Anima* 3.5, where Aristotle says that what he calls the active or productive intellect is separable and immortal. These passages pose lots of interpretive puzzles for readers of the *De Anima*. Many readers find them to be outlier passages and there are different ways different commentators address those passages. For example, even if the human intellect lacks a dedicated bodily organ the intellect may still be dependent on or emergent from other capacities that are necessarily embodied. When Aristotle says that the intellect lacks a bodily organ, maybe the intellect is separable from the body analytically or in account but not necessarily existentially. As for that passage about the active or productive intellect, no one knows what Aristotle is saying there. It has generated endless numbers of interpretations, but I think on the best reading of that passage Aristotle is probably not talking about the human intellect at all. Instead, Aristotle is probably talking about God, or the prime mover, which Aristotle identifies as an eternally actual, eternally active intellect that is wholly immaterial. But what applies to God need not apply to the human intellect. So, it's not clear to me that in the *De Anima* we find anything like support for the soul's unqualified immortality.

JW: Excellent, thank you Matthew. So that's the first kind of evidence, listeners. The books we can read where Aristotle wrote down what he thought and, in Matthew's opinion, does show that Aristotle did not believe in unqualified immortality for the human soul at all. So, now it's time for the second kind of evidence. Now, in my experience even people who are pretty well informed about the history of philosophy can be surprised to hear that Aristotle wrote yet more books that we can't read today because at some point people lost interest in making new copies. The last copies molded away, and so far as anybody has been able to discover they are lost forever. People might be even more surprised to learn that according to what ancient people who were able to look at them wrote about them, some of these books were widely read and celebrated even in the centuries after Aristotle's death, and that these were most

unlike Aristotle's surviving works. For, like Plato's famous writings, they were dialogues, dramas or stories in which the characters converse about philosophy. So, we have 'Aristotle's lost dialogues,' which is a very romantic idea. Matthew, what do we know about these dialogues, and in particular from the literary point of view, what do we know about the *Eudemus*, the dialogue you're focused on? Was it like reading the *De Anima*, how did Aristotle come to write it, for who?

MW: Well, indeed we don't possess the *Eudemus*, we don't possess it as a whole literary work. We possess only fragments from the *Eudemus*, and ancient testimony as to its contents. So, it's hard to answer that question as to what reading the *Eudemus* is like. It would be great to have the whole thing. Still, I can say a little bit about what it's like to read the passages that we do have, the fragments and the testimonies that we still possess. First of all, we can say that the *Eudemus* is not a treatise, unlike the *De Anima*. Instead, it's a dialogue, and as a dialogue it's one of Aristotle's so-called exoteric works. In other words, one of Aristotle's works meant principally for non-philosophers outside of Aristotle's school the Lyceum. Ancient commentators who talk about Aristotle's exoteric works highlight the colourful literary qualities of those works. In particular, Ammonius, an ancient commentator, says that 'in the dialogues which Aristotle wrote for the general public, he deliberately employs a certain volume and overelaboration of speech and metaphor.' That's one description of Aristotle's dialogues. Ammonius also notes, and again I'm quoting, that 'Aristotle changes the form of speech depending on the personalities of the speaker.' We have different characters, and the different characters speak in different ways. The fragments of the *Eudemus* that we do possess feature some of these literary qualities. We have some striking images and we have a little bit of dialogue back and forth between some characters.

JW: Excellent, as we'll hear in a moment your argument is that we should pay full attention to this literary form that the *Eudemus* had back when it existed, and that that puts a lot of distance between what Aristotle himself thought and what he made the characters in the dialogue say. But your opponents, people who have thought about the *Eudemus* in a more traditional way perhaps, sometimes concluded that in it Aristotle just endorsed unqualified immortality for human souls. Your approach I think can make those opponents sound a bit silly or shallow even sometimes, like they weren't really paying attention to the literary form of what they were reading about. But of course, these weren't silly people, so let's inhabit their world for a moment. How do they look at the evidence about the *Eudemus* and what sort of bigger picture about Aristotle or philosophical history do you think might have led them to draw the conclusion that they did?

MW: Right, well the *Eudemus* fragments that we possess include accounts of dream divination, arguments for the soul's unqualified immortality, and discussions of the soul's post-mortem experiences. The picture is, say, soul-body dualism that I remember one commentator described as dualism of the Shirley MacLaine persuasion. You might assume that the author of a dialogue is committed to defending as an item of doctrine various views and arguments that

characters in that dialogue present, and if so then Aristotle might seem to be committed to defending the soul's unqualified immortality. Some commentators have applied to Aristotle the approach that they apply to Plato. If Socrates and an interlocutor develop a view or a chain of reasoning in conversation then maybe we can assume that Plato accepted that chain of reasoning or that view. Likewise, if Aristotle's characters do the same in a dialogue such as the *Eudemus*, maybe we can assume the same. The key assumption as I see it is the idea that dialogues are principally devices for conveying an author's own positions or doctrines. That might be a reasonable assumption to have about some dialogues. Maybe some modern dialogues, maybe Berkeley's for instance, have that character where the idea really does seem to be to defend Berkeley's own views for instance. Still, if we look at the *Eudemus* in relation to the *De Anima*, thinking that Aristotle does accept this rather picturesque form of dualism requires us to reconcile the *De Anima* with the fragments of the *Eudemus* that we possess. In the twentieth century the most popular way of reconciling the works was Werner Jaeger's developmentalism. According to this developmentalist view, the *Eudemus* was written when Aristotle was a philosophical youth under the tutelage of Plato, but then later as Aristotle allegedly developed he became an anti-Platonist and rejected the *Eudemus'* picture of immortality. I think that's an appealing picture, I should say, but it has its problems. Its highly speculative, there are multiple conflicting accounts of Aristotle's supposed development, and you might just think it would be strange for Aristotle to change his mind so completely on such a basic topic, and especially without saying anything about his change of mind. We might also keep in mind the extent to which Aristotle's hylomorphism influences his thinking across many many treatises and many many subjects.

JW: Excellent. Listeners, there you have our two bits of evidence. On the one hand, Aristotle's surviving treatises, principally *De Anima*, on the soul, which suggests to Matthew that Aristotle didn't believe in unqualified immortality for the human soul at all. And second, the lost dialogue the *Eudemus* which has furnished Matthew's opponents with what had seemed to be evidence that Aristotle did believe in unqualified immortality for the human soul. Now that we're fully prepared, its time to hear Matthew's revolutionary take on how to put back together our two kinds of evidence and his disagreement with the traditional way of doing that. Matthew perhaps I can turn the floor over to you now, and you can give us your objection to how your opponents have read the evidence or the seeming evidence about Aristotle's views about immortality in the *Eudemus*.

MW: Well, there's a lot to say here. Let me try to be brief. I present various kinds of arguments to try to wean us off of that key assumption that the *Eudemus* is a dialogue in which Aristotle defends his own views about the soul's unqualified immortality. First, I present a formal argument, and its similar to an argument that other commentators have sometimes raised against so called doctrinal readings of Plato. The idea is that from the fact that various characters in the dialogue present various views and defend certain arguments, even when those characters are the dialogue's main characters or the main character of the dialogue, one has to be very careful about inferring that authors themselves accept those arguments or

accept those views. Maybe they do, but we would have to read those arguments in the context of the dialogue as a whole. As it turns out, we lack the *Eudemus* as a whole. So, I think skepticism is specially warranted in this case about inferring Aristotle's views. Second, unrelated point, I appeal to the sheer paucity of fragments that we have from the *Eudemus*. Given how little text we have, I think the best evidence that Aristotle affirmed views that appeared in that work is evidence from other texts in which Aristotle affirms those views in his own voice. But there's very slim to no evidence that Aristotle in his other works affirms those views or arguments. I think that consideration counts against the thought that the *Eudemus* shows Aristotle defending unqualified immortality. A third kind of argument is to examine some of the ancient testimony that we have for those fragments. In each instance I argue that we can deny that this testimony shows that there's some strong consensus in favour of thinking that Aristotle accepted unqualified immortality in the *Eudemus*. On the contrary, at least one major commentator, Alexander of Aphrodisias, denied that Aristotle himself accepted the soul's unqualified immortality when Aristotle wrote the *Eudemus*. According to Alexander, Aristotle uses the *Eudemus* to present a false view of immortality that Aristotle himself doesn't accept. Final kind of argument that I present is to consider Aristotle's status as Cicero's model for dialogue writing. Cicero says that he writes his own dialogues in the Aristotelian fashion, and part of the way Cicero does so is by featuring himself as the lead character in some of his own dialogues. But Cicero as it turns out takes care to avoid dogmatism in his own dialogues. He typically rests content to present arguments pro and con various positions. And he does so because he thinks it's important to let readers make up their own minds, otherwise they start parroting the views of others. Cicero's character Crassus in *De Oratore* 380 describes the true orator as one quote 'able in Aristotelian fashion to speak on both sides about every subject and by means of knowing Aristotle's rules to wheel off two speeches on opposite sides of every case.' So, I suggest that Cicero may also base his non-dogmatic dialogue writing practice on Aristotle in this way as well.

JW: Okay, now at this point I think I can imagine at least a couple of objections from your opponents here. There's some evidence that Aristotle wrote himself into his dialogues as a character and not under a disguise but rather a character called Aristotle who did and said Aristotle things. And Aristotle knew about Plato's dialogues and all the other philosophical dialogues of his day, and he was aware of all the puzzles that those still pose to a thoughtful reader, like why did Plato never appear as a character in his own dialogues? What and why are the differences between Plato and the real Socrates, and the Socrates that Plato wrote and so on? So, when Aristotle decided to put himself as a character into his own dialogues, the evidence suggests, what else could he have meant by that if not to say to the reader 'look, unlike Plato I'm not going to keep you guessing, here's my view of the matter.' There's one thing I could imagine your opponent's wondering. The second might be this. Like you say Cicero was a skeptic, he modelled his dialogues on Aristotle in order to deflect attention away from his own opinions. But look, Aristotle was no skeptic, Aristotle was very Dogmatic, he thought he knew the truth about things and he hoped to lead everybody else he could to agree with him.

So, if Aristotle wrote dialogues, surely he wasn't going to use them to deflect attention from his own views. I could imagine this objector saying 'look, why would Aristotle, the man that he was, have written dialogues if not to get his own ideas across.' My impression, at least in your article, is that you're sort of sensitive to the demand because you develop a new positive vision of what Aristotle may in fact have been up to when he decided to write these dialogues if he wasn't aiming to convince people of his own views. You gave us what you call the propaedeutic reading of Aristotle's lost dialogues. First of all, perhaps propaedeutic is obviously a technical term. What does propaedeutic mean?

MW: Okay, well by propaedeutic I mean simply a preparatory lesson. In my paper, I argue that the *Eudemus* is a propaedeutic work. On my approach we need not assume that Aristotle defends his own views in the *Eudemus*. Instead, he saves the task of defending his own views and maybe being a little more dogmatic for treatises like the *De Anima* and the *Parva Naturalia*. Still, the *Eudemus* can serve a valuable philosophical purpose for Aristotle. It provides a preparatory lesson in philosophical psychology for Aristotle's non-philosophical audience. It introduces them to certain views and arguments about the soul that Aristotle will address more scientifically in his own voice, but he will only do so elsewhere in those treatises. Moreover, the *Eudemus* does so by exploring these views and arguments in dialogue form with characters who propose various positions, and by engaging literary language. Once Aristotle has stirred interest and wonder in his audience with dialogue such as the *Eudemus*, then Aristotle's audience if they study more with Aristotle, will be ready for Aristotle's more scientific treatment of various issues in those treatises.

JW: Thank you, Matthew. Now that we've expounded the article for the listeners, perhaps I could direct some questions at you and maybe even an objection or two to hear how you dismiss those. Let's start with a question that you commonly hear about debates like this. At some times and places in history, to deny our immortality in public would have been dangerous for a philosopher's reputation and perhaps just dangerous for the philosopher full stop. What was 4th century Greece, that's Aristotle's place and time, like in this regard? Is it possible that religious practices, like the mysteries at Eleusis where initiates seemingly gained the hope of a better death, could have made it unpopular to deny a human afterlife? And could it be for that reason that Aristotle pretended that he didn't deny it, at least in public?

MW: Well, one can find various reports of Greek philosophers who were hounded for their views about the gods or charged with impiety. We have the examples of Anaxagoras, and Protagoras, and Pythagoras, and most famously Socrates. I can imagine one reason why it could have been dangerous publicly to deny the soul's immortality. If we think about Republic Book 1 by Plato, the character Cephalus presents conventional moral views, and Cephalus in that book of the Republic suggests that the fear of punishment in the afterlife provides our principal reason to be just in this life. So, maybe to deny the soul's unqualified immortality could invite a certain suspicion that one threatens to undermine conventional morality, maybe by eliminating conventional incentives to be just. So, if Aristotle rejects unqualified immortality maybe we

have some incentives to avoid trumpeting that fact. And I guess also one could say towards the end of his life Aristotle did face charges of impiety in Athens, though he famously fled - he said 'lest Athens sin twice against Philosophy.' For all we know, suspicions that Aristotle had unconventional beliefs about what punishments the gods might provide in the afterlife could have provided some motivation for that charge. Maybe all of that could explain why, according to some ancient reports, Alexander of Aphrodisias thought Aristotle loudly proclaimed the soul's immortality in his dialogues, but that in doing so Aristotle was merely presenting false views that other people held, not Aristotle's own views. But even if Aristotle had some reason to avoid denying the soul's unqualified immortality too loudly in public, I think it's a bit of a jump to infer that Aristotle must have sought to present a false doctrine to the many in *Eudemus* to try to convince people that he believed in the soul's unqualified immortality when he didn't. It seems to me that we can actually just question the assumption that Aristotle must have written the *Eudemus* to defend any doctrine in the first place. My propaedeutic reading explains why Aristotle would have had good reason to write a dialogue without our also needing to attribute any doctrine to Aristotle in the dialogue.

JW: Now, Matthew, a lot of my own research has been on our friend Cicero's dialogues, so let me pose a question from that point of view. In your article I think you admit Cicero to the ranks of those who are intelligent about writing and reading dialogues. Given how Cicero wrote his own work, he wouldn't just thoughtlessly attribute ideas to Aristotle on the basis of what some character or other happens to say in Aristotle's dialogues. Yet, in more than one place, and these are passages where Cicero or another character are doing their best to give us an honest history I think, Cicero attributes to Aristotle a weird theory of the human soul. Not only weird by the standard of what we think about Aristotle today, it's also just plain weird I think. And the theory is this. First, Cicero says, Aristotle thinks that the soul is a continuous motion. And second, Cicero says, Aristotle thought the mind – that's the *mens* in Latin, and that's a part of the soul presumably – was made of the fifth element, the stuff that we don't see down here under the moon but from which the stars are made so that they revolve eternally and continuously in circles around the Earth. So, if we put those two things together, speculatively perhaps, the picture Cicero means to attribute to Aristotle is that our minds too are continuous circular motions of the fifth element, or something like that, and that's pretty weird. So far as I know, it's not an idea that's supported in Aristotle's surviving works. So, Cicero is probably getting this from one or more of Aristotle's dialogues. Not necessarily the *Eudemus*, of course. My point is this. Cicero is a good reader of Aristotle's dialogues. Probably he thought he could attribute to Aristotle a theory of the human soul according to which at least part of it, the mind, will survive the death of the body. Perhaps this wasn't based on the *Eudemus*, though perhaps it was. But at any rate, it was very likely based on something in Aristotle's dialogues. And on one occasion Cicero reflects, and I think he writes this as his own inference rather than Aristotle's, but he reflects that such an account would imply that after death the human mind will go up as far away as possible from the earth, meaning to the outer heavens where the fifth element is. And this is part of an Argument from Cicero that after death our souls leave the

body and they go to the place that is their natural home. Well, I'm not sure what to make of it, but its kind of a striking echo of the interpretation of Eudemus' dream that we heard Cicero mention in *On Divination*. So, if we take that sort of interpretation of Cicero, what would it mean that he seems more confident than you are about what we can learn from Aristotle's dialogues about Aristotle's views on the soul?

M.W.D: Yes, those are some really interesting passages in Cicero, and gosh they really make me wish we had access to Aristotle's dialogues in whole. What do Cicero's remarks tell us? Well, they at least indicate that Cicero thought he was in a position to attribute some very strange views indeed about the soul to Aristotle, presumably on the basis of dialogues such as the *Eudemus*. What can I say about Cicero's reports? Well, I think we have to ask what might it mean to attribute views to a writer? In my paper I make a distinction between relying on ancient sources, first, for testimony about the content of lost dialogues, and relying on ancient sources, second, for their specific interpretations of those dialogues. Since we lack the *Eudemus* as a whole, just as we lack Aristotle's other dialogues, we really do have to rely on these ancient sources in the former way as offering reports of what those dialogues contained. But I think we should be hesitant to rely on any specific interpretations that those ancient sources provide us. So, how then could we understand Cicero's claim? Well, Cicero could be attributing various views to Aristotle as an author, in the sense that Cicero reports that some work by Aristotle is the literary source of those views. Maybe a crude comparison case might help. We might think about the arguments that the personified laws provide Crito for why one should refuse to escape from jail in Plato's *Crito*. According to one of those arguments, one should refuse to escape from jail because one is the offspring and servant of the city. And so, after reading the *Crito* one might write, quote 'in the *Crito* Plato says that one should refuse to escape from jail because one is the offspring and servant of the people,' in fact many people do write just that sort of line. In a limited sense that kind of claim is unobjectionable. Plato was the author of the *Crito*, Plato is the author of the law's arguments, and so we could say that Plato says all of those things about our being the offspring and the servant of the city. Yet, from another perspective that attribution to Plato is objectionable because on any deeper reading of the *Crito* its not clear that Plato's Socrates or Plato himself should, or would, or does actually accept the law's argument. So, even if Cicero writes 'in the *Eudemus* Aristotle says such and such,' we can still question what Cicero might mean there. Aristotle might make all the points that you've quoted from Cicero, but only in the weak sense that Aristotle the author articulates those views, he need not be endorsing them at the same time.

JW: Thank you, Matthew. Now, besides this paper you've written a whole book on Aristotle's idea in ethics that the life of contemplation is the happiest life for human beings. I'm guessing you've pondered how this article on the *Eudemus* and immortality reflects back on Aristotle's ideas about ethics and contemplation. Feel free to take this theme wherever you like, but one possible place to start might be this question. In his work the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle says that we wish for things we know are impossible, and the examples he gives are to be king of all humanity, or to be immortal. So that's pretty straightforward, its impossible for us to be

immortal. And while we might wish it, it would be irrational to plan for it. But in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that's the famous ethics, Aristotle famously tells us that to live our best lives we should identify ourselves with our most divine aspects to act immortally, or something like that. So what, are we supposed to kid ourselves that we are immortal when we aren't? Of all people Matthew, I expect you can explain.

MW: Gosh, I hope so. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle does say that we should identify ourselves with our intellects, and that by contemplating we immortalize ourselves in a certain way. By saying this, I don't think Aristotle is saying that we become unqualifiedly immortal through contemplation. If the soul is already everlasting and essentially everlasting, as the unqualified immortality claim would put it, we would face a puzzle about why we would have to make ourselves immortal or be implored to immortalise ourselves. Further, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* earlier on in book 3, chapter 2, Aristotle explicitly rejects unqualified immortality as impossible in a way that invites comparison to that passage from the *Eudemian Ethics* that you just mentioned. I think we can understand Aristotle's point in the *Nicomachean Ethics* about trying to identify ourselves with our most divine aspects as saying that we have certain capacities that gods also share, and that to approximate the condition of those gods as far as possible within a mortal life we should also exercise those capacities that the gods possess as well. We should not exercise only our human capacities. So, I think in a nutshell Aristotle does accept the soul's immortality in such passages, but the immortality in question is highly qualified and not the sort of unqualified immortality that the *Eudemus* explores.

JW: Excellent, thank you. For my last question, perhaps I could put to you a sort of compromise view, one that I think might reflect some more traditional ideas about how Aristotle could have been an immortalist given his writings that survive, but weather this due attention to the nature of a literary dialogue of the sort that you call for, Matthew. How about we suppose that the *Eudemus* led the reader towards Aristotle's real view not propaedeutically, as you say, nor through just straightforward argument or assertion, the way that the dialogue or the evidence about the dialogue has perhaps been read more traditionally, but rather figuratively through approximations, or hyperbole, or metaphors, and images, and stories, you know, literary stuff? If that sounds fishy at first, we could reflect that Plato certainly used those sorts of literary techniques all the time, so why shouldn't Aristotle? Here's a for-instance, suppose Aristotle's real view was a sort of qualified but substantial immortalism, suppose he thought your intellect is separable from the body and lives on, but the rest of your soul is not and does not. Your memories, your consciousness, your feelings, all of those things that we modern people like to cling to as what define ourselves, they don't make it out from death. But your intellect, your higher rational faculties, do. And perhaps Aristotle, unlike many of us, thought the intellect is the real you, the spark of the divine, the inner-self, not your memories and feelings and all that other junk. So, you, your inner-self, you are immortal, but that's clearly immortality qualified in such a way as to appeal only to a certain kind of long trained philosopher and probably not to appeal to an untrained layman. I'm not saying that was Aristotle's view, but lets suppose. Might he not have written the *Eudemus* to convey a view like that in figures, and myths, and images

which he didn't literally believe but which he intended as faithful literary ways to show a layman what he did believe? 'Here are the reasons that you, the real you, will live on forever.' After all popularization literature in our time, like when theoretical physicists popularize their work, they often represent really difficult ideas using literary figures, but they're not being deceptive, I don't think they're being propaedeutic for most of their readers, and they aren't just asserting the equations that they've developed. In the article it seems to me that you take care to leave open other possibilities beside your own view, although of course you think your own view is the most probable. Suitably adjusted for whatever Aristotle's view actually was, do you think something like what I've described is one of the possible interpretations of his purposes in the dialogues?

MW: That's a really interesting question and a really interesting suggestion. I think I should say a few things in response to that question. The first thing I would say is that first Aristotle presents all kinds of views in the *Eudemus* fragments that we possess, and he does so with striking imagery that may simplify things a bit. Nothing in my view precludes Aristotle from including in his dialogues various simplified imagistic sketches of views that he may turn out to endorse elsewhere. As it turns out there's a lost dialogue of Aristotle's called *On Good Birth* which contains a passage that is very close to a passage that appears in Aristotle's *Politics*, where Aristotle seems to endorse the view that appears in *On Good Birth*. So, nothing precludes Aristotle from presenting views incidentally in his dialogues that he might actually endorse. My principle claim is merely that Aristotle must have written his dialogues to defend some particular subset of those simplified imagistic views that we find in the dialogues. On behalf of that claim, I guess I would bring forth my specific formal argument that I mentioned earlier, the concern that Aristotle has that dialectical arguments are not fully demonstrative, also on behalf of my propaedeutic reading. And I guess I would just say if we consider the fragments we possess and if we think about Aristotle on the limits of dialogue then we have better reason overall to think that Aristotle simply sought to grip readers by sketching all kinds of views in striking ways, and by including tantalizing arguments pro and con those various views. Further, I guess more locally, I'm skeptical that Aristotle does think that the human intellect is the unqualifiedly immortal part of the human soul. Still, I recognize that some commentators do think Aristotle held that view about the intellect. Even if I disagree with those commentators, I wholly grant that Aristotle thinks that the human intellect is the most god-like of out various embodied human capacities and so may be immortal in a highly qualified way. I suppose if we read those passages carefully maybe we could try to find some kind of connection between the unusual views that appear in those fragments and the kind of qualified immortality that we find in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, descriptions of contemplation and its immortality. But I'm not really sure I see how that connection would work.

JW: Those are my questions for you today, Matthew. For my part I would like to close with this. Your article has proved to me that in the ancient world to be devoted to Aristotle involved the same texts and questions we have today, but it also required of the reader a whole beautiful, wonderful set of literary and philosophical questions about how to interpret the dialogues. And

conversations like ours today must have sprung up for centuries across the huge part of the ancient world where Aristotle was beloved. It's a tragedy those conversations have been lost along with his dialogues, except that they're not altogether lost because some of those ancient conversations have been brought to life vividly by your article. For which, many thanks. Lastly, is there anything else about the piece that you'd like to cover before we sign off?

MW: Thank you so much for all of your thoughtful questions, John. Maybe it's a little personal but I should say that I had more fun writing this article than I've had writing any of my other articles. Thinking through the fragments of the *Eudemus* and reading the various ancient commentators' remarks on Aristotle's exoteric works was incredibly stimulating. Looking at that material you get a broader sense of Aristotle as a philosopher, and a renewed appreciation for how interesting a philosopher he is and was. Overall, if I have any hopes for the article its that it might inspire others to revisit Aristotle's dialogues afresh and to think in new ways about what Aristotle might have been seeking to accomplish in them.

JW: Well, Matthew, I'd like to thank you for your time today. And thank you listeners. Bye-bye.