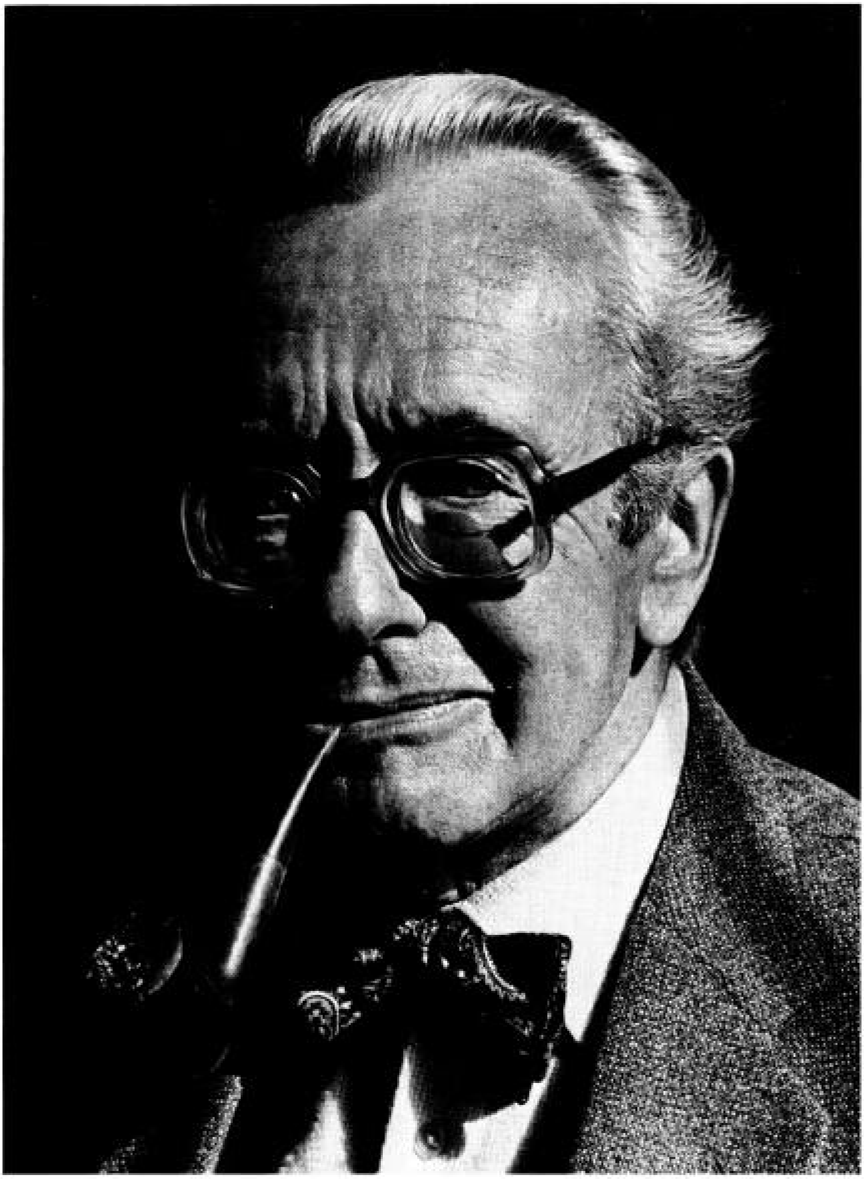
PLATE XXVIII



Billett Potter

G. E. L. OWEN

GWILYM ELLIS LANE OWEN

1922–1982

GWIL OWEN's death brought to a sudden end an academic career of exceptional brilliance. By his writing and teaching he had for three decades exercised a powerful influence on the study of Greek philosophy. The force of his personality, the sharpness of his intellect, and his energy and enthusiasm in teaching and discussion, had combined to win him a world-wide reputation and the deep affection and admiration of innumerable pupils and colleagues. Some indication will be given of the range of topics treated in his published papers, and these will not soon be forgotten. But his liveliest memorial will be the work and the teaching of those who were themselves influenced by him.

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Gwilym Ellis Lane Owen was born at Portsmouth on 18 May 1922, an only child. His mother was English, his father was Welsh and had come to Portsmouth from Tregeiviog in North Wales.

Owen went to Portsmouth Grammar School, an excellent old foundation, where he received an education that was scholarly without being narrow. He was (in the words of Frank Harrison, recalling him after his death) 'a charming boy who imbibed Latin and Greek like his mother's milk'. He was in particular indebted to Philip Richards for classical teaching and intellectual stimulus; and it was Richards, himself a Corpus man, who encouraged Owen to go to Oxford to read Greats at Corpus. He went up to Corpus in 1940 and took a shortened wartime course in Classical Honour Moderations in 1941. That he got a Second in Mods was perhaps due to the narrowness of the course and the uninspiring character of the teaching. It was in any case not a period when it was easy to concentrate.

From 1941 to 1946 Owen was on military service, first in the ranks and then as an officer in the Royal Corps of Signals. He regarded himself in retrospect as having had 'a good war'; and his work was certainly interesting and important. Seconded to the Special Operations Executive, he helped to train wireless operators who were to work behind enemy lines. In 1945 he was sent to Siam and Burma, to set up radio networks behind the

Japanese lines. After VJ day he returned to the Royal Signals in Calcutta and worked in education there until he was demobilized.

Owen returned to Oxford in 1946 for two years full of activity of a literary and journalistic kind. He was literary editor and then editor of *Isis*. In writing for it and in producing it he showed the intense energy and enthusiasm that were to remain characteristic of him. His friends at this time were mostly writers and actors, and he himself thought seriously of a career in literary journalism. Among those whom he met through *Isis* was Sally Clothier, who had come up to St Hilda's in 1945. Their close co-operation in steering *Isis* in difficult times bore further fruit: in the summer of 1947 they were married.

Owen had to postpone taking Greats until December 1948 because of eye-strain. He got an excellent First. His interests having moved (under Frank Hardie's tuition) towards philosophy rather than ancient history, he was encouraged by Gilbert Ryle to enrol for the B.Phil., recently established on Ryle's initiative as a course to train philosophers and teachers of philosophers. The course combined work on a range of philosophical topics with close study of some philosophical texts, and also required the writing of a short thesis. Owen had to work hard to complete this course in the five terms available to him, but he found the work much to his taste. Discussions in the lively B.Phil. classes, an increasingly close friendship and vigorous arguments with Ryle, work on a thesis full of original and challenging ideas about Plato: he was in his element. He completed the course in June 1950.

Owen went to Durham in October 1950 with a Research Fellowship, which he held for three years. He continued to work on some of the ideas contained in his thesis, and prepared his first major paper (on the place of the *Timaeus* in Plato's dialogues). Among other activities of a non-philosophical kind may be mentioned his production of Sartre's *Les Mouches*: literary and dramatic elements were to remain clearly visible in his own writing and teaching.

In 1953 the recently established University Lecturership in Ancient Philosophy fell vacant at Oxford, and Ryle had no doubt who should fill it. The Owens returned to settle down in Oxford.

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Owen's first task in his University Lecturership was to teach for the special subject, Early Greek Philosophy, that had recently been introduced into Honour Moderations—it was to meet this requirement that the Lecturership had been established in 1951; and he bore the main burden of this teaching throughout his time at Oxford. Though what he gave were listed as lectures they were often more like discussion groups; and texts that can seem archaic and remote came to life as their philosophical implications were worked out and the problems that they addressed were elucidated. Owen himself was particularly taken up with problems about Parmenides and Zeno, and he published several papers on them. Indeed themes from these philosophers—in logic, metaphysics, and philosophy of science—were to form a continuing thread in all his work.

Besides lecturing on the pre-Socratics Owen gave some undergraduate lectures on Plato and Aristotle, but his activity became more and more concentrated on graduate teaching, and it was among graduates that his influence was strongest. He acted as the supervisor of many individuals, but he was known above all for the weekly graduate classes he gave, one on Plato and one on Aristotle. These were designed primarily for people doing the B.Phil., but they were attended by many other young philosophers (often including visitors from overseas, especially from the USA). They provided an ideal vehicle for Owen's skills and interests. He would develop argument and counter-argument in rapid extempore addresses, sometimes focusing closely on particular texts, sometimes taking off on dialectical constructions and reconstructions. Members of the group were stimulated and inspired by Owen's brilliance and enthusiasm, they were encouraged to join in the debate, and many were decisively influenced in the manner and matter of their subsequent work as philosophers. This was a time when Oxford trained future philosophy teachers (including ancient philosophy teachers) for the world; and Owen had a large hand in this. He was fortunate in the strong support he had from Ryle and J. L. Austin, both of whom steered B.Phil. students into doing Plato or Aristotle as their 'chosen authority'.

Over the years some central texts and themes were discussed repeatedly at these graduate classes, which were a sort of reservoir into which many besides Owen put contributions and from which many drew ideas. In a footnote to a later paper Owen remarked: 'The bones of the argument were taken from a larger stew of many years' standing, familiar to seminars at Oxford and Harvard; I wish I could now distinguish the many cooks.' Owen's whole career as a philosopher was a continuous seminar with a few main themes and constant variations and refinements; his published work consisted mainly of papers required for particular occasions, papers which were extracted or distilled from work done over many years (and notebooks filled over many years). The fact that one paper was published after another does not imply that the work it represented was done after the work represented by the other paper.

Owen was involved in the re-establishment of the famous Oxford Aristotelian Society, a group of dons who met once a fortnight in term to read some text of Aristotle. Its members included for a time Sir David Ross (a member of the Society in its earlier phase), as well as such distinguished scholars as E. R. Dodds and L. Minio-Paluello; the Kneales were among the most regular attenders; and there were several of Owen's generation. Proceedings were slow and gentle. The text was read sentence by sentence, textual difficulties were teased out, silences for thought often occurred. This was not really Owen's cup of tea. He would occasionally burst in with a broad philosophical interpretation or a subtle analysis of an argument-stretch.

Of wider significance was the initiation in 1957 of the *Symposia Aristotelica*, triennial meetings of Aristotelian specialists, each devoted to a single theme or text. Both the project and the title were due to Ingemar Düring of Göteborg University, who had suggested the idea at a meeting of the Classical Association in Oxford in 1955. (Düring and Owen joined in editing the papers of the first symposium.) Owen threw himself into the organization of the 1957 meeting and also of the 1963 meeting (which was again held at Oxford). He acted as host, escort, administrator, and general problem-solver. The institution continues to flourish, and each triennium brings an important collection of papers following a week's conference at some European centre. The meetings of the symposia were necessarily controlled by a definite procedure—there were too many people to allow a mere free-for-all discussion; and because several languages could be spoken contributions had to be clear and preferably slow. A chairman would 'give the word' in turn to those who had indicated their wish to speak. This meant that instead of the cut-and-thrust of debate one had a succession of rather deliberate contributions not necessarily reacting to one another. Owen found this a decidedly constraining form; and though he enjoyed the meetings for their social side and for the informal talk they made possible, he gradually became less active in attending and participating in the formal sessions.

For most of this Oxford period the Owens lived in Headington, where their two sons were born in 1952 and 1955. In 1963 they moved to Lower Heyford, to a country house owned by Corpus. They subsequently bought it from the College. Quiet, spacious, and in a delightful setting, this house was Owen's home base for the rest of his life.

Owen gave his time freely to the graduates he supervised individually, and with his lectures and classes he was fully occupied. He was more or less free from administrative burdens as Lecturer and as Reader (1977) and as *ad hominem* Professor (1963). Nor did his election to a Fellowship at Corpus in 1958 bring him severe additional duties. Yet he came to feel himself overburdened and not provided by the University with sufficient support: he was doing single-handed what might have been expected of a small department. No doubt he *was* doing too much. The situation was, however, of his own making, in that he did not call upon all the help that colleagues would gladly have given. No doubt his individual style of teaching and his brilliance would have made it difficult for others to substitute for him—and he would not have found them satisfactory substitutes. But not a few of the Oxford philosophers of the time would have been happy to play some part in his overall programme. He was perhaps too much of an individualist and an individual performer to run a team. At any rate he eventually announced to startled colleagues at a sub-faculty meeting that he was resigning to go to a chair at Harvard from October 1966. He had of course made a number of visits to the USA during the previous years, and he had received offers of chairs from various universities there. The Harvard post was particularly tempting, and the time seemed ripe for a move.

During his years at Oxford Owen published nine papers, one on Plato, two on the Eleatics, six on Aristotle. All were based on much work and discussion. They were polished in style, dense in material, taxing in dialectical ingenuity. It would not be easy to summarize what is important in them. As with his oral teaching, his papers have their influence and distinction, not so much for theses established as from the thought-provoking analysis and dialectic itself. Enough can be said, however, to convey the breadth and nature of his main themes—there is a striking continuity of interests from first to last—and at least to suggest something of his style, a tone as individual as Ryle's.

'The Place of the *Timaeus* in Plato's Dialogues' had a larger aim than the title alone might suggest. In challenging the usual view that the *Timaeus* is a very late dialogue Owen sought to open up the study of Plato's later work: 'The *Parmenides* and its successors gain in philosophical power and interest when they are read as following and not as paving the way for the *Timaeus*.' He argued that 'in metaphysics and cosmology, in logic and politics, the *Timaeus* and *Critias* belong to the middle dialogues and ignore salient arguments and theories developed in . . . the later "critical" group'. The later dialogues no longer had to be burdened with the old theory of Forms. That belonged to the days of the *Republic* and *Timaeus*. The *Parmenides* contained criticisms that exploded the theory; and later dialogues did not revive it but moved on to their own profoundly important philosophical issues.

This paper made an immediate and lasting impact. Its heretical conclusion—that the *Timaeus* was written much earlier than usually supposed—won much support; and although the pendulum has swung back somewhat, there is still a recognition that it is no longer safe simply to assume the lateness of the *Timaeus*, and the study of the 'critical dialogues' has concentrated much more on their own new problems.

No less remarkable than the paper, however, was the style of its writing and argument. Wasting no words Owen developed a series of arguments nearly all revolving around philosophical issues and the interrelation of different views. The simple basic principle used is that if one text corrects a mistake made in another it is later than the other. His favourite arguments 'exhibit a precise error or inadequacy correlated with a subsequent precise correction'. Written with the vigour and aggressiveness of a young man, though carrying the authority and scholarship of an older, this first publication shows the characteristics of all Owen's work: vivid and hard-hitting in style, packed with references though centred on argument, clever in criticism and analysis, and interested above all in the interplay of ideas and arguments.

The hard-hitting character of this youthful piece did not endear its author to everyone. His objections to the views of Cornford and Cherniss were expressed with a breezy sharpness that suggested contempt rather than mere difference of opinion or judgement. Cherniss replied with papers that reinforced the opposition, and these two giants remained at arm's length—to the regret of their common friends. Over the years Owen developed other antipathies towards scholars with whose views he was out of sympathy; he did not find it easy to do justice to approaches different from his own.

Owen's second paper was written for the 1957 Festschrift published by the Hellenic Society in honour of Sir David Ross. A relatively technical paper, it examined a fragment of text from

Aristotle's early work *On Ideas* and sought to reconstruct the arguments and counter-arguments in the Academy which the text presupposed or contained. The contentions of the paper could have been written out fairly simply, but were in fact made to emerge from a series of dialectical steps, in which suggestions were made and then objected to and further qualifications or complications were added. This dialectical style suited Owen's way of thinking and arguing, and it was well fitted to the kind of subject-matter to which he was increasingly to address himself: Aristotelian texts in relation to the living arguments in the Academy. This subject-matter gave every scope for clever and imaginative reconstruction of philosophical debates and developments.

Owen worked on a new text and edition of *On Ideas* intermittently throughout his life, and it is a matter of great regret that the large amount of material he assembled—the makings of a *magnum opus*—remain in manuscript form only.

One idea whose importance Owen recognized and exploited in this paper was that of *incomplete predicates*; and problems about predication were to interest him always. There is also to be found in this paper a footnote about meaning that is the precursor of his influential discussion of *focal meaning* in the paper he wrote for the first Aristotelian Symposium.

Owen's third and fourth papers, in order of publication, arose from his teaching of early Greek philosophy. 'Zeno and the Mathematicians', written to be read at the Aristotelian Society in London, sought, first, to reconstruct the programme of Zeno's main arguments and to show that Zeno's aim in them was not to discredit one particular theory of the nature of ultimate individuals (as had often been supposed), but rather to refute, one by one, alternative accounts that might in principle be offered of the distinction between individuals and hence of plurality. The paradoxes are 'jointly planned to show that no method of dividing anything into spatial or temporal parts can be described without absurdity'. Owen's second aim was to correct errors in the history of mathematics: to criticize a certain view of Zeno's place in that history, and to show that Aristotle failed to get to the root of Zeno's paradoxes of space and time and hence failed ever to deal adequately with acceleration. Time, change, and infinity are themes to be rehandled later in various papers; the very last, posthumously published, will be on Aristotelian dynamics.

The other paper on the pre-Socratics, 'Eleatic Questions', published in 1960, gave new life to the study of Parmenides. Owen first addressed himself to the vexed question whether Parmenides claimed any degree of reliability for the cosmological part of his poem. He concluded that Parmenides set himself to give the correct or the most plausible analysis of those presuppositions on which ordinary men, and not just theorists, seem to build their picture of the physical world. Owen's argument here depended largely on a close scholarly discussion of one crucial couplet in Parmenides's poem. Next, in the most important part of the paper, Owen offered an interpretation of the Parmenidean 'way of truth'. Cornford and others had taken Parmenides to be referring to the One Being when he said, '[it] is and cannot not be'. Owen argued that by importing this subject from previous cosmology—by looking too far afield—these scholars had overlooked a remarkable argument. The subject of Parmenides's dictum is not 'what is' nor yet 'the One'. It is whatever can be talked or thought about, i.e. any subject. Owen reached this conclusion by attending to the actual arguments by which Parmenides himself supports and elaborates his dictum. Concepts and arguments that we associate with philosophical logic rather than with metaphysics predominate. In a final section of the paper Owen elaborated some points about tensed statements, truth, and existence that were to receive fuller treatment later. The paper convinced many that Parmenides was indeed 'the most radical and conscious pioneer known to us among the Presocratics'.

'Logic and Metaphysics in Some Early Works of Aristotle', written for the first Aristotelian Symposium, was one of Owen's most influential papers. In it he traced the use in Aristotle of the idea he felicitously dubbed *focal meaning*, the idea that a word may have several uses all related to one central use. In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle used the idea of focal meaning to justify the possibility of a general science of being *qua* being. Yet he had attacked Plato's belief in the possibility of a universal metaphysics on the ground that there were irreducibly different senses of 'being'. So when did Aristotle seize the idea of focal meaning, and when did he come to apply it to *being* in particular? The details of Owen's (anti-Jaegerian) chronological reconstruction are complicated and necessarily open to question. But the paper is undoubtedly an impressive display of probing analysis and suggestive interpretation, it contains penetrating comment on individual texts, and it highlights a powerful idea that was as important to Aristotle as it is congenial to twentieth-century philosophers. The paper combines Owen's central interests: being, meaning, and the interplay between late Plato (and the Academy) and Aristotle.

Tithenai ta Phainomena (1961) was presented to the second *Symposium Aristotelicum*, held in Louvain in 1960. The main contentions of the paper can be briefly stated. (1) The '*phainomena*' to which Aristotle constantly appeals and which he regards as the foundation of philosophy include not only observational data but also—more important—the beliefs and assumptions of ordinary people and of experts; to work from these is Aristotle's 'dialectical method'. (2) The *Physics* is not physics but philosophy. 'Its data are for the most part the material not of natural history but of dialectic, and its problems are accordingly not questions of empirical fact but conceptual puzzles.' Its problems and starting-points come in the main from the second part of Plato's *Parmenides.*

Owen argued these theses with force and clarity; they were widely accepted and were absorbed into the climate of scholarly opinion. Much valuable work has flowed from this characterization of Aristotle's method and its connection with Plato. For Owen himself the *Parmenides*, 'a work of astonishing brilliance and originality', remained a central interest and the subject of many classes.

Owen wrote 'Aristotle on the Snares of Ontology' (1965) for a collection, *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle.* In it he explored uses of the verb 'to be' in connection with the doctrine of categories and argued that for Aristotle *being* was *being something or other*: the sense of 'being' depended on the type of *something or other.* But if for ice (for example) *being* is *being frozen*, we meet 'the problem of the overworked paraphrase': 'ice exists' will mean 'ice is frozen water'. From this Owen moved to consideration of singular and tensed statements ('that ice no longer exists'), and finally to such more rarefied statements as 'time exists'.

This paper—which might perhaps have been entitled 'Aristotle in the Snares of Ontology'—is a good example of Owen's penetrating thought, which leaves questions and ideas bubbling in the reader's mind. It is also a good example of his distinctive style and of the complexity characteristic of his papers. Here is a sentence that suggests both: 'We shall try first one, and then another, general solvent on such difficulties, and it will be a piece of economy (as well as a way of keeping up suspense) to raise another problem first.'

'Inherence' (1965) was a short piece of limited scope and importance, but 'The Platonism of Aristotle' (1965), a British Academy lecture, was a climax, drawing together material and ideas worked on for many years. The main claim was that Aristotle deals with a central Platonic problem by distinguishing two types of predication. A second thesis was that Aristotle revives (in a new form) the Platonic idea of a general science of being by exploiting for 'being' the notion of focal meaning.

The Third Man regress fatal to the Platonic theory of Forms resulted from combining the two assumptions commonly labelled the self-predication and the non-identity assumptions. It might be thought that to avoid the regress one of the two must be sacrificed. But Owen argued that Aristotle challenged the presupposition that one account will hold good of all predicates, and so constructed a theory of predication immune to the Third Man paradox. In the *Metaphysics* he distinguished two types of predicate, for one of which (e.g. 'white') non-identity holds but not self-predication, while for the other (e.g. 'man') the reverse is true—'Socrates is a man' is a sort of identity-statement. But *what* sort of identity-statement? Problems about individuals and species were to exercise Owen to the end.

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The Harvard chair to which Owen went in 1966—the Victor S. Thomas Professorship—was a joint appointment in three departments, Philosophy, Classics, and the History of Science. He could look forward to working in ideal conditions, with ample funds and support, and in a highly stimulating intellectual environment. He attracted excellent graduate students, to whom, as at Oxford, he gave his time and energy unstintingly. Besides his regular lectures and seminars he was always busy with individual supervision and informal group discussions. He more or less lived in the philosophy department, on the third floor of Emerson Hall. He was able to arrange extended visits to Harvard (as Loeb Fellows) by a number of distinguished younger scholars from Britain and continental Europe.

In 1967 Owen initiated a series of monthly meetings, held in New York, for the discussion of ancient philosophy. They became a magnet for scholars and philosophers from a wide area, and Owen's dialectical power made them exciting and much talked of occasions. Since he was also often a visitor at conferences and colloquia at other universities, the influence of his oral teaching was indeed great, and not only on the East Coast. He was blessedly free from the burdens of University administration, and kept himself from the distractions of University politics.

When Owen first went to Harvard his wife and sons joined him, although they kept their Lower Heyford house. But there was a problem about the education of the boys, and in 1969—after a sabbatical year when the whole family had been in Oxford—Gwil went back to Harvard on his own and took an apartment near the University. He returned to England every summer. He relished the comfort and relaxation of home and garden, and family life and holidays. These were a very necessary relief from the taxing way of life he followed at Harvard. His divided years cannot, however, have been altogether satisfactory. When the Laurence Chair of Ancient Philosophy fell vacant in 1973, on the retirement of W. K. C. Guthrie, Owen indicated an interest—and was duly elected to it, becoming (surely) the first person to have held chairs at Oxford and Cambridge and Harvard.

Six papers were published in the Harvard period, 1966–73, four on Plato and two on Aristotle. The first, 'Parmenides and Plato on the Timeless Present' (1966) was based on a lecture given at Princeton in 1964. The main themes are familiar: change, subjects and predicates, 'is', time. But it is not easy to follow the twists and turns of the paper's argument; it can hardly have been easy to absorb as a lecture.

Owen showed how Parmenides argued from the impossibility of change to the untenability of time-distinctions and yet implied *en route* the permanent immutability of his subject. Plato took over the Parmenidean 'is', a tense-form 'which retains enough of a present sense to be coupled with expressions for permanence and stability, yet which has severed its links with the future and the past'. Plato himself half-saw the contrast between tensed and tenseless statements, but unfortunately he was led by the availability of the Parmenidean 'is' to turn the distinction between tensed and tenseless statements into a distinction between changing and immutable objects—'unfortunately', because 'to be tensed or tenseless is a property of statements and not of things, and . . . paradoxes come from confusing this distinction'.

The third *Symposium Aristotelicum*, held in Oxford in 1963, was devoted to the study of Aristotle's *Topics*; revised versions of the papers were assembled by Owen and edited by him in the volume *Aristotle on Dialectic* (1969). His own paper, 'Dialectic and Eristic in the Treatment of the Forms', attacked what he called 'the reductive thesis', the view that Aristotelian dialectic is no more than eristic. He argued instead that Aristotle employs dialectic seriously and constructively; that he works out his own ideas in the course of examining and criticizing those of his predecessors and colleagues; and that he employs dialectic to make philosophical advances, not just to discomfit opponents. This was certainly Aristotle's own claim, but was he not guilty of eristic in practice? 'What matters is to dissect the practice, with an eye for chicanery but without a predisposition to believe that by the rules of the game there must be chicanery to be found.' So Owen turned to a consideration of the arguments in the *Topics* which criticize Plato's theory of Ideas—and which have often been thought to do so very unfairly.

Among the paradoxes Aristotle developed against the theory of Ideas some were one-level paradoxes, others two-level paradoxes. A one-level paradox arises if inconsistent things of the same level are asserted of Ideas, if, for example, it is held that an Idea is both a predicate distinct from anything of which it is predicated and itself a subject of the predicate in question. (This is the Third Man argument, and, as Owen argued elsewhere, Aristotle's own theory of predication was framed to meet it.) In general, the one-level paradoxes constructed in the *Topics* were 'honest and well-founded'.

The two-level paradoxes are more suspect. A two-level paradox arises if something said of an Idea *qua* Idea is inconsistent with something said of that of which it is the Idea; thus the Idea of man is, *qua* Idea, immobile, but man is mobile. Was Aristotle fair in turning such paradoxes against the Platonists? For there are other passages in which he seems to concede to them the distinction in predicate-levels which in his attacks he denies them. Owen argued ingeniously that Aristotle is fully entitled—without malpractice—to argue as he does.

Doubts remain among Platonists as to whether Aristotle did give the theory of Ideas a full, fair, and sympathetic treatment, and whether the distinction between predicates of *F qua* form and predicates of *F qua F* is a distinction that can properly be directed against the Platonic theory. As with many of Owen's papers, the final complicated conclusions have stimulative rather than compelling force; but the arguments and analyses leading to them are powerful and illuminating.

Owen contributed the section 'Method, Physics, and Cosmology' to the Aristotle article in the *Dictionary of Scientific Biography* edited by C. C. Gillispie (1970). In a brief and masterly survey he examined the influence on Aristotle's scientific work of the mathematical model, he expounded the role of dialectic (and '*phainomena*'), he explained the basis and meaning of the proportionalities formulated in Aristotle's dynamics, and he made clear the extent of Aristotle's reliance on mathematics in his physics. The final sentence of the article contained a phrase that might (*mutatis mutandis*) be applied to its author: 'His influence on science stemmed from an incomparable cleverness and sensitiveness to counterarguments, rather than from any breakthrough comparable to those of Eudoxus or Archimedes.'

In 1939 Gilbert Ryle published in *Mind* a highly original paper on Plato's *Parmenides*, in which he gave a new interpretation of the antinomies in the second part of that dialogue. He claimed that they were designed to bring out by *reductio ad absurdum* the difference between formal and non-formal concepts. Owen's contribution to a collection in honour of Ryle was entitled 'Notes on Ryle's Plato' (1970), and consisted in the main of a 'map' of the second part of *Parmenides* in which not only the explicit but also the implied or assumed premisses were carefully formulated, and their interconnections noted. Owen hoped to show that the conflicts among the assumptions—conflicts which generated antinomies—were systematic, 'the nerve of Plato's argument'. So Plato's method was not directed to proving a thesis but to setting philosophical problems about certain very abstract or formal concepts. 'It is the first systematic exercise in the logic of aporematic and not demonstrative argument.'

The 'map', an extraordinary condensation of material and analysis, was the fruit of work and class-discussion that had been carried on over many years. It must have disconcerted most readers of the volume in which it appeared—it is all too obviously 'Notes'; but it is a powerful weapon to help future students of Plato's most intractable text.

In 1970 Owen contributed to a collection of papers on Plato a study of the *Sophist*, a dialogue on which he had worked and held classes over many years. 'The bones of the argument were taken from a larger stew of many years' standing.' Though long, the paper could usefully have been longer: the texts analysed are exceedingly difficult; the problems discussed, and the lines of thought pursued, are exceptionally complicated. But many have agreed with J. H. McDowell's judgement that the paper 'radically improved the prospects for a confident overall view of its topic'.

The central questions of the *Sophist* (puzzles left by father Parmenides) are: how can *what is not* (*nothing*) be an object of thought or the subject of statements; and, if it cannot, how is falsity possible? According to Owen, the traditional view was that the problems dominating the *Sophist* are existence-problems and that *the way to resolve them is therefore to disentangle the different* functions of the verb 'to be'. Against this he argued that the dialogue is 'primarily an essay in problems of reference and predication and in the incomplete uses of the verb associated with these'. In one section of the paper Owen discusses the *Sophist*'s puzzles about *nothing*. Plato's paradoxes show that we must not miscast Nothing as a logical subject, its role is to be a subject-excluder. As for 'what is not', Owen argues that Plato's solution is not to distinguish senses of the verb 'to be', but to diagnose a certain mistake about 'not to be'. Central is the distinction Plato draws between otherness and contrariety: to say that Tom is not generous is not to say that he is mean. Owen construes the *Sophist* as essentially the exposure of the error of construing 'not to be' as 'to be in no way at all'. This last is indeed a paradoxical, unusable, notion; but it is *not* the legitimate negation of 'to be'.

Owen was always a little too ready to speak disparagingly of 'orthodox', 'traditional', 'fashionable' views (or 'dogmas'). He liked to outline 'commonplaces' or 'familiar readings' and then overthrow them. The history of Platonic scholarship—including philosophical scholarship—suggests caution. Today's exciting new line will be tomorrow's commonplace, due for reversal the day after. What always remains is the clarity or acuteness of arguments and the stimulus they give to further reflection and deeper understanding. Owen's paper will surely stand the test of time.

The paper 'Aristotelian Pleasures', read to the Aristotelian Society in February 1972, offered an attractive solution to a long-standing problem about the two accounts of pleasure given in different books of the *Nicomachean Ethics.* The accounts are certainly different. How is this to be explained, and are they in fact positively inconsistent with one another? Or is one perhaps a refinement of the other? Owen undercuts this debate: 'Traditionally the question has been whether the two accounts are too divergent to be compatible. I hope to show that they are too divergent to be incompatible. They are neither competing nor co-operating answers to one question, but answers to two quite different questions.' One account, Owen argues, addresses the question 'What is (really) enjoyable?' The other account addresses the question 'What is *enjoying*?' This is quite a different question and one that does not obtrude into discussion of the other. 'If we are asked what is admirable about politics or detestable about beagling, we do not stop to ponder what admiring or detesting is before embracing the question.'

Owen's paper displayed his usual gifts and his usual techniques of argument and scholarship. Its solution was no doubt too good to be true—or at any rate too simple to remain unchallenged. In October 1973 J. Gosling's paper to the Aristotelian Society, 'More Aristotelian Pleasures', started the work of qualification and criticism. Owen had himself ended his paper by admitting that a residual problem remained intractable. Aristotle uses the very same expressions to identify the theories he rejects in the two discussions, even though they are theories of quite different types; and in both contexts he claims to be explaining *what pleasure is*: 'That remarkable and, I think, unremarked ambiguity I can only commend to your curiosity.'

'Plato on the Undepictable', a 'brief and inadequate salute to Gregory Vlastos', was published in 1973. One objection to the conclusions of the *Timaeus* paper had been based on the contention that a passage in the late dialogue *Politicus* obviously referred to Forms and likenesses of Forms. In this paper Owen re-examines the *Politicus* passage, arguing that it says nothing about Forms, but 'makes a sound philosophical point in plain terms'. In it Plato shows up the deficiency in the analogy between painting and language which he himself had often employed. Telling, he now claims, is always better than picturing; and (he warns in the passage under examination) 'in explaining the most important things there is no picture at all available to meet even nursery standards of instruction'. Owen gives, as often, his own additional twist. The distinction Plato draws between the depictable and undepictable is drawn among things that can be explained (that have a *logos*); and explaining them is taken to be a matter of identifying their elements, like spelling a word into letters. The question whether the letters themselves are depictable or not cannot arise within this conceptual framework.

This paper touched on many questions about meaning, analysis, and explanation which Owen had always found fascinating. It is a great pity that his close work on the *Cratylus* and *Theaetetus* (not to mention the *Republic*) did not reach the printed page.

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At Cambridge Owen was elected to a Fellowship at King's College, and from now on he divided his time between his rooms there and the house at Lower Heyford. He was of course already well known to his colleagues in philosophy and classics—some of whom had indeed been colleagues at Oxford in earlier years. The courses and constitution of Cambridge (England) differed markedly both from those of Cambridge (Mass.) and from those of Oxford; from Owen's point of view there were advantages and disadvantages. As before, he concentrated his energies on graduate teaching in seminars and groups, and on individual supervision; and with the aid of a strong team of colleagues he promoted the vigorous study of Greek philosophy. He did not involve himself deeply in College or University administration or politics. Music and talk were his main recreations in Cambridge; the weekends or vacation periods at Lower Heyford (or on holidays abroad) were his real relaxation and refreshment.

In February 1975 Owen initiated a 'London Group' similar to the group which he had left flourishing in New York. At its monthly meetings scholars from several cities joined in the very close discussion of a very difficult text, Aristotle's *Metaphysics V*. The record of these discussions was subsequently published by the Sub-faculty of Philosophy at Oxford; and this will remain not only a useful aid to future students of *Metaphysics V* but also a vivid example of the sort of careful, acute, and suggestive discussion characteristic of this period of philosophical scholarship. (The group went on to read *Metaphysics* ℨ and Θ, and the record of these discussions has also been published.)

During the Cambridge years Owen published relatively little, but his notebooks continued to fill, work on the *De Ideis* continued intermittently, and above all he was always trying out new ideas in discussion and teaching. Public honours accrued: to his Fellowship of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and of the British Academy were added Foreign Membership of the Finnish Academy, the Presidency of the Aristotelian Society (in its centenary year, 1978–9), and an honorary doctorate from Durham. He was appointed to give the highly prestigious Sather Lectures at Berkeley in 1979.

For Owen's sixtieth birthday a group of his pupils and younger colleagues produced a Festschrift in his honour. The handsome volume, published by the Cambridge University Press, was presented to him at a party held on his birthday less than two months before his sudden death. The volume contains powerful papers by distinguished contributors, all of whom acknowledge their debt (and their devotion) to Owen as teacher, dialectician, and personality.

During the Cambridge years, 1973–82, Owen published two papers (on Aristotle); and two further papers were prepared for publication and appeared posthumously.

'Aristotle on Time', contributed to a collection published in 1976, was a closely argued analysis of Aristotle's discussion in *Physics* IV. 10–14. Aristotle is here concerned with the nature of the 'now', the present; the reality of time; and the relations between time, space, and movement. Aristotle seeks to dissolve the paradoxes he has so cleverly constructed. Owen's examination brought out the difficulties in Aristotle's account, but gave him credit for at least partial success. 'If Aristotle hopes to show spatial order conceptually prior to temporal order, the attempt fails. But does this spoil the general parallel between space and time by which Aristotle hopes to meet the paradox of time's unreality? Surely not, for the gist of that was that in both cases there cannot be points without the stretches they join and bound. The moment 5.30 and the period from 5.30 to 6 are interdependent. Time is left with periods which are, in Aristotle's sense, "measures" of time. What he says of this goes admirably, as we can put it now, into a tenseless language of moments and durations. But it does not meet the paradox that at any real present the measurable stretches of time are behind or in front of us.'

'Particular and General', the Presidential address given to the Aristotelian Society on 9 October 1978, developed ideas that Owen had put forward in an unfinished discussion paper at the *Symposium Aristotelicum* in 1972. He sought to show that *Metaphysics V* followed an intelligible strategy in its various discussions of substance. The strategy is 'to allow our two requirements on substance—on, in fact, our ordinary references to individuals—to pull the argument in opposite directions, and then to show that either direction single-mindedly pursued leads to an intolerable result'. What we require is neither a bare 'this' nor a definable 'such', but a 'this such' (e.g. *this man*). However, paradoxes arise in the analysis of change and becoming in *Metaphysics V*, 7–9. The difficulties dissolve, Owen argued, when we realize that 'a sculptor engaged in making a statue is not making some particular statue, even if the end-product is a particular statue; a seed in process of becoming a tree is not becoming a particular tree, even if a particular tree is the end-product'. The last few pages of this paper contain a remarkable combination of detailed scholarly exegesis and philosophical argument.

'Philosophical Invective', published posthumously, was a brilliant and amusing study of ancient scandal and invective, particularly as they affected some traditional accounts of Aristotle's relationship to Plato. Owen showed how weak is the evidence about

Aristotle's departure from Athens some time in 347. If we knew exactly when, and why, and with whom he left, we might be able to draw some inferences about his professional and philosophical viewpoint and development. 'So far as I can see, we do not know this at all. When we follow the evidence in any direction it peters out in a bog of libels and lampoons.' Next, in a close investigative discussion of a series of ancient texts, Owen showed that accusations and calumnies were re-directed from one person to another, and that no trust can be placed in the evidence of the scandal-makers and gossip-mongers of antiquity. This rescues Aristotle 'from the libels on which some gimcrack interpretations have been built'.

In the other posthumously published paper, 'Aristotelian Mechanics', Owen returned to a theme he had discussed in one of his earliest Oxford classes, the role of mathematical ideas in Aristotle's physical writings. He first set in confrontation two sharply opposed views, the view that the apparently mathematical elements in Aristotle's physics are of no great importance, and the view that his equations and laws of motion are in fact a great achievement in mathematical abstraction; and he then argued that each side must make concessions. Aristotle does make serious use of mathematical models and abstractions in his mechanics, and the role they play is an important one, even though they are applications of an established discipline and not innovations in mathematics. On the other hand, it is wrong to exaggerate the abstractness and the mathematical character of the proportionalities he formulates; they are a long way from being 'laws of motion'.

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Gwil Owen was an unrivalled teacher of graduates, a brilliant dialectician, an original and influential scholar-philosopher. His friends will cherish also the memory of the man: his wit and ebullience, his warmth and generosity, his voice and laugh, his pipe and bow-tie.

J. L. Ackrill

Note. I am grateful for help I have received from Mrs Sally Owen and from Professor Geoffrey Lloyd, Professor Martha Nussbaum, Mr Christopher Taylor, Professor Bernard Williams, and Mr Michael Woods.

A bibliography prepared by Professor Martha Nussbaum and Dr

Malcolm Schofield may be found in *Language and Logos* (Cambridge, 1982). Three recent publications should be added to it: 'Philosophical Invective', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, i (1983), 1–25; 'Aristotelian Mechanics', in A. Gotthelf (ed.), *Aristotle on Nature and Living Things* (Pittsburgh, 1985); *Logic, Science and Dialectic: Collected Papers of G. E. L. Owen*, ed. M. Nussbaum (London, 1985).