

that 'the Stoics can present a strong case to show that their doctrine of happiness, virtue, the indifferents and the passions introduces some distinctions that we need in order to justify some of Aristotle's principle doctrines' (p. 192). This is an interesting, even somewhat provocative thesis, and if Irwin is right it will begin to show that Stoic ethics has a much deeper connection to Aristotelian ethics than has previously been thought. Julia Annas argues persuasively that ancient and modern sceptics have very different ideas about what it means to deny the objective existence of values. Her concern lies with the contrast between contemporary philosophers and the ancient Sceptics. The three articles on Hellenistic ethics are all outstanding contributions in their own right, but what is lacking is any sense that they belong together, or that they bring to light a period in which the Epicureans, Stoics, and Sceptics were deeply concerned with each others' views.

Ethics closes with an article on moral responsibility in Aristotle and the Hellenistic philosophers. What is refreshing about this chapter is that Susan Suavé Meyer does not merely reiterate her published views on responsibility in Aristotle and then tack on the Hellenistic arguments as an appendix. Instead, the article is thematically organized around such topics as fatalism, determinism, choice, cause, and control. To have the different views of Aristotle and (mainly) Stoics presented in this manner sharpens our understanding of ancient views of responsibility.

Ethics is a useful book and a handy introduction to current scholarly issues in ancient philosophy.

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THE GODS IN MYTH

M. LEFKOWITZ: *Greek Gods, Human Lives. What We Can Learn from Myths*. Pp. xii + 288, maps, ills. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003. Cased, US\$30/£19.95. ISBN: 0-300-10145-7.

Without defining 'god', 'myth', or 'religion', Lefkowitz sets out to prove that the 'gods' in Greek 'myth' were not frivolous conventions of literature, as most believe, but beings with important 'religious' value.

In the introduction she objects to popular misunderstandings in handbooks of Greek myth by Thomas Bulfinch, Edith Hamilton, Robert Graves, and Joseph Campbell, who believe that Greek gods are frivolous or immoral, 'human' more than divine, or these writers remove Greek gods from their historical contest. Such errors she will remedy through a study of how the gods play out in several literary narratives.

L. then proceeds to summarize Hesiod's *Theogony*, *Works and Days*, and the long Homeric Hymns to Aphrodite, Demeter, Apollo, and Dionysus. For some reason declaring the *Iliad* to be a 'religious text' (like the Quran? Like the Pentateuch? The gospel of John?) she gives a thirty-one-page summary of its narrative, concluding with observations about the preeminence of Zeus and his almighty will, and how the gods behave in a rather haphazard way toward mortals, whose fate is to suffer. Observations about the relations between men and gods, next pepper a twenty-seven-page summary of the *Odyssey*, but they can be banal: 'Athena's affection for Odysseus and his family is extraordinary, especially since she is not his mother or his lover'.

Turning to drama, L. assumes that the purpose of the festival of Dionysus in Athens was to honor the god (as the mass honors Jesus?), looking past its function of affirming the solidarity of the democratic polis (a purpose that many would see as

primary). The goal of drama is 'to remind the audience that the gods ultimately control human action and are determined to see that justice is done in the end' (p. 114). Next L. summarizes the plots of the Oresteia, Sophocles' *Electra*, and Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes*, noting that gods do not attempt to relieve human suffering because 'suffering and misery are inherent in the condition of being mortal' (p. 137). L. summarizes the plots of several other tragedies, including Euripides' *Hippolytus* and *Bacchae*, which depend on the motif of the offended god. Apparently Attic dramas 'deliver explicit messages about the difference between divine and mortal ethics' (p. 137).

Turning next to Hellenistic literature, especially the *Argonautica*, L. finds that the gods still are in charge, but stand more behind the scenes. Their epiphanies are more strange. In comparison to their power, mortals are 'ignorant, vulnerable, and morally flawed' (p. 170).

The following chapter on the *Aeneid* seems to slip outside a study of 'Greek gods', or at least raises complex problems about the relationship between Roman and Greek religion and literature. Finally, L. considers myths in Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, which belongs to Greek myth only with qualification.

I cannot be sure who is the audience for this book. Classicists will find limited interest in the bald plot summaries, unless to crib a lecture, and the bare academic style will not hold the general reader. Most troublesome is the author's refusal to face directly the immense complexity of myth and religion, or how it changed over time. Rather, she views 'myth and religion' as a unity divorced from history. L. does not really mean myth anyway, but rather the 'plots' of surviving major literary works. Religion, too, is not just 'things having do with gods'. The real, living religion of ancient Greece, the practice of cult and magic, had only a rough and ready relationship with plots of literary works, but of this the author seems unaware. One wonders if the moral drawn from her study is worthwhile, that 'mortal life is fragile, threatened, uncertain, and never consistently happy'. Is this what we are meant to learn from the study of Greek gods?

In the concluding paragraph, L. holds that ancient worshippers did not expect to receive compensation for their devotion; why, then, did they burn millions of thigh pieces on the altars of the gods? Mortals, she says, cannot find comfort from these gods, but must look to other mortals; true, but how does Greek religion differ from every other religion of evolution? She says that 'despite its realism and its clear difference from any of the religions we are now used to, these same stories can still offer a reliable guide to life in our own time' (p. 239). That we should grin and bear it, realizing that our well-being is of little interest to the divine powers around us? In any event, familiar religions of the Indian subcontinent and other places are remarkably similar to Greek polytheistic religion, and 'religion' and 'stories' remain very different things.

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NYMPHS

J. LARSON: *Greek Nymphs: Myth, Cult, Lore*. Pp. xii + 380, ills. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Cased, £48.50 (Paper, £22.50). ISBN: 0-19-512294-1 (0-19-514465-1 pbk).

Until the appearance of Larson's *Greek Nymphs*, no book had been published in any language specifically addressing the nature and function of nymphs. Larson's focused

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