

Book notes

EDITED BY MARTIN STONE

Mark Julian Edwards *Origen Against Plato*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002)
(Ashgate Studies in Philosophy and Theology in Late Antiquity).
Pp. vi + 198. £15.99 (Pbk). ISBN 0 7546 0828 X.

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This is the first volume in what promises to be an excellent and timely series of monographs published by Ashgate. The subject of Edwards's assured and erudite tome is the enigmatic yet much maligned Origen of Alexandria (AD 185–254), whose dalliance with the philosophy of the 'Platonic tradition' is well known to historians of ancient philosophy and Patristics. Edwards aims to set his book apart from other studies by arguing that Origen attempted to construct a 'Christian philosophy' with the intention of preserving theology from the snares of pagan thinking. By examining the more general question of the influence of pagan philosophy upon early Christian thinkers, Edwards advances and defends the plausible claim that many scholars have proposed a rather premature assessment of the relationship between Christian thinkers and pagan philosophers. Further to this, Edwards seeks to advance the discussion of Origen's philosophical development by offering new interpretations of his relationship to gnosticism, his doctrine of the Trinity, and the influence of Clement of Alexandria. The book concludes with the claim that Origen's biblical hermeneutics, eschatology, cosmology, and Trinitarian theology are all related to his theological anthropology, which is radically different to the account of human nature postulated by Plato. This is an informed and intelligent book that is an impressive contribution to late ancient philosophy and Patristics. It will be read, appreciated and much debated. *Origen Against Plato* is sure to enhance Edwards's reputation as one of the more interesting writers in contemporary Patristics.

[M.W.F.S.]

David A. Lines *Aristotle's Ethics in the Italian Universities (ca. 1300–1650): The Universities and the Problem of Moral Education*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002). Pp. xix + 614. €120.00/\$140.00 (Hbk). ISBN 900 412085 8.

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This monumentally researched work of scholarship studies the teaching of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (the standard textbook for instruction in philosophical morals in the Latin West) in the universities of Renaissance Italy. Lines assigns a special place in his text to the question

how university commentaries on the *Ethics* reflected developments in educational theory and practice. The issue of so-called 'Aristotelian humanism' also receives a great deal of attention. After surveying the fortunes of Aristotle's great text in the Latin West up to 1650, and its place in the study of moral philosophy in the universities, Lines's book focuses upon Italian interpretations of the *Ethics* up to 1500 (Part 2, 111–217) and then from 1500 to 1650 (Part 3, 223–384). Here, the focus is on the Universities of Florence-Pisa, Padua, Bologna, and Rome (including the Jesuit run *Collegio Romano*). Five substantial appendices document the institutional context of the study of moral philosophy and the Latin interpretations of the *Ethics* during the Italian Renaissance. Though indebted to the pioneering efforts of scholars such as Paul Kristeller, Charles Schmitt, Charles Lohr, and (more recently), Jill Krayer, Lines's book is an original study that makes a genuine contribution to its subject. While short on philosophical commentary (a feature that it is perhaps the only failing of this impressive book), the valuable material that Lines's detailed and sympathetic researches has unearthed helps to set late medieval, Renaissance, and early modern Aristotelian moral philosophy in a much more plausible and lucid context. In an era when serious scholarship no longer enjoys the esteem it deserves, it is heartening to find a book of some 600 pages that not only advances an interesting line of argument, but manages to sustain its central thesis throughout several digressions and textual readings. Lines is to be congratulated on producing a sound work of scholarship that will continue to grace the shelves of libraries and scholars long after the ephemeral, cursory, and superficial fads that currently dominate the study of the humanities have been forgotten.

[M.W.F.S.]

George Minois *Les origines du mal: une histoire du péché originel*. (Paris: Fayard, 2002). Pp. 439. €24.70 (Pbk). ISBN 2 213 61149 1.

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This lively, yet highly suggestive, study of the history of original sin is by the well-known religious historian, George Minois. Already known to the world of scholarship by virtue of his influential studies of the devil and atheism, Minois turns his considerable erudition in this book to consider one of the perennial problems of Western religious moral thought: original sin. Surprisingly for an author who is known to hold quite strong views on the subject of the development of occidental Christianity, *Les origines du mal* is quite a tame work that rarely imposes its point of view beyond the available evidence cited by Minois. Following a standard approach to the subject, Minois provides the reader with a detailed chronology of the development of Christian thinking about original sin, beginning with the Church Fathers' discussion of the deeds of Adam and Eve, through the Middle Ages, post-Tridentine Catholic theology, and on to modern times. Presenting his arguments by means of an exegesis of primary sources, Minois has many interesting things to say on the different historical periods he discusses. Of particular interest is his discussion of French philosophers and theologians in the seventeenth century (see 159–208), whose opinions he describes with tact and sympathy. Less convincing, however, is his discussion of the modern era, where he frequently fails to develop his arguments in anything like the detail they deserve, and all too often relies on suggestive statements and commonplaces. That said, his theories do provoke and entertain the reader, and he reveals himself to be among the very best of modern French religious historians in his ability to discuss theological ideas and their application to the conditions of human life. While by no means the final word on this most difficult of subjects, *Les origines du mal* is an earnest and stimulating book that is a valuable addition to the literature.

[M.W.F.S.]