

Book notes

EDITED BY MARTIN STONE

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Stephen Gersch and Maarten J. F. M. Hoenen (eds) *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages: A Doxological Approach*. (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002). Pp. v + 466. € 106 (Hbk). ISBN 3 11 016844 8.

Unsurprisingly for a work with the above title, this volume devotes itself to a study of Platonism in the Middle Ages. Surprisingly, however, for a book that has its origins in successive workshops and conferences, it is of the very highest quality and makes a genuine contribution to its subject. Consisting of eleven essays, and divided into three sections, the editors' volume tackles the subjects of Platonism in the early Middle Ages, the twelfth century, and the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. The aim of the 'doxological' approach favoured by Gersch and Hoenen is to attempt to specify just what the term 'Platonism' might mean in any of the above periods. Further to this, the editorial approach endeavours to identify continuities and discontinuities in the transmission and influence of Platonic texts that may affect current understanding of the various periods, personalities, and schools that collectively make up 'medieval philosophy'. The volume begins with a short editorial introduction, and then sets about its business with strong essays on early medieval philosophy by Stephen Gersch, Dag Nikolaus Hasse, and John Marenbon. Going on from this to consider the special events of the twelfth century, Frank Bezner, Thomas Ricklin, and Lodi Nauta discuss a range of topics, from Boethian Platonism to the different uses of Platonic thought within the monastic schools. Arriving at the period of 'high scholasticism', Henryk Anzulewicz, Wayne Hankey, Maarten Hoenen, and Markus Fluehrer consider the Platonic deposit in Albert the Great, Aquinas, Jean Gerson, and Nicholas of Cusa. The volume concludes with a fascinating article by David Knipp on medieval visual images of Plato, and is fully supported by an arsenal of indices. A work of consummate scholarship, Gersch's and Hoenen's collection makes a real contribution to the history of the Platonic tradition and to the current study of medieval philosophy. All scholars in these fields will welcome its appearance.

[M.W.F.S.]

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Sharon M. Kaye and Robert M. Martin *Ockham*. (Belmont CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2001). (Wadsworth Philosophers series). Pp. vi + 97. £10.00 (Pbk).

This short essay is one of the latest offerings from the Wadsworth Philosophers series. The publishers intend that volumes in this collection will 'provide a brief and accessible insight into the ideas of major philosophers throughout history'. For the most part, Kaye and Martin's slender tome meets this laudable objective and provides its reader with a short introduction to the work of William Ockham, a thinker whose own fat corpus is hardly characterized by brevity. It is perhaps a mark of the recent revival of medieval thinkers in contemporary English-speaking philosophy that the 'Venerable Inceptor' is granted a place in a series such as this. Clearly, the Wadsworth Philosophers series presumes the notion of a stable philosophical canon, so it is a welcome sign of the health of medieval philosophy that Ockham is now assigned his place in the sun. Kaye and Martin's book is divided into eight chapters which treat the prominent areas of Ockham's philosophy. The reader is introduced to the bare bones of his metaphysics by means of a chapter on nominalism, and some coverage is afforded to his account of human knowledge, involvement in the sciences, as well as his theories of meaning and reference. Later chapters focus on his philosophical theology, psychology, account of human freedom, ethics, and political theory. The chapters are prefaced by a short introduction and the volume concludes with the thinnest of bibliographies. The book is pitched at first-year undergraduates and is written in a style to which that undiscerning constituency would not object. By no means a work of scholarship, Kaye and Martin's book inflicts only moderate harm on its subject matter and yet broadly redeems itself by affording the reader simple instruction.

[M.W.F.S.]

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Christine Swanton *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Pp. xi + 312. £35.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0 119 9253888 9.

In this ample yet lively tome Christine Swanton offers a different view of virtue ethics that addresses the major questions of moral theory from the standpoint of a model of evaluating human acts based on character. Surveying a wide yet mutually reinforcing range of topics, Swanton discusses issues such as moral constraints, the rightness of action, the good life, moral requirements, subjectivity, and the practical nature of ethical concepts. Steering a resolute course away from what she believes to be the infelicities of Kantian and Consequentialist approaches, Swanton argues that self-styled virtue ethicists should seek to jettison many of the neo-Aristotelian assumptions, especially those connected with eudaimonism, that have hitherto been such a feature of virtue theory's return to philosophical prominence. Bidding farewell to Aristotle and many of his modern enthusiasts, Swanton employs insights gained from Nietzsche and other sources. Developing what she terms a 'pluralistic view', she endeavours to convince the reader that 'modes of moral acknowledgement', such as love, respect and appreciation, and creativity, are embedded in the very fabric of virtue and the moral life. An interesting if not an entirely

persuasive work (I doubt it will assuage all the doubts of modern Aristotelians who will still cling to their belief that the Satgirite provides the best point of departure for any genuine ethics of virtue), Swanton's considered book will be of interest to many specialists in moral philosophy and Christian ethics, and it will help to refresh the present enterprise of virtue ethics by advancing novel insights and outlooks. The book is well produced and is written with sagacity and feeling.

[M.W.F.S.]

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Andrew Pyle *Malebranche*. (London: Routledge, 2003). (Arguments of the Philosophers). Pp. xii + 289. £55.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0 415 28911 4.

Known mainly to specialists, although worthy of sustained philosophical and historical attention in his own right, Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715) has not always enjoyed the favour and attention of English-speaking commentators. Despite important recent studies and anthologies by Lennon and Nadler, and earlier systematic works by Connell, Malebranche has lacked a fair-minded synoptic book that simply seeks to set down his philosophical achievements in clear and accessible detail. With this volume Andrew Pyle has provided a generous service to English-speaking readers by providing such a work. His book not only addresses itself to all the important areas of Malebranche thought, but further provides agreeable and illuminating instruction in those areas that pertain to his context, and relationship to Cartesianism. Pyle presents an integrated account of Malebranche's central and notorious theses concerning occasionalism, the 'Vision in God', and expends much time clarifying his contribution to seventeenth-century debates on natural philosophy, psychology, self-knowledge, and grace and free will. Always attentive to the requirement of placing Malebranche in a coherent intellectual context, Pyle provides intelligent commentary on his relationship to figures such as Locke, Leibniz, and Arnauld. Pyle is to be congratulated for producing a book that is historically sensitive yet philosophically forthright. Malebranche's far-from-simple theories are treated with tact and justice, yet Pyle is minded to convict him of obscurity and woolly thinking when he is deserving of such criticism. Readers of this journal will find Pyle's treatment of Malebranche's philosophical theology (see chapters 3 and 10) of special interest.

[M.W.F.S.]