

Book notes

EDITED BY MARTIN STONE

John J. Cleary (ed.) *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism*. (Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, De Wulf-Mansion Centre, Series 1, Vol. XXIV). Pp. xxxiv + 578. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998). 2.950 BF.

This impressive volume, the fruit of a conference held at Maynooth, Ireland in 1995, explores in great detail the tradition of Neoplatonism and its influence upon Western philosophy. Divided into ten sections, the volume includes sections on Neoplatonic theology; the relationship of Plato to Plotinus; Plotinus on the intellect, mysticism, and eudaimonism; the Neoplatonist school; later Neoplatonic epistemology; late academic Neoplatonism; patristic and medieval Neoplatonism; Neoplatonism in Arab and Jewish thought; Renaissance Neoplatonism and modern Neoplatonism. The volume includes essays by many of the leading European and North American figures in Neoplatonist scholarship. Eminent authorities such as Jean Pépin, Denis O'Brien, Lloyd Gerson, Gerard Verbeke, Henry Blumenthal, Carlos Steel, James McEvoy, and John Dillon, all contribute essays of rigour and quality which help to create a very favourable impression of the current state of Neoplatonist scholarship. Further to this, the volume is committed to an inclusive portrait of Neoplatonist thought. To this end, areas such as Arab and Jewish Neoplatonism and an interesting final section on the Neoplatonism of Emerson and the modern-day philosopher and editor of Plotinus, A. H. Armstrong, help to demonstrate the fact that the tradition of Neoplatonist thought is perhaps as perennial as the volume's title would have us believe. Indeed, given the concern of Neoplatonist writers, past and present, with foundational issues in metaphysics, psychology and ethics, it is difficult to imagine its complete absence from Western philosophical speculation. The volume is attractively presented by Leuven University Press, and its reader's interests are well served by a fine introduction by John J. Cleary and a clear and useful set of indexes.

[M. W. F. S.]

G. A. J. Rogers, J. M. Vienne and Y. C. Zarka (eds.) *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context: Politics, Metaphysics and Religion*. (International Archives of the History of Ideas). (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997). Pp. xiv + 249. NLG 250.00, £89.00 Hbk.

The philosophy and theology of the Cambridge Platonists in the mid-seventeenth century constituted a unique return to many of the standard themes of classical Christian Platonism. It did so at a time defined by changes in the natural sciences and in philosophy under the impact of figures such as Galileo and Descartes and by religious and political turmoil in England associated with the Civil War. The above volume, edited by Rogers, Vienne and Zarka, not only explores themes arising from that context and the relationship of key figures in the group – More, Smith,

Whichote and Cudworth – with their contemporaries and successors – Descartes, Hobbes, Leibniz and Malebranche – but consists of an original set of papers written by some of the major scholars in this area. As such, it recommends itself as a leading volume in its field. A particular, and welcome, feature of the book is its development of certain themes which have previously been ignored by commentators on the Cambridge Platonists. Such themes include an attention to the relation of the work of the figures like More and Cudworth to the significant political debates of their day. The impact upon the work of the Cambridge Platonists of the natural philosophy of the period is also examined. Lastly, the volume devotes time and attention to the theology of the Cambridge Platonists. This last issue is particularly important since, in recent years, there has been a tendency in some scholarly circles to underplay the theological motivations of Cudworth et al., in order to make their work more conducive to a contemporary philosophical audience. It is to the credit of Rogers, Vienne and Zarka and their respective contributors, that they have provided an interesting and timely volume which displays the diverse views of the Cambridge Platonists in their very best light.

[M. W. F. S.]

John M. Dillon *The Great Tradition: Further Studies in the Development of Platonism and Early Christianity*. (Variorum Collected Studies Series). (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997). Pp. xii + 346. £55.00 Hbk.

This publication is the second collection of articles by the well-known scholar of Neoplatonic thought, John Dillon. Dillon, Professor of Greek at Trinity College Dublin, is well known to the world of scholarship for his original and innovative studies of Middle Platonism, Plotinus and Proclus. This volume, a companion to his earlier *The Golden Chain: Studies in the Development of Platonism and Christianity* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1991), represents Dillon's more recent work and shows him at his very best in dealing with the many facets of the Neoplatonic tradition. The volume is chronologically expansive and ranges from articles on Plato, Philo, the Middle Platonists, Plutarch, Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, to later figures such as Damascius, John Scotus Eriugena and Solomon ibn Gabriel. What emerges from the collection of essays is a very helpful set of explanations of the manner and ways in which Neoplatonism was transmitted to Jewish, Christian and Arab thinkers and how it came to influence the methods used by such thinkers in their theological and philosophical writings. While all the essays in the volume are of a high standard, I was particularly struck by the suggestiveness of Dillon's remarks on Porphyry and Iamblichus. Both these thinkers write at such a high level of abstraction and so readily retreat into mysticism, that many beginning students are put off their work by the seeming lack of philosophical rigour. One of Dillon's skills is to take on board the peculiarities of the thinkers he is considering, and to reproduce their thought on a range of philosophical and theological issues in interesting and tractable ways. His essays provide a good model of how to take inaccessible thinkers in the history of philosophy and make their views not only coherent but germane to philosophical scrutiny. For this and other reasons, the volume is to be warmly welcomed. It should do much to enhance Dillon's reputation.

[M. W. F. S.]

Jerome B. Schneewind *The Invention of Autonomy: a History of Modern Moral Philosophy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Pp. xxii + 623. £55.00 hbk, £15.00 pbk.

In this long awaited work, Jerome Schneewind produces nothing less than an entire history of modern moral philosophy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The volume represents a remarkable achievement and it will soon establish itself as a classic within its field. The book is organized into four sections. The first discusses seventeenth-century natural law theory. After adumbrating its earlier versions in late medieval thought, Schneewind tackles the difficult views of Suarez, Grotius, Hobbes, Cumberland, Pufendorf, Locke and Thomasius. The exposition is always clear and the analysis informed, fair and sympathetic. The second section examines perfectionist ethics in the work of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, his Neo-Stoic predecessors, Descartes, the Cambridge Platonists, Spinoza, Malebranche and Leibniz. Here the exposition is lively and colourful, and many will learn from Schneewind's profound knowledge of primary texts. The third section concerns those early modern philosophers who began the process whereby morality could retain its categorical nature without relying upon a notion of God. Here we meet discussions of Gassendi, Bayle, Reid and even the much maligned Marquis de Sade, who Schneewind approaches without cheap salaciousness and the familiar, but tedious, onanistically charged rhetoric. The last section sees Schneewind at his very best as he charts the figures and processes that came together to influence Kant's moral philosophy. Wolff, Crusius and Rousseau are discussed at length and a sober and honest appreciation of the presuppositions of Kant's project in moral philosophy is put before the reader. While the book certainly has its heroes and villains – the reader becomes aware over time of the author's sympathy for individual autonomy and his distaste for any moral system that is authoritarian – it is written without recourse to anachronism and informed by a solid knowledge of the period's literature, theology and politics. It will be relevant to the needs of the specialist as well as providing a much-needed education in moral philosophy's rich past to the advanced student. It is sure to dominate its field for years to come and is worthy of a wide readership.

[M. W. F. S.]

Georges B. J. Dreyfus *Recognizing Reality: Dharmakīrti's Philosophy and its Tibetan Interpretations*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997). Pp. 462 + Notes, Tibetan-Sanskrit-English Glossary, Bibliography, and Indexes.

In the fifth to the seventh centuries C.E. the Indian thinkers, Digñāga and Dharmakīrti, articulated detailed Buddhist philosophical points of view. As Buddhist tradition continued, Tibetan philosophers developed their own distinctive viewpoints by commenting on Indian thinkers such as Dharmakīrti. The present volume is a landmark study of Ge-luk (*dge lugs*) and Sa-gya (*sa skya*) traditions of Tibetan Buddhism by a Westerner who himself has become a Tibetan Ge-shay. It is also and importantly a work written by someone with a lively awareness of the value of philosophy.

The volume is divided into two main parts: Book One: Ontology and Philosophy of Language and Book Two: Epistemology. The work has a comparative aspect that

also includes contrasts. An example is that Dharmakīrti's philosophy is compared to modern empiricism in order to integrate his philosophy into the history of ideas. The central theme of the work is the problem of universals and its consequences for epistemology and semantics. Specific topics are introduced with background information, detailed discussion, and comparative perspective.

Dreyfus takes a view of 'philosophy as an education' (446). A reason for studying philosophy is that in philosophizing one learns how to raise new questions, 'how to problematize what we usually take for granted' (449). Yet Dreyfus does not think that one should look to other traditions in the hope of finding a solution to philosophical problems that one's own tradition has not been able to solve. Such an idea, he argues, is due to a lack of understanding of the nature of a philosophical problem.

Since (as Wittgenstein makes clear) there are no solutions to philosophical problems but instead rearrangements of what we have always known, there are no solutions to philosophical problems in the first place, let alone in Asian thought, Dreyfus argues. In the course of doing philosophical exposition of Dharmakīrti, Dreyfus shows how Buddhist epistemology may itself be an education. As Dreyfus puts it: 'Becoming experienced in life does not depend on finding some previously overlooked fact but on raising questions we had not considered previously concerning the most common objects of our experience. This is what we can learn from philosophy in general. This is also what we learn from studying Dharmakīrti's tradition' (450).

In this work a philosophical approach is provided that is appropriate to the texts themselves. The main focus of the work is Tibetan articulations of Dharmakīrti's work in relation to epistemology, specifically *pramāṇa* (means of valid cognition). Dreyfus focuses on the period between the end of the fourteenth and the end of the fifteenth centuries, viz. the heart of the classical period of Tibetan Buddhism. It is here that the Tibetan commentators elucidate the philosophical content of, and problems in, Dharmakīrti's thought.

In this brief review it is impossible to survey the scholarly details in sufficient depth to reveal the work's many strengths. But it is clear that Dreyfus has produced a very fine work, one which all major libraries with holdings on Buddhist philosophy and religion will doubtless acquire.

[F. J. H.]