

*Reading Ancient Texts, Volume I: Presocratics and Plato*, and *Reading Ancient Texts, Volume II: Aristotle and Neoplatonism: Essays in honour of Dennis O'Brien*, edited by Suzanne Stern-Gillet and Kevin Corrigan. Leiden: Brill, 2007. Volume I, ISBN 9789004165090, EUR 90; Volume II, ISBN 9789004165120, EUR 90.

Festschriften in honour of Dennis O'Brien are coming thick and fast. First we had *Agonistes. Essays in honour of Dennis O'Brien* edited by J. Dillon and M. Dixsault (Ashgate, 2005), followed now by *Reading Ancient Texts, Volumes I and II*; another fitting tribute to the prolific output of the honoree in question. In a review of this brevity, I can do little but make the reader aware of what is contained herein, and make some general comments concerning the nature of some of the contributions, but by no means doing justice to the full extent of their arguments. In general, volume I is divided into papers on the Presocratics and Plato, while volume II is taken up with essays on Aristotle and the heirs of Plato, essentially the Neoplatonist, Plotinus and St Augustine. The breadth of material covered in the two volumes is an indication of the extraordinary range of O'Brien's scholarship. A quick glance at the list of his publications, which is provided at the end of both volumes, serves to confirm his prolific output.

The essays on the Presocratics in the first section of volume I are fittingly dominated by the figure of Empedocles; the subject of O'Brien's doctoral thesis, and subsequent first monograph. Here M. Rashed writes on 'The Structure of the Eye and Its Cosmological Function in Empedocles. Reconstruction of Fragment 84 D.-K.', while J.-C. Picot asks concerning Empedocles, Fragment 115.3: 'Can one of the Blessed Pollute his Limbs with Blood?'. Given the amount of research O'Brien has conducted on Parmenides it is not surprising that he looms large in this volume, making an appearance here in F. Fronterotta's 'Some Remarks on *Noein* in Parmenides', and reappearing in section two in N. Notomi's analysis of some Platonic dialogues. The final essay in this first section is 'Philolaus and the Central Fire' by C. Huffman. These essays are an appropriate beginning to this tribute in that they begin where O'Brien did, among the Presocratics, and, in addition, they involve a close reading of a number of key Presocratic texts in a manner similar to the type of exegesis so prevalent in his writings.

Section two of volume I is devoted to essays on Plato, which range across the early to late dialogues, from 'Self-Knowledge in Plato's *Alcibiades*' by C. Gill to K.M. Sayre's examination of 'Dialectic by Negation in Three Late Dialogues', namely *Sophist*, *Statesman* and *Parmenides*. Sandwiched between are essays on the *Phaedo*, *Meno*, *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. T. Ebert writes on 'Socrates on the Definition of Figure in the *Meno*', R.K. Sprague on Plato's *Phaedo* as Protreptic', J.G.C. Strachan on 'An Absurd Question: Plato *Symposium* 199D', J.-F. Pradeau 'Tumescence and Spiritual Seed in the *Phaedrus*' and N. Notomi 'Plato against Parmenides:

*Sophist* 236D-242B'. Gill focuses on the specific topic of self-knowledge in *Alcibiades I* through a discussion of the meaning of the phrase  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{o}\tau\omicron\ \tau\omicron\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{o}$  found there, and he assesses the significance of the comparison between self-knowledge and vision which is found at 132c-133c. Notomi examines the importance of the figure of Parmenides across the dialogues *Symposium*, *Republic*, *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, but principally *Sophist*. In attempting to evaluate how much Plato owed to Parmenides Notomi disagrees with O'Brien's view that Plato supports Parmenides' statement about *what is not*, claiming that 'it is misleading to describe Plato's project... as that of distinguishing between two 'kinds' or 'senses' of *what is not*' (p. 170), which he claims O'Brien does in 'Parmenides and Plato on what is not' (Brill, 2000). That argument may not end here.

Volume II is divided into a section on Aristotle, a section on the heirs of Plato, where the essays are divided generally between Plotinus and Augustine, and a final section which contains an epilogue by D. Evans: 'Innovation and Continuity in the History of Philosophy'. In the first section there are four essays: C. Natali's 'Aristotle's Conception of *Dunamis* and *Techne*', C. Viano's 'Aristotle and the Starting Point of Moral Development: The Notion of Natural Virtue', J. Cleary's '*Akrasia* and Moral Education in Aristotle', and 'Effective Primary Causes: The Notion of Contact and the Possibility of Acting without Being Affected in Aristotle's *De Generatione et Corruptione*' by T. Buchheim, which surely could have been given a snappier title. Personally Cleary's article on the pursuit of moral education in Aristotle and the problem of *akrasia* was the one which I enjoyed most. The clash of reason with the passions is a problem that speaks to us all in the practical business of moral development. Cleary outlines Aristotle's presentation of this conflict in the *EN* and concludes that 'the appropriate response is not to suppress the passions... but rather to persuade them to cooperate with practical reason in performing moral actions' (p.62) which leads to the goal of *eudaimonia*.

Section II of volume II concentrates on a philosopher on whom O'Brien has also written on extensively, namely the Neoplatonist, Plotinus. Here G. Gurtler examines 'Plotinus: Omnipresence and Transcendence of the One in VI 5 [23]', while C. Horn tackles the tricky subject of 'The Concept of the Will in Plotinus'. J.-M. Narbonne's contribution is at a tangent to this as he discusses 'Divine Freedom in Plotinus and Iamblichus (*Tractate* VI 8 (39) 7, 11-15 and *De Mysteriis* III, 17-20', while P. Thillet looks at a topic on which O'Brien too has written, that is the *Vita Plotini*, asking: 'Was the *Vita Plotini* known in Arab Philosophical Circles?'. The final two essays in section two are given over to Augustine: 'Friendship and Transgression: *Luminosus Limes Amicitiae* (Augustine, *Confessions*, 2.2.2) and the Themes of *Confessions* 2' by G. O'Daly and 'Augustine and the Philosophical Foundations of Sincerity', by S. Stem-Gillet, one of the editors of these two volumes. The Plotinus section is dominated by

the problem of the freedom of the will in Plotinus, which he addresses in *Ennead* VI 8. This is a topic that is taken up by both Horn and Narbonne. Horn demonstrates, among other things, that Plotinus remains firmly within his own philosophical tradition in seeing the One as first and absolute cause, while Narbonne goes on to discuss the topic in Iamblichus, concluding that in *De Mysteriis* III, 17-20 we find a rejection of Plotinus' view that the One is self-generated. Two essays, found at the beginning of this section, stand outside the Plotinus/Augustine core, one by the other editor of these volumes, K. Corrigan who writes on 'The Organization of the Soul: Some Overlooked Aspects of Interpretation from Plato to Late Antiquity', and the other by F.M. Schroeder: 'The Final Metamorphosis: Narrative Voice in the Prologue of Apuleius' *Golden Ass*'. All said; this is a challenging collection of essays, contained in two handsomely produced volumes which do justice to the honorand, and recognise the enormous contribution that Denis O'Brien has made to the field of Greek philosophy.

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