

BOOK REVIEW

Syntactical Mechanics: A New Approach to English, Latin, and Greek. By BRUCE A. MCMENOMY. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014. Pp. xvi + 210. Paper, \$24.95. ISBN 978-0-8061-4494-8.

This book aims to be a “sketch of ... how Greek and Latin work, with reference to English” (196) and by and large it succeeds. The underlying philosophy here is that language is used to express meaning and that while the syntactic pathway to two constructions may be different, “their semantic burden is very similar” (61). The way ideas are cloaked in language is generally something that one learns after years of study and in the past I have usually sought enlightenment on the many ways to skin a cat (or express purpose) in composition textbooks. This book makes much of that information available in a reader-friendly format that is suitable for students, while many of the ways through which McMenemy approaches the material is also of use to teachers. The book provides a pragmatic way to think about what language does and might be something of an antidote for students who have less and less exposure to English grammar at the elementary and high school level.

The organization of the book is unusual in that the author starts with a chapter surveying the parts of speech, and next moves into a discussion of sentences and clauses. Subsequent chapters break down the various types of clauses into adverbial, adjectival, or noun clauses. As McMenemy states, “...every subordinate clause that appears in a complex sentence fulfills the function of some simpler part of speech in the clause on which it depends” (29). Again, where the book excels is in the explication of function (rather than morphology upon which first year languages perform dwell). This is followed by a brief digression on the relationship of Greek and Latin to Indo-European that allows McMenemy, in the remainder of the book, to use some historical linguistics to explain both the similarities in verb systems and the anomalies in case use between Greek and Latin—for instance, how each uses a different case to express the locative. Examples are proffered throughout from Latin, Greek and English.

The syntaxes we hand to our students tend to be descriptive, surveying instances or usage. *Syntactical Mechanics* is less cut and dried than either textbook

or traditional grammar, but gives, in my view, a truer understanding of how Latin and Greek actually work. In addition, the author provides brief discussions throughout of some of the philosophical issues with the way that language expresses ideas—such as implied causality, or the existential use of the verb “to be”—that broaden the intellectual appeal.

This is a very readable book that could be used with a mixed seminar of Greek and Latin students, as all examples are translated. For the instructor, it will help frame new ways of introducing concepts and awakening understanding. As someone who enjoys syntax and has read and used almost all of the books in the annotated bibliography provided by McMenemy, I still found new insights. For students finding their footing in the ancient languages, this book presents illuminating parallels and contrasts to English syntax. It can be used in the classroom as the prose is clear enough for relatively novice students to understand and even present to their classmates. And for those of us immersed in the ancient languages, it provides of wealth of comparanda and clear explanations that run the gamut from clauses to aspect. In short, *Syntactical Mechanics* fills a niche as a handy reference for both teachers and students of Ancient Greek and Latin.

AISLINN MELCHIOR

University of Puget Sound, amelchior@pugetsound.edu