

## BOOK REVIEW

*Roman Reflections: Studies in Latin Philosophy*. Eds. GARETH D. WILLIAMS and KATHARINA VOLK. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. v+306. Hardcover, \$74.00. ISBN 978-0-19-999976-7.

While much of the philosophical writing from antiquity—particularly covering the Hellenistic period—exists only in Latin or at least comes from Imperial sources, unique contributions by the *Romans* to philosophy have often been overlooked or dismissed. Instead, they have traditionally been viewed as simple translators or even *mis*interpreters of the Greeks, presenting others' theories and concepts with little or nothing original of their own (although more recently progress has been made to correct this habit).<sup>1</sup> This terrific collection of essays contributes to the discussion by scrutinizing philosophical arguments, historical exempla, and applications of the Latin language to philosophy that are uniquely Roman.

*Roman Reflections: Studies in Latin Philosophy* takes as its starting point the question, "Is there a Latin philosophy" or rather a *Roman* philosophy, as several of the sources wrote in Greek albeit from a Roman perspective (in particular, Epictetus; Marcus Aurelius is bypassed). The thirteen essays with an introduction by editors, Gareth Williams and Katharina Volk, reveal how Romans conveyed new insights and drew upon their own history and language to appeal to their audience. Their writings are thus not mere translations or imitations, but rather important philosophical contributions as "[t]hey mold, control, and react to and against those models, experimenting with their inherited systems and reformatting them as part of an assured assimilation of imported modes of thought" (2).

The volume is the result of what must have been a great conference on "Latin Philosophy" held at Columbia University in 2012. The resulting book builds on this spirit of scholarly back-and-forth and many of the chapters incorporate cross-references to one another. It also includes a combined bibliography, making it easy to use and consult. Chapters are organized chronologically in four

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Griffin, Miriam. 1976. *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics*. Oxford. and Powell, J.G.F., ed. 1995. *Cicero the Philosopher*. Oxford., among others.

sections (Orientation, The Late Republic, Seneca, and Beyond Seneca) and cover a wide range of ancient intellectual history from before Cicero through Saint Augustine. I will refrain from summarizing each chapter (as the editors' introduction fills this role nicely), however the main authors under discussion include: Cicero (in the contributions by Hine, Volk, Zetzel, Reinhardt, and Reydams-Schils), Varro (by Zetzel), Lucretius (by Rheinhardt and Williams), Seneca (by Riggsby, Roller, Baraz, Williams, and Graver), Epictetus (by Mann), Aulus Gellius (by Hine), Apuleius (by Fletcher and Hine), and Augustine (by Vogt).

Without reviewing all chapters, I will try to give an impression of the kinds of topics presented. Hine's essay, "Philosophy and *Philosophi*", provides the perfect inroad to the book as it examines the way writers from Cicero to Apuleius at first avoided self-applying or labeling contemporaries as a *philosophus*, revealing how the term shifted and finally was (re)claimed by Apuleius in the second-century CE. Over the course of the collection, we similarly see how other Roman writers adapted Greek terms, concepts, and philosophical arguments to suit their own needs and how they responded to philosophical questions in the late Republic and under the Empire. For instance, Volk's contribution (33-49) analyzes how Ovid, Cicero, and the Greek Plutarch represented Pythagoras as not merely a Greek philosopher, but rather an Italian—thereby making Pythagoreanism and philosophy part of Rome's cultural inheritance.

Authors provide translations of Latin (and Greek) texts under discussion, making the work accessible to both experts and novices alike (although full translations would help on pages 112-13, 132 note 5, and 205). Some of the arguments are perhaps a bit technical for readers with limited Latin (e.g. Rheinhardt's wonderful, but highly nuanced analysis of active and passive forms of verbs of seeing in Lucretius and Cicero (63-90)) or without as much philosophical training (e.g. Riggsby's discussion of anger and its metaphorical understanding in Seneca (111-28)), but are nonetheless valuable. Chapters also could be excerpted when studying individual authors (e.g. Rheinhardt's essay would be great for classes on Lucretius; Riggsby's for Seneca's *De Ira*; Roller's and Graver's for *Epistulae Morales*; Baraz on *De Constantia sapientia*, etc.). I would also make Mann's entry, "You're Playing You Now": Helvidius Priscus as a Stoic Hero", required reading for any course on Epictetus or Stoicism, since it thoughtfully analyzes Epictetus' arguments in *Diss.* 1.2 within their ancient context and concludes with thoughtful modern criticism. While Vogt's essay on Augustine and Skepticism may lie outside of many classicists' expertise, it is accessible and well worth reading, and would be valuable to students of modern philosophy and Christianity.

Building on the foundation of the two volumes of *Philosophia Togata* (Oxford, 1987 and 1997) edited by Miriam Griffin and Jonathan Barnes, which the editors acknowledge as their principal influence (2–3), *Roman Reflections* furthers the work of recognizing and assessing distinctly Roman contributions to philosophy. The essays address issues of philosophy, history, rhetoric, and literature so it should appeal to scholars from diverse fields. Furthermore, the spirit of scholarly dialogue between chapters shows the work to be more than a collection of journal articles, but rather a genuine attempt to work with camaraderie through a complex problem by examining a variety of authors and texts from a range of times and philosophical schools—including Epicureanism, Stoicism, Skepticism, Pythagoreanism, and Platonism. As the contributors demonstrate, the Romans did not simply deck out Greek philosophy in the Roman toga, as the title of Griffin’s and Barnes’ volume might imply, but rather *reflected* seriously upon Greek thought, and then responded to, adapted, criticized, reframed, and even altered it to suit their own interests and to appeal to a new contemporary context.

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