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Simplicius. On Epictetus' Handbook 1–26. Translated by Charles Brittain and Tad Brennan. Ithaca: New York, 2002. Pp. viii + 184. \$65.50. ISBN 0801439043.

Simplicius. On Epictetus' Handbook 27–53. Translated by Tad Brennan and Charles Brittain. Ithaca: New York, 2002. Pp. viii + 192. \$65.50. ISBN 0801439051.

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One does not read Simplicius' commentary on Epictetus' *Encheiridion* to learn about late Stoicism in general or Epictetus' vibrant brand of it in particular. Rather, one reads it to see the influence of the *Handbook* on an eclectic author who draws freely from Aristotle, other Platonists, and at times clumsily from the Stoics, to present Platonist views on metaphysics, ethics, the problem of evil, free will, and moral psychology. The elements from the various non-Platonist thinkers that Simplicius appropriates were to be influential on subsequent Christian theologians who were fond of the *Handbook*. But why does Brittain and Brennan's translation belong in the Ancient Commentators on Aristotle series edited by Richard Sorabji and published by Cornell University Press? In the preface we read: 'Simplicius was an ancient commentator on Aristotle, and this work tells us a great deal about him, the other ancient commentators on Aristotle, and the Platonist milieu in which they worked; and, though nominally devoted to a Stoic text, it is perhaps the most concise encapsulation of the Platonist vision of the world that survives' (vii). Yet Simplicius is both less challenging and less interesting to read than Plotinus.

Each volume generously includes a translation of each chapter of the *Handbook* before each set of Simplicius' corresponding comments, a page of textual

emendations, notes, a concordance of editions and overview of topics, an English-transliterated Greek glossary, a transliterated Greek-English index, and a subject index. The decision to duplicate the preface and the thirty-two page introduction in the second volume is odd. It would have been more convenient to have the entire commentary, a single introduction, and all the supplementary material in a single, shorter, less expensive volume.

The introduction opens by quoting from a letter from Nietzsche to Overbeck that illustrates the tight link between Christian theology and the pagan milieu of Simplicius' Platonizing exposition of Stoic ethics in *The Commentary*. 'The betrayal of all reality through morality is here present in its fullest splendor—pitiful psychology, the philosopher reduced to a country parson' (1). The second section of the introduction discusses Simplicius' biography and the historical background. Several of Simplicius' comments are interpreted as indications of his political dissent from the Roman, Christian, anti-pagan climate of his time. Brittain and Brennan evaluate and ultimately reject Michel Tardieu's intriguing argument that all of Simplicius' commentaries were written in the city of Harran on the Syrian border with Persia after 532 CE (3). No position is taken on the precise provenance and date of the commentary, nor on whether Simplicius is the author of the commentary on Aristotle's *De anima* that bears his name.

Why did Simplicius choose the *Handbook* as a tool for teaching Platonism? Brittain and Brennan explain in section three of the introduction that for Hierocles, Proclus, Damascius, and Olympiodorus the *Handbook* functioned as a simple and memorable source for first-order ethical rules, and they adopted it as the best course-book for their Platonist curriculum in ethics. Not even Epictetus' view that the soul is mortal discouraged Simplicius' choice. The translators propose three possible reasons for this: either because Simplicius just did not fully understand the incompatibility between his own views and Epictetus' ethics, or because Plotinus himself incorporated Stoic doctrines into Platonist ethics, or 'because Simplicius was an inveterate syncretiser' (5). However, they favor a fourth reason, that Simplicius thought the *Handbook* was the most powerful text for his Platonist purpose.

To defend this explanation, Brittain and Brennan study the structure and method of Simplicius' commentary, which has a brief introduction, 71 lemmata, and a final prayer. Simplicius divides the *Handbook* into four sections. The first, chapters 1–21, addresses what is up to us, what is not, and how to deal with external things. The second section, chapters 22–28, offers advice for intermediate students. Simplicius skips chapter 29. The third section, chapters 30–47, Simplicius thinks, gives technical advice for discovering 'appropriate actions' (*kathêkonta*) and discusses precepts on justice. The fourth, chapters 48–53, treats the practice of the precepts. Above all, Simplicius admires the structure, concision, emotional power, and practical applicability of the *Handbook*.

Simplicius' style lacks the panache and urgency of Epictetus' *Discourses* and the vigor of the *Handbook*. The translators perhaps understate in describing Simplicius' scholastic methodology as 'frequently rather dry' when he does not

digress (10). Simplicius is aware of his digressions into Platonist metaphysics—a world far removed from Epictetus’ concerns: ‘For I know that some of what I have said will seem unnecessary to some people, given that the primary aim of this work is to clarify Epictetus’ *Handbook*’ (vol. 2, 75). But readers hungry for post-Plotinian Platonist arguments will relish Simplicius’ extended discussions of the absolute transcendence of God, the hierarchy of being, all badness arising from the badness of material bodies, and the Platonist doctrine of ‘divine grace’ which ‘is as obscure to human reason as its Christian counterpart’ (12).

Simplicius insists that the human body is a mere instrument of the human being, so the good of each is disjoint. The more divine soul directs its attention up toward the Good, not down towards bodies. Human souls forget what their good is, and mistake the good of the bodies for their own good (14). Simplicius follows Aristotle rather than the Stoics in the view that there are degrees of responsibility, since actions that are fully free are those produced by pure reason, and the more an action is polluted by sensual inclination, the less it is up to us.

For his theodicy, Simplicius argues that evil is an illusion and bad things do not really exist. Human vice is not God’s fault, but the fault of people who choose to turn downwards. Brittain and Brennan observe that ‘Simplicius’ theodicy is thus remarkably close to more recent elaborations of the free-will defence’ (16). They excuse Simplicius’ conflation of an Aristotelian theory of deliberated choice and a Stoic theory of causal responsibility turning on assent as either incoherences inherited from Plotinus or the result of the twin temptations of the pre- and post-incarnate falls in Plato’s *Phaedrus* and *Laws* x.

Brittain and Brennan think it likely that Simplicius had access to the non-extant parts of the *Discourses* (19), yet they are surprised by his lack of knowledge of Stoic logic, epistemology, and moral psychology. Why read Simplicius to understand Epictetus and Stoicism, then? They suggest that perhaps Simplicius’ portrayal of the Stoics as theistic naturalists is a ‘salutary corrective’ to more secular presentations like Cicero’s *De finibus* (24). But given how poorly Simplicius understands central ideas, including theological ones, of Epictetus and the earlier Stoics, their assertion that Simplicius’ ‘portrayal of Stoic ethics remains of considerable historical interest’ (24) seems tepid. Simplicius’ comments are often heavy on repetition and light on penetrating explication. However, the commentary on the single, short sentence of *Handbook* 27 is thirteen pages of Platonist explanation of the nature and cause of ‘the bad in the cosmos’. In this respect, lemma xxxv marks a noticeable shift from the preceding lemmata, and thus a reasonable place to end the first volume and begin the second.

Johannes Schweighäuser and Ilsetraut Hadot are credited for how much their earlier translations shaped this new one. Brittain and Brennan offer a reasonable justification for deciding that since *prohairesis* is both important and problematic in Epictetus and Aristotle, it can be left untranslated (22-24). They make their translation splashy where they can, rendering *paidagogos* ‘au pair’ (vol. 2, 106 and 143n214) and *surphetoi anthrōpoi* ‘trashy people’ (vol. 2, 58), for example. Anglophones will welcome this work, which prints in the margins the page and

line numbers of Dübner's 1840 edition and prints in bold-face in the body of the text the pagination in Hadot's 1996 edition. For *Handbook* 27, οὕτως οὐδὲ κάκου φύσις ἐν κοσμῷ γίνεται, I prefer Robin Hard (1995) 'so what is bad by nature does not occur in the universe' to Brittain and Brennan's 'in the same way, there is no nature of the bad in the cosmos' (vol. 2, 37). Yet overall, with one qualification, the translators succeed in their stated aim of providing 'a work that reads like contemporary philosophical English and reproduces the philosophical content of the *Commentary* with as little distraction as possible' (25).

Volume 1 contains a few awkward sentences. 'For a student like this often disdains external things, to the extent that they regard himself, but he desires to help his friends because he thinks that is good and fine' (116). "“But the country,” he says, “will be without help so far as depends on me”, if I am persuaded by you and disdain external things as to me' (117). Other errors include 'given' for 'give' (119); 'the possibility of making conjectures of about people' (127n45). 'Be' has dropped out: 'we should *refer* to externals as things that are not our own, so that we can *disposed* to them' (94). The wrong verb: 'On the basis of possibility, because it is impossible for someone who doesn't dance attendance on the inviter to get the same things from him as those who do attend him get' (122). More errors: 'eurrhoia' (26), 'eurhoia' (148); 'Posedonian' (33n94); 'a image' (49); 'govenor' (147); 'bought' for 'brought' (75); omission of an open bracket (60, 120); mispunctuated comma (123).

Volume 2 has similar errata. An omission of a closed bracket (51), an inverted comma (78), and 'a different instances of' (66) are minor. But 'to' drops out too often: 'handing our body over the first comer' (51); 'he isn't going harm you' (57); 'we proceeded put it into practice' (125). 'For the first and properly self-subsistent must necessarily be something which subsists as a whole and is subsisted as whole' (70) is awkward. Other errors: 'mna' for 'mina' (77); 'how it does it make sense for God' (81); 'when we are in a bad way' (82); 'its' instead of 'it's' (106); 'appplication' (130n16); instead of 'through', 'though' (119); a missing apostrophe: 'Simplicius *Commentary*' (135n70). The printing errors in punctuation, spelling, and syntax are accompanied by a binding error. In my copy of volume 2 pages 121 through 127 are duplicated before the endnotes.

The notes cite apposite texts in Plato, Aristotle, Hierocles, Porphyry, Plotinus, Proclus, Damascius, the Stoics, and other authors. Manuscript discrepancies are flagged and typically reasonable emendations are offered. A footnote reference to *metriopatheia* in Sextus Empiricus could have been added to the text describing how Spartan youths probably felt pain 'less than untrained and soft people would' (vol. 1, 71). No note explains Simplicius' reference to 'the Mother of Life...and the Demiurge, and the Aeons up there' (vol. 2, 49). A note comments on Epictetus' use of *khairain* in chapter 34 (vol. 2, 142n200), yet the verb is absent from the Greek-English index. Non-specialists who might like a short note explaining what 'cataleptic impressions' (vol. 2, 113–114) are find none. For Simplicius' report that 'a friend is another self according to the ancient saying' (vol. 2, 58), the reader is referred to Porphyry *Vita Pythag.* §33; Cicero *De amic.*

21.80 (136n84), but oddly not to Aristotle *EN* ix 4.1166a32. ‘Cambridge changes’ are mentioned and an example is given, but what they are is not explained (vol. 2, 138n123). These omissions make this work difficult to use by scholars who are not specialists in both Stoicism and Platonism, but there is much of value here to those who are.

Some of the notes are good. Brittain and Brennan alertly articulate Simplicius’ mistaken construal of Epictetus’ views on the proper attitudes towards one’s own vice and the vice of others (vol. 1, 134n194). A good explication (vol. 2, 134n68) of Simplicius’ definitions of justice in the broad and the narrow senses (vol. 2, 53) is provided. A table of associative/disassociative and natural/prohairesic relations among similars/dissimilars (vol. 2, 135n76) is useful. The translators rightly criticize Oldfather 1946 for describing the woman Epictetus took on late in his life as a nurse for a child he adopted as Epictetus’ ‘wife’ (vol. 2, 141n186). I found the most enjoyable portion of the commentary to be on *Handbook* chapter 33. Lemmata xl through li provide an amusing amplification of Epictetus’ strictures on conversational frequency and topics, laughter, oaths, attending feasts, diet, drink, dress, housing, servants, sex, handling slander, conduct at the theater, public readings, and meeting people. Moreover, who would deny that ‘Appropriate actions towards teachers largely concern the requirement to follow their orders unhesitatingly, as if god were giving commands’ (vol. 2, 57)? Simplicius’ story about the Akrothoítai ‘who were swallowed up by the earth all of a sudden after they had become atheists’ (vol. 2, 68) is charming.

It is a pity that the product of so much hard work and careful attention bears so many printing errors and grammatical gaffes. The acknowledgment printed in both volumes indicates that they were printed in Great Britain (apparently by Duckworth) and that the editor thanks Han Baltussen for preparing the volumes for press. Did the translators have the opportunity to check Baltussen’s galley proofs? A second edition would have much to correct. This two volume set is not a tool for teaching Epictetus’ *Handbook* to undergraduates, but it is a useful resource for scholars of Platonism who prefer English to French.

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