

AN INTRODUCTION TO ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY. By A. H. Armstrong.  
(Methuen; 15s.)

This is a most refreshing book. The approach to classical philosophy is made from the point of view of its influence upon Christian thought notably of the middle ages. For this reason a full half of the book is devoted to that Hellenistic thought which was the medium through which the ancient philosophy was transmitted, and in which it suffered such notable changes. Few men living are as well qualified as Mr Armstrong to undertake this task, for neo-Platonism is his own chosen field.

It must not be supposed, however, that the account of the classical Greek thinkers is twisted to fit a scholastic mould. Mr Armstrong's procedure is not, after all, 'unhistorical'. Ancient philosophy *did* stand behind medieval thought, whatever the changes it suffered in transit; there was—and perhaps still is—such a thing as the *philosophia perennis*. All that this Introduction does is to point to the links and the changes involved in that continuous process; and the explanation of the differences between pagan and Christian thinkers is particularly well done, especially in the chapters on Plotinus and in the final very brief chapter on Augustine. The scholastic reader too will find it particularly useful to have what is Platonic discriminated by an expert from what is neo-Platonic.

Of the pre-Socratics the Pythagoreans are given greater prominence than is usual, and throughout the book their influence or that of neo-Pythagoreans is usually stressed. The account of Plato is little short of masterly in the way it conveys a summary of that most unsystematic and difficult-to-summarise thinker at the same time as making it quite clear that the simplifications involved are clearly tentative; the unity of the Platonic view and its development are depicted without forcing it into some Germanic straight-waistcoat.

With Aristotle (despite too evident attempts at fairness) Mr Armstrong is less at home; his sympathy in the old quarrel is with Plato. As a result, the treatment seems to lack unity; perhaps it would have been better if Aristotle's biological inspiration could have been brought more to the front. One interesting and unusual feature in the account of his thought is the page on his concept of 'pneuma', which was to be so richly exploited in Stoic thought, and subsequently to appear in the medieval theories of material light.

The historian of philosophy is faced with an almost impossible task in separating and making alive and interesting the complications and interactions of Middle and New Academy, Middle Stoa, Middle Platonism, Late Stoa and the rest. Mr Armstrong does not altogether succeed in keeping this part of his book at the same high level of interest as the rest. It might perhaps have been made more easily readable if some kind of date chart depicting contemporaneous schools and their mutual influences had been given for this period.

It would be impertinent to recommend the chapters on Plotinus;

enough has been said in calling attention to their admirable comparison between pagan philosophy at its highest theological moment and Christian thought.

In such a book it is always possible to query details; it seems, for instance, misleading to suggest that the analogy of Being is characteristically Christian and not Aristotelian, as a phrase on page 90 does. No doubt the application of that analogy to God and creatures was Christian, but the analogy of being itself was certainly plain Aristotelian doctrine of a piece with his categorical system.

This introduction does what all introductions should do—stimulates and encourages an approach to the philosophers themselves. Might it be suggested that practical assistance to this end would be afforded if references to the main loci were inserted, in future editions, down the margin? This would preserve the cursive character of the book but at the same time show the beginner where to start his own researches: there are all too few references in the book as it stands.

The bibliography at the end is useful. Miss Freeman's recently published *Companion to the Pre-Socratics* should now be added; and Professor Taylor's little book on Aristotle should be dated in its latest edition, 1944, for in that he made changes and additions that were clearly the result of his study of scholastic philosophy.

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FOUR ESSAYS. By C. Lambek. (Copenhagen, Einar Munksgaard; Oxford University Press; 7s. 6d.)

This work of a Danish thinker has been rendered into English by a Danish translator. There are certain errors, like 'in the first line' for 'in the first place' and 'a spiritual Frenchman' for 'a witty Frenchman', but the version, although not quite English, is usually intelligible. Perhaps it would have been more satisfactory to read the book in Danish if only one could read Danish, but one is not in doubt about Mr Lambek's general meaning.

The four essays are on 'Time and Reality', 'Objectivity', 'Logical Coherence' and 'Antagonisms in the Individual'. They represent a type of philosophy with which the world has become increasingly familiar since Kant, in which the two poles of thought are the crude material of sensation and the concepts employed in the sciences. The main discussion is not so much about what we know as how we come to think as we do; attention is directed not so much to the awareness of a real world as to the construction of a world of thought. Mr Lambek finds the origin of knowledge in the bringing into relation of the initially atomic facts of temporal experience. Different types of relation, static and dynamic, result in the things and laws of which we are accustomed to speak both in ordinary life and in the sciences. But there is no particular reason, other than instinct, choice, and habit, why we should combine our experiences in one way rather than in another.