

*[Review of A History of Ancient Philosophy by Ignatius Brady, Sangre de Cristo Seminary Library. Unpublished]*

We thus have a textbook before us and it will be evaluated as such.

First of all, the book has the advantage of being clearly written and easily understood. The author's fear of student complaints that “this is not an easy book” (p. vii) appear groundless. So simply are the main themes expressed that the average student need not grope for their meaning.

Unfortunately this undoubted advantage has a corresponding disadvantage. In order to achieve simplicity the technical arguments underlying the main themes have largely been omitted. For example, is it enough to say that relativism and skepticism are characteristics of Protagoras without giving the supporting argument recorded in the Theaetetus?

Since an instructor is often tempted to spend too much of the semester on the Presocratics, one cannot quarrel with the author's brevity here. Yet, if the externalities and historical accidents, biographical and cultural circumstances, had been sacrificed to a discussion of the origin of qualities, this early section could have had more philosophy without more length.

Some external material is justified. While the four and five line summaries of twenty seven Platonic dialogues contribute little, the fuller section on the writings of Aristotle is well done and merits the space.

That the chapter on Aristotle is by far the best in the book is not surprising. Here the argumentation is more detailed and the student learns something of what philosophy really is. The section on Philo also is relatively adequate — remembering that Philo

gives less opportunity for tracing detailed arguments. Plotinus, unfortunately condensed into seven pages, is none the less a satisfactory exposition.

The book contains some other noteworthy features of a different sort. On nearly every page there are a half dozen footnotes. These references to sources and contemporary studies will lead the student, if he has enough initiative, to the reasoning behind the great themes of relativity, ideas, and Forms. The author, with obviously painstaking care, has also prepared eleven pages of bibliography and three lengthy indexes.

Finally, what is unusual in a book of this title, the Ionian chapter is preceded by seventeen pages on the ancient Mideast and Ancient Far East. The book ends with three chapters on Arabian philosophy, eastern and western, and two chapters on medieval Jewish philosophy to Maimonides. The former may not be very philosophical nor the latter very ancient, but they both make good reading.

In choosing a textbook the instructor must compare it with the status of his students and with his own predilections. Some will not wish to use this one; others will find it just right.