

Stephen Everson (ed.). Language. Companions to Ancient Thought, vol. 3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. vii + 280 pp. Cloth, \$64.95; paper, \$19.95 — If ever a case is to be made that ancient philosophy is just an early species of analytic philosophy, this is the volume to do it. Everson has assembled eleven essays, mostly by Oxford scholars, that range widely over ancient theories of language from Parmenides to Augustine. Some of the essays will prove more useful to advanced scholars, others to students and non-specialists. The quality of the essays, in every case, is extremely high.

The individual contributions are unified by a commitment to understanding ancient theories of language in the light of analytic philosophy. The pages of this volume are full of contemporary references. Before leaving the first page of Everson's Introduction the reader will encounter Davidson and Dummett; these references reach their zenith when David Charles, in his essay on Aristotle's theory of names and natural kinds, introduces "the new Oxford Fregeans" (p.64). Indeed, it isn't an exaggeration to say that readers of this volume will learn more about Frege than about most ancient philosophers.

Perhaps this is not entirely a bad thing. Everson's essay on Epicurus, for instance, begins with five whole pages on Frege and Dummett, which will no doubt strike many readers as excessive. But by the end of this essay it becomes clear that we cannot interpret Epicurean accounts of language without having a clear

grasp of the relationship between theories of language and theories of understanding. And there is no better way to get at these issues than by way of Frege and Dummett. Still, I think even committed analytic philosophers will often have the sense that too much of this century is being read back into ancient thought — as, for instance, when David Glidden claims that "something similar" to the Kripke-Wittgenstein rule-following skepticism "was already discerned by Sextus" (p.147). (Glidden goes even farther, in fact, and speculates that Wittgenstein was aware of this similarity; that seems particularly implausible since it is generally thought that this skepticism is Kripke's own invention, not a view Wittgenstein himself held.) It often seems as if the project is to demonstrate how interesting ancient philosophy is by showing how like contemporary philosophy it is — a curious and seemingly unnecessary strategy, given the high prestige ancient philosophy currently enjoys in Anglo-American philosophy.

Hand in hand with this tendency toward precursorism goes a tendency toward placing questions about language and meaning at the heart of ancient debates. Sometimes this seems overstated. Charles, for instance, takes Aristotle to have advanced a metaphysics in order to justify a semantic theory: "his metaphysical account is one part of his attempt to vindicate his assumption that basic names signify kinds in nature" (p.69). It is this semantic theory which, in turn, renders global skepticism

incoherent (p.70). But not all the contributions take such a linguistic turn. Most notable in this respect is Michael Frede's essay on Stoic lekta (entities roughly akin to propositions). Frede makes the argument (which in the context of this volume amounts to apostasy) that the notion of a lekton was originally metaphysical, and gets applied to language and meaning only secondarily (pp.113 ff.)

Like previous volumes in this series, the essays give weight to later ancient thought, particularly Hellenistic philosophy. The volume is consequently rather thin in its coverage of earlier thinkers: there are no essays devoted to Socrates or the pre-Socratics, and only one on Aristotle. There are two essays on Plato: one by David Bostock on the connection between the Forms and language, and one by Bernard Williams on the Cratylus. But the latter, like Christopher Kirwan's article on Augustine, has been published elsewhere (facts that the volume neglects to note). Still, these shortcomings in coverage are compensated for by strengths elsewhere: in addition to the essays already mentioned, there are chapters by David Blank on Hellenistic grammarians, R.J. Hankinson on Galen, and Lesley Brown on the verb 'to be' in Greek philosophy. There is also an extensive annotated bibliography. In all, there is much to be learned from the volume. — Robert Pasnau, Catholic University of America.