Late Antique Epistemology. Other Ways to Truth. Edited by Panayiota Vassilopoulou and Stephen R.L. Clark, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2009, xii, 341pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-230-52742-3.

In her *Introduction* to this collection of essays, deriving from the 2004 conference of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies held in Liverpool, Panayiota Vassilopoulou tells us what the “other ways to truth” include: “oracular testimony, theurgic rituals, erotic passion, poetic inspiration, metaphors, and myths” (7)—in “Late Antiquity” these “were reckoned as reliable as reasoned argument, or better still”. Stephen Clark, in his *Conclusion* describes the concept of philosophy at work here, “like almost all philosophy until recently”—as “making a difference”, and “Reason, as we ordinarily conceive it, was not quite enough” to convince us that we should as philosophers “live differently”. “Our ordinary lives are structured by false values and false opinions”, but “[m]aking those insights *real* to ourselves takes more than ‘rational argument’”. (289). Between *Introduction* and *Conclusion* we find fifteen papers in four Parts—Rituals, Religion and Reality; Crossing Boundaries; Art and Poetry; Later Influences. Parts I and III take us deep into the concerns, and texts, of the time—Part I features Aude Busine on Porphyry and traditional religious practices, John Dillon on St John in Aemilius’ Seminar, Emilie F. Kutash on Proclus’ concept of time, Zeke Mazur on “Erotic Mysticism” in Plotinus, Part III Malcolm Heath on philosophers teaching rhetoric in late antiquity, Oiva Kuisma on “Proclus’ notion of poetry”, Christina-Panagiota Manolea on “The Homeric Tradition in Ammonius and Asclepius”. Parts II and IV range widely in place in time—Part III offers Taneli Kukkonen on Ibn ʿUṭayl and the Wisdom of the East, Joachim Lacrosse on Plotinus’ and Porphyry’s relations with India, Algis Uzdavyns on the animation of statues and Neoplatonism, and Part IV Robert Berchmann on Hegel and Plotinus, Daniele Bertini on Plotinus, Leibniz and Berkeley on determinism, Jay Bergman on “Proclus Americanus”, Kevin Corrigan on what ecology may come to owe to Plotinus and Neoplatonism, and finally Carol Poster on “Plato and Socrates in Eighteenth-Century England”. A “Glossary” (with entries on “Socrates”, as well as “Sufism”, “Levinas” and “Śakti”) prepared by Crystal Addey will guide the foreigner in these strange regions. Almost everyone will be a tourist in some of the places visited here.

With a remit to go beyond “Reason”, one pressing question is of course just what *reason* is. One word that can be translated *reason* is, of course, *logos*: Dillon’s discussion of Aemilius’ reading of the beginning of the Fourth Gospel suggests that Aemilius’ view that there are forms of “evils and opposites” may have derived from “meditation” on the start of St John’s Gospel (38). Logos, as Dillon suggests (33), conventionally enough, “a projection downwards into Soul... of the totality of forms resident in the intellect.” Seen in the context of the Demiurge’s address

to the Young Gods (Tim. 41A), this logos is, following Proclus, “demiurgic and divine”. Aemilius is then crediting St. John with having seen that the logos is not *prophorikos*, that is, it remains with God, even when acting as the efficient cause of Creation. A fascinating glimpse of Pagan familiarity with St. John, if tangential to epistemology.

If the point is that we need means other than mere argument to be persons whose lives are determined by “truth”, well, this is an insight that Aristotle and Plato were familiar with, as in pointed out in several places. “Realizing truth” (Introduction, p. 8), that is, I take it, being someone who knows the truth, depends of course on just the way one understands “truth”. Sometimes just this is the subject of debate: Al-Ghazâlî is quoted by Kukkonen to clarify the “knowledge that transforms the heart” (p. 95): “It became apparent to me that <the Sufis’> most distinctive characteristic is something that can be attained, not by study but rather by <way of> taste (dhawq), an <ecstatic> state (hâl), and an exchange of qualities <between> man and God>. What a difference there is between knowing the definitions and causes and conditions of health and satiety, and <actually> being healthy and sated.” This would appear to be referring to the distinction between knowing something and being an instance of it; thereby leaving epistemology behind. Ibn Ṭufayl himself (97) apparently differed from al-Ghazâlî, and was closer to Avicenna in that he thought “illumination is only apt to occur after diligent preparation of the *theoretical* sort.”

Prominent philosophical exponents of rhetoric uncovered by Heath include Longinus, and his most famous pupil Porphyry. Some philosophers could not afford to stop teaching rhetoric (Serapion), while for others it was just one of their many interests (Longinus). Emphasizing the distinctions between their own rhetoric and that of the competition would not only save face, but also answer Plato’s apparently critical stance to the subject (and might, I suppose, bring in business). But in fact others (David, Evagoras) appeal to Plato—rhetoric has the function of speaking the truth (Apol. 18A), and the right kind of rhetor is just, and knows what justice is (Gorg. 508C)—to make the discipline ethically and intellectually respectable. Nonetheless, it was not an ideal scientific rhetoric, but one intermediate between that and the “flattering” rhetoric of the *Gorgias* that was on offer. Here we are simply negotiating the rapids of Plato on rhetoric.

Corrigan argues that the Plotinus’ view of nature would be a help to ecological thought. But he does not explain how we can conceive of nature in the ways Plotinus does (“we are parts of a great living organism”, “Human beings are not the most important species”, 265), which he sees as being “light years ahead of some modern scientific paradigms”, e.g. what concept of species (I take it: *eidos*) does Plotinus have, how is one to understand “science” in Plotinus. Before these and

similar questions have been answered, looking for something “useful in an old, forgotten dusty text” (250) seems premature.

It would be helpful to explain more closely the way these novel modes of philosophizing link with perception and reason, and just how these traditional concepts were understood. For example, if it is legitimate to speak of “hyper-noetic experience”, as Mazur does with reference to “union with the One” (73), just what is the concept of experience at play here? Is not our obsession with “experience” a pale and invasive relict of Empiricism? What one is doing when one finds “the one” may not be thinking, but any inclination we have to assimilate it to sensual “experience” should be resisted. Still: A snapshot of work being done in the field, with much fascinating material; the volume is well presented, the indices of names and subjects useful.

R.A.H. King
University of Glasgow
Richard.King@glasgow.ac.uk