Sheppard, A.

The Poetics of Phantasia. Imagination in Ancient Aesthetics. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. Pp. xiv+124. HB. £65. ISBN: 978-1-472-50765-5.

It is unfortunate that this book's title, which implies a scope much broader than could be delivered in 104 pages of uncramped text, provides a gratuitously easy target to unconstructive criticism. Though it has its weaknesses, the value of what it actually offers is not compromised by the pragmatic selectivity of its coverage. Chapter 1 surveys visualisation, in relation to vividness and realism in rhetoric and the literary and visual arts more generally; the word *phantasia* was applied to this phenomenon from at least the first century AD. To many readers this will seem familiar territory. But Chapters 2 and 3 traverse much less familiar Neoplatonist terrain, where most of us will welcome the author's expert guidance. Chapter 2 starts from Neoplatonist ideas about how 'projections' of mathematical objects in *phantasia* can turn the soul back on itself, and towards intelligible reality. From there it proceeds to the indirect portrayal of the intelligible world by means of image, model and analogy in literature and visual art. This is important and illuminating material, of which I regret my previous ignorance. Chapter 3 asks whether the notion of imagination reaching out towards what imagination cannot comprehend is found in Neoplatonism, and argues that, though this appears as a minority position, most Neoplatonists appeal to inspiration rather than *phantasia* (p.74). Why should those be competing alternatives? Inspiration must be psychologically mediated somehow, and *phantasia* seems an obvious candidate. Sheppard's references show Olympiodorus opposing *phantasia* and inspiration, and Hermias relegating the enthusiasm of *phantasia* to a lower level. But she acknowledges that Proclus, though generally silent on the relation of inspiration to *phantasia*, does connect them in one passage. Do we, then, have a minority asserting what the majority denies, or a minority denying what the majority usually leaves implicit? I did not feel that I had been given either a sufficiently detailed textual exegesis or a sufficiently clear account of the philosophical context to understand how Sheppard had reached her conclusion, or what philosophical issues were at stake in the differences of Neoplatonist opinion.

For all its merits, therefore, this book can be frustrating. Though I shall illustrate why this is so from the introduction, similar problems occur with varying degrees of severity throughout. The introduction begins: "Imagination" is one of the standard translations of the Greek word *phantasia*. Although the word does appear in this sense in Plato, it was Aristotle's usage... that was of crucial importance for later thought' (p.1). Given the variety of senses in which 'imagination' has been used in English, saying that Plato sometimes

uses the word in 'this' sense is unhelpful. Perhaps that is of little consequence: Sheppard will focus on *other* senses in which Plato uses *phantasia*. Even so, using 'imagination' as if the word were transparent is symptomatic of a lack of conceptual clarity. When Sheppard goes on to say that 'a key issue in the interpretation of Aristotle's view of *phantasia* is the extent to which imagination involves the having of mental images' (p.1), the apparent implication that Aristotelian *phantasia* is imagination may be unintended: later she says that 'its scope is... rather different from that of the imagination' (p.7). But what makes an event in my mental life the having of a mental *image*, as distinct from simply having a thought? Are the two distinct? If so, how? Without some guidance, it is not clear what the key issue of 'the role of mental images in Aristotle's account' (p.7) amounts to. Sheppard addresses that issue without close engagement with Aristotle's text. She quotes the description of *phantasia* as a process (*kinēsis*) initiated by sense perception (*DA* 3.3, 429a1-2, p.7), but does not evaluate its relevance to mental images or imagination (which, since sense perception initiates many diverse processes, is *prima facie* minimal). The following lines (429a2-4) are reported as making 'a particularly strong connection between *phantasia* and vision' (p.9): in fact, Aristotle is explaining why a word with strong visual connotations has been applied to a phenomenon that is *not* limited to any one perceptual modality. As Sheppard recognises, Aristotle maintains that thought always involves *phantasmata*: but thinking about sounds or smells cannot involve *visual* images. When I multiply five by four, my thinking presumably needs *phantasmata* of five and four. That is not a problem for Aristotle, for whom number is an object of perception, along with movement, rest, magnitude and unity (*DA* 2.6, 418a7-20); perception of these things must give rise to *phantasmata*. But are those *phantasmata* images? Since *phainetai* can be used of abstract propositions, one might wonder whether Aristotelian *phantasmata* necessarily retain *any* of the sensory phenomenology associated with the perceptions which initiated the process from which they derive. Aristotle's *phantasma*, being a technical term defined by aetiology and function, is equipped to do work that the English word 'image' cannot do. Sheppard's conclusion that 'Aristotle sometimes refers to mental images, or *phantasmata*, although there remains room for dispute over just what his conception of a mental image is as well as how important he thinks such images are for *phantasia*' (p.9) is wholly uninformative. Hence my frustration.

I conclude with a philological point. In a note on the dating of the treatise *On Sublimity*, Sheppard suggests that 'the claim in 15.1 that the use of *phantasia* in the sense of "visualization" is a recent fashion fits a first century date very well'. The author's words are: ἡδη δ' ἐπὶ τούτων κεκράτηκε τοῦνομα. As combinations of ἡδη with πάλαι and cognates show (e.g. Pl. *Ap.* 18b1-2: ἐμοῦ

γὰρ πολλοὶ κατήγοροι γεγόνاسι πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ πάλαι πολλὰ ἤδη ἔτη...; Lys. 26.6: πάλαι ὁ χρόνος ἤδη παρελήλυθεν; [Hg.] *Inv.* 3.6, 138.6 Rabe: ἤδη δὲ ἡρκέσθησαν οἱ παλαιοί; Heliodorus 10.166: τοῦτο γὰρ ἤδη πάλαι τε πέπονθα), ἤδη does not mean 'recently'. The author, having mentioned the word's original, broad use, adds that an additional specialised use has *by now* become established: that would be just as true in the third century as in the first.

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