This book represents a welcome focusing of attention on a topic in which the philosophy, rhetorical theory, social practice, and literature of Greece and Rome all intersect. The study of ancient consolation is also timely given recent interest across the humanities especially in the history of emotions, and it is also something that given its category-confusing position in ancient culture is likely to benefit from a multi-authored approach. This volume, deriving in part from a 2007 colloquium at the University of London, brings together scholars with varying interests and priorities. A brief introduction by B. describes consolation as “a philosophically informed written crystallization of a social practice” (p. xiv), refreshingly signaling an approach not necessarily centered in the history of philosophy. The four “especially novel contributions” (p. xxii) that he sees in the book are its attention to consolation as social practice, to consolation’s limits and failures, to portrayals that are humorous, and to continuities with the ancient tradition in post-classical thought. (These emphases are borne out in the volume, except that a focus on social practice is never fully pursued here separate from literature.) A synoptic introductory chapter by David Scourfield (ch. 1) offers a comprehensive overview of the heterogeneous consolatory materials that survive from antiquity and late antiquity and confronts the problem of defining a “genre” of consolation and offers an alternative approach. The remaining chapters are arranged chronologically and offer a selective itinerary through some of the high points in the tradition, as well as a few less obvious moments. James H.K.O. Chong-Gossard (ch. 2) examines a consistent pattern in Greek tragedy in which consolatory advice is offered only to be rejected (with a few qualified exceptions). The remainder of the chapters are concerned with the Roman period and beyond, which somewhat reflects the fact that the lion’s share of the surviving evidence is indeed from the Roman era; Chong-Gossard’s chapter is a useful and representative consideration of consolation’s Greek literary prehistory, and includes interesting suggestions about the consolatory function of tragedy even (and especially) as it presents consolation’s failure. B.’s own chapter (ch. 3) offers a reconstruction of Cicero’s Consolatio ad se that emphasizes its place in a multi-stage process of managing grief and also offers some new suggestions about precisely what it was that was unique in Cicero’s work. In a survey of the writings of Seneca the Younger (ch. 4), Marcus Wilson demonstrates the pervasiveness of consolation.
throughout his works, including the tragedies; he argues provocatively that Seneca both marginalizes philosophy and shocks his audience, and explores some of the political ambitions pursued by a consoled who publishes his works. One of the longest and dryest surviving consolations is the Consolatio ad Apollonium ascribed to Plutarch; its main value has been seen in its preservation of testimonia and fragments from the first philosophical consolation, Peri penteuous by Crantor of Soli. In his chapter (ch. 5), George Boys-Stones revisits the work and gives a subtle analysis of its Platonist framework, and he argues persuasively that its goal is less about consoling an individual's grief than about inviting a fuller scrutiny of one's emotional life. David Konstan (ch. 6) considers Lucian's harsh critique of exaggerated grieving practices in the essay On Mourning and takes Lucian's seemingly cut-and-dry dismissal of grieving as an opportunity to speculate on what more significant ancient arguments in favor of grief (especially those made in Epicureanism) might have been harder for Lucian to dismiss. The two final chapters address separate strands of the post-classical continuation of consolatory discourse. Josef Lössl (ch. 7) revisits the oeuvre of Augustine: scholars have hitherto found only limited signs of traditional consolation there and so have excluded Augustine from the usual accounts of how consolation was appropriated and transformed in the Christian context. Lössl explores what it might mean to read a work such as Confessions as consolatory, and more generally, how relevant consolatory goals might be in an author whose adaptation of traditional forms is so creative and innovative. Peter Adamson (ch. 8) looks at the writings about grief in Arabic ethical philosophy of the ninth and tenth centuries, revealing both the close engagement with and critical perspectives on Platonic moral-psychological doctrine: in the Arabic authors, a more decisive rift is found between the wise person who does not grieve because he either does not value the things he has lost or has prepared himself for their loss, and the majority, whose grief is impervious to philosophical therapy or whose potential for rational control amid sorrow is ultimately limited by the human condition.

For a topic so wide-ranging, this is a relatively limited set of “case studies,” a dipping of toes in an ocean. Witness, for example, the absence of any detailed discussion of consolation in Roman poetry, despite its occurrence in such authors as Horace, Propertius, Ovid, Statius, and Juvenal, or the somewhat summary exclusion of Boethius’ category-confusing but important work in this context, Consolatio philosophiae. The book’s index also is overly selective and so not especially conducive to the exploration of specific themes from chapter to chapter in the multi-authored volume; for example, terms such as “emotions” or “passions” that are flagged in the introduction have sparse