Oral Traditions and Ethical Teaching among the Last Platonists

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This paper pushes us to think about late antique cultural life—and, in particular, late antique philosophical life—in a different way. In decades past, scholars considering late antique Greco-Latin philosophical interaction have done things like analyze the philosophical writings of Boethius and assess the degree to which their ideas bear the imprint of contemporary Greek philosophy. Instead of framing an argument about Greek and Latin philosophical relationships by looking at literary similarities, I instead examine these interactions more broadly. Ancient philosophical culture was not just defined by doctrines. It had vital social and practical components that introduced newcomers into an intellectual community defined by specific behaviors and personal relationships. Although modern scholarship sometimes tends to discount it, this social element was essential in determining the appeal of philosophy as well as the degree to which it actually influenced a student's ideas and actions. The paper considers a host of examples to show that, even into the late fifth century, Greek philosophy retained a real presence in parts of the Latin world that influenced the attitudes and actions of its devotees.

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