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Book Announcements

The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism, ed. by P. Remes and S. Slaveva Griffin, Routledge, London – New York 2014 (Routledge Handbooks in Philosophy), xi + 644 pp.

This multi-authored volume falls into seven main parts, each of them comprised of a number of short chapters. Parts I and II account for the historical and doctrinal background of Neoplatonism, but the overarching approach of the *Handbook* is thematic: Parts III to VI deal in succession with the One, the intelligible substance, soul and the related epistemological issues, the physical world, and finally with ethics and politics, thus following the deductive pattern from the One to the many laid down by E. Zeller in the chapter on Plotinus of his *Die Philosophie der Griechen*, adopted afterwards in virtually all the systematic presentations of Neoplatonism. To this familiar layout some new entries are added, dictated by contemporary debates such as that on “animal minds”, surfacing in Part VI. Part VII is devoted to the influence of Neoplatonism until the Middle Ages (Christian, Islamic, and Hebrew). In their *Introduction* (pp. 1-10) P. Remes and S. Slaveva-Griffin point out that their aim is less that of providing “summaries of research” than of offering “an opportunity to circulate new ideas or to defend a recently opposed view” (p. 9). The spirit of the volume becomes especially prominent in the *Introduction* to Part III, where it is phrased as follows: “The changing fates of Neoplatonism, from a late esoteric appendage to the Classical period of ancient philosophy to an up-and-coming vibrant field, is ostensibly a result of the advances we have made in understanding Neoplatonic metaphysics, the heart of hearts of Neoplatonism” (p. 163).

Part I, “(Re)sources, instruction and interaction” (pp. 13-99) deals with the doctrinal and institutional background of Neoplatonism. The first chapter, by H. Tarrant, is devoted to “Platonist *curricula* and their influence” (pp. 15-29), and pivots on the idea of the continuity of the reading order of Plato’s dialogues, not only – and predictably – from the so-called “canon of Iamblichus” onwards, but even before: “what is remarkable is how little the Platonic curriculum changed, not just after Iamblichus, but even since Plutarch of Chaeronea” (p. 27). R. Sorabji, “The Alexandrian classrooms excavated and sixth-century philosophy teaching” (pp. 30-9) explores the consequences for the history of philosophy of the Polish excavations at Alexandria, that have “identified the surprisingly well-preserved lecture rooms of the sixth-century Alexandrian school” (p. 30). The account of the teaching activities in late antique Alexandria gives R. Sorabji the opportunity to express his views on the question of the unanimity versus difference between the two main philosophical schools of the 5th-6th centuries: “Ammonius’ reticence about religious practice differentiated him from the devotional enthusiasm of Iamblichus, and of the Athenian school notably under Proclus, and I believe this gives truth to the controversial claim that the Alexandrian school was different in character from the Athenian”, (pp. 36-7; on this issue one may have a look at the review by the present writer of the book by I. Hadot, pp. 375-83). G. Reydamas-Schils and F. Ferrari, “Middle Platonism and its relation to Stoicism and the Peripatetic tradition” (pp. 40-51) explore the technique and the various kinds of the Platonist “co-optation”, meaning with this term a “strategy” to establish the truth of Plato’s philosophy by showing that in the doctrines of the rival schools (with the notable exception of Epicureanism) are embedded parts of that truth that only by Plato was expounded as a consistent whole. J.D. Turner, “Plotinus and the Gnostics: opposed heirs of Plato” (pp. 52-76) presents his opinion – already advanced in the 2001 volume *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* – that the Gnostic treatises read in Plotinus’ circle were the source of the latter’s derivational scheme. Turner is obviously aware of the harsh criticism addressed to the Gnostics by Plotinus, in particular in treatise II 9[33], but he finds in him a “mixture of acquiescences, objections and corrections” (p. 63) with respect to the Gnostic doctrines, especially as expounded in the “Sethian” treatises. Faced with II 9[33], Turner is ready to admit that “it may be that Plotinus’ encounter with the Gnostics also caused him to tighten up on his own doctrines” (*ibid.*). V. Adluri, “Plotinus and the Orient: *aoristos dyas*” (pp. 77-99) engages in a comparative assessment of Plotinus’ doctrines and “the Indian system of thought” (p. 77), without however raising the question whether

or not, and in case it does to what extent Plotinus was acquainted with such doctrines. Adluri's conviction is that "The question of Plotinus' Orientalism thus cannot be settled by geographic or historical investigations, because the question is fundamentally not a positive question. It is a *conceptual* question inasmuch as it pertains to our *definitions* of 'Occidental' (or 'Greek' or 'Western') and 'Oriental'" (p. 92, author's emphasis).

Part II, "Methods and Styles of Exegesis" (pp. 103-59) works with the assumption of the "highly hermeneutical nature" (p. 103) of the Neoplatonic philosophical enterprise best exemplified by Plotinus' well-known passage in V I [10], 8.11-15 (quoted *ibid.*) that "these statements of ours are not new; they do not belong to the present time, but were made long ago, not explicitly, and what we have said in this discussion has been an interpretation of them, relying on Plato's own writings for evidence that these views are ancient" (trans. Armstrong). This part contains the chapter "Aristotelian commentary tradition" by H. Baltussen (pp. 106-14), pointing to the rise and development of the running commentary, first in the Aristotelian tradition and then in the Platonic one. Baltussen sides with the view advanced by I. Hadot that a standard canon of readings imposed itself in Neoplatonism: "Platonist exegesis of Aristotle's works was intended to prepare the minds of students for the more important ideas of Plato. The inversion of the historical relation was justified with traditional and doctrinal arguments: after the moral training (reading Epictetus' *Handbook*) the 'smaller mysteries' of Aristotle's works would lead from a better understanding of words and concepts (*Categories, On Interpretation*) and the physical world (*Physics, On the Heavens*) to the metaphysical understanding of Plato's philosophy" (p. 113). In his "The non-commentary tradition" (pp. 115-25) A. Smith points to the fact that "From the time of Porphyry onwards ever-increasing attention was paid both within the schools of the Neoplatonists and in their publications to the reading and careful commentary of Platonic texts. By the time of Iamblichus a carefully ordered programme of Platonic texts was in place. But the activity of the philosophers in the schools continued to require other forms of communication. By means of letters, exhortatory works, general introductions, compendia, polemical treatises and large-scale comprehensive works they engaged with the society in which they lived, with their fellow philosophers and with their students" (p. 117). Examples of this non-commentary tradition are the *Letters*, like Porphyry's *To Marcella*, the Introductions to philosophy, like Iamblichus' *Protrepticus*, the Summaries like Porphyry's *Sentences*, or Sallustius' *On the Gods and the Universe*, or even Proclus' *Elements of Theology* and finally, notwithstanding the substantial differences with the works just mentioned, his *Platonic Theology*. L. Brisson, "Plotinus' style and argument" (pp. 126-44) presents Plotinus' biography and works, accompanied by an analysis of his grammar and syntax based on the reference work on the topic, namely the section "Sprache" in the entry "Plotinos" written by H.-R. Schwyzer for the *Pauly-Wissowa Realenzyklopädie für Altertumswissenschaft* (1951). After Schwyzer's foundational study, a detailed and helpful research was published by F. Phillips, *The Prose Style of Plotinus. Rhetoric and Philosophy in the Enneads* (Madison 1980), which however is not taken into account in this chapter. M. Martijn, "Proclus' geometrical method" (pp. 145-9) challenges the idea that Proclus did follow an axiomatic-deductive style of argumentation. In Martijn's views, the geometrical method has only a didactic aim, and this is the meaning conveyed by the term *στοιχειώσις*, *elementatio*. "In sum, then, any *Elements* is a concise *introductory teaching*, which, for didactic reasons, consists of *first principles* (if any) and *derivations* (or deductions), presented in the proper *order*: any deduction should be made using only the principles and what has already been established" (p. 147, author's emphasis). If so, "Geometry provides an ideal methodological paradigm, better than either dialectic or empty logic (...), because of the geometry's intermediate position in between the sensible and the intelligible, It combines a rigid structure reflecting the order of reality with the power of reversion to higher levels of reality" (p. 156).

With Part III, "*Metaphysics* and metaphysical perspectives" (pp. 163-244) begins the theoretical analysis that forms the main focus of this volume. In her "*Metaphysics: the origins of becoming and the resolution of ignorance*" (pp. 166-81) S. Ahbel-Rappe advocates the idea that "Neoplatonic metaphysics does more than tell a story; it is illocutionary as well as indexical, in so far as it tells us how to see the world and how things got to their present state, and offers a corrective for our current condition, namely ignorance. (...) For this reason, the language of Neoplatonic metaphysics is best understood as promissory, offering a glimpse of reality, a prelude to genuine knowledge" (pp. 166-7). Working with this assumption, Rappe offers a survey of the metaphysical views from Plotinus to Damascius. The Plotinian doctrine of the One is dealt with by J. Halfwassen, "The Metaphysics of the One" (pp. 182-99). The foundations of being are, for Plotinus, in the One; Halfwassen

explores the philosophical meaning and implications of this theory. Starting with an interesting comparison with Kant's point of view apropos thought and unity, he offers an insight of Plotinus' way of understand this relationship: "No one can dispute that everything which can be conceived of, can only be conceived of as a unity, because everything which is conceivable must be defined and definition is only possible as a unity. (...) However, it is precisely here that an objection might be suggested. One could perhaps argue, just like Kant, that unity is the highest principle of our reasoning faculty, by means of which we order reality according to unitary points of view, because we could not grasp them otherwise (...). However, it does not necessarily follow from this requirement of unity on the part of our thought that reality by itself, independent of our thought, must be a unity and must be ordered according to a unitary perspective. For Kant, the final basis for unity of our thought-forms is the unity of the thinking Self. (...) Interestingly, Plotinus also poses the question whether Thought itself first spawns unity, without which nothing can be thought (...). He, then, clearly formulates the alternatives: to interpret our thought's requirement for unity either subjectively, as a consolidation of Thought itself, or realistically and ontologically, as the perception of the unitary character of Being itself (...). Plotinus provides a quasi-transcendental analysis of the conditions for the possibility of our thought" (pp. 183-4). The typical move of Neoplatonic metaphysics, best exemplified by Plotinus, is that of locating this precondition for being and thought beyond being and thought. To this is devoted the final part of Halfwassen's chapter. S. Slaveva-Griffin, "Number in the metaphysical landscape" (pp. 200-15) examines "the Neoplatonist's expansive interest in the constitutional role of number and maps the metaphysical landscape according to the ontology of number in the thought of its most avid proponents: Plotinus, Iamblichus, Syrianus and Proclus" (p. 200). The subsets of this analysis, "Number in Plotinus' metaphysics", then "Number in Iamblichus' metaphysics", then again in Syrianus and Proclus, elicit the conclusion that "Starting with Iamblichus, the later Platonists indefatigably strive to close the gap between the applied sciences of mathematics and its ontological dimension". Thus, they proceed "[f]rom the quantifiable heterogenic multiplicity of the physical world, to the unquantifiable homogenic multiplicity of the metaphysical realm, to the highest productive principle of existence" (p. 212). R. Chiaradonna's chapter, "Substance" (pp. 216-30) offers an analysis of late antique views of οὐσία. "Plotinus' tripartite treatise *On the Genera of Being* (VI 1-3 [42-44]) laid the basis for subsequent accounts. (...) [I]n the *Genera of Being* Plotinus (...) argues that *ousia* is only properly referred to intelligible being, whereas what is improperly called *ousia* in the sensible realm does not satisfy the requirements of primary being and hence is *ousia* only homonymously" (pp. 217-8). This view is compared with another, earlier stage of the Platonist attempt to manage the divide between the Platonic and Aristotelian understanding of what primary being is – the intelligible realm, or the ontological foundation of individual substance. Chiaradonna aptly points out that "What we know of the early Platonic-Pythagorean reception of Aristotle's *Categories* in the first century BCE (...) points instead to a different direction. At that early stage, Aristotle's categories were probably incorporated within a Platonic-Pythagorean doctrinal framework: some of Aristotle's views were indeed criticized or adapted, but the distinction between intelligible and sensible beings was not used against his division" (p. 219). Against this backdrop, what is distinctive of Plotinus is that he raises "questions *internal* to the Peripatetic theory of sensible substance. (...) Plotinus argues that Aristotle's account of *ousia* is not only incomplete (for one should *supplement* Aristotle's sensible *ousia* with Plato's separate substance), but also self-refuting: while Peripatetics claim that *ousia* has a primary status over what depends on it, they cannot ground this priority" (pp. 221-2, author's emphasis). A survey of the positions of later Neoplatonists follows, that ends with Simplicius and with the remark that in the latter "Plotinus' account of *ousia* is thus completely reversed" (p. 227). J.-M. Narbonne, "Matter and evil in the Neoplatonic tradition" (pp. 231-44) explores the "role of matter as a possible source of evil" (p. 231) in the Neoplatonic tradition as compared with classical Greek thought. The main difference is the "derivative character of matter" (*ibid.*), grounded in Neopythagoreanism and maintained also in Gnosticism, by Numenius, in the *Chaldaean Oracles*, and by Plotinus. Radical dualism entails that matter is a rival principle with respect to the principle of the good; conversely, in an "integral emanative system such as the one advocated by our Neoplatonic philosophers (p. 232) matter derives from the unique principle of the good. Thus the problem arises "Whence comes evil, if there exists no independent principle of evil?" (*ibid.*). Plotinus' response, according to Narbonne, is "mixed dualism", namely the idea that "evil does not come from the first principle, but exclusively from the second; evil manifested as real force, although it remains less than

the force of the Good” (p. 236). As a consequence, “The evil cannot be totally outside being (because there is no such outside), but it cannot be inside either, since it is radically opposed to being” (p. 237). The chapter ends with an analysis of the criticisms raised against this theory, especially by Proclus in his monograph *De Malorum subsistentia*, where he presents his peculiar solution: evil, like accidents, has no being properly speaking, but only a sort of parasitical form of being: *parhypostasis*, “adventitious existence”.

Part IV, “Language, Knowledge, soul and self” (pp. 247-338) explores “the central role that the soul plays in Neoplatonic philosophy, both in metaphysics and cosmology as well as philosophical anthropology and theories of cognition and knowledge” (p. 247). In his “The gift of Hermes: the Neoplatonists on language and philosophy” (pp. 251-65) R.M. van den Berg deals with the opinions held by Neoplatonists on human language and its relationship with intelligible items. Van den Berg begins with the judicious remark that “This chapter will not be about anything like a ‘Neoplatonic philosophy of language’ for the simple reason that there is no such thing” (p. 251), and carries on an analysis of the reception of the ideas about language held by Plato – a linguistic “naturalist” – and by Aristotle – a linguistic “conventionalist”. The ways in which the Neoplatonists “dealt with the tension between the two accounts” (p. 252) vary from Plotinus’ little or no concern for the ways in which one might harmonize Plato and Aristotle on this issue, to the post-Plotinian efforts to establish a common ground for both the *Cratylus* and the *De Interpretatione*. A clearly different stance appears between those philosophers who worked with the assumption of the harmony of Plato and Aristotle, and those who did not. Ammonius’ commentary on the *De Interpretatione* provides a good example of the first stance; Proclus commentary on the *Cratylus*, of the second. “Ammonius tried to interpret away Aristotle’s claim that language is meaningful by convention only and that names are nothing but symbols, in order to be able to harmonize it with Plato’s claim that names are meaningful by nature. Proclus, on the other hand, did not so much try to harmonize Plato and Aristotle, but rather tried to separate them and accord them their own domain. Aristotle’s entire philosophy, his logic and ideas about language included, bears on the physical world of particulars, that of Plato on the intelligible realm of Forms” (p. 264). After an outline of the Plotinian doctrine of human cognition, L.P. Gerson, “Neoplatonic epistemology: knowledge, truth and intellection” (pp. 266-79) narrows his focus on the positions of post-Plotinian philosophers who did not accept Plotinus’ idiosyncratic doctrine of the undescended soul. “Rejecting the idea that our intellects are undescended, Ammonius and his followers were led to reflect on how our descended intellects operate in relation to intelligibles and hence how knowledge is possible for embodied persons. (...) [T]he possibility occurs that Ammonius and his school are appealing to Aristotle’s active intellect to account for embodied higher cognition. (...) This actualization, however, is not the identification of the intellect with the intelligibles, as it is for Plotinus in the undescended intellect (...). Rather, the actualization is of a representation of those intelligibles (...). So, the actualization of the intelligible or intelligibles in the intellect is a representational state. The object of knowledge is the content of the representation, not the intelligible itself. The knowledge is the identification of the intellect with the act of representing” (pp. 276-7), admittedly a highly un-Plotinian conclusion. In Gerson’s account of the reasons why the post-Plotinian Neoplatonists parted company with the theory of the undescended soul Iamblichus plays no major role; on the contrary, the latter is the pivot of the post-Plotinian account of soul in the paper by J.F. Finamore, “Iamblichus on soul” (pp. 280-92). At variance with Plotinus, Iamblichus maintains that when the soul is engaged in activities connected with the body, it does not “remain” connected with the intelligible realm. “The Iamblican universe is a complex place. Above the Forms and the Intelligible is the One itself. Below the Intellect are a series of psychic intermediaries (visible gods, angels, daemons, heroes, purified human souls). The human soul was placed far apart from the One and Intellect, adrift in the world of becoming. The soul could not ascend back to its intelligible home without divine aid. Such aid was available through sacred rites and theurgical practices. As Iamblichus makes clear in *Myst.* V.18, the largest segment of humanity is held down by nature, is subject to fate, and never rises” (p. 289). Another point to notice in Finamore’s article is his position about the authorship of a commentary on the *De Anima* ascribed to Simplicius, a text which heavily borrows from Iamblichus: in Finamore’s view, the question remains still open, and for this reason he refers to the positions expounded in this commentary as Simplicius’. In his “From Alexander of Aphrodisias to Plotinus” (pp. 293-309) F.M. Schroeder argues that the basic difference between Alexander and Plotinus consists in that the former is a dualist while the latter is a monist, a difference that according to Schroeder bears importantly also on the respective views of intellection. First Schroeder

compares Alexander's and Plotinus' accounts of the role of the diaphanous in vision; then he moves to their respective ways to use the metaphor of "illumination" in the explanation of how human intellection occurs. Even though in note 2 (p. 307) Schroeder advances the hypothesis that the "Alexander" famously mentioned by Porphyry (*VP* 14.13) as one of the commentators of Aristotle that Plotinus wanted to have read before he started his lecture was not Alexander of Aphrodisias but his father, it is indeed with Alexander of Aphrodisias that the comparison is conducted. Only with his *De Anima*, however: the *De Intellectu* is deliberately not taken into account, because Schroeder is convinced that this writing is not by Alexander; rather, he ascribes it to a later author influenced by Plotinus (cf. n. 41, p. 309). According to Schroeder, "The fundamental difference between Plotinus and Alexander is that, where Alexander is a dualist, Plotinus is a monist. The distinction is manifested in their different accounts of the physics of light. It is also at work in their respective epistemologies. (...) In the dualistic account of Alexander the Active Intellect is, in its cooperation with the human intellect, the efficient cause for the abstraction of form from matter, and the Active Intellect is the final cause of that evolution of the human mind that progresses to that moment. (...) In the monistic version of Plotinus, the One (corresponding to the Active Intellect in Alexander) is the efficient cause of Intellect. It is also the final cause of the return of Intellect (and ultimately of our return) to the One" (p. 307). G. Aubry, "Metaphysics of soul and self in Plotinus" (pp. 310-22) attempts a philosophical treatment of Plotinus' notion of ἑμῆς – the "self" – as distinct from the soul. "This philosophical breakthrough is inseparable from the discovery of immediate reflexivity; that is, the subject's ability to apprehend itself independently of its relation to an object or to another subject" (p. 310). This discovery creates, in Aubry's view's, a "gap between soul and self" that forms the core of this article. After a survey of the "levels" of the soul in Plotinus, their relationship with "self" is described. The notion of "self" is akin to consciousness: "[T]he association of *hēmeis* with consciousness prohibits the identification of it with any specific level of soul. At the same time, Plotinus thus provides himself with a graduated conception of the subject, since he distinguishes between the *hēmeis* and the intelligible 'self'. It is in the latter – identical to pure *ousia*, that is, the separated soul – that the foundation of individuality resides, together with the most intense life and an unalterable happiness" (p. 321). The main purpose of P. Lautner, in his "Perceptual awareness in the ancient commentators" (pp. 323-38) is to explain the late antique interpretation of *De Anima* III 2, where Aristotle distinguishes between perception and perceptual consciousness. "The commentators in late antiquity share Aristotle's conviction that perception is not the same as perceptual awareness" (p. 324). Taking as his starting point a passage of the commentary on *De Anima* III that is transmitted together with Philoponus' commentary, but whose author was in all likelihood Stephanus of Alexandria, Lautner surveys the positions of the philosophers mentioned in it, who held specific ideas on the relationship between perception and perception of perception. Thus, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Plutarch of Athens, and the "more recent" commentators Proclus and Damascius are taken into account. Then the position of the author of this doxography, aptly labelled "pseudo-Philoponus", is analyzed. Also the position expounded in a commentary ascribed to Simplicius is analyzed; its author is labelled – once again aptly in the opinion of the present writer – "pseudo-Simplicius". Finally, the position of Priscianus of Lydia is taken into account. Lautner's presentation of the doctrine of Pseudo-Philoponus counts as a synthesis of the Neoplatonic exegesis of Aristotle's perceptual awareness: "Pseudo-Philoponus thinks it is impossible that the same sense should know that it sees. He develops an argument to the effect that, if it can revert to itself (this is what perceptual awareness means to him), the power of perception is both immortal and incorporeal. (...) Moreover, the senses are not eternal, since they are tied to bodily organs. Therefore, they cannot revert to themselves. As a consequence, it is the rational part of the human soul to apprehend that we are perceiving. It is the attentive part that has this job. The thesis clearly goes against the Aristotelian assumptions" (p. 331).

The Neoplatonic conception of the visible world that is dealt with in Part V, "Nature: physics, medicine and biology" (pp. 341-90) is presented as part and parcel of a general system consisting "of two-way dynamic processes which unfold downward to instantiate the physical world and revert upward to confirm the ontological 'goodness' of this instantiation" (p. 341). A. Linguiti, "Physics and metaphysics" (pp. 343-55) discusses the idea that Plotinus and other Neoplatonists display little interest in the physical world. In some sense, this is true: the Neoplatonists "concentrate on causes, or principles, which differ by nature from physical bodies, in that they are incorporeal, immaterial, 'spiritual' and located in an order of reality that is not the same as the one allotted to bodies" (p. 343). However, the very fact that "[a]ccording to Plotinus and his followers (...) the

physical world never emancipates itself from its metaphysical causes, which relentlessly and pervasively keep on operating within it” (p. 344) makes the realm of nature also the realm of the instantiated logos. Through a description of the “Features of the sensible world” and of the “Causes and genesis” that Plotinus and Proclus grant to the world of coming-to-be and passing away, Linguiti reaches the conclusion that the Neoplatonic philosophy of nature is “eminently ‘rationalistic’, which is to say based on deductive inferences leading from intelligible principles all the way down to natural phenomena” (p. 352). In his “Neoplatonism and medicine” (pp. 356-71), J. Wilberding challenges the “rather uncharitable view of the Neoplatonic project, according to which the sensible world fails to warrant any sustained scientific investigation on account of its being a mere image of the true object of investigation, namely the intelligible cosmos” (p. 356). Wilberding begins by calling attention to the fact that some Neoplatonists were also physicians, like Oribasius of Pergamum, the Pseudo-Elias, and Stephanus of Alexandria (here named Stephanus of Athens, p. 356; whether or not he should be identified with the Neoplatonic commentator of Aristotle Stephanus of Alexandria is discussed at n. 8, p. 365), not to mention those who have written down nothing, but are recorded as taking part in Plotinus’ audience in Rome (Eustochius, Paulinus of Scythopolis, Zethus the Arabian). The same is true for Alexandria: Wilberding devotes some attention to a certain Asclepiodotus of Alexandria, who studied under Proclus. Even taking into account that the interaction between philosophy and medicine is a permanent feature of pre-modern learning, one can subscribe Wilberding’s claim that “far from being an object of neglect, then, the study of medicine generated a great deal of interest among Neoplatonists” (p. 358). This instructive chapter deals with “Medical training and interests”, with “Aetiology of disease and health”, and finally with the topic of the “Admission of the supernatural in medicine”. Part V comes to an end with the chapter by K. Corrigan, “Humans, other animals, plants and the question of good: the Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions” (pp. 372-90). Against the idea that the Neoplatonic “hierarchical view makes human beings disproportionately important” and “seems to eliminate individuality for the sake of abstract universality”, Corrigan advocates the view that “These criticisms are widespread and powerful, but (...) false and profoundly misguided” (p. 372). The ancient philosophical views about nature are cast as an “inclusive intelligible biology founded upon divine design or goodness, on the one hand, and specific natural capacities or best fittedness, on the other” (p. 376). In particular, the Neoplatonic philosophy of nature is described by Corrigan as striking, in so far as in it “not only do we find different modes of rationality: to be precise, a continuum of different intensities of life-kinds manifested throughout nature; and not only do we find many examples of design without rationality; but, even more important, rationality ceases to be the dominant paradigm for determining whether things are meaningful at all” (pp. 387-8). Meat-eating is also discussed, chiefly on the basis of Porphyry’s *De Abstinentia*.

In Part VI, “Ethics, political theory and aesthetics” (pp. 393-501) the debate turns around the different meaning of ethics in ancient and contemporary philosophy. As stated in the Introduction, “the whole idea of ethics as some kind of a search for or a collection of principles of moral behaviour may be intrinsically foreign to the ancient philosopher. In antiquity, the emphasis lies in the virtuous character capable of adapting to different circumstances (...). [I]n so far as some moral principles are discussed, the search is for principles that would be unqualified true” (p. 393). Thus, the focus of the chapter by S. Stern-Gillet, “Plotinus on metaphysics and morality” (pp. 396-420) is the nature of Plotinus’ ethics. Standardly it is assumed that, due to Plotinus’ otherworldly stance, he was not interested in what is expected to be the main concern of ethical theories, namely the criteria for other-regarding conduct. Stern-Gillet points out with justice that the contemporary accounts of Plotinus’ ethics “reflect a miscellany of theories on the nature of ethics that had currency in the latter half of the twentieth century and proceed from the anti-foundationalist conviction that it is futile to search for the grounds, metaphysical or other, of moral value. (...). It is my claim that those modern assumptions and theories hinder the interpretation of Plotinus’ own ethical reflections, which themselves proceed from very different assumptions” (p. 399). Contemporary descriptions of what ethics is, says Stern-Gillet, “especially when they remain below the level of critical awareness, cloud the examination of Plotinus’ ethics by generating questions to which the text of the *Enneads* can provide no clear or incontrovertible answers. The reason is that the assumptions in question are foreign to the thinking of a philosopher whose overriding aim – not to say the sole aim – was to convince his disciples of the truth of the metaphysical system he developed in the *Enneads*” (p. 400). Another point made by Stern-Gillet is worthy of note: “Plotinus’ ethical reflections are almost unintelligible unless placed within the

metaphysical background that alone can give them significance” (pp. 400-1). The conclusion is that “Plotinus’ ethics can be seen for what it is, namely a guide to the soul in us, pointing the way she must go if she is to lead a ‘perfect and true life’” (p. 417). B. Collette-Dučić, “Plotinus on founding freedom in *Ennead* VI.8[39]” (pp. 421-36) explores the same topic from the viewpoint of the foundations of human self-determination; he does so against the background of the two main conceptions of classical and Hellenistic philosophy, labelled “libertarian” – the idea, rooted in Aristotle’s account and endorsed by Alexander, that man possesses “the power for opposite courses of actions” (p. 422) – and “deterministic” – the Stoic idea that fate cannot be resisted. The analysis is conducted on the basis of Plotinus’ treatise *On Free Will and the Will of the One*, VI 8[39], and leads to the conclusion that the three main components of Plotinus’ position on self-determination: knowledge, mastership, and the will “all point towards the Stoic conception of freedom” (p. 433). It is Collette-Dučić’s conviction that Alexander of Aphrodisias is the main target of Plotinus’ polemics. Also P. Adamson, in his “Freedom, providence and fate” (pp. 437-52) deals with a topic which is patently conceived of as crucial in this volume. Adamson broadens the discussion to include other Neoplatonists such as Iamblichus, Proclus, and Hierocles of Alexandria on the issue of determinism versus human autonomy. In his views, “[T]he Platonists’ continuing fascination with providence and fate suggests that there was more at stake here than refuting deterministic opponents. Rather, the issue proved to be a useful way to explore central difficulties inherent to Neoplatonism itself” (p. 438). The Neoplatonists inherit from earlier doctrines the distinction between providence – that proceeds from the benevolent divine intellect – and fate, ruling the events of the sublunar world. Special attention is paid to Hierocles, who “is unusually explicit among Neoplatonists in describing fate as (in part) a kind of conditional necessity regarding human actions” (p. 440); but all the Neoplatonists concur in the idea that the more one is submitted to bodily constraints, the more one is submitted to fate: examples are given from Plotinus and Proclus. A survey of the Neoplatonist interpretations of the Myth of Er elicits the conclusion that “The numerous tensions that beset Neoplatonic treatments of freedom, providence and fate are, then, already prefigured in the Myth of Er. Among these tensions, the most philosophically interesting one concerns the very question of how to conceive freedom or autonomy. Sometimes Neoplatonists depict freedom as something the soul achieves by turning away from body and toward intellect (...). At other times, freedom appears to belong to the soul by its very nature, because it has a choice whether to turn towards body or soul (...). The first of these two conceptions, with its assimilation of freedom to secure rational commitment, owes more than a little to Stoic compatibilism” (p. 450). P. Remes, “Action, reasoning and the highest good” (pp. 453-70) compares Plotinus’ and Simplicius’ accounts of what is the highest good: “The picture emerging from the *Enneads* seems to promote contemplation, for several reasons, clearly above practical engagement in the world” (p. 454); a “competing strand of thinking that originates in the Stoic Epictetus” (*ibid.*) is presented, in itself and in the interpretation offered by Simplicius, who commented upon Epictetus’ *Enchiridion*. A survey of the Platonic-Aristotelian background sets the scene for the examination of Plotinus’ position, namely that “the order of priority is emphatically such that the theoretical activity is the higher one, and all other activities, be they productions or makings, lower. Contemplation is more final, more self-sufficient, and more desirable. The significance of this should, however, be neither misunderstood, nor overstated” (p. 461). At variance with Plotinus, Simplicius follows in Epictetus’ criticisms of the idea that theoretical studies lead to virtue. Remes refers with approval to the point raised by Dominic O’Meara that “the later Neoplatonists seem to take more seriously Plato’s suggestions in the *Republic* that acting virtuously not merely follows souls’ virtuous disposition but also promotes the virtue in the soul” (p. 463). Thus, “Simplicius complements Neoplatonism by challenging the exclusivity of the top-down order of priority (...). By lifting actions to a status of ‘that for the sake of which’ he creates an ethical order of priority opposed to the Neoplatonic hierarchy of metaphysics and value” (p. 468). D.J. O’Meara, “Political theory” (pp. 471-83) offers a presentation of the place of political science in Neoplatonism, especially post-Plotinian. “[T]he division of philosophy into three practical and three theoretical sciences becomes common in later Platonism. We find it in Iamblichus and in Proclus, and it becomes the standard way of organizing the teaching of Platonic philosophy among the late Alexandrian Neoplatonists. What this means is that ‘political science’ was seen as a distinct branch of Platonic philosophy, to be taught and read in the schools” (p. 472). The main texts that served as a basis for such teaching were Plato’s *Gorgias*, *Republic*, and *Laws*. “Developing a theme to be found in Stoic philosophers such as Epictetus (...), later Neoplatonists, describing the assimilation of the philosopher to the divine as an

imitation of the divine, find two activities of the divine which the philosopher should imitate: knowledge and providential action. As the divine knows all things and takes providential care of the world, so also should the philosopher attain knowledge (theoretical philosophy) and take care of others (practical philosophy), for example, in the political sphere, in legislative and judicial action” (p. 478). The last chapter of this part is “Plotinus’ aesthetics: in defence of the lifelike” by P. Vassilopoulou (pp. 484-501), where the question is raised whether or not Plotinus had a philosophy of art. Vassilopoulou answers in the affirmative if ‘aesthetics’ means “a philosophical discourse on beauty”, while if with this term is intended a proper philosophy of art “the evidence is ambiguous” (p. 484). Commenting upon VI 7[38], 22.24-32, where Plotinus says that the more lifelike (ζωτικώτερα) are the statues, the more beautiful they are, Vassilopoulou puts forth the view that “a ‘lifelike’ work of art would need to have the appearance of having a soul, to intimate the presence of soul beneath its visible form, in such a way that another soul (that of the spectator) can sense or recognize an affinity with it. This fits with the claim, explicitly made by Plotinus (...) that it is the soul that makes a sensible body beautiful (...)” (p. 489).

Part VII, “Legacy” (pp. 505-58) is devoted to the continuity of the Neoplatonic tradition, and operates with the assumption that “Neoplatonism does not disappear, it is transformed and subsumed in the ways of thinking we now entitle ‘medieval’ ” (p. 505). D. Moran, “Neoplatonism and Christianity in the West” (pp. 508-24) accounts for the presence of Platonic and Neoplatonic elements in early Christian literature, and extends until Augustine and Dionysius the pseudo-Areopagite and beyond: attention is paid also to Scotus Eriugena. Neoplatonism “struck the Christians as aptly expressive of the truth of Christian revelation in two ways. First, the triadic structure paralleled the paradise-fall-salvation sequence of the Christian myth. (...) The second parallel with the Neoplatonic triad is expressed by the nature of the One itself, since for the Christians the One is also a Trinity” (p. 520). After having discussed Eriugena, Moran mentions a series of medieval and Renaissance writers and concludes that Neoplatonism “continued to have a significant role in Christian theology to the very dawn of modernity” (p. 522). D.Y. Dimitrov, “Neoplatonism and Christianity in the East: philosophical and theological challenges for bishops” (pp. 525-40) deals with Gregory of Nyssa and Synesius of Cyrene on the three issues of souls, resurrection and the eternity of the world, in the context of their diverse Christian and Hellenic intellectual milieu” (p. 526). The discussion of Synesius’ *Letter 105*, with the claim that soul is hardly conceived of as ὑστερογενής with respect to the body, elicits the conclusion that his “outlook on souls and matter is shaped mostly by his contact with the views of Plotinus, Porphyry and the *Chaldaean Oracles* through his philosophical training in Alexandria and its intellectual milieu” (p. 528); as for Gregory of Nyssa, Dimitrov explains that he was “not ready to accept the notion of soul’s pre-existence implied in the idea of its immortality” (p. 529): in Gregory’s view, “the soul receives eternal life with resurrection only through the grace of God, and not as an immortal entity by itself” (*ibid.*). Other issues are discussed: creation versus eternity of the cosmos, resurrection, and the cognate issue of the allegorical interpretation of the Scripture. “In conclusion – says Dimitrov – we have no reason to regard the three objections of Synesius in his *Letter 105* as a testimony for his formal belonging to ‘paganism’, neither can we consider his way of thinking as incompatible with Christianity” (p. 537). In her “Islamic and Jewish Neoplatonisms” (pp. 541-58) S. Pessin expounds the peculiar version of Neoplatonism derived from its encounter with the Islamic and Jewish religious traditions. Both kinds of Neoplatonism “are often contrasted with Greek Neoplatonism for their emphasis on God’s role as a creator. However, among those Islamic and Jewish Neoplatonists who talk of creation, it is often, if not always, the case that creation is consistent with (or simply refers to) standard Greek emanation. (...) [T]here would be – for most of these thinkers – nothing impious or odd in jointly holding that God and the world are co-eternal, that being eternally emanates from God, and that God is the sovereign Creator” (p. 543). Another point raised is that of the process of emanation and the “descent” of the soul in the visible world, with its complementary account of the “return” of the soul to the upper intelligible world. “In more Aristotelian texts of Islamic and Jewish Neoplatonism, the Return/Ascent additionally gets described in terms of ‘conjunction’ (*ittiṣāl*) with Active Intellect (...). Perhaps most clearly highlighting the link between cosmo-ontology and human subjectivity, Neoplatonic Return is a call to self-transformation – an epistemological-ethical call to realign oneself with the knowledge-goodness of Intellect” (p. 550). The “List of the contributors” (pp. 559-62), a “Bibliography” (pp. 563-612), an “Index of passages cited” (pp. 613-29), and a “General Index” (pp. 631-44) conclude the volume.

There are some flaws in it: e.g., at p. 40 the opinion that has been advanced by G. Bechtle, *The Anonymous Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, Verlag Paul Haupt, Bern - Stuttgart - Wien 1999 (Berner Reihe

philosophischer Studien, 22), is summarized as follows: “the date of the anonymous commentary on Plato’s *Parmenides* is much more contested, though it is often associated with Porphyry (Bechtle 1999) or with Late Neoplatonism (Linguisti 1995)”, whereas Bechtle’s claim in the aforementioned book is exactly the opposite one: according to this author, there are no reasons to credit Porphyry with the anonymous commentary rather, it bears the hallmarks of Middle Platonism and counts as a step in the transmission of a metaphysical interpretation of the *Parmenides* whose starting point was Speusippus (see Bechtle, *The Anonymous Commentary*, e.g. p. 75).

Some examples of a strange mix-up of Latin and transliterated Greek appear: at p. 42, the expression *Platonem ex Platone saphenizein*, at p. 120 “the *Curiae Doxai* of Epicurus”. At p. 48 Marcus Aurelius is credited with the *Noctes Atticae*, a mistake which is reflected also in the “Index of the passages cited” (p. 617), whereas in the “Bibliography” (p. 566) the *Noctes Atticae* are correctly attributed to Aulus Gellius.

At p. 86 the assertion that “the problem of Plotinus’ ‘Orientalism’ is not the problem of Plotinus’ Oriental sources, which are, in any case, not in doubt among scholars” – a tenet in itself quite problematic – is supported by a note (n. 47 at p. 98) stating that “Ammonius Saccas, Nemesius and Philo are all Oriental philosophers, whose influence upon Plotinus is attested to in his own writings”: an account where that of considering Nemesius an author who influenced Plotinus is only the most blatant problem. If one considers that Ammonius Saccas and Philo are “Oriental” philosophers because of their ethnic or geographical origin, the same is obviously true for Plotinus himself, who was born in Egypt exactly as Ammonius Saccas and Philo. At p. 130 the variant reading ψυχικοῦ, already corrected into φυσικοῦ in the Humanist edition of Eusebius, is labelled “the only real typographical mistake in the *Enneads*”.

Some flaws feature also in the *Bibliography*. In the section on primary sources Olympiodorus is credited with a commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* instead of one on the *Meteorologica* (p. 572). Themistius is not even mentioned; true, his name is cited only once in the whole volume, as an example of the exegetical method of interpretive paraphrase (p. 109); but in consideration of the fact that among the primary sources are listed also works that do not belong to the philosophical tradition, like the *Mahābhārata* (p. 571) or John of Alexandria’s commentaries on Hippocrates (*ibid.*), or again the *Chronicle* by John of Nikiu (*ibid.*), one wonders why Themistius, who wrote extensively on Aristotle in Neoplatonic vein, has not been included at least in the *Bibliography*. In the section devoted to modern authors, the aforementioned book by Bechtle, alluded to as “Bechtle 1999”, is not included. The study by M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, “Deux traités plotiniens chez Eusèbe de Césarée” (published in 2007), is attributed to D’Ancona both in the bibliography (p. 587), and at n. 4, p. 142.

CDA

M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, *Cynisme et christianisme dans l’Antiquité*, Vrin, Paris 2014 (Textes et traditions, 26), pp. 250

The “Cynic Jesus Thesis” dealt with in a substantial part of this book depicts Jesus as a cynic-like sage. To phrase it with the A., this theory claims that “à côté du Jésus, prophète et figure apocalyptique, que l’on connaît à travers les évangiles, il faudrait aussi prendre en compte la figure d’un autre Jésus, philosophe populaire analogue au philosophe cynique” (p. 136). The editor of the collective volume *Le cynisme ancien et ses prolongements* together with R. Goulet (1993) and the author of the article “Kynismus” for the *Reallexicon für Antike und Christentum* (2008), M.-O. Goulet-Cazé offers in this learned volume an analysis of the “Cynic Jesus Thesis”, accompanied by an inspection of the grounds for its plausibility and culminating in her expert conclusion that “Au total, il n’est pas question de nier les similitudes, mais il faut bien reconnaître qu’elles ne sont jamais concluantes. Pourquoi? La culture sous-jacente n’est pas la même; l’esprit n’est pas le même et le contenu du message n’est pas le même non plus. Jésus vit dans un monde qui a un sens, même si la venue du Royaume modifie en profondeur ce sens ou en tout cas l’accomplit; Diogène et les cyniques vivent dans un mode dépourvu de sens, dominé par la Fortune, où les dieux grecs ne suscitent plus la pitié et où il faut que l’homme réussisse par ses propres moyens à trouver envers et contre tout le bonheur. (...) [L]e livre de Bernhard Lang sorti en 2010, avec son titre et son sous-titre provocateurs: *Jesus der Hund. Leben und Lehre eines*