

BOOK REVIEW AND NOTE

Later Platonists and Their Heirs Among Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Edited by Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides and Ken Parry. Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity, Volume 27. Leiden: Brill, 2023. xvii and 550 pp.

This collection of essays is a rich and useful intervention in the complex history of ancient and medieval thought, providing a map of the transmission or diffusion of Platonic/Neoplatonic sources among faith communities from early Christianity to the sixteenth century, from the Byzantine East to the Latin West, charting a complex diffusion of such thought in late antique and Medieval Syria, Armenia, and Georgia as well as among Arab and Jewish intellectuals from the seventh century onward. The book draws a major part of its inspiration (as its title indicates) from John Dillon's study of the immediate legacy of Plato in *The Heirs of Plato* (Oxford, 2013). It also, in my view, breaks down any rigid divisions between a "pure" Plato, reconstructed by the nineteenth century and following, and so-called "Middle Platonism" and "Neoplatonism." Furthermore, it articulates in a powerful way the need to change our understanding of "late antiquity," as in Garth Fowden's *Before and after Muhammad* (Princeton, 2014), to reach as far as Fārābī (870–950/951) and Ibn Sīnā (c. 970–1037) and thus to include the whole first millennium and more.

In their introduction the editors first identify some of the principal intellectual debates that focus the volume's contributions. These include the question of Neoplatonism itself which is defined as the Platonism developed from the time of Plotinus in the third century and its impact on the monotheistic traditions (though the question of what is Neoplatonic is usefully problematized throughout – see, e.g., Adrahtas, 154–164 on Damascene, Afterman and Michaelis, 483–491 on Jewish Neoplatonism, and Milani, 514–524 on Islam); the problem of the separation of faith and reason and the different faith traditions within the Abrahamic religions; how to reconcile paganism with "monotheistic" faiths, emanation with creation; the so-called "reconciliation" of Plato and Aristotle; the commentary tradition undervalued until recent times; the problem of evil (from Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus); imagination, mathematics, and science, and so on.

Accordingly, the book is arranged, after the Preface and Introduction, into six parts, comprising twenty-one essays, each essay (and General Introduction) with its own bibliography of primary and secondary sources, followed by three indexes, modern authors, subjects and places, and historical figures.

Part 1 treats the early Christian heirs from Plato to Clement of Alexandria and Origen in two chapters (25–86). Anagnostou-Laoutides outlines the early reception of the *Phaedo*, and especially the emphasis on silence in spiritual-intellectual progress up to Clement. Ilaria Ramelli shows how Origen, a zetetic thinker, thinks through Plato and Scripture together and concludes that while Origen's masterpiece on the Christian Trinity corresponds to the three principal hypostases of Plotinus, the use of the word hypostasis in Plotinus and Porphyry, decisive in Trinitarian thought, is

probably determined by Origen. This suggests, but does not argue for, the crucial inclusion of Origen for understanding the origins of Neoplatonism.

Part 2 covers Late Antique and early Byzantine heirs, ranging from Olympiodorus [sixth century] (Tarrant), Dionysius the Areopagite [fifth–sixth century] (Vasilakis), Maximus the Confessor [c. 580–662] (Skirris), John Damascene [675/676–749] (Adrahtas), to the broader topic of cult images in relation to Neoplatonism (Parry), in five chapters (89–207).

Part 3 presents Middle and Late Byzantine heirs, ranging from Michael Psellos [eleventh century] (Champion and Miles, chapters 8 and 9), Barlaam the Calabrian [c. 1290–1348] (Trizio), Gemistos Plethon [1355–1450] (Balthussen), and finally to Trapezuntios [1395–1486] and Bessarion [1403–1472] on Arabic philosophy and science (Steiris), in five chapters (211–323).

Part 4 treats Oriental Christian heirs, reviewing the reception of Neoplatonism by Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, and Arab Christians, ranging from the Syrian heirs of Neoplatonism [crucial links embedded in a Syriac Aristotelian tradition that leads up to the translation movement in the House of Wisdom in ninth-century Baghdad and the appearance of a translation/paraphrase of parts of *Enneads* IV–VI in Arabic under the puzzling title *Theology of Aristotle*] (Watt), the Armenian reception of Neoplatonism, (Calzolari) to Providence and Fate in Ioane Petritsi's [twelfth century Georgian Neoplatonist] *Commentary on Proclus' Elements of Theology* (Alexidze), and finally the Christian Arabic reception of the Neoplatonic view of evil, in four chapters (Tarras) (327–414).

Part 5 covers Western Christian heirs, in three chapters: first, Marsilio Ficino's reading of Priscian of Lydia's *Metaphrasis* (via Theophrastus' account of Aristotle's psychology – and Iamblichus) on imagination, intellect and perception (Corrias); second, two commentators on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Michael of Ephesus and Robert Grosseteste, and the development of two models of science, intellectualist and empirical/experimental with, in Grosseteste's case, an emphasis upon mathematics as key to understanding nature (Arabatzis); and third, the reception of Proclus' *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*, and the development of a universal mathematics as an ontology of relations putting special emphasis on the mathematical imagination (de Garay) (417–479).

Finally, part 6 explores Neoplatonic ideas among Jewish thinkers from the tenth to the twelfth centuries (chapter 20, Afterman and Michaelis) and in the Islamic world from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries (chapter 21, Milani) (483–544).

Particularly interesting for me is the inclusion under Jewish Neoplatonism not only of notable figures such as Isaac Israeli, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, and so on and the study of Neoplatonic elements in various modulations of the kabbalah, but also treatments of Saadya Gaon's *Commentary on Sefer Yesirah* and of the long version of the *Theology of Aristotle*. The latter is found in Arabic through a Judaeo-Arabic manuscript produced either in Ismaili, pre-Ismaili, or Jewish circles and is distinguished from the shorter version, among other things, by poetical expressions and by the idea of creation as a divine command based on the will of God.

Chapter 21 occasionally seems to envisage an unbridgeable gulf between Plotinian emanation and Jewish-Islamic creation, but chapter 20 notes the long-standing view that the Plotinian doctrine was adapted to a monotheistic creation framework already by sixth-century Syriac Christians. I suggest that this is already the case in the *Enneads*, despite the views of some Plotinian scholars. If the One/Good “makes itself . . . both for itself and from nothing,” as *Ennead* VI 8, 7, 53–54 states, then

creation–emanation is already operative for Plotinus. (On this see K. Corrigan and J. D. Turner, *Ennead VI 8: On the Voluntary and on the Free Will of the One*, Las Vegas/Zurich/Athens: Parmenides Press, 2018, 228–229.) Indeed, the Divine Command from the Qur'an is also consistent with *Ennead VI 8, On the Free Will of the One*. Finally, although I do not always agree with chapter 21's characterizations of Neoplatonism, I appreciate Milani's treatments of Al-Ghazali, his younger brother – Ahmad al-Ghazali, Al-Suhrawardi, and Ibn al-Arabi, and his characterization of the pervasive nature of Neoplatonic thought as “inspiration” rather than direct “influence.”

All this will show the range and richness of the work, which exceeds the possibility of fuller detail. One merit of this project is that it is much more than the sum of its parts, opening up the fields of Platonism/Neoplatonism, together with Aristotelianism, into a broader than usual *Nachleben*, which play a considerable role not only in the diffusion of Abrahamic streams of thought but also in the contested history of the development of modern science.

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