Gersh, S.E., *Neoplatonism after Derrida. Parallelograms*, in *Series in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition*. vol. 3. Leiden and Boston: E.J. Brill, 2006. Pp. xv, 223, EUR 113.- US\$ 153.- (hb.) ISBN 9789004151550.

Post-modern philosophy and especially Deconstruction are an acquired taste for most readers. When applied to Neoplatonism, post-modern philosophy is prone to become an overwhelming intellectual exercise. Fortunately, however, such is not the case with Stephen Gersh's *Neoplatonism after Derrida*. The book opens with a compelling dialogue on the relationship between Neoplatonism and Derrida, a dialogue which seeks to identify "'Neoplatonic' elements within the Derridean enterprise" and "'Derridean' elements within Neoplatonic thought" (p. xii). Faithful to the deconstructive method of "reading" texts, Gersh (hereafter G.) does not deconstruct Neoplatonism but juxtaposes Deconstruction and Neoplatonism. This is not an easy task and G. has handled it in a manner that combines erudition with originality. Thus in the preface he boldly announces that his study does not have "a *centered* [*sic*] thesis" but "numerous *decentered* [*sic*] theses" (p. xv), which he leaves the reader to identify. As a result, the book juxtaposes (and thereby justifies the use of 'parallelograms' in the title) the following pairs of concepts in both Neoplatonism and Derrida: 'stable' and 'mobile', 'causing' and 'caused', 'intellectual' and 'non-intellectual', 'monosemous' and 'polysemous', 'conceptual' and 'linguistic'. While engaging with the whole of the Derridean corpus, G. focuses on three essays, i.e. *Passions*, *Sauf le Nom*, and *Khôra*, all of which were published separately in 1993 but which Derrida later suggested could be combined in "a sort of *Essay on the Name* in three chapters or three steps."

At the onset of his work, G. invites the reader to tackle the chapters, save the first, in any order that they wish. Following his suggestion, I read the chapters in the order of one, two, four, and three, an order which I here retain since it has determined my understanding of the book.

The first chapter deconstructs Derrida's reading of (Neo-)Platonism by examining Derrida's reading of (Neo-)Platonism, our reading of Derrida's reading of (Neo-)Platonism, and our reading of (Neo-)Platonism. These aspects create three layers of discourse which, far from running parallel to each other, interweave and are mutually informative. Unsurprisingly, the first object of G.'s attention is how philosophy and the text of philosophy perceive their own identity separately. Concluding that "philosophical writing simultaneously establishes and transgresses its limits" (p. 20), G. notes that both Neoplatonism and Derrida treat the Platonic tradition as written text, with the difference that the Neoplatonists hold that writing externally reflects its philosophical truth, while Derrida believed that writing offers "an internal critique" of philosophical truth. Based upon the primary deconstructive understanding of the role of language and written text in the

construction of concepts, this observation sets up the parallelogram of the external and internal use of language in Neoplatonism and in Derrida respectively. Such parallelogram pertains to the core of both philosophies and grounds the rest of the investigation. According to G., Derrida's postcard method illustrates his deconstruction of the history of philosophy as writing because it accounts for the possible lacunae in the communication of knowledge, as in any written text. These lacunae denote the presence (or the absence) of sender and receiver, the disruption of communication, and the content of information and visual images, etc. All these features present philosophical writing primarily as a "metonymic operation" in which the existing part stands for the whole. Neoplatonist philosophers, however, preferred to rely on metaphors to explain the Platonic tradition and to elucidate its internal truth. In this juxtaposition, G. notes some Heideggerian intertext, originally suggested by the later Neoplatonists' interpretation of the supreme principle as both being and non-being, "beyond Being" and transcendent. This notion brings Derrida's metaphysics of presence to G.'s attention. While for the Neoplatonists Being is both being and non-being, present and non-present, atemporal and substantial, for Derrida absolute Being is equal to transcendent being. This latter view, however, contradicts, or at least fails to support, his understanding that *khōra*, the Platonic term for the Receptacle, in fact, represents a move away from the metaphysics of being. Derrida does not recognize that both Being and *khōra* participate in emanation and transcendence. This enables G. to show that Derrida does not understand one of the most deconstructive elements in Neoplatonism. The chapter successfully establishes the tension between Deconstruction's polysemous reading of a number of Platonic concepts and the Neoplatonic monosemous understanding of propositional thought.

The second chapter juxtaposes Neoplatonism and "negative theology" and is based upon Derrida's allusions to Neoplatonism in *Sauf le Nom*, i.e. the movement "beyond Being" and name, and the principle that Good can give that which it does not have. The chapter begins with an exploration of Derrida's propensity to mix references to modern and ancient sources. Specifically, Derrida presents negative theology from the viewpoint of Neoplatonism and Heideggerianism (p. 31). As the title *Sauf le Nom* itself suggests a multiplicity of meanings, Derrida relates the permeable nature of language to the polysemous complexity of Heidegger's philosophemes of *es gibt* and *Ereignis*. According to G., Derrida sees Heidegger in a quasi-Platonic light emanating from his interest in the contemplative and the transcendent, the atemporal and the universal.

G. divides *Sauf le Nom* into three parts: first, a section on the untranslated negative theology (48a-62b); second, a section on translated negative theology (63d-76c); and third, a connecting passage (62d-63a) which presents the double nature of negative theology as simultaneous erasure and affirmation of onto-theology.

This division foreshadows the use of the semiotic square in G.'s analysis. Since for Derrida, negative theology is "the discursive experience situated at one of the angles" formed by crossing the lines of the negation and the affirmation of being, G. approaches Derrida's treatment of negative theology through the principle of the semiotic square consisting of pairs of positive and negative terms, combined and neutral terms, arranged diagonally to form a square. G. identifies the roots of Derrida's interpretation in Aristotle's understanding of the principles that govern change. According to these principles, change involves both opposition and non-opposition. G., however, qualifies the semiotic compatibility of Aristotle and Derrida by introducing the Husserlian context of Derrida's position in which the combinatory nature of semantics relates to the semantic as well as the non-semantic sphere. On account of this duality, G. adapts Derrida's term of (a)semiotic square. In the long run, G. concludes, Derrida fails to understand "the overall significance of the Neoplatonic elements for the deconstructive method" (pp. xiii-xiv) on three counts. First, in the Neoplatonic principles of the primacy of non-spatiality over spatiality, atemporality over temporality, and temporality over spatiality, the first element of each pair is the center whose circumference is the second element. This centrism directly opposes the deconstructive decentering of structures. Second, the lower hypostasis does not attempt to achieve its higher hypostasis. Third, each hypostasis exists by limiting the infinity which emanates from its originaive hypostasis. Thus, the second chapter broadens the conclusion reached in the first chapter, namely that Derrida misconstrues the Neoplatonic principles of the hierarchical structure of being.

In the fourth chapter, G. applies the method of the (a)semiotic square specifically to Derrida's deconstructive reading of the concept of *khōra* in the *Timaeus*. In Derrida's view of *khōra* as a structure with a plurality of discourses, G. perceptively identifies a parallel to the Neoplatonic treatment of negative theology and language. Since the initial χ both of *khōra* and *khaos* represents both X as a symbol of a figure and a symbol of indefiniteness, G. suggests that both Neoplatonism and Deconstruction use the figure of (semi-) circularity and the partial figures of transcendence and translation. The figure of (semi-) circularity represents the subsequent displacement of a positive term by a negative term and by a combined term, whereas the partial figure of transcendence represents the displacement of a negative term by a neutral term and the partial figure of translation represents "a different realization of the combined term" (pp. 65-67 and 137). G. concludes that Neoplatonism and Deconstruction use different initial terms in the procession of the (a)semiotic square. Neoplatonism employs a unitary term which belongs to a "logically-structured conceptual network," while Deconstruction considers the initial term, disunited in conceptual, semantic, or verbal context. G.'s most important conclusion is that for the Neoplatonists propositional lan-

guage, no less than metaphorical discourse, connects elliptically to an atemporal sphere which establishes a metaphysical unity, while for Deconstruction (e.g. of ontology) propositions disrupt the logico-syntactic connectors with the temporal sphere, which establishes the non-metaphysical structure of parataxis-juxtaposition. The final section of the chapter analyzes the Derridean elements of performative utterance, non-propositional language, and textual juxtaposition in Neoplatonism. G. contends that Heidegger's erasure of Being is "a subtext of the Neoplatonic discussion of Being" and that Derrida's deconstruction of logic and syntax is "a subtext for the Neoplatonic discussion of the One" (p. xiv). The last section of the chapter centers on the relationship between performative utterance and performative experience. G.'s use of the principle of (a)semiotic square is most fruitful in so far as its results are unexpected and therefore bound to stimulate scholarly debate.

The third chapter entitled "Margins of Augustine" traces the Neoplatonic and deconstructive elements in Augustine's interpretation of the soul's return to its divine origin (referred to as "reversion" by G.), as presented in *De Quantitate Animae*. G. finds the basis for this chapter in Derrida's *Circonfession*, written as a response to Augustine's *Confessions* and to Bennington's attempt at systematizing the theory of deconstruction in *Derridabase*.¹ G. supports his case by pointing out that, in *Circonfession*, Derrida professes his religion while himself undergoing "a certain conversion" in relation to the Other, to God, and to Death. Despite the fact that neither Derrida nor Caputo (in *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*) has commented publicly on Augustine's *De Quantitate Animae*, G. argues that, by juxtaposition, the latter intersects not only with the above texts, but also with pseudo-Dionysius' *De Divinis Nominibus* and Derrida's *Sauf le Nom*, discussed in chapters one and two of the book. In Augustine's description of the soul's reversion, G. distinguishes an axiological structure containing the arrangement of superior and inferior terms, such as Soul and Body, and a combinatorial structure representing the arrangement of negative and affirmative terms, such as the description of Soul by negation of the characteristics of Body, and vice versa. The two structures delineate respectively the metaphysical and the textual layer in Augustine's treatment of the soul's reversion in *De Quantitate Animae* and elsewhere. G.'s detailed analysis of the seven stages in the soul's reversion offers a rich basis of interpretations. Among them, he distinguishes the self-transcending cycle of reversion, the bi-directional cycle of procession, reversion, and concord, and the bi-directional cycle of unity, equality, and concord. He distinguishes Augustine's cyclic reversion from Plotinus' bi-directional cycle of remaining, procession, and

¹) Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Bennington (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1993).

reversion, Neopythagorean arithmetic, and Derrida's play with numbers in his *Circonfession*. The chapter can be divided in three sections. The first establishes the grounds for the analysis of the *De Quantitate Animae*, the second contains the analysis itself, and the last contextualizes the analysis in Plotinus, Augustine and Derrida. The third part, however, is not without a touch of inconsistency and impatience. For example, in summarizing the three cycles of reversion, G. refers to the cycle of self-transcendence as "uni-directional", which he says has been discussed "at length in the preceding pages" (page 123), while, in fact, he describes the self-transcendence cycle as "bi-directional cycle of original state, fall, and return" (p. 121) and compares it to Plotinus' bi-directional cycle of remaining, procession, and reversion in which the last stage unites with the initial stage and thus achieves transcendence. He also defines the second cycle first as containing "procession, reversion, and order" (p. 121) and later as containing "procession, reversion, and concord" (p. 123). These inconsistencies detract from the smooth understanding of the material that is already very complex and complicated. Since, at the onset of the chapter, G. promises to relate Augustine's *De Quantitate Animae* to Derrida's *Circonfession* by using juxtaposition (pp. 100-101), the reader expects to find the exposition of this material in the main body of the text and not in footnotes (page 103, note 14ff.). Nevertheless, the subject of the chapter is compelling and the results of G.'s analysis noteworthy. As he suggests in his introduction, I read this chapter last. It brought a natural, perhaps not deconstructive, conclusion to the themes of the book.

The book is written in a style befitting the complex nature of Derrida's language and thought. The indices and the bibliography are thorough. *Neoplatonism after Derrida* is a pioneering study which relates with great originality the most complex ancient philosophical thought to the most complex postmodern theory. This is a Herculean feat on its own which challenges the reader to view Neoplatonism in a new light.

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