
Metaphysical Patterns in Platonism is an excellent showcase of the metaphysical influences of Platonism from the ancient to the contemporary world and of the capacity of different kinds of Platonism to cross over boundaries into apparently discrete traditions (e.g., the scientific tradition) or to contribute to a deeper understanding of the confluence of world traditions (e.g., world religions). As the editors indicate in the preface: “The papers in this volume trace the history of Platonism from the Middle Platonist Galen (c. 129-216 CE) to the… present… [and] are designed to be readable in sequence” (ix).

Accordingly, John Finamore opens the collection with an analysis of Galen’s creative reinterpretation of the Platonic tripartite soul and its application to the body’s major systems in the light of the Hippocratic tradition and his own considerable medical experience. Marilynn Lawrence then examines the connection between astrology and philosophy, showing the complexities of astrology’s place in Neoplatonism (Plotinus and Porphyry) and providing a critique of the binary opposition between the categories of the rational and the irrational that valorizes “philosophy” at the cost of divinization, magic and astrology.

There follow three articles on Plotinus: first, Daniele Bertini on Sophia in Ennead V 8 and the identity of the ontological and epistemological natures of things; second, Martin Achard’s useful analysis of Plotinus’ arguments about the relationship between the Good and the Beautiful from Ennead I 6 (1) to VI 7 (38) 32-33 (why Plotinus sometimes says the One is kalon and sometimes that it is beyond beauty); and, third, John Bussanich’s helpful corrective to the scholarly tendency to privilege negative theology, thereby blocking access to a performative, Plotinian discourse that incorporates metaphysical and psychological terms and escapes the limitations of both affirmative and negative language in order to evoke the experience of mystical presence. It seems to me that this last contribution also has a bearing upon Christian theological language of the 4th century, for it further erodes or complicates “neat” distinctions between pagan being-less formulations and supposed Christian being-focused language.

The next series of contributions takes us to Iamblichus, the Emperor Julian and Augustine—but with a strong contemporary resonance: astrology and contemporary practice, Nietzsche and Julian’s theology, and Augustine and Proust.

Crystal Addey explores two of Iamblichus’ forms of divination: inductive divination, caused by human reason, and inspired divination, caused by the divine, as a way of understanding Iamblichus’ wider claim that theurgy is superior to purely rational philosophy. Greg Shaw goes on to specify the “negative” capacity for
receptivity characteristic of the theurgic astrologer in Iamblichus and Ficino, namely, a capacity to endure a condition of not knowing and to be led by the soul's primordial eros for the divine; and he compares this with one contemporary form of astrological practice that seems to have independently rediscovered this negative capacity already being lost by the time of Iamblichus. Jay Bregman then compares Nietzsche's anti-Platonic critique of Christianity with the Emperor Julian's revalorization of Hellenism against Christianity and concludes that Nietzsche would have found the Neoplatonic critique of Christianity just a twilight-world moment in an essentially-for Nietzsche-negative tradition. Finally, Burcht Pranger examines the peculiar quality of Augustine's Platonism by means of a comparison of language and rhetoric in the Confessions and in Proust with particular reference to the special status of temporality in both.

The next section takes up some important aspects of Christian Neoplatonism and its complex extensions in the modern world.

Edward Moore provides his own guided tour of the evolution of theological discourse from Origen, Arius, Athanasius, Eunomius, and Gregory of Nyssa to Maximus the Confessor. Willemien Otten then examines a different facet of Christian Neoplatonism, namely, the poetic universality of Nature in Eriugena and Emerson and concludes with an illuminating account of Emerson's reading of Eriugena's 5 modes of Being and Non-Being. Mary Lenzi explores the intertwined, interpersonal paths in Christian Neoplatonism (Ficino) and pagan Platonism (Plato) for the realization of divine-human kinship and life-long assimilation to the divine in philosophy and theology. Gina Zavota then examines Copernicus' rejection of Aristotelian metaphysics/physics and the Ptolemaic model of the universe, on the one hand, and his attempt not only “to save the phenomena” of celestial motion, but more especially to discern the “Platonic” harmony, truth and beauty of the universe, on the other.

Robert Berchman takes us into the modern world. He argues that while philosophers can arrive at strikingly similar theories by somewhat different routes and while there are remarkable quasi-Hegelian, Berkeleyian and Kantian modes to be found in the Enneads, there is a strong affinity between Plotinus and Hegel in so far as for both Being and Thought are a continuum that can be mapped, not in the abstractions of either Aristotelian or Kantian categories but only by the 5 genera of the Sophist and the categories of Being, Non-Being and Becoming—with significant differences.

In the final part of the book, the focus shifts emphatically to the modern and contemporary world. Russell Ford argues that Adorno's lectures show that his dialectical project is less dependent on Hegel and German Idealism than is typically thought and more reflective of Aristotle's relation to Plato; and here it is less an attempt to critique the duality of Plato's Ideal and empirical worlds, while
drawing the essential, ideal truth from the empirical, as it is an attempt to answer the question how one can think after Auschwitz in the critical concern to question the relation between nature and culture.

Tomas Mróz charts the pioneering work of the Polish scholar Lutoslawski, first, in helping to establish a chronology for the Platonic dialogues (that anticipated the stylistic/stylometric finding of other scholars), second, in his interpretation of the development of Plato’s own thought and, third, in his defense of Platonism as the first representative of a spiritualistic pluralism proleptic in its later forms of Polish Messianism.

Bruce MacLennan, partly by means of a critical reinterpretation of the history of science, then argues for a return to key Neoplatonic notions in order to bridge the long increasing divide in the modern world between nature and science, to augment (and certainly not eliminate) current approaches to science, and to lay a foundation for an environmentally sensitive technology.

Finally, Atsushi Sumi draws the focus even more broadly as he tries “to intensify the ecumenical value of the reconstructive project of Neoplatonic metaphysics [Sumi advocates] by confronting it with the common vision of the world’s religions” (as in Huston Smith’s view of the remarkable unity underlying the surface differences of the world’s religions).

The sheer range of this volume is impressive, but there are some weaknesses. At least three of the contributions should have been extensively edited to have provided correct and polished English expression. A subject-name index would also have been valuable. Finally, the bibliography was inadvertently omitted. This last weakness is fortunately remediable. The bibliography is now available at http://www.isns.us/isnspub.htm. On balance, however, this is a rich book well worth buying, one that shows emphatically something of the remarkable transformative power and influence of Platonism in the history of thought.

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