ularly since most people who have written about the philosophy of Plotinus have focused on just about anything but his ethical theories.¹³

_Pursuits of Wisdom_ is aimed at a ‘wide readership’ (p. xiii) rather than at ‘co-specialists’. Doubtless it deserves a wide readership, and as I am writing here as a ‘co-specialist’ I would say that it deserves reading by us too. Of course we might miss comments about the scholarly literature, but readers should be assured that Cooper is highly reliable — the few quibbles that I raise seem more points for discussion than faults with Cooper’s text. What does ‘living a philosophical life’ involve? This book is a good place to go for several competing answers.

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This volume is a collection of twenty essays, most of them based on papers given at a conference held at the University of Ottawa in 2008. The first six chapters, which form the first part of the volume, address the question of what the Platonic myths are. Three deal with, _inter alia_, the complex distinction between _muthos_ and _logos_ (Glenn W. Most, Monique Dixaut, Harold Tarrant), three with myth and Plato’s art of writing (G.R.F. Ferrari, Catherine Collobert, Pierre Destrée). The remaining fourteen chapters form the second part of the volume. Fifteen focus on various Platonic myths: the myth of Prometheus in the _Protagoras_ (Claude Calame, Gerd van Riel); the myth of judgment in the _Gorgias_ (Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, Christopher Rowe); the eschatological myth of the _Phaedo_ (Elizabeth Pender); the myth of Er in the _Republic_ (Annie Larivée, Francisco J. Gonzales); the myth of Theuth in the _Phaedrus_ (Christopher Moore); the myths in the _Phaedrus_ (Franco Trabattoni); mythologized images of the soul in the _Republic, Phaedrus_ and _Timaeus_ (Kathryn Morgan); the myth of the creation of the world in the _Timaeus_ (Elsa Grasso, Luc Brisson; both authors discuss at length Myles Burnyeat’s interpretation of the phrase _eikós muthos_ , which Plato uses to refer to Timaeus’ cosmological discourse); and the myth of the two cosmic eras in the _Statesman_

¹³ A valuable exception is Pauliina Remes, ‘Plotinus’s Ethics of Disinterested Interest’, _Journal of the History of Philosophy_, 44 (2006), pp. 1–23. For a more extensive bibliography of recent works on Neoplatonic ethics, see http://phd.humanities.ku.dk/courses/registration-form/201214/literature/

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(Christoph Horn). The last chapter addresses the question of whether the story of the Delphic Oracle in Plato’s Apology can be considered a myth (Louis-André Dorion).

In the first chapter, ‘Plato’s Exoteric Myths’,15 Glenn W. Most argues that there are eight main features of the Platonic myth: (1) they are a monologue, which those listening do not interrupt; (2) they are told by an older speaker to younger listeners; (3) they ‘go back to older, explicitly indicated or implied, real or fictional oral sources’ (p. 17); (4) they cannot be empirically verified; (5) their authority derive from tradition, and ‘for this reason they are not subject to rational examination by the audience’ (p. 18); (6) they have a psychagogic effect (pleasure, or a motivating impulse to perform an action ‘capable of surpassing any form of rational persuasion’, p. 18); (7) they are descriptive or narrative; (8) they precede or follow a dialectical exposition. Most acknowledges that these eight features are not completely uncontroversial, and that there are occasional exceptions; but applied flexibly, they allow us to establish a corpus of at least fourteen Platonic myths in the Phaedo, Gorgias, Protagoras, Meno, Phaedrus, Symposium, Republic X, Statesman, Timaeus, Critias and Laws IV. The first seven features ‘are thoroughly typical of the traditional myths which were found in the oral culture of ancient Greece and which Plato himself often describes and indeed vigorously criticizes’ (p. 19).

Why are dialectic and myth so closely bound together in Plato’s dialogues? Because, Most argues, his dialogues are, to a certain extent, protreptic.

In ‘Combating Oblivion: The Myth of Er as Both Philosophy’s Challenge and Inspiration’ (which is the thirteenth chapter of the volume), Francisco J. Gonzales claims that the myth ending the Republic offers a ‘spectacle [that] is, in the words of the myth itself, pitiful, comic and bewildering’ (p. 259). In this eschatological myth souls seem to be ‘embodied’: they travel from one place to another, ‘wearing their verdicts around their necks, having their hands, feet and necks shackled, and, perhaps most interestingly, using language’ (p. 260); also, souls — even those who descend from heaven — rejoice (cf. 614e2) at the prospect of reincarnation; and, most surprising, they are allowed to choose their future lives. The choice is limited by one’s lot, and one’s knowledge of virtue, but many, including some of those coming from heaven, choose a bad life, as some of those coming from below the earth choose a good one. In the chosen lives hidden risks that are beyond one’s control may lie ahead. Before living the life they chose, souls must drink from the River of Carelessness, also referred to as the River of Oblivion. Thus, claims Gonzales, ‘what generally characterizes human life according to the myth is a fundamental opacity’ (p. 272). Which means that the myth is not actually a dramatization of the philosophical reasoning that unfolds in the Republic, as

15 Most’s essay is a revised version of one published in another good collection on Plato’s myths, Platon als Mythologe: Neue Interpretationen zu den Mythen in Platons Dialogen, ed. M. Janka and C. Schäfer (Darmstadt, 2002).