

**Anna Marmodoro and Irini-Fotini Viltanioti (eds.)**

*Divine Powers in Late Antiquity*. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2017. £65.00.

The volume brings together some of the papers presented at a conference held in Brussels in 2013 on the theme of divine powers in Late Antiquity, with invited papers added on later. It is divided into two parts, the first discussing the notion in pagan Neoplatonism, the other bearing on some of the most important Jewish and early Christian teachings.

Plotinus' use of the concept of δύναμις is complex, with occasional divergences, and Kevin Corrigan connects an overall survey with an analysis of some principal passages (e.g., III 8, 8.1-8; VI 2, 20.13-26; VI 7, 40. 5-18). He also makes a link with Aristotle's notion and emphasizes that Plotinus inscribes Aristotle's δύναμις-ἐνέργεια theory within the broad framework that he adapts from Plato. On Aristotle's account, potentiality requires a previous item which actualizes it. This view is in sharp contrast with the Plotinian distinction between potential existence and power with a stress on the active aspect of the latter.<sup>1</sup> To give just one sample, the Intellect defines itself by the power acquired from the One (V 1, 7. 9-17). In fact, it has two powers, one directed inwards, to see the contents of its own, and another directed towards the One. Thus the One is also the object of its thinking, although—as Corrigan emphasizes it—it is the object of thought for the intellect that will-come-to be (p. 26). So the double activity model is applied to the internal articulation of a single level of reality and to the derivation of one hypostasis from another. Interestingly, it is applied also to the explanation of free agency (VI 8. 6) with the emphasis on the inner activity as the locus of freedom. The relation between human action and divine power can be discussed from a different angle, too. Pauliina Remes shows that the vertical chain of causation offers two repercussions for the understanding of action. The many ways in which the *explanandum* is related to the higher explanatory entities form the core of the explanation but the distinctiveness of the phenomenon may be in danger as well since there is something in the phenomenon of action that resists vertical explanation. On her interpretation, Plotinus appreciates the features that are distinctive of a given action. As a consequence, action divides into two kinds: a determinate kind arising

1 Here one might bear in mind that the notion of the One as 'power of all' (V 1, III 8) constitutes a decisive turn from the final causality of the first principle to its efficient causality, see G. Aubry, *Dieu sans la puissance : Dunamis et Energeia chez Aristote et chez Plotin*, Paris: J. Vrin, 2007. 213. Among others, she also stresses (pp. 212-3) that Plotinus' notion is derived from Plato's thesis that (*Rep.* 509B9-10) the Good is beyond being (οὐσία) by surpassing it in dignity and power, and points towards the Christian notion of God as omnipotent creator.

out of a direct relation to the good and to the contemplation of forms, and a weaker and more indeterminate kind that lacks this connection. Plotinus develops the classical picture of action as involving an agent and a patient for he recognizes that not every activity is directed to something in the external world; there are intransitive or independent (*ἀπόλυτος*) motions such as walking. Thought and forethought seem to belong to this category as well. Although Plotinus favoured a model of vertical explanation, he did not fail to recognize actions and activities as directed to something other in the physical world. In this model, there seem two kinds of qualitative differences at play: beauty and goodness may establish themselves in manual production and in actions not directed towards the fulfilment of virtue. There is a shift between them and actions with an intelligible goal.

The connection between divine powers and cult statues has been examined by Irini-Fotini Viltanioti. The treatise *On Statues* has survived in fragments but so much is clear that it also witnesses to the change of ways of seeing in that age. Viltanioti focuses on the notion of the role of powers in statues. After having surveyed the recent discussions she claims that the text talks about gods mostly as powers, some are different kinds of the same power. In some other cases, however, they are symbols of powers. Furthermore, except for Zeus, all the powers inhabit the physical world. The powers should be considered in the context of Porphyry's doctrine of twofold power (an internal power which is part of the essence of the thing and produces an external power constituting the ontological level below) and spiritual ascent. On her reading, Porphyry's aim was to guide novice philosophers on the way in which proper contemplation of the images of gods could serve in unifying the power which in turn leads to the ascent of the soul towards the Intellect and the One. A similar issue, now in Iamblichus, was taken up by Peter T. Struck. The link between divine power and human intuition is set in a philosophical context of which the most important characteristic is the theme of divinatory insight as a kind of epiphenomenon of physiology which manifests a divine hand. The author stresses that despite undeniable differences the views of Porphyry and Iamblichus have much in common. Both philosophers follow earlier ideas of divination by characterizing the knowledge resulting from traditional divinatory practices as centred around the functionalities of the body. Moreover, both depart from the tradition by claiming that because the appeal to material structures the divine power is compromised in such practices. Unlike Porphyry, however, Iamblichus calls a more powerful kind of insight, attributable to divine power, as a new form of *μαντική*. This is not an insight that can be gained from the material world. A similar subject was taken up by Todd Krulak in the discussion of the link between animation of statues and divine manifestation in