
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 *Khōra*, 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 *khôra*, 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 *khôra* 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.