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BOOK REVIEWS

Proclus's Commentary on Plato's Parmenides. Translated by Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon, with introduction and notes by John M. Dillon. Princeton University Press, 1987.

I was first introduced into the complexities of Plato's dialogue *Parmenides* by Professor Robert Brumbaugh when I attended his graduate seminar on the text at Yale in the early seventies. Over weeks of wrestling with this difficult and obscure work (using Professor Brumbaugh's own translation) I began to feel a fascination for the dialogue, a fascination which must indeed have also been experienced by the Neoplatonists who made it one of the sources of their own philosophy. Unfortunately many modern philosophers treat it only as a source-book for a criticism of the theory of the Forms, and never attempt to enter further into the text. Indeed distrust of the dialogue is not new — Pico della Mirandola felt that it was written as a joke, and as early as the Middle Platonists it was regarded merely as a 'dialectical exercise'. But for Proclus it is a work of theology, and it was as a work of theology that it had a lasting influence in the West.

In the thirteenth century a Flemish Dominican, William of Moerbeke, discovered a Greek text of Proclus's *Commentary* and translated it. This translation in turn had a remarkable impact on Nicholas of Cusa who paraphrases it in his own work *De li non aliud*. Through William of Moerbeke, Proclus had an influence on Ficino and the Italian Renaissance. Later, Hegel praised Proclus's *Commentary*, and perhaps through the influence of Hegel, Victor Cousin began the first modern edition in the 1820's. In the 1920's Raymond Klibansky rediscovered Moerbeke's translation and showed that it contained a section not

found in Cousin or in any of the extant Greek manuscripts. Thus Moerbeke's work continues to be vital even today.

Proclus's commentary on the *Parmenides* is in the tradition of the Middle Platonic commentaries on Plato's dialogues. Everything is significant, and there are literal, allegorical and intellectual levels of understanding every sentence. Proclus begins with a prayer to all the gods, daimons and other lesser divinities to ensure his enlightenment in the understanding of the dialogue. Then he goes on to dismiss the view that it is merely a logical or rhetorical exercise. It deals with the highest realities — it is about all things in so far as they have a single source in the One. Here Proclus is following his own master Syrianus, but Proclus adds that the dialogue is about divinization, because all things are deified in so far as they are unified: since God is the One, things are godly if they are unities. Since Plato's aim is theological, Proclus finds the style of writing appropriate in that it is unadorned, bare, and follows the *logos*, eschewing all literary flourish.

Proclus's *Commentary* is of course a singular source for his own version of late Neoplatonism where many ranks of intermediaries have been added between the Forms and sensible things. Thus Proclus believes that between ordinary men and the Form of Man there are other kinds of humanity — including a waterly, a fiery, an airy and a heavenly type of man. Similarly he believes that there are many levels of time and of eternity, but the One which transcends all things is beyond both time and eternity, a view which was reproduced by Dionysius the Areopagite. Regarding the discussion of the Forms in the earlier part of Plato's dialogue, Proclus believes this serves to lead Socrates to a deeper appreciation of the levels or ranks between the Forms and sensible things. But the *Commentary* is not only useful for the light it throws on Proclus's philosophy, it is very important for showing how Platonists approached the dialectic of Aristotle and related it to Plato's concept of dialectic.

One item of crucial importance for later developments of

Latin Platonism in the Middle Ages is Proclus's discussion of the meaning and importance of negation in Book VI (1072-1077). Proclus argues that negations are more suitable than affirmations for the naming of the ineffable One, because negations strip away whereas affirmations clothe the One. This discussion seems to have been the source of Dionysius's discussion of affirmative and negative theology in the *Divine Names* and the *Mystical Theology* and so set the course of theology for the next thousand years. Nicholas of Cusa was interested in Proclus's *Commentary* especially in his *De li non aliud* which also seeks to use negations to say something about God.

The present translation was begun by Glenn Morrow and on his death was continued by John Dillon, who has also provided an excellent introduction and notes. This represents the first translation into English of a work which had an enormous impact on philosophical theology in the west. It is a very fine translation which is readable while at the same time observing a scrupulousness with regard to technical philosophical terminology. Professor Dillon refrains from a more elaborate interpretation of the work, and we must hope that he will present us with an interpretation of Proclus's thought in the not-too-distant future. But given the importance of the act of translation itself as a kind of philosophical intervention (as witnessed by the extraordinary fortunes of Moerbeke's Latin translation), I believe that Professor Dillon's achievement is of enduring philosophical interest. A must for all interested in Neoplatonism.

DERMOT MORAN

Das philosophische Denken im Mittelalter von Augustin zu Machiavelli. By Kurt Flasch. Stuttgart: Reklam, 1987, 720 pp. DM 27,80.

Professor Flasch is already widely known as the founder-editor of the *Corpus Philosophorum Teutonicorum Medii Aevi*, which has the great merit of having printed the

philosophical writings of Dietrich von Freiberg and has now passed the mid point of the vast commentary of Berthold von Moosburg on the *Elementatio* of Proclus. Aside from translations, the book under review is the most ambitious specialized study of medieval philosophy to appear in German in fifty years, since that of Boehner. It is a lively book, deliberately provocative; the author likes to shock and enjoys pointing up the conflicts in medieval thought and discussion. It is the explicit aim of the work to replace medieval thought (taken in the widest sense) in concrete relationship to the life that carried it, and some notable success is had on this score.

Flasch follows a chronological plan of exposition, prefacing each chapter with a sketch of the historical situation, and he is quite deliberately expansive on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, regarded as the preface to modernity. So much for the declared aims of the book. Taken all together, with its 600 pages of text and 80 of notes, useful chronological tables and indexes, we have here a work that is partly erudition, partly *haute vulgarisation.*

There is a thesis running through the book which does not receive enunciation in the introduction, but which provides the occasion for most of the best and most erudite writing. Roughly formulated, this thesis argues that an idealist school formed within that Dominican *studium* founded and inspired by Albertus Magnus, the school which made Cologne the third intellectual capital of Europe, after Paris and Oxford (see pp. 217ff.). It is in fact Albert, Ulrich von Strasburg, Dietrich von Freiberg ('einer der bedeutesten Denker des Mittelalters', p. 394), Meister Eckhart, Berthold von Moosburg, and, finally, Nicholas of Cusa, who are presented most skilfully and from primary sources; working back in time, Scottus Eriugena and Pseudo-Dionysius benefit in a similar way. Are we to draw the inference that the origins of German Romantic Idealism are to be sought within medieval Germany itself, in the Albertine doctrine of the *a priori* activity of the intellect? The reviewer has not noticed much criticism of Flasch's thesis as yet. Some links there