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Aller au sommaire du numéro

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coptes (R.-G. Coquin), éthiopiennes (R. Beylot), géorgiennes (B. Outtier) et syriaques (M. Albert). Chacune de ces parties obéit à un plan uniforme, qui leur confère une grande unité et en facilite la consultation : après une brève introduction, sont présentés I. les instruments, II. les œuvres, III. des compléments ou des renseignements pratiques. L'ouvrage se clôt par un glossaire, des cartes, un index onomastique et toponymique, et un index analytique.

Même s'il a une visée pédagogique et propédeutique avouée, on aurait tort de croire que ce manuel ne s'adresse qu'aux débutants. Les spécialistes y trouveront en effet rassemblés de précieuses notices bibliographiques, des mises au point inédites et des jugements critiques sur la recherche passée. Pour ne citer qu'un exemple, qui concerne les écrivains arabes chrétiens jusqu'au milieu du XVe siècle, M. Coquin a pris le relais de la *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* de Georg Graf pour indiquer les publications parues depuis 1947 et 1949 (p. 61-106). Les bibliographies qu'offre cette introduction seront vite dépassées par le progrès rapide et incessant de la recherche[1], mais le corps de l'ouvrage restera néanmoins longtemps la meilleure voie d'accès au vaste champ des christianismes orientaux. C'est dire le mérite des auteurs et la gratitude qu'on leur doit[2].

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Jean-Marc NARBONNE, **La Métaphysique de Plotin.** Paris, J. Vrin, 1994, 162 pages.

Narbonne is looking for the cluster of ideas which marks Plotinus' contribution to Western Philosophy and he finds it in a radical break from the Aristotelian notion of what needs to be explained — a revolution in the notion of the possible which generated a dynamic universe which can be understood against the background of a new notion of matter.

He says that what first struck him was "the omnipresence of matter in the metaphysical structure of the system of Plotinus" and that this implied a dynamic structure because "matter was something whose ontological structure was unfinished [...]" (p. 8). It is the search for an understanding of this dynamism which dominates the book.

Narbonne focuses first on the contrasts with the Aristotelian notion of substance as something essentially given, something which was not itself to be explained and as something within which possibility (he calls it "cosmological possibility") is to found. This sets in train an uneasy sequence in the history of philosophy, and Narbonne adopts the schematism of A. Faust to describe the philosophical wrestling with the Aristotelian heritage. The mediaeval philosophers opened the question further, invoking what Faust and Narbonne call "ontological possibility". This is really the possibility that the world should exist at all. Narbonne speaks of it as "not simply cosmological but [the] possibility of *réalité tout entière*" (p. 22). He does not stop to remind us, but the mediaeval philosophers were compelled to raise this question in order to deal with the notion of a creation ex-nihilo by God. They were less clear about the possibility of God's existence (or perhaps less willing

1. Voici d'ailleurs quelques ajouts utiles : § 213, p. 119 : Coulie ; § 258, p. 148 : Mahé ; § 307, p. 180 : suppléments à Scholer ; § 404, p. 223 : Beylot ; § 521a, p. 291 : Mahé ; § 603, p. 303 : Muruoka ; § 610, p. 313 : Petersen ; *ibid.*, p. 315 : NT interlinéaire ; § 612, p. 317 : concordance du NT. Au § 226, p. 129, lin. 11, lire : t. I, vol. III ; au § 310, p. 184, on notera que la collection « Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi » est éditée à Québec ou à Québec et Paris, selon les volumes, et non à Strasbourg.
2. Les étudiants et chercheurs trouveront un heureux complément à cet ouvrage dans Jean-Claude FREDOUILLE, René-Michel ROBERGE, dir., *La documentation patristique. Bilan et prospective*, Sainte-Foy, Presses de l'Université Laval / Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1995.

than Plotinus to face that question). But, forced to consider the creation of the world *ex nihilo,* they could never be too certain about such ideas as that of a "possible world". Indeed when philosophers were "deprived" of the onto-theological basis of their notion of possibility a radical change ensued. With Kant that "noological possibility" (essentially the possibility within the schemata of our experience and thinking) arose. Narbonne puts the "noological" issue as the question : "What is it that renders possible the knowledge which I have of the world ?"

Plotinus took a different tack. From the beginning he insisted that there could be no arbitrary limits to the demand for explanation. Narbonne sees the Plotinian revolution as beginning with the notion that the One must be able to explain itself — and also with the notion that the One is beyond all the distinctions, beyond the intelligences. (It was these intelligences which gave Christian philosophy its base and, though Narbonne does not pursue the matter, one can find elements of the notion of explanation by intelligence in both the "ontological" and "noological" senses of possibility.) The separation of the One from everything else, Narbonne insists, is the essence of "Plotinism".

Thus he brings Plotinus to bear on considerations which have played a large role in recent French philosophy — the critiques of onto-theo-logy which one finds in Emmanuel Lévinas, the search by Jean-Luc Marion for a way to free the concept of God from its choking attachments, and the historical explorations of Jean-François Courtine.

The question is then how to put these notions to use in showing that the One can both be separated from all other things and yet make contact with the world. Narbonne finds the crux of the issue in *Ennead* VI, 8, 21 in which the One is explained in terms of power, and he insists that it is possible to pose the notion of the One as an act without substance. Plotinus then needs only the notion of the liberty of the One as a "liberty of necessity". (This has been debated but Narbonne insists rightly that Plotinus "leaves no doubt".) What the One does it does because of its nature — the nature of the One after all is to be dynamic. (Aquinas, by contrast is hesitant about whether or not the goodness of God necessitated the creation of some world, though I think he finally concluded, too, that the divine liberty in this respect is a "liberty of necessity", for it would be a different God who created no world.)

But the world seems, indeed, permeated by matter at least in the sense that everything in it, even if it comes from the One, is expressed through matter. This is the question which originally aroused Narbonne's interest. Here he draws heavily on *Ennead* II.

What interests Narbonne (see p. 42) is the negativity of Plotinian matter as well as what he calls its "impassability". Matter is really to be conceived as the negation which confronts the one as it emanates into a plurality. This tension is the dynamism of the world as well as its incompleteness. In the writing of philosophers from Aristotle to Hegel there is always an unanswered question about the incompleteness of the world and about why the unfolding of the world takes so long. (Aquinas suggests that it is because God means to save us by our own free will and means the complexities of the world to have a chance to express themselves and work themselves out, but Aristotle's view of matter as the potentiality to take on form and Hegel's fondness for determinate historical processes both, in their very different ways, leave this question puzzling.) On the common readings of Plotinus, the good break free of the deterministic frustration of the process of emanation and can return to the One, thereby completing the cycle. What fails to return to the One is incomplete and shot through with unreality.

If, though, matter is negative resistance and the One is impelled to create by a liberty of necessity, the incompleteness of the world remains. Matter, as Narbonne believes Plotinus conceives of

it, has a certain "*irréalité*" (not quite "unreality" in English, but as the Latin *res* would suggest, a lack of thinghood) and thus in itself is a sterility. This reading does pose some problems and Narbonne devotes a long appendix to it. His reading sustains his basic point about the philosophy of Plotinus, but it also makes for complications with the notion of possibility to which Narbonne devotes a further chapter.

Narbonne insists that he neither wants to enter into the most technical debates about the reading of Plotinus nor to explore the details of Plotinus' relation to the history of philosophy, but that he simply wants to bring out the most distinctive notions in the Plotinian metaphysics. In fact he cannot quite keep to his desires and he does include a historical chapter which raises questions about self-generation before Plotinus.

Inevitably readers will want to ask questions which his analysis provokes. For instance, Plotinus' world becomes very open on Narbonne's account, and the One can only be understood through its expression in an infinity of worlds. It is in terms of this that moral issues associated with the return to the One — issues which emerged in Christian theology as questions about providence and grace — become complicated. In this region there is a thicket of disputed issues which must bring out Plotinus' involvement with traditional metaphysical categories and patterns of explanation which would tie him closely to the onto-theo-logy from which, evidently, Narbonne wants to free him. Again, Narbonne's account of Aristotle's substance is close to that of Joseph Owens (whom he cites). But Owens' view arises out of his study of mediaeval philosophy, and Aristotle would be seen as closer to Plotinus if one followed Chung-Hwan Chen who debated this question with Owens.[3] Chen saw Aristotle's being-*qua*-being as beyond substance. Would Plotinus have taken Chen's reading of Aristotle ? He surely did not, at any rate, read Aristotle quite as Owens does. Does this matter for our understanding of Plotinus ? Then, too, how great is the revolution if one takes into account the whole Alexandrian background ?

Whatever the answers to these questions Narbonne has opened a way of seeing Plotinus as relevant to some basic philosophical disputes of *our* time and his book — written simply but with elegance — is a pleasure to read.

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Thomas DE KONINCK, **De la dignité humaine.** Index des noms, index des notions. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1995, 244 pages.

L'ouvrage de M. de Koninck, professeur à l'Université Laval à Québec, ancien doyen de la Faculté de philosophie, vient à point. La dernière décennie a vu fleurir des références aux droits de l'homme, des protestations ou réclamations devant le flot des réfugiés car, comme l'observait déjà Kant en 1795, « une violation du droit en un seul lieu est ressentie partout ailleurs ». Pourtant ces références et ces protestations, souvent subjectives, appellent une fondation en vérité. Hannah Arendt le notait peu après la Seconde Guerre mondiale : « les droits de l'homme, philosophiquement, n'avaient jamais été établis mais seulement formulés ».

3. Joseph OWENS, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, Toronto : Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1951, 1963, 1978 ; Chung-Hwan CHEN, *Sophia, the Science Aristotle Sought*, Hildesheim : Georg Olms, 1976, p. 52-53. Father Owens responds, p. XXVI-XXVII, to an earlier formulation of Dr. Chen's thesis.