It is a common opinion among modern scholars of late ancient philosophy that Neoplatonists did not work out any kind of political theorization. In this ample

§ 129, 8 avrei reso διποῖν with ‘pericolo’ piuttosto che con ‘motive’. A § 108, 6 è saltato τὸ ὄντα, mentre a § 121, 2 l’aggettivo ἐκόντος. Infine, in § 4, 1, lo studioso, che accoglie la variante ἀγριότεθε, in pratica traduce la lezione dei manoscritti ἀγριότεθον ovvero ἀγριότεθη (correzione del Reiske).

Il ‘Commento’, in cui vengono affrontate in primum questioni testuali e linguistiche, ma anche interpretazioni omeriche, si segnala per la concisione e l’efficacia delle argomentazioni, che ne fanno un sicuro strumento esegetico e di consultazione.


In conclusione, si può affermare che la nuova edizione italiana del ‘Troiano’ di Dione Crisostomo, nonostante le evidenti lacune ed i limiti nello studio della tradizione manoscritta e in parte nella presentazione introduttiva dello scritto, rappresenta un valido contributo esegetico per lo studio della ricezione omerica in età imperiale. Ribadisco, inoltre, l’alto valore scientifico della traduzione e la pregevole constitutio textus, ispirata a fondatai principi neo-storicistici.

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and complex study O’Meara intends to show that this is a wrong point of view. As the author writes in the introductive chapter: «It is the purpose of this book to argue against the conventional view» (p. 5).

Briefly, according to the conventional view, the theoretical principle representing the fundamental goal of Neoplatonism, that is the divinization of man (διοίκωντος θεόν), necessarily excludes political thought: every man is a prisoner of this world and his own duty consists in escaping from it to achieve a sort of god-like condition in the heavenly intelligible world, his own true native land. O’M., in contrast with the conventional view, shows that the Neoplatonists’ political theorization lies just in the conception of divinization. This is the innovative interpretation propounded in this important book which represents the crowning achievement of a long research, as the former studies of O’M. on these themes testify.

The word ‘Platonopolis’ in the title of this study derives from a biographical note in Porphyry’s Vita Plotini (12, 3–12): Plotinus, counting on the support of the emperor Gallienus with his wife Solonina, proposed restoring a city of philosophers (ὁ πολιτικός πόλις) that long lay in ruins in Campania. This city would be called ‘Platonopolis’ and would be governed in accordance with Plato’s laws. But Plotinus failed to carry out his project because of the opposition of the counsellors at court. In O’M.’s opinion, we are unable to say what the meaning of Plotinus’ project was «as long as we are unclear about Plotinus’ theoretical position on the relation between philosophy and political life» (p. 16). However it is opportune to remark that, according to what Porphyry says in Vita Plotini, Platonopolis seems to be a ‘community of philosophers’ rather than a city of men governed by philosophers.

Taking as a starting point what Plotinus asserts in the treatise On Virtues (Enn. I.2), the author stresses the meaning of the concept of divinization in Neoplatonic philosophy: διοίκωντος θεόν means ‘becoming virtuous’. But what kind of virtues do we have to cultivate in order to become godlike? Plotinus is quite clear: these virtues should be identified, at least initially, with the four cardinal virtues as defined by Plato in the ‘Republic’: wisdom, courage, moderation and justice. They are described as ‘political’ by Plotinus and represent a first step on the path to divinization. We can find the same conception in all Neoplatonic thinkers. At the same time, according to them, the practice of these ‘political’ virtues enable men to imitate the perfect harmony and order of divine reality in the material world. O’M. explains this double movement, from the material world to divine reality and from this to the material world, as a reference to the ‘ascent’ and ‘descent’ of the philosopher in Plato’s allegory of the cave (‘Republic’, book VII, 514a–517d).

On the basis of these assumptions the author founds his reconstruction of a Neoplatonic political philosophy. So, using O’M.’s words, «the process of divinization, as Neoplatonists understood it, far from excluding political life, actually includes it» (p. 5). In spite of the complexity of the argument, it is opportune to stress the clearness and the theoretic coherence of this book. This already appears in the «plan of the work» inserted by the author at the end of the introductive chapter (pp. 10–12).

O’M.’s study is divided into three parts. The first part (chapters 3–6) deals with political virtues as a preparatory step in the ‘ascent’ of the philosopher to divinization, the second (chapters 7–11) deals with the ‘descent’ in the material...
world, i.e. the ambit of politics. The third and last part concerns the influence of Neoplatonic political philosophy over Christian thinkers, like Eusebius, Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius (chapters 12–13). In this section O’M. also dedicates a chapter (14) to al-Farabi (IX–X century A.D.) in order to show the presence of Neoplatonic political ideas in an Islamic context, as well.

From the Neoplatonic point of view, the philosopher, in his ascent to divinization, must climb the scale of ὑποτήτων which begins with political virtues and leads up to the ‘purificatory’ virtues. A specific scale of sciences corresponds to the scale of virtues: the first step is constituted, on the basis of an Aristotelian model, by the practical sciences which are, in fixed order, ethics, economics and politics. These practical sciences are subordinated to higher theoretical sciences which culminate in theology, the highest theoretical knowledge. According to the Neoplatonic view, a specific curriculum of studies must correspond to the progressive acquisition of knowledge and virtue: it should not be forgotten that Neoplatonism arose as a philosophical ‘school’. The curriculum is constituted by canonical texts which are studied under the guidance of a teacher. Obviously, among these texts (which also include some works of Aristotle, the Pseudo-Pythagorean ‘Golden Verses’ and Epictetus’ ‘Manual’) Plato’s dialogues have a prominent position. In Iamblichus’ platonic curriculum, which becomes canonical in the Neoplatonic schools, at least two dialogues are considered as concerning ethical-political matters: ‘Alcibiades’ and ‘Gorgias’. On this curricular level, of course the ‘Republic’ and ‘Laws’ are also studied under the direction of a teacher, but these dialogues, probably in consideration of their amplitude and complexity, could not have been systematically included in the curriculum. However, the group of treatises written by Proclus as a commentary on parts of the ‘Republic’ (some of which forms a kind of introduction to the reading of this dialogue) and some references regarding commentaries, ascribed to Syrianus and Damascius, on the ‘Laws’ confirm that all these works were read and discussed in the school in relation to the acquisition of political science (πολιτική ἔποιήμα) and political virtue (πολιτική ὑποτήτη).

It is basically in the second part of his work that the author confronts the main theme: the true reconstruction of the Neoplatonic political thought. The starting point is a question: why should the philosopher descend to the sensible world from the peaks of his contemplation in order to resolve the social-political problems of men? Briefly, why should the philosopher become king? According to O’M.’s interpretation, political action, for Neoplatonists, is to be considered an imitation of the providential aspect of divine life (p. 78). From this point of view, the author observes that «the philosopher, descending to the ‘cave’, will not sacrifice or lose this good or happiness [i.e. the good or happiness obtained as a consequence of his divinization], which will remain intact and immune from whatever political life imposes» (p. 83). O’M. supports this thesis through many references to the works of Neoplatonic thinkers, such as Iamblichus, Olympiodorus and Proclus.

What is therefore, according to Neoplatonists, the finality of the State? It is in the answer to this question that, in my opinion, we meet with the most difficult problem confronted by O’M. in his book. The structure of the Neoplatonic political thought could be synthesized as follows: the goal of a πόλις ruled by phi-
losophers is the good of its citizens; the most important good for mankind is the assimilation into god; so human cities must assimilate themselves into the divine reality which is ruled by an absolutely perfect order and harmony. The same order and harmony rule over the cosmos. On the basis of these considerations, it is clear that the supreme political goal, from the Neoplatonic point of view, is the divinization of θεός, which means that human cities have to be formed in the image and likeness of the divine and cosmic order. According to the Neoplatonists, monarchy or aristocracy represent constitutional types which reflect in the most accurate way the order of the universe (pp. 101–105). As a consequence of this conception, it ensues – we can add – that the greatest good for the State is the ‘Unity’ on which the perfect harmony of the ‘Whole’ lies. Obviously, according to the Neoplatonic theorization, religion has a fundamental political function for many reasons, in particular because the assimilation into the divine, as we have seen, is the goal of politics. Furthermore the philosopher-king finds a supreme degree of divinization in ‘theurgic’ virtue «whereby man truly becomes god» (p. 136).

On the basis of these considerations, it is clear what the intrinsic limits of Neoplatonic political theory are: they are the limits imposed by the human condition itself. Man is not, in any way, a god. He is a mortal being and he lives in a dimension conditioned by the unstable becoming of this material world. The philosopher-ruler can make mistakes, because he is a man notwithstanding his aspiration to διόνουσθεν θεό. As O’M. correctly points out, «the greatest imaginable political success cannot therefore go beyond the realization of a general condition of ‘political’ virtue, as a first, preparatory stage leading to higher levels of divinization» (p. 138).

In this consideration there appears, in my opinion, the most problematic point of O’M.’s thesis. However, the author seems fully aware of this difficulty. Is it really possible to speak about a Neoplatonic political thought? Is it not, instead, the result of a metaphysical-theological interpretation of Plato’s political philosophy? It might be said that neither in Plato can we find a political theorization in the strict sense of the term. Nevertheless, in this extremely rich and refined book the reader has the impression that the Neoplatonic authors try to turn political theorization into a metaphysical-theological speculation. The city of men has to assimilate itself, as far as possible, into the city of gods, which means that politics has to assimilate itself into theology. In Neoplatonism the political theorization actually takes the shape of a ‘theological politics’ or – it depends on points of view – of a ‘political theology’ (such as in Proclus).

This general impression is confirmed in the third and last part of O’M.’s book, where he discusses, as previously said, the influences of Neoplatonic political theory over Christian thinkers and, in an Islamic context, over al-Farabi. Here we can only give a very short account of this part. Authors such as Eusebius, Augustine and al-Farabi himself, propound, although from very different points of view, political theories, as O’M. shows, almost completely theologized. On the other hand, in Pseudo-Dionysius’ works the change of politics into theology appears complete and definitive.

Beyond the problematic question put in evidence here and necessarily connected with the nature of the Neoplatonic philosophical system, O’M.’s book
makes it possible to see some fundamental aspects of neoplatonic ‘Weltanschauung’ in a new light. It is well structured and widely documented work as the detailed bibliography shows. Furthermore, an index of names and subjects and an index of passages enable the reader to orientate himself in this complex matter.

No doubt this study constitutes a resource not to be ignored for any future research on Neoplatonism, a really holistic philosophical system firmly oriented in the direction of the final theological view. Even when a problem arises from political matters, the Neoplatonists prefer to consider it, no matter what, from a theological point of view.

Pavia

Michele Abbate


Après une brève préface (p. 1) et la bibliographie (p. 3–9), une introduction de soixante pages (p. 11–70) précède l’édition de la ‘versio antiqua’ de la Synagoge (p. 71–523) et de la ‘versio codicis B’ limitée à la seule lettre alpha (p. 523–701); divers index et des ‘addenda et corrigenda’ (p. 703–760) complètent le volume.

Rien de plus difficile – et peut-être de plus ingrat – que l’édition des lexiques grecs d’époque byzantine. Cunningham le sait mieux que quiconque puisqu’il a mis une vingtaine d’années à préparer l’édition de la Synagoge tout en publiant d’autres travaux, à commencer par son édition commentée des Mimiambes d’Hérodas (1971), et autant d’années (1982–2003) à la réaliser. Il est vrai que conservateur à la National Library of Scotland, il ne disposait que d’un temps limité pour cette tâche qu’il accomplissait avec une solide érudition et avec la minutie d’un bibliothécaire rédigeant une fiche descriptive.