

Jean-Michel Charrue, *NÉOPLATONISME: De l'existence et de la destinée humaine*, Ouverture Philosophique, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2014, pp. 234.
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This is an interesting and engaging book by the author of works such as *Illusion de la Dialectique et Dialectique de l'Illusion. Platon et Plotin* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2003) and *De l'être et du monde. Ammonius, Plotin, Proclus* (Klincksieck, 2010), and its scope is just as impressive. A collection of ten talks given for the most part at meetings of the ISNS from 2008 to 2014, the book focuses upon three major problems: First, the third hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* and the creation of the sensible world in the interpretations of Damascius and Proclus (chapters 1-3). Second, the existential question of human freedom in Neoplatonism generally, against the background of providence, destiny and necessity, a sustained treatment that occupies most of the work, ranging from Plotinus (chapter 4), Porphyry (chapter 5), Hierocles of Alexandria (chapter 6), to Iamblichus (chapter 7), Simplicius' *Commentary on the Manual of Epictetus* (chapter 8), and Gregory of Nyssa and Plotinus on providence (chapter 9). The third is a single chapter, but an intriguing, if unexpected issue: Plotinus' aesthetics and Aristotle's *Poetics* (chapter 10). Each chapter has its own bibliography and there is a helpful introduction to the book as a whole.

In the first two chapters, Charrue takes up what is probably the most important dialogue for the Neoplatonists, the *Parmenides*, and argues for a dialectical interpretation of the second part of the dialogue as opposed to ancient and modern views that this part is simply a logical exercise, which is to say (I think correctly) that in dialectic logic and ontology go together, but not symmetrically. Consequently, Charrue sees dialectic operative in the so-called third hypothesis of *Parmenides* 155e-157c (that is, hypothesis IIb, or III, the latter according to those commentators who see nine hypotheses, as opposed to 8, in this second part of the *Parmenides*). This hypothesis accentuates the dissymmetry involved in the generation of sensible temporality—that is, where the one both participates and does not participate in real being. For Plato, and later for Damascius, this third hypothesis pertains to human existence and temporality, linked through instantaneous change to both real being and temporality and through the soul as the intermediary that partakes of both. This sets the stage in chapter 3 for the discovery of the substantial permanence of the demiurge and matter in the co-creation of an eternal world in Proclus' argument XII in *On The Eternity of the World* from the analogous experience of temporal continuity rooted in the 'now' of experience.

The rest of the book effectively explores what this means for the human experience of freedom and free creativity against the broader background of providence, necessity, destiny, and different senses of compulsion. In what is effectively the pivot of the book, Charrue first emphasizes the existential dynamic force of freedom in Plotinus—whether or not souls come here by necessity or voluntarily (in iv 8 [6] and iv 3 [27]); he stresses “the formation of individual experience that forges character” (p. 77) that Plotinus traces in vi 8 [39] through the notions of “what is in our power” and “self-determination” *autexousion*, to the pure interior freedom that leads to the divine and the height of mystical experience (as in vi 7 [38]). Not only are the *Enneads* ‘l’histoire de la liberté humaine,’ but ‘la vertu parachève cette élaboration progressive d’une liberté inter humaine’ (p. 86). This is a careful study that rightly emphasizes the crucial importance of freedom in Plotinus’ thought as a whole. Chapter 5 shows in Porphyry’s Commentary on the *Timaeus* how prayer frames the entire work (27c-d) and also via the *Letter to Anebo* and fragments on freedom (in Proclus and Stobaeus) how providence and freedom are in tension but ultimately aligned, partly by distinguishing two kinds of choice in our lives, one determined by the stars which permits astrology, and the other our own agency.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 do something similar for Hierocles of Alexandria, Iamblichus, and Simplicius. Chapter 9 is different providing a subtle analysis of the profound influence of Plotinus upon Gregory of Nyssa, that concludes (p. 184) that while Plotinus, the philosopher, is not part of Gregory’s explicit Christian “predecessors”, he remained his “companion” throughout, inspiring “sa profonde réflexion sur la Providence et sur la vie.”

Finally, Chapter 10 is highly original. Charrue argues that there is an aesthetics in Plotinus, one linked to the critique of art in Plato, but in its own special way an aesthetics of production (“L’esthétique de Plotin est une poétique,” p. 192), thanks to the dynamic quality of form that actually creates in sensible things, a viewpoint very much in tune with Aristotle’s poetics. Charrue, in fact, uncovers two passages, altogether unsuspected hitherto in the *Enneads*, where he argues that Plotinus writes with Aristotle’s Poetics in mind: 1) in I 3, chapter 1, treatise 20, *On Dialectic*, treatise 20, where the words “these sounds, rhythms, and forms” (I, 28-29) and the mention of harmony that follows (I, 32) refer to Aristotle’s Poetics 1447a18-22; and 2) in III 2, chapters 15-18, *On Providence I*, treatise 47, where Plotinus’ treatment of the *theatrum mundi* or “the stage that is the whole world” (15, 50) is inspired in part, on Charrue’s account, by Aristotle’s treatment of tragedy in the Poetics, where both Plotinus and Aristotle attempt to grasp ethically endowed characters and their destiny in the providential cosmic drama. “In the truer poetic creation,” Plotinus writes,

"which men who have a poetic nature imitate in part, the soul acts, receiving the part which it acts from the poet creator" (III 2, 17, 33ff.). Here (p. 213) Charrue detects an allusion to Aristotle and to the *Poetics* in the words italicized above, an allusion that he goes on to nuance somewhat in his final section on mimesis which, while it is not quite that of Aristotle, nonetheless borrows some elements from him, notably, in the relation of art to nature, and in the *logoi* which dynamically manifest the form inside and outside of nature (pp. 222-227; cf. V 8, 1, 32-34, treatise 31 and *Physics* II, 193a30-31). The evidence, if slim, is there, and the impulse that Plotinus thought instinctively across the whole of ancient thought is surely justified.

In short, Charrue shows the roots of Neoplatonism in the *Parmenides* and its exegesis as a *system of the world* ("Le Néoplatonisme était devenu un système du monde," p. 6) together with the spirit of divine providence, destiny, necessity, and individual freedom that pervade this complex system in a living way from Plato and Aristotle across the thought of Plotinus, Porphyry, Hierocles, Iamblichus, Proclus, Simplicius, and also (appropriately) Gregory of Nyssa.

Kevin Corrigan
Emory University
kcorrigan@emory.edu