whole exposition could be a bluff, designed to put Porphyry in his place, but it does not sound like that, and therefore we must address it seriously. It is here that Iamblichus seems furthest from philosophic rationality, but, as C. emphasizes, this is a fact about him that we have to come to terms with. The main thrust of his response to Porphyry is that miracles do happen: theurgy is not about the manipulation of forces within the physical world through the use of cosmic sympathy; it is about channeling divine intervention, freely imparted. Of course, the theurgist is in control of the situation in a sense, but what I. wishes to emphasize is the voluntary nature of the gods' actions, and the subordination of the theurgist to their will.

All in all, C. has done an excellent job of bringing out the true nature of this remarkable work, and of analysing the essence of I.'s position. The book is copiously annotated, and has a comprehensive bibliography.

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RECONSTRUCTING NEOPLATONIC POLITICAL THEORY

D. J. O'Meara: *Platonopolis. Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity*. Pp. xii + 249. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003. Cased, £35. ISBN: 0-19-925758-2.

This book is both original and important. It is original to the degree that it is commonly assumed that the topic of the book, Neoplatonic political theory, does not exist at all. It is important, because D. J. O'Meara, a well-known Neoplatonic scholar, on the basis of a careful discussion of a valuable collection of material, indeed proves its existence and sketches its outlines. Moreover, since Neoplatonism was the dominant philosophical movement of late antiquity adopted by the élite—as Chapter 2 illustrates—this lucidly written book will be of interest not just to students of Neoplatonism, but also to historians who focus on this period, even though it explicitly does not deal with the possible influence of such theories on the practice of the political handiwork.

The first chapter analyses why Neoplatonic philosophical theories seem such an unlikely object of a study. Was there any place at all for political interests in a philosophy that was characterized by, if not obsessed with, the idea of leaving this material world for a divine existence in a transcendent realm? O'M. argues that there were even two stages in the life of a Neoplatonist where political interests fitted in. On the one hand, the ascending soul was supposed to acquire the so-called political virtues that Plato had discussed in the *Republic*. On the other hand, the godlike soul that had achieved the ultimate mystical experience, unification with the One or the Good, had to descend again. Its experience with the Good inspired such a soul to do good itself to lesser fortunate beings, for example by partaking in politics.

Chapters 3–6 focus on politics in relation to the ascent of the human soul or its divinization, the meaning of which in Greek philosophy in general and Neoplatonism in particular is the topic of Chapter 3. The subsequent chapter deals with political virtue as part of an established scale of virtues through which an aspiring Neoplatonist had to pass before he obtained divinization. The Neoplatonic program of studies was structured in accordance with this scale. Chapter 5 examines which

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https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/54.2.351 Published online by Cambridge University Press

works by Plato and others a student had to read in order to acquire the political virtues, and thus presents us with 'the library of Neoplatonic political philosophy'.

Chapters 7–11 examine the theory about the theories regarding the political activities of the philosopher who has achieved his ascent and descends again into this world. These chapters deal with such topics as the motivation of the philosopher to forsake his contemplative bliss, the Neoplatonic views on legislation and the administration of justice—two fields that were of particular interest to them—the political function of religion, and the limits of political action.

The last part of the book examines the influence of Neoplatonic political theory on Christian and Islamic thinkers. Among the Christians, O'M. treats such well-known figures as Eusebius, who accepted elements from it, Augustine, who rejected it completely in the *City of God*, and pseudo-Dionysius, as well as less familiar texts such as the anonymous dialogue *On Political Science*. The final chapter is reserved for Al-Farabi and his *Perfect State*, in which it is argued that, contrary to the common view, this 'founder' of political philosophy in Islam took on board various elements from mainstream Neoplatonic sources. Two appendixes conclude the book, one on Themistius and another on Sopatros, a Platonist rhetor.

O'M. convincingly shows that political theory was a bigger issue in Neoplatonism than is usually suggested. Yet, the question is how big? At times, O'M. has to work his material really hard in order to get minimal results out of it. Take, for example, his brief chapter on the judicial part of the Neoplatonic political science. As O'M. shows, Neoplatonists divide practical philosophy into a legislative science and a judicial one. Since we lack any serious discussion of the latter topic, O'M. turns to Neoplatonic interpretations of Plato's eschatological myths that deal indeed with (divine) punishment. From these, it appears that Neoplatonists emphasize two aspects of punishment: it should prevent people from doing wrong and cure those who have nevertheless done so. Turning from divine to human justice, O'M. compares these ideas to a (not very philosophical) letter of the Neoplatonist Sopatros to his brother Himerius, a man of some power and importance, which contains some sort of 'Mirror of Princes'. As regards the administration of justice, Sopatros advocates the same combination of deterrence and moral reform that can be found in the Neoplatonic interpretations of the eschatological myths. Rather circumstantial evidence, I think, for the content of a science. In the following chapter, about the political function of religion, to add another example, O'M. tries to connect the program of religious reform of the emperor Julian to a Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato's *Laws*. Even though it is a matter of fact that Julian knew the *Laws*, I am not convinced by some of the parallels to which O'M. points. It may be true, for example, that both Julian and the *Laws* hold that ancient traditions should not be disturbed, but this is a common place in Neoplatonism and does not necessarily connect Julian to Plato. In short, the very limited amount of information, together with the superficiality of Neoplatonic political theories, especially in comparison to their exuberant metaphysical speculations, leaves one with the impression that political philosophy did not really set the Neoplatonists on fire, even though, since Plato was full of political philosophy, they had to pay at least some attention to it and developed some ideas themselves.

However this may be, this book is an eye-opener: once one has read the book, one will, in my experience, start noticing more and more bits of political theory in Neoplatonic texts. As such, it will certainly serve as the stimulus for further investigation that its author intends it to be.

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https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/54.2.351 Published online by Cambridge University Press