This is an altogether splendid book, original in conception, provocative, and passionately argued. Remarkably for a book that is basically a Ph.D. thesis, it stands up very well indeed alongside the deeply reflective and learned works of Arnou, Hadot, Trouillard, and Gandillac. I recommend it wholeheartedly to all students of Platonism.

*University of Toronto* LLOYD P. GERSON

## IAMBLICHUS ON THE MYSTERIES

E. C. CLARKE: *Iamblichus:* De mysteriis. *A Manifesto of the Miraculous*. Pp. vii + 136. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001. Cased, £35. ISBN: 0-7546-0408-X.

This is a book warmly to be welcomed. Emma Clarke has produced a study of this remarkable work which will serve to define with greater accuracy than ever before its essential quality. This work, the true title of which is *The Response of the Master Abamon to Porphyry's Letter to Anebo, with Solutions to the Problems Raised Therein* (the usual title, *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians*, etc., is an invention of Marsilio Ficino, but it is undeniably somewhat snappier, so it is generally retained), is the second half of a polemical exchange initiated by Iamblichus' former teacher, Porphyry, in protest against Iamblichus' growing tendency to privilege 'theurgy', or the performance of ritual acts by properly qualified persons (what one might term 'sacramental theology') over philosophy proper. Not that philosophy was to be rejected; it was simply declared inadequate, by itself, to achieve the reintegration of the soul, damaged as it was, even in its essence, by descent into the body, with the realm of True Being, and, above that, with the One.

Iamblichus, of course, rejects Plotinus' theory that a part of the human soul remains 'above', and this acceptance of the complete descent of the soul would seem to be tied in with his promotion of ritual activity—a change of emphasis that affected Platonism ever afterwards, and which in consequence drew down upon Iamblichus the wrath of modern scholars dominated by modern ideals of rationality and enlightenment. However, in the last thirty years or so the situation has changed somewhat. It has been recognized that a case can be made for the inclusion of theurgy in an intellectual tradition which, it must be remembered, had many of the characteristics of a religion as well as of a philosophical movement. The pendulum can, however, swing too far in the direction of rehabilitating the *DM* from a rationalist viewpoint, and it is this against which C. is protesting. The *DM* is certainly well argued, on its own premisses, and even a rather sophisticated production, from a polemical perspective (the constant putting down of Porphyry by the high priest 'Abamon' exhibits, it seems to me, a degree of wit), but one must not be seduced into hailing it as a work of rationalism.

I quote, in this connexion, two programmatic passages from C., the one at the end of Chapter 1 (p. 12), the second near the beginning of Chapter 2 (p. 19):

> Although Iamblichus offers a point-by-point refutation in the *De Mysteriis*, his more sweeping answer to Porphyry is clear at the outset: all questions find their solution in the miracle of theurgy, not the intellectualist explanations of philosophy. The whole thrust of Iamblichus' argument depends upon the notion that Porphyry is asking the wrong questions in the wrong way. Iamblichus believes language to be an inadequate means of communicating

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> the divine mysteries. While in a sense this means that the *De Mysteriis* is an apology, we shall find that the spirit of this work is not apologetic but revelatory; it is a catalogue of, and tribute to, the powers of the gods as revealed in miraculous form to men.
>
> Iamblichus' entire theory of life relies upon the miraculous. His view that the soul was changed and damaged during its descent into the material world is generally accepted as one of the founding principles behind his radical approach to salvation, i.e. the stipulation that theurgy was the only means of re-ascent to god and, indeed, the only means of communication with the divine. The process of theurgy, which I would define as religious ritual demonstrating supernatural power, both symbolized and encapsulated the extraordinary wonder of salvation. Behind Iamblichus' approach lay his fundamental belief that all things come from the gods and that man has no power or authority over them or their laws; in the face of man's impotency, the immediacy of the gods and their supernatural demonstration of power is crucial.

I find very little to quarrel with in either of these statements. Only on the question of the impotence of man before god would I introduce a qualification. Certainly, Iamblichus constantly emphasizes the primacy of the gods, but the fact is, I think, that, in contrast to the Christian view of things (as represented by such a figure as St. Augustine), the theurgist, if he performs the correct rituals in the correct way, does call the shots: the gods will always respond—not, however, Iamblichus would emphasize, because they *have* to (that would be the outlook of vulgar magic), but because they *want* to.

Following on her first two chapters, which are more general and programmatic, C. undertakes a series of four studies, covering the salient features of Iamblichus' doctrine: 'Ritual: The Miracle of Sacrifice' (Chapter 3); 'Ritual: The Truth about Oracles' (Chapter 4); 'Inspiration or Possession' (Chapter 5); and 'The Epiphanies' (Chapter 6). The book ends with a short conclusion, 'A Farewell to Philosophy'.

In Chapter 3, C. focuses chiefly on Iamblichus' exposition of his theory of sacrifice in Book 5, highlighting his dissolution of Porphyry's *aporia* about animal sacrifice (dead bodies may pollute priests, but they do not pollute the gods, as nothing can pollute the gods), and his emphasis on the benevolent will of the gods as the key element in a successful sacrifice, as opposed to the workings of any sort of cosmic sympathy. What pleases the gods, if anything, is the de-materialization of matter, through the agency of sacred fire.

In Chapter 4, C. turns to Iamblichus' defence of the power of oracles, basing herself primarily on *De Myst.* 3.11. Once again, Iamblichus makes it clear that the key feature of a successful oracle (he instances in particular Delphi, Didyma, and Claros) is divine inspiration, freely imparted, and not any human skill, and C. gives a good account of his procedure—in the process criticizing those, like Herbert Parke and Joseph Fontenrose, who have too optimistically sought evidence for details of the procedures in the various shrines from Iamblichus' rather off-hand allusions.

Chapter 5 continues the theme of Chapter 4, by looking at Iamblichus' view of the nature of divine possession, whether in waking states or asleep, based largely on passages from Book 3, while in Chapter 6, she addresses what is certainly the most bizarre, even unnerving, section of the work: the detailed account, in Book 2, of how to recognize epiphanies of superior beings, from gods, through archangels and angels, down to hylic archons and various sorts of disembodied soul. What is so unnerving here is that Iamblichus proceeds in such a businesslike way to list the characteristics of the manifestations of the various classes of being, and the benefits they confer, on the assumption that this is a basic thing that the practising theurgist needs to know. The

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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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