

Dragos Calma, Reading Proclus and the Book of Causes

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Reading Proclus and the Book of Causes. 1: Western Scholarly Networks and Debates edited by Dragos Calma

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There is no doubt that in recent decades there has been an astonishing development in the study of Proclus' (AD 412–485) philosophy and its reception in the Arabic, Hebrew, and Byzantine worlds. Conferences, monographs, and collective volumes [e.g., [d'Hoine and Martijn 2016](#)] dedicated to the broad scope of his thought, numerous PhD dissertations taking up individual threads of the latter, and postdoctoral research initiatives testify to current scholarship's ever-increasing interest in the philosophical heritage of one of the greatest Neoplatonists. The collective volume under review testifies to this expansion and explores aspects of the influence of the *Book of Causes* in the Latin West and the reception of Proclus' highly influential work, the *Elements of Theology*, mainly in the Latin West but also in Byzantine thought.¹

The chapters of this volume derive from the conference *Les Elements de théologie et le Livre de causes du Ve au XVIIe siècle* (2015), organized in Paris by Marc Geoffroy and Dragos Calma. In addition to Calma's introductory essay, the volume includes 16 contributions and three indexes. These

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¹ The reception and integration of Proclus' thought into different cultural and philosophical contexts has been studied in various collective volumes and individual contributions. Among them one may read [Gersh 2014](#) and [Butorac 2017](#).

contributions are divided into two major parts, of which the first is titled “Liber de causis” [chs 1–10] and the second “Proclus” [chs 11–16].

The *Book of Causes* has dramatically influenced Western metaphysics. Written in Arabic in ninth-century Baghdad [Calma 2016, 11–13], this work was significantly informed by Proclus’ *Elem. theol.* in both its content and its form. Thomas Aquinas was the first to unearth the dependence of the *Book of Causes* on Proclus’ *Elem. theol.*, which he explicates in the preface of his commentary on the *Book of Causes*.

The first part of the volume under review examines certain crucial milestones of the influence of the *Book of Causes* in the Latin West, in particular, in the work of eminent medieval philosophers such as Albert the Great and Duns Scotus. This exploration is not dedicated merely to unearthing doctrinal and philosophical issues, but also brings out questions about the manuscript tradition related to this work, since two contributions discuss the diffusion of relevant manuscripts in English libraries and some glosses on the *Book of Causes* found in Parisian manuscripts. The second part of the volume is devoted to the study of the reception of Proclus’ *Elem. theol.* both in the Latin West and in Byzantium. Such a complicated issue, which still remains promising in terms of scholarly research, could not be exhaustively treated within one single volume, let alone in one of its parts.

A general comment at this point would be that the scope of these contributions significantly varies. Certain of them proceed to a rather broad reconstruction of Proclus’ influence on one specific commentator, whereas others opt for a more restricted account of a specific issue. This combined approach including analysis on the macrolevel and on the microlevel can thus benefit the eager, but perhaps less expert, reader and simultaneously meet the intellectual and scholarly needs of the researcher. In the following sections, I discuss each contribution according to the division of the volume into its aforementioned parts.

Part One—*Liber de causis*

In view of the complexity of the traditions represented by the *Elem. theol.* and the *Book of Causes*, before delving into specific aspects of them it would be quite useful to possess a solid conception of the very notion of tradition and, more importantly, of the idea of an exegetical tradition. In his chapter, Dominique Poirel focuses on this pressing question and suggests that an exegetical tradition is “l’ensemble des commentaires d’une même oeuvre” [18]. To reach this conclusion, he thoroughly discusses each and every term of this definition, starting with the corpus that is formed by the “ensemble”

of commentaries. Poirel divides the corpus of texts forming an exegetical tradition into three periods in chronological order, each of which has its individual features.

The first is the age of those initiators who established this tradition by picking up a text and producing commentaries on it, mainly in order to make it intelligible and accessible. In the absence of previous undertakings, the texts of this period are markedly innovative and original as far as their interpretative suggestions are concerned. For the same reason, they often draw parallels with other, already established texts in order to clarify obscure passages.

In the second phase, that of the continuators, the primary text has reached a broader audience and the relevant commentaries are increasingly dependent on the previous tradition, which accumulates layers of interpretation and understanding that pervade all subsequent commentaries. The latter, therefore, cease to be radical and all encompassing but rather, as Poirel underlines, isolate and discuss specific passages, avoiding a holistic account of the work. The third and last period is committed to the preservation of the tradition that may be declining for various reasons, for example, because new texts attract more interest, or, as Poirel himself puts it,

à cause de mutations culturelles importantes, qui conduisent les intellectuels, ou une partie d'entre eux, à rejeter des autorités tenues pour traditionnelles jusqu'alors, au profit d'autres autorités, plus neuves, ou au contraire plus anciennes, comme ce fut le cas à la Renaissance. [24]

The commentaries, the second phase in the division, include various sorts of texts, for example, commentaries, glosses, paraphrases, and reformulations. Regardless of their specific form, they always point beyond themselves to an authoritative text and mediate between the latter and their contemporary readers. Thus, they serve complex intellectual and scholarly goals that range from mere elucidation to delicate strategies of conciliation and adaptation. “L'oeuvre”, designating the third phase in Poirel's account and the object of the commentaries, is shown to be quite a flexible term. In many cases, we do not really have *one single* text, since the existence of multiple translations in different languages creates grids of differing but also related traditions ultimately dependent upon the “same” text.

Within the same context, we are invited to ponder the fact that, apart from the self-standing authoritative texts, there are others that became self-standing although they are part of broader texts, for example, the Letters of Saint Paul. Similarly, one may think of the first book of Plato's *Republic* or of how the eminent books 5–7 of the same work admit of a distinct scholarly

treatment. In a nutshell, Poirel promotes a multilayered conception of the exegetical tradition and appeals to illuminating examples in order to explicate its three fundamental elements.

Turning now to contributions more explicitly based on the *Book of Causes*, Irene Caiazzo provides us with an in-depth overview of the early reception of the *Book of Causes* in the Latin world. She focuses both on major works, for example, those of Alain de Lille, Gundissalinus, Alexandre Neckam, and Alfred de Shareshill, and on less-known sources, such as an unedited *questio* from the beginning of the 13th century. Her starting point is the translation of the *Book of Causes* from Arabic into Latin by Gerard of Cremona, which must have been accomplished before his death in 1187, given also that the first Latin philosophical work to cite this translation, namely, Alain de Lille's *De fide catholica*, was written between 1185 and 1200.

Regarding the manuscripts including this Latin translation, Caiazzo discusses MS Selden Supra 24 (Bodleian Library of Oxford), dated from the beginning of the 13th century [48]. She concludes on the basis of its title and chapter division that MS 71 (Aosta manuscript, Seminario maggiore) “est sans aucun doute plus proche de la traduction originale de Gérard de Crémone que le manuscrit d’ Oxford” [51].

Gundissalinus, the eminent translator who could read the *Book of Causes* in both Latin and Arabic, silently draws from it a theory of creation “mediante intelligentia”, which Caiazzo relates to chapters 3 and 8 of the *Book of Causes* [55], whereas Neckam turns to the *Book of Causes* primarily to shape his own account of eternity. However, this account displays significant variations when compared with the MS Selden Supra 24.

Caiazzo also refers to two texts whose theory of soul has been informed by the *Book of Causes*. The first of them, titled “Homo cum in honore esset”, relates to the *Book of Causes* because of a reference to its abridged title (“In bonitate pura”, as introduced by Gerard of Cremona) and brings out the eminence of the rational human soul. As for the second, written in the early 13th century, Caiazzo provides textual evidence that it advocates the immortality of the soul on the basis of the 11th chapter of the *Book of Causes*, as mediated by the *Contra haereticos* of Alain de Lille.

After those quite promising remarks on the pervasiveness of the *Book of Causes* in England in the early 13th century, Fiorella Retucci turns to the *Sapientiale* of Thomas of York, composed in the mid-13th century. She

presents Thomas' vivid interest in the *Book of Causes* as a surprising exception that runs contrary to the usually hesitant attitude displayed by Franciscans toward this work [72]. In total, Thomas refers more than 100 times to the *Book of Causes*, making use of 22 of its propositions. Retucci challenges the view "that Thomas of York was persuaded of the Christian origins of the *Liber de Causis*" [74] and convincingly suggests by means of textual evidence that for him it must have been "secular" in origin, representing, as it were, a philosophical contribution to theology.

It is equally noteworthy that, contrary to the received practice of his contemporaries, Thomas apprehended the underlying affinities of the *Book of Causes* with the Platonist tradition, thus anticipating Aquinas' relevant discovery and paving the way for Berthold of Moosburg's use of *Sapientiale* against the Aristotelian tradition. The impact of the *Book of Causes* is divided into three major aspects, of which the first lies in Thomas of York's conception of God, whom he identifies with the First Cause. Causality is specified as the second field of affinities, wherein Thomas considers God as the "efficient cause of everything" [82] while at the same time accepting the role of secondary causality. The third aspect relates to the question of intellect and the status of Platonic Ideas.

Retucci's analysis is not restricted to Thomas of York, but points to later developments as well. She shows quite astutely that Thomas questioned Aristotle's conceptualization of Plato's Ideas and through Eustratius of Nicea defended their status as transcendent, rather than merely abstract, ideas that have a causal, and not just a predicative, role to play. In this respect, the chapter anticipates the criticism raised by Berthold of Moosburg along the same lines and indicates that Berthold's advocacy of Platonism, although informed by his Dominican predecessors, drew as well from the Franciscan Thomas.

Remaining within an English framework, Laure Miolo commits herself to examining the diffusion of the *Book of Causes* and the *Elem. theol.* in England by studying the extent to which manuscripts with these works circulated in Merton College (Oxford) and Peterhouse (Cambridge). Such an approach may turn out quite illuminating because it can bring out the popularity that certain philosophical works might have enjoyed and their overall imprint on a particular community of teaching and research. Unlike the University of Paris, which had included the *Book of Causes* in the list of obligatory readings already from the mid-13th century, in Merton College (Oxford) and Peterhouse (Cambridge), the two works were not required

reading throughout the 13th and the 14th centuries despite the occasional changes in the relevant lists.

However, Miolo also sets another criterion for their study, which is the annual distribution of books among the college members by means of the academic process of *electio*. This procedure was organized by the rector and the vice-rector. In Merton College, the existing lists include six entries of the *Book of Causes* and the *Elem. theol.* for the period 1318–1338 [128]. Although, of course, these manuscripts include other works as well and it is difficult to specify the attention paid to them, Miolo justifiably stresses that at least in one case the *Book of Causes* is explicitly linked with Proclus' *Elem. theol.* Turning to Peterhouse (Cambridge), she appeals to a list of 1418 with “volumes enchainés”, of which four contained the *Book of Causes* and the *Elem. theol.*, as well as commentaries on them. Thus,

l'existence de plusieurs manuscrits comportant des *questiones* ou commentaires sur ces œuvres attestent de leur lecture, lors de leçons extraordinaires ou parallèle à l'enseignement universitaire. [137]

In light of this evidence, Miolo claims that these two works enjoyed a much greater diffusion in these two colleges than in Paris, albeit not in the form of obligatory readings, and aptly underlines that the English academic world seems to have been aware of Aquinas' discovery of the dependence of the *Book of Causes* on the *Elem. theol.*

The next contribution is narrower in scope in that it focuses only on the *Book of Causes* and discusses the glosses found in the Parisian manuscripts containing the text. Olga Weijers identifies 34 manuscripts in total, which she divides into three broad categories: the first, containing four manuscripts, includes commentaries on the *Book of Causes*; the second includes eight manuscripts with rather limited glosses; and the third, “il n'y a pas ou pratiquement pas de glosses sur ce texte” [152]. The focal point of her argument is that most of the manuscripts containing glosses on the *Book of Causes* “ont une provenance non-parisienne”, which is at odds with the presumably obligatory reading of the work within that university. The lack of glosses implies that the actual teaching of the work was not as regular and systematic as expected.

Katja Krause and Henryk Anzulewicz establish the prominent place of the *Book of Causes* in the intellectual development of Albert the Great throughout his career and in contexts that are both philosophical and theological. A quite subtle remark that grounds their account is that the role played by the *Book of Causes* has not always been of the same nature, since in different phases of Albert's career, starting with the early treatise *De natura boni*

and culminating in his *De causis et processu universitatis a prima causa*, he would draw from it different doctrinal and methodological insights. In this contribution, then, Krause and Anzulewicz specify three features (form/systematicity, content, and method) marking different periods of Albert's reception of the work and paving the way for the culminating point of this evolving reception, which is his conception of the *Book of Causes* as "the very foundation of *philosophia realis*" [182].

Albert first engaged with the *Book of Causes* during his pre-Parisian period and appealed to it only for the "formal-systematic characteristics of individual propositions" [183]. His use of it, then, is quite "decontextualized", to use the apt characterization of the authors, as is clear, for example, when Albert cites the very first proposition of the *Book of Causes* in order to devise a hierarchy of the sacraments in his *De sacramentis*.

The treatise *Summa de creaturis* represents the second phase of his appeal to the *Book of Causes*. Krause and Anzulewicz bring out both the increased number of references to the *Book of Causes* and, more importantly, that the latter is also doctrinally important for Albert in this phase. It is no longer transferred into alien contexts, but is cited as a self-standing source in "his argumentation in a context closely related to the concerns of the LDC [*Book of Causes*] itself" [191]. This development, of course, also relates to the content of Albert's own works, which draw from the *Book of Causes*, since the *Summa de creaturis* is already thematically closer to it than, for example, Albert's strictly theological treatises.

In order to explain the characteristics of the last period, the authors turn to Albert's commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. Although this is not one of his latest works, it exemplifies a major turn in Albert's thought toward establishing the methodological independence of philosophy from theology and *vice versa*, which benefited both disciplines. Angels and celestial intelligences provide us with a good example in this respect. The role of the former in a religious account of reality and that of the latter in a philosophical one are no longer confused, since Albert's perspective as a commentator on the *Sentences* is aligned with religious sources and authorities. For this reason, the *Book of Causes* is judged an inappropriate source of insights for this specific context, although it may perfectly provide Albert's *own* theological perspective with enriching insights coming from philosophy. All in all, this seeming "rejection" of the *Book of Causes* in this particular context actually marks a deeper appreciation of it outside the merely theological framework of commentaries.

Maria Evelina Malgieri delves into “an interesting anomaly” [210] surrounding the use of the fourth proposition of the *Book of Causes*. More concretely, she identifies two works, the *Quaestiones super metaphysicam* (more particularly, *quaestiones* 37 and 110) and the *Summa (Quaestiones ordinariae)* of Henry of Ghent, wherein the fourth proposition is mentioned as the first. With reference to both cases that she traces in the *Quaestiones*, Malgieri argues that neither the hypothesis of a mistake nor that of a manuscript bearing a different arrangement of the material may constitute a plausible explanation. On the contrary, the change is only seemingly numerical. In fact, it reflects the value attached to it, not merely by the author but in general by the intellectual milieu of his age.²

Quaestio 37 discusses whether “‘being’ and ‘true’ are convertible according to reason” [219] and its author attenuates, as it were, the absolute priority of being implied in the fourth proposition, since he concludes that being (*ens*) can be called first with respect to truth as long as it is considered *primus inter pares* (even though there is just one equal here, truth) [220]. Although fourth in order, this proposition is considered first in value, mostly because of its contribution, according to Malgieri’s suggestion, to the “debate on transcendentals in the second half of the 13th century” [239]. This peculiar practice, after all, also serves as an indication about the authorship of the *Quaestiones*, since it is only in these two texts that it appears. Since Henry qualifies the fourth proposition as the first without mentioning any other sources, it seems plausible to suggest that perhaps he was the author of the *Quaestiones* as well.

Jean-Michel Counet explores the quite rare references by Duns Scotus to the *Liber de causis*. In light of Scotus’ use of the 31st proposition of the *Book of Causes*, Counet remarks that Scotus conceives of the *Book of Causes* as a philosophical reference book, which one could use to correct other philosophical positions without necessarily resorting to the revealed truth of Christianity. The *Book of Causes* thus serves as an authoritative book within the limits of human reason that can guide our use of the latter.

Most of the examples Counet summons revolve around Scotus’ reception of the first proposition of the *Book of Causes*. In one case, Scotus uses this proposition, which establishes the superiority of the First Cause, in a context

² A somewhat similar practice appears in Berthold’s *Expositio super elementationem theologicam Procli* [Pagnoni-Sturlesi and Sturlesi 1984], since he considers the seventh proposition of the *Elem. theol.* [Dodds 1992, 7.139–10] the real foundation of the whole work.

that concerns the knowability of God and intelligences. The latter, according to Aquinas, are not graspable in the course of our life. In support of Aquinas' thesis, Scotus introduces the *Book of Causes*, claiming that in light of His superior causal power, God should be more knowable by means of its effects. However,

si, tout en étant plus connaissable par nous, la quiddité divine demeure néanmoins inconnue, a fortiori celle des intelligences séparées inférieures le sera-t-elle aussi. [254]

On the other hand, when applied to complicated doctrinal issues, the first proposition of the *Book of Causes* may result in illegitimate conclusions, for example, in the case of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. Seen on the basis of *Book of Causes* proposition 1, the role of the Father is shown to be superior to that of the Son, whereas, as Counet explains, Scotus insists that the Father and the Son should be conceived

comme un seul principe et une seule vertu principiante, dans une égalité complète, même si cette vertu principiante est “par soi” dans la personne du Père et “recue en totalité” dans la personne du Fils. [252]

The reception of aspects of the first proposition of the *Book of Causes* also concerns the next contributor. Dragos Calma studies it as it figures in the commentary (*Quaestiones super librum de causis*) by Siger of Brabant with a view to unearthing Siger's refutation of the thesis “selon laquelle la cause première peut produire des effets sans la participation des causes secondaires” [269]. Although on the microlevel this refutation is related to a critique against Aquinas, Calma's intention is to inscribe it into Siger's broader ambition, which is to establish the causal importance of secondary causes and thus to exclude the possibility of a causal model merely dependent on the First Cause. Accordingly, in the first and second of his *Quaestiones*, Siger explains that, even if the secondary causes owe aspects of their causal potential to the First Cause, this does not mean that the latter could have accomplished all causal works without the secondary ones. Thus, Siger draws from the *Book of Causes* proposition 1 insights demonstrating that secondary causes possess a proper and irreplaceable notion and function of causality, and he does not fail to notice that the attribution of an exclusive causal role to the First Cause has been considered problematic already by Averroes, who argues against God's direct intervention in the world [275] and accords secondary causes an active causal contribution.

In the second, as it were, part of his contribution, Calma briefly examines four commentaries on the *Book of Causes* posterior to that of Siger. An overarching remark in this respect should point to the influence that the

latter seems to have exercised upon the later commentary tradition “dans la mesure où la question de la production dans intermédiaires n’est pas attestée dans les exégèses du théorème le précédant” [291]. For Siger and two anonymous commentators (Sectator philosophie and the Anonymus from Erfurt), Averroes is an authority on secondary causes, although some of the authors whom Calma discusses distinguish between the possibility of a merely theological account, which is eager to put aside secondary causality, and the purely philosophical account that “tient de l’ordre naturel de choses” [293].

In the final contribution of this first part of the volume, Iulia Székely turns to the role of the *Book of Causes* in certain relatively underdiscussed quodlibetal questions of the early 15th century that originated in the universities of Prague and Erfurt. The chapter comes in two parts. In the first, she offers the reader a quite useful comparison of the traditional quodlibetal practice, as known in the context of the University of Paris in the 13th century, with the practice adopted in the newly established universities of Prague and Erfurt that she focuses on. The most important novelties that appeared in this second period are that the whole event was not restricted to the Department of Theology but also included the Faculty of Arts, as well as that its topic, the “principal question (questio principalis)” [304] was known beforehand, thus allowing the masters sufficient time to prepare themselves accordingly.

In the second part, Székely discusses three cases of quodlibetal disputations from the University of Erfurt (related to Henry of Geismar, Peter Steinbecke, and an Anonymous), which engage, either in the principal question or in its solution, with propositions 1, 5 (6), 7 (8), 9 (10), and 12 (13) of the *Book of Causes*. As for the University of Prague, she edits a quodlibetal question of the early 15th century attributed to Simon of Tišnov, which discusses the interrelation between primary and secondary causes. Not only does Simon’s treatment reflect an interest in the *Book of Causes*, it also depends on Siger’s remarks, previously discussed, in his commentary on the *Book of Causes* about Averroes’ criticism [309]. This is indicated by close terminological affinities, which, however, do not exclude that Simon’s knowledge of it could have been mediated by other sources. Since these texts clearly reflect an established practice within the universities of that era and thereby depict, even partially, its philosophical and theological directions and concerns, one cannot but underline that here also the *Book of Causes* remains crucial for the institutional debates. More than that, on the microlevel one cannot fail to notice the persistent influence and pervasiveness of specific propositions and, notably, that of the first.

Part Two—the reception of Proclus, *Elem. theol*

The next six contributors deal with the reception of Proclus' *Elem. theol.* in Byzantium and the Latin West. The first focuses on Eustratius of Nicaea, whose work was crucially shaped by Proclus' thought but also retrospectively used for the philosophical defense of Plato and Proclus.³ Apart from Thomas of York, Berthold of Moosburg appealed to Eustratius' eminent *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics* in order to defend the ontological priority of the Good against Aristotle's criticism [Aertsen 2012, 67–71].

Irene Zavattero's starting point is the 67th proposition from the *Elem. theol.*:

Every whole is either a whole-before-the-parts, a whole-of-parts, or a whole-in-the-part. [Dodds 1992, 65]

She argues that, before the introduction of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and Eustratius' *Commentary* in the Latin West thanks to Robert Grosseteste, Plato's doctrine of the Good was defended against Aristotle's critique mainly on the basis of the *Book of Causes* and Dionysius the Areopagites [333]. What changes afterward is that there is a turn toward Eustratius' argumentation, which lies in the projection of Aristotle's claims upon the above threefold distinction of parts and wholes. Eustratius defends the causal function of Plato's Ideas or Forms, which is overlooked when the universal is seen from the perspective of a merely logical account.⁴ He does so, then, by identifying them with the "whole-before-the-parts", because "elles subsistent avant la multiplicité des choses qui sont faites d'après elles" [334]. His fundamental criticism against Aristotle, then, one that both Thomas of York and Berthold warmly embraced and developed, is that Aristotle misunderstood Plato's doctrine in ignoring the productive, causal function of his Ideas, which are not predicates of beings, and thereby posterior to them, but their cause, and thereby prior to them.

However, to what extent was Eustratius' dependence on Proclus' identified by later commentators? Henri Bate and Berthold of Moosburg are crucial from that perspective. Despite their totally different ambitions—the former

³ It was perhaps exactly this influence that prompted Nicholas of Methone to write his *Refutation* of the *Elem. theol.* Proclus was of course the primary target, but Nicholas' text is also a form of reaction against the Byzantine theologians and intellectuals who applied his pagan insights to theological matters.

⁴ From the very beginning of his exposition, Eustratius highlights that one can judge the legitimacy and appropriateness of Aristotle's criticism only after having grasped what Plato really meant about the Good.

aimed to show the compatibility of Plato and Aristotle; the latter, the superiority of Plato—their common appeal to Eustratius brought them, as it were, closer. Bate, in his *Speculum divinorum*, refers to Proclus' proposition 67 and underlines that Aristotle's critique did not really grasp the intention or the tenor of Plato's argument⁵ and so does not in principle exclude the possibility of convergence.

As for Berthold, it is exactly in his commentary on the 67th proposition (but also elsewhere) that he discusses Eustratius' arguments. Through Eustratius one may better grasp the radically different conceptualizations of the universal by Aristotle and Plato. Indeed, Eustratius delegitimizes Aristotle's critique against Plato's Idea of the Good [Santas 1989] on the basis of Aristotle's own remark at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that all things desire the Good: if all of them desire it, should it not be the case that the Good should necessarily be beyond them? Transferred within Platonism, this thesis comes down to the claim that the Absolute Good,⁶ the cause of everything, lies beyond all beings, on a level of causality that is simply absent from Aristotle's philosophy.

Henri Bate is the subject of the next contribution. Guy Guldentops' main intention is to identify the crucial topics that primarily concern Bate when drawing from the *Elem. theol.* He thus specifies three broad categories: causality and participation, soul, and God [353]. With regard to the first, Bate mostly cites propositions 23, 24, 150, and 188 of the *Elem. theol.*, while drawing from other sources, such as Dionysius Areopagites and Pythagoras. Not only does he try to include them in a common philosophical family that also includes Plato and Aristotle, but when it comes to the issue of the Ideas

Bate essaie de démontrer que les idées 'platoniciennes' (qui à son avis sont acceptées également par Aristote) sont des causes à la fois transcendantes et immanentes des étants créés. [355]

As for soul, Bate cites propositions 15, 112, 147, 167, 176, 186, 187, 190, 191, and 192. Certain of them (112, 147, and 167), combined with passages from Dionysius Areopagites, are used to support the claim that our intellect does not need sensible images in order to think of separate substances, because our soul "à quelque chose 'en commun avec les êtres divins' qui se pensent eux-mêmes sans images sensibles" [360]. In the theological part of

⁵ The title of his 21st chapter is illuminating: *Quod secundum Eustratium commentatorem non realiter intentio Platonis reprehenditur ab Aristotele de bono ideali...*

⁶ For an in-depth account of the role of the Good within Platonism, see Steel 1999.

his *Speculum divinatorum*, Bate turns to Proclus rather rarely, citing the whole 62nd proposition and shorter excerpts from *Elem. theol.* propositions 11 and 12. Guldentops underlines the monotheistic tendencies displayed by Bate in his interpretation of Proclus' gods, since the divine henads, for example, are incorporated in the First Cause. Not only does Bate attenuate the causal plurality of this theology, but in the context of harmonizing Platonism with Aristotle he identifies the One or the Good with Aristotle's Divine Intellect [367]. One may therefore conceive of his strategy as contrary to that of Berthold, since according to Bate, "Proclus n'a pas l'intention de dire que le bien soit réellement différent de l'étant" [367].

The reception of the *Elem. theol.* by Berthold of Moosburg is the focal point of the two next contributions. Moosburg's *Exposition* (1327–1361), written after the Latin translation of William of Moerbeke in 1268, is by far the lengthiest and most detailed ever to have been written on the *Elem. theol.* and is, contrary to Nicholas of Methone's *Refutation*, enthusiastically conceived of as a philosophical or secular, as we would call it today, account of the divine realm that is compatible with Christianity. These two contributions significantly differ in their scope and intentions.

The first one, by Ruedi Imbach, takes as its starting point the question about the status of metaphysics in the history of philosophy and, in particular, certain critical remarks on its problematic conceptualization by Heidegger. In this respect, Imbach offers the reader a rather general overview of Berthold's intellectual context and ambitions,⁷ focusing mainly on the three introductory essays that precede Berthold's analysis of each proposition. The second, by Evan King, is thematically concerned with the echoes of Eriugenism in this massive commentary, and so its perspective is much more limited.

Drawing on recent contributions by J.-F. Courtine [1999, 2005] and O. Boulnois [2013], Imbach claims that Heidegger's conception of metaphysics ignores [377] the medieval achievements of this discipline and is thereby significantly restricted. For this reason, he turns to Berthold's *Commentary* as not merely an approach to metaphysics that bears testimony to its diversity in the Middle Ages, thereby confirming Boulnois' position, though Imbach further refines Boulnois' taxonomy of metaphysical works. It is already clear in Boulnois' account that, if there is no one single "metaphysics" but various tendencies and alternative approaches, then Heidegger's conception of it as onto-theology, despite certain qualifications made over the course of his

⁷ One may also consult [Gersh 2001](#).

own career, is open to criticism as insensitive to historical variations and strongly reductionist.

Imbach introduces Berthold's *Commentary* as a text that both justifies and radicalizes this criticism, since it unearths an aspect of metaphysics that Boulnois himself perhaps fails to incorporate in his account. This aspect lies in the fact that Berthold restores a Platonist metaphysical vision, one that goes beyond the Aristotelian model of being (*ens*) and posits a higher, superordinate level of *causality*, that of the Good or the One, which thereby lies beyond (*au-delà*) metaphysics. Imbach reconstructs the basic tenets of this vision, drawing from Berthold's introductory essays.

First of all, the *Elem. theol.*, according to Berthold, discusses the divine realm in terms of procession and return. In order to distinguish it from Christian theology, Berthold appeals to the famous distinction suggested by Augustine between natural and voluntary providence, of which the former corresponds, roughly speaking, to reason-based accounts of the divine realm and the latter to faith-based ones. Another crucial aspect is Proclus' purpose in writing the *Elem. theol.* Here again Augustine's importance as an interpreter can hardly be overestimated, because beatitude and God's contemplation are identified as the final goals to be achieved. From this perspective, the *Elem. theol.* is not merely about philosophical doctrines but aims at perfection and happiness as well.

However, the most prominent feature of Berthold's interpretation is that it conceives of the One or the Good (discussed in the first and the seventh propositions of the *Elem. theol.*, respectively, and presented as identical in the 13th) as the first principles of reality. In this way, he moves from predication to causality, that is, he turns against the theory of the transcendentals, which prioritizes being (*ens*) as "the last in the 'analysis' (*resolutio*) of our concepts and consequently the first in the composition" [Aertsen 2012, 548] over other concepts, such as the good (*bonum*). Instead, Berthold reintroduces an account of reality that suggests a First Cause of all beings. Thus, Berthold leads us beyond the level of being and "au-delà de la métaphysique" to what Imbach aptly calls "Agatho-théologie". This model, he concludes, may enrich Boulnois' taxonomy of metaphysical undertakings and points to

la perpétuation d'une certaine tradition platonicienne qui, elle-même évoluée, et évoluera encore chez Nicolas de Cues et Marsile Ficin. [390]

Turning now to the next contribution on Berthold's thought, King takes up the presence of Eriugenism in Berthold's commentary on the *Elem. theol.* Eriugena lived during the ninth century and was a prominent figure in the

history of Platonism, not only for his own interpretative work but also for his translations of key texts of the philosophical and theological tradition, among which one should definitely mention the work of Dionysius Areopagites. The term “Eriugenism” goes beyond, as it were, Eriugena himself and refers to the sources that contained doctrines found in Eriugena’s work and so became known to Berthold. This is the focal point of the first part of King’s research. The second brings out how the most important of these sources for Berthold, the *Clavis physicae*, facilitated

Berthold’s effort to provide an authoritative Christian equivalent to one of the most challenging doctrines in the *Elementatio theologica*, on the soul’s permanent “vehicle” (*susceptaculum*). [395]

As for the first part, King discusses four main sources:

- (1) the *Clavis physicae*, which was written by Honorius Augustodunensis and constituted an adaptation of Eriugena’s *On the Division of Nature*;
- (2) a corpus of scholia that were attached to Eriugena’s translation of the Corpus Dionysiacum and combined with passages from his *On the Division of Nature*;
- (3) Eriugena’s *Homily on the Gospel of John*, which was attributed to Origen; and
- (4) what Berthold calls *De causa causarum* and attributes to Alfarabius.

King discusses Berthold’s dependence upon each of these sources. For example, he argues that Berthold appeals systematically to the *Clavis physicae* (he cites 93 different chapters) for various doctrinal issues of his *Exposition*, such as the question of divine providence, the immaterial body of the soul, and the primordial causes [399–401].

However, one should definitely highlight that the causal role attributed to the primordial causes is the one common feature that brings together these four sources [414]. The theory of the primordial causes is of the utmost importance for Berthold. As is rightly pointed out, it is this theory that allowed Berthold to present Proclus’ *Elem. theol.* as compatible in principle with Christian theology. One may further add that Berthold appeals to it in order to explain in a more technical vocabulary the very topic and scope of Proclus’ *Elem. theol.*

In his prologue, the first of the three introductory essays, Berthold attempts to explain the meaning of the term “invisibilia”, which he finds in a well-known excerpt of St. Paul:

Invisibilia Dei a creatura mundi per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciuntur.

For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made. [Romans 1:20]

What are these *invisibilia*? After rejecting, on the basis of great authorities such as Dionysius and Augustine that the term might refer to God's nature, since the latter is beyond our knowledge, Berthold suggests that one should conceive of them in a "transitive" way. The *invisibilia* are nothing less than the effects, the products as it were, of the primordial causes (*sunt praeterea invisibilia effectus primordialium causarum*).⁸ This is also the subject of Proclus' *Elem. theol.*, presented, of course, according to natural providence.⁹

The second part of King's chapter focuses mainly on the vehicle of particular souls, which is confirmed by Proclus to be "perpetual" and of a constitution "without temporal origin and exempt from decay" [prop. 196], "created by an unmoved cause" [prop. 207], "immaterial" [prop. 208], and so on. This vehicle is examined both with reference to the heavenly souls, in which case Berthold draws from Dietrich of Freiberg and Averroes, and with regard to human souls, in which case he turns to propositions 196 and 205–210 of the *Elem. theol.* on the basis of the *Clavis physicae*. Despite some superficial affinities between the Christian account of the latter and Proclus', for example, their common exaltation of the immovable creator of this spiritual vehicle and the interrelation of the corruptible body with our "soul's fall from being into becoming" [416], Berthold is undoubtedly confronted with significant interpretative challenges. For the first time, he really has to disagree with Proclus about whether souls always fall, since from a Christian perspective the blessed ones do not. Besides, the question of the spiritual

⁸ Prologue, 13.252. Stephen Gersh [2012b, 10] nicely explains what primordial causes stand for: Iohannes Scottus Eriugena was the first important reader of Dionysius the Areopagite in Western Europe and one of the greatest medieval Platonists. His most famous doctrine is that universal nature is divisible into four species:

- (1) that which creates and is not created, corresponding to God as beginning of all things;
- (2) that which is created and creates, equivalent to the primordial causes;
- (3) that which is created and does not create, equivalent to the effects of the primordial causes; and
- (4) that which does not create and is not created, corresponding to God as end of all things [cf. Gersh 2021a].

⁹ Prologue, 13.164–266: *Ista sunt invisibilia Dei transitive accepta, de quibus in ista elementatione theologica subtilissime pertractatur, quantum pertinet ad providentiam naturalem.*

vehicle falls into the broader thematic of Eriugena's anthropology, which is articulated in robust Christian terms. Thus, Berthold does not accord one such individual body to each soul since the *Clavis* "presents the spiritual body as one and universal, belonging to the 'universal human'" [420]. Differences may also be found in the conceptualization of the corruptible body of the soul, whose individuation is shadowed in the *Clavis*, which argues that "these particular bodies are not the natural bodies of their souls but garments 'superadded' to common humanity" [420]. From this perspective, body does not function as a principle of individuation, and Proclus' concept of the incorruptible vehicle is intermingled here with Eriugena's soteriological anthropology.

In his contribution, Zénon Kaluza turns to the 15th-century theologian Gilles Charlier to discuss the extent to which the *Elem. theol.* informs his *Commentaire des sentences*, that is, his commentary on the four books of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. In this commentary, as Kaluza claims, the Platonic tradition is mostly represented by the *Elem. theol.* [442]. Charlier turns to proposition 121 of the *Elem. theol.* in order to add a philosophical grounding to the theological claim that goodness is the essence of God. God is not supposed merely to participate in goodness, for in this case goodness would exceed him and he would not be the first Good. No doubt, this reasoning is in principle compatible with Proclus' *Exposition* and reminiscent of his own argumentation early in the *Elem. theol.* [props 7 and 8], wherein the universal desire of all beings for the good necessitates that the first Good be beyond them. It thus comes as no surprise that God is presented as the "summum bonum" on the basis of the *Elem. theol.* proposition 8.

Within the same context, Charlier turns to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and to the *Elem. theol.* propositions 5¹⁰ and 110¹¹ in order to claim that the form of the divine goodness is only one, and that there is nothing of it outside itself. One might say that their combined use comes down to the claim that every goodness that is not absolute, that is, all instances of goodness other than the divine goodness itself, necessarily derive their own goodness from the latter.

¹⁰ "Every manifold is posterior to the One".

¹¹ For not all things are of equal worth, even though they be of the same cosmic order: such terms are not in fact identical in definition, but are co-ordinate only as proceeding from, and referable to, a single common principle. [Dodds 1992, 110.11–14]

Concerning the reversion to God, Charlier makes use of propositions 13 and 122 of the *Elem. theol.* in support of the claim that “lors du retour de la chose vers la fin, l’influence du Bien ne compose pas la chose, mais la simplifie” [457]. Among others, the crucial insights that Charlier finds in *Elem. theol.* proposition 13 are that “it belongs to the Good to conserve all that exists” [Dodds 1992, 13.26] and, a few lines below, that “the Good, wherever it is present, makes the participant one, and holds its being together in virtue of this unification” [Dodds 1992, 13.29–31]. One cannot but highlight the proximity between the theorems of the *Elem. theol.* that he turns to. Not only are they related, one way or another, with the Good, but some of them belong to the same argumentative group of propositions within the *Elem. theol.* For example, propositions 8 and 13 belong to a group of propositions that concerns God as the Absolute Good, which is gradually demonstrated to be identical with the One, whereas propositions 121 and 122 are part of a broader group of propositions that stress divine providence.

Barbara Bartocci draws our attention to aspects of the reception of Plato’s *Parmenides* during the Renaissance. Of course, Proclus famously discusses this dialogue in his relevant commentary and Bartocci naturally starts by briefly discussing one of the most vexing issues surrounding this work, namely, the question of its purpose and subject. Proclus himself points to this issue in his own commentary. Together with his Neoplatonic predecessors, as Bartocci points out, Proclus takes this dialogue as a metaphysical-theological work that expounds Plato’s doctrine of the One, that is, the causal dependence of the whole reality on the One. But Plato’s *Parmenides* also exercised a huge influence on Renaissance Platonism when the identification of its subject was again crucial.

Before turning to Contarini’s reception of the *Parmenides* in the Renaissance, Bartocci first juxtaposes the positions of Marsilio Ficino and his eminent student, Pico della Mirandola. Ficino, whose reception of the *Parmenides* is informed by Proclus, adopts a “doctrinal” interpretation of the work, whereas Pico, committed as he was to unearthing the concord between Plato and Aristotle, thinks that the dialogue is a dialectical exercise. Such an approach must have been based on his denial of the Platonic prioritization of the One and his claim in the *On Being and the One* that the One may be equated with Aristotle’s Being [469: Aertsen 2012, 579]. If these remarks constitute, as it were, the first part of her contribution, the second is exclusively dedicated to Gasparo Contarini’s *Primae philosophiae compendium*. Contarini identifies in this work four transcendentals (Being, One, Truth, Good), of which that of Being provides the occasion for a criticism of Plato’s

Parmenides. The point that Contarini raises is that these notions or concepts are thought to have “an extramental existence” [475], that is, to enjoy an ontological status that they do not actually “deserve”, since they are only epistemological terms.

Although this remark is articulated on the basis of Plato’s *Parmenides*, it is perfectly compatible with the reception of the *Elem. theol.* as well. No doubt, the objection that Contarini formulates is reminiscent of the commentary on the *Elem. theol.* by Berthold, who criticizes the Aristotelian tradition exactly because it does not acknowledge this extramental dimension. Contarini stresses that these concepts result from mere abstraction and, according to Bartocci’s reconstruction, rejects the solutions that Plato actually proposes for otherwise absolutely substantial philosophical problems, such as those pertaining to “the first principles and causes” [478].

Concluding remarks

It must be clear by now that the collection under review constitutes a significant contribution to the exploration of how Proclus’ *Elem. theol.* and the *Book of Causes* were received in the Latin West and in Byzantium. This volume of contributions by an interdisciplinary group of experts covers centuries of Proclean influence and familiarizes the reader with a vast array of complex philological and philosophical issues, ranging from details about manuscripts to the most complicated doctrinal controversies. As we have seen, the reception of these two works played a major role in theological and philosophical debates within vibrant communities during the Middle Ages. When it comes to the *Elem. theol.*, it was also used even for the reevaluation and reexamination of the reception of Platonic doctrines by Aristotle, its retrospective influence thus touching upon the medieval appropriation of the most classical figures of ancient philosophy. Since an inquiry of such a broad scope is not easily exhausted, the next volumes of the series shall further enrich our understanding of this topic.

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