

# **RESEÑAS DE LIBROS/BOOK REVIEWS**



Gwenaëlle Aubry, Luc Brisson, Philippe Hoffmann, and Laurent Lavaud, Eds. *Relire les Éléments de théologie de Proclus. Réceptions, interprétations antiques et modernes*. Collection Hermann Philosophie. Paris: Hermann Philosophie, 2021. 462 p. ISBN: 9791037008893. Soft cover: € 34

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This book is the result of the international colloquium “Les *Éléments de Théologie* de Proclus: interprétations, réceptions de l’Antiquité à nous jours” held in Paris in 2018. As the title of this book suggests, the theme of the colloquium and the contents of this book represent the collective effort of several specialists to explain the contents of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*, and its influence through different historical periods. However, contrary to what one would expect, the conducive thread of this work is not on the history of the reception of the *Elements of Theology*, even though the chapters are arranged according to a chronological order. Instead, the contents of this book pivot around three theoretical fulcra: systematicity, causality, and theology. Fortunately, in the introduction of *Relire* the editors supply some questions which serve as guidelines that make this text into a coherent whole: would it be possible to distinguish in the reception between the axes of systematicity, causality, and theology? Would it be possible to know if the systematic (geometrical) Proclus was more influential than the philosophical Proclus, or the other way around? Finally, does the system devised by Proclus for his *Elements of Theology* accept different philosophical worldviews? Of course, the answer to these questions varies from period to period, making an overall assessment of these questions uninteresting. Nevertheless, if we consider each chapter with these questions in mind, we cannot but recognize that all the authors excelled in their exposition by respecting the proposed guidelines for the book, supplying us with interesting insights around the axes.

*Relire les Éléments de Théologie de Proclus* consists of thirteen chapters ranging from studies on the contents of the *Elements of Theology*, the manuscript tradition of the text, and its reception up to the twentieth century. The first two chapters deal with the manuscript tradition of the *Elements of Theology* as it has come down to us. However, their difference lies in the value given to Petritsi’s translation of the *Elements of Theology*. Carlos Steel (ch. 1) follows the manuscript tradition settled by Dodds and he agrees with him on the limited value of the Georgian translation for the Greek manuscript family. Lela Alexidzé’s research (ch. 2) provides strong arguments in favour of the Georgian manuscript tradition. Among these arguments, specific attention is deserved by the translation of proposition 129 by Petritsi, 128b in Dodd’s. Ultimately, these chapters leave open the question of the Georgian tradition’s relevance to the readers.

Similar issues are discussed also by Douglas Hedley who focuses in the last chapter on the reception of the *Elements of Theology* from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century. Hedley's analysis retraces the evolution of the reception of this work (and of Proclus in general) by the hand of authors such as R. Emerson, S. Coleridge, Thomas Taylor, the Cambridge Platonists and E. R. Dodds. Although this chapter deals with many authors and their respective interpretations of the *Elements of Theology*, it is nonetheless an important piece of history. It is in many ways the tradition to which, to a great or lesser degree, scholars of (Neo)Platonism belong to.

Chapters three and four, written by Alain Lernould and Jan Opsomer respectively, deal with the systematization of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*. Their chapters centre around Proclus' application of the geometrical method. While Lernould supports the unhypothetical character of the dialectical method in the *Elements of Theology*; Opsomer explains that the *Elements of Theology* encompasses both a dialectical and a geometrical method. While Lernould argues that there cannot be an axiomatization of theology because every hypothesis asks for revision, Opsomer argues that though there is no axiomatic introduction in the *Elements of Theology*, however common notions are present within the first propositions of the text. Again, the favoured interpretation is open to the reader, with strong arguments on both sides to choose between one or the other interpretation.

In chapter five, Pieter d'Hoine presents an original reading of causality by participation, proposing an analogical exegesis between the triad of totality, the triad of participation, and the triad of subsistence. However, d'Hoine acknowledges a problem with this analogy. This problem arises from the double interpretation of the last rank in the triad of totality, i.e., "the whole in the part", specifically when its application touches upon matter. D'Hoine's solution points towards different modes of understanding totality at different levels of reality. In the sixth chapter of *Relire*, Soulier proposes a positive reading of the concept of infinity and its creative powers when it is in combination with the concept of Limit. This reading reaffirms an important feature for any interpretation of Proclus's thought; some concepts possess different meanings at different levels of reality, without losing their essential meaning. In this chapter's case, the concept of infinite is both proximate to or remote to the first principle on the basis of the level of reality we are dealing with.

Moving on to the reception of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, in chapter seven Richard Taylor explores the Arabic adaptation of the *Elements of Theology* in the form of the *Liber de Causis*, a text that is strongly influenced by the reading of Plotinus and the Plotiniana arabica. The core of this adaptation comes from the reinterpretation of the One to an ontological schema: the One-Being instead of the One above Being. Thus, the First Principle is transformed into the highest supreme being. From this adaptation, Taylor moves to explain key propositions from the *Elements of Theology* for an adequate understanding of causality in the *Liber de Causis*; on the one hand, the One-Being is the creator of Intellect, and on the other, the One-Being is the paradigmatic cause of all other beings. In chapter eight, Cristina D'Ancona faces the impact of the *Elements of Theology* in the Latin Middle Ages. D'Ancona's study shows how Thomas Aquinas reconnected the Latin *maxim omne quod*

*recipitur in aliquo ad modum rei recipientis recipitur* with proposition 103 of the *Elements of Theology*, by employing the Arabic *Liber de Causis*, and the sources of this proposition in Plotinus and Porphyry.

Chapter nine is dedicated to Dietrich of Freiberg. In this chapter, Frédéric Berlan shows the influence of Proclus in Dietrich's thought. By focusing on proposition 20, Berland suggests a reading of Dietrich which does not consider the One as superessential, but on the contrary, there is a requirement of graded continuity. In summary, Berland analyzes Dietrich's dynamic model of reality hanging from the mediation between the different ontological realms and via the triad of procession-permanence-reversion.

Chapter ten studies the reception of Proclus' *Elements of Theology* in Giordano Bruno. Ansaldi analyzes the influence of this work on the second part of Bruno's *Summa terminorum metaphysicorum*. In these parts of the *Summa*, Ansaldi shows how Bruno leaves aside the Aristotelian conceptual frame of the first part of the *Summa*, and focuses on propositions 103 and 124 of the *Elements of Theology*. Moreover, Bruno carefully threads the philosophies of Proclus and Nicholas of Cusa. For Ansaldi, Bruno's strategy to bring these authors together is to create a conceptual framework that allows him to explain the potential immanence of the Intellect in matter; "everything is everything, but potentially".

Frédéric de Buzon studies the influence that Proclus had on Leibniz in chapter eleven. De Buzon explains the sharp distinction drawn by Leibniz on Proclus: namely, Proclus as a geometrician, on the one hand; and Proclus the theologian on the other. It is not surprising to see that the *Elements of Theology* hold less value for Leibniz than Proclus' commentary on Euclid's *Elements*. Interestingly, de Buzon shows how Leibniz misunderstands, or rather, chooses to read Proclus' claims positively regarding the demonstrability of axioms. Contrary to Leibniz's geometrical reading of Proclus, in chapter twelve we find also a theological portrayal. Emmanuel Cattin explains the reception of the *Elements of Theology* and their place on Hegel's philosophy. For Hegel, as Cattin shows, Neoplatonism inaugurates the path for the world of spirituality, that is, the speculative endeavour to understand the development from unity to plurality in synchronicity. However, in this chapter Cattin also presents Hegel's criticisms of this model. According to Hegel, Proclus' plurality must be understood as the unfolding of units, and not of a true plurality. Finally, Cattin's chapter focuses on the process of permanence-procession-reversion, showing that in Hegel's account, Proclus described the law of the circular movement of the Spirit.

A virtue of this work is that it does not shun from controversy; this book does not attempt to present a unitary interpretation of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*. Thankfully, disagreements between interpretations are explicit and much welcomed. *Relire* is kind by allowing its readers to make up their mind by supplying strong arguments for opposite views. Additionally, in *Relire* one can find the most relevant problems surrounding the *Elements of Theology* and its reception; along with the forefront literature about these problems. However, due to the wide scope of *Relire*, this is not a book that is friendly to those who do not have much background knowledge of the *Elements of Theology* or its reception through different periods of history. This problem is somewhat mitigated in the

introductory sections of most chapters; where there is a short but informative description of the author dealt with, the moment in history where the reception of the *Elements of Theology* had taken place, and the tradition under which it was studied. Certainly, the chapters of *Relire* might be hardly adopted for a class of philosophy, and they might appear to be intimidating for someone who starts reading the *Elements of Theology* or parts of reception related to it. Nevertheless, by dealing with current problems in the literature and by supplying a comprehensive bibliography, *Relire* can be useful for furthering research on one of the topics treated in the chapters of this book.