

The 'Enneads' of Plotinus: a Commentary. Volume I. By Paul Kalligas. Translated by E.K. Fowden and N. Pilavachi. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014. \$85.00.

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There never were, it seems, better opportunities to study the *Enneads* than at the present time. Re-translations, monographs, commentaries, and articles in specialist journals appear with pleasing regularity under the most reputable imprints. While A.H. Armstrong's 1966-1988 translation continues to be the standard work of reference for English-speaking readers, a complete new translation with accompanying commentary is currently under way under the editorship of John Dillon and Andrew Smith (Parmenides Publishing). In French a re-translation of the *Enneads* has recently been completed under the editorship of L. Brisson and J.-F. Pradeau (Garnier-Flammarion, 2002-2010) while two more are ongoing, the one started by Pierre Hadot (Editions du Cerf 1984-2015, now moved to Vrin under the directorship of D. O'Meara, G. Aubry, J.-F. Balaudé and A.-L. Darras-Worms) and the latest in date proceeding under the directorship of J.-M. Narbonne (Collection des Universités de France). Like their Dillon-Smith counterpart, all three French re-translations are accompanied by extensive commentaries. In modern Greek, a translation of the first five *Enneads* has recently been completed by Paul Kalligas (Vivliothēkē A. Manousē, 1997-2013), who is now at work on *Ennead* VI. In addition to these re-translations, many individual tracts have been the object of detailed studies in German, English, Italian, and Spanish.

The three-volume commentary that Paul Kalligas (hereafter K.) has written to accompany his translation has a claim to being one of the very best, if not the best, contribution to Plotinian studies to have come out in English this century. The main purpose of the commentary, as K. conceives it, is to provide 'modern readers of the *Enneads* with the means necessary for making the text coherent and more readily intelligible' (xi). The present volume is the first to be translated into English. The commentary itself is based on the text of Henry and Schwyzer's *editio minor* (H-S²) in the Oxford Classical Texts collection, supplemented by the *Addenda et Corrigenda* recorded in tome III of that edition. In a significant number of cases, listed at the end of his commentary (657-668), K. has adopted readings at variance with the text of H-S². Judging that it would have been burdensome, if not downright misleading, to have the excerpts from the *Enneads* in his commentary quoted in an English rendering of his own modern Greek translation, K. took the decision to rely in those cases on Armstrong's rendering, which he considers to be 'outstanding and easily accessible' (xiii).

Although not all will agree with K.'s judgment, the decision seems entirely justified since even the most seasoned of Plotinians keep the Loeb translation at their elbow, although they may end up diverging from it. In any case, K.'s translators have taken care to point out all significant divergences between Armstrong's construal of the Greek and Kalligas' own.

Unlike his French counterparts, but in common with the editors of the ongoing English re-translation, Kalligas has chosen to follow the Porphyrian Enneadic order rather than the chronological order of composition of the tractates. His reason for keeping to the traditional order, he writes, is that 'no major change in his [Plotinus'] basic doctrines has so far been convincingly demonstrated and no significant insight into the evolution of his thought has been gained'(xi) by the chronological approach. Although the decision will surprise many, as it did this reviewer, the reason for K.'s decision lies in the trust that he places in the accuracy of Porphyry's account of the character and philosophical personality of the master. Judging the *Vita Plotini* (hereafter *VP*) to be, by any standard, a text of exceptional value for the understanding of Plotinus' thought, K. devotes to it a commentary that is twice as long as the one he allocates to the seminal tractate i 1[53] (*What is the Living Being*). Although not unaware of Porphyry's tendency to self-aggrandisement and of the element of arbitrariness in his ordering of the tractates thirty years after the master's death, K. regards those features as minor blemishes that, as such, do not seriously detract from the value of the *VP* as a historical document. K.'s commentary, which provides detailed historical information on the characters and events mentioned in the biography, also accounts for the position he takes on some of the controversies that it has given rise to in the last two centuries. On the subject of Plotinus' failed expedition to Persia and India (*VP*, 3), for instance, K. remarks that fascination with the Orient was so common at the time that it is not surprising that Plotinus, like Porphyry, should have fallen prey to it. Centuries later, K. wryly notes, that particular chapter of the *VP* 'sparked the imagination of scholars' and an abundant secondary literature on the subject of Plotinus and Indian thought ensued. Having dutifully listed the landmarks in those studies, K. all but dismisses them on the ground that 'Up till now, it has not been proven that there is some element in Plotinus' philosophy that cannot be explained as a development of views derived from earlier Greek philosophical tradition' (29-30).

Less dismissive is K.'s tone in the pages that he devotes in his commentary on the *Enneads* themselves to the more tangled issue of Plotinus' polemics against the Gnostics. K.'s thorough knowledge of the various theosophical movements prominent in Rome in Plotinus' time (see his *Hermathena* 2000, 169) has given him no taste for Gnostic writings, which he describes as 'a concoction combining cosmological narratives of intricate multifariousness and bizarre symbolism with exotic magico-religious beliefs' (365). Philosophical fastidiousness, however, does not prevent K. from providing a detailed and remarkably non-partisan account of the views that were held in common by Plotinus and the Gnostics. As for the currently much discussed question of a possible evolution in Plotinus'

attitude to Gnosticism, K.'s position is also balanced. While countenancing the view that Plotinus may have chosen at first 'not to enter into direct conflict with this movement, toward some aspects of which he may well have even felt a modicum of sympathy', K. holds that, in mid-career, so to speak, and possibly under the influence of Porphyry, Plotinus came to fear a likely Gnostic influence over the minds of his contemporaries. The vigorous polemics in tractate ii 9[33] (*Against the Gnostics*) are grounded in what Plotinus perceived to be the Gnostics' anti-Hellenic irrationalism and distortion of the teachings of 'the godlike men of antiquity', distortion that took the form of anticosmism and indifference to ethical concerns. Far from easing off after the completion of that tractate, Plotinus' opposition to the Gnostics, K. holds (520-521), went on smouldering until the last years of his writing life. So much is clear from his rejection of their cosmological interpretation of the Platonic myth of the birth of Erōs. *Pace* assorted Gnostic claims, the Erōs of Plato's dialogues, Plotinus argued in tractate iii 5[50] (*On Love*), far from symbolizing the whole of the sensible universe, is but a *daimōn* amongst many, a *daimōn* who is in a perpetual state of neediness. In K.'s view, therefore, Plotinus never ceased explicitly to dissociate himself from the dualistic and anticosmic implications of the Gnostic interpretations of Plato and his myths.

K.'s detailed and largely philosophical line by line commentary on Plotinus' text is designed to complement the broad historical outline sketched in his introductions to the tractates and to be read in conjunction with the original text. The latter point is to be emphasized: K.'s commentary is a guide to Plotinus, not a substitute for reading him, for it requires of the reader some knowledge of Greek as well as familiarity with the landmarks of Classical thought.

To ease the reader's entry into Plotinus' often complex if not convoluted style of exposition, K. first situates each tractate within the tradition that links the Pre-socratics to the later representatives of the Peripatetic school through Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Middle Platonists. He then identifies targets that Plotinus had left unclear, clarifies allusions that would have been transparent to his audience but likely to remain opaque to modern readers, and uncovers the overall argumentative strategy deployed in the passage. His copious cross-references to other tractates from all periods of Plotinus' writing life go some way to justifying his conviction that there is little doctrinal evolution in the *Enneads* as a whole. Making clear what Plotinus says, why he says it, whom he is borrowing from or debating with, K. enables the reader to reconstruct Plotinus' arguments, see how they add up to the 'solution' he recommends and come to appreciate the intensely systematic nature of his thinking. Under K.'s expert guidance, readers of Plotinus will be made to realise that Plotinus does not contradict himself as often as he is sometimes claimed to do. Ample and scrupulous references are made to relevant secondary material; unfortunately, a full list of the secondary literature will have to wait until the publication of the last volume of the translation.

Two examples will best highlight the quality of K.'s line by line commentary. Take first his presentation of i 1[53], a seminal but demanding text; the writing is

crabbed and the argumentation, although proceeding step by step, is exceptionally succinct. Plotinus is there grappling with the problem of reconciling the doctrine of the impassibility (*apatheia*) of the soul, which he held more consistently and more uncompromisingly than any other Platonist, with what is for human beings an everyday experience, that is, the emergence to consciousness of sensations, feelings, and emotions. K. shows how Plotinus adapted the conceptual apparatus of earlier philosophers to express his view that it is the soul that empowers the body ‘so qualified’ (*to toionde sōma*) to receive and to process the traces (*typoi*) of the higher world that it holds within itself and, so doing, to make perceptual judgment possible.

Tractate i 2[19] (*On the Virtues*) presents a different sort of challenge for the commentator. Shorter and, *prima facie*, easier of approach than many of the more explicitly metaphysical tractates, it is often dismissed as philosophically lightweight. K.’s commentary should dispose of that view. He analyses the grounds of the finely drawn distinctions that Plotinus introduces in that analytical tractate and shows how they enabled him to improve on the various versions of the grades of virtue that had been put forward by earlier thinkers and, in turn, to provide an account of the ideal of ‘assimilation to the divine’ than was more precise and more robust than theirs had been. In so far as the Plotinian version of the ideal is achieved, as K. writes, through ‘the adoption of an attitude of indifference toward the sensible and...a shift of attention toward the supra-sensible’ (140), it highlights the close interrelationship of ethics and metaphysics in the philosophy of the *Enneads*. As K. concludes, ‘Plotinus ideal, which was also the ideal of his age, was not “the noble and virtuous” man of action, but the divine man who has withdrawn from the turbulence of the world’ (148).

Is K.’s commentary without shortcomings? Pretty much so. His choice of the Enneadic order is mildly disappointing in so far as the chronological approach would have multiplied the occasions for noting how Plotinus’ thinking evolved in the sense that problems identified in earlier tractates and dealt with in a scholastic manner later came to receive a fuller, more original, treatment. The translation reads well, the volume is well-produced and, in so far as I could see, devoid of typos. I noticed one mistake only: v 7 is eighteenth tractate in the chronological order, not nineteenth, as stated on page 104.

This is a splendid volume, which no serious student of Plotinus’ philosophy can afford to be without.

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