Book Reviews

Alessandro Linguiti, *Plotin: Traité 36 (I,5)*, translated from the Italian by Anna Chiara Peduzzi. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2007, paperback, pp. 137, €27.

One specific question that seems to have arisen in the context of the perennial debate about the essence of the good life is that of whether *eudaimonia* (“happiness” or “well-being”) increases with the passage of time. Plotinus (hereafter “P.”) weighs in on the issue with a firmly negative response in his 36th treatise (*Enneads* I.5). The excellent new translation and commentary by Alessandro Linguiti (hereafter “L.”) is the 11th to appear thus far in the series under the direction of Pierre Hadot. Why a commentary on this diminutive text (only 5 pages in the Henry-Schwyzler *editio maior*) might have merited publication—and even translation into French from the original Italian—before better-known or more obviously important Plotinian treatises will immediately become apparent from a brief perusal of L.’s analysis. The treatise turns out to be a virtual microcosm of P.’s thought, touching not only upon his ethics, but also, indirectly, upon important aspects of his psychology and metaphysics—e.g. his ideas about time, the soul, and Intellect, as well as his reformulation of the Aristotelian notions of *energeia* and *kinêsis*—all brought to bear upon a precisely delineated yet deceptively complex philosophical problem. But the real challenge of Plotinian interpretation is to discern the tacit arguments of unmentioned interlocutors, and L. does so skillfully, elucidating P.’s subtle recruitment of Stoic and Epicurean ideas against Aristotle, as well as the Aristotelian premises themselves which (as so often) may be found lurking beneath the surface of P.’s own thought.

L. observes that I.5 was composed during the period in which P. was becoming more overtly polemical and less inclined to harmonize Aristotle with his own variety of Platonism. Indeed, the unspoken target of the treatise is Aristotle’s claim in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (I, 10-11) that true *eudaimonia* may only be predicated of the biographical totality of a complete life (*bios teleios*). In L.’s analysis, P.’s rejection of the cumulative view of happiness depends upon two basic lines of argument, each arising from a distinct notion of the “present moment” (*to enestôs, to paron*): what L. calls (p. 87) “le véritable ‘héros’ du traité.” In the principal line of argument which runs throughout the treatise,

P. tendentiously adopts aspects of Stoic, Epicurean, Peripatetic, and even Cyrenaic doctrine in his claim that *eudaimonia* (variously correlated with either virtue or pleasure) is a discrete, qualitative “disposition” (*diathesis*) subsisting uniquely in the present moment, the present being the sole locus of both subjective experience and moral action. Since *eudaimonia* obtains only in the present, it is not augmented by the repeated attainment of desires nor through pleasant memories of the past, nor even through a multiplicity of virtuous actions (the only truly virtuous act, according to P., being self-directed *theôria*); happiness, therefore, does not increase with time.

According to L., this principal thesis is supported by a second, subsidiary argument—occurring in a kind of excursus in chapter 7—that depends upon a different, metaphysical notion of the present moment, and also upon uniquely Plotinian ideas about time and the good life (ideas that P. will later expose more fully in III.7[45].2-5 and I.4[46].3-4). In essence, P. maintains that *eudaimonia* is the attainment of the best life, and since the best life is in fact the eternal “life” of the hypostatic Being-Intellect (with which the apex of our soul is always, although not always consciously, in contact), happiness is not a function of temporal duration, but only of eternity, here redefined (after Plato, *Timaeus* 37d and *Sophist* 254c ff.) as the atemporal, transcendental present, the archetype of temporal extension. P. therefore insists that *eudaimonia*—now understood as the actualization of the noetic life of Being—must occur not over time, but altogether at once, in the eternal “present moment.”

L. is undoubtedly correct to note (pp. 92-3) the importance of this latter, metaphysical argument—itself ultimately dependent on the doctrine of the undescended soul—since it provides the Platonic ontological underpinning of the former, more scholastic argument; he thus rightly rejects Bréhier’s suggestion that chapter 7 is an extraneous Porphyrian interpolation. Yet here, precisely, is the only place in L.’s otherwise exceedingly thorough commentary where one might have wished for a slightly more detailed analysis. Specifically, although L. does not address the issue, chapter 7 (especially the last sentence, lines 27-30: *πάν ὅλον ληπτέον . . . πᾶσαν ὁμοῦ*) implies a curious convergence between Plotinian *eudaimonia* and a discrete mystical union. This is suggested by several parallels elsewhere in the *Enneads*; one might consider, for example, P.’s statement at VI.7[38].31.32 that the soul in love with the Good is “filled with the life of Being” (*tês tou ontos zôês plêrôtheisa*), or his mention of the *eudaimonôn bios* in a mystical context at VI.9[9].11.49; also, his frequent use of various forms of *lambanein* to describe the grasping of the One (e.g. III.8[30].10.32), or the similar adjuration in V.5[32].10 to grasp the intelligible world simultaneously (*homou*) as a whole (*holon*); and, finally, his description of the “sudden” (*exaiphnês*) arrival of unitive states (e.g. V.5[32].7.34,

VI.7[38].34.14, 36.19, V.3[49].17.29 etc.) suggesting that these states occur during what (at least in mundane temporal terms) would be a single, transient (e.g. VI.9[9].10.1, IV.8[6].1) instant without time for discursive thought (e.g. V.3[49].17.25ff.) in which one nevertheless obtains an ineffable glimpse of the eternal reality. That L. does not delve into this, however, is hardly a flaw in this book; the choice of brevity over comprehensiveness is understandable.

Finally, the French translation is lucid and accurate. Happily for the reader, L. is conservative with respect to the (unreproduced) H-S text, suggesting a total of only four emendations. Especially helpful are L.'s extensive notes explaining virtually every choice and clarifying the subtleties of P.'s diction even down to the precise rhetorical force of his particles (with frequent reference to Sleeman and Pollet's *Lexicon Plotinianum* and Schwyzer's *RE* article). Supporting apparatus such as indices and an extensive and up-to-date bibliography are also felicitous. Overall, this commentary represents an elegant balance of thoroughness and concision, and will be tremendously useful for those wishing to deepen their understanding of this short but difficult text.

Z. Mazur

University of Chicago, USA

ajmazur@uchicago.edu