Book Reviews

A New French Translation of Plotinus: The Brisson-Pradeau *Plotin*

With the arrival in the spring of 2010 of the final volume, comprising treatises 51-54 (that is, for those of us who stick obstinately to the Porphyrian arrangement, *Enn.* I 8, II 3, I 1, and I 7), and, remarkably, Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, tacked on to the end of the collection rather than the beginning, we can now celebrate the completion of the great enterprise, initiated back in 2002 by Luc Brisson and Jean-François Pradeau, of the complete translation, with introductions and notes, of the *Enneads* of Plotinus. When one considers the many other activities of the editors, especially Luc Brisson, during this period, it amounts to a stupendous achievement, which should be celebrated by all right-thinking persons.

I am not capable, I fear, of reviewing in any detail either this final volume or the previous eight. I will instead offer some synoptic remarks, focusing in particular on the first and last volumes, and on the fourth, which comprises Luc Brisson's annotated translation of tractates 27-29, that is to say the great treatise *Problems of the Soul* (*Enn.* IV 3-5), in which I have a particular interest at the moment, and from Luc Brisson's excellent translation of and notes to which I am deriving much enlightenment.

Volume 1 begins with a general introduction by the co-editors, Jean-François Pradeau and Luc Brisson, giving a very sound and lucid account of Plotinus' life and principal doctrines, followed by a comparative table of the tractates, with their chronological order lined up to their enneadic position, and then a note on the translation. This latter informs us that the texts result from a series of seminars, attended by the editors, along with Jean-Michel Charrue, Richard Dufour, Jean-Marie Flamand, and Mathieu Guyot, in which the details of translation and notes were worked over communally, a procedure which has doubtless much enhanced the resulting edition. Each of the treatises is accorded a short introduction, with summary of contents, and a generous set of notes, on matters of text and translation, as well as sources, parallels within the Plotinian corpus and philosophical questions, comparing very favourably with the Harder-Beutler-Theiler German edition, the notes to which can be rather scrappy, and which is in any case by now rather dated. The rival French series presided over by the late Pierre Hadot is on a

somewhat more copious scale, certainly, but it is far from complete, so that this enterprise of Brisson and Pradeau is substantially unrivalled.

In this first volume, the first treatise, I 6, 'On Beauty', is dealt with by Jérôme Laurent; the second, IV 7, 'On the Immortality of the Soul', by the editors themselves; the third, III 1, 'On Fate', by Brisson and Laurent; the fourth, IV 2, 'On the Reality of the Soul'—a very short one—once again, by the editors; the fifth, V 9, 'On the Intellect, the Ideas and Being', by Francesco Fronterotta; and the sixth, IV 8, 'On the Descent of the Soul into Bodies', by Laurent Lavaud. These names will recur throughout the subsequent volumes, and make up a very satisfactory team. Indeed, to turn to the final volume, Treatise 51 (I 8, 'What are Evils and Whence do they Come?') is dealt with by Laurent Lavaud, 52 (II 3, 'Are the Stars Causes') by Richard Dufour, 53 (I 1, 'What is the Living Being?') and 54 (I 7, 'On the Sovereign Good and the Other Goods') by Jean-François Pradeau; while the whole of Volume 4, comprising *Problems of the Soul*, was taken on by Luc Brisson.

This latter volume I have had occasion, as I say, to work through in some detail, and find it most impressive. This particular treatise, while providing many fascinating insights into Plotinus' doctrine and ways of thinking, nonetheless in many places presents serious problems to the translator, and I have been repeatedly most grateful for the surefootedness of Luc Brisson. He prefaces his translation with a suitably extended introduction, in which, besides setting out a detailed scheme of the whole treatise (which has the form of a series of interlocking *aporiai*), he discusses a series of issues concerning the soul which arise in it, such as the relation of the individual soul with the soul of the world, the various faculties of the human soul and their relation to the body, memory, the passions, and cosmic sympathy—this latter arising in relation to Plotinus' discussion of the power of magic.

The translation itself seems to me again and again to hit the spot, in dealing with very troublesome passages, where Plotinus is being at his most Plotinian, either through wrestling with very complex or subtle concepts, or simply temporarily losing the thread of his discourse; and it is backed up by notes which are copious but succinct—542 for IV 3, 501 for IV 4, and 95 for the 'appendix' on vision, IV 5, covering both difficulties in the text, troublesome points of doctrine, identifications of references to Plato and other previous thinkers, and cross-references to other parts of the Plotinian corpus—all the things, in fact, that notes should be about.

So far as I can observe, this format is pretty well replicated throughout the project, and this makes this series overall the best service that Plotinus has received in any language. It will surely help to enhance his reputation further, and bring him yet more securely into the main-stream of ancient philosophical studies.

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