

BOOK REVIEW

Plotinus, Ennead IV.3-4.29: Problems Concerning the Soul. By JOHN M. DILLON and HENRY J. BLUMENTHAL. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2015. Pp. xiii + 444. Paper, \$47.00. ISBN 978-1-9-30972-89-6.

Plotinus, Ennead IV.4.30-45 & IV.5: Problems Concerning the Soul. By GARY M. GURTLER, SJ. Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2015. Pp. viii + 368. Paper, \$47.00. ISBN 978-1-930972-69-8.

Dillon-Blumenthal's¹ and Gurtler's books are respectively the third and fourth volumes in the series of translations with introductions and commentaries of selected tractates from Plotinus' *Enneads* directed by John M. Dillon and Andrew Smith. The series, now in its ninth volume, was established in 2012 with the purpose of offering accessible and up-to-date translations of Plotinus. Although its primary audience seems to be the general reader, experts on Neoplatonism will find it a reliable and useful addition to the bibliography of this branch of ancient philosophy.

Like a few other writings in the Plotinian corpus (III.2-3, VI.1-3, VI.4-5), *Enneads* IV.3-5 actually form a lengthy single treatise that Porphyry, Plotinus' disciple and editor, clumsily and arbitrarily divided so as to achieve number of fifty-four tractates artificially and, then, arrange them into six groups of nine—pretending to have found the symbolic “perfection of the number six with the nines” (*Life of Plotinus* 24, 13–14). Dillon and Gurtler wished to publish the treatise in its original entirety, but the almost five hundred pages of commentaries and appendices led them to split it into two parts. They reasonably chose to

¹ Readers acquainted with Neoplatonic studies may be puzzled to read that H.J. Blumenthal, who sadly passed away in 1998, is one of the authors of this new publication. As Dillon explains (13–14), by the time of his death Blumenthal was working on a commentary on Plotinus' great treatise on the soul; his work is at the base of the present book, a cooperative effort of the two friends. Blumenthal would certainly be glad to see his incomplete project concluded by his old friend Dillon, who is responsible for the final form of the translation, the introduction, most of the commentary, and all editorial decisions.

divide it at IV.4.29, where some manuscripts report that Eustochius had ended the second book of his division of the treatise in his own edition of Plotinus' works (which has not survived), as what comes after that (i.e. from IV.4.30 to the end of IV.5) can be regarded as a sort of supplement to the main body of the work.

In their individual introductions, Dillon and Gurtler expound the general features of Plotinus' intricate psychology that are indispensable for reading the tractates. The demarcation of the boundaries of each level of the soul, and their proper functions as well, is a difficult and vital issue in Plotinus' philosophy. Thus Dillon, after a few words on the structure and aporetic nature of the tractate, presents a comprehensive, albeit short, study of the Plotinian doctrine of soul, clarifying the natures of the hypostasis soul, the world soul, and the structure of individual souls. Many are the questions that arise from this investigation, such as the kind of soul astral bodies have, time and eternity, sensorial perception, imagination and memory, and so on, all of them briefly discussed by Dillon. Gurtler's introduction to his volume, for its turn, presupposes Dillon's more general one and concentrates on explaining the specific issues to which Plotinus turns in this part of the tractate: the influence of the planets and the attendant problems of their memory and cooperation with evil, their possible benefits and harms to different souls, and then the nature of vision and light. Minute synopses follow each introduction, making it easy for the reader to grasp the plan of the treatise.

It makes little sense to assess the quality of the translation of scholars like Dillon and Gurtler, who have been editing, translating, interpreting and actively shaping our understanding of Plotinus and other philosophers of the Platonic tradition for the past decades. Their translations are, as one would expect, careful and reliable. The translators' concern is to produce a fluent and intelligible English text, often expanding Plotinus' terse Greek a bit. One might point out a few, insignificant, and merely stylistic disagreements that are not matter of correctness but rather of preference. For instance: they render *ousia* as "substance", whereas I have a slight preference for rendering it as "essence". Gurtler translates *pharmakeus* as "alchemist" at IV. 4. 40. 7 (a reference to Plato's *Symposium* 203d8), a word for which I would choose "sorcerer", as I suspect that Plato did not know alchemy and Plotinus, if he did, would consider the alchemist to be closer to the philosopher than to the magician. (However, Gurtler explains the meaning of the word on page 187). At IV. 4. 16. 22, Dillon does not preserve

Plotinus' paradoxical formulation *diastêma adiataton*, translating it as "an interval without extension" (cf. Armstrong's Loeb translation: "an unextended extension"). Dillon, with Bréhier and Brisson, translates *περὶ δὲ τοῦ εἰ ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ τι ἔχει τὸ σῶμα καὶ παρούσης ζῆ πῆς ψυχῆς ἔχον ἥδη τι ἴδιον* (IV. 4. 18. 1–2) as "now for the question whether the body possesses anything on its own account, and brings some distinctive quality of its own to the life bestowed on it by the presence of soul", whereas I would follow Armstrong in understanding the genitive absolute as temporal: "[whether the body] lives already possessing something proper to it when soul is present to it".

The basic Greek text adopted by Dillon and Gurtler is that of Henry and Schwyzer's *editio minor* (*Plotini Opera*, Oxford, 1964–1982), and deviations from this edition are noted in the commentary. Even though deviations are not numerous, I think they should have been made explicit in a separate section of the volumes. It may be unimportant to the general reader, but it would allow scholars to go straight to the passages where a different text is read and thus quickly quench our thirst for philological discussions. Regarding such deviations, as far as I was able to judge, Dillon and Gurtler strongly defend their choices, usually improving Plotinus' text and our understanding of it—e.g. I have been persuaded by Dillon's defense of Dodd's emendation *θέαμα τοῦ νοῦ* for the reading of the manuscripts *θεαμάτων* at IV. 3. 1. 12 (commentary on page 168); the adoption of Kirchhoff's emendation *ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς* for *ἄφ' ἑαυτῆς* at IV. 3. 2. 56–57 (commentary on 181); and Dillon's own emendation of *δυνάμενον* into *δυνάμενα* at IV. 3. 3. 20 (commentary on 184–185), possibly solving the problem of a passage considered corrupted by Henry and Schwyzer.

Dillon's and Gurtler's commentaries are impressively detailed. They pay special attention to Plotinus' sources and interlocutors, and analyze and reconstruct Plotinus' not always clear arguments. I was not able to notice any single passage that has been neglected or insufficiently explained by them. Gurtler's treatment of the astronomical and astrological difficulties of chapters IV. 4. 30–45 (152–229) is remarkable.

Gurtler's volume contains in reality a little more than what its cover shows: the appendix (299–343) is a translation with introduction, synopsis and commentary of the short treatises IV. 1 and IV. 2, both also concerned with psychological questions. It would have been a good editorial strategy to report this on the book cover.

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