



STUDIES ON PLOTINUS

FERRONI (L.), TAORMINA (D.P.) (edd.) *Plotinus IV 7 (2) On the Immortality of the Soul. Studies on the Text and its Contexts.* (Academia Philosophical Studies 79.) Pp. 292. Baden-Baden: Academia, 2022. Paper, €64. ISBN: 978-3-89665-998-9. doi:10.1017/S0009840X24000532

Plotinus' *Ennead* IV 7 (2), 'On the Immortality of the Soul', is the second treatise in the chronological order provided by Porphyry. The treatise is devoted to a defence of the immortality of the incorporeal soul through an examination of the ontological features of both corporeals and incorporeals. For this purpose it also confronts and critically dismisses an array of competing philosophical views on the soul, notably those of the Peripatetics, the Atomists, the Stoics and – as we will see later – the Middle Platonists. The direct tradition presents us with some thorny textual problems, as there is a significant lacuna for which we have to rely on extensive quotes from Eusebius' *Praeparatio evangelica*: this is a problem carefully addressed by the editors of the volume in their introduction and by A. Michalewski's helpful contribution ('La question de l'immortalité de l'âme en IV 7 (2) 8⁵: le choix des extraits d'Eusèbe de Césarée en PE XV, 9–11').

Being the second in the chronological order and being in large part devoted to the presentation of other philosophical views, the treatise did not enjoy a good reputation among scholars, as it was considered a mere scholastic work. H. Dörrie (*Porphyrios' Symmikta Zetemata. Ihre Stellung in System und Geschichte des Neuplatonismus nebst einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten* [1959], pp. 24–35 and 117–21), for example, argued that the doxographic part of the text was heavily based on Middle Platonist material, perhaps a *De anima* handbook. This assessment has been challenged by more recent scholarship, which has emphasised the philosophical maturity of the treatise as well as its dialectical character (see, e.g., R. Chiaradonna, *Studi sull'anima in Plotino* [2005]; C. D'Ancona, 'The Arabic Version of Enn. IV 7 (2) and its Greek model', in: J.E. Montgomery [ed.], *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy. From the Many to the One* [2006], pp. 127–55). The aim of the editors of this rich collection of articles is to contribute to this more positive reassessment of the treatise. In the introduction they argue that two key elements militate against considering the treatise as scholastic or as merely relying on Middle Platonist handbooks: first, the tight logic of Plotinus' arguments and, second, the considerable influence of these arguments on later Neoplatonic philosophers, such as Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus and Priscian of Lydia (pp. 25–30).

The volume is multilingual and has an interdisciplinary character, bringing together contributions from ancient philosophy scholars, classical philologists, and historians of religions and of late ancient culture. It contains twelve articles arranged into three sections. The first, 'Philological Issues', presents two contributions by Taormina and Ferroni, respectively. The second contains four articles (by G. Paşcalău, C. Lo Casto, E. Perdikouri and M. Pagotto Marsola in collaboration with A. Araf), which focus on the Enneadic context of the treatise and on the latter's presentation of key aspects of doctrines that Plotinus further articulates in later treatises. The third section comprises six articles (by F. Verde, L. Gili, F.M. Petrucci, G. Sfameni Gasparro, C. Ombretta Tommasi and Michalewski), which examine Plotinus' philosophical targets in the treatise, the arguments he articulates against them and the treatise's later fortune. The volume concludes with a useful index of ancient authors and texts.

A cluster of articles offers important contributions towards the main aim of the volume, namely that of reaching a more balanced assessment of the nature and philosophical value of the treatise, challenging the old view that the treatise is scholastic, and therefore a philosophically less interesting piece of writing. Verde, in ‘L’anima come aggregato di elementi in Plotino (IV 7 [2] 3, 1–6) e il *De anima* di Aristotele (I 4–5)’, proposes to read Plotinus’ critique of the theory of the soul as a collection of indivisible elements in Chapter 3 as an attack not against a specific (Stoic or Epicurean) theory, but against a more general theoretical model that takes the soul to be composed of either corporeal or incorporeal elements (p. 141). Particularly interesting here is Plotinus’ critique of the notion of a composition either from indivisibles (ἀμερῆ) or from atoms. According to Verde, Plotinus draws on arguments in *Physics* Z, where Aristotle argues that indivisible elements cannot be constitutive of a continuous body, and *De anima* I, where Aristotle criticises Xenophanes’ theory of the soul as number. Plotinus’ rationale would, then, be that an aggregate of atoms or indivisible elements could not possibly produce a homogeneous magnitude but only a juxtaposition, making it impossible for the soul to perceive (pp. 150–2). Gili, in ‘Forms as Wholes. Plotinus’ Dialectical Refutation of the Doctrine of the Entelechy-soul’, makes a compelling case that Chapter 8⁵, devoted to the refutation of the theory of the soul as entelechy, has a strong dialectical character. According to Gili, the sketchiness of the presentation of the entelechy theory may be due to the fact that Plotinus is targeting not only Aristotle but multiple Aristotelians who gave diverging interpretations of the doctrine. Plotinus’ method here would be to establish a set of premises that cannot coexist even from a viewpoint immanent to Aristotle’s own psychology. If the soul is the form of the body as standing in a bijective relation with it, and if the soul is assimilated to the body, then the soul will need to be divisible into parts in the way in which a body is, a conclusion Aristotle could not accept (p. 165). Importantly, Gili notes that the inferential pattern is not exegetical but dialectical, for some of the premises employed are not to be found in the Aristotelian corpus (p. 166).

Petrucci, in ‘Hidden Targets: Plotinus’ Criticism of the Middle Platonists in IV 7 (2)’, offers the main piece of evidence in support of the refutation of Dörrie’s view that the doxographical part of the treatise relies on Middle Platonist handbooks. Petrucci makes a persuasive case that we ought to include crucial Middle Platonist theories among the targets of Plotinus’ polemics in the treatise. In particular, Plotinus would criticise Middle Platonist philosophers on three accounts: first, their literalist reading of the *Timaeus*, which took the soul as a composite (see, e.g., Plut. *Mor.* 441D–442 and Atticus, fr. 11); second, the Middle Platonist idea that the pre-cosmos is not ensouled and moves irrationally, which for Plotinus would amount to considering the soul as mere self-movement and not as essentially rational; third, the Middle Platonist sempiternalist view of the harmonious constitution of the soul. In conclusion, according to Petrucci, Plotinus combines a general attack on rival philosophical traditions with a more hidden criticism of certain strands of Middle Platonist philosophy (pp. 190–1).

The three articles discussed above are successful in showing that Plotinus’ engagement with competing philosophical views in this treatise has a dialectical and critical character, rather than a scholastic one. Perdikouri’s article, ‘The Independence of the Soul from the Body as a Necessary Condition for Perception in Plotinus IV 7 (2) 6–7’, further contributes to this reassessment of the treatise, by arguing that there are at least two fundamental tenets of Plotinus’ theory of knowledge already articulated in IV 7 (2). The first is that the soul is entirely separate from the body, the second is that the soul is a completely unified nature and there is no mortal or passible part of the soul. Here Perdikouri’s analysis diverges from that offered, not without ambiguities, by Lo Casto in the same volume (‘Il tema del vero uomo in Plotino: IV 7 (2) 1, 22–25 e I 1 (53) 9–10 a confronto’), who seems implausibly to

argue that only the rational soul is immortal (p. 106). On Perdikouri's analysis both tenets are crucial for Plotinus' theory of perception. This is because, following *Theaetetus* 184d 1–5, in Plotinus' view two conditions are necessary for perception to occur: the subject of perception must be unified, and it must have *a priori* concepts through which it can attribute general predicates to what it perceives and differentiate among perceptual data. This latter condition is only possible if the soul is separate from the body and autonomous.

A further important contribution to our understanding of IV 7, in addition to the excellent articles discussed, is offered by Taormina and Ferroni. Taormina, in 'Plotin IV 7 (2): la numérotation marginale', provides a convincing defence of P. Henry's view that the marginal annotation in the portion of the manuscript dependent on the direct tradition indicates the lemmas of a commentary by Porphyry, today lost. This intervention aims to offer additional elements for the reconstruction of the structure of Plotinus' arguments. Ferroni, in 'Trois notes textuelles en marge de Plotin IV 7 (2)', examines some textual problems at IV 7, 8², 1–18; 84, 23–38, and 85, 35–43, for which he offers a new edition and French translation. The discussion of these passages serves, moreover, the purpose of showing that the excellent standard *editio minor*, by P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer, can still be improved upon.

In conclusion, several articles from this volume are a welcome addition to Plotinus scholarship and significantly further our understanding of *Ennead* IV 7 (2).

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