PLOTINUS ON THE INTELLECT

J. LACROSSE: *La philosophie de Plotin. Intellect et discursivité*. Pp. x + 276. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003. Paper, €22. ISBN: 2-13-053473-2.

Even though the title suggests differently, this is not a book on Plotinus' philosophy in general. Rather, it studies what its author, the Belgian J. Lacrosse (L.), considers to be Plotinus' most important contribution to Greek thought, his concept of intellect, or *noûs*, as a second hypostasis in between Soul and the One and identical with Being. L. argues furthermore that this concept shaped the way in which Plotinus did philosophy. More particularly, L. sees the *Enneads* as a 'discursive practice of *noûs*' which aims at reaching the principle that inspires the text, *noûs* itself. By this, he means that when the human soul philosophizes, it imitates the activity of *noûs* in its own fashion. *Noûs* coincides with its object of contemplation, the intelligible Forms. Therefore *noûs* is able to contemplate them all at once. The human soul is incapable of this sort of simultaneous contemplation: it contemplates reality discursively, i.e. in bits and pieces, which it subsequently has to recollect and recompose into a unified whole. In the same way, L. argues, we have to read the *Enneads*: we should not view the treatises as self-contained units, but instead we are allowed to, and in fact should, break them up into pieces and then recompose something new out of it. The various chapters of the book focus on *noûs* from different perspectives and thus provide a *leçon par l'example* of this practice, which includes, for example, a discussion of the practice of exegesis and of polemic in Plotinus.

These are interesting topics indeed, and the questions whether the content of Plotinus' philosophy influenced the format in which he philosophized and, if so, what this means for the way in which we have to read him are well worth asking. Yet the way in which L. proceeds fails to convince.

Take the first chapter, which examines the rôle of *noûs* in Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*. Homing in on the fact that Plotinus did not care greatly for the way in which he expressed himself in writing, as appears, for example, from the fact that he wrote with disregard of orthography, and without reading back what he had written, it is concluded that this way of writing is unique to Plotinus and a product of his 'practice of *noûs*'. The text of the *Enneads* is presented by L. as an unfinished product, which will remain 'indécodable et inintelligible' unless we ourselves practice *noûs* by bringing Plotinus' various scattered thoughts together from all over the *Enneads*, instead of trying to read the various treatises as self-contained, understandable units. Yet as some of the secondary literature quoted by L. shows, Porphyry's remarks about Plotinus' style are a *topos*: true philosophers are supposed to cherish a disregard for appearances, be it of themselves or of their style of writing. Furthermore, Porphyry reports that Plotinus used to work out 'his design' (*skemma*) mentally 'from the first to the last' and then wrote it out 'as though he were copying from a book'. From this, one gets the impression that Plotinus intended to write structured treatises with a clear beginning and an end, not some kind of lucky bag from which one should choose and pick elements to construct one's own concept of *noûs*. More important still is the fact that, even though there is no point in denying that the *Enneads* demand a lot of their reader, most of them exhibit a clear and logical arrangement, and one may assume that Plotinus intends his readers to follow the line of the argument rather than zap through the *Enneads*.

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L.'s unexpected solution for one of the vexed problems of Plotinian studies, the existence of ideas of individuals (Chapter 6), may serve as an example of L.'s practice of *noûs* at work. The issue has provoked a lot of discussion, since he seems to hold different views on the matter at different times. L. rejects the two most obvious solutions, that either Plotinus changed his mind over time or that the inconsistency is only seemingly. He argues instead that Plotinus explicitly wanted to be inconsistent in order to make us discover something about ourselves. Plotinus may show himself to be well aware of the limitations of logical thought, yet the idea that he is sowing hidden contradictions throughout the *Enneads* on purpose I find highly unlikely.

In conclusion, this book is an interesting, yet failed, experiment in reading Plotinus.

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THE WISE MAN IN PLOTINUS

A. Schniewind: *L'Éthique du Sage chez Plotin. Le paradigme du* spoudaios. (Histoire des Doctrines de l' Antiquité Classique 31.) Pp. 238. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2003. Paper, €32. ISBN: 2-7116-1616-9.

The focus of this monograph is, as its title suggests, the ethical stance of the *spoudaios* in Plotinus' *Enneads*. Schniewind provides in her introduction an accurate summary of the work of previous writers on Plotinus' ethical theory. This summary demonstrates that there is some disagreement as to whether or not Plotinus provides an ethic that is applicable to the ordinary man, as opposed to the *spoudaios*. A number of writers, this reviewer included, have found it difficult to see what practical ethical guidance is available to the ordinary man in the egoistic behaviour of the Plotinian *spoudaios*. Yet Porphyry's *Life* presents Plotinus, whom one must assume was a *spoudaios*, as a figure deeply involved with the life of the community and not the austere figure that the *Enneads* seem to conjure up. S. claims that this dichotomy can be resolved upon examination of the figure of the *spoudaios*, and in the seven chapters that make up this monograph, she argues her case in a thorough and scholarly manner.

Chapter 1 examines the historical context for the term *spoudaios*, examining its development prior to its use by Plotinus. S. notes the importance of Aristotle in imbuing the term with moral connotations. The Stoics used the term interchangeably with *sophos*, and Plotinus, borrowing from both, employs the term to describe a man who has reduced the aspects of his corporeal self to a minimum, and become self-conscious at the level of his higher soul in the timelessness of Intellect. Like the Stoic *sophos*, the Plotinian *spoudaios* displays little emotion concerning the events of the sense world, which is a mere reflection of true life in Intellect. Since wise, good, fulfilled, etc. simply do not do justice to what Plotinus means by the *spoudaios*, S. sensibly transliterates throughout.

In essence, Chapters 2–6 examine *Ennead* 1.4 [46], 'On Well-Being' (*Peri Eudaimonias*), since it contains the most sustained analysis of the *spoudaios* to be

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