

Igal's Translation of Plotinus

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Plotinus has been called the most difficult of Greek authors, and there is much to justify this claim. His difficulty resides not only in the fact that his Greek is often tortuous and elliptical to the point of unintelligibility, but also in the extreme abstractness and abstruseness of his philosophical thought. It is no doubt for these reasons, as well as his long-standing reputation for a religious mysticism unbecoming a Greek philosopher, that he was one of the last of the great classical Greek authors to be translated into the vernacular languages of Europe.

Despite the prodigious achievement of Marsilio Ficino, who put the entire Plotinian corpus into Latin at the end of the fifteenth century, it was not until the nineteenth century that the complete *Enneads* were translated into a modern language: by M.N. Bouillet into French and by H.F. Müller into German. Understandably, they relied heavily on Ficino. It was not until the present century that Plotinus' oeuvre was translated into other contemporary languages. First, before World War II, there appeared renderings in English (K.S. Guthrie and S. MacKenna), in Polish (A. Krokiewicz), in Spanish (J.M. Quiroga), and new versions in French (Alta and E. Bréhier) and in German (R. Harder). By and large these translations were severely deficient: Guthrie and Quiroga are often little more than translations of Bouillet's French, Alta is guided more by theosophical speculations than by the Greek text, MacKenna often impresses more with literary style than philosophical accuracy, and Bréhier, despite his sure philosophical intuition, often misunderstands Plotinus' Greek. The German version of Harder, however, is a masterpiece of accuracy, readability and penetration. It stands as a monument to the advances made in Plotinian scholarship in the first half of the twentieth century.

The second half of the century has seen the masterful Italian translation by V. Cilento, which builds on the work of his predecessors (particularly Harder), a new Spanish version by J.A. Míguez, and the revision of Harder by Beutler and Theiler. Unfortunately this revision is not always an improvement, since Theiler tends to be rather free in emending the Greek text. However, with the appearance of the monumental edition of Plotinus' text by Henry and Schwyzer, subsequent translations

have a secure textual base from which to work. This text lies at the foundation of the recent translations of the *Enneads* into modern Hebrew (N. Spiegelmann) and Dutch (R. Ferwerda), as well as the new English version by A.H. Armstrong which is appearing in the Loeb Classical Library. Each of these also makes respectful use especially of Harder's German and Cilento's Italian.

For the serious student of Plotinus' writings, the range and quality of existing translations is not just a matter of curiosity or peripheral interest. For understanding this great and obscure philosopher, the translations provide indispensable and often the only commentaries on Plotinus' text. The Greek often yields its meaning only after a comparative study of a number of different translations. Time and again we realize that Ficino's Latin, or Harder's German, or Cilento's Italian illumine the text in unexpected ways. It is worth learning Italian in order to be better equipped to understand Plotinus.

The same can now also be said about learning Spanish. Jesús Igal, S.J., professor at the University of Deusto, in Bilbao, Spain, has published the first volume of his Spanish translation of Plotinus. It is entitled *Porfirio, Vida de Plotino-Plotino, Enéadas I-II* (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1982), and contains, besides the actual translation, an extensive *Introducción general* (pp. 7-115), specific introductions and outline of contents for the *Life of Plotinus* and each of the treatises of the first two *Enneads*, and explanatory footnotes on almost every page. In my judgement, this may well be the most reliable and most useful edition of Plotinus that has ever appeared.

This is due in large measure to the fact that Igal is thoroughly familiar with the expanding world of Plotinian scholarship (people have spoken of a twentieth-century "renaissance" in this field) and is himself a leading participant in that world. What his edition of Plotinus gives is not just a translation, but a kind of *mise au point* of contemporary Plotinus scholarship by a ranking authority within it. And in doing so he does not only summarize and build on the work of others, but carries it forward to a new level.

Take for example the question of the Greek text underlying the translation. As we have said, every translator of Plotinus must now take the Henry-Schwyzler text as his point of departure, and Igal does so. But that text has been, in a certain sense, in flux since the first volume of Henry-Schwyzler appeared in 1951. Over the years the editors have relaxed the rigor of their initial very conservative approach to the text, and we can observe a certain process at work when we compare the successive volumes of the *editio maior*, the *editio minor*, the *Addenda ad Textum* of the former (1973), and the

text cited in Sleeman-Pollett's *Lexicon Plotinianum* (1980). Gradually an increasing number of conjectures were accepted into the text. In the last decade of this process Igal has played a preponderant role, as a cursory glance at the *Lexicon* will make plain. Time and again Igal has been able — to an extent that Theiler was not — to persuade Schwyzer of the soundness of his text-critical proposals. This slow but perceptible movement in the development of what might now almost be called the Henry-Schwyzer-Igal text finds its latest expression in Igal's translation. Unlike earlier translators, however (e.g. Ficino, MacKenna and Harder), Igal does not fail to alert the reader to the places where his text diverges from the published Greek text. Before every treatise he gives a short comparative table listing the readings of Henry-Schwyzer's *editio minor* and those adopted in his translation. Sometimes this means a return to the consensus of the MSS. (e.g. at *Vita* 8.1), or to the reading of certain MSS. (e.g. at *Vita* 2.26); sometimes it means accepting an earlier editor's conjecture (e.g. at *Vita* 3.36) or a new one of his own (e.g. at *Vita* 3.3, where he reads ἀνιόντα instead of ἀπιόντα). Although certainly not slavish or rigid, his attitude in the textual criticism of the *Enneads* can be called conservative (he speaks on p. 105 of "the fundamental, if not total, faithfulness" of the medieval archetype of our MSS. to Porphyry's original edition), and he occasionally accomplishes the rare feat of making sense of a manuscript reading which even the first edition of Henry-Schwyzer had emended (e.g. μεταβαλεῖν at *Vita* 8.1 and ἀπό τι πηλίκον at II,4 [12] 9.11).

But it is not only in matters of textual criticism that Igal shows himself to be in the front line of contemporary Plotinus scholarship. This is evident throughout the introductions and notes which are such a valuable feature of this edition of the *Enneads*. The *Introducción general*, for instance, which has the dimensions of a small book (108 pages), is not only a model of clarity and compression, but incorporates new material from Igal's own research. For example, section 67 of this introduction refers to the evidence for a development in Plotinus' view of man which Igal has presented at length in an important but little-known article entitled "Aristóteles y la evolución de la antropología de Plotino" (*Pensamiento* 35 [1979] 315-346). The bibliography, too, which is found at the end of the general introduction, is a valuable resource, containing not only many older titles, but also useful references to the latest literature, notably to some little-known works in Spanish.

Similarly, the brief introductions to the individual treatises, and the copious footnotes throughout the translation, represent a

compendium of modern Plotinian scholarship, and a mine of useful and often new information. We find not only references to relevant literature and to the appropriate sections of the general introduction, but also explanations of Greek usage (e.g. on the use of *καί* in the sense of "in fact," in the notes on pp. 335, 336 and 444) and indications of hitherto unnoticed allusions in the text to passages of Plato (e.g. to *Timaeus* 69 c 7 — d1 at I,1 [53] 8.19; 12.9 and 12.21).

A particularly useful feature of Igal's edition of the *Enneads* is also the giving of a *Sinopsis*, or brief outline, before the *Vita* and each treatise. These are not just brief enumerations of some of the main themes dealt with in a given treatise, but actually seek to give the articulation of the argument in each case. It is obvious that a great deal of close study and analysis has gone into these outlines, and they are a great boon to the reader, for whom they provide a kind of Ariadne's thread through the labyrinth (which usually turns out to be a quite rationally planned labyrinth) of Plotinus' treatises.

Of the translation itself it behooves the present reviewer to be extremely modest in judgement. For some one with at best a working knowledge of Spanish it is impossible to judge matters of idiom, style or felicity. However it is possible, at least in many cases, to judge how a particular passage of the Greek is interpreted in the Spanish, and on that score it seems that Igal's translation is throughout very careful and well thought through, and therefore generally very reliable. I have found no evidence of haste, shipshod exegesis, undue reliance on earlier translations, or a facile avoidance of problems.

With so much praise and genuine admiration as the basic thrust of this review, it is clear that points of critique must concentrate on details and incidental questions of interpretation. I offer the following comments as a small gleaning of *Schönheitsfehler* from the first instalment of what promises to be, when completed, a magnificent achievement.

The word βασιλεύς is correctly translated *emperador* at *Vita* 3.17 and 12.1, where the reference is clearly to the Roman emperor of Plotinus' day. Igal uses *rey*, however, at II, 3 [52] 2.16, where the words *καὶ στρατηγὸν καὶ βασιλέα γενέσθαι* are probably an allusion to the Roman general Claudius, who had become *emperor* (replacing Plotinus' patron Gallienus) in 268, shortly before these words were written. Similarly, the reference to βασιλείας at I,4 [46] 7.19 probably refers, not to *reinos* (so Igal), but to instances of the Roman *imperium* (cf. *Vita* 4.1 and 4.10).

At *Vita* 3-4 the words τοῦ πλωτίνου τὰς θερινὰς μὲν ἄγοντος ἄργοις should probably be taken to mean simply "while Plotinus was taking his summer holidays" (so Armstrong), and not "al tiempo en que Plotino pasaba sus vacaciones veraniegas ociosamente" (so Igal), since ἄργοι is here to be taken as an equivalent of ἄργια, meaning "holidays" (see the *Supplement* to Liddell-Scott-Jones, *Greek-English Lexicon* s.v. ἄργός). Porphyry is here alluding to the Roman *feriae aestivae*.

At *Vita* 24.9 the τόμοι into which Apollodorus the Athenian collected the works of Epicharmos (comparable to the πραγματείας into which Andronicus divided the works of Aristotle and Theophrastus, and to the "enneads" into which Porphyry divided the works of Plotinus) are not *tomos*, i.e. "volumes" (Igal), but "divisions" or "sections." Consequently the πραγματεία of Andronicus (*Vita* 24.10) is not a *disciplina* (Igal), but a "treatise." We must distinguish clearly the six "divisions" or "treatises" of the *Enneads* from the three σωμάτια in which they were first published (*Vita* 25.1 and 26.2-6). This latter word, in its turn, is a technical term for the *codex*, and Igal's translation *volumen*, though not strictly incorrect, is misleading insofar as it is reminiscent of the scroll which the codex was rapidly replacing in Porphyry's day, especially for such large works as the Bible and the *Enneads*.

The word πραγματεία is also translated *disciplina*, this time correctly, at I,3 [20] 4.19, where it refers to dialectic as the scientific "discipline" of logic. The passage in which it occurs merits a closer look.

. . . entonces es cuando,
estando sosegada *del modo*
como allá se está en
sosiego, *sin afanarse ya*
por nada una vez redu-
cida a unidad, se dedi-
ca a contemplar, cediendo
a otra arte la llamada
"disciplina logica" sobre
proposiciones y silogis-
mos, como cedería *la*
ciencia de escribir. . .
(I,3 [20] 4. 17-21; p. 230
of Igal's translation)

. . .it is then, being at
rest in the manner in which it
remains at rest there, no longer
engaged in fruitless toiling,
being now reduced to unity, that it
devotes itself to contemplation,
leaving to another art the so-
called "logical discipline"
concerned with propositions and
syllogisms, the way it would
leave the science of writing
[to another art]. . .

This important passage, in which Plotinus contrasts the Platonic conception of "dialectic" with the Aristotelian one, contains a

number of pitfalls for the translator, most of which Igal successfully avoids. Not only does he correctly identify *πραγματεία* as “discipline,” i.e. “branch of learning,” but he also catches well the absolute use of the single verb *βλέπει*, which he renders “se dedica a contemplar.”

However, he is probably beside the mark in using the expression “sin afanarse ya por nada” to render οὐδὲν ἔτι πολυπραγμονοῦσα. He is here clearly dependent on Cilento’s Italian version, which has “senza affannarsi più per nulla”, which fails to capture the contrast between the πολυ- of πολυπραγμονοῦσα and the ἕν of εἰς ἕν γενομένη (“una vez reducida a *unidad*”). Moreover, if my Spanish dictionary can be trusted, the phrase “afanarse por nada” is an idiom meaning “to fidget,” and it is doubtful whether Plotinus intends to imply that Aristotelian logic is “fidgeting” in its concern for propositions and syllogisms. The point is rather that, lacking vision, it loses itself in the multifarious busyness of discursive reasoning. As so often, Ficino’s Latin version, though less idiomatic, is more accurate, rendering the Greek phrase as “haud ulterius circa plurima satagens.”

Another pitfall is Plotinus’ use of μέχρι with the articular infinitive, here ὡς μέχρι γε τοῦ ἐκεῖ εἶναι ἔν ἡσυχία, which Igal translates “del modo como allá se está en sosiego.” However, the meaning of the preposition in this usage is “as long as” (see *Lexicon Plotinianum* s.v.), so that Plotinus is saying that dialectic is at rest the way it is (ὡς) *as long as*, or *insofar as*, it remains there (i.e. in the intelligible realm). Again, Ficino has it right: “utpote quae, *quatenus* illuc pervenit, quietem assequitur.” We find the usage again at I,1 [53] 3.15, where Igal correctly renders μέχρι γὰρ τοῦ τὸ μὲν εἶναι . . . as “Porque, *en la medida en que* uno es. . .”

Finally in this passage we should note the reference to leaving things “to another art” (ἄλλη τέχνη), where the word τέχνη has a double connotation. On the one hand it refers to Aristotle’s usage in his classification of the sciences, in which τέχνη belongs to the practical and productive disciplines.

On the other hand, τέχνη in Plotinus’ vocabulary has the negative connotation of the merely technical, the practical know-how of the philosophically unenlightened. It is probably impossible to capture both connotations in a modern translation, but Igal’s *arte* seems to reflect neither, suggesting instead the narrow field of artistic endeavor. Ironically, the mention of art in the narrow modern sense could have suggested a more plausible interpretation of the subsequent phrase τὸ εἶδέναι γράφειν, which Igal translates “la ciencia de escribir.” This probably refers to the

technical know-how or ability of the *painter*, since γράφειν and its cognates often refer to the art of painting in the *Enneads* (see *Lexicon Plotinianum* s.v.). What Plotinus is saying is that dialectic, Platonically understood, is engaged in contemplation of the Forms in the intelligible world, and leaves to a lower τέχνη such derivative forms of contemplation as discursive reasoning and artistic production.

A notoriously difficult treatise is *Enneads* I,1, which bristles with philological and philosophical problems. Igal's translation and notes do much to clarify Plotinus' argument in the treatise, but of course they also offer much that can be disagreed with.

Somewhat disconcerting is the way Igal handles the word πάθος and its equivalent πάθημα, which is an important technical term in the argument of I,1. He begins by translating it *emoción* (1.6; 1.8; 1.12; 2.4), then switches to *afección* (3.4; 3.5; 3.7; 3.10; etc.), and ends up with *pasión* (12.9). Matters are not helped by the fact that ἀπαθής is rendered *impassible* (2.11; 4.14; 5.3) and πάσχειν *ser afectada* (5.5; 5.7). To help clarify the argument, it would have been better to work throughout with *afección* and its cognates. Another related point is this: as we have noted, Igal helpfully identifies 12.9 δεινὰ πάθη, translated 'pasiones terribles,' as an allusion to *Timaeus* 69d1, a point which is explicitly confirmed by the citation of the *Timaeus* passage in the immediately preceding treatise, at II,3 [52] 9.8. There, however, the same phrase is rendered 'pasiones temibles,' which obscures the parallel.

We find a similar inconsistency within I,1 itself, with reference to the verb διαπλέκω. The passives διαπλακεῖσα (an allusion to *Timaeus* (36e2) at 3.19 and 4.13, διαπλακέντα at 4.13, and διαπέπλεκται at 4.17, are consistently rendered by forms of *estar entrelazado*. At 4.13, however, where the argument depends on the use of the same verb from the *Timaeus*, the infinitive διαπεπλέχθαι is translated *estar compenetrado*, which obscures the point being made.

In an excellent note on p. 186, Igal points out that chapters 2 and 12 of I,1 distinguish two philosophical accounts of soul ("dos modos de concebir el alma"), one which deals with soul in complete abstraction from the body, and another which deals with soul as a combination of this true soul and its image in the body. Now each of these two accounts is called a λόγος in the Greek text (at 2.4 and 2.9, and again at 12.2 *bis*; 12.5; 12.6; 12.33; 12.35). Again, the argument seems to depend on the continuity of vocabulary. However, like other translators before him, Igal translates λόγος in

varying ways: as *razonamiento* in chapter 2, as *doctrina* at the beginning of chapter 12, and as *leyenda* and *relato* at 12.33 and 12.35 respectively.

Speaking of the two λόγοι at the end of chapter 12, Plotinus suggests that "the poet" (i.e. Homer), in speaking of two manifestations of Heracles at *Od.* 11.602, seems to be making a distinction, ὅπ' ἀμφοτέρων τῶν λόγων κατεχόμενος, "constreñido por ambas leyendas" (Igal). Not only does this translation miss the reference to the above-mentioned two accounts of soul, it also fails to appreciate the force of κατεχόμενος. This is almost certainly another allusion (as at V.3 [49] 14.9-10) to Plato, namely *Ion* 533 e, where "poets" are said to be ἐνθεοὶ and κατεχόμενοι, that is to say, "inspired" or "possessed." Plotinus is suggesting that Homer was inspired by both λόγοι of the soul, thus giving divine sanction to Plotinus' own attempt to harmonize the two. He does not insist upon this explanation, however, but simply adds: ἐμέρισε δ' οὖν (12.34), i.e. "in any case, he divided him [Heracles]." Although Igal is generally very careful in his treatment of the elusive Greek particles, he misses the mark when he translates here "Así que lo dividió," as though there were no difference between οὖν and δ' οὖν. The point here is that, whatever the explanation may be, Homer in fact did divide Heracles into a god and a shade. He did so "in any case," the standard meaning of δ' οὖν (see also VI,4 [22] 12.3 and 12.29).

Plotinus not infrequently plays on the etymological meaning of compound words. At 5.4, for example, συμπάσχειν does not mean to sympathize or have compassion, but "to be affected along with" another subject. Igal captures the sense well by translating "sea afectada junto con el cuerpo." However, he misses a similar case at 9.20, where he translates οἷον συναίσθησις as "por una especie de consciencia." Now it is true that συναίσθησις in Plotinus often does mean simply "consciousness," but in this case (given the context, which speaks of soul as not being itself involved in bodily sensation) he is making an etymological pun: "as by a co-sensation." Schwyzer translates correctly "sozusagen mit einem Mitempfinden" (*Sources de Plotin*, p. 368), and already Ficino captures the sense ("quodam quasi sensu"; similarly MacKenna and Cilento).

No one who has not himself tried his hand at translating this most difficult of Greek authors can appreciate how cheap an undertaking it is to find fault with the details of a finished translation of Plotinus. The sampling of critical comments which we have presented (focussed mainly on the *Vita* and *Enneads* I,1)

could be increased without great difficulty. But this would be to give an unfair impression of the extraordinary qualities of this superb translation and edition of Plotinus' works. Father Igal is to be congratulated on this auspicious beginning of his monumental undertaking, and extended best wishes for the speedy completion of his task.

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