

*Plotinus Ennead VI.4 & VI. 5 – On the
Presence of Being, One and the Same,
Everywhere as a Whole*

Translation, Introduction, Commentary by Eyjolfur
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This edition represents the 5th successful editorial step of Parmenides Publishing's ambitious project of offering to the scholarly community new translations and commentaries on all the treatises of Plotinus' *Enneads*. The new volume of Plotinus' *Ennead VI.4 & 5* demonstrates considerable virtues. It succeeds in offering to the reader a reliable instrument, a key to unlock the doors and grant access to some of the darkest rooms of Plotinian metaphysics. It deals with intricate issues which have not had the chance to become the principal subject of any English publication *ad hoc*, even though they were identified by the secondary literature several decades ago. It would suffice to recall A. H. Armstrong's initial recognition of Plotinus' doctrine of 'receptivity according to the capacity of the recipient' – a major topic in the present study- in his book *'The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus'* (1940). Armstrong's doctrinal formulations on participation according to Plotinus were followed up 35 years later. In 1975, Dominique O' Meara addressed this doctrine and brought it to the forefront of research for a couple of years; his *'Structures hiérarchiques dans la pensée de Plotin'* gave rise to a debate that culminated in 1979 and 1980, between him and Jonathan S. Lee (*'The Doctrine of Reception According to the Capacity of the Recipient in Ennead VI. 4-5'* and *'The Problem of Omnipresence in Plotinus Ennead VI, 4-5: A Reply'*). The present elegant English translation and commentary work by Emilsson and Strange is the first in the 75 years since Armstrong's first formulation of this principal dimension of the Plotinian theory on participation.¹ It should be mentioned though, that a valuable commentary on the very same Ennead is available in German published in 1998, by Christian

1. Armstrong, A.H., *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus*, Cambridge: C.U.P., 1940

Tornau, to which Emilsson and Strange is indebted.² Some 27 years ago, in his Introductory Note to *Ennead VI.4-5*, Armstrong pointed out that “there is, perhaps, no work in the *Enneads* which is more necessary to understand if we are really to grasp Plotinus’ thought, and all Neoplatonically influenced thought about the nature and presence of spiritual being, in all its depth and breadth.”³ If he is right, then Emilsson and Strange’s present study on *Ennead VI.4-5* should be proclaimed not only as worthwhile but also as a must-read – not only for scholars of Neoplatonism but also for any friend of Plotinus who wishes to penetrate the complexity of the reality of participation as it manifests in the relation of the body to the soul as well as the sensible to the intelligible.

Having realized the fundamental importance of the Parmenidean discussion on participation, Plotinus decisively attempted to illuminate this Platonic idea and solve the main issue it had raised, now codified as the so called ‘Sail-Cloth’ enigma. Emilsson notes that Porphyry by classifying VI.4-5 under the title: ‘*On the Presence of Being, One and the Same, Everywhere as a Whole,*’ reminds us of the Parmenides but neglects to mention the soul and thereby misleadingly titled the *Ennead*. Emilsson stresses, one should be aware that by the word “being” Plotinus refers to the soul.⁴

The present work has been conducted and, to some extent, solely implemented, by Eyjolfur K. Emilsson, Professor at the Department of Philosophy in the University of Oslo. The book is the outcome of a work the idea of which, although it was actualized in 2015 in Norway, was born in 1990, at the Center for Hellenic Studies, in Washington DC. It should be noted that the untimely passing away of the co-author, Steven K. Strange, in 2009, obliged Emilsson to shoulder the completion of the edition. The edition develops in three complementary sections: 1) Introduction, 2) Translation and 3) Commentary. Furthermore, a helpful Note on the Text as well as synopses of the chapters’ topics precede the translation body. A tripartite select bibliography consisted of original texts, several translations of the *Enneads* and studies on VI.4-5 as well as other related studies has been included, followed by Indices of Ancient Authors, Names and Subjects.

The introduction to the treatise is valuable and satisfies several needs related to the complexity of the subject matter. It offers a

2. Tornau, Chr., *Plotin Enneaden VI 4-5 [22-23], Ein Kommentar*, Stuttgart and Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1998

3. Armstrong, H.A., *Plotinus Ennead VI.4-5*, Massachusetts: HUP, 1988, p. 270

4. Περὶ τοῦ τὸν ὄν ἐν καὶ ταῦτὸν ἅμα πανταχοῦ εἶναι ὄλον’.

coherent and comprehensible brief study consisting of six sections which is suitable even for those uninitiated to Plotinus' thought. Emilsson approaches the *Ennead VI.4 and 5* in accordance, as the very title signifies, with the Plotinus' initial intention in mind, i.e. to write it as a unified treatise. Thus, the intervention of Porphyry's classification that is responsible for the present duality of the text does not have a substantial effect on Emilsson's treatment. The author grounds the singularity of the treatise in the fact that it deals with complementary aspects of the main question at issue: a) the nature of the Soul, b) the body/soul relation, and c) the nature of participation. These issues recapitulate some of the most difficult questions of Plotinian metaphysics. In fact, what Plotinus aims at, although he omits to name it in the original title, is to elucidate the way the non-spatial, hence indivisible, soul is received by the inferior, in terms of spatial divisibility, body. From this point of view VI.4 and VI.5 eventually takes into consideration basic ideas from the *Parmenides* and *Timaeus*. Plotinus' main thesis is that the intelligible is undivided and bodies participate in it as a whole. This position, however, insistently raises further challenges that Emilsson succeeds in reproducing with simplicity and clarity.

The first part of the introduction provides general remarks. Clearly, Plotinus is well aware that both the *Parmenides* and the *Timaeus* needed explication. The *Parmenides* had certainly boosted the development of the idea of participation within Platonism and its Neoplatonic legacy. The discussion on participation from 130e to 135c, the celebrated passage of the *Timaeus* 35a on the constitution of the Soul, as well as the direct and indirect comments on them by Middle Platonists, Neoplatonists, and Early Christian thinkers are evidence for this claim. The second part contains the main thesis that the intelligible realm is undivided and that bodies participate in it as a whole. The third consists in analyzing the influential doctrine of 'receptivity according to the capacity of the recipient.' Philosophers such as Iamblichus, Proclus, and Dionysius the Areopagite, made extensive use of the doctrine formed in the concept of *epitēdeiotēs* -- a term which is already present in Plotinus. Correspondingly, Tomas Aquinas focused on it under the influence of its developments by Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus. The fourth section explicates the line of Plotinus' argument. And the fifth section contextualizes the *Ennead VI.4-5* into the wholeness of the Plotinian writings. In the last part of the introduction the author deals with the twofold

central topic of the body-soul relation and the concomitant problem of participation.

The translation has been mainly worked out by Strange who, during the years after the 90's and until his untimely death, made several corrections and improvements. It reproduces the Plotinian original text in simple, but not simplifying, fully comprehensible English, distinguished by clarity and accuracy. Having considered available translations of the Greek text of the *Enneads* in English, French, German, and Italian, Emilsson created an edition which is not only new but also enriches those obscurities in some of the available translations. In other words, some ambiguities of the Plotinian language have now been clarified. The careful reader will find some minor typos and a few omissions, such as, the Plotinian emphasis in the phrase 'ἵνα ὄντως λαμβάνωσι' (VI.5, 10.32). However, these mistakes do not affect the faithful rendition of the Greek text. In general, the translation aptly reveals the consistency and coherence of the solutions proposed by Plotinus and their limitations.

Needless to say, what one eagerly looks forward to in such a study is the commentary itself, and it is there where a great amount of merit is to be found. The commentary expands in small sections which follow the inner structure of Plotinus' thought and the course of his argumentation. It sustains correspondence to the translation's chapters and subsections, which are marked appropriately, while the quintessence of each chapter is always stated with a short prefacing subtitle. That Emilsson does not compromise in regarding the treatise as separate, autonomous works, is also reflected in the comments which develop in both depth and breadth, hence correlating ideas that, although discussed in other treatises, directly or indirectly relate to the questions raised in VI.4-5. The analysis is detailed and comprehensible, aiming at recapitulating the central tenets and components highlighted by Plotinus, while exploring the boundaries of his thought on the question at issue. Original questions arise on topics that lay between the Plotinian lines. Moreover, the commentary vividly discusses Plotinus' suggestions, which are now revitalized in a fluent manner throughout the analysis. The author's profound knowledge on Plotinus and his penetrating mind render perplexities into digestible ideas for which any scholar or curious reader will be grateful. Valuable references and connections to the secondary literature support Emilsson's arguments, but he uses

them thoughtfully only to complement or to give rise to critical examination.

A book review is written with the aim to present not only the content but also the edition in general. The present volume has both technical as well as aesthetical merits. In spite of the difficulties of the content in *Ennead* VI.4-5 that may apply to readers' intellects, this volume is printed in a user-friendly shape and size, suggesting, at least on the level of sensation, a light, portable, and pleasant read. Its front page is cleverly decorated with a picture of a snowflake that confirms the validity of Plotinus' philosophical convictions. Indeed, a fractal, which is implied by the snowflake, has the structure such that each part has the same character and make-up of the whole.