

[1941. Review of *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus*, by A.H. Armstrong. *The Philosophical Review* 50, No. 6, Nov.]

*The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus*. By A. H. ARMSTRONG. Cambridge, At the University Press, 1940. PP. xii, 128. (New York, The Macmillan Company.)

The laborious title disguises a small work which, by its careful, unhurried argument, will delight the historian of philosophy. The main thesis is that the philosophy of Plotinus splits at every crucial point upon a basic inconsistency.

On the subject of the One Plotinus sometimes expresses himself as an exponent of a "negative" theology. This view makes the One a mathematical, or metamathematical, unit of which nothing can be predicated and from which the derivation of anything else seems impossible. But Plotinus also speaks of the One as if in some respects it resembled the Deity of Christianity. For it thinks itself, wills itself (and its effects), and loves itself.

Connected with the positive view of the One is the conception of emanation and the metaphor of light to explain Intellect. The negative approach, on the other hand, results in an evolutionary scheme by which everything comes from a spermatic nothing.

In the realm of Soul and nature, matter may be the last but yet good production of the Soul, and it may also be an independent evil principle.

There is, further, the inconsistency of limiting the hypostases to three in number and then of introducing a lower soul and a Logos, both of which meet the requirements of hypostatization.

To explain these phenomena, Mr. Armstrong, rightly eliminating Indian influence, traces with nicety the history of two Greek traditions, and argues that Plotinus came just short of harmonizing them.

A just criticism of the book would involve minute examination of many details. For example, the author adopts W. D. Ross' interpretation of a passage in Aristotle and rejects that of Robin; the reviewer, a pupil of the latter and not of the former, may have another bias. Again, one may wonder whether Plotinus' "acceptance of Forms of individuals . . . derives from the Stoic doctrine of the *ιδίως ποιόν*". The author, to be sure, notes that Plotinus "goes beyond the Stoic position and argues vigorously against it". Then, finally, the statement of the author's "personal view of the validity of Plotinus' philosophical system" had to be too brief and disjointed to be of equal value with his historical exposition, which is indeed a work well done.

But these are all minor details. The difficulty lies in the first discovery of inconsistency. Did Plotinus intend to propose a positive theology, or, as Brehier maintains, are his statements on thinking, willing, and loving merely "une méthode de persuasion" on a subject in which "on est forcé d'employer des termes qui ne s'appliquent rigoureusement qu'aux réalités inférieures . . . formules sujettes à de constantes corrections"?

Mr. Armstrong replies: "Plotinus may protest as much as he likes that he intends to introduce no sort of duality into the One, and that any appearance of duality . . . is due to the limitations of language. He takes the decisive step when he makes the One ἐνέργεια and gives it will, makes it eternally create itself and return eternally upon itself in love."

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