

# A HISTORY OF ANCIENT WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

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## [ CHAPTER 18 ]

### Neoplatonism

THE LAST GREAT effort of ancient pagan philosophy is now called Neoplatonism. The term dates only from the nineteenth century. The movement itself was regarded by its exponents as the direct continuation of Platonic thought. To themselves and to their contemporaries these men appeared simply as Platonists. Attempts have been made to see some of the characteristic doctrines of Neoplatonism in preceding thinkers, but as a distinct and developed philosophy it is not found in any writings earlier than those of Plotinus. Plotinus, accordingly, may for all practical purposes be considered its founder.

#### PLOTINUS (204/205-270 A.D.)

**Life.** Practically all that is known about the life of Plotinus comes from the biography written by his disciple Porphyry. According to Porphyry, Plotinus would never say anything about his family or birthplace. He even seemed ashamed of having to lead a bodily life (*Life*, 1). His racial origin and his native city remained unknown for Porphyry, though around the end of the fourth century "Lyco" (Lycopolis ?), Egypt, was given by Eunapius (*Vitae Soph.*, III,1,1; ed. Giangrande) as the place of his birth. He was born, Porphyry relates, during the thirteenth year of the reign of Septimius Severus. As Porphyry seems to begin the years in Egyptian fashion at August 29 or 30, and to count incomplete years as well as complete ones, he would be placing the birth of Plotinus sometime within the year commencing with the end of August, 204 A.D. Similarly, in stating that Plotinus died at the age of sixty-six towards the end of the second year of the reign of Claudius, he would mean not long before the end of August, 270 A.D., in the sixty-sixth year of life.

At the age of twenty-seven Plotinus became intensely interested in philosophy. He was disappointed, however, with the most highly reputed teachers at Alexandria, until he heard a discourse by Ammonius Saccas. Ammonius, Porphyry wrote, had been brought up a Christian but had abandoned the Christian faith.<sup>1</sup> Under Ammonius, Plotinus continued the study of philosophy for the next eleven years. Then, in search of an opportunity to investigate Persian and Indian thought, at the age of thirty-nine he joined the expedition of the Emperor Gordian against Persia. However, he did not get any further than Mesopotamia, and there is no reliable evidence that he ever acquired a direct knowledge of Indian philosophy.

Escaping with great difficulty after the failure of Gordian's expedition, Plotinus came to Rome, settled there, and engaged in philosophical discussions for ten years. Only after that period, and so at the age of about fifty, did he begin to write (*Life*, 3). He became a close friend of the Emperor Gallienus and of others high in political life, but in his writings he shows no sign of political inclinations on his own part. Porphyry mentions, however, that Plotinus nearly persuaded Gallienus to rebuild a city for philosophers in Campania. It was to be called Platonopolis, and was to be governed according to Plato's laws (*Life*, 12). Porphyry further records that Plotinus was opposed to eating the flesh of animals, or using medicines containing any substance taken from animals (*Life*, 2).

Porphyry, himself thirty years old at the time, met Plotinus in the tenth year of Gallienus' reign, when Plotinus was about fifty-nine (*Life*, 4). He relates that four times during the period that he knew him, and so during the next seven or eight years, Plotinus attained a state of ineffable union with "the god above all things."<sup>2</sup> The achievement of this ecstatic union was, according to Porphyry, the one goal of Plotinus' life. Porphyry himself reached this state of union once, in his sixty-eighth year (*Life*, 23).

**Writings.** The treatises of Plotinus, written from about the age of fifty on, all belong to the last seventeen years or so of his life. They do not allow much time for doctrinal development, at least in any radical

<sup>1</sup>Eusebius (*Ecccl.Hist.*, VI,19,10) denies the assertion that Ammonius gave up the Christian teaching, perhaps confusing this Ammonius with another of the same name.

On the chronology of Plotinus, see Hans Oppermann, *Plotinus Leben* (Heidelberg, 1929), pp. 29-57.

<sup>2</sup>*Life of Plotinus*, 23.16. The texts of Plotinus and of his *Life* by Porphyry are cited in this chapter according to the lineation of E. Bréhier's *Ennéades* (Paris, 1924-1938). The translation of the passages from the first five *Ennéades* follows the text established by Paul Henry and Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer, *Plotini Opera*, Vols. I and II (Paris and Brussels, 1951-1959).

sense. Therefore, in spite of some minor differences that may be found in them, they may all be taken to represent his mature thought. According to Porphyry, they were never arranged systematically or given titles by their author. In fact, they were not even read over by him, partly on account of his poor eyesight. They were arranged by Porphyry according to their subject matter, starting with the ethical discourses, into six groups of nine treatises each. This was the origin of the name *Ennéades*, or groups of nine. Porphyry, who had been entrusted by Plotinus with the revision, faithfully respected the text itself, at least as far as can be ascertained. He changed only the arrangement, using titles that had become accepted, and recording the succession in which Plotinus himself had written the different groups of treatises (*Life*, 4-8; 24).

#### PHILOSOPHICAL TEACHINGS

**Ascent of the Soul.** The exhortation of Plotinus to his hearers was to follow the path that leads to union with the supreme principle of all, the union that was the single purpose of Plotinus' own strivings. In the treatise *On Beauty*, listed first in the earliest group of his writings, the upward journey of the soul is made dependent upon a godlike and seemly disposition. The journey is then described in the manner of the ascending dialectic in Plato's *Symposium* (210A-211B). It reaches the order of intelligence, in which the Ideas function both as offspring and as entity of intelligence itself. Beyond the whole world of the Ideas, however, is their source, the good, which Plato's *Republic* (VI,509B) had described as the origin of being to the Ideas and of all knowledge of them. It is represented as screened off from the intellectual gaze. Plotinus urges: "Let everyone, then, first become godlike and everyone beautiful, if he is to behold god and anything beautiful. For ascending he will come first to the intelligence; and *there* he will know that all the Forms are beautiful; and he will say that beauty consists in this, the Ideas. For through these, the children and entity (*ousia*) of intelligence, are all things beautiful. That which is beyond this we call the nature of the good, having the beautiful raised shieldlike before it" (*En.*, I,6,9.32-39). The region above the sensible world is regularly referred to by Plotinus as *there*, and the visible universe as *here*.

**Platonic Background.** As emerges clearly enough from the

above way of speaking, the movement of Plotinus' philosophy is an intuitional dialectic, starting with the cognition of sensible things and rising from their participated beauty to the vision of the Ideas, with the aim of penetrating somehow still further to an absolutely primal source beyond the Ideas (V.9,1-2). It is dependent on one's own affective disposition for its start and its progress. It was thought out by Plotinus himself in profoundly logical sequence, yet, as Porphyry remarks, "to no one do the cogently reasoned links involved in his discourse readily come to light" (*Life*, 18.7-8). The upward way, as presented in the *Enneads*, is the dialectic that "having left aside the region of deception, nourishes the soul on what is called the 'plain of truth,' using Plato's method of division for the distinguishing of Forms, using it also for the establishing of essence, using it likewise in so far as the primary genera are concerned and weaving by way of intellection the genera that proceed from these, until it has gone through all the intelligible order; and in opposite fashion it unravels them until it reaches the first principle" (I,3,4.10-16). Only when one has seen the whole intelligible world in all its multiple and intricate complexity is one in a position to analyze it in a way sufficient to disengage its supreme principle of unity and somehow rise to that principle. So dialectic, in Platonic fashion, is the highest part of philosophy, and not merely an instrument in the form of rules and propositions (I,3,5), as it would appear from the Peripatetic viewpoint. As is evident enough from the passages already cited, Plotinus is retaining the sharp Platonic division of things into sensible and intelligible: "... there is, on the one hand, that which is always in motion and which admits of all kinds of change and is distributed throughout all place, which accordingly should be named 'becoming,' but not 'being' (*ousia*); on the other hand, there is that which always *is*, which is not distributed, which is identically the same in nature, neither becoming nor perishing nor having any space or place or any abode, neither emerging from anywhere nor passing in turn into anything, but abiding in itself, . . ." (VI,5.2.9-16).

The soul, moreover, is not as it was for Aristotle a corporeal form (IV,2,1). In Platonic fashion it is something complete in itself. It "makes use of the body as of an instrument" (I,1,3,3). Even though it may be spoken of as the form of the body, it still

leaves the body outside the notion of man proper. The soul, when regarded as the other principle concerned in man, "is most dominant and is the man himself. If this is the case, it stands in relation as to matter (the body) in so far as it is the form, or as to instrument in so far as it is the user; and in each of the two ways the soul is himself" (IV,7,1.22-25). Plotinus puts his finger very deftly on the weak point of the Aristotelian doctrine that the human soul is a corporeal form and yet a principle of supersensible cognition. In order to explain intellection, he notes, the Peripatetics have to introduce what he would like to call a further type of soul, over and above the soul that is a corporeal form: "Therefore even they themselves bring in another soul or intellect, which they posit as immortal" (IV,7,8<sup>s</sup>.15-16). For properly intellectual cognition and for immortality the Aristotelian doctrine required the further principle called intellect (*nous*), which Plotinus is trying to view as another soul. Though maintaining that for the soul "the body is an imprisonment and a tomb, and the cosmos is for it a cavern and a den" (IV,8,3.3-5), Plotinus keeps in mind the additional Platonic doctrine that soul becomes joined to body in the course of natural necessity.<sup>3</sup> He finds no contradiction in this double explanation (IV,8,5).

**Aristotelian Influence.** The general background of Plotinus' philosophy is therefore unmistakably Platonic. But an equally unquestionable Aristotelian cast is given the Ideas in relation to intelligence, vitally affecting the intimate nature of the very first object of the Plotinian intellect. This difference radically changes the whole procedure, and makes the thought of Plotinus a new and different philosophy. Porphyry had observed: "In his writings . . . even Aristotle's treatise *The Metaphysics* has been compressed" (*Life*, 14.4-7). Through intellection, as Aristotle had maintained, the knowing subject and the object known are one: "To the extent in which it knows does the knowing subject—for now earnest attention must be given this point—come into unity with the thing known" (III,8,6.15-17). This principle is understood as identifying the object of intellectual knowledge with the intelligence knowing it: "If this is the case, the act of contemplation has

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of this question, see A. H. Armstrong, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus* (Cambridge, Eng., 1940), pp. 83-90.

to be identical with the thing contemplated, and the intelligence has to be identical with the object of intellection" (V,3,5.21-23). The object of intelligence, however, is being. Being is therefore located in intelligence in a way that identifies it with intelligence. To it Parmenides' dictum, understood now to mean identity of being and thinking, is applied: "In intelligence, it is now clear that subject and object are one, not by making the object its own, as is the case in even the best of souls, but by very entity (*ousia*), in that its 'being and thinking are the same'" (III,8,8.6-8). The Ideas or intelligibles, accordingly, are found *within* the Plotinian intelligence—somewhat as for Philo they were placed within the mind of God—and not outside it.

Other Influences. Plotinus draws not only upon Plato and Aristotle, but on other leading Greek philosophers like Heraclitus, Parmenides, Empedocles, and Anaxagoras, as well as upon the Pythagorean tradition. Stoic influence is frequently apparent, for instance in his use of the doctrine of seminal reasons: "For the universe is intricate in the highest degree, and in it are all (*seminal*) reasons, and powers unlimited (*in number*) and of many varieties" (IV,4,36.1-2). However, though he dealt considerably with Stoic philosophy, he does not seem to have been at all profoundly affected by it. He takes an extremely restricted view on "reasonable" suicide (I,9). He speaks of seminal reasons and the *logos* in general, understanding by these terms powers of the soul concerned with ordering matter in accord with intelligence. Although he may speak of the seminal reasons as to some extent identical with souls,<sup>4</sup> he usually describes them as psychic forces that exist in souls but are not the same as souls. As specifically Stoic principles the seminal reasons are not a very operative feature in the development of his thought. Still less is there any evidence of real Oriental influence. Plotinus was acquainted with and deeply interested in Oriental philosophies, as his Egyptian background and his journey to Mesopotamia would indicate. Yet there seems to be nothing in his entire thought that cannot be explained as a regular development of his Greek sources, even though he may have had Oriental philosophies in mind as he worked out his own conclusions.

**The Intelligibles.** Although human cognition is aroused

<sup>4</sup> See E. Bréhier, *La Philosophie de Plotin* (Paris, 1928), p. 53.

through sensation, the starting point of philosophy proper is found rather in the objects of intellectual cognition.<sup>5</sup> These intelligibles exist within the intelligence, after the fashion of strict Aristotelian union between the knower and the object. The fifth book of the fifth *Ennead*, as its title indicates, undertakes to show "That the intelligibles are not outside the intelligence" (V,5). The treatise seeks to establish this doctrine through the difference between sensation and intellection. Sensation consists in attaining things outside the cognitive subject, through representation, in accordance with the derivation of the word *doxa* from the Greek verb "to receive." Truth, therefore, is not concerned with something that is received from without and that is other than the intelligence. It bears rather upon an object already identified with the intelligence in spite of the duality to which they give rise. If this were not the case, intellection would not differ from sensation (V,5,1). "One should not then either seek the intelligibles outside it, or say that they are impressions of being upon the intelligence, or in depriving it of truth render the intelligibles unknown and non-existent, and even do away with the intelligence itself" (V,5,2.1-4).

The reasoning of Plotinus, accordingly, is based upon the teaching that there has to be truth, not just opinion (*doxa*). That was the fundamental Platonic position on human knowledge, and could easily be taken for granted in the environment in which he was discoursing. However, in order to safeguard truth in its status above sensation and opinion, and to render secure the whole order of being, Plotinus teaches that the objects of intelligence have to be located within the intelligence itself, and not at all outside it: "Rather, if both knowledge and truth are to be admitted, and beings and the knowledge of each thing's essence upheld, . . . all things have to be placed in the veritable intelligence. For in this way it will both know, and know veritably, and will neither forget nor go about seeking; and the truth will be in it and it will be the abode for beings, and will be living and will be exercising intellection" (V,5,2.4-12).

**Identity and Plurality.** In that union all beings are identified with the intelligence: "We have, then, this one nature, intelli-

<sup>5</sup> *En.*, I,3,4. On this topic, see W. R. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus* (reprint, 3rd ed., London, etc., 1948), II, 39-64.



gence, all beings, the truth. If so, it is a great god, or rather, these may claim to be not a god but deity entire" (V,5,3.1-2). In spite of the identity, however, the intelligibles remain distinct from one another and from the intelligence: "Let intelligence, accordingly, be the beings, and let it contain them all within itself, not as in place, but as containing its own self and being one with them. 'All are together' *there* and none the less they are differentiated. For even soul, in having many sciences at once in itself, does not have anything fused together; and each science does its own work when required, without drawing in the others along with it; and from among the thoughts that keep lying inside, each individual thought comes into actuality clear of any admixture. In this way, and much more so, is the intelligence all things together and yet not together, because each thing is an individual power; and the whole intelligence encompasses them all as a genus its species or as a whole its parts" (V,9,6.1-10). The union of intelligence and intelligibles is accordingly illustrated by the union of a genus with its species. The genus comprehends all its species, yet can be distinguished from them; and similarly every species can be distinguished from the others, in spite of its union with them in the genus. The comparison helps to explain the way in which Plotinus can speak almost indifferently of intelligence and intelligences, or of soul and souls, or of being and beings.

**Priority of Being.** The union of intelligence and beings is not left open to an Idealistic interpretation,<sup>6</sup> in the sense that being would result from thinking. Plotinus repeatedly asserts the primacy of being over intelligence, even though the two belong on the same level of reality: "First, then, one should understand what holds in all cases for the being (*ousia*) of the Forms, that they do not exist because the thinking subject thought of each of them, and then by that very thinking endowed them with existence. For not because it began thinking what justice is did justice come into being; nor because it began thinking what motion is did motion attain existence" (VI,6,6.5-10). From this

<sup>6</sup> P. V. Pistorius, *Plotinus and Neoplatonism* (Cambridge, Eng., 1952), p. 1, presents the philosophy of Plotinus as an Idealism, though in the meaning that the world of concepts has more reality than the world of sense. However, the three principal hypostases become merely different "aspects of the same Being" (p. 59).

viewpoint intelligence is only second in order: "Since being is first, one has to place being first in the order of understanding; then, intelligence; . . . and intelligence is second, for it is being's (*ousia*) actuality" (VI,6,8.17-20). In order to be known, things have to be prior to the knowing: "For the object of intellection must be prior to this intellection. Otherwise, how would it reach knowledge of it?" (V,9,7.16-17). The very nature of knowledge, then, prevents the Ideas or intelligibles from having the role merely of thoughts produced by thinking.

**Individuality.** For Plotinus, nevertheless, being and intelligence are co-ordinate. The order of being is the order of intelligence. True beings are all intelligibles, and are all found in the intelligence, in a living identity that allows them to remain distinct from one another as well as from intelligence. In this living identity is realized the doctrine of Parmenides (*Fr.* 8.25) that being closes in on being and that the all forms a compact whole (*En.* VI,4,4). On account of this identity *all* the intelligibles are many in one and one in many (VI,5,6). Each one is identified in the intelligence with all the others in such a way that a sufficiently keen vision would perceive everything whatsoever in any one of the intelligibles: "Besides, every one of them has them all within itself, and moreover sees all in any other, so that all are everywhere and every one of them is every one and each is every one, and unlimited is their splendor. . . . *Here*, of course, one part does not emerge from another part, and each can be only a part; but *there* each always emerges from the whole, and is simultaneously individual and whole—it shows itself indeed as part, but to the beholder with penetrating sight it is visible as whole" (V,8,4.6-24).

In the same way, every intelligence is identical with and yet distinct from the one intelligence. This variety in unity allows the intelligible world as well as the sensible universe to be regarded as a cosmos: "We consider it, accordingly, an intelligible cosmos, since there are also the individual intellectual powers and intelligences included in it—for it is not one alone, but one and many" (IV,8,3.8-10). In that way there is an individual intelligence for each individual soul, yet all such intelligences form one supreme intelligence (IV,3,5). Absorption in the intelligible

world, however, excludes all memory of earthly things and of individual personality (IV,4,1-2).

**The One.** Being and intelligence, therefore, constitute an order that is multiple. Such an order cannot be absolutely primary, since unity precedes multiplicity. This consideration prompts inquiry about a cause prior to both being and intelligence: "Who is he, then, who engendered this intelligible cosmos? It is he who is single-natured, and who is prior to such a multiplicity, who is cause both of its being and of its being multiple, the producer of plurality. For plurality does not come first; since even before duality there is the one, and duality comes second" (V,1,5.3-7). That primal cause is identified with the good that Plato's *Republic* had placed above being: ". . . know that it is the good—for, as it is a power, it is cause of wise and intellectual life, with life and intelligence proceeding from it; that it is cause of entity (*ousia*) and being; that it is one—for it is single-natured and primary; that it is first principle—for from it come all things" (V,5,10.11-14). It is unlimited in the sense that it will never fail as the source of all other things: "But neither is it limited. For by what could it be given bounds? Nor on the other hand is it unlimited as though it were a magnitude. For where would it have to keep extending? Or why might anything accrue to it when it is in want of nothing. But its *power* has the nature of the unlimited; for it is never any different nor will it ever fail, as even indefectible things have their permanence through it" (V,5,10.18-23).

Being, consequently, is not unity. It can only *participate* unity: "But if the being of an individual is a multiplicity, and it is impossible for the one to be a multiplicity, being and the one will differ from each other. . . . The more so, accordingly, will entire being, containing all beings in itself, be multiple and other than the one. But in having unity by participation, it will also be partaking of the one" (VI,9,2.17-24).

**Negative Predication.** Since the one is beyond the order of being, it is not able to receive the predication of any of the categories of being. It is not even a substance or a "this." Only negative predication can properly be made of it (VI,9,3-4). Since it is above the order of intellection, it cannot be attained by any intellectual act, but by a superior and indescribable act

of presence and union, that may be called vision only in contrast to discursive reasoning (VI,9,4). Intellection can merely show that there has to be a one prior to being; it cannot attain the one through any act in its own order. Even when the one is called the good, it is denominated not from anything in itself but from what it causes in others: "In it, then, there is no willing of anything; but it is above good, and it is good not for its own self but for other things, if they are at all able to partake of it" (VI,9,6.40-42). Nor does it know itself, any more than it could will itself. Intellection is essentially a movement towards the good, and so cannot be found in it (V,6,5). But that does not mean that the one is ignorant of itself. It is negative even in regard to ignorance. Rather, it is of its very nature one with itself and so requires no intellection to unite it with itself: "The *alone*, however, neither knows, nor has anything that it does not know; but being one, being united with itself, it does not need intellection of itself. In fact, 'being united with itself' should not be added, in order that you may keep intact the 'one'" (VI,9,6.48-51). Even the term "one," when applied to it, is not to be taken in any positive sense, but merely as a negation, in so far as it does away with multiplicity: "But perhaps even this name the 'one' has a negative meaning, in reference to plurality by doing away with it. . . . If the one—both the name and what is signified—were positive in meaning, it would become less clear than if no name were mentioned for it. Perhaps indeed this name was mentioned in order that the inquirer begin with that which most of all is expressive of singleness, and then end in a negation even of that. It was asserted as the best adapted to what was under discussion; yet not even it is suitable for the manifestation of that nature" (V,5,6.26-35). Only in this restricted sense may Plotinus speak of the first principle as loving itself, seeking itself, and producing itself (VI,8,13-15).

In accordance with the Greek metaphysical tradition that goes back to Parmenides, being is kept strictly equated with form and finitude. It is what can be defined. But its source is beyond the whole order of finitude. That source "is necessarily formless. And since it is formless, it is not being (*ousia*). Being has to be a 'this,' and a 'this' is limited. . . . It is therefore 'beyond being.'" (V,5,6.4-11).

**Emanation.** The first principle of all things is, as Plato (*Ti.*, 29E) had stated, without jealousy. It therefore tends necessarily to realize all the possible effects of its unlimited power. Goodness, accordingly, appears as the reason for the production of other things: "How then would the most perfect and the primary good stay within itself, as though begrudging of itself or lacking the power—it the power of all? And how would it still be first principle? Accordingly, there must also be generation of something from it, if there is indeed to be any of the other things too, things that of course derive their existence from it; for in it must they have their origin" (V,4,1.34-39). This reason for the emanation requires that all possible effects be realized, and so makes the real coextensive with the possible: "It was not befitting to stay this power as though enclosing it in jealousy; but it should always keep going onwards, until all things reach the limits of their possibility down to the ultimate detail" (IV,8,6.12-14). The procession of being and intelligence from the first principle is of course eternal. It involves no motion, and so does not occur in time: "Let us, however, put aside temporal generation in treating of the eternal beings; but in verbally attributing generation to them, we will be assigning them causes, causes of order in their procession too. We have to say, then, that what is engendered *there* is engendered without any motion having taken place in its source" (V,1,6.19-23). This necessity is understood as excluding free choice from the process of emanation. All possible good has to be realized. The notion of universal providence arises only from the viewpoint of a lower order of things: "Providence, then, either over anything animate or over this universe in general, did not proceed from a reasoning process; for *there* there is no reasoning out at all. But it is called reasoning, to indicate that all things are as a wise man would have arranged from reasoning in the matters of a subsequent order; and it is called foresight, because they take place as a wise man would have provided in affairs on the subsequent level" (VI,7,1.28-32).

**The Hypostases.** The emanation proceeds from the one through intelligence (being) and soul to the material order. What proceeds from the one is stabilized by turning towards the one and thereby acquiring the character of *being*; while its own self-knowledge, so stabilized, makes it intelligence: "For, being per-

fect by reason of neither seeking anything nor possessing nor needing anything, the one as it were overflowed; and its overflowedness has produced something else. And what was engendered turned round to it and was satisfied to the full and became set in its gaze upon itself; and this is intelligence. And on the one hand its stabilization upon the one caused the being, and on the other hand its looking upon itself caused the intelligence. Since it was stabilized upon the one, then, in order that it might behold, it is rendered simultaneously intelligence and being" (V,2,1.7-13). In a corresponding way, soul proceeds from intelligence and being: "As the intelligence is like the one, then, it produces in like manner, . . . And this actuality issuing from being (*ousia*) is the actuality of soul, . . ." (V,2,1.14-17). Soul in its turn gives rise to the visible world of nature, though now through a process of motion: "Without any change on the part of the intelligence was soul born its likeness; for also without any change on the part of its own prior source did the intelligence come into being. Soul, however, does not produce without change, but in motion it engendered an image. . . . an image of itself, sense and nature, the nature found in the vegetal order" (V,2,1.17-21). The whole process of emanation, however, remains one continuous life: "There is, then, as it were a life far extended in length. Each part is different from those that follow; yet it is a whole continuous with itself" (V,2,2.27-29). The one, intelligence (being), and soul were known as the three principal hypostases, considered as set and definite stages in the process.

**Soul.** The order of being and intelligence was seen to be both one and many, after the manner of the unity and multiplicity found in genus and species. Similarly, the order of soul is both multiple and unitary: "Correspondingly, souls too had to be many and one, and the many differing souls had to come from the one soul; just as from one race (*genus*) comes types (*species*) some better, some worse, some more intellectual, others less actually so" (IV,8,3.10-13). In this fashion the differing capacities of the various individual souls are explained. The highest grade is left to the universal soul: "If a city, for example were endowed with soul, containing other living things within its bounds, the soul of the city would be more perfect and more powerful; yet nothing



would prevent the other souls too from being of the same nature" (IV,8,3.16-19).

Besides the function of thinking, soul has also the role of ordering matter. In this way it differs from intelligence, even though, in the Platonic contrast of sensible and intelligible, soul belongs to the higher sphere: "The functioning of the more rational soul is indeed intellection, but not just intellection. For how then would it differ at all from intelligence? Yes, in receiving over and above the intellectual nature something else, it did not remain essentially intelligence. . . . But on the one hand in facing towards what is prior to itself it engages in intellection; on the other hand, in looking to itself it looks to what comes after it, which it sets in order and manages, and rules over it" (IV,8,3.21-28).

In soul, accordingly, is found the transition from the order of being to the order of change: "For life *here* is in a process of motion; but *there* it is immobile" (III,2,4.12-13). The soul itself lives in both orders: "Having turned back towards intellection the soul is freed from its bonds and journeys upward, when from recollection (*anamnesis*) it takes its starting point to 'behold beings.' For in spite of everything it always possesses something superior. Souls, then, come to lead as it were both kinds of life, obliged to live in part the life *there* and in part the life *here*. Those who are able to be more united with the intelligence, live in a greater degree the life *there*; while those who either through nature or through conditions of fortune have been disposed the opposite way, live in a greater degree the life *here*" (IV,8,4.28-35).

Souls proceed downward through the heavenly bodies to the more crass and earthly, in accordance with the Platonic traditions of transmigration.<sup>7</sup> The immortality of the soul is proven from its incorporeal nature, and by other Platonic arguments, for instance that it is essentially a vital principle and that it knows the Forms: "That the soul has its kindred to the eternal and more divine nature, is also made clear by the proof that it is not a body. Moreover, it has neither figure nor color, nor can it be touched. Besides, it can be shown too from the considerations that follow"

<sup>7</sup> *En.*, III,4,2; IV,3,15; 17; VI,4,16. On the extent of the Plotinian notion of soul, see Pistorius, p. 76.

(IV,7,10.1-4). All souls, without exception, are therefore immortal: "Regarding the soul in other living things—any souls that have fallen so far as to reach the level of bodies of wild beasts—these also are necessarily immortal. And if there is any other type of soul, this too has to come from no other source than *the* living nature, since *it* indeed is the cause of life to living things; and the same holds for the soul in plants" (IV,7,14-1-6).

**Nature.** The necessary process of emanation requires that soul produce corporeal nature: "If it is to go forth, it will engender for itself place, so also body" (IV,3,9.22-23). It is by contemplation alone that the soul produces the entire sensible world: "The production therefore reveals itself to us clearly as a contemplation. For it is a result of a contemplation that remains contemplation without having done anything else, but it produced by being contemplation" (III,8,3.20-22). Nature itself is represented as explaining how this happens: "And what contemplates in me produces what is contemplated, just as geometers during their contemplation draw what they contemplate. But I do not do any drawing. I contemplate, and the figures of bodies come into existence as though falling out of my contemplation" (III,8,4.7-10). Production and action, accordingly, are but a weakened form of contemplation: "Everywhere then will we find production and action either a falling off of contemplation or a by-product of it. . . . The duller types of children also bear witness to this. As their disposition renders them incapable of studies and contemplation, they are relegated to the crafts and trades" (III,8,4.39-47). The visible cosmos has always existed and will exist forever (II,1,1; III,2,1). The entire dependence of the sensible universe on contemplation makes manifest the doctrine that body is in soul, not soul in body. Body is contained as well as conserved by soul: "For it lies in the soul that sustains it, and in it is nothing that does not share in that soul" (IV,3,9.36-38).

All things, as has been seen, form one vital process. This allows the individual soul to retain and make operative its union with everything else: "For the soul is both many things and all things and the things above and the things below, on to life in its entirety; and we are each of us an intelligible cosmos, joined by the things below to this world, but by the things above, and those of a cosmos, to the intelligible world" (III,4,3.21-25). By its

thinking, then, the soul can journey in reality back to the unity of the intelligible world: "For both what is ours is brought back to the order of being and we ourselves; and we return to it as from it we first came. And we know the things there without having images of them or impressions. But if we know them without such aid, we know them because we are those things. If then we partake of veritable knowledge, we are the things there not by receiving them in ourselves, but by ourselves being in them. And as not only we but also the rest of things are they, we all are they. In being together with all things, therefore, we are they. We are therefore all things as one" (VI,5,7.1-8). Shrines and statues are meant to reflect the omnipresence of soul, and so indicate that the nature of the all is everywhere (IV,3,11).

**Evil and Matter.** With the soul, the process of emanation is still in the order of the divine (V,1,7). The continued emanation, however, is a descent from the good. It involves increasing devolution and deterioration. The necessity implicit in such a process requires that it continue till it reaches the opposite of the good, evil: "Since, then, the good is not the only thing that exists, it was necessary in the emanation outside it—or, if anyone should wish to say so, in the perpetual descent and recession from it—that the ultimate, yes, that after which there was nothing more to be engendered, should come. Evil, it can be understood, is this" (I,8,7-17-20). Evil is accordingly a lack of goodness. It is likewise not-being. To call it not-being does not at all imply that it does not exist, but asserts that it is opposed in character to the Greek philosophical notion of being: "And 'not-being' does not at all mean what is in every respect not-being, but only what is other than being; yet not in the sense in which motion and the stability concerned with being are other than being, but as an image of being, or even as not-being in a still more pronounced sense" (I,8,3,6-9). Evil, then, consists either in sensible things or in something still more remote from being than the sensible. This latter kind may be described only through lack of form and lack of finitude: "For one would come to a notion of it in considering that it is as lack of measure in comparison with measure, and unlimited in comparison with limit, and formless in comparison with something form-giving, and always needing in comparison with self-sufficient, always indeterminate, in no respect stable, entirely

passive, unsated, absolute destitution; and that these features are not accidental to it, but they are as it were its very entity; . . . and that whatever other things partake of it and become like to it do indeed become evil, but are not of their very essence evil. . . . And if besides it there is anything of evil character, it either has evil mixed with it, or through facing towards evil is of evil nature or is a productive cause of what is evil" (I,8,3,12-34).

Absolute evil, then, is described by Plotinus in the terms that Plato used for the receptacle of generation and those applied by Aristotle to the absolutely primary matter. Evil, accordingly, is necessarily present in the material world: "The nature of bodies, in so far as it shares in matter, will be evil, though not the primary evil" (I,8,4,1-2).

**Lapse, Return of Souls.** Individual souls become evil through forgetfulness of their divine origin. This is caused by their rash decision to be self-sufficient in the world of change and otherness: "The source, indeed, of their evil plight is recklessness and becoming and the primary otherness and the will to belong to themselves. Glad to all appearance at their independent status, they became steeped in the movement proceeding from their own selves; running the course opposite their true destiny, they brought themselves to a state of extreme recession from it. In consequence, they came to be without knowledge even of their own origin *there*" (V,1,1,3-8). Individual freedom and responsibility are upheld by Plotinus in this sphere of moral action: "But each thing has to be an individual, and there have to be our own actions and thoughts, and the good and bad actions of each have to proceed from the individual himself. No, the causing at any rate of evil things is not to be ascribed to the all" (III,1,4,24-28).

The soul, though, never lapses entirely into the not-being that is nothing. It can always turn again to the intelligible order and rise through the intelligibles to the one: "For the nature of the soul will not reach the point of complete not-being. In going downwards it will sink to the level of evil, and in this sense to not-being; yet not to what is in every respect not-being. But in running the opposite course it will come, not to something else, but to its own self; and in this way, since it is not in anything else, it will be in nothing at all except in its own very self. But the location in itself *alone* and not in being is location in that beyond;

were closed by Justinian, and thereby the history of ancient pagan philosophy may be said to have come officially to an end. The philosophical tradition was continued by commentators down into the Middle Ages. In the meantime, from the early era of Patristic writing, a new type of philosophical thinking was being developed within the framework of Christian faith. On account of this setting, however, so radically different from that of the pagan world, it constitutes a long phase of European thought that is more conveniently treated<sup>8</sup> as part of a history other than that of ancient Western philosophy.

### RETROSPECT

In Neoplatonism many of the leading aspects of Greek philosophical tradition found their most harmonious synthesis. The notion of the whole cosmos as a living being, present from the start in Greek thought and modified considerably in the Platonic doctrine of the world soul and the Aristotelian teaching on the animated heavens, was more completely rationalized in the Plotinian development of the progression of life and soul. The Parmenidean contrast between the world of being and the world of the *doxa*, in the light of which Plato and Aristotle had thought out their metaphysical tenets, was explained and absorbed in the process of gradual devolution from the supreme and ineffable perfection of the first principle. The Greeks, Parmenides not excepted, had all frankly admitted the evident plurality and motion of the things in the visible cosmos. The problem was to reconcile them with the immutable being, of which they somehow bore the imprint. Plotinus, in locating unity itself outside and above the order of being, and making being a stage in the process of devolution, provided the most consistent escape in ancient times from the tyranny of the all-embracing Parmenidean concept. The presence of evil and the irrational, admitted regularly throughout the course of Greek thought, found a justification in his doctrine of the successively deteriorating phases of the emanation process and its necessity. As with his predecessors, an over-all necessity reigned supreme in the universe. As with them, free choice was recognized for ethical purposes, but it was kept on a lower level and seemingly did not call for any profound philosophical explanation. A

<sup>8</sup> E.g., as in Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1955).

different setting from that of Greek philosophy would be required to see it in the highest level of being. In this respect as well as in the other features of his thought, Plotinus remained within the tradition of his philosophical forbears, and from the viewpoints of both time and internal consistency he brought their way of thinking to its culmination. Contemplation, now raised above the hindrances of intellectual duality, remained the supreme goal of human living, while production received a coherent explanation as a much weaker and lower type of contemplative activity.

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## [ APPENDIX ]

### The Chronology of Empedocles

THE CORRECT dating of Empedocles is of notable importance for understanding the history of Greek philosophy during the fifth century B.C. The activities of Anaxagoras, Democritus, Gorgias, and others have to be kept in close chronological relation with the work of Empedocles. A late dating for Empedocles, which for the most part has been accepted by historians, renders much of the evidence about movements of philosophical thought in the fifth century difficult to understand. A brief survey of the chronological indications regarding the dates of his life is therefore necessary at least to remove any prejudice that may arise from a fixed opinion on this score and so predetermine the datings of other philosophers in the century.

The oldest source for the chronology is the reported testimony of Glaucus of Rhegium, a contemporary of Democritus. Of all the authorities he is the closest to Empedocles in point of time. He was quoted by Apollodorus as stating that Empedocles came to Thurii, a city on the gulf of Tarentum, shortly after its foundation (D.L., VIII,52; DK, 31A 1). Thurii was founded in 444/443 B.C. No details are given by which this report might be checked. Apparently on its strength Apollodorus (*cf.* D.L., VIII,74) placed the *floruit* of Empedocles in the eighty-fourth Olympiad (444-441 B.C.). The most trustworthy account of Empedocles' age seems to be the one taken from Aristotle by Diogenes (VIII,52: 74), according to which Empedocles was sixty when he died. On this basis the dates for Empedocles' life would be from about 484 to about 424 B.C., or up to a decade earlier.

According to the manuscript text of Diogenes Laertius (VIII,67; DK, 31A 1), however, the Sicilian historian Timaeus, writing over a century later than Glaucus, seems to have recorded that when Acragas was being "settled" the descendants of Empedocles' enemies prevented his return to the city. At any rate, Timaeus stated that Empedocles left Sicily and never returned, the manner of his death remaining unknown