



Plotinus' Philosophical *Eros* for the One: His *Unio Mystica*, *Ethos* and Legendary Life

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Above all, this paper explores Plotinus' unparalleled philosophical *eros* for *henosis* (union) with the 'One,' highlighting his legendary life as recounted by his biographer and disciple Porphyry. It is ascertained here that the *ethos* of great visionaries of the order of Plotinus, whose metaphysical insight mystical experience and ethical life harmoniously coalesce: legend supersedes historical fact and philosophical acumen. Plotinus' metaphysics in the *Enneads* is examined *qua* his mystical claim of having attained spiritual dignity through life's ultimate goal (cf. VI.9.9.47-48). His metaphysical scheme following the hierarchical structure of Plato's *Parmenides* differentiates three *hypostatic* realities: the Ultimate *One*, *Nous* (*Intellectus*, Mind), and *Soul*. The *One* is absolutely independent beyond being, time stillness and movement, however through its dynamic emanation of *Nous* and *Soul* paradoxically generates multiplicity—every form quality compound or thing. But concurrently, the 'derivation' of multiplicity from the *One* transcends the emanation of *Soul* and *Nous* (being and form), hence lies beyond all intelligibility. Notwithstanding, Plotinus claims the *One* can be directly experienced and this order of mystical contemplation constitutes the *unio mystica*; is often paralleled to the vision of Plato's Form of the Good beyond being (*Rep.* VI.507-509); and to the pinnacle of Diotima's ladder of divine love (*Symp.* 210a-211b), whereby the lover of wisdom ascending through *Nous* to the greater mysteries of *eros*, beholds the highest and final mystery the transcendent vision of beauty-itself—of one form always—beauty that "neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes" (211a), true beauty simple and divine that transforms the visionary to immortal friend of god. Affirming Plato's *Theatetus* (176b), Plotinus unequivocally claims the philosophical aim to become like god to the highest possible degree (*Enn.* I.2.1.4, I.4.16.10-13). However, his mystical illumination leads to equivocation of the 'One' to the 'Form of the Good' making his insight comprehensively conspicuous; it encompasses Platonic metaphysics, clarifies what Plato implied but never really elucidated: the *beyond being* of the *Good itself*. For Plotinus, only the mystical experience of the *soul's* gradual ascend to the *Soul of the All* (*Psêché tôn Pantōn*), then unto *Nous* and finally unto the ultimate cause can disclose our ever-present-and-direct-link to the divine: to the *One hypostasis par excellence* that is everywhere (*pantachou*) and nowhere (*oudamou*), that as prior cause transcends intelligibility, multiplicity dyad or number; yet paradoxically as *One*, is absolutely simple—all-pervading-immanence—being neither a part nor a compound rather the prior simplicity of the whole, oneness: unifying-in-and-as-itself parts to compounds and forms to being. Accordingly, the good life and *eudaimonia* ensue in measures to the degree the divinized self-manifests unity in everydayness. Hence, Plato's heavenly forms are directly accessible immanently linked to the earthly world and realm, wherein the inner realization of the *One* manifests the divine good in everyday activity and experience. Plotinus' simple and immanent *One* augments Platonic metaphysics one decisive step further pronouncing the *unio mystica*: union with the first cause the sole aim of everyday life. In *toto*, the

Plotinian insight accentuates evermore Platonic metaphysics with the renewed visionary *ethos* of the *One* that links ontologically Plato's heavenly forms to wholesome earthly self-actualizations.

Keywords: Plotinus, Enneads, unio mystica, eros, Porphyry, Plato

[...] souls which have descended from the higher realm into multiplicity and division are both identical with one another and yet different: each soul remains one and all are one together. The many souls springing from one are like the intellects in *Nous*: they are divided and yet not divided [*Ennead* IV.3.5.9]. Further, each person is himself and yet is identified with what is all; so by knowing himself he knows all, and by knowing all he knows himself [V.8.3.32]. Or, again: in the world of *Nous* each item is itself and yet is simultaneously everything else. All things There are heaven: earth and sea and animals and plants and men are heaven. Each has There everything else in itself and sees all things in every other, for all are everywhere and each and every one is all, and the glory is unbounded: for each of them is great, because even the small is great: the sun There is all the stars, and each star is the sun and all the others [V.8.3.32].

–Leo Sweeney, “Basic Principles in Plotinus’s Philosophy.”¹

Let us speak of the *Nous* in this way, first invoking God himself, not in spoken words, but stretching ourselves out by means of our soul in prayer toward him, since this is the way in which we are able to pray to him, alone to the alone.

–Plotinus, *Enneads* (V.1.6.9-12).²

The oracle says that he was mild and kind, most gentle and attractive, and we knew ourselves that he was like this. It says too that he sleeplessly kept his soul and ever strove towards the divine which he loved with all his soul [...].

–Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* (VP.23.1.6).³

Introduction

Plotinus’ three *hypostases* of *Soul*, *Nous*, and the *One*, as well as the *Good itself* are capitalized throughout this paper. Plotinus himself only capitalizes the terms ‘One’ and ‘Good’ and he does not

¹ L. Sweeney, “Basic Principles in Plotinus’s Philosophy,” *Gregorianum* 42 (3, 1961): 506-516, 507. Brackets added to reference Sweeney’s system of footnotes to the *Enneads*. Sweeney’s cites the *Enneads* “according to the chronological order in which Plotinus wrote them and not in the order in which they appear after Porphyry edited them” (506). The citation method utilized in this paper follows Porphyry’s edition of the *Enneads*.

² The translation of Plotinus’ *Enneads* mostly utilized for this paper follows: A. H. Armstrong, *Plotinus*, 7 vols. (London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann, 1966-88). At times, I have altered Armstrong’s translation in order to reflect more accurately the intended Greek meaning, or else to make the translated text more accessible. I have also consulted S. MacKenna’s English translation, *Plotinus: The Enneads*, 4th edition revised by B. S. Page, forward by E. R. Dodds, intro. by P. Henry (London: Faber and Faber, 1969).

³ The *Vita Plotini* or ‘*The Life of Plotinus*’ constitutes Porphyry’s preface to his edition of the *Enneads* which he published in 301 A.D. Cf. A. H. Armstrong, *Plotinus*, vol. 1, *op. cit.* no. 2, 3-87. It is important to note that Porphyry made public his edition of the *Enneads* some thirty years after Plotinus’ death. The above quotation constitutes part of Porphyry’s commentary on the oracular disclosure that salutes and pays tribute to Plotinus. The oracular disclosure essentially divulges aspects of Plotinus’ life before and after his death. Among other things, the oracle reveals that Plotinus’ life on earth was unremittingly under the special protection of the divine. Part of the oracular disclosure is cited in the section of this paper, titled: “Porphyry and the oracle song of Plotinus’ legendary life.” It is highly probable that Porphyry had the oracle disclosure at his disposal before writing his *Vita Plotini*. Thus he may have composed the ‘*Vita*’ with the oracle’s disclosure in mind.

capitalize the terms ‘soul’ and ‘intellect.’ However, for the purposes of the present paper all of the above terms are capitalized; this is a strategy some scholars of Plotinus follow to emphasize the fact that when he speaks of the three *hypostases* of the *One*, the *World Soul* or *Soul of the All* (*Psêchê tôn Pántōn*), and *Nous* or *Intellect*, he wholly differentiates them from material reality or from anything material. In following Plato, Plotinus determines that materiality is equivocal to non-being; it constitutes the totally unformed layer of necessity, already laying there utterly deficient and dark devoid of the *hypostatic* light of being.

As will be elucidated in forthcoming sections of this paper, when the *Soul* descends into a particular human body its pure light mixes itself with materiality, therefore material stuff bears the potential to cast a veil of darkness that may partially hinder the *Soul’s* intellectual development. At all junctures, the proportion of light to darkness is analogically equivalent to the particular *Soul’s* level of intellectual development. But be as it may, the adverse influence of material stuff can never completely cover-up or in any way ever extinguish the immortal light of *Soul* and *Intellect*. The intellectual ascend evinces various levels of ontological elevation and attainment that proportionately increase the light of *Soul* allowing for greater freedom of *Intellect* to inform and transform material reality thereby, changing one’s relation to matter. Finally, Plotinus contends that the mystical vision of union with the absolute *One* occurs in the spiritual sphere of *Psêchê tôn Pántōn* and the divine *Nous*. Nevertheless, its effect and dispensation manifests-itself as radical immanence and transcendence, initiates the freedom of self, illumines the body and balances *Nous* to cohere with the infinite light of *oneness*—lighting-up everydayness—and all that is.⁴

It ought to be noted in advance, Plotinus clearly elucidates that intellectual attainment through the higher echelons of *Nous* erases the split between a descended earthly *Soul* -below- and an undescended heavenly *Soul* above. As the mind’s rational capacity develops the veil is gradually removed and ultimately there occurs the event of merging or a melting of the two into one: the earthly *Soul* below coincides and harmonizes with the *Soul of the All* and with the divine life of *Nous* above. The harmonization between the ‘above’ and the ‘below’ potentiates everydayness coalesces and coheres with everyday life and activity. In essence, there is only one *Soul* and one *Intellect* the one within the other; the seeming split between ‘an above and a below’ occurs only because of the adverse influence of material reality.

The paper is divided in three unified parts, the first two parts consist of four sections each, and the last part has three sections. Part I, explores Plotinus’ *eros* for the *One* and his *unio mystica* as it relates to Plato’s vision of the *Good*. Part II, explores the *Enneads* as they relate to Plotinus’ metaphysics of the *One* and his ethical vision. Part III, explores Porphyry’s *Vita Plotini* in relation to his realization of Plotinus’ comprehensive place in the historical and cosmic order of the universe. There is a dialectical relationship that occurs between the three parts as well as between the sections of each part that proceeds in a forward and backward movement. This way, concepts and ideas discussed in one section are expounded-on in other sections finding their rightful place within an integrated whole of parts. One of the primary intentions of this paper is to disseminate Plotinus’ philosophical and mystical vision by making it more accessible to the general public. My hope and aspiration is that after reading the following pages the reader will be stimulated moved and encouraged to turn to Plotinus’ *Enneads* themselves. Thus she/he may tackle the difficulties of a rather inaccessible however divinely inspired and beautiful text. The extensive secondary literature provided in the footnotes is sufficient to guide the general reader to investigate and delve deeper into the aspects of Plotinus thought discussed below.

⁴ The term ‘self’ is rarely used in this paper, however it equivocates the term ‘*Soul*.’ Also, the term ‘particular’ or ‘individual’ *Soul* denotes the descended part of *Soul*, as distinguished from its undescended compliments of *World Soul* and divine *Nous*. Ultimately there is one-self or one-*Soul*.

A short summary of the sections of each part follows.

Part I

The section titled, "Plotinus' historical influence and his universal message," discusses the extensive impact Plotinus' thought exerted in the history of western philosophy and religion, as well as the diachronic and cumulative effect his philosophizing had on occidental culture, society, and civilization. In turn, the reason for the far-reaching appeal of his universal message is explored.

The section titled, "The *biosophic* sphere of love as *eros* and *prima philosophia*," explores the love that arises from the *unio mystica*, defined as *biosophic* union with the heart's core wisdom. In turn, it investigates the relation that the *biosophic* sphere bears to the philosophic *eros* for knowledge. In Plotinus, both the *biosophic* wisdom of love and its philosophic compliment of *eros* for wisdom are found to coalesce and cohere in the perennial inquiry of *prima philosophia*.

The section titled, "The *One* and the *Good*: Plotinus' and Plato's mystical vision," investigates the way Plotinus' metaphysics of the *One* compliments Plato's mystical vision of the 'Form of the Good.' Further, this section illumines the way Plotinus enriches Plato's theory of ideas and explores the way he elucidates the 'beyond-being' of the *Good*. It also briefly explores parts of Plotinus' novel hermeneutics of Plato's philosophy.

The section titled, "Porphyry's testimony of Plotinus' Platonic way of life," mainly surveys Porphyry's biographical insight into his teacher's Platonic way of life as presented in the *Vita Plotini*.

Part II

The section titled, "The negative metaphysics of the *One* in Plotinus' *Enneads*," explores the ineffable aspect of the *One* as well as illumines Plotinus' suggestion of the relation we ought to maintain to the unspeakable in ourselves. Further, it elucidates the reason why Plotinus himself speaks of the unspeakable in his metaphysical vision of reality.

The section titled, "Plotinus' existential-visionary dynamics of the mystical *One*," explores the phenomenological characteristics of Plotinus' visionary experience of the *One* in the *Enneads*, and also presents the existential dynamics of *Nous* as unifier of the multiple.

The section titled, "Everyday unity: undescended and descended *Soul* and *Nous*," explores in Plotinus' *Enneads* aspects of the separation and reunification of the human *Soul* 'below' with *Psêché tôn Pántōn* and divine *Nous* 'above,' and clarifies the potentials that the amalgamation of heaven and earth holds for every day existence.

The section titled, "Evil and *kathartic* virtues: mastery of matter and self-freedom," again references the *Enneads*. It illustrates the way Plotinus' vision of matter constitutes absolute evil, and surveys his exposition of the *kathartic* virtues as a prelude for elevation and illumination. In turn, it explores the way Plotinus establishes freedom of self from material reality, and illustrates the way the free *Soul* relates anew to materiality and everyday existence.

Part III

The section titled, "Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* as radical *kathartic* process," explores the questions and dilemma's Plotinus' faithful student and successor must have faced before writing the 'Life of Plotinus.' It elucidates the *katharsis* he must have undergone before coming to terms with 'who' his beloved teacher was, especially in comparison to his exalted forbearers.

The section titled, "Plotinus' *daimōn*: Porphyry's insight and *Ennead* III.4," primarily explores Plotinus' metaphysics of the 'allotted spirit guide' or the 'allotted personal *daimōn*' in *Ennead* III.4. Porphyry's insight regarding the grandeur and exalted stature of his teacher in the *Vita Plotini*, points to

this treatise considering it a prerequisite to apprehending the way Plotinus was a philosopher-sage of the highest rank.

The last section, titled, “Porphyry and the oracle song of Plotinus’ legendary life,” presents the oracular disclosure of Plotinus’ earthly and divine life that Porphyry includes in the *Vita Plotini*. For Porphyry, the oracle’s revelatory exposé constitutes incontestable divine verdict that attests to the truth of his primary insight regarding Plotinus’ exalted standing within the heavenly spheres of the cosmic order. It is argued here that Porphyry’s ‘*Vita*’ does not only reveal the intellectual path of his teacher; it first and for mostly constitutes spiritual biography. Legend, *poesis* (poetry), *mythos*, and *analogia* (analogy) constitute necessary prerequisites of most spiritual biographies and the hagiographic tradition of antiquity, as they open the self to the untapped potentials of the imagination, enabling in great measure the unveiling of the inner-life of a great saint, mystic, or philosopher-sage.

I

Plotinus’ Historical Influence and His Universal Message

Plotinus’ and the Roman school he meritoriously inspired prompted a far and wide revival of Plato’s thought that surpassed the third century AD. The Plotinian spiritual stimulus issued in a backward movement a reinterpretation of the Platonic universe enriching our understanding of the philosophical and religious world of classical antiquity. But concurrently in a forward thrust, it influenced provoked transformed and augmented the Athenian and Alexandrian schools of late antiquity.⁵ Most effectively however, Plotinus’ influence accentuated evermore Platonic metaphysical insight with the renewed visionary *ethos* of the *unio mystica*: injecting into western philosophy, religion, culture, and civilization, its operative beatific and ontologically *henotic* actualities.⁶ Undeniably, the diachronic sway of the spiritual forces released unto the human collective by the father of Neoplatonism, initiated a compendium of originary influences of mystical predilection that efficaciously transmuted the medieval corpus of Jewish,⁷ Christian,⁸ and Islamic⁹ thought; more-so conspicuously advanced the Greco-Christian synthesis

⁵ For a rather comprehensive study of the influence of Neoplatonic philosophy (from Plotinus to Damascius) in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, see R. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London: Hackett, 1972). Also, see A. H. Armstrong, (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

⁶ See A. Afterman, “From Philo to Plotinus: The Emergence of Mystical Union,” *The Journal of Religion* 93 (2, 2013): 177-196. Afterman ascertains that the Plotinian “scheme of elevation, illumination, and *unio mystica*,” was later absorbed “into the three monotheistic traditions.” Continuing, he maintains that the understanding of “*henosis* as mystical union with God,” was first introduced by Philo of Alexandria and that Plotinus most probably impacted by Philo’s discussions, adopted the concept of *henosis* and consequently influenced both the Neoplatonic tradition and “a wide range of medieval Jewish, Christian, and Arab articulations” (178-179). On the other hand, two sources that claim Plotinus was the first to found the understanding of the *unio mystica* are: W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 236; and E. Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: Meridian, 1955), 372–373. For further insight into Plotinus’ *unio mystica*, see: R. Arp, “Plotinus, Mysticism, and Mediation,” *Religious Studies* 40 (2, 2004): 145-163; and J. M. Rist, “Mysticism and Transcendence in Later Neoplatonism,” *Hermes* 92 (2, 1964): 213-225.

⁷ For instance, Avicbron and Mnaimonides were deeply influenced by Plotinus’ apophaticism. Cf. W. O. E. Oesterley and G. H. Box, *A Short Survey of the Literature of Rabbinical and Medieval Judaism* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1973). Also, see C. Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁸ See J. M. Rist, *Platonism and Its Christian Heritage* (London: Variorum, 1985); and A. H. Armstrong, *Plotinian and Christian Studies* (London: Variorum, 1979). For the way the Plotinian influence on St. Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Gregory of Nyssa, had a profound influence on Eastern Christian theology, see: J. Rist, “On the Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa,” *Hermathena* 169 (2000): 129-151; Kevin Corrigan, “‘Solitary’ Mysticism in Plotinus, Proclus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Pseudo-Dionysius,” *The Journal of Religion* 76 (1, 1996): 28-42; R. J.

of Renaissance schools¹⁰; also forming an essential link to eighteenth century philosophical¹¹ and nineteenth century romantic¹² currents of emancipatory thinking, whose unquenchable poetic craving for the infinite spilled over in numinous flux, affecting modern undercurrents of integrative philosophical and religious thinking.¹³

It is beyond the present scope to address *historia quaestionis*. However, the undeniable historical impact of Plotinus's influential thought on a wide audience of philosophers, mystics, and religious thinkers is indeed striking.¹⁴ The phenomenal sway of his philosophical activity seeped through the blank

O'Connell, "The Enneads and St. Augustine's Image of Happiness," *Vigiliae Christianae* 17 (3, 1963): 129-164; A. H. Armstrong, "The Plotinian Doctrine of ΝΟΥΣ in Patristic Theology," *Vigiliae Christianae* 8 (4, 1954): 234-238. For a notable and rather comprehensive study of the influence of Platonism on Christianity, see J. F. M. M. Hoenen and S. Gersh eds., *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period: A Lexicographic Approach* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002). Interestingly, the *Enneads* filtered through the works of Ambrose and Augustine among others had an impact on Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* which was indirectly influenced by Plotinian *henology*. In this regard, Plotinus' percolating effect profoundly affected the Catholic doctrine of *Soul* and *God*. Regarding the influence of Plotinus on Aquinas, see: Fran O'Rourke, "Aquinas and Platonism." In O.P. Fergus Kerr ed., *Contemplating Aquinas: On the Varieties of Interpretation* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 247-79; Wayne Hankey, *God in Himself: Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); R. Henle, S. J., *Saint Thomas and Platonism: A Study of the "Plato" and "Platonici" texts in the Writings of Saint Thomas* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956).

⁹ Although generally the name of Plotinus does not appear in Arabic literature his effect on prominent figures such as Al-Kindi, Avicenna, and Averroes, came through the influence exerted by paraphrased parts of *Ennead IV*, which either masqueraded as Aristotelian theology, or were accredited to an alleged Greek sage who was ascertained to have infiltrated the literature through Greco Syrian sources. Cf. Fr. Rosenthal, "Aš-Šayḥ al-Yūnānī and the Arabic Plotinus Source," *Orientalia* 21 Nova Series (1952): 461-492. Two interesting sources regarding Plotinus' influence on Avicenna and Averroës are: R. Agar, "Intellect Versus Active Intellect: Plotinus and Avicenna." In D. C. Reisman and A. H. Al-Rahim eds., *Before and after Avicenna: Proceedings of the First Conference of the Avicenna Study Group* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 69-90; and E. Renan, *Averroës et l'averroïsme: essai historique* (Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1861).

¹⁰ For a selection among many exceptional sources that address the influence of Plotinus' thought in the Renaissance, see: H. D. Saffrey, "The Reappearance of Plotinus," *Renaissance Quarterly* 49 (3, 1996): 488-508; and W. Beierwaltes, *Marsilio Ficinos Theorie des Schönen im Kontext des Platonismus* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1980).

¹¹ Cf. W. Beierwaltes, *Platonismus und Idealismus* (Frankfurt: Main, 1972). The extraordinary effect of Plotinus on Goethe, Schelling, and Hegel is well known; their influence activated the genuine interest of many German French and European scholars of Plotinus that followed.

¹² Cf. D. Moffat, "Coleridge's Ten Theses: The Plotinian Alternative," *The Wordsworth Circle* 13 (1, 1982): 27-31; S. Brodwin, "Emerson's Version of Plotinus: The Flight to Beauty," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35 (3, 1974): 465-483. Primarily through the effects of German idealism Wordsworth, Blake, and Yeats were also deeply influenced by Plotinus' thought. Of interest is the article by M. de G. Verrall, "A Possible Reminiscence of Plotinus in Tennyson," *The Modern Language Review* 2 (4, 1907), 327-330.

¹³ For instance, among multitudes of modern articles on Plotinus, a good example of integrative philosophical and religious thinking is presented by Ilaria Ramelli, "The Divine as Inaccessible Object of Knowledge in Ancient Platonism: A Common Philosophical Pattern across Religious Traditions," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 75 (2, 2014): 167-188. For a rather exhaustive bibliography of modern scholarship on Plotinus, see R. Dufour, "Plotinus: A Bibliography 1950-2000," *Phronesis* 46 (2001): 235-411. Interestingly, aside from a plethora of recent articles interested in Plotinus' philosophical and religious worldview in the occident, an increasingly comparative perspective of his thought with oriental philosophies and religions is presently on the rise. For a selection of two among many comparative articles on Plotinus' philosophy with oriental thought, see: W. Randolph Kloetzli, "Nous and Nirvāṇa: Conversations with Plotinus—An Essay in Buddhist Cosmology," *Philosophy East and West* 57 (2, 2007): 140-177; and A. H. Armstrong and R. Ravindra, "The Dimensions of the Self: Buddhī in the 'Bhagavad-Gītā' and 'Psyché' in Plotinus," *Religious Studies* 15 (3, 1979): 327-342.

¹⁴ In this regard, D. J. O'Meera's [*Plotinus—An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995)] observation is quoted at length:

In contrast to a number of their colleagues in continental Europe, philosophers in England and North America have tended in general for most of this century to dismiss Plotinus as an irrational mystic or esoteric metaphysician, a marginal and negligible figure in the Western

and uncharted spaces of thought and belief in antiquity, to become commonplace thought and value in the modern civilized *Weltanschauung*. Hence, the astounding impression his philosophical genius effectuated in the transformation of historical existence makes one wonder concerning the inner workings of his mystical life from which issued forth his philosophical activity and *ethos*.

Now rising above the penchant of historians to divide time and space in conformity to lines of periodic exactitude, the extent and magnitude that Plotinus' unremitting influence has transmitted to European civilization and beyond is comprehensive diachronically cumulative and impossible to decipher; surely it irreversibly transformed the history of philosophy and the philosophy of religion¹⁵, but above all percolates through even the most invariable strata of society art¹⁶ and culture.¹⁷ Thus, the far-reaching outspread of his influential *philosophia* is not to be sought in the pervasive horizontal dimension of straight lines that measure its extensive width. Rather the extensive influence of his thinking exponentially points to the vertical dimension of primal depth and originary insight, gushes forth from the ubiquitous and totally benevolent source of creativity, love, beauty and truth; hence, bears a unifying expansiveness that at once integrates and transcends thought veracity, assimilates and rises above societal and cultural norms, national boundaries, disciplinary borders, or else scientific and philosophic acumen.

The profound impact of Plotinus' *philosophia* through the ages is best understood through the simplicity of its universal message and aim. His philosophical activity diachronically resonates precisely because it proclaims the very entrance into the most potent realm of the heart's intuitive and wholesome sphere. It is to the heart that the sage of old speaks truths that gently ring the bell of *Veritas (Alêtheia)* to every willing meritorious and attentive ear. The straightforward verity of his thought pervades the seemingly silence from which it is gently born, aims to direct the heart unto wakeful remembrance of its inner voice and core. Apparently, above the vestiges of time, many are the attentive ears paying homage to Plotinus'

intellectual tradition. This attitude, which is now changing, derives in part from simple ignorance of Plotinus' works and of history, in part from a narrow view which chooses to notice only certain aspects of the past, in part from a restrictive and intolerant philosophical stance which can allow no room for anything that appears to be metaphysical (111).

For the cumulative influence of Plotinus on European thought, see: L. P. Gerson "Bibliography." In Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, *op. cit.* no. 5, 199-208; O'Meera, *Plotinus—An Introduction to the Enneads*, *op. cit.*, 111-119; J. Dillon, "Plotinus at Work on Platonism," *Greece & Rome* 39 (2, 1992): 189-204, 203-204.

¹⁵ It is well understood today that we owe much to Plotinus for our deeper philosophical and religious understanding of the mystical One. Indeed, Plotinus has enhanced our conception of monotheism in the western world however his diachronic influence runs much deeper. O'Meera, (*Plotinus—An Introduction to the Enneads*, *op. cit.* no. 14), puts it well when he says:

Plotinus' presence in Western culture extends well beyond the circle of those who read the *Enneads*. The diffusion of his ideas through such influential intermediaries as Augustine and Ficino ensured a much wider impact, affecting not only the history of philosophy, but also the history of religious thought, literature, and art (117).

¹⁶ For a selection of sources that address the aesthetic dimension of Plotinus' thought, see: G. G. Pérez, "Plotinus and Contemporary Art: Art, Beauty and the Unifying Power of the Soul," *Universitas Philosophica* 56 (28, 2011): 109-127; J. P. Anton, "Plotinus' Conception of the Functions of the Artist," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 26 (1, 1967): 91-101; A. N. M. Rich, "Plotinus and the Theory of Artistic Imitation," *Mnemosyne* 13 (3, 1960): 233-239; and H. P. R. Finberg, "The Filiation of Aesthetic Ideas in the Neoplatonic School," *The Classical Quarterly* 20 (3/4, 1926): 148-151.

¹⁷ In effect, Plotinus was a unifier of thought and culture. The Plotinian influence has enhanced our understanding of the unifying power of truth and beauty which has been integrated in our culture as a central aspect of being thought and action; it has indeed been infiltrated and ingrained as common sense wisdom, hence the potent power of *One*-all-unifying-reality that underlies living forms is widely accepted, exerts an everyday influence in all spheres of life such as societal norms, political structures, and cultural forms. Most importantly, Plotinus' understanding of the unifying power of self increasingly bears the potential to evermore integrate and imbue the *henotic* meaning of wholesomeness and integrity to all systemic structures psychic and noetic forms.

universal message of truth; as wholesomely indeed, it contemplatively arises in prayer and thought from the silence to which it returns: singing the melody of the *One* that unifies all it informs.

The Biosophic Sphere of love as Eros and Prima Philosophia

Plotinus knew very well from the paradigmatic life of Socrates, and from his beloved and self-educated godlike teacher (*Theodidaktos*) Ammonius Sakkas¹⁸, who both wrote nothing¹⁹, that when *biosophia*—the wisdom and way of life lived—is unceasingly self-generated in and through the unifying *One epékeina tou ontos* (beyond-being), it precedes overtakes outstrips and supersedes *philosophia* by far. In the Plotinian sense, *philosophia* manifests as the *love for wisdom* whereas the *biosophic* sphere of mystical union manifests the self-arising *wisdom of love*. But either way, both *biosophia* and *philosophia* bespeak of wisdom and love, they coalesce in the same love of the *Good*, the oneness of love itself. On one hand, for Plotinus the *biosophic* sphere points to the magnanimous event of the *unio mystica*: union with the source of love or the heart's core wisdom. On the other hand, *philosophia* points to the love for wisdom, translates to the progressive erotic ascend (*anabasis*) of the mind to the *Soul of the All* and then unto *Intellectus (Nous)*, but ultimately at every level of elevation or attainment the *Soul* coheres and coalesces with the radical mystery of the *One* love, *eros* as such.²⁰

Plotinus' hierarchical *hypostatic* scheme proceeds from the *One* unto *Nous* or *Intellectus* and unto *World Soul* or *Soul of the All (Psêchê tôn Pántōn)*. The procession from the *One* evinces the overflowing of the pure *eros* of generation. It is the communication of *eros* at different levels of derived *hypostatic* reality that sanctions the hierarchical structure of being multiplicity and existence, all the way to the sensible world, including the derivation of natural forms from the *Psêchê tôn Pántōn*. At any rate, when the human *Soul* descends from the *Soul of the All* into a particular body, the reversal of ascend necessitates that the descended *Soul* generate *eros* for the *Psêchê tôn Pántōn* and the higher dimensions of *Nous* or *Intellect*. The generation of *eros* by the descended *Soul* initiates *philosophia*—the love for knowledge—that leads the way to the elevation of mind to higher dimensions of *Soul*-wisdom and love.

¹⁸ Ammonius was probably called *Theodidaktos* because he was God-taught that is he probably did not have a teacher in philosophy. Cf. A. H. Armstrong, "Plotinus and India," *The Classical Quarterly* 30 (1, 1936): 22-28, 23; W. R. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus* vol. 1 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 115. From day one Ammonius had a profound impact on Plotinus who studied with him for 11 years. We do not know much about the life of Ammonius save that he wrote nothing. His teaching was scarcely mentioned as he wished his doctrine to remain secret; all that came down to us is that he sought to integrate Aristotle into the Platonic teaching. He also evinced a great interest in Persian and Indian philosophies. It ought to be noted that his famed school in Alexandria was most successful and open to all. Cf. L. P. Gerson, *Plotinus* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2010), xii; L. Brisson and J.F. Pradeau, "Plotinus." In M.L. Gill and P. Pellegrin eds., *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 577-596, 577. Of interest is D. O'Brien's, "Plotinus and the Secrets of Ammonius," *Hermathena* 157, Proceedings of the Dublin Conference on Neoplatonism (1994): 117-153.

¹⁹ As is well known Socrates wrote nothing; it is highly probable that Ammonius was following his paradigmatic example.

²⁰ Here the terms 'love' and 'eros' are used interchangeably. Ordinarily, in Platonic discourse *eros* bespeaks the love for knowledge or *gnosis* on the ascendant path of the self towards the forms or ideas. Fore mostly, the philosopher standing in-between knowledge and ignorance is overcome by *eros* the desire for evermore knowledge. However, *eros* in Plato is never equivocated with the *Form of forms*: the *Good*. Rather, *eros* accentuating the love for knowledge is likened to an unquenchable desire to possess the *Good*, a *pathos* which at every level of ascend manifests as lack rather than fullness, the same lack the lover experiences in pursuing the beloved. As such, Platonic *eros* is ultimately neutralized or annulled when the vision of the *Good* is finally attained. However, in Plotinus *eros* at each stage of the *Soul's* ascend participates proportionately in the fullness of the prior simplicity of the *One* as the *Good*—*eros* is never neutralized. This is the case because the *One* generates the *Nous* and the *Soul* as well as all the forms out of overflowing pure love. As such, *eros* is already proportionately present as fullness of love at every level of the *Soul's* conscious attainment. Finally, ever-present *eros* as love abounds in the vision of the *Good* or the *One (unio mystica)*; it is in effect amplified infinitely. In Plotinus therefore overflowing *eros* constitutes the very fabric from which reality is woven, finds its ownmost thriving proportion of love at all levels of being and existence.

In Plotinus *contra* Plato, the *eros* for wisdom that leads the descended *Soul* onward unto the philosophic path of ascend in search for evermore knowledge and truth, does not appear *elliptical*.²¹ Plotinus sees the manifestation of the *Good* not as a universal object of desire to be possessed. Rather, *eros* or *l'amour* partakes at all levels of personal elevation and illumination in the fullness of the all-unifying cosmic *principio* of the *Good* or the *One*. The perfect simplicity of the *Good* in-and-as-itself desires no-thing, hence never shows diminution or ellipsis. The simplicity of the *Good* just is, illuminating-itself as *eros* in the simple fullness of its being, at all levels of *Soul* elevation or attainment. Just as the procession from the *One* generates *Nous* and the *Soul of the All* in the fullness of overabundant love, the philosophic *eros* generated by the *Soul's* ascend to higher levels of intellectual life, appears evermore fulfilling both at the cosmic and personal levels.²²

Bertozzi most interesting articulation illustrates well how in Plotinus “both the derivation of all reality from one single principle and its unfolding are regulated by *eros*.” Ultimately, Plotinus apprehends the source of all procession as “[...] an *eros* which the One bears to itself and only to itself, and at the same time is productive of otherness.” Thus Plotinus understands “the derivation of reality [...] as an overflowing of *eros* productive of *eros*. [...] While in the One *eros* is self-contained, or aims at nothing other than itself, in all derived reality *eros* brings with itself a directedness to something other than itself, namely to the One understood as the Good.”²³

Plotinus therefore upholds that at all levels of the philosophic ascend or elevation of mind self-illuminates *qua eros* the all-unifying reality of the heart; thus *eros* is productive of the *Good* conceived as the *One*. Above all, he contends that the philosophic activity of the philosopher sage of the highest rank infinitely apprehends the prior to unification ‘erotic’ pathos for the *Good* as well as the subsequent ‘erotic’ actualization of the *One*. Hence, at every juncture the philosopher sage is enabled to point the way to the overabundant wisdom of love for lovers of wisdom that is for students of philosophy. The philosopher sage of the highest caliber having undergone in *toto* the *Soul's* elevation, illumination, and unification with the *One*, best understands the processes of ascend at every level of erotic attainment, mostly apprehends the *biosophic* sphere of *eros*—the *unio mystica*—as overflowing wisdom and love.

For Plotinus himself, philosophical activity subsequent to the benevolent event of the *unio mystica*, is enduringly transformed to the living impetus power and stature of *prima philosophia* (first philosophy or metaphysics). Accordingly, it ultimately befalls to the *modus operandi* of philosophic activity to bear the first and the last word in the clarification of the quintessence of radically transcendent and immanent wisdom and love.²⁴ Put otherwise, Plotinus in prototypical fashion seems to ascertain that after the *biosophic* event of the *unio mystica*, the effectual truth of philosophy at once becomes *prima philosophia* and *philosophia perennis*, it illuminates the *prôte arche* (first principle) and in so doing sustains the *ergon* (works) and unfolds the *ethos* of perennial love (*eros*; *l'amour*; *amore*; *agape*), that order of friendship that guides the lover of wisdom toward what may be conditionally called, the transcendent and imminent order of the *cosmic* truth and beauty of the unconditional *One*.

As such, Plotinus’ philosophical insight brings to light the *ethos* of the *unio mystica*: pronounces the simplicity of the unified person that attains the ever-present amalgamating love *perennis* of *cosmic* identity.²⁵ Thenceforward, philosophical activity in the Plotinian *corpus* equivocates to wisdom arising

²¹ For an interesting perspective on the *elliptical* aspects of *eros* in Plato, see T. Perper, “Will She or Won’t She: The Dynamics of Flirtation in Western Philosophy,” *Sexuality & Culture* 14 (2010): 33–43.

²² Cf. A. Pigler, *Plotin: une métaphysique de l’amour: l’amour comme structure du monde intelligible* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2002), see 145-160.

²³ A. Bertozzi, *On Eros in Plotinus: Attempt at a Systematic Reconstruction (With a Preliminary Chapter on Plato)*, (Chicago: Loyola University, 2012), 12. Open access Dissertation by Loyola eCommons et al.

²⁴ The way transcendence and immanence coalesce in Plotinus’ philosophy will be elucidated in forthcoming sections of this paper.

²⁵ Cf. Th. G. Sinnige, “Plotinus on the Human Person and Its Cosmic Identity,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 56 (3, 2002): 292-295.

from-within the unfounded source, springing forth from nowhere²⁶ so to speak—pure *energeia*²⁷ that overflows in all *dynameis* and *logoi*—divine love that best clarifies the pathways of unending *eros* for foundational truth.

But no matter what, Plotinus' primary insight recurrently points to the attainment of mystical union, and this is accomplished in and through the *prius* holy *biosophic* sphere of life itself. In this light, Plotinus finds that the antecedent cognitive and metaphysical truth of *philosophia* is consequential, but nevertheless very essential. For one thing, the effectual truth of original philosophic acumen directs its pathos towards elucidating the prior holy ground of ineffable *henotic* wisdom that the philosopher-mystic is experiencing anew. Ultimately however, *prima philosophia* at every turn *ipso facto* seeks an impossibility, to hear and say the unsayable²⁸ and the unheard, or else to think and speak the unthinkable and the unspeakable, in multifarious paradoxical, analogical²⁹, mythical³⁰, metaphorical, and allegorical³¹ ways that recurrently point to the *unio mystica*. Thus in Plotinus *prima philosophia* engages the infinite play of withdrawing, subtracting (*aphairesis*), or negating (*apophasis*), all and any positive affirmations

²⁶ On the meaning of the 'quasi spatial' location of the *Nous* in Plotinus, which at once is everywhere and nowhere but contradictorily, is semi-located in the spatial cosmic region that borders on the heavens in accordance with the cosmic religions of antiquity, see J. Wilberding, "'Creeping Spatiality': The Location of *Nous* in Plotinus' Universe," *Phronesis* 50 (4, 2005): 315-334. Wilberding resolves the paradox in Plotinus' thought, whereby *Nous* (but also the One) is at the same time everywhere and nowhere. He finds that: "The intelligible region [*Nous*] is everywhere in the sensible universe to the extent that its powers [*dynameis*] and *logoi* are instrumentally present in all sensible things. But where is the intelligible region itself fully present? The answer must be 'nowhere,' and this answer must be understood [...]: It is at the edge of the universe, which is technically not in place" (331; brackets added). In the final analysis, everything, especially the divine *Nous*, coalesces and harmonizes with the prior simplicity of the self-sufficient self-same Plotinian *One*, that perpetually generates infinite unified cosmic identities; but concurrently as it where, calls back unto its *prius* source all antecedent projections/emanations: sensible, *psychic*, and *noetic*. The *One* is therefore at once present everywhere in space and time, everywhere in the *kosmos* in all *logoi dynameis* and *energeiai* but, being transcendent, 'is' absent and withdrawn: nowhere to be found, transcending space and time infinitely, and paradoxically, transcending transcendence as such. For the meaning of transcending transcendence, see R. Panikkar, *The Silence of God* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1990). In a different context, Panikkar likens 'the silence of God' to "absolute transcendence, transcending transcendence itself, the ultimate reality ceases to be transcendence, it ceases to be altogether" (130). At once within and outside all absolutes the Plotinian *One* may be said to be in the sheer flux of transcending itself in and as the absolute, absolutely. The *One* is as it where absolute silence, silencing itself, absolutely. Also, see G. Gurtler, *Plotinus: transcendence and omnipresence of the One in VI 5 [23]*. In S. Stern-Gillet & K. Corrigan eds., *Reading ancient texts: Essays in Honor of Denis O'Brien*, vol. 2: Aristotle and Neoplatonism (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 137-152. For an opposing view contending that Plotinus' metaphysics stays within the parameters of the transcendental rather than exhibiting the transcendent outside and beyond human knowledge and experience, see H. Oosthout, *Modes of Knowledge and the Transcendental: An introduction to Plotinus Ennead 5.3 [49]* (B.R. Grüner, Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991).

²⁷ Cf. P. Kalligas, "From 'Energeia' to Energy: Plotinus and the formation of the concept of energy," *Hermathena* 192 (Summer 2012): 45-64.

²⁸ Cf. M. Sells, *Mystical Languages of the Unsayable* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994); W. P. Franke, *A Philosophy of the Unsayable* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014). Also, from a philosophical literary theory point of view, see S. Budick and W. Iser eds., *Languages of the Unsayable, The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

²⁹ For paradoxes and analogies in Plotinus' thought, see Sweeney, "Basic Principles in Plotinus's Philosophy," *op. cit. no. 1*.

³⁰ Regarding the utilization of myth and metaphor in Plotinus, see S. R. L. Clark, *Plotinus: Myth, Metaphor, and Philosophical Practice*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2016. Clark provides a fascinating account of the ways myth and metaphor play a central role in Plotinus' philosophical practice of spiritual self-transformation *qua* contemplation.

³¹ Plotinus pays close attention to Plato's turn from rational discourse to myth and allegory in order to resolve metaphysical paradoxes. However, by placing a strong emphasis on the phenomenological dynamics of the highest form of mysticism, Plotinus accentuates the paradoxical allegorical mythical and metaphorical predilection of the human psyche, beyond the boundaries of intellectual acumen so as to drive the 'seeker' to the contemplative wisdom of the *One*.

that pertain to the ultimate ground of *henosis*: predicates, attributed meanings, qualifications or determinations-, negating even the negations.³²

After every withdrawal and negation is effected we are so to speak, left with the ‘ethereal’ event of subtraction *par excellence*³³—the *unio mystica*: unification with the *One* that is everywhere (*pantachou*) and nowhere (*oudamou*)³⁴, that is neither something nor no-thing, neither substance nor non-substance, neither being and time nor eternity; rather pervades as it where multiplicity but is prior to it—uniting it yet not of it; moreover, it is neither still nor moving, it can neither be named nor is it nameless and it cannot even be called an ‘it,’ the ‘One,’ or evermore-so the mystery of mysteries or the holy of holies.³⁵

Thus, Plotinus’ thought like life-itself superseding both *mythos* and *logos* breaks all bounds of permissibility, certitude logic and knowability. His *philosophia* transcending paradox symbol allegory and analogy pronounces as it where fleeting images that are projected nowhere-, on a withdrawn screen so to speak. Henceforward, one is left with nothing to grasp-onto save that which is ungraspable; as ungraspable remains Plotinus’ *biosophic* sphere—the life, wisdom and thought—of one among the most enigmatic figures of human history, a mystic-philosopher who unlike his predecessors, Socrates and Ammonius Sakkas, –chose late in his life during his fiftieth year to put in script that which no mouth lips or tongue can utter³⁶–, initiating thus a new philosophical and theological genre of articulation that recurrently points to *eros*, silence, interiority and self-expansiveness; an ingenious and novel mode of expression that later came to be known as *apophatic* thought in the Greek tradition, and *via negativa* in its Latinized version.

But before we investigate further Plotinus’ negative metaphysics of the *One*, it is imperative to first elucidate his visionary relation to Plato’s metaphysics of the Good, and in turn to present Porphyry’s testimony of his Platonic way of life.

The *One* and the *Good*: Plotinus’ and Plato’s mystical vision

Plotinus’ far and wide influential thought issues forth from the mystical effects of his exemplary philosophic life and the paradigmatic accomplishments of his clear and powerful mind. Through and through his philosophical activity ensues from and coheres with his all-unifying beatific vision of the *Good itself*; it therefore emanates arises and unfolds from within the ‘groundless-ground’ of the *unio mystica* that is the quintessential and ceaseless generation of the beneficent human person. His

³² For a selection among many exceptional articles addressing the Negative philosophical way and acumen of Plotinus, see: D. Jugrin, “Negation and Mystical Union in Plotinus,” *Philobiblon* XX (1, 2015): 94-108; M. Sells, “Apophysis in Plotinus: A Critical Approach,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 78 (1/2, 1985): 47-65; A. C. Lloyd, “Non-propositional Thought in Plotinus,” *Phronesis* XXX (1/3, 1986): 258-265; and R. Mortley, “Negative Theology and Abstraction in Plotinus,” *The American Journal of Philology* 96 (4, 1975): 363-377.

³³ Michael Sells draws the analogy of the ultimate withdrawal in Plotinus as “...a kind of *manus ex machina*... This is *phasis*: to reach into a reference and withdraw the delimited referent, to reach into the notion of contemplating something and withdraw the ‘some-thing.’ What appears to happen *ex machina* is not really artificial...” rather the negative withdrawal of a some-thing, or else of whatever is, “is governed by the inner logic of the *aporia*...the entire image” is “not withdrawn, only the central mass” (Sells, “Apophysis in Plotinus: A Critical Approach,” *op. cit. no.* 32). Essentially, one is left with some-thing that at once is no-thing. How paradoxical can thinking become? It seems Plotinus finds that when one is infinitesimally touched by the *One*, a *posteriori aporia* and paradox emerges as necessary constituent of philosophical activity.

³⁴ Plotinus’ *Enneads*: VI.9.4.24-28, III.9.4.1-9, V.8.23-27, VI.8.39.1-12 & 16). For an exposition of Porphyry’s thought on Plotinus’ paradox of how the priority of the *One* remains in-itself whilst at once is ‘everywhere’ and ‘nowhere,’ see J. M. Z. Calvo, “‘Everywhere and Nowhere’: Porphyry’s *Pathways to the Intelligible* 31,” *Anuario Filosófico* 46 (3, 2013): 503-522.

³⁵ References regarding this aspect of Plotinus’ thought are provided in a forthcoming section, titled: “The negative metaphysics of the *One* in Plotinus’ *Enneads*.”

³⁶ Cf. B. Bitton-Ashkelony, “‘More Interior than the Lips and the Tongue’: John of Apamea and Silent Prayer in Late Antiquity,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 20 (2, 2012): 303–331.

metaphysical scheme follows the hierarchical structure of Plato's *Parmenides*, and as previously indicated, differentiates three *hypostatic* realities: the Ultimate *One*, *Nous* (*Intellectus*), and *Soul*. The *One* is absolutely independent beyond being, time stillness and movement, however through its dynamic emanation of *Nous* and *Soul* paradoxically generates multiplicity—every form quality compound or thing. But concurrently, the 'derivation' of multiplicity from the *One* transcends the emanation of *Soul* and *Nous* (being and form), hence lies beyond all intelligibility.

Plotinus univocally makes the claim that the *One* above all intelligible form can be directly 'experienced' and this order of mystical contemplation is what constitutes the *unio mystica*; is often paralleled to the vision of Plato's *Form of the Good beyond being* (*Republic* VI.507-509); and to the pinnacle of Diotima's ladder of divine love (*Symposium* 210a-211b), whereby the lover of wisdom ascending through *Nous* to the greater mysteries of *eros*, beholds the highest and final mystery the transcendent vision of beauty-itself—of one form always—beauty that "neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes" (211a), true beauty simple and divine that transforms the visionary to immortal friend of god.

Following Plato's *Theatetus* (176b), Plotinus unequivocally affirms that the philosophical aim is to become like god to the highest possible degree (I.2.1.4, I.4.16.10-13). His beneficent mystical illumination leads to equivocation of the 'One' to the 'Form of the Good' making his insight comprehensively conspicuous; for it encompasses Platonic metaphysics, clarifies what Plato implied but never really elucidated: the *beyond being* of the *Good itself*. As such, Plotinus maintains that only the mystical experience of the mind's gradual ascend to the *World Soul* or *Soul of the All* (*Psêchê tōn Pantōn*), then unto *Nous* and finally unto the ultimate cause can fully disclose our ever-present-and-direct-link to the divine: to the *One hypostasis par excellence* that is everywhere (*pantachou*) and nowhere (*oudamou*), that as prior cause transcends intelligibility, multiplicity dyad or number; yet paradoxically as *One*, is absolutely simple—all-pervading-immanence—being neither a part nor a compound rather the prior simplicity of the whole, oneness: unifying-in-and-as-itself parts to compounds and forms to being.

Accordingly, Plotinus contends the good life and *eudaimonia* ensue in measures to the degree the active intellect dynamically thinks intelligibles in and through divine *Nous*³⁷, self-manifesting unity in multiplicity and ultimately the mystical *One* in everydayness. In effect, Plato's heavenly forms are directly accessible immanently linked to the earthly world and realm, wherein the inner realization of the

³⁷ Cf. L. P. Gerson, *Plotinus: Ennead V.5: That the Intelligibles Are Not External to the Intellect, and On the Good. Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2012). In their "Introduction to the Series" prefacing Gerson's aforementioned book, John Dillon and Andrew Smith point out that although Plotinus' metaphysics constitutes an interpretation of Plato's philosophical system, this may not be immediately obvious to the uninitiated as the *Enneads* filter through and incorporate centuries of later Platonic philosophy as well as aspects of Aristotelian, Stoic, and Epicurean thinking. For instance, it is well acknowledged that Plotinus incorporates facets of Aristotle's divine intellect in order to perfect Plato's theory of forms against criticism, but also to advance his own interpretive dynamics of levels of *Soul*-development or *Soul*-consciousness. Dillon and Smith are worth quoting at length concerning the way Plotinus acutely aware of Aristotelian "criticism of the Platonic Forms as lifeless causes," took

[...] on board Aristotle's concept of god as a self-thinker to enable him to identify this intelligible universe as a divine Intellect that thinks itself as the Forms or Intelligibles. The doctrine of the Forms as the thoughts of God had already entered Platonism, but not as the rigorously argued identity that Plotinus proposed. Moreover the Intelligibles, since they are identical with Intellect, are themselves actively intellectual; they are intellects. Thus Plato's world of Forms has become a complex and dynamic intelligible universe in which unity and plurality, stability and activity are reconciled. Now although the divine Intellect is one it also embraces plurality both because its thoughts, the Intelligibles, are many and because it may itself be analyzed into thinker and thought. Its unity demands a further principle which is the cause of its unity. This principle which is the cause of all unity and being, but does not possess unity or being in itself, he calls the One (ibid., 5-6).

One manifests the divine good in everyday activity and experience. Plotinus' simple and immanent *One* augments Platonic metaphysics one decisive step further pronouncing the *unio mystica*: union with the first cause the sole aim of everyday life. In *toto*, the Plotinian insight accentuates evermore Platonic metaphysics with the renewed visionary *ethos* of the *One* that links ontologically Plato's heavenly forms to wholesome earthly self-actualizations.

As a whole, Plotinus' philosophical thinking highlights the mystical dynamic of coherence that holds between the being of the visionary or philosopher and his/her existential thinking. It is his contention that philosophical activity essentially arises and shines forth through the curious interplay between the *hypostatic* undescended forces of *Soul* and *Nous* and their descended counterparts in an earthly body. However, embodiment constitutes a compound of descended *Soul* and dark matter. Plotinus therefore determines material reality to equivocate non-being as the eclipse of light and form. Accordingly, the descended *Soul* compounded with the dark forces of material embodiment is adversely influenced by matter therefore partially loses its ontological grounding in the *hypostasis* of *Nous* and being. Put otherwise, the *Soul's* mixing with matter shrouds the power and pure light of its undescended life concealing its divine origin in *Nous*. Consequently, the *Soul's* liberation from the vestiges of bodily provocations incitements and sensual stimuli is accomplished through its rational predilection; it involves the gradual ascend of the rational mind to its divine counterpart in *Nous*. As the undescended light of *Soul* and *Nous* directly interlaces with its descended counterparts in matter it potentially gives rise to new forms of rational discourse and intelligibility. The light of reason arises in interplay with the material predilection of the human body proportionately to the level of darkness the *Soul* confronts and in conformity to the decrees of free choice.³⁸

Indeed, Plotinus' novel hermeneutics of Plato's philosophy involves an ingenious articulation of the entangled predicament the human *Soul* undergoes by descending into the body. The enmeshment with material reality causes *Soul* to forget its undescended divine life in both the *Soul of the All* and the *Nous*. For this reason, the *Soul's* embroilment with the human body allows for the mantle of darkness to mask perhaps envelope its pure form its being and light. Consequently, the now deluded *Soul* is mistakenly lead-on to live a split illusory life: an earthly life below partially separated from its heavenly divine origin above, veiled through varying degrees of ignorance in accordance to its intellectual level of development.³⁹ The way to unification of the split in the human self-constitutes the Plotinian ascend of the mind through gradations of reunification between the particular *Soul* and its heavenly archetypal monad.⁴⁰

The Plotinian process of reunification effectively discloses an emergent existential ethics, whereby the *One Good* at once equivocates and transcends *hypostatic* being manifests-itself in and as the

³⁸ In Plotinian philosophy the level of darkness a particular *Soul* confronts is directly proportional to its level of intellectual development. Hence, the development of the rational mind essentially accentuates the freedom of will to choose the light of goodness.

³⁹ This aspect of Plotinus' philosophy is further clarified below and in forthcoming sections of this paper, titled: "Everyday unity: undescended and descended *Soul* and *Nous*;" and "Evil and *kathartic* virtues: mastery of matter and self-freedom."

⁴⁰ The term 'particular *Soul*' signifies the descended counterpart of the undescended heavenly *Soul*-monad that is an interdependent part of the collective of *Souls* and *Intellects* that comprise both the *Soul of the All* and *divine Nous*. It ought to be noted that in Plotinus' metaphysical scheme of three *hypostases* the *One* constitutes 'absolute-unity,' whereas the *Soul of the All* and the divine *Nous* or *Intellect*, constitute 'unity-multiple.' As the individual *Soul* ascends to the *Psêché tôn Pántōn* and unto higher *Intellect* it eventually attains its divine form through its holy monad and therefore understands its individuated interdependence and communication with all other *Souls* and *Intellects*, and with all that is. Put otherwise, by attaining its divine form, the *Soul* is unified with itself and whilst retaining its identity may at once potentially unify with multiplicity; that is, if the *Soul* turns its gaze upon the whole it may unify with the multiple interdependent order of all universally dynamically active forms (other *Souls* and *Intellects*), including the forms of nature. Or else, if the *Soul* turns its gaze on any aspect of the whole it may wholly unify with that intelligible form it contemplates or sees (cf. IV.3.8.15-16, IV.4.2.10-14, IV.4.2.30-32, V.1.4.16-28, V.6.6.21-27). We will return to this dimension of Plotinus' thought in a forthcoming section, titled: "Plotinus' existential-visionary dynamics of the mystical *One*."

overflowing of light knowledge and truth, divine wisdom and beauty.⁴¹ In contradistinction, evil shows itself as *non-hypostatic* and illusory: appears as the eclipse of being, the absence of light and knowledge. By identifying on a moral level the ways of ignorance and untruth as *non-hypostatic* Plotinus elucidates philosophically the way to freedom as the recurrent choosing of light over darkness. Hence, freedom of will becomes quintessential to the ethical life; and his metaphysical thinking transcending abstract systematic or idealistic *exigesis*, emanates directly from the realization of the spiritual life: evinces a highly evolved and illumined mind, an enlightened visionary that with confidence can paradigmatically assert concerning *henosis* with being as the *One*, that “whoever has already seen, will know what I am saying” (VI.9.9.47-48). As such, Plotinus’ metaphysics of *henosis* with the *One*, effectually accentuates an emergent philosophical activity whose primary focus becomes existential *didactics*, or else an ethics of *katharsis* (catharsis), that aims to direct and cajole the worthy individual *Soul* to the attainment of “*hyperechon ti*” (IV.8.4.30-31)—that transcendent ‘something.’

Indeed, Plotinus’ philosophical originality reflects Plato’s vision of the *Good* by illuminating further the processes or pathways of accomplishing unification between the descended part of the individual *Soul* with its undescended *hypostatic* counterparts of *Psêché tōn Pantōn* and divine *Nous*, and finally with the *One*, that transcendent beyond: “*to hyperechon*” (IV.8.8.17-18). Most importantly, Plotinus’ philosophizing (*philosophounta*) is very similar to Plato’s in that it coalesces with the highest form of spiritual life, wherein metaphysical insight mystical experience and the ethical life blend and reinforce each other, granting to the human the realization of having attained spiritual dignity through life’s integral and ultimate goal.

The best and most important witness to attest to the truth of Plotinus’ mystical realization of the *One* is his close student as well as friend associate and biographer Porphyry, who at the mature age of sixty-eight years, writes in the introduction to his edition of the *Enneads*, that his beloved teacher was a “god-like man above all, who often raised himself in thought, according to the ways Plato teaches in the Banquet to the first and transcendent god, that god appeared who has neither shape nor any intelligible form, but is throned above intellect and all the intelligible” (VP.23.8-13). Porphyry, goes on to tell us that once when he drew near to Plotinus he “was united to him,” hence to the *One* above all. Continuing, he proclaims: “To Plotinus ‘the goal ever near was shown’: for his end and goal was to be united to, to approach the god who is over all things. Four times while I was with him he attained that goal, in an unspeakable actuality and not in potency only” (VP.23.13-18).

The undeniable coherence between Plotinus’ mystical experience and philosophical thinking is what best clarifies and sanctions his firsthand experiential confirmation of the truth of Plato’s metaphysical universe. He is justly called the primary exegete and novel interpreter of Platonist philosophy in late antiquity, indisputably the father of Neoplatonism. For he indeed full heartedly affirms the Platonic way of life as the most humanly rewarding; he claims it sustains the truest and most noble conception of the human person or self. At the culmination of his life’s thought he resolutely determined to illuminate anew two interrelated questions: *What Is the Living Being; and What is the Human Person?*⁴² The resolutions he proposes to these primordial questions certainly evinces the Platonic direction of his thinking along the pathways of his visionary experience.

Armstrong most appropriately says that “it was experience which was most important in determining Plotinus’ adoption and maintenance” of his distinctive neoplatonic “doctrine of the higher self” and that “his whole-hearted acceptance and distinctive personal development of the basic Platonic position seems [...] to have been due to his own experience more than respect for tradition or satisfaction with his own reasonings.”⁴³ In this light, the relation that holds between Plotinus’ and Plato’s metaphysics is best

⁴¹ Cf. S. K. Wear, *Plotinus on Beauty and Reality—A Reader for Enneads I.6 and V.1* (Mundelein, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2017).

⁴² Cf. *Ennead* I.1

⁴³ A. H. Armstrong, “Tradition, Reason, and Experience in the Thought of Plotinus.” In *Atti del Convegno internazionale sul tema, Plotino e il Neoplatonismo in Oriente e in Occidente* (Roma: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1974), 171-194, 191.

made manifest or else ever-more discovered and uncovered through the *biosophic* sphere, wherein their respective visionary experiences and philosophizing seem to coalesce and cohere in the mystical vision of the all-unifying power of the *One Good* as such.

Porphyry's Testimony of Plotinus' Platonic way of Life

In the first two sentences of his *Vita Plotini*, Porphyry tells us that Plotinus “seemed ashamed of being in the body,” that “as a result of his state of mind he could never bear to talk about his race or his parents or his native country?” (*VP*.1.1-5). Hence, Porphyry severs out from the ‘*Vita*’ biographical data such as the ancestral origins of his teacher or his place and date of birth. Belonging to the inner circle of disciples he must have been well aware of the biographical specifics of Plotinus’ life, but most probably was instructed by the sage himself, who shared Plato’s distrust for outer circumstantial details, never to divulge such historiographical information, trivia completely unimportant to the inner life of a philosopher.

The following quotation from the *Enneads* sheds light on Plotinus’ state of mind and determines his stance toward material embodiment and his reticence to outer circumstances. Most importantly, it discloses the inner aim and purpose of his life.

The common life of body and soul cannot possibly be the life of well-being. Plato was right in maintaining that the man who intends to be wise and in a state of well-being must take his good from There [the One], from above, and look to that good and be made like it and live by it. He must hold on to this only as his goal [...] (I.4.16.9-14; brackets added).⁴⁴

Here Plotinus pays tribute to Plato’s teaching which points the way to attain the mystic vision of the *Good itself*. Concurrently however, whether consciously aware of it or not, he pays homage to Ammonius in whose living presence he initially recognized the manifest possibility of the goal Plato speaks of—not as a *philosophia generalis* rather as *philosophia perrenis*. Plato’s words point the way to the perennial truth of living by the *Good*, hence of unifying with the *biosophic* wisdom of love: “the god within each of us as one and the same—*tò ên ekástō hemōn theòn ôs ên kai tó autón*” (VI.5.1.4).

In any case, Plotinus showed little or no care for the outer world of becoming which in following Plato saw as an image of reality: the ever-changing theatre of *phantasmagoria*. As such, he considered his body as an illusory image of outer reality. In the third sentence of the ‘*Vita*’ Porphyry writes of Plotinus’ strong objection

to sitting to a painter or sculptor that he said to Amelius, who was urging him to allow a portrait of himself to be made, ‘Why really, is it not enough to have to carry the image in which nature has encased us, without your requesting me to agree to leave behind me a longer-lasting image of the image, as if it was something genuinely worth looking at?’ (*VP*.1.5-10).

Plotinus had a similar kind of defiance toward the outer processes of writing. He entrusted Porphyry with “the editing of his writings” (*VP*.7.51-51), indeed a laborious task. For one thing, not only did Porphyry have to penetrate but often had to incur Plotinus’ complex and dense meanings. This, because he had to efficaciously decipher the often illegible script of his teacher; and to add to the confusion, Plotinus divided his syllables incorrectly and cared little for spelling (*VP*.8.4-7). But most importantly, he did not revise his manuscripts as he did not want to interrupt his total absorption in the contemplative state of divine *Nous*; but also, when he “wrote anything he could never bear to go over it twice; even to read it through once was too much for him, as his eyesight did not serve him well for reading” (*VP*.8.1-4).

⁴⁴ Plotinus’ reference to Plato is from the *Symposium* (211a1). Cf. *Theatetus* (176b1by).

Further, as he was wholly focused on *Intellect* it was his custom to first work out in his mind the entire order of his thought and then write it down in a form of speed-writing. But what surprised Porphyry the most is that when interjected by visitors, which was often the case, he engaged them in conversation without interrupting his train of thought; however after they departed he continued in the same speedy manner to write from the point he left (*VP.8.8-19*) as if copying from a book (*VP.8.12*). Porphyry wondered how it was possible for him to uninterruptedly sustain single-focused-consciousness within the contemplative *noetic* state, and be “present at once to himself and to others [...]” Effectually, “he never relaxed his self-turned attention except in sleep: he even reduced sleep by taking little food, often not even a piece of bread, and by his continuous turning in contemplation to his intellect” (*VP.8.19-24*).

Porphyry took heed of Plato’s teaching to his last breath: he drew his good from the Supreme, fixed his gaze on ‘That,’ becoming the likeness of ‘That’ and cared for only ‘That’ (cf. *I.4.16.9-14*; quoted above). Eustochius told Porphyry that when he was staying in Peteoli, he hurried to him as he was “to the point of death [...], in coming to him he [Plotinus] said, ‘I have been waiting a long time for you.’ He then said: I am trying to lift up the divine within me to the divine in the All—*tón én hemín theòn anágein prós tò én pantī theïon*” (*VP.2.23-27*; brackets added).⁴⁵ Plotinus’ last sentence is impregnated with perhaps his highest and most profound teaching of the existential meaning and praxis of *biosophic eros*, the wisdom of love, that is what enabled him to the very end to fix his gaze on ‘That,’ to draw his good and last breath from the Supreme that unifies the All.

Effectually, Plotinus’ god-realized wisdom, very much like that of Socrates and his beloved Plato, was not reserved for himself or for his close circle of companions. His last act demonstrates that his *philanthropia* (*eros* for humanity) extends to all philosophers and to the generations; he discloses the way along the paths of Plato, to lift oneself high through the ranks of *Nous* to attain the purity and dignity of the *One* love and wisdom—the *unio mystica*—of the *Good* as such.

II

The Negative Metaphysics of the *One* in Plotinus’ *Enneads*

As previously discussed, Plotinus claims that the source of the human self is the *One* which is posterior to Plato’s intelligible forms, on one hand identical to the *Good itself*, beyond movement being and time, unchanging and immortal, yet it provides the simple, absolutely self-sufficient and wholly independent foundation and source (cf. *V.3.10.50-51*, *V.3.13.16-21*, *V.3.17.10-14*, *V4.1.5-13*, *V.5.5.1-7*, *V.6.2.15-16*, *V.6.4.20-22*, *VI.7.23.7-8*, *VI.9.6.16-17*) of love beauty and goodness and of all that is. He writes:

For there must be something simple before all things, [...] other than all the things which come after it, existing by itself, not mixed with the things which derive from it, and all the same able to be present in a different way to these other things, being really One, and not a different being and then One; it is false even to say of it that it is One, and there is “no concept or knowledge” of it; it is indeed also said to be “beyond being.” For if it is not to be simple, outside all coincidence and composition, it could not be a first principle [...] (*V4.1.5-13*).

The *One* is an absolutely simple first principle prior to every-thing and all generated things derive themselves from it and are within it. However the *One* in its utter simplicity as oneness, ‘*is*,’ no particular thing. All particulars “are beings, and being: so It is ‘beyond being.’ This phrase ‘beyond being’ does not

⁴⁵ For possible variants to Plotinus’ last sentence, see P. Henry, “La dernière parole de Plotin,” *Studi Classici e Orientali* 2 (1953): 113-130.

mean that It is a particular thing—for it makes no positive statement about It—and it does not say Its name, but all it implies is that It is ‘not this.’” Continuing, he adds: “But if this is what the phrase does, it in no way comprehends the One...” (V5.6.8-15).

As such, the *One* is utterly ineffable and nothing can be said about it, not even that it is the *One* or the *Good* or beyond being. But ultimately, not even negative predicates really apply that it is not this or that; for it is absolutely formless and transcendent as it were, transcending at every turn all affirmations and negations, including the Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of divine intellect: for no intelligible articulation applies to it.

Accordingly, Plotinus clearly states: “For intellect is something, one of the beings.” However, the *One* “is not something, but is prior to each, nor is it a being.” Whereas, “being has, as it were, the shape of being, but it [the One] is without shape and intelligible form.” For sure, it generates all things but it as such “is none of them. Nor is it something, or a quality or quantity or intellect or soul. Nor does it move or rest. Nor is it in place or time, but is ... rather without form and prior to all form, prior to movement and rest. For these have to do with being, making it many” (VI.9.3.36–45; brackets added). It is absolutely non-substantial infinite and unknowable and has to be approached *qua* unknowability. It cannot even be said that the *One* is the cause of everything or of itself. Moreover, Plotinus writes: “It is higher than speech and thought and awareness; It gives us these, but It is not these Itself” (V.3.14.18-19).

But be as it may, in a certain way we can speak of the *One* as the unspeakable within us for in some fashion “we have it in such a way as to speak about it, but not to say it itself” (V3.14.6). In other words, we can speak of it conditionally as we have in us something of that which is beyond knowledge ‘existing in-itself;’ however, “he who speaks accurately should not say ‘it’ or ‘exists’” (VI.9.3.51). Above all, we have to remember that when speaking of it we are not comprehending it but merely articulating our subjective imprints: “we circle around it on the outside, as it were, wishing to communicate our impressions, sometimes coming near, sometimes falling back [...]” (VI.9.3.52-55).

Plotinus elucidates that the only reason he himself speaks of the *One* is to point the way for those on a philosophical quest. He says: “[...] we speak and write, sending on to It and wakening from words towards contemplation, as if showing the way to him who wishes to see something.” Philosophical teaching “extends to the road and the passage,” but most importantly, “the vision is the work of him who has decided to see” (VI.9.4.12-16). Accordingly, knowledge, intentionality, and decision to freely follow the philosophic path play an important role in the potential ascend of the mind to the *One*. Further, Plotinus maintains the name *One* “was given It in order that the seeker, beginning with this which is completely indicative of simplicity, may finally negate this as well” for no name “is worthy to manifest that nature [...]” (V.5.6.29-34); to the seeker “[...] analogies teach, as do negations and knowledge of what comes from It [the One], and certain steps upwards” (VI.7.36.6-8; brackets added).

Plotinus’ Existential-Visionary Dynamics of the Mystical *One*

Over and above the understanding provided by the necessary intellectual and theoretical acumen, I submit that the true comprehension of both Plato’s and Plotinus’ universes is firmly established in the mystical, mostly in what parapsychology calls the out-of-body-experience (*exosomatosis*), that is the realization of the independence of the *Soul* from the body, and the realization of the relative independence of the divine *Nous* from the *World Soul* (*Psêchê tōn Pántōn*); though the absolute interdependence of *World Soul* and divine *Nous* should be noted, in the ascend of the mind *Soul* receives all that is within the divine *Nous*: the one is ultimately within the other and “both are one” (IV.4.2.22, cf. I.1.13.5-8).

Plotinus claims that the *One* is best approached in complete detachment from the human body, through the reality of *Psêchê tōn Pántōn* and the divine *Nous* wherein the godlike state of the human person is made possible. In a much quoted passage he writes:

Many times, awakened to myself away from the body, becoming outside all else and within myself, seeing a wonderful and great beauty, believing myself then especially

to be part of the higher realm, in act as the best life, having become one with the divine and based in it advancing to that activity, establishing myself above all other intelligible beings, then going down from this position in the divine, from intellect down to discursive reasoning, I am puzzled how I could ever, and now, descend, and how my soul has come to be in the body (IV.8.1.1–10).

Plotinus upon his descend from the *One* to divine *Nous* and then to *Soul*—puzzled—inquires as to the connection of his *Soul* to the body. Here, discursive reasoning pertaining to the dimension of *Soul* is given to the inquiry about the causes of things. But no matter what, the way the immortal and timeless *Soul* is inwardly connected to its mortal spatiotemporal counterpart forever remains a puzzle discursive reason cannot resolve or fathom.

At any rate, Plotinus finds that once the *Soul* approaches and then establishes itself in the non-discursive thought sphere of the divine *Nous*, it attains and retains its godlike individuality (cf. VI.7.34). Therein, the seer is inwardly united with being as such, thus with what s/he contemplates intends and sees both of self and others and of all there is (IV.4.2.10-14). Put otherwise, the singularity of the ascended *Soul* after it receives the divine *Nous*, having attained its own divine form (IV.4.2.30-32), is potentiated in conformity to pure intend (cf. V.1.4.16-28), to contemplatively unify with all other *Souls* and *Intellects*, intelligible beings and with being as such (V.6.6.21-27). Or else, when seeing different things the divine self becomes what it sees (IV.3.8.15-16).

Most interestingly, the Parmenidean unity of the contemplator with beingness and *Nous* constitutes for Plotinus the mark of nearness to the *One*: the source of the All. He elucidates that the contemplator “[...] becoming being and intellect [...] no longer looks outside; having become this he is near.” He is so close that the next is it, the *One*: “shining in proximity on all the intelligible.” Continuing, he states:

Now leaving behind all learning, educated up and established in the beautiful, in which he is, up to this stage he thinks. But carried out by the wave, as it were, of intellect itself [divine *Nous*], lifted up high by it as it swells, so to speak, he suddenly saw, not seeing how, but the sight, filling the eyes with light, does not make him see another through itself, but the light itself was the sight seen (VI.7.36.11–21; brackets added).

As the mind ascends first to *Psêchê tōn Pántōn* and then to divine *Nous* the singularity of the human self discloses one *Soul* and one *Intellect*, the one within the other; thus, the divinized individual now self-unified in being and thought stands close to oneness, and in accordance to the measure of inward unification, unbeknownst to herself, not knowing where or how, riding as it were the rising light of divine *Nous*, ultimately ascends from beingness to the vision of the *One* itself. The ascension from *World Soul* to divine *Nous* and finally to the *One* progressively indicates greater freedom of self and less restriction, all the way unto the absolute sense of freedom attained in *henosis* with the *One* as such. This very shining of the *One* on the living being and on all the intelligible pronounces the *Soul's* proximity to the source of perfection, the source that forever mysteriously generates oneness beingness and divine *Nous* in and as itself (cf. V.14.26-28).

Plotinus' mystical phenomenology proclaims that as the particular soul ascends to the *Psêchê tōn Pántōn* it realizes the independence of the nature of *Soul* from the body; the higher it ascends memory of the body becomes all the more faint, a momentary intellectual matter (IV.4.4.6-7). Moreover, as the *Soul* ascends even higher to divine *Nous* memory of the body slowly disappears (IV.3.27.14-24, IV.4.1.1-11, IV.4.2.1-3), and ultimately in the *henotic* experiencing of the *One* and its bedazzling beauty it is erased (IV.3.32.13-14).

But above all, concerning the phenomenology of the mystical experiencing of the *One* nothing can be said, and as previously indicated, what is retrospectively said points to the negation of all affirmations as well as negations. Nevertheless, Plotinus' existential philosophy calls-for a total integration of the *Soul* wherein visionary and mystical realizations bring earthly self-actualizations. The prerequisite to freedom of self-entails the unification between the mind's undescended heavenly sphere (of *World Soul*, divine

Nous, and unto the surprise of the *unio mystica*), with its descended earthly sphere, wherein manifests the actualized vision of the mystical *One*, potentiating in a forward thrust everyday experience.

Everyday Unity: Undescended and Descended *Soul* and *Nous*

As previously indicated, although Plotinus finds that our divine *Soul* and *Nous* are internally linked to the *One* hence to each other, he distinguishes between the undescended and descended counterparts of both *Soul* and *Intellect (Nous)*.⁴⁶ The divine *Nous* is the undescended *Intellect* of the All or else intellect in itself, unity as well as multiplicity; it is immortal, identical to being as such (V.6.6.21-22) and constantly emanates beyond time (V.1.4.16-18). The person who ascends to the divine *Nous* having risen to the contemplation of his own godlike form thinks the whole, at once thinking anything and everything and seeing himself within it (IV.4.2.10-14). Now, directly linked to the divine *Nous* stands its descended counterpart, that which manifests as the giver of form in particular souls (III.4.3.8-10, cf. I.1.8.1-8, III.3.4.34-44, IV.9.5.12-26, VI.2.20.10-23, V.2.2.9), it essentially shapes their reincarnated form of intelligibility (cf. I.8.2.18-21, V.9.5.1-4): their innate character, rational capacity (VI.7.9.14-15), *heimarménē* or fate (cf. V.7.2.1-15, II.3.15.5-8), as well as potentiates their individual destiny.

Similarly, the *Soul* has an undescended and descended predilection. The undescended *Soul* is soul as such, unity as well as multiplicity: the *Soul of the All* or *World Soul (Pséché tôn Pántōn)*, the universal *Soul* of all *Souls* beyond time, immortal and unmanifest (cf. I.1.8.8-15, IV.3.1.16-37, IV.3.7, IV.9.4.6-20). Following Plato's *Phaedrus* (246b-c), Plotinus maintains that the *Pséché tôn Pántōn* is perfect and as such "[...] 'walks on high,' and does not come down, but, as we may say, rides upon the universe and creates (*poiei*) in it; and this is the manner of direction of every soul which is perfect" (IV.3.7.16-18, cf. IV.3.12.8-12, IV.8.2.19-26). Hence, a perfected human *Soul* exhibits a kingly and universal character (cf. III.3.2, *Phaedrus* 253b). However, linked to the *World Soul* stands its descended counterpart that manifests in and as the particular form of each body (IV.4.32-4-13, IV.9.1.6-13); it exhibits particular desires and emotions as well as constitutes the organizing power of the body's particular movements (IV.9.2.1-12) and animating life force.⁴⁷ Either way, the *Soul*—descended as well as undescended—is timeless and anterior to material embodiment. But this will become clearer in the following section.

As previously alluded, Plotinus finds that the human self, both *Soul* descended in particular bodies and the undescended *World Soul*, bear a permanent link in the intelligible (IV.8.8.2-4). Accordingly, one is called to first ascend to the *Pséché tôn Pántōn* and then ascending further, to be enabled to receive the life and activity of the divine *Nous* in order to 'uncover' the immortal and true self: the *One*. Concurrently, Plotinus maintains that whether aware of it or not we are perpetually linked to the *World Soul* and to divine *Nous*. However, for the most part we remain separated from our true selves unaware of the everlasting link with the transcendent life and power of our *Souls* and *Intellects*. The link always available is essentially concealed from us, remains veiled by mundane concerns, obsessions, worries, or else by wicked passions or vice of all sorts. Sadly enough, the constant turmoil of the sensual world, the

⁴⁶ For a most informative articulation of Plotinus' novel philosophy of the constitution of selfhood, that clearly distinguishes between the undescended and descended counterparts of both *Soul* and *Intellect* in their intrinsic relation to the *One*, see A. Ousager, *Plotinus on Selfhood, Freedom, and Politics* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2005), 15-120. Cf. E. Song, "The ethics of descent in Plotinus," *Hermathena* 187 (2009): 27-48; and J. M. Rist, "Integration and the Undescended Soul in Plotinus," *The American Journal of Philology* 88 (4, 1967): 410-422.

⁴⁷ To elucidate further Plotinus' understanding of the relation of the descended counterpart of both *Soul* and *Intellect* to the body, let us consider identical twins. The difference in their intelligence and character is not to be found in their descended *Soul* which according to Plotinus is identical as their bodies are alike in every way—the body being a manifestation of the particular (or descended) *Soul*. Rather, the difference in their intelligence originates in the descended part of their respective *Intellect* which is what distinguishes their lives, character, predominating qualities, and the machinations of their possible destinies through time. Cf. Ousager, *Plotinus on Selfhood, Freedom, and Politics*, *op. cit.* no. 46, 10. Also, see C. I. Noble, "How Plotinus' Soul Animates his Body: The Argument for the Soul-Trace at *Ennead* 4.4.18.1-9," *Phronesis* 58 (2013): 249-279.

distractions of embodied life as well as our preoccupations with material reality cast a veil as it were, that separates our awareness from “the things contemplated by the part of our soul above” (IV.8.8.5-6, cf. IV.3.12.1-3, II.9.2.5, VI.7.5.26, V.1.10).

As such, we are ignorant of our true selves living divided or split lives one below and one above; the higher life for the most part eluding us as we are normatively unaware of it. It is Plotinus' contention that the philosophic journey clears the link to our transcendent self by purifying the unnecessary turmoil and distractions that hold us down. Accordingly, to replace thoughtless noise and vice with virtue, thoughtfulness quietude and contemplative activity, enables the step by step ascent of the mind, bringing about the reunification of our descended and undescended *Soul* and *Intellect*, so that our everyday actions and lives may normatively coincide with divine *Nous*.

Plotinus asks: “But we – who are we? Are we that which draws near and comes to be in time?” Answering, he says: “No, even before this coming to be came to be we were there...pure souls and intellect united with the whole of reality; we were parts of the intelligible, not marked off or cut off but belonging to the whole; and we are not cut off even now” (VI.4.14.16-22). As such, clearing the link with our *Soul* and *Intellect* that ‘walks on high’ brings a reunification with our inmost true self. By penetrating the veil of illusion in ever greater measures, the transcendent above manifests its imminent activity and unifying-oneness in our everydayness: thus, *eudaimonia*⁴⁸, transcendent joy compassion love goodness and wisdom, become the actuality of everyday life and not some seemingly far away futural potential.

Ascending to the vision of the One “[...] is the work of him who has decided to see” (VI.9.4.12-16), and this order of decision involves the wholehearted and deep desire to be established in the *Good*, to directly experience transcendent and *henotic* goodness in all facets of everyday life and activity.⁴⁹ But to advance this end, it is imperative to understand the nature of evil and how it impedes the actualization of the self by casting a veil of ignorance and duality that fetters the growth of the *Soul* and *Intellect*, separating the reality below from the higher divine life of *Nous* and the *Good* above.

Evil and *kathartic* Virtues: Mastery of Matter and Self-Freedom

Plotinus finds matter itself constitutes pure and primal evil, absolute undefined darkness, formlessness and indeterminacy, or else limitless and permanent deficiency in relation to all that is self-sufficient (I.8.3.13-16). In effect, material reality ceaselessly resists knowledge measure and form it remains through and through *non-hypostatic*: “[...] nowhere stable, subject to every sort of influence, insatiate, complete poverty” (I.8.3.16-17): hence, wholly “[...] other than being” (I.8.3.7) not even resembling an image of being but “something still more non-existent” (I.8.3.9); it does not participate in being at all. For this reason, neither the *One* beyond-being nor being-itself nor the totality of *Soul* and *Nous* have anything to do with the generation of matter. As a whole, the *hypostatic* and *henotic* reality of the *Good itself* effectually remains unstained and pure of material reality.

⁴⁸ For the best extant articulation of Plotinus' understanding of *eudaimonia*, see K. McGroarty, *Plotinus on Eudaimonia, a Commentary on Ennead I.4* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). In Plotinus there exists a simplicity and directness to the vision that leads to happiness, virtue and excellence. Cf. P. Hadot, *Plotinus Or the Simplicity of Vision*, M. Chase trans., A. Davidson intro., (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

⁴⁹ Cf. Pao-Shen Ho, *Plotinus' Mystical Teaching of Henosis: An Interpretation in the Light of the Metaphysics of the One* (Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, 2015). In this light, Pao-Shen, writes:

“...the One or the ultimate reality is at once radically transcendent and radically immanent insofar as it underlies our everyday experience. [...] It is already there by and within us [...] no extraordinary power is required to establish our contact with the One, for our daily experience itself already provides an access to It and hence constitutes the formal condition of Plotinus' teaching of *henosis*” (49).

As such, Plotinus clearly shuns Gnostic doctrines of the production of matter by the *Soul* and also eschews the position that the material world is the result of an evil *demiurge* (cf. III.2.1.5-10, II.9).⁵⁰ Instead, he determines that contrary principles of good and evil are necessary for the creation of the universe. He asks: “But how then is it necessary that if the Good exists, so should evil? It is because there must be matter in the All? This all must certainly be composed of contrary principles; it would not exist at all if matter did not exist” (I.8.7.1-4). Accordingly, the *Good* necessitates its contrary of evil (I.8.6.16-19, cf. *Theatetus* 176-177), and the whole generation of the universe is a combination of two contraries: *Intellect* and necessity (I.8.7.4-6; cf. *Timaeus* 47e5-46e1).

In this light, matter constitutes a universal necessity on one hand it is a kind of noxious wholly deficient primal evil that resists light and form at every turn. On the other hand however, it constitutes the necessary principle of unformed nature that bears the potential to be formed by *Soul* and *Intellect*, or else by the divine *Good*. For material reality cannot resist the holy power of the superior *principio* of *World Soul* (*Psêchê tôn Pántōn*) that potentially and actually informs it. In effect, for Plotinus the whole natural world is informed by soulful intelligence; the *Psêchê tôn Pántōn* is the constitutive power behind natural forms. Hence, the necessity of the contrary principle of unformed matter plays an important role in the formation of the natural world and universe.

Material reality effectively becomes the *par excellence* necessitated contrary principle for the formation of the world though it is not a metaphysical principle that derives itself from the *Good*. Rather, metaphysical evil is derived through the production of weakness and ignorance in the descended counterpart of the *Soul's* mixing with matter. The moral failure of the *Soul* originates from its necessary descend into matter through its prolonged association with and focus upon bodily and material reality. The *Soul* in its self-willed movement may be given to a kind of recurring and persistent fascination with material stuff. And if this be the *Soul's* involvement it becomes enmeshed and weakened, remaining vulnerable to downward influences.

Henceforth, even though the *Psêchê tôn Pántōn* participates in pure form manifesting the mind's perfect measure, and is entirely outside of evil—does not and cannot partake in it (I.8.4.6, cf. 4.14-15)—the descended counterpart of the human *Soul* which by necessity has to take a particular body, may exhibit receptivity to moral evil since its mixing with matter may adversely influence it towards irrationality, “measuredness and excess and defect, from which come unrestrained wickedness and cowardice and all the rest of the soul's evil, involuntary affections” and “false opinions” (I.8.4.6-11). On this account, Plotinus maintains that whereas matter constitutes primary evil all things whose composite nature require an association with matter—such as our bodies—constitute a secondary evil (I.8.4.1-5). Accordingly, if the descended *Soul* by fusing with the body fixes its gaze on material reality it necessarily follows the irrational predilection of material stuff: darkened by matter it is internally affected by evil; the darkness pressing from the outside, as it were, also infects it from the inside. Or else, by lack of measure the *Soul* has allowed darkness to enter. Hence, the *Soul*

is hindered in its seeing by the passions and darkened by matter, and inclined to matter, and altogether by looking towards becoming, not being; and the principle of becoming is the nature of matter, which is so evil that it infects with its own evil that which is not in it but only directs its gaze to it” (I.8.4.19-23).

Thus on a moral level, matter pushes itself from the outside and if it finds weakness in the *Soul* it may internally infect darken or taint it, matter is already there, “and begs it [the *Soul*] and, we may say, bothers it and wants to come right inside” (I.8.14.34-36; brackets added); but the place of the *Soul* is holy, and there is nothing in the body “without a share of soul” (I.8.14.38), and the *Soul* which has many latent powers is solely responsible for strengthening its light by moving away from the influence of matter. For the *Soul* bears free will to decide its movement and destiny either upwards to the forms or to be scattered

⁵⁰ For Plotinus' essential response to the Gnostics and the many controversial aspects of his thought regarding the metaphysics of material reality, see J. M. Narbonne, *Plotinus in Dialogue with the Gnostics* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011). Also, see P. Kalligas, “Plotinus against the Gnostics,” *Hermathena* 169 (2000): 115-128.

downwards. Plotinus says: “living beings which have a self-willed movement incline sometimes to the better things, sometimes to the worse” (III.2.4.36-37).

The progressive illumination of the darkness by the light through free will gives the *Soul* the opportunity to inquire as to the source of the emergent light, consequently reason manifests and the progressive ascend of the mind is generated, “until soul manages to escape back to its higher state” (I.8.14.49). As such, the contrary principle of matter constitutes universal necessity: the *Soul* is required to generate from within itself light: knowledge virtue and free will⁵¹ in order to overcome the darkening effects of material reality. Moreover, matter is necessary so that the *Soul* may reincarnate in a body; and by increasingly rising beyond matter, by progressively giving birth to its originary self and unifying light it is empowered—enabled—to illuminate the darkness and thus the whole universe. Hence, the *Soul* in and through the phenomenological interplay of darkness and light, by the ever-more curious birthing of originary knowledge of its divine form, is progressively enlightened as to the necessity of matter as well as to the true causes of the universe. Above all, the *Soul's* trajectory necessitates the perfection of the body through a proper and purifying relation to matter.⁵²

It is Plotinus' contention that the virtues morally purify the *Soul* from bodily affections acquired through its mixing with matter (I.2.3.12-21). The reception of light in the *Soul* purifies its gaze inwardly away from multiplicity toward higher achievements, accentuating thus the virtues of intelligence and wisdom. Strengthened further by the virtue of self-control the *Soul* moves away from bodily experiences; and by possessing the virtue of courage it “is not afraid of departing from the body” (I.2.3.17-18). Moreover, justice is made manifest when the rational *Soul* is ruled by the divine *Nous* without any opposition: “one would not be wrong in calling this state of the soul likeness to god, in which its activity is intellectual, and it is free this way from bodily affection” (I.2.3.19-21). Wisdom ensues in that *Soul* which imitates the divine. Hence, to know justice translates to leaving behind any human model of being a good person in accordance to the requirements of civic virtue; rather, a new model shines forth beyond the likeness of any human paradigm: “likeness to the gods is likeness to the model, a being of a different kind than ourselves” (I.2.7.29-30, cf. I.2.7.24-30).

Regarding virtue, Plotinus maintains that wickedness stands contrary to it but even though virtue is a good, it is not the transcendent *Good*. Nevertheless, first we have to become virtuous because it is the purifying effects of virtue that ultimately qualify our participation in the light of the *Good*. Virtue, strengthening our rational natures and will, is a regenerative power of being that purifies the *Soul* by preparing it to ascend to the higher echelons of *Intellectus*. Hence, “the perfect soul [...] which directs itself to intellect is always pure and turns away from matter and neither sees nor approaches anything undefined and unmeasured and evil” (I.8.4.25-28). Plotinus claims that ultimately a purified *Soul* established and perfected in virtue is enabled “to master matter” (I.8.6.20-21). He says: “evils our prior to us; and those that take hold on men do not do so with their good will, but there is an ‘escape from the evils in the soul’ for those who are capable of it, though not all men are” (I.8.5.28-31). The invisible gods but also those men purified from vice, are masters of matter “by that in them which is no matter” (I.8.5.31-35). At the level of the mind's mastery over matter evil is nowhere to be found; the necessity of matter is cleared and understood by the enlightened *Soul*.

In following Plato's *Phaedrus* (246c), Plotinus writes that the perfected *Soul* “‘travel[s] above and direct[s] the whole universe’; when it ceases from being in bodies or belonging to a body, then like the

⁵¹ For a concise but clear exposition of the issues involved in understanding the complexities of Plotinus' notion of free will, see J. M. Rist, *Plotinus the Road to Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 130-138.

⁵² Cf. B. Fleet, tr. intro. & com., *Plotinus Ennead IV.8: on the Descent of the Soul into Bodies* (Las Vegas, Zurich, Athens: Parmenides Publishing, 2012). Fleet provides a convincing account concerning the possible reasons as to why perfect *Souls* are compelled to descend into bodies; he contends that perhaps the compulsion is partly voluntary: *Souls* seek to fulfill their part in bringing the material universe toward original perfection by organizing the physical world in accord to its archetypal structuring of goodness (154ff.). As such, souls have an intuitive sense that their own descend into matter bears something good regarding their own evolutionary trajectory which is intrinsically woven into, and interdependent with, the evolution of the universe. Also see: C. Schäfer, “Matter in Plotinus' Normative Ontology,” *Phronesis* XLIX (3, 2004): 266-294.

Psêchê tōn Pántōn, it will join in governing without difficulty the universe [...] ordering by the uninvolved command of royal rulership [...]” indeed, taking “care of the particular through applied action by [...] contact of the maker with what is made” (IV.8.2.19-30; brackets added). And again, he says: “That intellect is the first act of the Good and the first substance; the Good stays still [...]” in itself, but “the activity of intellect” moves about and around it. “And soul dances round intellect outside, and looks to it, and in contemplating its interior sees god through it. ‘This is the life of the gods,’ [Phaedrus 248a1], without sorrow and blessed; evil is nowhere here [...]” (I.8.2.21-28; brackets added).

Above all, the life of the gods manifests freely and most perfectly in earthly self-actualizations through the simplicity of the pure *Soul* established in oneness, unifying self and world, full of wisdom beyond measure, moving about in ordinariness minding her ownmost business: immanently manifesting the transcending *One* in everydayness; perhaps that is the nature of justice: the constant giving of the *unifying-One*.

Plotinus’ all-unifying philosophical acumen is most pertinent to the spirit of our time wherein the ethical has become a valorization of the relativity of values founded upon civic differences at the beck and call of individual and collective profiteering. Plotinus’ understanding that ethics involves the mystical as well as the philosophical leads him to out rightly affirm the ethical as bearer of the quintessence of all knowledge. He therefore holds the individual absolutely responsible for his/her thoughts and actions. Freedom and responsibility accentuates the *Soul* to turn its gaze inward—forwarding the mind’s ascend—toward that *One* universal power which infinitely enhances the self’s transformative development towards all that is good, transforming concurrently the development of the collective, the whole of humanity planet and universe. The infinite wisdom and justice of Plotinus’ unifying insight bespeaks the benevolent economy of a politics of transformative *eros* and universal love, abundantly and freely overflowing from within. It affirms what we mostly need in our broken day and age, the highest *ethos* of direct divine realization and moral integrity that accentuates in all realms and dimensions of experience, including politics and science, the manifestation of the *One in the All*: reconciling differences: perfecting ethically.

III

Porphyry’s *Vita Plotini* as Radical *Kathartik* Process

Obviously Plotinus’ extraordinary philosophic life and thought must have charged his close disciple and biographer Porphyry with an extremely difficult task which he nonetheless met with success⁵³; rightfully earning his place as a significant personage in the subsequent trajectory of Platonic philosophy. His *Vita Plotini* initiated a new genre of biography; it was “the earliest extant memoir of a philosopher by his pupil⁵⁴,” a literary masterpiece that aimed to portray the intellectual development of a master sage⁵⁵ (or better, a philosopher-saint and mystic of late antiquity); but mostly: it was “an original work of literature...the mature work of a scholar and philosopher,” a loyal disciple “who for centuries eclipsed his master in influence, if not in reputation.”⁵⁶

In the final analysis, Porphyry’s *Vita Plotini* was a personal testament a direct witnessing of the ingenious grandeur and magnificence of a truly accomplished one, of a teacher who must have appeared

⁵³ Porphyry was tasked first with the editing of the *Enneads*, which meant first the deciphering of Plotinus’ incorrigible and at times fragmentary writing. In turn, he split and joined treatises as well as rearranged the order of texts providing titles throughout. In addition, he prefaced his edition of the *Enneads* with a biographical chapter on the Life of Plotinus.

⁵⁴ M. J. Edwards, “A Portrait of Plotinus,” *The Classical Quarterly* 43 (2, 1993): 480-490, 480.

⁵⁵ Cf. M. J. Edwards, “Two Episodes from Porphyry’s Life of Plotinus,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 40 (4, 1991): 456-464; Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, *op. cit.* no.51, 1-20; R. Harder, “Eine Neue Schrift Plotins,” *Hermes* 71 (1, 1936): 1-10; J. Bidez, *Vie de Porphyre* (Ghent: E. van Goethem, 1913).

⁵⁶ M. J. Edwards, “A Portrait of Plotinus,” *op. cit.* no. 54, 480.

to his disciple as a figure that was more than a sage; after all antiquity was filled with genuine sages of one sort or another, moreover his direct testimony of Plotinus' comportment and way of life seemed to surpass most sages by far; indeed, the wisdom of his teacher seemed of another order and caliber.⁵⁷ And again, though Plotinus seems to have been a master perhaps even a master of masters, Porphyry was well aware that mastery was equally an inadequate characterization for one whose largesse though appearing equivocal to the source of life could never equivocate that source but only participate in it. In the final analysis, his beloved teacher knew better: when it comes to the incomprehensible gift of the *One*, the self is exponentially carried away by the darkest of mysteries, which by necessity commands infinite layers of total surrender to radical mystery or else to unknowing *qua* unknowability. As such, union with the *One* resists mastery at every turn. For one thing, realizing the *henotic* sphere of reality, or else attaining supreme freedom, can neither be comprehended nor mastered or commanded by any means.

How then could Porphyry fulfill the ministrations destiny had charged him with and be faithful to his hagiographic mission⁵⁸, which must have many a time appeared to be impossibility. How was he to put in script for posterity the life of his beloved teacher whose very *bios* and thought resisted all images and words; how was he to speak of the exclusivity of a philosopher mystic of the stature of Plotinus, whose very heart in-folded-within the nucleus of the central sphere of life without circumference, of him, who tirelessly played the music of *henosis*, unceasingly singing the melody of the central source. Above all, how was he to portray for future generations his teacher's saintly demeanor and unimaginable presence, his tremendous illumination and power the unparalleled beauty; and the ever-more unveiling of his transcendent peace, emanating love and divinized wisdom?

Porphyry must have undergone a *kathartic* process which led to progressive stages of illumination before undertaking the writing of the biography that prefaced his already demanding and surely painstaking editing of the *Enneads*⁵⁹, that is perhaps why the *Vita Plotini* ranks, as Dillon puts it, "very high among surviving specimens of ancient biography."⁶⁰ Undoubtedly, if we were to take a glance at the awe-stricken biographer's emotive self he must have at times stood dumbfounded felt the bouts of melancholy, and perhaps unacknowledged spells of yearning piercing the veil of yonder-, a yet unformed longing for the company of his beloved teacher. Truly, he must have been at once perturbed surprised and fascinated by the gravity of the task ahead.

⁵⁷ This is not to say that it did not dawn to an educated man like Porphyry that there were indeed philosopher sages of equal and perhaps greater import and stature than Plotinus, perhaps Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Ammonius, and a host of others. However, he could not truly speak or judge the greatness of others without personal testimony. At any rate, if such comparative dilemmas existed in Porphyry they must have appeared with the passage of time and before the task at hand ever-more inconsequential. Indeed, the task before him was to do justice to the one whose grandeur was immediately evident, perhaps greater than all others in that it was Plotinus himself who directly showed him the way to illumination. Hence, he must have reckoned that the only one way to do justice to the life and perhaps unparalleled greatness of his beloved teacher was to genuinely come forth with his personal truth, claiming straightforwardly what he experienced and witnessed. But as we shall elucidate in forthcoming sections, he already intuited that even his personal testimony would not suffice. He must have therefore many a time wondered as to the best way to express the exalted stature of his most beloved teacher. In this light, Porphyry's firsthand experience of the magnitude of Plotinus' enlightenment, along with his prolonged association with him, must have enabled him to realize that his teacher was not yet another sage among sages. Perhaps he was a sage equal in greatness to his exalted forbearers.

⁵⁸ Porphyry tells us that he was one of Plotinus' closest friends and that it was his beloved teacher himself who entrusted him with the editing of his texts (*VP*.8.50-52). Plotinus' writings were initially open only to a few select students of the inner circle of his school. The trust Plotinus showed regarding the editing of his writings establishes a direct recognition of his close friendship with Porphyry, and most importantly, constitutes a sign that points to the designation of his successor regarding the teachings of the school.

⁵⁹ Only the editing of the *Enneads* and the rearrangement of treatises must have given Porphyry many an illumination. Not only did he study in depth matters of self-development but also the most profound principles of universal reality.

⁶⁰ Dillon, "Plotinus at Work on Platonism," *op. cit.* no. 14, 189.

Undeniably, the prospect of writing the biography of his beloved teacher must have many a time compelled the disciple himself to stand in radical amazement before the unknowable mystery. He must have been thrown into question repeatedly, standing there in wonderment of how to proceed, how to acutely discern what to reveal and what to suppress. And then again, in what philosophical mode or literary style and perhaps in which medium was he to portray the one who shunned all forms of portrayal as such.⁶¹ But alas! His creative ingenuity disclosed the median and the medium; he masterfully laid down the golden script that makes one marvel at both the teacher and the student.

Plotinus' *Daimōn*: Porphyry's Insight and *Ennead* III.4

For Porphyry above all Plotinus was *spoudaïos* (cf. III.4.6.1–2). The translation of the Greek term *spoudaïos* bears a variant of meanings ranging from grand, magnificent, distinguished, momentous, or else a proficient man of great importance, an eminent man of great ingenuity. But in the context of the appearance of *spoudaïos* in *Ennead* III.4.6, the meaning of the term takes the form of a wise philosopher whose guardian spirit or *daimōn* is a god. It makes sense therefore that Porphyry, who was convinced of the greatness of his teacher's incomparable wisdom, determined that Plotinus had the *daimōn* of *spoudaïos* and that the spirit overseeing his philosophical activity was a god. In *toto*, the quintessence of Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* effectually constitutes a kind of recantation that recurrently points to the multifarious ways that confirm Plotinus was *spoudaïos* in the above sense.

However, Porphyry does not directly make reference to the term *spoudaïos*, rather directs us to *Ennead* III.4, titled *On Our Allotted Guardian Spirit*, by telling us that Plotinus wrote this work following a strange incident with an Egyptian priest, who managed to convince his teacher to participate in a *séance* at the Temple of Isis in Rome. As the story goes, the priest promised to reveal Plotinus' personal *daimōn*—his guardian spirit or tutelary deity (cf. *VP*.10.15-25). But as Porphyry tells us, upon the summoning of Plotinus' *daimōn* instead of a lesser spirit—which to the mind of the priest would have constituted the nature of the *daimōn*—a god became visible. The shocked Egyptian priest exclaimed: “O blessed art thou, whose guardian is not one of the lesser spirits but a god.” (*VP*.10.24-25).

Continuing, Porphyry tells us that Plotinus was puzzled after the *séance* at the temple of Isis and that his perplexity regarding the event caused him to write *Ennead* III.4; an exposition that expounds-on the import and complexity of meaning that concerns one's *daimōn*, or else one's 'allotted guardian spirit' or 'tutelary guide.'⁶² Aside from Porphyry's interpretation of the above incident with the Egyptian, which as will be shown seems to be erroneous, it appears that Plotinus' intention in *Ennead* III.4 was twofold: firstly he wanted to set the record right concerning the true nature of the *daimōn*; and secondly he wanted to disclose that the level of understanding the true nature of the *daimōn* and the role it plays in the life of the human being, varies in accordance to the particular *Soul's* developmental state of *noetic* being. But above all, Plotinus' primary intention in III.4 was to set the record right: he sought to clarify that the *daimōn* of a *spoudaïos* is *Nous* and the *One* as such. Moreover, he wanted to unmistakably convey that the *daimōn* of a truly wise philosopher sage—whose character is in harmony with the star above him (cf. III.4.6.27-28)—with *Nous* and the *One*—can never become visible.

As Armstrong *contra* Merlan has authoritatively contended: the *spoudaïos* in *Ennead* III.4.6 applies for one “who lives by *Nous*, his *daimōn* is indeed a *theos*: it is the One, the Good itself.”⁶³ Armstrong goes on to say:

⁶¹ Cf. M. J. Edwards, “A Portrait of Plotinus,” *op. cit.* no. 54, 480.

⁶² In Plotinus the term ‘allotted’ essentially means ‘lot;’ that is, the ‘spirit guide’ is allotted by divine providence in accordance to the particular *Soul's* lot or fate. Hence, it is ‘*Our Allotted Personal Daimōn*.’

⁶³ A. H. Armstrong, “Was Plotinus a Magician?”, *Phronesis* 1 (1, 1955): 73-79, 77. Armstrong observes that: “*Nous* and the One (the *daimōn* of the *spoudaïos*) are far beyond any possible range of theurgic conjuration. Plotinus does sometimes speak of the “coming” of the One to the Soul (*Enn.* V.5.8; V.3.17), but it is a mystical vision which has nothing to do with theurgy” (78). Merlan erroneously contends providing weak arguments for his thesis that passages in Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* in conjunction with passages in *Ennead* III.4, corroborate to show that Plotinus

“the whole of the *Enneads* show that the One was the only god in whose presence Plotinus was interested and that his whole life and work was an effort to attain that presence entering as a necessary preliminary into the company of the divinities of *Nous*,” and that *Nous* and the One (the *daimōn* of the *spoudaïos*); are far beyond any possible range of theurgic conjuration.⁶⁴

What indeed becomes most clear in a careful reading of Plotinus' *Ennead* III.4, the guardian spirit or *daimōn* of a man cannot be conjured by the magical arts by rite ritual exorcism, sacrificial invocation or by theurgical means, either for good or bad purposes.⁶⁵ Hence, Plotinus' understanding of the *daimōn* is not to be identified with anything demonic or with *daimōnes* (as in the race of lesser gods), not even with the gods that in accordance to ancient cosmology inhabit the highest echelons of the *noetic* world, and whose beneficent identification with and protection of varying deserving humans, makes men into heroes that rise to stand out in-between humans and the highest gods.

As noted above, reaffirming Armstrong's insight, Rist points out that the meaning Plotinus espouses concerning *daimōn* is the life of *Nous* ultimately the *One*. He insists that since both the undescended *Nous* and the *One* are invisible the *daimōn* could not have become visible by any means of conjuration. On this ground, he rejects the séance with the Egyptian priest at the Temple of Isis in Rome whereby Plotinus' god allegedly became visible, claiming that the incident was most probably a rumor that circulated in the school, and Porphyry who suspected that his teacher had a god as his allotted guardian spirit was most probably adversely influenced by later Platonic misconceived interpretations, perhaps that of Apuleius who erroneously thought the *daimōn* could become visible.⁶⁶ Rist references Dodds who points out that both the alleged séance and the writing of Plotinus' *Ennead* III.4, “took place before Porphyry's arrival in Rome and that the account of the séance is hearsay in which we cannot put much

through theurgic means practiced the darkest of black magic conjuring to his obeisance even the *One* as such. See, P. Merlan, “Plotinus and Magic,” *Isis* 44 (4, 1953): 341-348. As Edwards puts it, Porphyry's intention in chapter 10 of the *Vita Plotini* where the incident with the Egyptian priest is discussed becomes more than obvious, when we consider that he certainly does not want us to come away with such dark image of Plotinus; he precisely intends the reverse. Cf. Edwards, “Two Episodes from Porphyry's Life of Plotinus,” *op. cit. no.* 55, 456. Besides, Plotinus' *Ennead* III.4 clearly intends to show that the greatest attainment of the human being is precisely the *daimōn*: ultimately identical to the *god* above the *One* as such, or the *Good itself*; and indeed what a contradiction it would be if the *Good* was able to be summoned by theurgic conjuration. On the great importance of the meaning of Plotinus' *daimōn* in comparison with Socrates' *daimonion*, see M. Rist, “Plotinus and the ‘Daimonion’ of Socrates,” *Phoenix* 17 (1, 1963): 13-24. Rist provides an illuminating perspective of the history of the understanding of both the Socratic *daimonion* and the Platonic meaning of the *daimōn* in antiquity. He arrives at some most stimulating conclusions about the similarities between Socrates' and Plotinus' realization of their god above the life of *Nous*. For a magnificent and more comprehensive articulation of the meaning of Plotinus' *daimōn* as situated in the historical context of the ancient religious worldview as well as the Middle Platonic tradition, see P. Kalligas, *The Enneads of Plotinus—A Commentary*, vol. 1, E. K. Fowden and N. Pilavacki trans. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 481-501. Kalligas reviews the many meanings of *daimōn* in antiquity and in contradistinction discloses the original meaning as intended by Plato and Plotinus. Both Rist and Kalligas agree with Armstrong's interpretation of Plotinus' *daimōn* as the ‘allotted guide’ the personal god above and beyond theurgic means of influence.

⁶⁴ Armstrong, “Was Plotinus a Magician?,” *op. cit. no.* 63, 78.

⁶⁵ Helleman seems to speak the last word when she says: “Plotinus' affirmation of the highest part of the soul as undescended, together with the claim that our soul has a common origin with the World Soul in Soul-Hypostasis, is significant for the relative unimportance he attributes to the role and effect of magic.” W. E. Helleman, “Plotinus and Magic,” *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 4 (2010) 114-146.

⁶⁶ Rist, “Plotinus and the ‘Daimonion’ of Socrates,” *op. cit. no.* 63, 21. It is primarily in reference to Apuleius that Rist essentially contends that Porphyry and the rest of the students in the school were adversely influenced by later Platonic theories of *daimōnes* that could become visible by conjuration. In this regard, Rist claims they misinterpreted Plato's meaning of *daimōn* as well as the Socratic *daimōnion* (*ibid.*, 22ff.). Regarding Maximus' views of Socrates' *daimōnion* see Rist, *ibid.* Cf. Apuleius' *De deo Socratis* 11, 145, 15-16, 150-55; and Maximus Tyrius “What Is Socrates' *Daimonion*?” VIII 5, 90.17-92.4 and IX. In Plutarch *De genio Socratis*. Also, see Kalligas, *The Enneads of Plotinus*, *op. cit. no.* 63, 485-486, notes 22-24.

confidence.”⁶⁷ In contradistinction, Rist goes on to say, we must take seriously *Ennead* III.4 for it is a genuine treatise of Plotinus: “In that treatise we find that a few people have a god (*theos*) as their *daimōn* and that these are the sages (III 4.6). Since it is certain that Plotinus’ pupils con-sidered their master a sage, we can understand how they came to believe that his *daimōn* was a god.”⁶⁸

As such, this interpretive confusion on the part of Porphyry does not in the least subtract from his first hand experiential understanding of his teacher’s grandeur along the pathways of the *One*. In the final analysis, it is Porphyry that sagaciously guides us to carefully read *Ennead* III.4 in order to discover for ourselves Plotinus’ very own self-interpretation of the various meanings of our ‘allotted guide’ or *daimōn*. Most importantly however, Porphyry’s intuition to let Plotinus speak for himself, has effectively provided us with the philosophical backbone to determine for ourselves the meaningful interrelation between *spoudaios* and *daimōn*; intertwined words whose meaning in the context of *Ennead* III.4, hit the mark when it comes to explaining the vastness of Plotinus’ exalted stature in relation to the *One*. The entangled meaning of these two words indeed evinces the grandeur of Plotinus’ sage-hood, directly pointing to the immensity of his relation to the universal scheme of the *cosmic* order.

Rist sheds light regarding the conflict Plotinus confronts in *Ennead* III.4.5, as he endeavors to reconcile contradictory denotations of *daimōn* in two Platonic dialogues: (i) the *Timaeus* (90a), where the *daimōn* by way of *Nous* is allotted to every human being as a gift from god in order to guide the *Soul* through the arduous path of life; and (ii) the myth of *Er* (*Republic* 620d-e; corroborated by *Laws* 732c & 877a), where the *daimōn* is chosen by the individual *Soul* to guard its fate:

Whereas in the *Timaeus* Plato thinks of the *daimōn* as *Nous*, in the myth of *Er* the *daimōn* is a principle chosen by the soul, yet still in some respects apparently outside the soul, which watches over the soul’s life. What is inside the soul should be different from what is outside; yet the word *daimōn* is used for both. Plotinus is partially aware of the difficulty of reconciling the passages [...]. [He] struggles to avoid making the passages contra-dictory. The *daimōn* is not wholly outside, he says in line nineteen. This is a concession to the doctrine of the *Timaeus*, which would be denied outright if the *daimōn* were thought to be outside *Nous*. Yet on the ground that as individual humans we live a life to which it [the *daimōn*] is superior Plotinus has to add that it is not bound up with us. This addition is almost opposed to the *Timaeus*, but fits the *Republic* better. Again, the *daimōn* is said to be ours, if “we” are our souls, though it is not the agent of our actions...it is, of course, hard to see how the *daimōn* of the *Timaeus*, if it is not the agent of at least our noblest actions, can be the same as *Nous*, as Plato says it is.⁶⁹

In the following few paragraphs we will address the *aporias* Rist raises and also show the way Plotinus attempts to reconcile them in *Ennead* III.4. Paraphrased, the two contradictory accounts in Plato denoting the *daimōn* are restated: (i) the *daimōn* is allotted as a providential gift from god to guide the individual *Soul*’s fate hence belongs within the intelligible sphere of *Nous* (cf. *Timaeus* 90a); and (ii), the *daimōn* is chosen by every individual *Soul* after birth as guardian of their fate to guide their development (from the outside) through the tribulations of life (cf. the myth of *Er* in *Republic* 620d-e, corroborated by *Laws* 732c & 877). Granted the discussion is rather difficult almost inaccessible as Plotinus addresses the choice of *daimōn* in accordance to the various developmental levels of particular souls.

Rist observes that the misconceived interpretations of the *daimōn* arising in the Middle Platonic tradition mostly stem from the fact that the two aforementioned Platonic denotations of the ‘allotted guardian spirit’ in *Timaeus* (90a) and *Republic* (620d-e) were not amalgamated. Or else, they were erroneously amalgamated by placing undue emphasis on (ii) the myth of *Er*, wherein the *daimōn* is

⁶⁷ Rist, “Plotinus and the ‘Daimonion’ of Socrates,” *op. cit.* no. 63, 13. Cf. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 289.

⁶⁸ Rist, “Plotinus and the ‘Daimonion’ of Socrates,” *op. cit.* no. 63, 13.

⁶⁹ Rist, “Plotinus and the ‘Daimonion’ of Socrates,” *op. cit.* no. 63, 14.

chosen by every individual *Soul* after birth as guardian of their fate to guide their development through the tribulations of life.⁷⁰ Rist goes on to show the way this hermeneutic ambiguity lead to many erroneous Middle Platonic understandings that were founded solely on the meaning denoted to *daimōn* in the myth of *Er*. For thinkers in the later Platonic tradition concocted various general theories proclaiming that as there are differing levels of *noetic* development among individual *Souls*, and since the *daimōn* is chosen in accord to each *Soul's* level of intellectual development, there must also be varying ranks of *daimōn* from which to choose. Moreover, Middle Platonic interpretations of this sort ended up vulgarizing the divine purity of the 'guardian spirit' by further decreeing that these so-called ranks of *daimōns* can be influenced or conjured for various purposes by magical means.

However, closer to the truth of Plato's as well as Plotinus' meaning of 'guardian spirit' is that all *daimōns* are located and unified in *Nous* and they are co-creators. There is no attributed rank between them; they constitute the collective of interdependent divinities that inhabit the higher echelons of the *noetic* world. In contradistinction, humans do have rank that is established in accord to their level of intellectual development and their fate—as determined by past choices, predispositions, inclinations and propensities—hence, their choice of *daimōn* after birth reflects their ownmost yet limited understanding of the 'guardian spirit.' As will be elucidated below, Plotinus claims that the particular *Soul* chooses a *daimōn* after birth one level above its own. This, because the particular *Soul* after birth can only recognize or conceive the meaning of *daimōn* one level above its own *noetic* development; therefore it can neither comprehensively understand the *hypostatic* reality of *Nous* nor the true nature of its 'guardian spirit' which is located in *Nous*.

Now, in reference to the claim made in *Timaeus* that the *daimōn* is a providentially 'allotted guardian spirit,' it is divine providence that intervenes to allow the *Soul* to choose a *daimōn* one level above its *noetic* development. In other words, divine intervention allows the individual *Soul* to see one level above its ontological state in order to enable it to perceive clearly the next level it aspires to achieve in the present life. Henceforth, the *daimōn* is providentially *allotted* in proportion to the *Soul's* development, propensity and predisposition, in other words according to its *lot* or fate; and the allotted 'guardian spirit' (something like a guardian angel) superintends the particular *Soul's* development in the present life.

More specifically, let us take a step by step look at the way Plotinus resolves this apparent contradiction in *Ennead* III.4.2 to III.4.4. He first determines that the choice of *daimōn* by an individual *Soul* (cf. *Republic* 620d-e) after descending into the body reflects its propensities and inclinations in proportion to its *noetic* level of *Soul*-development in previous reincarnations (III.4.2). Put otherwise, the *daimōn* chosen by the *Soul* after taking birth reflects its past predisposition or inner constitution of character development (cf. III.3.4.34-44). Plotinus concludes III.4.2 by further clarifying that the *Soul's* identity after death is established by its predominant character propensity. In III.4.3 he elucidates that the *Soul's* predisposition from its past reincarnation is not the only criterion that regulates its choice of *daimōn* before its entrance into the present life. The *daimōn* chosen after birth is -ontologically outside-, one *noetic* level above the way of life the *Soul* seeks to follow in its present reincarnation. Most importantly, he tells us that the *Soul* chooses its *daimōn*, even though it, the *Soul itself*, unbeknown to itself, holds within it the intelligibility of the whole universe. Now, in III.4.4 Plotinus illumines the whole matter further by saying that after the *Soul* descends into a body, its chosen *daimōn* guides it from the outside as the 'spirit guide' never descends from the divine sphere of *Nous* to which it is devoted.⁷¹

Now, let us decipher and survey Plotinus' above elucidations from III.4.2 to III.4.4, within the general context of *Ennead* III.4, and within the overarching context of the *Enneads* as a whole. Plotinus determines the *Soul* after birth chooses the *daimōn* to guard and guide its fate not exclusively from its predetermined propensity of character acquired in its past life, but also from the way of life it is determined to follow in this life. Needless to say that through its sojourn in life the *Soul* does not consciously remember the way of life it chose to follow in its present reincarnation. For this reason, first and fore mostly the *daimōn* guides the particular *Soul* it is superintending toward its prior choice of the

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Means or ways by which the *daimōn* guides the soul it oversees will be discussed later.

way of life it determined to follow after it's descend into the body. However, the *daimōn* knows all too well that the *Soul's* ownmost free choices at important forks or junctures may at any time lead it either for good or bad toward a different choice of life. Above all, the *daimōn* respects the decree of free will; but to this we shall return. At any rate, being purely of divine origin the *daimōn* does not descend to the ontological level of the human self rather dwelling in the sphere of divine *Nous* guides the descended *Soul* from the outside by superintending the best potential outcomes (III.4.4, cf. III.4.3.1). In this regard, Plotinus follows Plato who upholds that the *daimōn* superintends any choices made by the particular *Soul* it oversees (*Republic* 620d8–e1). Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that for both Plato (*Timaeus* 90a) and Plotinus (III.4.4) the *locus classicus* of the *daimōn* is the divine sphere of *Nous*, ultimately it transcends intelligibility it is the *Good itself*, the god above.

Hence, the 'spirit-guide' through its '*locus*' in the divine *Nous* is enabled to remain distinct from the descended *noetic* counterpart of the *Soul* it superintends (cf. III.4.4), however its privileged positioning gives it a kind of universal overseeing of the *Soul's* complete and immediate state of being. That is, the 'spirit-guide' knows what is ontologically going on inside the *Soul* it's past and present contradictions, dilemmas, potential choices, and so on. But the 'spirit guide' oversees and guides it from *Nous* in and through unification (a kind of melting) with the *Soul's* undescended *noetic* counterpart (cf. III.2.13-15). Hence, the *daimōn* knows at all times the *Soul's* present state of being by overseeing actualities and potentials in *toto* but respects its freedom of will; it superintends and guides the *Soul* from *Nous* above disclosing to its descended *noetic* level of present-development the rightness or wrongness of personal choices (cf. III.2.13, III.2.18). But by what means does the 'spirit-guide' accomplish this?

Undeniably, the *daimōn* working in conformity to the divine decree of free will (cf. VI.8) is not allowed to interfere or intervene. However, as divine 'spirit guide' that guards and guides the superintended *Soul* it has a providential task, to disclose at every juncture and by all possible means—whether the descended *Soul* is consciously aware of it or not—positive or negative signs that may reveal the rightness or wrongness of its freely chosen thoughts deeds or actions (cf. *On Providence* III.2 & III.3). The possible means or signs of disclosure that may be imparted to the descended *Soul* by its *daimōn qua* its undescended *noetic* compliment, involve the activation of conscience, consciousness, intuition, dreams, oracles, synchronicities, negative commands or prohibitions, silence, and so on.⁷² As such, the Plotinian understanding regarding the measure or criterion by which the *daimōn* determines that an action to be taken, or else the result of an action already taken is right or wrong, must depend on whether the

⁷² Plotinus does not explicitly divulge the ways his *daimōn* speaks to him (in *Ennead* III.4), although elsewhere he discusses at length silence and intuition, and also elucidates philosophically consciousness and conscience as the rise of the rational predilection of the *Soul*. And again, his interest in astrology, omens, portents and divination is well known. Most importantly however, he was very familiar with Plato's *Apology* where Socrates proclaims to obey divine channels "it has [...] been enjoined upon me by the god, by means of oracles and dreams, and in every other way that a divine manifestation has ever ordered a man to do anything" (*Apology* 33c4-7). In effect, both the beginning as well as the fulfillment of Socrates' philosophical vocation and mission was conveyed through supernatural channels. His philosophical career began when he set out to prove the oracle at Delphi wrong. As he was exceedingly aware of the magnitude of his ignorance, Socrates could not understand the oracular pronouncement "that no man was wiser than him" (*Apology* 21a6-7). Knowing well that the oracle never lies he commenced his notorious cross-examinations in order to reconcile his persuasion of the oracle's veracity with the consciousness of his ownmost ignorance. Socrates finally realizes that the oracle is right; he may be wiser than others in one thing that he is aware of his ignorance, whereas others are not. It was Socrates' divine sign or *daimōnion* that guided his philosophical vocation. The prohibitive voice of *daimōnion* stopped his tracks when he was about to perform a morally reprehensible action. However, the lack of the customary preventive intervention of *daimōnion* on the day of his trial, its utter silence, conveys to him that the divine sanctions the verdict of his death. Socrates' awareness of his *daimōnion* is so acute that he also becomes aware it communicates to him *ex silentio*. His divine sign confirms *ex silentio* that his death conviction is "a good thing" (*Apology* 40b6); it endorses his persuasion that the event of his death brings the fulfillment of his philosophic mission at the right time and place. Above all, the ready-to-die Socrates confirms through the silence of *daimōnion* that the entirety of his life was under the superior protection and favor of the god.

particular action or its intention brings the particular *Soul* closer to unification with the undescended realities of the *Soul of the All* and divine *Nous* (cf. III.2.14, III.2.18), ultimately with the *One Good*.⁷³

What constitutes the expansiveness of Plotinus' philosophy of *Soul* is the fluidity of the conscious human being to recognize its chosen *daimōn* as the intelligible ground that activates its inner *noetic* development at different ontological levels of personal choice. To summarize, the *daimōn* chosen by the individual human at birth is one level above the *Soul's noetic* state of being at that time. As such, during the *Soul's* sojourn on earth the *daimōn* that is wholly devoted to divine *Nous* intrinsically bears the sole aim that the person it superintends move toward progressively higher ways of life. Of course, this primarily depends on the personal choices the *Soul* makes at important fork roads, junctures or turns. Hence, the *daimōn* potentiates guides and activates the *Soul* in accordance to its present level of free choice. It guides by activating the particular *Soul* toward an intelligible way of life beyond its reach that already lays un-activated within it (cf. III.4.5).

Kalligas in plain language articulates wonderfully Plotinus' various levels of *Soul* activation:

His expansive theory of the soul and of its relation to the conscious "I" [...] allows him to interpret it instead as an entity that, although extending beyond the narrow confines of our consciousness, remains nonetheless indissolubly bound with the inner truth and the intrinsic aims that rule us and motivate us and integrate us into an order of things that, however much it may transcend us, is in reality most profoundly our own. His pioneering view that the soul is able to range across a field much broader than the "I" offers him the possibility of understanding its higher regions as "not-I," and hence as something superior and daemonic. The question concerning the nature of the "allotted spirit" offers itself to him as an occasion to investigate the complexity and multilayered character of man's inner life, which is revealed thereby as an entire "intelligible universe." At the same time, the motility that characterizes the "I" causes that higher element to become apparent and apprehensible at various ontological levels, depending on the level at which the soul happens itself to be activated.⁷⁴

In the final analysis, the conscious individual is solely responsible for realizing that the *daimōn* activating it is essentially *noetic* and of divine origin, a divine aspect of the inner life of self. However, the *Soul* of a philosopher sage of the highest rank of virtue recognizes his *daimōn* as a god (cf. III.4.6.22-28), the *One* itself, a daemonic power of genius that is at once issued forth from within and outside *Soul* and *Nous*—from the divine as such.⁷⁵

To the truly wise sage their *daimōn* does not belong to them rather is the gift of the divine, the *One*-itself (cf. III.4.6; *Timaeus* 90a). Most importantly, the exalted sage who walks along the pathways of the

⁷³ To reiterate, the multifarious subtle means or signs that the 'spirit-guide' superintending our destiny may activate are communicated in alignment with our undescended *Soul*. They self-point the way, disclosing whether our personal choices are in line (or not) with the divine counterpart of ourselves, that is our undescended compliment that mostly remains veiled from us however is wholly transparent to the *daimōn's* privileged position in the divine sphere of *Nous*. The *daimon* is ultimately the *One*.

⁷⁴ Kalligas, *The Enneads of Plotinus*, *op. cit.* no. 63, 486-487.

⁷⁵ Edwards cites a paragraph from Porphyry's *Sententiae* that illumines Plotinus' exalted stature as well the ranks of sage-philosophers: "The good man possesses the political virtues, but he who has the cathartic virtues is a daemonic man or a good daemon, he who has the intellectual virtues is a god, he who has the paradigmatic virtues a father of gods." *Sententiae* 31.5ff, Lamberz; as cited by Edwards. Cf. Edwards, "Two Episodes from Porphyry's Life of Plotinus," *op. cit.* no. 55, 459. Here, the appellation "father of gods" forwards the Plotinian meaning of the *unio mystica: henosis* with the *daimōn*: the *One* above the divinities of *Nous*. In this context elsewhere, Edwards quotes Plotinus: "For activity [*energeia*] also generates gods in silence by contact with [the One], and it generates beauty, righteousness and virtue (*Enneads* VI.9.9)." M. J. Edwards, "Birth, Death, and Divinity in Porphyry's Life of Plotinus." In T. Hägg, P. Rousseau, and C. Högel eds., *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2000), 52-71, 65. As expected, there is a multiplicity of interpretations that can be attributed to this most profound statement.

One, knows all too well that the *daimōn* of every individual is a divine gift that activates to the highest possible degree the ascend from their present state of ontological development toward the likeness of their god-, along the pathways of unification with the undescended *hypostasis* of the *World Soul* and its *noetic* compliment.⁷⁶

Edward's elucidation below regarding Plotinus' meaning of *daimōn* hits the mark. He tells us that Plotinus imports "the doctrine of the *Timaeus* (90a) that the *daimōn* is the highest, the rational element of the human soul on earth." In turn, Edwards quotes Plotinus who provides the answers to two questions he poses: "Who is the daemon? He who was so in life. And who the god? Again he who already is so (III.4.3.1-3)." Edwards goes on to say, Plotinus is "struggling for precision," he therefore forwards "the suggestion that for those who live according to the rational injunctions of the soul - that is, for philosophers - the *daimōn* is that state of themselves which is higher even than intellect (III.4.6.4); the soul on earth is a passenger, which is piloted by its *daimōn* through the troubled seas of life (III.4.6.46ff.)." Plotinus, Edwards points out, expressly maintains "that his daemon is not so much a thing distinct from the self as a state above the present one which the self should aspire to enjoy. [...] for the man of virtue is one whose self-in-prospect must be something more than a *daimōn*, and must be reckoned at the very least a god (*Enn.* III.4.6.4)."⁷⁷

In the Plotinian sense of *Ennead* III.4, the *spoudaïos* philosopher sage realizing the intelligible universe within, is living the *eudaimōnic* life of the activated mind beyond bodily or sensual distractions, hence concurrently realizes his *daimōn* as a god beyond *Nous* outside and above it. The exalted philosopher is therefore perpetually activating or realizing in everydayness the indissoluble unity of the undescended and descended counterparts of his *hypostatic Soul* and *Nous*. As such, the *spoudaïos* keeps realizing his god as a gift from god the *One-itself*.

Plotinus adamantly preserves that for the philosopher sage of the highest rank of wisdom, the resilient unification with the *daimōn* becomes the ground of freedom. These wise sages are indeed *spoudaïoi* in that they know "that there is a universe in our souls, not only an intelligible one, but an arrangement like in form to that of the *Soul of the World*," however when their "souls [...] are set free they come to the star which is in harmony with the character and power that lived and worked in them, retaining the star above them as their *daimōn* their god" (III.4.6.22-28).

Despite Porphyry's misconceived understanding regarding the visibility of Plotinus' *daimōn* in the alleged séance at the temple of Isis which in effect he never witnessed, his personal testimony prevails as he informs us of having witnessed Plotinus' attainment of the *One* four times,⁷⁸ "in an unspeakable actuality, and not in potency only;" and that once drawing near Plotinus "he was united to him," hence to the *One* above all (cf. *VP*.23.13-18). In reference to these experiences Porphyry does not mention once that Plotinus' *daimōn* became visible. Instead, his *testimonium* in the *Vita Plotini* proclaims through and through that his teacher's greatness freedom and magnanimity coalesces to the amalgamated god-like exalted status of *spoudaïos*; his *daimōn* was a god grounded in the *Good* itself, illumined in and by the *One* as such.

⁷⁶ This addresses Rist's objection (quoted above) as to how the *daimōn* can guide the *Soul* to honorable actions however not be the agent of its noblest actions. As previously indicated, the *daimōn* located in the divine guides our actions from the outside in accord to our personal choices. The 'guardian spirit' is not the agent of our actions and by divine decree respects our free will. However, when a noble action is performed by our *Soul* we ourselves coincide with the divine *Nous* hence with the *daimōn*, not the other way around. This way, a noble or honorable action requires the merging of the self below with the self above, hence with the *daimōn* overseeing the *Soul* from its divine location in *Nous*.

⁷⁷ Edwards, "Two Episodes from Porphyry's Life of Plotinus," *op. cit.* no. 55, 457-458. Here Edwards seems to miss the mark however in the philosophy or religion to miss the mark means that you have hit it. In this light, it is not that the enlightened sage of superior virtue discovers that "his self-in-prospect must be something more than a *daimōn*, and must be reckoned at the very least a god," rather the realized sage realizes that his *daimōn* is a god, the *One itself*: "the god within each of us as one and the same—*tò ên ekástō hemōn theòn ôs ên kai tón autón*" (VI.5.1.4).

⁷⁸ We have no idea how many times Plotinus might have realized the *One* when Porphyry was not around.

Porphyry and the Oracle Song of Plotinus' Legendary Life

Porphyry was exceedingly aware that his biographical *testimonium* of the life of Plotinus would not suffice. Regardless of the many disclosures he exposed that attested to the divine greatness of his beloved teacher no images and words could ever capture the grandeur of his glorious stature and spiritual countenance.⁷⁹ He knew that for his spiritual biography⁸⁰ to be complete he needed an incontestable outside verdict a divine confirmation by the gods who apperceive and know all. So he happily sanctioned and counted in the '*Vita Plotini*' the disclosure received from the oracle of Apollo to Amelius' inquiry regarding the fate of Plotinus' *Soul* in the afterlife; it tailored well, for it was Apollo that set Socrates' legendary philosophical vocation on track.⁸¹

Consequently, in the '*Vita*' Porphyry exclaims: "But why should I talk of oak and rock?"⁸², as Hesiod says; for if one wants to appeal to the evidence of the wise, who could be wiser than a god, and that god who truly said, I know the number of the sand, the measure of the sea. I understand the dumb, and hear him who does not speak."⁸³ Porphyry then goes on to disclose Amelius' inquiry to the oracle of Apollo. He emphatically remarks: the divine channel of Apollo revealed Socrates "is the wisest of men"⁸⁴—hear, what a great oracle he uttered about Plotinus: [...]" (*VP.22.1-12*).

The gist of the oracular disclosure is cited below interpolated with bits of commentary.⁸⁵ The oracle conducts its salutation and tribute to Plotinus—indeed, an eroticizing panegyric eulogy—in graceful atmosphere reminiscent of Homeric elegance and style, unveiling the legendary hero in the exceptional mythic and poetic amelioration of verse, accompanied by lyre-music and the hymn-song of the Muses. Thus the oracle strikes "an immortal song, in honor of a gentle friend, weaving it on the sweetest notes of the tuneful harp struck by the golden plectrum;" and the chorus of Muses is called upon to join-in with the singing, requested by the divine oracle to unite their "voices to accomplish the fullness of all song," to raise the crescendo to "a full-noted crying of triumph, a sweep of universal melody," in honor of that "gentle friend" who was "man once" but now broke away "from the roaring surge of the body to that coast," wherein lies "the easy path of the pure soul," and "where the splendor of god shines round [...]" and the divine law abounds in purity far from lawless wickedness" (*VP.22.11-30*).

The oracle singing directly to the immortal spirit of Plotinus praises the strength of his heart that allowed a swift return to the heavenly realms yonder (cf. *VP.22.24-25*); and goes on to reveal ways his life was divinely empowered and superintended by the gods, interminably remaining under their superior protection that effectually enjoined him to them throughout his difficult sickness and unto his death (cf. *VP.22.31-39*). First, the oracle discloses matters pertaining to his illness when the body was suffering grave pain: 'You were,' the oracle reveals, "struggling to escape from the bitter wave [...] of life, from its sickening whirlpools, in the midst of its billows and sudden surges, often the Blessed Ones showed you the goal ever near" (*VP.22.31-34*). Continuing its illustrious song, the oracle reveals evermore: "Often

⁷⁹ Porphyry reveals in the '*Vita*' other incidents than the séance at the temple of Isis that attest to the supernatural power of Plotinus. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss such disclosures.

⁸⁰ It is ascertained here that Porphyry's '*Vita Plotini*' does not only reveal the intellectual path of his teacher, it first and for mostly constitutes spiritual biography.

⁸¹ Porphyry never discloses to which oracular shrine of Apollo Amelius addressed his question. Hence, the source of the oracular shrine passes into the legendary. As previously noted (no. 3), Porphyry may have possessed the oracle disclosure before writing the '*Vita*.' And perhaps the '*Vita*' was composed with the oracle's disclosure in mind. However, there is no evidence for either of the above possibilities. We simply just do not know when Porphyry possessed the oracular disclosure. Porphyry did not divulge easily information that pertained to time place or location.

⁸² Hesiod, *Theogony*, 35. Cited by Armstrong, *Plotinus*, vol. 1, op. cit. no. 2, 65.

⁸³ Herodotus I. 47. Cited by Armstrong, *Plotinus*, vol. 1, op. cit. no. 2, 65.

⁸⁴ Diogenes Laertius II, 5, 37. Cf. Plato, *Apology* 21a6-7. Cited by Armstrong, *Plotinus*, vol. 1, op. cit. no. 2, 65.

⁸⁵ It is beyond the present scope to cite the entire oracular disclosure. Granted the interpolation of commentary introduces a subjectivist hermeneutical bias. Admittedly, the interpretive ambiguities introduced by commentary greatly miss-out on the unspeakable and captivating beauty of the original. I therefore call upon the reader to investigate the original text.

your mind was thrusting out by its own impulse along crooked paths, it was the Immortals that raised you by a straight path to the heavenly circuits, the divine way, sending down a solid shaft of light so that your eyes could see out of mournful darkness” (VP.22.31-39). The oracle in turn extols Plotinus’ exemplary visionary sight: “Sweet sleep never held your eyes, but scattering the heavy cloud that would have kept them closed, borne in the whirl you saw many fair sights which are hard for human seekers after wisdom to see” (VP.22.40-44).

Now, the tone shifts and enraptures: the oracle’s immortal song captivates with the enthralling sight and melody of heavenly felicity in probably what must have been an ecstatic dalliance:

But now that you have been freed from this tabernacle [...] which held your heavenly soul, you come in the company of heaven where the winds of delight blow, [...] full of pure joy, brimming with streams of immortality which carry the allurements of the Loves, and sweet breeze and the windless brightness of heaven. There dwell Minos and Rhadamanthus, brethren of the golden race [...], and Plato, the holy power, and noble Pythagoras and all who have set the dance of immortal love and won kinship with spirits most blessed, there where the heart keeps festival in everlasting joy (VP.22.45-58).⁸⁶

In turn, the oracle concludes its praiseful song with enchantment: “O blessed one, you who have born so many contests, and now move among holy spirits, crowned with mighty life” (VP.22.58-60). And in the finale addresses the Muses: “let us set going our song and the gracefully winding circle of our dance in honor of Plotinus the happy. My golden lyre has this much to tell of his good fortune” (VP.22.61-63).

Edward’s prompts us to remember, Porphyry belonged to a generation of philosophers who no longer thought it childish that the gods expressed themselves in verse.⁸⁷ However, in the final analysis, it is beyond the ken of human comprehension to determine the mysterious ways through which the divine speaks to humanity. After all, it especially behooves human understanding to know the precise origin and location or else the time place and space, the depth width and height of totality or of the divine as such; more-so to apprehend its means and ways. Thus Plutarch does not doubt or distrust the validity of oracles rather assumes their legitimacy. As Riley puts it, Plutarch wants to establish that oracles “are generally accepted means by which the divine or daemonic realm communicates with men.” Plutarch is “not interested in the contents of these oracles, rather what mostly fascinates him is “the fact that daemonic communications such as oracles exist. In reporting these communications he wishes to point out that oracles are not the ambiguous tricksters known from Herodotus, but that they have legitimate philosophical meanings and moral contents.”⁸⁸

The universal fascination with oracles bespeaks not of human trait rather is inspired by wonder before the radical mystery of divine omnipresence; it is fascination inspired by the mysterious ways of divinity as such. Thus Porphyry reminds us that the human is more often concerned with “talk of oak and rock,” whereas the omnipresence of a god “knows the number of the sand, the measure of the sea.” A few pages down, in his commentary on the oracular disclosure he states: “the contemplation of men may certainly become better than human, but as compared with the divine knowledge it may be fair and fine, but not enough to be able to grasp the depths as the gods grasp them” (VP.23.24-28).

It is ascertained here that the *ethos* of great visionaries of the order of Plotinus, whose metaphysical insight mystical experience and ethical life harmoniously coalesce: legend supersedes historical fact and philosophical acumen. Nevertheless, in the occident our obsession with historical precision and fact, the historicity of time place and actuality, is gravely misplaced when it comes to the spiritual biography of supremely enlightened personages. It is widely acknowledged both in the ancient world and in late

⁸⁶ Minos and Rhadamanthus were the mythical progeny of Zeus.

⁸⁷ M. J. Edwards, “Birth, Death, and Divinity in Porphyry’s Life of Plotinus,” *op. cit.* no. 75, 64.

⁸⁸ M. Riley, “The Purpose and Unity of Plutarch’s *De genio Socratis*,” *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies* 18 (3, 1977): 257-274, 261. On another note, Porphyry’s profound interest and writings on oracles and his involvement with the Chaldean Oracles of Zoroaster lies beyond the present scope.

antiquity: in Greece, Rome, Egypt, Asia Minor, Chaldea, Asia, and elsewhere, that the exalted life of great sages has a public *bios* that is known as well as a secret inner-*bios* that forever remains unknown, defies even the loftiest of imaginations. Hence, oracular proclamations as well as poetry, allegory, myth and legend, accomplish the analogical and symbolic performative act of teaching philosophical meanings and unveiling moral didactics, by accessing touching and striking chords in the daemonic depth of the self that are otherwise unavailable to rational acumen however lofty it maybe. Thus the admixture of myth and legend takes precedence in the spiritual biographies of legendary figures the globe over.⁸⁹

Many authoritative scholars on Plotinus debate the origins of the oracle's communiqué; they wonder if it was produced by a priest in a shrine or perhaps Porphyry or Amelius authored the account.⁹⁰ But after all is said, there is no worthy evidence to question Porphyry's or Amelius' beneficence and integrity. At any rate, even though the scholarly observations noted above are indeed most interesting, it is beyond the present scope to engage at length these or similar observations regarding authorship. For either way, it is ascertained here that the oracular disclosure is sacred text legitimately constitutes part of the legendary biography of a philosopher saint of late antiquity. Hereby, the oracle's revelations are treated as the saturated admixture of sacred legend pure *poesis* (or *poiesis*) *mythos* and *logos* that coalesces with music and song, as it passes into the ineffable and transcendent beyond. Put otherwise, the oracular disclosure is treated as divinely inspired text the outcome of human-divine orchestration regardless of authorship. The juice of the matter is Porphyry's primal and contemplative intention; that the divine channel, the oracle, directly channels the decree of divinity-itself; and the voice of deity, unswervingly confirms the divine life of Plotinus both on earth and in heaven. Plotinus earned the dauntless ardor of blessed "spirit man" (*VP.22.23*) and "heavenly soul—*psêchês daimōniês*" (*VP.22.46*)—appellations confirmed by his students and saluted freely in the immortal verse of pure radiance, the Spirit from above. The oracle channels and unveils the deity in and through its versatile verse, discloses the legendary life of a great philosopher-mystic and saintly sage of antiquity, indeed pays homage to a living legend.

It is Porphyry's most firm belief and apperception, that Plotinus is *spoudaios* an exalted wise and most proficient god-realized personage because being *philosophos* he truly lived by his philosophy; he attained within himself the supreme perfection *qua* the *One*: "the god within each of us as one and the

⁸⁹ Some enlightened personages whose spiritual biographies are expressed in an admixture of myth and legend the globe over are: Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Pythagoras; in India, Babaji and the whole Siddha tradition, as well as Mahavira and Buddha; in China, Lao-tzu, Chuang-tzu, Confucius, Vimalakirti, and Bodhidharma; in Tibet, Padmasambhava, Tilopa, Naropa, Milarepa, Yeshe Tsogyal; in Judea, Moses, King David and King Solomon; in Islam Mohammed, and in Sufism Omar Kayyam and Rumi; in Christianity the lives of St. George, Saint John of Damascus, Saint Teresa of Avila, and a host of martyr-saints the hagiographic tradition commemorates, just to name a few.

⁹⁰ One of the most widely recognized Plotinian scholars H. R. Schwyzer is well known to believe that Porphyry authored the oracle. Goulet rejects that Porphyry was the author mostly because he would not have named Amelius as the person who inquired about the fate of Plotinus' afterlife. See R. Goulet, "Sur quelques interprétations récents de l'Oracle d'Apollon." In Luc Brisson, Marie-Hélène Congourdeau et Jean-Luc Solère dir., *Porphyre: La vie de Plotin*, Histoire des doctrines de l'antiquité classique (Paris: J. Vrin, 1982), 603-617, 604. Brisson and Flamant are in agreement with Goulet. See Brisson and Jean-Marie Flamant, "Structure, contenu et intensions de l'Oracle d'Apollon." In Luc Brisson et al., *Porphyre: La vie de Plotin*, Histoire des doctrines de l'antiquité classique (Paris: J. Vrin, 1982), 565-602. Igal claims Amelius composed the oracle. See J. Igal, "Enigma del oráculmo de Apolo sobre Plotino," *Emerita* 52 (1984): 83-105. Edwards makes an interesting observation that is beyond the present scope to address. He says that "those who regard the oracle as 'genuine' must think that either Apollo was its author or that Plotinus was more celebrated than any philosopher has a right to be." He argues that the overloaded allusions of Homer's and Hesiod's mythological universe required expert understanding exceeding the proficiency of a shrine priest. See M. Edwards, trans., *Neoplatonic Saints: The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by Their Students* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 40 note 229. On the other hand, Busine contends that expert allusions to Homeric and Platonic texts are common in oracular utterances of the time, and points to similar productions from the shrines to Apollo at Claros and Didyma. See A. Busine, *Paroles d'Apollon: Pratiques et traditions dans l'Antiquité tardive (IIe-Vie siècles)*, Religions in the Graco Roman World (Boston: Brill, 2005), 307-313. Cf. A. P. Urbano, *The Philosophical Life—Biography and the Crafting of Intellectual Identity in Late Antiquity* (Washington D.C.:The Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 134 note 37.

same—*tò ên ekástō hemōn theòn ôs ên kai tón autón*” (VI.5.1.4). By attaining his god through dauntless virtue freed himself from his human fate. Thus Plotinus stands in equal footing with the pure lineage of his enlightened forebears.

Most interestingly, in a different context, Rist points out that

[..] the Socratic *daimōnion* may have some kinship with the highest kind of *daimon* that can guide a human life, perhaps with the only kind that can give a first impulse to philosophy. If such is Plato’s view of it, Socrates’ *daimōnion* was a manifestation that Socrates was guided by something superior to the *daimones* of other men, that he was under the especial protection of God and that his life fulfilled a specific purpose in the divine scheme. This is in fact the view which the *Apology* suggests.⁹¹

Porphry appears to be right in his belief that along with the legendary Socrates, Pythagoras and Plato, and perhaps a host of others, Plotinus also belongs to this rare lineage of philosophers. They were all decidedly evolved and supremely inspired beings under the superior protection of the deity, and their lives fulfilled a divine purpose in the scheme of the universal order. It seems that Pythagoras Socrates and Plato aligned, were destined to give western philosophy its first impulse, its historical *raison d’être*; and Plotinus, in illuminating the *One* as the beyond-being of Plato’s ‘Form of the Good,’ was catalytic - destined to activate the subsequent trajectory of western mystical philosophy and religion, to better apprehend and articulate the *fundamentum inconcussum* (unshakable foundation) of the absolutely transcendent deity: *to Ên epékeina tés ousías*.⁹²

In the Place of Conclusion

In his interpretive commentary on the oracular disclosure Porphyry gathers that the *Enneads* were written under the guidance of the Immortal Ones:

Also it is said that the gods often set him straight when he was going on a crooked course “sending down a solid shaft of light” which means that he wrote what he wrote under their inspection and supervision (*VP*.23.18-21).

⁹¹ Rist, “Plotinus and the ‘*Daimonion*’ of Socrates,” *op. cit.* no. 63, 16.

⁹² *To Ên epékeina tés ousías* translates to “The *One* beyond essence.”