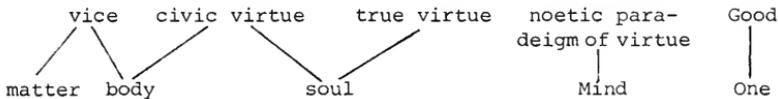


PLOTINUS' ETHICAL THEORY

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In his treatise *On Dialectic* (I.3.6.6) Plotinus remarks that the theoretical part of ethics is provided by dialectic, while practical discipline is something 'added on.' Brief though it is, this is an accurate account of the status of ethics, which does rest directly on the ontological hierarchy traced by dialectic (I.3.4).



Vice and civic virtue both center on bodily life but differ in so far as the body dominates a life of vice, while the soul is dominant in a life of civic virtue. Civic or 'natural' (I.3.6.18) virtue represents the best in traditional public values (I.4.16.4; I.2.7.25: the 'decent' and 'good' man). It is the general code of restraints and common deficiencies which we observe to make life in the world with our fellowmen possible.¹⁾ Since body and the irrational soul at work in it (I.8.4.1f) are closely tied to matter, they display an absence of measure, and civic virtue accordingly is specifically the 'measure' imposed on physical passions (I.2.2.11f).²⁾

As measures, civic virtues resemble the noetic paradigm from which they are derived, and for that reason Plotinus concedes them a certain value. It is, he admits, unreasonable to hold that civic virtues completely fail to make us like the gods, and so tradition is correct in calling men of great public virtue 'divine' (I.2.1.23f). Heracles is an example: his active virtue and nobility won him the rank of god (I.1.12.31f). Similarly in his discussion of love

(III.5; I.6) Plotinus follows Plato in allowing substantial value to civic virtue, and in connection with reincarnation he says that civic virtue guarantees that the soul will reappear in human form (III.4.2.28).

But there is another side to the matter. Heracles' active virtue is actually embodied in his *ghost* and that is in Hades (cf. IV.3.27 where the ghost again represents his lower self). His career of endless wandering, building and fighting is preeminently an illustration of the external or environmental nature of civic virtue. But such virtue makes us resemble the gods only 'to a degree', and the myth thus dramatizes a deficiency which Plotinus elsewhere deals with more explicitly. Only inner virtue is truly free, since civic virtue presupposes external evils and is therefore under compulsion (VI.8.5.20f). Conventional values are imitations and 'traces' of the paradeigms (I.2.2.19), but it is also true that they *merely* imitate and are *mere* traces because they are tied to body.³⁾ Imitation is thus also a sign of inferiority, and that is so because the noetic paradeigm is itself *not* 'virtue'.⁴⁾ The paradeigm is beyond virtue, which exists only in the soul (I.2.1.28f; I.2.2.3; I.2.6.14f; I.2.7.2). As a result, though civic virtues do resemble the paradeigm, their resemblance is remote and therefore largely illusory.

This startling assertion of *discontinuity* between phenomena and paradeigm undergirds Plotinus's radical deprecation of conventional virtue.⁵⁾ He explains the discontinuity further by distinguishing the similarity between two things derived from a common source from the similarity between two things, one of which is derived from the other. In the former case the two things must also resemble each other; in the latter there need be no resemblance since the pair are not coordinate and the superior member may be quite different (I.2.2.5 f).⁶⁾ The second case is a rough application of the distinction between transcendent and immanent Form or instantiation: as the Form of heat is not itself hot (I.2.1.32f), so the Form of phenomenal virtue is not itself virtue or virtuous. The inferiority of civic virtue lies in its being a merely *immanent* empirical measure, which is in that respect unlike its paradeigm. The oddness of the situation is marked by

There is one Mind, always the same and unchangeable, imitating the Father [the One] as far as it can. One part of our soul is always focused on noetic reality, another on phenomena, a third is between them. For since the soul is one nature, at times all of it is carried along with the best part, at times the worst part is dragged down and takes with it the middle (for the whole soul cannot be dragged down). This happens to it when it does not remain in the most beautiful sphere, where soul is not a part [but whole]...

As is often the case, a precise distribution of the phases is difficult. The upper level may be true virtue, the middle may be civic virtue (embodying a realistic compromise), and the lower may be a life of vice. Or perhaps the phases should be shifted one step up: the lowest level would be civic virtue, the middle true virtue (which from one point of view also mediates) and the highest would be direct grasp of noetic reality and therefore not 'virtue' at all.⁸⁾

All of this yields a strikingly negative view of true virtue, epitomized in Plotinus's characterization of it as 'stripping' or 'purification' (I.2.3.9).⁹⁾ Civic *sōphrosynē* measures desires, true *sōphrosynē* simply eliminates them (I.2.7.18f). The negativity comes to the surface most clearly at two points: Plotinus's devaluation of conventional virtue and the nature of his own metaphysical ethical principles. The former is a standard feature of Platonism going back to Plato's own criticism of 'demotic' virtue. The latter are more complex and enable Plotinus to reshape virtue in two closely related respects: true virtue turns out to be empirically empty and highly generic. The reality with which civic virtue deals is in terms of Plotinus's ontology 'dimensional', i.e., it is tied to the extended (spatial, temporal, material) world which makes up the context or environment for the many specific objects to which man reacts. It is discrete, concrete and divided (for the 'dividedness' of soul and body, cf. I.1.8.11f). Since Plotinus, however, takes account of a second noetic world he must rethink ethics for a second, wholly different situation: one that is not environmental or contextual, that is radically unified and unextended, internal rather than external and non-specific because there can be no events.

Conventional virtue, then, is limited by its own deficiency, that is to say, by the environmental *threats* which it is

forced to meet with a wide variety of 'measured' virtues or goods: preservation of life, satisfaction of basic physical needs (health, food, drink), adequate wealth, social standing and security, proper pleasure, political power, physical beauty, commanding personal presence, artistic skills, sound opinions and judgments, etc. Such implicitly futile goods figure prominently in Plotinus's critique of astrology, which is preoccupied with calculating ('measuring') relative goods and evils. Thus in II.3.14 he lists various goods which fall within the orbit of civic virtues and depend on environmental factors (cf. *to exō* in II.3.12.7). Conventional virtue at its best was epitomized in the four cardinal virtues summed up by Plotinus as follows (I.2.1.17f): wisdom is competence in discursive reasoning, bravery deals with aggressive impulses, self-control balances desire and reason, justice is proper distribution of authority and obedience. As products of habit and training (and not of wisdom) such virtues are defined by a social environment, and like it they are tied to vices (I.1.10.12f) and entail 'sin' (true virtue is 'sinless': I.2.6.1; I.1.9.1f; I.1.12.1).

Deprecation of civic virtue is thus due to the radical dissociation of soul from body on which Plotinus insists (e.g., I.1 or III.6.1-6) and which he can conceive of in drastic terms (e.g., his theory of multiple selves and unconscious mental processes). Dual personality raises in acute form the problem of the status of the empirical self, a problem implicit in *Ennead* I.1 ('What is a living creature?'). Even something so obviously our own as sexual desire is called in question: is man as a whole or some part of him its true agent (I.1.5.25f)? In the next section Plotinus uses the notion of soul's 'presence' (*parousia*) to define empirical man as a combination of body and the image emitted by soul as it is present to space. The elusiveness of such a creature leads him in I.1.7.6 to wonder how 'we' can be said to perceive, and in I.1.9.26 he still refers to the living creature in bafflement - 'whatever it is.' This is the more striking because *Ennead* I.1 is one of the latest treatises; after a lifetime of reflection Plotinus is still puzzled about something which might well seem self-evident. Little wonder, then, that the

civic virtue which goes with our ordinary selves is also problematic. Virtue is needed by those faced by evils not by those at peace, but that does not mean that virtue aims at *mastery* of the environment. In fact, the soul's encounter with eternals (*ta exō*) is more apt to occasion evil, and even civic virtue is tied to necessity. True virtue, on the contrary, is abandonment of environment, 'fleeing from here' and returning to the soul's 'ancient state' (II.3.8.13ff). In commenting again on the dictum 'one must flee from here' Plotinus remarks that it does not mean actually leaving this life but simply 'being just, holy and wise while living on earth' (I.8.6.10). This sounds ordinary enough, but he in fact redefines the major virtues in such a way that they are unearthly, radically unified and emptied of specific content.

	I.6.6	I.2.6	I.2.3.14
Self-control:	no association with bodily pleasure	reversion inward to Mind	impassivity
Courage:	no fear of death	impassivity due to likeness to the impassive paradeigm	detachment from body
Wisdom:	noesis which directs soul upward and turns it from lower concerns (cf. I.2.7.7)	contemplation of Mind's content	solitary activity
Justice:	—	soul's activity toward Mind	dominance of reason without opposition from other elements

These are highly abstract definitions, which reflect the fact that truth is for Plotinus radically internal; we *are* soul and do not 'have' a soul (I.1.13).¹⁰⁾ Purified soul is, in fact, a Form or *logos* (I.6.6.14; cf. I.8.1.9), and at this level the various virtues imply each other (I.2.7.1) in the sense that they all ultimately reduce to thought.¹¹⁾ We can again see why Plotinus refers to the Forms of virtues as 'quasi'-paradeigms - true virtue is so abstract and introverted that it scarcely answers to concrete ethical experience.

Plotinus describes the denial of environment and of its empirical content in various ways. In simplest terms, true virtue is 'closing the eyes' (I.6.8.4 and 25) - a natural image (which also suggests connections to initiation) because in Mind seeing becomes wholly internal as seer and seen coincide (V.8.10.35f). By the same token, waking up the soul is making it 'cease to see the so-to-speak external sights' in its dreams (III.6.5.10f); that is to say, empirical reality is a mere dream. The wider social/physical context of civic virtue is similarly denied when true beauty is sought not in external bodies but in one's own or others' inward beauty (I.6.5). Lovers accordingly 'long to withdraw themselves from bodies' (I.6.5.7), as soul generally 'gathers itself into its own places, so-to-speak' (I.2.5.6; cf. I.8.14.31).

As we have seen, the noetic plane has no 'order, arrangement, or symmetry' (I.2.1.45).¹²⁾ Moreover, the world soul - which occupies the highest position of any soul related to body and can be said to have no environment because it is not actually 'in' its body (III.4.4.4f) - dispenses with ordinary self-control and bravery because it has nothing external to fear, and it is without desire for pleasure because there is nothing external to acquire or enjoy (I.2.1.11f; cf. I.1.2.13; cf. I.4.11.11; I.4.3.29).¹³⁾ Though the visible gods have matter, they do not suffer from moral evil (I.8.5.31f), and by the same token they are beyond moral virtue as is the world soul. The world soul thus serves as a somewhat odd *ethical* model: when we can control our body with ease, we will be 'like' the world soul or astral souls (II.9.18.22f). This combination of true virtue, cosmic order and denial of environment proves to be useful to Plotinus in his controversy with the Gnostics, who in their way shared his rejection of environment. It enables him to take a middle position between their largely justified rejection of earthly life as evil and their unjustified rejection of the entire cosmos. Thus in II.9.5 and 7 he glosses over earthly evils and points instead to heaven to show that creation as a whole is the best possible. Starting as it does from the premiss that good and evil are not defined in any decisive way by the earthly environment, his line of argument is sound.

But it requires that celestial life be treated in effect as non-environmental, and Plotinus provides for that in his doctrine that celestial souls care for celestial bodies automatically, without deliberation and without involvement.

Detachment from environment is again a factor at work in Plotinus's critique of astrology and its ethical implications. His attack focusses on its preoccupation with the visible universe (II.3) and especially on its insistence that planets are specific causes of individual external events. In fact, true causation is psychic and unified. Astrology thus assigns the role of wholes to mere parts and ignores the inner autonomy of soul (e.g., II.3.15.15f) and of virtue.¹⁴⁾ In III.1.1f he broadens his criticism to include a wider variety of theories which emphasize external causation. But soul in fact is the true cause, though it is so only when free from external factors. His own view of providence is, of course, bound to start from the undeniable fact that the goodness of the universe is mixed with evil and is dependent in part on the components of the universe being in their proper environment. But all such contextual and relative value is subordinate to the wholly unified logos which undergirds specific goods and evils: 'The universal logos is one, though divided into unequal parts', (III.2.17.75; cf. III.3.1). Our bodies are subject to astrological and magical influences (IV.4.40ff) since what is external can indeed be 'charmed', but Plotinus is skeptical about any influence which stars might have on character (IV.4.31.40f). He is guided by the same principle that leads him to deny creation of the universe in time: specific decisions are impossible in the noetic world because they presuppose time. Creation in time would be a specific event, hence derivation of the universe from the noetic world is intelligible only if it is non-temporal and non-specific. In the same way, while the world soul as a (timeless) whole exercises choice (*prohairesis*, IV.4.35.21f), its (temporal) parts do not, and in any case world soul's choice is directed not toward realizing specific empirical events but toward the Good.¹⁵⁾ That is why it is an ethical model, and since the Good - i.e., the One - is empty of empirical content and devoid of any environment, true virtue in

its own way must be denial of both empirical content and environment. 'Lives, fates and choices' are 'indicated' but not 'caused' by stellar patterns (IV.3.12.22), while virtue is entirely free (IV.4.39.2). Hence it - not specific external events - is the decisive cause. Providence thus stands to the universe much as true virtue stands to daily life: both respond to the specific demands of empirical existence, yet neither is immanent because their intention or vision remains non-specific. Though he is sympathetic to the inwardness of Stoic ethics, this line of thought leads Plotinus to reject their understanding of happiness as 'rational life'. He does so because as materialists (who also accepted astrology) they are bound to understand life in environmental terms (I.4.2.32f). Their contention that the wise man is happy even in the bull of Phalaris is admirable (and true) enough, but not demonstrable on materialist premises (I.4.13.7). Happiness must instead be focussed in noetic life so that it is not an (external) quality of life but radically at one with it (I.4.3.16f). Once inside this spaceless world, soul enjoys true virtue which is simply 'to be active alone', free of interaction with an environment (*apathēs*: I.2.3.15).

The other feature of noetic reality is its paradigmatic or generic character. The paradigms are generic because they are non-spatial and non-temporal. The former property is guaranteed to true virtue by the radical simplicity and unity which we have considered. The latter is argued for at length in I.5, where Plotinus shows that true happiness is totally independent of temporal events. Because it is timeless (*ou chronikon*) and dimensionless (*adiastaton*, I.5.7.24), it provides no environment for specific events, and any external factors that do flow from it - e.g., 'fine actions' and their 'results', I.5.10.13f - are irrelevant, since (as facets of *civic* virtue) they can be measured, while true virtue cannot be temporally quantified (I.5.3f). The timelessness of true virtue can be indicated by tense forms suggesting absence of process. The state of 'being purified' is inferior to that of 'having been purified' (I.2.4.4; I.2.7.9; cf. 'having been turned' to Mind, I.2.4.17; I.4.11.8).¹⁶⁾ True virtue makes

temporal psychic processes superfluous, for they take place in the 'trace' (or 'light' or 'image') projected by soul directly into the body in order to share in its life (I.1.6ff). That trace disappears (I.1.10.11; I.1.12.30) when separation from the processes rooted in genesis takes place. The adverb *ēdē* ('now', 'already') often signals the instant of transition from temporal process to a frozen, timeless state. In I.2.4.5 *ēdē* is combined with the timeless perfect tense: 'the virtue in being purified is less complete than that in having been purified, for the latter is already (*ēdē*) a sort of end or perfection.' 'True pleasures go with the presence of (true) goods and are not in movement or process, for now (*ēdē*) the goods are present' (I.4.12.5); desire for true life is not desire for past or future but for 'what now (*ēdē*) is' (I.5.2.13; cf. I.1.10.6; I.4.4.14; and perhaps I.1.9.19 and I.1.7.12).

Though Plotinus can speak of our identity (*tautotēs*) with god in purification (I.2.5.2), he commonly observes the distinction between true virtue and its paradeigm - i.e., between soul and Mind - and thus turns true virtue into the conceptual grasp of Forms which structure phenomena. Virtue is a direct vision or recollection of Forms but we still only receive their immaterial impression (*typos*),¹⁷ just as vision is distinct from its object (I.2.4.19; cf. I.2.7.6). Mind itself grasps by direct touch, soul by contemplation. Virtue is 'someone's', while each paradeigm is 'of itself', without parts. Civic justice expresses itself in multiple parts, while true justice is 'activity in one's own sphere' but now in a true 'one' (I.2.6.13f). In the next section (I.2.7) Plotinus offers definitions of the paradeigms of virtue. Wisdom (*noēsis*) is simply itself, i.e., '*epistēmē*' or '*sophia*'; self-control is 'relation to itself'; justice is 'an entity's own activity'; bravery is 'freedom from matter and purity in itself.' If we add these definitions to the definitions of virtue (above, p. 246), we have the following, progressively introverted grades: civic justice (for example) is keeping to one's place in the world, true justice is focusing one's reason on Mind, the paradeigm is Mind's internal activity. The contrast between the two virtues is that between our experience of specific instantiations (in civic

virtue) and our knowledge of the true virtues as objective, generic structures. Objectivity is preeminently a mark of Forms, and that phase of true virtue comes to the fore throughout I.4 as Plotinus contends that well-being is a wholly objective state independent even of consciousness. The notion of universals is explicitly introduced in the discussion of the relationship between dialectic and virtue in I.3.6. Plotinus begins with the general statement that ethics takes its theory from dialectic and adds (concrete) 'discipline and character'. Other (moral) virtues apply discursive reasoning to specific passions and actions; wisdom (*phronēsis*) is an additional discursive reason dealing with specifics yet doing so in a more universal way (*katholou*), while dialectic and *sophia*, in turn, provide 'in universal form without matter' everything needed by wisdom. It is not clear whether true virtue is restricted to the last phase or whether it includes one of the other phases. In any case, soul answers to the level of virtue which it has reached and so it too is either universal or particular: when separate (i.e., in true virtue) it is not individual but whole (*pasa*), and when not separate it focusses on (*epistatousa*) an external object and is partial (VI.4.16.32f).

The philosopher, then, has substantially abandoned civic virtue yet still lives in an environment, and that fact forces Plotinus toward the notion of multiple and partially unconscious selves. We have two selves (I.1.10.5; I.1.7.17f); in so far as the philosopher is wholly free of involuntary impulses he is a god 'following the First,' but if they persist 'he is a double person - god and demon - or rather he has with him someone else who has a different virtue' (I.2.6.3f). For all its metaphysical abstractness and preoccupation with the true self Plotinus's ethical theory is forced to remain concrete at the point of overlap between the two realms, and that is where we have some idea of what a life of true virtue is actually like.

In I.4.4-6 and 11 Plotinus analyzes human motivation in terms of a loose distinction between non-environmental will (*boulēsis*) and environmental wish (*thelein*). The former is the driving force of true virtue and expresses its unity; in

willing we 'are what we have' and seek no more because will embraces its object for its own sake. But there are environmental factors to be considered, too. Though necessities are not objects of will, the man of true virtue does 'know' them and uses discursive reason to avoid difficulties. The distinction, then, comes to this:

(A) we do not *will* to avoid evils (though we *wish* to do so)

(B) rather, we *will* not to *have* to avoid them (i.e., we will to be safe in Mind).¹⁸⁾

Plotinus shows that will is dissociated from environment by noting (I.4.6.26) that we are indifferent to health - i.e., we do not truly will it - when we have it. (B) corresponds to the denial of environment in true virtue. Civic virtue and 'wish' are introduced into the discussion of motivation in I.4.11. The good man 'would wish' that all evils be gone and all men prosper (=A), though his happiness is not affected if they do not. But if such a wish is wholly serious (i.e., if it becomes something willed) it is absurd, for evils are bound to exist. A serious and authentic 'will' can only be internal (=B). (A) is a gesture of common decency to the concerns of civic virtue; to wish evils away - sincerely but not *too* seriously - is (so to speak) a pious fraud pointing to the ambiguity of true virtue's relation to the world. The serious wish is a violation of (A), i.e., it is the illusion that specific evils can really be dealt with on their own level.¹⁹⁾

In I.4.14.21f Plotinus remarks that a young man actually is better off if he experiences poor health. An old man needs neither pleasure nor pain, and though he will resist pain with his natural powers, health is not of real worth to him. Will and wish overlap in a delicate balance here between 'willed' denial of environment and 'wished' response to it. Plotinus's view of suicide follows the same pattern (I.9). It is not permissible because we are bound to care for our body, but we do so by allowing it to die, i.e., neglecting to kill it. Not specifically killing it is the 'positive' gesture of 'wishing' care toward the most immediate environment which we have - a gesture so void of content, however, that it is simultaneously a 'willing' generic denial

of the environment as such.

The residual empirical life of the man who has attained true virtue, then, has an oddly suspended quality to it. He is like the stars or like a 'great and beautiful statue studied in face and chest with stars' (III.2.14.25f) - images which are suggestive both of remoteness and unreality. On the one hand, the wise man responds to the demands of circumstance and in his personal relationships he is neither unfriendly nor insensitive. Yet there is a touch of unintentional irony when Plotinus adds that as the wise man is to others 'so he is to himself' (I.4.15.23). He is anything but well-disposed to himself in any ordinary sense of the term, and in respect to others he can group *pity* with envy and jealousy as examples of moral evils to which true virtue is superior (I.1.10.14f). The wise man 'knows' death, but the distress he feels at the death of friends and relatives affects only his irrational part; 'he himself' simply refuses to accept grief (I.4.4.32f; III.2.15.49f). Because his knowledge is generic he is immune to specific grief. Though evil men have a place in the scheme of things, part of that scheme is that we do not feel sympathy for them (III.2.17.15). After death the higher part of soul is still able to recollect without passion the best experience transmitted to it from the lower soul: friends, children, wife, country. But gradually it forgets them too, 'for it is best even on earth to detach oneself from human concerns' (IV.3.32). As we have seen, Plotinus criticized the Stoics for failing to justify their conviction that the wise man is happy even in Phalaris' bull. They failed because as materialists they had no way of truly transcending the material environment and its values. Plotinus himself meets the difficulty with his conception of a non-environmental self. But in a sense he succeeds too well. For if our true self is radically free from body, 'we' are detached not only from emotional distress but from everything phenomenal,²⁰⁾ and Plotinus does not justify the continuing involvement in ordinary life which he evidently assumes.²¹⁾ In III.6.5.1 he raises the question of what role philosophy can have if the soul is essentially passionless, and he does not really find an adequate answer.²²⁾ The picture sketched

in Porphyry's *Life* illustrates the contradiction: Plotinus is deeply engaged in some ordinary concerns of life, wholly indifferent to others. The situation is epitomized in the curious account of how he was 'present at once to himself and to others' (8.12f) and so could carry on a social conversation without breaking the train of his philosophic thought.

In Plotinus' ethical theory, then, the wise man sees ordinary life as a routine, ritual or play. He views the world of temporal events as though he were a spectator in a theater (III.2.15.44f). His seat is the noetic world made up of fixed patterns, the temporal world is the stage of free will and chance, and the two are held together by providence, which brings into events such coherence as they have. The Forms are very general patterns quite different from time; on the other hand, events are highly specific occurrences quite different from Forms, and as a function of transcendent soul providence binds the two. It does so by embodying the *pattern* of events and thus constitutes a 'transcendent' time in so far as it embodies *timeless* patterns. This elusive intermediate region is characterized by Plotinus in terms that recall his distinction between the phase of virtue that consists in 'being purified' and the phase that 'has been purified'; like the latter, the pattern 'has been written' (II.3.7.6). Elsewhere Plotinus likens providence to a play which is already written by the cosmic playwright and which we perform in time (III.2.15.25f; 17f). True virtue is what guides a man who lives his life in accordance with the supra-temporal 'script.' From this point of view the Forms become in effect a collection of rough sketches, an epitome or shorthand version of the story-line of time. Providence and true virtue are generic, time and civic virtue are specific. Time, i.e., discursive 'history', occurs when the pattern is actually played out under the influence of free will and chance, while the pattern itself is generic in the sense that it is a fixed outline contained in logoi or Forms. True virtue is the code which shapes the life of a man who exists in both worlds but who in a very special sense only 'goes through the motions' because he lives for true, motionless reality. This generic

view of things is bound to lend a sense of unreality, remoteness and ambiguity to the experience of time.²³⁾ The choice of lives in Plato's myth of Er suggests such a generic view of time, and in III.4.5 Plotinus does interpret the choice of a complete 'life-type' (*bios*) along with a guardian daemon as a symbol for soul's 'universal, general choice and disposition.' Soul's choice reflects its character and that has a pretemporal dimension. Hence when Plotinus himself uses astrological motifs (e.g., each soul enters its temporal life as though boarding a ship and Necessity then assigns it a seat, 6.48f), he is not thinking primarily of specific, immanent material causes but of generic causation. Life and its values are intelligible only from a general, timeless point of view, and that is especially true of the wise man, who sees his own life as an exemplification of noetic reality in the form of true virtue.²⁴⁾ Taken in conjunction with the world soul's role as model for true virtue (above, p.247), passages which speak of individual souls joining the world soul in governance of the universe (e.g., IV.8.2.20) again imply a non-discursive grasp of time - now on a scale much larger than that in the choice of an individual life. True virtue is an assimilation of our lower to our higher self resulting in 'felt realization of immortality, of the goodness of Providence, of the existence in eternal reality of the world of Forms.'²⁵⁾ It is not yet a full vision of the One, and since it is part of continuing though detached earthly life it embodies the ambivalence which Plotinus himself catches in the distinction between the present and perfect tenses of 'purification' (above, p.249). As everything environmental is stripped away the soul becomes at once empty and full, because in terms of Platonic ontology to be emptied of phenomenal reality is to be filled with true reality.

Even the peroration which ends I.6 has a notably abstract flavor despite its hymnic eloquence. We must chisel off unwanted parts to make ourselves into fine statues and permit the 'godlike glory of virtue to shine out.' Then we will not be hindered in 'becoming one' and 'being pure with ourselves'; in fact we will be pure light or all eye, not 'measured by spatial dimensions great or small' but 'unmeasured' because

we are greater than any measure. Chiseling is 'being purified', the glory which shines out is 'having been purified', the 'measure' is civic virtue, and the transmutation into statue, eye or light is true virtue.

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NOTES

1) Cf. VI.3.16.27f for immanent civic or practical virtues which do achieve what is desirable and not merely necessary. II.9.9.14f emphasizes the competition in civic virtue through which each gets what he deserves (though the results do not in any case really matter).

2) Since virtue is the function of a moral agent, it is 'measure' in the soul rather than in the body, and soul then becomes a kind of 'matter' (I.2.2.19f). By using the Form/matter model Plotinus can make soul itself 'measured' in respect to virtue or Form and 'measuring' in respect to matter. As *logos*, soul carries Form into matter.

3) 'Trace', 'shadow' or 'image' are regular terms for the lowest levels of soul's activity (e.g., IV.3.10.39; IV.4.18.7; IV.4.19.3).

4) Cf. 'Quantity does not itself have quantity' (II.4.9.5). Forms are not qualities (II.6), which are not properly parts of noetic being and scarcely of phenomenal being either. They are rather empirical states subsequent to 'being,' and when Plotinus mentions 'virtues and vices, beauty and ugliness' (II.6.2.23f) he is thinking of qualitative, empirical civic virtues as opposed to the paradeigms. I.8.8: Form by itself 'does' nothing and therefore matter must be the cause of (empirical) evil. Soul comes under a similar principle. As something simple it does not admit what it causes in others (I.1.2.7), e.g., it gives body power to have passions but itself remains *apathês* (I.1.6.5). For soul as Form cf. I.8.1.9.

5) In I.2.1.52 he admits how drastic his position is by promising 'persuasion' in addition to the 'force' of the argument which establishes the discontinuity.

6) The restatement of the distinction in I.2.7.25f apparently treats the three things in the former case as all coordinate. For when Plotinus says that one must abandon the life of the good man as defined by civic virtue and emulate the gods, he is implying that in the similarity which civic virtue entails there is only an immanent standard: good men are similar to another good man who is their model. They are not similar to the genuine paradigm of virtue as is the man of true virtue.

7) As a Form, true Beauty, too, is not a matter of symmetry but of simplicity (I.6.1.21f; cf. VI.7.22.25). Cf. I.2.3.20f: true virtue is soul's pure activity (thought), and that genuinely resembles the paradigm. At the same time, since only soul and not Form is 'disposed', even true virtue is unlike the paradigm.

8) Since Plotinus thinks hierarchically, multiple levels of virtue appear frequently in the *Enneads*. III.5.1.25f: (1) love of true beauty,

(2) 'sinless' and restrained love of physical beauty (i.e., civic virtue), (3) vice. V.9.1: (1) some divine men are able to 'fly home above the clouds', (2) others fall back to a life of (civic) virtue, (3) others never rise above matter. IV.4.17 treats the three levels in 'Augustinian' terms as three cities: (1) the best city is ruled by the man of reason, (2) the middle preserves a certain degree of order, (3) the lowest is popular misrule. II.9.9: (1) men of true virtue, (2) men of civic virtue, (3) the mob, which provides necessities for its betters. III.2.8: (1) some men are like gods, (2) some are like animals, (3) the majority are in between and deservedly end up as the victims of the worst men because they neglect to discipline themselves. Plotinus probably would here connect the majority with civic virtue, which he views more optimistically in the next section (9.20f). Plotinus's theory of the major planes on which soul exists provides the model into which the three levels of virtue and vice fit: (1) All-soul, (2) world soul and celestial souls, (3) individual souls in bodies. IV.8.2: souls at the intermediate level are not properly 'in' bodies or are so only in a universal, 'whole' manner, while other souls 'go farther into body' to become 'partial' and specific (cf. IV.3.17).

9) Cf. J. Trouillard, 'Valeur Critique de la Mystique Plotinienne,' *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, 59 (1961), 440. For the negative, introverted and asocial nature of virtue cf. R. Arnou, *Le Désir de Dieu* (U. Grégorienne: Rome, 1967), 43f (for Plotinus men do not have relationships with each other but like radii run parallel and meet only in the center, 47); P. Hadot, 'Le Mythe de Narcisse et son Interpretation par Plotin,' *Nouvelle Revue de Psychoanalyse* 13 (1976), 105f; O. Becker, *Plotin und das Problem der geistigen Aneignung* (de Gruyter: Berlin, 1940), 26f; P. Hadot, *Plotin ou la Simplicité du Regard* (Plon: Paris, 1963), 70f.

10) For a more detailed classification cf. W. Himmerich, *Eudaimonia* (Triltsch: Würzburg, 1959), 150. Himmerich identifies the noetic paradigms with the four major classes of Being (153f).

11) For the close connection of mind and virtue cf. VI.8.5.34: virtue is a 'kind of mind' or mind's *energeia* (VI.2.18.15).

12) Mind, of course, does have complex order from another point of view, since it is made up of many Forms (e.g., I.2.7). All physical order - especially that of the universe - is derived from Mind.

13) Soul and the universe do not get anything from 'outside' (circular motion has no *exō*, II.2.1.11), but they do take from 'higher' planes of reality (I.2.1.15; I.2.4.18; I.2.6.18). The word *ekeithen* ('from yonder') often marks this second, non-external relation. For the doctrine of inner and outer *energeia* (the latter being spatial activity in the case of soul) cf. V.1.3.8f; V.1.6; V.3.7.26f; I.1.2.8f. Civic virtue is a form of the latter.

14) In so far as their determinism reduces all causes to one great pantheistic cause the Stoics' understanding of astrology might be thought of as itself highly generic. Plotinus observes that such a single cause is tantamount to absence of any cause (III.1.4.12f), and in any case strictly immanent, material causation cannot be generic in his sense of the term because it exists only in its instances. Cf. G. Clark, 'Plotinus' Theory of Empirical Responsibility,' *The New Scholasticism* 17 (1943), 18f.

15) Cf. V.1.2.30 for world soul directing the universe by *boulēsis*; VI.8.5.20: *boulē* and *logos* are free, while (civic) virtue depends on external actions.

16) The pairs *chōrizomenē/chōristē* in I.1.10.9 and *anachōrēsis/chōrismos* in I.1.12.18 perhaps point to the same distinction; for the perfect tense marking a timeless state cf. I.4.4.15.

17) Throughout I.2.4 Plotinus struggles to preserve a distinction between Mind and soul (and true virtue). Cf. VI.5.7.3 for *typoi* as inferior to the full identity of subject and object in Mind. In V.9.13.11 he moves a step closer to identity: the virtues in our soul on earth are not merely images of the noetic patterns, but the patterns are 'here in some other way.'

18) Cf. I.4.8.28: we do not *wish* misfortune (=A), rather, we set virtue against it to make the soul difficult to disturb, (i.e., we *will* avoidance of the possibility of grief =B). In III.8.6.5f Plotinus observes that men of action seek to internalize the object of their activity by 'knowing' it. That is to say, all men really 'will' to have and be the Good as they 'wish' to have goods. VI.8.5 and 6: soul 'wills' not to need to exercise (civic) virtue and does not 'plan' (= 'wish') to be affected by necessary external events, but when it is, it takes whatever steps are needed to preserve its inner autonomy (=its 'will'). But Plotinus often ignores a distinction between wish and will.

19) Cf. I.4.7.1f: A man of true virtue does 'wish' to have necessities, since external evils may be fatal or at least may intrude into the relationship between soul and true being as an unwelcome third. This = (A). I.2.6.1f: drastic curtailment of bodily demands makes us 'sinless', but our true intent (*spoudē*) 'is not to be sinless but to be gods.' Apotheosis is (B); sinless detachment from the body here seems equivalent to (A), i.e., the lower phase of true virtue in which we are 'being purified'; 'sin' is civic virtue. I.4.7.33f is especially interesting. Only an odd man would be content to die before witnessing (say) the enslavement of his daughters on the ground that an evil he has not seen cannot happen. Everyone knows that such specific evils may and will occur (this seems to be the force of *an doxai hōs kai genēsomenou*), (though we all *wish* that they do not =A). But if the possibility does not affect our happiness, the actual event should not do so either (=B). The argument is that if even in the case of ordinary virtue happiness is not held hostage to the uncertainty of temporal life (where many things may or may not happen), all the more in the case of true virtue should it not be affected when evil actually occurs. It is precisely the aim of true virtue to turn such detachment from actual evil into a way of life, (though Plotinus goes on to mention purely empirical reasons - some people are better off, after all, for being slaves, and suicide in any case is always available; cf. III.2.18.17f). His fundamental point is that 'overcoming' specific evils by merely avoiding them is empty; they must be made to vanish once for all in a generic view of existence.

20) Though Plotinus admits that civic virtues are a necessary stage for true virtue (I.3.6.15f), it ultimately makes them irrelevant (I.2.7.23f). In fact, if body ceased to exist, soul would not be distressed (II.1.4.33; cf. II.9.7.23f and V.5.12.43f for the general principle of high level indifference to lower levels).

21) For Plotinus's failure fully to integrate ethics into metaphysics cf. J. Rist, *The Road to Reality* (Cambridge U: Cambridge, 1967), 165f. Another aspect of the same problem is the ambiguous status of soul's descent: in so far as emanation is necessary, the descent is neutral or good, but in so far as it is a subjective, willed 'fall' the descent is evil. Rist, 112f; H. Blumenthal, *Plotinus's Psychology* (Nijhoff: The Hague, 1971), 4f; J. Katz, *Plotinus' Search for the Good* (Columbia U:

N.Y., 1950), 52f; V. Schubert, *Pronoia und Logos* (Pustet: Munich and Salzburg, 1968), 103f; H. Schlette, *Das Eine und das Andere* (Hueber: Munich, 1966), 204f, 224; Clark (above, n. 14), 16f.

22) Cf. Blumenthal (above, n. 21), 54f, 66, who reduces the difficulty to some extent by construing *apathēs* as 'morally resistant to evil.'

23) The elusiveness of temporal existence comes out also in the elusiveness of our empirical self; cf. H. Buchner, *Plotins Möglichkeitslehre* (Pustet: Munich and Salzburg, 1971), 111 on the desire of the human soul to destroy itself; Himmerich (above, n. 10), 73f, 84; Blumenthal (above, n. 21), 109f; G. O'Daly, *Plotinus' Philosophy of the Self* (Irish U: Shannon, 1973); Rist, 'Integration and the Undescended Soul in Plotinus,' *American Journal of Philology* 49 (1967), 417f.

24) This typically abstract NeoPlatonic view of life may have contributed to the intellectual climate which produced the deficient medieval sense of time and history (P. Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past*, Arnold: London, 1969, 1f, 19).

25) Rist (above, n. 23), 419f.