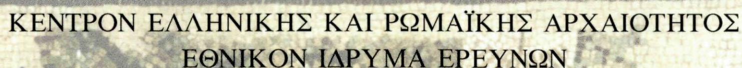

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RESEARCH CENTRE FOR GREEK AND ROMAN ANTIQUITY
NATIONAL HELLENIC RESEARCH FOUNDATION

ΜΕΛΕΤΗΜΑΤΑ

54

ELIZABETH KEY FOWDEN
and
GARTH FOWDEN

CONTEXTUALIZING LATE GREEK PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS 2008
DIFFUSION DE BOCCARD – 11, RUE DE MEDICIS, 75006 PARIS

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"The school of Plato". Mosaic, Pompeii, 1st c. A.D.,
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Abbreviations

ANRW	H. Temporini and W. Haase (eds), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* (Berlin 1972-)
DL	Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum*
DM	Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*
In Alc	Proclus, *In Platonis Alcibiadem*
LSJ	H.G. Liddell, R. Scott, H.S. Jones (eds), *A Greek-English lexicon* (Oxford 1940[9]), with a revised supplement, 1996)
SHA	*Scriptores Historiae Augustae*
VA	Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii*
VIsid	Damascius, *Vita Isidori*
VProc	Marinus of Neapolis, *Proclus sive de felicitate*
VP	Iamblichus, *De vita Pythagorica*
VPh	Eunapius, *Vitae philosophorum et sophistarum*
VPyth	Porphyry, *Vita Pythagorae*

In the Bibliography of Primary Sources, references to Greek and Latin works appear in their standard Latinized forms, whereas Arabic titles are given in English for greater accessibility.

Preface

Thanks above all to the efforts of Pierre Hadot,[1] we have in recent decades come to understand more clearly than before that ancient philosophical writing, and the oral teaching which lay behind it, was not usually intended as the construction of a theoretical system. Rather it was meant as an incitement to concrete 'spiritual exercises', aimed at helping the philosopher to purify the self – in other words, that in us which we are in a position to change by our own efforts – while letting go of longings and appetites whose fulfillment lies outside our own powers. Ancient philosophy was not primarily a doctrinal edifice, but a way of life.

Parallel to this, some limited progress has also been made in the study of philosophy's social environment and of its own social articulation, particularly at the end of Greco-Roman antiquity and in the circles of the so-called 'Neoplatonists'. In the same year in which Hadot published his influential discussion of 'Exercices spirituels', one of the contributors to the present volume published his first article, entitled 'The Platonist philosopher and his circle in late antiquity', *Philosophia* 7 (1977) 359-83. This was part of a doctoral thesis submitted at Oxford in 1979 under the title 'Pagan philosophers in late antique society, with special reference to Iamblichus and his followers', but never published in its entirety;[2] nor has any other work covered the same ground in the meantime. Hadot, an historian of ideas, drew attention to the fundamentally personal character of late Greek philosophy; but it was never his intention to work out in practical socio-historical terms the mechanisms by which that understanding of philosophy was translated into day-to-day *experience*, through for example the unique relations that

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1. P. Hadot, 'Exercices spirituels', *Annuaire de la Ve Section de l'École pratique des hautes études* 84 (1977) 25-70; reprinted in id., *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (revised and expanded edition, Paris 2002) 19-74.

2. See though G. Fowden, 'The pagan holy man in late antique society', *Journal of Hellenic studies* 102 (1982) 33-59.

obtained between the philosophical master and his disciples. As for the social historians, Edward Watts has recently made an important contribution in his *City and school in late antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley 2006); but generally speaking interest in the biographical texts has rarely been accompanied by serious commitment to reading the philosophical treatises and commentaries.

The present volume is intended to show that the ideal of an at once socio-historical and authentically philosophical approach to the spiritual life of the late Greek elites is still alive, and that a presentation of late antique philosophical life that does justice as much to the ideas themselves as to the circumstances in which they were studied and lived is a realizable aim. What follows is, then, work in progress, all destined to be presented more fully elsewhere.

Part I (E.K.F.) takes its cue from the late *Lives* of Pythagoras by Porphyry and Iamblichus, which tell us a lot about Pythagoras's educational activities, above all in Magna Graecia. These two chapters pose the question, how one acquired the first seeds of philosophy in the course of one's general education. What was the earliest context for the idea of philosophy as a way of life? And how was this encouraged through the formulation of ideal systems of education such as that attributed to Pythagoras, aimed at making those who went through it 'as like God as possible', but at the same time mindful of the need to construct a viable human society?

Part II (G.F.) focuses on the greatest of the later Greek philosophers, Plotinus. After an account of his life in chapter 3, it attempts a historically contextualized approach to his doctrine (chapters 4-5) by concentrating on four chronologically consecutive treatises, probably originally a single exposition delivered during the mature years of his teaching career at Rome. Part III (G.F.) is then dedicated to 'Plotinus's posterity', and in particular Christian and Muslim reception of his teaching. Although patristic readings are occasionally dealt with in introductions to Plotinus's thought,[3] the ninth-century Arabic translation – under the name of Aristotle – is usually left to specialists in Arabic philosophy. Our rejection of this division of labour is linked to a much wider historiographical project, namely the incorporation of both late Greco-Roman antiquity and the world of early Islam in a broader periodization, the first millennium, based primarily on the history of

3. E.g. J. Rist, 'Plotinus and Christian philosophy', in L.P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge 1996) 386-413.

ideas rather than political, social or economic considerations.[4] It is, after all, primarily through the religions and philosophies it inculcated that this period still acts on our contemporary world.

Annotation has for the most part been confined to identification of primary sources, except in the last chapter on account of the unfamiliarity of the materials there discussed to the classical audience at which the present series is aimed.

4. G. Fowden, 'Late antiquity: Period or idea?', in J. Arnason and K. Raaflaub (eds), *Comparative perspectives on the Roman Empire* (Oxford, forthcoming). Cf also id., *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad elite in late antique Syria* (Berkeley 2004).

Acknowledgments

Earlier versions of chapters 3 to 6 were delivered and discussed at the Central European University Summer University, Budapest, in July 2004; and of chapter 7 at the conference on 'Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire (1st-4th cent. AD)', University of Exeter, July 2006.

PART I

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN LATE ANTIQUE PLATONISM

by

ELIZABETH KEY FOWDEN

INTRODUCTION

> And it is likely that, whether a child or a man is playing or being serious, one plays and the other is serious for the sake of contemplation, and every action is a serious effort towards contemplation.
>
> Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.8.1.13-15.[1]

It is customary when studying ancient education to assume that philosophical education may commence once the student has reached some level of maturity – it was, after all, a road chosen by a small elite. What I am interested to trace, instead, is that train of thought which understood philosophical education more generously, not only as a discipline of reading and interpreting set philosophical texts as the student progresses up a scale of virtues, but as a discipline of the whole person, body, mind and soul, that began from the very beginning of an individual's life.

The philosopher who in late antiquity was widely thought to embody best this all-embracing mode of learning was Pythagoras. His teachings offered a way of life that confirmed the inter-relatedness of all stages of learning, from painting to philosophical discourse, from walking in a grove to solving arithmetical problems. This was the view of Pythagoras espoused and developed most explicitly by the Platonist thinkers Porphyry and Iamblichus in the third century AD. My aim in these two chapters is to highlight some of the main issues that gave shape to this view of Pythagoras as expounder of a way of living, and to outline how his teachings were used to develop a philosophical education broad enough to include all human beings. The chapters are offered as a survey of themes to be treated at length in a monograph I am preparing on the subject of elementary education. Like the

1. Tr. A.H. Armstrong. Unless noted otherwise, all translations from Plotinus are Armstrong's.

late Pythagoreanizing Platonists themselves, I emphasize how the body, mind and soul are related in practice as well as in thought: how the pupil learns to act is closely related to how he learns to think.

* * *

Several currents of contemporary scholarship intersect at my particular set of questions about late antique philosophical education. Most notable among studies concerned to show how philosophy was lived are those of Pierre Hadot and Dominic O'Meara. We have already mentioned in the Preface the critical importance of the former's 'Exercices spirituels'[2], and I would like to add here Dominic O'Meara's study of how late Platonists understood the philosopher's engagement in the world, *Platonopolis: Platonic political philosophy in late antiquity.*[3]

A second current is the enormous interest in biography, especially *Lives* of philosophers. Many of the late antique *Lives* illustrate the influence of Pythagorean ideas that are also apparent in more sophisticated Platonist treatises. In addition to Garth Fowden's unpublished Oxford doctoral thesis, *Pagan philosophers in late antique society, with special reference to Iamblichus and his followers*, written some thirty years ago, there has been a more recent burst of activity surrounding Iamblichus's *On the Pythagorean way of life* including, to mention only a few items, two English translations and various studies.[4] Other philosophers' biographies have received attention too: for Porphyry's *Life* of his teacher we have Pavlos Kalligas's commentary, *Πορφυρίου Περί τοῦ Πλωτίνου βίου καί τῆς τάξεως τῶν βιβλί-*

2. P. Hadot, 'Exercices spirituels', *Annuaire de la Vᵉ Section de l'École pratique des hautes études* 84 (1997) 25-70; reprinted in id., *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (revised and expanded edition, Paris 2002) 19-74.

3. D. O'Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic political philosophy in late antiquity* (Oxford 2003).

4. Translations: J. Dillon and J. Hershbell, *Iamblichus: On the Pythagorean way of life* (Atlanta, Georgia 1991); G. Clark, *Iamblichus: On the Pythagorean Life* (Liverpool 1989); and also a French translation by L. Brisson and A.-Ph. Segonds, *Jamblique, Vie de Pythagore* (Paris 1996). Studies: C. Macris, *Le Pythagore des néoplatoniciens: recherches et commentaires sur 'Le mode de vie pythagoricien' de Jamblique* (unpublished, École pratique des hautes études, Paris 2004), and the same author has also published an annotated translation of Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras*: C. Macris, *Πορφυρίου, Πυθαγόρου βίος* (Athens 2001); G. Staab, *Pythagoras in der Spätantike. Studien zu 'De Vita Pythagorica' des Iamblichos von Chalkis* (Leipzig 2002); M. von Albrecht, *Jamblich, ΠΕΡΙ ΤΟΥ ΠΥΘΑΓΟΡΕΙΟΥ ΒΙΟΥ. Pythagoras: Legende - Lehre - Lebensgestaltung* (Darmstadt 2002); C. Riedweg, *Pythagoras: Leben, Lehre, Nachwirkung. Eine Einführung* (Munich 2002).

ων αὐτοῦ (Athens 1991), and *Porphyre, La Vie de Plotin* by Luc Brisson and others (Paris 1982, 1992). And more recently Mark Edwards has translated and annotated Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* in the same volume with Marinus's *Proclus, or On Happiness.*[5]

The question what form the best education should take emerges naturally from late antique philosophical biography, since these texts are above all testimonies to what their authors considered to be the rightly oriented human being in action. By the third century, the Pythagorean way of life had sent down deep roots, especially into Platonist circles where the well-rounded philosopher became the focus of interest and imitation. Accounts of philosophical lives such as those of Apollonius of Tyana by Philostratus, Pythagoras as described by Porphyry and Iamblichus, or Proclus by Marinus were didactic by design. Their purpose was to elicit the good from within the individual through imitation of the ideal (not idealized) human being, in other words, the true philosopher, who is also the model teacher, in his social, intellectual and religious context.

Rather than regarding them as either historical documents or teaching manuals, to approach the *Lives* as general guides to the best way of life comes closest to the intent with which they were written. Otherwise, the reader is left disappointed for there are often very few highly specific indications of the ages when various subjects should be taught, for example, or a clear order in which they should be introduced. What is built up is a rough sketch of what a child would have as his foundations in order to reach maturity as the best possible human being. In other words, this is not necessarily a view of education composed by a teacher of children (though this cannot be entirely excluded), but by a mature student of philosophy – a Porphyry, Iamblichus, Eunapius, or Marinus – looking back and constructing the education he believes would facilitate the frame of mind required for philosophical progress.

In the various *Lives* of philosophers, education is most often seen in practice. Its purpose is to teach the pupil how to understand his own place in relation to the intertwined spheres of the gods, the individual and society. Man's behaviour toward the gods is expressed in terms of thought and action; cult activity is not meant to be the automatic performance of traditions handed down over generations, but rather a thoughtful, conscious

5. Mark Edwards, *Neoplatonic saints: The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their students* (Liverpool 2000).

acting out of rituals and prayers. In this way intellection and intuition are joined in symbolic action, making worship of the gods the most fully engaged behaviour of humankind. In order to be perfected in his conduct toward other individuals, the pupil must be trained to be reflective about his conduct and mindset, and to command as thorough a knowledge of the world in which he lives as his capacities allow. Because the private and public spheres were understood to operate according to the same principles, the man who has mastered himself can help society to master itself. The prominence of social relations in philosophical biography should not be viewed as a growing penchant for gossip and drama, but as part of a didactic scheme in which action and intellection are complementary.

The subjects of the philosophical biographies we will draw on are by and large well-known historical figures. Around some, layers of legend had already accumulated and it was the biographer's task to make what he could of an inherited tradition of mixed historical and meta-historical elements. Pythagoras (c.570-480 BC) and his disciple Apollonius of Tyana, who lived in the first century AD, are two such complex cases. In the hands of Porphyry and much more so Iamblichus, the remote and more legendary life of Pythagoras becomes an opportunity to mould the master in the image of all the author believed a philosopher should be. It may first seem to us that Iamblichus's Pythagoras is an abstraction, an idealized rather than an historical person. But this, I believe, misses the point of philosophical biography. To describe a philosopher's life is to describe not simply a person, but a path, because the philosopher comes to embody the path and part of what the biographer is describing is all the stops and distractions that form the person along the way to becoming a true philosopher. We are often presented with the end result, but all philosophical biographers also pay great attention to the connections between their subjects and the world around them, to how all his physical and social contexts were part of his becoming a true philosopher, to the extent that he was able.

The difference between what appear to be more 'idealized' portraits and the more 'historical' is the degree to which the biographer is determined to distill metaphysical principles from a life, making obvious the interconnections between ideas and actions. If Iamblichus does this more boldly than Eunapius, for example, it is because his *On the Pythagorean way of life* is the introduction to a much larger and explicit enunciation of a philosophical way and its entire structure. As the foundation stone of his larger project, Iamblichus's Pythagoras is charged with a more ideal or perfected quality so

that the true nature of all his physical and behavioural features stand out clearly and in correct relation to all other dimensions of the sage's life. While the goal of divine likeness unites all the biographies, the individual accounts do not freeze their subjects; they are not portrayed in a state of static arrival at their goal. Instead we are shown an example of rightly oriented progress through the multiplicity of experience. Even Plotinus is not perfected in Porphyry's account of his teacher – his reserved attitude towards mathematics and religious cult keeps him from attaining the status of a fully rounded philosopher, despite Porphyry's sympathy and efforts to fill in the gaps as best he could.[6] One must be careful, then, not to distinguish too sharply between historical and idealized representations of philosophical education, for the goal in all cases is practical, to exemplify the ideal in the student's whole way of life.

The fact that the early education one finds scattered across the pages of the *Lives* resembled more or less that which children normally received in the ancient world may explain why early education has not captured the interest of students of philosophy. What we find in the *Lives* is a backwards projection of principles by which the philosopher explained and justified a natural evolution of education in a society in which man was still closely linked to rhythms of nature and the religious ritual which had originally developed from these rhythms. In the *Lives*, characteristic moments are picked out and heightened to emphasize certain philosophical virtues and principles. To judge, for example, from Pythagoras's homilies to the different age groups at Croton, the fundamental connections between both gods and man, as well as within society itself, needed constant correction and re-emphasis. It was the role of the teacher to bring out these connections, however obvious and 'natural' they may have seemed.

How can we justify using side by side Iamblichus's highly programmatic *On the Pythagorean way of life* and Porphyry's more patchwork though still paradigmatic *Life of Pythagoras* with, for example, Eunapius's more historically grounded biographical collection, or Marinus's *Life of Proclus*, which falls somewhere in between? Are we talking about a program of early education that was advocated for use in practice, in 'real life'? Or simply a systematization of the ideal early education that would prepare and goad on the future philosopher for his ascent along the scale of virtues? Is there any

6. See D. O'Meara, *Pythagoras revived. Mathematics and philosophy in late antiquity* (Oxford 1989) 29.

evidence that this program, or what can be pieced together as a program, was ever implemented? Is Iamblichus, for example, in his presentation of Pythagoras's pedagogical practices, proposing anything different from what children in the ancient world had always received as their early training? My answer to this last question would be, not in any dramatic way. What is different is the examination of it, the explanation of common subjects, such as music, dance, observation of nature, geometry, as seen in the philosopher's sophisticated retrospect. Iamblichus is performing the role of the philosopher who goes into the temple to philosophize about sacred acts the priests have been performing for generations. Education is above all a making conscious of inherited practices. It is a 'making conscious' of who we are, of our nature[7], and of the meaning behind what we do. It is not a step beyond or a complete replacement of doing, but a correction and enrichment of it. And with this begins the explanation of how the program of education described in the pages to follow was indeed intended to be implemented in 'real life' and at least potentially for all human beings.

Philosophical biography was designed to inspire readers to change their lives; it held up a practical way of life that activated the ideal. Mature philosophers may have offered a somewhat daunting model, but they were real people with practical lives that could be imitated – even Pythagoras, who attracted so much later elaboration, was no doubt a historical figure. The point was to marry *theoria* and *praxis*, to forge as felicitous as possible a union of the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*. The *Lives* were designed to be anagogic. The term *paideia* is the broad church that we translate variously as education or culture. It is used to represent a state of being. *Anagoge*, also translated as education, is a more vibrant term, capturing more actively the process whereby one acquires *paideia*. The *Lives* are prefaces intended to lead the reader along the way toward *paideia*, even if, like the first pages of books on library shelves, the *Lives*, as prefaces, were the pages most thoroughly thumbed by the many people who would open them, but never reach the end of the story.

The third current of research that feeds my project is recent interest in education in Greco-Roman antiquity, especially the efforts to encourage new investigations into the subject made by Yun Lee Too, who has edited or co-edited two collective volumes on the subject of education, *Pedagogy and power* (Cambridge 1998) and *Education in Greek and Roman antiquity*

7. *Enn.* 1.1.11.1-8.

(Leiden 2001)[8], in addition to arguing in her monograph *The pedagogical contract* (Ann Arbor 2000) for taking more seriously individual emotional and intellectual complexity when studying ancient educational systems.[9]

In the preface to *The pedagogical contract*, Yun Lee Too writes:

> Teaching and learning, which constitute the activity named in this book as pedagogy, are often regarded as being wholly or largely concerned with the mind and perhaps, when ethical issues become relevant, with the soul. While acknowledging that these are indeed spheres of teaching and learning, this study treats the pedagogical scene as one *embodied* by individuals who occupy the roles of teachers and students, variously and fluidly, who frame the intellectual with any number of contexts and inflections defined by emotion, (self-)interest, desire, social identity.

To understand the 'embodiment' of the 'pedagogical scene' among late Platonists we must first turn to a more essential understanding of embodiment, namely how to view the material world in which the ensouled body operates. To see the place of the individual in the whole was one of the great aspirations of late Platonist teaching, and constant self-scrutiny one of the student's most potent tools for learning. Late Platonist teachers understood themselves as well as their students as involved in a continuous process of education, each being at different stages along the way to true knowledge. For this reason I fully agree that to study education we must study the individuals involved and the nature of their interactions. It was precisely in the day to day observation and imitation of the teacher that the student progressed. The teacher and student move through this fascinating

8. In Y.L. Too, *Education in Greek and Roman antiquity*, two articles address themselves to more formal aspects of what was taught and in what manner in the course of more technical philosophical training: S. Rappe, 'The new math: How to add and to subtract pagan elements in Christian education', 405-432; and R. Lamberton, 'The schools of Platonic philosophy of the Roman Empire: the evidence of the biographies', 433-458. These studies add to the important work of Ilsetraut Hadot that has focused on Simplicius's commentary on Epictetus's *Encheiridion*, and the structure of formal philosophical education espoused there (e.g., recently, I. Hadot, *Simplicius, Commentaire sur le manuel d'Épictète*, vol.1. [Paris 2003] Introduction VII-CXXVIII). See also Charles Brittain and Tad Brennan, *Simplicius, On Epictetus's Handbook 1-26* (London 2001). The work of these scholars helps clarify the direction in which the most elementary education envisioned by the late Platonists, the subject of my interest here, was pointing.

9. G. Snyder, *Teachers and Texts in the ancient world: Philosophers, Jews and Christians* (London 2000), ch.4, also explores teacher-student relationships among Platonists in the early Roman Empire.

level of particulars that is the embodied pedagogical scene, learning to discern and contemplate the connections linking the individual with the world around him. How the individual embodied soul learns to be in harmony with the rest of the cosmos is one of the major lessons of education.

My hope is, eventually, to present the subject of late Platonist education at its early stages in a manner that draws productively from these three rich areas of current research. For the present, I offer the following two chapters as an overview of the whole in a way that suggests some of the parts. In the first chapter, I examine the *Lives* of Pythagoras and the Pythagorean philosopher Apollonius of Tyana for the way in which Pythagoras's life is made to stand as a pattern for how to learn and how to teach. What Pythagoras has to teach is a multi-leveled philosophy, and the eyes of young students can be opened to the continuities between gods and men through imitation and by accustoming them to appropriate relations. The second chapter continues the theme of right movement and relationship begun in the first, asking how the ultimate goal of likeness and assimilation to God shapes the form education takes from the very start. The chapters represent the general, 'elementary' stage of education as described by the philosophers, the stage in which the young person's orientation is fixed before he begins filling in, by increasingly specialized learning, the outlines of the parts that make up the whole.

1.

LEARNING TO LIVE IN THE WORLD

> As the soul progresses gradually from lesser to greater things and finally finds the most perfect goods, thus the turning [of the soul] must progress along a route starting from what is general and common.
>
> Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* 1.18-22[1]

At its most fundamental level, philosophy is about what connections we make between the lesser and the greater, and how we make them. To follow a particular philosopher is to learn one way of making certain connections in certain ways. What draws us to a particular philosopher and his way of making connections? In part it is the soundness of his reasoning, the strength of the connections; it has also to do with the place where the philosopher lived, as well as his cast of mind and physical constitution, and one's own intellectual, emotional and physical constitution and environment. Something like this, in any case, would have been the answer offered by the three third-century biographers of Pythagoras - Diogenes Laertius, Porphyry and Iamblichus – for whom physical as well as intellectual considerations were a crucial part of what it meant to be a philosopher. Certainly the material existence of Pythagoras was of great importance to them all – what the teacher did was the most powerful tool in his pedagogical armory.

We see in the writings of philosophers, their biographers, and their satirists, how thinkers and teachers of the third century were seeking ways to harmonize the many philosophical and religious currents that fed the Severan empire's diverse cultures. How to take what was useful from various traditions and mould them into a coherent way of thinking and living? The writers we shall discuss saw the figure of Pythagoras as the best guide in

1. Ed. É. Des Places, 40-41; tr. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived* 34.

seeking an answer to this question. Their Pythagoras was above all a harmonizer whose power to discern connections lay in his notion of *philia*, or 'cosmic friendship', as we might translate it.

Harmonizing the world

Diogenes Laertius sat down sometime during the Severan age to think about what the ancient Greeks called philosophy.[2] Though more commonly used as a work of doxography, or biography, his *Lives of philosophers* could also be considered a work of philosophy, to the extent that it is Diogenes's attempt to discern connections between ways of thinking, and to organize his perceptions accordingly. Diogenes was not, it seems, a professional philosopher, or an adherent of a particular school, but a man with wide-ranging philosophical interests. He opens his ten books of lives and opinions with a prologue that starts: 'The work of philosophy began, some say, among barbarians'. The 'work of philosophy' is a literal translation of τὸ τῆς φιλοσοφίας ἔργον. Diogenes's first words are active words, 'the work of philosophy', the business of loving wisdom. His choice of 'work' should not be obscured by our possible preference to translate it as the 'study' of philosophy[3], which reveals our tendency to underestimate the active aspect of philosophy. Diogenes starts with doing philosophy and in the catalogue of doers of philosophy we find not discreet discourses on their philosophical doctrines, but in many cases, and most successfully in his presentation of Pythagoras[4], a more rounded view of what a philosopher is, his place, his behaviour and his context in its fullest sense.

Once Diogenes has stated in his opening line the possibility that philosophy originated among barbarians, he tells us just what sort: Magi, Chaldeans, Gymnosophists, Druids, Semnotheoi. He briefly considers

2. Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum*, ed. M. Marcovich (Leipzig 1999); reviewed by T. Dorandi, *Phronesis* 45 (2000) 331-340. Dorandi is preparing a new edition for the Collection des Universités de France. Recent translations include M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, *Diogène Laërce, Vie et doctrines des philosophes illustres* (Paris 1999), with an introduction by L. Brisson; and G. Reale with G. Girgente and I. Ramelli, *Diogene Laerzio, Vite e dottrine dei più celebri filosofi* (Milan 2005). On Diogenes' floruit, see J. Mejer, *Diogenes Laertius and his Hellenistic background* (Stuttgart 1978) 56-59.

3. R.D. Hicks, *Diogenes Laertius, Lives of eminent philosophers* (Cambridge, Mass. 1925).

4. Mejer, 'Diogenes Laertius and the transmission of Greek philosophy', in *ANRW* II.36.5 (1992) 3601, also notes how Diogenes's Pythagoras is the most balanced portrait, whereas either the 'life' or 'opinions' tend to dominate in his other portraits.

attempts to establish their priority by relative dating – citing on the one hand the Egyptian claim that the son of the Nile and originator of philosophy, Hephaestus, lived 48,863 years before Alexander, and on the other hand the Persian claim that Zoroaster had lived 5000 years before the fall of Troy. But, 'they forget' that the achievements of the Greeks came first, he responds. And not only philosophy but the very origin of human beings is traced back to the Greeks. They forget the order of the connections. And he goes on to explain that there was Musaeus among the Athenians and Linus among the Thebans (DL 1.3-4): with these men born of gods and muses we begin, for they were the first to write about the connections between the gods and the natural world and the original unity. They inspired those later figures we call philosophers.[5]

Diogenes sets straight the order of connections – Greeks first – but he does not disconnect the other traditions from the one he considers primary and which will be the focus of his study. The barbarian philosophers reappear as educators of too many of his subjects, and Pythagoras among the most important, for him to do that.[6] Diogenes does not cut off the possibility of connections with non-Greek ideas and practises, he does not dismiss them by pointing out their errors. Rather, he goes straight on to describe some of these ideas and practices, simply reporting by way of introduction that those who speak of philosophy arising among non-Greeks also explain the different way in which philosophy is expressed in each place. Diogenes's work is an account of eminent Greek philosophers, but he clearly felt the need first to place his subjects in their fuller cultural context, not to deny the co-existence of possibly compatible ways of thinking. His purpose here is not to draw out overlapping views, but to make clear the order of any connections that others might seek to find. Though it is not the focus of his endeavour, he nonetheless does not resist a passing interest in ways of thinking practiced by other peoples, and he goes on using the term philosophy to describe what they do, the connections they make and how they make them: the Gymnosophists of India and the Celtic Druids use

5. See G. Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic philosophy. A study of its development from the Stoics to Origen* (Oxford 2001) 188-194, on Clement's similar movement back to the divine origins of Greek philosophy through barbarian wisdom, esp. *Strom.* 6.7.57.

6. For example, Diogenes includes traditions relating that Thales studied with Egyptians (1.27); Democritus with Magians, Chaldaeans, Egyptians and Gymnosophists (9.34); and Pyrrho with Gymnosophists (9.61).

riddles, they philosophize through their worship of the gods, their avoidance of doing evil, and their practice of courage; the Chaldaeans philosophize through their study of the stars; the Magi, also astronomers, through worship, sacrifice and prayer, and by thinking of their gods as natural elements (DL 1.6).

Having spent the first half of his prologue on non-Greek philosophy, Diogenes now turns to the word *philosophia*, which he has already hinted (as further proof of the Greek origin of its practice) 'refuses to be rendered into a barbaric tongue'(DL 1.5). According to a tradition widely accepted in antiquity, it was Pythagoras who first called himself a lover of wisdom, a *philosophos* (DL 1.12).[7] No one is wise except for God. Pythagoras's invention marks an orientation, a habit of thought that places God first with the man who yearns for wisdom and is turned toward its source placed afterwards. Diogenes fixes Pythagoras at the centre of his prologue, as his pivot between the non-Greek and Greek philosophical traditions, and at the head of the latter of the two branches of Greek philosophy, the Ionic and the Italic.

If one of the attractions of philosophical biography is that it puts flesh on the life of the mind, Pythagoras is the biographer's dream. In his manner of living, thinking is made tangible as in no other philosopher's life. Diogenes opens Book Eight, on the Italic school, with Pythagoras and begins by presenting the accounts of where Pythagoras was born and spent his childhood and youth – a native of Samos, he was educated first on Lesbos and Samos[8] and then, led by his natural curiosity, among non-Greeks: Egyptians, Chaldaeans and Magi. Pythagoras's knowledge was not bound by what he learned in the life he spent as Pythagoras, since he claimed to remember all his previous incarnations, a part of the tradition that Diogenes simply relates without comment. As if to show that he can indeed be critical of his sources, Diogenes goes on to express his disbelief that Pythagoras left no writings, as some claimed. Diogenes accepts the opinion that Pythagoras wrote three treatises – *On Education*, *On Statesmanship* and *On Nature* – though he does not claim to draw his account of Pythagoras's teaching from

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7. Diogenes cites Heracleides of Pontus, fr. 87 Wehrli. Cp. Cicero, *Tusc.* 5.8 = Heraclides of Pontus, fr. 88 Wehrli. See also Iamb., *VP* 58-59; DL 8.8; Diod. 10.10.1; Clem., *Strom.* 1.61.4 and 4.9.1. See C. Riedweg, *Pythagoras. Leben, Lehre, Nachwirkung* (Munich 2002) 120-128.

8. This is the tradition on which Diogenes settles – there are many variations as we shall see later when we turn to Porphyry and Iamblichus.

autopsy of these volumes, but rather from Alexander Polyhistor (born c.105 BC), whom he cites.[9] Like Porphyry and Iamblichus after him, Diogenes appears to have relied on wide-ranging accounts of Pythagoras's life and teaching, some of which seem to have been composed even as early as the time of Plato and his circle. Some of these early accounts were preserved in 'Handbooks' (*Hypomnemata*), such as those composed by Alexander Polyhistor and the Justinianic Hesychius of Miletus, whose resemblances have led scholars to conclude that they shared a common source, now lost. Diogenes's selection and presentation of the material he assembled about Pythagoras is interesting for the way we see emerging a philosophy that is all embracing, in which ideas and actions are modeled on one another, and in which the world of ideas and the world of matter are conceived as one.

Diogenes begins his overview of the content of Pythagoras's teaching with the philosopher's ban on praying for ourselves since we do not know what is in our best interest. After thus anchoring Pythagoras's teaching, Diogenes gives us a torrent of aphorisms: drinking alcohol is a snare, keep sex for the winter, friends have all things in common. These are mixed in with glimpses of Pythagoras's personal reputation, his advocacy of vegetarianism, his pedagogical use of *symbola* (what we might call potent aphorisms, or cryptic utterances), his bloodless worship, his patterning of his ethical teaching on the development of all organic life. As the culmination - before his chapter splinters into multiple versions of Pythagoras's reputation and his demise - Diogenes offers a more connected description of Pythagoras's teachings (DL 8.25-35), moving from the principle of all things, the monad, to the undefined dyad; from these spring points, lines, plane figures, solid figures, sensible bodies, the four elements, which combine to produce the ensouled, intelligent, spherical cosmos. From this understanding of the origin of the elements Pythagoras derives his cosmology and anthropology in which harmony is central. It is the extent to which created beings possess harmony in the relation of their parts that determines the nature of their life. 'Virtue is harmony and so are health and everything good and God, because everything is connected through harmony' (DL 8.33). With the following words, 'Friendship is harmonious equality', Diogenes makes the transition

9. On Diogenes's sources, see A. Delatte, *La Vie de Pythagore de Diogène Laërce* (Brussels 1922) 9-63; W. Burkert, *Lore and science in ancient Pythagoreanism* (revised Eng. tr. E.L. Minar, Cambridge, Mass. 1972) 101-102, 218-227; Mejer, *ANRW* II.36.5.3597-3602; B. Centrone, 'L'VIII libro delle "Vite" di Diogene Laerzio', *ANRW* II.36.6 (1992) 4185-4188.

from presenting theory to demonstrating its practice as he returns to further specifications of how to worship, what diet to keep, how to behave in social relations – all illustrations of how to live in harmony in the ensouled, intelligent, spherical cosmos.

Diogenes's presentation of all this is highly condensed. By interweaving what might formally be considered Pythagoras's ethical, physical, metaphysical and religious teaching with the philosopher's personal qualities and the impact of his teaching in Italy, Diogenes attempts a fully rounded representation of Pythagoras's philosophical way in which thinking and doing were two manifestations of the same world view. In this respect, Diogenes's account is similar to those written nearly a century later by Porphyry (232/3-c.305) and Iamblichus (c.240-c.325), and this is in part thanks to the traditions about Pythagoras in which his way of living made a lasting impression precisely because it was a distillation of his thought. The message that comes through to different degrees in different writers is that when dealing with Pythagoras, it is not only that right behaviour toward one's elders, asceticism and religious ritual are training for higher intellectual or spiritual disciplines; the physical acts in themselves correspond to parallel, or we could say harmonious movements of the mind and soul. The germ of this way of understanding Pythagoras is there already in Diogenes, though thickly sown to be later weeded and tended by Porphyry and Iamblichus. Reading Diogenes's account is like trying to learn from a book. The information is presented, rather overwhelmingly at times in its density, and some connections are drawn or hinted at. We might think of Diogenes as a representative of the first level of Pythagoras's students – those who were allowed only to hear the teacher (DL 8.10). Seeing the teacher comes much later. Reading Diogenes is like hearing Pythagoras, letting the torrent of *symbola* slowly sink in until it is time for the next stage, the appearance of the teacher who embodies the *symbola* that the student has learnt by heart, having himself embarked on the process of learning to embody the teachings. The later biographies by Porphyry and especially Iamblichus, though also written accounts, are efforts to take the Pythagorean tradition beyond the book learning represented by Diogenes.

But in addition to the attractiveness of Pythagoras's life as a distillation of his thought, his life also elides beautifully with the eagerness to see the connectedness of all things that drew attention to the Pythagorean way in the third century when interest in modes of thinking beyond that entombed in standard philosophical writing was growing. As we have said, the third

century was a time when many were attracted to the possibility of 'harmonizing' philosophical and religious traditions, and Pythagoras became an emblem of this harmony. In his prologue especially, Diogenes participates in the movement toward harmonization, though in his attempt to organize Greek thought into schools we see the lingering effect of the rigidification of the philosophical tradition he inherited, a condition from which it was emerging thanks particularly to the influence of the so-called Middle Platonists and Neo-Pythagoreans, who sought to harmonize not only Plato and Aristotle, but other teachers as well, most notably Pythagoras.

Learning by imitating

One of the advantages of the Pythagorean way was its flexibility in accommodating followers with a wide range of interests and educational levels. As the doctrine was bound up with conduct it could be passed on implicitly or developed explicitly, according to the capacities and determination of the individual. Published most likely between the mid 220s and the mid 230s, Philostratus's biography of the Pythagorean sage, Apollonius of Tyana, attests the popularity the Pythagorean ideal had acquired in circles wider than the formally philosophical.[10] Whereas we know nothing about the circle of Philostratus's contemporary, Diogenes Laertius, Philostratus was a prominently placed sophist, esteemed by Septimius Severus's empress, Julia Domna, who was known for her literary and philosophical tastes. It was her idea, Philostratus claims, that he compose the *Life*. Although Julia Domna died in 217 and so did not live to see its publication, Apollonius retained a place in the Severan household thanks to her great nephew Alexander Severus, who ruled from 222 to 235, that is, precisely the time when the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* probably began to circulate. Alexander was said to have revered a statue of Apollonius which he kept in his personal shrine in the palace alongside Abraham, Jesus, Orpheus and others[11] in what we could see – even if largely imaginative in detail – as a

10. E.L. Bowie, 'Apollonius of Tyana: Tradition and reality', in *ANRW* II.16.2 (1978) 1669-70 with n.71, investigates questions relating to the date of publication and suggests the 220s-230s. C.P. Jones accepts the same date in his recent translation, *Philostratus, The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (Cambridge, Mass. 2005) 1.3. In my translations from the *Life* I have benefited from those of both C.P. Jones and F.C. Conybeare, *Philostratus, The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (Cambridge, Mass. 1912).

11. *SHA, Vita Alex. Sev.*, 29.2.

very physical manifestation of the tendency toward harmonizing philosophical and religious traditions.

Philostratus drew inspiration from a variety of sources relating to the first-century native of Tyana, and the extent to which his portrait either creates new dimensions in Apollonius's character or simply embellishes it here and there cannot be known for sure.[12] What matters to us is the early third-century Apollonius whom Philostratus sent out into the world. The figure of Apollonius continued to grow in wisdom, well beyond the years of his biological lifespan. This idealized figure was many things to many people, and it is the combination of the roles of political counsellor, rhetor, cultic corrector, philosopher, ascetic and wonder-worker that will be the focus of our interest. Apollonius is in all cases the model teacher: showing rival factions of communities how to negotiate solutions, showing priests how to worship the gods most fittingly, showing his disciples how to comport themselves. In every case Apollonius demonstrates for them how to live correctly, he *acts* so that his wisdom can be imitated. Philostratus's Apollonius is a tireless and flawless teacher, and the *Life* is in some ways more illustrative of the ideal Pythagorean teacher's day to day activity than any portraits we possess of Apollonius's great model, Pythagoras.

We see again and again how imitation is the basis of learning, especially but by no means exclusively in the earliest stages of being a student. To take just one example, the connection between imitating model physical behaviour and the teachings that the model teacher embodies is made explicit when Apollonius transfers from one ship to another simply by jumping across. His students don't miss a beat, but follow after him, 'because, for them, to love wisdom was to follow both what he said and what he did' (*VA* 5.21). Imitation and social intercourse are Apollonius's pedagogical tools. Imitation of the teacher is complemented by dialogue with the teacher. Right thinking is inculcated by right movement and one basic form of movement is the many-leveled interaction between two parties, notably between teacher and taught.

But right movement is much more than the movement of dialogue or thought. We see the intimate connection of properly cultivated thought to physical movement and place in one of the discourses ascribed to the philosopher Musonius Rufus, a contemporary of Apollonius who plays a cameo role in Philostratus's *Life*.[13] In this treatise, Musonius argues for the

12. See Bowie, *ANRW* II.16.2 (1978) 1671-92 on Philostratus's possible sources.

13. See Bowie, *ANRW* II.16.2.1655-57 and 1668-70, on Musonius Rufus in the *VA*.

pastoral life as the ideal setting for living as a philosopher with one's circle of students. One might be tempted to read this as a romanticization of country life, but the temptation should be bridled in this case. Musonius was exiled by Nero to the tiny, waterless island of Gyara[14] in the northern Cyclades, where he is said to have discovered a spring (*VA* 7.16).[15] During Musonius's time there his reputation as a teacher continued to grow, since even on Gyara he was said to have attracted a circle of young men, eager to learn from him. He writes:

> Young students would seem to me to be helped not by sitting at the feet of their teacher in a city, nor spending their time listening to what he has to say, but by seeing him at work in the countryside, demonstrating in practice the lessons philosophy inculcates... For there are no true lovers of philosophy who would not be willing to live with a good man in the countryside, even if the conditions were extremely difficult, as he would be bound to benefit greatly from the experience of being in the company of his teacher both day and night, keeping at a distance from the evils of the city, which pose an obstacle to the philosophical life, and having all his actions, good or bad, under the teacher's eye – a tremendous help to those who are learning. And also to eat and drink and sleep under the active guidance of a good man is a great advantage.[16]

The spareness of agricultural life on a Cycladic island can be put to work for the philosopher who discerns the essential compatibility of the two

14. Modern Gyaros is uninhabited today, though it was used to detain political prisoners until 1974. It was recently declared a monument to all those who were forced to live as exiles on the rat-infested island over the centuries.

15. Musonius is also mentioned at *VA* 4.35, 4.46 and 5.19. Julian, *ep.*30 (ed. Bidez), to the high priest Theodorus, also recalls the solitude Musonius enjoyed when exiled by Nero to Gyara.

16. Discourse 11, p.60, lines 9-14; p. 61, lines 10-20 (Hense). For a discussion of Musonius's life and an edition and translation of the discourses attributed to him, see C.E. Lutz, 'Musonius Rufus, "The Roman Socrates"', *Yale Classical Studies* 10 (1947) 3-147. The present translation is my own. A.C. van Geytenbeck, *Musonius Rufus and Greek diatribe* (Assen 1963) 129-134, reviews philosophers' attitudes to the value of the agricultural life, noting Musonius's original development of the theme through his creation of the philosopher-farmer, though without making what I consider to be a vital connection between Musonius's personal experience on Gyaros and his original perceptions. For the context of Musonius's treatment of the relationship between the theory and practice of philosophy, see R. Laurenti, 'Musonio, maestro di Epitteto', *ANRW* II.36.3 (1989) 2113-2120.

pursuits – that of the pastoralist and that of the philosopher. Both are entirely exposed, and they are forced to adapt their own individual rhythms to the divinely established rhythms of nature. By intimate association with and imitation of the teacher, the student learns to conform his physical, ethical and intellectual behavior to that of his teacher, who has attuned himself to the movements of nature. Musonius's treatise expounds an active education that physically manifests connections and a philosophical orientation that is fundamentally in harmony with the Pythagorean way as described in the *Life of Apollonius* – and also in the other biographies of Pythagoras as we shall see later.

The critical nature of social intercourse for learning is set out explicitly at the opening of the *Life* where Philostratus explains that Pythagoras, the authority behind all that Apollonius does and says, learned through social intercourse with the gods. 'He associated with the gods and had learned from them in what way man pleases them and in what way they are grieved at him, and from this association he taught about nature' (*VA* 1.1). Pythagoras's teachings are not his own, they are simply modeled on what he learned from the nature of the relationship between the gods and man. His wisdom about nature derives from keeping company with the gods. Social intercourse provides the framework for learning and when the correct nature of that relationship, the true hierarchical connection between the gods and mankind, is perceived, it is then possible to apply that paradigm to the entire cosmos and indeed to teach about the order of all nature. It is the movement of learning, the questioning and answering, that informs the student's efforts to model his actions on those of the teacher. And the ultimate teacher for all mankind, not only for Pythagoras, is the gods.

When Apollonius explains Pythagoras's teachings to the king of Babylon, he frames it in terms of the connections between how one relates to the gods, the natural world, and animals in particular, as well as to one's fellow humans. Pythagoras, Apollonius says, 'taught how to worship the gods, to be engaged with them regardless of whether or not they are visible, and to remain in conversation with them' (*VA* 1.32). He goes on to explain that the student in turn must manifest his understanding of connections by offering only bloodless sacrifices, not eating meat or using animal products. The cultivation of correct relations with the gods and the natural world brings in tow the ability to discern correct conduct and even clairvoyance.

The philosopher priest

The order of connections between the gods and men is embodied in the order of Apollonius's daily activities:

> He would frequent the more solemn places and make his home in temples that were not shut. At sunrise he would perform certain rites by himself which he enacted openly only to those who had practiced silence for four years. Afterwards, if the city was Greek and its sacred rites familiar, he would summon the priests and lecture them wisely [literally 'philosophize'] about the gods, correcting them if they had deviated from any tradition; if on the other hand, the rites were not Greek in origin or were unusual, he would learn about them by asking who founded them and why, and once he had discovered these things he counseled how to foster the rites, if upon reflection he thought of a wiser manner in which they could be performed. Then he would go off to find his disciples and bid them ask whatever questions they liked. For he said that it was the duty of those who live according to this philosophical way to begin their day at dawn in the company of the gods, then as the day advanced to converse about the gods, and during the rest of the day to converse about human affairs. (*VA* 1.16)

We should not pass by this ordering of the day as a dry rhetorical commonplace. It is in fact a tightly packed image not just of the philosopher's ideal day, but of the hierarchy of relations between gods and men, the authority connecting them and the different use of human capacities for knowing and communicating that is encapsulated in those different relationships. First, there is independent intercourse with the gods through non-discursive ritual actions whose philosophical meaning Apollonius has fully investigated. Then there is exegetical and investigative intercourse with priests about how to relate philosophically with the gods through cult. Finally Apollonius pursues dialogue with his students, thereby inculcating a familiarity with dialectical thought through practice, encouraging them to ask so that by watching him respond to questions they learn by imitation and repeated application, as this is a daily routine. The entire structure is designed to teach the right movement of wisdom from the gods through the philosopher to the priests and students who receive and then implement that wisdom.

The wisdom that Pythagoreans would teach is the power of discernment. When the philosophy of Pythagoras assumed female form and appeared to Apollonius what she promised him was a hard life of discipline that would

eventually bring light to his eyes, allowing him to discern the differences between gods, daemons and humans, and, by implication, how they are related (*VA* 6.11). According to Philostratus, Apollonius was suspected of colluding against the Emperor Domitian and was brought to defend himself against an array of charges, mostly to do with his eccentric mode of life. Philostratus takes Apollonius's trial as an opportunity for the philosopher to present a more systematic statement of his wisdom, which is usually shared out according to the requirements of the particular situations he meets. For instance, before his trial Apollonius is called into the emperor's presence for an informal meeting, and on first seeing him Domitian is so struck by the long-haired sage's appearance that he exclaims he must be a daemon. Apollonius responds by contrasting the clarifying light bestowed by the gods with the mists that they deliberately hang before the eyes of those who have not trained themselves for discernment, but instead stumble about clinging to confused identities (*VA* 7.32). When Apollonius later explains before the emperor that the good man is called '*theos*' (*VA* 8.5), his justification for this rests on the godlike powers of discernment that give the good man access to how things really are and not how they appear. Apollonius calls his life 'improvised' (*VA* 7.30) not because of any randomness it may seem to possess, perhaps on account of his constant travels and responses to the changing circumstances he encounters. Rather, thanks to his arduous training of all his faculties Apollonius has perfected his understanding of the order and relation of all things and is able to conform anything that might come his way in his experiences to this vision. That is, his 'improvisation' (αὐτοσχεδιασμός) is guided not by his individual inspiration but by his understanding of the correct relation of all things. Likewise, his fearlessness, which impresses others, is simply the product of his knowledge of order and harmony. Wisdom amazes man, but wisdom (what the philosopher embodies) is not amazed (*VA* 7.22). Philostratus also includes in his account of Apollonius' encounter with Domitian the long oration he claims the philosopher had prepared but never delivered at his trial. In it, Apollonius defends himself against charges of posing as a god by explaining why people might call a wise man a god (and of course earlier the emperor himself was shown making a similar mistake) given that 'there is between man and God a certain kinship on account of which he alone of the animals knows the gods, and speculates about his own nature and the manner in which it participates in the divine' (*VA* 8.7). For this reason, Apollonius can assert that, for example, in the case of sacrifice, the wise man and the gods 'have the same mind'.

As the perfected philosopher, likeminded with the gods, Apollonius is shown repeatedly correcting cult practices in his daily routine of clarifying man's relation to the divine world. Again we see here the philosopher as harmonizer of man with the gods through his realignment of the connections made through philosophically informed worship and right conduct. His harmonization of cult and philosophy is an explicit, physical application of thought to action. He harmonizes the priesthood so that this harmony can be communicated through the priests' philosophical actions to all worshippers.

Philostratus's Apollonius is an indefatigable corrector who by his example demonstrates that to worship the gods as is fitting is truly to love wisdom, and in the reverse, to be a true lover of wisdom one must worship the gods appropriately. The priests who accompany Apollonius to the shrines at Dodona, Delphi and Mount Helicon on his campaigns of cultic correction are depicted thirsting not for wine but for mixing bowls overflowing with philosophical discourse on proper worship (*VA* 4.24). In Athens, whose inhabitants Apollonius found particularly fond of sacrifices, he discoursed on how to adopt the right form of worship for each deity, whether it be a sacrifice, libation or prayer, and at what precise time of day or night it should be performed (*VA* 4.19). Apollonius's tour of Greece's shrines reached its climax at the Oracle of Trophonius at Lebadeia in Boeotia.[17] Against the wishes of the shrine's priests, Apollonius descended into the oracular cave wearing his philosopher's cloak and posing Apollo's son Trophonius the question which philosophy he considered the most perfect and pure. He reappeared from his philosophical consultation seven days later at Aulis on the Euboean Gulf, bearing the answer in the form of a book containing the maxims of Pythagoras (*VA* 8.19).

The philosopher is a high priest. He follows divinely sanctioned teaching and impresses mere mortals with his utter familiarity with the gods and their sanctuaries. Apollonius resides in temples. But not only that, he moves from temple to temple in overt imitation of the gods' circulation among men (*VA* 4.40). The philosopher makes the temple his home, and the philosopher's house is deemed a temple, as that of Pythagoras at Metapontum was known as a temple of Demeter and his porch the sanctuary of the Muses.[18] But only

17. See P. Bonnechere, *Trophonios de Lébadée. Cultes et mythes d'une cité béotienne au mirroir de la mentalité antique* (Leiden 2003) 111-115, 273-291.

18. References to the house/shrine at Metapontum include: Cicero, *De fin.* 5.2.4 ('you remember how once I came with you to Metapontum and would not go to the house where we

the house of the philosopher, the properly educated man, can be compared with a temple. Apollonius upbraids a wealthy but uneducated young man who in his ignorance likens his luxurious house to a temple where people would gather and presumably admire his possessions as they would admire the temple's adornments, which would become the subject of comment and spread the reputation of the giver. What the young man had in mind was the temple's power of attraction, its role as the heart of the community.

It was in part because of this focusing, social characteristic of temples that Plato in the *Laws* asserts that children up to the age of seven should be brought by their nurses to play around the village temple. The age seven is significant, for traditionally in Greek society formal education began around that age, with the fundamentals of reading, writing and arithmetic – what in Greek is covered by the inclusive term *grammata*. The informal education that goes on before the age of seven takes place in the household, in the outdoors and in sacred precincts – in the child's observation of and participation in the rhythms of daily life.[19] The philosopher's familiarity with the gods, his co-residence with them in their temples, as portrayed by Philostratus, is not the culmination of a philosophical training, but begins when the foundations for perfection are laid at the very earliest stages of an individual's life. Those foundations begin with the implicit rather than explicit teaching of an orientation.

We have plenty of opportunities to see children playing around temples other than in Plato's model community.[20] To take an instance from Diogenes

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were to stay until I had seen the very place where Pythagoras breathed his last and the seat he sat in'); also in favour of Metapontum are references in Favorinus (in DL 8.15); Justin, 20.4.18; Iamb., *VP* 170. Porph., *VPyth* 4, places it at Croton, where Pythagoras first lived and taught before moving to Metapontum, but this must be a slip rather than deliberate substitution by his source, Timaeus: see Delatte, *Vie de Pythagore* 183; Burkert, *Lore and science* 112 n.18.

19. For an evocative account of children's engagements in the household and in religious rituals outside as well as inside the house, in classical Athens, see M. Golden, *Children and childhood in classical Athens* (Baltimore 1990) 30-38, and in communal religious ritual, 41-51.

20. On children in Roman religious ceremonies, in processions, and singing hymns in choruses at temples, see B. Rawson, *Children and childhood in Roman Italy* (Oxford 2003) 315-328. F.A.G. Beck, *Album of Greek Education. The Greeks at school and play* (Sydney 1975), has a delightful collection of images of children, mainly from vase painting, shown in cultic and festival activities: 77-174; H. Rühfel, *Kinderleben im Klassischen Athen* (Mainz 1984) ill.66, shows the often illustrated relief from Brauron, in which a family, including children, offer sacrifice at an altar.

Laertius, Heraclitus evokes a scene of children playing knucklebones at the temple of Artemis at Ephesus on the occasion when he claimed to prefer their company to involving himself in local politics (DL 9.3). Or we see children participating formally in the temple's ritual life. Iamblichus's Pythagoras declared that children (or possibly just boys), 'were most beloved of the gods. For this reason in times of drought they are sent by the cities to ask the gods for rain, since the divine power listens especially to them. As only they are completely pure, they enjoy the privilege of spending time in temples' (*VP* 51-52). Official delegations to oracular shrines such as Claros and Didyma were customarily composed of clergy, choirs of children – boys, or boys and girls – child-minders and teachers, and artists. It was often the case, as attested in inscriptions, that participation ran in families: we see priestly fathers accompanied by their hymn-singing sons.[21] An inscription from Panamara in the territory of Stratoniceia, inland to the southeast of Miletus, vividly portrays the participation of boys in civic religion. Panamara was renowed for its cult of Zeus Panamaros, whose cult image was processed down to Stratoniceia where a three-day festival with games was celebrated. Hera and Hecate were also honored at Panamara with festivals and mystery cults involving both men and women. One inscription from the late second century AD makes public the council's decision that, 'there should now be chosen from those that are well-born thirty boys whom the boy-guardian shall in company with the public boy-minders lead each day into the Council chamber, wearing white robes and garlanded with green shoots, and likewise holding green shoots in their hands, and to the accompaniment of a lyre-player and a herald they are to sing a hymn which will be composed by the Secretary Sosandros of Diomedes'.[22]

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21. See A. Busine, *Paroles d'Apollon. Pratiques et traditions oraculaires dans l'Antiquité tardive (IIe-VIe siècles)* (Leiden 2005) 72-81, and R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York 1986) 178-183, for choir boys and girls on pilgrimage and their role in consultations. To cite just two examples, epigraphical evidence related to a consultation by a delegation (*theoria*) from Tabae, near Aphrodisias, and another from Carian Heraclea-by-Salbace, dating to the mid- to late-second century AD, mention the priest's name followed by seven others, presumably the boys': see J. and L. Robert, *La Carie* II (Paris 1954) nos. 24.6-9; 28.1-2; 31; 146, 192-7, and E.L. Bowie, 'Choral performances', in D. Konstan and S. Saïd, eds., *Greeks on Greekness. Viewing the Greek past under the Roman Empire* (Cambridge 2006) 91, for other boy hymn-singers.

22. F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées de l'Asie mineure* (Paris 1955) no.69.7-10; also no.69.15-22, for boys recruited annually to sings hymns in honour of Hecate. On Panamara, see G. Bean,

Temples were schoolrooms, both formally and informally, and philosophers are often depicted teaching in sacred precincts – Apollonius sat at the feet of his first teacher of Pythagorean doctrine at the oracular shrine of Aesclepius at Aegae; at Croton in Magna Graecia Pythagoras taught at the temples of Demeter and Apollo.

Pythagoras the model student

In Diogenes Laertius we see Pythagoras's attention to harmonizing elements in his composite philosophy, we see him making conspicuous the continuities that link the many elements that make up the structure of reality. In Philostratus we see the model Pythagorean sage confirming the many connections in his behaviour, especially in his relations to gods and men. The connections are made explicit and acted out to be imitated by all who observe him. In the second half of this chapter we will turn to Porphyry and Iamblichus to examine the manner in which they portray Pythagoras as a paradigm for how to learn and how to teach, viewing context and company as integral to educational progress. The correct general orientation Pythagoras provides students constitutes the foundation, composed of experience and knowledge of τὰ κοινά that will make possible their progression towards particular, higher learning.[23]

We have seen that both informal play around the sacred precinct and more structured participation in its ritual are central to the Pythagoreanizing idea of early education. First and foremost was this establishment of the individual's orientation to the divine, the natural world and society, but also towards an active mode of engagement with them. Accounts of Pythagoras's own early education bear this out.

Diogenes Laertius does not linger over Pythagoras's early years. He simply reports that Pythagoras's father, Mnesarchus, was said to have been a gem engraver who lived on Samos, though of Tyrrhenian origin according to Aristoxenus (late 4th/early 3rd c.BC). Diogenes records that Pythagoras lived

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Turkey beyond the Maeander (London 1971) 76-77. See also Bowie, 'Choral performances', 87, 90-92, for the translation, and further examples of children participating in public religion, such as 'the glorious boys' class busy with song, a lusty choir for Olympian Zeus', that greeted Herodes Atticus on his return to Athens from exile: *IG* 2-32.3606, tr. J. Oliver, *Marcus Aurelius: Aspects of civic and cultural policy in the East* (Princeton 1970) 34.

23. O'Meara, *Pythagoras revived*, chapters 2-4, esp. 34-35 and 92, discusses Iamblichus's didactic progression from common to specific as exemplified in his ten volume work.

on Samos and Lesbos where he was a student of the philosopher Pherecydes (fl.550 BC) and that while still a young man (νέος) he was led by his love of learning to leave home and travel across Greece and beyond to be initiated into all rites and mysteries. Diogenes mentions his intiations among the Egyptians, Chaldaeans and on Crete in the cave of Idean Zeus. Diogenes's last piece of information with regard to Pythagoras's background is the report from Heracleides of Pontus (who studied philosophy in 4th c.BC Athens) that Pythagoras claimed to have been told by Hermes (in a former life as Aethalides) to choose any gift except immortality, so he asked for memory of experiences through life and death and rebirth. This background is significant for our purposes since one of the first lessons for young students is the cultivation of memory, including memory of past lives, for such knowledge is part of the accumulation of wisdom across generations that can contribute to an individual's discernment of universal harmony and the connections between all things.

Porphyry in his biography of Pythagoras spends more time on his subject's early years. Here we see Pythagoras the ideal student and ideal teacher. Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras*, like that of Diogenes, belonged to a much larger work on the history of philosophy. The *Life* was part of the first book of Porphyry's four volume *Philosophical History* that began with Homer and ended with Plato. Only fragments of Books One and Two of the chronologically-arranged *Philosophical History* survive and the *Life of Pythagoras* would most likely have belonged to Book One, covering from Homer to the Seven Sages. Even the *Life of Pythagoras* is not entirely complete though there is enough to give us a sense of Porphyry's main emphases in his presentation of the subject.[24] Dominic O'Meara has described Porphyry's *Life* as a 'learned compilation of source materials concerning Pythagoras'.[25] Porphyry's *Life* contains extracts from the lost *Life of Pythagoras* by the second-century AD mathematician Nicomachus of Gerasa, in whose work the influence of Pythagorean thought is pronounced. Porphyry also quotes from Moderatus of Gades, author of an eleven volume work on Pythagoreanism (now lost), who is also counted among the Pythagoreanizing Platonists of the second century.

24. See A. Segonds in É. des Places, *Porphyre, Vie de Pythagore, Lettre à Marcella* (Paris 1982) 163-178, for a discussion of the fragments and their relation to the *VPyth*, the only (largely) intact biography in the *Philosophical History*.

25. O'Meara, *Pythagoras revived* 26; for an overview of Porphyry's sources, see 14-23.

One can easily understand why Porphyry's *Life* disappoints anyone hoping for intellectual sophistication in its exposition of Pythagorean tenets; one might even conclude that 'Pythagoras's philosophy emerges as an elementary sort of Platonism'.[26] From the elementary and common, though, the student learns patterns and relations that will enable him later to progress to greater and more sophisticated knowledge. Even in the record of the subjects Pythagoras studied as a child, we can find compressed a whole cosmology. Just the naming of the subjects allots each science to its place in the understanding of the world that Pythagoras came to represent for the Platonists, an understanding that rested firmly on the belief that one engaged with material things, with both the body and the mind; and through that engagement with the material one came to experience and know the truth about the nature of immaterial reality. So from one's earliest education one saw the unfolding of the ideal philosopher's orientation toward the business of *doing* philosophy, as it had been in Diogenes Laertius's account of Pythagoras.

Like Diogenes, Porphyry tells us that Pythagoras's father was called Mnesarchus and gives various accounts of the latter's place of origin and occupation (*VPyth* 1-2, 10). Porphyry's account of his philosopher's parentage and early education lacks a satisfactorily linear progression, but instead turns back on itself several times in order to present his various and sometimes conflicting sources. Porphyry does not offer a connected analysis of Pythagoras's education, instead he presents the reader with compact gobbets, barely contextualized. In his opening paragraph Porphyry describes how 'from his earliest childhood (ἐκ παίδων), Pythagoras was naturally gifted (εὐφυής) in whatever he was set to learn' (*VPyth.* 1).[27] In the *Lives* we

26. O'Meara, *Pythagoras revived* 26.

27. In ancient Greek usage, the language designating age is not consistent, so one must weigh it carefully against the context. For example, παῖς appears usually to refer to a child who has reached the age of at least 7 years old. On the other hand, Diogenes reports that according to Pythagoras, man's life can be divided into four parts: one is παῖς for 20 years, νε-ηνίσκος for 20 years, νεηνίης for 20 years and γέρων for 20 years. This seems highly schematic and scarcely helpful in evaluating the wider range of terms found in our texts. On the usage of age terminology in classical texts, see, Golden, *Children* 12-14; and R. J. Penella, *Greek philosophers and sophists in the fourth century AD. Studies in Eunapius of Sardis* (Leeds 1990) 26, on Eunapius's use of νεανίσκος loosely to suggest the relation of the younger student to the older teacher. H.Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité* (Paris 1965⁶) 161, made an attempt to generalize from wider usage and characterizes successive ages as follows: παιδίον (up to 7 years), παῖς (7-14), μειράκιον (14-21).

often find εὐφυής used to evoke the best raw material, the god-given excellence that distinguishes an exemplary specimen of the created world, whether a human being or, for example, a tree (*VPyth* 10). Porphyry goes on to state bluntly, and without any indication of age, that Mnesarchus took his son to Tyre where he associated with Chaldaeans and participated fully in all their rites. Pythagoras then went to Ionia where he studied first with the philosopher Pherecydes of Syros and afterwards with Hermodamas at Samos (*VPyth* 1). Porphyry later returns to the subject of Pythagoras's education, adding that he studied mathematical sciences with Egyptians, Chaldaeans and Phoenicians: from the Egyptians he learned geometry; from the Phoenicians the knowledge of numbers and calculation; from the Chaldaeans astronomy. From the magi he learned the performance of rites in honour of the gods and all else that is appropriate for everyday life (*VPyth* 6). In another vignette we find the zealous Pythagoras traveling to Egypt's holy cities determined to learn by association with the priests their rites and practices (*VPyth* 7). Finally, we come to the most informative passage, where Porphyry reports that Pythagoras was sent while still a child (παῖς) to study the lyre, gymnastics and painting. He was sent to Miletus to study geometry and astronomy with Anaximander, going on next to learn from Egyptians, Arabians, Chaldaeans and Hebrews, among whom he became perfected in astral knowledge and first practiced divination by incense. He kept company with Egyptian priests who instructed him in the three forms of language: epistolographic, hierographic and symbolic (*VPyth.* 11-12). While each passage may contribute some new detail, the composite portrait of Pythagoras's education is strongly colored by the Samian's religious and philosophical training among representatives of ancient wisdom. This is consistent with Porphyry's own interest in the harmonization of Greek and non-Greek traditions and is, of course, the most appropriate background for his Pythagoras, the paradigmatic harmonizer.

Iamblichus, who most likely composed his *On the Pythagorean way of life* after his teacher Porphyry, makes more of Pythagoras's early characteristics. Just as Porphyry's biography was part of a larger work, so *On the Pythagorean way of life* served as the introduction to a much broader project. It was the first volume of Iamblichus's ten-book *On Pythagoreanism* designed to expound the entire philosophical way taught by Pythagoras.[28] Only the first four books survive, but the titles of the books were as follows:

28. See O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived* 32-35, on the title of the entire work and the relation of each book to the overall expository concept.

1 On the Pythagorean way of life
2 Protreptic to philosophy
3 On general mathematical science
4 On Nicomachus's arithmetical introduction
5 On arithmetic in physical matters
6 On arithmetic in ethical matters
7 On arithmetic in theological matters
8 On Pythagorean geometry
9 On Pythagorean music
10 On Pythagorean astromony (conjectured)

The didactic progression begins with a paradigmatic life wherein the teacher embodies the teaching. It is essential to Pythagoras's understanding of the relationship between the material and immaterial, as expounded by Iamblichus, that the very beginner be shown how to live in concordance with the principles that make up the structure of reality. The student must be led from the whole to the part, from the common and general to the technical and specific. Biography is made to represent the common and general, and for this reason serves as the prologue to Iamblichus's whole work, providing a model of conduct that will allow the student to ascend properly to the more difficult, more specifically Pythagorean sciences. This works on the principle that rightly aligned actions, as those portrayed in the first book, pre-contain higher truths to be taught explicitly later, once the ground has been laid. O'Meara comments on the first book that:

> Iamblichus's interpretation of Pythagoras provides a means of determining the purpose of his encomiastic biography of Pythagoras, at least in its earlier chapters. The wondrous stories of Pythagoras's birth, education and travels constitute, not a biographical narrative, but an accumulation of evidences and signs, recognized by those that witnessed them, of Pythagoras's unique relation to the divine, his privileged access to intelligible truths, and his soteriological mission...In short, *On the Pythagorean Life* is a protreptic to Pythagorean philosophy through an illustration of the spiritual credentials of the founder of that philosophy.[29]

As a god-sent saviour, Pythagoras is a guide to how to learn. Pythagoras may have enjoyed special privileges but rather than setting him apart, this

29. O'Meara, *Pythagoras revived* 39.

draws him closer to men, all potentially his students, as he acts out in social intercourse exactly how man should live. In addition, then, to establishing Pythagoras's credentials as founder of a philosophical system Iamblichus is about to expound at length, I would suggest that the active purpose of the first book is also to demonstrate the pre-contained, higher truths at the level of *doing* philosophy. For this reason, we should read what may seem like a somewhat typical rhetorical treatment of a life instead as a breathing paradigm for philosophical living that distills in each detail a meeting point of theory and action.

Setting out on his exposition of the Pythagorean way of life, Iamblichus opens with a carefully paraphrased echo of the Pythagorean Timaeus, the namesake of Plato's dialogue: 'when throwing oneself into all love of wisdom, it is the custom among those of tempered disposition to call upon God' (*VP* 1)[30]. We could translate ἐπὶ πάσης μὲν φιλοσοφίας ὁρμῇ as 'at the start of every philosophical investigation' (Hershbell and Dillon) or 'embarking on any philosophical study' (Clark) since ὁρμή does signify a start. But the actively directed movement, the desirous impulse implied by the word should not be lost for it stands at the opening as a signpost for the reader of how to approach wisdom, with ὁρμή. This prayerful start is all the more appropriate in his case, as the subject of his writing is the philosophy of the divine Pythagoras, whose origin is from the gods and which can only be grasped through the gods. So Iamblichus begins his relation of this philosophy by speaking of Pythagoras's own early orientation, bidding the reader to orient himself in the same way. His birth was foretold in an oracle from the Pythia at Delphi, where Mnesarchus had gone on business with his wife, not knowing that she was already pregnant. Iamblichus like Diogenes Laertius takes care to ensure the right connections are made as he relates Pythagoras's story, so he begins from first things: the accounts that Apollo sired Pythagoras are false. Rather, Apollo was the guide of Pythagoras's soul into this world, and these signs concerning his birth and the all-encompassing wisdom implanted in his soul reflect his great intimacy with his spiritual

30. Ἐπὶ πάσης μὲν φιλοσοφίας ὁρμῇ θεὸν δήπου παρακαλεῖν ἔθος ἅπασι τοῖς γε σώφροσιν. Cp. *Tim.* 27c: πάντες ὅσοι καὶ κατὰ βραχὺ σωφροσύνης μετέχουσιν, ἐπὶ παντὸς ὁρμῇ καὶ σμικροῦ καὶ μεγάλου πράγματος θεὸν ἀεί που καλοῦσιν. Throughout these chapters, in my translation of Iamblichus's *On the Pythagorean way of life* (henceforth *VP*), I have benefited from the translations by Clark, as well as Hershfeld and Dillon. The numbering follows Deubner.

guide.[31] The link between his natural father and his spiritual father is manifested in Mnemarchus's act of erecting a shrine to Apollo upon returning from his long and profitable travels in the East. He then turned his attention to his son's education, nourishing him with learning that was both 'wide-ranging and exemplary' (τόν τε παῖδα ποικίλοις παιδεύμασι καὶ ἀξιολογωτάτοις ἐνέτρεφε). He entrusted him in turn to Pherecydes of Syros and 'almost all who were experts in divine matters.' His purpose in these choices was so that, 'to the extent it was humanly possible (κατὰ δύναμιν)', his son 'might be taught thoroughly and sufficiently about divine matters' (*VP* 9).

We see how in Iamblichus's scheme the metaphysical order is reflected in physical bearing and appearance. The connections are explicitly and carefully drawn out at every level. The sound spiritual and intellectual foundation laid by Pythagoras's father manifested itself in Pythagoras's physical appearance and manner: he became the most beautiful person ever recorded in history and in good fortune the most attuned to the gods (θεοπρεπέστατος). And after his natural father's death he went on to become the most dignified and sound-minded (σεμνότατος σωφρονέστατός τε). 'While still quite young he was already thought worthy of respect and reverence even by the eldest' (*VP* 10). Through these qualities of character the child was linked to all the community, so that even the oldest deemed him worthy of respect and reverence. He struck wonder into everyone who heard him or saw him – through the senses everyone who encountered him perceived at once he was a child of God. Bolstered by such a reputation, and by this education which began from his infancy as well as by his natural godlikeness (θεοειδεία) he made every effort to be even more worthy of his present privileges by disciplining himself through religious rites, study, and a strictly regulated diet (*VP* 9-10).

Iamblichus uses the verb διακοσμέω, to rightly order and thus to make beautiful, to describe Pythagoras's self-training in which he disciplines the whole person to work harmoniously: the soul through religious rites, the mind through study, and the body through dietary regimen. Thus he acquires a finely balanced soul and well regulated body (διεκόσμει... εὐσταθείᾳ τε ψυχῆς και καταστολῇ σώματος). His speech and actions are infused with tranquility and inimitable calm, untouched by any form of disturbance. He

31. See O'Meara, *Pythagoras revived* 37-39, for the Platonic background of Iamblichus's representation of Pythagoras's relation to Apollo.

lived like a 'beneficient guardian spirit', a characterization which again underlines Pythagoras's role in Samian society, sent down by Apollo as a model for all ages. But Pythagoras's reputation spread abroad to wise men who were best able to discern its divine origin, even while he was still a youth (ἔφηβος) (*VP* 10-11).

Iamblichus relates that at the age of 18, foreseeing the future of Polycrates's tyranny for Samos, how it would be an obstacle to his purpose and everything he was keen to learn, Pythagoras fled by night to take refuge with new teachers: Pherecydes, Anaximander, Thales. The last admired him as unparalled among his peers, and encouraged him to travel to Egypt to associate with the priests at Memphis and Diospolis. The aged Thales went on to say that neither nature nor training had endowed him with the privileges possessed by Pythagoras, and that association with these priests would make him the most divine and the wisest beyond all other men (*VP* 11-12).[32]

From Thales, Iamblichus relates that Pythagoras learned the vital lesson of making the best use of his time, sleeping little on account of the clarity of his clean soul and healthy body trained by a meatless, wineless diet (*VP* 13). He sailed to Phoenicia where he kept company with hierophants and was initiated into all the sacred rites of the mysteries celebrated especially in Byblos and Tyre and in many parts of Syria (*VP* 14). He was propelled to learn these things out of his 'love and appetite for knowledge as well as his reverent concern that nothing worth learning preserved in the ineffable doctrines or rites of the gods escape his notice' (*VP* 14). One is reminded again and again of the insatiable appetite for penetrating all religious practices and the thinking behind them, attributed by Philostratus to his Pythagorean Apollonius.

After a sea voyage in which even would-be slave traders paid him homage having understood his uniqueness among humans from his godlike behaviour and its calming effect on the natural environment, Pythagoras arrived in Egypt where he immersed himself in visiting and investigating every holy place, associating with all the priests, listening to all men revered for wisdom, attending all rites, none too obscure to merit his attention (*VP*18).

32. This attraction between the naturally gifted and rightly-oriented child and older wise men appears in other late antique philosophical lives. Olympios, to give but one example, is said by Damascius to have kept company with older people whom he resembled in spiritual ways: *VIsid* 42E (Athanassiadi).

Pythagoras's careful engagement with every source of divine knowledge was fuelled by his appreciation that each had his own particular understanding to impart, while the work of the philosopher was to expose himself to all wisdom so as to be able to discern its place in the whole. He followed the same practice, in Iamblichus's account, among the magi of Babylonia, where he perfected his knowledge of divine worship as well as of numbers, music and other mathematical sciences.

In his description of Pythagoras's early education Iamblichus brings out the reciprocity of learning in all his encounters with wise men as a child (βρέφος, παῖς) and what we would call a young man (νέος). Pythagoras's natural, precocious yearning for knowledge, in all its variety, leads him to seek out wise men and his relationship to these men, who discern in him a common orientation and goal, is always described in terms of association and familiarity. His relationship to Apollo is characterized in a similar way: he is a companion or partner in an even more intimate relationship (τὸ μέντοι τὴν Πυθαγόρου ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀπόλλωνος ἡγεμονίας, εἴτε συνοπαδὸν οὖσαν εἴτε καὶ ἄλλως οἰκειότερον ἔτι πρὸς τὸν θεὸν τοῦτον συντεταγμένην: *VP* 7-8). He sat beside his first teachers, joining their company and eliciting from them their love and their wonder at his nature. They make him share in their discourses (*VP* 12). Also in Egypt the mutuality of learning is made even more explicit when Iamblichus describes Pythagoras's sojourn among the magi of Babylon, using the participal *asmenos*, 'to be well-pleased' to characterize the delight, the engaged satisfaction experienced by both the student and his teachers (κἀκεῖ τοῖς μάγοις ἀσμένοις ἄσμενος συνδιατρίψας: *VP* 19). Iamblichus had used the same language to describe Thales's gratified acceptance of Pythagoras as a young pupil (*VP* 12).

Porphyry discussed in a more explicit way the pleasure of learning – as of course Plato had. Proclus's commentary on the *First Alcibiades* is a protracted contemplation of the role of love and pleasure in the long, careful process of education in which the teacher is lover and spiritual guide. In his *Life of Pythagoras*, Porphyry writes that there are three different things worthy of study: what is noble and good; what is useful; and what is pleasurable. Pleasure is of two sorts: that of the stomach and that of sexual pleasures, on the one hand, which resembles the Sirens' songs and, on the other hand, 'the good and just pleasure which is necessary to life and grants the same instant delight, but without being followed by repentance, and these, Pythagoras said, resemble the resemble the harmony of the muses' (*VPyth* 39).

Pythagoras the model teacher

After his education abroad among the wise men of the East, Pythagoras returns to Samos where as a mature man – at the symbolic age of 40 in Porphyry's account and 56 in Iamblichus's – he adopts the role of teacher. To the novelist Antoninos Diogenes (fl. 100 AD), Porphyry attributes the story of Astraios (*VPyth* 10, 13), not included in the accounts by Diogenes Laertius or Iamblichus. Astraios was discovered by Mnesarchos, who presented him to Pythagoras as a gift. He had found the infant lying on its back under a large well-formed (εὐφυής) poplar looking unblinkingly at the sun and with a small, thin reed in its mouth by which it was nourished on dew dropping from the tree. Taking the scene as a sign of the child's divine nature, Mnesarchus brought him to live with his own three sons, and gave him the name Astraios. Assuming paternal responsibility for the child's education, Pythagoras's first step was to read the signs of his physical features and bearing. Physiognomy was an art of character discernment that Pythagoras would use to orient all his teaching. It reflected the awareness that each student must be approached and guided differently, according to his particular nature and abilities. This particularity is apparent in material forms, such as physical features and the manifestation of inner movement in the body, and it is the work of the philosopher to make obvious the connections so that through this knowledge he can then lead the student step by step to self-knowledge. There are many paths to education and Pythagoras 'transmitted the appropriate portion of wisdom according to each one's own nature and ability' (κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν φύσιν ἑκάστου καὶ δύναμιν παρεδίδου τῆς σοφίας τὴν ἐπιβάλλουσαν μοῖραν: *VP* 90).

Another young pupil, this time a Thracian slave belonging to Pythagoras, was Zamolxis the legendary lawgiver of the Getae. Again the relationship is described as one of affection (ἀγαπῶν δ' αὐτὸν ὁ Πυθαγόρας: Porph., *VPyth* 14).[33] It is similar to the intimacy of a father-son relationship which existed between Pythagoras and his first teacher Pherecydes when, according to one tradition, the devoted student returned to Delos to bury his teacher (Porphyry, *VPyth* 55-56).[34] Pythagoras trains Zamolxis in knowledge of the stars, as well as in sacred ritual and other matters of religion – what we would

33. Cp. Iamb., *VP* 12, describing the affection of Pherecydes, Anaximander and Thales for the youth: ὥστε πάντας αὐτὸν ἀγαπᾶν.

34. See H. Schibli, *Pherekydes of Syros* (Oxford 1990) 1-13, on Pherecydes's life and the legends surrounding it.

expect on the basis of reports of Pythagoras's own early education. Iamblichus offers as the clearest example of this principle Pythagoras's relationship with Abaris, a Scythian from the Hyperboreans, a priest of Apollo who was, though, untrained in Hellenic wisdom (*VP* 90-94). Given his particular status as an elderly priest deeply versed in sacred wisdom, Pythagoras did not submit him to the more usual course of training, starting with five years of silence. But 'he quickly brought him to a state of readiness to hear [Pythagoras] expound his doctrines, and taught him in the shortest time possible his treatises *On Nature* and *On the Gods*'. On account of their intimate relationship founded on a common bond with Apollo, Pythagoras bade Abaris stay with him and

> join in the improvement of (συνδιορθοῦν) those who came their way, and share the gold which he collected with those who were suitable, that is, those who were so guided by reason that they confirmed in their actions his dogma which is "common are the things of friends" (κοινὰ τὰ φίλων). So then, when Abaris agreed to remain with him...Pythagoras imparted to him knowledge of nature and theology in epitomized form, and, instead of prognosis by divination from the entrails of sacrificial animals, he instructed him in foreknowledge through numbers, believing this to be purer, more divine and more conformable to the heavenly numbers of the gods. (*VP* 92-93)[35]

It is no coincidence that Pythagoras's first three pupils are distinct from his Greek followers – Astraios, of divine origin, Zamolxis the Thracian, and Abaris the Hyperborean. Rather, this illustrates how in practice Pythagoras applied his universal teaching to men of all backgrounds. His method draws first on principles of paternal love and friendship that open the way to trust and openness, and in turn allow the quality of discernment to blossom so that the pupil is able to learn to grasp how these same relations of *philia* and *eros* energize the physical world and its movements. For this reason, early training focuses on music, astronomy and divination, in which physical and metaphysical phenomena are intimately joined.[36] Music, says Iamblichus, induces feelings of joy and causes the pupil to become graceful and rhythmical. These are signs of an engaged participation in all levels of being, the

35. Also on Abaris as companion of Pythagoras, see *VP* 140-141, 215-221. Porphyry, *VPyth* 28-29, makes less of Abaris, mentioning him only as a priest of Apollo and wonder-working disciple of Pythagoras.

36. These subjects will be discussed at greater length in chapter two.

goal of philosophy, but achieved at this foundational stage by rightly oriented action not conscious theorizing. Early lessons through active participation in religious ritual confirm the connections.

That this discernment of individual difference served as the foundation of all his teaching is clearly demonstrated in Iamblichus's account of Pythagoras's activities in Samos. Upon his return to Samos, Pythagoras met with resistance to his manner of teaching, which Iamblichus says he had adopted from the Egyptian priests. To counter this he adopted a plan by which he persuaded a poor youth who was graceful (εὐφυής) and agile (εὐκίνητος) to accept to learn from him, providing him with a three obol piece in return for his every effort. So as not to overwhelm him at first, Pythagoras began with some lessons he himself had learned from non-Greeks when he was still a youth. Pythagoras then moved on to numbers and geometry, showing the youth himself not theoretically, but in practice, by means of a drawing board. As time went on the youth's enthusiasm for such learning grew and he progressed in the best way possible to theoretical thinking. Now firmly set on the road to wisdom, the youth grasped the pleasure of learning and its natural progression. Once he had reached this stage Pythagoras told him that he no longer had any money with which to pay him, but was himself now in need. The youth responded by suggesting that he would compensate his teacher for continuing their lessons together (*VP* 21-25).

The structure of the particular relationship between teacher and student was reflected in society at large. The teacher assumes the role of the father as we have already seen in both Porphyry and Iamblichus. Philostratus had developed this image in order to highlight Apollonius's correct actions and demeanour both as pupil and teacher. The young Apollonius had been given his natural father's blessing to forsake his rhetorical studies in decadent Tarsus and establish himself instead at the sanctuary of Asclepius at nearby Aegae, in whose more suitable, peaceful surroundings philosophers of various schools instructed their disciples. Though he kept company with adherents of the other schools, and did not despise them, Apollonius was drawn to the wisdom of Pythagoras taught by one Euxenus of Heraclea in Pontus. Now Euxenus, says Philostratus, was not a very serious person. He did not endeavour to live the philosophy he taught, but was devoted instead to gluttony and sexual delights more appropriate to an Epicurean:

> He knew the Pythagorean maxims just as birds know what they learn from men, for the birds will bid you 'Welcome' and 'Be well', and say 'God bless you' and such like, without understanding what they say and

> without any real sympathy for mankind, merely because they have been trained to move their tongues in a certain way. Apollonius, however, was like the young eagles who, as long as they are not fully fledged, fly alongside their parents and are trained by them in flight, but who as soon as they are able to rise in the air, outsoar the parent birds, especially if they perceive the latter to be gluttons who keep to the ground to gorge themselves. Like them the young Apollonius sat at the feet of Euxenus and was guided by him in the path of argument, but when he reached his sixteenth year he threw himself into the Pythagorean way of life[37], winged for this purpose by some higher power. Even so, he did not cease to love Euxenus. (*VA* 1.7)

This compact vignette of the relationship between teacher and student reveals the flexibility inherent in it and rightly exploited by the perceptive student. Pythagorean maxims depended on the student's receptivity which was grounded in individual capacity. It is not within the capabilities of a parrot to do more than mouth the words. The better endowed pupil takes the maxims to heart and comes to live and breath them through training. Parental guidance, like that of the teacher, is needed for this training, but this too has its limits and at the appropriate time this role is assumed by a 'higher power'. The divine teacher takes over as the student outsoars his first trainers. But he never leaves them completely, for part of his acquired wisdom is an understanding of the connections that link him to the entire cosmos. Hence Euxenus's failure is expressed as the bird's lack of sympathy for mankind, while Apollonius never ceases to love his inadequate teacher, perceiving as he does Euxenus's own limited capacities.[38]

Just as teaching and learning depended on careful attention to individual aptitude and was grounded in affection between teacher and taught, as well as a desire on both sides for progress, so Pythagoras's method of teaching was articulated at the level of the community to correspond to the different needs of each group.

37. The word used is ὥρμησεν; cp. the opening of Iamblichus's *VP* discussed above.

38. Iamblichus's pupil Aedesius behaved towards his own father with reverence despite his knowledge that his father erred when the latter drove him out of the family home as useless on account of his desire to study philosophy: Eunapius, *VPh* 4.1-3.

The community

Pythagoras is best known for his success among the Greek colonists of Southern Italy and Sicily. At the opening of his narration of the Samian philosopher's sojourn there, Iamblichus sets out what we might call Pythagoras's pedagogical method. Essential to his presentation of Pythagoras's work is the fact that he frames it in terms of the teacher's relationship with his audience, and the recognition he received as a divinely inspired teacher. It is on account of this recognition that he is so uniquely esteemed and wondered at by men (*VP* 29-30). First Iamblichus gives an overview of Pythagoras's overall concept of connections and then, again, briefly and succinctly explains that Pythagoras taught about nature in its entirety, the heavens and its movements, and everything on earth, both visible and invisible; he taught a way of thinking about all things that allowed the soul to see clearly, to discern the real principles and causes of everything. He made the Greeks familiar with this entire approach to seeing (*VP* 31-32).

Iamblichus goes on to name aspects of this true understanding of principles and causes in their relation to the community and the individuals that constitute it. He taught what is the best community and what it means to live as a unified body (ὁμοδημία), he taught that friends have things in common, he taught worship of the gods, reverence for those who have passed before us, lawgiving and education and silence and forbearance for other living beings, self-control and sound-mindedness and sagacity and divinity (θειότης). These he makes apparent (ἐφάνη), showing how they are worthy of desire (ἀξιέραστα) and great effort (περισπούδαστα) to all those who love learning (*VP* 32). All the qualities Iamblichus names intimately link the individual student with his place in the community, for it is through learning to live harmoniously all the true connections between the individual and the entire cosmos that the human being orients himself toward the ultimate goal of likeness to God to the extent possible for each individual. Most of Pythagoras's specific teaching which now follows is aimed at particular groups within the community, with the goal of showing them how to live correctly their specific relation to the other groups. The essential character of relationship is emphasized in Iamblichus's choice of language: Pythagoras familiarizes his audience with correct ideas, ideas which are worthy of *eros* by those who are friends of learning, all of which, says Iamblichus, elicits wonder in his hearers.

Iamblichus expounds a view of human society in which each age flows into the next, building on the structures established in the previous age.

Taking this view of the whole, he insists that it is foolish to despise even the wrong opinions of the ignorant, for without knowledge of this too the teacher cannot expect to correct and realign the parts that make up society (*VP* 200). But people must be made to learn from those who are trained in right knowledge, and this starts from the earliest age:

> But in the whole of human life there are certain ages, which are 'divided up'[39] (such is said to be their term), which not just anyone can connect with another; for these ages conflict with one another, if the human being is not well and correctly guided from birth. It is the case, then, that when the education of the child is good, temperate and manly, a great part of it is transmitted into the age of its adolescence; and similarly when the care and education of an adolescent is good, temperate and manly, a great part of it is transmitted into the age of manhood. (*VP* 201)[40]

At Croton, Pythagoras is first shown by Iamblichus addressing the male youths (νεανίσκοι). He goes to them where they are, in the gymnasium (*VP* 37-44). First he urges them to esteem their parents, drawing examples from nature to teach that that which is prior in time takes priority in honour. He also uses the example of their city's patron, Heracles, to illustrate deference to one's elders since it was in honour of his father Zeus that Heracles undertook the labours which earned his reputation among gods and men, and created the occasion for establishing the Olympic games in commemoration of the son's efforts for his father. As a society, the Greek colonists of Croton were unrivalled in their passion for these games, in fact, their esteem for victorious athletes bordered on the pathological, as a visit to the Crotone archaeological museum testifies. By setting these first lessons in the physical context of the gymnasium, and with future victors as his audience, Iamblichus could not have better orchestrated Pythagoras's initiation of the entire community's reorientation.

Pythagoras next spoke to them about temperance (σωφροσύνη), an essential virtue for boys and girls, women and older people too but one most important for youths since theirs is the age when desire reaches it fullness. Temperance, he taught, is the only virtue that affects both body and soul, allowing one to maintain both in a balanced, healthy state so that desire can

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39. The word used is ἐνδεδασμένας, an old Pythagorean locution from ἐνδαίω, see Hershbell and Dillon, *Iamblichus, On the Pythagorean way of life* 205 n.14.

40. Cp. *VP* 204: 'Men, like puppies and colts, should be both accustomed to and learn, from the start of their lives, the things that they will be required to do as adults'.

be put to use in the best pursuits. The correct place of this individual maintenance of temperance in the community is demonstrated through Pythagoras's emphasis on education in the broadest sense of the term *paideia.* He urges the youths to focus all their energies on the acquisition of a general culture driven by carefully exercised thought. Learning the practice of *dianoia* across wide-ranging subjects would in turn help them to exercise temperance in all they think and do, for education is a training of the mind that affects both body and soul. To focus primarily on the care of the body, he says, places the body in the mind's role as guide. Instead what must take the lead is the cultivation of thought, not only because it trains the mind but because it puts us in relation to the community of thinking people across time in a lasting way that is not possible with the cultivation of bodies which associates one disproportionately with the level of the individual. In one of the most potent statements of his understanding of the power and purpose of education, Iamblichus has Pythagoras say that 'education is the collective genius of those who are outstanding in each generation, for the discoveries made by these have become the education of others' (*VP* 43). This shared culture of education has a collective longevity far beyond that to which any individual Olympic victor could possibly aspire.

Once he had established the pattern by which he addressed the different groups that constituted the community, Pythagoras conferred along the same vein with each. The fathers in the community, they who constituted Croton's ruling council, recognized and praised him as teacher. He first urged them to establish a temple to the Muses in order to maintain a model of concord. Models of unity are emphasized by Iamblichus's exuberant use of language of sharing and mutuality (*VP* 45-46). At the community's centre the Muses move in their perpetual dance, always a circular dance that is ever constant, in unison, rhythmical. Taking up the Muses' dance, the leaders of Croton should practice a constant exercise of their own reigning virtue, justice. Their virtuous governing of the community should be reflected also in their households, where they consciously play out their role as model – their contract with their wives is their children who reflect in their imitation of the father what manner of man he is, especially in his exercise of discipline and temperance (*VP* 47-48).[41]

Urged next to address the children, Pythagoras meets with them in the

41. Cp. Philostratus, *VA* 6.31, where Apollonius is made to quote the Pythagorean Archytas saying, 'Let the father be an example of virtue to his children, for fathers also will walk more resolutely in the path of virtue because their children are coming to resemble them'.

temple of Apollo (*VP* 51-53). He begins by contemplating the activity most common among children: they should not spend their time quarreling but focus on their education. His view is unswerving. The child 'who is not well brought up at this time will find it difficult, if not in fact impossible, to finish life well after a bad start' (*VP* 51). The disposition that befits the purity of children, and which earned them the privilege of spending time in temples, should be cultivated in relation to their elders and what they can learn from good models. They should respond to Apollo and all the gods that guide their growth by being worthy of their friendship; and 'they should practice listening so as to be able to speak'. No time should be lost, but they should set out on their chosen path straightaway and not contradict their elders.

Again the address is received with reverence, the circle of communication joins up. The final group Pythagoras addressed was composed of women, again linking them first with their appropriate divine guide at the temple of Hera, advising them on the most fitting forms of prayer and offering to the gods, and then moving to their correct relation to their fathers and husbands (*VP* 54-57).

Iamblichus uses Pythagoras's addresses to distinct social groups to pick out their dominant virtues and their relations to other groups in the community, human and divine. Subsequently he narrows his focus to the smaller scale of a community, of mixed ages (though whether also of mixed gender is not stated), made up of devoted followers of Pythagoras's teachings (*VP* 95-100). Iamblichus's portrait recalls the division of the day as espoused by Apollonius in Philostratus's *Life*, starting with the gods and moving downward and outward toward men.[42]

For Porphyry, in his *Life of Pythagoras*, there were two times of the day best suited to reflection and self-scrutiny: upon waking and upon going to sleep. He cites prayers from the *Golden Verses* that Pythagoreans would utter on each occasion (*VPyth.* 40)[43]:

> When you first rise from sweet sleep, consider very well which deeds you will perform during the day.

42. *VA* 116, see above 13-14.

43. Tr. J. Thom, *The Pythagorean* Golden Verses. *With introduction, commentary* (Leiden 1995) 38 and 42. The verses recited upon going to sleep are *Golden Verses* 40-42. Those used upon rising also appear after 39 in two codices of the *Golden Verses*: see Thom, 35-58, on Porphyry's use of the verses. Iamblichus (*VP* 165-166) also mentions similar exercises used to train the memory.

> Do not welcome sleep upon your soft eyes before you have reviewed each of the day's deeds three times:
> 'Where did I transgress? What did I accomplish? What duty did I neglect?"

Iamblichus's community begins the day in individual attention to the harmonization of the body, mind and soul: a lone walk in some quiet place like a sacred grove, where the disciple can set his soul in order and compose his thoughts. Only once he has done this on this morning walk is he prepared to encounter others, either in temples or similar venues.

This is the time for training the mind through instruction (διδασκαλία καὶ μάθησις), and what the Pythagoreans called the correction of character (ἡ τῶν ἠθῶν ἐπανόρθωσις). Afterwards, they turned their attention specifically to the care of their bodies, again choosing gardens and groves for the exercises, which were studiously adapted to fit the strength of their respective bodies. For their midday meal they ate bread and honey or honeycomb, but drank no wine. After lunch they devoted themselves to wider social concerns, applying the law to situations outside their immediate community.

Reinforcing the philosopher's place in the community was managed in like fashion by Iamblichus's pupil Aedesius, who by his own behaviour taught his circle the need for interaction with people from all walks of life. The manners of Aedesius, reports Eunapius whose own teacher, Chrysanthius, was Aedesius's pupil, were courteous and affable:

> After their competitions in literature and disputations, he would go for a walk in Pergamon accompanied by the more distinguished of his pupils. And their teacher used to implant in his pupils a feeling of harmony and of responsibility towards mankind when he observed that they were intolerant and overbearing because of their pride in their own opinions; and when they spread their wings further than those of Icarus, though they were even more fragile, he would lead them gently down, not into the sea, but to the land and to human life. While he thus instructed them, he himself, if he met a woman selling vegetables, was pleased to see her and would stop in his walk to speak to her and discuss the price she charged, and say that her shop was making a good profit; and at the same time he used to talk with her about the cultivation of vegetables. He would behave in the same fashion to a weaver, or a smith, or a carpenter. Thus the more diligent of his pupils were trained in this affability. (*VPh* 8.5-8)

This vignette from Eunapius helps breathe life into Iamblichus's more programmatic description of the philosophical community in society.

Returning now to Iamblichus's Pythagorean day, the late afternoon they again devoted to walking, this time not alone but in twos or threes, recalling to mind what they had learned and 'training themselves in good habits'. There was then time for bathing before a common meal of wine, barley cake, bread, relishes, boiled and raw vegetables, sacrificial meat and, rarely, fish. The meal was attended by no more than ten people and it too was carefully contextualized. Once they had assembled, they made offerings of aromatic herbs and incense, and again after the meal libations were offered. At the meal's close the youngest read out loud whatever the oldest member present had chosen and in the manner he had been instructed to read it. The reading too was framed by a libation after which the oldest admonished the assembled group, summing up the order of harmonious relations: not to harm or destroy a cultivated or fruitful plant or living being harmless by nature to humans, to have a reverent disposition to the divine, daemonic and heroic and also towards parents and benefactors, and finally to assist the law and the war against lawlessness. With this each went to his own house.

The ideal life for the student was spent in the constant company of his teacher. Together their life was a pilgrimage toward knowledge and experience of what is true. Everything along the way was made a lesson. In this chapter we have brought out the structure of Platonist Pythagorizing education as seen in the model of Pythagoras's life. With the structure and its basis in rightly ordered relationships and mutuality in place, we will turn in the second chapter to the first subjects studied and the ultimate goal of likeness to God which dictates the manner in which they are approached. We may conclude this chapter with an image of the Pythagorean teacher with his community of students.

When the time had come to visit and learn the wisdom of the famed Naked Philosophers of Ethiopia, Apollonius of Tyana was followed by a band of self-selected disciples, trained as if for a sacred competition. Before setting out they prayed to the gods and sacrificed 'as if embarking on a sea voyage'. On their camels they set out for the pyramids,

> keeping the Nile on their right. They crossed the river at many points in order to learn about everything on its banks, and there was no city, sanctuary or any holy place in Egypt that they passed without discussion, but they were constantly being taught or teaching a kind of sacred discourse, and any vessel that carried Apollonius resembled a pilgrim ship. (*VA* 5.43.3)

The word Philostratus uses to describe Apollonius's sacred ship is *theoris*, the vessel that carried a religious envoy (θεωρός) on its way to consult an oracle.[44] In this journey, Apollonius and his students embody the full range of the word *theoria*. Originally, *theoria* was used to denote the sending of a mission to consult an oracle, or make offerings at a religious festival on behalf of the home community. It retains this meaning, but comes also to include the spectators, those who see, whether at a religious festival, or on the travels that take them there. It comes also to signify those who contemplate the universe and the structure of reality they discern from this seeing. *Theoria* is what the philosopher does: he participates in sacred rites, travels to see and learn from the natural world, and contemplates and speculates about what he sees. He does this on behalf of the community and as part of a community. It is through relationship and movement that the philosopher with his pupils participate in the most active form of doing that engages the entire range of human potential, namely, contemplation.

44. See Riedweg, *Pythagoras* 126-128, for a discussion of *theoria* in the context of the coining of the word 'philosophy', attributed to Pythagoras.

2.

LEARNING TO BECOME LIKE GOD

> For teaching extends to the road and the passage, but the vision is the work of him who has decided to see.
>
> Plotinus, *Enn.* 6.9.4.15-16[1]

When asked by a father how best to educate his son, Pythagoras is said to have responded, 'By making him a citizen of a well-governed state' (DL 8.16).[2] The reply makes sense if one believes that human beings learn above all through imitation, and that given good models to imitate a child will grow to resemble them. It is necessary too to understand the rightly-formed individual as a part of a whole, in this case the well-governed state. Education is the harmonizing of the parts. At one level, it is the harmonizing of the parts that make up each individual. But the individual's internal balance extends to produce relations of concord among his fellow citizens, and this harmonization is what, in turn, makes possible a well-governed state, which was thought to mirror the cosmos, a term said to have been coined by Pythagoras to indicate the order and beauty of the universe that is comprehensible to the educated man. Education was the acquisition and maintenance of a way of living in the world that harmoniously engaged the whole human being, body, mind and soul.

As we have seen in Chapter One, the legacy left by Pythagoras and the Pythagorean tradition to late antique Platonism is most clearly discernable in the idea that the harmonizing of the parts can and should take place not only at the cosmic level as it is comprehensible to man in, for example, music and mathematics, but especially in a way of living. This harmonizing of the parts of a human being is effected by constant training, and constitutes a necessary

1. Tr. D. O'Meara, *Plotinus, An introduction to the* Enneads (Oxford 1993) 105.
2. Diogenes here cites Book Ten of Aristoxenus's *On Education* as his source.

preparation for the ultimate goal of human existence, which, in the Platonist tradition, is to become like God so far as possible.[3] The properly educated human being is the good citizen who becomes so through learning how to act and think with regard to God, himself and other individuals. He does not pour all his energies into one activity alone, but balances his occupations between worship of the gods, intellectual discourse and a range of social relations.

Pythagoras is said by Iamblichus to have compared the variety of approaches to life with the variety of approaches to a festival (*VP* 58). Different people go for varying reasons: some to make money, some to display their physical strength, some to view the exhibitions of fine wares and listen to beautifully honed discourses. So with life, one's motivation for living dictates how we live, and our guiding genius can be the yearning for wealth, gain, or the beautiful and excellent. Iamblichus states the same principle in the *On the mysteries*, this time with regard to the necessity that each person worship in a manner appropriate to his particular state of being:

> Each person attends to his rite according to what he is, not according to what he is not; therefore the rite should not surpass the proper measure of the one who performs that form of worship. (*DM* 220.5-7)[4]

In worship as in education, manifest variety is a reflection of that inherent in the human condition. On account of the variety of forces that motivate us and the state of each individual constitution, education was viewed as a highly individual matter that was tailored to the character and talents of each pupil. Not only the method of instruction, but also the subject matter, at least in emphasis, should be adapted to correspond to and make the most of each pupil's abilities.

Educational exercises

Education is learning to do, understanding doing in the most holistic way we can conceive of human activity, physical and mental. 'Words breed a certain sort of disposition'.[5] How one thinks is reflected in how one conducts oneself. Or, we could state it another way: actions breed a certain sort of thinking. By starting with teaching children rightly-oriented acts, the teacher

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3. Plato, *Theaetetus* 176b.

4. Tr. G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the soul. The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA 1995) 157, with slight adjustments.

5. Julian, *ep.* 89b.301c.

is laying a foundation for similarly-oriented mental doing. The first subjects taught are all 'doing' in a way that ties in with learning to understand the natural order and the connections between the levels of that order. None of our sources includes a detailed curriculum for elementary education. Instead we must draw on passing references to Pythagoras's own education and his pedagogical routine with his own students, but also from biographies of other philosophers, to build up a schematic overview of the order and intent of early lessons.

Music and movement

Pythagoras's first formal education, according to Porphyry, began when he was sent as a young boy (παῖς) to study the lyre, gymnastics and painting (*VPyth* 11). These three subjects engage a child above all in learning harmonious movement. Correct movement lay at the foundation of the Pythagoreanizing understanding of the cosmos, and through teaching correct physical movement by music and gymnastics[6], the teacher sets up a paradigm that can be applied to harmonious movement at other levels in the individual's experience: movement in relation to the natural world and its cycles, for example, or later on, the movement of discursive thought.

Accustoming a child to right movement and beauty, as in the study of music and painting, is also a training in the suitable use of his senses. At the earliest stages of education one is 'led along by the teacher and well-grounded in beauty' (*Enn.* 6.7.36.16-17).[7] This grounding in beauty is effected through the cultivation of the senses to discern beauty and order in all their manifestations, especially in relation to oneself, one's fellow humans and the gods. In describing how Proclus was finely balanced in body, Marinus comments first on his senses and how they remained unimpaired throughout his life as a sign of his correct use of them. Proclus, he writes, had an 'outstanding keenness of senses, which they call indeed the wisdom of the body, especially the more honourable senses, sight[8] and hearing, the ones

6. Plato, *Laws* 673a, calls gymnastics the systematic training for the proper movement of the body.

7. Cp. Iamb, *VP* 59: 'But the purest way of life for a human being is that which embraces the contemplation of the most beautiful, which is what one may term "philosophical". Beauty, for a start, is the sight of the whole heaven and the stars revolving in it, if one observes their order'.

8. Damascius (*VIsid* 33B) says of Marinus as a teacher that he 'did not force pupils to pursue invisible truth through reasoning alone...but strove to persuade them by placing eyes in their soul, or rather cleansing those which were already there', tr. Athanassiadi.

that have been given for the purpose of philosophy and to produce good relations both with human beings and with the gods' (*VProc* 3).[9]

Iamblichus too privileges sight and hearing among the senses, explaining that Pythagoras 'thought that human training (ἐπιμέλεια) begins with the senses, when one sees beautiful shapes and hears beautiful rhythms and melodies' (*VP* 64). But his discussion of music suggests that the range of sensible perception that feeds into building a good foundation is very broad and includes all the senses. And this range is not simply useful for foundation-laying, but sets paradigms for later development. The inclusion of the senses in educational technique reflects the insistence on including the physical realm in a paradigmatic way, as a conceptual tool that is based on perception and experience, in philosophical progression toward the more technical and theoretical. It is part of this insistence, taught implicitly from the very outset of education, that thinking and doing are intimately related, as are the material and immaterial.

> So the first stage of [his] system of education was based on music: songs and rhythms from which came healing of human temperaments and passions, and the harmonization of the soul's powers. He devised remissions and complete recovery from diseases affecting both body and soul. And, by Zeus, even more worthy of mention than all these things is that he ordered (συνέταττε) and adapted (συνηρμόζετο) for his pupils what they called arrangements (ἐξαρτύσεις) and treatments (ἐπαφάς). (*VP* 64)

This vocabulary appears again later when Iamblichus is explaining Pythagoras's use of music:

> The entire Pythagorean school practised what was called arrangement (ἐξάρτυσις), or adaptation (συναρμογή), or treatment (ἐπαφή), skillfully reversing (περιάγον) dispositions of the soul to the opposite emotions with certain suitable tunes. Before turning to their beds, they purified their thoughts from the disturbances and pervasive sounds of the day with certain odes and special types of tunes. In this way they prepared themselves for tranquil sleep with few dreams and those only good ones. On rising again from bed, they shook off sluggishness and torpor by means of a different type of chant, and sometimes even with wordless melodies. There are cases in which they healed emotions and certain sicknesses, as they say, truly by means of singing as an incantation

9. Tr. Edwards.

and it is probable that thence this noun, 'incantation' passed into common use. So Pythagoras established this most useful method for the rectification (ἐπανόρθωσις) of human characters and modes of life by means of music. (*VP* 114)[10]

It is striking how the words Iamblichus uses to describe Pythagorean practices are very physical even though they relate to emotional and intellectual dispositions. The terms 'arrangement' (ἐξάρτυσις) and 'adaptation' (συναρμογή) have to do with making connections, and we should not forget that ἐπαφή, commonly translated as 'treatment', literally means 'touch', that sense by which we make physical connections, realign, rearrange, and is meant to cover both physical and emotional correction, as is repeatedly made plain in the quoted passages. A favorite Pythagorean term for the constant self-scrutiny required of the student, led by his teacher, is ἐπανόρθωσις, which I have rendered as 'rectification'. Behind all these words we see the teacher showing in practice how physical acts and the physical language derived from them operate at the level of the body and the soul on account of their intimate interconnectedness, and the work of the philosopher is the formation and constant re-arranging and adapting of connections within the individual, within society and between man and the divine. The teacher constantly guides the student to act and think as a part carefully aligned on the whole.[11]

It is worth noting, if only briefly, that Plotinus, in whose thinking sight and especially the perception of light becomes a potent tool to represent the indescribable, also uses ἐπαφή and its verbal forms at several points where he endeavours to describe the presence of the One to the intellect.[12] As in

10. Cp. a similar description of the routine use of music's balancing power at *VP* 65, and 224, for further examples of regulating emotions through melodies.

11. See *VP* 75-77, on the bad teacher who neglects first to prepare the student by purifying his agitated character, but instead attempts to sow his teaching among the thickets of ignorance and shameless conduct; cp. *VP* 70 and 228, on the purification of the emotions and intellect as necessary preliminaries to teaching and training.

12. See, for example, 5.3.17.25-27: 'But it is enough if the intellect comes into contact (ἐφάψασθαι) with it; but when it has done so (ἐφαψάμενον δέ), while the contact lasts (ὅτε ἐφάπτεται) it is absolutely impossible, nor has it time, to speak; but it is afterwards that it is able to reason about it. One has to believe one has seen, when the soul suddenly takes light: for this is from him and he is it; we must think that he is present when, like another god whom someone called to his house, he comes and brings light to us: for if he had not come, he would not have brought the light.' (tr. Armstrong).

Iamblichus, the use by Plotinus of the sense of touch exemplifies how, with their proper use established from the earliest stages of education, the senses can later help the more sophisticated student of philosophy to summon up a wide range of thought and experience in order to serve his strivings to describe noetic truths.

Iamblichus not only describes the Pythagorean application of music in individual daily routine, but also relates how it could be put to proper use in groups as well, adapted in concord with the seasons:

> Pythagoras also believed that music contributed greatly to health if one used it in proper ways. It was his custom to employ this means of purification not as a supplementary remedy, but in fact he even called it musical healing. In the spring season he used choral chanting such as this: he seated in the middle someone holding a lyre; round about in a circle sat those able to sing, and thus while the first one played the lyre, they chanted certain paeans in unison, through which they expected to induce feelings of joy, and to become graceful and rhythmical...They also made use of dances. (*VP* 110-111)

We may conclude this outline of the place of music and movement in Pythagoreanizing Platonist thinking about education by returning to Plato. In a characteristically playful passage in the *Laws*, Plato had drawn out the importance of movement for the correct formation of the individual, even from its time as an embryo in its mother's womb. He suggests that pregnant women should go for walks, and that once the child is born the nurse should carry it to the country or temples or relatives (*Laws* 789e), as 'all young children, and especially very tiny infants, benefit both physically and mentally from being nursed and kept in motion, as far as is practicable, throughout the day and night' (*Laws* 790c). He goes on to explain the effects of different types of movement and music on temperament, and how the cure of imbalance consists in 'movement to the rhythms of dance and songs' (*Laws* 790d-e). When Plato says that the child should be taken to the country or temples or relatives he is making a general point about how movement helps the individual to learn his correct relationship to the natural world, the gods and society. We may recall how Marinus in the passage quoted above makes explicit that the philosophical purpose of the senses is to establish proper relations among individuals and between them and the gods.

Plato elaborates on the interconnectedness of the individual, society and the gods in Book Two of the *Laws* using the example of dance. There he reflects upon man's difficulty in maintaining a correctly disciplined balance of emotions:

> The gods, however, took pity on the human race, born to suffer as it was, and gave it relief in the form of religious festivals to serve as periods of rest from its labours. They gave us the Muses, with Apollo their leader, and Dionysus; by having these gods to share their holidays, men were to be made whole again, and thanks to them, we find refreshment in the celebration of these festivals...Virtually all young things find it impossible to keep their bodies still and their tongues quiet. They are always trying to move around and cry out; some jump and skip and do a kind of gleeful dance as they play with each other, while others produce all sorts of noises. And whereas animals have no sense of order and disorder in movement ('rhythm' and 'harmony' as we call it), we human beings have been made sensitive to both and can enjoy them. This is the gift of the same gods who we said were given to us as companions in dancing; it is the device which enables them to be our chorus-leaders and stimulate us to movement, making us combine to sing and dance...Can we not assume that education comes originally from Apollo and the Muses, or not?..So by an 'uneducated' man we shall mean a man who has not been trained to take part in a chorus; and we must say that if a man has been sufficiently trained, he is 'educated'. (*Laws* 653c-654b)[13]

In this passage are condensed many facets of the society the late Platonists aimed to produce, in which properly trained movement places the individual in a harmonious relation to the gods, the leaders of the dance. There is perhaps no better physical and symbolic image of concord than the traditional circle dance that confirms and makes beautiful the individual's place in the community as a whole. By starting his formal education with music and movement Pythagoras was oriented in practice as well as in theory toward a harmonious relationship with all the movement of the cosmos. Learning to maintain equilibrium is training to become god-like.[14]

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13. Cp. the summing up of the discussion (*Laws* 672e-673a) where the Athenian says: 'We found that singing and dancing taken together amounted, in a sense, to education as a whole. One part of it – the vocal part – was concerned with rhythms and "harmonies"...The second part concerned the movement of the body. Here too we had rhythm, a feature shared with the movement of the voice...When the movements of the body, which we described as "dancing with delight", are such as to result in a fine state of physical fitness, we ought to call the systematic training which does this "gymnastics"'. All quotations from the *Laws* are translated by T.J. Saunders.

14. Plato, *Laws* 792d.

Awareness of and sensitivity to one's place in the dance was one of the chief goals of musical healing, or as Plato put it, 'making men whole again'. The dance moves and the individual adapts his particular movements to fit gracefully into the whole. Feelings of superiority, for example, were 'turned around and led' in the direction of virtue, they were 'rectified' by music (*VP* 64), so that the individual interacted instead in the correct relation to his fellow dancers. Likewise, the musical realignment of body and soul is carefully adapted to the cycle of nature, again affirming the original connection between individual temperament and natural rhythms, both daily and seasonal.

That the dance could go wrong and lose its harmonious movement was obvious to anyone who had observed or participated in the traditional circle dance. While individual variation expressed the differentiation of constitutions, the individuals could never allow themselves to forget they were a part in the whole, otherwise the harmony of the whole was jeopardized. Iamblichus uses the image of the dance to describe just this balance between the individual 'part', and his expression at the 'local' level, on the one hand, and his simultaneous awareness of his belonging to the movement of the whole, on the other:

> And so it is that, in the motion of the universe as a whole, all the revolutions preserve the whole cosmos in like manner, whereas often one particular part is jostled by another, as we see clearly in the dance. (*DM* 56. 14-15)[15]

When discussing the same problem of the relation of the individual part or soul to the ever-harmonious All soul that is not affected by the disharmony of the parts, Plotinus had used the same image of the harmonious movement of the dance:

> But if any of the parts of the universe is moved according to its nature, the parts with whose nature the movement is not in accord suffer, but those which are moved go on well, as parts of the whole; but the others are destroyed because they are not able to endure the order of the whole; as if when a great company of dancers was moving in order a tortoise was caught in the middle of its advance and trampled because it was not able to get out of the way of the ordered movement of the dancers: yet if it had ranged itself with that movement, even it would have suffered no harm from them. (*Enn.* 2.9.7.33-39)

15. Tr. Clarke, Dillon and Hershbell, with slight alterations.

The goal of education is to ensure that the individual learns to move according to his true nature and so dances harmoniously in the whole.

The observation of nature

After his first studies in music, gymnastics and painting, Pythagoras went as a youth (νεανίας), Porphyry relates, to learn geometry and astronomy from Anaximander at Miletus (*VPyth* 11-12).[16] Our texts offer a few glimpses of the practical methods used for teaching mathematics: we see Pythagoras using a drawing board to demonstrate his lessons to the poor athlete in Samos (*VP* 21-22), and students at the sanctuary of Asclepius at Aegae drawing geometrical figures on the ground (*VA* 8.31). The roots of geometry are fixed in observation and are traced by Iamblichus back to the Egyptians, with whom Pythagoras studied both geometry and astronomy as a young man (*VP* 158-159).[17] This link between the practical and the theoretical knowledge that derived from observation is brought out in Iamblichus's presentation of how Pythagoras investigated musical harmonies.

In a long section derived from the *Handbook of harmonics* by Nicomachus of Gerasa, Iamblichus presents the method through which Pythagoras arrived at his practical theorizing about musical ratios (*VP* 115-121). Once, in a state of contemplation, Pythagoras was searching for some instrumental aid by which harmony could be grasped by the senses. Walking past a forge he heard the sound of iron beaten by hammers on an anvil creating sounds in full harmony with one another, except for one combination. Taking this as his cue, Pythagoras set about testing the various sounds produced by different combinations of weights and balancing until he developed a practical system by which he could communicate the musical harmonies of the cosmos.

Still, Pythagoras did not limit his teaching to this theoretical system derived from observation, but continued to act as a living paradigm of how it is in the power of mankind to grasp such harmonies. Through his own experience and exercise of reason Pythagoras cultivated his ability to hear the celestial harmonies with his senses. He is described as ἔμπειρος, for his expert knowledge derived from experience (*VP* 158).

16. Cp. *VP* 12, where it is also claimed that Pythagoras travelled to Miletus to study with Anaximander, the natural philosopher. See Burkert, *Lore* 415-420.

17. Cp. *VP* 19 on Pythagoras's study of numbers, music and other mathematical sciences in Egypt.

> By some ineffable divine power that is difficult to comprehend by the mind he stretched (ἐντένιζε) his hearing and applied (ἐνήρειδε) his intellect to the celestial harmonies of the cosmos. He alone, he indicated (ἐνέφαινε), could hear (ἐνακούων) and perceive the harmony and concord of all the spheres and of the stars moving through them. (*VP* 65)

By his tight repetition of the prefix ἐν- Iamblichus points to the derivation of Pythagoras's unique sensitivity. Rather than requiring physical instruments and techniques by which to bring harmonies to his attention, Pythagoras was able to perceive their existence from within himself. Aware of this unique privilege bestowed upon him by a divine spirit, Pythagoras devised a pedagogy by which he could communicate this knowledge through the way of knowing that he himself embodied. So he created certain likenesses to these sounds that would be sufficient for those who were not able to perceive the archetypes but would be benefited and re-oriented through their acquaintance even with these sensory images of the pure sources (*VP* 66). Here again Iamblichus returns to a practical demonstration of Pythagoras's technique by comparing his procedure to the way in which one observes an eclipse not directly through the eyes, for they are too weak to tolerate such direct illumination, but reflected in a bowl of water. Thus, by learning from Pythagoras's personal example and his instruction the student strengthens his mind and senses toward the vision of the archetypes. Pythagoras's scientific teaching, conveyed in brief sayings and symbolic fashion, is like small seeds broadly cast (*VP* 67).

Divine ritual

'They say that of the sciences, the Pythagoreans revered above all music, healing and divination'(*VP* 163). After his studies in geometry and astronomy at Miletus, Pythagoras was trained thoroughly, according to Porphyry, in dream interpretation and divination by incense among the Egyptians, Arabians, Chaldaeans and Hebrews (*VPyth.* 11). We have seen already in Chapter One the importance given to children's habituation to religious life and its rituals. Eunapius describes the effect of early training in religious rites in two striking portraits of children amidst his mature philosophers: that of Sosipatra, the future wife of Aedesius's kinsman Eustathius (*VPh.* 466-469), and Aedesius, the son of Chrysanthius, named after the latter's beloved teacher (*VPh.* 504). Both Sosipatra and Aedesius are described as full of virtue from their earliest childhood.

As an infant (παιδίον δὲ ἔτι νήπιον) Sosipatra radiated beauty and

natural decorum that brought blessings to all around her. At age five, her beauty and charm attracted the attention of two aged travellers who, with her father's blessing, trained her for five years in Chaldaean lore and ritual. This education not only transformed her mind, which now excelled that of mere mortals, but also left its mark on her physical appearance and character, to the extent that her father scarcely recognized her but greeted her instead with the reverence due a divine being. Her initiation by these 'gods in the likeness of strangers' allowed her to comprehend and interpret fully and effortlessly the works of poets, philosophers and rhetors, who she now made part of her everyday life. After marrying Eusthathius she went on to share her learning and 'enthusiasm' with a devoted circle of students at Pergamon who attended her lectures after Aedesius had finished teaching for the day. Aedesius himself loved her and looked after her. Sosipatra gave birth to three sons, one of whom, Antoninus, devoted himself to the sacred rites of Egypt, nourishing the youths who hungered for philosophy (*VP* 469-471).[18]

Chrysanthius's son, Aedesius, from earliest childhood (ὁ παῖς ἐκ παιδὸς) was drawn by only the good steed of Plato's *Phaedrus*. He applied himself to his lessons with ardour and a keen wit, and devoted himself fully to the worship of the gods. His natural kinship with the gods enabled him to deliver infallible and perfectly composed oracles without having yet mastered the art of writing in his studies. His premature death at just 20 years old proved for his parents an opportunity to show in their manner of living the true nature of their philosophy.

These two children in Eunapius's philosophical biography are exemplary, but they point to a potential within even young children for correct alignment with the cosmos. Education was a perpetual process that began from infancy and continued throughout a lifetime. Sensitivity to individual gifts and backgrounds is fundamental, and it is exemplified in Pythagoras's re-education of the priest Abaris, whose religious expertise included divination by animal sacrifice. Iamblichus says that, 'not wishing to deprive [Abaris] of his zeal for truth', Pythagoras devised instead an instrument for divination that more closely corresponded to immaterial reality. We have seen this method already in his development and use of a system of comprehending musical rations in his explication of celestial harmonies. He trained Abaris away from animal sacrifice and instead taught him divination based on arithmetical science (*VP* 147).

18. Penella, *Greek philosophers* 58-62, on Eunapius's portrait of Sosipatra as an exemplification of 'religio-theurgic *sophia*'.

Suitable movement is inculcated by training in music and dance and in the study of the mathematical order of the planets and stars whose orbits are understood by Iamblichus to be embodied *noesis*.[19] The heavenly bodies were perceptible images (ἀγάλματα) of the Nous[20] and it was the ultimate goal of the rightly oriented teacher to re-educate his pupils so they resume their proper circular movement, imitating the movement of nature and the gods, to become the companions of the gods.[21] This movement is also instilled by training in dream interpretation and divination. When the individual soul comes into correct conjunction with the divine, their association is described by Iamblichus as circular movement. For example, in dreams, Iamblichus explains that, 'sometimes an incorporeal and intangible *pneuma* encircles those lying down so that there is no sight of it but its presence is felt by a sensing awareness' (*DM* 103.14-104.4)[22]; or in divination, 'the presence of the fire of the gods and an ineffable form of light descend on the possessed from outside, entirely fills and dominates him, and circularly embraces him from everywhere at once' (*DM* 113.8-14)[23]. Training in divination was a training in divinization. Iamblichus asserts that,

> Divine divination alone unites us with the gods, for it genuinely gives us a share of the divine life, has a share in prognosis and divine intuitions, and makes us truly divine. It truly bestows the Good on us, because the most blessed intuition of the gods is filled with all good things. (*DM* 289.3-8)[24]

In order to start out on this path towards the divine life, the student needs, though, to acquire from the very beginning the correct understanding of his place in the hierarchy of his family and community, and his place before the gods must be constantly affirmed. For this, prayer is, according to Iamblichus, the most effective tool:

> For it is due to this very fact, because we are far inferior to the gods in power, purity, and everything else, that it is of all things most critical that

19. *DM* 31.18-32.7. See also Iamb., *In Tim.*, fr. 49.15: 'for the intellection of the soul and the circular motion of bodies imitate noetic activity', tr. Dillon 152-153.

20. Plato, *Timaeus* 39e.

21. Plato, *Phaedrus* 2248a, 1-3. See Shaw, *Theurgy*, Chapter Seven on the centrality of circular movement to Iamblichus's entire philosophy. On the Platonic background of circular movement, especially in the *Timaeus*, and assimilation to God, see D. Sedley, 'The ideal of godlikeness', in G. Fine, ed., *Plato* (Oxford 1999) esp. 316-328.

22. Tr. Shaw, *Theurgy* 89.

23. Tr. Shaw, *Theurgy* 89.

24. Tr. Shaw, *Theurgy* 233.

> we do pray to them to the utmost. For the awareness of our own nothingness, when we compare ourselves to the gods, makes us turn spontaneously to prayer. And from our supplication, in a short time we are led up to that One to whom we pray, and from our continual intercourse with it we obtain a likeness to it, and from imperfection we are gradually embraced by divine perfection. (*DM* 47.13-48.4)[25]

Godlikeness

A child's first teachers are his family and his community. Imitation and habituation are the first methods by which it learns. Imitation as a pedagogical method involves the senses, the body and the mind – it is active. Imitation as a way to learn is espoused in the exhortation to become like God. To become like god one is active, one learns to move along the path toward likeness by practising behaviours that emphasize human connectedness with the divine goal. To imitate means to do, and it is essential that thinking is understood as doing, for thinking too is movement.

We see this in a late Platonic ethical work by an otherwise unknown Nicolaus who writes:

> A long time ago, my little daughter, when you were a very small girl indeed, I was in the habit of drawing you on by stages that might be useful to you in the development of your life...I wanted to make sure that you had all those necessary qualities which are formed by keeping to orderly habits, so that this might serve to introduce you to the moral life in its highest possible aspect. But now God and Time have brought you to an age at which you can conceive of true discipline. So I have formed the purpose of writing for you this tract, which contains an introduction to the art of ethics, so that theory backed by proof may follow on the habits which you have already acquired in your life's course.[26]

Most of the education we have discussed in these two chapters has been precisely this right orientation and habit-forming that provides the basis on which education of the rational faculties can be grounded. Once placed in the hands of teachers who will develop systematically the right use of the child's rational faculties, the child is seen to commence his ascent towards becoming

25. Tr. Shaw, *Theurgy* 111.

26. The treatise is preserved only in an Arabic version. For translation and discussion, see M.C., Lyons, 'A Greek ethical treatise', *Oriens* 13-14 (1960-61) 35, and O'Meara, *Platonopolis* 47, for discussion.

fully human, and even towards assimilation to god. This scale of virtues toward likeness to God was the primary organizational device developed by late antique philosophers for their teaching. As I have made clear from the start, my interest in these chapters is not in the scale of virtues, but in the educational phase that is preparatory to ascending that scale. What I hope to have brought out so far is the fluidity of individual movement – that of the teacher and the student. The *Lives* of philosophers insist on this fluidity by showing the variety of ways in which their subjects had advanced to the different stages along the scale. Their movement is not only linear, it is circular, as is all properly oriented movement. Through the process of teaching and realigning their students, the teacher too progresses and keeps his place in the ever-moving dance of the cosmos, of which he is always a part, however close he draws to his goal of likeness to God. There is a constant, reciprocal movement between the child – at the stage before he even steps up onto the first rung of this formalized scale of virtues – and the teacher.

The education of a child in its pre- and early rational phases has the quality of pre-containing the entire spectrum along which the maturing individual, given the discipline and capacity, will ascend toward the goal of likeness to God. Plato had seized upon this special state of children to illustrate some of his most central teachings, precisely because of the same qualities of innocence and openness that had always propelled traditional societies to allow children special privileges with respect to the divine.[27] Children's pre-rational nature had to be trained and oriented so as to make the most of their natural capabilities through education. It is striking how sensitive Iamblichus and others are to individual differences and the need for the educator to lead each pupil appropriately.

We have often mentioned the goal of likeness to God and the time has come to consider this goal in the context of the awareness among teachers of individual variety and the need to adjust one's pedagogy to bring out the best in each pupil. Although the authors as well as the subjects of late antique philosophical biography are philosophers, the prevailing message is not how to train professional philosophers, but how to train each individual to the extent it is possible, given their particular abilities. This attitude derives from describing the goal of human existence as Plato did, to become as like God as

27. R.K. Sprague, 'Plato and children's games', in D.E. Gerber, ed., *Greek poetry and philosophy. Studies in honor of Leonard Woodbury* (Chico, Ca. 1984) 275-284.

possible – ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν. The impact of this definition on educational ideals is pervasive and determinative, for from it spring answers to the question whom to educate and how to educate.

For those philosophers who ask the question whom and how to educate, *kata to dynaton* becomes the focus of interest. Likeness to God provides the orientation, *kata to dynaton* the path. How to teach in a way that will elicit self-knowledge from each different student emerges as a response to the qualification *kata to dynaton*, for the teacher must be practical and teach first of all from the perspective of the whole, asking how in each part the human being comes close to likeness, or assimilation, to God. It will be helpful to step back and briefly survey the background to the development of thinking about Godlikeness among third- to fifth-century Platonists.

In the first century BC, the Platonist Eudorus of Alexandria understands *phronesis* as that faculty through which we acquire virtue and wisdom, and thereby likeness to God:

> Socrates and Plato agree with Pythagoras that the *telos* is assimilation to God (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ). Plato defined this more clearly by adding 'according as is possible' (κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν) and it is only possible by wisdom (φρόνησις), that is to say, to live according to virtue. (fr.25)[28]

Eudorus attributes the original definition to Pythagoras whose exhortation to 'follow God' was, according to Eudorus and subsequent Platonist tradition, pursued further by Plato in the *Theaetetus*'s urging to become like God.[29] But how to do this in practice? How to 'acquire' and 'exercise' perfect virtue? The answer developed among so-called Middle Platonists, many of whom had by now integrated much Scholastic and Pythagorean thought into their formulations, was to pursue a threefold path to virtue that combined the individual's nature, instruction and practice. The Middle Platonist Alcinous explains this path as follows:

> We may attain the goal of becoming like unto God if we are furnished with a suitable nature, and correct habituation, training and discipline, and, most importantly, if we use reason, study and the transmission of doctrines in such as way as to keep a distance from the great majority of human affairs, but instead to be ever oriented toward intelligible reality. (*Didascalicus* 182.3-6)[30]

28. See Dillon, *Middle Platonists* 122-123, for discussion.

29. Fr. 25.

30. Tr. adapted from Dillon, *Middle Platonists* 300, (where the passage is attributed to

Early in the first century AD, Philo uses a similar three-part path of *physis*, *askesis* and *mathesis* in a manner that points to the necessary transposition of the problem from the general level of human capacity to that of individual cases, and in this way his discussion resembles the manner in which later Platonists would come to approach the problem of how to educate individual students. Philo discusses the subject of different individual qualities of character in the light of the three Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in whom predominate, according to Philo's interpretation, *mathesis*, *physis* and *askesis*, respectively.

> The holy text [Ex. 3:15] seems to be searching into types of soul, all of them of high worth, one which pursues the Good by means of instruction, one by natural aptitude, one through practice. (Philo, *De Abr.* 52-54)[31]

He goes on to explain that all three Patriarchs possessed all three qualities, but in each constitution one predominates. This three-part path is important for the history of later Platonist thought on education for two reasons. Firstly, it illustrates a way of thinking about the nature of education in general that follows the path to likeness to God, and, secondly, it introduces the importance of sensitivity to the differentiation in constitutions in one's pedagogical approaches. Both points emerge from thinking about the implications of *kata to dynaton* at the universal and the individual levels. I suggest that the importance given to individual capacity even in Iamblichus's exposition of Pythagoras's life and teaching method encourages us to consider the three-part path to virtue as relevant not only to the scale of virtues pursued in formal philosophical training, but also to the very earliest orientation of young children.

Plotinus begins his treatise *On the difficulties about the soul* with the yearning of the individual soul to know its relation to multiplicity and unity: 'inquiring into this we should be obeying the command of the god who urged us to know ourselves' (*Enn.* 4.3.1.8-10).[32] The language is that of the lover and his desiring for virtue and true knowledge, language used later by Proclus, for example, when he speaks of the desire for self-knowledge in his

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Albinus, although at 445 in the 1996 revised edition Dillon accepts the reattribution to Alcinous), J. Whittaker, Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* (Paris 1990), and J. Dillon, *Alcinous: The Handbook of Platonism* (Oxford 1993) 38. Alcinous goes on to name music, arithmetic, astronomy and geometry as the preliminary purificatory studies, as gymnastics is preparatory for the body.

31. Dillon, *Middle Platonists* 152.

32. Tr. Armstrong with adjustments.

commentary on the Plato's *First Alcibiades.* Part of satisfying the yearning for the vision of the intellect is to yearn to understand the nature of the very yearning that propels us toward self-knowledge. Once he has thus oriented his own seeking, Plotinus insists that in order to approach the question of the individual soul's relation to the universal Soul, one must first understand the relation of the part to the whole. The part, he explains, is a part of the whole and 'the division [of the whole] is a kind of manifestation (προφορά) and activity (ἐνέργεια) of each individual part' (*Enn.* 4.3.2.52-53).[33] The part contains the whole potentially, while the whole is in no way lessened by the manifestations and activities of the parts (*Enn.* 4.3.2.53-54). Education, as we have seen, is a matter of correctly orienting the part, the individual, toward the understanding of his true nature, his relation to the whole.

When Iamblichus states that 'education is the collective genius of those outstanding in each generation' (*VP* 43), he is recognizing the different strengths of individuals, which when seen collectively point humankind toward spherical wisdom, that is, *paideia* in its fullness. The qualification *kata to dynaton* does not refer only to the individual's movement toward virtue and wisdom, but toward the natural collective genius (κοινὴ εὐφυΐα). The goal is collective, that is, it is the acquisition of universal wisdom that leads to likeness to God, and this goal operates at the level of the whole. The approach is individual. It is the acquisition of particular knowledge, and operates at the level of the part.

Already for Eudorus, the great patriarch and paradigm is Pythagoras. As we have seen, the tendency seen there to attribute foundational ideas to the Samian philosopher is most profoundly exemplified by Iamblichus: 'Pythagoras', he writes, 'discovered many ways of educating and handed down the fitting portion of wisdom according to each individual's nature and ability' (*VP* 90).[34] It is true to form, then, that Iamblichus should portray Pythagoras as a teacher paying careful attention to individual difference in his efforts to convey wisdom as a whole way of understanding and living. The process of inculcating this orientation demanded the teacher's attention to the individual capacities of the students and a whole range of pedagogical approaches adapted to accord with each student's constitution. This delicate process was not just a prelude to learning, it was an essential part of educa-

33. O'Meara, *Plotinus* 67, commenting on *Enn.* 4.3.2.

34. ὡς πολλὰς ὁδοὺς Πυθαγόρας παιδείας ἀνεῦρε καὶ κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν φύσιν ἑκάστου καὶ δύναμιν παρεδίδου τῆς σοφίας τὴν ἐπιβάλλουσαν μοῖραν.

tion, without which the teaching of philosophical doctrines would be fruitless.

> Such indispensable attention as this Pythagoras believed must be given to education before one practices philosophy, and he set the highest value on the teaching and communication of his doctrines. He examined and assessed the beliefs of those who came to him with a variety of teachings and a vast array of scientific knowledge. (*VP* 79)

This passage in *On the Pythagorean way of life* is followed immediately by a description of how Pythagoras distinguished between two categories of students, again by weighing up the individual strengths and weaknesses of his students.

> Now let us discuss how he divided up those he had assessed each according to their merit. It was not right that all should partake equally of the same things, for not all were alike in nature; but neither was it right that some should partake in all the most valuable teachings and some in none at all, for that would be a failure of community feeling and fairness. But by giving each the fitting share of the appropriate teachings he shared out benefit to all, to the extent that it was possible (κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν), and also safeguarded the principle of justice by giving each one the teaching he deserved. (*VP* 80)

Proclus acknowledges the primary importance of giving attention to individual abilities and constitutions before embarking on the teaching of doctrine when he explains at the very opening of his commentary on the *First Alcibiades*, the first dialogue read in late Platonist circles, 'it is natural for each one to differ in being, so also their perfection varies in different cases, according to their descent in the scale of being' (*In Alc* 1)[35], and later, 'the educator must apply his training after this fashion, offering salvation to everyone on the basis of the natural aptitudes in each individual' (*In Alc* 153). Marinus in his biography of Proclus follows this same line of thought when he explains the different levels of virtue toward which the student (in this case Proclus) progresses. Having explained the progress through the acquisition of political virtues, he discusses the purpose of purificatory virtues that are designed to 'purify the soul, in some way, and to enable it to consider human affairs without prejudice, so that it has that likeness to God which is its highest end, nevertheless not all souls separate [from matter] in the same way, but some more and some less' (*VProc*

35. Tr. O'Neill. All translations of Proclus, *In Alc* are his.

18).[36] The good teacher discerns the aptitude of the student's soul and leads him accordingly. In a passage reminiscent of Iamblichus's many motivations for attending a festival, Marinus opens his account of Proclus's life with the image of the many different offerings which men make to the gods:

> in temples those who approach the altars do not make their sacrifices from equal means, but some through bulls and goats and other creatures of this kind render themselves fit for communion with the gods who possess the altars, and furthermore produce polished hymns some in metre and some without metre; others, by contrast, having nothing like this to offer, but consecrating, as it may be, a cake or handful of incense, and making their orison with some brief invocation, enjoy no less benign a hearing than the former. (*VProc* 1)[37]

Marinus uses the image to explain his boldness in offering what he could in honour of his subject. We can also understand the offerings more generally as representative of the many different constitutions possessed by men who seek divine direction and guidance, and whom the teacher must lead in the way appropriate to each. But how does the teacher recognize the individual student's abilities so as to determine the particular course of his education? Again here, according to Proclus, the science of physiognomy was one way to help the teacher read the outward signs of the soul in the body's appearance.

> Socrates saw in Alcibiades many remarkable natural tokens of his suitability towards virtue. His outward beauty and height were signs of his enterprising, exalted and conspicuous pre-eminence of soul; and to their appearance nature which creates the body attached certain tokens, which Socrates observed and judged the youth to be worthy of attention. This was originally a custom of the Pythagoreans, to discern through bodily signs, in those that approached them, their fitness for the better life, since nature that fashions bodies to souls subjects them as suitable instruments to the latter and proffers likenesses of souls in bodies, through which those who are quick to perceive these things can discern the individual characteristics of souls' (*In Alc* 94).[38]

The Pythagoreans were not of course unique in their use of physio-

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36. Tr. Edwards. For a discussion of Marinus's, *VProc* and the scale of virtues, see H.J. Blumenthal, 'Marinus' Life of Proclus: Neoplatonist biography', *Byzantion* 54 (1984) 469-494.

37. Tr. Edwards. Cp. Porph., *VPyth* 19, where he exhorts the teacher to recognize the sameness in all living beings.

38. Tr. O'Neill.

gnomics, though it was carefully integrated into their way of life, and so naturally became closely associated with them. Iamblichus presents the science in its explicitly educational context:

> when young people came and wished to study with [Pythagoras], he did not immediately agree until he examined and tested them and first inquired how they associated with their parents and other relatives. Then he watched them for untimely laughter, and silence and chatting beyond what was proper. Also he looked at the nature of their desires, their familiars and their conduct towards them. Most of all, he looked at the leisure occupations in which they spent the day, and what things gave them joy and pain. He observed, moreover, their physique, their gait and their whole bodily movement. Studying the features by which their nature is made known, he took the visible things as signs of the invisible character traits in their souls. (*VP* 71)[39]

Physiognomics, like the elementary study of music and mathematics, operates on the principle of pre-contained truths that exist at all levels and with appropriate training can be discerned in their physical manifestations. In addition to a predisposition, it is the first signs of individual will that aid the individual in applying himself in the course of his education. 'It is possible to be educated according to one's own deliberate choice (προαίρεσις)'(*VP* 44), writes Iamblichus, singling out education as one thing within an individual's power to acquire and something that distinguishes human beings from beasts.

Conclusion

In his commentary on the *First Alcibiades*, we see Proclus grappling with the problem of the multiplicity of human constitutions that make it impossible to prescribe one way to perfection, to the fulfillment of human potential, that is, *eudaimonia*. He resolves the problem by explaining that different approaches must be chosen that respond to the level of each soul. The ideal expressed in the *Theaetetus* remains the same. But Proclus takes

39. Cp. *VPyth* 54. One sees this in *Republic* VII.536de where Plato explains, 'therefore calculation, geometry and all the preliminary education required for dialectic must be offered to the future rulers in childhood and not in the shape of compulsory learning either...because no free person should learn anything like a slave. Forced bodily labour does no harm to the body, but nothing taught by force stays in the soul...Then don't use force to train the children in these subject, use play instead. That way you will also see better what each of them is naturally fitted for'.

care to explain that there were many paths, and that the majority of those who start out will not progress very far toward the common goal, though for varying reasons. Apollonius of Tyana expresses a similar sentiment when at Ephesus he urges all citizens toward the philosophical life as their sole pursuit (*VA* 4.7). He – or, strictly speaking, Philostratus – does not envision a state in which every individual has arrived at the highest level of the perfected philosopher. Nor is that necessarily the realistic goal of all humankind, but some share of *eudaimonia* can be achieved through right orientation at whatever stage the individual finds himself.

Early education is not only what children need; it is also the elementary stage through which an adult lacking true education must travel. It may be that these elementary stages are simply what traditional society had to offer all people, it was intrinsic to its communal forms and structures, but the philosopher's return and engagement with society to readjust and make conscious the place and significance of these basic elements is in line with Iamblichus's particular view that the material structures were essential to the ascent of the soul towards full realization.

We began this overview of early education by examining the paradigm of Pythagoras as student and teacher in the context of third and fourth century philosophical biography. Two themes in particular have emerged. One is the critical role of connections and reciprocity in teaching harmony. The second, closely related theme is the role of imitation and assimilation. Education is the making conscious of oneself[40] and the realization that awakening requires movement. Education is above all a training in learning to recognize right connections and, most importantly, to live them through proper movement. It is the nature of elementary education that the child is taught to act correctly through habituation before he is taught to think rationally about the acts. The responsibility of the philosopher is to guarantee that the actions within a society and its relations with the gods are physical manifestations of immaterial reality, so that those who are not ready to think rationally about the levels of meaning in the acts, to become self-conscious, can nonetheless operate in correct relation to the structure of reality. This state of pre-self-consciousness is characteristic of children, but it can equally well apply to human beings of any age. The thinking expounded in philosophical biography suggests that it is the purpose of all human beings

40. Cf. *Enn.* 1.1.11.1-8.

to become self-conscious, to the extent their capacities allow. But this is especially true in the light of Iamblichus's insistence that material reality plays a decisive role in the ascent of the soul for, as we see in the Pythagorean paradigm, all action is potentially contemplation. It needs the philosopher to constantly readjust the connections, so that by right orientation in all relations even the elementarily educated can participate to some degree in the harmony of the universe. The qualification *kata to dynaton* does not exclude, it is powerfully inclusive and leads to a more subtle and flexible way of thinking about the goal of likeness to God, about contemplation and what it is. We should not forget that Plotinus, in a spirit of provocative playfulness that reminds us of Plato, suggested that children contemplate through playing.[41]

In a stimulating discussion of the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* in which he places the biography within the cultural climate of the Severan age with its introduction of many foreign elements to Hellenism, Simon Swain laments that 'it is a shame that ...this demonstration of Hellenism's universal appeal from Spain to India, and of its revealed, divine wisdom, amounts to a traditional exclusivity and élitism which non-members might partake of only if one worked hard (Damis [his devoted disciple]) or happened to be an empress (Julia Domna)'.[42] Reading late antique philosophical biography with special reference to elementary education has suggested there was in fact just such a universal way. The sensitivity of teachers to individual capacity and the differentiation of bodies and souls, how they combine and how they interact, leads to a highly nuanced approach to education in which the most physical, imitative dimensions are carefully connected with the highest notions of reality that they pre-contain. The child or the mature individual who attentively worships the gods takes up his place in the dance as an educated person. He does not become the leader of the dance. That place is reserved for Apollo and the Muses, followed by the philosophers. What is essential is that even as he takes his first tentative steps, imitating the leaders of the dance, he makes the best use he can of his god-given nature, his

41. *Enn.* 3.8.1.13-15, cited above in the epigraph of the Introduction: καὶ κινδυνεύει, εἴτε τις παῖς εἴτε ἀνὴρ παίζει ἢ σπουδάζει, θεωρίας ἕνεκεν ὁ μὲν παίζειν, ὁ δὲ σπουδάζειν, καὶ πρᾶξις πᾶσα εἰς θεωρίαν τὴν σπουδὴν ἔχειν. See also Plato, *Rep.* 7.536de.

42. S. Swain, 'Defending Hellenism. Philostratus, *In honour of Apollonius*', in M. Edwards, M. Goodman and S. Price, eds, *Apologetics in the Roman Empire* (Oxford 1999) 195.

discipline and what learning he has acquired. Putting these together harmoniously is the work of philosophy. Plotinus, an experienced teacher, advised that, 'teaching extends to the road and the passage, but the vision is the work of him who has decided to see' (*Enn.* 6.4.9.15-16).[43] That work is essential to progress does not implicate this elementary truth in elitism, as suggested by Simon Swain's disappointment in Hellenism's failed universalism. The philosophical way expounded by the Platonists of the third to fifth centuries did indeed envision a universal way that could embrace all humankind, to the extent that each was able. Because the structure of this universal reality was pre-contained at each level, as expressed in traditional society, it was indeed possible for all men, at whatever stage they were, to be fully engaged. The keys to realizing this vision were two, first that there were teachers prepared to engage in constantly realigning all the connections within society and between the human and the divine, and second that each individual, whatever their age and place, was prepared to work, to become a doer of philosophy.

43. μέχρι γὰρ τῆς ὁδοῦ καὶ τῆς πορείας ἡ δίδαξις, ἡ δὲ θέα αὐτοῦ ἔργον ἤδη τοῦ ἰδεῖν βεβουλημένου.

PART II

PLOTINUS'S LIFE AND TEACHING

by

GARTH FOWDEN

3.*

THE LIFE

Pursuing our theme of contextualizing Greek philosophy, we turn in Part II to a single – albeit dominant – figure, Plotinus. Plotinus is a personality of such enormous intrinsic interest, both for his life and for his teaching, that many modern students barely feel the need to contextualize him at all. What is more, so-called Middle Platonism hardly prepares us for the emergence of such a spiritual giant;[1] while his successors, Porphyry and especially Iamblichus, showed a degree of interest in ritual and sacramental approaches to contemplation that has tended – wrongly in the view of the most recent scholarship – to cast Plotinus as, in retrospect, the last representative of that characteristic Greek view which held that the philosopher may attain to the truth by mind alone, and its rational processes.[2]

To pursue either of these perspectives on Plotinus – either Middle Platonist or theurgical – would be a major task. Fortunately, neither has been entirely neglected by scholarship. What is offered here, instead, is two other approaches to contextualization. One starts from within Plotinus's writings, the other from outside the Platonist 'succession' altogether. We begin, then, after a brief account of Plotinus the teacher as portrayed by his pupil and

* [3] indicates the beginning of discussion of the section in question.

(15) locates a quotation where it is not unambiguously clear that it belongs to the section identified in the preceding set of square brackets.

1. Cf. J. Dillon's conclusion to his *The Middle Platonists: A study of Platonism 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (revised edition, London 1996) 415: 'The claim...that I make for these men is a modest one. Like those humble sea-creatures whose concerted action slowly builds a coral reef, the philosophers of this period each contributed some detail to the formation of what was to become perhaps the greatest philosophical edifice of all time', in other words late Platonism or 'Neoplatonism'.

2. Cf. G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA 1995) 93-94.

biographer Porphyry (chapter 3), with a taste of his teaching based not, as is more usual, on the whole of his writings, but on a group of chronologically consecutive treatises that address, in particular, problems posed by the Gnostics, contemporaries who professed a very different world-view from Plotinus's own, yet were to be found even in his own circle (chapters 4 and 5). After this first look at how Plotinus's thought can be contextualized even from within the *Enneads*, an attempt will be made to view Plotinus through later, foreign eyes both Christian and Muslim, to see how he could be made to respond to demands quite different from those imposed by his own circle and intellectual tradition (chapters 6 to 8).

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Who, then, was Plotinus? To ask this question is not necessarily a sign of mere curiosity, or of a cast of mind that is historical and biographical rather than philosophical. It is true that Plotinus does *not* talk much about himself, in the writings that have come down to us under his name. But to publish his teaching in book form was anyway his pupils' idea, not his. He himself assumed you would come and hear him in person, in which case you would know very well who Plotinus was. As for his pupils, they had the idea that some people might want to go on listening to the master's voice after he was dead. So they wrote his lessons down. One of these pupils, Porphyry, also wrote a *Life* of his teacher, and to this day that is where we go to find out who Plotinus was. Both in the manuscripts of Plotinus's writings edited by Porphyry under the title *Enneads* (because the texts are presented in groups of nine, *ennea* in Greek), and in the modern printed editions, which follow the layout of the manuscripts, the *Life* comes before the writings, and serves as an introduction to them.

As it happens, it is through Plotinus's own writings rather than Porphyry's biography that we are best able to glimpse the young Plotinus during the first 27 years of his life between his birth in 204 and his setting off to study philosophy in Alexandria in the year 231-32. In later life Plotinus 'could never bear to talk about his family or his parents or his native land' (*Life* 1). Porphyry, who only knew him at the end of his life from 263 onwards, confines himself to one anecdote, about how his teacher had gone on sucking at his nurse's breast until he was 8 years old, and stopped only when someone told him he was a little pest (3). If this was all Plotinus bothered to tell his most intimate friends about the first three decades, almost, of his existence, we may be sure he felt his experiences had been of

no significance compared to what must have amounted to a philosophical conversion in his twenty-eighth year. Still, he did occasionally make use of memories from his youth in order to illustrate a philosophical point.

Not from Porphyry, but from the philosophical biographer Eunapius writing about a hundred years later, we learn that Plotinus was born at Lycopolis, modern Asyut, in Upper Egypt (*Lives of the philosophers* 3.1); and we may assume it was here or nearby that he grew up as well. Since he was able to travel to Alexandria to study philosophy there, at the relatively advanced age of 27, we may deduce that he was endowed with not only a good Greek education, but also some financial resources. Like most other late antique philosophers, he must have belonged to one of the elite families of his native city. From his later writings all we can glean is snapshots from the leisured and reflective years of his youth.

'To become like God' – such is the philosopher's goal according to the mature Plotinus. The phrase is from Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus* 176b, and over a lifetime's teaching, Plotinus came back to it over and over again. How does it feel, though, 'to become like God'? It is – Plotinus recalls of his own experience – an awakening, a sense of being outside everything, an entering into oneself, a calmness, a vision of beauty, a feeling that one belongs (4.8.1). No mere description can convey this vision. Simile and metaphor may come closer. And certain places have a suggestive genius. Growing up around Lycopolis, Plotinus had at least on occasion frequented the temples. He had gazed long and intently at the hieroglyphic inscriptions that covered their walls, and he knew enough about the hieroglyphs to realize that each sign conveyed, not just a letter or a syllable, but a whole concept. Later in life he recalled these great inscribed walls in the Egyptian temples, when he was trying to explain in class one day the difference between on the one hand discursive reasoning that uses words and sentences in order to approach a decription of reality, and on the other hand Intellect's immediate, effortless possession of knowledge 'all together in one' (5.8.6). By Intellect or Nous Plotinus means that first and highest level of reality immediately after God or the One. Intellect is that realm in which all reality exists in its most perfect form, and of which the physical world known to our senses is just a pale reflection. The parallel Plotinus draws here is especially effective; and his allusion to 'the wise men of Egypt', who created the hieroglyphs, serves to evoke all those Egyptian sages who in times past had played host to Solon, Pythagoras, Plato and other eminent Greeks. Plotinus himself was the authentic heir of both the Greeks and the Egyptians.

On another occasion too he inexplicitly but unmistakably evoked these same Egyptian temples and their priests, in a famous passage Porphyry so highly esteemed, despite its being one of the master's earlier writings, that he placed it at the very end and culminating point of his edition of the *Enneads*. In *Enneads* 6.9.11 (and cf. 5.1.6) Plotinus compares the sage who contemplates the One to an Egyptian priest who enters into one of those vast, elongated sanctuaries with their successive courts and halls of columns, and leaves behind the surge and shock of the world. Everywhere there are images of the gods. But the priest

> enters into the sanctuary [the small, dark chamber that is the holy of holies] and leaves behind the statues (*agalmata*[3]) in the outer shrine. These (statues) become again the first thing he looks at when he comes out of the sanctuary, after his contemplation within and intercourse there, not with a statue (*agalma*) or image (*eikōn*) but with the Divine itself; they [the images outside] are secondary objects of contemplation.

Plotinus knew very well, of course, that

> if one looks in another way, one finds nothing. These are images; and this, therefore, is how the wise among the expositors of holy things (*tōn prophētōn*) express in riddles how that god is seen; and a wise priest who understands the riddle may make the contemplation real by entering the sanctuary; and even if he has not been there, and thinks that this sanctuary is something invisible, and the source and the principle, he will know that he sees principle by principle, and that like is united with like.

In other words, the unilluminated priest may enter an Egyptian temple sanctuary and see only the cult statue; the wise priest (that is, the philosopher who is the only true priest) may see the cult statue yet in reality contemplate the true God; while the sage who has never been anywhere near an Egyptian temple may still enter the sanctuary and see the vision, provided he has made himself as much as possible like that which he wishes to see.

Outside these ancient sanctuaries (on which cf. also 4.3.11), the Nile's cramped valley with its cities and villages and intensive cultivation left scant space for the philosopher to be alone in. Those who sought an environment conducive to closer conversation with God made for the 'mountain', in other words the desert plateau beyond the cliffs that bounded the valley to east and west. There Hermes Trismegistus had held secret discourse with his son Tat;

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3. Cf. 5.8.6, where hieroglyphs are said to *depict agalmata*; the word is not used of the hieroglyph itself, *pace* LSJ.

there too the Christian hermit Antony would purge himself of his demons.[4] Plotinus seems to have taken the same path, 'going up into high places where the earth has a red-gold colour'; and there he was 'filled with that colour and made like that upon which he walked'. Such, he observed years later in conversation with his disciples, is the effect of the divine beauty that transfigures all creation (5.8.10). Dwelling now in the immense metropolis by the Tiber, Plotinus remembered, it seems, how the desert had rippled with shadow and mellow light in the sun's brief setting, while the valley below already lay in evening gloom. And recollecting, perhaps, how on some other occasion he had heard the sudden rumble of thunder as grey clouds blackened the sky, he bade his students 'imagine a voice sounding over a vast wasteland, and not only over the emptiness alone but over human beings; wherever you be in that great space you have but to listen and you receive the whole voice, and yet not the whole' (3.8.9). This is to illustrate how the One is everywhere around us, yet we cannot embrace the fullness of its transcendent glory.

But then comes always

> the moment of descent from intellection to reasoning. And after that sojourn in the divine, I ask myself how it happens that I can now be descending, and how did the soul ever enter into my body, that soul which, even within the body, is the high thing it has shown itself to be (4.8.1),

by projecting itself (Plotinus means) through the realm of Intellect towards contemplation of God, the One. In this brief passage we see Plotinus's three levels of reality, the One, Intellect and Soul, clearly set out in relation to each other. Likewise the philosopher must return from the desert to the city, for his is the teacher's vocation – his pupils await him impatiently. Later, when he lived in Rome, Plotinus seems no longer to have felt the wilderness's call. He was by now entirely focused within. But growing up in Lycopolis, he was perhaps still open to other paths – he had not yet found his maturest, most distinctive way.

We remain in the dark about his motives for taking up philosophy, or the conflicts his calling may have caused at home – perhaps family reminiscences were simply too painful, and were one of the reasons why he said so little to his pupils about the first period of his life. In his own writings that calling is already a given. As for Porphyry, all he says is:

4. *Corpus Hermeticum* 13.1; G.J.M. Bartelink (ed.), *Athanase d'Alexandrie: Vie d'Antoine* (Paris 1994), Index des mots grecs s.v. _ϱος.

> In his twenty-eighth year he felt the impulse to study philosophy, and was recommended to the teachers in Alexandria who then had the highest reputation; but he came away from their lessons so depressed and full of sadness that he told his trouble to one of his friends. The friend, understanding the desire of his heart, sent him to Ammonius, whom he had not so far tried. He went and heard him, and said to his friend: "This is the man I was looking for." (3)

The encounter with a charismatic teacher is the defining moment in the life of many searchers after wisdom. To surrender one's will is in itself a crucial first step on the path of self-emptying that leads to the vision of God; while the gesture of trust implies a loosening of other attachments and frees the teacher's hands to remould the willing disciple. Yet such guides are few, and Plotinus had reached the age of 27, and already frequented the schools of Alexandria for a time, without encountering one. Nor was Alexandria to be rivaled, in those days, by many other centres of teaching in the Greek and Roman world. But when the moment came, Plotinus was ready, and gave himself entirely. He stayed with Ammonius for eleven whole years.

Alexandria was a Greek city, in but not entirely of Egypt, and so situated that not only much of Egypt's own fabulous agricultural productivity, but also a large part of Rome's Red Sea, Indian and Chinese trade, debouched through its marketplaces and docks into the Mediterranean. There can have been little in the culture of the European, African and Asiatic worlds that had not left its trace somewhere in this mighty emporium and long-established seat of Greek learning. Straight after the passage just quoted from the *Life*, Porphyry continues with these words:

> From that day he stayed continually with Ammonius and acquired so complete a training in philosophy that he became eager to make acquaintance also with the Persian (philosophical) discipline, as well as with that prevailing among the Indians.

In other words, Plotinus made the most of the comprehensive Greek philosophical education that he had every right to expect in this powerhouse of Hellenism.

We know almost nothing about what Ammonius taught, since he did not write his lessons down. Anyway, in those days it was usually students who committed their master's teaching to writing and published his courses; but still we have no way of knowing how much of Plotinus's originality came from Ammonius, even though Porphyry says that, to begin with, Plotinus followed Ammonius's teaching quite closely (*Life* 3, 14). It seems, from

comments in later writers, that Ammonius argued that Plato and Aristotle were in essential agreement; and even though Plotinus rejects many of Aristotle's doctrines, still he is constantly in dialogue with him, and Porphyry observes that Plotinus's writings 'are full of concealed Stoic and Peripatetic doctrines; Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, in particular, is concentrated in them' (*Life* 14). On the other hand, it looks as if Ammonius was not responsible for Plotinus's doctrine of God as the 'One' – for him, the highest principle was apparently a Nous or Intellect that thinks and creates rather than being above any form of relationship, as is Plotinus's One.

One thing we do know about Ammonius is that he whetted Plotinus's appetite for the Oriental wisdoms of Iran and India, an appetite, though, which Alexandria could not satisfy. So when Ammonius died, in 242 as it seems, Plotinus did something quite surprising for a by now almost middle-aged student of philosophy – he joined the Emperor Gordian III's expedition against the Sasanian Empire. But his projected study trip came to an abrupt end when 'Gordian was killed in Mesopotamia and Plotinus escaped with difficulty and came safe to Antioch' (*Life* 3) – this in the year 244. The dead emperor was immediately succeeded by Philip 'the Arab', a native of southern Syria. He soon set out for Rome to secure his position, accompanied by a group of relations and friends a number of whom he was to appoint to high office (Zosimus, *New history* 1.19.2). Since Philip had already served as Gordian's prefect (Zosimus 1.18.2), it is probable that Plotinus knew him. His decision to travel to the capital should be seen in this context. It is hard to imagine that he was moved by political ambition. But contacts he had made in the army, at Gordian's court and in Philip's circle may have encouraged him to believe that Rome, though it was not a traditional centre of Greek philosophical life, might nonetheless turn out to be fertile ground for his teaching. The newcomers to power were equestrian not senatorial, and oriental. Both considerations could have led Plotinus to feel that there was a certain loosening up of the social and political Establishment, and perhaps therefore openings for his ideas, a chance to sow them among the movers and shakers. Plotinus was well aware that he lived in an age of rapid change, and he may at this stage have been more convinced than he was later in life, that the philosopher can make some practical difference to the world's affairs. After all, Plato had tried to turn the tyrant of Syracuse into a philosopher king, however unsuccessfully; and Aristotle had been Alexander's mentor.

Plotinus was to stay at Rome for his remaining 26 years – he died in the

summer of 270, aged 66. To begin with, he followed Ammonius's example by accepting pupils and providing them with a systematic philosophical education, but not writing his teaching down (3). Only when he was 50, in 254, after a whole decade had passed by, did Plotinus 'begin to write on the subjects that came up in the meetings of the school' (4). Hitherto he had 'based his lectures on his studies with Ammonius' (3; also 14, apparently referring to Plotinus's maturity as well). In other words, neither the content nor the manner of his teaching was primarily of his own devising. Over time, though, that changed. Plotinus began to offer a doctrine that was more distinctively his own, and clearly the mature fruit of reflection, because there is no great conceptual evolution between the first and the latest in date of what Porphyry eventually published as the *Enneads*.

In the next two chapters we will look in detail at Plotinus's teaching as it had come to be expressed by the mid-260s, within a few years of his death. But before that we need to understand something of his way of life in Rome and of his circle of pupils, also of the way in which he taught. This is important because Plotinus believed philosophy is above all else a way of life, not just a set of doctrines. This, evidently, is the reason why Porphyry felt his edition of the *Enneads* was incomplete without an introductory biography attached to it.

It would be quite misleading to talk about Plotinus's 'school', if by that we meant anything like the philosophical schools of classical Athens. Whereas Academics, Peripatetics and Stoics gathered in public buildings where they might easily be overheard, and continued to meet in the same place from generation to generation, Plotinus and those who came after him stayed behind the blank walls of their mansions and presided over circles that rarely much outlived the master who had gathered them in the first place. Their existence might be unsuspected even by fervent seekers after truth, unless by word of mouth they chanced to become known, as Ammonius eventually did to Plotinus. This is not to say that there was no public instruction in philosophy in the cities of the late antique world: Marcus Aurelius (161-80), for example, had endowed public chairs at Athens for instruction in Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism and even Epicureanism. But the spiritual teachings of the Platonist sages were conveyed – as their opponents put it – 'on couches and in corners'.[5]

5. G. Fowden, 'The pagan holy man in late antique society', *Journal of Hellenic studies* 102 (1982) 56.

At one point, Plotinus conceived the idea of reviving a ruined city in the Campania, not far from Rome, and settling it with citizens who 'were to live according to the laws of Plato, and it was to be called Platonopolis; moreover he undertook to move there with his companions' (*Life* 12). But this idealist philosophical community was hardly going to refute the criticisms of elitism that could so easily be levelled at the Platonists. The reason why Plotinus imagined he might actually be given a whole city to run as he wished was that he had made the acquaintance of the Emperor Gallienus (253-68) and his wife Salonina, both of whom 'greatly honoured and revered' him (*Life* 12). But 'jealous courtiers' blocked the Platonopolis idea, according to Porphyry. Despite this setback, we can see from the *Life*'s brief account that Plotinus must have been extremely well known, if not necessarily very often seen, in Roman high society. He never went to the baths (2), but still he must surely have paid occasional visits to Gallienus and Salonina – Porphyry lets slip that he actively pursued the relationship, 'trying to make full use of their friendship' (12). And not a few men of the highest rank called regularly on Plotinus and took part in the meetings of his circle.

> A good many members of the senate also attended his lectures, of whom Marcellus Orrontius and Sabinillus worked hardest at philosophy. There was also Rogatianus, a senator, who advanced so far in renunciation of public life that he gave up all his property, dismissed all his servants, and resigned his rank...He would not even keep his own house to live in, but went the round of his friends and acquaintances, dining at one house and sleeping at another (but he only ate every other day)...Plotinus regarded him with great favour and praised him highly, frequently holding him up as an example to all who practised philosophy. (7)

Plotinus's own regime will hardly have been much different. He too kept no house of his own, but lived in the residence of a lady called Gemina 'who had a great devotion to philosophy' (9). Gemina must have been wealthy, and her house capacious, for

> many men and women of the highest rank, on the approach of death, brought him their children, both boys and girls, and entrusted them to him along with all their property, considering that he would be a holy and god-like guardian. So his house was full of young lads and maidens... (9)

who surely benefited from the comings and goings of Plotinus's friends and pupils, men such as Paulinus of Scythopolis in Palestine, Eustochius of Alexandria and Zethus the Arab, who were all doctors, or Zoticus the critic

and poet, or Castricius Firmus, 'the greatest lover of beauty of us all', as Porphyry calls him, or another Alexandrian, the rhetor Serapion. Ideally, Plotinus would have wished all these men to follow Rogatianus's example; but as he well knew, each soul is differently entangled; not all are granted the same clarity of vision. Zethus 'he kept trying to divert from the affairs of state in which he was active and influential' (7); Castricius 'was again an admirer of Plotinus who had chosen a public career' (7); while Serapion 'was unable to free himself from the degradation of finance and money-lending' (7). There was no guarantee that even Plotinus's young wards would follow his example: he 'used to say that as long as they did not take to philosophy, their properties and incomes must be kept safe and untouched for them' (9). One of them, Polemon, turned out to be 'amorous and short-lived' (11), a great disappointment.

How did Plotinus spend his day? The alarms and diversions offered by a large household could be time-consuming.

> Once a valuable necklace was stolen, belonging to Chione, who lived with her children in his house in honourable widowhood. The slaves of the house were assembled before the eyes of Plotinus, and he looked carefully at them all; then, pointing to one man, he said: "This is the thief." The man was flogged, and persisted at first in denial, but finally confessed and gave back what he had stolen. (11)

The young wards were also a heavy responsibility and absorbed emotional energy as well as time. Then there was writing – Porphyry complains that Plotinus was careless of his prose and never looked it over (8), and the modern reader senses this as well. Presumably he also corresponded with friends in the East; certainly his pupils did. The large number of Orientals in the circle suggests a certain preference, in this Latin-speaking city, for cultural kith and kin, though it went without saying that Westerners who participated in the circle were able to do so in Greek.

No doubt the meetings of the circle were what Plotinus attached most importance to, though private guidance and exhortation was also a high priority, to a depressed Porphyry for example, on which occasion the teacher went so far as to visit the pupil at home; or to a politically entangled Zethus. The gatherings of the circle varied widely in format and formality. The birthdays of Socrates and Plato were commemorated in traditional fashion with a sacrifice and a meal. 'Those of his friends who were capable of it had to read a discourse before the assembled company' (2). At one such birthday party for Plato that we happen to hear about, this meant sitting

through a pretentious and largely incomprehensible poem from Porphyry on 'The sacred marriage', which provoked from somebody the stage-whispered remark that 'Porphyry has gone mad' (15). Possibly on the same occasion, the rhetor Diophanes gave a speech arguing 'that a pupil for the sake of advancing in the study of virtue should submit himself to sexual intercourse with his master, if the master desired it' (15). Plotinus was incensed and almost left; he gave Porphyry the job of declaiming a refutation.

At the regular meetings, Plotinus would have passages read out from 'the commentaries', that is on Plato and Aristotle, and then provided his own interpretation, 'bringing the mind of Ammonius to bear on the investigations in hand' (14). Of the rhythms of his discourse we often catch echoes in the informal prose of the *Enneads*, and in their constant repetition of the same ideas, differently expressed. But he encouraged his students to ask questions as well, and this might distract him from the main thrust of his exposition. Amelius once complained that the sessions were, for this reason, 'full of disorder and a lot of pointless chatter' (3). Porphyry recalled that he had once cross-examined Plotinus for three whole days to get a satisfactory explanation of how the soul relates to the body.

> A man called Thaumasius came in, who was interested in general statements and said that he wanted to hear Plotinus speaking in the manner of a set treatise, but could not stand Porphyry's questions and answers. (13)

One forms the impression that, although it was probably the circle's habit to convene on certain days of the week at a fixed time, the meetings were in practice elastic, might well go on interminably, and in a sense continued wherever Plotinus was, whenever he was awake, because he was not a compartmentalizer – his life and his every breath was the pursuit of wisdom. 'He never relaxed his self-turned attention except in sleep. Even sleep he reduced by taking very little food, often not even a piece of bread, and by his continuous turning in contemplation to his intellect' (8).

From the *Enneads* themselves we can form a clear impression of the enormous range of Plotinus's teaching, in both subject matter and style. Some treatises are technical expositions of problems in Aristotelian philosophy, such as 2.6 criticizing Aristotle's doctrine of quality; others contain extraordinarily vivid and personal glimpses of Plotinus's own experiences of contemplation. Sometimes one senses the atmosphere of the school room; at other times one imagines Plotinus's pupils sitting in rapt attention – surely not taking notes – as the master's exposition took off into

an evocation of the beauty of Intellect or the One itself, at the approach to which all language must falter. The Greek is taut, experimental, 'abounding more in ideas than words' (14), as tense – yet glittering – as one of Beethoven's last string quartets. Plotinus summons all his energy to express his thought and his experience. 'He was wholly concerned with thought; and, which surprised us all, he went on in this way right up to the end.' (8) 'When he was speaking, his intellect visibly lit up his face. There was always a charm about his appearance, but at these times he was still more attractive to look at; he sweated gently, and kindliness shone out from him.' (13)

One of the few concessions Plotinus made to the body was that he took summer holidays away from the damp heat of Rome. During these holidays he would not hold formal meetings of the circle, but still he conversed with his companions (5). He also made occasional visits to friends' estates in the Campania near Rome (2, 7). It was to one of these that he withdrew after a wasting disease from which he was suffering put his friends off from visiting him any more. At the end, only the doctor Eustochius was with him. He only just arrived in time, as Plotinus was about to expire. The master wasted no breath on pleasantries, or on medical enquiries; he had never devoted any care to his health, and now was not the time to start. Instead he came straight to the point.

Try to restore the god in us back up to the divine in the All! (2)

were almost the only words he managed to address to Eustochius before his soul departed from the body – an exhortation to a perhaps under-achieving pupil to keep his mind fixed on the only worthy goal, the soul's purification.[6] Plotinus's death was of a piece with his life, which had become entirely focused on the idea of return. Death was not a special day for Plotinus, nor did it require some unusual preparation. For his soul had always been turned towards the One. Now it was simply less encumbered than it had been before. Porphyry quotes an oracle supposedly delivered by Apollo, according to which Plotinus had gone to heaven along with Plato and Pythagoras. But during his lifetime he had already enjoyed union with the One. That was the fruit of his wisdom, and his example to posterity. Writing 130 years later, Eunapius of Sardis could speak of 'Plotinus's altars, still warm' (*Lives of the philosophers* 3.3).

6. Cf. G.W. Most, 'Plotinus's last words', *Classical review* 53 (2003) 576-87.

4.

THE GREAT TREATISE 1

To experience Plotinus the teacher at his peak, we must drop in at one of his circle's regular meetings in Gemina's palazzo, during the phase when Porphyry was with him, between 263 and 268. Earlier, Porphyry tells us, Plotinus had been too disorganized. Later, the illness creeping up on him was to make him less lucid.

Although Plotinus's teaching is dense and difficult, he repeats it constantly. A single treatise will almost always allude to, and perhaps even summarize, his whole doctrine, in a restless process of recollection and revision. The three prime hypostases or principles (2.9.1), the One, Intellect and Soul, constantly recur; so do such themes as the individual soul's attempts to disentangle itself from worldly concerns and to attain to contemplation. Each time, we view these themes from a different angle and grasp something new about them as well as consolidating our basic orientation.

Among the 24 treatises Plotinus produced during this time, we will concentrate on just four. They are really one long composition cut and pasted by Porphyry to fit his thematic arrangement of the *Enneads*. In practice, in order to deliver so much material, Plotinus himself will have been forced to divide it. Probably he spread himself over long, consecutive sessions: he had once taken three days in a row to explain to Porphyry how he understood the relationship of the soul to the body, so that a visitor to the circle, Thaumasius, became impatient because he wanted something more in the manner of a set treatise (*Life* 13). But it was not at all Plotinus's style to talk like a textbook. He knew, as well as any of his colleagues, how to dissect and refute an argument he disagreed with; he might also speak in a style of rapt inspiration (*Life* 14). On this occasion he evidently adopted the question and answer mode.

The Great Treatise (as we shall call it) is memorable for its clear, syste-

matic exposition of Plotinus's doctrine. And it ends with a vigorous attack on a group of Gnostic Christians which serves – by contrast – to throw Plotinus's own ideas into high relief, as well as showing us how he dealt with his contemporaries, whom he usually addressed, if at all, very indirectly.

The Great Treatise consists of *Enneads* 3.8, 5.8, 5.5 and 2.9, numbers 30 to 33 in the chronological sequence. Although the theory that these four writings are really one has long been accepted by most students of Plotinus,[1] it has been challenged, partly on the grounds that they are much too repetitive and disparate to be just one work.[2] But we do not need to trouble ourselves about the details of this controversy, since we know for sure from Porphyry that numbers 30 to 33 were written in sequence and probably without any great lapse of time between them. And if we read straight through them, we will see that they provide a good way of getting to the heart of Plotinus's thought. In order to emphasize the closely related subject matter and proximity in time of these four writings, I will call them 'sessions'. This term will also remind us that what we are reading is a transcript of living, oral teaching delivered by a master seated amidst the circle of his students. The subdivisions used in modern editions I will call 'sections' rather than 'paragraphs', again in order to get away from a too literary appreciation of the *Enneads.*

3.8 [30]

Porphyry's title, 'On nature, contemplation and the One', captures the broad, introductory sweep of this first session, embracing all levels of reality (and unreality) from matter to the very One itself. What is it that links everything together? A natural answer for an educated Roman to give would have been some impersonal force such as the power of the stars that the astrologers insisted on, or the closely related 'cosmic sympathy' taught by the Stoics, a whole network of energies that links everything together and is the cause of growth, decay, sensation and so on. Plotinus, by the way, was

1. Cf. the commentaries by D. Roloff, *Plotin, Die Großschrift III,8-V,8-V,5-II,9* (Berlin 1970), and V. Cilento, *Plotino, Paideia antignostica. Ricostruzione d'un unico scritto da Enneadi III 8, V 8, V 5, II 9* (Florence 1971).

2. A.M. Wolters, 'Notes on the structure of Enneads II, 9', in *Life is religion: Essays in honour of H.E. Runner* (Ontario 1981) 83-94.

strongly opposed to the doctrines of the astrologers, and was attacked for this reason in the 330s by a Latin writer called Firmicus Maternus, who pointed out in a rather unpleasant way that even Plotinus, who had rejected the power of Fate, had been overwhelmed, at the end of his life, by a particularly disgusting disease (*Mathesis* 1.7.14-22). This is in fact one of the earliest glimpses we catch of Plotinus, outside the writings of his own circle, in other words Porphyry.

Plotinus offers another solution to the question about what links everything together, namely 'contemplation'. He is well aware that this will raise eyebrows; in fact his very first words are: [1] 'Just for a game to begin with, before we set forth on our serious exposition; what if we said that all things aspire to contemplation?' – and that includes irrational things such as plants and the earth. 'Could anyone bear such a paradox?' But since our discussion is just among ourselves, Plotinus assures us, there is no risk in playing. This is not a public lecture, but Plotinus's circle, an informal meeting of a few men and women most of whom knew each other well.

Plotinus does not press the joke very far. Even in this first section, it becomes clear that he is perfectly serious about contemplation being the spring of every action (cf. 4). And he starts the discussion with the natural world: earth and trees and plants. Many modern accounts of Plotinus's teaching start from the One and work downwards to Matter; but here Plotinus himself, mature and in systematic mood, makes the exactly opposite choice. He begins from the natural world, in order to work upwards. And again we see him reveling in the paradoxical, in this case the idea that 'nature, which people say has no power of forming mental images or reasoning, has contemplation in itself, and makes what it makes by contemplation'.

This particular session we are eavesdropping on is the one in which Plotinus had more to say than on any other occasion about contemplation, and it gives us our best chance of understanding not only what he meant by it, but also what his 'contemplation' corresponds to in our understanding of the world. For us, 'contemplation' in the philosophical or religious context signifies concentration on a reality either situated outside our self or buried deep within our self. This meaning is also present in Plotinus's understanding of contemplation; but he takes what was understood as a spiritual exercise practised by human beings and projects it onto the whole spectrum of reality, from nature to Intellect. In linking the levels of reality together in this way, he makes clear that he conceives of them as a continuum and ultimately as a

unity. He teaches that Intellect and Soul, and hence nature that derives from Soul, emanate or flow out from the One. Yet they also look back and contemplate the One, so that nothing in the whole realm of reality is entirely isolated from its source. 'It was necessary, since the first principles were engaged in contemplation, for all other things to aspire to this state, granted that their originative principle is, for all things, the goal.' (7)

At the risk of seeming reductive, one might add that Plotinian contemplation – understood as he understands it, as something in which the whole of creation participates, including the trees and the rocks – presents certain points of contact with our modern understanding of the universe as a projection outwards from a primordial big bang. Not that Plotinus's understanding of matter was exactly the same as that of our twenty-first century cosmologists: he believed, for example, that the stars are made of much purer stuff than us (2.9.5,8), whereas it is now held that the fundamental structure of matter throughout the known universe is uniform.[3] But Plotinus would have been the first to point out that this just confirms the common origin of all things and therefore their mutual coherence. We hold now that ordinary atoms constitute only about 4% of the mass-energy in our universe. Scientists speak of 'dark matter' and 'dark energy' as making up, together, the other 96%.[4] There are powerful forces abroad, that we cannot detect with our senses, far less describe. We may also recall the phenomenon of cosmic microwave radiation, first detected very faintly in the 1960s, and which seems to have emanated directly from the big bang. All these forces, whether material or less so, unify the cosmos in a way that seems to correspond to Plotinus's concept of contemplation. Scientists are struck, too, by the apparent oddity of human kind's ability to contemplate its own origins; and they are much preoccupied by the question, whether we can possibly be unique in this ability. In talking about 'contemplation', Plotinus seems to be describing this same unity and consonance of all things, but with vocabulary taken from the sphere of human – indeed philosophical – activity. This is not just another example of the anthropocentric and endlessly self-referential character of human thought. Rather, it reflects a thoroughly honest and realistic acceptance that the most reliable place to start thinking is with what our senses tell us about the world around us – that is why

3. M. Rees, *Our cosmic habitat* (London 2003) 44, 111.

4. Rees, *Our cosmic habitat* 110.

Plotinus starts this session with the realm of nature, not with the One from which all things emanate, and whose existence we deduce by analogy not observation. Given his esteem for observation, if he were alive today Plotinus would surely be following the latest developments in cosmology, and adjusting his own thought accordingly.

By making contemplation an activity characteristic of all creation, Plotinus also conveys a markedly positive, optimistic view of the whole structure and nature of reality. Whatever the obstacles and whatever – in particular – the remoteness of matter from the One, still there is a disposition to draw closer, to remain aware of unity. Nothing is cut off from the whole. Plotinus is most definitely not a dualist – there is no room, in his vision of things, for absolute evil. We shall see this again, in his attack on the Gnostics.

Let us return now to our reading of 'On nature, contemplation and the One'. In the first four sections, Plotinus goes into some detail about how nature may be said to contemplate. In accordance with the session's ascending structure, he then turns to Soul, which he says is 'prior to nature' (5). Soul both in this treatise and throughout the *Enneads* is to be found 'everywhere' in the world around us; but it comes from 'above' and always remains, at least in part, illuminated by that upper world, the realm of Intellect. Being filled with this 'vision' (*theōrēma*), the soul 'produces another vision', weaker of course but still connected, however remotely, to that upper world (5).[5] This is the origin of the physical world or nature, though it remains subordinate to Soul rather than developing into a fourth level of reality (or principle or hypostasis) after the triad of One – Intellect – Soul. Plotinus regards nature as a form; he also calls it a *logos* or 'forming principle', as Armstrong translates (2).

Note that Plotinus speaks with great enthusiasm, at the beginning of section 5, about the act of contemplation as practised by the soul – this was, after all, the focus of his own life as well. He speaks of the soul's 'love of learning and spirit of enquiry, its birthpangs from the knowledge it attains, and its fullness' which causes it to 'produce' another vision – the language of childbirth transposed into the spiritual sphere evokes also the lover's erotic longing for the beloved, which leaves little room for any other thought. Likewise, the philosopher allows himself to become obsessed by desire for the beautiful and the good.

5. Cf. J. Rist, *Plotinus: The road to reality* (Cambridge 1967) 92-93, 99.

This is not the only point where Plotinus's attempt to depict the working of the different levels of reality provokes observations about human nature and in particular the vocation to philosophy. In section 4, for instance, he presents Nature personified in dialogue with a questioner, evidently of philosophical bent, who seeks to understand why nature creates. Nature explains to the philosopher that 'what comes into being is what I see in my silence, an object of contemplation which comes to be naturally...as the geometers draw their figures while they contemplate'. Still, nature's contemplation is rather 'blurred' compared, for example, to that of Soul; and this leads Plotinus on to express the philosopher's characteristic prejudice, that 'men, too, when their power of contemplation weakens, make action a shadow of contemplation and reasoning' (4) – though all action aims ultimately at attaining contemplation, albeit sometimes by a rather roundabout path.

Towards the end of section 6, Plotinus compares the soul's contemplation to nature's – the soul's is 'quieter' because fuller and more accomplished. Here again he allows himself an analogy with the life of the sage who, when he teaches, says Plotinus, 'has already finished reasoning' – he has become pure vision. 'He is already turned to what is one...and all is within him.' We begin to form the distinct impression that Plotinus found introspection as good an approach as any to the pursuit of reality. It is as if, in his search for the truth, he decided to start from what seemed purest in what he was most familiar with – his own self, which he had grown to know through careful examination. This observation raises a further question, about what it means to say that Plotinus was a Platonist. He had certainly been formed, as a philosopher, by reading Plato (among others). But his stance towards Plato was that of an admiring critic. He does not treat Plato's writings as revealed scripture. His ultimate criterion of truth, however Platonically conditioned, appears to have resided within himself, if we judge from the heartfeltness of his language about the 'pure vision'. We are reminded, in other words, that philosophy in the hands of its great masters is a choice, and an entirely personal way, and one in which working on one's own statue, to use Plotinus's image (1.6.9), may bring rewards no less astonishing than reflection on the major texts, however fertile those may be. Not that this is an either/or choice; but exercise and examination of the self cannot be overvalued, if one's goal is a life, rather than just a degree, in philosophy.

After a recapitulation in section 7, Plotinus proceeds in section 8 to the next level of reality after Soul, namely Intellect. At each level contemplation

becomes more and more integrally a part of the contemplator, 'and in the soul of the good and wise man the objects known tend to become identical with the knowing subject, since they are pressing on towards Intellect', where 'thinking and being are the same' (an allusion to Parmenides). Even so, Intellect is not one, for 'it wanted to possess everything', and it could therefore no longer remain one. It suffered a kind of fall. [9] Hence, it is logically necessary that beyond the multiplicity of the Intellect there must exist that which is truly and always one, beyond Intellect and intelligible, subject and object – it is the source of everything that comes after.

But beyond the recognition of logical necessity, is there any other way in which we can grasp this ultimate level of reality? Intellect we may know by intellect; but 'by what sort of simple intuition (*epibolē*$_i$ *athroa*$_i$) could one grasp this which transcends the nature of Intellect?' The answer is: 'by that which is like it in our selves', for it is everywhere present, like 'a voice filling a desert place'. If Intellect is 'the first life...the way of outgoing of all things...(which) holds all things distinctly', then that from which it derives must be the origin of these things – quite distinct from them, in other words, and not to be found in them. This origin must be something entirely simple. [10] We may call it 'the productive power of all things (*dynamis tōn pantōn*).' Returning again to nature as a source of images with which to explain ideas, Plotinus likens this power to a spring, ever gushing forth, never exhausted by the rivers it gives rise to; or to a great, spreading plant, which yet derives its life from a single root, whose unity is in no way affected by the luxuriant plurality of what it produces. In the study of all things, even of the highest and most truly existent things, we are led back to their 'one'; and this one, since it is the origin of all things, you cannot describe in the sort of terms that arise from the study of all things – you cannot even call it being, substance or life, since these all have an origin other than themselves. This recalls the so-called 'apophatic' approach to reality, that is to say, the refusal to try to describe it as it is, but instead the attempt at least to say what it is not. For Plotinus, though, that is an arid exercise. By 'taking away (*aphelōn*)' all these things, he wants us to 'grasp' the Good, not any longer by logic, but by hurling ourselves upon it.

> If you grasp it by taking away being from it, you will be filled with wonder. And, throwing yourself upon it (*balōn pros auto*), and coming to rest within it, understand it more and more intimately, knowing it by intuition and seeing its greatness by the things which exist after it and through it.

[11] Plotinus does not find it easy to talk about Intellect without being carried onwards into the highest realm of reality, what he has already, in section 9, begun to call the Good (*to agathon*). Nor does he manage to say much about the Good without constantly reverting to Intellect. As concepts – though not in reality – they nourish each other. Intellect – like the sage, at the end of section 6 – is described as vision, *opsis* (11 *ad init.*) Intellect derives its reason for existing at all from looking at – contemplating – the Good. As for the Good, it has no need of Intellect – it is just that Plotinus, in trying to conceptualise the Good in words, finds it easier to talk about how to approach it through Intellect, than to describe the Good itself. He is all too well aware that if you add anything to the Good in your mind, 'you will make it deficient by whatever you have added'. Plotinus now brings to a close this first of the four sessions recorded in the Great Treatise by evoking once more the main lines of his argument so far. Intellect, he reminds us, is

> the most beautiful of all; its place is in pure light and pure radiance and it includes the nature of real beings; this beautiful universe of ours is a shadow and image of it... As one who looks up to the sky and sees the light of the stars thinks of their maker and seeks him, so the man who has contemplated the intelligible world and observed it closely and wondered at it must seek its maker too, and enquire who it is who has brought into being something like this. (11)

The urge to contemplate is first stimulated by the natural world; and as this session began with nature, so too it ends there.

If we look at it as a whole, the Great Treatise provides two accounts of ascent to the One. We have now completed the first, so this is a good point at which to recall to mind the levels of reality according to Plotinus, but putting what we have learnt into our own words, in order to interiorize it more effectively.

We began with nature, the material world we know through our senses. Its amazing diversity, but at the same time harmony, strongly suggests that it derives from a single source, and that behind plurality lies unity. Theoretically, then, one might deduce the existence of the One from the world of insects and plants. But this is an immense leap. Starting from the natural world, what we more easily arrive at is a conception of a creative power that holds all things in unison, and which is therefore conscious of its own creations. That is not the One, whose unity prevents it from either thinking or involving itself in any subject-object relationship. Instead, Plotinus gives this universal harmony the name of Intellect. The world of

Intellect is of another, transcendent order, lacking the materiality of our visible world. Accordingly it is hard to describe except as perfect beauty. It is clear, nonetheless, that there must be constant contact between Intellect and nature; and this contact, this purveying of forms into matter, as Plotinus put it, passes through a median world of what he called Soul, which is present everywhere in creation. We may think, then, of the levels of reality as emanating either downwards from a peak or outwards from a centre – and that unique peak or centre we may reasonably call the One. The process of emanation calls into being, successively, Intellect, Soul and nature. And each of these levels of reality recalls, however dimly, its origin, and longs for it – this is the urge of contemplation that is so pervasive a theme of the pages of Plotinus we have just read. What flows outward in emanation, therefore, ebbs inward in contemplation, finding in its environment, but also within itself, in introspection, clues to the origins of being and the true nature of reality.

5.8 [31]

[1] The beginning of Plotinus's second session, to which Porphyry gave the title 'On the intelligible beauty', keeps up the first one's marked interest in the natural world. We are invited to imagine two great blocks of stone set side by side, one fresh from the quarry, the other carved into the image of a surpassingly beautiful being, either a goddess or a human. The artist has given form to what was not otherwise especially beautiful; and where did the artist get this form from? He had it inside himself, 'because he had some share of art'. The form that resides in the work of art is therefore a derivative form that has had to accommodate itself to the shortcomings of matter; in the process it has been diluted. Still, Plotinus warns us, we should not despise art for that reason, since nature likewise proceeds by imitation. And art resembles nature in another way too: it seeks to model itself on the forms (which reside in the realm of Intellect). Hence the unearthly beauty of Pheidias's statue of Zeus in the great temple at Olympia.

This positive attitude to images, as capable of giving us at least a glimpse of the world of forms, and therefore of Intellect in which the forms reside, was acted on by Plotinus's pupil Amelius, who tried to persuade the master to sit for his portrait. Porphyry chose to begin his *Life of Plotinus* by retelling the story of how the artist chosen for this job was forced to attend the meetings of the circle and sketch Plotinus from memory, because the

master refused to pose. The reason he gave was that there was no point in wasting effort on creating what was in effect just an image of that other image in which nature has 'encased' us: what Plotinus seems to mean is that, if you want to know the true man, you must search to glimpse his soul rather than letting your gaze rest on his body. This attitude seems slightly perverse in view of his admiring comment on Pheidias's Zeus: the explanation is perhaps that he was just being modest, though his comment about not wanting to leave behind 'a longer-lasting image of the image' hints that he may have also wanted to discourage any sort of cult after his death, which might distract from the study of his teachings. Implicitly, Porphyry's use of this story at the very beginning of his biography reads like a warning against seeing the life as somehow a substitute for the teachings, and in particular for the writings to which the *Life* is a prologue. This effect is intensified by the very first words of the *Life*:

> Plotinus, the philosopher of our times, seemed ashamed of being in the body. As a result of this state of mind he could never bear to talk about his race or his parents or his native country.

We are left in no doubt that what is important about Plotinus is his teaching, and only his teaching.

Returning now to our reading of 5.8: the opening remarks refer back, in different language, to what Plotinus has already said in session one about nature's contemplation. And just as this theme of contemplation gave an ascending impetus to session one, session two likewise now moves from nature's imitations and those which artists effect by moulding matter, [2] to the source of the beauty of living creatures and especially of women – Helen of Troy, for example. Here too the answer is the forms: always there is a model at a higher level of reality for that which seems beautiful in inferior things. Therefore beauty is not to be understood as characteristic only of physical beings, whether inanimate or animate: it is present also in such things as courses of study and ways of life and in general in souls. Even an ugly person may possess moral sense. And there are beauties within us – note, again, Plotinus's demand for introspection – that are eminently worthy of our appreciation. But not all of us can see this: the master pointedly observes that 'this is why discussions about these sorts of thing are not for everybody'.

[3] The beauty of Soul is both exalted and accessible enough for it to have special importance at this stage of Plotinus's exposition. From it derives beauty in nature and, finally, beauty in body. Souls may of course be more or

less beautiful, but the beauty of a good soul points higher, to the source of all beauty, namely Intellect. Here Plotinus invokes the gods as well – by which he means beings who, though they may be embodied, are distinguished because Intellect is especially active in them. And there are different levels of gods – those 'who are in heaven...continually contemplate, but as if at a distance, the things in that higher heaven [the sphere of Intellect] into which they raise their heads [Plotinus alludes here to the *Phaedrus* myth]', while the gods who dwell in that higher heaven itself are part of it, and therefore their apprehension of it is more immediate. [4] There is the realm of real being; all is transparent, nothing opaque. Plotinus seems to be describing his own visionary experience. The style is suddenly poetic, concentrated, personal – the circle of pupils drinks down each one of the master's words with no thought, here, of questioning or in any way interrupting him. Everything in the realm of Intellect is immediate and full. 'This life is wisdom, wisdom not acquired by reasonings...not derived from any other wisdom.' Plato called this 'a knowledge not different from that in which it is' – but what exactly did he mean by this?

[5] He meant that the forms, whose home is in the realm of Intellect, are not just mental propositions, but beautiful images such as also exist in the soul of the wise man – 'images not painted but real'. By 'images' Plotinus means 'concrete living realities'.[6] His reference, by the way, to images that exist in the soul of the wise man is yet another Platonic allusion, this time to the speech Alcibiades delivers at the end of the *Symposium*, in which he compares Socrates to the busts of the ugly, horse-eared, human-faced spirit Silenus that were common in ancient Athens, and which opened up to reveal images of the gods inside them – 'divine and golden images of fascinating beauty' (216e-217a). It was perhaps because of this remark by Alcibiades that philosophers were often in late antiquity described as or compared to statues.[7] They not only had something divine about them; if you met them in their own person rather than through their books, they also offered you direct, wordless access to wisdom, intuitively rather than rationally, just by your looking at them.

[6] Plotinus next offers, from a completely different angle, another illustration of the image's ability to convey, in a particularly direct way, a

6. See Armstrong's note ad loc.

7. E.g. Diogenes Laertius 6.51; Porphyry, *On abstinence* 2.49; id., *Letter to Marcella* 11; Proclus, *Platonic theology* 1.1.

living reality, without the need for exposition or argument. To do this, he draws (as we already saw in chapter 1) on his memories of Egypt where he had grown up, and in particular of the hieroglyphs that covered the walls of its temples, and which manifest, Plotinus says, 'the non-discursiveness of the intelligible world, that is, that every image is a kind of knowledge and wisdom' and can convey a given idea directly, all at one go, without the need for discourse or explanation such as that which we customarily convey using letters or words.

Having once established this non-discursiveness of the intelligible world, [7] Plotinus deduces that our physical, visible world was not created bit by bit in sequence (he presumably has in mind the account in Genesis), but at one go, suddenly, either with or without the mediation of soul. Immense numbers of forms were sent forth, and by them the whole universe was made 'without noise and fuss', and remains tightly bound together. The order of our visible world is not, then,

> the result of following out a train of logical consequences and purposive thought: it is before consequential and purposive thinking; for all this comes later, reasoning and demonstration and the confidence (produced by them).

[9] How then can we advance from perception of the material world to some apprehension of the intellectual? This is a practical question, and in trying to answer it Plotinus makes an unusually detailed suggestion for a specific spiritual exercise that anyone can conduct. What we must do is imagine the visible universe just as it is, in all its plurality but also interconnectedness.

> Let there be in the soul a shining imagination of a sphere, having everything within it... Keep this, and apprehend in your mind another, taking away the mass: take away also the places, and the mental picture of matter (you have) in yourself, and do not try to apprehend another sphere smaller in mass than the original one, but, calling on the god who made that of which you have the mental picture,[8] pray him to come. And may he come, bringing his own universe with him, with all the gods within him, he who is one and all, and each god is all the gods coming together into one,

for the intellectual realm is both manifold and a oneness. It is also present everywhere:

8. I.e. Intellect: Rist, *Plotinus* 209-12.

> this (visible) heaven is indeed great, and so are all the powers together within it; but it would be greater, even indescribably great, if there were not present with it a petty power of body

and if it had, instead, a greater 'share in the beauty which is according to form'.

[10] Then Plotinus imagines the gods coming in procession to contemplate Intellect, led by Zeus himself.

> But he [Intellect] appears to them from some invisible place and dawning upon them from on high illuminates everything and fills it with his rays, and dazzles those of them who are below, and they turn away unable to see him, as if he were the sun.

Here, in dramatic language, Plotinus puts the traditional gods of the Greeks firmly in their place in relation to the philosophical hierarchy of Intellect and the One – the old pantheon is not by any means denied, but it is shown to be wedded to our lower world, not part of the intellectual realm. Nonetheless, each god and spirit and soul beholds whatever it is able to take in from the intellectual realm, according to its own capacity. And the beauty of the intelligible

> shines bright upon all...so that they too become beautiful, as often men, when they go up into high places where the earth has a red-gold colour, are filled with that colour and made like that upon which they walk.

As already suggested, our Egyptian philosopher must have in mind the extraordinary clarity and depth of dawn or late afternoon light as it slants across the desert and bathes in colour the cliffs that border the Nile Valley. This intellectual light we must internalize as much as we can 'and look at it as oneself...and bring about the vision of the god in oneself'. Such at least is the aspiration of the sage.

[11] True contemplation of the intellectual realm means becoming one with it, without the mediation of any image. Then the sage may become in his turn 'an object of vision to another, who contemplates him shining out with thoughts of the kind that come from that world', just as Plotinus himself did when he spoke of these things to his pupils: Porphyry tells us –in a passage already quoted in the previous chapter – that

> when he was speaking his intellect visibly lit up his face. There was always a charm about his appearance, but at these times he was still more attractive to look at: he sweated gently and kindliness shone out from him, and in answering questions he made clear both his benevolence to the questioner and his intellectual vigour. (*Life* 13)

So what are the 'thoughts of the kind that come from that world', as Plotinus puts it? They are quite unlike the thoughts we have here below, which depend on sense and the existence of a subject-object relationship.

> In the higher world, when our knowledge is most perfectly conformed to Intellect, we think we know nothing because we are waiting for the experience of sense-perception, which says it has not yet seen; and it certainly has not seen, and never will see things like these.

[12-13] Plotinus concludes this session with an exposition of the myth of Uranus, Cronus and Zeus, from Hesiod's *Theogony*, in terms of the One, Intellect and Soul. We have already seen Plotinus eager to use the gods of traditional Greek mythology to illustrate his exposition. It may be that the attempt comes over rather awkwardly, as here; but the very difficulty Plotinus experiences underlines how necessary he felt the undertaking to be. His pupils were soaked in Greek culture, whose religious aspects were already by this time under attack from Christians, as Plotinus knew very well indeed from the years he had spent studying in Alexandria. Plotinus felt the need to show some solidarity with this tradition, though at the same time he subordinated it to a rigorously philosophical view of the world. We get the impression from his biography that, at least in his later years when Porphyry was with him, he spent little time in temples. Yet here, in section 12, he invokes the old myths in the same breath in which he attacks the Christian doctrine of created and destructible matter:

> Those are not right [he says] who destroy the image-universe [i.e. preach the destructibility of matter] while (holding that) the intelligible abides, and bring it into being as if its maker ever planned to make it.[9] For they do not want to understand...that as long as that higher reality gives its light [i.e. for ever], the rest of things can never fail. (12)

There is no mistaking the fact that Plotinus is here taking sides in the religious debates of his day – while preserving, naturally, the detachment that befits a philosopher. Not for him the bitterly controversial style of the attack his pupil Porphyry later made on the Christians, in his infamous treatise *Against the Christians*, which earned him, from later Latin writers, the epithet 'the mad oriental dog'.[10]

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9. A reference to the Christian creation myth: *contra*, J. Rist, 'Plotinus and Christian philosophy', in L.P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge 1996) 394.

10. E.g. Gildas, *On the ruin of Britain* ch. 4

5.

THE GREAT TREATISE 2

5.5 [32]

'Is what we have said enough to lead to a clear understanding of the intelligible region, or must we go back and take another way, like this?' The last words of the second of the four sessions, as Porphyry divides them, come more naturally at the beginning of the third: Plotinus has perhaps realized that some of his pupils have not fully grasped this very difficult subject of what is the Intellect, and that they need to be given another chance, another line of approach.

[1] He begins by asserting that Intellect possesses perfect knowledge and memory, not dependent on demonstration. Sense-perception grasps images, not the thing itself; but when Intellect knows, it knows immediately something which cannot be outside the – by definition – all-embracing realm of the intelligible. Hence the title Porphyry gave this session when he turned it into an independent treatise: 'That the intelligibles are not outside the Intellect, and on the Good'. One can only truly know that which one entirely possesses. The senses give one access to opinion, not knowledge.

[3] Clearly Intellect is a great god – in fact it is universal god. But still it is only 'the second god'; the first God – that is, the One – is enthroned high above it, and before it goes forth

> an inconceivable beauty...as in the procession before a great king the lesser ranks go first, and then in succession the greater and after them the yet more majestic and the court which has still more of royal dignity, and then those who are honoured next after the king; and after all these the great king himself is suddenly revealed, and the people pray and prostrate themselves before him – those at least who have not gone away beforehand, satisfied with what they saw before the coming of the king.

No doubt Plotinus evoked a smile from his aristocratic pupils at this point –

but he immediately concedes that the simile is not so good, given that the great king is separate from those who go before him, while the One's kingdom consists of its own offspring.

[4] How then are we to grasp this One? – this One which has nothing to do with number. 'It does not even belong to the category of essential number, and so certainly not to that which is posterior to it of quantitative number' – in other words, the One is not the first in a series, [5] and remains the same even if other things come into being from it. And those beings retain, all of them, a trace of the One from which they proceed. [6] The One imparts form, but is itself beyond form; and if it is without form, it is without substance as well, for a substance – an *ousia* – is defined and limited, whereas the One is not. The One is likewise beyond being, *epekeina ontos* – Plotinus here uses a phrase from Plato's *Republic*, 509b, which is easily his favourite Plato passage and the one he most often quotes, especially the assertion that 'the good is not existence, but lies far beyond it in dignity and power'. But in truth, Plotinus continues, no phrase can comprehend the One.

> He who wishes to contemplate what is beyond the intelligible will contemplate it when he has let all the intelligible go; he will learn *that* it is by means of the intelligible, but *what* it is like by letting the intelligible go.

Yet in fact it is not 'like' anything.

> Perhaps this name "One" contains only a denial of multiplicity. This is why the Pythagoreans symbolically indicated it to each other by the name of Apollo, in negation of the multiple.

(Plotinus plays on the name Apollo by deriving it from *polloi*, the word for 'many', prefixed by the privative particle a–.) In truth, it would be better to use no name at all for the One. One could say that the One is more easily seen than its name is heard; 'but if the seer tries to look at a form, he will not know even that', [7] since forms are not perceptible to ordinary sight. We may best imagine the appearance of the One to Intellect as a sudden light, 'alone by itself in independent purity', coming from outside, perhaps, or from within: Intellect cannot tell, [8] for in truth there is no 'whence'.

> One must not chase after it [the light], but wait quietly till it appears, preparing oneself to contemplate it, as the eye awaits the rising of the sun; and the sun rising over the horizon ("from Ocean", the poets say) gives itself to the eyes to see.

Yet the One does not really come to us, as it is here/there before all things. 'It is Intellect which comes, and again Intellect which goes away.' Plotinus

here speaks less exaltedly of Intellect than is his custom – clearly he is trying to convey a personal experience impossible to put fully into words, and he happily sacrifices the consistency of his doctrine in order to give us some sense of the quality of that experience.

Having tried, in this memorable passage, to make us understand something of what it means to 'see' the One, [9] Plotinus spends the rest of this third session attempting to say something more about the One itself. First he makes clear that, whereas everything else is contained in something that comes before it, the One encompasses and possesses all things. It is not somewhere, therefore there is nowhere where it is not. [10] And although there are traces of the One in all things, those creations will not help us to appreciate the One's utter purity and independence. [11] Despite the name we use for it, the One has nothing to do with number; and it has nothing to do with any sort of reality perceptible to the senses – yet it is in fact truly real. 'So reverse your way of thinking', the sage exhorts his pupils,

> or you will be left deprived of God, like the people at festivals who by their gluttony stuff themselves with things which it is not lawful for those going in to the gods to take, thinking that these are more obviously real than the vision of the god for whom they ought to be celebrating the festival, and so they take no part in the rites within.

Here we have an extraordinarily vivid allusion to the festivals of the gods as they were celebrated in the ancient world, including Egypt,[1] and as they continue to be celebrated in honour of the saints in the mountains and islands of Greece, for example, where those who attend the festivals are often there mainly for the excursion, the company and the food and drink, and barely trouble to enter the shrine. And they defile the holy place by leaving their rubbish behind them when they return home.

Plotinus dwells a good deal, in these concluding sections of the third session, on how the seeker may be distracted from the Good. [12] Passionate love of beauty is another such distraction – the Good has no need of beauty, but beauty needs the Good. [13] In general, the Good is deficient in nothing and needs nothing. If we add or attribute anything else to it, we 'will deprive it of being the Good by the addition' – an idea we have already encountered, expressed in very similar words, at 3.8.11.

1. S. Morenz (tr. A.E. Keep), *Egyptian religion* (London 1973) 90.

2.9 [33]

[1] At the beginning of the fourth, last and most remarkable session transcribed in the Great Treatise, Plotinus is still wondering whether it is in any way possible to speak about the One. No language can possibly describe the One; but there are some terms that at least help to locate it in our way of thinking. We may call it the Good, the First or the Self-Sufficient. After it come intellect and Soul – these three are basic and irreducible. Nor is it in any way necessary to suppose that there are more principles than these three. [2] As regards, in particular, the soul, there are three parts – or better, powers – of it, one that looks to the intelligible world, one that looks to the material world, and one in the middle. The more the soul contemplates Intellect, the fairer and more powerful it becomes. It does not direct the body through discursive thinking, but receives and purveys light.

[3] Each level of reality

> must *of necessity* give of its own to something else as well, or the Good will not be the Good, or Intellect Intellect, or the soul this that it is... *Of necessity*, then, all things must exist for ever in ordered dependence on each other.

That this process of emanation is *necessary* – a point that is made twice in this brief passage – does not of course mean that the One is forced to do something against its will. Rather this is a 'logical must', 'a deduction made from the One's nature'.[2] Whatever has come into being will be always in the process of becoming; 'nor will anything be dissolved except those things which have something to be dissolved into; that which has nothing into which it can be dissolved will not perish'. Matter will not be dissolved – if that is to be its fate, why was it created in the first place? Since it has proceeded from them, matter will always continue to be illuminated by the divine principles.

Near the end of section 3, Plotinus turns his attention more specifically towards the Gnostics. He follows the custom of writers at this time in not identifying contemporaries by name, nor does he even name them generically as Gnostics, though Armstrong several times inserts this term into his translation. (In fact, the latest philosopher Plotinus names is Epicurus, who had died in 270 B.C.) Eventually Plotinus provides an obvious clue to the identity of his opponents, when he discusses their characteristic

2. Rist, *Plotinus* 75.

myth of Sophia. And, fortunately, Porphyry adds precise details in chapter 16 of his biography, where he states that among the Christians of Plotinus's day (we assume he means, specifically, the Christian community in Rome) there was a heretical minority which subscribed to doctrines derived from or related to the Greek philosophical tradition. Amongst other details, Porphyry mentions that these 'heretics' possessed books 'by Zoroaster and Zostrianus and Nicotheus and Allogenes and Messus and other people of the kind'. He also observes that they were in the habit of attacking Plato because 'he had not penetrated to the depths of intelligible reality'.

Who exactly were these Gnostics, then? Most scholars seem to agree that they were followers of Valentinus, who had been active at Rome a century or so before Plotinus. There appear to have been many different Gnostic sects, but all shared hostility to the material world and a taste for putting their teachings into mythological form, that marks them off from what we think of as 'mainstream' Christianity. All claimed to convey knowledge of the highest God, and believed that man is part of the divine essence, exiled from heaven and trapped in this hostile material world by a malevolent or simply ignorant creator or 'demiurge'. Into this melange of doctrines Valentinus attempted to introduce a Platonic-Pythagorean philosophical framework. The Valentinian system – if that is the right word – was characterized by an apophatic account of an utterly transcendent God below whom was a whole range of subordinate divinities including Sophia, 'Wisdom', who had transgressively brought forth the demiurge (or creator) of the material world, called Ialdabaoth. Sophia's repentance for this deed had opened the way for the restoration of the divine elements which had fallen into the material world, and these included spiritual humans, the Gnostics themselves.[3]

[4] It is precisely to this myth of Sophia that Plotinus turns in section 4. If the Gnostics say that Soul (i.e. Sophia) made the world as the result of a moral failure, then we must, Plotinus points out, ask them how it was possible for Soul to create when it was evidently not busy contemplating intelligible realities. It is ridiculous, he argues, to imagine Soul created the world out of a desire for honour, or by discursive reasoning, or that it is going to destroy the world. Nor can we say the world had an evil origin, just because there are unpleasant things in it. We cannot expect it to be just like

3. M. Tardieu, 'Les Gnostiques dans la *Vie de Plotin*: Analyse du chapitre 16', in L. Brisson and others, *Porphyre, La vie de Plotin* 2 (Paris 1992) 503-63 ; P. Kalligas, *Plōtinou enneas deutera* (Athens 1997) 327-34.

the intelligible world. Our world is in fact very impressive, and a thoroughly worthy image of the intelligible. How could fire or the earth or the sun be made any better than they already are?, asks Plotinus.

[5] In section 5 Plotinus attacks the Gnostics' behaviour as well as their ideas. He is struck by their arrogance in claiming to grasp the intelligible and be on the same level of understanding as the sun, when in fact we men are much further from the truth than is the sun. Their soul they consider to be immortal and divine, and the heaven and the stars to have no share in immortal soul; whereas in fact, says Plotinus, the stars are made of much purer stuff than us. In general the Gnostics hate the material world, [6] and have introduced a whole range of new teachings particularly about the soul, not to mention terminology that has no precedent in ancient Greek teachings. Even though some of their doctrines are taken from Plato, others are completely new, or else misunderstood or falsified teachings of Plato.

> They degrade the great man's teaching as if they had understood the intelligible nature, but he and the other blessed philosophers had not. And by giving names to a multitude of intelligible realities they think they will appear to have discovered the exact truth, though by this very multiplicity they bring the intelligible nature into the likeness of the sense-world, the inferior world, when one ought there in the intelligible to aim at the smallest possible number.

There is nothing wrong in disagreeing with the ancient Greek authorities, but one should do so respectfully, since we owe so much to these earlier thinkers. Plotinus is especially upset by his opponents' hostility to the universe in general, and in particular to the human body. They degrade the universe by teaching that the Soul which created it suffers from the same weaknesses as individual souls.

[7] We need to insist, especially, that the universe will last as long as the intelligible world continues – it will not be destroyed; also that we cannot judge the Soul of the All on the basis of what we know about our individual soul's relationship to the body. Our soul is bound by the body, but the universal Soul is free, and a ruler. It determines the movement of the whole; and whatever does not accord with that order is eliminated,

> as if when a great company of dancers was moving in order, a tortoise was caught in the middle of its advance and trampled because it was not able to get out of the way of the ordered movement of the dancers; yet, if it had ranged itself with that movement, even it would have suffered no harm from them.

In this rather odd simile, Plotinus takes account, perhaps, of the observed irregularities of our universe, such for example as meteorites and in general the collisions that occur between heavenly bodies; and he reassures us that these need not be seen as calling in question the impression we have of a broad universal harmony.

[8] Plotinus complains that his opponents do not understand that the universe is a clear image of the intelligible realm. Being an image, it is not exactly like the original, but still it is admirable. Think only of the stars, which are 'gods moving in order, circling in well-arranged beauty'. They enjoy virtue and understanding, 'grasping in their intellect God and the intelligible gods'. 'If this All is of such a kind that it is possible to have wisdom in it and to live according to that higher world when we are here', then clearly it depends on the intelligible realities. [9] It is true that life here is not without its inequalities and travails; but the sage should anyway not care about such things. His concern is with the upper world, while 'the common crowd is there...to do manual work to provide for the necessities of the better sort'. 'If the world is like a sports ground, where some win and others lose, what is there wrong with that?' In general, this world (Plotinus says 'this city') honours virtue and punishes vice; and all are watched over by the images of the gods, and by the gods themselves.

Needless to say, some modern commentators find this passage, and others like it, troublingly complacent and insensitive.[4] Surely the philosopher who teaches virtue and longs for the Good should care more about the fate of his less fortunate fellow men and women? The answer is that Plotinus did care – there is plenty of evidence for that in Porphyry's *Life*, particularly in the passage about the orphan children who were entrusted to Plotinus and whom he educated and generally looked after until they came of age. But in his writings Plotinus is concerned with the whole immensity of reality; and in the sage's view of reality, ethics and social concerns will occupy only the immediate foreground – a *sine qua non* for virtue, but entirely lacking the distance and depth of the sage's true goal. For Plotinus, the sage's vocation was to a higher level of virtue which took the lower virtues as given and assigned an appropriate space to them, in other words, a very small space. If challenged, Plotinus would surely have pointed out that if every sage were a

4. M. Miles, *Plotinus on body and beauty: Society, philosophy, and religion in third-century Rome* (Oxford 1999) 165-67; cf. A. Schniewind, *L'éthique du sage chez Plotin: Le paradigme du spoudaios* (Paris 2003) 202-03.

social worker, not only a whole perspective on reality but a whole involvement with reality would be entirely lost to the human race – a situation not unlike our own, in other words.

He might indeed have answered his modern, socially conscious critics in much the same terms as he answered the Gnostics – one ought to try to be good, but not to think that only I am good. One should be aware, he says, that there are also other perfectly good men; there are also good spirits; gods who are in this world and look to the other; 'the ruler of this universe, the most blessed Soul'; intelligible gods; and 'the great king of that other world', in other words the One, who 'displays his greatness in the multitude of the gods'. This whole passage is an excellent example of Plotinus's power to contextualise the human condition, and thereby reduce it to its proper dimensions.

But this part of section 9 has other interest as well – let us continue reading it:

> It is not contracting the divine into one but showing it in that multiplicity in which God himself has shown it, which is proper to those who know the power of God, inasmuch as, abiding who he is, he makes many gods, all depending upon himself and existing through him and from him. And this universe exists through him and looks to him, the whole of it and each and every one of the gods in it, and it reveals what is his to men, and it and the gods in it declare in their oracles what is pleasing to the intelligible gods.

It would be hard to find in Plotinus a passage that more clearly demonstrates how he integrated the polytheistic world view into the Platonist philosopher's essentially monotheistic doctrine. It would be simplistic to call Plotinus either a monotheist or a polytheist. Instead he taught that a proper understanding of reality must embrace both plurality and unity.

[10] Plotinus admits that some of his acquaintances, who had espoused Gnostic views before they met him, still persist in them. This session is addressed to his close friends, since the others do not seem amenable to reason. He then goes on to refute [10-12] one of the central Gnostic myths, that of Sophia and the Demiurge. We need not go into the details of this refutation here; instead we may pick Plotinus's argument up again [13] at section 13, where he recalls the natural hierarchy of all things, which inspires fear only in men who are irrational – Plotinus is thinking of the cosmic spheres that the Gnostic's soul had to traverse, and which might bar its progress if the Gnostic did not know the right formula. Plotinus's elder

Christian contemporary Origen, another eminent philosopher, preserved a set of these Gnostic spells. Here, for example, is the one that had to be used when one was passing through the eternally chained gate of Ialdabaoth:

> And thou, Ialdabaoth...born to have power with boldness, being ruling Word of a pure mind, a perfect work for Son and Father, I bear a symbol marked with a picture of life and, having opened to the world the gate which thou didst close for thine eternity, I pass by thy power free again. May grace be with me, father let it be with me. (*Against Celsus*6.31)

The true sage simply hurries on toward the One.

> And if men have a degree of honour in comparison with other living things, these (cosmic spheres) are much more honourable, as they are not in the All to exercise tyrannical rule [as the astrologers maintain] but as the givers of beauty and order.

Once again, as in section 5, Plotinus emphasizes man's subordinate place in the visible world. Yet this is by no means to say that man is to be condemned, just because he is a lesser good and falls short of a higher level of reality. There is no necessary condemnation implied in saying that some things are by nature higher, and others lower.

[14] Going back to the formulas used by the Gnostics, Plotinus condemns these magical devices intended to bind the higher powers, and thus intervene in the natural order of things. The Gnostics, he complains, also claim to be skilled in driving out the demons who, they say, cause disease. They boast of these skills in order to impress the masses – instead of encouraging the afflicted to adopt a temperant and orderly way of life. It makes much more sense, observes Plotinus, for the doctor of bodies to speak in terms of 'strain or excess or deficiency or decay', and to offer cures that expel whatever is harming the body, either through excretion or blood-letting, or else that involve fasting.

> The rest of their [the Gnostics'] teaching I leave you [in other words Plotinus's pupils, such as Porphyry] to investigate by reading their books, and to observe throughout that the kind of philosophy which we pursue, besides all its other excellences, displays simplicity and straightforwardness of character along with clear thinking, and aims at dignity, not rash arrogance. It combines its confident boldness with reason and much safeguarding and caution and a great deal of circumspection. You are to use philosophy of this kind as a standard of comparison for the rest,

especially for Gnosticism, which is constructed on exactly the opposite principles.

[15] This invaluable general characterization of his own philosophy, to which we will come back shortly, allows Plotinus to set up, in the next section, an extremely disadvantageous comparison with the Gnostics. First he evokes Epicurus, whom late antique philosophers, Jews and Christians were at one in condemning as the most dangerous of all thinkers because, as Plotinus here points out, he denied Providence, so that all that was left to pursue was pleasure.[5] Then Plotinus asserts that the Gnostics are even worse: they 'despise all the laws of this world' and the winning of virtue and self-control, 'and the righteousness which comes to birth with men's characters and is perfected by reason and training'. So all they are left with is their own needs and pleasures. This, argues Plotinus, entirely contradicts their claim to possess knowledge (*gnōsis*), which must surely impel them toward the higher world. Yet the whole subject of virtue is significantly absent from their books. 'It does no good at all to say "Look to God", unless one also teaches how one is to look.' In this phrase, Plotinus brings up the whole question of spiritual exercises, to which we have already seen him giving some attention at 5.8.9, and which Pierre Hadot has so brilliantly studied in our own times.[6]

> For [Plotinus continues] someone could say, "What prevents me from looking (to God) and (yet at the same time) refraining from no pleasure or from having no control over my emotions; (or what prevents me) from remembering the name 'God' and at the same time being in the grip of all the passions and making no attempt to get rid of any of them?" In reality it is virtue which goes before us to the goal and, when it comes to exist in the soul along with wisdom, shows God; but God, if you talk about him without true virtue, is only a name.

In this passage, especially, we see clearly Plotinus's deep concern with ethics and virtue, which seems to some students to be largely absent from his writings. It is absent, though, only because the focus of Plotinus's thought was elsewhere. His encounter with the Gnostics had the beneficial effect of forcing him to express himself on various matters which usually he passed over quickly. Among these was moral deportment, and in particular the moral deportment of his opponents. Porphyry's *Life* seems to have been quite consciously designed to compensate for the neglect of these matters in

5. W. Schmid, 'Epikur', T. Klauser and others (eds), *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (Stuttgart 1950-) 5.772-803.

6. See above, Preface.

the *Enneads*: certainly we derive, from this text, a highly sympathetic portrait of Plotinus the human being.

In the concluding sections of this fourth and final session of the Great Treatise, [16] Plotinus returns again to the contempt the Gnostics evince for 'the universe and the gods in it'. But if, as they say, they revere the intelligible gods, how can they despise the souls that issue forth from them, and are present throughout our world? The Gnostics simply do not grasp the interlinking of these worlds. If God cares for *them*, how can he ignore all the rest of creation? And likewise, how can anyone behold the extraordinary beauties of this world, and not be seized with reverence for their source?

[17] It is true that Plato spoke of the obstacles the body places in the way of the soul; but this should not blind us to the form imposed by Intellect on the universe. And this beauty ought in turn to lead us towards some appreciation of the upper world as well. Because all things are interlinked, it makes no sense to despise any part of the whole, even the lowest. [18] And in any case we are obliged to stay in our body, which has been built for us by Soul: Plotinus was completely opposed to suicide. We will resist pleasure and bear hardship, and strengthen ourselves by virtue and the action of the mind.

> As we draw near to the completely untroubled state we can imitate the soul of the universe and of the stars and...hasten on to the same goal and have the same objects of contemplation...So we can be without affection for the body and pure, and despise death, and know what is better and pursue it.

* * *

Especially in this attack on the Gnostics, but also at many other points in his writings, one is struck by Plotinus's emphasis on the arrogance of his opponents, contrasted with his own sane awareness of the limitations of human kind, including philosophers. For Plotinus, the ensouled sun or stars see the One more clearly than any human being (e.g. 2.9.5). Yet late antique Christians were often to present contemporary Platonists as consumed with arrogance, because they relied on their own resources in order to arrive at the vision of God, rather than on the grace of God's incarnate son. We shall see an example of this attitude when we look at Augustine of Hippo.

On the other hand, the Christians' apparent 'humility' in relying on God's grace freely given, and on the son he willingly sent to suffer amongst and for mankind, does of course presuppose that God is vividly and personally interested in us. This is a giddyingly high claim for us to make, and the more

so, the more transcendentally we conceive of God. Plotinus is not prepared to go that far. This reticence should be taken into account when we come to assess his supposed 'arrogance'. For Plotinus, God is

> graciously disposed to all, to men as well. The man of real dignity must ascend in due measure, with an absence of boorish arrogance (*agroikia*), going only so far as our nature is able to go, and (he must) consider that there is room for the others [i.e. for all ensouled beings] at God's side, and not set himself alone, next after God. (2.9.9.)

We may recall in this connection the Christian doctrine of the first man, Adam, who in later art was often to be represented, in floor mosaics, enthroned just in front of the altar, the throne of Christ.[7]

As already mentioned, Plotinus gives a very good characterization of his own approach at the end of 2.9.14. He says that he aims at 'simplicity and straightforwardness of character along with clear thinking, and aims at dignity, not rash arrogance'. His teaching is reasonable, cautious and circumspect. This description coincides exactly with what we have seen in the last two chapters: a thinker who starts from what can be observed, the natural world, and works outward or upward from that, with no help from so-called 'revealed' books – there are no more than glancing allusions here to, for example, the Orphic texts. Even the great forerunners, Plato and Aristotle, are used critically. Logic prevails, as in the frequently used idea that plurality points toward an underlying unity. And logic is deployed in a practical and modest spirit, because it is the tool we have, not in order to advertise the all-conquering power of the human intellect. Merely to use the word 'intellect' reminds us how far away man's mind lies removed from the supernal realm of true Intellect.

Plotinus's reflection led him, though, to certain experiences of what we may call 'mystical' insight; and we have noted at least one passage where such an insight appears to be dominant, and even to have modified a basic feature of his more systematic philosophy (e.g. 5.5.8). Plotinus was of course profoundly indebted to the earlier Platonist tradition for the formation of his mind and expectations – he does not depart in any thoroughly radical way from this well-established highway. Nevertheless, his mystical experiences were of enormous importance in focusing and amplifying what the tradition had taught him. He also faced the fundamental human problem, that our

7. G. Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad elite in late antique Syria* (Berkeley 2004) 134-38.

discursive reason simply does not give us access to the nature of the transcendent God. And that is precisely where Plotinus called on that quality of boldness (*to tharraleon*) that was missed out from our summary, a moment ago, of his description of his own philosophical method at 2.9.14. To put it briefly, he took his own mystical experiences and writ them across the stars and well beyond, right up as far as the Intellect's vision of the One. That universal longing for and tendency towards unity which Plotinus calls 'contemplation' has its origin in his own longing for the One inspired by his gazing at pluriform yet inexpressibly beautiful nature. This is not arrogance or anthropocentricity, but a reasonable and entirely natural use of the sublimest experience open to men and women, in order to open ourselves up to the intelligible world which otherwise would remain closed to us.

Plotinus is well aware of the boldness of this entirely poetic leap he makes – that is why he introduces the Great Treatise, and his most extended description of contemplation, by pretending he is 'playing' (3.8.1). It was a brilliant stroke, to extrapolate from his mystical experience of contemplation and make of this the motive force of all reality. To such conventional unifying forces as cosmic 'sympathy', he added the passionate conviction of the man of prayer. He recast all reality in the image of the sage, not to glorify himself, but to make reality more accessible to his pupils. It was a daring undertaking, but convincing because Plotinus combined recognition of the limits of human knowledge with perfect sincerity and determination to transcend those limits. Yoking the chariot of reason to the steeds of poetry, Plotinus formulated a philosophy of prayer and contemplation that still speaks to individuals disciplined enough not only to sit at his feet, but also to exercise themselves in his way.

PART III

PLOTINUS'S POSTERITY

by

GARTH FOWDEN

6.

PLOTINUS AMONG THE CHRISTIANS

In these last two chapters I want to trace the often indirect or subterranean – and even pseudonymous – ways in which Plotinus became known first to Christians and then to Muslims. In the Muslim world, for example, translations from the *Enneads* circulated under the name of Aristotle, and even philosophers had barely heard the name of Plotinus himself, or did not know it at all. We may start, though, with the Gnostics in Plotinus's own circle and among his personal friends. In the previous chapter we saw the bitterly personal terms in which the philosopher attacked the Gnostics in 2.9 – Plotinus who was usually so mild and gentle in his manner of speaking. Nowhere else does he speak with such passion about his contemporaries, or – for that matter – about figures from the past. So our first question must be, what was it that attracted Gnostics to Plotinus's circle in the first place, and why was there such a falling out?

Given that at least one Christian, Origen, may have attended Ammonius Saccas's circle in Alexandria, though probably much earlier than Plotinus, we should not be too surprised to find them in Plotinus's too. In cities where there were philosophically trained Christians, it was not unusual for them to frequent the classrooms of those teachers who, whatever their religious beliefs, were able to provide them with a language in which to think and teach about God. In Plotinus's circle these Gnostics would have found kindred spirits, at least at first sight – men committed to the doctrine of one transcendent God, and to the study of the soul's search for that God and for liberation from the bonds of matter. Plato was evidently a shared inspiration, and so too were teachings from the East, specifically from Iran. In the Gnostic treatises mentioned by Porphyry (*Life* 16; see above, ch. 5, p. 6), 'Zoroaster' and the apparently related name 'Zostrianus' point in that direction; and Plotinus too had set out for Iran after the death of his teacher, 'eager' according to Porphyry 'to make acquaintance with the Persian (philosophical) discipline' (*Life* 3).

Of these motives for convergence, Plato was to become a major stumbling block. Plotinus was perfectly prepared to disagree with Plato, but he always did so respectfully and felt himself to be firmly in the same tradition. The Gnostics in his circle were inclined to be much more pugnacious, and Plotinus eventually could not stomach any more what seemed to him to be pure arrogance. The problem must in part have arisen from a predictable divergence over Plato's attitude to matter, which could be made to seem decidedly dualistic.[1] Although there were many different species of Gnostic, they all seem to have agreed that the material world is not merely defective – as Plotinus held – but positively evil. This was to become, as we saw in the previous chapter, a major point of disagreement; yet careful reading of Plotinus's earlier works reveals that he too had taken a darker view of matter before the crisis of c. 265 – up until a mere four years, in other words, before his death. After 2.9, Plotinus's teaching brightens up somewhat – the Gnostics seem to have alerted him to the way in which his own doctrine too contained the seeds of completely unacceptable interpretations.[2] In other words, the relationship between Platonists and Gnostics involved a real intellectual give and take, with considerable common ground, notably their shared fascination with the journey of the soul.[3] If the Gnostic writings often repel us with their proliferating personifications and excessively baroque myths, we should bear in mind that Plotinus too invoked classical mythology, on occasion, in order to make his doctrines more palatable to men and women of traditional Greek education.

We can only guess at the effect Plotinus's withering attack had on the Gnostics in his circle. Its tone had been sharpened by the master's awareness that some of the doctrinal disagreements pointed to weak points in his own teaching. Earlier references to the Gnostics in his lessons had been indirect, but 2.9 contained extended passages of bitterly personal criticism. It is hard to imagine the Gnostics staying around after this outburst, but nor do we have any record of how they replied. One thing we can say, though, is that

1. K. Rudolph, *Die Gnosis: Wesen und Geschichte einer spätantiken Religion* (Göttingen 1990[3]) 68.

2. See the discussion between H.-C. Puech and R. Harder, in *Les sources de Plotin* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique 5 (Geneva 1960)) 182-85; also Kalligas, *Enneas deutera* 329-31.

3. A.C. Wire in J.M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi library in English* (Leiden 1988[3]) 491; Dillon, *Middle Platonists* 388-89.

when Plotinus's pupil Porphyry decided, in his turn, to launch an attack on Christianity, his *Against the Christians*, he chose mainstream doctrines and practices as his target, not the conventicles of the Gnostics. Perhaps it was becoming apparent that the Gnostics had spent their force. Even so, the mainstream of Christianity remained, for some generations after Plotinus, very broad and quite ill-defined. This has been illustrated recently by the dispute about whether the library of Gnostic books discovered in 1945 at Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt could or could not have belonged to a relatively conventional monastic community founded by S. Pachomius, which existed quite close to the find spot in the fourth century. The Nag Hammadi codices are particularly interesting, from our point of view, because they include treatises entitled *Zostrianus* and *Allogenes*, along with references to Zoroaster and Messus[4] - in other words they seem to contain some of the exact same texts known in Plotinus's circle and mentioned by Porphyry in his *Life*. Yet the Christian elements in, say, *Zostrianus*, are very few, certainly not, on their own, enough to justify Porphyry's description of Plotinus's Gnostics as *Christian* heretics.[5] We are left wondering to what extent Plotinus can really be said to have come into contact with what we would see as mainstream Christians, like Origen for example, who clearly found the Gnostics just as odd as Plotinus did. For Origen, it was about as reasonable to call a Gnostic a Christian as it was to call Epicurus a philosopher:

> Those who abolish providence cannot really be philosophers, nor can those be Christians who introduce strange new doctrines which do not harmonize with the traditional doctrines received from Jesus. (*Against Celsus* 5.6.1)

And in any case, so far as we can tell, Plotinus had absolutely no interest in Christianity as a religion (unlike Porphyry, for example, or Julian). He quarreled with the Gnostics for purely theoretical, philosophical reasons.

* * *

Plotinus himself had grown up not so very far north of Nag Hammadi, at Lycopolis, modern Asyut. But if the Gnostics had penetrated these provincial depths, the classics of contemporary Platonism were more likely to be read in the great city of Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast, where Plotinus himself had resorted when he felt the need for a proper teacher of

4. Robinson, *Nag Hammadi library* 16-22, 402-30, 490-500.
5. Kalligas, *Enneas deutera* 329 n. 10.

philosophy. Alexandria was a highly cosmopolitan city, a major centre of commerce. Although the Jews had not recovered from the suppression of their revolt in 115-117,[6] the Christian community was strong and produced men of considerable philosophical education such as Clement and, indeed, Origen, who may even have studied with Ammonius Saccas. Origen, and before him Clement, presided over study circles that no doubt resembled Ammonius's. It would, then, have been entirely natural for the educated elite of the Christian community in Alexandria to take an interest in the writings of a man like Plotinus, who had emerged from a background so like their own, even if he had gone off to teach in distant Rome.

In the generation after Origen, one of the leading pastors and teachers of the Christian community in Alexandria was the priest Arius. Arius was to achieve an immense impact on the whole development of empire, Church and society in the fourth century and later, when his name was attached to the so-called 'Arian' heresy, a set of teachings about Christ which emphasized his subordination to God the Father and was rejected, at the Council of Nicaea in 325, in favour of a doctrine of Christ – a Christology – that made him fully God, equal to the Father. Eventually Nicaea became the doctrine of the universal Church; but in the late third and early fourth centuries there were still men like Arius who, without necessarily wanting to make trouble for either bishops or emperors, were seeking to understand the Gospels in the light of the heritage of Greek thought, which was, after all, the most subtle as well as the most prestigious system of thinking available to them.

We know little about Arius except what his many enemies tell us. He was in charge of one of the more important Alexandrian churches, and as a preacher was greatly admired. His teaching was backed up by an ascetic way of life. Some decades after his death, bishop Epiphanius of Salamis chose the following words to describe him:

> He was very tall in stature, with downcast countenance – counterfeited like a guileful serpent, and well able to deceive any unsuspecting heart through its cleverly designed appearance. For he was always garbed in a short cloak and sleeveless tunic (*kolobion*) [in other words, like a philosopher or an ascetic]; he spoke gently, and people found him persuasive and flattering.[7]

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6. C. Haas, *Alexandria in late antiquity: Topography and social conflict* (Baltimore 1997) 103-09.

7. Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* 69.3, tr. R. Williams, *Arius: Heresy and tradition* (London 2001²) 32.

Up to the present day, controversy has ebbed and flowed round Arius. As with that other earnest and divisive figure, the Emperor Julian, later writers have tended to make him resemble whatever it was they had on their mind. Usually that was not to Arius's advantage – even Julian was more often cast in a favourable light than he. Both men seem to have invited misunderstanding by trying to read a body of established religious beliefs in the light of philosophy. But while Julian's writings show little if any knowledge of Plotinus,[8] Arius is alleged to have been considerably indebted to the great Platonist, most recently by Rowan Williams (the present archbishop of Canterbury) in his book on Arius published in 1987.[9]

In general, it is quite hard to prove Plotinus was read by Christian writers before the late fourth century.[10] In particular, there is no hard evidence that the *Enneads*, or any part of them, circulated in Alexandria during Arius's lifetime (c. 270-336). If they had, that would not have been in the least bit surprising. But in practice we are thrown back exclusively on comparison of the *Enneads* with the rather small amount of reliable information that has survived about Arius's teaching. This includes a few verses from a poem-treatise Arius wrote c. 323, called the *Thalia*. I will summarize rather than quote:

Before he became a father, God was all alone. The Son did not always exist. Like all existing creatures, the Son, the Word of God, was created out of nothing. 'But then God wanted to make us [i.e. mankind]'; so he made what we call the Word, Wisdom or the Son, 'so that through him he [God] might make us'. So there is Wisdom and the Word in God himself, and the same again in the Son who has been brought into being, and who participates in them by grace [i.e. not by his very nature, but by the father's gift]. The son chooses to be good and is therefore favoured by God; but he can change. 'He may be called "God" but he is not true God', for he belongs to the class of created beings. For this reason, also, the Son cannot fully know the Father, or even his own substance. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are quite different, 'having no participation with each other'.[11]

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8. R. Smith, *Religion and philosophy in the thought and action of Julian the Apostate* (London 1995) 40.

9. Williams, *Arius.*

10. J. Rist, 'Plotinus and Christian philosophy', in L.P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge 1996) 386-413.

11. Cf. Williams, *Arius* 100-01.

The most striking feature of these brief, unargued theological assertions is their adamant denial of any identity or intimate relationship between the highest divine principle and that which comes after it, the creative power or Word. It is true that second-century Christian thinkers had often emphasized the Father's monarchic authority, perhaps in an attempt to mark themselves off from polytheist ways of thought; but from c. A.D. 200 the doctrine of the Son was ever more elaborated and elevated.[12] For third-century parallels to Arius's way of thinking, we must have recourse to the philosophers of the Platonist school. These had earlier tended to regard creation as the offspring of rivalry between unity and plurality, but were now more and more espousing the view that plurality derives from unity, whose position is therefore placed still higher above the material world.[13] This was of course Plotinus's position, and he was the pre-eminent figure in philosophy when Arius reached maturity, in the first two decades of the fourth century. On the other hand, Arius believed that God exercises will; he makes a decision to create. 'The activity of the One is conceived less as eternal and unspecific energy, more on the pattern of the acts of created intelligence.'[14] Here we see Arius the philosopher making the minimum necessary concession to the view of God as conscious creator contained in the scriptures.

But for Arius's Christian contemporaries, what was perhaps of most concern was his closely related belief that, God and the Word being quite separate, the Word cannot have full knowledge of the Father. If that is true, then our own chances of speaking rightly about God are vastly reduced. Here too it has been suggested that Plotinus's teachings may have had some part in moulding Arius's thought, and particularly his assertion that the Son can fully know neither the Father *nor even his own substance*. Plotinus, Rowan Williams remarks, 'provides a structure of thought in which *nous*' [Intellect's] falling short of the simplicity of the One is necessarily connected with the dynamic, always questing and always finding, character of *nous*' own self-apprehension'.[15] To quote Plotinus himself:

> If then it [the Intellect] comes to know that [Good]...it will come to know itself since it comes from there...; but if it cannot see him clearly, since perhaps that seeing is the sight itself [i.e. seeing is identical with

12. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian doctrines* (London 1977⁵) 109.
13. Williams, *Arius* 192.
14. Williams, *Arius* 198.
15. Williams, *Arius* 210, and cf. the discussion of Plot. 5.3 at p. 202.

> what is seen], then especially in this way it will remain for it [Intellect] to see and know itself. (5.3.7)
> [Paraphrase: If the Intellect comes to know the Good, it will come to know itself as well, since it has its origin in the Good. But it may be that the Intellect does not see the Good clearly, in which case the Intellect will not fully see or know itself either.]

Arius seems more at home in this environment than in that of Middle Platonism (the phase of Platonist thought before Plotinus). But he is primarily a Biblical exegete not a philosopher, so we should not expect him to have read systematically in the Platonism of the third or any earlier century. What we do expect from him, though, is a convincing account of why we should listen to the scriptures he expounds, if the god they proclaim is so radically unknowable. This was one of the points on which he was most successfully attacked by his chief opponent, bishop Athanasius of Alexandria, who affirmed the more commonly held Christian belief, that the scriptures reveal not only the creative and providential activity of the Father, but also the salvific story of the incarnate Son. One can see why it was not easy to be a Christian philosopher – in fact, when Christians (especially monks) called their faith philosophy, it was usually to a discipline of spiritual exercise and asceticism that they alluded, not to dogma.

Before we leave Arius, I should point out that the Plotinian inspiration alleged by Rowan Williams for the idea that the Son cannot fully know his own substance has been challenged by Christopher Stead, who believes Arius would more easily have found the idea in the Christian tradition (46-47).[16] In the second edition of his book, Williams retreats from several of his late Platonist interpretations of Arius, in the light of Stead's criticisms. His broader picture of Arius as a Christian philosopher still stands, though, at least in the general sense that Arius was struggling with questions that were also central to the thought of Plotinus and others, but from a perspective of firm commitment to scripture and revelation. The constraints imposed by the scriptures were bound to create severe problems for anyone who had been trained in the rational procedures of the Greeks. Alternatively, the scriptures might be seen as a liberation from the constraints of philosophy. We can now turn to the best-documented instance of this other way of seeing things: the conversion to a committed Christian faith of Augustine of Hippo.

16. C. Stead, 'Was Arius a Neoplatonist?', in E.A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia patristica* 32 (Leuven 1997) 39-52.

* * *

Augustine was of course brought up in a Christian environment (in Latin-speaking Numidia, modern Algeria) by his devout mother Monnica, who plays a prominent role in the *Confessions*, our main source for this story. A sensitive and questioning young man, but also ambitious for a brilliant career as an orator, Augustine was greatly moved at the age of 18 when he came across Cicero's exhortation to philosophy in the *Hortensius*. 'It altered my prayers, Lord, to be towards you yourself...I longed for the immortality of wisdom with an incredible ardour in my heart. I began to rise up to return to you' (3.4.7). The whole of the *Confessions*, written in 397 or soon after, is, as Henry Chadwick has put it, 'a prose-poem addressed to God, (but) intended to be overheard by anxious and critical fellow Christians':[17] they were critical because they knew Augustine had become a bishop just two years earlier, and that doubts had been expressed about his qualifications. It is safe to assume Augustine was attracted by Cicero's style, the like of which he had certainly not found in the Latin Bible (3.5.9); also by the prospect of laying hold on wisdom in order to become an admired teacher for others.[18] He was at this time, he tells us, full of 'inflated conceit...puffed up with pride' (3.5.9). But wisdom for its own sake will also have attracted him – amidst the welter of half-understood motives in an eighteen-year-old's mind, that too will have been there.

Writing this account down in his *Confessions*, a quarter of a century later, Augustine naturally has a quite different perspective and purpose from that of the eighteen-year-old. His aim is to explain himself as he now is. He offers, for example, a nutshell summary of the message of Cicero's *Hortensius* (3.4.8): 'See that none deceives you by philosophy and vain seduction following human tradition, following the elements of this world and not following Christ; in him dwells all the fullness of divinity in bodily form.' The quotation is not, of course, from the *Hortensius* at all, but from the apostle Paul's epistle to the Colossians, 2.8-9. 'At that time', Augustine continues, 'as you know, light of my heart [this is how he addresses God], I did not yet know these words of the apostle.' Nor, of course, could Cicero have known the words of Christ still unborn. For the mature Augustine, the philosophers' only use is as a staging post on the way to Christian con-

17. H. Chadwick, *Saint Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford 1998) ix.

18. Cf. 7.20.26 on a later period in his life.

version. For the youthful Augustine they had assuredly seemed, at least potentially, more than that – they had seemed to be the gateway to a whole world of spiritual quest. And it was precisely for this reason Augustine was so worried by the fact 'that the name of Christ was not contained in the book'.

Amidst all this doubt and questioning while reading books, with none to guide him, Augustine suddenly fell in with some Manichees. We do not need to investigate his nine-year relationship with this dualist, ascetic sect that assigned quite a prominent place to Jesus. But we should just notice one thing: right to the end of his life he remained sore and bitter about Manichaeism, in a way that only rings true if we suppose that his attachment had not been a library enthusiasm, but a warm and trusting human relationship – or set of relationships – that had gone wrong. Not that he had encountered some special teacher among the Manichees; but he speaks longingly of the friendships he made then, between the ages of 19 and 28, and of the love of conversation, jokes and books that he shared with his new-found companions (4.8.13). He seems to have been part of an intimate and fulfilling Manichaean cell, and to have enjoyed relaxed human society in a way that was no longer open to him, once he was enclosed in a bishop's residence.

One can well imagine that what Augustine had longed for more than anything else was a teacher, such as Plotinus had found in Ammonius Saccas. He never had this good fortune; instead, the stages in his progress toward illumination were marked by the reading of books. First came the *Hortensius*; and much later, after he had left the society of the Manichees, he encountered the 'books of the Platonists'. Then came Paul's epistle to the Romans and the *Life of Antony* the Egyptian hermit, to seal his conversion to Christianity. Perhaps this is one of the reasons for the *Confessions*' enormous popularity – we are, alas, all more likely to find a good book than a charismatic teacher. But Augustine wanted someone to play (as it were) Plotinus to his Porphyry, or Maximus of Ephesus to his Julian, or Hypatia to his Synesius – and Synesius was a contemporary, who became a bishop (though a very philosophical bishop), so he is the best pointer to what Augustine might have been, had he found a teacher of philosophy. But then he would not, of course, have been forced to work it all through for himself; he would not have grown in the way necessity forced him to grow; and the world would not have been mesmerized by the *Confessions* of a man who, precisely because he had no confessor, had analyzed himself with pitiless

disregard for the pride that still, assuredly, always lurked within him. For all their artfulness, the *Confessions* at times have the terrible fascination of a wounded soldier who, for want of a surgeon's help, extracts the bullet lodged in his own flesh.

During the years Augustine spent at Milan from 384 to 387, he knew the city's great bishop Ambrose, yet Ambrose never became for Augustine the intimate director of the soul that he desired. Instead, in 385 or 386, his attention was drawn to the 'books of the Platonists' 'by a man puffed up with monstrous pride' (7.9.13) who has not been securely identified – but its not his name that's important, only his sin of pride that in part provokes Augustine's final awakening to the Christian way of humility. The best efforts of modern scholarship have not uncovered which exactly were these books – a few treatises of Plotinus, it seems, and perhaps one by Porphyry as well. Nor does Augustine trouble to quote them. Instead, as with the *Hortensius*, he offers us a summary of their message in the form of a catena of mostly New Testament passages. Augustine does not seek to advertise the glories of Plotinus, only to reassure his readers that whatever diversions from the high road he may have taken earlier in his life (at least, those he chooses to remind us of) had been justified, eventually, by his baptism.

'In the beginning was the Word' was one of the things Augustine had found in the books of the Platonists, but not – he adds – that 'the Word was made flesh' (7.9.14). At this distance in time, the books of the Platonists seem interesting to Augustine only for their partial consonance with the Gospel, and their significant 'omissions'. We may doubt whether, when he first read them, things seemed as simple as that. As long as the subject of Augustine's summary of the Platonist books in scriptural language is the Father and the Son – that is, the One and Intellect – the scriptural reminiscences flow easily from Augustine's pen (7.9.13-15). But – even in 397, in the bishop's study – when the subject becomes the inner self, the Biblical quotations almost dry up.

> By the Platonic books I was admonished to return into myself [Augustine writes]...I entered and with my soul's eye, such as it was, saw above that same eye of my soul the immutable light higher than my mind – not the light of everyday, obvious to anyone, nor a larger version of the same kind which would, as it were, have given out a much brighter light and filled everything with its magnitude. It was not that light, but a different thing, utterly different from all our kinds of light. It transcended my mind, not in the way that oil floats on water, nor as heaven is above earth. It

was superior because it made me, and I was inferior because I was made by it. The person who knows the truth knows it, and he who knows it knows eternity. Love knows it...When I first came to know you, you raised me up to make me see that what I saw is Being, and that I who saw am not yet Being. And you gave a shock to the weakness of my sight by the strong radiance of your rays, and I trembled with love and awe. And I found myself far from you "in the region of dissimilarity", and heard as it were your voice from on high... (7.10.16)

In this passage the editions provide us with references no longer to scripture, but to Plotinus, and abundantly. For the pure beauty of this vision of light, Augustine found no appropriate scriptural parallels.

In the course of what Augustine presents as an extended vision, much was made plain to him about the nature of creation, of good and of evil (7.10.16-16.22). But the experience could not last:

I was astonished to find that I already loved *you*, not a phantom surrogate for you. But I was not stable in the enjoyment of my God. I was caught up to you by your beauty and quickly torn away from you by my weight. With a groan I crashed into inferior things. This weight was my sexual habit. But with me there remained a memory of you. I was in no kind of doubt to whom I should attach myself, but was not yet in a state to be able to do that. "The body, which is corruptible, weighs down the soul, and our earthly habitation drags down the mind to think many things" (Wisdom 9.15).' (7.17.23)

'I sought a way', Augustine observes in concluding this mystical narrative, 'to obtain strength enough to enjoy you; but I did not find it until I embraced "the mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2.5)' (7.18.24). It was to be some years until Augustine finally accepted baptism, and all that it presupposed for him, in terms of setting his moral existence in order. We may suppose that in the meantime he read the Platonists, and longed for a teacher. 'I sought a way to obtain strength enough to enjoy you', says Augustine. Strength enough he could not find in books alone, and finally the answer came through a person – not the spiritual guide he probably still expected, alive in flesh and bone, but 'the living Lord', 'the Word made flesh'.

What Augustine needed strength for is made crystal clear in his narrative. He needed the will to resist the sexual urge and embark on that purity of life without which communion with God would always remain a dream. He had been blessed with much insight and inspiration from books, but contra-

puntally to that, in the only apparent peace of the study, there was always the stirring of his sexual appetite. This was no less an obstacle to the seeker after Platonist illumination than to the postulant for Christian baptism.

In an age when conversions to philosophy, and philosophers themselves, were getting rarer, while Christianity exercised an ever more irresistible attraction even over the educated classes, it is perhaps unlikely that Augustine would have been won for philosophy, though he might, given a teacher to reassure and strengthen him, have followed a path closer to Synesius's. As it was, the Church did not satisfy his yearning for an authoritative guide either. Not even bishop Ambrose of Milan could play that part for Augustine – the chemistry simply was not there. He benefited, though, from the strong foundation of Monnica's love, and from a circle of Christian friends such as Alypius and Nebridius, who contributed to his conversion and are virtually the only people mentioned by name in the *Confessions*. Against this rather unsatisfactory background for a man of spiritual ambition, it was natural enough that Augustine should develop so intimate a relationship with the man-God, to whose Father the *Confessions* are so intimately addressed.

Not finding a human teacher, Augustine wrote a passionate, human book that played, for others, something of that role – in certain passages it is almost what German scholarship calls a 'Lesemysterium', an initiation effected through reading. Yet this is a far cry from Plotinus, who to start with did not write at all, and when he did write, only occasionally allowed his readers a glimpse of the heart's travail. Augustine was really being quite unrealistic in seeking the cure of his soul in the *books* of the Platonists, even those of Plotinus. There was much that was true in those books, and much that was inspired and inspiring; but Augustine needed a healing hand as well. Towards the end of book 7, he wonders out loud what would have happened if he had encountered the scriptures, and his saviour, *before* the *libri platonicorum*.

> If I had been made docile by your books and my wounds (had been) healed by your gentle fingers...if I had first been formed in mind by your holy books, and if you had made me know your sweetness by familiarity with them, and then I had thereafter met those volumes [sc. the books of the Platonists], perhaps they would have snatched me away from the solid foundation of piety. (7.20.26)

But one senses Augustine is here avoiding the real issue. What if he had encountered not 'those books' but his Ammonius, there in Milan, or even

later? Perhaps he would then have understood that the pride he thought he detected in Plotinus, and professed to find so off-putting, was an illusion created by his having access only to the mind's ascent in cold script, without the master's presence and encouragement – which had driven Porphyry almost to kill himself, but only because he longed so very much to be like his adored model. Perhaps the teacher's 'gentle fingers' and 'sweetness' would have prevailed over the Saviour Augustine had encountered in the Bible but without the mediation of a convincing – and demanding – spiritual guide. Would Augustine, whose language becomes so longingly tactile when he talks about Christ, have resisted the teacher if he had presented himself?

* * *

To summarize: we started with Plotinus literally 'among the Christians', and saw how he and the Gnostics shared an interest in the soul's journey toward a transcendent God. It looks as if having Gnostics in his own circle helped alert Plotinus to the dangers of a negative approach to matter. The modern debate over Arius's debt to Plotinus, thanks precisely to its inconclusiveness, illustrates how hard it is to tie down specific Plotinian influences before the end of the fourth century. But at the same time it reminds us that there was a whole tradition in the Church, represented especially by Origen, of men who instinctively sought to understand the Christ of the Gospels in the light of what the Platonist tradition had said about modes of relationship between a transcendent God and what he creates (whether immediately or at a remove). After the condemnation of Arianism at the Council of Nicaea in 325, it became very hard for Christians explicitly to espouse the Platonists' hierarchical understanding of reality, because the Trinity was founded on a horizontal relationship between three equal persons. But the Platonists' attempts to describe the godhead, and especially the experience of contemplating it, remained deeply attractive, and it is no surprise to find echoes of Plotinus's language in Ambrose and the Cappadocian Fathers. It was Augustine, though, who grappled most openly with Plotinus and Porphyry, and left us an absorbingly personal account of the psychological states which accompanied this engagement. Augustine's importance for the eventual development of Latin philosophy imparts considerable significance to this encounter, and has perpetuated a certain Augustinian spin in all subsequent perceptions of the late Platonists, not entirely to their benefit.

Even after this most formative period of patristic thought, the fourth

century and the first half of the fifth, Plotinus might still be pondered upon. The interest of a Christian philosopher, such as John Philoponus in sixth-century Alexandria, need not surprise us very much; but we may also note the references made to Plotinus in bishop John of Scythopolis's commentary on Dionysius the Areopagite, in which this likewise sixth-century writer makes quite extensive use of Plotinus's text in order to bring out the full implications of Dionysius's teaching on the origins of evil.[19] By and large, though, memory of Plotinus seems by this time to have been occluded by the influence of more recent figures, notably Proclus. If we look at the indices in volume 3 of Henry's and Schwyzer's edition, we see that Plotinus was not seriously read in the Greek-speaking world between the sixth century and the eleventh, when Michael Psellus shows knowledge of a number of his treatises.

19. See P. Rorem and J.C. Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian corpus: Annotating the Areopagite* (Oxford 1998) 119-37.

7.

THREE GREEK SHEIKHS FROM BAGHDAD: PLOTINUS, PROCLUS AND ARISTOTLE

Recent discussion of 'pagan monotheism' has drawn on a wide range of sources from quite humble inscriptions to the most sophisticated philosophical texts.[1] This is a strength in that it encourages us to ask what ordinary men knew of philosophy, and what account philosophers took of ordinary men's belief. But it may also be a weakness, if we are led to imagine a 'pagan' cultural sphere more homogeneous than it really was, or endowed with a single history. Because it was an *idea*, 'pagan monotheism' could not be shut down, demolished or burned, like a pagan temple or a pagan statue. Books might of course be banned or incinerated, but even if all copies were found, the idea itself might already have percolated into someone else's book. The worst that could be done to an idea was to convert it – like certain temples too, and even statues. But whereas a pagan image with a cross scratched on it is a sorry thing, a philosophical idea fizzing away in a scriptural mind can have a transformative effect.

This process of ideological conversion is the subject of the present chapter. And like some eastern temples, 'pagan monotheism' went through two stages of conversion, first Christian, then Muslim. Our interest will mainly be detained by the fate of Plotinus and Proclus in, respectively, Shiite Iran and Latin Europe. If, on the basis of this investigation, it turns out to be possible to say something of wider interest about these two traditions, then we may find that comparisons suggest themselves with Byzantium and the Sunni world too. My hope is to show that the study of pagan monotheism can lead to an unexpectedly wide-angle picture of the relations between these civilizations, especially in the period up to the fifteenth century.

* * *

1. P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede (eds), *Pagan monotheism in late antiquity* (Oxford 1999).

Our journey will take us to the Latin Empire of Constantinople, the papal court at Viterbo and Orvieto, the lecture halls of Paris, the Ottoman court at Edirne, and before any of these to the Shiite schools of seventeenth-century Isfahan and twentieth-century Qom. But we start in Baghdad in roughly the 830s, when it was still a pretentious Abbasid new town full of men on the make and open to any fresh idea that promised fortune or fame – or perhaps even the truth. As you would expect in the capital city of a dynasty that presented itself as Muslim to the bone, Baghdad hosted a burgeoning Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* industry. This was the moment when 'classical' Islam was coming together. Mid-ninth-century Baghdad produced, and even at times nourished, monsters of scriptural literalism, of whom Ibn Ḥanbal (780-855) was only the most notorious specimen – still today a name that evokes a whole way of thinking and living, 'Hanbalism'.

Some found this mindset asphyxiating; others were reassured by it – after all, Magians, Jews and Christians were all still very much in evidence. Precisely in order to sharpen Muslim wits to deal with the controversies and apologetics bound to arise, the Abbasid elite almost from the outset encouraged translations of the one man who, though himself a Greek, was recognized by those who knew about such things as the best arguer, namely Aristotle. So the logical treatises, the *Organon*, were translated first – by Christians, because Muslim Arabic-speakers were by and large too convinced of the merits of their own language to learn others.[2] One notes, right from the beginning, the ambivalences inherent in these cultural negotiations.

Once Aristotle had been deployed as an instrument of religious apology, it was natural to ask whether he might have something of substance to offer as well. (Ibn Ḥanbal had no such illusions, but some dared to ignore his warnings.) It was rumoured that Aristotle had written a book on *Metaphysics*. The title sounded promising, so one Uṣṭāth – evidently a Chalcedonian Christian called Eustathius – was set to translate it. Though his version apparently lacked the first and last books, it was completer than any subsequent translation – of which there were to be several. These showed a marked preference for Book Lambda, which is where Aristotle had finally got to the 'juice' and talked about God – briefly but pregnantly. Probably no fewer than six Arabic versions of Lambda were produced in the ninth and

2. H. Hugonnard-Roche, 'L'*Organon*. Tradition syriaque et arabe', in R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques* (Paris 1989-) [*D.P.A.*] 1.502-28.

tenth centuries – some measure of Arabs' fascination with what the 'prince of philosophers' had found to say about the divine.[3]

The Qur'ān quite often speaks of God as if he were possessed of human frame and faculties and seated on a throne (5.64, 7.54, 20.5, 23.27). Quite a lot of Muslims took this literally. That struck other Muslims, no less pious, as implausible, for what they found in the Qur'ān was a God of entirely superhuman all-powerfulness and omniscience (6.59, 42.11). Long arguments ensued, more heat than light of course. We may take it as certain that it was for help with this problem that Muslims turned to Aristotle. Talk of the 'unmoved mover' did not give much away; so the next step was to wonder what else might be found in the largely unexplored legacy from ancient Greece. One imagines Mesopotamian and Syrian monasteries, hitherto better known to the Umayyad and even the Abbasid elite for their wines and attractive young monks, suddenly receiving puzzling enquiries about their library catalogues too.[4]

Eventually someone alighted upon a manuscript of Plotinus's *Enneads.* A translator was found – he was called 'Abd al-Masīḥ b. 'Abdallāh b. Nā'ima al-Ḥimṣī, a revealing name. It tells us he was a 'servant of the Messiah', in other words a Christian, and a native of Syrian Homs, where there are still plenty of Christians to this day. Perhaps Ḥimṣī was himself the manuscript's discoverer. Perhaps he took it to Baghdad and offered to translate it, like Qusṭī b. Lūqā after him, who arrived in the big city with a bag of manuscripts from Baalbek and made his name by putting them into Arabic. One obvious problem for Ḥimṣī was that nobody had ever heard of Plotinus. Though the contents of the manuscript seemed highly germane to what everybody was interested in, the author's name failed to resonate. But in Baghdad Ḥimṣī had found a patron, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb b. Isḥāq al-Kindī, later known as 'the philosopher of the Arabs' because he was the only Arab who bothered with philosophy at a time when it was the preserve of Greeks and Iranians. Perhaps it was Kindī's idea to reallocate the *Enneads* to Aristotle.[5]

3. A. Bertolacci, 'On the Arabic translations of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*', *Arabic sciences and philosophy* 15 (2005) 241-75.

4. E.K. Fowden, 'The lamp and the wine flask: Early Muslim interest in Christian monasticism', in A. Akasoy, J. E. Montgomery and P. E. Perman, eds., *Islamic crosspollinations, Interactions in the Medieval Middle East* (Cambridge 2007) 1-28.

5. On the Arabic Plotinus see M. Aouad, 'La *Théologie d'Aristote* et autres textes du *Plotinus arabus*', *D.P.A.* 1.541-90. Qusṭā b. Lūqā: Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* 304 Tajaddud, tr. B. Dodge 584-85.

Ḥimṣī was not the only translator in Kindī's circle.[6] Uṣṭāth seems to have belonged as well, and Yaḥyā b. al-Biṭrīq. All Christians. Kindī set them to work on texts that dealt, amongst much else of course, with the nature of God. Proclus was, as we shall see, another late Greek philosopher who caught their eye. Allusion (at least) was also made to the Peripatetic commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias, and to Plotinus's pupil and editor Porphyry. The results of the circle's work were collected into a big volume to which an eminently commercial title was affixed: *The theology of Aristotle*.[7] According to the Prologue of the Plotinus section, Kindī edited it and presented it to his pupil Aḥmad, the Caliph Mu'taṣim's son, in an effort to explain how the theology Aristotle had begun to develop in the *Metaphysics* might be extended and completed from Plotinus (who is never mentioned, though). The *Theology* as such no longer exists. What we have instead are various sections of or derivatives from it. The surviving parts of the Plotinus section were always attributed to Aristotle until nineteenth-century European scholars finally realized what had happened, and so too were the surviving parts of the Proclus section (from the *Elements of theology*) until Thomas Aquinas revealed (as we shall see) the true author. What role if any genuine works of Alexander of Aphrodisias or Porphyry played is less clear. Part of the Plotinus tradition is attributed just to 'the Greek sheikh' (*al-shaykh al-yūnānī*).[8] In my title I have taken the liberty of applying this appellation to Proclus and Aristotle as well.

In creating his Arabic version of Plotinus, Ḥimṣī concentrated on *Enneads* IV to VI, and even then was highly selective. What survives of his work says more about the Soul than the One. His motive in this was probably to supplement not just Aristotle but also the Qur'ān, which has little to say about the individual's journey to knowledge of God and concentrates instead – first things first – on avoidance of wrongdoing and

6. Kindī and his circle: G. Endress, 'The circle of al-Kindi: Early translations from the Greek and the rise of Islamic philosophy', in G. Endress and R. Kruk (eds), *The ancient tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism* (Leiden 1997) 43-76.

7. The interpretation here summarized is based on G. Endress, *Proclus arabus: Zwanzig Abschnitte aus der Institutio theologica in arabischer Übersetzung* (Beirut 1973), and F.W. Zimmermann, 'The origins of the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*', in J. Kraye, W.F. Ryan and C.B. Schmitt (eds), *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages: The Theology and other texts* (London 1986) 110-240.

8. Aouad, *D.P.A.* 1.574-80.

pursuit of righteousness. When Ḥimṣī does deal with the One, he gives Plotinus a significantly different spin from what readers of the Greek are familiar with, ramming the message home in numerous expansions of the original and excursuses, that add up to a running commentary. Where Plotinus's One unselfconsciously emanates Intellect, Ḥimṣī's First Cause conforms to the scriptural norm of a creator who decides to produce the universe and then takes cognizance of its progress, and is even capable of anger when confronted with the stumblings of individual souls. Direct echoes of the Qur'ān – or of the Christian scriptures for that matter – are remarkably rare in Ḥimṣī's lengthy extracts from Plotinus; but the providential God of the Christians and Muslims is always there, at times described in language deliberately lifted from passages where Plotinus's concern is not with the One at all, but with Intellect.[9]

That Plotinus was dressed up as Aristotle must have contributed significantly to the circulation of the Arabic extracts from the *Enneads*; while the attempt to use the God of the philosophers in order to deal with the problems surrounding the Muslims' scriptural God also enjoyed a certain success. In particular, the philosophers' God was one to whom the soul longed to return. The Arabic Plotinus's concentration on the soul sprang directly from this longing; and one passage over which its readers lingered was the famous one at the beginning of *Enneads* IV.8 that describes the soul 'waking up' from its bodily life and coming to identity with the Divine. The next major Arabic philosopher after Kindī, Fārābī (d. 950-51), quotes at length Ḥimṣī's version of this account of the soul's contemplation in his treatise *On the harmony between the opinions of Plato and Aristotle* (153-55 Najjar-Mallet). Fārābī's great successor Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) went so far as to write a commentary on the Arabic Plotinus; but after him what gradually prevailed in the Sunni world was the idea that philosophy is the handmaid of theology. This was Ghazālī's view, for example, and his influence ensured that what henceforth was used in the Sunni schools was the logical part of philosophy more than the metaphysical.

It was in Iran that the Plotinian part, in particular, of the *Theology of Aristotle* lived on.[10] The fundamental Shiite doctrine according to which,

9. P. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus: A philosophical study of the Theology of Aristotle* (London 2002) 137-55 (emanation v. creation); 75 (God's anger); 116, 123, 153, 155 (assimilation of God to Plotinian Intellect).

10. For a general survey see Aouad, *D.P.A.* 1.587-89.

even after Muḥammad, there were and are inspired teachers, Imams, created a flexible atmosphere in which philosophy continued to find numerous students. The highly personal synthesis created by Ibn Sīnā, himself an Iranian, remained deeply influential instead of encountering the suspicion accorded it in the Sunni world. And among Ibn Sīnā's successors, the one who inspired most followers was not Ghazālī with his mixture of theology, philosophy and Sufism, but Suhrawardī, executed in Aleppo in 1191 at the age of 36, and the author of fundamental expositions of what came to be known as 'illuminationist' philosophy, because of the emphasis it laid on the access of divine light to the philosopher's soul. For Plotinus it was light that linked Intellect to the One, and Soul to Intellect; he could say that 'the beauty of Intellect is inactive till it catches a light from the Good' (VI.7.22). In the well-known passage I have already mentioned, about the soul's awakening (IV.8.1), Plotinus did not – as it happens – invoke light; but Ḥimṣī added this concept in rendering the Greek into Arabic. After Fārābī, Suhrawardī too alluded to the same passage at least three times in his published works. On one occasion he assigned it, quite appropriately, to Plato rather than Aristotle:

> Plato said that in certain of his spiritual conditions he would shed his body and become free from matter. Then he would see light and splendour within his essence. He would ascend to that all-encompassing divine cause and would seem to be located and suspended in it, beholding a mighty light in that lofty and divine place. The passage of which this is a summary ended with the words, "but thought veiled that light from me". For his part the prophet-legislator of the Arabs and Iranians [the Prophet Muḥammad] declared: God has 77 veils of lights; if they were raised from before his face, the radiant brightness of his face would incinerate everything he gazed upon. (*Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* §171 pp. 162-63 Corbin)[11]

Suhrawardī's use of this passage from the Arabic Plotinus – back to back, in this particular quotation, with a famous and influential *ḥadīth* of the Prophet[12] - played a major part in crystallizing Iranian illuminationism, a

11. On Suhrawardī's use of the Arabic Plotinus see J. Walbridge, *The leaven of the ancients: Suhrawardī and the heritage of the Greeks* (Albany 2000) 133-37 (whence part of the translation); also D. Gutas's comment, 'Suhrawardī and Greek philosophy', *Arabic sciences and philosophy* 13 (2003) 308-09.

12. Cf. H. Corbin, *En islam iranien: Aspects spirituels et philosophiques* (Paris 1971-72) 2.98 n. 143; also Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī's commentary on the Suhrawardī passage, printed on

philosophy that has endured to the present day. We may find, for example, among the works of the Imam Khumaynī occasional references to Aristotle's *Theology*, untouched by any awareness of its true identity, which was first published in Europe by the English Platonist Thomas Taylor in 1812.[13] Khumaynī's thought is overwhelmingly dominated by the philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā, the major representative of the seventeenth-century Isfahanian school. 'Mullā Ṣadrā! Who will make you understand who Mullā Ṣadrā is?', exclaimed Khumaynī in one of his courses. 'He managed to resolve problems about the resurrection that had defeated even Ibn Sīnā.' Though Khumaynī acknowledged Ibn Sīnā's great intellectual acuity, he declared 'his errors in metaphysics [to be] extremely numerous', and his Greek philosophy of little value to those who truly seek God. Real wisdom and light comes from the Qur'ān and the traditions, mediated by such as Mullā Ṣadrā – 'Muslim wisdom and gnosis do not come from Greece or the Greeks'. To convince oneself of this, according to Khumaynī, one need only compare on the one hand 'the books and writings of the world's great philosophers – though their knowledge too comes from the source of revelation –..., [books] of which the most elevated and subtle is perhaps the *Theology*...of Aristotle', with on the other hand 'the perceptions present in the pure religion of Islam and in the great Muslim sages and gnostics'. 'To derive, then, all wisdom from Greece, and to deem the Muslim sages followers of Greek wisdom', is to reveal one's ignorance both of the books of the Muslim sages, and at the same time of the contents of 'the Holy Book and the traditions of the Infallibles'. 'If it were not for the Qur'ān, the gateway to knowledge of God would be forever closed. Greek philosophy is something quite different, which is of great value in its own way. It proceeds by argument, but one does not in that way acquire knowledge. The Prophet's mission wrought a great change in the domain of knowledge. The arid philosophies of the Greeks...which had and still have their merits, have been transformed for the contemplative masters into an effective gnosis and true contemplation.'[14]

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p. 163 of Corbin's edition and translated by id., *Shihâboddîn Yaḥya Sohravardî, Le livre de la sagesse orientale* (Paris 1986) 342-43.

13. P.B. Fenton, 'The Arabic and Hebrew versions of the *Theology of Aristotle*', and J. Kraye, 'The pseudo-Aristotelian *Theology* in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe', in Kraye, Ryan and Schmitt, *Pseudo-Aristotle* 241, 272.

14. Extracts translated by Y. C. Bonaud, *L'Imam Khomeyni, un gnostique méconnu du XX*^e^ *siècle: Métaphysique et théologie dans les oeuvres philosophiques et spirituelles de l'Imam Khomeyni* (Beirut 1997) 49-50.

Whatever it loses in comparison with the luminaries of Islamic gnosis, the *Theology of Aristotle* is still studied in Iran and treated with reverence, though even in the schools of Qom it is now understood that its doctrines are those of Plotinus not Aristotle.[15] Given the authority and influence enjoyed by those who have received the traditional religious education, it would be reasonable to claim that Iran is the only place in the world today whose public doctrine is based on a reading – however selective – of Greek philosophy very much in the spirit in which it was read in the latest phase of the ancient tradition, in Alexandria, taking account of the adjustments that have had to be made – and which were already being made then – in order to reconcile the sages of Antiquity with the doctrines of scriptural monotheism.

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The nearest recent European equivalent I can think of to this situation is the influence Neo-Scholasticism, and hence Aristotle, exercised on Roman Catholic thought from the late nineteenth century up to the 1960s, offering a combination of faith and reason as counterweight to the modern ideal of secularity.[16] It happens to be the case that a strand of this tradition too can be traced back, via classical thirteenth-century scholasticism, to Kindī's circle in ninth-century Baghdad and to the *Theology of Aristotle* – a fact that came to light only in the present generation, and largely thanks to the careful philological researches of the German scholar Gerhard Endress. These researches focused on the Kindī circle's Arabic selection from Proclus's *Elements of theology* and on its Latin derivative, the so-called *Liber de causis.*[17] From Baghdad, Plotinus set forth to conquer Iran, Proclus the Latin West – both under the name of Aristotle, of course, just as they had been presented in the *Theology of Aristotle.* Proclus makes only rare and modest appearances in Arabic literature and manuscripts,[18] while the Arabic Plotinus

15. I am indebted for information about the *Theology* in contemporary Iran to Professors Mohammad Fanaei Eshkevari (Qom), Mahmoud Binaye Motlagh (Isfahan) and Mahdi Ghavam Safari (Tehran), whom I met at a conference on Plato and Suhrawardī held in Athens in February 2006.

16. Cf. A. Kenny, 'The Thomism of Pope John Paul II: The encyclical letter *Fides et ratio*', in id., *Essays on the Aristotelian tradition* (Oxford 2001) 119-26.

17. See above, n. 6; also C. D'Ancona and R.C. Taylor, '*Liber de causis*', *D.P.A.* Suppl. 599-647.

18. For an attempt to explain why Albert the Great saw fit to attribute intense interest in the *Liber de causis* to Arabic philosophers, see A. de Libera, 'Albert le Grand et le platonisme.

did not become known in the West until in 1519 an expanded version of Ḥimṣī's text from a manuscript an Italian traveler had acquired at Damascus was published at Rome in a Latin translation prepared by a Jewish physician from Cyprus, Moses Arovas, and edited by the physician and philosopher Pier Nicola Castellani.[19] Just 27 years earlier, in 1492, Marsilio Ficino had published his very popular Latin Plotinus (from the Greek) at Florence. Nobody noticed the resemblance between these two works until Thomas Taylor, three centuries later; and scholars did not pay much attention to him either.[20] It was not really until 1883, on the morrow of the shorter Arabic text's first European printing, that the scholarly world began to take cognizance, finally, of Plotinus's strange history *in partibus*.[21]

Once Plotinus had been rendered into Arabic, he was transmitted as a matter of course to Iran, with its rich philosophical heritage - Ibn Sīnā was not only himself Iranian, but spent his entire life in the eastern reaches of Islam. The Arabic Proclus's migration to the Latin West was much less straightforward, and until Endress established that the Arabic version derived from Kindī's circle, it was widely held that it was produced much later, in Muslim Spain. The Latin version, though, can be placed exactly: Gerard of Cremona made it in Toledo, probably between the years 1167 and 1187. The Arabic original was entitled *Aristotle's book on the exposition of the pure good*, and Gerard used this for his Latin version too: *Liber Aristotelis de expositione bonitatis purae*. This, and not the more popular title *Liber de causis*, is what appears in the very early Aosta manuscript (Seminario Maggiore 3-B-38), which also offers no less than 60 readings that diverge from the consensus of the Latin tradition, but agree perfectly with the Kindī circle's Arabic version. It also reproduces the Arabic chapter headings, omitted by all the other Latin manuscripts.[22]

De la doctrine des idées à la théorie des trois états de l'universel', in E.P Bos and P.A. Meijer (eds), *On Proclus and his influence in medieval philosophy* (Leiden 1992) 89-119, esp. 92.

19. Fenton, loc. cit. (above, n. 12).

20. K. Raine, 'Thomas Taylor in England', in K. Raine and G.M. Harper (eds), *Thomas Taylor the Platonist: Selected writings* (Princeton 1969) 19-29. I owe my knowledge of this book to Denise Sherrard.

21. The largest part of the Arabic Plotinus, to which alone the general title *Theology of Aristotle* was in those days applied, received its *editio princeps* from F. Dieterici in 1882, but was recognized as Plotinus only in a review by V. Rose, *Deutsche Literatur-Zeitung* 4 (1883) 843-46.

22. D'Ancona and Taylor, *D.P.A.* Suppl. 605, 606.

The *Liber de causis* was quickly esteemed for its attribution to the ultimate philosophical authority, Aristotle, of a Platonic doctrine of the One that also accommodated the scriptural concepts of divine creation and providence. By the mid-thirteenth century it had circulated widely and was among the textbooks of metaphysics used in the emergent universities.[23] At least five of our later Latin manuscripts attribute the *Liber de causis* to Proclus, though, not Aristotle.[24] How did their scribes come by this entirely correct piece of information?

The Fourth Crusade and the establishment of the Latin Empire of Constantinople (1204-61) bred a new type of adventurer, the wandering scholar in the Levant. In colophons to the earliest dated specimens of the series of ground-breaking and usefully literal translations from the ancient Greek which he produced by his death c. 1285, the Flemish Dominican William of Moerbeke tells us that in 1260 he spent time at both Nicaea (the default-capital of the learned Lascarid dynasty) and Thebes. We next find him living at Viterbo in 1267-68, and either in or shortly before these years he produced translations of the *Metaphysics* and of Themistius's and John Philoponus's commentaries on Aristotle's *On the soul*, using manuscripts he had acquired himself in the East (where he had presumably already spent time learning Greek before his first dated translation in 1260). On 18 May 1268 Moerbeke also completed a translation of Proclus's *Elements of theology*. But if the dated translations are a rough guide, Moerbeke changed tack in 1269 and concentrated for a while on what we would call more 'scientific' writers: Archimedes, Hero of Alexandria and Ptolemy.[25]

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23. D'Ancona and Taylor, *D.P.A.* Suppl. 599, 640-43; add A. Fidora and A. Niederberger, *Von Bagdad nach Toledo: Das "Buch der Ursachen" und seine Rezeption im Mittelalter* (Mainz 2001) 205-31.

24. D'Ancona and Taylor, *D.P.A.* Suppl. 606.

25. W. Vanhamel, 'Biobibliographie de Guillaume de Moerbeke', and (on the *Metaphysics*) C. Steel, 'Guillaume de Moerbeke et Saint Thomas', in J. Brams and W. Vanhamel (eds), *Guillaume de Moerbeke: Recueil d'études à l'occasion du 700e anniversaire de sa mort (1286)* (Leuven 1989) 309-10, 62. On one of Moerbeke's Greek manuscripts, containing *inter alia* the *Metaphysics*, see G. Vuillemin-Diem, 'La traduction de la Métaphysique d'Aristote par Guillaume de Moerbeke et son exemplaire grec: Vind. phil. gr. 100 (J)', in J. Wiesner (ed.), *Aristoteles Werke und Wirkung, Paul Moraux gewidmet* (Berlin 1985-87) 2.434-86; ead., 'La liste des oeuvres d'Hippocrate dans le *Vindobonensis phil. gr.* 100: Un autographe de Guillaume de Moerbeke', in Brams and Vanhamel, *Guillaume de Moerbeke* 135-83. On a search for rare manuscripts in Macedonia and Thessaly in 1239-40, under the aegis of the Emperor John III Vatatzes of Nicaea, see Nikephoros Blemmydes, *Autobiographia* (ed. J.A. Munitiz, Turnhout 1984) 1.58, 63-64.

Something else we know about Moerbeke is also germane: it is well documented that he was a learned translator who made his own judgments about what was worth translating, and communicated his thoughts and advice to other scholars of his acquaintance. For example, from Philoponus on *On the soul* (completed on 17 December 1268) he chose only one brief passage, about the then controversial subject of intellection. When his manuscripts were damaged he knew how to fill the gaps according to sense – *ex sensu supplevi*. By 1268, the year of the Proclus translation, Moerbeke was – in the words of a recent student – 'maître de son métier: il connaissait déjà suffisamment le vocabulaire et la pensée d'Aristote'.[26]

That being the case, Moerbeke must have known very well what was considered at this time to be one of Aristotle's most useful works, the *Liber de causis*. And in translating the *Elements of theology*, he cannot have failed to notice that this was the true source of the *Liber de causis*. Credit for the discovery has all gone to Thomas Aquinas, who in his *Super Librum de causis expositio*, completed in 1272, exhaustively demonstrated how the real author was Proclus.[27] But Pope Clement IV (1265-68) often resided at Viterbo; Aquinas will have visited his court from Rome where he was based; and he must have made his fellow Dominican Moerbeke's acquaintance because, for example, he uses Moerbeke's translation of Themistius's commentary on *On the soul*, dated 22 November 1267, in a work of his own on the soul (*Sententia libri De anima*) composed between December 1267 and November 1268. It is clear that both Moerbeke and Aquinas were deeply interested in questions of the soul, and metaphysics more generally, at exactly the same period and in the same place. Aquinas may have ordered some of the Aristotle translations, but the earliest antedate Aquinas's interest, and it must have been Moerbeke's idea to translate Proclus, who at that time was virtually unknown in the Latin world except under the guise of Aristotle or pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.[28] After all, only Moerbeke

26. G. Verbeke, 'Moerbeke, traducteur et interprète; un texte et une penseé', and Steel, art. cit., in Brams and Vanhamel, *Guillaume de Moerbeke* 4-6, 72-73.

27. H.D. Saffrey (ed.), *Thomas d'Aquin, Super Librum de causis expositio* (Paris 20022).

28. E.R. Dodds, *Proclus: The elements of theology* (Oxford 19632) xxvi-xxxii; H. Boese, *Wilhelm von Moerbeke als Übersetzer der Stoicheiosis theologike des Proclus: Untersuchungen und Texte zur Überlieferung der Elementatio theologica* (Heidelberg 1985) 11. On the introduction of Proclus's astronomical handbook the *Hypotyposis*, and even of the *Elements of theology*, into the Byzantine educational curriculum c. 1260, just when Moerbeke was at Nicaea, see. M. Cacouros, 'Deux épisodes inconnus dans la réception de Proclus à Byzance

had access to the manuscripts. He almost certainly deserves the credit for pointing out to Aquinas the true nature of the *De causis*.[29] But once Aquinas returned to Paris in 1268, and especially after the publication of his *Expositio*, the news spread fast, on *his* authority. Proclus became known to the schoolmen – hence the manuscripts which attribute the *De causis* no longer to Aristotle but to its real author. Indeed, by the fifteenth century the scribe of one of our few manuscripts of the Arabic original, the one now in Ankara, also knew to ascribe it to Proclus – whereas an earlier, Leiden manuscript still credits Aristotle.[30]

Thanks to Moerbeke and Aquinas together, then, one of our disguised Greek sheikhs was unmasked just four centuries after Kindī had dressed him up in Arab garb. Not that pseudo-Aristotle's exposure as Proclus seriously harmed the reputation of the *Liber de causis*. It went on being invoked and quoted by the finest products of later mediaeval European culture – Dante, for example, Meister Eckhart and even Ficino.[31] In striking contrast the Arabic Plotinus went unrecognized, as we saw, until the rise of Orientalist philology in the nineteenth century, despite the availability from 1519 of a Latin translation and the attractiveness, one would suppose, to the Renaissance mind of a Greek sage who could speak the language of scripture as well. If the Arovas-Castellani translation really had been that popular, one of its readers would surely have recognized it for what it was, Plotinus not Aristotle. So the final question that needs to be posed is why the Arabic Plotinus enjoyed such particular success in the East, and the Arabic Proclus

aux XIIIe – XIVe siècles', in A.P. Segonds and C. Steel (eds), *Proclus et la Théologie platonicienne* (Leuven 2000) 589-627. Nicholas of Methone had already felt the need to refute the *Elements* in the previous century; cf. G. Podskalsky, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz: Der Streit um die theologische Methodik in der spätbyzantinischen Geistesgeschichte (14./15. Jh.), seine systematischen Grundlagen und seine historische Entwicklung* (Munich 1977) 119-21, esp. n. 554.

29. As pointed out in passing by H.-D. Saffrey, 'L'état actuel des recherches sur le Liber de causis comme source de la Métaphysique au Moyen Âge', in P. Wilpert (ed.), *Die Metaphysik im Mittelalter: Ihr Ursprung und ihre Bedeutung* (Berlin 1963) 269 n. 11. Among recent discussions of the relationship between Moerbeke and Aquinas see Steel, in Brams and Vanhamel, *Guillaume de Moerbeke* 57-82. Even before Moerbeke and Aquinas, it was recognized that the commentaries on the *Liber de causis*'s propositions were not by Aristotle: Saffrey, art.cit. 279; Fidora and Niederberger, *Von Bagdad nach Toledo* 226-29.

30. D'Ancona and Taylor, *D.P.A.* Suppl. 600-01, 603.

31. D'Ancona and Taylor, *D.P.A.* Suppl. 645-47; Saffrey, *Super Librum de causis expositio* XXV; Fidora and Niederberger, *Von Bagdad nach Toledo* 237-47.

in the West? And what does this tell us about East and West? – not to mention what lies in-between, the Sunni and Greek Christian worlds.

* * *

The comparison between Iranian East and Latin West is not a simple one. The incomparably rich civilization of Iran had access to both Plotinus and Proclus, and its preference for one over the other was entirely conscious; while until 1519 the Latin world knew just Proclus, and even then only from the later twelfth century onward. The concise and systematic exposition of theology contained in the *Elements of theology* no doubt appealed to a public just beginning to get to grips with a non-scriptural way of thought; while Plotinus's rambling, non-systematic writings were harder to get into, despite Ḥimṣī's combination of dramatic cuts with explanatory insertions.

In his *Confessions*, Augustine recalled how he had discovered God the Father and the Son, his Word, in 'the books of the Platonists'; and although Plotinus and his ilk had managed to do without the Holy Spirit, it seems that even the bishop of Hippo only gradually came to see that as a problem.[32] Plotinus could be made to seem doctrinally compatible with Christianity even without Ḥimṣī's assistance. Nor was Proclus's much more layered and in a sense polytheistic description of the divine world necessarily an obstacle, since that had all been smoothed out in the Arabic version, and very little theological difference remained between Proclus and Plotinus. It is hard to imagine, then, that doctrinal considerations were much of a factor in the West's preference for Proclus. Nor indeed was authorship, since both Plotinus and Proclus benefited from the prestigious ascription to Aristotle, and Proclus's eventual exposure did not take him out of the market. Probably, then, the *Liber de causis*'s brevity and clarity really were what recommended it, especially its division into brief propositions and proofs general enough to be applicable in various situations.[33] To Iranians, by contrast, the *Liber*'s Arabic original, the *Book on the pure good*, will have looked spare and undeveloped – and it will have seemed strange that such

32. Augustine, *Confessiones* 7.9.13-14; id., *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 2.25 ('summi philosophi gentium...sine spiritu sancto philosophati sunt'); J.J. O'Donnell, *Augustine, Confessions* (Oxford 1992) 2.425.

33. Cp. Boese, *Wilhelm von Moerbeke* 12-13, on the similar reasons for the *Elements of theology*'s appeal, once translated.

luminaries as Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā took no overt notice of it, whereas they did of the Arabic Plotinus. The Proclus inevitably looked like no more than a schematic summary of the Plotinus. What seemed handy in the West will have struck the philosophers of Iran as elementary.

Instead, then, of trying to distinguish between Iran and Latin Europe on the basis of their respective preference for Plotinus and Proclus, who in their Arabized form were anyway not so different, it is more interesting to ask what these two civilizations shared that marked them off from Sunnis and Greeks who had so much less use for either. The enthusiasm of both the Iranian and the Latin elite for Aristotle had to do with their adhesion to a broadly 'patristic' view of their tradition, combined with access not only to the incomparably useful logical works of the real Aristotle, the *Organon*, but also to the powerful metaphysics of a pseudo-Aristotle who was really Plotinus or Proclus. By 'patristic' I mean that they acknowledged the possibility their scriptural tradition might be renewed by the work of inspired teachers who came after the founding revelation. And that renewal might lead to a philosophico-theological synthesis, a *summa*, of the sort we find in Mullā Ṣadrā or Thomas Aquinas.[34] By contrast, Sunni Islam possessed the *Theology of Aristotle* but could not really open itself to the insights of the philosophers because of its fundamentalist adhesion to Qur'ān and Tradition. As for Greek Christianity, it positively reveled in its (Christian) Fathers, but was not at all sure what to do with its Ancients, who were Fathers too in a way.[35] Plotinus and Proclus even belonged to the Christian era, unlike Aristotle. But Greeks laboured under the crippling disadvantage of reading all of them in the original, and therefore being both aware of Aristotle's lack of a serious metaphysics and perhaps hypersensitive to the essential heathendom of Plotinus and – especially – Proclus.[36]

34. Cf. D.B. Burrell, 'Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Mulla Sadra Shirazi (980/1572-1050/1640) and the primacy of *esse/wujūd* in philosophical theology', *Medieval philosophy and theology 8* (1999) 207-19, written from a purely philosophical standpoint without awareness of the shared ancestry in the *Theology of Aristotle*.

35. This theme is developed by Podskalsky, *Theologie und Philosophie*; cf. esp. 1 ('das Axiom "Philosophia = ancilla theologiae" ist zwar innerhalb des Christentums zuerst im Osten, von Klemens von Alexandreia, formuliert worden, um dann unangefochten, ja fast als Gemeinplatz endlos wiederholt zu werden; doch seine institutionelle Verwirklichung erreichte es bekanntlich nicht in Byzanz, sondern in der abendländischen Scholastik'), 173.

36. The Comnenian prince who annexed Proclus's *De decem dubitationibus circa providentiam* for the use of his fellow-religionists purged it of 'pagan' passages, whereas the

Something has just recently begun to be made of the translation movement from Arabic into Greek,[37] and one cannot help wondering what impact might have been made on the Byzantine thought world if the *Theology of Aristotle* – or parts of it – had been available, and the Byzantines had enjoyed access to the wisdom of the Ancients in a Scripture-compatible format.[38] That an appetite existed is certain – but how to meet it? It is fascinating to note how, just when Proclus was becoming better known in the Latin West, the Orthodox world seems to have adopted from Italy a way of representing Christ's ancestors and forerunners in the Tree of Jesse that embraced not just Old Testament prophets but also the sages of antique Greece, especially Plato and Aristotle. This image first appears at Sopoćani in Kosovo c. 1268, and then on imperial territory at Thessalonica soon after 1315. Its archetype has been plausibly traced to Orvieto in the 1260s – Orvieto which was struggling at that time with neighbouring Viterbo to attract the still itinerant papacy, and whose intellectual atmosphere was dominated by the same concerns about ancient philosophy's place in Christian discourse.[39] That this set of images became enormously more popular in the Greek world than the Latin suggests it met a need for legitimation of the ancients which the Greeks had failed to devise on their own. Likewise when the Orthodox Church finally reconciled itself to Aristotle at the end of Byzantium and under the Ottomans, it was to a significant degree thanks to Aquinas's scholasticism translated into Greek (though Plato continued to cause the Greeks more trouble than he had Aquinas).[40]

Latin Archbishop of Corinth – William of Moerbeke – who rendered the same treatise into Latin left it unexpurgated: D. Isaac (ed.), *Proclus: Trois études sur la providence* 1 (Paris 1977) 24.

37. M. Mavroudi, *A Byzantine book on dream interpretation: The Oneirocriticon of Achmet and its Arabic sources* (Leiden 2002) 392-429 (with D. Gutas's review, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 97 (2004) 609-10); J. Niehoff-Panagiotidis, *Übersetzung und Rezeption: Die byzantinisch-neugriechischen und spanischen Adaptionen von Kalīla wa-Dimna* (Wiesbaden 2003).

38. Cf. Podskalsky, *Theologie und Philosophie* 242: 'Man war der klassischen Philosophie nie radikal entfremdet worden, sah sich aber auch nicht dazu veranlasst, sie im Zeichen der Offenbarung zu entfalten.'

39. M.D. Taylor, 'A historiated Tree of Jesse', *Dumbarton Oaks papers* 34-35 (1980-81) 125-76. More recent discussions have not seriously impugned Taylor's thesis: see e.g. D.M. Gillerman's review, *Art bulletin* 80 (1998) 568-69, of A.M. Kosegarten, *Die Domfassade in Orvieto: Studien zur Architektur und Skulptur 1290-1330* (Munich 1996).

40. G. Karamanolis, 'Plethon and Scholarios on Aristotle', in K. Ierodiakonou (ed.), *Byzantine philosophy and its ancient sources* (Oxford 2002) 253-82.

If Arab Sunnism and Greek Christianity resemble each other in their variously problematic patristics, and in this respect contrast with the two intellectual traditions, Latin and Iranian, which flank them and are or were strikingly more hospitable to pseudo-Aristotelian theology, nonetheless it looked at one moment, in the mid-fifteenth century, as if dramatic developments intellectual as well as political might come precisely from that middle ground, or at least from slightly off-centre representatives of those two streams. I have in mind the enthusiasm for Aristotle shared by Mehmet II, the Conqueror, a Turkish Sunni as insouciant of traditional boundaries as a prince can afford to be, with the three Greek Christian Georges who either belonged or aspired to belong to his circle: Trapezuntios who submitted to Rome and made his career in Italy, Scholarios who flirted with Union but later turned against Rome and accepted the patriarchal throne, and Amiroutzes who perhaps became a Muslim.

We know Mehmet was deeply interested in theology and philosophy and could be flattered by Trapezuntios for his commitment to Aristotelianism, in which he was tutored by Amiroutzes.[41] He also assembled a notable library both Arabic and Greek (including works by Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī; pseudo-Aristotle's treatise on statecraft, the *Secret of secrets*; and Demetrios Kydones's translation of Aquinas's *Summa contra Gentiles*).[42] It is certainly no coincidence that the best surviving copy of the Arabic Plotinus is contained in the composite manuscript Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Aya Sofya 2457, and was completed at Mehmet's capital, Edirne, in 1459.[43] The sultan may not have ordered it personally, but whoever did was an active participant in the eclectic cultural atmosphere Mehmet fostered.[44] (It is delicious to note in passing that Cardinal Bessarion, that other noted student of Plotinus, was

41. J. Monfasani, *George of Trebizond: A biography and a study of his rhetoric and logic* (Leiden 1976) 187; Michael Kritoboulos, *History* 1.5.2, 4.9.2-3, 5.10.4 (Reinsch).

42. J. Raby and Z. Tanindi (ed. T. Stanley), *Turkish bookbinding in the 15th century: The foundation of an Ottoman court style* (London 1993) 49, 62, 78-79, 150-51, 172-73, 178-79; D. Gutas, *Greek thought, Arabic culture: The Graeco-Arabic translation movement in Baghdad and early 'Abbāsid society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)* (London 1998) 174-75.

43. 'A. Badawī, *Aflūṭīn 'inda 'l-'arab* (Cairo 19662) (50), prints the colophon. Mehmet was intermittently resident at Edirne during 1459: cf. F. Babinger (tr. R. Manheim), *Mehmed the Conqueror and his time* (Princeton 1978) 162, 172, 173. I owe some of my knowledge of Aya Sofya 2457 to Dimitri Gutas.

44. See the passage from Ḥajjī Khalīfa translated by Gutas, *Greek thought* 173.

preaching crusade against Mehmet in the papal curia this very same year.[45])

As for Scholarios, we possess an autograph essay by him, datable c.1446-50, containing an attempt to reconcile Aristotle and Plotinus on happiness – *Περὶ ἀνθρωπίνης εὐδαιμονίας Ἀριστοτέλους καὶ Πλωτίνου συμβιβαστικόν* is its title.[46] Scholarios here shows that the account in the *Nicomachean ethics* and *Metaphysics* of happiness in human society can be extended and completed from Plotinus when he speaks of the higher, more divine and 'theological' forms of happiness – though the last word, Scholarios insists, must be left to the Fathers of the Church. In other words, the whole concept of this little work is strikingly reminiscent of the Arabic *Theology*'s attempt to complete from the *Enneads* the approach to divinity adumbrated in the *Metaphysics*, while keeping all the time within the parameters set by scripture (in this case the Qur'an) and theology. Trapezuntius, for his part, held that Aristotle was compatible not just with Christianity but with Islam as well.[47] He called on Mehmet to assume a universal monarchy, of Christians as well as Muslims.[48] This was an outrage to many, but Mehmet was a willing candidate for the throne if not the font. He would happily have played Alexander to George's – or anyone else's – Aristotle,[49] and he died as his armies were attempting to establish a bridgehead in southern Italy. Both men were, I suspect, given the confidence to think outside the frame at least in part by their admiration for Aristotle, whose authority derived from his own powers of reasoning, not from any scripture or revelation. Ps.-Aristotle and Plotinus were also part of this intellectual atmosphere. Since the *Theology* was being copied at exactly this

45. Babinger, *Mehmed* 171. Bessarion may have discovered Plotinus just a few months earlier: P. Henry, *Les manuscrits des Ennéades* (Brussels 1948^2) 70-71. On humanist enthusiasm for crusading, see J. Hankins, 'Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade literature in the age of Mehmed II', *Dumbarton Oaks papers* 49 (1995) 111-207, though this is hardly the reign in which to contrast Islam's 'ever fewer active links with the heritage of classical antiquity' (146) with Europe's (undoubted) enthusiasm for Greek and Roman resistance to Persian 'barbarism'.

46. L.Petit, M. Jugie and X.A. Siderides (eds), *Oeuvres complètes de Gennade Scholarios* (Paris 1928-36) 8.499-502; on the date see XI, 17*.

47. M. Balivet, *Byzantins et Ottomans: Relations, interaction, succession* (Istanbul 1999) 139-50.

48. Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* 131-36, 184-94.

49. Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* 188; J. Raby, 'Mehmed the Conqueror's Greek scriptorium', *Dumbarton Oaks papers* 37 (1983) 18-19.

time and place, it seems it was just one of those chances of history that it failed of a wider audience.

Scholarios honoured Aristotle as the first philosopher who had unambiguously denounced polytheism in favour of monotheism.[50] In a sense that made him the original 'pagan monotheist'. But as we have seen, being a 'pagan' did not exclude Aristotle from taking an honoured place in the genealogy of Christianity – the Tree of Jesse – or among the intellectual forebears of Islam. In other words, far from being as it is for us an object of mere scholarly curiosity, or (for some) a device to question Christian claims to uniqueness, 'pagan monotheism' remained, long after Antiquity, a powerful imaginative force founded on the whole development of ancient thought up to, including and beyond the three Greek sheikhs of Baghdad. As such, it was a guarantor of truth that retained a certain independence vis-à-vis the major scriptural monotheisms, while at the same time confirming the essential accuracy of their doctrine of one God.

50. *Oeuvres complètes* 8.507 lines 2-4.

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