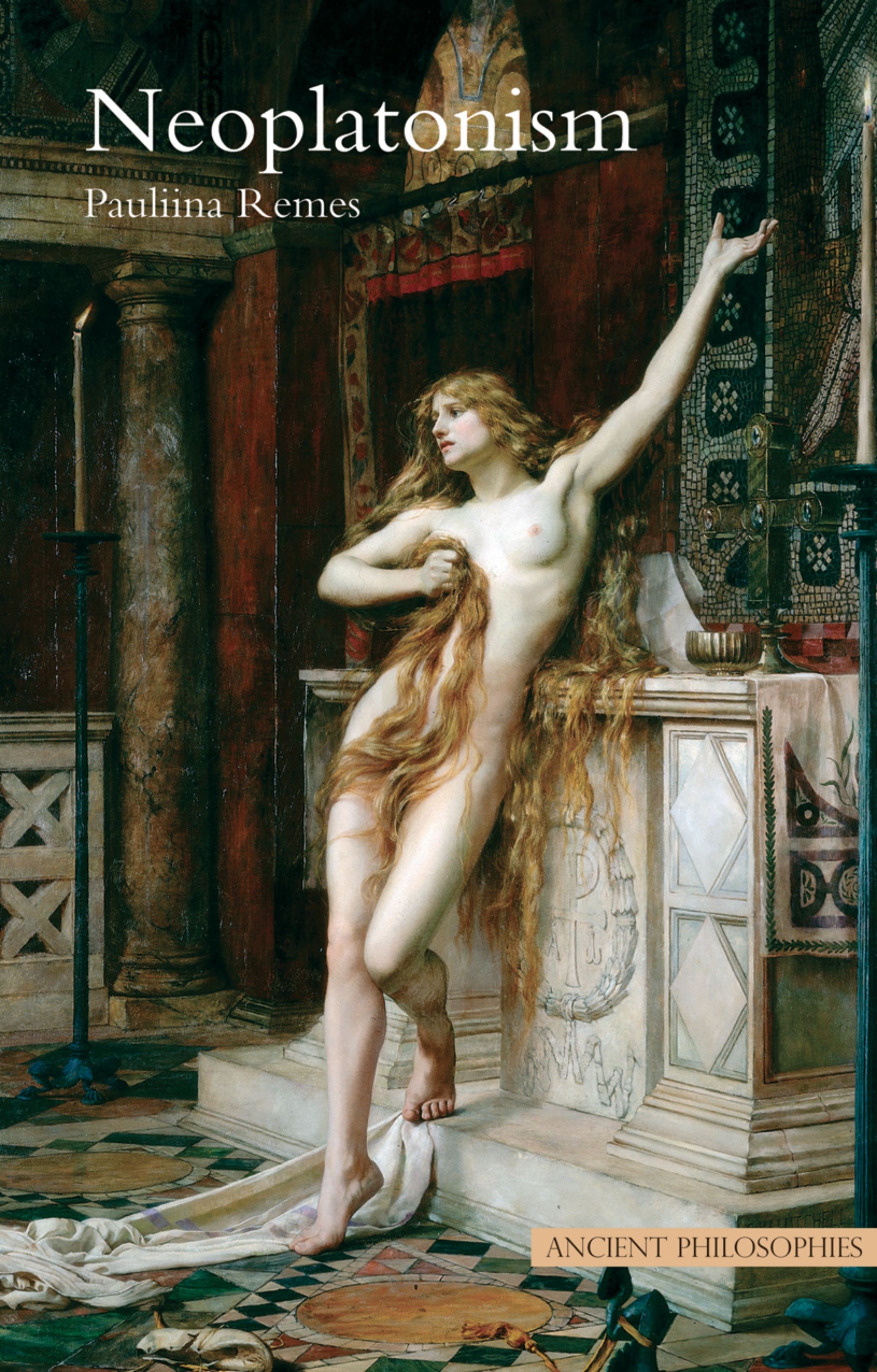

Neoplatonism

Pauliina Remes

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Neoplatonism

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Neoplatonism

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Preface

In school in the 1970s I learned that the world does not consist only of human beings, trees, cars, colours or even the materials these are composed of; rather, everything is made of tiny, invisible atoms that function according to their own laws. What we perceive and identify in our everyday life emerges from these basic elements that we cannot perceive in ways only the experts know and understand. By the 1970s, atoms were no longer considered indivisible (*atomoi*), and their more subtle internal structure had been described. Since then, even smaller entities have become the subjects of mainstream physics; these subatomic particles are even further removed from the direct empirical gaze of the perceiver, and from the direct sight of the physicists. Scientists introduce such theoretical entities as quarks and strings to explain the elementary constituents of matter and radiation. For their part, these explicate the true elemental structures of the universe. Importantly for our purposes, the establishment of these new entities has not meant a replacement of, say, an atomic level of explanation, but the opening of a new level of reality and its study. Reality seems to be constituted of a hierarchy of levels, only one of which we are directly aware of.

In late antiquity the philosophical movement called Neoplatonism flourished in cultural centres of the Mediterranean such as Alexandria, Rome and Athens. This school of thought, which prospered from

the third century well into the sixth century CE and beyond, shares certain important features with contemporary physics. Like physics, it concentrates on revealing the order of the universe, working on the assumption that although this order is not directly perceivable, a correct combination of gathering information through perception and theorizing about it will reveal its basic nature to human reason. Again like physics, Neoplatonism postulates levels of being on which different entities and different characteristics appear, all of them explanatory of this very same world we see and live in. Some of these levels and entities are more speculative than others. As in physics, these levels are hierarchically ordered, each level functioning as an explanatory level proper for certain phenomena, having a complex relation to the levels and entities above and below. In both theories, the subtleties of the cross-level relations are as, or even more, problematic than the study of the levels themselves and the entities they consist of. In sum, what is shared by Neoplatonists and some modern physicists is a speculative effort and readiness to postulate theoretical entities that form a layered reality inaccessible to perception.

For the comparison to illuminate rather than distort, however, we should also note the paramount differences. Unlike most contemporary physics, Neoplatonism treats matter as inert and without any properties of its own, claiming that what is basic and most truly existing is pure order, not qualities of matter nor even the realization of order in matter. The Neoplatonic explanations of phenomena do not seek constitutive, simple elements of which things are composed, but share the general Platonic tendency of appealing to intelligible principles. This has been called Platonic "top-downism" as opposed to the "bottom-upism" of many theories currently in fashion (Gerson 2005b: 259–60). Undoubtedly, too, the levels and the entities postulated are completely different in the two theories. It is also likely that Neoplatonists went much further than most modern physics in their methodology, in which the justification for the theory is not sought in how well the empirical studies and their results fit the theory, but in matters *internal* to the theory: its completeness, consistency and rational plausibility. Although the starting-points for the study are the experiences and perceptions of the enquirer,

ultimately the theoretical considerations outweigh comparisons with experience. It is important in this context to recall that at the time of Neoplatonism, systematic empirical science had not yet been developed. In their speculative spirit and readiness to postulate theoretical entities, however, many modern physicists are Platonist in spirit, some of them manifestly so.

Thus we might claim that present-day physics and Neoplatonic metaphysics both start from perceptible reality and share the tendency to postulate further layers of reality foreign to the common man, but that they are poles apart in choosing their direction. Where physics proceeds "downwards" by penetrating the subtleties of material or physical structures of the universe, Neoplatonists separated themselves from what they considered matter's limitations, and sought a purely intelligible order. For intuitions nestled in contemporary science, this move may seem fatal, but to grasp and appreciate some of the basic Neoplatonic insights it is enough to allow the possiblity of a multilayered reality penetrable to reason.

Before looking at the details of this philosophical position, however, a thought experiment might help to make the reader more sympathetic to the Neoplatonic preference of order and formation over matter. Try to think of matter: not mud, soil, clay or pebbles, but just matter. The inclination to organize it in your mind in some way or other – as brown, earth-like, coarse or whatever – is fair enough, otherwise it seems difficult to think or imagine it at all. For the Neoplatonists, this is a conclusive sign: pure matter cannot function as a starting-point for any enquiry because it resists intellectual attempts to grasp it. What is grasped in trying to think of matter is actually some intelligible organization or another, imposed on it by intelligence. This, rather than matter in and of itself, must therefore serve as the nucleus for the theory.

The somewhat bizarre but fascinating and highly influential philosophical school of thought called Neoplatonism, although pagan, had an emphatic interest in spiritual matters. As the centuries reveal, Neoplatonism existed side by side and, to an extent, in dialogue with the growing Christian religion. Despite the religious and spiritual context, Neoplatonism was focally a continuation of ancient

philosophy: a dialectic with Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic heritage. The emphasis of this book will be on the philosophical system and motivation of Neoplatonism (Chapters 2–6). I shall also strive to explicate the ways in which Neoplatonism differs from standard Platonism, as well as its place within ancient thought in general (Chapter 1). Its principal influences in Western thought are also briefly visited (Chapter 7). Chapter 1 begins by elaborating on the question of whether there is a particularly Neoplatonic way of doing philosophy, and if and how it can be separated from its forerunners and intellectual origins, especially Platonism.

Despite its status as the first systematic interpretation of Plato's philosophy as a whole, Neoplatonism has not always been at the centre of interest in history of philosophy. In the twentieth- and twenty-first-century English-speaking world, intellectual historians' and classicists' appreciation of Neoplatonism has often preceded the philosophical interest. For an Aristotelian or analytic philosopher, as for anyone opposed to extravagant metaphysics, some of the Neoplatonic tenets are undeniably hard to swallow, but this should not be allowed to cast its shadow on the movement as a whole. Historically, this position is neither long-lived nor global: Neoplatonism long infiltrated the Western history of ideas, and in continental philosophy it has always enjoyed respect and interest. Undoubtedly, it provides interesting philosophical arguments and insights as well as a philosophical structure, the unity and systematicity of which can only be admired. Its influences on our thought are surprisingly deep. And indeed, times are changing. In the twentieth century, scholars started to redeem Neoplatonism. This involved accepting it as a branch of Greek philosophy rather than pure spiritualism of some foreign, Eastern kind. The recent decades have witnessed an upsurge of English (as well as French, German and Italian) editions, translations and studies of Neoplatonism. The relative novelty of this philosophical interest implies that the whole subject area is evolving. Research results especially on later Neoplatonism are far from conclusive yet, and in general our picture of the philosophical purport of this school of thought is evolving. Although this applies particularly to the details of the doctrines, and

has therefore no direct bearing on a basic outline of the theory such as the one provided in this book, the reader is best advised to keep this dynamic situation in mind.

Another difficulty pertains to the number of philosophers and theories under scrutiny. In order to be able to give a picture of the movement as a whole, and its central and recurring features, I have decided to organize the book thematically rather than chronologically. My aim has been to explicate the shared philosophical tendencies, worries and preferred solutions, and then enrich this overview with the notable differences and disagreements between the members of the school. Inevitably some chronological clarity is thereby lost, and I can only hope that this deficiency is remedied by the unified, argumentative understanding of this particular branch of philosophy towards which I have striven.

The reader new to ancient philosophy is advised to use the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* list of abbreviations to identify a given ancient text. In cases where no abbreviation has been available, the reference is abbreviated according to the abbreviation system of the *Liddell–Scott Greek–English Lexicon* (new editions), or not abbreviated at all.

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Helsinki

ONE

Introduction

What is Neoplatonism?

"Neoplatonism" refers to a school of thought that began in approximately 245 CE, when a man called Plotinus moved from the intellectual centre of the Eastern Mediterranean, Alexandria, Egypt, to settle in the capital of the Roman Empire, where he began teaching his interpretation of Plato's philosophy, gaining many disciples and followers. Out of the association of people in Rome and the collection of the written treatises of Plotinus and his pupil Porphyry emerged a school of philosophy that displays enough originality to be considered as a new phase of Platonism: a school of thought of its own. At the time of the closure of the Academy in Athens in 529 CE by the Christian emperor Justinian, the Neoplatonic manner of philosophizing had spread to Syria, Asia Minor and Alexandria, as well as to Athens, the birthplace of philosophy and Platonism.

Neoplatonism long coexisted with Christianity in an empire that had featured Christianity as the official religion from the first Christian emperor Constantine (emperor 306–337 CE) onwards. At the beginning of the movement, that is, in the third century, the debate between the Neoplatonists and Christians, as well as Gnostics, was intense but peaceful. The last Neoplatonic – and pagan – heads of the Academy in the sixth century, however, had difficulties with

Christian rulers of the empire, facing, among other things, a ban on teaching philosophy in public. In Alexandria, things had been worse before that: it has been suggested that the Alexandrian Neoplatonists constantly had to adapt their teaching to take into account the Christian leaders of their city (Wallis [1972] 1995: 142). The severity of the problems is evident from the killing of the female Neoplatonist mathematician and philosopher Hypatia, who was struck down by a Christian mob in 415 CE.

There is a clear-cut end to the school only in an institutional sense, in the closure of one of its main centres, the Neoplatonic school of Athens. Evidently, however, the Neoplatonic way of thinking continued in many contexts, both pagan and Christian. In its final phases, it deeply influenced those Christians who had theoretical, theological or philosophical interests. Indeed, in many places the Neoplatonic approach was the only one available to a student committed to theoretical studies. Through Christian intellectuals, it left its footprint in the Western history of ideas. Moreover, Judaic and especially Arabic philosophizing bear its deep marks, as does, for instance, Renaissance art. Chapter 7 gives a guide to its central influences in Western thought. The movement itself delivered us such thinkers as the aforementioned pupil of Plotinus, Porphyry, as well as Iamblichus, Proclus and Simplicius, to mention but a few; they will shortly be introduced in more detail.

The term "Neoplatonism" implies that this school of thought was committed to Plato's teachings but in some novel manner distinct from not just Plato himself but from the preceding Platonisms prevalent in the more than five hundred years between Plato and Plotinus. The applicability of the term, however, has been contested. First, it stems from nineteenth-century German scholarship, and bears no relation to the self-understanding of Plotinus and his followers, who, no doubt, understood themselves as simply the spiritual and philosophical pupils of Plato. This is entirely in line with the common philosophical allegiance and commitment to the authority of the founder figure in ancient philosophy. Proving the founder of the school right was considered a much more venerable task than gaining personal originality (Sedley 1989). Secondly, it has been argued that the term

"Neoplatonism" creates an artificial gap between the Neoplatonists and what it has been customary to call Middle-Platonism, although the continuity between some of the Middle-Platonists and Plotinus is evident, and the later Platonists do not see a decisive difference between them (Frede 1987). Plotinus does seem more systematic than many of his Platonic predecessors, but the fact that his entire work has been preserved to posterity, unlike that of many other philosophers, may distort the picture in his favour.

The originality of Plotinus is an issue of extensive debate and involves the difficult task of separating particularly Neoplatonic inventions from what is common to Platonism in general. Platonist commitments shared by Plato, the Middle-Platonists and Neoplatonists alike are, at least, the following three general ideas: (i) the understanding of metaphysics as a hierarchy of intelligible and sensible layers of which the higher is the explanatory, as well as the better and more powerful (for the two levels in Plato, see e.g. Thesleff 1999); (ii) the already mentioned top-down explanatory approach, in which the orientation of investigation is predominantly vertical, not horizontal; (iii) a commitment to the psychological as an irreducible explanatory category, and the connected dogma of the immortality and eternality of the soul. Further, all or most Platonists share the idea of cosmic unity and its explanatory role in everything, including personal happiness (see Gerson 2005b). Yet Plotinus especially is not a mere exegete; he does reinvent and reinterpret Platonism in several crucial ways and occasionally, at least implicitly, criticizes his teacher of a half millennium earlier. He considered Plato's views as hitting the truth but saw them as obscurely expressed, which left him plenty of room for their interpretation. Even though his self-imposed task is that of an interpreter, the systematicity and idiosyncrasy with which this task is undertaken create a new form of thought.

The time span between the two has evident doctrinal implications: Plotinus' view of Plato is – and this is vitally important – both post-Aristotelian and post-Stoic. That is, he is well informed of the criticisms of Plato's teachings, as well as of the developments and steps made by intervening Peripatetic and Hellenistic philosophers. In general, the Neoplatonists were eager to merge Plato's and Aristotle's

philosophy into a whole, preserving Plato's metaphysical and spiritual intuitions while combining these with the valuable work on the sensible world by Aristotle, as well as with the latter's laudable clarity and precision. Yet Plotinus' distance from his great master not only makes him someone capable of standing on the shoulders of several giants all the way from Plato to nearer his own time, but also means that Plotinus' understanding of Plato is of a particular sort: an interpretation that has its own lengthy intellectual history and distinctive motivations. Before glancing at the closer predecessors of the Neoplatonists, it must be added that the movement had its foundation in a particular social environment and cultural climate. If the democratic city-state was both the origin and target of Plato's philosophical evaluation of reality, human nature and social life, Neoplatonism had its home in the multicultural Roman Empire with a wealth of spiritual movements and religious as well as philosophical syncretism. As has often been pointed out, the inward-turned, spiritual attention of many of the popular movements of this time may be the result of the diminished possibilities of political action within the dictatorship of the Roman emperor and his imperial court. For all these reasons we should expect the Neoplatonists to deliver us not a merely detailed, corrected or updated version of Plato, but something unprecedented: Plato might well have thought they had missed some of the core ideas of his own thinking.

As has already been indicated, it is difficult to distinguish Neoplatonism from various other forms of Platonism, starting with Plato's successors in the Academy. Plato's immediate successor, Speusippus (*c*.400–339 BCE), developed certain Pythagorean ideas and indications in Plato's dialogues towards a metaphysics where levels of being are derived from a first principle, One. Thus, despite Speusippus' views not being widely adopted before the Neopythagoreans of the first and second centuries CE, one of the central ideas guiding Plotinus' thought was already formulated before the Hellenistic, not to mention Roman, era (Dillon 2003: 30–88). In the third and second centuries BCE, Plato's Academy went through two philosophical phases that have been called sceptical, the main proponents of which were Arcesilaus (head of the Academy

268–241 BCE) and Carneades (head 155–137 BCE). Ancient scepticism is a wider phenomenon, and it differed in many ways from later forms of sceptical thinking. The scope of its doubt may not have been as radical and extensive, especially in the form scepticism took in the Academy. Significantly, however, it produced a host of arguments against different dogmatic positions. Plotinus was a system-builder who may have found some of the arguments thus originated useful, but whose take on Plato and philosophy was of a more dogmatic nature.

In this respect Neoplatonism is intellectually more indebted to the period of so-called Middle Platonism, starting around 130 BCE (the birth of one of the heads of the Academy, Antiochus of Ascalon) and lasting up to and including the late-second century CE. With its return to a more dogmatic reading of Plato and its temporal vicinity to Plotinus, this period is vital, yet especially challenging. In the case of Middle Platonism we do not have extant sources even to the extent that we have them from the periods before and after. Another problem relates to the way of doing philosophy common in this period. Although to call it and other philosophy done then "eclectic" is pejorative (Dillon & Long 1988: introduction), the fact remains that this period saw no great novelty in terms of whole new systems of thought. Rather, philosophers tried out different combinations of doctrines stemming especially from Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, as well as the Pythagoreans. The Platonist idea of incorporeality seems to have resonated. In this spirit, the Middle-Platonists combine Plato's ideas about the intelligible realm with the Aristotelian doctrine of a perfect intellect, *nous*, separate from the individual human intellects, rendering Platonic forms as contents of the supreme Intellect (Gatti 1996).

Of the individual intellectuals preceding Plotinus, one particular person should be recalled. Porphyry reveals that Plotinus was accused by some Greek intellectuals of having merely appropriated the thought of Numenius (fl. 150–215 CE), and that one of Plotinus' students defended him by composing a treatise on the doctrinal differences in the thinking of the two (Porph. *Plot.* 17). Numenius was a Syrian Platonist from Apamea. His thought

showed Neopythagorean leanings, and Plotinus seems to have shared with him, among other things, a layered understanding of metaphysics, the distinction between the irrational and rational soul, as well as the doctrine of matter as evil (see Frede 1987). The relationship between Numenius and Neoplatonism, however, is complicated. The similarities of thought are accompanied by certain evident differences. For example, like many Middle Platonists, Numenius was a dualist, or close to a dualist, concerning good and evil. He was committed to two principles, good and evil, whereas the Neoplatonists tended towards monism of goodness, and towards a secondary or derivative role of matter and evil. It is also good to note in this context that in Platonism goodness is not to be conflated with the Christian conception. In antiquity, goodness (*agathon*) is closely associated with beauty (*kalon*), both to be understood through such notions as order and intelligible structure, as well as virtue (*aretē*), paradigmatic examples of which are courage and self-discipline (*sōphrosynē*).

Another prominent figure is Plotinus' teacher, a man called Ammonius Saccas who had founded his own school in Alexandria around 200 CE. Unfortunately, Ammonius did not write philosophical works, and thus it is difficult to estimate what, exactly, Plotinus learned from him. The influence seems to have been profound; later in his life Plotinus, when lecturing, ceased to teach on noticing a pupil of Ammonius entering the audience, commenting that enthusiasm for teaching wanes when someone already knows what one is about to say (Porph. *Plot.* 14). Later Neoplatonists claimed that Ammonius was originally a Christian philosopher and had reverted to paganism, and that he was motivated by amalgamating Platonic and Aristotelian doctrines. He held, for instance, that reality can be divided into three connected levels. In the hierarchy God is the supreme reality, followed by celestial realities. On the next level can be found something akin to Aristotle's fifth element, namely ethereal realities, as well as demons, and the lowest level consists of human beings and animals (Reale 1991: 461–70). We can see here more than just seeds for Plotinus' hierarchy of hypostases (to be explicated in Chapter 2).

What, if anything, then, is novel in this way of philosophizing? What makes this movement something we can identify and separate from other approaches to philosophy, and, more challengingly, from other ways of interpreting Plato? A combination of five characteristics mark the movement and are worth noting:

(i) There is a commitment to a first principle, One (*hen*), above the Aristotelian intellect (*nous*), from which everything is derived, accompanied by a careful analysis of the technicalities of this hierarchical derivation, also called procession (in secondary literature often "emanation"). While the derivative entities are accessible to intellection and reason, the first principle is, ultimately, ineffable.

(ii) There is a proliferation of metaphysical layers and entities. Plato can be interpreted as postulating (in a more or less crude simplification) two aspects or levels of reality: one that is material, perceptible, temporal and changing, and another that is immaterial, intelligible, eternal and permanent. The latter is understood as the true reality that explains the former, while the former is actually only an imitation of the latter. The Neoplatonists take this layered understanding of reality to be correct, but following Middle-Platonic authors and Plotinus they postulate yet further levels between the two, or, perhaps better, within the higher or the intelligible. In general, Neoplatonism is marked by metaphysical complexity, and there is a tendency to further differentiate ontology and to postulate new entities to solve further philosophical dilemmas. Where there is reduction, it appears as a striving to reduce everything, ultimately, to the first principle, but the steps through which this kind of reduction happens are numerous.

(iii) As in most Platonism, the metaphysically prior is always more powerful, better and more simple or unified than the metaphysically lower. Taken together with the above tendency to a hierarchical metaphysical system, this creates, in ways that will be explicated in Chapter 2, not only a graded reality, but a hierarchy that reaches from what is absolutely one to the varied

manifold of the perceptible universe. This hierarchy displays an increasing intensity of unity and goodness the higher one gets in the hierarchy, and conversely an increasing variety, complexity and deficiency towards the lower levels of the ladder of reality.

(iv) The central layers of reality postulated are simultaneously metaphysically real and essentially connected to – or, as in Plotinus, internal to – the human soul. Neoplatonists are metaphysical realists to the extent that reality really does exist independently of any one human mind thinking it. Yet in a particular manner (to be examined in later chapters), reality also resides in the mind. Following the epistemic realistic assumptions that were strong in ancient philosophy, the Neoplatonists emphasize the points of contact between cognition and what really exists. The complexity of thinking must coincide with the complexity of being. Reality is thereby essentially minded or intelligible, that is, both intelligibly organized and penetrable to reason, as well as in some sense essentially thought. Neoplatonists incorporate in this their idea of hierarchy, differentiating not only levels of metaphysics but levels of human experience and thought. A human being, and especially his or her experience and cognition, forms a layered hierarchy, the main lines of which correspond to the central features of the hierarchy existing in the universe. The details of this dogma, its different variants and the partial departures from and challenges posed to it by the later Neoplatonists will be discussed later in this book, especially in Chapters 4 and 5.

(v) Non-intellectual life and striving is understood as the desire for wholeness, perfection or completeness, and continuation. Because what is most unified, perfect and eternal can be found at the top of the hierarchy, the horizontal striving of living beings becomes identified with vertical striving (Dillon & Gerson 2004: xi–xxii). The striving we see in nature for continuity of life and existence, as well as the efforts towards unified agency and different kinds of perfection particular to human beings, are all manifestations of a more universal striving of

> the generated and lower layer towards its source and origin, and ultimately towards the absolute unity at the top of the hierarchy. Cosmic creation and its entities thereby also convey psychological notions. For example, creation is contemplative (Gatti 1982) in that the created always turns to contemplate its origin. This return or reversal towards the first principle is essential to and distinctive of Neoplatonic thinking.

In addition to these unifying doctrinal factors, it must be stressed that Neoplatonism is predominately spiritual in nature. There are, however, differences as to how central a role spirituality played for different members of the school, and the exact nature of this spirituality must be established. Neoplatonism belongs to the branch of philosophy that has been called "philosophy as a way of life". This is the particular way of understanding the role of philosophy common in antiquity. Alongside doctrines and philosophical systems there existed an ideal and an aim to live one's life philosophically. Philosophy was seen as something that has direct consequences on the chosen way of life (Hadot 2002). Especially within Platonism and Hellenistic schools (e.g. Nussbaum 1994), central priority was given to a therapy of the soul. Philosophical work coincided with the effort of healing the soul from excessive desires and emotions. It equipped the person with well worked out reasons to act, and the means of seeking true happiness. Neoplatonism shares this understanding of philosophy and its role in life. Within it, a central method of the therapy of the soul was a turn towards the inner: an inwardly directed contemplation. Importantly, this activity is not necessarily understood as opposite or hostile to the use of reason, but as a kind of intellectual intensification. The role of reason in the therapy of the soul was seen as focal, especially by Plotinus, although, as we shall see, the highest spiritual experiences were located outside conceptual and rational grasp. These experiences became fundamental in later, especially fourth-century, Iamblichean Neoplatonism. Furthermore, the inwardly directed contemplation that ultimately ended in non-conceptual experiences of unity and blessedness was not understood as primarily unworldly. On the contrary, contemplative work and

the higher experiences it might lead to were understood as bringing about practical wisdom, happiness and even social reform.

Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism, in particular, is marked by what the present-day reader may assess as extra-philosophical activities, especially the growing importance of a practice called theurgy. In its original Neoplatonic meaning, theurgy refers to the process of making the human being worthy of or a likeness of a god, and thus belongs to the lengthy tradition of "becoming godlike" within ancient philosophy (for the traditional forms of this, see Sedley 1999). Thus it can, in principle, involve any kind of human practice believed to make us more godlike. Usually, and especially in Classical as well as Hellenistic philosophy, it combined some kind of habituation of the wants and passions of the body to the concentration on and use of what was considered the most divine aspect of human nature, namely reason. In Neoplatonism, the methods used in divinization combined religious practices into philosophical study and contemplation. Since the summit of the metaphysical hierarchy is beyond conceptualization and intellection, it became customary to invoke other practices to reach it. Prayer and ritual magic came to be practised alongside philosophy, and were, in fact, considered the only paths to the highest levels of existence and experience. Theurgy renders Neoplatonism a fascinating target for studies in religion, mysticism, religious practices and meditative experiences. In this book, we shall acquaint ourselves mainly with the philosophical motivation and foundation of theurgy (Chapter 5).

Sources, curriculum and method of exegesis

A student entering a Neoplatonic school somewhere around the fourth century CE was advised to start philosophy by moral purification, for which it was deemed appropriate to acquaint oneself with the Pythagorean *Golden Verses* (or Epictetus' *Manual* or *Handbook*; see below). After achieving a sufficient level of moral self-control, the next step was a study of Aristotle. Aristotle's works were considered both as a good introduction to philosophical matters and

as authoritative about nature, about the sensible realm. It is known that in the school gathered around Plotinus, not only Plato's dialogues but also, for instance, the commentaries on Aristotle' s works by Alexander of Aphrodisias served as essential reading. Porphyry says further that Aristotle's *Metaphysics* can be found concentrated in Plotinus' writings (Porph. *Plot.* 14). In fact, the founder of the school and his followers had inherited an ambivalent relationship to Aristotle. On the one hand, many Middle-Platonists entertained a belief in the harmony of Plato and Aristotle. By the third century CE, much of Platonism had therefore, as we have seen, acquired an Aristotelian flavour. On the other hand, such Platonists as Atticus (*c.*150–200 CE) and Nicostratus (also active in the second century CE), working in the Roman imperial age, and preceding Plotinus, were openly hostile to Aristotle. Plotinus' stance is different. His reading of Aristotle is careful rather than dismissive, but its ultimate aim is to show that the Peripatetic position is internally inconsistent or problematic, and then proceed to complement or replace it with Platonic alternatives (Chiaradonna 2005).

From Plotinus' student Porphyry onwards, the idea of agreement between Plato and Aristotle took firmer hold. The main lines of Aristotelianism were understood as compatible with Plato and both were considered to be expressive of the same truth, which resulted in many commentaries of Aristotle's works being written, designed, among other things, to indicate this compatibility. As Simplicius expresses the matter in the sixth century CE:

> With regard to what is said by [Aristotle] against Plato, the good exegete must, I believe, not convict the philosophers of discordance by looking only at the letter [of what they say]; but taking into consideration the spirit, he must track down the harmony which reigns between them on the majority of points. (Simpl., *Commentary on the Categories*, 7,28–32 [= Sorabji 2005b: 2(a)1, trans. Chase])

This means, further, that eventually Aristotelianism became Platonized, since most of the philosophers commenting on Aristotle

had a Neoplatonic education or background. We shall see later how they deal with cases where the uniformity of Plato and Aristotle was difficult to establish (see further Blumenthal 1990; Gerson 2005a; Karamanolis 2005).

As necessary starting-points for anyone willing to become a philosopher, the Neoplatonists chose ethical considerations from Aristotle's philosophy that had to do especially with self-discipline. Since, however, logical terminology and education gave precision and clarity to all philosophical undertakings, and since Aristotle also used logical terminology in writing on ethical issues, logic was chosen as the best place to starts one's studies (Anonymous, *Prolegomena*, ch. 26, lines 16–58, [Westerink] [= Sorabji 2005b: 2(a)11]). According to a no longer viable view, Aristotelianism would have had a stronger hold in the Alexandrian school than in the Athenian school, but it is unlikely that the emphasis could have been very different because there was some exchange of the two schools' personnel, as well as family ties between them. Research has also shown that the Alexandrian commentators were (Neo)Platonic in spirit, and the extent to which commentaries of Aristotle include Neoplatonic dogmas depends, rather, on the context, that is, on the topic that is commented on (e.g. Sheppard 1987).

Once the student reached a certain level of clarity in his thinking and argumentation, he was introduced to the divine Plato (Marinus *Procl.* 13). Plato's works were read in a certain order. The Neoplatonists did not adhere to the idea that Plato's writings would display a chronological development, and thus they did not, for instance, consider some of the dialogues as "early", "Socratic" or "mature". Rather, they formed their own curriculum, which consisted of the following books (in the order they appear here): *Alcibiades I*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Cratylus*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus* and *Parmenides* (Festugière 1969; O'Meara 2003: 61–8).

The first of these, *Alcibiades I* – since the nineteenth century sometimes considered inauthentic – was deemed to be especially appropriate as a propaedeutic to Platonism. This dialogue concerns the question of the proper kind of care for the self, and the

accompanying question of self-knowledge: what is that self which I should care for? The dialogue introduces philosophy as a form of care for the (true) self and argues for the centrality of this question for political activity and the kind of life the person wants to live. Recognition of the true self is, as we shall see in Chapter 4, central for Neoplatonic enquiry. At the other end of the curriculum, advanced courses focused on the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides*. These dialogues deal with major questions about metaphysics and cosmology, and the *Timaeus* designates the place of human beings in the metaphysical and cosmological order of things. While *Timaeus* was more "physical", *Parmenides* delivered central argumentation for theology. The Neoplatonists understood the famous second deduction of the second part of the *Parmenides* (142b ff.) to establish a One separate from being, the dialogue thus forming a central source for the Neoplatonic philosophy of the first principle.

Assessing how much the Neoplatonists read or took influences from the other philosophical schools of antiquity is a matter of ongoing research. We have already seen that Neoplatonic intellectual sympathies are not with Scepticism; rather, the Sceptics pose an intellectual challenge and act in the role of a useful antagonist. Plotinus, for example, seems to develop some of his main theses as an answer to Sceptical arguments (Wallis 1987). It also seems that he learned a great deal from Sextus' discussion of self-intellection, and that his analysis of the structure of intellect's activity is indebted to it (Crystal 2002). The Neoplatonists very rarely refer to the Epicureans, whose materialism is as remote to their understanding of the ultimate truth about the universe as the hedonistic outlook is to Neoplatonist understanding of what happiness consists of.

The relationship to the other leading materialists, the Stoics, is more complicated. Plotinus lived in a time when Stoicism had become a part of the general schooling of an educated male citizen, so the Stoic philosophical vocabulary had spread to intellectual communication and writing, making it difficult to separate doctrinal influences and similarities from more superficial terminological connections and loans. Although the founder of the school, Plotinus, rarely mentions the Stoics, it is safe to say that he felt quite free to exploit their ideas

and revise them so as to fit into his non-materialistic philosophy. Porphyry testifies that concealed Stoic doctrines abound in Plotinus' works (*Plot.* 14). Despite its materialism, Stoicism is in many ways closer to Platonism than Epicureanism. As we shall see, the understanding in the two theories of what makes a good and happy human life are not that far from one another, and both movements, of course, regarded themselves as adherents of Socrates. The Stoic conception of the physical universe permeated by internal "sympathy" had an influence on the way the Neoplatonists regarded nature and the hypostasis Soul as responsible for the temporal and living unity of the cosmos. It is interesting to note the acceptance into the Neoplatonic curriculum of a work of Stoic origin that lacked treatises on moral conduct and action. To fill this gap, the later Neoplatonists used a rather late Roman Stoic, Epictetus (*c.*55–138 CE), who was active in Rome a hundred years before Plotinus' arrival. Epictetus' philosophy has a very practical flavour, and his understanding of human nature displays the same late ancient features as those of the Neoplatonists. This produced, in the sixth century, a still extant Neoplatonic commentary on Epictetus' *Manual* or *Handbook* (in Greek *Encheiridion*) by Simplicius.

To sum up the relation to other leading philosophical schools of antiquity, we can note that Neoplatonism is Platonism in so far as the reading of Plato's central dogmas, works and the interpretative work on them was considered to be the main task of the Neoplatonic philosopher. Yet it is also true that Stoicism and Aristotelianism heavily influenced the Neoplatonists, and without the Sceptics the arguments would perhaps have been much less carefully discussed. Some of the proponents of the school came rather close to Aristotelianism, especially in its late ancient form, in which, for instance, the thinking of particular human beings was no longer considered enough to explain rationality, and much use was made of a higher "active intellect", a kind of divine and universal intellect, activated each time when a particular mind understands something (cf. Alex. Aphr. *De an.* 88,23–24). This kind of late Peripatetic tendency to "top-downism" was well suited to Neoplatonic thought; indeed, it may have influenced Plotinus' outlook. In the later phases of the movement, the

proponents of the school commented eagerly on Aristotle, perhaps partly because most of Aristotelianism contained less controversial issues than Plato's dialogues with respect to the deepening controversy between pagan philosophers and the Christians.

Alongside such argumentative and dialectical partners as the Peripatetics and the Stoics, Neoplatonism had other predecessors, some of them more religious or spiritual. By the time of Plato, Pythagoreanism had a certain appeal within the Academy. The centrality of mathematics, numbers and abstract thinking, a belief in transcendent first principles as well as a predominantly spiritual approach to the human soul and its destiny were features shared by both schools (Hare [1982] 1999: 117–19). The first centuries CE saw a rise of a Neopythagorean school of thought, also present in Alexandria. Neopythagoreanism juxtaposed the materialism of Hellenistic philosophy with the immaterial or incorporeal, underlined the spiritual and immortal nature of the soul as opposed to the body, and endorsed ascetic practices and prayer as important aspects of a philosopher's life. For the Neopythagoreans, the reality consisted of a hierarchy starting from a God proceeding to the Monad and Dyad, and finally to numbers. Taken metaphysically, the number sequence that runs in both increasing and decreasing order already resembles Plotinus' ideas about progression and regression (Trapp 2007: 357). One of Plotinus' strongest influences, the above-mentioned Numenius from the second century CE, presents a fusion of Platonic and Pythagorean thinking that must have influenced Plotinus deeply. The Pythagorean heritage and its proper understanding seems even to have been an issue of competition: the rhetorician Longinus, Plotinus' contemporary rival and opponent, defended Plotinus' role as the first one to explain the doctrines of Pythagoras and Plato with accuracy (Porph. *Plot.* 20.71–6). The significance of Pythagoreanism for later Neoplatonism is detectable in, among other things, Iamblichus' work on the life, or better, the ways of life, propagated by Pythagoras (see Clark 1989).

There remains one central source of Neoplatonism, albeit not of a philosophical nature: the Chaldean Oracles. This is a group of fragmentary texts from the second century CE, the main part of

which is a Hellenistic commentary on a mystery poem that was believed to have originated in Babylon (Greek Chaldea). In the surviving form the hexameter verses were attributed to a man called Julian, and believed to be uttered in or after a trance not unlike the ones that archaic oracles of Greece experienced and in which they prophesied. These texts display a cosmological and soteriological system accompanied with moral and ritual rules, held in antiquity to be divine revelation. In content, the oracles seem to testify to the syncretism practised in Alexandria, combining Platonic elements to other, especially "Chaldean", wisdom. The central features resemble Neoplatonism in, among other things, postulating a metaphysical hierarchy of entities over and above the sensible realm (such as Father, Intellect, Hecate and World-Soul), as well as in directing people towards a contemplative life separated from the bodily and worldly worries. The influences between Platonic philosophy and the oracles have been discussed, and it is possible that a search for influence in a single direction is futile (see Majercik 1989; Athanassiadi 1999). Porphyry commented on the Chaldean Oracles, and Iamblichus accepted them as a central, if not main, source of divine revelation.

The question of the lines of influence between Neoplatonism and the two prominent spiritual movements popular in the Roman Empire simultaneous with it, namely Christianity and Gnosticism, is a vexed one. All these systems of thought display similarities to the extent that the adherents of these spiritual movements believe in the existence of one first principle or God, and in the need of the embodied human soul to rise from its present state closer to this principle: that is, in its salvation. All have an interest in the existence of souls after death, in evil, prayer and mystical experiences. The shared tendencies betray their common background in the Eastern Mediterranean culture with its spiritual syncretism, and the differing approaches must, at least, have positioned themselves in relation to one another, in the context of competing ways of thinking contemporary to them. There are, in any case, deep differences as well. The ineffable and austerely simple One acting out of the necessity of its nature of Neoplatonism is not to be equated with the anthropomorphic God of Christian faith. Unlike its Christian counterpart,

Platonic salvation or ascent is not primarily a personal or individual matter. The ideal is understood to be, rather, an immersion in perfect intelligibility or goodness. The means for the human soul to escape its earthly condition are also divergent in the two. Despite the spiritual and mystic tendencies in Neoplatonism, its commitment to philosophical argumentation necessarily distinguishes it from the other two competing worldviews.

Plotinus' stance towards Gnosticism is known particularly from his treatise against the Gnostics, in which he, for instance, scorns the idea that some people are chosen or nearer to God than others, regardless of their attempts at living a virtuous life, as well as the Gnostic claims to cure diseases by magic (*Enneads* II.9.9 & 14). His pupil Porphyry's written work against Christians has survived in substantial fragments (see Berchman 2005), and thus we know that Porphyry was familiar with texts from both the Old and New Testaments. He objected, among other things, to the obscurity of some of Jesus' sayings, which, from a purely philosophical point of view, seemed to him nonsense, but he also presented theological counter-arguments. As will be seen in the exposition of the individual members of the school, later Neoplatonists both openly clashed with the Christianized culture they lived in and sought compromises with it. In the end, they were absorbed into Christian civilization. Neoplatonic influences on Christian theology will be revisited in Chapter 7.

In this context, something must be said of the way in which the Neoplatonists expressed themselves and interpreted their sources. We have already seen that Neoplatonists wrote extensive commentaries, especially on the works of Plato and Aristotle. The later Neoplatonists were not content with the casual way in which Plotinus used Plato, and strove for careful exegesis and interpretation of all the dialogues. For this purpose, they had at their disposal the genre of literary commentary. The commentaries in question are exegetic, but in a peculiar manner. Aristotle's works in particular were sometimes openly and manifestly appropriated into the Neoplatonic setting. This happened, for instance, by concentrating on themes that Aristotle had merely mentioned more or less in passing, which left the commentator with

the liberty of reading between the lines (see Hadot 1968b; Hoffmann 2000). Despite the philosophical inventiveness that shines through the exegetical form, the commentary genre also proposes a challenge for philosophical work and originality, as well as for later scholarly work. It led into centrality of interpretation and incorporation of the classic philosophical texts into the Neoplatonic way of thinking. This means that it is sometimes difficult to extrapolate the commentator's own view from the one propounded in the commented text. Since the school had also adopted strictly non-philosophical texts as authoritative about the universe and the good life, there emerged a rising demand to combine myths, oracles and philosophy into a unified system. In this process, Greek pagan divinities in particular were absorbed into Neoplatonism and thereby "depersonalized", that is, stripped of many of their particular characteristics crucial for their ordinary religious role. The reader therefore encounters a challenge of concepts and entities that are largely missing from the Platonic and Aristotelian corpus.

Neoplatonic exegesis displays two characteristics the reader should be aware of. First, careful reading of Plato's dialogues was conducted according to a belief that a single dialogue expressed one central theme or *skopos*. The introductory portions were seen as heavy with allegorical significance. This led to fairly peculiar interpretations of the settings of the dialogue, which were taken to express or prefigure one or another heavy metaphysical doctrine expounded later in the dialogue (Procl. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, col 658,33–659,15 [= Sorabji 2005b: 2(b)2]). Secondly, because myths function in a way different from, for instance, metaphysical treatises, and allow themselves to be connected to different metaphysical items and theories, further principles of textual exegesis were required. Myths were seen to have many roles. On the one hand, they were understood as concealing truths that the uninitiated should not see; on the other they were seen as nourishing human imaginative powers and helping to create conviction to arguments. Immediately after Plotinus' time, for his pupil Porphyry, a single myth could still convey different allegorical meanings. Porphyry's pupil Iamblichus, however, taught that different sciences approach the same subject

matter from different points of view that can be organized in a hierarchical manner, according to, for example, the relationship between archetype and image. Similarly, the meanings expressed by myths could be organized under a primary meaning that depended on the main theme of the dialogue in question. Although there are personal differences in Neoplatonic exegesis (see Wallis 1972: 136; Sorabji 2005b: 52–4), these principles seem to recur.

Life and works of the prominent members of the school

Plotinus (204/5–270 CE)

The likelihood is that Plotinus was born in Lycopolis, Egypt, in 204 or 205 CE. What is known of his life and school derives mostly from his biography, *The Life of Plotinus* (*Vita Plotini*; see Brisson *et al*. 1982). It was written by his pupil Porphyry, and thus concentrates on his philosophically active life and the period when Porphyry accompanied Plotinus. We learn, among other things, that after studying philosophy for ten years with Ammonius Saccas in Alexandria, Plotinus took part in the military expedition of Gordian III to Persia, thus travelling extensively in the East. Fantastic, but not altogether ungrounded, speculations have been made of his possible encounters with and influences from Indian wise men. Porphyry relates that Plotinus was, indeed, motivated to travel to Persia and India for this reason, and it has been suggested that Plotinus' role in the expedition was that of a philosopher rather than, for example, that of a soldier (Rawson 1989: 233–57). Nothing, however, is conveyed of the intellectual success or results of this voyage, nor of any encounters with the local wise men.

At about forty years of age, Plotinus arrived in Rome, apparently with a developed approach to philosophy already in mind. On his arrival he attracted the attention of intellectuals and began teaching philosophy without delay. He was hosted by a woman called Gemina, whose household provided a home for Plotinus as well as a place of unofficial lecturing. The lectures were founded on Ammonius'

teachings, which Plotinus exhibited in the particular manner of his interpretation. The attending audience consisted of both men and women, politicians and learned men, such as doctors. Even one of the emperors, Gallienus (co-emperor with Valerian 253–60, sole emperor 260–68 CE), and his wife, Salonina, venerated him (*Plot.* 12.1–2).

It took another ten years, however, for Plotinus to begin writing down his ideas. Somewhat astonishingly, the resulting works are preserved for us in full, organized by Porphyry in six groups of nine treatises, the *Enneads* (from the Greek word *ennea*, meaning nine). Porphyry took liberties both in arranging the treatises and in dividing some of them into two. The extant arrangement starts from perhaps easier ethical treatments, proceeding in *Enneads* II and III to discussions pertaining mostly to natural philosophy and cosmology. Philosophical psychology is discussed in IV, epistemological issues and intellection mostly in V. The last groups of treatises deal with the higher levels of the hierarchy of being, namely numbers, being in general, as well as the One beyond being. It should be noted that this order reflects Porphyry's adoption of the Aristotelian division of philosophy into ethics, physics and metaphysics, which Plotinus may not have shared in all details. Furthermore, it emphasizes the role of the One as the ultimate end of human life. Fortunately, Porphyry also delivers the reader the original chronological sequence in which Plotinus wrote the treatises, which reveals, among other things, that for Plotinus the identification with Intellect or *nous* (rather than the One) may have been the *telos* of the sage's life (cf. Hadot 1966; Strange 2007).

Much has been made of Porphyry's remarks on the method and style of Plotinus' writing. On the negative side, we learn that Plotinus proceeded somewhat unsystematically, inspired by meetings with his students. The normal procedure for these gatherings was for Plotinus to read and comment on a commentator of Platonic and Aristotelian texts, and for the students to interrupt the teacher in order to pose questions, and for the teacher to answer them. Plotinus' writing seems as least partly to reflect this procedure. Because of bad eyesight, he could not bear to revise anything he had once written

down, and thus the structure and unity of his writings was further compromised. On a much more positive note, Porphyry observed that Plotinus had no need to revise his texts; he formed an orderly conception of the whole in his mind, to then be written down in a single, sustained effort. He was capable of doing this even when someone interrupted him. While discussing other things, we are told, he maintained his train of thought. The latter report is likely to be influenced by the *topos* of a sage in ancient literature: a sage is above everyone else both with respect to cognitive capacities and to virtuousness. Suitably for a particularly Neoplatonic sage, Plotinus was capable of simultaneous hierarchical levels of cognition. He died in Campania in 270, having withdrawn from society with a severe illness.

The teachings and writings of Plotinus form the backbone of Neoplatonic philosophy. For his followers, he was a wise man, a divine teacher. His interpretations of Platonism did not, however, enjoy exclusive acceptance or praise, but also became a point of departure for later members of the school. As we shall see, his followers often thought that Plotinus' metaphysics lacked clarity, and therefore postulated further differentiations within the intelligible, going against many of the founder's dogmas. The status of the human soul in the universe and the methods of its ascent to divinity differ considerably (in ways explicated in Chapters 5 and 6 on psychology and ethics) in Plotinus and the later Neoplatonists.

Amelius (c.246–290/300 CE)

Although one of the leading figures of Plotinus' school in Rome, Amelius has not enjoyed much recognition in the history of philosophy. Apparently of Etruscan origin, Amelius studied with Plotinus almost the entire time that Plotinus' school in Rome existed. Plotinus entrusted him with several philosophical tasks, and we may consider him as the second in charge of Plotinus' school (especially taking into consideration how brief Porphyry's stay in Rome actually was). None of the works of Amelius have survived, but we know

from, among other things, Plotinus' biography by Porphyry that he was a prolific writer, composing *scholia* (explanatory comments) on Plotinus' lectures, a defence of Plotinus' originality in relation to Numenius, and several commentaries on Plato's works. He also took part in the school's polemics against the Gnostics by composing a lengthy answer to a revelatory text by Zostrien (*Plot.* 3.38–48, 7.1–6, 10.33–38.)

Doctrinally, just like Plotinus, Amelius was close to the Middle-Platonic Numenius, and presents an important link between Numenius and later Neoplatonists. Before studying with Plotinus, Amelius is reported to have been a student of a Lysimachus, probably the Stoic philosopher, and hence Amelius is likely to have been one origin of Stoic influences in Plotinus' school. The main lines of his metaphysics followed the three-level hierarchy of Plotinus' One, Intellect and Soul. Apparently, he was not merely explicating Plotinus' philosophical system but had also interests and originality that went beyond Plotinus' thought. He seems to have been more interested in religion, religious practices and the Chaldean Oracles than Plotinus. Furthermore, he anticipated the later division of hypostases, especially the One and the Intellect, into three sub-aspects or phases.

After Plotinus' death, Amelius moved to Apamea, Syria. Judged by the fact that he is called in the sources an Apamean citizen, he probably lived there for a long time, but it is there that we lose track of the details of his personal history.

Porphyry (234–305 CE)

Originally named Malchus ("king"), Porphyry was probably born in Tyre, Phoenicia (presently Lebanon). Before attending Plotinus' lectures in Rome he had studied with the middle-Platonist Longinus in Athens, and must therefore have been familiar with many central tenets of Platonism. After his arrival in Rome in 263 CE, Porphyry adopted Plotinus' interpretation. He was highly active in Plotinus' school, but suffered a period of depression, and spent, advised by Plotinus and reported by himself in his biography of Plotinus, a

lengthy period in Sicily recuperating. He was away when Plotinus died in Italy, and started editing his teacher's writings posthumously. Whether or not he took over the leadership of the gatherings in Rome is uncertain. In general, we know little of how he spent the decades after Plotinus' death, apart from his noticeable philosophical activity and the fact that he married a woman called Marcella.

Porphyry was a productive author. Over sixty works have been attributed to him, most of which only survive by name. His extant works, besides the edition of *Enneads* by Plotinus and the biography of Plotinus, are: *Life of Pythagoras*, *Letter to Marcella*, *On Abstinence from Eating Food from Animals*, *Launching Points to the Intelligible* (also known as *Sentences*, in Latin *Sententiae*), *Introduction* (or, in Greek, *Eisagōgē* used commonly as the first introduction to philosophy and logic in the Middle Ages), *On the Cave of the Nymphs* and commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories* and Ptolemy's *Harmonics*. Fragments of his polemic *Against the Christians* have survived.

The content of Porphyry's work show a thinker following rather closely the system of thought established by Plotinus, and we may conjecture that his questions to and discussions with his teacher had their effect on Plotinus' thought. It was customary for the followers to refer to Plotinus and Porphyry sometimes as a pair. Porphyry's work also features topics to which Plotinus had not been paying much attention. For example, his works on (Aristotelian) logic are unprecedented in Plotinus, and the emphatic interest in religion and its relationship with philosophy, too, seems to be original to Porphyry. It has been suggested that the anonymous *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* could be attributed to Porphyry (Hadot 1968a). If this speculation holds, then Porphyry would also have interpreted the highest metaphysical entities differently from his teacher. We shall revisit this discussion in Chapter 2.

Iamblichus (c.240–325 CE)

Whether or not Iamblichus can be taken as a student of Porphyry is a matter of taste. He did study with Porphyry either in Rome or in

Sicily, but since he was probably only about four years younger than Porphyry, the relationship between the two may not have been that of a mentor and a devotee. This is perhaps reflected in Iamblichus' at times sharp philosophical critique of Porphyry's positions. Very little is known of his life with certainty; much of what we do know stems from his biography in Eunapius' *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists*, written later in the fourth century. The reliability of Eunapius' testimony is not without doubt, if for nothing else than because he was born twenty years after the death of Iamblichus. Iamblichus seems to have been of aristocratic or well-to-do origin, with a native city of Chalcis in Syria. After travelling in Italy and studying with Porphyry, among other people, he founded his own school in Apamea, not far from Antioch. He soon became a widely respected figure in the area. It is likely that for instance Dexippus, the author of the extant commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*, was one of the school's adherents.

It is probably to Iamblichus that we owe the Neoplatonic curriculum as presented earlier in this introduction. In addition to the formal exegesis of Aristotle and Plato, Pythagorean philosophy and the above-mentioned Chaldean Oracles formed an important backbone of Iamblichus' teaching. Of his own works, unfortunately, mostly fragments remain. Extant are four books of a compendium of Pythagorean philosophy, and *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians* (*De Mysteriis*, originally entitled *Reply of Abammon to Porphyry's Letter to Anebo*). Further, fragments have been preserved of his many commentaries on Plato's and Aristotle's works as well as of the treatises *On the Soul*, *On Chaldean Theology* and *On the Gods*.

The extant works and fragments are sufficient to reconstruct the main lines of Iamblichus' thought. As we shall see in Chapter 2, he is the central figure in the developments where the solving of obscurities and problems of Plotinus' thought leads into postulation of yet further metaphysical levels. In particular, the problem of participation inherited from Plato – namely, how a transcendent entity can simultaneously be a cause and an explanation for the sensible and remain itself unaffected by these relationships – is solved by Iamblichus by making a distinction between an "austere" and unaf-

fected level of the One and the lower levels, as well as a more flexible level related to the lower entities. His division of the noetic realm into a triad of a pure intellect, intellect involved in the generation and formation of lower levels of being, and the intellect as reflected in the lower level of being, was to serve as an example for the later Athenian Neoplatonism in its application of a triadic form to each hypostasis. As we shall see, Iamblichus is also the first of the later Neoplatonists firmly to oppose Plotinus' doctrine of the undescended soul. The originality of his thinking is not in doubt.

According to later reputation, besides philosophical education, magical practices were common in Iamblichus' school, and there are even reports of magical acts or miracles performed by the head of the gatherings. In part, these stories belong to hagiographical tendencies and can be attested in many biographies of the time, but undoubtedly magic had a more prominent role in this branch of the Neoplatonic school than it had in others. There is direct evidence for this from Iamblichus himself. In *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians*, he defends theurgy, responding to the criticism of Porphyry in his *Letter to Anebo*. Iamblichus emphasizes there that theoretical activity alone is not sufficient to free and salvage the soul from its worldly and bodily situation, but acts such as rituals are needed.

Despite numerous students such as Sopatros, Aedesius, or Theodore of Asine (275/280–360 CE, formerly a pupil of Porphyry), the school did not continue to function in Apamea. Because of political disorder, its students spread around, and Aedesius continued Neoplatonic education by founding a school in Pergamum.

Hypatia (370–415 CE)

The first recognizably Neoplatonic philosopher teaching in Alexandria, Hypatia, taught mathematics, astronomy and philosophy with her father Theon of Alexandria. She edited her father's works as well as writing treatises of her own. We know next to nothing of the content of her philosophical teaching, but something has survived of her mathematical works. Extant is her father's *Commentary on the*

Almagest (an astronomical work) revised by Hypatia. Some sources maintain that she was philosophically inferior to the men within the Neoplatonic school, and that her contribution was, rather, within mathematical sciences. Others testify to her surpassing mental capacities in many areas. Her pupils included Synesius of Cyrene (370–413 CE), who later became a Christian bishop of Ptolemais. Hypatia's lectures were widely popular and she even influenced important town officials in Alexandria, which led to her murder by a Christian mob. Her terrible death in a church at the hands of fanatic believers makes her a martyr of (pagan) wisdom. One cannot escape the feeling that her gender played a role in the difficulties of accepting her as a politically and philosophically important figure.

Plutarch of Athens (c.350–431/2 CE)

Plutarch of Athens was one of the heads of the Neoplatonic school in Athens, and perhaps its founder. He should not be confused with the more famous Plutarch of Chaeronea who lived in the second century CE, a biographer and Platonist whom the Neoplatonists did not, however, consider a true Platonic. The Neoplatonic Plutarch seems to have been cautious towards theurgy, which had gained an important role within Neoplatonism. He may have propounded some kind of secularization within the school. He wrote commentaries at least on Plato's *Phaedo* and *Parmenides*, and many fragments of his commentary on Aristotle's *On the Soul* (in Latin, *De anima*) are preserved in John Philoponus and Simplicius. His students included, for instance, Hierocles, who taught philosophy in Alexandria some twenty years after the death of Hypatia, and wrote, among other things, a work *On Providence*.

Syrianus (fifth century)

In addition to succeeding as the head of the Academy after the death of Plutarch of Athens in 431/2, Syrianus is mainly known for being

the teacher of Proclus and the author of the extant *Commentary on Metaphysics*. Because his pupil's surviving works are numerous, history has given the successor a more prominent place in the history of philosophy than Syrianus himself. It may well emerge that many of Proclus' expounded doctrines originated in Syrianus, if not in the teacher of both, Plutarch, or even Iamblichus.

*Proclus (*c.*410/12–485 CE)*

The great systematizer of Neoplatonism, Proclus was born probably in Byzantium (Constantinople), the son of a barrister; he was thus from a well-to-do family. Like his father, Proclus first studied law, but turned to philosophy and mathematics in Alexandria. At the age of nineteen he moved to Athens, and soon became a close disciple of the head of the Academy, Syrianus. In Athens, Proclus studied Aristotle, Plato and theurgic Neoplatonism. He succeeded Syrianus as the head of the Academy in Athens around 356 CE, at the mere age of twenty-five. According to Marinus' biography of his teacher, Proclus was unmarried, immensely industrious and quick-tempered but easily soothed (Marin. *Procl.* 16, 22). He lived to the mature age of seventy-five, which points to an exceptionally long philosophically active period.

Proclus' interests were wide, and extended from mathematics – particularly geometry – to aesthetics as well as magical and theurgic practices. His thought is especially accessible in the extant *Elements of Theology*, which provides a systematic account of Neoplatonic metaphysics in a form imitating Euclids' *Elements of Geometry*, that is, in 211 propositions each followed by a short explanatory section. Of his immense life work the following also survive: *Platonic Theology*, *Elements of Physics*, *Opuscula*, *On Providence*, *On Fate* and *On Evil*. We also have commentaries on Plato's *Timaeus*, *Republic*, *Parmenides* and *Alcibiades* as well as scientific works such as a commentary on the first book of Euclid's *Elements*.

Like his teacher Syrianus, Proclus abandoned certain of Plotinus' tenets, and favoured Iamblichean proliferation of the supra-sensible

realm. Mostly his value has been attached to his systematization and clarification of both Plotinus' and Iamblichus' heritage. One particular dogma, that of Henads (to be explicated in Chapter 2), has been attributed to him, although here, too, he may take Iamblichus' views to their logical conclusion. In a passage, his biographer Marinus attributes to him only one original dogma: that of an intermediate soul in between the eternal intellect and discursive soul. In other respects, his work has been suggested to have consisted of systematization and filling in gaps left by previous Neoplatonists. This picture of his role within the movement may be changing as the philosophy of the later Neoplatonists receives growing philosophical attention. Yet even though Proclus is rather careful in mentioning his intellectual debts to his predecessors, there will always be difficulty in separating his views from those of his predecessors, of whose philosophical positions little evidence remains, and that mainly in Proclus' own writings. Be that as it may, in his own time he became a deeply respected and widely influential figure who was, among other things, consulted by (even Christian) politicians, and usually referred to by his followers as "the great Proclus". The list of his extant works is long, which testifies to the fact that he was influential well beyond Neoplatonic late antiquity.

Proclus was succeeded in Athens by Marinus of Samaria, who wrote his biography. Marinus was not a young man when he took over the leadership of the school, and was probably rather soon succeeded by Isidore of Alexandria.

Ammonius (440–521/517 CE)

Born in Alexandria, Ammonius studied philosophy in Athens with Proclus. Returning home, he succeeded his father, Hermias, as the head of the school of Alexandria, where he cultivated the tradition of commenting on Aristotle's works. Faithful to both Proclus' and Hypatia's heritage, he seems to have, further, worked on both geometry and astronomy. The school's difficulties with the Christians continued during his period, and Ammonius is reputed to have made a

deal with the bishop of Alexandria. What the content of the deal was and whether it was entirely honourable on the part of Ammonius is unclear (for an approving interpretation, see Sorabji 2004: 21–3), but it may have kept the school in existence in times that were less than favourable to philosophy.

Of Ammonius' lecture notes, probably only his teaching on Aristotle's *De interpretatione* is edited to a final form by Ammonius himself. Apart from the *Prooemium* (preface or introduction), his commentary on Porphyry's *Introduction* may also be authentic. All the other works attributed to him are either not extant or survive edited by his pupils. The students may remain anonymous or the texts are edited by Philoponus or Asclepius, and hence the works bear either no name or the name of the editor. The surviving works include commentaries on *Aristotle's Categories*, *Prior Analytics*, *Posterior Analytics*, *Metaphysics 1–7, On Generation and Corruption* and *On the Soul*, as well as on Nicomachus' *Introduction to Arithmetic*.

Ammonius' significant work on Aristotle established the tradition of Aristotelian commentary in Alexandria. Doctrinally, Ammonius seems to have followed his teacher Proclus. Proving Aristotle's and Plato's fundamental harmony or agreement was a major motivation of his work. Many significant later figures were his pupils: Simplicius, Philoponus, Asclepius, Damascius and Olympiodorus.

*Damascius (*c.*460–540 CE)*

The Syrian Damascius studied both in Alexandria, with Ammonius, and in Athens, with the by then elderly Proclus. Originally more interested in rhetoric, Damascius started to study philosophy under the guidance of Marinus around 492. Damascius is known not through his works, but as the person who reorganized the Neoplatonic school after Proclus' death. Marinus was more prone to theurgy than rigorous philosophical study, but was probably already ill when he succeeded Proclus. In *c.*515 CE Damascius succeeded another of his teachers, Marinus' successor Isidore, as head of the school. It was Damascius' task to re-establish the study of Plato, Aristotle and the

Chaldean Oracles as the main occupation of the school. Internal difficulties aside, Damascius also witnessed the period when Christian faith finally took over even the intellectual education in Athens, and the school was closed around 529. He was the head of the school at the time of its closure, and together with six other philosophers decided to seek refuge with the Persian king Chrosroes. The success of their time in Persia is uncertain, but we know that the treaty that was soon made between Rome and Persia included a promise that the philosophers could return in peace. Very little is known of the activities of these philosophers after their return to the eastern Roman Empire. It has recently been convincingly argued that the Neoplatonic group moved to a city called Harrân, inside the borders of the Byzantine Empire but near to the Persian border. That way the pagan philosophers would have remained under the watchful eye of the king who had negotiated the terms of their return. In the Arabic world, this city was know for its Platonic philosophizing well into the tenth or even eleventh century, and thus it is possible that Athenian Platonism continued in Harrân for another 500 years (Tardieu 1986; I. Hadot 1990).

Of Damascius' extant works, *On Principles* is of interest. Further extant are commentaries on Plato's *Parmenides* and *Philebus*. Several commentaries on Plato and Aristotle have been lost, but fortunately, for example, his writings on *Time, Space, and Number* are cited, at some length, by Simplicius in his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*. Finally, a considerable fragment of Damascius' biography of his teacher Isidore has been preserved by Photius.

Simplicius (c.490/500–560 CE)

A disciple of both Ammonius and Damascius, Simplicius of Cilicia is one of the seven philosophers who had to flee Athens. Again, very little is known of his personal history after that date, except that, based on the details he mentions in his works, all of Simplicius' extant works seem to date from the period following the exile from Athens. We may perhaps imagine him toiling away in Harrân with other

Neoplatonic philosophers returning from Persian exile. Wherever he worked, it is evident that he had for his use a high-quality library.

Simplicius is known as a celebrated commentator on Aristotle. His surviving works are commentaries on Aristotle's *On the Heavens*, *On the Soul* (although the attribution of this work to him has sometimes been doubted), *Physics* and *Categories*, as well as a commentary on the Stoic Epictetus' *Handbook*. As an author he is scholarly, with a concentration on arguments and details of different philosophical positions, without much tendency to mysticism or religion. He is most valuable as a source because of his frequent references to Greek philosophers before him, not solely to Platonists and Peripatetics but also to Presocratic and Stoic authors. His commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* preserves and integrates 800 years of philosophical commentaries on Aristotle's original work. He is also known for his "pagan" attack on the contemporary Christian author, John Philoponus. He was widely read and influential in both Byzantine and Arab worlds.

Olympiodorus (*c.500–570 CE*)

The best-known leader of the Alexandrian school after Ammonius, Olympiodorus inherited the growing problem of the status of philosophy in a Christian city. On the one hand, the emperor Justinian saw it as his task to eradicate philosophy from both public and private realms; on the other hand, no high-level theology was possible without education that relied almost exclusively on ancient philosophy (Wildberg 2007). If anything, this situation was likely to make philosophers cautious. In Olympiodorus, this is visible, for instance, in his emphasizing that the names of the pagan divinities do not stand for competing divinities or different substances but merely aspects of the power deriving from the first principle. For him, ancient wisdom does not enjoy an exclusive or even best possible way to truth but presents, rather, a cultural heritage of which the intellectuals should be aware.

The extant works of Olympiodorus are *Prolegomena to Aristotle's Logic* and commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories* and *Meteorology*,

Plato's *Alcibiades I*, *Gorgias* and *Phaedo* as well as a *Life of Plato* (which is an introduction to the lectures on Plato's *Alcibiades*).

Of Olympiodorus' pupils not much is known for certain. They may have been either pagans or Christians; in any case their commentaries survive under such names as David and Elias. Also, the Christian philosopher Stephanus of Alexandria – the last-known thinker of the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria, active in the seventh century CE – seems to have shared the overall pedagogical method of Olympiodorus.

The last phases of the Alexandrian School: John Philoponus

John Philoponus ("lover of toil") (490–570 CE) is not, properly speaking, a Neoplatonist, but plays a role in the last phases of the Alexandrian school. His intellectual background was in Neoplatonism; he studied in the Alexandrian school under Ammonius' leadership. Two things separate him from other members of the school: first, he was a committed Christian; secondly, he broke away from the exegetical tradition rampant in the school. His writings contain open criticism of the long-prevalent Aristotelian Neoplatonism, repudiating, among other things, the doctrine of the eternity of the world. Philoponus' extant works are many, and contain commentaries of Aristotle's *Physics*, *On the Soul*, *On Generation and Corruption*, *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*, as well as *Metereology*. He also wrote treatises against both Aristotle and Proclus on the topic of the eternity of the world. The theological works include a treatise *On the Creation of the World* as well as a not extant work *On the Trinity*. As the titles indicate, his interests were, on the one hand, in natural sciences, and on the other, in religious or theological issues.

With Olympiodorus, Stephanus and Philoponus, the Neoplatonic school of Alexandria approaches its end. The intellectual rigour of the movement must have waned as the current philosophical paradigm became both outlawed and perhaps also exhausted, and another, Christian era began, with the possible exception of Harrân's

long-lived Platonic centre. Further intellectual changes in Alexandria resulted from the Arab conquest of Egypt in 642 CE. In any case, the change in the history of ideas was not sudden, nor absolute. Well before, as well as at the time of, the turn of the paradigm, themes and approaches from Neoplatonism had been incorporated into the new ways of thinking.

TWO

The first principles and the metaphysical hierarchy

It has been claimed that there are two general approaches to metaphysics. One is to make an inventory of reality, that is, to find out what kinds of beings and classes of beings exist. Perhaps there exist, for instance, perceivable entities, recurring qualities, material physical particles or other elemental units and so on. The other approach is to inspect that which is basic and primary in reality, and that other existing things depend on (Moravcsik 1992: 56). Are perceptible entities basic or do they consist of more fundamental things, such as form and matter, or qualities, perhaps of some basic elements? What is the most basic thing in reality, and how do other things depend on it? Neoplatonism and this introduction to it include both approaches, while for the Neoplatonists the latter is the crucially more important. In their view, an inventory of existing things would be worthless without an account of the hierarchies and dependence relations the entities form and a view of what, ultimately, is fundamental in reality.

In their search for the fundamentally real, the Neoplatonists are guided by two preoccupations, both of which they inherit from foregoing ancient philosophy. One is the question of one versus many, the other that of constancy versus change.

One versus many

From its very start, ancient philosophy was preoccupied with the question of the relationship between simple and complex, unity and multiplicity. An existing Presocratic interest was finding the principles of reality, and an explanation that would be ultimate and in need of no further explanation itself. For the Presocratics, such an explanation would be as simple as possible, since complex explanations are always in need of further explanations concerning their parts. This tendency to a kind of reductionism led to, among other things, attempts to find basic and simple elements of metaphysics. While Democritean atomists reduced everything into basic and indivisible simple material elements, there was also a mistrust towards material explanations, and their ability to explain the existence and behaviour of things. Parmenides, the Eleatic monist (sixth century BCE) reasoned in another direction; namely (according to the traditional interpretation), that being itself is one. This conclusion was not something the later Platonists could have accepted, but the way Parmenides proceeded to postulate one reality, one-being, rather than reducing everything into elemental simples was decisive for them. Accompanied by the tendency to understand the behaviour of an object in terms of its end, of what it is meant to achieve or which good it aims at, this led into an idea of a single agent that imposes the order of the universe on to matter, visible both in Plato's demiurge (*Ti.* 28c ff.) and Aristotle's unmoved mover (*Metaph.* Λ 7, 1072a21–6; Frede 1999; Gerson 2005b). As a first principle imposing an intelligible structure on matter, this peculiar kind of agent was considered as divine, although not, as we shall see, in a manner entirely in line with a more personal notion of God.

A central self-imposed task of the Neoplatonists was to explain the derivation of the multiplicity of being from this single origin, and explain everything in a way that ultimately led into this first principle. This tendency can be seen in Proclus' statement:

> Even thus, if we were to seek for the root, as it were, of all bodies, from which have sprouted all those both in the

> heaven and beneath the moon, both wholes and parts, we would not unreasonably say that this was Nature, which is the principle of motion and rest of all bodies, established in the things themselves that move and are at rest (I mean by Nature the single life that permeates the whole cosmos, participating after Intellect and Soul, and by means of Intellect and Soul, in unity). This we would say is the principle, rather than any of the many of the particular things. And yet not even this is a principle in the true sense; for it has a multiplicity of powers, and by means of different ones it controls different parts of the universe. However, we are at present seeking the single common first principle of all things, not a multiplicity of separate principles. But if we are to discover that single first principle, we must ascend to the most unitary element in Nature…
>
> (Procl., *Commentary on the Parmenides* 1045–6 [trans. Morrow & Dillon])

Starting with particular bodies, Proclus here proceeds "higher" into the principles that explain them, but finds that Nature, as a principle of manifold powers distributed in different parts of the universe, is not simple enough a principle. Rather, that principle should be the most *unitary* element in Nature.

Before Neoplatonism, both Aristotle and Plato often seem content with being as an ultimate explanation for what is to be explained, but their treatment of it seems to have differed. While Aristotle may be said to have concerned himself particularly with sortals, that is, "being …" – being a horse or a man, for instance – for Plato being one (i.e. a unified, countable entity) seems to have been primitive (see e.g. McCabe 1994: intro. and ch. 4). For the Neoplatonists, the first and second hypotheses in the second part of *Parmenides* proved to be central. Very generally, the first hypothesis shows that if the one is, it cannot be many, resting on the idea that the one is just one, and nothing else. But if the one is, and if its being is understood as different from its nature, any predication necessarily pluralizes the one in question. All this turned out to be crucial for the so-called

negative theology (to be discussed in Chapter 5). In outline, the Neoplatonic way of understanding the difficulties was to postulate an entity, the One, which is austerely just itself and of which nothing else can be predicated, even being, whereas being belongs to entities that admit of partition and predication (see e.g. Dodds 1928). However, the hypotheses also showed that without oneness nothing can exist: what is, is one, and without oneness it is impossible to conceive of the many (Pl. *Prm.* 137ff.). It is this concern with the relation of unity and being that motivates Plotinus, when he says:

> It is by the one that all beings are beings, both those which are primarily beings and those which are in any sense said to be among beings. For what could anything be if it was not one? For if things are deprived of the one which is predicated of them, they are not those things.
>
> (*Enneads* VI.9.1.1–4 [trans. Armstrong])

Not having oneness means, according to Plotinus, losing the status of being a thing or entity, and therefore being one is primary. It is both essential for being and ultimately prior to being in the metaphysical hierarchy of things. For this reason, unity must be connected to the first principle.

This issue is further connected to the notion of intelligibility, and therefore a short excursion to epistemology is needed. To the extent that it is possible, in this chapter I shall try to steer free of epistemological issues (to which Chapter 5 will be dedicated). Yet where the striving for availability for cognition coincides or, better yet, directly motivates metaphysical thinking, these issues must be taken into account. In ancient philosophy, metaphysics goes hand in hand with epistemology, and a rigid separation between the two would be impossible, and would probably have violated the self-understanding of ancient philosophers. In the same vein, being one something, a determinate entity, is essential for its availability to intellection. Undefined masses without unity do not allow the differentiation needed for thought. Things both fall apart and become unknowable without a fixed identity. From these speculations the

Neoplatonists conclude that unity is both metaphysically and epistemologically prior. To the perennial ancient question of why and how the many derive from the one, the Neoplatonists answer that there is an ultimate cause and principle, the One, which causes everything in existence and functions as an ultimate explanation for all being.

Additionally to the metaphysical and epistemic priority they detected in oneness with respect to being, the Neoplatonists relied on crucial evidence in Plato and Aristotle. First, they had learned from the *Republic* that above all beings there is a Form of the good. Good is beyond the finite existence and nature of other Forms. This super-form gives everything else its intelligibility and goodness, just as the sun illuminates and makes everything perceptible (e.g. *Resp*. 6.509a–b). The fact that the plurality of being is good, and composes a beautifully structured and harmonious whole, is explained by an existence of a prior principle, the Good. Secondly, Plato's *Timaeus* provided them a mythical story of a demiurge, a creator of the cosmos, although this creator differs from an ultimate origin in creating the cosmos according to a pre-existing model (e.g. 28c–29a). Thirdly, they inherited and, for their own part, continued the early history of the cosmological argument for God's existence. Aristotle argued for an unmoved mover as an ultimate physical principle: that which sets the world in motion. Because all movement requires a mover and there cannot be an infinite series of causes and effects, there must be unmoved movers (*Ph.* 8.5, esp. 256a4–28, b13–24). A study of nature, therefore, includes a doctrine about the first source and principle (*archē*) of motion. The Neoplatonic interpretation of this heritage is to deny Aristotle's apparent conviction that the first mover is an intellect (*nous*), some kind of perfect active intelligibility of the world. Since the intellect coincides with the truth about the intelligible structure of the universe, it must not be unqualifiedly one but also many – it is systematic and complex – and therefore it cannot be the kind of single ultimate principle they are seeking for. It must derive from something more fundamental. This is a one beyond being, beyond the many: the One (Plotinus, *Enn.* III.8.9, V.4.1; see Gerson 2005a).

These developments show that the Neoplatonists ask not just what being or existence is, but also a further question: how is it that that which is, exists (e.g. Narbonne 1994: 26, 58)? In reply, they combined Platonic and Aristotelian ideas in the attempt, common in ancient philosophy, to find an ultimate explanation.

Constancy versus change

A connection between epistemology and metaphysics not unlike the one already visited may also be seen in the Neoplatonic tendency towards a hierarchy between not just the one cause and the being that originates from it, but levels internal to being. Platonic metaphysics strives to establish some intelligibility, fixity and constancy *both* in the world and in our thoughts (Silverman 2002: 1–3). For example, forms are postulated to explain both the recurring and orderly features of the world we perceive and the human mind's possibility for knowledge. The term "intelligible realm" (Greek *noēton*, that which is attained by *nous* and not by perception, *aisthēsis*) used in the research literature as a counterpart for the term "sensible" also testifies to this epistemic role in Platonism: the "higher" reality postulated to explain the sensible reality is by its very nature understandable, penetrable to a correct kind of reasoning.

The Neoplatonists start from the Platonic insight that the perceptible universe and its particulars present several challenges to cognition and knowledge. Plato noted that sensible objects suffer from compresence of opposites, that is, they can be, for example, both larger and smaller at the same time depending on the context in which they are inspected. Simmias is both taller than Socrates and shorter than Phaedo. Is he both tall and short at the same time (*Phd.* 102c–103a)? Despite their sympathy for Parmenides' chosen direction of explanation, the conclusion that perhaps the ultimate nature of being that the appearances fail to reveal would be simply one, was unpalatable to the Platonists. Plato's Parmenides attacks the conception that being could be many by saying that in that

case the same things must be both like and unlike (*Prm.* 127e2–8). Plato's solution is to postulate another level of true being in which forms such as unlikeness and likeness are self-identically just what they are and not their contraries. This leaves only beings in the sensible realm in the cognitive and metaphysical loophole where things are also their contraries. Therefore, they are not real beings, but dependent for their existence on something that is unqualified.

Aristotle understood Plato to distrust ordinary objects of perception not so much because of the compresence of opposites but because they are changing and thus offer no permanent basis for thought (*Metaph.* A 6, 987a30). In the course of time, things lose and acquire properties and even come to have, at different times, contrary properties. To grasp, or to give an account or a definition of a changing thing presents severe difficulties. Nonetheless, the universe is not in complete disorder or flux but displays recurring features, some order and regulation. To explain this puzzling combination of order and disorder, stability and change, another level of reality is postulated, one that is eternal and unchanging, the image of which the sensible reality is. The permanent entities of the immaterial, independent and ungenerated level function as explanations for the sensible realm in two ways: they are both that which explains the properties and phenomena of the sensible realm and that which generates it, brings it into existence. They are the true objects of knowledge. For these items to function as proper explanations, they must really exist, or so the Platonists believed.

As we have seen, the One is, ultimately, explanatory of phenomena of the sensible realm. Although it is a metaphysically real first cause of the existence of being (and also of the derivative existence of the sensible realm, through the intelligible), it is simultaneously a principle of explanation of all perceptible unity and determination. This double role as a causal and explanatory principle is not without its problems. An example involving numbers reveals some of its problems. Let numbers be ordered into odd numbers on the right and even numbers on the left. The principle of such an order is different from the order itself, but how would that principle also be the *cause* of the numbers in such an order (Gerson 2005b)? Problems aside, we

can see here a striving for an explanatory scheme that would, at its foundation, be as simple as possible. But because of that same absolute simplicity, the first principle cannot explain all the phenomena alone. Multiplicity and intelligibility require other, secondary levels of explanation. Perhaps somewhat paradoxically the Neoplatonic metaphysics is infamous for the many-level hierarchy and sometimes chaotic multitude of entities it, in the end, presents as explanatory for the sensible realm. The intelligible reality grows into a graded hierarchy with classes of entities other than mere Platonic forms or ideas and the One ultimately causing and explaining them.

Basic principles of metaphysics

Neoplatonic metaphysics is driven by certain dogmas and principles that all or most of the school's proponents adhered to. These are either inherited from ancient philosophy's mainstream or developed as answers to various dilemmas concerning, among other things, the coming to be of multiplicity from the One. Most of these principles explicate and regulate the hierarchical ordering of the Neoplatonic metaphysics. The hierarchy results from Neoplatonists' interest, shared with Plato and Aristotle, in determining the priority and posteriority relations structuring reality. As they see it, the articulation of reality is the articulation of the relational patterns ordering being (O'Meara 1996). Before the exposition of the entities and classes of entities in Neoplatonic metaphysics, let us therefore acquaint ourselves with some of the crucial principles.

Principle I. "All that exists is caused by a single first cause"
As we have already seen, the existence of diversity and multiplicity is explained as having a single unified source. The way things are caused by it is not creation by an anthropomorphic God but a single, bare and disinterested ultimate principle at the end of a chain of causes that produces what we perceive in the universe. We thus have the ultimate link in which all chains of causation and explanation end, the One, which in itself is a perfect unity.

In answering the question of why a perfect unity of this kind would create anything, the Neoplatonists were supported by a commonly shared assumption in antiquity that perfection is not just self-sufficiency but that true perfection and goodness "overflows". The demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus* is naturally well disposed, wishing that the world would resemble its own goodness as much as possible (29e). In the tradition, this benevolence gets the shape of overflowing goodness (in Latin known as *bonum est diffusivum sui*).

Principle II. The principle of spontaneous generation
By necessity, perfection is such that it is always reflected outside, tending towards reproduction of itself. If the source is good and perfect, it generates something good as the result of its own activity. As Proclus says: "Whatever is complete proceeds to generate those things which it is capable of producing, imitating in its turn the one originative principle in the universe" (*Elements of Theology*, prop. 25). This recalls Aristotle's prior actuality principle (e.g. *Metaph.* Θ 8, 1049b23–29).

For the Neoplatonist, goodness is, by necessity, directed outside, creating something in its wake. This outwardly directed activity is either the production of something other than the cause or an affection in something other than the cause. Because of the nature of the origin, its perfection and completeness, this production in no way diminishes the source.

The dependence relations between the source and its products are determined by causal relationships. Without a cause, the effect would not have come about. For this reason, the Neoplatonists take the independent existence of the effect to be somewhat questionable.

Principle III. The principle of non-reciprocal dependence
The generated thing is always dependent, for both its features and existence, on its cause, but not vice versa. Of the Aristotelian priority relations, the Neoplatonists give crucial role to the "priority by nature" that Aristotle himself thought was central for all other meanings of priority, and refers to as having been used by Plato.

What is prior in this sense "can be without other things, while the others cannot be without them" (Arist. *Metaph.* Δ 11, 1019a1–4; O'Meara 1996: 69). The caused and thus the metaphysically posterior in the hierarchy is always dependent on its cause and origin, while the prior is independent of the posterior. This dependence also holds for the content or character of what is created. The cause bestows its own character to the effect. The cause does not create another thing identical to itself, but the Neoplatonists believe that if the effect did not communicate anything of the cause, it would not be capable of arising from that particular cause (e.g. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 18).

If the top of the explanatory and causal hierarchy is simplicity and perfection, designed to explain and generate the world of plurality and imperfection, we may expect that whatever is postulated between the two will display a gradation from perfection to imperfection and from unity to plurality. Combined with the principle of non-reciprocal dependence we shall have a sequence of causation that has implications for the value of what is generated. When the One or God generates the hypostasis Intellect (both to be discussed in more detail below), the Intellect is by necessity a deficient entity in comparison to its source. Hence, causal relations also turn out to be relationships of value and levels of perfection.

Principle IV. The principle of causal relationships
The cause is always not just distinct from the effect but also better and more perfect than it, or, as Proclus puts it: "Every productive cause is superior to that which it produces" (*Elements of Theology*, prop. 7; cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* V.1.6.37–9; Rangos 1999). In Plato's *Republic*, the Form of the Good is not only prior in the sense of being the independent source on which other forms are dependent, but it is also superior to them in power and dignity (6.509b9–10). In Neoplatonism, this principle holds explicitly for all causal relationships. In the context of the big picture of Neoplatonic metaphysics it entails that the sequence of created things is not a horizontal series of equally perfect and qualitatively indistinguishable items, each item

depending on the previous one; rather, we have a vertical succession of things of *different rank*.

A continuation and extension of the last principle is the Neoplatonic vision of relations of universality: the more perfect is also simpler and more universal (e.g. Plotinus *Enn.* V.4.1.4–5, VI.2.13.7–9; cf. O'Meara 1996: 72). At the top of the hierarchy is the One, because in order for anything to be an identifiable and graspable thing, it must be one. All other features and properties are posterior to it. The hierarchy generated by the One presents an unfolding of properties and formations, gaining more and more details the lower one comes down the ladder. The metaphor used by Plotinus is that of a seed: a Form of human being contains all possible configurations of a human in a similar manner to that of a seed, which contains all the information for the plant (*Enn.* IV.8.6.6–10, V.9.6.11–20). Because the human being applies to more instances than, say, a snub nose – only some human beings have a snub nose, others are straight or aquiline – humanity must be higher up in the hierarchy than "snubnosedness".

If these principles were inserted into a suitable computer program, what kind of virtual universe would be created out of these ingredients? The universe would have one source and origin that would be the most perfect thing we can imagine since there is no cause "above" it. This one cause would generate something else by the necessity of its perfection, and the generated thing would be inferior to it. Again, the produced entity, although inferior to the single source, would nonetheless reflect its goodness in its own, albeit inferior, manner, and therefore produce something as good as possible, although again inferior to itself, and so on. At each level, variety and differentiation grows, whereas universality diminishes. This is the barest outline of the Neoplatonic hierarchy of being, depicting something that in the history of philosophy became known as *emanation*, and that the Neoplatonists themselves described as generation (*genesis*), outpouring or unfolding, consisting, as we shall see, of procession (*prohodos*) and reversion (*epistrophē*). Emanation refers to the way in which the multiplicity of the beings and properties of the sensible realm

unfolds itself in the hierarchy of generation from the One, and has a place within that hierarchy depending on its immediate cause.

It is important to note that the derivation of multiplicity is necessary and atemporal. The generation in question is not like the personal creation that can be found in several monotheistic religious systems. Rather, it happens by the necessity of the nature of the supreme cause and every cause following after it. The terminology of "before", "after" and "sequence" is metaphorical; it is used to describe the metaphysical order of priority and posteriority, and hence *not* a production that would happen in temporal sequence. Each level that is generated explains simultaneously and at all times what human beings perceive and experience in the world at any given moment.

Can anything whatsoever come into existence through this process? Are its possibilities infinite? Does the sequence of acts of generations extend into infinity? Ancient philosophy is committed to a conception of possibility that is always, sooner or later in the history of the cosmos, realized. Also, the Neoplatonic descending *scalae* of generation does not go on into infinity but stops at the material and perceivable universe.

Principle V. The principle of plenitude

The best possible universe is always also a full universe. It contains everything there is, and thus there are no unactualized possibilities. The *scalae* of generation stops when all possibilities are produced in the universe. Arthur Lovejoy formulates the principle in the following way: "no genuine potentiality of being can remain unfulfilled" (Lovejoy 1936: 52). The universe is complete, with everything in it generated by the first principle, "aided" by the intermediate causes in between it and the sensible properties and entities.

These are some of the most effective principles of Neoplatonic metaphysics. The list is hardly exhaustive, and we shall continue it as further principles become required. At this stage we can note that the system described gives rise to particular philosophical concerns. First, how exactly is the multiplicity of actualized potentialities we see in the universe generated from unity? If the ultimate cause is

an absolute unity, and if the effect or generated level always displays, although imperfectly, the nature of its source and origin, from whence come multiplicity and differentiation? Why and how does the unity become multiplicity? The basic principles seem enough to create only a series of entities – the basic levels – and remain silent about any horizontal variety. Secondly, whichever way the relation between different layers in this hierarchy is generally explained, the fact seems to remain that there is a wide gap between the two original Platonic levels: intelligible and sensible. As with any relation between two extremely different levels of reality, it is bound to be problematic. The multiplication of explanatory layers "above" the sensible may not create a bridge from what we see to what, according to the Platonists, really and separately exists. Thirdly, despite or perhaps owing to its orderliness and accompanied structural beauty, the rigidity of this model may turn out to be extremely tricky; causation is always from top to bottom in it, and therefore it seems likely that all relations from the bottom *upwards* will be inherently awkward. We shall see that this presents problems, for instance, for Plotinus' account of perception, learning and emotion. Fourthly, at the level of the sensible we find not just well-organized and beautiful material things, but ugliness, failure, imperfection and vice. Whence do these appear in the causation basically defined as a generated series of unity and goodness? Since the perfect and good One produces items that are also perfect and good (although not quite in the same way and to the same degree as it is itself), and, furthermore, if evil does not have an ultimate origin other than the One – which would imply a dualism of good and evil, and hence a clear departure from the system described above with only one ultimate cause – its generation within the system remains a challenge.

The hypostases in Plotinus

Let us next look into the levels and entities generated by and according to the principles sketched out in the previous section. As in the following chapters, we shall start with Plotinus' system, which,

although hierarchical, is relatively simple and forms a convenient foundation for all later developments. Besides being a starting-point for later Neoplatonism, Plotinus is the only author whose works we possess in full and, furthermore, are treatises written to expound his views rather than commentaries on Plato's or Aristotle's works. Hence his philosophy as a whole presents fewer serious interpretative problems than many of his successors. After explicating its basic structure, we shall proceed by observing the kinds of additions and departures his followers introduced into Neoplatonism, and studying what motivated these changes philosophically. In this context it will not be possible to review the thought of each of the approximately ten leading proponents of the school on each topic discussed. Nor is their position *vis-à-vis* a given question always clear (owing to the extant source material or the current phase of scholarly work). We shall therefore try to outline the representative developments within the movement. In the case of metaphysics, we shall target the main changes in the understanding of the nature of the first principle, as well as of both the sensible and intelligible realms. We shall also strive to see the reasons for the ever-growing proliferation of entities and levels. These entities will be indicated here with a capital letter (One, Intellect, Soul, etc.) to distinguish them from other uses of the same terms.

Traditionally, the levels generated in the way described above have been called hypostases. This, although customary, is somewhat misleading. Although the later Neoplatonists employ the term in much the same sense as contemporary research literature, Plotinus uses the term *hypostasis* for several kinds of entities that are immaterial and independent, and does not reserve it for these levels of existence. The entities under inspection here he often calls, rather, principles, *archai*. They are (i) basic principles of explanation or fundamental explanatory categories; (ii) paradigms imitated by the lower levels and entities; and (iii) causes that actually generate everything there is (cf. Gerson 1994: 3–4).

At the top of Plotinus' hierarchy is the One (*Hen*, also "god", *theos*). Besides the perennial question of ancient philosophy, namely how the many derive from the one (discussed in the first section of this

chapter), Plotinus has been accredited with posing another, new question about the one: namely, why does the One exist and why is it what it is (Gatti 1996: 28)? As we have seen, the One is an absolute unity admitting no multiplicity or compositeness; otherwise it would not fit into the role of ultimate, unique explanatory principle. It is described as formless, that is, without any determination, as well as infinite it its power to generate (*Enn.* VI.7.17.17, 40, 33.4; VI.9.3.39; V.5.10.18–22).

Further, we have seen that the One is identified with the super-Form presiding over other Forms, the Good of Plato's *Republic*. The Good of the *Republic* is said to be, besides goodness, "other" than science and truth, "above" them and surpassing them in beauty (6.509a–b). Plotinus follows this idea of the One as transcendent to being. Being is varied and many, whereas the One is absolute simplicity, and hence it is not among beings but beyond being (*epekeina ousias*; *Enn.* I.1.8.9–10, V.3.13.1–6). As transcendent goodness, the One is also perfection (*teleion*). It is a fully perfect actuality (*Enn.* VI.8.20.9–16). Here, Plotinus departs from Aristotle and much of ancient thinking, in which actuality and perfection are connected with being (*ousia*). Perfection is the actualization of one's *ousia*. The One is a perfect actualization of its own particular kind of *ousia*: a being actually beyond being, beyond substance and limitation (cf. Gerson 1994: 17; Bussanich 1996).

As perfectly actual, the One cannot lack anything and therefore it will not desire anything beyond its own nature. It is self-sufficient (*autarkes*) (V.3.13.17), to the extent that it has no two-way relations to anything external. What the One creates changes it in no way. For the created this relation of having been created is real; for the creator these are mere extrinsic or Cambridge properties, that is, they involve no (intrinsic) changes at the creating or generating end (Bussanich 1996: 45). The self-sufficiency extends to the origin of the One. Since the One is designed to fill the role of the ultimate cause and explanation of everything else, it cannot itself have an external cause. But Plotinus thinks that it cannot be uncaused either, but that it has one real relation, a self-relation. It is a cause for itself, *aition heautou*, or, in Latin, *causa sui* (VI.8.13.55, 14.41; Beierwaltes 1999).

The manner in which the One can be said to be a voluntary cause and create voluntarily is slightly controversial. It is certainly the case that the One is described as paradigmatic, autonomous free will or self-determination (VI.8.20.32–3). Yet it is also necessarily what it is (the emanationist reading; VI.8.10.15–20). The necessity in question is entirely internal to the One; it could not be a first principle if it was constrained by something external to it. Yet Plotinus ends his treatise of the free will and the will of the One by saying that the One is entirely what it wills, and primarily his will, thus strengthening the voluntarist reading (VI.8.21.14–16; for a longer discussion, see Gerson 1994: 26–32). In the One, the will and the being coincide to the extent that even if there was a possibility for the One to become something else, it does not wish to be anything else but is what it is by necessity (*hupo anagkēs*) (VI.8.13.36). Therefore the One creates out of the necessity of its nature, but uncoerced by anything external to it.

As austere unity, the One cannot, in principle, admit predicates or any formation, and it is only possible to describe it metaphorically or negatively. We shall revisit this theme in Chapter 5. Here it is enough to note that in practice, Plotinus does describe the One in a number of ways adding, sometimes, the qualification "as it were" and "as if" (*hoion*); the One is, for example, as it were conscious of itself. Owing to its being the cause of everything that exists and is good, Plotinus is reluctant to deny the One any central positive attributes, such as "conscious", "alive" (or "love" as we shall later see) and so on. As long as the attributes are not explicitly against or in opposition to its nature, the causal dependency demands that the One somehow incorporates them in its overflowing nature. Outside its nature must remain duality and thereby both multiplicity and intelligibility, perception (since perception is directed outside and the One, being everything there is, does not have anything external to perceive), and all ugliness and failure as well as desire (because this would imply a lack in its nature, whereas it is perfection).

By its overflowing nature the One generates everything there is, and it is thus, on one hand, none of the existing things but beyond them, their cause, independent and separate from them. On the

other hand everything is generated by the One and reflects to some extent or other its nature, unity and goodness (e.g. V.3.15.11–15, VI.9.1.3–4). In a qualified sense, then, the One can be said to be all things, or perhaps better in all things. It is omnipresent (e.g. III.8.9.25, V.2.2.24–9). But if everything is part of the One in this qualified sense, what makes something a thing in its own right, with an identity distinct from the source? Central here are Plotinus' doctrines of internal and external activities (*energeia*) as well as "procession" (*prohodos*) and "reversion" or "conversion" (*epistrophē*). Plotinus claims that:

> In each and every thing there is an activity which belongs to essence (*ousia*) and one from essence; and that which belongs to essence is the activity which is each particular thing, and the other activity derives from that first one, and necessarily follows it in every respect, being different from the thing itself. (V.4.2.27–30)

Thus, every distinct thing in ontology is constituted by an activity characteristic only of itself. This internal activity (*energeia tēs ousias*) is accompanied by an external activity (*energeia ek tēs ousias*) derived from and dependent on the internal one. The internal activity is complete, and unchanged by its generation of the lower activity (Gerson 1994: 25; Emilsson 1999: 274–6). The external activity is that which in a sense becomes the next ontological level, a kind of pre-entity. What makes the product another self-subsisting entity in its own right is its conversion to its source. (Of course, the absolute and self-caused One is the only unqualifiedly self-subsisting thing.) This brings to the fore yet another principle active in all Neoplatonism.

Principle VI. The principle of cyclic activity

This states, again in Proclus' formulation, that "All that proceeds from any principle reverts with respect of its being upon that from which it proceeds" (Procl., *Elements of Theology* prop. 31; cf. Beierwaltes 1965: 133; Dillon 1987a: xviii–xix). We shall later examine the principle in action not just in metaphysics but, and

perhaps more appropriately and approachably from the present point of view, in the soul.

This conversion, it has plausibly been suggested, is a metaphysical counterpart and explanation of the striving of all living things towards something, towards goodness, unity and continuity (Dillon & Gerson 2004: xxi). In Neoplatonic metaphysics, being an entity distinguishable from others requires two things: the production of something other than the cause or source; and the establishing of this something as a thing with its own characteristics. This is done by the conversion of the production towards its source, which is not only the effective cause of the product but also its final cause: that at which it aims (e.g. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 34). One might claim that the conversion establishes the new identity in three ways. First, the bare act of reverting is already, as it were, a change of the course given to the thing by its source. Thus, by reverting the product gains a characteristic that the mere external activity or procession from the source did not embody. Secondly, because the conversion is a result of a desire towards the source, the thing generated must somehow be, as it were, conscious of its separation from the source. In desiring to go back towards the source, the production, so to speak, acknowledges itself as a distinguishable thing. Thirdly, in conversion, the thing creates its own interpretation of its source. In turning to look back on its source from some distance, in a certain manner it analyses, breaks down or dissects its source, thus giving rise to a new level of reality with its own characteristics. The later Neoplatonists called this process that of self-constitution (the emergence of self-constituted entities, *authupostata*; Steel 2006). Note again that all the phases in the cycle rest–procession–reversion are atemporal, non-spatial and immaterial. The temporal and spatial vocabulary strives to explicate ontological relations, and especially the priority, posteriority and dependence relations.

The role of the One in metaphysics becomes threefold. We have seen that the One is an efficient cause of everything there is in the universe. It was also established that it is the ultimate explanation of everything's unity and existence. Finally, since everything reverts

back to its origin, the One is the final cause of everything that exists. Following Aristotle's doctrines of perception and thought (*De an.* 2.12, 424a18–28; 3.4, 429a16–17, 429a24), the potentiality of the next level needs an object to be actualized. The Intellect becomes actual by turning to and contemplating the One. Thereby the unity and goodness of the One also become normatively regulative ideals for all following existing things.

If the first principle is single, how does multiplicity enter into metaphysics? The principle of the variety of being is in the Intellect (*Nous*, pronounced "noose"). The One generates everything there is, but its immediate generation is the next hypostasis, the Intellect. The Intellect embodies ideas from two sources: it corresponds to Aristotle's God, that thinks itself according to the participation in the intelligible (e.g. *Metaph.* Λ 7, 1072b19–21). There is a paradigmatic thought activity in which the objects of thinking are internal to the thinker. For Aristotle this thought activity is the highest principle, whereas Plotinus, as we have seen, objects that owing to its complexity, it cannot be the ultimate first principle (Gerson 2005a: 206). Plotinus combines the Aristotelian doctrine with Plato's idea that the intelligible structures and features of the cosmos exist and are preserved as changeless and eternal forms to which the soul has an innate connection. Since this real being is varied, it imports complexity into the paradigmatic thinking. These forms come to be understood as the contents or the thoughts within the Intellect. The Intellect, Plotinus is clear, is not any of the individual intellects, but "an Intellect of all things" (*Enn.* III.8.8.41–2), comprising intelligible formations such as principles of species and central notions needed for individuation as well as dialectic, for example.

This is the point where multiplicity is introduced into metaphysics. It happens on two fronts. First, let us think of an overflowing water source (albeit one that is like the horn of plenty or abundance, never itself diminishing in its flowing). Once the water comes from the source it can be identified as different from the source. We would seem to have two things, the water and its source, which, although connected, can be conceptually distinguished from one another. Unity has become duality, one has become two. Furthermore, as

we have seen, the procession from the One not only flows from it but also reverts back to its source and, as it were, looks or intuits its source. It thereby establishes itself as a subject of that intuition, different from its object. The duality between subject and object has been created.

Before moving from this duality to variety, one interpretative note has to be made. The classification of this kind of theory among later or present theories such as idealism or realism is bound to be anachronistic, but a comparison with the later theories might make its particularity clearer. The Neoplatonic standpoint resembles modern realism in taking the metaphysical entities and objects of thought as being metaphysically real and independent of any one human mind, but it also contains seeds of later idealism in placing the objects of thought in a sense inside the mind, as results of the mind's activity. This is thinking activity that at its peak creates nature and existence, but the mind or thinker that generates being is raised above individual minds; it is hypostasized. In sum, the Neoplatonists deny a strict separation of thinking and being, but in a subtle way, wanting to maintain central tenets of metaphysical realism.

Let us then concentrate on the way in which the theory introduces multiplicity, or the variety of being. The Intellect is not just some bare other with respect to the One; it is also itself the multiplicity of being. After all, being hardly resembles the undifferentiated monolith in, for example, Stanley Kubrik's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The Intellect must explain the intellectual design in the universe with a complex intelligible structure; it gives rise both to the variety in our conceptualizations and thinking and to the variety of being. It creates reality: the things themselves that human conceptualizations attempt to grasp. This happens in its reversion; in turning back towards the One, the Intellect interprets the emanation from the One as differentiated, as the multiplicity of being (*Enn.* V.1.7.6–24). Out of the emanation, the Intellect generates and maintains itself, the multiplicity of intelligible being. The result is that the Intellect consists of Platonic Forms or Ideas: the true or real beings. It is the multiplicity of these Ideas in a unity of some sort. It explains the complexity inherent in thinking, for example, that 5 is odd and 4 is even, and that these are

two distinct truths, yet connected in important ways (Gerson 1994: 66). It is the principle of all harmony and order found in the universe, thereby explaining whatever is beautiful in it.

Let us recall the principles according to which the effect is generated by the cause. These stated, among other things, that the cause bestows its own nature on the caused items. How can the Intellect, then, be something many rather than one? An answer of a kind is given by the fact that the unity creating multiplicity is not just some unity, but perfect unity, that is, unity that is simultaneously supremely good. Could overabundant perfection create something differing from its own nature? Plotinus seems to embrace the idea that the One is capable of producing something other than itself, a nature different from that of its own (D'Ancona Costa 1996: 368–75). As we shall see, the later Neoplatonists try to alleviate the opposition between simplicity and multiplicity by, among other things, postulating mediating entities between the One and the Intellect.

So far, we have the principles of unity and the multiplicity of the stable features and universal, or at least recurring, structures of the cosmos. But the universe we perceive is hardly eternal or stable. Rather, it is full of movement and change. Moreover, the cause of some of the changes within the cosmos is difficult to track down all the way to the One. Some of the moving entities in the universe seem to have a principle of life and movement from within. Some of the inhabitants of the cosmos grow, nourish themselves or move without being apparently affected or caused to do so by an external cause within that same cosmos. According to Aristotle, in plants and animals this is owing to the principle of life, of movement and sensation, the soul (e.g. *De an.* bk 1). Here we encounter the next hypostasis or level, the Soul (*Psuchē*): another metaphysical entity that perhaps even more emphatically than the Intellect sounds like something human. The Soul is an instrument or mediator of the generation of the sensible by the Intellect (*Enn.* V.1.6.45–6). At its most basic level, the Soul can be understood as a hypostasized, reified principle of temporal life. While the Intellect is the actuality of thinking, nothing in it explains *life* particularly. Thus the Soul is one more step towards the world perceived. It is the something that

explains the dynamic nature of the sensible, its desire and striving. The Soul explains the movement, growth, perceptual consciousness and action that we see in the world. While the Soul itself is an eternal or timeless entity, its acts create or happen in temporal succession. It gives this succession an order and direction, thus producing also past–present–future order and dimensions (*Enn.* III.7.11).

But why, one may ask, do we need a transcendent principle of something that seems as immanent as life? In Neoplatonic thinking, the individual souls are not enough to explain why individual living things share certain crucial functions. Individual souls are many, and in an attempt to explain these phenomena as simply as possible, they postulate a single principle that explains the multiple realizations. The fact that, for instance, perception and nutrition function in much the same way in several living beings must, in their view, be due to a single universal origin of these capacities. This is the (hypostasis) Soul of which all individual souls (including the World Soul discussed in Chapter 3) are parts (*Enn.* IV.3.4.14–22). Similarly, the fact that both human experience and the world seem to share the same temporal dimensions and direction of time is, for them, a mark that these phenomena have a unified transcendent origin. Time, as we shall see, is also a transcendent principle. This is the general Neoplatonic tendency towards top-downism mentioned in the Preface and Chapter 1.

The Soul is needed to function as an intermediary between the Intellect and the perceptible universe. This is visible in the peculiarity of Plotinus' thinking of the lifeless world – stones, mountains and so on – as ensouled. For them to have a share of the Soul in them is for them to be intelligibly structured: for them to have an organization of some sort. Since the Intellect is an atemporal multiplicity-in-unity embracing the most universal differentiations, it cannot easily explain the manifold formations that matter takes on the most basic levels of existence. Following Plato, who hesitated over whether such insignificant things as nails, hair and mud or things that seem predominantly material such as (embodied) human beings had Forms of their own (Pl. *Prm.* 130c–d), Plotinus' Soul becomes a principle of further differentiation and structuring mediating between the

changeless and eternal Intellect, which incorporates the most universal features of the cosmos, and the changing, temporal sensible realm full of minutiae and particularities.

From an Aristotelian point of view, it would seem that Plotinus here confounds two issues: the principle of organization and the principle of movement, life and cognition. Aristotle postulates vegetative souls but does not think of lifeless things such as stones as ensouled. For him, the soul is precisely that which animates. From the Platonist point of view we may here detect not just a departure but a dissatisfaction with the Aristotelian theory. Both believe that matter gets its constitution from a formal aspect. But the (Neo)platonic particularity is to ask also where the universe gets this organization from. Where do the forms that organize the cosmos come from? For living things, Aristotle may appeal to generation and reproduction, but these, too, must have an ultimate origin somewhere. Furthermore, the existence of and organizing principle in lifeless things seems, from the Neoplatonic point of view, to be an unexplained starting-point in Aristotelianism. Besides exploiting fairly difficult and abstract Aristotelian notions of first mover and active intellect, Plotinus follows the demiurgic story of the *Timaeus* and likens the generation of organization in, for example, stones to its appearance in living beings. Both are organized because the Soul has formed them according to the principles in the Intellect. (Note that Plotinus further distinguishes a particular aspect of the Soul, namely something called the World-Soul or the Soul of the All. This principle will be discussed in Chapter 3.)

If unity, order, structure, differentiation and all kinds of intelligibility of the universe are explained by the hypostases, what role does the sensible have? This will be the topic of Chapter 3. Here it suffices to say that the material is a combination of matter and organizing principles, so-called rational forming principles, sometimes also called reason-principles or seminal principles (*logoi* or *logoi spermatikoi*). These can be thought of as some kind of normal causation, immanent in the sensible realm, but they anticipate in some stronger sense what is to come, how the thing can develop in time. In any case, they have their power from the separate forms. The formations in the sensible and the changes of objects over time

are governed by the power of the separate Forms (Plotinus, *Enn.* II.7.3.7–10, III.2.12.31–3, IV.4.39.6–18, VI.3.3.16). The sensible, material realm is the final step in emanation. It is furthest from the goodness of the source, the One, and hence displays most deficiency with respect to it. It is also the level on which we see the unfolding of being at its most extended form. It displays: extension; all kinds of properties and qualities, colours and configurations; both recurring and individual differences; wholes and parts; action, virtue and vice. Matter, as we shall see, is formless and without measure, liable to excess or defect. Without form it would not tend to good or beautiful proportion. At its best, it functions as a kind of surface or mirror for the images of forms to be manifested. It does not add to the qualities of the images that the forms make, apart from the differences produced by the form sometimes being incapable of structuring matter according to its nature (*Enn.* I.8.14.40–50).

This description of Plotinus' metaphysical system may be summarized in the following schema:

The One
The Intellect
The Soul
The sensible realm
Matter

Let us consider an example of how this hierarchy explains what we experience in our life of perception. Consider a brown horse that you see galloping across a field. This horse is an identifiable and unified being because it is caused by the ultimate principle of unity and identity, the One. Its fine structure, which makes it complete and well functioning as a horse, is due to the goodness of this first principle. Its beautiful proportion, too, ultimately derives from the same principle, mediated by the Intellect and the Soul. Furthermore, the horse has a universal, intelligible form and structure that can be abstracted from the particular one that we see. It is an animal, a mammal and a horse; it has brown colour and other properties in suitable combination. Its properties and the "horsehood" they form are secured to it by the

intelligible principles that are the contents of the Intellect: the Forms. Since these principles form an explanation that has several parts, as explanations, they must be inferior to the single One itself, and hence due to the Intellect. The particular horse is also alive, being itself the origin of its own living functions and motion, and displaying inclinations and strivings. This is explained by the Soul, by its being an ensouled, animated thing. Finally, the horse is also temporal, bodily and material. It is extended, may have a cut in its leg, and it lives and functions in time. If it is not particularly good at hearing or galloping fast, this is mostly owing to the fact that the actualization or mirroring of the intelligible principles in matter is not entirely successful.

In this metaphysical and explanatory hierarchy, there are two especially problematic ruptures. First, as we have seen, the way in which the One creates multiplicity, the Intellect, is by no means philosophically unproblematic, and we shall see the later Neoplatonists struggle with this dilemma. Secondly, the problem inherited from Plato – namely, how the intelligible reality of eternity, stability and immateriality is related to the sensible sphere of time, change and matter – is far from solved by the introduction of an intermediate entity, the Soul, in Platonic metaphysics. Again, we shall follow the Neoplatonists' continuous efforts to formulate participation in a way that would be acceptable in this regard. In these respects, later Neoplatonism is a response to problems inherent in Plato and Plotinus. It must also be noted, however, that the path chosen by them, namely, the amplification of Plotinus' relatively simple metaphysical structure, not only solves problems but also creates them.

Later Neoplatonism and the proliferation of metaphysical entities

Plotinus' system opens up two possible directions in which it can be developed, both courses of thought within which experiments were made by the later Neoplatonists.

Plotinus strove for a metaphysical hierarchy that would fulfil explanatory demands and be governed by principles that would

secure the continuity of the procession of coming to be, proceeding from the One and ending in the sensible realm. Yet one can wonder, together with Plotinus' immediate pupil Porphyry, whether a rigid separation of the three hypostases from one another is favourable to that continuity, and whether the division of functions into three main classes – unity and goodness, multiplicity and intelligibility, and life and time – is philosophically sound. Especially the distinction between Soul and Intellect may seem forced or artificial. The contemporary reader may in any case feel that at each level, the generation of the lower level involves an anthropomorphic explanation; the One creates something, a pre-Intellect, that only becomes itself by returning towards the One. Intellect's final constitution, that is, the "fall" and separation of the Intellect from the One, happens ultimately because of its act of self-assertion: its audacity (*tolma*) to want to be itself (*Enn.* VI.9.5.29). Similarly, in turning back towards its source, the Soul establishes itself as something other than Intellect: a Soul. Now, if one grants the explanatory tendency into an explanation that would be simple and in no need of other explanations, the necessity for there to be something other than absolute unity, namely the multiplicity, is in itself perhaps a good enough reason to postulate an Intellect. The details of its anthropomorphic motivations to revert and be itself can be dismissed as metamorphic ways of describing the relation between the two. However, in the case of the Intellect and Soul, there seem to be no equally substantial metaphysical reasons. We have seen that unlike the Intellect, the Soul is an intermediary between the Intellect and the sensible realm, but we may wonder whether it actually solves the difficulties of participation between the intelligible and the sensible (for participation, see pp. 68–70). The other primary role for the Soul is to explain time and living functions. But would not particular souls be enough to explain them? Do we actually need a hypostasis Soul at all? Perhaps the functions of the Soul could be divided between the Intellect, the particular souls and the sensible?

Reasoning like this may have led Porphyry sometimes to treat the hypostases as features of one and the same thing rather than distinct metaphysical entities. For instance, he collapsed the Soul

of the All (to be explicated in Chapter 3) with the hypostasis Soul. In the research literature, this tendency is called "telescoping" the hypostases (Lloyd 1967: 288). Another instance of this tendency was the reinterpretation of the relation between the One and Intellect or being. As we have noted, the coming to be of the multiplicity of being from the absolute One is somewhat mysterious, as is any relation between two levels of reality of such a different essential nature. In an anonymous commentary on the *Parmenides* sometimes attributed to Porphyry (Hadot 1968a; cf. Bechtle 1999), a solution is found in the Intellect's aspect, which acquires its contents from the One and is directed at contemplation of the One. This aspect of the Intellect may be highlighted at the expense of such intellection as produces the multiplicity of being. The Intellect is not just its external activity producing ever more refined multiplicity, but also that which keeps this multiplicity unified. This is the highest element in the noetic triad: its unified gaze at the One (Anonymous, *Commentary on the Parmenides*, fr. 5). Plotinus anticipates this kind of undivided *Nous* (*Enn.* V.9.8.20–22), but in the commentary, this higher aspect of the Intellect is identified simply as the One, thus rendering the One and the Intellect as aspects of one and the same thing. This move could revolutionize Plotinus' hierarchy because, when taken to its extreme, it leaves open only two possibilities: either the One has no separate, transcendent existence at all, and thereby what divinity and unity there is, is actually divinity and unity immanent in multiplicity (a kind of pantheism) (Wallis 1972: 118), or if the Intellect and its contents, or beings, are actually within the transcendent One, then there is no immanent being at all, whereby the One is everything that really exists (called "acosmism" by Wallis). Either way, the crucial bit of the hierarchy, the one-many, vanishes.

Even though some of these ideas did continue to have their proponents in the Neoplatonic movement, the prevalent tendency was the exact opposite of "telescoping": namely, the multiplication of levels and entities. It has been well formulated that the motivation of much of the later Neoplatonism was to see what things there are that have a separate existence, and to conclude that a real ontological distinction must be postulated to correspond to every genuine distinction

that can be made in thinking (Lloyd 1967: 298–9). When this idea is combined with another idea that Plotinus had, at least implicitly, also followed – namely, that what is more universal is also always higher up in the hierarchy – we get a much more elaborate, as well as confusing, hierarchy. In what follows we shall have a closer look at some philosophical motivations for the proliferation of levels.

To the question of how the One can be both an absolute and transcendent unity as well as the multiplicity immanent in being, the later Neoplatonists often choose to reply by postulating a new entity. Iamblichus, for instance, postulates a higher principle above the One: the Ineffable. The Ineffable is the true transcendent principle, and therefore the One need not be so inflexible as not to admit first indications of multiplicity of being, or some conceptual descriptions or cognitive grasp (see e.g. Dillon & Gerson 2004: 260–61; cf. Dillon 1987b). Proclus takes another path. He considers the One itself as ineffable and transcendent, and postulates a series of unities, Henads, which are partly transcendent and unknowable, but nonetheless somehow describable and within the reach of the human soul. The supra-intelligible level of the One is thereby extended with the Henads, each of which functions as the first term in a series or chain (*seira*) of entities. Thus every entity is subordinated not just to the One, but to one or another Henad. The Henads also come over and above the Forms, which belong to the intelligible level, thus upstaging them. (Henads are discussed by Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, props 113–65; *Commentary on the Parmenides*, book IV; cf. Dillon 1987a: xvii–xix; for the controversy over whether this doctrine should be attributed to Iamblichus, cf. Dillon 1993.) The Henads are designed to preserve austere or inflexible unity in the case of each major class of beings, yet correspond to the multiplicity of beings in the way the One itself cannot function, since it is beyond any qualities and positive characteristics. We shall shortly revisit these new items in the metaphysics.

A very different solution to the gap between the One and being is suggested by Damascius, the last head of the school of Athens, who takes the Plotinian way of underlining the simplicity of the One to be a mistake. The choice to pick the absolute simplicity of the One

as its paradigmatic aspect demotes its other crucial nature, namely, the One as all, and creates the gap between the One and everything else: between One and being. If the One is, rather, taken as primarily One-*All* which precedes and encloses all differences, the gap between them diminishes remarkably (*On Principles* II 27.10–11; Dillon 1996; Tresson & Metry 2005). This, as we shall see, has its own repercussions on whether the way of describing the One by means of negations is the most fruitful, or even appropriate.

Another challenge against the principles guiding the Plotinian threefold distinction is found in later Neoplatonic treatment of duality. Remember that Plotinus introduced the generation of multiplicity on two fronts. On the one hand there is the generation of something other than the One, and hence already duality. On the other hand, there is a multiplicity of being: the variety of different things existing in the universe. Why exactly should duality and multiplicity be functions of one and the same metaphysical entity? Accordingly, the later Neoplatonists give the first phase, duality, a more prevalent status in metaphysics. If one agrees with the idea that what is simple must first give rise to duality rather than to a more diverse multiplicity, the question then becomes: what is this duality? Combining the numerical idea of number 2 succeeding number 1 but preceding other numbers with the idea of the key concepts of "limit" and "limitlessness" or "infinity" (*peras* and *apeiron*) from the Pythagoreans and Plato's *Philebus* (16c–e), they postulate immediately after the One a dyad of antithetical principles, Limit (*peras*) and Limitlessness (*apeiron*): "Since all things consists of unity and plurality, there must be two antecedent principles, one causing unity in all things, the other plurality; they are themselves posterior, of course, to the One Cause, which brings about all things absolutely" (Damascius, *Lectures on the Philebus* §43 [trans. Westerink]).

Being must be structured so as to have a principle that, in a sense, brings things together, limiting and unifying them, and a principle dividing and extending being, that is, producing multiplicity. All occurrences of limit and finitude in the universe go back to the primary principle of limit, and similarly the limitless or infinite potency of anything is ultimately derived from the principle of

Limitlessness (Procl., *Elements of Theology*, props 89–95). In this, the Neoplatonists also perhaps echo the so-called unwritten doctrine according to which Plato may have ascribed to two basic first principles "one" (*hen*) and "indefinite dyad" (*aoristos duas*) (for a treatment of this issue, see Thesleff 1999: 91ff.). Of the two, "one" or "limit" is always better than what is more pluralized or indefinite, but nonetheless the Neoplatonists seem to locate limit and limitlessness on the same level, perhaps owing to the fact that given that the first ultimate and absolute One is postulated above them, neither of these lower principles alone can do the job given to them: differentiate and structure an order of beings. Going back to Plato's late thought and to the idea of there perhaps being a pair of crucial concepts that explain being and cosmology, it may well seem a rather natural choice to take limit and limitlessness as representing the paramount duality that exist in metaphysics. Immediately below the One in the hierarchy is not Intellect, but this dyad. Just like the One, they are in some manner present in all the levels below, rendering entities discrete. They are connected with unification and the multiplication needed for there to be a variety of beings.

Besides attacking the details of the functional differentiation of Plotinus' three-level metaphysics, in the background of the later Neoplatonists' suggestions can be found a general methodological principle. In the history of Platonism, the question of when it is appropriate and philosophically warranted to postulate an explanatory intelligible entity was often raised. Which things are basic enough to merit a place among the eternal and stable principles? In the *Republic* as well as in the *Parmenides* (e.g. *Resp*. 10.596a; *Prm*. 130c–d), Plato faces the question as to what there are Forms for. One suggested answer is that we must postulate a Form for every general concept, everything that can be thought of and conceptualized, for every property. Thereby, whatever can be thought must exist, really and separately, as part of the explanatory intelligible realm. Taken together with the theorems that Plato elsewhere seems to commit himself to – that of (i) self-predication, the idea that Forms themselves have the properties they explain, and (ii) the theorem that each Form is separate from its instances, we would arrive in a help-

lessly loaded totality of Forms, including things such as, for example, mud, that seem to be paradigmatically material. What a Form of mud *separate* from its material instances but nonetheless "muddy" in itself would be like is a fair question (for the *Parmenides*, see Rickless 2006: esp. 54–5). Even if Plato would be uncomfortable with the idea that the intelligible stands for every possible property, the later Neoplatonists take it seriously. They stress, however, that even though methodologically the study of the concepts we use gives rise to postulation of metaphysical entities, in reality the entities come first. They exist prior to the conceptualizations (see Sorabji 2005b: 5(c), with references). Therefore one cannot simply postulate an entity for each passing thought or invention, but in each case one must conduct a careful study of the whole intelligible realm, its entities and internal relations, and see whether the new entity suggested has a place and function to fulfil there or not. The new entities in metaphysics we have encountered all result from this demanding philosophical process.

Perhaps another application of this can be seen in the way that the post-Plotinian Neoplatonists more or less agree that being is prior to intelligibility. Influential was Plato's *Timaeus*, in which the intelligible model is prior to the demiurge creating the world (39e3–9; Procl., *Elements of Theology*, prop. 161). This can be called the realistic principle.

Principle VII. The realistic principle

Applying the idea that the higher is always also more universal, the Neoplatonists reasoned that everything exists but not everything thinks, hence thinking is posterior to being.

Plotinus wavered between two possibilities: either the Intellect generates intelligible objects in and by its activity, or the objects are prior to the Intellect which grasps an already existing being (Sorabji 2001). The later Neoplatonists' firm choice of the latter alternative implies that in the hierarchy, the One is followed by Being, and only then by the Intellect. The basic structure of the hierarchy becomes:

The One (further divisible into aspects)
Limit and Limitlessness
Being
The Intellect
…

In several ways, Plato is the origin of further proliferation. Although basically his system divides into only two levels, he does explicitly rise to two levels *within* the intelligible sphere: the Form of the Good would seem to be above other Forms in illuminating them – in providing the standard by means of which human beings apprehend the reality of everything that has value (*Resp*. 6.508e). Other indications that Plato thought of the intelligible realm as graded are his division of the intelligible realm into two sub-sections in the Divided Line of the *Republic* (6.509d–511e), and the idea that numbers are Forms, and perhaps even vice versa, that Forms could be numbers: a view attributed to Plato and with at least some certainty to Plato's disciple Xenocrates. Some numbers are more primary than others or, as Aristotle puts it: "Plato made the other principle a Dyad, because of the fact that the numbers, apart from the primal ones, are generated from it by a natural process, as from a mould" (Arist. *Metaph.* A 6, 987b34–988a1; see also Dillon 2003: 19–20, 107–10). Because of the fact that some numbers seem to be constitutive of others, there must exist a hierarchy in which some are more primary than others and, moreover, some dependent on others.

Seeds for further gradation within the intelligible can be found in Plato. Different dialogues mention Forms as different as "largeness itself" (*Phd.* 102d), "likeness itself" (*Prm.* 130b4), "beauty itself" (*Symp.* 211a–b), "piety itself" (*Euthphr.* 5c–d) and the Form of "living being" (*Ti.* 30c): perhaps even Forms of artefacts such as beds (*Resp.* 10.597c). One may immediately wonder how the ideas of central ethical concepts sometimes called "Socratic" are related to such relative terms as "larger than". Although it is unclear whether Plato postulated something like species Forms (the Form of a human being, bull, or horse), it is clear that, following Aristotle, the Middle Platonists talk of such further intelligible entities. Are all these things

"Forms" in the same sense of the word, and how, if at all, are they interconnected? How are the different *kinds* of Forms related?

Ordering the complexity of the intelligible is one area in which the Neoplatonists make a central contribution. As we have seen, they lift goodness above the realm of Forms, as an essential nature of the One, thus acknowledging and building on Plato's idea of the particular status of the Form of the Good. Reading other dialogues, especially the *Sophist*, together with the *Timaeus*, Plotinus suggests that at least the so called greatest kinds of Plato (*megista genē*) – being, motion, rest, sameness and difference, which Plotinus calls first kinds (*prōta genē*) – form a category of their own, and thus the intelligible realm is not a mere group with members of similar nature and status. On Plotinus' reading, two of these, sameness and difference, organize the rest of the intelligibles into groupings, realizing the essential similarities and differences in being. Perhaps because of such special kinds of Forms as sameness and difference, it is possible to understand both horses and dogs as mammals, but as different species of mammals. The same basic conceptions allow understanding of the individuality of two different horses and their sameness with respect to the shared species. Although these items are introduced in some kind of thinking process, they are not purely psychic but part and parcel of the intelligible organization of the world. As in the *Timaeus*, they structure being by being its most basic kinds. Through these kinds, the intelligible acquires a species–genera hierarchy (*Enn.* VI.2.8.31–8; Remes 2007: 135–40).

Another, and more influential source for the proliferation of metaphysical gradation are Plotinus' doctrines of internal and external activities (*energeia*) as well as procession and reversion. Later Neoplatonists divide each and every thing produced within metaphysical emanation into three aspects: abiding in one's cause or "rest" (*monē*); procession (*prohodos*); and reversion (*epistrophē*; Procl., *Elements of Theology*, props 30–39). Both rest and reversion coincide, more or less, with the internal activity in Plotinus: rest is the thing's own, independent activity, whereas procession is its external activity, which contributes in the generation of the next level. The point of having three, rather than two, phases is to lessen the

gap between the main levels. The rest or abiding phase of each new item in the metaphysics corresponds to the procession phase of the previous entity, and thus the emanation of levels is continuous, with no clear gaps between the generated entities. The resulting structure is a process of cyclic causation where each new level not only is and processes but also, as it were, turns to look at its more perfect origin. Due to its fine structure, this chain of generation enjoys continuity. It is noteworthy that, for the later Neoplatonists, the phases distinguished, that is, the steps that make the chain of generation further graded and thus continuous, will themselves turn out to be items or entities in the metaphysics.

The cyclic activity is in itself somewhat puzzling. It has been argued that the Neoplatonists put forward here something intrinsically inconsistent. The claim is that an entity becomes itself only through a reversion towards and a vision of its cause. Why would a vision of the origin and cause be a source of individual identity? After all, the thing has an identity separate from the cause as soon as it becomes individuated as an effect. Rather than contributing to its individuality, the reversion seems to make it, in content, again resembling and closer to the cause. What is new or different in the effect? Nonetheless, the reverted thing is distinct from the source. Because of this distinction it also has a feature that the source does not have: a desire toward the cause. In comparison, the cause has a self-sufficient relation to itself (Damascius, *On Principles*, 117, 16ff. [Budé edn]; Lloyd 1990: 128; Dillon 1997).

The levels or aspects that are separated in this process are connected to an attempt to solve a problem already inherent in Plato. Since Plato's *Parmenides*, the Platonists had struggled with participation (*methexis*). In Plato, this technical term denoted the relation of the sensible things to the Forms. Plato discusses the nature of this relationship in the *Parmenides*, where the elderly Parmenides forces Socrates to admit that all ways of trying to establish the nature of this relation are bound to be problematic for the nature of Forms. Participation means that the sensibles *have a share in* the Form, but to explicate how this is possible is problematic. This is shown on two fronts: the whole and the part. Recall that in order to function as

the kinds of fixed and constant explanations Plato was looking for, Forms had to be unified and single. In contrast to particulars of the sensible realm that consist of plurality of properties, the Forms are understood as austere or pure unities that admit no plurality, and no contrary properties. Now, on the one hand, if the particulars participate in any one Form as a whole, then since there are many particulars, there will be many rather than one instance of the whole Form. Furthermore, if having the Form means that the Form is *in* each of its sensible occurrence, each of these is separate from one another and must also be separate from the Form itself. Thus the Form becomes also separate from itself. One can, on the other hand, reject the idea that each of the instances is separate from the Form itself. An example is a day, which is simultaneously in or covering many places. The example is altered by Parmenides into a sail. In this model, the particulars participate in something covering all the instances, and Parmenides pushes Socrates to admit that in such a case, they partake in only a part of a Form. If so, then the Form is divisible into parts, and hence many (*Prm.* 130e–131e; cf. e.g. McCabe 1994: 51, 77; Rickless 2006: 58–60). But the Form cannot be both many and one, and thus must be just many, which is an altogether undesirable conclusion. In both horns of the dilemma, the unity and singlehood of the Form is threatened. The mind-independent and non-physical nature of the Forms should be explicated in a manner that guards them from any partition and reduplication.

For Plotinus, this is a great challenge, which he attempts to solve in a manner vaguely familiar to present-day metaphysicians arguing for universals. Basically, the move is to claim that as immaterial substances these entities do not abide by the laws of the spatiotemporal realm. The point of postulating them is precisely to postulate another *kind* of being: in Plotinus, one that can be everywhere simultaneously as a whole (e.g. *Enn.* VI.5.2.1–9). Real being is therefore not divisible nor to be redoubled in a manner similar to extended things. The intelligible realm is the realm of omnipresence and indivisibility, and hence more like a day, present everywhere as a whole, than a sail spread over things, covering different things by its different parts. It is *sui generis*, of its own, proper kind, and thus

nothing prevents many things from participating in it simultaneously as a whole.

Now, one may or may not grant the existence of such a separate and deviating realm of being with principles proper to it alone. But even if one were to accept such a class of existence, it is unclear whether the problems of participation would thereby be solved. Note that unlike the contemporary theorists of universals, ancient Platonists needed the Forms not just to explain recurring features of the universe but also to function as fixed and eternal objects of knowledge. For them it is not enough that the Form is immanently everywhere as a whole: it must have its own separate and transcendent existence. Can a Form both remain in transcendence or separation, and be immanently everywhere as a whole? It may not perhaps be too harsh to say that the austerity of Forms may sit ill with any relation a Form can have, be that to other Forms or to the sensible realm.

The later Neoplatonists were acutely aware of these problems, and were unsatisfied with Plotinus' answer. They did two things to the participation relations. First, the above tripartite cycle of rest, procession and reversion became understood in terms of the unparticipated–participated. The idea we find in Iamblichus and Proclus is the separation from each intelligible entity of an aspect that is truly separate and transcendent, that is, "unparticipated" (*amethektos*). This higher aspect is accompanied with a less uncompromising nature, the "participated" (*methektos*) aspect of the very same thing. One could claim that the unparticipated aspect is the austere or inflexible individual needed to maintain the fixity and unity of non-sensible entities ("a whole before the parts"), whereas the participated aspect is the more generous nature needed to explain any relations this thing can have to other entities and to the sensible reality ("a whole of parts"; Procl., *Elements of Theology*, prop. 67). This distinction is connected to and appropriated with the rest–procession–reversion differentiation. The unparticipated can be roughly identified with the resting or "abiding" of a level in its own internal activity, the participated with its external activity or procession. The general point is that the twofold division allows us to distinguish a transcendent level from the level that takes an active part in the chain of generation of being. A third term, "a

whole in its parts", refers to all the individual instances of the thing in question. It is the illumination of the participated further down in hierarchy.

Now, although each level of emanation has a triadic structure, in looking at the whole hierarchy we may reduce it into two entities at each hypostatic level. This is because the lowest level of any triad always corresponds to the unparticipated of the next level going downwards in the hierarchy. In this way, our hierarchy becomes the following:

The unparticipated/Ineffable One
The participated One/Henads
The unparticipated pair of Limit and Limitlessness
The participated pair of Limit and Limitlessness
Unparticipated Being
Participated Being
Unparticipated Intellect
Participated Intellect
(Participant Intellect =) Unparticipated Soul
Participated Soul
(Participant Soul =) Body, or the sensible realm

Secondly, the later Neoplatonists expanded the application of the relation of participation to most relations internal to the transcendent world (Meijer 1992). This is a highly un-Plotinian move. For Plotinus, participation is a technical term designed to solve the above-mentioned difficulty of participation between the sensible and the intelligible. His point is to emphasize the non-symmetrical nature of that relation: participation does not endanger the nature of the intelligible entities because of the very special nature or features of the "higher" realm. The relation in question is an asymmetrical imitation relationship in which the intelligible stays altogether unaffected. Perhaps because the later Neoplatonists used, rather, the division between an unparticipated and participated level to solve the same problem, they were able to extend the participation relationship beyond its original application.

The final, if somewhat simplified, metaphysical hierarchy looks like this in its Proclean form:

The One (unparticipated)
The Gods or Henads (participated)
Unparticipated Dyad
Participated Dyad
Unparticipated Being
Participated Being
Unparticipated Intellect
Participated Intellect
Unparticipated Soul
Participated Soul
Body or the sensible realm

The overall hierarchy is further complicated by the special status that the Henads have in the system. Apart from the One and matter, all entities in this chain of generation have their direct and indirect causes and effects, and in order to preserve the graded continuity of the system, their causation and relations to levels and entities not immediately adjacent to them happens through intermediaries. Henads form an exception to this rule, and thereby break down the hierarchy into a system of two partly overlapping or complementary systems. The One gives rise to a class of participated "Forms" of a sort: unities present at each level of the hierarchy, the highest of which is the crucial one. Each of the Henads also corresponds to a god of traditional religion, and is individualized as "someone", with potential personal features. Here metaphysics is combined with traditional religion. Whether this was a deliberate move to boost paganism under growing Christian pressure, one may only wonder. Yet Henads are postulated not just for theological or religious reasons. Their role can be explicated by distinguishing them from two items that compete for similar functions in Neoplatonic metaphysics: the One and the Platonic forms.

We have seen that the Henads function, on the one hand, as intermediaries between the One and being as well as intellection; on the

other, as E. R. Dodds (1963: 277) writes, bridging – or concealing – the gulf between the One and the multiplicity of the intelligible. Their postulation probably follows from a close reading of the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, which suggests that there are as many portions of the one as there are of being (Saffrey 1984). As participated, the Henads are a midpoint in the relations between unity and existence. Could there, then, be only one Henad, a participated unity? Such a Henad (like Iamblichus' One below the Ineffable) would perhaps add to the continuity of the system and reduce the width of the gap between the One and Being, but it would in no way explain variety or multiplicity. Could one, perhaps, postulate several exactly similar unities in order to give rise to the notion of mere multiplicity, without the actual variety of being? The problem with such bare items is their identity and individuality: if they have no distinguishing characteristics, it is unclear what, if anything, identifies them as individuals and keeps them from collapsing into one. For these reasons or the like, the Henads are each of them a unity, but not in the bare, property-free way of the One. They have some individualizing charateristics, even though human cognition may only surmise the exact nature of those differentia. Multiplicity is multiplicity of differentiated items.

Human beings are not, however, entirely incapable of approaching the Henads. As was mentioned, each of the Henads also forms below itself a series of related divinities that can be found on each level of existence. Proclus' example of the series of Henads, governed by one highest Henad, is light. Evidently, there are different kinds and sources of light. Light has many causes, such as material fire or light that the heavenly bodies shine out into this world. Some of these causes are more powerful than others and thereby they can be understood as belonging not to a mere group of lights, but, rather, as forming a hierarchical series of more and less powerful lights. Each light has its own particularities, but they are also relevantly similar, and some more similar to one another than others (Procl., *Commentary on the Parmenides* 6, 1044). A Henad is a transcendent and supremely unified source of a hierarchical order with distinctive characteristics, the lower levels of which are available for human cognition.

But if the Henads explain variety and multiplicity, and if they are marked by individual characteristics, what differentiates them from the Platonic Forms? Why postulate entities the functions of which have been taken care of by other entities in the same system? If the Henads are understood simply as principles of multiplicity, this question lacks an adequate answer. Remember, though, that the Henads also function as a medium in making unity multiplicity and vice versa. They must thus be both one and many in equal measure. The problem with Forms is that whenever they are cognitively approached, they consist of parts: they are cognitively grasped by explanations and definitions that are made of parts, such as "a rational animal". Furthermore, in order to explain both cognitive complexity and the structures of metaphysics, they are related to one another, or "interparticipate", which again makes them less self-sufficient and unified. The Henads do not suffer from these problems. They are beyond both thinking and being, remaining in their unity, being nonetheless many, differentiated and participated.

This doctrine of a connected series or hierarchy of divinities aided the Neoplatonists, for instance, in the interpretation of literature by opening a whole hierarchy of divinities internal to the Neoplatonic system to try to match with entities found in mythology and literature. Yet in the case of the series following the Henads, a motivation that has to do with philosophy and the internal logic of the system may be surmised. If the Henads had no individual consequences in metaphysics, their individual characteristics would remain entirely obscure and external to the human cognitive grasp and the world we live in. Because each of them is beyond being and thought, their particular characteristics, as Proclus tells us in the *Elements of Theology*, proposition 123, can only be approached in inspecting their products or "dependent beings" in their own series. Without our acquaintance with many kinds of light we could not postulate or philosophize about a Henad for light.

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Our study of the items within the Neoplatonic metaphysical system must end here. An overall description will always do some damage

to the finesse of the system in question. In the case of a system of such complexity as the late Neoplatonic one, this sword of Damocles hovers especially heavily over the whole enterprise. Also, much remains to be explicated, and, indeed, to be researched within this area. The purpose of this exposition has been to elucidate the Neoplatonic system especially with respect to the central philosophical dilemmas the Neoplatonists grappled with, as well as the way in which they dealt with the Platonic heritage and the problems they inherited or found in it.

THREE

Nature and the sensible universe

Hitherto, the entities and things within the sensible realm – the world we perceive and live in – have received limited attention. It is now high time to turn to the part of the metaphysics that directly explains the realm in which human beings live and act. What is the physical universe like, what are its basic structures and what status does it enjoy in the hierarchy of things? This means also explicating the main point of discord between the Neoplatonists and the archetypal philosopher of the perceived and lived world, Aristotle. For Aristotle, the perceived world and its entities are basic. For the Neoplatonists, they are derivative.

Conceptions of nature

Ancient philosophy of nature (*phusis*) is a study of not only physical things but also the metaphysical entities and doctrines that most directly condition the study of natural things. Hence, for instance, philosophy of time, regardless of our expectations, falls within this study. Neoplatonist natural philosophy rests on an intellectual background that is partly Aristotelian and partly Platonic. First, Neoplatonists build on and react to the Aristotelian idea of nature and the soul's role in it. Nature refers to the forms of the sensibles

that exist by nature, as distinct, for instance, from artefacts. These are things that change naturally, that is, that have an *internal* principle of change and stability in them, as opposed to whatever needs to be changed from outside, externally (Arist. *Ph.* 2.3, 192b13–14, 20–23; *Metaph.* Δ 4, 1014b16–1015a19). A particular feature of the Neoplatonic conception of nature lies in the idea that despite the appeal to an internal principle of life, nature is not autonomous but organized and maintained by higher, intelligible principles. Crucial intermediaries here are the immanent *logoi*, or rational forming principles, in matter, which owe their power and intelligibility to the higher principles: to Forms. The late Neoplatonist Simplicius states against Aristotle that if the seed did not include such a relation to the higher principles, it would only be capable of giving rise to another seed (Simpl. *in Phys.* 312,18–314,15 [= Sorabji 2004: 1 (b) 8]). In his view, the fact that the effects in nature may reflect features that are in no way apparent in the causes is a testimony to the involvement of non-immanent principles.

For reasons that we saw in Chapter 2, the Neoplatonists place particular importance on that part of Aristotle's nature that is ensouled or animate, and emphasize the role of the soul not merely as the internal principle of life but of organization. Aristotle famously defines the soul as the first actuality of an organic body that potentially has life (*De an.* 2.1, 412a27–28). The Neoplatonists understand the fact that the universe is organized as a sign of it being in some sense "alive" and thereby ensouled. Things like stones and primary elements are natural in the sense of belonging to things organized by an involvement of a soul. This brings us to the other unchallenged starting-point of Neoplatonic physics: Plato's *Timaeus*, with its story of the coming to be of the body and soul of the cosmos. This Platonic heritage has the important but perhaps surprising repercussion that the study of nature is at the same time theology, or close to theology. For Plato of the *Timaeus*, the cosmos is a visible god (34a–b, 62e, 92c): a unified, divine whole created by the demiurge in the best possible way. It lives a divine life. To study the cosmos is to study something that is both ensouled, that is, well-organized and "alive", and even divine. This can perhaps be interpreted as an emphasis on

the idea that, in the case of nature, the object of study is a well-functioning totality within which things have their own proper places and tasks. Let us see two ways of interpreting this heritage: those of the founder, Plotinus, and the Athenian systematizer, Proclus.

Although some later Neoplatonists treat the two entities as one and the same, Plotinus separates from the hypostasis Soul an entity called the Soul of the All (or the World Soul; *hē tou kosmou psuchē*). This is the soul of the entire universe of the *Timaeus*. In Plotinus, it is an aspect or part of the Soul, just as individual souls are parts of the hypostasis Soul. It fulfils the same function in the universe as the Aristotelian individual soul does in the individual living being. The Soul of the All is the structural organization of the whole universe, of its order both at this very moment and in temporal succession. It produces the totality of bodies in the universe. As in Plato's *Timaeus*, the universe is a bodily, ensouled whole (*Enn.* IV.3.4.26–8). This soul unifies the universe into one, a reified and supreme living being, the parts of which connect to one another and form a unified whole. This also recalls the originally Stoic idea according to which a breath (*pneuma*) and tension permeate the world and make it a single, coherent, bodily whole, even though in Stoicism this unificatory thing is material (Alex. Aphr. *Mixt.* 223,25–36 [= Long & Sedley 1987: 47 L]).

Like all steps in the generation of being, this level of nature produces without deliberation, out of necessity inherent in its nature. The resulting nature has neither perception nor consciousness of anything and, unlike the Soul, it is not transcendent. It both affects and is affected in the world (cf. Pl. *Soph.* 247e1–4). Yet it is not to be equated with corporeal or physical things themselves. It is the lowest rational power shining in and from the Soul. As such a power, it gives the bodies their determination and rational configuration (Plotinus *Enn.* IV.4.13). The Soul of the All and individual human souls share a close connection to the universe, the world and entities we perceive. They are all parts of the hypostasis Soul, which remains in its transcendence a step further away from the sensible realm, whereas they act on matter. This act is understood as the lowest phase of contemplation (*theōria*). Even though nature is production, the

principle of coming to be of the sensible things and their changes, it nonetheless coincides with rational forming principles derived from higher principles. Nature's production follows from its relation to the higher principles. Because of this reference to the intelligible power, nature is, in a sense, contemplation (*Enn.* III.8.3.1–23; 4.1–31).

Proclus' commentary on the *Timaeus* affirms the unity and divinity of the cosmos. Science of nature is not directly theology – it does treat questions that concern the physical universe – but it is dependent on theology: "it is manifest that science of nature (*phusiologia*) is a kind of theology, because what is constituted by nature also has a divine existence in a way, to the extent that it is produced by the gods" (*In Ti.* I 217, 25–7, trans. Martijn). Proclus and other Neoplatonists agree that the universe cannot be discussed without referring to the higher, divine causes properly explanatory of it (see further Martijn 2006).

Proclus seems, further, to give an emphatic role to the body of the universe. The divine unity of the universe is due not merely to its soul aspect, but also to its body. The particular organization the body has contributes to the character of the composite. Also, the completeness of the universe derives partly from its bodily aspect. It includes all elements and is therefore perfection, lacking nothing external to it. In this Proclus may depart from Plotinus' account, which emphasizes the role of the soul. As we shall soon see, the account the two give of the role of matter in evil is different and, in general, Proclus is perhaps more world-affirming than Plotinus (see Baltzly 2007: 23–5). Nonetheless, following the line of thought already present in Plotinus, in his hierarchy Proclus places nature above the bodily realm. He may even separate an uncompromising, transcendent or "imparticipable" aspect of nature, a Nature prior to nature as participated, even though Nature would seem to be paradigmatically the sort of thing that is entirely participated (see Siorvanes 1996: 137–40). The later Neoplatonic hierarchy would thus gain one more level to explain the sensible.

One particular example of the way in which Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of nature are amalgamated in later Neoplatonism is the discussion on causes. As is well known, Aristotle's explanatory

framework includes the fourfold distinction of causes. There is a material cause (e.g. the matter out of which a house is made), a formal cause and an efficient cause, as well as the final cause. In nature, all causes are present, but they may coincide (Arist. *Ph.* 2.3 & 7, esp. 198a24–7). For instance, the soul is the formal cause (the intelligible organization of matter that forms the body), the efficient cause (the principle of movement and life) as well as "that for the sake of which". The only causal role it does not fulfil is the material cause. The late Peripatetic Philoponus, who had gone through a Neoplatonic education, is a good source for giving examples of the four causes and for delivering to us the way in which the Neoplatonists transformed or amplified the theory:

> …for instance, the matter of a house is stones and bricks and timbers, its form is such-and-such a shape, its efficient cause the builder, and its final cause the human use for which it comes to be (I mean, to be a shelter protecting against rain and heat); and similarly in all cases. … Actually there are two other causes of things that come to be, the instrumental and the paradigmatic, which Plato too enumerates among causes, but Aristotle, as a natural philosopher, lays no claim to these. The paradigmatic [he lays no claim to] because this is superior to what is according to nature – for nature has no regard to a paradigm in producing things, for even if it contains the definitions (*logos*) of the things that come to be, it does not have them by way of knowledge, like a carpenter, but only by way of life, in that [things] have been produced in accordance with them. … But what sort of instrument of such a kind could one select for the very coming to be of the four elements? Plato, speaking as a theologian, calls the Craftsman the efficient cause, and says that the matter is an instrument. Aristotle, however, speaking as a student of nature, naturally calls this an efficient cause, but has no analogue to the instrumental cause.
>
> (Philoponus, *Commentary on the Physics*, 241,12–16, 18–23, 27–31 [trans. Lacey])

What becomes evident, first, is the description of Plato as a theologian and Aristotle as a student of nature. Secondly, what has evidently happened in Neoplatonism is an introduction of two further causes into the system. These derive from the *Timaeus*, which introduces a paradigmatic cause and instrumental or contributory causes (*sunaitia*; 46c–d, 47e–8a, 68e–9a). What are treated as paradigms are first and foremost the Forms: the intelligible model separate from its material instantiation, which even the demiurge looks to when creating the universe.

As a true Peripatetic, Philoponus denies here that nature would need such an external and higher paradigm. He disagrees with Simplicius (above) and argues that nature produces differently from the human builder, who establishes into matter an intelligible form that both pre-exists and exists externally in relation to the actual building. Nature does not look elsewhere in producing but includes its definitions and structuring principles. In Philoponus' Neoplatonizing reading, Plato would further demote matter to the role of a mere instrumental cause – again a move that disagrees with Aristotle's original list (see further Lacey 1993: n.342). Thus the controversy shows how, at the same time, Aristotle's natural philosophy is adopted by the Neoplatonists, and how it is supplemented with crucial material from the *Timaeus*.

Matter and immanent incorporeals

If the emphatic interest of Neoplatonism is the Form structuring being, what role is there left for matter? In Platonism, the sensible is a strange level of reality that, in actual fact, lacks reality. The Forms of the Intellect are the true "real beings", that which paradigmatically exists, whereas the sensible is a mere image of that reality. Furthermore, according to Plotinus the Forms are mirrored in and by something that does not properly exist, namely matter. Plotinus works with a broadly Aristotelian conception of matter as something without any organization that would inhere in its own nature (so called *materia prima*; e.g. Plotinus, *Enn.* II.4.11.38–43). But he radi-

calizes the theory by claiming that matter is privation, whereas for Aristotle matter and privation are the same only in substratum, not in definition (Arist. *Ph.* 1.9, 192a27ff.). According to Plotinus, matter as such is privation of Form, that is, essentially unlimited and undefined. Through the mediation of the Soul and the Soul of the All, Forms give matter its peculiar structures and formations. Form, size, dimension and definite being are all imposed on matter by rational forming principles (*logoi*), and through this formal power the Soul organizes and sustains the bodily universe in being. Yet in order for the Forms to be present in any way in matter, matter must somehow be *receptive* of formal power. Its essential being cannot be entirely hostile or foreign to received formation, or it would not be able to take it on.

In this way of thinking, matter actually never exists without being qualified in one way or another. Although we may conceptualize its own proper nature as incorporeal, without formation and quality, in actual fact the lowest existing level is corporeal. At the corporeal level of bodies, that is, organized masses (Latin *corpus*, meaning body), incorporeal Forms have a particular kind of existence. According to Plotinus, formal power is present in the sensible immanently, inseparable from matter. The unfolding of Forms, rational forming principles (*logoi*), resemble Forms not just in content but also in being incorporeal, but since they – unlike their intelligible source – only appear in matter, they are inseparable from it (e.g. *Enn.* II.7.3.7–14). Plotinus' pupil and editor, Porphyry, forms a whole theory of incorporeals (*asōmata*) that he divides further into two: beings and not beings, which are separated and inseparable, respectively. The former exist independently; the latter have a need of something else in order to exist. The former are intelligible substances; the latter are things that belong to the corporeal world – matter, form, "natures and powers", space, time, void (*Sentences* 19, 10.4–9; 42, 53.6–10 [Lamperz edn]). In the physical world, these appear always as parts of the corporeal existence (see Chiaradonna 2007). In this way, Neoplatonism absorbs insights belonging to Aristotelian ontology, most importantly the idea of the inseparability of form and matter.

The purport of Platonism lies in the assessment on how the incorporeals are present in the corporeal world. It has already been

mentioned that some passages suggest that according to Plotinus matter in some unreal manner reflects the Forms rather than actually receives them. In any case the incorporeal power is only perfect in its independent, separable existence, and therefore at the level of corporeality Forms are only present less than perfectly. *Logoi* are always aspects of the Form in its perfection, and the material organization may further distort them. In general, the sensible realm is the level in which deformation, deficiency and vice compete with and often conquer order, perfection and virtue. But it is also the level of individuality and particularity. In the ancient picture, individuality has no self-evident and independent value, but Neoplatonism does see variety, and the individuality connected with it, as one way of displaying perfection. The emanation from the One is perfect only if it generates everything that can be generated: every possible property and creature. Each of the things thus produced contributes to the perfection of its generation. Material extension is the last and most extended, unfolded and individual level of generation.

In this context it is vital to understand that Neoplatonism is not dualism in its present or even Cartesian sense. The sensible realm does display features the intelligible does not have, such as non-formation, limitlessness, imperfection and temporal succession, but its order derives from, and is thereby intelligible, and can only be grasped through, the intelligible Forms. There are not, therefore, two realms with entirely different properties and laws. It comes closest to a kind of dualism perhaps in the distinction between Form and matter, where matter gets its definition by being everything that the Form is not. In this case too it must be remembered that matter derives from the same origin, the One, and thus it is not an independent principle of metaphysics.

Basic kinds of being

For both Plato and Aristotle, *ousia* is a primary or basic kind of being. But for Plato, the primary kind of being is the Form, while Aristotle denies two central tenets of his teacher. He objects to the

separation of Forms, that is, to their independent existence separate from the sensible particulars, as well as to the ontological priority of the universal. For Aristotle of the *Categories*, the less universal substance is ontologically prior to a more universal substance (Strange 1987: 958). Neoplatonism is famous for a connected debate that turns on the categories of being and predication. Famously, Aristotle suggested a list of basic categories along the category of substance. These categories involve two questions: (i) how do we talk about and explain what we encounter in the world; and (ii) what kinds of classes map reality most efficiently? What is at stake in the Neoplatonic reception of the category doctrine is which of these two questions the doctrine is designed, primarily, to answer.

Aristotle's doctrine of categories distinguishes the following:

substance	*man, horse*
quantity	*2 cubits long, 3 cubits long*
quality	*pale, literate*
relation	*double, half, larger than*
place/where	*in the Lyceum, in the marketplace*
time/when	*yesterday, last year*
position	*lies, sits*
state	*has shoes on, is armed*
action	*cuts, burns*
affection	*is cut, is burnt*

The details of the doctrine given in the *Categories* 4 (1b25–2a3) are not elaborately argued, but its basic idea seems clear enough: there is that which functions as the subject for predication, the substance, such as man or cat, and nine ways to predicate different kinds of things about it, such as "man walks", or "horse is larger than cat". The difference between that which is the subject of predication and that which is predicated about it seems intuitively compelling and certainly informs us of the way our language functions. Perhaps it could also inform us of the structure of the universe, and not just of the logical behaviour of our assertions. Also persuasive seems to be the claim that within things predicated of substances, some seem to

be more similar than others, and thereby grouping them under some general headings seems justifiable.

Plotinus raises a number of challenges against Aristotle's list. One problem is the status of the first category, that of substance. Another is the number of categories. On the one hand, for him, the Aristotelian claim that matter, form, and the composite of matter and form are all substances, but in a slightly different sense of the term, implies incoherence of the class. How meaningful is a class with such different members as matter and form, sensible and intelligible? On the other hand, Plotinus attempts to show that some categories are actually futile. For instance, time and quantity seem too close to one another to merit a category of their own, since temporal expressions such as "yesterday" can be said to be quantities of time. Perhaps the most serious lack from Plotinus' point of view is the fact that Aristotle does not discuss the application of categories to the intelligible entities at all, and hence also neglects the issue of whether the intelligible and sensible items are divisible into the same categories or not (*Enn.* VI.1.2–4; 13).

Treating sensible particulars as basic was for a Platonist, in general, a faulty starting-point. The whole outlook of the Aristotelian categories differs from the Platonic outlook: Aristotle raises the sensible entities such as this man or that horse to a privileged position as basic things, substances. At least in his early writings, and perhaps also in his mature work, for him these particular substances are also ontologically prior to kinds (e.g. *Metaph.* Z 3, 1029a27–8). Particular, enmattered substances are prior in nature and in being. For the Platonist, however, universal is always prior to particular. Universal substance *F* both explains and generates the particular *F*. The particular and less universal is posterior and dependent on the universal. Therefore, concerning what is most basic in reality, the Platonists and Aristotelians would seem to be almost directly opposed to one another. In the case of some of Plotinus' counter-arguments to Aristotelian categories, one may wonder how much they finally would have worried Aristotle. Nonetheless, the crucial difference in the Platonic and Peripatetic outlooks was certainly demarcated, and a challenge was posed to rethink the general

categories of being as well as to question the list Aristotle never properly argued for.

The later Neoplatonists are often acclaimed for restoring the Aristotelian categories. A central work in this respect is Porphyry's *Introduction* (*Eisagōgē*), in which he takes the categories seriously and seems to incorporate them into Neoplatonic thinking. Yet it is by no means clear that this involves a radical doctrinal change in metaphysics or in interpretation of Aristotle. The Neoplatonists understood the *Categories* as being a work of logic rather than metaphysics, and were interested in its integration into their own system. In his commentary on the *Categories*, Porphyry claims (following an old Aristotelian commentary tradition) that the categories are about words, about "expressions used for communicating things", and thus not about things (*in Cat*. 58,3–6 [= Sorabji 2005b: 3b1]; Strange 1987; De Haas 2001). This is in line with the general strategy of taking Aristotle to be authoritative about this world, whereas the realm of being could safely be left to more Platonic entities. Abstracted Aristotelian universals that are the referents of general terms have a mere conceptual existence. Therefore they can be inferior to the sensible things, but they have little to do with Platonic Forms, which have a real existence prior to the sensible particulars. This idea from Porphyry had a long aftermath and many of the Neoplatonists to come were in broad agreement with him. The controversy and Neoplatonic interest in the Aristotelian categories placed them in the philosophical syllabus for centuries to come.

In his own positive response to the basic categories of being and thinking, Plotinus invokes the so-called greatest kinds of Plato (*megista genē*; *Soph*. 254b–256a), which he calls the first kinds (*prōta genē*): being, motion, rest, sameness and difference. Plotinus derives the genera through a reflection of the Intellect: Intellect is, and its being is activity or a motion of sorts, therefore one must postulate the genera of *being* and *motion*. Intellect's activity is also perfect actualization, not in need of anything. Therefore it is also at *rest*. Thinking about being, motion and rest as genera implies understanding them as belonging to the same class of things; therefore, we must add *sameness*. Again, understanding them also as distinct from one another implies *difference*. All other categories are subsumed under these primary ones, in

a way that is not altogether clear. What Plotinus says, is, for example, that "sameness, which is there as well, makes equality exist, and difference, inequality" (*Enn.* VI.2.21). Equality as a particular kind of sameness is subsumed under the primary genus of sameness. To give another example, and one that places an Aristotelian category in the system, it seems that rest gives rise to magnitude, which, in turn gives rise to quantities of different kinds.

This, one may justifiably argue, does not yet seem very helpful in approaching and explaining the sensible realm. The entities with which Plotinus replaces Aristotelian categories seem to constitute, again, a step away from what we experience in the world we live in. They seem to float somewhere, high in the abstract metaphysical space. Two of the entities, sameness and difference, are also ingredients in the demiurgic creation of the *Timaeus*. Both the soul and its functioning as well as the stuff of which the universe is made display sameness and difference. This aspect is highly influential in Plotinus. As will be argued in Chapter 5, his motivation is the attempt to distinguish the most basic concepts needed in thinking, and find these also as central categories of metaphysics. This still leaves us with the question of the status and explanation of the sensible reality. We have seen that on a very general level sensible things are images of forms imprinted on matter. But as Aristotle's list of categories testifies, the sensible consists of things as different as particulars, qualities, quantities and so on. Here we shall go on to ask what role human beings and horses play for Plotinus, that is, what status is left for Aristotle's particular substances.

Plotinus actually calls sensible particulars quasi-substances. They are substances in the limited sense of functioning as subjects in predication in the familiar Aristotelian manner. Yet what they really are is more like bundles of properties or of images of Forms, mirrored in certain bits of matter, governed and unified by the Soul of the All. Each thing you see consists of a pile of images of different kinds of Forms, starting from images of elements, through different kinds of properties all the way to those qualities that make the thing that which it is. The power of the forms is mediated by reason principles (*logoi*), the immanent aspect of Forms in nature. A particular human being

can be understood as having the reason principles of water and other basic stuffs, of the structure of flesh and blood, of the formations of human beings, plus all kinds of qualities of which some are accidental, while a group of others is necessary for her to be what she is. In the case of human beings, rationality and animality, at least, are completing properties of this sort; neither alone explains the human being, but both are needed in the explanation (cf. Remes 2007: ch. 1.2; for a possibly similar theory in Plato, see Silverman 2002).

The details of this doctrine are yet to be explored. Furthermore, for the story to be complete, an account will have to be given of the human soul and intellect. Through an individual soul and intellect, human beings are something more independent and individuated than bundles of properties held together by the Soul of the All (see following chapters). Hopefully sufficiently enough, however, the sharp contrast distinguishing Aristotelian thinking has been explicated and allowed to emerge. The Platonic intuition that perception deceives us is not just about its reliability in the reporting of details or the desirability of items in the world. Rather, the Platonists' fear is that it may well be the case that it deceives us of the true nature and structure of the universe and of its basic entities.

Time and eternity

Throughout, I have made use of the notion of the eternal as a distinguishing characteristic, broadly, of the intelligible realm. What is the Neoplatonic conception of time? Is it possible to explicate those items that are in time and the ones that are eternal before having an adequate understanding of these two key concepts and their function in metaphysics? The reason for the chosen order of exposition lies in the Neoplatonic method of approaching time and eternity. Whether or not we find the approach feasible, Plotinus starts from the intelligible and sensible realms, forming an account of eternity and time that arises from the features and particular kind of existence of these realms and the items in them. He treats them as the total of eternal and temporal entities, as it were.

The intelligible is the realm of constancy and fixity. It is also the realm of perfect actualization. It always has the same entities and the same features. There is no internal generation nor passing away: no change. Eternity is explained as this changeless being. Whether it is more like a strange kind of continuation without any alteration, beginning or end, or an eternal present, a peculiar frozen now without any meaningful before and after, is hard to tell. In any case, there is no passing from one state or phase over to another. Just as items in that sphere are eternal because of their unchanging and fixed character, eternity itself is the unchanging state of the whole of the intelligibles in their perfect actualization. Rather than sempiternal, it is timelessly eternal.

The Neoplatonists had a standard definition for time, derived from the *Timaeus*: time is the moving image of eternity (*Ti.* 37d). In contrast to eternity, time is essentially connected with movement and change. Its existence is the continuous coming to be: generation. Things are generated and pass away; they lose and acquire properties in temporal succession. Plotinus objects, however, to both Aristotelian and Stoic accounts of time on the grounds that they fail to distinguish time from that which is in time. Aristotle's definition of time as the measure of movement (*Ph.* 4.11, 219b1–2, 4.12, 220b32–221a1) would seem to render time either the measured movement in matter or the measuring magnitude, the eternal number (Plotinus, *Enn.* III.7.9). Plotinus calls time, rather, the life of the Soul (*Enn.* III.7.12.20–25), thus raising it above the changes that happen in the sensible realm but also distinguishing it from intelligible numbers. For him, changes are in time, not vice versa. Repeating much the same view, Damascius says explicitly that time, for example, provides an order and localization for events (Simpl. *in Phys.* 775,16 [Diels edn]). To account for the different points of view towards time, it is sometimes suggested that Plotinus operates with two conceptions of time: one that is manifested and another that is real. The former is more piecemeal and episodic, essentially connected with and manifested in change, the latter higher and more unified, creating the horizon for temporal things to appear and be localized in (e.g. Smith 1998).

The definition of time as the life of the Soul also makes one think of the affinities that time has to human cognition. Human experience and thought seem to essentially involve or happen in the past–present–future horizon. This brings us again to the connections of metaphysics and philosophical psychology: for the Neoplatonists, time is one of those things that is equally metaphysically real – as the "life" of a metaphysically real entity, the Soul – but also something that essentially belongs to the functioning of a mind or a soul. The following chapters will further explicate the Neoplatonic understanding of experience and cognition and their connection, as well as that of human beings in general, to the metaphysical system. Here it must be underlined that the later Neoplatonists make it very clear that time is prior to soul, just as eternity is prior to intellect. The hierarchy thereby increases with such entities or hypostases as Eternity and Time (Them., *Commentary on On the Soul* 120, 17–21; Procl. *In Ti.* III 27,18–28 [= Sorabji 2005b: 11(d) 7 & 10]).

Commenting on Aristotle, the later Neoplatonist accounts of time connect especially to an attempt to solve paradoxes about the existence of time recorded by Aristotle. The paradoxes employ the notion of parts, divisions or segments. The first paradox claims that time cannot exist since its past and future parts do not exist, and the present is a sizeless instant with no length. Even if one tries to make the present a thing with duration, one merely accomplishes the following: the early parts of this extended present are past and the later parts future, and we are nonetheless left with an instantaneous present in between. The second paradox wonders about the ceasing to be of the present. Clearly it must happen since past people lived in a different present than we do. But as long as the present exists, it cannot cease to exist. And it cannot cease to exist at the very next instant since sizeless instants are never next to one another. And if it remains in existence until some later instant, then it exists also through the indefinitely many instants in between its own instant and the one when it ceases to exist (Arist. *Ph.* 4.10).

The Neoplatonic tradition contains several attempted solutions to the paradoxes, utilizing, among other things, Plotinus' division between a higher and lower time, which Proclus, Damascius and

Simplicius all accept (Simpl., *Corollaries on Place and Time*, in his *in Phys.* 795,4–11; 787,30; 788,9–10, 29–32; *Commentary on the Categories* 355,8–14). Damascius points out, among other things, that a now at the higher level of time is not subject to division, while it is not important for the lower now or present to be real, to have real existence. A more interesting solution comes from Simplicius, who stands at the end of a long commentary tradition on the paradoxes. He denies that the flowing nature of Time is correctly understood through notions that involve segmentation and division:

> So I think that the difficulty arises because the soul tries to understand everything in accordance with the changeless form within it. So thus it brings process to a halt, trying to understand it in its formal nature and not in accordance to its natural flux. (Simplicius, *Corollaries on Place and Time*, in his *in Phys.* 798,27–30 [trans. Urmson])

Even though discursive reasoning necessarily happens in temporal succession, something of the nature of time is easily misunderstood by it. It attempts to deal with time through spatial notions such as parts or segments, and therefore misrepresents its dynamic and flowing nature. The paradoxes dissolve if one understands that although time imposes a temporal ordering for coming to be, for history, the divisions we use in talking about it are imposed on it by the mind. (For the paradoxes and discussions on time, see further Sorabji 2004: 11 (e).)

The fact that the bodily universe is also temporal seems to render two temporal levels on which it can be inspected. Inspired by Plato, who seemed to hold that it was possible to think of Socrates, for instance, as divisible into time-slices, Plotinus suggests that things in the realm of coming to be, of *genesis*, have a particular kind of existence that extends in time analogously to its extension in space:

> In the case of things that have come to be, if you take away the "will be", as they are things that acquire [being], non-existing immediately begins. … It seems that for the things

> that have come into being, substantial being (*hē ousia*) is existing from the origin of their coming to be until they have reached the extreme of time in which there is no longer being. This is [their] being and if anyone took it away, their life (*bios*) would be lessened. And similarly [would their] being (*to einai*). (*Enn*. III.7.4.18–19; 24–8)

Temporality adds, as it were, a fourth dimension. Beings in time extend both in space and time. This allows Plotinus to explain, among other things, change, the acquisition and loss of properties. Different temporal parts may have different properties. The divisibility this imparts, for instance, in the human being is, however, only proper to the lower level of time and the human mind's attempts at grasping it. On a higher, dynamic level human beings are flowing, continuous wholes that admit no division into parts. On a yet higher intelligible level, there is no flowing time but the properties of things exist in eternal "togetherness" (see further Remes 2005; 2007, in part).

Evil

As we have seen, the metaphysical hierarchy has a problem trying to explain the origin of evil. If the derivation from the One is good, how can it generate vice or imperfection? Yet as everyone can testify with their own eyes, the universe is not perfectly good, nor are people solely capable of virtue. Moral questions, which will be discussed in Chapter 6, start to make sense only when we are dealing with a universe that it not merely good, perfect and complete, but in which failure, vice and incompleteness have a place. The Platonists preceding Plotinus had sometimes been monists, sometimes dualists concerning good and evil. The former held that the universe has only one generative cause, from which both good and bad things must be derived. The latter postulated another principle or origin for evil and ugliness. The Neoplatonists were monists for the simple reason that they were committed to the idea of only one ultimate cause, the One, which is also good. Thus they struggled to explain

where and how evil can have an origin in the derivation stemming from an absolutely good first principle.

Most interpreters hold that Plotinus identified evil with indetermination and lack of form. The paradigmatic case for this was matter, and thus Plotinus' view is built on a denial of Aristotle's distinction between matter and privation. Matter is produced by the lower aspect of the Soul responsible, among other things, for nature as it is found in plants. Matter is the image of this lower soul. It is in this production that evil also steps into the picture. Unlike in Gnosticism, the soul is free from it, and evil appears only in its production (O'Brien 1971; 1991: 16–18). Matter and evil are real, yet they are not being, but, rather, otherness (*heterotēs*), contrary to being. This means that matter is the opposite of being's (i.e. intelligible form's) determination. It lacks determination, limit and measure. All these are external to the substratum: stamped on, as it were, by the formal power. Moreover, since form is that which transmits the Goodness of the One to the sensible universe, matter is also bereft of goodness (*Enn.* I.8.9; VI.7.15–18). It is formless and lacking good proportion rather than positively evil. Matter-evil is wickedness, ugliness and imperfection. This point of view is typical of ancient thought, with its tendency to identify evil with privation of goodness. In a sense, ancient philosophy actually lacks the positive notions of evil or sin developed much later in the history of philosophy. This also leaves open a possibility of questioning matter's evilness in Plotinus. Even matter would seem to have a touch of goodness; it is, despite everything, capable of receiving formation and goodness, and this receptivity can be seen as its sole, yet important, positive characteristic. If so, perhaps matter is not evil as such but only becomes evil in its incongruent interaction with soul (Van Riel 2001: 137; Schaeffer 2004).

To escape dualism, Plotinus held that matter has its source in the One. But how does the One's emanation become evil? If the effect is always implied in the cause, as the basic principles of Neoplatonism stated, why does the good proportion and generations of the soul become matter-evil? Remember that unity, beauty and goodness diminish gradually the lower and further from the One the *scalae* of generation proceeds. Perhaps at the ultimate end of generation

where the soul produces matter there is so little beauty and goodness left that the resulting level – that is, matter – must be defined by its lack of these things rather than by their presence. Yet there seems to remain a problem of why the lowest level of production displays a feature entirely different from, indeed the opposite of, all the previous levels. In any case, Plotinus' commitment to monism seems slightly compromised by his descriptions of matter's nature as always the opposite of form and goodness. According to another interpretation, it is possible that matter is not to be located as the lowest level of the gradual generation happening via the Intellect and the Soul. It is generated not by the Soul, but more or less directly by the One. Perhaps the One in its creative activity gives rise to another line of generation. This is generation not of form, but of intelligible matter and matter proper (Narbonne 2006; 2007b). This would mean that the One in its limitless power generates directly two mutually completing series of things, one that is form and determination, and another that is formless indetermination capable only of reception of form. In this interpretation, although there is only one ultimate principle of generation, matter has a more prominent and integrated place in the metaphysical hierarchy originating in the One than ultimate deficiency of goodness and formation.

Whether or not this was Plotinus' interpretation, this is much closer to how the Neoplatonists after Plotinus approached the issue. They denied that matter is evil at all, upholding Aristotle's distinction between matter and privation, the latter of which is merely the absence of form. The new interpretation of the origin of evil may have been pioneered by the first figure of the so-called Athenian Neoplatonism, Iamblichus, but, as in many other cases, his views are to be found in the fifth-century writings of the school's later systematizer, Proclus. As has already been noted, these philosophers gave a much more central role to the principle of duality found in both Pythagoreanism and Plato's *Philebus*. The central concepts of the latter, Limit and Unlimited (*peras* and *apeiron*), are enhanced to the status of the highest principles second only to the One itself. Of these, Limit stands for measure and demarcation, while the Unlimited becomes interpreted through Aristotelian *dunamis*, and as a power (Procl.

Platonic Theology III.12, 44.23–45.4). It is capable of, as in Aristotle, receiving demarcation, but it is further understood as an inexhaustible power generating being, and hence a principle equal to limit. From the first production of the One onwards, generation is divided according to these two principles, present in diminishing degrees at each level of the hierarchy of production. Ultimately it is present in the sensible universe where, however, what is left of the power of the unlimited is matter's capacity for formation. Just as form and limit are present in the sensible only in images, so the power of the unlimited is not immanent in the sensible. Its presence follows the original–copy relationship governing the relations between the two levels.

This theory removes the gap from the end of the *scalae* of generation that Plotinus' theory faced. It does, however, face its own problems. As Damascius was quick to note, the theory establishes a new problematic rupture at the top of the hierarchy, between the One and Duality: why is the immediate production of the One duality? One would think that at the top, when the productive power is still at its strongest, the One would be capable of overcoming duality (Damascius, *On Principles* II 22.1–31.6). The problem of how a good origin causes an evil effect is turned into a problem of how a simple origin causes a dual effect.

The derivation of evil in Proclus' universe is also interesting. Proclus builds on the idea of evil as privation of goodness, as something that has no independent existence. But he maintains that it is not to be simply identified with privation, and gives an interesting account of how evil has its existence in and from the good. It is a perversion and a dependent parasite of goodness internal to it. This is linked to a theory of *parhypostasis* in later Neoplatonism, probably inaugurated already by Iamblichus. When something is caused in accordance with the nature of the cause and towards a goal that is intended, the effect has existence, it is a *hypostasis*. But there are also accidental effects, those that exist besides (*para*) the intended effect. The existence of such things is accidental and parasitic: *parhypostasis*. The existence of evil is such a case. Along with the good coexists its negation: evil disposition, which is a kind of side-effect of goodness (e.g. Procl., *On the Existence of Evils* 7.30–31; 50.29–31; see Steel

1998; Opsomer 2001: 183). Thus evil, in a sense, follows goodness in its wake from the very beginning. Regardless of the inevitability with which it follows goodness, it has no claim to the status of another principle or origin in metaphysics, for it has no independent existence. It is entirely parasitic on goodness.

In all these approaches, evil undermines the goodness of the generation emanating from the One, but it has no ultimate power over it, nor is its existence independent of it. Even though evil marks especially the material and sensible existence, it should be remembered that Neoplatonism regards the sensible existence as a mainly positive one: a realm that displays the beauty of the higher principles. Plotinus attacks vehemently, for instance, Gnostic dualism: this world, although deficient, is not unqualifiedly or even predominantly evil but an image of a beautifully ordered intelligible realm. Bodies are beautiful houses and instruments of souls, not anything inherently evil (*Enn.* I.4.16.21–30, II.9.4–5). Even though matter is often described as a source of deformation and vice, it is unlimited and formless, and thereby without any beautiful organization or proportion, rather than being positively evil. It is not another source of existence alongside the One, but, rather, generated by the One, even though furthest removed from its goodness.

Beauty

In Neoplatonism, sensible beauty is often understood as harmony, symmetry or good proportion. Significant is that this is not what beauty is in itself, but a reflection of it, a particular way in which beauty is present in the sensible realm. The explanation of beauty follows the familiar top-downism. As in Plato's *Symposium*, sensible beauty is below the Beautiful itself. The Beautiful has an intimate connection with the Good. Whether or not the primary Beautiful is the One for Plotinus is a matter of some controversy. *Ennead* V.8, *On the Intelligible Beauty*, seems to locate the beautiful in the Intellect, and thus be understood as Form and the perfect internal relationships structuring the system of Forms. This is incorporeal beauty.

Yet it has also been argued, based on *Enneads* VI.7.22–3, that the intelligible beauty has its source higher, in the One itself (Stern-Gillet 2000). Damascius delivers the following statement:

> Proportion, according to the commentator, belongs to the elements and appears in their relation to each other; for only when they have become proportionate can they coalesce, and then the whole superimposes itself upon them. Beauty, in his opinion, comes in with form as a whole, being Form of forms. (Damascius, *Lectures on the Philebus* §235 [trans. Westerink])

Beauty does not seem to be just one Form in the intelligible, a Form of Beauty, but is either something that the intelligible contains as a whole or, as in Damascius, a Form of forms. In general, the intelligible, the One and the human experiences of both levels are often described through beauty and connected notions.

In the sensible, beauty comes to be through two different means. On the one hand the rational forming principles structuring matter render the sensible objects and formations beautiful. This is the beauty inherent in the corporeals. On the other the artist may transmit intelligible principles to an artwork, perhaps at times even better than they are in nature itself:

> Then he must know that the arts do not simply imitate what they see, but they run back up to the forming principles from which nature derives; then also that they do a great deal by themselves, and since they possess beauty, they make up what is defective in things. For Pheidias too did not make his Zeus from any model perceived by the senses, but understood what Zeus would look like if he wanted to make himself visible. (*Enn.* V.8.1.34–42 [trans. Armstrong])

Yet too much emphasis should not be put on any sensible beauty; rather, one must always keep in mind that it is an image of the intelligible or trancendent beauty.

FOUR

Human being and the self

What is a human being and who are we? These questions are, it may well be argued, central for Neoplatonism. Neoplatonism is situated in a long tradition that evaluates humanity as something special; human beings are both a part of nature and, through their divine intellectual ability, above the rest of nature. The Neoplatonic approach to these issues combines this general attitude of ancient philosophy with a novel way of putting the emphasis in questions about "us" (*hēmeis*). While explicating the shared nature of human beings as parts of the cosmos as well as highlighting the human capacity of and possibility for reasoning and knowledge in much the same manner as most philosophical schools of antiquity, the Neoplatonists seem to force apart an aspect of human being that is the "I", or, as Plotinus puts it, "we". This discussion is rooted in the Socratic exhortation "Know yourself!" (*gnōthi seauton*), and especially in the notion of care of the self (*epimeleia heautou*) central in the *Alcibiades I*. While modern scholarship sometimes considers this dialogue to be inauthentic, the Neoplatonists deemed it a propadeutic to all Platonic philosophizing. The dialogue introduces care for the self as central for human well-being. In order to be able to care for the self one must know what the self is. The striving is to discern a part of human nature that would be most thoroughly "us", that is, the deepest and most important aspect of our nature worthy of our attention. The Neoplatonists

further go into the question of how this aspect coexists with other aspects of our nature. They come to separate a notion not unlike "self" from the concept of human being (*anthrōpos*), soul (*psuchē*) as well as intellect (*nous*), although the similarity with later and present notions can be granted only with several qualifications.

The domain of connected issues studied in the context of humanity and selfhood can be roughly divided into two. Central for understanding humanity is, undoubtedly, the study of the abilities and functions of the soul. This is a topic begun by Plato, if not the Presocratics, and further advanced as well as systematized by Aristotle in his *De anima*. This side of the story is the subject of Chapter 5. Here we shall begin with an enquiry into the place of human beings in the metaphysical order of things. The Neoplatonists follow the ancient tradition in believing that our nature is explicable through an ontological positioning. What are the fundamental beliefs about humanity and soul in relation to our position in the universe? What does the place of human beings in the order of things reveal about our nature? While many ancient philosophers are mainly focusing on human nature and its ontological basis rather than on any vague notion of self or person, the Neoplatonists, following, among others, the later Stoic authors, advance a slightly different line of questioning. As we shall see, they combine the foundation of shared humanity and its metaphysical explanation with enquiry into a more reflexive and dynamic question: who are we?

Before trying to capture the prehistory of selfhood to the extent that it is to be attributed to the Neoplatonists, the more substantial and concrete notion of human being should be studied in some detail. Humanity proposes one particular challenge. On the one hand human beings are part of nature: material beings that stand in causal relations to other such things. On the other hand, human beings perceive, conceptualize and reflect the rest of nature as well as their *own* nature and place within it. Sometimes they would seem even to transcend nature, to mould and change it or to escape its causal necessities. What kind of explanatory and conceptual toolbox is needed to capture a being as multifaceted as this? How do the different aspects coexist? How are they related? Neoplatonic anthropol-

ogy stands on the following four pedestals: human being's relation to the hypostases and the hierarchy they form; the dual character of humanity as something material and corporeal, yet conscious and rational, and the coexistence of the two dimensions; the Platonic doctrine of the immortality of the soul and the Neoplatonic myth of the "fall" of the soul; the view of each soul as everything there is in the universe, an intelligible universe. Let us look at each of these four foundations in some detail.

Human being and the metaphysical hierarchy

One focal and original particularity of Neoplatonism is not just the proliferation but also an internalization of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. In some manner, a human being encompasses, or is fundamentally related to, the metaphysical levels. She is not an outside spectator, nor firmly to be located at any single level, even though the level of soul may well be the most significant and explanatorily most appropriate. Rather, a complete explanation of human nature must be built on all the levels (Wildberg 2002). The implication of this, among other things, is that any readings of Neoplatonism that render human beings as solely inhabitants of otherworldly heights is bound to be incorrect. A truthful explanation of human nature must unite something from all levels of reality. The idea recalls Aristotle's psychology, in which plants have vegetative souls, animals both vegetative and sensitive souls, and human beings both of these as well as a rational soul (*De an.* 2.2, 413a21ff.). To be more exact, the human soul is a unity of functions of different levels, some of which are shared by other living things, some particular to just human beings. The more elaborate the organism in question, the more inclusive of functions it is. A complete explanation of humanity includes all different levels of the soul.

In the Plotinian system we encounter (starting from the bottom) (i) the material and extended nature. This is an aspect of humanity as a part of the spatiotemporal world, as a thing that can be measured and touched. It is our most concrete existence. This dimension is closely

connected to the human (ii) bodily life, with endeavours and desires connected to the world human beings perceive and live in. As beings with a soul, human beings have all the Aristotelian functions of the soul, starting from nutrition all the way to perception and consciousness. The highest Aristotelian faculty of the soul, reason, happens in embodied existence, but it is empowered by (iii) the intellect, the highest part of reason in a state of infallible knowledge (to be discussed in Chapter 5). The connection to the intellect explains human cognitive capacities and possibility for knowledge. Finally, (iv) the One endows human beings, with more than just their existence, their unity and goodness. On the one hand, human beings are entities with internal structure, separate from their surroundings. That is, they are individuals. Their individuation and coherent organization is due to the fact that human beings ultimately derive from the One: from the supreme principle of absolute unity that gives them what unity and harmony they possess. This aspect the human beings share with all other individuated entities. On the other hand, human beings have a particularly strong capacity and a striving towards beauty, goodness and happiness: towards perfection and further unification. These inclinations and the abilities to realize them separate human beings from other individuated entities. This, too, is owing to the derivation of the human soul from the first principle.

Neoplatonic anthropology internalizes not only the metaphysical structure, but also the value hierarchy involved with it. To be a human being is to be a creature with several dimensions, and the good life, as we shall see in Chapter 6, begins with this realization. Yet paramount is the understanding that all these dimensions do not stand on an equal footing: some levels are "higher" or better, inaccessible though they may be to most people (Blumenthal 1996: 83). This has also a normatively regulative implication; some aspects of human nature are to be cultivated more than others. In the case of human beings, perfection cannot refer to the mere fulfilment of our capacities and possibilities as embodied creatures. As the *Alcibiades I* states, for the soul to know itself it must look at the region that makes the soul good, namely wisdom (133b). Because we reach all the way up to the intellect, which, like the hypostasis Intellect, directly gazes at the beauty of

the One, for us perfection means calling attention to this highest part of our nature. In accordance with the hierarchy of values captured in the metaphysical system, being a *good* human being is a matter of fulfilment of the highest parts of our nature. Here the Neoplatonists also agree with Aristotelian teleology; each living thing fulfils its end by living a life in accordance to its particular nature and function. Since human beings are rational creatures, for them this means a life of cultivation of this highest aspect of their nature, rather than settling with a life of, say, mere nutrition or sensation (*Eth. Nic.* 1.7, 1097b30–1098a7). That, as Plato put it, would be the life of a mollusc (*Phlb.* 21c), and not a proper human life.

Soul and body

Of the many dimensions and characteristics incorporated in human nature by this anthropology made metaphysical, two would seem to be paramount, yet they are by no means self-evidently related or in unison. We are living and bodily beings, walking, eating and in general reacting to the impulses from our surroundings, even in many automatic or near automatic ways. Yet we can also solve difficult mathematical puzzles, create art that makes people weep after centuries or even millennia, or be so immersed in reading an interesting book that we forget to eat or ignore our current personal situation and circumstances. We undergo pain and sadness but can train ourselves to be prepared for it and thus alleviate at least some of its immediacy. We may reflect, and stand back from or confront our own dispositions and choices, as well as beliefs. Are these different functions strictly speaking functions of one and the same thing? How are these dimensions of humanity connected to one another? Do they form a unity?

Ancient philosophy is, in broad outline, committed to the view that soul is a principle of two different kinds. The soul is a life-giving force, animating the body and thus distinguishing it from inanimate existence, but it is also a seat of consciousness and cognition (Kalligas 2000: 26–7). There may not be any easy way to incorporate

these functions under the same agency or subjectivity, under one and the same soul. Philosophers try several paths. Well known is Plato's division of the soul into three parts in the fourth book of the *Republic*, as well as the *Pheadrus*' metaphor of a charioteer (reason) and his two horses (desire and spirit), of which only the latter two are directly connected to the body (246a–c, 253c–e). Broadly taken, in Platonism humanity can at the outset be seen divided into two things of entirely different sorts. One becomes actual or has a meaningful existence only in the body; these are activities happening in and through a body. The other is not essentially tied to the body; this is reason or the intellectual capacity that can function and exist separately from the body.

Although in most cases it appears that the rational soul is unified and merely actualizes capacities proper for embodied existence in the body, sometimes Plato seems to maintain that only the intellectual souls are immortal. If so, only the rational soul is essential, which would further threaten the unity of human nature. In the demiurgic creation myth of the *Timaeus*, Plato acknowledges the dual role of the soul, and although the dialogue strives to give a unified account of humanity, it can nonetheless perhaps be seen as a further step towards widening the gap between the two dimensions. The dialogue recounts how the demiurge who creates the universe gives human beings the principle of the soul himself, whereas the creation of mortal bodies he leaves to the lesser gods. Thus our bodily being becomes understood as something that has a nature and origin different from, as well as "lower" or less significant than, the soul. Moreover, the non-rational parts are called mortal and only the rational soul is called immortal, and hence only the latter is essential (*Ti.* 41c–e). Platonic heritage is far from simple on this question. For instance, in the *Phaedrus* (246b–c) it seems to be the case that gods, too, have non-rational parts of the soul, and therefore these parts have a more prominent role. Nonetheless, the overall tendency to denigrate the bodily nature is undeniable in many instances, not least in the *Phaedo*.

Plotinus very rarely refers to Plato's distinction between the parts of the soul – to the desiring, spirited and rational soul – and seems to take the *Timaean* division and the Aristotelian background as more

significant. In his interpretation of this heritage he postulates two phases of ensoulment: the forming and animating soul; and our individual soul, which, as he says, is the source of our well-being rather than being, that by which we are our selves (*kath' hēn hēmeis*) (*Enn.* II.1.5.18–23) – it is both rational and individual. Which precise abilities belong to which phase of ensoulment is not entirely clear. The functions of the Aristotelian vegetative soul belong to the first, lower phase, and the functions of the sensitive soul must either belong to the animating soul, or are to be divided between it and the individual soul. (In Chapter 5 we shall further enquire into perception, imagination and memory.)

Unlike Aristotle, in some passages Plotinus seems to identify the first or more elemental phase of ensoulment as due to another, distinct soul, namely the Soul of the All (*Enn.* VI.3.18.19–21), and thus in his own way he confirms the *Timaean* picture of two distinct sources of ensoulment. If this is the right reading of his theory, the Soul of the All would create or mould the whole body of universe, stones, plants, animals and human bodies included. Individual human souls would then take their place in appropriate bodies, some of them in animal bodies as a punishment for previous vicious lives. This view presents a number of difficulties. If the individual soul is to be identified with the rational soul capable of directing the life of the composite towards virtue and goodness, and if this is the only kind of individual soul there is, then animals would have no individual souls at all. Are we to think that all the functions we share with animals are endowed by the Soul of the All? Yet, for instance, as we shall see in Chapter 5, from early on human perception is connected to higher cognitive capacities, and it seems somewhat strange to leave it as a function simply shared with everything else in the universe. (But if the animals have a non-rational soul besides the share in the Soul of the All, we are faced with the question of what happens to this soul when a rational soul is transmigrated to an animal body as a result of a bad previous life.) Moreover, how do we explain individual characteristics? Since animals have individualizing characteristics and some of them are even, in some sense, "personalities", how plausible is it to claim that what individuates and particularizes

us is the rational soul, rather than the forming or animating soul? Finally, how are the first and second phase of ensoulment related if they stem from two different sources? How does the individual soul fit itself to a "suitable" body and coexist with it?

Whether or not Plotinus has a satisfactory answer to these dilemmas is a matter of some controversy. In any case, he does seem to concede that humanity *is* twofold. That precisely is one of his points: human beings are "amphibious" – they live two kinds of life, those of the intellect and the composite. Of these, the life of the intellect reflects the true self (*Enn.* IV.8.4.31–35, II.3.9.30–31). Porphyry's theory is not far from his teacher's, but, perhaps with more clarity than Plotinus, he distinguishes a transcendent soul and the soul giving life to the composite, the animated life, *empsuchia*. For Porphyry, it is central to distinguish not intellectual or rational soul from other soul functions, but, rather, an impassible soul from the embodied one. Analogically to the distinction between separable and inseparable incorporeals, the transcendent soul differs from the animating one in that the former is an independent substance, the latter a dependent, immanent incorporeal (*Sentences* 18; cf. Karamanolis 2007).

The later Neoplatonists chose different paths of overall interpretation. In their attempt to read and comment on Plato in more detail than Plotinus had done, they sought to incorporate his views on tripartite soul into their philosophy. Thus, at the turn of the third and fourth centuries CE, Iamblichus seems to have believed that the souls go through substantial change:

> So then, according to Iamblichus, the individual soul partakes equally of both permanence and change, so that also in this way its median role is preserved. … And it changes somehow not in regard to its states alone but also in accordance with its essence (*kata tēn ousian*).
>
> (Priscianus, *Metaphrasis in Theophrastum* 32.12–15, 19–20 [trans. Steel])

Since the unified soul as a whole directs itself either to the intelligible or to the sensible, no part of it remains permanently unchanged,

and therefore in its acts it also changes itself – "substantially" (cf. Steel 1978).

Proclus, the fifth-century Athenian, claims in his commentary on the *Republic* that the human soul comprises three substances. If each part of the soul, the desiring, spirited and rational, have their own perfection, then they are, he reasons, three separate substances, of which the desiring soul is directed to our bodily existence, and the rational soul to the noetic objects of reason, whereas the spirited soul deals with things that combine elements from the first two. However, since perceptual power clearly belongs to none of these substances, and yet is a very basic power of the human soul, it must be yet a further substance of its own. Human nature thus becomes divided according to its basic powers and dimensions, and not only into different faculties, powers or parts, but into *substances*. How it is that these substances form a unity becomes an ever more pressing problem (Procl. *In R.* I 207.9–11; Perkams 2006).

The worry about the co-existence of two essentially different natures, the bodily and the incorporeal soul, is shared by all Neoplatonists. Plotinus' pupil Porphyry formulates it in the following way:

> How, then, could body, when united with the soul, still remain body, or, conversely, how could soul, being as it is incorporeal and truly real of itself, be united with body and become part of living being while preserving its own essence uncontaminated and uncorrupted?
>
> (Porph., *Inquiries into Various Topics*, fr. 259 [Smith], preserved in Nemesius of Emesa, *De Nat. Hom.* 3, p. 38 [Morani] [= Dillon & Gerson 2004: 195–6])

Two ideas are basic to all solutions concerning the unity of human nature in Neoplatonism. First, the Neoplatonists took Plato's dialogue *Alcibiades I*'s theory about the soul–body relationship as authoritative: the soul uses the body as a tool (*organon*) (*Alcibiades I* 129c–e). There are not, as in Aristotle, two distinct but mutually dependent things, soul and body, form and matter, that have their own important role in together contributing to the composite human being;

rather, in Platonism, soul shows a certain amount of independence from the body and governs and uses it. The soul–body relationship resembles the relationship between a Form and its image, where the former is prior both in reality as well as in causal efficacy (for this in Plato, cf. e.g. Gerson 2002: 3). Neoplatonism goes even further. Since in the derivation of everything from the One the Soul is on a higher level than the body, it, in fact, partakes in its generation. As an intermediary cause in emanation, Soul is the cause of the body. Plotinus contends that without the Soul there would be no body. This stretches the tool metaphor only a little: something is made a tool only by there being a user with a function for the tool, and an end (*telos*) for that function to fulfil. If Plotinus is a dualist, he must be a very strange kind of dualist. There is no talk of two different and independent substances when the body is dependent on the soul (Clark 1996: 276). So it also makes no sense to press Plotinus to answer on how a soul may have any causal relevance to the body, because the body is generated by a soul, be that the hypostasis Soul, the Soul of the All or the individual soul, all of which share the same genus. The third metaphysical principle, the principle of non-reciprocal dependence, stated that the generated thing is always dependent for its features and existence on its cause. Therefore the body cannot but be related to the soul in the appropriate way, and it must be dependent on the soul for its features and existence. The above-mentioned solution by Proclus similarly appeals to the connections between the levels in the hierarchic universe: the intellectual or rational soul substance actually generates or emanates all the lower soul substances in the same order as the metaphysical hierarchy emanates from the One. Thus they form a connected series of substances all dependent, ultimately, on the highest, intellectual soul substance (Procl. *In R*. I 235).

Secondly, as has been indicated, following Plato's *Parmenides*, the Neoplatonists postulated a different realm of being, one not defined by spatiotemporal laws. For them, the soul is a being that belongs to this immaterial realm. Neoplatonists firmly reject any materialistic accounts of the soul (of both the Stoic pneumatic and Epicurean atomistic variety), and belong to the Platonic–Aristotelian tradition in which the soul is understood as an immaterial Form, or at

least something very much like the immaterial Forms. In Plotinus' view, the fact that some objects of the soul's cognitive functions, of its thinking, are immaterial, means that it is impossible for the subject of these thoughts to be material (*Enn.* IV.7.8.7–17). Matter's role in the generation of embodied human beings is in accordance with its overall role in the metaphysics: to receive the form. Plotinus likens this reception to the way in which the mirror receives its images (*Enn.* IV.9.5.18–19). Two aspects of this reception can be highlighted. First, a mirror does not add anything substantial to the image. It may distort it or fail to display all of its details, but it does not help in creating the figurations. Secondly, the images on the mirror are not real. A mirror mirrors the real things, providing mere unreal copies on its surface. In human being, the origin of the formation, life, motion and cognition is the soul, or rather, the two souls ensouling the bit of matter designated to the human being in the cosmological whole. The body cannot be a principle of these activities since it is a composite, and thus in a need of a unified ordering principle, and because stuffs simply are not capable of life (see also Clark 1996: 277).

As an immaterial and incorporeal thing, the soul is a being capable of being "everywhere as a whole", or "whole through whole" (*holon di' holou*). As Porphyry describes the matter:

> The soul, on the other hand, being incorporeal and not spatially circumscribed, completely and wholly penetrates both its light and its body, and there is not a part that is lit by it in which it is not present as a whole, for neither is it controlled by the body, but rather it controls the body, nor is it in the body as in a container or a bag, but rather the body is in it. … If someone were to say, "So, then, my soul is in Alexandria and Rome and everywhere," he would fail to see that he is speaking in spatial terms, for "being in Alexandria" and in general "in such and such a place" is a spatial concept.
>
> (Porph., *Inquiries into Various Topics*, fr. 261, preserved in Nemesius of Emesa, *De Nat. Hom.* 3, p. 41, 5–10; 42, 1–3)

What is clear is that the soul is not in a body as in a place, nor as a property of underlying material. Rather, the later Neoplatonists prefer to say that the soul is "in relation" (*kata schesin*). Plotinus had already given several indications about the special nature of this existence. He explores the Peripatetic metaphor of the steersman and ship made in passing by Aristotle (*Enn.* IV.3.9.22–3; cf. Aristotle, *De an.* 2.1, 413a8–9). This metaphor suggests that the soul is the actuality of the body in the same way that a steersman is the actuality of a ship, that is, that which actualizes the functions for which the ship exists. He is content with it to the extent that it rightly embodies the idea that the soul is, in the Platonic manner, separate from the ship. Yet the metaphor tells very little about the manner of the presence of the steersman on the ship, and ultimately fails because it does not capture his idea of its presence on the ship as a whole at all. Plotinus therefore preferred Plato's idea that the body, rather, is in the soul. He clarified this somewhat cryptic statement by saying: "What I mean is this: when the ensouled body is illuminated by soul, one part of it participates in one way and one in another; and according to the suitability of [each] organ to its task, as soul gives [each] the appropriate power for its task …" (Plotinus, *Enn.* IV.3.23.1–5).

The particular power of the soul is its capacity to endow different kinds of organs with different kinds of powers and ensure that all of these also belong to the same whole, the same human being. Plotinus may use the Stoic idea of the soul, which reaches to all parts of the body without losing its unity as one soul. The commanding faculty (*hēgemonikon*) is like the trunk from which the other parts, such as senses, branch and to which they report (e.g. Calcidius 220 [= Long & Sedley 1987: 53 g]). For Plotinus, the power of the soul is such that although it activates different powers in different spatial parts of the body, it is not divisible to these functions. If it was, it would be like a body, and thus divisible and destructible. He opposes Stoic materialism and holds that a soul divisible to spatial parts does not lend itself easily to explanations of how the different powers nested in human being work together to form an individual with coherent motions and unified consciousness and agency. Here Plotinus inherits from Plato, among others, the importance placed on the

explanation of the cross-modal unity of human perception. In his view, the phenomenon of unified perceptual consciousness – that perceptions from different organs come together in the perceiving subject – can be explained solely by the immateriality of the soul (Emilsson 1991; Gerson 1994: 129–32).

The Neoplatonic way of taking the soul as a unified and immaterial principle of different powers inherent in human beings is a suitable tool for explaining unities of a different sort. What is more difficult is to explain how this nature escapes from any alterations imposed on it by the lower level of the body. Can it be impassible and at the same time receptive to perceptions and experiences in the body? We shall consider perception and learning in Chapter 5. Here we shall present the overall solution to the problem of the impassibility of the soul. Because the soul belongs, properly, to the hypostasis level, and because its presence in the bodily realm is only as a source of powers, not of affections, Plotinus claims that the soul actually does not come to a bodily existence at all. Rather, what animates and comes to be immanent in bodies is a shadow or trace of the soul (*Enn.* IV.4.18.1–9). It is thus a further unfolding of an entity properly belonging to a higher level of existence. From Porphyry onwards, the Neoplatonists also employ the above-mentioned Aristotelian notion of relation (*schesis*). For Aristotle, relation is posterior to substance. Neoplatonists conclude that the relation of body to the soul is something lesser or posterior to the substance of the soul. The soul that has a relation to the body is dependent on the soul substance and is itself of lesser reality than it (Lloyd 1967: 289). Broadly taken, these are Platonic moves: first, it is important to hold on to the soul's indestructibility and immortality; secondly, the soul is like a Form that, rather than coming to be entirely immanent in the sensible, is mirrored by or unfolded in the sensible, remaining on its proper, transcendent, level of existence. The suggestions also testify to a general tendency within Neoplatonism: solving problems connected with the cooperation of any two different levels by postulating further levels between them. The significant outcome is that the soul may preserve its immutability and impassibility while its trace both effects and undergoes things in the material universe.

The descent of the soul

If the deepest nature of humanity extends to the unchanging and divine levels of being, into the immediate vicinity of the One, why are we nonetheless embodied, and spend most of our time in less than intellectual activities, far from wisdom as well as perfection of goodness and happiness? Why is human existence marked by vice and imperfection? For the Neoplatonists, this question is translated into the question of why embodied human beings were generated in the first place: that is, why eternal or timeless intellectual souls "separated" themselves from the Intellect and acquired individuality and bodily as well as temporal existence:

> What is it, then, which has made the souls forget their father, god, and even though they are parts from this higher realm and altogether belong to him, be ignorant both of themselves and of him? The origin of evil for them was audacity (*tolma*) and birth and the first difference and the wish to belong to themselves. Since they appeared to take pleasure in self-determination (*to autexousion*), and to make much use of self-movement, running the opposite way and making the distance as great as possible, they were ignorant even that they were from that realm. (Plotinus, *Enn.* V.1.1.1–9)

The overall normative picture where the higher aspect of the human being, the soul and especially its intellectual aspect, is better and more worthy than its embodied life is strengthened by the doctrine of the "fall" or descent (*kathodos, katabasis*) of the soul. The generation myth or story weaves human imperfection together with individuation. As a part of the Intellect, each of us would have no true individual existence. The human striving towards individual existence, towards being oneself, separates the souls from the original "togetherness" within the Intellect. This urge and audacity (*tolma*) creates token souls and ultimately brings them to the utmost individuation: to an existence as embodied, individual human beings. Our home and origin is the intelligible universe, gazing closely at

the One or God, yet becoming a human being with a personality, individual characteristics and body, as well as a place and task in the universe, unrelentingly ties us to the realm below perfection. Thus belonging to something high and perfect, without any individualizing characteristics, is contrasted with being an individual with one's particular existence and personal features. Personality and individuality are understood as essential to our nature, yet connected with imperfection. The same move that makes us what we are, embodied individuals, creates problems for the human claim to truth, perfect goodness and paradigmatic unity.

The descent myth is told as a history of our nature, but just like all creation or generation "histories", its point is to explain human nature now, at this very moment, as well as for the moments to come. The individual immortal souls are above time but, through descent, their experiences and actions take place in temporal succession. The descent myth describes human beings as inhabitants of the realm familiar to us, the temporal and sensible, but also of the eternal and intelligible. Its significance is in explaining human inclination and capacity to intellection and to grasping beauty and goodness. The fact that we have our "source" in the intelligible explains our affinity to paradigmatic thought, that is, our natural abilities to think and to acquire truth or understanding. The metaphysical vicinity of human beings to the One explains why they can live, at least occasionally, morally, and why they have the means to accomplish unity, harmony and beauty in different aspects of human life.

The descent myth places all human beings in individual yet parallel situations. Everyone is separated from original unity and goodness. Nonetheless there are personal differences in how virtuous and harmonious are the lives that human beings conduct. What explains this variation? Analogous to the tie that human functions and capacities have to metaphysics, the actualization of these powers is explicable through metaphysical notions. Our innate desire for and pursuit of things such as unity, beauty, truth and goodness are explainable by the idea that everything aspires and reverts to its source. The soul that has become individual realizes its own separation from the intelligible and yearns back to it. Therefore it, like the hypostases, returns

back and strives to rise back towards its source. This turn (*epistrophē*) and "ascent" (*anabasis*, *anodos*) refers to the human being's desire and attempt to actualize the higher levels of her being. It captures not merely having but also *using* intellectual or rational capacities endowed in human nature. It stands for human striving towards happiness, and a particular kind of happiness that would be not just pleasant feelings in the body but a deeper and more constant state (to be further discussed in Chapter 6). To ascend requires that one carries out or realizes goodness in this life. It is the human response to a need to become as unified and perfect as possible: an imitation of the One or the Good. Just as the metaphysical hypostases constitute themselves by turning back towards their source, human self-constitution requires this same reversal of attention. We become who and what we are by directing ourselves back towards the origin (*Enn.* I.6.9.7–25). The actualization of different levels of our being that we can, at least to some extent, voluntarily influence shapes our lives: it constitutes our embodied selfhood.

Through the described descent and ascent, as well as the changes of emphasis between different dimensions of human nature connected to it, the human soul nonetheless remains immortal and indestructible. Following Plato's *Phaedo*, the Neoplatonists consider the soul immortal. Basically, it is a thing that cannot admit changes, deep affections or fundamental partitioning; otherwise it would be liable for destruction. As we have seen, the overall metaphysical causation in the Neoplatonic metaphysics is from the top downwards, and thus the soul cannot really be affected by anything lower than its own nature, that is, by the body or bodily life. If the soul cannot undergo any deep alterations, exactly what happens to it in its descent to the body and ascent away from it is thus far somewhat mysterious, and we shall return to this question below. Here it suffices to say that to incorporate the idea of immortal soul into the generation myth of descent and ascent, one must postulate not only a dimension of the soul that is unchangeable and perfect, but also an aspect or dimension that includes the boldness and desire for individuation and its consequences: a thing which lives its life in connection with the body and the bodily world.

One of the big differences between Plotinus and the later Neoplatonists relates to the doctrine of descent. Plotinus held that the human soul has an "unfallen" part, that is, that there is an aspect of it, the perfect intellect (*nous*) that does not descend but remains eternally contemplating the whole of Platonic Forms, although our everyday consciousness is not directed to this activity. Plotinus contends: "If one must venture to state what is the case against the opinion of the rest, not all our soul descends, but a part of it always is in the intelligible" (*Enn.* IV.8.8.1–3). This doctrine amalgamates the originally Aristotelian idea of a perfect, higher intellect thinking of everything there is to know into the Platonic doctrine of recollection, *anamnēsis*, claiming, broadly, that the fact that there seems to be innate knowledge, be that conceptual or logical or whatever, is explainable through the idea that each rational human soul actually has a share of that perfect intellect. Everyday reasoning is a further unfolding of this perfect ability in each and every human soul.

The later Neoplatonists deny the doctrine of the unfallen soul. Thus Proclus says, rather, that: "Every particular soul, when it descends into temporal process descends entire: there is not a part of it which remains above and a part which descends" (*Elements of Theology*, prop. 211). In defending their revised position, the later Neoplatonists appealed to Plato's *Phaedrus*. The charioteer of the *Phaedrus* is identified with the highest element of human being, and since the charioteer sometimes rides high and sees the eternal forms, sometimes descends, they conclude that the highest element is not immutable but experiences different states at different times (e.g. Iamblichus, fr. 87 [= Dillon & Gerson 2004: 255]). Iamblichus' view is that the soul is an entity that is a mean between two extremes: Intellect and Body. It cannot be divided into a descended and an undescended part. The changing and abiding nature are somehow more integrally united, and whenever the soul approaches the Intellect, it does this as a whole; whenever it proceeds towards the sensible life, it does, this, too, as a whole (ps.-Simpl., *Commentary on On the Soul* 5.38–6.17).

The arguments posed in favour of the abandonment of the Plotinian doctrine can be divided into metaphysical, ethical and epistemo-

logical (Blumenthal 1997: 276). The epistemological worry concerns the fact that people are erring; if each and every soul is in possession of perfect truth, why do we nonetheless repeatedly err (Procl. *In Ti.* III 333, 28–334.8)? Plotinus' answer to this could have been to say that he nowhere claims that we are conscious of this perfect knower within us at all times. It is a propensity of ours, the source of cognitive capacities. Because this is not at all a complete description of human nature, it is true that they do err. Yet because of the abilities, people also get it right remarkably often. An undescended intellect simply does not present the whole truth of our nature, nor our everyday nature. In Plotinus' view, "we" are somewhere between the intellect and the sensible: "sense-perception is our messenger, while intellect is our king" (*Enn.* V.3.3.45–6). While the complete explanation of human nature includes all metaphysical levels, some of them explain more about us than others. The higher levels have ontological and epistemological priority, but the human self is not straightforwardly to be identified with them. Particular to our being is our central position, roughly in between the body and the intelligible.

The ethical complaint against the doctrine of undescended soul formulated by Proclus follows a similar path to the epistemological complaint. Since the perfect intellect is, according to Plotinus, also paradigmatically happy, does it not follow that each of us should and could be happy at all times? But our experience testifies to the contrary (Procl. *In Ti.* III 334, 8–15). This is somewhat trickier for Plotinus to answer. He does try to argue that just as we are not aware of the perfect knowledge within, we are not aware of this inner happiness. Yet what does it mean to have a latent, inner happiness that one is not aware of? Even more than knowledge, happiness does seem to have an experiential dimension. If we do not experience happiness, are we really happy in any meaningful sense? Nor does the idea of inner happiness as a propensity or capacity for everyday happiness seem to work analogously to the idea of cognitive capacities. It can be questioned whether happiness is any sort of propensity or capacity that can be actualized.

The metaphysical argument is perhaps the strongest, and it concerns the relationship between the intellect and the soul. It runs as

follows. Either the intellect exercises only its own proper kind of perfect intellection without inference and discursivity, or the intellect does both kinds of reasoning, and the soul would partake in the lower one. In the first case, the soul would have to take part in this perfection. Yet the soul reasons mostly inferentially and imperfectly. In the second case, however, the intellect that was supposed to be one substance would be composed of two essentially different aspects (Procl., *Elements of Theology*, prop. 211 explanation). The implications of the doctrine may turn out to be problematic. Perhaps human nature is composed of two substances, in which case their relationship must be explained. If the higher one is the cause and origin of the lower one, how does it fail in making the lower one also perfect? And if it creates something clearly deficient and different from itself, why would it attach itself to this lower substance? (Procl., *Commentary on the Parmenides* 948.12–38).

One path open to Plotinus would have been to try to deny the two-substance theory, and the idea that the soul and its aspects must be things that rigidly follow the levels of metaphysics and the difficulties concerning their participation relations. Human intellect and soul is a particular kind of thing, like a microcosmos in which we find both noetic and soul levels. It is not any one, or two, Aristotelian substance, or substances, but an amazing thing with different natures and the capacity of accentuating any one of them. The soul is an unfolding of the intellect, not another separate substance, and as an unfolding it is bound to be connected but deficient in comparison to its source. The whole made up of the two is our true nature. Nonetheless the fact remains that Plotinus divides human nature into two different aspects of very different kinds: perfection versus imperfection, knowledge versus belief, eternity versus time, and so on. Each division prompts questions about the unity of the divided entity. Consequently, Plotinus' anthropology can be seen as either ridden by divisions like these or flexibly accounting for different aspects of our manifold nature, depending on the interpretative direction.

The later Neoplatonic denial of the undescended *nous* is itself a double-edged move. On the one hand, despite the abandonment,

they hold on to many connected ideas, such as immortality and some kind of divinity of the soul, as well as the internal hierarchical division into aspects and capacities of the soul. Thus it is also possible that they retain some of the problems connected to the unity of the soul. The move also severs the human relationship with the intelligible universe and its objects of knowledge, thus creating possible problems for explaining knowledge acquisition. In Chapter 5 we shall see the later Neoplatonists grapple with questions about knowledge and its limits. Yet by the same move the later Neoplatonists *humanize* human beings, rendering them a species of their own, different and separate from divinity. Their doctrinal development accentuates the idea that human beings are not gods or even semi-gods, but have their own appropriate place and status in the universe. God is a possibility, not an endowed part of the human soul. All this has serious ethical and political implications. The ethical quest of becoming godlike becomes a quest in becoming, literally, *like* god, and not, as it used to be, actualizing a divinity internal to the human soul. Human worldly activities come to be seen in new light. While earlier Platonism and Plotinus often use rhetoric that renders acting in the world and engaging in a society necessary evils or impediments of a more worthy existence, theoretical activity and contemplation, the later Neoplatonists give, as we shall see in Chapter 6, more value to these central aspects of normal human existence.

Individuals as intelligible universes

A somewhat puzzling Neoplatonic view is the idea of each soul as a noetic cosmos or intelligible universe. Plotinus states it as follows:

> For the soul is many things and all things, both the things above and the things below to the limits of all life, and we are each an intelligible universe (*kosmos noētos*), encountering the things below with that [lower spirit], and the things above and of the cosmos with the intelligible [in us].
>
> (*Enn.* III.4.3.21–4)

Even though the intellects and souls acquire an individual existence in the myth of generation and self-constitution, each of them still embraces all rational forming principles (*logoi*). That is, each of them has the propensity of becoming anything or almost anything in the universe, from the highest to the lowest of beings. How does this idea square with the view that humanity is something particular, a level of existence in this cosmos proper only for us? The doctrine is probably partially, perhaps primarily, motivated by epistemological issues, and we return to it below. Here we shall concentrate on its other aspects.

When human souls descend, we have stated, they remain immortal. Borrowing material from, among others, the *Republic* (book 10) and the *Timaeus* (42b–c), Plotinus concludes that a soul takes more than one embodied human lifetime to ascend. Hence the doctrine of reincarnation and providential retribution; the human soul survives death and becomes reincarnated according to what the person has accomplished in this life – whether and to what extent she has actualized her lower or higher nature in the previous life or lives. In the course of reincarnation, the soul gradually prepares itself for a discarnated existence. This is a true ascent, after which the soul will no longer be incarnated in any body, but rejoins the bliss, wisdom and eternal perfection of its source. For the soul to have whatever it takes to be different persons and even animals that it may find itself incarnated into, it must include the reason principles (*logoi*) that organize the matter endowed to it accordingly. The reason principles of a particular soul must be capable of actualizing themselves in a body of whatever kind.

The issue of transmigration of souls is, as needs be, somewhat touchy for a philosophically minded scholar of Platonism, and one that Augustine, for instance, openly ridicules:

> He [Porphyry] was ashamed, apparently, to adopt the Platonic theory, for fear that a mother, returning to earth in the form of a mule, might perhaps carry her son on her back. Yet he was not ashamed to believe in a doctrine by which a mother, returning in the form of a girl, might perhaps marry her son. (August. *De civ. D.* X 30, 6–8 [trans. D. S. Wiesen])

In all fairness, Augustine is not entirely sensitive to the details of the theory under attack. For the Neoplatonist, the doctrine of reincarnation does not mean that a human person with a particular life history would be reincarnated; in reincarnation, the souls lose most if not all of their individual memories as well as those of their characteristics closely connected to the particular bodies they have incarnated in previous lives. Strictly speaking, then, whatever reincarnates is not anyone's mother or son in any meaningful sense. Yet this defence has its price; if that which goes through the cycle of reincarnation and finally ascends to the highest is not a person, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul in question holds no, or virtually no, promise of personal survival, and thereby offers also no consolation. Although Socrates does propound the theory of the immortality of the soul as a kind of consolation to his friends in the *Phaedo*, the central motivation of Platonist views around these issues should probably be sought elsewhere, within epistemological and metaphysical domains. Yet one might add that the kind of consolation the reincarnation theory perhaps manages to put forward is cosmic in character. According to this theory, the fact that virtue may not be rewarded nor vice be punished in this life does not mean that the cosmos is not beautifully organized. In the course of time, the inequitable features are smoothed out by providential supervision. This simply takes more than one lifetime to happen.

The human soul's propensity to actualize different rational principles is not just a technical tool used to accommodate the doctrine of incarnation derived from Plato's dialogues. It also testifies to the extraordinary dynamism the Neoplatonists see in human nature. Unlike the rest of the universe, the human soul is not a prisoner of any one form or way of looking at the world. It is the possibility of everything else, of a supple realization of the hypostases, species, formations and properties of various kinds. Not all of these opportunities are equally good, but in one way or another they exist within us. In the words of Iamblichus:

> the soul seems to have in itself all kinds of essences and activities, all kinds of principles, and forms in their entirety.

> Indeed, to tell the truth, while the soul is always limited to a single, definite body, it is, in associating itself with the superior guiding principles, variously allied to different ones.
> (*On the Mysteries of the Egyptians*, II.2 [= Dillon & Gerson 2004: 228])

This doctrine is mainly used by Iamblichus in explaining the vertical possibilities of human nature, that is, its capacity to ascend to levels of existence like that of the gods. But he says also emphatically that the soul is "the forms in their entirety", "all kinds of essences" and hence must ascribe also to the horizontal interpretation.

From the present point of view, the view may be accused of confusing thinking with being: the fact that we are able to *think* of everything, to penetrate the universe with our mind, does not mean that we could actually *be* or become everything. Even though the human capacity to think verges on unlimited, this tells us nothing about being. Besides falling back on the doctrine of incarnation inherited from Plato, it must be remembered that for the Neoplatonists, the connection between contemplation and being is tight. As we saw in connection with the metaphysics of time, in their view the Soul's thinking activity creates the temporal existence, the succession of generation. Remember, also, that this thinking activity is not wholly unlike nor altogether detached from the thinking activity of human minds; human souls partake in it since they are parts or aspects of the hypostasis Soul. The generated nature in a sense is or coincides with contemplation (Corrigan 2005: 47). For this reason, the relation that the human soul has to the universe is much closer.

But it is still possible to persist and try to beat the Neoplatonists on their own battlefield. If the human soul contains all possible reason principles, why is it that all our experience testifies to the fact that we remain limited in our nature? I cannot become a tree, or an ocean, nor can I understand what it is like to have a lateral line sense organ or any sensations connected to it. The universe does close some of its doors to me. To this the Neoplatonists argue that they have never claimed that human beings actualize each and every one of

the reason principles within them, at least not in the same manner. This brings us to an influential principle to be added to our list of central Neoplatonic principles.

Principle VIII. "All is in all but in each appropriately to its nature"
This principle is attributed originally either to the Pythagoreans or to Numenius (Dodds 1963: 254). Plotinus, as we have seen, understands this as meaning that the whole intelligible universe is also present or included in each human soul. The later Neoplatonists give the principle a much wider application, holding that each part of the universe mirrors all the other parts (e.g. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 103). Vertically, each hypostasis is an interpretation of the whole of being, and horizontally, each member of any one hypostasis mirrors in some sense the whole of that hypostasis. In this system, particularity is founded on the qualification "but in each appropriately to its nature". A thing gets its particularity by some of the reason principles (*logoi*) predominating in it.

The consequences of this principle to anthropology can be assessed in the following manner. To take the vertical approach first, each hypostasis interprets humanity in a different way: "All things are in all, but in a mode proper to the essence of each: in the intellect, intellectually; in the soul, discursively; in plants, seminally; in bodies, imagistically; and in the transcendent, nonintellectually and supraessentially" (Porph., *Launching Points to the Intelligible* §10 [= Dillon & Gerson 2004: 178]). Applied to human beings, we may perhaps think that at the level of Intellect, only the most universal characteristics of humanity are present, and the intellectual nature of humanity gets more emphasis. At the level of the soul, the form of human being is understood to be further unfolded, that is, in more detail, with formations for fingers and toes, perhaps concave and snub noses and other parts and particularities. Moreover, this level connects humanity to the idea of temporality, and human being is seen as a discursive, rather than an intuitive or contemplative thinker. The level of the sensible, in turn, shows humanity in extended and particularized form, as images of the Forms mirrored

in matter. Finally, all these levels derive from the One, which encompasses them in a manner particular to it, namely, utterly unified, and in a manner that is ultimately beyond thought and intellection as well as being.

Secondly, while it is horizontally the case that each human soul contains the *logoi* of everything else in the universe, since it is a human soul, humanity predominates in it. Therefore the soul does not literally become an ocean or a horse when contemplating it intensely but remains a human being. It remains in "difference". Moreover, even though each soul contains the *logoi* of all possible variations of human beings, none of them actualizes more than one particular person at a time, because in each particular soul some *logoi* are predominant and others at the background at any given time. Already the laws of the spatiotemporal realm necessitate this; the soul cannot actualize contrary properties at the same time nor is one human life long enough for a series of actualizations of all human *logoi*. Rather, the particular soul holds some basic tendency to actualize certain kinds of reason principles at a time and in succession, and this tendency gets its detailed unfolding in a particular body and circumstances (see Remes 2007: ch. 1.2).

Plotinus on self and individual

This chapter started with the claim that the Neoplatonists separate a notion of self from the notions of both "human being" and "soul". On the level of terminology, Plotinus tackles this field by, among other things, exploiting the reflexive pronoun *autos*, "himself". He is most famous, though, for his use of "we" (*hēmeis*). He says, for instance: "'We' is used in two senses, either including the beast or of that which is above it" (Plotinus, *Enn.* I.1.10.6–7). The claim is that "we" are either something that includes the bodily desires (the beast refers to Pl. *Resp.* 9.588c), or exclusively that which is "above it", presumably the rational soul or intellect. Now could Plotinus be talking of souls or human beings? It might make sense to say that the lower soul includes the bodily desires whereas the higher does

not, or that a human being in the sensible level includes the body whereas in the intelligible level he is something different, but had Plotinus wanted to make either of those points, the vocabulary was there for him to use. We see him here, rather, trying to say something more complicated. The claim yields a two-dimensional selfhood: in one sense, we are the whole thinking and desiring being in the composite; and in another, just its rational part or capacity. This is not just a matter of describing or defining souls or human beings correctly, but a point about self-identification. We can either identify ourselves with the whole human being, or just with the rational soul or intellect. We can embrace our bodily nature and live a life according to it – indeed, that is what we most often do – but there are also times when it would be more correct to say that we are our reason or reflective power. Like humanity, selfhood relates to all hypostatic levels, depending on the level we identify it with (O'Daly 1973).

We saw earlier that Plotinus is realistic enough to posit "us" between the intellect, which eternally and perfectly cognizes the Forms, and the power of sense-perception, which lacks the higher abilities of memory and reflection. Now he has also directly acknowledged a sense of "we" that includes body and its desires. This yields a very moderate and not overly intellectual picture of human selfhood. In fact, intellectualism governs the picture in a more subtle way: as an *ideal* kind of living and identification. Which of our dimensions is most valuable becomes evident in several passages. Plotinus identifies our true nature as that which is capable of controlling bodily desires and emotions, the part in us that makes us virtuous (*Enn.* II.3.9.14–18). In places he even seems to identify true selfhood with the intellect within (*Enn.* I.4.9.28–9), meaning, presumably, not that on an experiential level we are perfect and eternal intellects, but that without the intellect within, human beings would have no power over their desires, no reflection and discursive reasoning over both ends and means of action and human life. In that sense, the intellect, although the ideal rather than the everyday self, is our true self.

Alongside this two-dimensional picture, there has long lived an idea of Plotinus' self as "a spotlight of consciousness" (Dodds 1928). Although this description is somewhat vague and there

is no one place or passage that clearly provides evidence for it, it gives, perhaps, voice to the feeling of the reader of the *Enneads* that rather than being identifiable with any entity, the self is the *power* of that identification. The reason selfhood needs to be separated from embodied human being, but also from the soul or the intellect, is that it is a power to identify itself with any of these. The self that somehow encompasses all the hypostatic levels as well as the sensible existence in a body can accentuate one or the other of these levels; in fact, that is pretty much what happens in descent and ascent. This view must be qualified in one important respect: the self is not an entirely free choice that could illuminate any of these levels at will. As we have seen, its true origin is in the higher levels of the hierarchy. This has a twofold consequence: the higher levels have more explanatory power than the lower, and are therefore closer to the self's true nature. Furthermore, these levels also have pulling power; they compel the human being towards the realization and actualization of its better dimensions. The self only truly becomes itself when realizing these aspects of its nature. This self-improvement starts with self-control, curing excessive emotions and dialectical work, and concludes with self-realization as an intellect (Aubry 2004: 51; Remes 2007: esp. ch. 4).

The selfhood Plotinus is primarily interested in is not an individual thing if by an individual we mean a personal self, an individual with characteristics proper only to him or her. A person with his own life history and personal tendencies and habits gets due attention from Plotinus. Because personhood represents the lower levels of our being, and since Plotinus aims to give an account of selfhood that is tied to a normatively regulated process of self-improvement and self-realization, his central interest is not in personality. In general, ancient philosophy discusses individuality instead in the metaphysical context of the principle of individuation. If human beings are composed of both matter and form or soul, which of these individuates them? Is the same form of human being realized in different bits of matter and are they therefore individuated by each having their particular chunk and location of matter? Or are there individual forms of human beings that share central characteristics

of humanity but also display individual differences? If this is studied in the context of the Neoplatonic doctrine of the descent of the soul, we may ask whether the soul descends into a particular body because it already includes the seeds for particularity, that is, because it is an individual, or whether it gains particularity and individuality only in descent into the body.

Plotinus is highly reluctant to leave a task as important as individuation to something as inert and unreal as matter. This has led scholars to postulate that he introduced a doctrine of Forms of Individuals (based particularly on *Enn.* V.7; e.g. Kalligas 1997). According to this doctrine, a soul is also a form of an individual, and thus a tendency to unfold into a particular kind of human being in the sensible realm. The textual evidence may not entirely support the idea of souls as "forms" in the same sense as Forms of things with more universality, such as the Forms of human being. Yet it must be correct to find the reasons for individuality at the levels of Intellect and Soul, rather than the sensible. For Plotinus, matter simply cannot have a decisive role in coming to be of any quality, be that shared or individual. His solution is found in the following passage:

> One human being as a model would then do for all human beings, just as a limited [number] of souls produces an infinity of human beings. No, for different individuals it is not possible for there to be the same *logos*, and one human being will not serve as a paradigm for several human beings differing from each other not only with respect to matter but with a vast number of peculiar differences. *Human beings are not related to their archetype like portraits of Socrates are to theirs, but the different making must result from different logoi.* The whole revolution [of the universe] contains all the *logoi*, and [it produces] the same things again according to the same *logoi*. (*Enn*. V.7.1.16–23, emphasis added)

Individuality is due to two different causal systems. On the one hand, bodily individuality is due to the kind of collection of *logoi*

proper to humanity that each soul instantiates in matter. This involves the bodily situation of the soul and its contexts in so far as one's parents and location in the universe have a bearing on which *logoi* will be instantiated. Plotinus thinks that the propensity for actualizing some *logoi* rather than others is passed on in reproduction. In coming to embodied existence the souls come to be in a body that has a causal role in the universe. Bodies have histories and future, and in searching for the individuality of a person one must take this into account. Here Plotinus, perhaps following Aristotle, also explains parental endowment (*Enn.* V.7.2).

On the other hand, each intellect (and thereby soul) has some peculiar individuality since the intellects are many even in discarnate states of existence, and this individuality must be decisive in determining the particular collection of *logoi* instantiated. Plotinus speaks often of souls and intellects in plural even in discarnate modes of existence, which seems to imply that they have numerical and hence perhaps also qualitatively distinguishable identity (*Enn.* IV.3.5.1–14). As such, this is a problematic view when combined with the doctrine of the unity of the intellect and its object (see Chapter 5). If all pure intellects think the same Platonic Forms and in thinking them become identical with them, what can remain that differentiates them in this activity, which is their being? There is, hence, a conflict between perfection – understood as one and universal, the same for everyone – and individuality. Despite it possibly making sense to say, like some other late ancient philosophers, that the Intellect is only one, and the souls many, Plotinus wants to maintain some kind of individuality of intellects.

Individuality, as has already been established, increases in descent. Concerning the level of the sensible, Plotinus has an elaborate account of how a particular human being is a collection of qualities, some of them particular only to him, realized in matter. We have seen that Plotinus functions with the interesting notion of *logoi*, or rational forming principles in matter. It is the actualization of these principles that results in qualities in matter. Although the soul has the *logoi* of all essences in it, it actualizes only a part of them, depending, presumably, on the kind of soul that has "descended".

Later Neoplatonists on individuality and the changing self

As we have seen, for Plotinus philosophy of the self concerns the "we", not solely the "I". Of the human being, what is most properly "us" is the rational and intellectual aspect. That aspect is essentially the same in each human being. The recognition of the fact that the self might be an individual, with its own self-awareness and dynamic self-relations as well as personal characteristics, is not entirely missing, but hardly of central interest to Plotinus. His immediate successor Porphyry highlights the individuality and uniqueness of the collection of individual characteristics:

> Socrates is said to be an individual, and so are this white thing, and this person approaching, and the son of Sophroniscus (should Socrates be his only son). Such items are called individuals because each is constituted of proper features the assemblage of which will never be found in any other of the particulars.
>
> (Porph., *Introduction* 7,20–24 [trans. Barnes])

Individuality is due to a collection of particular characteristics not to be found in anyone else. Porphyry is here, while commenting on Aristotle and perhaps influenced by the Stoic idea of a quality proper only to each individual (*idion poion*), probably drawing on Plato's *Theaetetus* (209c) (see further Sorabji 2006: 138–46). While a very similar idea appealed to Plotinus, he still maintained a role for matter in the individuation of sensible particulars. Perhaps Porphyry here only apparently goes further in the Platonic direction, since for Plotinus all qualities that make matter identifiable and definite as something come from intelligible forming principles, and thus the role of matter is solely in reception of them.

In later Neoplatonism, prominence is given to a doctrine of vehicles of soul, mentioned in passing by Plotinus and derived from Plato's *Phaedrus* (247b) and *Timaeus* (41d–e). The earthly body is one kind of vehicle of the soul, but it has no existence on the higher levels. Since the soul exists on these levels, and thereby without the earthly

body, it needs some other kind of vehicle (*ochēma*) on the higher levels of its existence. These vehicles are pneumatic, airy bodies, and they fulfil several roles. On the one hand, they would seem to be a higher equivalent or paradigm of the normal body, responsible for the perceptions and desires of the ordinary body. On the other hand, the vehicles enable the soul to continue to have at least some perceptions and memories after death. Plotinus toyed with the idea that memory gives some kind of foundation for personal identity (*Enn.* IV.3.27.7–10). The later Neoplatonists also provide human beings with the identity necessary for them to stay themselves through the circle of reincarnation; a punishment after death is a punishment of the same entity only if there is sufficient continuity or identity with the person before and after death. In a sense, then, the idea that human beings are individuated not by form but by matter returns in the form of this theory. What individuates human beings does not need to be the earthly body, nor exclusively the immaterial soul, but a higher kind of pneumatic body. This "pneumatic" body shares many features with ordinary bodies but is made of fine enough stuff to have an existence above and beyond the spatiotemporal, sensible realm. The Neoplatonists debated over whether these kinds of bodies are eternal or not. A prevalent solution seemed to be that they are not eternal, yet last during the entire time that the soul takes part in genesis, through all its incarnations (for references and discussion, see Sorabji 2005a: 221ff.).

The prevalence of this doctrine can be appreciated through an understanding of the new situation the later Neoplatonists found themselves in. Since they deny Plotinus' doctrine of the undescended soul or intellect, in their philosophical apparatus there is no place for a part of the self that would be strictly identical at all times. In Plotinus, the perfect and unchanging core of selfhood is the intellect, and although it may not fulfil the individualistic expectations the present reader may have, it does provide a stable core for identity. The later Neoplatonists self-consciously abandon this idea, and see the particularity of human selfhood in its changing nature rather than strict identity. As we have seen, they even introduce the idea of a soul substance that would change, that would go through substantial

alterations, thus simultaneously stretching the Aristotelian idea of substance yet showing appreciation for the dynamic and changing nature of human self (Steel 1978). Having denied a paradigmatic and impersonal identity at the centre of each self, the post-Plotinian Neoplatonists must seek novel foundations for identity, this time personal and individual. One such foundation is found in the pneumatic body. Truthful to those interpretations of Aristotle that see the principle of individuation in matter, they reinterpret this matter in Platonizing spirit as purer, intelligible matter and "luminous" bodies formed out of it.

Theories about the individual aspect of selfhood are further developed in the course of later Neoplatonism. Theories other than luminous vehicles are relevant in this context. As we shall see in Chapter 6, the doctrine of individual divinity for each and every human soul creates an individual ideal for each human being. When trying to live a godlike existence, a human being no longer tries to assimilate (as in Plotinus) into an impersonal ideal but into a personal daimon. Thus on the level of normative aspirations too, the later Neoplatonists emphasize particularity of persons and their situation.

Self-determination and freedom of self-constitution

One branch of philosophical outlooks identifies the self as will. Self is whatever it is in us that has the ultimate power to move us in one rather than another direction, to more or less freely choose over the possibilities explicated through reasoning. The notion of will develops only gradually in antiquity, and most of its functions are attributed to reason or intellect. In Platonism there are also non-rational volitions capable of leading to action. Neoplatonism gives some predominance to a freedom of a certain sort. This discussion also involves a disagreement between members of the school. Let us first see the aspects on which the proponents are more or less in agreement.

Although influenced by the Stoic idea of a providentially determined universe where freedom is a matter of understanding one's own station in the universe and determining, rather, one's own

evaluation and reaction as regards the necessity of this situation, the Neoplatonists always emphasize that there is an aspect of humanity not determined by cosmic motions. Compulsion and inner slavery are indications of giving too much power to things external and to a material universe, whereas self-determined acts rely on inner capacities of the soul, especially intellect:

> Now when the soul is without a body it is in absolute control of itself and free, and outside the causation of the physical universe; but when it is brought into body it no longer has authority in every way, for it is stationed in the order of other things. Chances guide, for the most part, the circumstances into which it has fallen when it comes to the middle [situation], so that it does things because of these [circumstances], but sometimes it rules over them itself and guides them where it wants. (Plotinus, *Enn.* III.1.8.9–15)

The human embodied condition is one in which freedom is always compromised by the causal situation the person finds herself in. Denying the Stoic deterministic picture, Plotinus, however, believes that when the soul follows intelligible principles, it is merely restricted by the contingencies of the sensible, not determined by it. Its choices may transcend it.

In explicating what kinds of choices have this feature Plotinus uses the Aristotelian framework. As in Aristotle, he holds that an action done knowingly and without external coercion is voluntary (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 3.1, 1109b30ff.). But he claims, further, that not all voluntary actions are under our own power (*eph' hēmin*) (for the notion and its background see Eliasson 2008). For something to be truly free it must also be in our own control in some stronger sense than, for instance, externally non-coerced desire leading to action in a situation where we have all the needed knowledge of the circumstances. For something to be in one's own power, Plotinus seems to formulate the following rule. Things that are truly in our own power have their origin in ourselves and are, ultimately, also directed back towards ourselves. Only this kind of self-originated

self-directedness guarantees that there is no external pulling or pushing power involved. What is it for something to be both self-originated and self-directed? The paradigmatic case is the Intellect, which initiates its own thought actuality and thinks nothing else than its own nature, true being. Since being is also the next best thing in the hierarchy after the One, this self-directed thinking is thinking about universal being, and about the goodness of that being. It is thought that is never tainted by complexities of particular situations or by self-interest (Plotinus, *Enn.* IV.4.44.1–9). Less than a century later, Iamblichus, who in many other respects departed from Plotinian dogmas, repeats much the same idea in maintaining that the human being can either become a part of the realm of generation where fate plays a significant role, or, through the intellectual activity, "mind its own business" and become freed from the bonds of necessity (Iamblichus, *Letter to Macedonius, On Fate* Frs. 2 and 3 [= Dillon & Gerson 2004: 245]).

This is a highly ideal picture of freedom. The same tendency to perfection is visible in the fact that the ultimate principle within the hierarchy, the One, is, according to Plotinus, paradigmatically free or self-determined (*Enn.* VI.8.20). As self-caused, it is entirely independent of all other things. All its proper activities, if it can be said to have any, are directed to its self-sufficient own being. Only the generation it gives rise to is directed outside, and having an objective external to itself, the self-sufficiency of this generation immediately becomes compromised. Freedom and self-determination are understood not through a lack of external coercion or knowledge of the appropriate circumstances, but through the notions of independence and self-sufficiency of the agent (see also Steel 2006). Through the use of reason, a human being may get closer to such an existence, but because of her embodied situation, her self-determination will always be constrained. Needless to say this raises many serious problems. Presumably the use of intellect should also contribute to the (compromised) self-determination of the actions in the sensible, and an account should be given of why and how it could have this effect on the lower level of physical causation. We shall later revisit the question of the role and value of action in a theory that, equally

emphatically, raises intellection as something more self-determined and valuable.

The slightly otherworldly or ideal character of this notion of freedom is strengthened by the fact that in the view of the founder, Plotinus, freedom is always directed at the good (*Enn.* VI.8.15.14–21). Here, however, the later Neoplatonists again come a step closer to particularly human existence. Where Plotinus identifies only the will towards goodness as genuinely due to the soul, the later Neoplatonists are not willing to posit evil entirely to the body. The soul itself is capable of both good and evil (Procl., *On the Existence of Evils* 28.9–10; 33.1–3).

What is significant is the idea that there is an aspect of the human being capable of self-determination and transcendence of the given. With these powers, the self is equipped with the abilities needed for self-constitution and the shaping of her own life. Several more steps within the history of philosophy, however, are needed to make the self the kind of thing discussed in modern and postmodern theories, with the freedom to determine its own values, to take on identities and to narrate its own history and personality. In ancient Neoplatonism, the self is endowed by higher metaphysical entities, and its ideal existence is determined by them. Moreover, selfhood does not enjoy the centrality that it acquires in, for instance, early modern philosophy. On the contrary, the ultimate *telos*, the unification with the One, involves a loss of the self. What is required is an abandonment of all limits, all personal features included, as well as a surrender to a power larger than oneself (e.g. Plotinus, *Enn.* VI.9.7.12–20, 11.8–16). The self's becoming absolute goodness, unity and infinite power is accompanied with its loss of its particularity and self-determination.

FIVE

Epistemology and philosophical psychology

If we see metaphysics as directed from the top of the Neoplatonic hierarchy downwards to the sensible and material realm, then in learning, concept formation and acquisition of knowledge the direction is reversed, from the bottom upwards. Here, too, however, the higher hypostases are prior to the extent that they endow the human soul with all its powers and have ontological priority. Also, the intelligibles serve as the foundations for knowledge. Nonetheless, methodologically and developmentally, human beings start with bodily functions and perception, and only arrive at dialectic and knowledge – if at all – through arduous conceptual and philosophical work based on both experience and rational capacities.

The Neoplatonists have sometimes been taken as philosophers who show no interest in the normal faculties and functions of the human beings living the composite life of the soul in a body. Their contribution has been seen, rather, to lie within the field of spiritual and otherworldly experiences, or at best, in metaphysics. This view is simply mistaken and outdated or at least heavily oversimplified. The numerous commentaries the Neoplatonists wrote on Aristotle's *De anima* alone testify to this effect. By necessity, human beings are tied to the world of matter, change and perception, and consequently their mental life also involves, to a great extent, items and happenings in that world. The *explananda* are phenomena and experiences of

the sensible, even though the *explanans*, ultimately, is always found higher up in the hierarchy.

This chapter strives to give an overview of the Neoplatonic philosophy of the soul and its functions, and give credit to the value of their philosophical psychology, or, perhaps rather, *psychē*ology. The exposition builds on the doctrines of soul and human being presented in Chapter 4, but its emphasis is on the powers and functions of the soul rather than on the soul as an entity with ontological and cosmological position. In antiquity, psychology included all living functions, starting from vegetative functions of the plants all the way to the human capacities of language and reasoning. Neoplatonic interest is mostly in animal and rational capacities, that is, in cognitive powers, which are enumerated as perception, imagination and intellection or thinking (Porph., *Launching Points to the Intelligible* or *Sentences* §43 [= Dillon & Gerson 2004: 190]). We shall concentrate on these here. As we have seen, for the Neoplatonists human beings extend or can reach beyond their proper physical status to the intelligible, that is, they have claims for knowledge and even higher experiential states connected to the highest levels of the metaphysical and mental hierarchy. Interestingly, the Neoplatonists recognize and emphasize the limitations of propositional and rational discourse. This leads them to envisage other kinds of experiences and ways of arriving at truth, or in true unity with the Intellect or the One. The latter part of the chapter is devoted to this issue.

Perception and imagination in Plotinus

Does the human mind have access to the external world? To what extent do our experiences inform us about the universe? Neoplatonic philosophy of perception shares the realistic tendency of most ancient philosophy. Basically, the idea – elaborately propounded and explicated by Aristotle – is that in perception, the form of the perceptible object is realized in the soul. Thus when the human being perceives a horse, the immaterial form of the horse is actualized in the mind (e.g. Arist. *De an.* 2.12, 424a17–19; 3.4, 429a13–17). The form in the

soul is the very same form that makes the horse a horse, and not an image or a representation of it. Its only difference is that it is located in the soul rather than in the horse, and thus necessarily appears in a different mode. What this mode is exactly is something Aristotle does not say a great deal about, but it is clear that it is *not* the mode in which the form of the horse is in the particular horse, that is, it is not a form in matter, a form structuring matter. It is the same form without the function of organizing matter into a structured individual. The importance of this doctrine is in the faith it puts in the human mind's ability to grasp the universe. The mind is essentially connected to the world because the same forms appear in both the world and the mind. Perception functions as the reliable medium of this connection.

In this framework, there is no space for the Cartesian worry exploited in the film *The Matrix*. This thought experiment famously suggests that perhaps an evil demon has programmed *the entirety* of our perceptions and cognitions, and therefore they do not actually report reality at all. It is possible that reality and our situation in it are entirely different from what our experience informs us. Even though the Platonists from Plato onwards entertained a considerable amount of doubt concerning the reliability and trustworthiness of the senses, this kind of *wholesale* mistakenness about the world is precluded. Broadly speaking, the Neoplatonists are committed to the Aristotelian form of perceptual realism. Since our perceptions deal with the perceptible objects themselves and not some representations that may or may not correspond to the world, they report reality trustworthily; in fact, they do not merely report it but actualize it in the mind. Another more recent idea that perceptual realism would seem to preclude is intentionality, at least in the technical sense in which it has come to be used. Rather than being directed towards the world, and being "about" the objects of perception, the mind *becomes* the perceptible forms.

Plotinus' view follows this general view rather closely. For him, perceptible objects are the objects of the world and their real qualities, not any image or shadows of them in the mind. When the perceiver sees a yellow daffodil, the eyes receive the form of the yellow in

a manner or mode that suits the organs of perception. The resulting affection is located in the sense organ, but it is the colour of the daffodils, not a picture or any kind of representation of yellow. Its mode of existence in the organ and the soul may not be entirely lucid, but what is clear is that it is not a mere mental thing. It is essentially connected to or even the same as the form in the world (*Enn.* IV.4.23; Emilsson 1988: esp. 68–9).

In one important respect the Neoplatonists depart from the Aristotelian philosophy of perception, following Plato's teachings in, among others, the *Timaeus* (45e–d). Both Plato and Aristotle agree that perception is one instance of a wider phenomenon, that of natural change. For Aristotle, the change in question is reception of the form. The perceptive power is a power to receive. It is passive, and precisely this passivity makes it a trustworthy means to grasp the world: the mind does not tamper with perceptual objects – it does not create anything but receives the form as it is in the sensible world. What is given is an elaborate account of the causal interaction in perception, whereas Aristotle remains silent about the kind of change in the soul caused by the material interaction. Plotinus follows Plato's idea that perception is an interaction between a passive and an active power (*Tht.* 156a–c), thus placing emphasis on whatever happens at the ultimate receiving end of perception: not just the sense organ but also the (powers of the) soul. There are several philosophical reasons for perception to be, at least in part, an active power. First, the idea that the sensible world could affect the soul as a passive recipient goes against the Neoplatonic direction of metaphysical causation from the top downwards. Secondly, without further argument it does not seem evident that the perceiver would contribute nothing to perception. Mere and pure receptivity encounters its own problems. For instance, we have already seen that since the form must be in the soul in some other mode than it is in the object, the soul's nature, in a sense, does something to the form, rendering it in a mode appropriate to the soul. Platonism has, further, a general tendency to render perception as "minded": the emphasis is on the idea that entities are perceived as something or another, and perceptions are immediately categorized and connected to past perceptions and cognitions by the mind (for

Plato, see Carpenter 2007). Thirdly, Plotinus takes the actualization of the external objects and their qualities in the soul to be sensory affections, for instance in the case of the reception of the colours of the object of perception. Sensory affections are something even infants may have before they start to form proper unities out of the colourful perceptual field, much less conceptualize these unities as family members, dogs and flowers. For reasons such as these, Plotinus highlights the idea of (developed or adult) perceptions as judgements (*krisis*). A true perception has two components: the passive reception of the perceptual field, such as perception of colours (using, again, seeing as an example), and the judgement that this is a yellow daffodil, a brown dog or my mother. The judgement "part" of perception is not passive reception, but an act in which the perceiver is the origin of that judgement (*Enn.* III.6.1.1–4; Emilsson 1988: ch. 4).

If in perception the soul realizes the forms immanent in matter rather than any representations or images of them, where does error enter into the picture? We do make perceptual mistakes of a different sort, such as taking a curved stick to be a snake, or seeing a real but small and non-poisonous snake as something inherently dangerous to our existence. It is, of course, possible that the organ of perception fails to function properly, and thus the reception of the object of perception fails in a crucial way. Plotinus finds another source of mistakes in the other faculties of the mind, especially in the imaginative faculty, or, rather, the faculty of appearance, *phantasia*. Incorporating the long tradition of Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic conceptions about *phantasia*, Plotinus takes each complete perception to finally end in this faculty. Appearances are not just distortions of perceptual objects or imaginings of non-existent objects. Each perception and thought is accompanied by an appearance. This faculty does seem to be a significant place for error to occur. Plotinus says, among other things, that emotions are connected to appearances (*Enn.* I.2.5.20–21; 8.15.18). As we shall see, emotional therapy teaches the person not to take emotional appearances as trustworthy starting-points for reflection and action. Somehow, *phantasia* depicts things for the soul, and it may deceive the soul in depicting things as desirable, dangerous and so on.

Although, especially rhetorically, the emotional side of appearances is always described as a source of perceptual errors and, through those, of bad choices, *phantasia* is also used in non-normative connections, as simply a faculty of the soul. In Plotinus, this faculty may be an answer to the dilemma of the unity of perception and consciousness, discussed by Plotinus:

> If something is going to perceive something, it must itself be one and grasp everything by the same [being], both if a number of perceptions come in through many sense-organs, or many qualities are perceived with respect to some one thing, or if a varied thing, for example a face, is perceived through one sense organ. For there is not one [perception] of the nose, another of the eyes, but one and the same [perception] of all together. And if one [perception] comes through the eyes and another through hearing, there must be some one thing to which both come. Or how could one say that these [ways of perceiving] are different, if the perceptions did not come together to one and the same [thing]? This then must be like a centre, and like lines coming together from the circumference of the circle, sense-perceptions from every side come completed in it, and that which grasps them must be of this kind, a being that is truly one.
>
> (*Enn.* IV.7.6.3–15)

Plotinus does not make use of Aristotelian *koinē aisthēsis* (in Latin, *sensus communis*), which Aristotle holds responsible for cross-modal perceptual judgements (e.g. *De somno* 2, 455a15–22). If all different kinds of perceptions come together in *phantasia*, we may postulate that for Plotinus this secures them as connected in relevant ways. It is possible that *phantasia* has a role to play in explaining why, in my experience, this same apple is red, smooth to my fingers and has a fresh odour. Something must render unified the perceptions from different organs.

Furthermore, *phantasia* may be the point of an even deeper unity within the soul. The Neoplatonists follow Plato's *Sophist*, which states

that this faculty is somewhere between perception and belief (*Soph*. 264a–b). *Phantasia* is where perceptions end, but it also borders on reason. What exactly does it accomplish? One relatively straightforward answer would be to say that in *phantasia*, the perceptions gain conceptual form. *Phantasia* not only forms some kinds of (emotional) images of perceptual objects, but also unites them with our beliefs and conceptions. Perceptions come to have a conceptual form, available for reasoning. The problem with this solution is that it may well be the case that the judgemental phase of perception itself, perhaps somehow aided by discursive reason, is responsible for this function. When Plotinus explicates how perception involves judgements of various sorts, he only talks of perception (*aisthēsis*) and discursive reason (*dianoia*) (*Enn.* IV.7.6.1–10). Conceptualization seems to be a function where reason should be involved. In content, it seems connected to belief and judgement.

Be that as it may, the unificatory role of *phantasia* is also endangered. Plotinus postulates two faculties of appearance, a higher and a lower. He denies that the distinction is between a faculty that would deal with appearances of external things and a faculty forming appearances of forms, departing from ancient philosophy's general tendency of differentiating mental functions through their objects. Such a division would mean that there would be no true unity within the human being: one faculty would live in the sensible world, the other in the intelligible (*Enn.* IV.3.31). Unfortunately, Plotinus does not describe these faculties in more detail but, taking his denial, at least one of them must be capable of dealing with appearances of both external and internal kinds. If both faculties of *phantasia* have objects of the two different kinds, the question becomes: why postulate two faculties of appearance in the first place? Some later Neoplatonists, such as Plutarch of Athens (active in Athens in the first decades of the fifth century CE), prefer to talk about one faculty that somehow extends like a line from the sensible to the intelligible (Blumenthal 1975). This solution may be somewhat obscure, but it is designed to explain two things: the unified nature of human mind as well as its peculiar capacity in dealing with things as different as sensible and intelligible objects.

A further function of *phantasia* is the storing of appearances, that is, memory. Memory is not a feature of the bodily things, of collections of spatiotemporal parts, but of a soul capable of stability, consciousness and self-awareness. Without memory, the self-awareness and consciousness of the embodied subject would be impaired, and she would not be capable of rationality. The possibilities of making combinations, drawing inferences and so on, all require that one retains information – or appearances or propositions – through time. The faculty responsible for memory is *phantasia*. Memories are either appearances of past sense-perceptions or, in the case of thoughts, retained verbal expressions of rational acts. As selected and stored past appearances, memories are highly useful to the agent. But they also share all the same – if not more – problems as present appearances: they are mediated and thus unreliable images of true objects. In the ascent, the soul may retain virtuous memories for some time, but they have no real usefulness for the intellect itself (*Enn.* IV.4.1.10–14). Since memory is a phenomenon of the temporal realm, souls have memories in the same sense that they engage in other activities of the temporal realm. They cause and have them without becoming deeply affected by them themselves.

Plotinus' remarks on memory further enforce the division into two of human mind. He seems to postulate two kinds of memories: the individual and higher soul has individual memories, the lower soul shared memories (*Enn.* IV.3.27.1–6). We may perhaps surmise that the shared nature of the lower memories has to do with the fact that the lower soul phase belongs to the Soul of the All and is not an individual ensoulment. The memories connected to it concern the basic drives and bodily experiences found in all creatures with similar bodies. Memory unifies both kinds of appearances, and thus memory can be seen as a psychological ability designed to unify a temporally extended consciousness into a whole. Acting within the past–present–future horizon makes it necessary to have this ability.

The exact role of different functions and the way they cooperate in perception remains to be studied. Nor, in Plotinus' picture, is it entirely clear which of these belong to the first ensoulment (the Soul of the All?) and which to the individual soul.

Perception and imagination in Porphyry and Proclus

The later Neoplatonists built on the basic scheme of Plato and Plotinus. For them, too, reason and conceptualizations infiltrate perception, which is thereby far from pure reception. Porphyry notes that the human mind can sometimes add and correct perceptual information, and concludes that this must be owing to its prior possession of the form that is under investigation (*Commentary on Ptolemy's Harmonics* 14.32–15.6 [Düring edn] [= Sorabji 2005a: 1(b)7]). These later theories are better equipped to disentangle such a complex function as perception, although sometimes their philosophical motivation lies elsewhere, in problems internal to the Neoplatonic way of philosophizing. Let us have a look at two representatives from two different periods of Neoplatonism: Porphyry, who personally knew Plotinus, and Proclus, who was writing almost 200 years later in Athens.

Porphyry's description of the process of perception sheds some light on the functions of different phases in perceiving and recognizing things, although puzzles remain. He contends:

> For in the first place apprehension arising from sense-perception contacts the existing thing and tries to recover the forms to make a kind of report on them and introduce them into the soul like some guide or usher. Next, belief-making assumption receives what has been introduced, names it and describes it in words as if upon some writing tablet existing in it. Next, the third faculty is one that makes images out of peculiar features and is really like a faculty of painting or moulding, namely, *phantasia*. It is not content with the form produced by naming and describing, but just as those who try to make out persons sailing into port who work out details of resemblance in a way similar to those who attend to features to match, so this faculty works out the whole form of the object, and when it achieves accuracy in this way, then it stores the form in the soul.
>
> (Porph., *Commentary on Ptolemy's Harmonics*, 13.24–14.3 [Düring edn, trans. Tarrant, modified by Lautner])

According to this description, perception is immediately followed by some conceptualization of the perceptibles. As in the *Philebus* (38–9), the soul has an internal scribe who turns perceptions into words, into real judgements that can be either true or false. The role of *phantasia* is separate from this function, and concerns the making explicit of the salient details of the perceptible object, and thus enables recognition of individuals. This is the internal painter of the *Philebus*, who provides illustrations of the words the scribe has written. What the passage does not explain, among other things, is who or what the scribe is. Is the scribe the rational soul or perhaps a power of judgement that the sensitive soul has? Furthermore, what in this suggestion takes care of the cross-modal unity of perception? For the scribe to conceptualize perceptual information, it would seem to be the case that the information should already be unified. Even if it were itself the force of that unification, the role of *phantasia* outlined by Porphyry seems to be in recognizing details and salient formations rather than in unification (for an interpretation of the passage, see Lautner forthcoming).

True to his systematizing spirit, Proclus distinguishes no fewer than four different levels of perception (e.g. *In Ti.* II 83, 16–84, 5). Of these, only the lowest two follow the Peripatetic idea of perception as being always of objects external to the percipient. The lowest type of activity is interaction between physical bodies and the accompanying feeling of pleasantness or painfulness. For Proclus, *aisthēsis* is hereby a wider notion than it is in Aristotle, for the lowest kind of perception is something even the plants have in the sense of being disposed to "prefer" certain things over others (turning towards the warmth and light of the sun). That is, what determines whether a lowest kind of perception is at hand is whether the thing reacts to an external stimulus with activities that testify to it "recognizing" something as beneficial or harmful to it. Plant perceptions may not be self-aware nor have any feeling aspect, but Proclus holds that they are perceptions nonetheless. The next level is perception in much the same sense as we encountered in Plotinus. It is reception of external sensory affection accompanied by a cognition or judgement of a sort. The judgemental side of this ability, since it, nonetheless, is

perception and not thought, could perhaps be some kind of basic discrimination. The third and fourth types are not directed to the perceptible objects in the universe. Their objects are already internalized and appear as a whole, not in temporal procession. Proclus' theory derives from his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*; accordingly, he treats the universe as a complete living being. Such a living being has the highest, fourth kind of perception, but since there is nothing external for it to perceive, its perception is directed back to itself. Whether or not the human soul has anything like this type of perception is unclear on the basis of the text. The special term for this kind of perception, *sunaisthēsis*, is also used of human beings, denoting, among other things, perception of motions of or within the perceiver. At the level below it, the third level of perception, things are perceived in an unchanging way, from every point of view and as a whole. Again, it is somewhat difficult to see what this kind of perception could mean for human perceptual powers and how exactly it differs from the highest kind of perception. It seems to resemble *phantasia* in that it concerns objects that are derivative in externally directed perception, that is, affections that have already been internalized by the first act of perception. Recalling memory imprints might be one case of this kind of perceptual power (see Lautner 2006).

Why postulate so many different levels or types of one and the same power? First, perceptual power may not be single and unified: it deals both with external objects and past perceptions; sometimes it discriminates its objects, sometimes not, and so on. The phenomenon is multifaceted. For all these thinkers it is important to try to explain the receptive, the discriminatory and the retentive perceptual powers. Secondly, as we have seen, for the Neoplatonist it is important to keep some part of the soul impassible. Proclus preserves impassibility here by distinguishing perceptions that are affections from perceptions in which the soul remains invulnerable to external influences.

In general, the later Neoplatonists affirm also the role that Plotinus gives to *phantasia* in memory. They develop an interesting theory of projection. *Phantasia* is a faculty in which, as it were, the objects

of perception are projected onto the soul, as in a mirror. Again, this theory starts to sound like a predecessor of a theory of intentionality. The images or projections within the soul are about the external objects and can be, as [ps.-]Simplicius notes, projected even when the perceptible object itself is not present (*Commentary on Aristotle's On the Soul* 202.2–6). This makes it seminal for the act of remembering.

Thinking and knowledge

How it is that human beings arrive at knowledge? What are the capacities that enable cognitive progress, and whence do they derive? These questions are particularly central for Neoplatonists since they all adhere to the idea of the unreliability of much perception without further processing by the mind. Sensible objects pose a grave difficulty for thought activity that strives for stability, coherence and knowledge. Things in the sensible world are cognitively challenging. According to Platonic heritage, they suffer from compresence of opposites and change, and thus they are unreliable even in cases where the sensory apparatus reports their nature faithfully (Plato, *Phd.* 102c–103a; *Resp.* 10.602d–603a; for Plotinus see Remes 2005). For the Platonist, true objects of knowledge cannot have this complex and changing nature. We have seen that Plotinus believes that the human soul has an aspect, the intellect, which remains undescended, that is, is at all times engaged in the perfect, eternal and unchanging thought activity of the hypostasis Intellect. Its objects are the unchanging Platonic Forms. This is a state of knowledge of which the everyday self is rarely aware. As we shall see, the later Neoplatonists widen the gap between the human soul and intellect by claiming that the human mind never has direct access to the contents of the Intellect, the Forms.

Now it might seem to be the case that if the intellectual operations are situated above the soul, in an individual or even the hypostasis Intellect, they are actually extra-psychological. This is only partly true. The Intellect is metaphysically real and separate from the human soul, and obviously independent of it. But its separation

from the soul should not be overstated. In Plotinus, the soul extends, as it were, to the level of the intellect, having as its highest part this paradigmatic thought activity, which, as we shall see, unfolds in and informs the soul's normal thinking activity. In later Neoplatonism, this same thing happens mediated through images. Most of our thinking is directed to sensible objects and memories of these, and this level must therefore be an integral part of psychology. The place of thought between infallible, paradigmatic intellection and fallible psychological phenomena such as perception and imagination is tricky and requires careful distinctions. We shall first introduce differences, and then proceed into points of contact and continuity.

Plotinus distinguishes two modes of thought: discursive thought of everyday reason (*dianoia*) and intellection (*noēsis*). Where the former uses concepts acquired by perception and reasons discursively about things in the external world, the latter thinks the objects of knowledge themselves, that is, is in identity with being. A list of salient differences may help in appreciating the respective natures of the two:

Nous	*Dianoia*
• knowledge (infallible)	• opinion (fallible)
• eternal/non-temporal	• temporal, moving in time (e.g. *Enn*. VI.1.4.7–19)
• objects: internal, the forms	• objects: external, both the sensible and the forms
• unmediated, direct	• representational, mediated by images (*eidola*), imprints of *phantasia,* or by concepts (e.g. V.3.2; VI.5.7.)
• non-inferential (V.5.1.38–41)	• inferential
• connected to the hypostasis Intellect and the same as it in form and content, yet perhaps retaining somehow some individuality (IV.3.5.6–9)	• particular to one soul in one body

- its own "higher" consciousness, unavailable to the embodied person without dialectical work
- everyday consciousness

(Bussanich 1997: Emilsson 2007: ch. 4.1)

In many ways, the intellect and discursive reason are opposites: one is perfect, the other not; one eternal, the other temporal; one immediate, the other mediated by representations; one directed to the stable internal objects, the other to the changing external world. Let us start with intellection.

In a perhaps somewhat paradoxical way, intellection and knowledge resemble perception. Even though perception in the Neoplatonic hierarchy is a lower and less important power than the capacity for knowledge, it, and especially the power to see, functions as a model for knowledge. This is a common feature of ancient philosophy. In a manner parallel to perception, intellection actualizes the form existing in the world, that is, being itself, and not some representation or image of it. The security and infallibility of knowledge relies on this immediacy. If the objects were different and separate from the intellect, it would not grasp them at all. Grasping is conceptualized as identity or sameness. The thinker becomes the forms it thinks (Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On the Soul* 87,29–88,10; Plotinus, *Enn.* V.3.5.28–31; 42–44; see also Emilsson 1996). This secures the infallibility and yields the desired immediacy or direct exposure to the object of thinking. This kind of cognition differs from perception by having objects that are internal to it (e.g. Porph., *Launching Points to the Intelligible*, §16), and from ordinary thinking in, among other things, being involved directly with its objects, and not via any representation or images.

A further feature of the kind of knowledge that interests the Neoplatonists is that it is systematic and holistic. The statements "5 is odd" and "4 is even" represent distinct eternal truths that, in turn, rely on the necessary connections among distinct Platonic forms (Gerson 1994: 66). The thought activity or knowledge of the Intellect is not a mere collection of Platonic Forms but a whole system of

them, in meaningful interconnections. To give another example, horses and human beings are both mammals, and thus there must be in the intellect some connection between the Form of a horse and that of a human being, whereas a similar connection cannot relate bees and human beings. The repercussion this has to human endeavour to gain knowledge is significant; it is not the case that recollection is some kind of mystical connection we gain to Forms that float separately in the intelligible realm. Rather, recollection must happen in a way that reveals the connections between the Forms. That is, knowledge is systematic (e.g. Plotinus, *Enn.* IV.9.5.16–21).

The last difference between intellection and discursive reasoning in the above list, namely the *awareness* or consciousness we have of the two thought activities, also raises a serious problem: if the intellect's functioning is not something we are aware of, what is the point of postulating such an activity at all? Motivation for the postulation of the intellect comes from several sources. The first is historical. The theory is Plotinus' combination of Platonic and Aristotelian influences; Aristotle postulated a perfect intellect that thinks about everything there is to know at all times, although this intellect does not lie within the soul (*Metaph.* Λ 7, 1072b13–30). Peripatetic commentators took the human mind to have some connection to this intellect distinct from the human mind (for references, see Sorabji 2005a: 3(g)). This Aristotelian entity becomes united with Plato's theory of *recollection* (*anamnēsis*): the idea that the soul has innate knowledge opaque to normal human beings, but something that they can recover by intellectual work. Famously, this knowledge is in the soul before it ever becomes incarnated in a body, and thus also pre-exists perception.

The second motivation is "phenomenological". Although we are not at all times aware of perfect knowledge of the entire universe, we do have experiences of momentary understanding of large systematic wholes by, as it were, one, synoptic look. Mere discursive reasoning that, as it is defined above, relies on successive inferences in time, the components of which also succeed one another in the temporal succession of thought, do not seem to capture this kind of cognitive grasp of complex wholes (Emilsson 2007: ch. 4). Intellect is the

source and paradigm of this kind of experience; it is a whole capable of contemplating complex wholes at the same moment, timelessly.

The third motivation concerns the internal systematicity of Plotinus' philosophy. For Plotinus, the intellect is not just the opposite of discursive reason, nor even an abstracted perfection of human reasoning. It has an important role in the explanation of human cognitive capacities, in full accordance with the general explanatory top-downism of Neoplatonism.

There is an important question concerning the last point: the relation of the two modes of thinking. How does truth or intellection figure in fallible thinking besides being its *telos*? Some scholars have preferred to read Plotinus (as well as Plato) in a way that severs the connection between discursive reason and intellection. This can happen on at least two fronts: one can claim that empirically gained concepts have nothing to do with intellect's objects of knowledge (e.g. Gerson 1994: 180; 1999: 74), and one may argue that the intellect's functioning is entirely different from normal reasoning (e.g. Rappe 2000). The first view is unappealing if we think that the sensible world consists of images of the intelligible, although undeniably in a further unfolded form. The perceptible horse is an unfolding of a form of a horse (*Resp*. 6.490a6), the perceptible yellow derives from intelligible yellow, and so on. There is an ontological connection between the sensible and the intelligible, and this connection also implies an epistemological connection between the empirically gained concepts and intelligible forms. Therefore empirically gained information cannot, or should not, be entirely disconnected from the intelligible. In the case of the second horn of the dilemma a similar solution is not applicable. The Intellect is described as one-many, as a peculiar unity of all beings or forms "in togetherness". If one concentrates on this unity, knowledge of the contents of any intellect starts to look like an experiential state altogether different from discursive thinking: it does not happen in temporal succession, and it does not have parts. Rather, it is a kind of mystical union, not with the One but with being (cf. Plato, *Resp*. 6.490a6). Undeniably, such a union seems to be present in Plotinus' *Enneads*, but in many places he also treats and emphasizes the Intellect as many, and not just one; after all, it is

the multiplicity of being. At one instance he claims that the Intellect is both not divisible into parts and divisible to parts (V.9.8.20–22, V.1.5.1). Perhaps Plotinus here anticipates the later Neoplatonic division of each hypostasis into further moments or phases. The higher phase gazes at the One and sees it in its unity, the lower discriminates all beings out of the undifferentiated emanation from the One. For the purposes of understanding how Plotinus considers thought, Intellect's lower nature as many is the appropriate interpretation, and the one that should be compared and related to discursive thinking (for a longer discussion see Remes 2007: ch. 3).

The relationship between intellection and discursive thought is one between the metaphysically higher and independent cause and its temporal unfolding in the soul. The Intellect is the laws according to which the discursive reason functions (*Enn.* V.3.3.31–2; 44–5; 4.1–4.). But what are these laws and how do they help the human mind in thought and knowledge acquisition? One particular competence endowed by the Intellect seems to be that of recognizing meaningful similarities and differences. This is based on two Platonic sources: the method of collection and division (*dihairesis/sunagōgē*) in, for instance, the *Sophist*; and the circles of sameness and difference in the *Timaeus*. In Plotinus' interpretation, the basic notions of sameness (*tautotēs*) and difference, or otherness (*heterotēs*) are central to the Intellect's functioning, and they enable the human being to (i) recognize individuals – "Andreas is self-same but different from Andrew"; as well as (ii) place individual instances under a more general heading, that is, make species-genera distinctions – "Andreas and Andrew are both human beings, whereas Star is a horse. They are all mammals" (*Enn.* VI.7.39.5–9; Remes 2007: 135–40). A further role of the Intellect in all thinking is provided with its identity with being, with Form. Since the Intellect is in identity with the objects of knowledge, the Forms, it also embraces the objective contents that discursive reason seeks. This must be relevant for concept formation. Although the concepts acquired rely on perception, in some manner the intellect in the human mind ensures that we form salient concepts: concepts that correspond to natural kinds, such as the concept of "horse" or "human being", rather than, say, "large-nosed

things" or suchlike. Thus the significance of the intellect is dual: on the one hand it is that which enables discursive thinking, learning and dialectic towards systematic knowledge; on the other it is that end, the perfect system of knowledge that coincides with the beings and structure of the universe. It seems likely that the Intellect also empowers the mind with basic logical laws, although Plotinus is silent on this interesting side of human thinking.

The existence of either forms or their signs or images in the mind gives the mind the power to rise above changing and fallible beliefs (*doxa*) to something more stable: to knowledge. The abilities to recognize sameness and difference, in particular, are at the heart of the activity through which the human mind can come to grasp reality. In Platonism, the method used is called "dialectic", and is explored by Plato especially in the *Sophist*. In discussing the method of philosophical enquiry and the efforts that need to be made in order to ascend, Plotinus describes it as:

> the state of being able to say about each thing with *logos* what it is and how it differs from others, and what is common; and to what kind it belongs, and where in its kind every thing is, and if it is a thing that [truly] exists, and how many are the things that exist, and again the things that do not exist, being different. It discusses good and not good … using the Platonic method of division (*diairesis*) to distinguish the forms, and to determine the essential nature of things, and the primary kinds, by weaving intellectually things that come from these (*ta ek toutōn noerōs plekousa*) until it has gone through all the intelligible … (*Enn.* I.3.4.2–7; 4.12–15)

The core task of philosophy is to establish what kinds there are, how they differ from others, to what kind they belong and how. This leads to the discernment of things that truly exist, that is, essences and the salient kinds of things, such as Forms and primary kinds. The purpose of dialectic is to lead from an unsystematic collection of beliefs and discursive reasonings to knowledge of the true structure of the universe. It is for this purpose that the cognitive capacities exist

in the human soul. Whether the soul has an undescended part or not, knowledge is not at hand in human everyday awareness. Rather, we have the means to strive dialectically towards it.

A philosopher who has abandoned the idea of the undescended intellect, like Proclus in the fifth century, must account for knowledge in some other manner. For him, the soul has no direct access to the intelligibles, to the beings themselves. The soul's access to truth grows ever more challenging. However, the Aristotelian idea of predominantly, although not purely, empirically gained concepts (see e.g. Tuominen 2007) does not appeal to Proclus' Platonizing taste either. He argues that if we formed the concept of human being by abstracting it from the perceptions of many human individuals, the concept would be hopelessly too thin; it would fail to include qualities that are accidental and outside the common character of human being, and hence not correspond to the true individual human being, like Socrates. A richer concept of human being is a recollected concept, one that appears in the mind as a reason principle, *logos*, of human being. This *logos* "comprehends the whole of each particular, for the particular comprehends unitarily all those potencies which are seen as being involved in the individuals" (Procl., *Commentary on the Parmenides* 981, 11–15 [trans. Morrow & Dillon])

Proclus' way of explaining the human possibility of knowledge is to appeal to substantial representations of the intelligibles. Even though the human mind does not have the intelligibles themselves inside it, inside the soul, it does have truthful representations of them. The human mode – as distinct from the divine or godlike mode – of dealing with the intelligibles is by signs (*sunthēmata*) or concepts (*logoi*) that conform to the things above but are not identical with them (Steel 1997; O'Meara 2001).

In this later Neoplatonic theory, direct relation and any identification with the intelligibles is beyond the abilities of human soul. This has interesting repercussions. First, it leaves the door open to intentionality, which was precluded by the direct realism of its predecessors. Since the objects of discursive reason are transcendent to it and it deals with concepts or images, the latter must be in some manner related to the objects themselves: "about them" (O'Meara

2001). Secondly, in the same development, the Peripatetic way of distinguishing powers of the soul through their particular kinds of objects (Aristotle, *De an.* 2.3, 415a16–22) – *ta aisthēta* for perception, *aisthēsis*, and *ta noēta* for intellection, *noēsis* – is gradually replaced by the idea that the nature of the power depends, rather, on the knowing subject (e.g. Ammonius, *De interpretatione* 135.14–15). Again, however, the novelty imposed is not quite as radical as one might think. Proclus retains the overall Plotinian idea that the functions of the soul may be roughly divided into two: the externally directed perception and discursive thought and the internally directed intellection, namely, the thinking of the intelligible forms. The separation of humanity from the intelligible is not as rigid as would seem to be the case if one expanded the implications of the denial of the undescended soul in all possible directions.

Reflexive awareness

In ancient psychological theories, attention is drawn to different kinds of self-reflexivity. From Plato's *Charmides* (167c–d, 168a) onwards, philosophers discuss the question of whether perception and thought imply iterativity, that is, whether we perceive that we perceive and think that we think, or whether one mental act is enough to reveal the object of perception or thought to the soul. Plato recognizes a possible problem for the second-order act; as a perception of perception but not of the objects of perception it may be contentless, and this leads to questions about its usefulness and function. Aristotle notes another serious problem, namely the possibility of infinite regress (*De an.* 3.2, 425b12–23). For the second-order act itself to be conscious, must we postulate yet a further layer of mental activity, and so on *ad infinitum*?

Plotinus' seminal discussions around this theme happen on the paradigmatic level: the functioning of the intellect (*Enn.* V.3.5.10–15). He believes that true knowledge necessarily includes such an immediate and self-evidential awareness that one knows what one knows, and that in this aspect, too, the Intellect is paradigmatic for

cognition in general. The Intellect also enjoys paradigmatic self-awareness. Plotinus offers an account of self-intellection in which the epistemic subject apprehends itself in a transparent and not merely accidental or opaque manner. Self-intellection of the intellect includes an immediate understanding of its own act. His argument is a continuation of the Aristotelian theme of self-intellection and identity between the thinker and his objects, but it yields an immediate knowledge of the thinker's activity, a self-transparency that is not "eclipsed" by the apprehension of the objects (cf. Crystal 2002).

For discursive thinking, two levels of self-reflexivity ought to be separated. In ordinary thought, the activity itself does not necessarily include the further aspect of thinking that one thinks (*Enn.* II.9.1.34–8), if this means a further, second-order reflection on one's thinking activity. Plotinus notes cases in which the mind is deeply engaged in an activity without reflecting on the activity. Yet one might separate a more basic level of self-reflexivity. As such, self-reflexivity is the capacity for cognizing our own states without interpreting them: that is, without naming what it is that is felt. It is just the immediate and self-evidential awareness of the feeling itself. This kind of self-reflexivity is shared by intellection and discursive thinking as well as perceptual states (see further Gerson 1997).

Sometimes these discussions expand to the question of awareness of oneself as a subject and an agent. It seems that many ancient philosophers think that perception of perception and thinking of thinking somehow naturally include awareness of the subject of these acts. The issue is most clearly brought out by Plotinus:

> How would the one who contemplates (*ho theorōn*) know itself in the contemplated (*en tō theoroumenō*), having set himself as the one who contemplates? For the contemplating (*to theōrein*) is not in the contemplated. Knowing himself (*gnous heauton*) in this way he will think himself as contemplated, *not as contemplating* (*ou theōrounta noēsei*); so that he does not know (*gnōsetai*) the all or the whole of himself;

> for what he saw he saw contemplated but not contemplating, and so he will have seen other, but not himself.
>
> (*Enn.* V.3.5.10–15)

Plotinus draws attention to the difficulty of explicating the nature of self-knowledge as knowledge of the subject who, for instance, has this very same knowledge. If the subject of knowledge thematizes its own role as the subject of the cognitive act, the point of view of the subject is objectified as that of any other object of cognition. Whatever is particular for being the subject of cognition from the point of view of that subject seems to escape such an objectified thematization. In enquiring into the structure of self-intellection, the Sceptics and Plotinus deepen the issue by formulating what became later know as the "paradox of subjectivity": how is it possible for the subject to grasp itself *qua* subject rather than *qua* object (cf. Crystal 2002; Remes 2007: ch. 3.2)?

Motivation, emotion and disposition

Ancient philosophy, if not philosophy as such, is often accused of being intellectualist. Whether what is promoted is logic, conceptual analysis, the beauty of the argument, the coherence of the theory or even philosophy as wonder, as a way of looking at the world from ever new angles and with new questions in mind, it is firmly grounded in *logos*, in reason. In antiquity, other human activities were understood as dependent, preparatory or in other ways secondary to the use of reason. Platonism is often seen as the summit of an intellectual approach to the universe. In Platonism, knowledge of eternal Forms is understood as the goal of the philosopher's life and the ultimate source of happiness and goodness. Further, this *telos* is something that is supposed to make the life of everyone, even societies, better organized and more prone to proper functioning and happiness. According to Plato, our relationships with others could and should be guided by reason. Other human motivational sources such as emotions and desires may function as driving forces but they have

no value without the guidance of reason, and sometimes the ideal kind of life, like the immortal existence of the soul, is seen as separation from not just the body but also from any motivations realized in and through the body.

There is one significant crack in this overall picture of Platonism, namely, the role of love, *erōs*. Plato famously dedicated a whole work, the *Symposium*, to this notion. In the *Symposium*, Socrates reports what an old wise woman, Diotima, told him about love. Diotima teaches that it is possible to start by loving particular (and sensible) beauties and learn in that way to love the Beautiful itself (211c). There is a long controversy about what this allows us to infer of the significance of *erōs*. Is Diotima's view also the considered view of Plato? If so, is erotic love absolutely central for philosophy as well as to a striving for a good life? If it is necessary, is its value instrumental or is it also constitutive of the *telos* itself? After you have grown to love the beautiful itself, do you still keep on loving the sensible beauties? Finally, does *erōs* provide any kind of basis for other concerns or was it not until the Christian *agapē* that love or some emotional aspect of human experience informed our interrelationships and thus also grounded ethics?

In the *Symposium*, the nature of *erōs* is also described with the help of a myth, that of the intercourse between Poverty (*Penia*) and Plenty (*Poros*) (203b–d). While Plenty lies in the garden of Zeus, Poverty comes to him and sees in him something she needs. In the garden, Poverty lies with Plenty. Erōs is generated by this intercourse between that which has more than it needs and that which is a need. Having both of these natures in it, *erōs* must be a lack, a need, as well as carrying in itself the resources for the fulfilment of that lack. Love carries with itself a desire, a force that pushes it forwards, as well as the seeds of the satisfaction of that desire. *Erōs* establishes a dynamic in the soul: a dialectic between need and its fulfilment.

In this myth, *erōs*' central significance seems to lie in explaining a psychological motivation and dynamic: human nature's striving towards beauty, towards fulfilment of the lack in its nature. The Neoplatonists build on the Platonic idea of *erōs* as a motivation to reach beauty and goodness. In a move highly typical of Neoplatonic

philosophizing, the founder of the school, Plotinus, however, ontologizes the myth (*Enn.* III.5). He locates each character of the myth as an entity in his metaphysics. He interprets Zeus as the hypostasis Intellect, the eternal realm of Platonic ideas, Aphrodite as the next metaphysical level, the hypostasis Soul, the principle and origin of all living functions in the universe. Plenty is the rational forming principle, *logos*. This is the principle coming from the Intellect, through the Soul to the matter, giving unity, orderly structure and beauty to entities in the realm of time and sense. The rational forming principle is like an immanent or enmattered form. It is not too difficult to guess what role is left for Poverty: as a lack, poverty is pure, unstructured matter, Aristotelian *materia prima* – or its Plotinian interpretation. It is the indefiniteness and receptiveness in need of a formal principle. This interpretation gives *erōs* an ontological location as an outcome of both matter and formal principle, and places it in the metaphysical hierarchy. In this interpretation, love is both material and divine or daimonic. It is above mere matter in having the divine *logos* within it, but it is not like the highest metaphysical entities and divinities in Neoplatonic hierarchy because it has within it the aspect of material indefiniteness.

Plotinus' interpretation of Plato's myth identifies *erōs*' parents as *logos* and *hulē*, as rational forming principle and matter. If *erōs* were a sum of these two, it would be simply nature, the sensible world. Yet the point of the myth is to show that *erōs* is the offspring of these two things rather than their sum. Plotinus locates *erōs* especially within the soul, as a child of the hypostasis Soul or Aphrodite. It is thus particular to things that experience a lack and therefore turn towards perfection or plenty. In fact, *erōs* seems to be the force behind that turning. It is, as it were, the awareness of indefiniteness and lack of matter (Poverty) as well as a recognition of how this lack might be amended (Poverty's recognition of Plenty as something desirable).

Connecting *erōs* with need would seem to posit it firmly in the sensible level, or, at the very least, at the level below ultimate, self-sufficient perfection, the One. But there is an alternative interpretation where love is more than an instrument of ascent, and almost foundational for metaphysics. Plotinus once uses *erōs* in describing

the One itself; he says that the One is at the same time "lovable, love himself and love of himself" (*kai erasmion, kai autos ho erōs kai autou erōs*) (VI.8.15.1). This would render *erōs* directly derivative and present in One, in the good itself, and thus give love a much more constitutive role in metaphysics – and in philosophy – than what we find in Plato. Love seems to be something diffused from the One into its derivatives and thereby an essential part of the generation of all being. If Plotinian love has its origin in the One, it must be both a foundation in metaphysics, the principle of every conversion and aspiration towards goodness, and an end itself. It is not a mere means to something higher, a grasp of beauty and goodness (Pigler 2003). This sits ill with the metaphysical positioning presented earlier (III.5) where love is to be found much lower in the metaphysical hierarchy. Most occurrences in the *Enneads* locate *erōs* firmly at the level of the hypostasis or the human soul, as that which is not god and goodness itself but loves the good (VI.9.9.25–35). In many instances, the *telos* or the One is described as the loved one (*erōmenon*) rather than love (*erōs*).

We have two options, both with their own benefits and problems. This first is that we understand *erōs* as constitutive of all existing things, whatever it is that makes them entities composed of matter and form, being in "need" of perfection only in a metaphorical sense, as lacking perfection and having their origin and beauty from a source external to them. In this reading, *erōs* has a clear ontological explanation in the One, as well as a prominent place in the hierarchy. *Erōs* is the driving force behind the turn or reversal of everything below the One back towards goodness. All entities deprived of the completeness and self-sufficiency of their origin, are, as it were, conscious of the lack or poverty thus created in their nature, and seek to fulfil it, turning back towards perfect goodness. But this interpretation of *erōs* yields us nothing particular or exclusive about human motivation. The other reading emphasizes the aspect of *erōs* that is particular to a special kind of soul, the human soul. Without *erōs* the sensible world would not aspire to beauty and goodness. There would be no motivation, no striving towards these things. This makes *erōs* seminal for human motivation, for our psychic

outlook. It is whatever makes human beings aware of imperfections, dependencies and lack, and the motivation to turn towards activities that make us more independent, more self-sufficient and better. In this reading, however, we need to explain why erotic vocabulary has infiltrated the descriptions of metaphysics and the One (e.g. *Enn.* VI.9.4.16–21).

In later Neoplatonism, a threefold distinction between faith (*pistis*), truth and love, *erōs*, becomes quite frequent. It introduces a third, hitherto untried item as indispensable for psychic apparatus. The capacity to reveal the intelligible structures of the universe is not in itself sufficient. We have seen that through its natural desire for beauty, love motivates this research. It gives enthusiasm to the striving to knowledge. But even the combination of enthusiastic motivation and dialectic is not enough. The soul also needs faith, that is, some kind of ability to be persuaded by good arguments and experience. In order for a dialectician, for instance, to persevere in her task she must be capable of trusting both that her project is viable and there will be a good outcome for the enquiry (for references and discussion, see Sorabji 2005a: 18(d)). Psychologically, knowledge acquisition is not a purely rational business.

Even though love and faith have a place in human motivation, in general emotional states are considered problematic rather than beneficial for the soul. The word translated as "emotion" in antiquity is *pathos*, which means, rather simply, an undergoing of something as a result of an action on the part of something else. *Pathē* are affections that arise from a contact with something else. Thus many philosophers thought that, for instance, perceptions are *pathē*. Ancient philosophers do, however, seem to recognize a special group of these affections, such as feelings of joy, sadness or anger. These are emotions or passions of the soul. Often in antiquity, both pleasure and pain were included in this group, in divergence from many theories. As something powerful, disturbing and, in Platonism, non-rational, this group was considered especially challenging for philosophical therapy of emotions, even though a beneficial role was reserved for some moderate emotions by Platonists and Peripatetics.

Even a philosophically and psychologically satisfactory explanation of emotions posed several problems for the Neoplatonists. Let us consider Plotinus. First, Plotinus thought that the soul itself must not be genuinely affected by anything. The soul is impassible, that is, an entity that does not undergo any alterations. Secondly, at the very least the soul should not be affected by what is in an ontologically lower position than itself, that is, for example, the material body, since in Plotinus' metaphysics causation is from the higher to the lower. And yet emotions would seem to violate both these laws; the very word *pathos*, or the verb *paschein*, suggest a change, an alteration or an affection that the subject undergoes. Contrary to the metaphysical hierarchy, many emotions are accompanied or even originated by irrational bodily movements or elements, and both the bodily movements and the emotions themselves seem to inflict a change on the soul.

One of Plotinus' challenges, therefore, is to give a plausible account of the soul that is *not* genuinely affected in the so-called affections of the soul. He meets this challenge by consigning all genuine changes to the body and by arguing that what happens in the soul is not genuine change but an activity. The idea of shame, for instance, is in the soul, but the feeling itself is identified as a bodily state (III.6.1.30–7; 3.1–15; see Emilsson 1998). In a genuine alteration, that which changes acquires a new property, whereas both perceptions and emotions do not change the soul in this respect. The perceptual *faculty* is not changed in perception, and accordingly the soul itself does not undergo change or "suffer" in emotions.

This answer does not seem entirely satisfactory if one thinks of learned tendencies and inclinations. These seem to change our being in some deeper sense, and not merely the body. Emotions and emotional tendencies are closely connected to the organism, which includes both body and soul, and especially to the so-called vegetative soul responsible for functions that involve the body in different ways. For Plotinus, as we have seen, the aspects of this soul are sometimes described as "traces" of the soul as opposed to the soul itself. A similar basic solution can also be found in, for instance,

Iamblichus, who differentiates between the soul proper and its aspect that comes to be in matter:

> Just as, then – though composite living beings come to existence and are destroyed – the soul, which is their primary cause of generation, is, in its essence, ungenerated and indestructible, so also – though what participates in soul and does not possess life and being to an absolute degree, but is enmeshed in the indefiniteness and otherness of matter, is subject to suffering – the soul itself is unchangeable, in being superior in its essence to passion, owing its incapacity for being affected neither to any mental attitude that might incline in either direction, nor to participation in any state or potency taking on an acquired unchangeability.
> (Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians* I.10 [= Dillon & Gerson 2004: 227])

This, in sum, is the theory the Neoplatonists resort to. Whatever happens in the body, even when it suffers from external affection, is also due to the principle that gives life and existence to the composite living being, but it is not the soul itself that undergoes anything. The soul is an independent and pure activity or power, and its physical expression "enmeshed in the indefiniteness and otherness of matter" ought to be understood as a separate thing. Therefore tendencies, too, probably belong to the composite living being, composed out of the trace of the soul and the body.

Limits of cognition

Even though there is something, a sparkle, of the primary principle in the human being, the mind's approach to the ultimate principle, the One, is profoundly problematic. First, Plato – or the author of the *Seventh Epistle* – said that there are things about which it is better not to say or write anything. The most important things may be simply unexpressible in language (241c–242a). Plotinus' inter-

pretation of God as an austere unity enforces this doubt. The One does not lend itself to explanations that have many components. We have seen that Plotinus argues against any direct descriptions of it:

> For if the absolutely partless had to speak itself, it must, first of all, say what it is not; so that in this way too it would be many in order to be one. Thus when it says "I am this", if it means something other than itself by "this", it will be telling a lie; but if it is speaking of some incidental property of itself, it will be saying that it is many or saying "am am" or "I I".
> (Plotinus, *Enn*. V.3.10.33–7 [trans. Armstrong])

In trying to describe something that is absolutely simple, one either breaks it down into parts in one's speech or repeats, tautologically, its proper nature. Therefore, all descriptions apart from its name are not, ultimately, fitting to an absolute simple unity. This idea later gave rise to negative theology: the idea that one can only describe what God is not, not what God is (*via apophatica*). As we have seen, Plotinus cannot altogether refrain from describing the One, but he insists that these descriptions are, at best, approximations. Many of his followers took the negative way more seriously, trying to, as it were, strip the One of everything unsuitable for its nature.

There is also an altogether different idea about the most propitious way of approaching the One. Let us recall the view of the very late Neoplatonic philosopher Damascius that the One is primarily not an absolute unity, but One-*All,* a thing that precedes and encloses all differences. It is not absolute unity but perhaps everything in profound unity. Such a comprehensive One can best be approached by everything it comprehends rather than by stripping it from anything. The method Damascius suggests is contraction or simplification (*anaplōsis*) of all thoughts into a unity. Since what is sought is something one, something utterly simple, distinctions must be overcome, not by disregarding them but by forging them somehow into unity. Damascius describes this method as melting together all distinctions. The soul does not ascend to the One by

denying all differentiation but by simplifying those differentiations into something simple (Tresson & Metry 2005: 222–3). In this method, too, the resulting unity free from any differentiation ultimately escapes all descriptions that are made of parts.

The unavailability of the One for cognition is nicely brought out by a much earlier Neoplatonist, Porphyry, in his analogy of dreaming; it is possible for us to describe to someone else the experiences of a dream we had last night, trying to reveal its salient happenings, phenomenal qualities and the emotional feelings connected to it. Yet only the one who has the dream has a direct comprehension of it; the other must make do with second-hand reports of the peculiarities of that state. Similarly, our normal thinking can only portray the One from a distance (Porphyry, *Launching Points to the Intelligible,* §25).

Perhaps surprisingly, the cognitive unavailability to the third-person also seems to hold for intellection and the intellect: if, as we saw, the intellect is *identity* with its internal objects of knowledge, all reports and descriptions of it are bound to be a step away from this identity. Descriptions and reports are mediated by representations, by concepts and expressions. The immediate import of this is a fall from that identity, and another, a mediated cognitive relation to the objects. The experience of this identity-knowledge, too, resembles a dream; only the one who actually has the dream realizes it in its immediacy and with all its details and characteristics. But if knowledge is like this, we encounter a dire consequence: is knowledge teachable at all? If all representational ways of approaching objects of knowledge are doomed to fail, then it would seem to be the case that knowledge can only be had in first-person experience (Rappe 2000: esp. introduction). This does not mean that a wise person could not help a student to become wiser. Even when knowledge is taken to require unmediated identity, it remains possible to teach methods and pieces of doctrine that aid the student in his working towards knowledge. The teacher may perhaps teach certain parts of knowledge, and he may also emphasize the importance of systematicity. He may lead and aid the student in the dialectical enterprise. What he cannot do is to transmit final knowledge to the student.

This view of knowledge as something one can only gain in a first-person encounter has three important consequences. First, its philosophical value seems to be in the idea that knowledge is not something that can be poured into the soul by someone else; rather, it requires the subject's own efforts (cf. Plato, *Symp.* 175d). If the subject is not herself involved in trying to understand, to solve, dilemmas, and create a unified and systematic view of whole areas of research, the pieces of information given to her will not form knowledge. This also seems to be experientially true. Most people recognize the feeling of having really understood something; it involves not just listening to or reading wise things but also one's own intellectual efforts, among other things, at forming connections between the pieces of information one has learnt. Secondly, since even the wisest of teachers cannot lead the student all the way into knowledge, other methods must be used. Recall that either directly or mediated by images, the soul is in possession of the objects of knowledge, even though these are not immediately available for everyday awareness. This means that it is possible that the student can, in a way, be his or her own best teacher. This is a call to try to reveal a knowledge innate to the soul. Perhaps after a certain amount of outwardly directed observation and education, one would be best advised to turn towards the inner opulence of the soul. Thirdly, this view of knowledge suffers from a serious disadvantage. If the phase of learning is essentially different from the end, true knowledge, the breach between the two becomes problematic. Is it possible that a mediated thought also available in shared discourse leads to a knowledge in more solitary identity with being, accessible only to the first person encounter? How does the move between the two take place? And if it does not follow from discursive reasoning, is there any means by which the soul may reach the highest summits of metaphysics?

Inward turn and the practice of theurgy

Principle IX. "Like is known by the like"
This insight, already present in Presocratic philosophy, bases the explanation of acts of sensation and thinking on what is like: that is, an absence of what is different or contrary. (For Aristotle, see e.g. Ar. *De an*. 2.5, 417a19–21, 418a3–6.)

Recall that according to Neoplatonic anthropology the human being extends from the lowest material existence all the way to or near to the divine mode of existence. This means that, through its nature, it has the advantage of being able to approach different metaphysical levels. Proclus states this as follows:

> If then, the divine is to be known at all, it remains only that it be graspable by the [corresponding] mode of existence of the soul, and be knowable by this, so far as this is possible at all, for at every level we say that "like is known by like"; that is to say, the sensible realm is known by sensation; the opinable world, by opinion; the dianoetic, by discursive reason; and the intelligible, by the intellect; so that it is by the One [in us] that the most unitary realm is known, and by the ineffable element [in us], the ineffable. That is why Socrates in the Alcibiades was right to declare that it is by entering into itself that the soul can gain the vision of not only of all other things but also of god; … (Procl., *Platonic Theology* I. 3 [= Dillon & Gerson 2004: 290])

The fact that the human soul extends to as many, or almost as many levels, as the metaphysical hierarchy ensures that it has the cognitive and other powers suitable for the penetration of all these levels. For Proclus (above), there are no fewer than six layers of cognition, whereas Plotinus would probably have been happy with four (perception, discursive reason, intellection and propensity for the experience of absolute unity). For the Neoplatonist this cognitive wealth also means that in philosophizing, one must have faith in this

fact. Even though perception may sometimes report the structures of the universe correctly, one ought not to try to solve issues based merely on empirical evidence. The inner experiential and cognitive realm, the powers and intuitions of the soul, have a focal role. In later philosophical terminology, this might mean centrality of *a priori* reasoning as well as some kind of phenomenological approach, that is, a striving to take seriously the experiential structures of human experience and cognition. Because the universe has an essential connection to the human intellect and soul, this does not lead into idealism but helps us to understand the world.

The many-level psychology is combined with two Platonic heritages. First, from Socrates in Plato's dialogues the Neoplatonists had learned of the centrality of self-enquiry and self-knowledge. In the *Alcibiades I*, which Proclus explicitly refers to, this knowledge includes both the realization that one is not one's body but, rather, the soul, as well as the idea that the ultimate truth about self has to do with the divine, intellectual aspect shared by all souls (133a–c). Secondly, Plotinus makes one logical conclusion from the idea of recollection. If the objects of knowledge are internal and innate to the soul, then the best place to search for them is also that very same soul. Hence the famous Neoplatonic inward turn, here in Plotinus' well-known version:

> Retreat to yourself and see; and if you do not yet see yourself beautiful, then, just as a maker of a statue which ought to become beautiful takes away here and polishes there, and makes one place smooth and another pure till he has brought to light the beautiful face [proper] for that statue, so you too must take away what is superfluous and straighten what is crooked and by purifying what is dark to make it bright, and never stop on "building up" your statue till the godlike brightness of virtue shines on you, till you see "reasonableness standing on its sacred pedestal". If you have become this, and see it, and are united with yourself in purity, having nothing obstructing you from becoming in this way one, nor having anything else inside mixed with it, but [being]

> wholly yourself, only true light, not measured by magnitude, or defined by shape into [being something] less, or increased into magnitude by unlimitedness, but everywhere unmeasured because greater than all measure and superior to all quantity; if you see that you have become this, then from this time onwards you have become sight; feel confident about yourself, for having already ascended you no longer need anyone to show you; look intently and see. For this eye alone looks at the great beauty.
>
> (Plotinus, *Enn.* I.6.9.7–25; quoting Pl. *Phdr*. 252d, 254b)

The idea is to leave the changing and alluring sensible reality and concentrate on inwardly directed contemplation. In this process, it is important to gain a correct kind of self-understanding, to realize what one really is. It is a gradual process that starts from the realization that one is not one's body, its desires and dependencies on the world, nor one's particular person with bodily attachments, personal ties and tendencies. One's capacity to discursive reason is already closer to one's true nature, but even this is not satisfactory: one must distinguish whatever it is that enables reason's functions, that gives it its powers, namely the intellect. Inward turn involves, thereby, a stripping or cutting away of that which is, according to the Neoplatonists, not fundamental to our nature. This leads into ascent to that which is the highest part of our nature.

Later, Proclus explicates this in the following manner:

> for it is through turning itself towards its own unity and the center of its whole life and shaking itself free from all multiplicity, and the variety of multifarious powers within it that the soul may raise itself to the highest "vantage point" from which to view the whole existence.
>
> (Procl., *Platonic Theology* I. 3
> [= Dillon & Gerson 2004: 290])

In the inward turn, the soul has access to all powers innate to it. The task given to the student of philosophy is first to realize that

her nature encompasses all these powers. She is then required to realize that some of these powers and levels are less reliable and more dependent on others, whereas some are more stable, trustworthy and independent. This means working her way from the lower powers towards the higher ones, and it happens by gradually "shaking herself free" of the powers of less value. This is a process of self-realization of oneself as a godlike thing.

In his biography of Plotinus Porphyry tells that in his contemplation, Plotinus reached a union with God four times in his life (*Plot.* 23). Plotinus himself describes his experiences of unity with the being, with the intelligible:

> I have many times awakened into myself from the body when I exited the things other than myself, and entered into myself, and, seeing a marvellous and great beauty, I was then especially confident that I belonged to the better part, and that I was engaged in the best life, and that I had come to that activity having identified myself with the divine and having situated myself in it, that is, having situated myself above all else in the intelligible world. After this repose in the divine, descending from the intellect in discursive reasoning, I am puzzled how I have now descended and how my soul has come to be in the body when it is the way it appeared to itself even while it was in the body.
>
> (Plotinus, *Enn.* IV.8.1 [trans. Armstrong])

This description tells us certain central features of a "mystical" experience: first, it is an experience in which the body has a highly minimized role. It is an experience of oneself without, and free from, the body. Secondly, the experience fills one with beauty. Thirdly, the experience is accompanied with a feeling or certitude that this, rather than the everyday bodily existence, is one's true nature. Fourthly, the experience is of a fleeting kind, that is, it cannot last. And finally, once passed the experience is not forgotten but it, rather, intellectually or experientially, nourishes the normal philosophizing, life and existence of the person who has had it.

In the ultimate unification with the One, the limits and conceptualizations belonging to reasoning and intellection must be abandoned. Simplicity does not allow conceptual multiplicity or inference. Some scholars have suggested that it is first and foremost *erōs* that helps the human soul in this final leap. Certainly it must be the case that the motivation or desire (*ephesis*) to ascend must be owed to the same awareness of lack that motivated the turn in the first place: "The soul's innate love makes clear that the Good is there. … For since the soul is other than God but comes from him it is necessary in love with him" (*Enn.* VI.9.9.24–7). Whether *erōs* plays a more crucial role is unclear.

Since the unions with both being and God are found in solitary contemplation, ultimately they do not lend themselves to description, thought or being in any way propositionally approached: at least, an aspect of them is by necessity left out in the third-personal approach. What reason do we have for believing that such an experience is, indeed, possible? So far, we have only Plotinus' conviction that the dialectical and philosophical work he has devised, that is, the study of the intelligible order of the universe as well as human beings in it, has led him into these experiences, and a somewhat vague hope that it might do so also in our own case. In the case of intellection, we may, again, appeal to the argument of ontological connection. Since the intellect comprises Forms, the images of which we encounter daily in the sensible realm, a philosophical work towards recognition of the salient features of that world and their systematization will necessarily lead towards the intelligible order of being. With the One this move is less successful; if the end is a true unity without any multiplicity and differentiation, our dialectical work in revealing the multiplicity of being cannot directly bring us into union with absolute unity. The road from thinking and intellectual contemplation to unification may not be straight and simple. Inward-turned self-recognition leads into self-transcending experience (*ekstasis*, "to stand outside").

The later Neoplatonists suggest a divergent path to the divine, one that they call *theourgia*, differing from theoretical work (*theōria*) as well as reasoning about divinity (*theologia*). Let us recall again that

the later Neoplatonists deny the doctrine of the unfallen soul and thereby create a breach between the human mind and the intelligible. This also renders divinity something that is not a self-evident part of human nature, but a thing over and above it. The place that Plotinus attaches to undescended yet individual intellect is inhabited for the later Neoplatonists – from the central figure of the more spiritually inclined branch of Neoplatonism, Iamblichus, onwards – by gods separate and higher than human beings. Theurgy refers to the practices of, among others, ritual and prayer used in invoking these gods. In the context of Neoplatonic metaphysics, a question immediately arises. If causation is always from the higher and independent to the lower and dependent, how is it possible in any way to influence the gods? Can we make them benevolent or receptive to prayers? Iamblichus is clear on this point. God and the (lower) gods are creatures that cannot be commanded or controlled through the use of reason, nor by theurgic practices. They are entities that may give human beings help and reveal their nature to the one who seeks it, but they can also deny any approach human beings attempt in their direction. Their benevolence towards individual human beings depends on the status of the soul of the seeker. Theurgy shapes the soul of the seeker into the right kind of state, it does not change the gods (Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians* II.11 [= Dillon & Gerson 2004: 229–30; Dillon 2007: 30–41).

The different means of making the human soul prepared for divinity are collectively called theurgy. Theurgy consists of meditation practices and different kinds of therapy of the soul as well as prayers. Broadly taken, the purpose of all these methods is the same as emotional therapy (to be discussed in Chapter 6): to prepare the soul so that it is pure enough for actualization of higher, divine powers. These practices, so to speak, render the soul suitable for the god to enter. This is preparatory work that invokes God or gods, but which in no way necessitates or has a power of command over them. The unification (*henōsis*) with God may only take place by God's initiation.

According to Iamblichus, who less than a century after the time of Plotinus established several of these practices as central for the

functioning of the Neoplatonic movement, theurgic union is attained by the following means: "It is the accomplishment of acts not to be divulged and beyond all conception, and the power of unutterable symbols, understood solely by the gods, that establishes theurgic union" (Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians* II.11, 96–7 [= Dillon & Gerson 2004: 229])

Theurgy is here contrasted with reasoning and understanding. Meditation of symbols and other such practices rely on ineffability; there is no point in trying to explain what their power consists of since it is, by definition, a power other than the rational one. Thus ordinary prayers that use concepts and words function only at the lower stages of spiritual development. The higher one gets in this development, the more ineffable the whole process becomes, and the less we can know about its content. This "has as its mark ineffable unification, which establishes all authority in the gods and provides that our souls rest completely in them" (*On the Mysteries of the Egyptians* V.26 [= Dillon & Gerson 2004, 231–2]; see also Dillon 2002; van den Berg 2000: ch. 5).

The theoretical justification of magic stems from Plotinus' idea of the universe being a whole in which everything is connected to everything else. For Plotinus, however, this idea applied to the sensible universe, and explains, for instance, the fact that the divination may reveal something of the fate of individual human beings (e.g. *Enn.* III.3.6). Accordingly, Plotinus' pupil Porphyry still posits theurgy at a relatively low level, as that which helps first and foremost those who lack intellectual facility, and it is thereby far from the highest or securest way to salvation of the soul or to making it godlike (e.g. Porphyry, *de Regressu Animae* fr. 2, 27,21–8,19 Bidez [= Sorabji 2005a: 18(b)4]). Porphyry's critical remarks towards overly religious and especially magical tendencies in his *Letter to Anebo* invited a wholesale counter-attack from his pupil Iamblichus, in the form of *The Reply of the Master Abammon to the Letter of Porphyry to Anebo* (commonly known, since Marisilio Ficino, as *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians*, and quoted above). The tradition deriving from Iamblichus also extends the idea of the inherent connections within the universe beyond the sensible, to divine levels and their relation-

ship to the sensible. Theurgy becomes precisely the way with which to overcome the gap between the divine and the sensible.

Another un-Plotinian aspect of this tradition is the role of material objects that can be used as vehicles of ascent. Material objects are understood as bearing signatures or symbols (*sunthēmata, symbola*) of gods, thus they can be used in invoking the higher beings. The theoretical justification for this theory is to be found, among other things, in the following ideas: (i) the gods illuminate matter and are present immaterially in material things; (ii) there exists a filial and beneficent bond between the gods who preside over life and the lives that they produce. Sacrifices, for instance, do not affect the gods but activate the elements within the physical universe that have a natural kinship with the divine. This, rather than that which is entirely transcendent, is the proper level of human action, and therefore compatible with us (Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians* V.17 [= Sorabji 2005a: 18(b)16]). For Iamblichus to raise material objects to this important status must have been a part of his overall critique of human reason, connected also to Plotinus' denial of the undescended intellect. According to Iamblichus, human reasoning is not in itself enough to divinize its practitioner. The true agent of theurgy is the divinity, whereas the practitioner may only invoke such divine action on himself. If successful, however, this practice as a whole, with the divine agent and a practitioner who prepares his or her soul for divinity, has the power of raising the human soul to the level of the gods (see esp. Shaw 1995: ch. 4; Dillon 2007).

SIX

Ethics and politics

General expositions of ancient philosophy often stress the centrality of ethics in ancient thought. A basic motivation for all philosophical enquiry in antiquity, at least since Socrates, is answering the question of how one ought to live one's life. Ancient ethics is often called "eudaimonistic". The philosophical schools of the era agree that the ultimate end (*telos*) of human life is to be happy, to achieve well-being (*eudaimonia*). The happiness sought is not a fleeting moment of pleasantness or even euphoria: most philosophers agree that a properly happy life is one that can be assessed as a happy whole, an existence that is stable and happy in the long run. More often than not this happiness is seen to coincide with living virtuously. Another strong tendency shared by many ancient philosophers, even the hedonist Epicureans, is the idea that the activities of the rational part of the soul are the most capable of securing an invulnerable and permanent state of well-being. Like Aristotle, Plotinus equates happiness with living well (*to eu zēn*). Both living and goodness are notions that appear to a different extent and in different manners on different levels of the Neoplatonic hierarchy. Thus the kind and degree of goodness suitable for human beings depend on the kind of life particular to them. This is especially life according to the intellect in us (Schroeder 1997). Neoplatonism also follows the ancient teleological tendency to try to describe and reveal things

in their purest and most complete, perfected form. For this reason, the figure of the wise man, *spoudaios*, is a central figure of ethics (cf. Schniewind 2003).

For Plato's followers, the goal of living is to be found in "assimilation to god in so far as this is possible" (*Tht.* 176b1–2; *Resp.* 10.613b1; *Ti.* 90a2–d8). This puzzling formulation raises the question of what kind of life is sought. Is it simply a maximally virtuous but nonetheless human life, incorporated in the available notion of perfection, namely God? Or is the ethical ideal of moral goodness accompanied with a spiritual ideal of essentially non-human perfection, something only to be achieved by leaving human experience and morality behind (Annas 1999: 64; Baltzly 2004)? Especially in the case of the spiritually charged version of Platonism, like that of Neoplatonism, the pressing question concerns the level of otherwordliness involved in the ethical ideal.

Neoplatonists, and especially Plotinus, are often also accused of not providing a cogent ethical theory. If ethics turns into spirituality disengaged from the world of action, there might be no need for or interest in properly formulated ethical principles. One goal of this chapter is to assess whether ethical enquiry still preserves its centrality in late antiquity and in Neoplatonism. In order to do so, we must try to determine what is meant by "ethics", what are the foundations of ethical thinking in Neoplatonism and which branches of ethical theory the Neoplatonists contributed to and how.

The role of political theory and the value of political involvement within Neoplatonism is an equally vexed question. Although the *Republic* was well known to Plotinus, the founder of the movement wrote no treatises of a political nature, and almost all we know of his interest in politics is to be found in his biography. Porphyry testifies that Plotinus attempted to get the emperor and empress of Rome interested in reviving a city of intellectuals and philosophers situated in Campania (*Plot.* 12). Had he succeeded, the city would have been called Platonopolis and its government would have been based on principles derived from Plato's teachings, especially the *Laws*. Despite the massiveness of the plan, the *Enneads* seem to contain no theoretical or practical teaching connected to it. Traditionally,

the reason for the minor role of politics within the school has been found in the cultural and political climate of the era. Plotinus wrote in a time when the emperor was the sole arbiter of political power, and political influence was hard to come by. Later Neoplatonists worked in societies governed by Christian rulers, and it was by no means easy for them to influence political decision-making. Undeniably, the period is marked by inward turned and spiritual movements of which Neoplatonism is only one. Both the late Stoics and Neoplatonists believe that truth, stability and happiness can be found within, in contemplation or theoretical activity. In such an atmosphere, the place of action and political activity becomes a dilemma. Yet this does not reflect on all members of the school. Recent research has shown that the post-Plotinian Neoplatonists comment amply on political questions.

Good and evil

The first question to tackle is the status of goodness and evil in the Neoplatonic system. In Chapter 2, we saw that the One is also the supreme Good (*agathon*). Since the One is good, the universe and the whole metaphysical hierarchy that derives from it must also display unfolded goodness. And indeed, the goodness and unity of the One are present in the beautifully organized universe, in the rich diversity of beings and properties it exhibits. Another instance of this unfolding is the human capacity to be good. The One-Good is not only the source of everything in the universe, but also the final end of all generated things. In the case of human beings, this means that they should try to fulfil the capacities endowed to them, especially the highest of them, the powers of intellection and unification. This consists of turning back towards the good source: the human being is good when she actualizes the goodness in her nature by reverting towards the intelligible principles and towards God. The reversal can be interpreted as a conscious attempt to ground one's thought and action in the intelligible principles. Failing to do so is a failure at self-constitution. The generation of the human being, or self, is,

in a way, incomplete. For the self to become who she is, she needs to realize herself through this reversal.

In a sense, one might claim that Neoplatonic metaphysics and philosophy is permeated by ethics. If existence is a matter not just of being generated by a good principle but of striving back towards goodness, and if each entity in the universe reverts towards its source, then each entity and activity in the universe is actually "ethical". But if *everything* is ethical, is anything *properly* ethical? That is, does not the metaphysical "ethicalization" trivialize the whole notion? To this one might answer in two different ways. First, it is not the case that metaphysics in this reading becomes or turns into ethics. Rather, the Neoplatonic metaphysical system seems to be structured so as to have immediate ethical consequences, and thus ethics must have been one central motivational force in the system-building. Everything is ethical only in so far as everything is connected to ethics, that is, everything can be looked at from an ethical perspective: metaphysics provides the foundations for ethics, and epistemology, for instance, can be seen as a way of gaining knowledge that would be ethically beneficial. This foundation has to do with the values that the metaphysical hierarchy incorporates. The hierarchy of values has important ethical implications. Secondly, in this wide usage of ethics, it is legitimate to use the term in a narrower sense. This is a sense used when a scholar wonders, for instance, whether Plotinus provides an ethical theory or not. It deals with questions such as: does the philosopher studied explicitly discuss virtue, moral behaviour or happiness? Is he interested in, for example, the common good? Does he make explicit ethical inferences from metaphysics or epistemology? As we shall see, the Neoplatonic emphasis is somewhat different from ours. The question of other-regard does not have the centrality it gains later in the history of philosophy, and ethics is concentrated on the good and virtuous life of, or for, the practitioner himself or herself. Nonetheless, the treatises concern moral self-improvement and use ethical terminology (see further Stern-Gillet forthcoming). An inclusive exposition of Neoplatonic ethics uses both of these approaches, the wide as well as the narrow. We shall start with the ontology of evil.

The Neoplatonists present two main options for the metaphysical location of evil. Either it is produced at the lower level where the soul comes to be in matter (Plotinus, *Enn.* I.8.5.26–8, 14.49–51), or it follows the creation at every level, gaining in power the further away from the first principle we get (Proclus and others). This has repercussions on the role of evil in human reality. For Plotinus, the soul is not instrinsically evil. Evil in the soul is connected to the soul's irrational parts, which display a certain weakness towards evil, or towards the unlimited, lack of measure and excess. The true source of evil is in matter but it needs to be complemented by the soul's weakness and its alienation from its true source. For Proclus, evil does not have the twofold origin in matter and in the soul but stems only from the soul's fascination for what is inferior to it. Evil, he maintains, precedes the soul's descent to the body, as Plato's *Phaedrus* shows (*Phdr.* 248a; Procl., *The Nature and Origin of Evil* 28.9–10, 33.1–3). Without much oversimplification one might perhaps say that Plotinus' view can lead into degradation of the bodily and material, whereas the later Neoplatonic solution establishes evil as inherent in the same source as goodness, namely in our psychological outlook – not just the bodily. The difference between these stances should not, however, be overstated. The philosophers are unanimous in the fact that when the soul or, perhaps better, the self, forgets its true origin, which is in the higher levels of metaphysics, and looks at the inferior level, at what is unintelligible, she becomes ignorant of her true nature. Identifying oneself with the inferior aspects of one's own nature means losing control, and thereby being vulnerable to the excesses and defects of the body (e.g. Gurtler 1997). The quest of moral existence is reversion away from the bodily and overcoming this alienation afflicting our life.

Becoming like god

What is the purpose of human life? Neoplatonic understanding of the *telos* of our existence can be summarized in the classical exhortation, to be found in Pythagoreanism and repeated by both Plato

and Aristotle, "to become like god" (*homoiōsis theō*). This notion of "becoming like God" figures in most ancient philosophical systems as the ultimate end of human life (Pl. *Symp*. 207c–209d; *Tht*. 176a5–c3; Arist. *Eth. Nic*. 10.7, 1177b33; cf. Sedley 1999). In all ancient philosophy, ethics is not primarily about, for instance, consequences, but about goodness of character. It is generally agreed that in philosophical discussions, the divinity in question is rational and resides in the rational soul or intellect. Becoming like God is the process in which the human being cultivates and adheres to this better part of his nature rather than, say, his bodily nature. Where sources and opinions may diverge is whether the God within is personal or the universal and shared Intellect, and to what extent this self-identification is a demand to become another kind of creature than one is, and thus possibly an inhuman ideal. This is the question of the level of otherworldliness of Neoplatonism. Are we meant to bring the divine in us to bear in the sensible and embodied life, or are we supposed to go further, and leave the bodily life and activities behind us in our search of a more godlike existence? If the latter, what happens to action and politics?

The spiritual development and self-realization that Neoplatonism holds as absolutely central aim at unification with the Intellect and ultimately the One or Good. It is to this that the turn inwards is directed. This can be seen as a call to abandonment of the world human beings live in, and an exhortation to otherworldly contemplation and ascetism. Undoubtedly, Neoplatonism belongs to those spiritual movements that direct concentration in an inner realm and try to find there, away from the perils of the changing world and its temptations, peace and harmony. Well-being resides in the perfect and invulnerable activity of the highest, unfallen part of the soul, the intellect, rather than in the feelings, actions or even cognitions bodily human beings have in the imperfect realm of the senses. Iamblichus words may seem very austere:

> So then, since man's true essence lies in his soul, and the soul is intelligent and immortal, and its nobility and its good and its end repose in divine life, nothing of mortal nature

> has power to contribute anything towards the perfect life or to deprive it of happiness. For, in general, our blessedness lies in the intellectual life; for none of the median things has the capacity either to increase or to nullify it. It is therefore irrelevant to go on, as men generally do, about chance and its unequal gifts.
>
> (Iamblichus, *Letter to Macedonius, On Fate*, fr. 7 [= Dillon & Gerson 2004: 247–8])

Just like Plotinus before him, Iamblichus holds that worldly matters are entirely irrelevant for happiness. In opposition to Aristotle, who gives a role to the worldly contingencies in individual well-being, for the Neoplatonist neither good fortune, happy marriage or fame, nor poverty or misfortune in human relationships or political career have constitutive or destructive consequences for well-being. Rather, in a Stoicizing manner, these thinkers contend that happiness is constituted internally by one's mental life. If one's state of the soul has the right relation towards the intelligible and the One, then one achieves happiness that is independent of circumstances and one's worldly situation. No role is left to external impact.

But it would be misguided to dismiss the ethical significance of the Neoplatonic turn inwards too quickly. The reversal of attention from the bodily to the One is supposed to lead to a complete transformation of one's life. A person who realizes himself or herself correctly as an immortal soul and intellect with an origin in the divine unity and goodness cannot and will not continue to live in the way he used to. Philosophy becomes a new way of life (for the concept, see esp. Hadot [1963] 1997), and its theoretical side is supposed to revolutionize the whole life and existence of the person engaging in it. This need not mean that the person withdraws from the world as we know it, but that he acts in it according to a new set or principles. He or she founds her actions in the vision of the intelligible and the One (*Enn.* I.2.6.1–2; 7.20–24). On one level, this simply means recognizing the role of reason in human life. Without reason, the kind of pleasure appropriate for human beings is impossible to attain. Following Plato's *Philebus*, Damascius states:

> Actually, however, nobody would choose to feel pleasure without having intelligence, even if the pleasure were perfect; for we cannot enjoy the past without memory, nor the future without anticipation, nor the present without reflection; and besides, one would no longer be a human being nor an animal endowed with sense-perception, but something like a sea-lung. (Damascius, *Lectures on the Philebus* §83 [trans. Westerink])

Besides the role of reason as the capacity in the human being that alone can engage in planning an overall good life, in the inward turn the conscious life of the person will become gathered around the one grounding principle of being and goodness, the One. The One is the leading and motivating point of orientation (Beierwaltes 2002: 125–7).

The issue of the actual difference the acquired vision of the One, rather than Intellect, would make to the moral choices of a philosopher is a difficult one. It would seem to involve, at least, an ultimate loss of an egoistic stance. What seems apparent is that of the two levels of selfhood in Plotinus (distinguished in Chapter 4), becoming as happy as gods involves identification with the higher and true self. The activities of the souls in the temporal realm happen as a series of momentary states. This fact makes acts and states of an embodied soul into composites that have no true permanency. They begin and end, they are intermittent and their stability not to be trusted. For this reason, even a long, blessed, and happy state of an embodied being is a composite, and does not enjoy the kind of unity and invulnerability that truly simple states do. The intellect, on the contrary, is in a simple and unchanging state of wisdom, happiness and awareness of its own state. If we look for stability, peace and true harmony, it is to this aspect of our nature that we ought to turn (Sen 1995).

The notion of becoming godlike is most closely related to the Neoplatonic theory of virtues. Plotinus actually accuses a rival school of thought, the Gnostics, of not having a proper ethical theory to offer (*Enn.* II.9.15.28–33). His theory of virtues is partly a response to

this debate (Schniewind 2003). Plotinus posits two levels or grades of virtue, which have different relations to action. The so-called political or civic virtues (*aretai politikai*) are useful in the realm of action. Their role is to give order to desires. The first civic virtue is practical wisdom, which has to do with discursive reason; the second is courage, which has to do with emotions; the third is reasonableness, which consists of a sort of agreement and harmony of passion and reason; the last is justice, which makes each of these parts agree in "minding their own business (*oikeopragia*) where ruling and being ruled are concerned" (*Enn.* I.2.1.16–21; cf. e.g. Pl. *Resp*. 4.433a). What later became known as the cardinal virtues are given a special interpretation. They are connected to control and command within the soul and, despite their name, have little to do with the *polis* or with any social relationships. This seems to involve a step towards the inner, and to entail a turn away from the political, as well as from the realm shared with others. Rather than imposing radical freedom from all emotion, these virtues would, however, still suggest a kind of *metriopatheia*: the person lives in the realm of action and very much in and through the body, but reason rules in him. He is self-controlled and practically wise, and has only moderate passions.

Above the political virtues are the greater or contemplative virtues (sometimes called *katharseis*). A person who has them is wholly directed to the intelligible realm and to the contemplation of forms. Her soul is separated and purified from the body; it has something that resembles the Stoic *apatheia* rather than the Academic and Aristotelian *metriopatheia* (*Enn.* I.2.6.20–28, I.2.5.4–12). This is also the level of virtues that man should ultimately strive to achieve. The notion of grades of virtue was postulated by Plotinus to dissolve a problem inherent in Plato. He accommodates Plato's different accounts of the value and status of passions and irrational parts of the soul: where the *Republic*, for instance, suggests control exercised by reason over irrational elements, the *Phaedo* goes further in the direction of the ideal philosopher and the complete purging of these elements (*Phd*. 82a11–b1 on *dēmotikē kai politikē*, and *Resp*. 4.430c on *politikē*). The apparent contradiction between the two views is solved by positing different levels of virtue (Dillon 1983).

The theory leaves open the question to what extent the sage still acts and interacts with other people. Perhaps attaining a life according to the higher, contemplative virtues would necessarily entail inactivity in the sphere of other people, and thereby leaving behind as unnecessary not just the lower, political virtues, but any virtue in action. Political or civic virtues are a transitory step in the development towards the higher virtues, and the reformed contemplative life of higher virtues shares little with the virtuous life understood as virtuous action in everyday situations and circumstances. Yet it is also possible that the political virtues retain a role to play, not as preparatory virtues, for obviously the wise man no longer needs any preparation, but as something directed to the sensible world. The wise man in possession of higher virtues still lives in the sensible world, and must make choices and act in it. If the higher virtues are directed to the intelligible, they could, as it were, further unfold into lower virtue in the realm of action.

By now it should come as no surprise that the later Neoplatonists multiply the grades of virtue further. Porphyry begins by systematizing Plotinus' position, clarifying the virtues above the civic level. The higher virtues are divided into three: the purificatory, that is, the process of reorientation away from the body and towards the Intellect; the theoretical, that is, the result of this purification; and the paradigmatic, that is, the paradigms of virtues in the soul. Porphyry does more than just amplify the higher virtues. For Plotinus, virtue is something appropriate to the realm of sense and action. The intelligible generates and gives principles to especially higher virtues, but these should not be predicated of the Intellect itself. His pupil transforms the theory of virtue according to the axiom of "each thing in everything but in a manner appropriate to the subject". Virtue becomes something that exists at all levels of reality. Each level can be predicated on its own particular virtues. Following this axiom leads, naturally, to Iamblichus' extension of virtues both downwards and upwards. For this first deeply spiritual thinker of the movement in the third and fourth centuries, they include virtues that even animals may have, as well as theurgic virtues that unite the soul with the highest levels of the metaphysical hierarchy (Porph., *Sentences* 32;

for Iamblichus, see e.g. Olympiodorus, *Commentary on the Phaedo* 8, 2, p. 119, 6–7 [Westerink edn]; O'Meara 2003: 44–9).

What is noteworthy is that the theory of virtues, and especially the preparatory phase of virtue, has largely (although not exclusively) to do with the body and its desires. These must be brought into the control of reason. In Plotinus, this happens by a realization that one's true self is not the bodily aspect of the whole human being but, rather, that which controls it (e.g. *Enn.* II.3.9.14–18). One's happiness consists of this self-realization. In general outlook, this is one branch of eudaimonistic ethics. It deals with the question of how to live, and concentrates on the health and state of the person's own soul. The primary aim is to achieve and maintain the health and well-being of one's soul (Stern-Gillett forthcoming). This well-being lies at the junction of the human being's double nature: on the one hand we have a place and station in the world and complete the production of the world through our agency; on the other hand we are also beings with a higher status in the world and with an access to the highest levels of reality.

In Plotinus, this double nature reveals a rich conception of anthropology, but it may also indicate a tension between the personal and particular, and the impersonal and universal. Moreover, since the latter is the true *telos*, the status of the former is in question. Later Neoplatonists share with Plotinus the commitment to the hierarchy in which virtue, goodness and being come in degrees, and the higher is always better and more perfect. Yet within this overall picture, they try to assuage this tension and the impersonal otherwordliness implied in it by several measures. As was explicated in Chapter 4, the later Neoplatonists reject Plotinus' doctrine of the unfallen part of the soul. For them, the human soul is entirely psychic, with no divine or unfallen parts. Thereby its perfection, too, is not assimilation to something foreign to itself, like the *nous*, but a psychic and human event. We have also seen that the great Athenian systematizer of Neoplatonism, Proclus, postulates personal divinities in the higher levels of the metaphysical hierarchy. Of these divinities, all human individuals follow one or another cosmic god. These divinities are higher entities, but appropriate goals to the human level of existence.

Therefore the human assimilation to god is not assimilation to an impersonal intellect. Rather, in these divinities human beings have a *personal* ethical goal or ideal (Baltzly 2004). Becoming like God becomes understood not as a transformation to something impersonal and non-human but as a perfection of psychic and personal human existence.

Action and other-regard

Two connected dilemmas merit closer study. First, even though life's ultimate purpose, unification with the Intellect and the One, was understood as not a departure from but an amplification of life in the sensible realm, it remains unclear what role action has in that new kind of life and existence. Does the sage whose priority is the inward-turned contemplation embrace or avoid action? Moreover, how exactly is the fairly abstract kind of experience of unity with the higher levels supposed to illuminate and nourish the life of action? Secondly, if the reversal of life is a turn inwards, which alone is capable of making us truly happy, and if human relationships are, hence, never constitutive of happiness, what happens to our relation to other people?

Plotinus defines the place of action in the universe through his overall metaphysical system. He contrasts it with contemplation. As a metaphysical notion, the activity of the Intellect is a step from the top of the hierarchy, the One. Human beings have access to this intellectual activity through their intellectual soul. Within the human being, action is by necessity a further step from the peak of the hierarchy; it is something that human beings produce – their external activity. As productions of the soul and intellect, and therefore on a lower level than either of them, actions may affect only our bodily dispositions. They have no power to change the soul itself. Their goodness, if they display any, issues from the intelligible principles on which the agent has founded them, just as beauty found in art is derived from intelligible principles that the artist is capable of revealing or transmitting through his work (*Enn.* III.8.4.30–48, I.2.7.20–24, V.8.1).

Disregarding those aspects of Plato's *Republic* that deal with social conditioning, Plotinus focuses on the idea of good action as what happens when the philosopher goes back to the cave after seeing the reality and the sun (*Resp.* 7.517c–518a). For him, the order of primacy between theoretical and practical activity follows unfailingly the order of metaphysical causation: from the top downwards. In addition to this, action has one particularly problematic aspect to it: it is always dependent on the external world. Even though the agent may be internally unified and act freely as well as according to well-reasoned principles, action happens in the changing world. It and its success are dependent on changing circumstances. Therefore it can never be as pure or independent as theoretical activity.

It is, therefore, perhaps unsurprising that the Neoplatonic curriculum suffered from a lack of guidelines about *practical* ethical issues, that is, the way in which Platonic dialectic could guide human beings in the realm of action and other people. Who would want to devote his life to writing exclusively about something that has no primacy, that is, on things that are actually entirely dependent on higher principles? Platonic dialogues offer few recommendations on how to conduct oneself. What they display is the exemplary figure of a sage, Socrates, but no explicit examination on how his person and actions actually might fit together with Platonic ethical theory. The *Republic* is highly utopian, but the *Laws* do give some ideas about practical engagement in the world. Plotinus' *Enneads* are even more lacking in this respect, with only passing remarks on virtuous behaviour, such as the idea that a sage is also well disposed to everyone (I.4.15.22–5). The gap was filled from a somewhat surprising source: from the camp of the Neoplatonists' adversaries, the Stoics. What the Neoplatonists recommended for reading was Epictetus' *Handbook*, with its very practical advice on how to behave in private as well as in public. On the one hand, then, we have a hierarchical order of more important and demanding reading and philosophy, in which action has no central place – or no real place at all. On the other hand, the antidote is a recognition of this defect, and an attempt to fix the situation with a work of Stoic origin. The late Neoplatonist Simplicius chose to write a commentary on this work in the sixth century CE.

The overall taste we get from that commentary as regards action is very different from that of Plotinus. In general, the later Neoplatonists seem to take more seriously Plato's suggestions in the *Republic* that acting virtuously also promotes the virtue in the soul. Simplicius seems to accept much of Epictetus' practical outlook. He believes, among other things, that even though actions would not constitute goodness itself – this is still by the later Neoplatonists constituted by the higher principles – each of them does have a profound way of affecting one's moral and rational progress. Moreover, Simplicius takes Plotinus' overall picture of layered metaphysics to be true, but contends that there is another order of priority, and one in which the sensible is prior to the intelligible. Acting in the sensible and bodily existence is an *origin* of goodness and virtue; although their principle must in some sense be God and divine layers of metaphysics, in another sense it is the actual life in the corporeal world that is prior. Action, rather than contemplation, is the purpose of life, that for the sake of which theoretical activities are performed (Simpl., *Commentary on Epictetus' Handbook* 135,36–30; Remes forthcoming).

The fact that the soul in the late Neoplatonic theory is no longer inviolable and divine in its superior heights changes the position of action in the philosophical system. In the process by which human beings strengthen their own particular position in the universe as something lower than gods yet above the rest of nature, action gains weight as something peculiar just for beings at this level. Also, if no part of the soul is perfectly intellectual and beyond the causal order of the universe, we may assume that action has the power to affect the human being more deeply. When the soul is no longer treated as divine, its nature becomes something that not merely causes things in its surroundings, but also undergoes changes. Therefore action can come to have a real role to play in the formation of selfhood.

But is there room for a true concern for another human being for his or her own sake in these theories? The question of other-regard and its solution are something Neoplatonism shares with most of ancient philosophy, although the school's devised method of philosophizing renders this field of issues perhaps even more prob-

lematic. The shared problem is the danger that the search for one's own happiness overrides any duties and concern for another human being, "the other". According to what has become the conventional view, the ancient conception of well-being can perhaps be considered a peculiar branch of ethical egoism in so far as it includes the idea of primacy of individual well-being, but since the good of the individual is conceived in objective rather than subjective terms, and since the conception of good is further such that virtues and friendship play a large part in it (cf. e.g. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 9.8–9, 1168a28ff.), the modern juxtaposition between one's own good and that of others does not arise. Eudaemonistic ethics may be formally agent-centred, but its content is not. The good one ultimately aims at is not simply one's own pleasure or subjective happiness. For Plotinus, too, the knowledge that reforms the life of the wise man coincides with the knowledge of what is good for all (e.g. *Enn.* II.9.9.27ff.). The self-reformation he endorses is not aimed simply at maximizing the happiness of the reformed sage and hence his version of *eudaimonia* does not necessarily violate our sense of impartiality. Both one's own well-being and that of the *kosmos* are considered as important, and, in fact, neither is understood as primary. The good of the universe is not instrumental to the self-regarding happiness nor is the perfection of the *kosmos* an aim that would constitute one's own happiness. Both ought to be incorporated in a good human life.

The self is not singularly important, but promoting its true well-being is the only means to an understanding of what is good *simpliciter*. One's own role, as well as the role of the other, is to be a part of the cosmos. In that respect there is no difference. In fact, if one succeeds in one's ethical and philosophical development, one realizes the essential similarity and unity of all souls and intellects. Unification with the Intellect and the One involves the following realization: like all other differences that keep things apart, personal differences and particular goals are not essential. A sage should be able to see beyond disorder, separation and difference, to an ordered universe and finally into unity. Human beings have a unified origin and a shared end. This yields one concrete moral result of the union with higher levels: human beings should be seen as essentially similar

and unified by a common goal of life. A benevolent reader may here see the core for the idea of equal and intrinsic worth of every human being. What gives Neoplatonic ethics an agent-centred spin is its emphasis on how the most perfect happiness can be attained. Since knowledge of the *kosmos,* of one's own place in it as well as the highest kinds of happiness all rely on a turn inwards, towards the soul's intellectual capacities and the One, happiness is tied to contemplation: to self-directed activities and mental states (Remes 2006).

Because truth and goodness are to be found within, in inwardly directed contemplation, the quest towards the above-described realization cannot take the other as its starting-point. Nor are such notions as pity or fellow-feeling central. To a reader with a background in, for instance, Western and particularly Judeo-Christian history of ideas, these may well seem like limitations in the ethical position outlined.

Common good and political science

In the famous simile of the cave in book 7 of Plato's *Republic*, the philosopher who has found his way out from the cave and seen the true sunlight and real beings goes back to the cave; he becomes a philosopher-king, someone interested in contributing to the good of the society. Why this should be the case if the happiness of a sage is constituted by theoretical activity has puzzled interpreters ever since. The early Neoplatonists, Plotinus and Porphyry, give this doctrine a metaphysical explanation. The doctrine of emanation relies on two principles relevant here, (II) the principle of spontaneous generation (see Chapter 2) and the principle of omnipotence. The former establishes that in addition to its internal activity, the One has a ceaseless overflowing productive power that gives rise to everything else. This activity displays the goodness of the One and is repeated by each and every thing below the One (Plotinus, *Enn.* V.4.1–2). The latter refers to the omnipresence of the One. As the ultimate universal cause of all things, the One is present in every-

thing. Together these principles seem to suggest that the goodness of the One is present in everything, and, furthermore, that goodness is always generous. It belongs to its nature that there is no shortage of it but an abundance. Through contemplation, the sage secures that his state of mind resembles the Intellect or the One itself. Like the One, the sage's presence and goodness flow towards and affect everything around him without having any consequences for his internal state of mind. The sage who has truly become like God imparts wisdom and goodness into his surroundings without his internal state suffering from this involvement – or so the theory somewhat optimistically suggests. His inner happiness is transcendent and thus inviolable even when he, as an embodied person, acts and experiences in the world (see also Smith 1999).

In an interesting passage, Iamblichus seems to compromise the transcendent nature of the philosopher-ruler's happiness and tie it with the happiness of his citizens. He maintains that "the individual good is included in the whole and the part is saved in the whole, in animals, cities and other natures" (Stobaeus, *Anth*. IV p. 222, 14–18 [Wachsmuth]). The well-being of any part is dependent on the well-being of the whole, and therefore it seems that the well-being of the sage could not remain intact if his subjects would be, for instance, as hungry and poor as many French citizens were before the revolution. Both the well-being of the ruler and that of his subjects belong to a common good, the care for which should be the aim of everyone (O'Meara 2003: 87–8). This seems to have the consequence that there are no true happy sages in bad societies. Perhaps a philosopher in a truly bad society should put more effort into making the society good before he can fully concentrate on his own happiness.

But is the philosopher of any real use to the society? This leads to the problem of the relation between universal and particular, between knowledge and its practical applications. For Plotinus and his followers, ethics requires a correct grasp of metaphysics. But if practical ethics is largely based on metaphysical understanding, how does this understanding lend itself as a tool in everyday life, its changing situations and practical choices? What makes the Neoplatonists confident in believing that a turn inwards and the specific kind of

contemplative life they endorse would result in anything positive in the realm of politics?

Plotinus describes ethics as a combination of dialectic and virtuous dispositions and exercises. It has a practical side to it and there is need for application skills, but its principles and foundation lie in dialectic and wisdom (*sophia*). Both wisdom and practical reasoning (*phronēsis*) rely on the soul's association with the Intellect and its content, the Forms (*Enn.* I.2.6.13–15). Plotinus emphasizes the total dependence of practical reasoning on what is universal and immaterial (I.3.6, esp. ll. 12–14). Good, practical action is based on a harmonious soul through which knowledge provided by higher principles guides action. The philosopher may not be acquainted with what we call social or political sciences, but he would know essences, and for instance by knowing a species he would also have access to the salient constitutive parts of that species, that is, its essential attributes. In a sense, then, he has more valuable possessions than the politician's expertise. His decisions to act and to react are based on the knowledge of higher principles. For example, the serenity the Plotinian sage shows when facing the death of a friend is due to knowledge of what death truly is. That is, he knows that there is nothing terrible in death, that it means merely the separation of the soul from this particular material body. If his dying friend is a wise man, he too will have a similarly detached view of his own death (*Enn.* I.4.4.32–7).

Dialectic reveals essences or Forms in all their interrelations, and therefore in the whole intelligible structure of the universe. By distinguishing the Forms, the essential nature of each thing, and by "weaving" them together, that is, realizing their connections, the dialectician goes through the whole intelligible world (*Enn.* I.3.4.13–16). Through this activity dialectic exposes the intelligible order that governs and creates the world-order of the sensible realm. Importantly, this order is not a mere structure of interrelated substances. It also reveals a hierarchy of values, based on each thing's status in relation to the higher principles. Echoing Plato's *Alcibiades I*, it could inform us, among other things, that the care of the body is less important than the care of the soul, and that the life of a

human being is more valuable than that of an animal, even though the latter, too, has its own place and role in the universe. It tells us that even though the social role and providential destiny of human beings differ, their fundamental nature and worth are the same. We may thus imagine that a ruler with a detailed understanding of the hierarchical order of the universe would, indeed, have knowledge applicable and important for both ethics and politics.

How well or completely this knowledge would have been able to respond to the demands of a changing and dynamic life in the sensible realm is another matter. Plato's *Statesman* suggests that one particularity about politics and political knowledge is that it deals with the changing sensible world. Therefore the ruler's knowledge, too, should be dynamic rather than entirely static (Lane 1998). From Plotinus' pupil, Porphyry, onwards the Neoplatonists are sensitive to this requirement. The later Neoplatonic understanding of human beings as temporal beings rather than gods probably enforces this realization. It has a twofold doctrinal consequence: on the one hand, according to later testimony, Plotinus' pupil Amelius admits that a wise man may make mistakes about actions, for the simple reason that political choices are not exclusively based on theoretical knowledge, but always include estimations and beliefs about the sensible world (Procl., *In R.* II p. 29.7–9 [Kroll]). Because action in the political sphere concerns not just the eternal and unchanging intelligible sphere but the changing and at times highly unpredictable sensible realm, even the wise man cannot be right on each and every occasion. The changing nature of the realm that politics concerns creates, on the other hand, a new dimension to political science. Politics must take into account the right moment (*kairos*). Because political activity happens in temporal succession, choices to act must be accommodated into this succession. This doctrine is tied together with the idea of fate: the ideal moment for *right* action is fixed by fate. Some moments simply are more favourable to some actions than others (O'Meara 2003: 134–5). By incorporating the demands of temporality into the theory of politics, the later Neoplatonists revise and supplement the thought of their own school in a significant manner.

The political ideal

We have seen that the first and most important reform is a reform of one's own soul and life. Yet the Neoplatonists also recognized two other levels of political reform: that of the constitutional order of laws and customs and an ideal one without any such restrictions, the paradigm of which was designed in Plato's *Republic*. The latter was mostly treated as an unattainable ideal, something to try to approximate in the real life (O'Meara 2003: 92–3). A best possible model of government should imitate the intelligible, the Forms. It is somewhat unclear what kind of models the Neoplatonists suggest. Perhaps the differentiation within the intelligible that happened in later Neoplatonism created space for a whole divine, paradigmatic city, even a number of these occurring on different levels of the ever-increasing hierarchy. In a Stoic manner, the intelligible universe itself can be seen as one such paradigm. Analogous to the way in which the god is the ideal for the aspiring philosopher, the beautifully structured cosmos where everything has its own place and task is a paradigm of political order (*ibid.*: 94-7). Such an ideal seems to imply that a good society is one in which there is plenty of room for plurality of beings, and where each part has its own place and role to play. The participants of such a society would work harmoniously towards a unity and beauty of the whole.

The task of legislation within Neoplatonic political theory is much the same as it is in Plato's *Republic*. Laws and virtues are interdependent. Good laws secure the citizens with a place to grow into moral human beings, to be educated in the virtues the philosophers have singled out as beneficial to their soul. Politics thus has an important role to play in the divinization of the soul, in the soul's and self's efforts at becoming godlike. A bad society with twisted educational practices would jeopardise the soul's development towards its proper goal. Yet a good society with good laws can only be created by philosophers whose souls have attained at least some level of virtue and knowledge. Society can only become close to a divine ideal if its rule is grounded in philosophical knowledge. This creates a circle of two mutually interdependent well-beings: of the soul and of the city. But

here, as ever, there is a hierarchy of value. Let us acquaint ourselves with Porphyry's threefold distinction. According to him there is (i) the law of God, the divine principles stamped in the soul through intellect; (ii) the law of mortal nature, which determines the extent of suitable, non-excessive need of the body; and (iii) law established in nations and states, which strengthens the social interaction through mutual agreement. Of these, not all are necessary: "With these laws [(i) and (ii)] as your point of reference, you need never be concerned about the written law. For the written laws are laid down for the sake of temperate men, not to keep them from doing wrong but from being wronged" (Porph., *Letter to Marcella* 27.420–25 [trans. Zimmern]). The role given to ordinary laws seems limited here to providing agreement among citizens who are less than sages and in protecting the virtuous ones from being brutally handled by those who are not proficient with laws of type (i) and (ii).

In real life, ideal, divine cities do not exist. The fact that politics takes place in the sensible realm renders it always less than perfect. Even with the best philosophical advice, the material and changing realm cannot be entirely controlled. The hope that all citizens would be sages, and that no vice or vicious acts would be performed within a society, is equally utopian. For this reason legislative work is not enough. The laws that provide the framework within which common good is cultivated and protected are transgressed by individuals. Judicial theory designed by philosophers secures that these transgressions are punished along the lines that follow intelligible principles. Presumably a good judicial theory would take into account the Neoplatonic value hierarchy, while attempting to apply the insights it provides into the changing and less than perfect realm of action. For the Neoplatonists, this worldly punishment is treated analogously to the providential punishment accompanying the soul in the circle of reincarnation. In both cases, justice has a corrective function. Just as providential justice restores the moral order of the universe through its temporal existence, normal justice corrects the moral order within one soul. The primary purpose of punishment is curing the soul and the universe, not retribution (O'Meara 2003: 107–9).

In a sense, one might claim that both legislation and a judicial system are tools in the overall therapeutic project of Neoplatonism, in which the soul and the human community are primarily cured from within, starting from the soul of an individual and its virtue and well-being. Despite their inwardly directed methodology, the Neoplatonists are not naive. They realize the commitment and ties between the individual and the community, and therefore engage in the therapy of not just the soul, but the society. Their interest in society and common good is not purely instrumentalist. As we have seen, some of them even toy with the idea that common good is constitutive of the happiness of an individual: of the Neoplatonist philosopher-king. What ultimately governs their thought around these issues is their contention that the individual is always a part of a whole, a part of the universe. As such, neither the fulfilment of his life and happiness nor his moral and epistemic perfection can be entirely private matters.

SEVEN

The Neoplatonic legacy

In the course of Western history, it turned out that the Neoplatonic understanding of Platonic philosophy became *the* reading of Plato, to finally gradually crumble away only as a result of the rise of modern philological and historical scholarship emerging in the seventeenth century (Tigerstedt 1974). Thus when we speak of Augustine's Platonism or of the so called Cambridge Platonists (of the seventeenth century), we are often speaking of Platonism that is saturated by many Neoplatonic insights into Plato. This makes it difficult to disentangle Platonic and Neoplatonic influences. The study of the Neoplatonic heritage can be roughly divided into two. On the one hand, there are direct influences, which are sometimes explicitly reported by the thinkers themselves. This means that the author in question has actually consulted the Neoplatonic works. On the other hand, there are indirect influences that may come, through intermediaries, from a variety of sources. These are more usual but sometimes also more difficult to prove. The core of scholarly work must then be in the study of the similarity of doctrines rather than the curriculum or intellectual history of the author studied. In the case of Neoplatonism the latter kinds of influences are much more common.

There are several reasons for the prevalence of Neoplatonic interpretation of Platonism. The early Christian Fathers and thinkers

were often deeply influenced by Neoplatonism, even though they departed from ancient thinking in holding, among other things, that time and universe have a beginning in the creation. For them, the temporal universe is not eternal. Another significant departure concerns salvation and the body. For a Christian the body may be something that resurrects, and salvation is often understood in highly personal terms, while the Neoplatonists elaborate much more abstract notions of the soul's existence after death. The Neoplatonic influences can perhaps be divided, without much violence to subtleties in the theories, into Plotinian, Athenian and Alexandrian strands of thought. The Plotinian strand is faithful to the *Enneads*, the Athenian is marked by the abundance of metaphysical and theological entities and notions, and includes a strong mystical streak, while the Alexandrian can perhaps be identified as the Neoplatonic reception of Aristotelianism, and particularly logic. Let us briefly acquaint ourselves with the central thinkers.

In the Latin West, three figures merit special attention. The fourth-century Christian rhetorician and theological theorist Marius Victorinus translated Greek Neoplatonic literature into Latin. Influenced by their conceptual framework, he used Neoplatonic insights and notions to describe and analyse Christian Trinitarian theology (Markus 1967: 331–2). Also, the highly influential Church Father Augustine (354–430 CE) lived at a time in which Neoplatonism was still a living school of thought, and Neoplatonic treatises of philosophy were available in Greek, with parts and selections also in Latin translations. Augustine's unification of Christian faith and Platonism renders Christian belief its philosophical foundation. His Neoplatonic Christianity also includes Stoic trains of thought, and is close to Plotinian and Porphyrian interpretation of Platonism. Boethius (*c*.480–*c*.525 CE), sometimes called the last thinker of antiquity, is another very important link between antiquity and medieval philosophy. In his thought, Neoplatonism is present through Porphyry's commentaries on Aristotle's logical works. Boethius wrote, among other things, a commentary on Porphyry's *Introduction*. His well-known *Consolation of Philosophy* is also predominantly (Neo)Platonic in spirit (see e.g. Marenbon 2005).

In the medieval West, the work and translations of the Irish monk Johannes Scottus Eriugena (*c*.800–*c*.877) became significant, as did translations that gradually became available of Arabic philosophy, which was widely infiltrated by Neoplatonism. Further, between 1268 and 1281 William of Moerbeke translated Proclus' *Elements of Theology* and the commentaries on Plato's *Parmenides* and *Timaeus* into Latin, thus making Proclus available in the West. This had its effect, among other things, on the thought of his friend, Thomas Aquinas (1225–74 CE). Thomistic reading of Aristotle is thereby far from free of Neoplatonic influences. The more mystical side of Neoplatonism lived on in the so-called Rhineland school and the thought of Meister Eckhart (*c*.1260–1327); it involved particularly the idea of negative theology. Nicolaus of Cusa (1401–64), a German cardinal and deeply spiritual thinker, was a central figure in the continuation of this school.

Greek intellectual Christianity displays an equally strong, if not stronger, Platonic influence. Central are the so called Cappadocian Fathers, Basil of Caesarea (330–79 CE); Gregory of Nazianzen (329/330–*c*.390 CE) and Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394 CE). Two later Greek Christian authors are significant: the anonymous author writing in the name of St Paul's Athenian convert, Dionysius the Areopagite and commonly known as pseudo-Dionysius; and Maximus the Confessor (580–662 CE), a monk, politician and scholar from Constantinople. Of authors on the Greek side, Gregory of Nyssa can be said to propound, broadly speaking, Plotinus' branch of Neoplatonism, while the hugely influential pseudo-Dionysius was an adherent of Proclean tradition. The latter is the author of *The Divine Names*, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and *The Mystical Theology,* all displaying more than Neoplatonic influence; indeed, the sincerity of the author's Christian faith has been questioned. The Neoplatonic aspects of his thought include mysticism, and a role given to theurgy. This corpus found a commentator and interpreter in, among others, Maximus the Confessor, who adopts, for example, the Neoplatonic triadic universe. The above-mentioned Eriugena is a central figure in transmitting Greek Platonism further; he knew Greek and therefore had access to this tradition that had been largely unknown in

the West. Among other things, he translated the pseudo-Dionysian corpus into Latin. His work is a development of Neoplatonic cosmology and inheritance, although it is unlikely that he had direct access to the original Neoplatonic texts (see Moran 2004). In the Byzantine Renaissance, the study of the Neoplatonists themselves was conducted by, among others, Michael Psellus (1018–79 CE). Greek scholars were also to thank for the introduction of Neoplatonism into the Italian Renaissance. The Platonist-minded Georgius Gemisthus Pletho (*c.*1360–*c.*1450 CE) was one of the delegates negotiating the reunion of the Eastern and Western churches, bringing with him to Florence the trend of scholarship on Neoplatonism and the ideal of a Platonic School like that of the Academy, which deeply inspired Cosimo de Medici in his work towards making Florence a scholarly, "academic", centre.

On the Arabic side of the Mediterranean cultural tradition, such figures as Avicenna (980–1037) and al-Ghazali (*c.*1055–1111) are attributed with having "Neoplatonized" Aristotle. Their thought brings together Peripatetic and Neoplatonic insights, combining them with the monotheistic insights of the Muslim intellectuals. An important vehicle of this transmission was a piece of writing that long went by the name *Theology of Aristotle*. In fact, this work is a translation of excerpts from Plotinus' *Enneads*. As a translation, it is not, however, always faithful to Plotinus' spirit but turns Neoplatonism into something more suitable to the Islamic context. It was a key source for many Islamic philosophers from al-Kindī (*c.*801–73 CE) to al-Fārābī (872–950/1 CE) and Avicenna (see Adamson 2002).

Of Jewish thinkers, Maimonides (1138–1204 CE), among others, is significant in relation to Neoplatonism. Although he was previously understood as a prevalently Aristotelian thinker, the new research has shown that he is clearly also Platonic in many aspects of this thought, and combines both Plato's and Neoplatonists' doctrines. Interestingly, in trying to solve the difficulties between God and the created things, Maimonides abandoned the emanative account of creation, and chooses to speak of the issue in moral terms (see Seeskin 1997).

A central cause of the incorporation of Neoplatonism into Western history of ideas concerns the Renaissance period; the body of Plato's works was translated into Latin by the Renaissance scholar Marsilio Ficino, and translations of Plotinus' *Enneads* soon followed from the same hand (1492), as did translations of works of other Neoplatonists. Ficino thought of Plotinus as a "second" Plato, through which Plato spoke to his later audience. In his interpretation of Plato through the eyes of the Neoplatonists, Ficino also Christianized Platonism by further combining together Christian and Neoplatonic ideas. The whole line of questioning of what it was that Plato himself thought about philosophical issues, in his historical moment and particular culture and, to the extent that it is possible, purified from later interpretative work, and what in his thought is separate and different from the ideas of his acute commentators and interpreters, started to make sense much later. Besides Ficino, Neoplatonism had significant appeal for Pico della Mirandola (1463–94), who adopted, among other things, the notion of loss of the self as a part of the mystical union with God, as well as for Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), who either departing from Neoplatonism, or, as some might also claim, taking it to its logical conclusion, identified the infinity of matter with that of the One. Within Renaissance arts, Dante's close of his great *Divine Comedy* is entirely Neoplatonic. In visual arts of the period, Neoplatonism was present both in theoretical and symbolic levels. For instance Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* is infiltrated by heliocentricism and sun symbolism. Particularly influential in the Renaissance was the idea of the universality of man, interpreted both as the god-likeness of the human form depicted and as the universality of the artist.

Although the early modern period is often described through its departures from rather than connections with antiquity, its central philosopher, Descartes, testifies to Platonic insights through his extensive use of Augustine. Of other significant thinkers, the seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonists (so called because of their association with the university) applied a largely Renaissance conception of Platonism, combining classical studies of particularly Platonic heritage to humanistic interest in things wider than the theoretical.

The members of this movement, such as Ralph Cudworth and Henry More, also had a religious background and a fervent interest in such matters as the existence of God and the immortality of the soul as well as practical ethics of a Christian kind (e.g. Hutton 2007). Baruch Spinoza's monism and G. W. Leibniz's monads also owe a debt to Neoplatonic philosophy, while George Berkeley's idealism can be seen as one particular interpretation of the Neoplatonic vicinity, if not identity, of ontology and contemplation. As such, it follows on the lines of Gregory of Nyssa, for whom physical objects are bundles of God's ideas (cf. Sorabji 2004: 7, 158ff.). Of the nineteenth-century German idealists, Friedrich Schelling read Plotinus and G. W. F. Hegel Proclus. Their views on consciousness of the "I" and the self-consciousness of the spirit, as well as those of other German idealists such as J. G. Fichte, echo Neoplatonic discussions, although the context and interpretation are altogether new. Of thinkers broadly taken with the movement of British idealism, R. G. Collingwood is particulary relevant. The French philosopher Henri Bergson lectured on Plotinus, and his account of the distinction between two kinds of time, one episodic and spatial, the other more like duration, a lived time, owes a debt to Neoplatonism.

Within art, icons present perhaps the clearest example of Neoplatonic influences on aesthetic theory. The relation of an image to what it depicts is understood as an instance of participation (*methexis*). Thus the icon partakes in Christ (see further Alexandrakis 2002). In the West, Neoplatonic influences have been found in, among others, the paintings of William Blake and the poetry of Coleridge, Shelley and Yeats. Neoplatonism is crucial for different branches of transcendentalism that share especially two ideas: the division into sensible and spiritual levels of reality and the appeal to intuition rather than to experience. Among American transcendentalists, the most famous are Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Thoreau.

Neoplatonism infiltrated the intellectual and philosophical traditions of Western and Arabic cultures for a long time. Unlike in the twentieth-century Anglo-American world, Neoplatonism has long been part of the philosophical curriculum of French universities, and

therefore French philosophers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault, display good awareness of its central features, even at times positioning themselves in relation to it.

Of Neoplatonic philosophizing, one central feature, the proliferation of metaphysical and cognitive levels, had no significant aftermath. The metaphysical structure postulated in late antiquity had already reached such complexity that it may be concluded that the road was travelled to its bitter end. In other areas, Neoplatonism did leave significant traces to the history of philosophy. In what follows, I shall conclude by briefly summarizing some of the crucial Neoplatonic tenets that had a long influence.

God

Of the Neoplatonic account of God or One we may perhaps disentangle three central influential aspects. The first is the idea of the One as a threefold source of being, truth and happiness, all in one. God is omnipotent and there is no other fundamental principle to turn to. Even evil, foreign though it is to the goodness of God's nature, is its production, as the fallen angel is the creation of the Christian God. God creates formation and definite beings encountered in the world, although where this usually happens directly in monotheistic religious systems, in Neoplatonism this creation happens through the intermediaries of Intellect and Soul. Truth, too, is endowed to the world by God, and forms are thoughts in the mind of a divinity. In Neoplatonism, they are thoughts in the mind of God's most divine production, the divine Intellect. Even happiness is directly connected to God: blessedness is the proximity to this unified origin of everything orderly, good and beautiful.

The second is the doctrine of emanation from the creator, explored, among others, by Augustine in his *On the Trinity*. The Neoplatonic triadic doctrine of the power of the God proved to be influential; it has internal activity or rest, the external activity or procession, and the return back towards the creator. This division heavily influenced the way the Christian thinkers such as Gregory of Nyssa, pseudo-

Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor and Thomas Aquinas understood cosmic theology and creation. It became interpreted as the distinction between *ousia* (substance), *dunamis* (power or potentiality) and *energeia* (activity) (see further Rist 1996). In the Christian picture, God creates by effecting his will, and not automatically. In Christian creation, God makes itself known. The Cappadocians, for instance, concluded that the Forms are identical with the attributes of God recorded in the scripture. The idea of the divinity reverting back on itself in creation is nicely visible in the most fundamental parts of Christian faith: God is transcendent to the world but produces the world. The created nature turns back towards its creator, as, for example Jesus Christ or each person praying turns back to God.

The third, the idea of negative theology – we may only say what God is not, not what he is – stems from Plotinus' doctrine of the ineffability of the One. This heavily influenced the *via apophatica*, that is, such Eastern thinkers as the Cappadocian Fathers, Maximus the Confessor and pseudo-Dionysius, whereas the thinkers of the Latin West are more often adherents of cataphatic theology, that is, making positive statements about God.

Nature

A Neoplatonic reading, mingled with Stoic insights, of Plato's *Timaeus* is the source of the somewhat peculiar idea that the universe, and not just those of its parts that are living beings, is ensouled. In a sense, then, the whole universe is alive. It is unified by a particular force of nature, sympathy, which binds all its parts and levels together. This renders it a divine and dynamic whole, the parts of which are in relation with one another. In pseudo-Dionysius, for example, this sympathy is seen as that which enables theurgy. The doctrine has given rise to different sorts of panpsychism or pantheism. In Johannes Scottus Eriugena, God is present in nature to such an extent that Eriugena has sometimes been called a pantheist. A similar understanding is sometimes also attributed, for instance, to the seventeenth-century Baruch Spinoza.

Another important feature is the emphasis on the temporality of the world. The particularity of the world we live in is its temporal and dynamic nature.

Soul and humanity

Most Neoplatonic doctrines, such as the immortality of the soul, stem from Plato. Also, the idea of the soul as having a divinely intellectual aspect is something shared with other ancient philosophers. What is perhaps peculiarly Neoplatonic is the doctrine of the descent of the soul: the idea that we have fallen from our divine origin, are alienated from it, and that the ethical quest is a quest to return to this original state of the soul. This doctrine suited some Christian dogmas, for instance, the story of the creation of human beings and their banishment from paradise.

The later Neoplatonic move to remove the soul from its divine heights humanizes human beings. It renders them no longer essentially divine and thus creates for them their own proper nature and place within the universe. This is central to the Christian tradition, in which the soul cannot rise to the level of the transcendent creator. The Greek Church Fathers also follow the Neoplatonic doctrine of ascent that happens in stages. Practical virtues purify the soul from sin and error, theoretical virtues bring the soul into wisdom, and the last phase coincides with unification with God. As created, the soul cannot bring this phase about on its own, and God's grace is needed. Thus the doctrine of the ascent resembles the later Neoplatonic doctrine more than the Plotinian way of thinking still faithful to ancient dogmas about the divinity of the rational (see further Sheldon-Williams 1967).

Neoplatonic psychology was particularly influential in Augustine. One idea he inherits from them is that of self-intellection. The intellect cannot fail in knowing that it is also the thinker, the subject, of its thought activity. Augustine goes further and asks how I can be mistaken in thinking that I am (*De civ. D.* XI.26). This, in turn, leads Descartes to his famous *cogito*.

In later Neoplatonism and Augustine, the soul also becomes, among other things, entirely temporal. By further making the soul a substance that may change, the Neoplatonists create a soul and humanity that are decisively freer and more dynamic than their classical predecessors, and widely influential in the later history of the philosophy of self.

Knowledge

Against Aristotelian doctrines of concept formation and knowledge acquisition, the Platonist view of the mind is not a *tabula rasa*, but an active power. The soul is in possession of cognitive capacities, perhaps even innate concepts that crucially help in organizing and interpreting empirical evidence. While Plato's *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist* and *Timaeus* form the background for this understanding, the Neoplatonists go a long way in interpreting how the intelligible forms are present in the fallible mind. They try to capture their role in perception and concept-formation. One version of Platonic epistemology is Augustine's doctrine of illumination, which is explicitly indebted to the Neoplatonists. Later and even contemporary nativist theories of cognition sometimes recognize their position as descendants of Plato and Neoplatonic interpretation of Platonism.

Self

In general, Plotinus' explicit distinction between the soul and the self ("we") opens a new way to enquire into human nature. Within the human being there is a power to identify oneself with different aspects of one's nature.

A particular doctrine, Plotinus' division of two levels of selfhood, the bodily and the intellectual, of which the latter is a very abstract entity, may be seen to precede such divisions such as, for instance, that of Immanuel Kant, between the empirical and transcendent "I". Moreover, following sceptical arguments, Plotinus helps in

formulating the so-called paradox of subjectivity, namely that the human subject must somehow be both in the world as well as that which enquires into the world. This dual nature makes the subject a challenge: a third-person approach only succeeds in grasping the former.

Further, Plotinus' method of the inward turn is a step in the creation of the modern, and recently much contested, notion of self as an inner realm or stage. Together with the infinite power of the One, this realm develops in Augustine into an experiential infinity internal to the subject. Early modern conceptions of mind as an inner theatre develop against this background. The way in which the later Neoplatonists toy with the idea of the soul substance as changing, undergoing substantial change, contributes to an understanding of the self as essentially temporal. All this makes the self in the history of ideas something dynamic, with infinite possibilities of self-creation, getting an extreme expression in such thinkers as Sartre.

Beauty

Central to the Neoplatonic view of beauty is the idea that beauty is itself transcendent, but shines through in the material entities. The beauty of this world is derived from the higher levels. Things are beautiful to the extent that they participate in form. The role of the artist may be in surpassing the sensible, deficient formations in the ordinary sensibles by connecting more directly with the intelligible principles and beauty. In Renaissance art theory, the intelligible beauty comes through in the sensible world in different guises. The intelligible was seen, among other things, as present in nature in geometric or mathematical series and proportions, and in the way the human form reflected god-likeness. Artistic creation was understood as yet another reflection of divine creation, through human intelligence.

Glossary of terms

actuality (*energeia*), also activity. Each thing's proper activity, divided into the internal (*energeia tēs ousias*) and external (*energeia ek tēs ousias*). The former is complete and characteristic only to the entity in question, the latter its outward expression or generation. In the hierarchy of metaphysics, the latter is already, in a sense, a (pre)entity below.

appearance (*phantasia*), also imagination. The faculty that in Neoplatonism, as in Stoicism, reveals the object of cognition to the soul and probably explains, among other things, unity of cross-modal judgements.

ascent (*anabasis, anodos*) The soul's movement back towards its source, towards the One, through virtue, contemplation and/or prayer.

audacity (*tolma*) The soul's original wish to belong to itself and to separate itself from other souls and perfection.

(self-)awareness (*sunaisthēsis*) The soul's direct and immediate cognition of its own state.

becoming godlike (*homoiōsis theō*) The central aim of ancient ethics: to become perfectly virtuous, happy and to reach invulnerability.

being (*on*) Includes both existence and the nature of the thing that exists. Paradigmatic cases are Platonic forms.

belief (*doxa*) A cognitive state with (propositional) content, allowing error.

cause (*aitia, aition*) Including the four Aristotelian causes but implemented to include the Platonic paradigmatic cause as well as instrumental causes (*sunaitia*).

concept (*logos*, *ennoia*) Reliant on sense-perception, but refers particularly to its intellectual residue or organization.

contemplation (*theōria*) The relationship between the intellect and its objects of thought: the forms or intelligibles.

descent (*kathodos, katabasis*) The soul's coming to be embodied, to an imperfect and vulnerable existence.

discursive reason (*dianoia*) The soul's inferential and propositional reasoning that happens in time and uses representations.

division (*dihairesis*) Platonic method of distinguishing between entities and kinds, determining essences and exploring their interrelations. As a whole, dialectic involves also the reverse activity, that of collecting (*sunagōgē*).

emotion (*pathos*) Emotional states of the soul–body composite, including desire and pain. Considered as mental disturbances.

essence (*ousia*) The things' proper nature, as a limited and definite being. Primary cases are the Forms. The One is beyond this definite existence (*epekeina ousias*).

existence (*einai*) The thing's realness, its being, as distinct but including the character or essence of that thing.

first kinds (*prōta gene*) Plotinus' interpretation of Plato's greatest kinds (*megista genē*), sameness (*tautotēs*), difference (*heterotēs*), motion, rest (and being). These are principles that organize being, the "ordinary" Platonic Forms. Particularly the first two are relevant for cognition, for systematic thought and truth.

generation (*genesis*) The beginning or coming to be of everything that exists in time.

happiness (*eudaimonia*) In ancient philosophy, the widely agreed goal of human life. In Neoplatonism to be achieved by a reversion towards one's true self, the intellect.

henad (*henas*), unity. Partly a transcendent and unknowable principle of unification and unitariness, but nonetheless somehow describable and within the reach of the human soul (unlike the One).

human being (*anthrōpos*) A soul–body composite and as in Aristotle: a rational animal. Separate from but connected with the notion of self.

hypostasis Literally "that which stands above", used particularly in the contemporary research literature for the main levels and principles of metaphysics, particularly for the Intellect and the Soul. In later Neoplatonism each of them is further divided into phases; see **rest**, **procession** and **reversion**.

Intellect (*nous*) One of the main levels and principles of metaphysics, the actualized totality of Platonic Forms. For Plotinus the first generation of the **One**.

intellect (*nous*) [uncapitalized] The part of human cognition capable of immediate relationship, or, rather, identity with objects of knowledge.

intelligible (*noēton*) The object of intellect's thinking activity; in plural the contents of the Intellect, that is, the Forms.

inward turn (*epistrophē pros heauton*) Literally "reversion towards oneself", by which the soul starts the attempt to ascend back towards its origin in the Intellect and the One. A source and act of moral self-improvement and self-recognition.

judgement (*krisis*), also discernment. A fundamental property of cognition, involving the recognition of samenesses and differences.

knowledge (*epistēmē*) Non-discursive cognition of forms in which they are cognized directly, without mediating representations, and understood in their salient interrelations. Infallible.

limit and unlimited (*peras* and *apeiron*) Two basic principles of Pythagoreanism, central for Plato's *Philebus*. The later Neoplatonists take them to be metaphysically crucial, secondary only to the **One**.

living being (*zōon*) Ensouled beings, including the whole universe, with intelligible structure, functionally differentiated parts and self-awareness of the whole.

love (*erōs*) A desire, a lack, and the force that leads into the satisfaction of that same desire. Directed towards beauty and goodness.

material or **corporeal** (*hulikos, sōmatikos*) The most basic level of existence, a combination of matter and organizing principles, the **rational forming principles**.

matter (*hulē*) *materia prima* (Latin) A component of material or sensible things, the part of them that is without any organization that would inhere in its own nature, but receptive to forming principles. For Plotinus, also evil in the sense of non-being, or privation of being and intelligibility.

monad (*monas*) A unifying cause of a series.

nature (*phusis*) Physical things in the cosmos, the study of which includes also the metaphysical entities that directly condition that study, for example, time.

One (*Hen*) The first principle to which all explanation ultimately ends. The ultimate cause of everything, as well as itself (*aition heautou*).

participation (*methexis*) The asymmetric dependence relationship between the sensible and the intelligible. In later Neoplatonism used also for the relationships within the intelligible realm.

perfection (*teleiōsis*) Actualizing a goal (completely).

political virtue (*aretai politikai*) The lower level of virtue concerned particularly with self-control and control of emotions, delivering, at best, a state of the soul with measured and controlled emotions (*metriopatheia*).

power (*dunamis*) Used in two senses: the Aristotelian sense of potency or ability (to be actualized), as well as in a particularly Neoplatonic sense as the power and character which a higher principle bestows upon the lower, as expressed in the lower principle.

practical reason (*phronēsis*) Reasoning guiding action. Reliant on higher, intelligible principles but involving application of these principles in the situations of practical life.

principle (*archē*) (i) Explanation; (ii) source or origin; (iii) paradigm. **Hypostases** are *archai* in all three of these senses.

privation (*sterēsis*) A lack that pushes towards change, used to explicate the nature of matter as a lack of determination, intelligibility, and being.

procession (*prohodos*) The layered generation of everything from the ultimate principle, **One**. Specifically: the second phase or aspect of the triadic inner organization of the metaphysical principles, that is, their external activity.

purifications (*katharseis*) The higher level of virtue or excellence in which the role of the body and its functions are minimal or non-existent. The person who has successfully reached this level enjoys *apatheia*, that is, does not undergo emotional disturbance.

rational forming principle (*logoi*; *logoi spermatikoi*) A principle expressed on a lower level, particularly the intelligible principle as expressed in the corporeal existence. Sometimes also translated as reason-principle.

reason, see **discursive reason, thinking, intellect**

rest (*monē*) The first phase or aspect of the triadic inner organization of metaphysical principles, their internal, self-directed activity.

reversion (*epistrophē*) Also conversion, literally "turning towards"; the way in which each entity constitutes itself through reverting back towards its source. For human beings, a turn towards the inner, towards one's true **self**.

right moment (*kairos*) Connected to the doctrine of political science as something that deals with the temporal. Also used in the context of right action in the universe governed by fate.

sage (*spoudaios*) A both cognitively and ethically exemplary figure through which many ethical norms are explicated.

self, "we" (*hēmeis*) Used in two main senses: (i) for that which leads the life and has the interests of the soul–body composite, and (ii) for the ideal and true self, usually the intellect.

self-constituted (*authupostaton*) Refers to the way in which, in **reversion**, the generated thing creates its own interpretation of its source, by analysing or "dissecting" its source, thus rendering itself as a new level of reality with its own, proper characteristics.

self-determination (*to autexousion*) The power to determine freely one's own actions.

self-transcending experience (*ekstasis*) The ability to transcend the given, to ascend to a higher metaphysical and cognitive level.

series (*seira*) Synonym for "order".

signs (*sunthēmata*) A particularly human mode of cognitively approaching the intelligible and the **One**. Conceptual or symbolical.

S/soul (*Psuchē*) The third principle or **hypostasis** in Plotinus' metaphysics, explanatory of temporality and life. In human beings, the principle of movement, living functions, cognition and consciousness.

Soul of the All (*hē tou kosmou psuchē, hē tou pantos psuchē*) The soul of the universe, responsible for unity, formation and intelligibility of corporeal existence in the cosmos.

substance (*ousia*) Basic entities of metaphysics, for Neoplatonism always the intelligible entities – Forms. Only in a derivative sense, as quasi-substances, the ordinary, Aristotelian sensible particulars.

theurgy (*theourgia*) A complex of practices to prepare the soul for god, including such practices as contemplation, offers and prayer.

thinking (*noēsis*) The activity of the **intellect**, an identity with the structure of all being. This activity also delivers the laws according to which normal, **discursive reason** functions.

union (*henōsis*) Identification with a higher principle, particularly the **Intellect**, perhaps also the **One**.

up to us, in our own power (*eph' hēmin*) A technical way of referring to something in which the agent, and only the agent himself or herself, is the true origin of an action or choice.

vehicle (*ochēma*) The soul's luminous or astral body in disembodied states of existence. Relevant for personal identity.

virtue (*aretē*), see **political virtue,** and **purifications**

Guide to further reading

Collections of primary texts and sources

The following works enable easy access to the original texts of the Neoplatonists. The first also provides a comprehensive bibliography on Neoplatonism, including material that is not mentioned here.

Dillon, J. M. & L. P. Gerson (eds) 2004. *Neoplatonic Philosophy: Introductory Readings.* Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.
Gregory, J. (ed.) 1999. *The Neoplatonists: A Reader*, 2nd edn. London: Routledge.
Sorabji, R. (ed.) 2004. *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200–600 AD: A Sourcebook. Volume 2: Physics.* London: Duckworth.
Sorabji, R. (ed.) 2005. *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200–600 AD: A Sourcebook. Volume 1: Psychology (with Ethics and Religion).* London: Duckworth.
Sorabji, R. (ed.) 2005. *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200–600 AD: A Sourcebook. Volume 3: Logic and Metaphysics.* London: Duckworth.

The latter three volumes include material from non-Neoplatonic authors, but they present many sources either directly or indirectly relevant for Neoplatonism.

Editions and translations

Full editions of the Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle's works in original Greek are published as a part of *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* of the Berlin Academy. Many new and reliable English translations are to be found in the Duckworth series, *Ancient Commentators on Aristotle*, edited by Richard Sorabji, particularly the Aristotle commentaries of Ammonius, Simplicius and Olympiodorus. The series also contains Simplicius' commentary on Epictetus' *Handbook* edited by Tad Brennan and Charles Brittain (2002). Many of these volumes have informative introductions.

Below I list a selection of other useful editions, translations and commentaries. (Older translations of texts are also available on the internet and can be found through http://www.isns.us/texts.htm).

Anonymous

Kroll, W. 1892. "Ein neuplatonischer Parmenides-kommentar in einem Turiner Palimpsest". *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* **47**: 599–627 [Commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*].

Damascius

Commentaire du Parménide de Platon [Commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*], L. G. Westerink (ed.), J. Combès & A.-Ph. Segonds (trans.) (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997) [in French].

De principiis [On Principles], L. G. Westerink (ed. and trans.) (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1986–91) [in French].

Lectures on the Philebus, L. G. Westerink (ed. and trans.) (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1959).

The Philosophical History, P. Athanassiadi (trans. with notes) (Athens: Apameia, 1999).

Iamblichus

Iamblichus, De Anima, J. F. Finamore & J. M. Dillon (trans. with comm.). (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

Iamblichi chalcidensis in Platonis Dialogos commentariorum fragmenta, J. M. Dillon (ed. and trans. with comm.) (Leiden: Brill, 1973).

On the Mysteries = De mysteriis Aegyptiorum, S. Ronan (ed.), T. Taylor & A. Wilder (trans.), together with two extracts from lost works of Proclus *On the Sacred Art and On the Signs of Divine Possession* (London: Chthonios Books, 1989).

On the Pythagorean Life, G. Clark (trans. with notes and intro.) (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989).

On the Pythagorean Way of Life, J. Dillon & J. Hershbell (trans. and notes) (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1991).

Olympiodorus

Commentary on the First Alcibiades of Plato, L. G. Westerink (ed.) (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1956).

Commentary on Plato's Gorgias, R. Jackson, K. Lycos & H. Tarrant (trans. and notes), H. Tarrant (intro.) (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

Plotinus

For an edition of the *Enneads* in Greek, see *Plotini Opera*, P. Henry & H.-R. Schwyzer (eds), (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964). The most faithful English translation of the *Enneads* is probably currently the Loeb Classical Library edition, which includes Porphyry's *Vita Plotini*, A. H. Armstrong (trans. and comm.) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966). There is also a rather beautiful, but old-fashioned translation by Stephen McKenna that takes some liberties with the Greek original (Burdett, NY: Larson, 2004). Central passages accompanied by commentary can be found in K. Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus: A Practical Introduction to Neoplatonism* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2005).

Porphyry

Against the Christians, R. M. Berchman (ed.) (Leiden: Brill, 2005).
Against the Christians: The Literary Remains, R. Joseph Hoffmann (ed. and trans. with intro. and ep.) (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1994).
Introduction (*Eisagōgē*), J. Barnes (trans. with comm.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).
Launching-Points to the Realm of Mind: *An Introduction to the Neoplatonic Philosophy of Plotinus*, K. S. Guthrie (trans.) (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1988).
Letter to his Wife Marcella: *Concerning the Life of Philosophy and the Ascent to the Gods*, A. Zimmern (trans.) (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1986).
Porphyrii Philosophi Fragmenta, A. Smith (ed.) (Stuttgart & Leipzig: Teubner, 1993).
Porphyrios Kommentar zur Harmonielehre des Ptolemaios, I. Düring (ed.) (Göteborg: Göteborgs Högskolas Årsskrift, 1932).
Sententiae [*Sentences*], E. Lamperz (ed.) (Leipzig: Teubner, 1975).

Proclus

Alcibiades I, 2nd edn, W. O'Neill (trans.) (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971).
A Commentary on the 1st book of Euclid's Elements, G. R. Morrow (trans.) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970). Reprinted 1992, with a new foreword by Ian Mueller.
Commentary on the Alcibiades I, L. G. Westerink (ed.) (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1954).
Commentary on Plato's Parmenides, G. R. Morrow & J. M. Dillon (trans.), J. M. Dillon (intro and notes) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987). Reprinted 1992 with corrections in paperback.
Commentary on Plato's Timaeus, Volume 1, Book I: Proclus on the Socratic State and Atlantis, H. Tarrant (ed. and trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); *Volume 2, Book 2: Proclus on the Causes of the Cosmos and its Creation*, D. T. Runia & M. Share (eds and trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); *Volume 3, Book 3, Part I: Proclus on the World's Body*, D. Baltzly (ed. and trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction, and Commentary, E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1963] 2004).
On the Existence of Evils (*De malorum subsistentia*), J. Opsomer & C. Steel (trans.) (London: Duckworth, 2003)
Proclus: On the Eternity of the World (de Aeternitate mundi), H. S. Lang and A. D. Macro (intro., trans. and comm.), J. McGinnis (trans. from Arabic argument) (Berkeley, CA. University of California Press, 2001).
Théologie Platonicienne [*Platonic Theology*], 6 vols, H.-D. Saffrey & L. G. Westerink (eds and trans.) (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968–97) [in French].

For further editions and translations of Proclus' works, see www.hiw.kuleuven.ac.be/dwmc/plato/proclus/proeditions.htm#014 (accessed June 2008).

Background and context

Athanassiadi, P. 1999. "The Chaldean Oracles: Theology and Theurgy". In *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, M. Frede & P. Athanassiadi (eds), 149–83. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Chiaradonna, R. 2005. "Plotino e la corrente antiaristotelica del platonismo imperiale. Analogie e differenze". In *L'Eredità Platonica. Studi sul platonismo da Arcesilao a Proclo*, M. Bonazzi & V. Celluprica (eds), 237–74. Naples: Bibliopolis.
Dillon, J. 1977. *The Middle Platonists, 80 BC to AD 220*. London: Duckworth.
Dillon, J. M. 1992. "Plotinus and the Chaldean Oracles". In *Platonism in Late Antiquity*, S. Gersh & C. Kannengiesser (eds), 131–40. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
Dillon, J. 2003. *The Heirs of Plato: A Study of the Old Academy (347–274 BC)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Dodds, E. R. 1928. "The *Parmenides* of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic One". *Classical Quarterly* **22**: 129–43.
Frede, M. 1987. "Numenius". In *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II, volume 36, part 2, W. Haase (ed.), 1034–75. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
Gatti, M. L. 1996. "Plotinus: The Platonic Tradition and the Foundation of Neoplatonism". In *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, L. P. Gerson (ed.), 10–37. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Gersh, S. 1986. *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition*, 2 vols. Notre Dame, IL: University of Notre Dame Press.
Graeser, A. 1974. *Plotinus and the Stoics: A Preliminary Study*. Leiden: Brill.
Karamanolis, G. 2006. *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Majercik, R. 1989. *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Leiden: Brill.
Meijer, P. A. 1998. "Stoicism in Plotinus' *Enneads* VI 9,1". *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* **30**: 61–76.
O'Meara, D. (ed.) 1982. *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*. Amherst, NY: SUNY Press.

O'Meara, D. 1989. *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Rist, J. 1996. "Plotinus and Christian Philosophy". In Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, 386–413.
Runia, D. (ed.) 1984. *Plotinus amid Gnostics and Christians.* Amsterdam: Free University Press.
Sharples, R. & R. Sorabji (eds) 2007. *Greek and Roman Philosophy 100 BC–200 AD*, vols 1–2. London: Institute of Classical Studies, University of London.
Wallis, R. T. 1987. "Scepticism and Neoplatonism". In Haase (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, 911–53.
Wallis, R. T. & J. Bregman (eds) 1992. *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
Watts, E. J. 2006. *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
Wildberg, C. 2005. "Philosophy in the Age of Justinian". In *The Age of Justinian*, M. Maas (ed.), 316–40. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

General introductions

Very few introductory books covering the whole movement are available in English. I have included here studies that deal with more specific issues but nevertheless range over the whole or most of the school. For introductory reading on Neoplatonism, one should also consider basic works on Plotinus (see below), which deliver the philosophical, or systematic, backbone of Neoplatonic thought.

Lloyd, A. C. 1990. *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Merlan, P. 1953. *From Platonism to Neoplatonism*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
O'Meara, D. 2003. *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Rappe, S. 2000. *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-Discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus and Damascius*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Wallis, R. T. [1972] 1995. *Neoplatonism*, 2nd edn, foreword and bibliography by L. P. Gerson. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.
Whittaker, T. [1901] 1968. *The Neoplatonists*, 4th edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Collections of articles

Bonazzi, M. & V. Celluprica (eds) 2005. *L'Eredità Platonica. Studi sul platonismo da Arcesilao a Proclo*. Naples: Bibliopolis.
Cleary, J. J. (ed.) 1997. *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism.* Leuven: Leuven University Press.
Cleary, J. J. (ed.) 1999. *Traditions of Platonism: Essays in Honour of John Dillon*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Dörrie, H. (ed.) 1975. *De Iamblique a Proclus*. Geneva: Vandoeuvres.
Finamore, J. & R. Berchman (eds) 2005. *History of Platonism: Plato Redivivus*. New Orleans, LA: University Press of the South.
Kobush, T. & M. Erler (eds) 2002. *Metaphysik und Religion. Zur Signatur des Spätantiken Denkens*: *Akten des internationalen Kongress vom 13–17. März 2001 in Würzburg*, 261–78. Leipzig: K. G. Saur.
CNRS 1971. *Le Néoplatonisme*, Proceedings of the CNRS International Conference, Royaumont, 9–13 June 1969. Paris: Éditions du CNRS.
Sorabji, Richard (ed.) 1990. *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and their Influence*. London: Duckworth.

There are also several interesting collections edited by R. B. Harris, ranging from Neoplatonism to its later significance and contacts with Indian thought.

Studies of individual philosophers

For the members of the Neoplatonic movement, their lives, philosophical works and main tenets, see the basic source of all biographical information in antiquity, *Realencyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. In English *The Encyclopedia of Classical Philosophy*, D. J. Zeyl (ed.) (London: Routledge, 1997) is useful. There are a growing number of new articles on the Neoplatonists in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. These include lengthy expositions on several Neoplatonic thinkers by leading scholars of the field, such as Plotinus by Lloyd P. Gerson, Porphyry by Eyjólfur Emilsson, Ammonius by David Blank, and entries on Olympiodorus, Elias, David and John Philoponus by Christian Wildberg. Here is a selection of further literature.

Amelius

Brisson, L. 1987. “Amélius: Sa vie, son oeuvre, sa doctrine, son style”. In Haase (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, 794–859.

Damascius

Dillon, J. 1996. “Damascius on the Ineffable”. *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* **78**: 120–29.
Dillon, J. 1997. “Damascius on Procession and Return”. In Cleary (ed.), *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism*, 369–79.

Iamblichus

Blumenthal, H. & G. Clark (eds) 1993. *The Divine Iamblichus*. Bristol: Bristol Classical Press.

Clarke, E. C. 2001. *Iamblichus' De Mysteriis: A Manifesto of the Miraculous*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
Dillon, J. 1987. "Iamblichus of Chalcis (*c*.240–325 A.D.)". In Haase (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, 862–909.
Shaw, G. 1995. *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Plotinus

For commentaries on individual treatises of the *Enneads,* see:

Plotinus' Cosmology: A Study of Ennead II.1 (40), J. Wilberding (text, trans. and comm.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
Plotinus' Ennead V.1 On the Three Principal Hypostases: *A Commentary with Translation*, M. Atkinson (comm.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).
Plotinus Ennead III.6. On the Impassivity of the Bodiless, B. Fleet (trans. and comm.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
Plotinus On Eudaimonia: A Commentary on Ennead I.4, K. McGroarty (trans. and comm.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
Soul-Sisters: A Commentary on Enneads IV 3(27), 1–8 of Plotinus, W. Helleman-Elgersma (comm.) (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1980).

See also:

Armstrong, A. H. 1940. *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Reprinted 1967 (Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert).
Bussanich, J. 1990. "The Invulnerability of Goodness: The Ethical and Psychological Theory of Plotinus". *Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* **6**: 151–84.
Gerson, L. P. 1994. *Plotinus*. London: Routledge.
Gerson, L. P. (ed.) 1996. *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Gurtler, G. M. 1988. *Plotinus: The Experience of Unity*. New York: Peter Lang.
Hadot, P. 1997. *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Vision*, M. Chase (trans.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Originally published in 1963 in French as *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard* (Paris: Plon).
Fattal, M. (ed.) 2000. *Études sur Plotin*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
Inge, W. R. 1929. *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 2 vols. London: Longman.
Miles, M. R. 1999. *Plotinus on Body and Beauty: Society, Philosophy and Religion in Third-century Rome*. Oxford: Blackwell.
O'Meara, D. 1993. *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Rist, J. 1967. *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Sleeman, J. H. & G. Pollet 1980. *Lexicon Plotinianum*. Leiden: Brill.

Porphyry

Hadot, P. 1968. *Porphyre et Victorinus*. Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes.
Karamanolis, G. 2006. *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. See especially ch. 7.
Karamanolis, G. & A. Sheppard (eds) 2007. *Studies on Porphyry*. London: Institute of Classical Studies, University of London.

Proclus

Beierwaltes, W. 1965. *Proklos. Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik*. Frankfurt: Klosterman.
Blumenthal, H. & A. C. Lloyd (eds) 1982. *Soul and the Structure of Being in Later Neoplatonism*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
Bos, E. P. & P. A. Meijer (eds) 1992. *On Proclus and His Influence in Medieval Philosophy*. Leiden: Brill.
Gersh, S. 1973. *Kinēsis akinētos: A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus*. Leiden: Brill.
Perkams, M. & R. M. Piccione (eds) 2006. *Proklos: Methode, Seelenlehre, Metaphysik*. Leiden: Brill.
Sheppard, A. 1980. *Studies on the Fifth and Sixth Essays of Proclus' Commentary on the Republic*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
Siorvanes, L. 1996. *Proclus: Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Science*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Simplicius

Hadot, I. 1990. "The Life and Work of Simplicius in Greek and Arabic Sources". In *Aristotle Transformed*, R. Sorabji (ed.), 275–301. London: Duckworth.

Metaphysics, cosmology and nature

First principles and procession

Bussanich, J. 1988. *The One and Its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus: A Commentary on Selected Texts*. Leiden: Brill.
D'Ancona Costa, C. 1996. "Plotinus and Later Platonic Philosophers on the Causality of the First Principle". In Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, 356–85.
Emilsson, E. K. 1999. "Remarks on the Relation between the One and Intellect in Plotinus". In Cleary (ed.), *Traditions of Platonism*, 271–90.
Gerson, L. P. 2005. *Aristotle and Other Platonists*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. See especially ch. 6.
O'Meara, D. 1996. "The Hierarchical Ordering of Reality in Plotinus". In Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, 66–81.

Schroeder, F. M. 1978. "The Platonic *Parmenides* and Imitation in Plotinus". *Dionysius* **2**: 51–73.

Categories of being

Sorabji, R. (ed.) 2005. *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200–600 AD: A Sourcebook. Vol. 3: Logic and Metaphysics*. London: Duckworth. See especially ch. 3 (including further reading).
Strange, S. 1987. "Plotinus, Porphyry, and the Neoplatonic Interpretation of the *Categories*". In Haase (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, 955–74.

Time

Majumdar, D. 2007. *Plotinus on the Appearance of Time and the World of Sense: A Pantomime*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
Simons, J. 1985. "Matter and Time in Plotinus". *Dionysius* **9**: 53–74.
Smith, A. 1996. "Eternity and Time". In Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, 196–216.
Sorabji, R. 1983. *Time, Creation and Continuum*. London: Duckworth.
Strange, S. K, 1994. "Plotinus on the Nature of Eternity and Time". In *Aristotle in Late Antiquity,* L. P. Schrenk (ed.), 22–53. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.

Matter and evil

Corrigan, K. 1996, *Plotinus' Theory of Matter-Evil and the Question of Substance: Plato, Aristotle, and Alexander of Aphrodisias*. Leuven: Peeters.
Narbonne, J.-M. 2006. "Plotinus and the Gnostics on the Generation of Matter (33 [II.9.], 12 and 51 [I.8.] 14)". *Dionysius* **24**: 45–64.
O'Brien, D. 1971. "Plotinus on Evil: A Study of Matter and Soul in Plotinus' Conception of Human Evil". In *Le Néoplatonisme*, Proceedings of the CNRS International Conference, Royaumont, 9–13 June 1969, 113–46. Paris: Éditions du CNRS.
O'Brien, D. 1991. *Plotinus on the Origin of Matter: An Exercise in the Interpretations of the* Enneads. Naples: Bibliopolis.
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Sorabji, R. 1988. *Matter, Space and Motion: Theories in Antiquity and Their Sequel*. London: Duckworth.
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