

THE ESSENTIAL PLOTINUS

REPRESENTATIVE TREATISES
FROM THE ENNEADS

SELECTED AND NEWLY TRANSLATED
WITH INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY BY
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THE GOOD OR THE ONE

(VI, 9 [9])

In the Introduction the opinion was expressed that Plotinus' ontology reposes upon his psychology of introspection. Some of the grounds for that opinion are discoverable in the treatise that follows, one of the half-dozen or so classics of Neoplatonism.

At the outset a good, pedestrian, academic concern is shown for the question, much debated in the philosophic schools of the day, "Whence comes unity?"—a latter-day refinement of the problem of the one and the many which had so tormented Plotinus' predecessors. And, rather too quickly, the concern is expeditiously satisfied with an answer of which both Pythagoreans and Stoics would approve (§1) and Aristotle is curtly refuted on the basis of that answer (§2) and then the rest of the treatise is given over to an extended analysis of the soul's mode of access to The One (§§3-11). The suspicion accordingly obtrudes that the assertion-denial of §§1-2 rests really upon the psychology of §§3-11.

Throughout, Plotinus reveals an unaccustomed awareness of the difficulties one might have in following his rigorous analyses that is, for all its novelty, quite charming and endearing particularly since he does not allow it to stay his hand in the least.

The human mind dislikes the indeterminate; but indeterminacy must be the burden of one's discoursing on The One; let then the mind rebuff this tendency of its "fallen" nature to flee the indeterminate and take refuge in things of this sure and firm set earth and allow its higher self, still resident in the intelligible realm, to find itself for, in finding itself, it finds The

Intelligence—immediately above which is The One (§3).

That one use words of The One should not be allowed to foster the illusion that The One is, after all, something determinate and that the soul can attain to it in following its usual earthbound way. Such words as one uses are no more than signals providing direction, no more than suggestions of what one's attitude should be. Attitude? Yes. An attitude of faith. Of faith, apparently, in Plotinus himself. Let there at least be confidence if comprehension is out of the question (§4).

Then, with that familiar professorial device of giving back with one hand what one has just taken away with the other, he appeals to comprehension with an argument derived from the admitted existence of The Soul, the intermediary between the soul and The Intelligence, the repository of a multiplicity that is spiritual—and undivided (§5). And the appeals to comprehension continue unabated to the end, as argument follows luminous argument, analysis follows analysis.

It is no great chore to "have faith" in a man as reasonable as this.

It is by The One that all beings are beings.

1. This is equally true of those that are primarily beings and those that in some way are simply classed among beings, for what could exist were it not one? Not a one, a thing is not. No army, no choir, no flock exists except it be one. No house, even, or ship exists except as the unit, house, or the unit, ship; their unity gone, the house is no longer a house, the ship is no longer a ship. Similarly quantitative continua would not exist had they not an inner unity; divided, they forfeit existence along with unity. It is the same with plant and animal bodies; each of them is a unit; with disintegration, they lose their previous nature and are no longer what they were; they become new, different beings that in turn exist only as long as each of them is a unit. Health is contingent upon the

body's being coordinated in unity; beauty, upon the mastery of parts by The One; the soul's virtue, upon unification into one sole coherence.¹

The Soul imparts unity to all things in producing, fashioning, forming, and disposing them. Ought we then to say that The Soul not only gives unity but is unity itself, The One? No. It bestows other qualities upon bodies without being what it bestows (shape, for instance, and Idea, which are different from it); so also this unity; The Soul makes each being one by looking upon The One, just as it makes man by contemplating the Idea, Man, effecting in the man the unity that belongs to Man.

Each thing that is called "one" has a unity proportionate to its nature, sharing in unity, either more or less, according to the degree of its being. The Soul, while distinct from The One, has greater unity because it has a higher degree of being. It is not The One. It is one, but its unity is contingent. Between The Soul and its unity there is the same difference as between body and body's unity. Looser aggregates, such as a choir, are furthest from unity; the more compact are the nearer; The Soul is nearer still, yet—as all the others—is only a participant in unity.

The fact that The Soul could not exist unless it was one should not, really, lead anyone to think it and The One identical. All other things exist only as units, and none of them is The One; body, for instance, and unity are not identical. Besides, The Soul is manifold as well as one even though it is not constituted of parts; it has various faculties—discursive reason, desire, perception—joined together in unity as by a bond. The Soul bestows unity because it has unity, but a unity received from another source.²

Granted that being is not identical with unity in
2. each particular thing, might not the totality, Being, be identical with unity? Then upon grasping Being, we would hold The One, for they would be the same. Then,

¹ Cf. VI, 6 [34], 16.

² "The One, the first hypostasis, can be confused with the third, The Soul; the Stoics did just that in identifying the supreme god with the soul of the world whence the consequent tension, in their doctrine, throughout the universe because of this oneness of beings. It can also be confused with the second hypostasis, The Intelligence; Aristotle did that; his doing so is examined by Plotinus in §3."—Bréhier, *Plotin: Ennéades*, VI, 2e, p. 172, n. 1.

if Being is The Intelligence, The One would also be The Intelligence; The Intelligence, as Being and as The One, would impart to the rest of things both being and, in proportion, unity.

Is The One identical with Being as "man" and "one man" are identical? Or is it the number of each thing taken individually? (Just as one object and another joined to it are spoken of as "two," so an object taken singly is referred to as "one.") In the second case, if number belongs to the class of being, evidently The One will belong in that way, too, and we shall have to discover what kind of being it is. But if unity is no more than a numbering device of the soul, The One has no real existence; but this possibility is eliminated by our previous observation that each object upon losing unity loses existence as well.

Accordingly, we must determine whether being and unity are identical either in each individual object or in their totality.

As the being of each thing consists in multiplicity and The One cannot be multiplicity, The One must differ from Being. Man is animal, rational, and many things besides; and this multiplicity is held together by a bondlike unity. Thus there is a difference between man and unity: man is divisible, unity indivisible. Being, containing all beings, is still more multiple, thus differing from The One even though it is one by participation. Because being possesses life and intelligence, it is not dead. It must be multiple. If it is The Intelligence, it must be multiple—and the more so if it contains the Ideas, because Ideas, individually and in their totality, are a sort of number and are one only in the way in which the universe is one.

In general, then, The One is the first existent. But The Intelligence, the Ideas, and Being are not the first. Every form is multiple and composite, and consequently something derived because parts precede the composite they constitute.

That The Intelligence cannot be primary should be obvious as well from the following. The activity of The Intelligence consists necessarily in intellection. Intelligence, which does not turn to external objects, contemplates what is superior to it;³ in turning towards itself it turns towards its

³ Cf. V, 4 [7], 10.

origin. Duality is implied if The Intelligence is both thinker and thought; it is not simple, therefore not The One. And if The Intelligence contemplates some object other than itself, then certainly there exists something superior to The Intelligence. Even if The Intelligence contemplate itself and at the same time that which is superior to it, it still is only of secondary rank. We must conceive The Intelligence as enjoying the presence of the Good and The One and contemplating it while it is also present to itself, thinks itself, and thinks itself as being all things. Constituting such a diversity, The Intelligence is far from being The One.

Thus The One is not all things because then it would no longer be one. It is not The Intelligence, because The Intelligence is all things, and The One would then be all things. It is not Being because Being is all things.

What then is The One? What is its nature?

3. It is not surprising that it is difficult to say what it is when it is difficult to say even what being is or what form is, although there knowledge has some sort of approach through the forms. As the soul advances towards the formless, unable to grasp what is without contour or to receive the imprint of reality so diffuse, it fears it will encounter nothingness,⁴ and it slips away. Its state is distressing. It seeks solace in retreating down to the sense realm, there to rest as upon a sure and firm-set earth, just as the eye, wearied with looking at small objects, gladly turns to large ones. But when the soul seeks to know in its own way—by coalescence and unification—it is prevented by that very unification from recognizing it has found The One, for it is unable to distinguish knower and known. Nevertheless, a philosophical study of The One must follow this course.

Because what the soul seeks is The One and it would look upon the source of all reality, namely the Good and The One, it must not withdraw from the primal realm and sink down to the lowest realm. Rather must it withdraw from sense objects, of the lowest existence, and turn to those of the highest. It must free itself from all evil since it aspires to rise to the Good. It must rise to the principle possessed within itself; from the multiplicity that it was it

⁴ Cf. VI, 4 [22], 7.

must again become one. Only thus can it contemplate the supreme principle, The One.

Having become The Intelligence, having entrusted itself to it, committed itself to it, having confided and established itself in it so that by alert concentration the soul may grasp all The Intelligence sees, it will, by The Intelligence, contemplate The One without employing the senses, without mingling perception with the activity of The Intelligence. It must contemplate this purest of objects through the purest of The Intelligence, through that which is supreme in The Intelligence.

When, then, the soul applies itself to the contemplation of such an object and has the impression of extension or shape or mass, it is not The Intelligence that guides its seeing, for it is not the nature of The Intelligence to see such things. From sensation, rather, and from opinion, the associate of sensation, comes this activity. From The Intelligence must come the word of what its scope is.⁵ It contemplates its priors, its own content, and its issue. Purity and simplicity characterize its issue and, even more, its content and, most of all, its priors or Prior.

The One, then, is not The Intelligence but higher. The Intelligence is still a being, while The One is not a being because it is precedent to all being.⁶ Being has, you might say, the form of being; The One is without form, even intelligible form.⁷

As The One begets all things, it cannot be any of them—neither thing, nor quality, nor quantity, nor intelligence, nor soul. Not in motion, nor at rest, not in space, nor in time, it is “the in itself uniform,” or rather it is the “without-form” preceding form, movement, and rest, which are characteristics of Being and make Being multiple.

But if The One is not in motion, why is it not at rest? Because rest or motion, or both together, are characteristic of Being. Again, because what is at rest must be so on account of something distinct from it, rest as such. The One at rest would have the contingent attribute, “at rest,” and would be simple no longer.

Let no one object that something contingent is attributed

⁵ Cf. II, 9 [33], 14.

⁶ Here, refuting Aristotle, Plotinus permits himself the irony of using categories from the previously refuted Stoics.

⁷ Cf. VI, 7 [38], 34.

to The One when we call it the first cause. It is to ourselves that we are thereby attributing contingency because it is we who are receiving something from The One while The One remains self-enclosed. When we wish to speak with precision, we should not say that The One is this or that, but revolving, as it were, around it, try to express our own experience of it, now drawing nigh to it, now falling back from it as a result of the difficulties involved.

The chief difficulty is this: awareness of The One comes to us neither by knowing nor by the pure thought that discovers the other intelligible things, but by a presence transcending knowledge. When the soul knows something, it loses its unity; it cannot remain simply one because knowledge implies discursive reason and discursive reason implies multiplicity. The soul then misses The One and falls into number and multiplicity.⁸

Therefore we must go beyond knowledge and hold to unity. We must renounce knowing and knowable, every object of thought, even Beauty, because Beauty, too, is posterior to The One and is derived from it as, from the sun, the daylight. That is why Plato says of The One, "It can neither be spoken nor written about." If nevertheless we speak of it and write about it, we do so only to give direction, to urge towards that vision beyond discourse, to point out the road to one desirous of seeing. Instruction goes only as far as showing the road and the direction. To obtain the vision is solely the work of him who desires to obtain it. If he does not arrive at contemplation, if his soul does not achieve awareness of that life that is beyond, if the soul does not feel a rapture within it like that of the lover come to rest in his love, if, because of his closeness to The One, he receives its true light—his whole soul made luminous—but is still weighted down and his vision frustrated, if he does not rise alone but still carries within him something alien to The One, if he is not yet sufficiently unified, if he has not yet risen far but is still at a distance either because of the obstacles of which we have just spoken or because of the lack of such instruction as would have given him direction and faith in the existence of things beyond, he has no one to blame but himself and should

⁸*Cf.* I, 6 [1], 7.

try to become pure by detaching himself from everything.

The One is absent from nothing and from everything. It is present only to those who are prepared for it and are able to receive it, to enter into harmony with it, to grasp and to touch it by virtue of their likeness to it, by virtue of that inner power similar to and stemming from The One when it is in that state in which it was when it originated from The One. Thus will The One be "seen" as far as it can become an object of contemplation. Anyone who still lacks faith in these arguments should consider the following:

Those who believe that the world of being is governed by luck or by chance and that it depends upon material causes are far removed from the divine and from the notion of The One. It is not such men as these that we address but such as admit the existence of a world other than the corporeal and at least acknowledge the existence of soul. These men should apply themselves to the study of soul, learning among other things that it proceeds from The Intelligence and attains virtue by participating in the reason that proceeds from The Intelligence. Next, they must realize that The Intelligence is different from our faculty of reasoning (the so-called rational principle), that reasoning implies, as it were, separate steps and movements. They must see that knowledge consists in the manifestation of the rational forms that exist in The Soul and come to The Soul from The Intelligence, the source of knowledge. After one has seen The Intelligence, which like a thing of sense is immediately perceived (but which, although it transcends the soul, is its begetter and the author of the intelligible world), one must think of it as quiet, unwavering movement; embracing all things and being all things, in its multiplicity it is both indivisible and divisible. It is not divisible as are the ingredients of discursive reason, conceived item by item. Still its content is not confused either: each element is distinct from the other, just as in science the theories form an indivisible whole and yet each theory has its own separate status. This multitude of co-existing beings, the intelligible realm, is near The One. (Its existence is necessary, as reason demonstrates, if one admits The Soul exists, to which it is superior.) It is nevertheless not the supreme because it is neither one nor simple. The One, the source of all things, is simple. It is above

even the highest in the world of being because it is above The Intelligence, which itself, not The One but like The One, would become The One. Not sundered from The One, close to The One, but to itself present, it has to a degree dared secession.

The awesome existent above, The One, is not a being for then its unity would repose in another than itself. There is no name that suits it, really. But, since name it we must, it may appropriately be called "one," on the understanding, however, that it is not a substance that possesses unity only as an attribute. So, the strictly nameless, it is difficult to know. The best approach is through its offspring, Being: we know it brings The Intelligence into existence, that it is the source of all that is best, the self-sufficing and unflagging begetter of every being, to be numbered among none of them since it is their prior.

We are necessarily led to call this "The One" in our discussions the better to designate "partlessness" while we strive to bring our minds to "oneness." But when we say that it is one and partless, it is not in the same sense that we speak of geometrical point or numerical unit, where "one" is the quantitative principle which would not exist unless substance, and that which precedes substance and being, were there first. It is not of this kind of unity that we are to think, but simply use such things here below—in their simplicity and the absence of multiplicity and division—as symbols of the higher.

In what sense, then, do we call the supreme The
6. One? How can we conceive of it?

We shall have to insist that its unity is much more perfect than that of the numerical unit or the geometrical point. For with regard to these, the soul, abstracting from magnitude and numerical plurality, stops indeed at that which is smallest and comes to rest in something indivisible. This kind of unity is found in something that is divisible and exists in a subject other than itself. But "what is not in another than itself" is not in the divisible. Nor is it indivisible in the same sense in which the smallest is indivisible. On the contrary, The One is the greatest, not physically but dynamically. Hence it is indivisible, not physically but dynamically. So also the beings that proceed from it; they

are, not in mass but in might, indivisible and partless. Also, The One is infinite not as extension or a numerical series is infinite, but in its limitless power. Conceive it as intelligence or divinity; it is more than that. Compress unity within your mind, it is still more than that. Here is unity superior to any your thought lays hold of, unity that exists by itself and in itself and is without attributes.⁹

Something of its unity can be understood from its self-sufficiency. It is necessarily the most powerful, the most self-sufficient, the most independent of all. Whatever is not one, but multiple, needs something else. Its being needs unification. But The One is already one. It does not even need itself. A being that is multiple, in order to be what it is, needs the multiplicity of things it contains. And each of the things contained is what it is by its union with the others and not by itself, and so it needs the others. Accordingly, such a being is deficient both with regard to its parts and as a whole. There must be something that is fully self-sufficient. That is The One; it alone, within and without, is without need. It needs nothing outside itself either to exist, to achieve well-being, or to be sustained in existence. As it is the cause of the other things, how could it owe its existence to them? And how could it derive its well-being from outside itself since its well-being is not something contingent but is its very nature? And, since it does not occupy space, how can it need support or foundation? What needs foundation is the material mass which, unfounded, falls. The One is the foundation of all other things and gives them, at one and the same time, existence and location; what needs locating is not self-sufficing.

Again, no principle needs others after it. The principle of all has no need of anything at all. Deficient being is deficient because it aspires to its principle. But if The One were to aspire to anything, it would evidently seek not to be The One, that is, it would aspire to that which destroys it. Everything in need needs well-being and preservation. Hence The One cannot aim at any good or desire anything: it is superior to the Good; it is the Good, not for itself, but for other things to the extent to which they can share in it.

⁹ The original text throughout the latter part of the paragraph is grievously defective. The translation attempts, out of the textual materials provided, merely to round off the reasoning begun.

The One is not an intellective existence. If it were, it would constitute a duality. It is motionless because it is prior to motion quite as it is prior to thinking. Anyhow, what would it think? Would it think itself? If it did, it would be in a state of ignorance before thinking, and the self-sufficient would be in need of thought. Neither should one suppose it to be in a state of ignorance on the ground that it does not know itself and does not think itself. Ignorance presupposes a dual relationship: one does not know another. But The One, in its aloneness, can neither know nor be ignorant of anything. Being with itself, it does not need to know itself. Still, we should not even attribute to it this presence with itself if we are to preserve its unity.

Excluded from it are both thinking of itself and thinking of others. It is not like that which thinks but, rather, like the activity of thinking. The activity of thinking does not itself think; it is the cause that has some other being think and cause cannot be identical with effect. This cause, therefore, of all existing things cannot be any one of them. Because it is the cause of good it cannot, then, be called the Good; yet in another sense it is the Good above all.

- If the mind reels at this, The One being none of the things we mentioned, a start yet can be made from them to contemplate it.
- 7.

Do not let yourself be distracted by anything exterior, for The One is not in some one place, depriving all the rest of its presence. It is present to all those who can touch it and absent only to those who cannot. No man can concentrate on one thing by thinking of some other thing; so he should not connect something else with the object he is thinking of if he wishes really to grasp it. Similarly, it is impossible for a soul, impressed with something else, to conceive of The One so long as such an impression occupies its attention, just as it is impossible that a soul, at the moment when it is attentive to other things, should receive the form of what is their contrary. It is said that matter must be void of all qualities in order to be capable of receiving all forms. So must the soul, and for a stronger reason, be stripped of all forms if it would be filled and fired by the supreme without any hindrance from within itself.

Having thus freed itself of all externals, the soul must

turn totally inward; not allowing itself to be wrested back towards the outer, it must forget everything, the subjective first and, finally, the objective. It must not even know that it is itself that is applying itself to contemplation of The One.

After having dwelled with it sufficiently, the soul should, if it can, reveal to others this transcendent communion. (Doubtless it was enjoyment of this communion that was the basis of calling Minos "the confidant of Zeus"; remembering, he made laws that are the image of The One, inspired to legislate by his contact with the divine.) If a man looks down on the life of the city as unworthy of him, he should, if he so wishes, remain in this world above. This does indeed happen to those who have contemplated much.

This divinity, it is said, is not outside any being but, on the contrary, is present to all beings though they may not know it. They are fugitives from the divine, or rather from themselves. What they turn from they cannot reach. Themselves lost, they can find no other. A son distraught and beside himself is not likely to recognize his father. But the man who has learned to know himself will at the same time discover whence he comes.¹⁰

Self-knowledge reveals to the soul that its natural motion is not, if uninterrupted, in a straight line, but circular, as around some inner object, about a center, the point to which it owes its origin. If the soul knows this, it will move around this center from which it came, will cling to it and commune with it as indeed all souls should but only divine souls do. That is the secret of their divinity, for divinity consists in being attached to the center. One who withdraws far from it becomes an ordinary man or an animal.

Is this "center" of our souls, then, the principle we are seeking? No, we must look for some other principle upon which all centers converge and to which, only by analogy to the visible circle, the word "center" is applied. The soul is not a circle as, say, a geometrical figure. Our meaning is that in the soul and around about it exists the "primordial nature," that it derives its existence from the first

¹⁰ On this self-knowledge as divine knowledge, see Arnou, *Le désir de Dieu*, pp. 193-4.

existence especially when entirely separate from the body. Now, however, as we have a part of our being contained in the body, we are like a man whose feet are immersed in water while the rest of his body remains above it. Raising ourselves above the body by the part of us that is not submerged, we are, by our own center, attaching ourselves to the center of all. And so we remain, just as the centers of the great circles coincide with that of the sphere that surrounds them. If these circles were material and not spiritual, center and circumference would have to occupy definite places. But since the souls are of the intelligible realm and The One is still above The Intelligence, we are forced to say that the union of the intellective thinking being with its object proceeds by different means. The intellective thinking being is in the presence of its object by virtue of its similarity and identity, and it is united with its kindred with nothing to separate it from them. Bodies are by their bodies kept from union, but the bodiless are not held by this bodily limitation. What separates bodiless beings from one another is not spatial distance but their own differences and diversities: when there is no difference between them, they are mutually present.

As The One does not contain any difference, it is always present and we are present to it when we no longer contain difference. The One does not aspire to us, to move around us; we aspire to it, to move around it. Actually, we always move around it; but we do not always look. We are like a chorus grouped about a conductor who allow their attention to be distracted by the audience. If, however, they were to turn towards their conductor, they would sing as they should and would really be with him. We are always around The One. If we were not, we would dissolve and cease to exist. Yet our gaze does not remain fixed upon The One. When we look at it, we then attain the end of our desires and find rest. Then it is that, all discord past, we dance an inspired dance around it.

In this dance the soul looks upon the source of life,

9. the source of The Intelligence, the origin of Being,
the cause of the Good, the root of The Soul.

All these entities emanate from The One without any lessening for it is not a material mass. If it were, the emanants would be perishable. But they are eternal because

their originating principle always stays the same; not fragmenting itself in producing them, it remains entire. So they persist as well, just as light persists as long as sun shines.

We are not separated from The One, not distant from it, even though bodily nature has closed about us and drawn us to itself. It is because of The One that we breathe and have our being:¹¹ it does not bestow its gifts at one moment only to leave us again; its giving is without cessation so long as it remains what it is. As we turn towards The One, we exist to a higher degree, while to withdraw from it is to fall. Our soul is delivered from evil by rising to that place which is free of all evils. There it knows. There it is immune. There it truly lives. Life not united with the divinity is shadow and mimicry of authentic life. Life there is the native act of The Intelligence, which, motionless in its contact with The One, gives birth to gods, beauty, justice, and virtue.

With all of these The Soul, filled with divinity, is pregnant; this is its starting point and its goal. It is its starting point because it is from the world above that it proceeds. It is its goal because in the world above is the Good to which it aspires and by returning to it there its proper nature is regained. Life here below in the midst of sense objects is for the soul a degradation, an exile, a loss of wings.

Further proof that our good is in the realm above is the love innate in our souls; hence the coupling in picture and story of Eros with Psyche. The soul, different from the divinity but sprung from it, must needs love. When it is in the realm above, its love is heavenly; here below, only commonplace. The heavenly Aphrodite dwells in the realm above; here below, the vulgar, harlot Aphrodite.

Every soul is an Aphrodite,¹² as is suggested in the myth of Aphrodite's birth at the same time as that of Eros. As long as soul stays true to itself, it loves the divinity and desires to be at one with it, as a daughter loves with a noble love a noble father. When, however, the soul has come down here to human birth, it exchanges (as if deceived by the false promises of an adulterous lover) its divine love for

¹¹ Cf. the words of St. Paul in Acts 17:27-8. For discussion, Theiler, *Die Vorbereitung des Neuplatonismus*, p. 101.

¹² Cf. V, 8 [31], 13.

one that is mortal. And then, far from its begetter, the soul yields to all manner of excess.

But, when the soul begins to hate its shame and puts away evil and makes its return, it finds its peace.

How great, then, is its bliss can be conceived by those who have not tasted it if they but think of earthly unions in love, marking well the joy felt by the lover who succeeds in obtaining his desires. But this is love directed to the mortal and harmful—to shadows—and soon disappears because such is not the authentic object of our love nor the good we really seek. Only in the world beyond does the real object of our love exist, the only one with which we can unite ourselves, of which we can have a part and which we can intimately possess without being separated by the barriers of flesh.

Anyone who has had this experience will know what I am talking about. He will know that the soul lives another life as it advances towards The One, reaches it and shares in it. Thus restored, the soul recognizes the presence of the dispenser of the true life. It needs nothing more. On the contrary, it must renounce everything else and rest in it alone, become it alone, all earthiness gone, eager to be free, impatient of every fetter that binds below in order so to embrace the real object of its love with its entire being that no part of it does not touch The One.

Then of it and of itself the soul has all the vision that may be—of itself luminous now, filled with intellectual light, become pure light, subtle and weightless. It has become divine, is part of the eternal that is beyond becoming. It is like a flame. If later it is weighted down again by the realm of sense, it is like a flame extinguished.

Why does a soul that has risen to the realm above
10. not stay there? Because it has not yet entirely detached itself from things here below. Yet a time will come when it will uninterruptedly have vision, when it will no longer be bothered by body. The part of us that sees is not troubled. It is the other part which, even when we cease from our vision, does not cease from its activity of demonstration, proof and dialectic. But the act and faculty of vision is not reason but something greater than, prior and superior to, reason. So also is the object of the

vision. When the contemplative looks upon himself in the act of contemplation, he will see himself to be like its object. He feels himself to be united to himself in the way that the object is united to itself; that is to say, he will experience himself as simple, just as it is simple.

Actually, we should not say, "He will see." What he sees (in case it is still possible to distinguish here the seer and the seen, to assert that the two are one would be indeed rash) is not seen, not distinguished, not represented as a thing apart. The man who obtains the vision becomes, as it were, another being. He ceases to be himself, retains nothing of himself. Absorbed in the beyond he is one with it, like a center coincident with another center. While the centers coincide, they are one. They become two only when they separate. It is in this sense that we can speak of The One as something separate.

Therefore is it so very difficult to describe this vision, for how can we represent as different from us what seemed, while we were contemplating it, not other than ourselves but perfect at-oneness with us?

This, doubtless, is what is back of the injunction of
11. the mystery religions which prohibit revelation to the uninitiated. The divine is not expressible, so the initiate is forbidden to speak of it to anyone who has not been fortunate enough to have beheld it himself.

The vision, in any case, did not imply duality; the man who saw was identical with what he saw. Hence he did not "see" it but rather was "oned" with it. If only he could preserve the memory of what he was while thus absorbed into The One, he would possess within himself an image of what it was.

In that state he had attained unity, nothing within him or without effecting diversity. When he had made his ascent, there was within him no disturbance, no anger, emotion, desire, reason, or thought. Actually, he was no longer himself; but, swept away and filled with the divine, he was still, solitary, and at rest, not turning to this side or that or even towards himself. He was in utter rest, having, so to say, become rest itself. In this state he busied himself no longer even with the beautiful. He had risen above beauty, had passed beyond even the choir of virtues.

He was like one who, penetrating the innermost sanc-

tuary of a temple, leaves temple images behind. They will be the first objects to strike his view upon coming out of the sanctuary, after his contemplation and communion there not with an image or statue but with what they represent. They are but lesser objects of contemplation.

Such experience is hardly a vision. It is a seeing of a quite different kind, a self-transcendence, a simplification, self-abandonment, a striving for union and a repose, an intentness upon conformation. This is the way one sees in the sanctuary. Anyone who tries to see in any other way will see nothing.

By the use of these images, the wise among the soothsayers expressed in riddles how the divinity is seen. A wise priest, reading the riddle, will, once arrived in the realm beyond, achieve the true vision of the sanctuary. One who has not yet arrived there and knows the sanctuary is invisible, is the source and principle of everything, will also know that by hypostasis is hypostasis seen, and that like alone joins like. He will leave aside nothing of the divine the soul is capable of acquiring. If his vision is not yet complete, he will attend to its completion, which, for him who has risen above all, is The One that is above all. It is not the soul's nature to attain to utter nothingness. Falling into evil it falls, in this sense, into nothingness, but still not complete nothingness. And when it reverses direction, it arrives not at something different but at itself. Thus, when it is not in anything else, it is in nothing but itself. Yet, when it is in itself alone and not in being, it is in the supreme.

We as well transcend Being by virtue of The Soul with which we are united.

Now if you look upon yourself in this state, you find yourself an image of The One.

If you rise beyond yourself, an image rising to its model, you have reached the goal of your journey.

When you fall from this vision, you will, by arousing the virtue that is within yourself and by remembering the perfection that you possess, regain your likeness and through virtue rise to The Intelligence and through wisdom to The One.

Such is the life of the divinity and of divine and blessed men: detachment from all things here below, scorn of all earthly pleasures, the flight of the lone to the Alone.

SOURCES

For the key to abbreviations see *Guide to Sources*, page 223.

- 1 Source of the basic distinctions in the two opening paragraphs is disputed. Harder believes it to be the Stoics (see *Plotins Schriften*, I, 468); Theiler, Poseidonius (see *Die Vorbereitung des Neuplatonismus*, pp. 97-8).
- 2 ¶2 as "man" . . . identical: cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, III, 2; 1003 b 26-29.
- 3 ¶2 It seeks . . . realm: cf. Plato, *Republic* 508 d 5.
 ¶4 without employing the senses: cf. Plato, *Banquet* 211 a. without mingling perception: cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 179 c 3; *Timaeus* 28 a 2.
 ¶7 "the in itself uniform": Plato, *Banquet* 211 b 1. "without-form" . . . and rest: cf. Plato, *Parmenides* 139 b, 138 b, 141d.
- 4 ¶2 "It can . . . about.": Plato, *Parmenides* 142 a; cf. *Letter VII* 341 c-d.
- 6 ¶2 "what is . . . itself": Plato, *Parmenides* 138 a.
- 7 ¶2 matter . . . all forms: cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 50 d ff.
 ¶4 "the confidant of Zeus": Homer, *Odyssey*, XIX, 179. have contemplated much: cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 248 d.
- 8 The entire first paragraph is a synopsis of Plato, *Timaeus* 43-44.
 ¶1 That . . . their divinity: cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 248 a. or an animal: cf. *op. cit.* 249 b.
 ¶2 "primordial nature": Plato, *Statesman* 273 b 4. whose . . . water: cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 43 a. by virtue of . . . and identity: cf. *op. cit.* 90 d 4-5.
- 9 ¶3 gives birth . . . virtue: cf. Plato, *Banquet* 209 a; 212 a.
 ¶4 starting point . . . goal: cf. Plato, *Laws* 715 e. is for the soul a degradation: cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 85 e. loss of wings: cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 246 c; 248 c.
 ¶5 When it is in . . . commonplace: cf. Plato, *Banquet* 180 d; 203 b - e.
 ¶6 And then . . . excess: cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 247 d 4.
- 10 ¶1 its activity . . . and dialectic: cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 189 e; *Sophist* 263 e.
- 11 ¶11 Such is . . . blessed men: cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 176 a 1. lone to the Alone.: cf. Numenius in Eus., XI, 22.