Ethics for an "Amphibian" Soul: The Plotinian Self in its Metaphysical Environment

Ética para uma alma "anfíbia": o Eu plotiniano em seu ambiente metafísico

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Abstract: In this paper, I concern myself with the dual-life structure of human souls in Plotinus, and I delve into its normative orientation for individual conduct from the standpoint of his metaphysics of the One. For Plotinus as for most Hellenistic philosophers, metaphysics, theory of knowledge, psychology, and ethics mutually implicate one another. Plotinus' discourse on the human *psychē* is grounded on his understanding of the nature of things, on ontology, or better yet, in his case, on "henology," and this is tied to normative guidelines on how human beings ought to behave during their embodied existence. By analyzing his treatise "On the Descent of the Soul into Bodies" (IV.8 [6]), especially chapter 4, 31–35, I aim to explicate the overall tenets of Plotinus' amphibian soul with reference to his metaphysical scheme and in tandem with his ethical commitments. In brief, I take the view that by elaborating on the "amphibious" structure of human souls, one may to be able to acquire a better understanding of the interplay between Plotinus' metaphysics, psychology, and ethics.
Keywords: Plotinus; Neoplatonism; psychology; metaphysics; ethics.

Resumo: Neste artigo, ocupo-me da estrutura de vida dupla das almas humanas em Plotino e examino a sua orientação normativa para a conduta humana, de acordo o prisma de sua metafísica do Um. Para Plotino, assim como para a maioria dos filósofos helenísticos, metafísica, teoria do conhecimento, psicologia e ética estão mutuamente implicados. O discurso de Plotino sobre a *psychē* humana está assentado em seu entendimento sobre a natureza das coisas, a ontologia, ou ainda melhor, no seu caso, a "henologia", e isto está vinculado a diretrizes normativas de como os seres humanos devem portar-se durante sua existência corpórea. Ao analisar o tratado "Sobre a descida da alma nos corpos" (IV.8 [6]), especialmente a passagem 4, 31-35, intenciono explicar os princípios globais da alma anfíbia em Plotino com referência ao seu esquema metafísico e em relação aos seus compromissos éticos. Em resumo, presumo que ao desenvolver a estrutura "anfíbia" das almas humanas, se poderia adquirir uma melhor compreensão da interação entre a metafísica, a psicologia e a ética de Plotino.
Palavras-chave: Plotino; Neoplatonismo; psicologia; metafísica; ética.

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In this paper, I aim to expound on the notion of an "amphibious" structure of souls put forward by Plotinus in his early treatise "On the Descent of the Soul into Bodies" (IV.8 [6] 4, 31-35)[1]; a notion that cuts across his reflection, reappearing in various guises throughout the *Enneads*. I am convinced that by exploring the "amphibious" character of human souls, one could achieve a better appreciation of the interplay between Plotinus' metaphysical frame of reference and his ethical precepts.

Anthony A. Long has compellingly argued that the most pressing question for Ancient Philosophy was the question of "what to make of oneself?" (cf. Long 2001). This question, the "self-model question," as he terms it, brought together a theoretical-cognitive edge ("What should I take myself to be") and a practical-ethical one ("What should I fashion myself into?"), in such a way that the (self-)comprehension of one's condition in the grand scheme of things is interlocked with the purpose to lead one's life in the best possible manner. In light of Long's account of the "self-model question", I seek to underscore the interdependence between Plotinus' metaphysics and ethics in a careful analysis of the amphibian structure of human souls.

By doing this, I aim to dispel a current misconception, exemplified by Suzanne Stern-Gillet, who has argued that "in the philosophy of the *Enneads* ethics is a maidservant to metaphysics" (Stern-Gillet 2009: 336). Contrary to this approach, I assume that an adequate understanding of Plotinus' philosophy should take metaphysics and ethics as organically interwoven and mutually supportive. Thus, the relationship between metaphysics and ethics comes out as one of coordination and not of subordination. It is of vital importance to underscore this relationship in order to grasp Plotinus' philosophy in its fullest sense and maximum extent.

[1] As it is fairly standard in Plotinus scholarship, I first cite the *Ennead* with a Roman numeral, followed by the number of the treatise, then the chronological number from Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* in brackets, next the chapter of the treatise and, separated by a comma, the corresponding lines. When I do not provide the reference to the *Ennead* and treatise, this means that I am continuing to cite from the last treatise just cited. For the translation, I have used Armstrong's from the Loeb edition to most *Enneads*, while specifically for *Ennead* V.1 [10] I have resorted to Perl's (while preserving Armstrong's original title for the treatise), for *Ennead* IV.8 [6] to Fleet's, and for *Ennead* VI.9 [9] to Clark's, the three of them from Parmenides Press. The citation of line numbers is approximative and may not match with the original Greek text in the canonical *Plotini Opera* edited by Paul Henry and Hans-Rudolph Schwyzer, as I could not access my library during the final review of this paper.

In the first section, I provide a synthetic account of Plotinus' portrayal of a hierarchical order of reality. I resort chiefly to his treatise "On the Three Primary Hypostases" (V.1 [10]) to present the overall structure and overriding logic of his system. This first move is essential for an adequate explanation of what Plotinus means when he suggests the nature of human souls to be amphibious, as well as for a clarification of the position this notion occupies in his metaphysical framework. I intend to show how the philosopher's metaphysical description is bound up with a moral normativity that informs the soul's twofold disposition, with bearings for his ethical doctrine.[2] In the second section, I examine *Ennead* IV.8 [6], underscoring his account of the dynamic ambiguity of souls, that is, of their interposition between the higher and the lower spheres. Finally, having laid out the floor plan of Plotinus' metaphysical edifice and having considered the status of this multivalent soul within it, I introduce his ethical teachings on the ways one ought to act, and what one ought to strive for, in the interest of achieving happiness, well-being, or simply *εὐδαιμονία*. In this last section, my chief references are *Ennead* I.2 [19] and I.4 [46].

I. The order of reality

What is the status and standing of individual human souls in Plotinus' thought? For the sake of leading one's life in the best possible way, it is necessary to realize where one is located in the cosmic order of things. In essence, self-knowledge is tied to the knowledge of reality. In this way, as Plotinus writes, a child would not know "his father when beside himself with madness, but one who has learned to know himself will also know where he came from." (VI.9 [9] 5, 31-4; trans. Clark) But this is only half of the story, for metaphysics without ethics is empty, and ethics without metaphysics is blind. Metaphysical understanding means virtually nothing if it is not expressed by an existential commitment to adopt a more valuable and truthful mode of life.

At the zenith of Plotinus' system is the One and at the nadir lies matter. Human souls occupy an intermediary position within the order of reality and have an amphibian constitution, that is, they enjoy an embodied life in the everyday world, while at the same time an aspect of them is always lodged

[2] I assume a strict distinction between morals and ethics in the present paper. The former is understood to be non-subjective and context-independent, whereas the latter is understood to be a set of precepts for subjective activity.

in an other-worldly habitat. Hence, there is an element of human souls that always remains in the realm above. Yet, there is the enduring risk of souls forgetting their other-worldly habitat and plunging into the realm below them, that is, the physical and corporeal environment. In this section I succinctly outline the configuration of Plotinian metaphysics to then dwell with more details into his psychology, that is, his theory of human souls.

The highest principle in Plotinus' philosophy is the One. It is the apex of his monist system, its first and foremost element; it is absolute unity, the *simplex*. As such, it is also the single source of everything that is, the source of being [*τοῦ εἶναι*] as well as being's *raison d'être*, the "why" of being [*τοῦ διὰ τί εἶναι*] (VI.8 [39] 14, 30–5).

In the wake of Book VI of the *Republic* (509b7), Plotinus identifies the One with the Good, that which lies beyond being (Cf. V.1 [10] 8, 9). In Plato's well-known analogy, just as the sun is the cause of the visibility of the objects of sense-perception, so is the Good the cause of the intelligibility of being. In this regard, the One transcends being: it is aetiologically prior to beings and stands "ontologically"[3] above them. For Plotinus, thus, the One is at once the Supreme reality and the *Summum bonum*.

The One is the infinite potency, the all-powerful generator of every being [*δύναμις πάντων*] (V.1 [10] 14, 7, 11). Its process of generation, however, differs from the *fiat* of creation, the "Let there be light and life" of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The One remains everlastingly turned toward itself. The second-degree reality the One elicits comes into being through no inclination [*οὐ προσνεύσαντος],* no act of will *[οὐδὲ βουληθέντος*] and no movement [*οὐδὲ ὅλως κινηθέντος*] on its part. Rather, said reality comes forth as a kind of radiation [*περίλαμψιν*] that is discharged from it: "the sun's brightness, as if it

[3] As the highest component of Plotinus philosophy is not "being" or "beings" [*ον/όντα*], the term "ontology" falls short. It would be more appropriate to speak of a "henology" since the One is, as it were, the cause of itself, primary self [*πρώτως αὐτὸς*] and, more significantly, self in a "hyperontic" mode [*ὑπερόντως αὐτός*] (VI.8 [39] 14, 43) to which is attributed thought in a "hypernoetic" mode [*ὑπερνόησις*] (VI.8 16, 32). Hence, as a "being beyond being" with a "thinking beyond thought," the One is likewise "beyond language"; ineffable, it can only be conceived of allusively, indirectly, by means of apophatic (*via negativa*) or metaphorical (*via analogica*) speech. Only from the "output" of the One's activity do we have any indication of it. Thus, when speaking of the One as Good, we are merely describing our own need for and dependence on it; its Goodness is what is Good for us, who have a minor share in it, and should not be understood as an adequate predicate for the One (Cf. VI.9 [9]). Along these lines, Reiner Schürmann offers an instigating parallel reading of Plotinus' henology and the notion of *Ereignis* in Heidegger (cf. Schürmann 1982).

were running around it, always generated from it while it abides." (6, 19–31; trans. Perl). In a contrast reminiscent of what one finds in Numenius' writing (fr. 14) between divine gifts (knowledge, fire, as in the myth of Prometheus) and those of human provenance (wealth, precious metals and so on), the One benefits the receiver without impoverishing the donor or, differently put, its gifts are bestowed without ever leaving their place of origin.

Plotinus holds as an axiom, which is of Aristotelian inspiration, that all things, as they come to perfection, generates [*πάντα δὲ ὅσα ἤδη τέλεια γεννᾷ*] (6, 38). Since the One is always perfect [*ἀεὶ τέλειον*], it generates everlastingly [*ἀεὶ καὶ ἀίδιον γεννᾷ*]. Therefore, since the One is this superabundant producer, its products are by-products, as they are an "unintentional" and collateral consequence of its activity; thus, they are inferior to it. The One generates according to what Emilsson, among other scholars, describes as the logic of double activity or emanation: the One is turned toward itself, resting in itself, in quiet contemplation, self-contained and self-concerned, and yet, as an outcome of its first and internal activity, a second and external activity arises which issues an overflow, a bonus, a by-product (cf. Emilsson 2017, 48–57).

The immediate upshot of the One is Intellect. Intellect is an image [*εἰκόνα*] of the Good and retains much of the likeness [*ὁμοιότητα*] of its originator, just as sunlight retains its likeness to the sun (V.1 [10] 7, 5). Intellect does not possess the infinite productive power of the One [*δύναμις πάντων*], but it has the power to produce substantial reality. Intellect longs for and loves its begetter, the One/Good. By turning towards it (cf. 6–13), in an attempt to comprehend its own source, Intellect *in potentia* becomes actual Intellect. Hence, in this two-phase process of constitution—departing from the One and turning back to it—Intellect already implies a distinction, a complexification, in contrast to the simplicity of the One. Thus, it comprises both unity and multiplicity, identity and otherness, thinking subject and object of thought, Intellect and Being.[4] As Plotinus remarks, earlier in this treatise, "intellect, by thinking, establishes being, and being, by being thought, gives to intellect thinking and existence" (4, 27–30; trans. Perl).

This level of reality, or "hypostasis,"[5] is the second in greatness after the One. Intellect corresponds to an archetypal [*ἀρχέτυπον*] reality, a truer reality

[4] For a more detailed account on the generation of the Intellect, exploring its indebtedness to Aristotelian physical and psychological models and technical vocabulary, see Lloyd 1987.

[5] While Plotinus himself does not apply the term "hypostasis" to each of the three levels of reality in a rigorous and consistent form, later scholarship, starting off with Porphyry, has

[*ἀληθινώτερον*]—that is, in comparison to the sensible world we inhabit, rather than to the first-order reality of the One. This hypostasis is associated with the Platonic noetic realm of incorporeal and imperishable beings,[6] the supersensible "ideas" or "forms," which linger in a state of unchangeable stability and within clear-cut limits, even if intertwined in communication and communion [*κοινωνίᾳ*] with each other.[7] Intellect lies outside the coordinates of "time" and "space", or—in less Modern and more Platonic wording—it is exempted from the flux of becoming. Effectively, it constitutes an indissoluble unity in multiplicity, compared by Plotinus to the relationship between the universal body of knowledge and each particular theorem that composes it.[8]

Soul comes after Intellect. Just as Intellect is an expression and a sort of activity of the One, Soul is an expression [*λόγος*] and activity [*ἐνέργειά*] of Intellect (V.1 [10] 6, 45–6). Soul is generated because Intellect is perfect (7, 37–8) in its own manner. A further degree apart from the One, Soul's expression is obscure [*ἀμυδρὸς*]: it is a ghost or phantom of Intellect [*εἴδωλον νοῦ*], but also a light and a trace of it [*νοῦ φῶς καὶ ἴχνος*] (44). The hypostasis Soul is less unified, less simple, less defined; more dependent, more complex, more restless than Intellect and, *a fortiori*, than the One.

As it proceeds from Intellect, Soul's essence is an intellectual one. Its intellection, nonetheless, develops by discursive reasoning [*λογισμός*; *διάνοια*],

taken up this rather broad, ill-defined term and refined it in such a way as to give a technical meaning in Plotinus' metaphysics.

[6] It is also related to Parmenides' identification between thought and being: *τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστί τε καὶ εἶναι* (DK 28 B3) Plotinus, in his interpretation of Platonic tradition, endeavors to render explicit what was for him implicit in these ancient and revered doctrines, elaborating on and drawing connections between the writings to make them clearer and more closely adherent to their stated purposes. A little later in the same treatise, he writes: "these statements of ours are not new; they do not belong to the present time, but were made long ago, not explicitly, and what we have said in this discussion has been an interpretation of them, relying on Plato's own writings for evidence that these views are ancient" (V.I [10], 8, 12-5)

[7] For instance: "And in respect of the just and the unjust, the good and the bad, and all the ideas or forms, the same statement holds, that in itself each is one [*αὐτὸ μὲν ἓν ἕκαστον εἶναι*], but that by virtue of their communion [*κοινωνίᾳ*] with actions and bodies and with one another they present themselves everywhere, each as a multiplicity of aspects." (*Rep.* V.476a)

[8] "Intellect and the intelligent substance; each individual Idea is not other than Intellect, but each is Intellect. And Intellect as a whole is all the Forms, and each individual Form is an individual intellect, as the whole body of knowledge is all its theorems, but each theorem is a part of the whole, not as being spatially distinct, but as having its particular power in the whole." (V.9 [5] 8, 2–8)

contrary to the non-discursive, all-in-one apprehension [*νόησις*] of Intellect.[9] Soul's immediate father, its *archê,* is Intellect; then again, it is also its *telos*, the true home to which it longs to return, the fulfillment of its essence. The resulting structure is not unlike the one that exists between Intellect and the One; as Plotinus writes: "The existence of [soul], then, comes from intellect, and its reason is made actual by intellect's being seen. For when it looks at intellect, it possesses within itself and as its own what it thinks and effects." (V.1 [10] 3, 15–18; trans. Perl).

On the other hand, Soul is also in touch with a lower degree of reality, the physical world, the perceptible universe into which it infuses life, *logoi,* and a spark of its light, as it were. The World-Soul ensouls [*ἐψύχωται*] the physical realm (sun, stars, heavens, animals[10]), it animates, confers movement, and provides a rational organization for what would otherwise amount to nothing but a "dead body" or even "the darkness of matter and non-being" [*σκότος ὕλης καὶ μὴ ὂν*] (2, 28; trans. Perl). Subsequently, individual souls endow bodies with rational and intellectual capacities, giving rise to the type of hybrid being we consist in—in a lesser sense, an empirical and embodied subject, in a higher sense, an intellectual soul.

To be clear, in Plotinus, one should differentiate between Soul as a hypostatic level— Universal Soul, which resides in the intelligible realm—and the distinct types of soul that belong to it: i) the Soul of the All or World-Soul, that ensouls the physical cosmos or Body of the World, which correlates to Plato's *Timaeus*; ii) the soul of heavenly bodies, and iii)); the individual soul that ensouls human beings. In a sense, each one of them is unique, providing life, movement, and *logos* (or the rational structuring principle) to different spheres of the sensible world. Nevertheless, they find themselves unified and interwoven in the hypostasis Soul[11] just as the ideas of "movement" and "rest," while distinct, form a unified whole in Intellect.

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[9] Plotinus claims that Intellect thinks [*νοεῖ*] not by seeking [*ζητῶν*] but by already having [*ἔχων*] (V.1 [10] 4, 17). All forms exist and rest in it in a state of unity-in-diversity. In addition, it is the condition of possibility for logical-discursive reasoning, and provides the absolute measures for it (an aspect given special emphasis in chapter 11 of the treatise).

[10] Plotinus writes: "For to all that magnitude, as far as it extends, [soul] has given itself, and every interval both great and small is ensouled. (V.1 [10] 2, 32–4; trans. Perl). Here, I avoid entering into the debate on whether to attribute souls to heavenly bodies, and whether the World Soul would, in that case, comprise them.

[11] It should be noted that the hypostasis Soul as a structural and generative dimension in Plotinus' metaphysics can be further divided into two species or at times three, the World-Soul

Soul generates this further degree of reality (which is not strictly speaking a "hypostasis", for they are divine [*τὰ θεῖα*] and threefold[12] [*τριττὰ*]) by projecting the transcendent forms as immanent *logoi* onto matter, producing or projecting a reflection of "pseudo-beings" and a "material world" (in contrast with the "real beings" of the immaterial intelligible realm). Plotinus compares matter with a mirror, in the sense that the eternal forms it receives and reflects impart to it an existence of sorts (cf. III.6 [26], 13). Matter *qua* matter, however, can only be absolute nothingness, privation, indefiniteness, needfulness; it is inconceivable as such, as if we were to imagine the reflection of a mirror *in vacuo*, abstracted from the whole universe, including itself.[13]

Moreover, if the One is the apex of Plotinus' philosophy, matter is the rock-bottom, the degree zero of his system. While the One is above being and is the productive power of everything, matter is below being, and has the capacity to receive all forms. Furthermore, just as Plotinus equates the One and absolute Good, he will in a later treatise equate matter and absolute evil, to the point of deeming it the actual source of all evil (cf. I.8 [51]). With the material world, individual souls become subject to "evil" of a secondary kind: by leaning too deeply in the direction of matter, by turning away from their origin in Intellect and sink into "alienation" [14] [*ἀλλοτριότητι*] (Cf. V.1 [10] 10, 27). From this, one can glimpse how metaphysics and morality are knit together in his theory.

Plotinus commenced this particular treatise (V.1 [10]) by arguing that, through a hubristic act [*τόλμα*] of self-independence and self-belonging [*αὐτεξουσίῳ*], human souls are debased, stripped of their vocation; they begin to despise themselves and to honor alien things.[15] In light of this, Plotinus urges humans to turn [*ἐπιστρέψει*] in the opposite direction [*εἰς τὰ ἐναντία*], toward that which is primary, and ascend [*ἀνάγοι*] to that which is the most elevated and the most singular and the most fundamental [*τοῦ ἀκροτάτου καὶ*

or soul of the cosmos, the soul of heavenly bodies, and the individual human soul. See Fleet 2012: 17-8.

[12] Plotinus likens his three hypostatic degrees (One, Intellect, Soul) to the threefold hypothesis found in Plato's *Parmenides* (cf. V.1 [10], 8): The One, The One-Many, and The One-and-Many.

[13] As mentioned by Hadot, the production of the sensible world by a process of reflection in a mirror is not peculiar to Plotinus but was common also in some other cosmologies from his time (cf. Hadot 1976: 99).

[14] For a stimulating reading of the status of the human soul in Plotinus within a Hegelian framework of alienation, see Gurtler 1997.

[15] Interestingly enough, Plotinus contends elsewhere that Intellect was somehow generated by a similar act of *τόλμα: ἀποστῆναι δέ πως τοῦ ἑνὸς τολμήσα* (VI.9 [9] 5, 29).

ἑνὸς καὶ πρώτου] (V.1 [10] 1, 26). True to his Platonic lineage, this is indeed one of the main purposes of Plotinus' philosophy: through an explanation of the ultimate arrangement of reality, to exhort people to adopt a mode of living more properly aligned with such metaphysical vista.[16] For Plotinus, then, cognition of reality and practice of life are complementary, as it is insinuated in Long's "self-model question." Perl sums this up well in his introduction to *Ennead* V.1: "as is always the case in Plotinus, metaphysics is spirituality and spirituality is metaphysics." (Perl 2015: 16).

Further down in the treatise, Plotinus makes a striking claim that perhaps justifies (along with his "henology" and some other insights) the prefix "neo" that German scholars of the eighteenth century employed to describe and differentiate his form of Platonism from the tradition preceding him.[17] While referring back to Plato and relying on the authority of his philosophy, Plotinus introduces something slightly different, something new. He maintains that the three hypostatic levels are found not only in nature but also within us—not within our empirical selves, to be sure, but that aspect of ourselves to be found "outside" the spatiotemporal world of sense-perception, which he associates with the "inner man" [*τὸν εἴσω ἄνθρωπον*] Plato writes of in the *Republic* (IX.589a–b). Elsewhere, Plotinus would give this idea a sharper formulation by stating that each of us carries an intelligible universe within ourselves (Cf. III.4 [15] 3, 22).

Plotinus contends that the nature of souls is incommensurable to the physical realm. The intelligible and immaterial rules over the sensible and material, while remaining independent from and unaffected by the latter (which, in its turn, depends on the former). Rather than an embodied soul, then, what one finds in Plotinus is an ensouled body.[18] The rational and highest part

[16] See Hadot 1994.

[17] "The term 'Neoplatonism' was used in 1744 by A. F. Bushing, who spoke not only of an eclectic sect but also of 'new Platonists'; in 1786, C. Meiners produced a 'History of New-Platonic Philosophy,' continuing, however, to consider it in a negative light. Finally, in 1793, G. G. Fülleborn chose to express with the title 'Neoplatonic Philosophy' the common name for the 'famous Neoplatonists,' though he still regarded them in basically a negative manner. In any case, the gradual formation of the term 'Neoplatonism' reveals a change in the view of the philosophy of Plotinus and of his successors, no longer described as an eclectic excrescence, but as an authentic form of Platonism." (Gatti 1996, 23)

[18] To express the soul-body relationship in its incommensurability, he claims that the body is in the soul as air is in the light [*τὸ φῶς ἐν τῷ ἀέρι*] (IV.3 [27] 22, 1–8). Often it appears that the human soul arrives at an already-animated body, ensouled by the World-Soul, which the

of the soul[19] thus remains free from the body, always abiding in the primary intelligible realm [*ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ νοητῷ*] (V.1 [10] 1, 18) with privileged access to the immutable forms, and sometimes even transcending the constraints of predicative reasoning to reach the noetic, all-in-one cognitive grasp. Even so, the degradation of souls through self-oblivion and self-deception remains always a possibility, as Plotinus argues in the initial chapters of the treatise. If one is to become aware of that greatness that, due to their intellectual and divine origin, individual souls already possess, one must turn our power of perception inwardly [*τὸ ἀντιλαμβανόμενον εἰς τὸ εἴσω ἐπιστρέφειν*] (12, 14). This is an articulation of Plotinus' original and controversial doctrine of the undescended soul.[20]

After this succinct exposition of the three-dimensional structure of the hypostases, it is the vertical tension of the individual soul—stretched from its noetic household down to the human body—that I would like to address in the following section. Towards that end, I explore Plotinus' depiction of souls as being, in a certain sense, amphibious [*οἷον ἀμφίβιο*] (IV.8 [6] 4, 31-32). Nonetheless, an insight, neatly formulated by Pierre Hadot, should be kept in mind as we proceed: the order of hypostases is not an ethereal metaphysical formation external to the self, but rather is part and parcel of the organization of the self. As he puts it: "All these levels of reality become levels of inner life, levels of the self. Here we come upon Plotinus' central intuition: the human self is not irrevocably separated from its eternal model, as the latter exists within divine Thought. This true self—this self in God—is within ourselves." (Hadot 1994: 27).

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individual soul takes over as its own; Plotinus speaks of the ensouled body illuminated by the soul [*τοῦ σώματος πεφωτισμένου τοῦ ἐμψύχου ὑπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς*] (Cf. 23, 1–3).

[19] It would be more accurate to speak of the rational faculty or the reasoning activity since Plotinus asserts that the soul is both immaterial, immortal, and undivided, contrary to Stoic materialism, to Peripatetic hylomorphism, and even to a "literal" and "spatialized" reading of the Platonic tripartition of the soul. For a methodic account of how Plotinus operates with Aristotelian conceptual tools (and sometimes even Stoic ones) within his Platonic approach, cf. Blumenthal 1971.

[20] As Rist notes: "Plotinus' doctrine that part of the soul remains above was recognized as novel and widely believed to be unplatonic. It is a 'new theory' according to Proclus, and Proclus, Damascius, and Hermias all recognize it as peculiar to Plotinus" (Rist 1967: 415)

In dealing with the theoretical-cognitive branch of the self-model question, one is inclined to ask Plotinus: "Where do I fit within the ontology of things?" (Long 2001: 19). In the treatise IV.8 [6][21], Plotinus argues that the individual soul has a dual disposition: on the one hand, an intellectual desire to return to itself, that is, to return to the principle from which it was generated; on the other, a power/capacity[22] directed to the world below (4, 1–4). Plotinus tries to explain this second disposition with a telling image: a soul is "just like light, which depends on the sun above but is unstinting in its generosity to what comes after it" (4, 5–6; trans. Fleet). To make things clear, the double-life structure has to be qualified: actually, the life of individual souls is always already in the intelligible realm, since the "life" that takes care of the body and concerns itself with the world is not the true life of the soul, but a sort of image of it or a projection of its upper life in the noetic habitat.

Albeit manifested differently, the same framework pervades all three hypostases: the "reversion" [*ἐπιστροφῇ*] toward the source is what is decisive, what rightly defines each stratum. The One is permanently turned toward itself, as it is the primary source, the cause of itself and of everything else; Intellect is turned toward the One, and Soul is turned toward Intellect. However, as the borderline case in the triadic structure of the hypostases, it appears that it is at the level of Soul that, along with discursive reasoning and temporal succession, the contingency of error and "evil" surfaces. Still, this affirmation should be slightly qualified: it is at the level of Soul considering that it is the last hypostasis in Plotinus' system. Evil and error do not relate to Soul as a unified and unifying hypostasis, but only to a specific part of it, viz. human soul — and, as we shall see, only to an aspect of its activity, that is, its inclination toward matter. As the opening line in the treatise of virtue

[21] As an example of the lack of engagement with this passage in the secondary literature, take Caluori's recent and extensive exploration of the theme of soul in Plotinus (Caluori 2015). Not once does he not pick up on the amphibian nature of individual souls that comes forth in said passage from the *Enneads*, even if this move would certainly illuminate his discussion on the contrast between discursive reasoning (*logismos*) and discursive thinking (*dianoia*), as well as in the opposition between soul's essential and eternal internal activity against its non-essential, exterior, and temporal-bounded activity, as developed on Chapter 4 of his book. Cf. Caluori 2015, 91-110.

[22] As Caluori notes: "Explaining activities by means of powers (or, more generally, dunameis) was widespread in ancient psychology and physics; it was part of the Aristotelian heritage" (Caluori 2015, 144).

states: "Since it is here that evils are, and 'they must necessarily haunt this region,' and the soul wants to escape from evils, we must escape from here. I.2 [19] 1,1-3; trans. Armstrong).

The propensity to "evil," then, is exclusively associated with the individual human soul, rather than with the Universal Soul in the intelligible, (the hypostasis Soul), or with the World-Soul (or Soul of the All), which infuses rational order and living movement to the entire cosmos and that, in doing so, governs it.[23] If individual souls stood with the hypostasis Soul in the intelligible, they would remain "untroubled" [*ἀπήμονας*]; if they stood with the World-Soul in heaven, they would share in its divine government (4, 6-8).[24] It is by setting apart from the Universal Soul, by turning away from Intellect, by wishing to belong to themselves in separation, as self-standing singularities, that souls become "corrupted" by matter—although only to a certain extent, as we shall see later. As a consequence, souls change, they are transformed from being a whole [*ἐκ τοῦ ὅλου*] to being a part [*εἰς τὸ μέρος*] (4, 11).

Plotinus carries on explaining how the "apostasy" of individual souls—their isolationism, their separatist tendencies—impairs them. He argues that they become exposed to the harms and dangers of the sensible world (represented as a cave: *ἐν σπηλαίῳ*[25]), grow to serve only external things (20–1) and are ultimately fettered in the body (23–4), echoing Plato's well-known *topos* from the *Phaedo*. Nevertheless, no matter how deeply the soul has sunk into the body and remains bewitched by the world of senses, some aspect of it always remains pure, free, unaffected: "in spite of everything," writes Plotinus, "it always keeps something in some way transcendent" (*ἔχει γάρ τι ἀεὶ οὐδὲν ἧττον ὑπερέχον τι*, 4.32; trans. Fleet). This is the doctrine of the undescended souls, indicated near the end of the previous section.[26]

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[23] Indeed, it is so, as in chapter 7 Plotinus argues that the Soul of the All is unconnected to the lower sphere and has "no experience of evils" (IV.8 [6] 7, 27-30), and that it does not make sense to speak of "evil" in the hypostasis Soul as such. Evil, that is, pertains exclusively to the human soul in its relation to the domain that lies beneath it, to the enmattered universe.

[24] In this passage, Plotinus uses the term "Universal Soul" in both cases, referring to the hypostasis Soul and to the World-Soul. Still, it seems more accurate to assume that he is distinguishing between them: one in the intelligible, and the other in heaven. The former has no affairs whatsoever in the material world; the latter is responsible for its "ensoulment" and government.

[25] An illustrious image from Plato's *Republic* (Book VII.514a.).

[26] With Caluori, following the lead of Bréhier and Festugière, I agree that the "descent" of souls is not to be taken literally, but rather as an image to express soul's care for bodies and their environments rather than the pure contemplative state within his "ontological scale." It is

Let us turn, then, to the specific passage wherein Plotinus mentions the amphibious character of individual souls, i.e., their twofold life-structure:

> So souls become, so to speak, amphibious [*οἷον ἀμφίβιοι*], forced to live one life "there" [*τόν τε ἐκεῖ βίον*] and one "here" [*τόν τε ἐνταῦθα*], turn and turn about. Those more able to consort with Intellect live more of their life "there" [*μὲν τὸν ἐκεῖ*], while those in the opposite state, either by nature or chance, live more of their life "here" [*τὸν δὲ ἐνθάδε*] (IV.8 [6] 4, 31–35; trans. Fleet with minor modifications)

Although this is the only passage in the *Enneads* in which this expression appears, the duality it implies in its characterization of souls as "amphibious"— endowed with two forms of life—traverses Plotinus' philosophy. For instance, Plotinus commonly makes use of such demonstrative adverbs as *ἐκεῖ* (There) and *ἐνταῦθα* (Here) as, respectively, placeholders for the intelligible cosmos and the sense-perception world. Additionally, prepositions possessing a spatial sense as *ἀνά* (up, upwards) and *κατά* (down, downwards), related compound verbs (*ἀναβαίνειν, καταβαίνειν; ἀνάγειν, κατάγειν*[27], etc.) and adverbial forms abound in his writings, formulae deployed in an attempt at grasping this ambivalence.

To affirm that the soul has a dual life is to claim that it lives alternately in the upper and in the lower spheres. Yet, how can that be possible? How can the soul be both separable from the world and nonetheless partake in it as its ruling agent, even? How can the soul's transcendence from the sensible world not negate its immanence to it? Furthermore, did souls detach themselves from Intellect in the first place?

In all likelihood, the individual soul can be both: at once a worldly prisoner and an otherworldly ruler. [28] In this treatise, Plotinus is seeking to equate the negative account of the soul's enchainment to the body and the

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a metaphorical descent *within* the soul to lower levels of its activity, rather than a spatial stretching out to different dimensions of the cosmos (e.g., from the superlunary to the sublunary realm). See Caluori 2015, 138-9.

[27] A variant of each of them has appeared in the chapter we are currently dealing with: *καταβαίνοντες*, line 9; *ἀναβαίνειν*, line 30. In the metaphor of the individual light under the higher sun, Plotinus uses a very interesting construction: the light is *κατὰ τὰ ἄνω ἡλίου*—it is "under" in the spatial sense, but also dependent on it, submitted to it.

[28] In Plotinus' attempt to both account for and expand on the dualism between intelligible and sensible strata that characterizes Platonic thought, the notion of "amphibian" soul evinces a refurbishment of the Platonic heritage that the philosopher reclaims. Plotinus is thus able to remain faithful to "the godlike Plato" (IV.8 [6] 1, 24) while advancing his own philosophical contribution through insightful commentaries on the Platonic corpus.

contempt for the perceptible world which one finds in some of the works of Plato (e.g. in the *Phaedo*) with a more positive yet no less Platonic view. The latter, which one encounters in the *Timaeus*, may be stated as follows: the universe as a whole cannot but be beautiful, since it was designed by the Demiurge in an act of supreme goodness and according to the paradigm of the divine forms.[29] For Plotinus, there is no contradiction between these images, as there is no contradiction between voluntary willingness [*ἑκούσιον*] and necessity [*ἀνάγκη*] (5, 3–4) or the willingness [*τὸ ἑκούσιον*] and the unwillingness [*τὸ ἀκούσιον*] of the descent (5, 8–9). One is bound to the other.

By necessity, then, humans souls descend into this world[30]; yet it is by will that evildoing takes place once they have arrived below. Under the spell of their own power, and in an attempt to orderly arrange [*κοσμήσει*] the reality that comes after them, souls will spontaneously project themselves into the lower world. They err and commit evils if they lean too much in the direction of corporeal needs and wants, i.e., if they mistakenly take the composite's actuality as their own and mistakenly assume the actions and passions of the empirical ego as their own.

In his endeavor to reconcile Plato's twofold perspective with his monist system, Plotinus asserts that because the One is all-powerful and magnanimous, everything that comes after it had to exist as a chain of necessity.[31] The One's self-expansion provokes a cascade effect that generates, in the form of a descending spiral, all divine hypostases and all lower degrees of reality. Plotinus places matter as the utter extremity, the ultimate conceivable limit [*ἀπλέτου*] (6, 15), of this sequence—it's *Nec plus ultra*.

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[29] For the Platonic antecedents of this motif in Plotinus, see Fleet 2012: 13-42.

[30] An assertion that seems perhaps to evoke *Phaedrus* 248c-e. Moreover, in line with Song' exegesis of this chapter of *Ennead* IV 8 [6], which I am sympathetic to: "Plotinus is apparently taking up Aristotle's teleology, encapsulated in the formula that nature does nothing in vain (*ouden maten*). From this teleological perspective, the 'why' of the descent of soul is to be found in its purpose or goal (telos). According to Plotinus' teleological account, the soul descends into the body in order to actualize her latent powers, i.e. to realize her own nature." (Song 2009: 36).

[31] A chain of necessity that is, at the same time, a chain of freedom. Since Plotinus deems the One to be the cause of everything, the One is not subject to necessity, as that would imply the latter to be stronger than the former. Moreover, as he has argued in this very treatise, the interweaving of freedom and necessity stands beyond human understanding. Later, in VI.8 [39], Plotinus gives a fuller account of this topic, that is, of "freedom" and self-determination in relation to the One.

Like a true Platonist, Plotinus argues that beauty in the world of sense-perception exists only through participation in the higher and nobler realm, through participation in its power and goodness. According to this metaphysical understanding, nature is, in essence, twofold (7, 1): at once intellectual and sensible. Hence, just as the soul is amphibious, so is nature twofold [*διττῆς*].[32] Accordingly, soul holds "a middle rank among real beings" (7, 6; trans. Fleet), intermediate between the higher and the lower domains. It is divine because of its origin, but it shares borders [*ὅμορος*] with the physical, perceptible world (7, 8). It is the soul's vocation to abide in the noetic realm, which is its true dwelling-place, and to govern [*διακοσμοῖ*] the cosmos from above, in symbiosis with the World-Soul.[33]

Indeed, a permeable (and thus dangerous) border separates soul and world. The soul's activity [*ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια*] (7. 23) takes place precisely at this boundary: after and below it lies the material world; before and above it, the contemplation of true beings [*ἡ θέα τῶν ὄντων*] (7, 24–5), i.e., Intellect. Plotinus assigns to human souls an in-between position and a sort of Janus-faced constitution. From this perspective, there is always the risk that a soul might sink into the realm of sense-perception, disengaging from the state of unification—not remaining whole with the whole [*ὅλη μεθ' ὅλης*] (7, 11)—by engaging in corporeal affairs, dazzled by the golden chains of the sensible.[34] In this scenario, the experience of evil can even amount to some good, as it might stir knowledge of the Good *a contrario* in those whose intellectual capacities are feeble (7, 17-18).

In the first chapter of the treatise, Plotinus provides a first-person narrative of his "mystical" journey out of the body [*ἐκ τοῦ σώματος*] and into the self [*εἰς ἐμαυτὸν*] (1, 1–2), which is to say the "true self," the highest and undescended

[32] O'Meara's commentary might be instructive at this point: "This dual status is common in Plotinus' universe: soul is both part of (in) the world and separate from it; intellect is both part of (in) soul and above it; and the nature of intellect is such that it derives from something which both composes it and is prior to it, the One. This is no universe where immanence excludes transcendence. Plotinus would not accept a view that would force us to choose between a god that is part of the world and a god that is separate from it: god is both" (O'Meara 1993, 46).

[33] As Plotinus had previously indicated (cf. IV.8 [6] 4, 6-10).

[34] In the last section of his treatise on evil, Plotinus makes a suggestive claim: because of the power of the good, evil does not appear as completely evil; it may yet retain some element of beauty, as would be the case with prisoners bound in chains of gold [*οἷα δεσμῶταί τινες χρυσῷ*]. Even in such a dire situation, the beauty of the chains could remind those in captivity that a higher beauty exists, sustaining it (cf. I.8 [51]) 15, 24–29).

soul.[35] He claims to have experienced a departure from the sensible into the intellectual sphere, as well as an identification with the divine (1, 5–6), which relates to the Platonic motif of achieving likeness to God.[36]

In the last chapter of the treatise, Plotinus offers his full account of the undescended soul:

> Furthermore—if I may venture to state my convictions more clearly against the opinions of others, as I must—not even our own soul sinks in its entirety, but there is always some part of it in the intelligible world. But if the part in the sensible world wins mastery, or rather is itself mastered and thrown into turmoil, it hinders us from having perception of whatever the higher part of the soul (*τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἄνω*) is contemplating. (IV.8 [6] 8, 1–7 trans. Fleet)

The amphibious nature of souls that Plotinus discusses is decidedly dynamic, and one would do well to regard it in this light. While the human soul has its domicile in Intellect, its activities are set in a porous frontier with the sensible world, to which it gives a rational structure, but due to which it may become forgetful of its divine origins. As Plotinus puts it, displaying that vertical tension we have sought to emphasize, "every soul has in it something of what is below on the side of the body, and something of what is above on the side of intellect." (8, 12–3; trans. Fleet). Thus, souls can become a governor from above with the World-Soul, or become imprisoned by the alien desires, pleasures, and necessities of the soul-body compound. As Plotinus writes elsewhere (V.3 [49] 3, 45–6), sense-perception is soul's messenger [*ἄγγελος*] and Intellect is it's king [*βασιλεὺς*]; if one lives under Intellect, then one turns into a king (4, 1–2). However, should one somehow invert this relationship and enthrone the sensible instead of the intelligible, one cannot but become a prisoner.

In other treatises, Plotinus delves into mythical imagery[37] to gather examples to support his view, with the purpose of more strongly conveying his notion of the amphibious soul. He refers to the mythical Narcissus, comparing him to those given to the impetus of chasing and seizing the reality of the senses, which carries nothing but images [*εἰκόνες*], traces [*ἴχνη*]

[35] The doctrine of the "undescended soul" will be severely criticized and abandoned in the work of later Neoplatonists, from Iamblichus onwards, as Carlos Steel has demonstrated in his seminal work (cf. Steel 1978). See also Dillon 2005.

[36] For an exploration of this theme in Plato's philosophy along with its ramifications, see Sedley 1999.

[37] For an instigating and extensive account of the role of myth in Plotinus' thinking, see Oliveira 2013.

and shadows [*σκιαὶ*] (I.6 [1] 8, 8–9). If one recalls that Plotinus equates matter to a mirror, and physical objects to mere "reflections" of true noetic beings, this philosophical appropriation of the tale of Narcissus acquires additional nuances, as in a carefully developed interpretation of the myth by Hadot (1976). Moreover, Plotinus insists, whoever lives in such a way will sink into the depths of Hades and become blind (8, 16).

From the opposing point of view, he introduces Odysseus, who has turned down the spell of the sensuous (Circe and Calypso) in his struggle to return to his homeland.[38] His argument suggests that Intellect is the Ithaca to which one should aspire to return; it is unreachable by land or sea, however, being a country one can only come to by means of a readjustment of perspective.[39] "Shut your eyes," writes Plotinus, "and change to and wake [*ἀλλάξασθαι καὶ ἀνεγεῖραι*] another way of seeing [*ὄψιν ἄλλην*], which everyone has but few use" (8, 26–8; trans. Armstrong). In other words, directedness toward the sensible blinds us; if one does not focus upon it, but rather shuts off whatever emerges via sense perception, another kind of sight—an inward and intellectual gaze[40]—is said to arise. Disentanglement from the senses would thus imply an awakening to another form of life—one developed through the practice of dialectics, purification, virtue, and contemplation.[41]

Similarly, Plotinus deploys the mythological figure of Heracles to emphasize the soul's dual life. In this passage, he speaks of the form of the soul (I.1 [53] 12, 8) and distinguishes between two possibilities: a soul that is single [*ἁπλοῦν*] and sinless [*ἀναμάρτητος*] and a soul that is compounded [*σύνθετος*] and sins [*ἁμαρτάνει*], one which is as multifaceted as the sea-god Glaucus. Plotinus alludes to the episode of Odysseus' descent into Hades and his encounter with Heracles (*Hom.* Od. XI.600–4); in the celebrated passage, Homer remarks that it is only Heracles's phantom or ghost [*εἴδωλον*] that is in Hades, as the actual Heracles must undoubtedly be feasting among the immortal gods.

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[38] Hadot also draws the contrast between a "Narcissistic" and "Odyssean" soul in his study of the myth (1976), following an original cue from R. Harder's *Plotinus Schriften*.

[39] "Every reader of the *Enneads* knows that the dominant theme of them is the soul's return to its fatherland." (Lloyd 1987: 182.

[40] As an empirical individual bears an intelligible universe [*κόσμος νοητός*] within, "turning inwardly" and "ascending upwardly" are closely related notions, as captured by the following scheme: Introspection–Reversion toward the source–Ascension.

[41] One can trace back to Plato, and even to Heraclitus, this range of metaphors opposing an awakened to a sleeping state; wake up, and lie down to sleep: (cf. DK 22 B1, B74, B89).

The Homeric account, as revisited by Plotinus, captures precisely that amphibious nature of souls that we have set to examine. The soul descends [*καταβαίνειν*] or is inclined [*νεύειν*], toward the world; it illuminates the world with life and *lógos*; what is illuminated by it [*τὸ ἐλλαμφθὲν*], however, is nothing but a reflection [*τὸ εἴδωλον*] (28–30). The ghost of Heracles in Hades[42] stands for the downward inflection of souls, bringing about the embodied and empirical human beings; Heracles, as a god among gods in Olympus, represents the undescended soul, a denizen in the noetic heaven. Plotinus complements the picture by saying that if Heracles had a theoretical character [*θεωρητικὸς*] and not a practical one [*πρακτικός*] (38), his "reflection" in the underworld would not even exist, as he would live exclusively in the Olympian "*über*-world". Put differently, Heracles would have accomplished the simplification of his soul with the full-fledged identification of his self with the undescended soul in the noetic ambiance.

Plotinus' reading of the Orphic myth of Dionysus-Zagreus is yet another narrative that might shed light on the amphibious nature of souls.[43] Given the present limitations of space, however, I instead move on to an exploration of the implications of the soul's twofold nature for Plotinus' ethical teachings, with a particular emphasis on his account of virtue and the attainment of "happiness"[44] (*εὐδαιμονία*).

III. Ethics for an amphibian being

Now the paper addresses the practical-ethical side of the self-model question, as formulated by Long: "What shape or goal should I give to my life?" (Long 2001: 19). To put it briefly, and to paraphrase Aristotle, one could say that, for Plotinus, the self is said in many ways. It is intimately related to—although not interchangeable with—the status given to individual soul

[42] In both cases, Hades appears to be equated with the world of sense-perception, in that it is filled with nothing but the pale shadows of formerly full-fledged beings. In a way, from the perspective of the intelligible otherworld, the world we inhabit is already an underworld of sorts.

[43] In this regard, I defer to Christian Wildberg's cogent account of the myth (cf. Wildberg 2011).

[44] In this paper, I adopt Long's translation of *εὐδαιμονία* as happiness, considering that "there is copious evidence that what the ancient philosophers mean by *eudaimonia* is happiness, and not a condition that can be captured by a less demanding English expression." (Long 2001: 33). However, sometimes I simply leave it transliterated, whenever it will be more suiting to the context.

within the metaphysical framework of his philosophy.[45] Additionally, his views on selfhood are often introduced through his remarks on "what we are," on "who is this we that inquire and ascend" and on "what is ours." In a certain sense, the Plotinian "we" is convertible with the "self".[46]

In the first treatise of the *Enneads* (among the last to be written, chronologically), Plotinus claims that "we are many" (I.1 [53] 9, 7).[47] Furthermore, he asserts that, as had been the case with "nature" in the aforementioned treatise, the "we" is employed in two senses [*διττόν*], either referring to the body-soul composite, or to that element in our lives which already transcends it [*τὸ ὑπὲρ τοῦτο ἤδη*], i.e., the true man or undescended soul (10, 6–8).[48] The transcendent is the separate [*χωριζομένη*] and separable soul [*χωριστῇ*] (10), the pure, simple and sinless soul, as previously discussed. For Plotinus, what constitutes the "we"[49] in the truest sense is the intellectual-noetic activity of the pure soul, whose ascendancy [*ἡγεμονίαν*] over the living organism is a

[45] As a matter of clarification, I resume the five functions that the Soul perform in relation to human beings, as put forward by Cooper: i) the World-Soul constitutes the particular material stuffs making up a human body, operating by natural laws of material interaction; ii) the "trace" of the World-Soul that carries out the "automatic" or "plant-like" functions of nutrition, growth, respiration, heat maintenance etc., iii) at the third level, there is perceptions, nonrational desires and emotions; iv) at the fourth, there is the power of reasoned thought (empirical reasoning) and decision making about events in the physical world; v) at the fifth, there is the higher and pure soul. (Cooper 2012: 326ff).

[46] For an in-depth study of selfhood in Plotinus' philosophy, cf. Remes, 2007.

[47] In a similar fashion, Plotinus maintains elsewhere that the soul is manifold [*πολλὰ ἡ ψυχὴ*]. In the passage, one can glean the affinity between the double life of the soul and the duality of the "self": "For the soul is many things, and all things, both the things above and the things below down to the limits of all, and we are each one of us an intelligible universe [*κόσμος νοητός*], making contact with this lower world by the powers of soul below, but with the intelligible world by its powers above and the powers of the universe; and we remain with all the rest of our intelligible part above, but by its ultimate fringe [*ἐσχάτῳ*] we are tied to the world below, giving a kind of outflow [*οἷον ἀπόρροιαν*] from it to what is below, or rather an activity, by which that intelligible part is not itself lessened." (III.4 [15] 3, 22–28; trans. Armstrong)

[48] In II.3 [52] he also talks about the double [*διττός*] nature of man; there, however, he asserts that one is the compound being [*μὲν τὸ συναμφότερόν*], and the other is he himself [*ὁ δὲ αὐτός*] (II.3 [52] 9, 32–33).

[49] Reaffirming E. R. Dodds' definition of the soul, Blumenthal claims that one ought to regard the "we" as a "focus of conscious activity that can shift as such activity shifts without causing violent disruptions of the world around us" (Blumenthal 1971, 110). In what is from my viewpoint a more precise and interesting manner, O' Daly writes that "the self is not a static datum, even if it exists potentially in its entirety: it is essentially a faculty of conscious self-determination, a mid-point which can be directed toward the higher or the lower" (O'Daly 1973: 49).

consequence of its unaffected [*ἀπαθῶς*] contemplation of the ideal forms.[50] What is "ours", on the other hand, pertains to a lower dimension: our bodily capacities and functions, entangled with sense-perception and assailed by affections [cf. 7, 10–24].[51] As Plotinus expresses in VI 9 (9) 9, 16-19: "For the present state, without God, is a trace or shadow [*ἴχνος*] of life, imitating that true life. For living there is an activity of Intellect, and that activity generates gods in peaceful contact with the One" (trans. Clark).

In light of such preliminary remarks, one can perceive with greater clarity the direction toward which his ethical teachings point. The discussion in Plotinus' treatise on virtue (1.2 [19]) is framed by the Platonic ideal of becoming godlike. Plotinus explains that there are two heterogeneous types of virtue that suggest different kinds of likeness [*ἡ ὁμοίωσις διττή*]. The first degree belongs to the class of civic or political virtues. They bear upon the cardinal virtues (justice, temperance, courage, prudence) of Plato's *Republic* (Book IV) and are conducive to the life of the good man (*τοῦ σπουδαίου βίος*). They are virtues in a mundane sense, concerned with human perfection in the ordinary world. As an imitation of the archetypal form of virtue in the intelligible sphere, they carry "a trace [*ἴχνος*] in them of the best There [*τοῦ ἐκεῖ ἀρίστου*]" (1.2 [19]) 2, 21; trans. Armstrong). Nonetheless, while recognizing the relative importance of the civic or political virtues, for Plotinus they come short when compared to the purifying or cathartic virtues. On the whole, it appears that the possession of the lower virtues is a necessary albeit insufficient condition for the attainment of the higher form of virtues[52] (cf. 7,11ff).

Thus, the higher degree is that of the purifying or cathartic virtues, akin to those found in Plato's *Phaedo* (69b–c). These virtues stand for the cardinal virtues in a primal and superior fashion. The practice of these virtues

[50] From a different angle, Blumenthal concludes his article on the two modes of apprehension that are associated with Soul and Intellect with the remark that Plotinus remained irresolute as to where one ought to find the highest part of the individual soul, whether within the rational-discursive domain (dianoia) or within the perpetual intellection of pure forms (noesis); cf. Blumenthal 1996.

[51] With some reservations, this distinction between a "lower self" endowed with regular awareness in an everyday, sense-perception mode of being and a "higher self" affiliated with the unceasing intelligible cognition of transcendent forms has been paired up with the empirical-transcendental distinction in Kant, most recently by Emilsson (2017, 293).

[52] As Smith (1999) argued, and I am in full agreement on this, "the exercise of the civic virtues does have a continuing role to play in the life of the good man, even though that role is subordinate to the higher life he now leads." (Smith 1999: 232). For a more detailed account of Plotinus' ethics in the context of Antiquity, see Dillon 1996.

aims at liberation from corporeal bounds (affections, emotions, needs), at the expurgation of all the "evil" bound with the composite body-soul entity, and, consequently, at upward elevation and inward reversal. Plotinus affirms that virtues have no place in Intellect, for it is already perfect, or in the One, which is above perfection, but concerns the soul as a derivation of the transcendent principles (cf. 3, 32–4). Whereas the civil virtues have the life of the good man as their end, it is the life of the gods that is the horizon for cathartic virtues. In this sense, O'Daly rightly assumes that Plotinus offers a conception of the self in which ethical and ontological elements interact, so that "what Plotinus is, in fact, saying is that we are what we have made ourselves to be, by our dominant pursuits, by the type of life—determined in turn by the phase of the soul—according to which we have chosen to live" (O'Daly 1973: 22).

Furthermore, each form of virtue implies a different grade of likeness [*ὁμοίωσις*]: "Likeness to good men is the likeness of two pictures [*εἰκὼν*] of the same subject to each other; but likeness to the gods is likeness to the model [*παράδειγμα*], a being of a different kind to ourselves" (7, 29–32; trans. Armstrong). Even if it may be possible for the good man to achieve happiness through the exercise of the lower virtues, this would be the happiness of a subsidiary sort in contrast with the happiness of the wise men who have become godlike through the exercise of the higher virtues.

Thus, in his treatise on evils, Plotinus holds vice and virtue to be intermediary states. Vice is paired with ignorance regarding the soul, a secondary manifestation of evil which will ultimately drag one toward the absolute evil of matter (cf. I.8 [51] 13). Virtue, on the other hand, is not the absolute good, but a secondary good which enables us to achieve mastery over matter and ascend toward the transcendent forms which are but an emanation of the absolute Good (6, 21). In a way, accretions of matter obstruct one's self-comprehension *qua* intellectual soul, leading to one's mistaken self-identification as an embodied, empirical entity living simply in an earthly ecosystem.

In this sense, the cathartic virtues could be understood as soul-cleansing instruments, tools apt to eliminate whatever is inessential to a soul and clear up its inner and intellectual sight. The procedure for the purification of the soul is, thus, a process of simplification (*ἅπλωσις*, cf. VI 9 (9) 11, 24), one that has in the unfathomable simplicity of the One its epitome.[53] The striving

[53] Rist speaks of "integration" where I speak of "simplification." I think that the latter sounds more adequate to grasp the endeavor of emulating the One in its pure simplicity, and it has

of becoming like God involves the effort of simplifying the soul, of unifying its dual-life arrangement in favor of the intellectual soul, thus rendering it as similar as possible to the One. This notion is conveyed, for instance, in the self-sculpting practice that Plotinus develops in his treatise "On Beauty" (1.6 [1])[54]: the subtraction of the pseudo-being which is the body (the middle ground between the non-being of matter and the true being of form) so that the inner light of the intellectual soul may shine through. It is also present in the metaphor of the soul that, like purified gold, returns to unmixed, resplendent, gilded beauty once it is purged from the earthiness of matter (5, 50–58).

As for the amphibious character of souls, Plotinus offers us a telling image in the treatise on virtue. Concerning its purification, the compound organism is depicted as a man who resides in the neighborhood of a sage (i.e., the higher soul). This proximity will stimulate his improvement: because of the *αἰδώς* with which he beholds the sage, the man will endeavor to become like him, or at the very least will not commit any act of *τόλμα* of which the sage would disapprove (cf. 1.2 [19] 5, 22–32).

Thus, the goal of the twofold self in Plotinus is to draw to the background the lower life of the soul (the composite's existence) and to bring to the fore its noetic higher life (the pure and perfect life of the intellectual soul). This is the path to attaining likeness to God, which Plotinus takes up from Plato and reworks in his own way. Consequently, if one possesses an involuntary [*ἀπροαίρετον*] and irrational element, one will remain a sort of double spirit

at least a direct lexical antecedent in Plotinus' *ἅπλωσι* from VI 9 (9) 11, 24. As a side note, I find that Rist's phraseology about the "second self" as the higher soul to which the empirical ego should identify with is profoundly misleading (cf. Rist 1967). In keeping with Plotinus, it makes more sense to think about the empirical ego *as* the second self, and the higher soul as the first and foremost self.

[54] "Go back into yourself and look; and if you do not yet see yourself beautiful, then, just as someone making a statue which has to be beautiful cuts away here and polishes there and makes one part smooth and clears another till he has given his statue a beautiful face, so you too must cut away excess and straighten the crooked and clear the dark and make it bright, and never stop 'working on your statue' till the divine glory of virtue shines out on you, till you see 'self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat.' If you have become this, and see it, and are at home with yourself in purity, with nothing hindering you from becoming in this way one, with no inward mixture of anything else, but wholly yourself, nothing but true light, not measured by dimensions, or bounded by shape into littleness, or expanded to size by unboundedness, but everywhere unmeasured, because greater than all measure and superior to all quantity; when you see that you have become this, then you have become sight; you can trust yourself then; you have already ascended and need no one to show you; concentrate your gaze and see. This alone is the eye that sees the great beauty." (1.6 [1] 9, 8–25)

[*δαίμων διπλοῦς*], which is to say one "who has with him someone else who possesses a different kind of virtue;" however, "if there is nothing, he will be simply god, and one of those gods who follow the First" (1.2 [19] 6, 5–8; trans. Armstrong).

To be sure, contemplation and action are certainly compatible in Plotinus' philosophy, and action may be even perfected by contemplation, as compellingly argued by Smith (1999; 2005). The problem would lie in the identification of the soul with the empirical self and its daily concerns, thus becoming forgetful of the higher self and its transcendent aspirations. In my view, then, even if the virtuous life is not incompatible with political involvement following the model of the providential cosmic rationality, as Song (2009) has maintained, this would not be the ideal type of Plotinian sage, to the extent that concern for this world may hinder the simplification of the soul and the contemplation of the true reality.[55] At the very least, this would present an uneasy and potentially problematic arrangement.

A life lived in accordance with Intellect, animated by the desire for the Good, leads to *eu-daimonia*: to heed to that *daemon* who follows the First, to echo the metaphor employed above. Happiness is unrelated to the common life of the body-soul composite but is exclusive to the pure soul in its intellectual activities, transcending even discursive reasoning.[56] Indeed, for Plotinus happiness is not a condition but an activity, that is, the activity of leading a good life devoted to contemplation, in harmony with the grand scheme of things that is generated through the One. In outline, this would

[55] Recalling the hierarchy of lives in the *Phaedrus*, I would say that Song's model of the Plotinian sage as a king, legislator or governors would offer the second-best soul, falling behind, therefore, of the lover of wisdom and beauty (cf. 248d2-e3).

[56] As Cooper nicely articulates the guidelines of Plotinian ethics: "*Our* life, Plotinus thinks, lies exclusively in activities of pure intellectual thinking that we, all of us, engage in all the time, most of us without even realizing it; our task is to become as self-conscious as possible of this activity, and to constantly focus our minds upon it (something we can, in principle, do even while, qua embodied animals, living an embodied life). If we do this, we lift ourselves altogether out of the physical world, and up to a world of pure intellectual thinking, in which our true life has, all along, been taking place. But now, if we reach the final goal of self-purification, our life consists in a full and active understanding of the intelligible objects of that intellectual thought. We self-consciously and actively live that life of the intellect. That, for Plotinus, is the human good and human happiness (Cooper 2012: 307, emphasis in the original). This predominant tendency in Plotinus' philosophy, however, does not exclude completely the care for the others and concern for the world, as Song has recently argued (cf. Song 2009). However, there is an uneasy tension in Plotinus' thought between the soul's desire to return to the noetic habitat and the willingness to engage with this-worldly matters, as I noted above.

be Plotinus' answer to the "self-model question." Moreover, happiness is independent of chance, physical health or trouble, and above all from feelings of pain or pleasure. It postulates a self-identification with the highest soul (cf. I.4 [46], 16); it involves an awakening, a process of "desalination", of "dis-identification" with the alien aggregates that have a share in the indefiniteness, measureless, and needfulness of matter. For this reason, it requires a change of place or domain (cf. 16, 15).

As the realm of *eudaimonia* is not of this world, it is not subject to the flux of time. In the short treatise labeled "On Whether Well-Being Increases with Time", Plotinus notes that "if well-being [*τὸ εὐδαιμονεῖν*] is a matter of good life, obviously the life concerned must be that of real being; for this is the best. So, it must not be counted by time but by eternity; and this is neither more nor less nor of any extension, but is a 'this here,' [*τὸ τοῦτο*] unextended and timeless" (I.5 [36] 7, 23–25; trans. Armstrong). Extension of time is thus rendered meaningless for whoever attains such an insight into the noetic cosmos and is able to abide by it; one would, under such circumstances, become a god, and live the life of eternity (7, 29). The cause of happiness is an inner state or disposition [*ἡ ἕξις*], then—an intellectual activity of the soul turned to the noetic cosmos in its core (10, 19–24). Given this, I take that one should add to John Dillon's notorious characterization of Plotinus' ethical system as "self-centered," and "otherworldly" (Dillon 1996: 331-2) the qualification of "eudaimonistic," as *eudaimonia* constituted the core motivation of Plotinus' ethics, as was the general thrust of philosophical schools in Antiquity.

To render happiness in an image borrowed from that mythical tradition Plotinus is so fond of exploring in a philosophical key, the sort of individual to which his ethics seem conducive would be someone akin to a placid Odysseus, staunchly unaffected by the songs of the Sirens as he traverses the perilous sea. He would be immune to the allure of their feigned harmony, for he distinctly hears voices from above urging his return to Ithaca—to that Intellect that lies within.[57] Odysseus' placidness is an expression of the impassibility of his pure and true soul, a soul to which he is perpetually turned as though tied to the mast, enjoying unending happiness.

[57] I am thinking here of the last lines from "On The Three Primary Hypostases," and the discussion through which this paper began. "Just as, if someone waiting for a voice that he wants to hear, turning away from other voices, should arouse his ear toward the best of things heard, when it comes; so too, here, dismissing sensible sounds except as far as necessary, we must keep the soul's power of apprehension | pure and ready to hear the voices from above. (V.1 [9] 12, 15–21; trans. Perl).

In the first section, I have succinctly outlined the blueprint of Plotinus' metaphysics. I aimed to demonstrate that his order of hypostases corresponds to a scale of values. The One/Good lies at the summit and matter/evil lies at the bottom of his multi-layered edifice.[58]Morality is, as it were, built into his metaphysical system.

Soul is set on the exact midpoint of Plotinus' metaphysical picture. On the one side, Soul is the third and last of the divine hypostases; above it, there is Intellect and the One. On the other side, there is the physical universe and, finally, matter. The World-Soul instills life, movement, and order—within a rational framework—to physical nature, governing it from on high while contemplating the unchanging forms of the noetic realm.[59] Additionally, the World-Soul is our elder sister soul (cf. IV.3 [27] 14) and it ruled the cosmos before the rise of individual souls. Human souls compose the hybrid being that is one's mundane empirical self, with an instance of it that never descends to the world of sense-perception. The higher soul is our true self, that is, the pure activity of thinking that abide in the noetic habitat, while the living human creature is nothing more but a "trace" or an "illumination" of the undescended soul or a "soul-image" in Cooper's words (Cooper 2012: 332).

Individual souls, then, are said to have an "amphibious" or double-life structure: one directed above to its source, and one directed below to the miscellany of matter in the everyday atmosphere. The "self," or the Plotinian "we," may be captivated by the flare of the sensible and fall for the golden brilliancy of its chains within the sensible sphere. However, through constant practice of the cathartic virtues, it can also break free from its corporeal fetters and turn to the noetic cosmos it carries within itself. By turning inwardly, the self ascends upwardly, thus elevating itself toward Intellect, its true dwelling-place, and arguably even experiencing a momentary unification with the One/Good. In light of this, one could construe Plotinus' ethical tenets as a protreptic wake-up call aimed at changing the nature and focus of "sight" by delineating the direction towards the uppermost self-realization of the soul or, differently put, the realization of the self *qua* divine soul. Within Intellect, and even beyond it, in unification with the One, surpassing the experience of

[58] Emilsson compares it to an Aztec pyramid (cf. Emilsson 2017: 67).

[59] For a comparison between Plotinus' treatment of the World-Soul and the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *De Mundo*, which adopts the image of the Persian Great King to compare it to the divine (royal) providence, see Caluori 2015, 114-20.

time and the capacity for discursive reasoning, the question remains: could one even speak of a "self" in such a state of *unio mystica*, of jubilant reunion of the soul with the One[60]? Plotinus' first-person reports of such instances[61] point to a negative response.

The desire to comprehend reality and the striving to live accordingly are the warp and weft of the fabric of Ancient philosophy, as the "self-model question" articulated by Long insinuates. On the one hand, Plotinus puts forward, throughout the *Enneads*, a distinctive theory, of how, borrowing Wilfrid Sellars' definition, "things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term" (Sellars 1991: 1) and, on the other hand, of how one should lead one's life. The metaphysical vista and the ethical instructions intertwine and reinforce each other; metaphysical thought and existential commitment are both necessary for the life of the sage.[62]

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[60] For an exploration of this theme from the perspective of Plotinus' erotic and even sexual imagery, see Mazur 2009.

[61] In his *Vita Plotini*, Porphyry recounts that Plotinus has achieved this stage on four different occasions (ch. 23, 14–7). For a more extensive discussion of the problem of mystical unification and the status of the "self" in it, see "Losing the limits of the self" (Chapter 6 of Remes 2007), as well as Rist 1989.

[62] As Song writes, and in this I am in full agreement with her, Plotinus "suggests that the knowledge of how we are to live has its roots in theoretical understanding of the intelligible principles, ultimately of the Good itself which is the final object of dialectic. In this concept of ethics, a theoretical training is crucial for practical wisdom. However, Plotinus' ethics is no purely theoretical discipline. It includes also the virtuous dispositions and the exercises (*askeseis*) which produce them. In other words, ethical philosophy is constituted not only of a theoretical training, but also of a practical training and a practical competence. From this, we can conclude that the sage as the fully virtuous person does not neglect practical training." (Song 2009: 44).

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