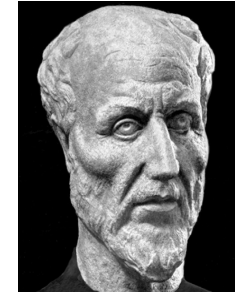


# 04. Plotinus (~204-270 A.D.) and Neoplatonism

1. Metaphysics
2. Procession & Reversion
3. Dynamics
4. Knowledge of the One

- Late antiquity: Hellenistic Egypt and Rome (post-Alexander, post-*Pax Romana*).
- *Enneads* (published by Porphyry in 301 A.D.)
  - 54 treatises organized into six sets of nine ("ennead") each.



- Primary founder of *Neoplatonism*:

- *Why return to Plato?*

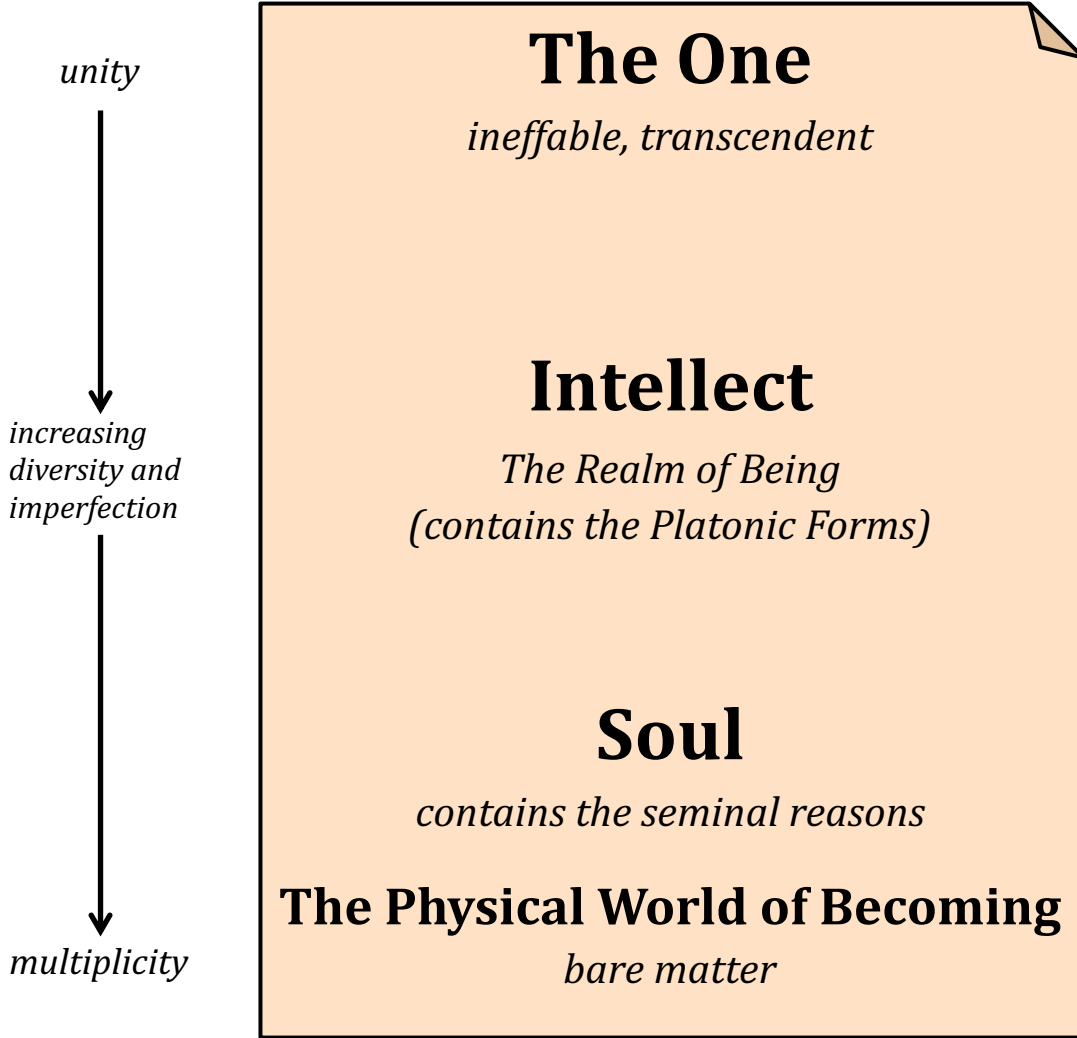
*A better fit with Christian doctrine  
(but note later influence of Aristotle)*

- *Motivation*: How is the World of Forms related to the World of sensible objects?

*How is the Problem of the One and the Many solved within Plato's metaphysics?*

# 1. Plotinus' Metaphysics

*The three hypostases (levels):*



## The One

- *The source of all things: Pure unity.*
- *Ineffable (knowable only through what it is not).*
- *Plato's the Good.*

## Intellect

- *The World of Forms (Forms = thoughts in Intellect).*
- *A "One-in-Many".*
- *Aristotle's Prime Mover (self-thought thought).*

## Soul

- *Seminal reasons (logoi spermatikoi) = copies of Forms.*
- *A "One-and-Many".*
- *Immanent in physical world and transcendent to it.*

## Physical world

- *Generated by Soul imparting Forms onto matter via seminal reasons.*
- *Bare matter: source of evil.*

## On the One and Intellect

- Why posit the One? Why not stop with Intellect?

### Intellect is not a true unity

- It can be spoken of.
- It contains multiplicity.
- It contains the subject/object distinction (thinker/thoughts).

- Claim: A first principle must be a *radical unity*.
  - Why? *If not, there will always be something prior to it.*
- In contrast: Aristotle stops with Intellect (his Prime Mover).
  - But recall: *Aristotle denies there is a World of Forms "external" to the physical world.*
  - *For Aristotle order does not require an "external" explanation: the source of the order of the cosmos is internal to its constituents.*

## On Soul

- Three distinctions:
  - *Soul* (the third hypostasis).
  - *World soul* (soul of the physical world/cosmos in the sense of *Timaeus*).
  - *Individual souls*.
- Individual souls have two parts:
  - (a) "*higher part*" - remains in the realm of Intellect
  - (b) "*lower part*" - descends to inhabit a corporeal body in the physical world.
- Thus: Humans are directly connected to the One *via* the Intellect.
  - *Humans are amphibians: the link between the realms.*

### Comparison with Stoics

- Stoicism = Hellenistic school of philosophy.
- Stoic cosmos = Soul (*i.e.*, just one "level").
- Mediator = *pneumena* (air)
- Individual souls are fragments of World soul.
- Plotinus: Both individual souls and the World soul are on equal footing as aspects of Soul.

# Comparison with Plato and Aristotle

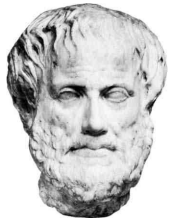
## Plato:

- Individual souls are immaterial and immortal (but *not* Forms).
- "Fall" into trap of body (the body is an instrument and a prison for the soul).



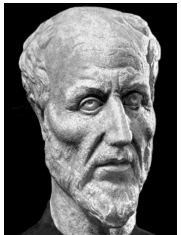
## Aristotle:

- individual soul = form
- body = matter
- human = indiv. soul (form) + body (matter)
- No "afterlife": soul (form) is destructible (except for intellect).



## Plotinus:


- human = individual soul + body
- body = form + matter (after Aristotle)
- So: human = indiv. soul<sub>1</sub> + (indiv. soul<sub>2</sub> + matter)



*"higher part": immaterial and immortal and linked with Intellect.*

*"lower part": form of body and in physical world.*

## 2. Doctrine of Procession and Reversion

- How are the three hypostases linked? 
  - How are the Many derived from the One?
  - How do objects "participate" in Forms?
- Two aspects of all things:
  - (i) *Inner act* = substance or essence of the thing.
  - (ii) *Outer act* = image or likeness of inner act; a *necessary* expression of inner act.

- *Procession* = Process in which outer act emmanates from inner act.

Ex: Heat as the essence of fire (its inner act) vs. heat that flows out (emmanates or procedes) from fire (its outer act).

- *Reversion* = Process in which outer act contemplates (reverts to) inner act and thereby establishes itself as an actual, independent but inferior, existant.

*Possible interpretation*: Inner act is a *final cause* for outer act. Thus reversion is more pronounced the higher up in the chain of being.

- Key characteristic: Procession and reversion are *atemporal*.

## How this is supposed to explain the relations between the hypostases

- Each hypostasis is the complete cause of the next lower one.
- The lower emanates (proceeds) from the higher as its outer act.
  - *Procession accounts for the material existence of the lower (its matter).*
  - *Reversion accounts for its form (its true being): The matter of the lower is informed through the act of contemplating (reverting to) the higher.*

## Procession as necessary, undeliberate, and undiminishing

- Procession must be undeliberate and undiminishing in order for it to apply to the One (and thus account for the generation of Intellect).
- But: Why must the One emanate necessarily?

Argument from Analogy: All things generate necessarily:

- *Fire generates heat.*
- *Snow generates cold.*
- *Animals generate offspring.*

- Is necessary emanation undiminishing?
  - *Does this impose a constraint on the omnipotence of the One?*

### 3. Dynamics of Plotinus' Metaphysics

#### 1. How Intellect is generated from the One.

- Potential Intellect (outer act of the One) proceeds necessarily from, and without diminish to, the One.
- Potential Intellect contemplates the One and brings itself and the Forms into being.
- Forms are the representations in Intellect of the One.

#### 2. How Soul is generated from Intellect.

- Potential Soul (outer act of Intellect) proceeds necessarily from, and without diminish to, Intellect.
- Potential Soul contemplates Intellect and brings itself and the seminal reasons into being.
- Seminal reasons are the representations in Soul of the Forms.

#### 3. How the physical world is generated from Soul.

- The physical world, as the outer act of Soul, proceeds necessarily from, and without diminish to, Soul.
- The physical world contemplates Soul and brings itself and physical objects into being.
- Physical objects are imperfect copies in the physical world, mediated by the seminal reasons, of the Forms.



Is the Plotinian cosmos created (Plato) or eternal (Aristotle)?

(i) Created: Plotinus stresses that his doctrine is just an articulation of Plato.

(ii) Eternal:

- Procession and reversion are atemporal processes.
- Soul does not act on matter like Demiurge; rather, Soul acts as a final cause to produce physical objects.

## 4. Knowledge of the One

- Individual souls have become separated from the One:
  - *Reverence for Earthly things and lack of respect for themselves are the causes.*
  - *They can regain their connection with the Intellect and the One, and hence their true natures, by being reminded of their parentage.*
  - *To do so, they must turn inward.*
- Turning inward:
  - *An overpowering experience: non-sensory, non-temporal, non-spatial, turning point of life, etc.*
  - *Plotinus experiences this three times...*
- Plotinus and Gnosticism:
  - *Pessimistic Gnosticism: The world is inherently evil. The goal of the soul is to escape the physical world to commune with God.*
  - *Optimistic Gnosticism: The world is inherently good. Humans contain within them this goodness.*